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Diversity is the word that best describes the survival of today's New England farms. As the pictures on the front and back cover show, New England agriculture is filled with diversity. Not only do several New England States have their own signature commodity; dairy in Vermont, potatoes in Maine, cranberries in Massachusetts, shellfish in Connecticut and Rhode Island, and of course Maple Syrup throughout New England, but there is also variety in how the produce moves from farm to consumer. Wholesale, farmers markets, farm stands, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), raw product or value added; each provides different opportunities for New England farmers. But just how important is each one? The best opportunity to measure this and other aspects of New England and US agriculture will be the 2007 Census of Agriculture. Yes, 2007 is the reference year for our next Census of Agriculture. We will be mailing questionnaires to farmers in mid-December and actively collecting the data for much of early 2008.

To those that receive a questionnaire, we understand the time commitment needed to complete these questionnaires and fully appreciate your effort. However, the reasons for accurately completing your questionnaire are numerous. Besides being the only source for most county level and demographic information the 2007 Census of Agriculture will offer a measure to the latest trends in agriculture. Just how large is Organic Agriculture? The Census of Agriculture will have value of sales for crops, livestock, and livestock products along with the number of certified organic acres and acres in transition. Is the Direct Market trend still growing? In 2002, Massachusetts led the nation with the largest percentage of direct market sales. What is the farm gate value of Agri-tourism? How many farmers sell through a CSA? How many farmers generate some of their own energy or electricity? The 2007 Census of Agriculture will answer these and other questions about agriculture.

Again, our appreciation goes out to the thousands of farm operators across the region who willingly contribute to our estimating program. You **are** the heart and soul of our program for without your cooperation the rest of the story could not be accurately written. We also appreciate the cooperation and support extended by the New England Commissioners of Agriculture (CT, ME, MA and NH), the Chief of the Rhode Island Division of Agriculture and Marketing, and the Vermont Secretary of the Agency of Agriculture. Without their financial contribution, this annual bulletin would not be printed.

Sincerely,

Gary R. Keough
Director

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