



National Agricultural Statistics Service

Key Accomplishments

FY 2003

NASS Mission: To provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) administers the Department's program of collecting and publishing national, State, and county agricultural statistics. In addition to its many quarterly, yearly, and monthly reports, NASS conducts the five-year Census of Agriculture. Data provided by NASS are essential to both the public and private sectors of the agriculture industry and are used for making effective policy, production, and marketing decisions in a wide range of agricultural areas.

Each year, NASS records its key accomplishments that meet the specific goals set out by the Research, Education, and Economic (REE) mission area in support of USDA's strategic plan. Below are achievements for fiscal year 2003.

Goal 1: To enhance economic opportunities for agricultural producers.

New and Expanded Agricultural Statistics. NASS provides timely and accurate agricultural statistics that are used throughout the agricultural sector to evaluate supplies and determine competitive prices for world marketing of U.S. commodities. These statistics promote a level playing field in production agriculture with impartial information available to everyone at a predetermined and publicized date and time.

- A new potato size and grade table for major potato producing States was published in the January 2003 *Potato Stocks* report in response to a request from the potato industry. Potatoes are sized and graded according to accepted U.S. fresh grading standards. Size and grade measurements come from potatoes harvested in Potato Objective Yield Survey sample plots.
- For the October 10 *Crop Production* report, NASS reviewed FSA certified acreage information and updated planted and harvested acreages for spring planted crops. FSA data were previously reviewed in late December along with year-end survey information. However, with the availability of FSA data nearly two months earlier, NASS altered its policy. NASS will continue to use FSA certified acreage information to update rice and cotton acreage during the September *Crop Production* report.
- NASS worked closely with the Economic Research Service (ERS) to evaluate its economic statistics programs and data needs. Integration and expansion of economic surveys will reduce respondent burden; ensure definitions are consistent; and provide more detailed information on the state of the economy for the agriculture sector, field crop chemical use, and agricultural production practices. Larger sample sizes will enable release of information for the top 15 agricultural

production States based on cash receipts. NASS developed enhancements to the existing processing system to facilitate the handling of a larger sample. This includes developing an electronic tool to review edit results. The enhanced processing system will also capture pertinent information to study editing processes and to evaluate mail vs. face-to-face interview modes on quality and completeness.

- A special report titled *Corn, Soybeans, and Wheat Sold Through Marketing Contracts 2001 Summary*, was published in February 2003. Developed to help identify changes in the structure of the Nation's grain and oilseed markets, this report included information on marketing contracts at the U.S. and Regional levels and is broken down by Economic Sales Classes and Farm Production Region.
- In August 2003, the annual *Agricultural Land Values* and *Agricultural Cash Rents* reports were combined into one report. Titled *Agricultural Land Values and Cash Rents*, this change allows data users to more easily access these important economic data series.
- Beginning in January 2003, the *Livestock Slaughter* and *Poultry Slaughter* reports were moved to an 8:30 a.m. release time at the request of their respective industries.
- A new table was added to the June 2003 *Chickens and Eggs* report for table egg layers in flocks of 75,000 and above, at Regional and U.S. levels. Included in the table are inventory and eggs laid per 100 layers on the reference date of December 1 of the preceding year.
- As of May 14, 2003, the weekly *Broiler Hatchery* report now includes Louisiana data separate from the combined States category.
- Weekly and annual totals, for broiler-type chick eggs set and chicks placed by State and U.S., are now available (1981 to present) through the *Quick Stats* function on the NASS website.
- A special report, *U.S. Broiler Industry Structure*, was issued November 2002. This report contains a summary of the changes in the structure of the U.S. broiler industry from 1934 to present.
- The monthly *Cold Storage* releases were adapted to include a new data series for chicken parts. Chicken parts, which were previously published as a total number, are now broken out by categories: breasts and breast meat; drumsticks; leg quarters; thigh and thigh quarters; thigh meat; wings (all products); and paws and feet.
- Color class definitions were changed in the annual *Mink* report for 2002 based on industry requests. Data under the new color class definitions were published for pelt products and females bred to produce kits.
- The monthly *Catfish Processing* report now includes data on fresh catfish fillet exports. This began in April 2003 with the release of January and February data.

- Beginning in April 2003, the monthly *Dairy Products* release now includes data for U.S. sour cream production.
- The monthly *Cattle on Feed* report was modified in February 2003 to exclude calculation and publication of the historical seven-State total. The seven-State data can still be calculated by summing up the totals from the individual States within the monthly *Cattle on Feed* report. U.S. monthly estimates have been available since 1996.
- Permanent procedures were developed and implemented, as part of the monthly Agricultural Yield Survey process, that allow data for changes in harvested areas to be collected and summarized when warranted by extreme weather events. These procedures were utilized during 2003 to determine potential changes in row crop harvested areas due to drought conditions in five States and flooding in one State. The process is now flexible and can provide data users timely updates to harvested area, resulting in more accurate production forecasts.

Security and Contingency Planning. NASS continues to update and improve its comprehensive security contingency planning. During 2003, security awareness was emphasized through training for all employees, and specialized training for the Computer Security Team, as well as special briefings with software developers, secretarial staff, and new employees. A new security intranet page has also been developed and new policies for all employees dealing with computer security have been issued.

Security clearances were conducted for the Computer Security Staff and the IT development staff responsible for NASS's most sensitive agricultural estimates. The clearance process continues for IT system administrators. Risk assessments were conducted and security plans created for all of the major application systems and general support systems in NASS.

Hardware, software, and contract help have been procured to support efforts to improve and establish the following programs: operating system vulnerability patch management, Continuity Of Operations (COOP), Virtual Private Network (VPN) for encrypted communications outside of our primary network, and an Intrusion Detection System (IDS) to alert staff about potential attacks on the network.

Farm Bill. U.S. marketing year average (MYA) prices and marketing percentages for certain commodities were published earlier than normal during fiscal year 2003 in order to meet requirements described in the 2002 Farm Bill. In June 2003, the U.S. MYA prices for oats, barley, and wheat were published in the *Agriculture Prices* report. In previous years, these crops were not published until August. In September, corn, sorghum, and soybeans were published in the *Agriculture Prices* report. The soybeans during September also included all States MYA prices and marketing percentages and were previously not published until November.

Counter-cyclical payments introduced in the 2002 Farm Bill are calculated in part by using MYA prices estimated by NASS. The magnitude of payments potentially affected by the accuracy of the NASS MYAs has led to a self-initiated review of the *Prices*

Received by Farmers survey program. All procedures and documentation have been reviewed and updated as necessary. These changes will increase data quality and ensure all States are consistent in data collection activities.

Data Users Meeting. The October 2003 meeting for data users in Chicago, Illinois, provided NASS with the opportunity to field requests for data series changes, which are currently being reviewed.

Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics. In February 2003, a meeting was held in Louisville, Kentucky, to debrief the committee on the status of the 2002 Census of Agriculture and seek input on the NASS plan related to the use of administrative data, monthly hogs, and preparation for the 2007 Census of Agriculture.

eGovernment. NASS continues to revise its 5-year tactical plan for improving agency management and performance. While the plan takes advantage of NASS's strengths, revisions were necessary as a result of accomplishments and progress in other USDA eGovernment initiatives, such as Enterprise Architecture, that are included as part of the President's Management Agenda. NASS has made significant progress toward providing the organizational resources necessary for the execution of our long term plan.

During FY 2003, NASS continued to take a lead role within the USDA to assist with USDA's eGovernment program. NASS looked for and evaluated opportunities to contribute to the overall success of USDA's eGovernment activities, based on our available resources and budget.

NASS continued developing its Electronic Data Reporting (EDR) program in 2003. Analysis was done and work completed on the first set of web data collection instruments to be made available to agricultural producers as a means of reducing their reporting burden and automating the data collection process.

NASS moved into phase 2 of the development of the Question Repository System (QRS). QRS is tightly coupled to the electronic data reporting program. This application will produce all questionnaires, regardless of the data collection mode in which they are delivered (by paper, on the web, in person, or over the telephone).

Work performed for others. NASS performs services and statistical consultation for other Federal and State agencies and private commodity organizations on a reimbursable basis. Statistics generated meet special needs not covered by the national agricultural statistics program. In addition, statistical consultation by NASS staff members contribute to improvements in the overall quality and consistency of statistical information produced for the needs of other organizations.

Special surveys conducted in FY 2003 by State Statistical Offices, by survey type:

Survey Type	Number of Surveys
Seeds, Field Crops, Vegetables	27
Fruits and Nuts	13
County Estimates	15
Cropping Practices, Pesticide Use	6
Livestock, Poultry	7
Safety, Health, Disability	4
Nursery and Floriculture	6
Farm Finance, Land Values	13
Miscellaneous	57
TOTAL	148

American Indian/Alaska Native USDA Employee Survey. In May 2002, Secretary Veneman created the USDA American Indian/Alaska Native Employee Advisory Council (AI/AN EAC). The Council provides the Secretary and USDA management advice on AI/AN employee and program delivery issues. In September 2003, the Council contracted with NASS to conduct a mail survey of USDA AI/AN employees. NASS's Idaho field office performed the printing, two questionnaire mailings, and data entry functions for the questionnaires returned via mail. About 40 percent of the USDA employees mailed questionnaires responded to the survey. NASS provided summary tables to the AI/AN EAC which included descriptive statistics for each question of the USDA employee survey.

International Technical Assistance Provided. NASS provided technical assistance and training to improve agricultural statistics programs in 10 foreign countries. Short-term assignments supported work in Brazil, China, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Mexico, South Africa, Russia, and the Ukraine. In addition, NASS coordinated and/or conducted training programs in the U.S. for 168 visitors representing 27 countries. These assistance and training activities promote better quality data and improved access to data from other countries, which allows US analysts to better understand the world supply and demand situation. Improved analysis supports more efficient marketing of U.S. agricultural products.

Goal 2: To support increased economic opportunities and improved quality of life in Rural America.

2002 Census of Agriculture. Information from the five-year Census of Agriculture provides periodic detailed data down to the county level which facilitates locality-based policy and business decisions affecting the agricultural industry and rural residents.

List building efforts conducted by NASS yielded a census mail list of 2.86 million names for the U.S. and Puerto Rico. From December 2002 through April 2003, mailings were conducted to gather data from farm operators using regionalized report forms. In addition, a small portion of operators were contacted by telephone or through personal interviews. These latter efforts typically focused on the larger operations that did not respond to initial mailings.

Additionally, NASS outsourced the mail data collection and data capture activities to the National Processing Center (NPC) in Jeffersonville, IN. NPC handled mailings for approximately 5 million pieces of mail. All mailings were returned to NPC and controlled through various processing stages using an automated tracking system. For the first time, the Census of Agriculture used optical character recognition (OCR) as the principal means of data capture; however, every questionnaire was subjected to a "correct from image" operator that verified specific cells on the report form. Using this new technology allowed NASS to capture virtually all data by the end of May 2003, faster than any previous census.

Calling centers were established in Kentucky, Montana, Oklahoma, and Wyoming to respond to questions and inquiries from a toll-free number provided to offer assistance to any individuals receiving a census questionnaire. Routing procedures for various centers were established using 80 lines and daily activity was closely monitored to maximize use of telephone operators while ensuring high quality service. A combined total of approximately 260,000 calls were received from the four call centers.

A new edit and imputation strategy, the concept of 'nearest neighbor' imputation, was developed for use in the 2002 Census of Agriculture for item imputation. This method utilized data from a similar type farm, in close proximity, to statistically impute for incomplete items.

New analysis systems and tools were developed to help expand NASS's ability to quickly trace questionable items to a specific record. Using the interactive analysis tools in tandem with scanned images of questionnaires greatly increased efficiency compared to prior censuses.

Puerto Rico Census of Agriculture. Puerto Rico census forms were prepared for initial mail out in December 2002. Field enumerators collected data for operations not reporting by mail. Training sessions were conducted for the field enumerators in Puerto Rico through a joint agreement among NASS, the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture, and the Extension Service. An information hot line was developed, tested, and operational throughout data collection. The 2002 publication, in both English and Spanish, was published on February 3, 2004.

Goal 3: To enhance protection and safety of the Nation's agriculture and food supply.

Chemical Use. In July 2003, NASS released the biennial *Agricultural Chemical Usage for Vegetables Summary*, published every other year since 1990. This year's report provided vegetable chemical use statistics for 28 crops in 18 major producing States.

In March 2003, NASS released the *Agricultural Chemical Usage, Postharvest Applications - Apples and Pears* report, covering pesticide applications made at off-farm storage facilities after crop harvest. The data in this report were collected during the summer of 2002, covering the 2001 crop and included six States: Washington, Oregon, California, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Durum wheat, Winter wheat, Other Spring wheat, corn, and soybeans were crops targeted for the *Agricultural Chemical Usage 2002 Field Crops Summary* released in May 2003. Data were compiled from the Agricultural Resources Management Survey (ARMS) and from NASS's Objective Yield Survey in 20 States.

NASS began monitoring adoption of the use of biotechnology in the nation's corn crop in 2002. In 2003, the agency released a special analysis of the adoption of biotech corn, *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), in 10 major corn-producing States. Tables in this special analysis provided information on the number of farms planting Bt corn by percent of corn area reported as planted with Bt varieties.

National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) Catfish Survey. In January 2003, NASS collaborated with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) to investigate management practices and health-related issues currently affecting the U.S. catfish industry. NASS selected catfish producers from the list sampling frame in four States (Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi). These States represented 95.5 percent of the catfish inventory in the U.S. and 73.4 percent of all U.S. catfish operations as of January 1, 2003. NASS provided APHIS-NAHMS statistical consultation on sample selection, questionnaire development, data collection, and data validation. APHIS released a number of publications related to this study, including two detailed reports covering fingerlings and food-size catfish health and production practices and several information sheets describing disease control and treatment practices associated with disease.

Goal 4: To improve the Nation's nutrition and health.

ARS Nutrient Data Laboratory. NASS continued to provide statistical consultation to the Agricultural Research Service's (ARS) Nutrient Data Laboratory (NDL). This included designing and implementing national-level plans for sampling retail foods and beverages for the laboratory's National Food and Nutrient Analysis Program. In addition, NASS refined and modified, as necessary, the data handling and statistical procedures previously developed by NASS for the NDL Architecture and Integration Management Nutrient Data Bank System.

Goal 5: To protect and enhance the Nation's natural resource base and the environment.

Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey. Content and production plans have been finalized for the 2003 Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey (FRIS), a follow-on survey to the 2002 Census of Agriculture. The 2003 FRIS report form will include wording designed to meet data needs of the Bureau of Reclamation. NASS successfully conducted a pretest for the survey in Arkansas, California, Georgia, and Nebraska. The National Processing Center (NPC), Census Bureau, has been contracted to print, mail, and capture the data from the FRIS report forms. Initial mail out is planned for January 2004.

Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP). During 2003, NASS entered into a cooperative agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) to conduct the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP). The CEAP will be conducted in the fall of each year from 2003 through 2007, the legislative life of the 2002 Farm Bill. This survey will provide the data for models which will output scientifically defensible assessments of the environmental benefits of conservation programs contained in the 2002 Farm Bill. Programs include the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Wetland Reserve Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), and Conservation Technical Assistance. The CEAP will provide an accounting of the environmental benefits from conservation program expenditures.

Woodland Owners Survey. NASS assisted USDA's Forest Service on a national survey of U.S. woodland owners. The Forest and Rangelands Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 charged the Forest Service with monitoring the forest resources of the United States. The Forest Service has implemented the National Woodland Owner Survey to increase understanding of private woodland owners with an emphasis on non-industrial owners. Two key functions of the survey are to facilitate the planning and implementation of forest policies and to support forest sustainability assessments in the United States. This is the second consecutive year NASS has assisted in conducting this survey. NASS updated and enhanced the computer assisted telephone interviewing programs and conducted the telephone interviews of non-respondents to the mail survey conducted by the Forest Service.

Want more information?

Visit our web site at
www.usda.gov/nass/

Or call the NASS Hotline at 1-800-727-9540

