

# National Agricultural Statistics Service

# Strategic Plan

FY 2020 - FY 2025



United States Department of Agriculture  
National Agricultural Statistics Service



# Table of Contents

- Table of Contents ..... 1**
- Message from the Administrator ..... 2**
  - Mission Statement ..... 3**
  - Vision Statement..... 3**
  - Core Values ..... 3**
  - Civil Rights Commitment..... 3**
- About USDA-NASS..... 4**
- Summary of Strategic Plan..... 5**
- Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes ..... 7**
- Workforce Transformation ..... 8**
  - Objective 1.1: Increase employee professional growth and development, satisfaction, engagement, innovative thoughts, as well as diversity and inclusion. .... 8
  - Objective 1.2: Appropriately size, recruit, and train the workforce..... 9
  - Objective 1.3: Develop strategic workforce planning capabilities to support transition from traditional survey data collection to in-depth integration of survey data with alternative sources and methods..... 9
- Exceptional Customer Experience ..... 10**
  - Objective 2.1: Increase effectiveness of stakeholder engagement. .... 10
  - Objective 2.2: Raise the awareness of and use of NASS products and services. .... 11
  - Objective 2.3: Incorporate new data sources and data collection techniques to reduce respondent burden and increase sample representation, while maintaining confidentiality and privacy. .... 11
- Organizational Excellence ..... 12**
  - Objective 3.1: Create new, modern business processes to produce quality data and products at a faster rate. .... 12
  - Objective 3.2: Mature, expand, and enforce enterprise-level strategic and program management processes and tools to guide data-driven decision-making. .... 13
  - Objective 3.3: Mature ability to manage risk and ensure that proven effective internal controls are built into every process and system. .... 13

---

# Message from the Administrator



I believe everyone recognizes the need to modernize our agency processes and procedures and update our infrastructure to meet the growing demands of our data providers and data users. Therefore, we must commit to modernize our systems, perform better data analysis, improve data dissemination, and improve communication and engagement with our customers. For us to be successful in these endeavors all NASS employees must join together in shaping our future. I recognize the outstanding commitment and hard work that NASS staff are already performing daily despite staff shortages and heavy workloads, which we are working diligently to resolve. However, it is imperative that we continue to work towards more efficient ways to carry out our mission.

I am excited to put the NASS Strategic Plan: FY2020 – FY2025 in place as a road map in planning the future of NASS. This plan is anchored in three major initiatives: data collection dashboard, the NASS operating model reimagined, and improving the agriculture data user experience. These initiatives align with the Secretary's goals to improve customer service and access to data, and to modernize IT infrastructure. These initiatives also serve as the focal point for this new and broader Agency Strategic Plan defining the future vision for NASS.

I hope that you will join me and the rest of the Senior Executive Team in championing this plan as we seek to promote NASS as the premier source of comprehensive agricultural data and reports that data providers and users trust to meet their changing needs.

Thanks for your valued commitment to making NASS a great place to work.

*Hubert Hamer*

---

## Mission Statement

We provide timely, accurate and useful statistics in service to United States agriculture.

## 2025 Strategic Vision Statement

NASS is recognized as a modern, innovative, customer-focused organization that readily adopts cutting-edge technologies and engages its world-class workforce to produce the **most trusted, useful** statistics on all aspects of U.S. agriculture.

## Core Values

- **Trust among data providers:** NASS will continue the relationship of mutual respect and our legal pledge of confidentiality with our respondents who provide their personal and agricultural data in support of U.S. agriculture.
- **Credibility among data users:** NASS will maintain credibility with our data users by issuing complete and accurate statistical information about agriculture.
- **Objectivity of Statistics:** NASS will produce and disseminate statistical information on an equitable and transparent basis so the public understands that the data are objective and impartial.
- **Relevance to Policy Issues:** We will remain knowledgeable about the issues and requirements of the agriculture industry, public policy, and Federal programs, and will remain able to provide objective, accurate, and timely information relevant to those needs.
- **Commitment to Service:** Each USDA-NASS employee and representative is committed to these core values and takes great pride in working together to serve American farmers and ranchers, rural communities, and all who rely on the information we produce.

## Civil Rights Commitment

NASS cultivates an inclusive workplace environment where the unique qualities, experiences, and talents of every employee are valued, nurtured, and appreciated. Treating all employees, job applicants, and customers with fairness, equality, and respect is a core agency value.

Consistent with USDA civil rights policies, NASS firmly enforces all federal civil rights laws, executive orders, and regulations to ensure that the agency maintains a workplace free from discrimination. NASS has a comprehensive civil rights program that protects all employees, job applicants, and customers from harassment (sexual and non-sexual,) retaliation, and reprisal. NASS civil rights commitment makes the agency a model employer, committed to preventing, stopping, and remedying all forms of discrimination including race, color, sex (including pregnancy, sexual harassment, sexual orientation, gender identity, or transgender status), national origin, religion, age (40 and above), disability (mental or physical), equal pay, genetic information, or retaliation.





# About USDA-NASS

## Legislative Mandate

USDA was established in 1862 by President Abraham Lincoln to provide US agricultural information to the United States government and the public. The first official report regarding crop conditions was published in July 1863. The original NASS mission continues today in the USDA forecasts and estimates publications released by the NASS Agricultural Statistics Board. NASS's responsibilities are authorized under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 (7 U.S.C. 1621-1627) and the Census of Agriculture Act of 1997, Public Law 105-113 (7 U.S.C. 2204g). Public Law 105-113 transferred responsibility for the Census of Agriculture and other special studies from the Department of Commerce to USDA in November 1997 and entrusted to NASS to perform. Conducted every five years, the census provides comprehensive information about the nation's agriculture on a national, state, and county level basis. The agency maintains a current list of farms and ranches in the United States, one of its unique Federal roles. NASS also performs important reimbursable agricultural survey work for other Federal agencies, state governments, and producer organizations. NASS also provides technical assistance for agricultural statistics programs in developing countries.

## Relationship with Partners, Customers, and Stakeholders

As the primary statistical agency for USDA, NASS has relationships with many partners, customers, and stakeholders whom we serve with data products and services, and who use and advocate for the data we produce. Among them are:

- State departments of agriculture and land grant universities. Through cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding dating back to 1917, NASS field offices serve jointly as the federal field office and the state government agricultural statistical office. In this role, NASS provides data collection and statistical services to other agencies and provides statistics to the public through agreements with private producer organizations.
- The National Institute of Statistical Sciences, which brought together the best academic and NASS researchers to provide recommendations for modern day challenges facing the agricultural statistics program.
- More than 40 community-based organizations (CBOs), as well as countless local associations, facilitate USDA outreach to limited resource and historically under-represented producers. These groups work with NASS staff to ensure their constituents are represented and that the census includes all farms and ranches, regardless of size, location or type of operation. NASS also partners with these groups to provide hands-on assistance and support to local producers—including non-English speakers—to complete their census forms. NASS targets media outreach that reach small, minority, and non-English-speaking producers.

---

# Summary of Strategic Plan

This strategic plan is the first step in an ongoing strategic and operational planning process. The strategic plan is anchored around three strategic goals:

- **Strategic Goal #1:** Workforce Transformation – Foster a diverse workforce to meet current and emerging needs
- **Strategic Goal #2:** Exceptional Customer Service – Proactively strengthen relationships with data users, providers, and partners
- **Strategic Goal #3:** Organizational Excellence – Operate as a strategic, integrated, efficient organization built on sound management practices and methodological principals

The NASS Strategic Planning Office will track the implementation of the plan and ensure individual and office accountability for achieving our strategic goals.

In 2018, NASS senior leadership created three strategic initiatives to transform and prepare the agency for the future. The three strategic initiatives are tightly integrated within this five-year strategic plan. The three strategic initiatives are:

- **Strategic Initiative #1:** Data Collection Dashboard
- **Strategic Initiative #2:** NASS Operating Model Reimagined
- **Strategic Initiative #3:** Customer Experience: Improving the Ag Data User Experience

This strategic plan is aligned with USDA's strategic goals and the Research, Education, and Economics Strategic Themes.







# Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes

Goal 1: Workforce Transformation

Goal 2: Exceptional Customer Experience

Goal 3: Organizational Excellence







## Goal 1:

# Workforce Transformation

NASS’s long-term success is rooted in the hard work and dedication of a highly skilled workforce. Moving forward the continued success of the organization is contingent on development of the existing workforce to meet the changing needs of customers. Accomplishing this requires a deliberate focus on training and retention in critical knowledge areas. Supporting transformational initiatives requires that the organization clearly identify capabilities, competencies, and emerging skills. Management must evaluate each opportunity to identify required skillsets and determine if current skillsets meet the need or if the organization is better served through hiring, re-training, or out-sourcing. Leadership will foster an environment of creativity and innovation through value placed on new ideas and focus on professional development.

The objectives for this strategic goal are aligned with Strategic Initiative #2: NASS Operating Model Reimagined.

### **Objective 1.1: Increase employee professional growth and development, satisfaction, engagement, innovative thoughts, as well as diversity and inclusion.**

NASS will develop a customer-centric, inclusive, and high-performing workforce by investing in and engaging employees to improve the delivery of services through modernization of programs and “thinking outside the box.” Employees will have a broad understanding of and input into the mission and strategic roadmap to move NASS forward. NASS will promote an inclusive and high-performing culture that leverages a diverse and creative workforce to better serve customers. Finally, NASS will afford employees opportunities to increase their knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet both current and emerging needs.

#### Outcome for Objective 1.1

1. Use employee satisfaction and engagement surveys to increase the baseline measures by two percent per year.

---

## **Objective 1.2: Appropriately size, recruit, and train the workforce.**

Using changing technologies and meeting customer demands require transformation of NASS processes to provide faster, more accessible, and diverse information. NASS must prepare for the changing work and skills needed by identifying the competencies required for success throughout various stages of transformation. Consequently, a complex human capital management plan will be developed to execute data-driven recruiting, hiring, attrition, and retirement analysis, while upskilling the current workforce.

### Outcomes for Objective 1.2

1. Develop a human capital plan that addresses opportunities for NASS's current and future workforce. Establish measures of success and show an increase in established workforce transition targets over the five-year period.

## **Objective 1.3: Develop strategic workforce planning capabilities to support transition from traditional survey data collection to in-depth integration of survey data with alternative sources and methods.**

NASS will establish a strategic workforce planning capability in 2020. The initial focus will establish an effective and repeatable process to assess the current workforce to identify competency gaps. Once these approaches are honed, NASS will focus on predicting how business transformation will impact the workforce so that an informed transition can occur. Accordingly, the first predictive model will be built based on traditional survey workflows and changes that occur when alternative data sources and methods are applied.

### Outcomes for Objective 1.3

1. Establish strategic workforce planning predictive functions and dashboards to provide accurate information to leaders on full time employees (FTE) numbers, occupations, and competencies.
2. Strategic workforce planning predictive functions and dashboards serve as the basis for human capital management within NASS.





## Goal 2:

# Exceptional Customer Experience

NASS goal is to be the gold standard with customer experience to survey respondents, data users, stakeholders, and the public. To help expand rural America prosperity, NASS must deliver objective, relevant, timely, and accurate statistics so that producers, researchers, USDA policy makers, Congress, market analysts, agribusinesses, and other data users can make sound, informed decisions. Official agricultural statistics promote a level playing field in production agriculture, with impartial information available to all equally. The Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) releases a calendar each year with the scheduled date and release time for each report.

These data users and other stakeholders have different levels of experience with statistical information. Therefore, it is imperative that NASS products are easily accessible, understandable, and available in formats that help the agricultural community make data driven and better-informed decisions.

The objectives for this strategic goal are aligned with Strategic Initiative #1: Data Collection Dashboard and Strategic Initiative #3: Customer Experience: Improving the Ag Data User Experience.

### **Objective 2.1: Increase effectiveness of stakeholder engagement.**

NASS will enhance stakeholder engagement by leveraging technology, a geographically dispersed workforce, and digital communications to raise the perceived value of NASS products and services.

#### Outcomes for Objective 2.1

1. An expanded customer-centric public affairs strategy that reshapes stakeholder engagement at local and national levels.



---

## **Objective 2.2: Raise the awareness of and use of NASS products and services.**

NASS was created to deliver accurate, relevant, and useful agricultural data and statistics. NASS provides value when data are accessible and understandable by audiences with different levels of knowledge and different data needs.

NASS will make data more accessible and raise data literacy through ongoing stakeholder engagement and education.

### Outcomes for Objective 2.2

1. Improved customer ability to search, visualize, and interface with statistical and geographic information.
2. Users of NASS data products express greater confidence and sophistication in using NASS products to support data-driven decision-making.

## **Objective 2.3: Incorporate new data sources and data collection techniques to reduce respondent burden and increase sample representation, while maintaining confidentiality and privacy.**

NASS is committed to continually improving data collection and data products, while exploring ways to reduce respondent burden. Some of the methods include using alternate data sources for survey supplementation, moving toward increased Internet response, and enhancing data collection and products based on emerging customer needs. NASS will develop and implement modernized disclosure-protection policies, procedures, and systems to support rigorous privacy protections for data providers, while ensuring timely, efficient, and dissemination of accurate data products.



### Outcomes for Objective 2.3:

1. Data collection dashboard is deployed allowing data to be collected once from respondents.
2. Products are created using alternative data sources with no additional respondent burden.
3. NASS researches integrating precision agricultural and satellite imagery into business processes.
4. Business processes for surveys and/or products include a step to review administrative and other sources of data available before any new data collection effort.



### Goal 3:

## Organizational Excellence

NASS will continue to explore the use of new business processes, methodologies, and technologies aiming for faster and more efficient data collection to output quality data with greater speed and relevance. These methodologies and technologies show promise in improving and enhancing the measurements of the agricultural economy and community without imposing additional respondent burden. To expedite and streamline data processing, NASS will commit to enterprise solutions, innovative tools, and data sources.

The objectives for this strategic goal are aligned with Strategic Initiative #2: NASS Operating Model Reimagined.

### **Objective 3.1: Create new, modern business processes to produce quality data and products at a faster rate.**

NASS will take advantage of new survey lifecycle models using alternative data sources and methods. NASS will continue to modernize processes and measure success by producing high-quality statistical benchmarks, measures, and geographic information.

#### Outcomes for Objective 3.1:

1. NASS data products meet or exceed targets for quality, cost, and delivery schedule.
2. Business processes are expanded to think beyond the traditional survey lifecycle toward a broader information lifecycle model using survey and non-survey data.
3. Modernize information technology and support services to improve business processes.

---

**Objective 3.2: Mature, expand, and enforce enterprise-level strategic and program management processes and tools to guide data-driven decision-making.**

Over the next five years, NASS senior management will establish offices to guide the implementation of mission-critical capabilities—including portfolio management, performance management, risk management, program and project management, and formalized cost estimation. Top quality products and assistance will be provided by staff, including strategic planning, employee time-on-task reporting in Project Server through either the Survey Lifecycle/Mission Enabling Support framework or through a project Work Breakdown Structure, and expanding cost estimation practices. NASS will focus these resources to (1) increase integration, (2) formalize knowledge management and transfer, and (3) execute capabilities consistently at the enterprise level. Execution of these capabilities will be facilitated through more formal program evaluations and consistent approaches to program management—a clear and embraced governance process—and continuous improvement feedback loops.

Outcomes for Objective 3.2:

1. Processes are defined, documented, repeatable, integrated, and scalable.
2. Processes help not only the enterprise but also the divisions and programs meet strategic and operational goals and objectives, as measured by a roll up of program evaluations from the divisions to the enterprise.
3. NASS will invest in the development and use of methodology and technology for record linkage, quality assessment and enhancement, data management, and modern disclosure-limitation and security procedures.

**Objective 3.3: Mature ability to manage risk and ensure that proven effective internal controls are built into every process and system.**

Attention to managing enterprise risk and applying internal controls ensures that NASS performs effectively and efficiently according to regulations, controls, and policy. A strong foundation of integrated risk management and internal controls ensures that data are accurate, privacy is protected, and credibility is enhanced.

Outcomes for Objective 3.3:

1. Negative findings within management control are reduced over time.
2. Strategic and operational risks are managed within acceptable tolerances.

