

# **Safeguarding America's Agricultural Statistics**

**A Century of Successful and  
Secure Procedures, 1905-2005**

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# DEDICATION

**“Out of Adversity Often Come Great Solutions”**

*-Unknown Author*

This publication is dedicated to the thousands of employees of the United States Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service—and its predecessor organizations—who in the past 100 years have built the premiere statistical confidentiality procedures in the world. It is also intended to honor the memory of Willet Martin Hays who set those procedures in motion when the responsibility for the integrity of official statistics was thrust upon him in reaction to a breach of public trust by another employee.

This presentation is intended to be illustrative, instead of exhaustive, in its detail. Many different sources were consulted for the earliest historical events in this summary. A list of suggested references is included at the end of this account.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication has been written to serve as an oral history of USDA's Agricultural Statistics Board from 1905 to 2005. However, since no one person was present during all the events in the past century, it was necessary to rely on a series of former accounts of the history of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB). The most prolific recorder of this earlier history, and an inspiration for this publication, was Emerson Brooks, USDA, who created at least two earlier summaries.

Through a preliminary release of this publication, many of the specific actions were described or verified by past Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries of Agriculture, Assistant Secretaries for Economics, Chairpersons of the ASB and the World Agricultural Outlook Board (WAOB), and Secretaries of the ASB. Their help was invaluable in creating as complete a story as you now read. Since it is impossible to fully recreate history and to sort out small differences in recorded dates, spellings and actual actions from different accounts, the author takes responsibility for any incorrect details in this account. In addition, he will assume responsibility for any misspelling of names, or use of less than favored name forms, in the publication.

# INTRODUCTION

This publication commemorates 100 years of protecting United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) statistical publications from improper advanced notification to any outside individuals. It explains the unfortunate events of 100 years ago, which led to the creation of the Crop Reporting Board (CRB), now referred to as the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB). It traces the evolution from one small group of people protecting the pre-release integrity of specific reports to an agency-wide way of life that ensures the integrity of all data that the organization handles.

This presentation begins in 1905, explaining the discovery of an insider trading scheme and the quick remedies that were taken. The organizational structure and the data sources in 1905, as well as major changes in statistical procedures and Agency organizational structure across the last 100 years, are traced along with their impacts on ASB procedures.

Some of the lighter moments in ASB history—and the impact of its security procedures upon unsuspecting parties—are covered. The explanations sometimes correct popular folklore that resulted from the telling and retelling of stories over time. Evolution of new physical and electronic security and release procedures demonstrate how the Agency has adapted to new technologies over the past 100 years.

Most of all, this story tells about the people who have upheld and improved USDA's confidentiality procedures. The Agency received one of its highest compliments, in 1969, when followers of consumer activist Ralph Nader (dubbed "Nader's Raiders") spent the summer studying and investigating the operations and security procedures of many Federal Government agencies in the Washington, D.C. area. At one point, a Nader publicist commented that they found the Department of Agriculture protected secrets better than any other organization they studied.

## Chapter 1

# THE EVENT THAT CHANGED STATISTICAL REPORTING

### *The “Data Leak” of 1905*

The summary and release procedures for the USDA Bureau of Statistics’ reports in the early 1900s produced separate summary tabulations for each data source available (up to six sources, in some cases). The indications from all sources were brought together only shortly before a report was scheduled for release. Three specific individuals, led by the Chief of the Bureau, reviewed the indications, compared them to data from earlier months and years, and decided on the state and national figures to publish. This process needed to be finished in sufficient time to allow for typing and setting up the telegram formats that were transmitted across the country at the moment of release. It is also relevant that the release time for cotton reports in those years was noon, Eastern Time, and that the commodity markets discontinued trading for an hour starting at noon on release days. The

original procedures allowed the three people who had determined the final numbers to go about their business, or even leave the building if they wished, once a report’s contents had been set.

In 1904 there were rumors about insider trading. As came to light later, one of the three Bureau of Statistics people, E.S. Holmes, Jr., did have an outside partner, a New York cotton trader named Louis Van Riper. Shortly after an estimate was set, Holmes would meet Van Riper and tell him what cotton estimate was going to be published. Van Riper would take whatever market action would be most profitable based on the advance information.

Bureau Chief John Hyde did not believe that insider trading was possible. However, he announced an additional measure to demonstrate the “integrity” of the system by decreeing that none of the three members would leave the work area until



the report had been released. That did not deter Holmes and his partner. They worked out a signal system using a particular window blind to indicate the level of the figure to be published. They apparently estimated a probable level for the national figure and if the actual total was close to their estimate Holmes raised the window blind to the middle of the window. If the total was higher or lower, Holmes adjusted the blind based on the scale they had contrived.

Bureau Chief Hyde felt he had taken care of any possible opportunity for data being leaked but the insider rumors persisted. The scheme came to light following the cotton acreage report issued on June 2, 1905. The three members met and adopted the state and national figures to be published. After Holmes had sent his signal, one of the other people who had worked on the report asked for reconsideration. After further review, the figures to be published were revised. At that point, the outside partner had already interpreted the original signal and proceeded to place trades.

The scheme came to light when Van Riper charged in a telegram that a “fraudulent” report had been released. In explaining why he thought this was a false report, he unwittingly revealed that he had the information ahead of time. Evidently, Holmes’ outside partner had an overabundance of ego, but not a good balance of common sense in going public with his story.

### ***Immediate Reactions to the Data Leak***

In 1905 no insider trading prohibitions were in place. Holmes was removed from office and a number of grand jury indictments were issued. Since the specific grounds for prosecution were not as clear as they are today, it took several years to prosecute him. Holmes received a fine of \$5,000 and some other parties to the scheme were also fined.

Bureau Chief Hyde resigned in frustration. Hyde was an honorable person who had made many improvements in the USDA crop estimating procedures after he took over in 1897. However, he had suffered through multiple criticisms and investigations—including a hearing before the House of

Representatives Committee on Agriculture about the 1904 cotton crop, in which he persuasively demonstrated the rigor of the survey indications received and the accuracy of the data that had been released. His resignation letter mentioned that his medical advisor worried about the impact stressful conditions had already had on his health.



**Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Willet M. Hays signs an official statistical report, in March 1910, as members of the Crop Reporting Board watch. Pictured (L to R) are Private Secretary to the Chief Statistician M.M. McKenna, Field Statistician John J. Darg, Chief Statistician Victor H. Olmsted, State Statistical Agent for Indiana Duncan, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Willet M. Hays, and Associate Statistician Nat C. Murray. Photograph from Special Collections, National Agricultural Library.**

Secretary of Agriculture James “Tama Jim” Wilson, who had earlier in 1905 persuaded Willet Martin Hays to leave the University of Minnesota and join USDA as an Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, assigned Hays to temporarily head up the statistical program. Hays was known for his work in teaching field studies of agricultural economics and farm management techniques. His work in Minnesota, before joining USDA, had been to establish a system of agricultural high schools, which were associated with the university. His USDA work in agricultural education was successful in putting projects in motion that eventually led to the landmark Smith-Lever Act in 1915, which is still providing research funding to the States today.

Hays did not view himself as an agricultural statistician, particularly not of the John Hyde caliber. Instead of continuing the three-member, fixed panel approach to setting estimates, he developed an approach of identifying eight qualified individuals (four in Washington and four State Agents) who would bring statistical and agricultural knowledge to the crop estimating work. His approach was to have four of the eight individuals participate in setting the estimates for each major report. The State Agents would particularly bring firsthand knowledge of current crop and market conditions.

Hays' new concept was adopted immediately and, by August 1905, reports were labeled as being released by the "Crop Estimating Board of the Department of Agriculture," instead of the former, "issued by the Bureau of Statistics." The first use of the specific Crop Reporting Board term appeared in November of 1905 and became the standard.

Two special reports were issued in August 1905. The first was a revision (correction) of the cotton acreage that had been released on June 2. The new U.S. estimate, based on a thorough review of all indications that were present in June, was

for a reduction in planted acres compared to the originally published 11.4 percent. There is some evidence that Holmes had originally pushed for an even smaller reduction than the 11.4 percent. The second special report was a correction to the 1905 tobacco acres by type estimate. In this instance, it appears that the original estimate had not been manipulated but three computational errors were overlooked in preparing the June summary during the tumultuous period after Hyde resigned and Hays assumed his new duties.

The 1905 Yearbook of Agriculture contained a seven-page synopsis of the work of the Bureau of Statistics. That write-up served as a basic "scope and methods" document and expressed the basic philosophy of why impartial statistical reports were essential to agricultural producers. It did reference the unfortunate June report and closed with the following strong sentiments:

"... The responsibility for this 'leak' is shared by everyone who, to get money without work, gambles in farm products. When this form of industry ceases, these parasites who tempt Department officials will have to work for their bread."

## Chapter 2

# EVOLUTION OF AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS REPORTING—A TIMELINE

### *Data Sources and Release Procedures in the Early 1900s*

The Department of Agriculture was a different organization at the turn of the 20th century compared to the organization that exists now—100 years later. The two original functions of the Department were to collect statistics and to distribute seeds. Additional functions evolved by the early 1900s but a very close tie remained between the Secretary of Agriculture and the statistical estimates. The explanation of the revised Crop Reporting Board procedures included in the 1905 Yearbook of Agriculture specified that the Board would meet on report days “...under the personal supervision of the Secretary or the Assistant Secretary.”

The earliest statistical work of the Department for domestic estimates had been based on regular (mostly monthly) schedules completed and sent to Washington, D.C., by large numbers of

county correspondents. Paid, part-time State Statistical Agents were added in 1887, each of whom developed his own corps of correspondents. By 1905 State Agents were located in 43 States. The backgrounds of the State Agents further illustrate the close relationship of the Bureau of Statistics to the Secretary of Agriculture—and the U.S. Congress. The Georgia State Agent was an ex-governor. The Alabama Agent was an ex-Confederate Army General and professor at Alabama A&M. The Mississippi Agent was a prominent farmer recommended by both senators and the governor. The North Carolina Agent was a professor of agriculture at the State College.

A system of township correspondents had been added in 1896. Somewhere along the line some paid, part-time special Field Agents were named who were responsible for evaluating the

conditions in more than one State. John Hyde had developed three additional types of reporters while he headed up the statistical work: cotton ginners, bankers and merchants, lists of specific growers.



**USDA officials retrieve the “Special A” envelopes containing summaries and recommendations sent from State and Field Agents to USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C.**

For reports such as the first acreage report of the year, all six data sources might be employed. Questionnaires coming to Washington, D.C., from each data source (county correspondents, township correspondents, cotton ginners, specific growers, and bankers/merchants) were tabulated separately and the individual tabulations were not compared with one another until the work area doors were locked. The State and Field Agents sent their summaries and recommendations by sealed Special “A” envelopes or, if they were located far from Washington, D.C., by telegraph using a cipher system. The documents were kept secure in a double-locked mailbox which served as a safe. The reports from the State and Field Agents were not removed from the mailbox and opened until after the doors had been locked. Two sets of keys were required to unlock the dual locks to ensure the reports were kept secure.

Most statistical reports were based on percentage change opinions (for acreage) or condition percentages in the case of evaluating crops during the growing season. Statisticians used the most recent census of agriculture data as benchmarks, and reports that had been issued since the last census of agriculture were re-evaluated and revised if needed when new census data became available.

If sources of information for a particular report did not closely agree, weight was given to historical performance of indications from each of the sources.



**USDA officials unlock the safe/mailbox. Two sets of keys were required to unlock the dual locks to ensure the reports were kept secure.**

Since Hyde had already instituted a locked door policy for the detailed review of the various indications, it appears that Hays’ contributions were first to define the rotational Board approach and second to be sure the curtains were drawn, and any additional physical security measures employed, while the Board deliberated up to the release time.



**USDA officer closes and seals the window blinds to maintain security.**



**From the Telegraph Room in the USDA South Building, the Crop Report is sent to all parts of the world.**

Even in the early 1900s, due care was taken to inform all interested parties as uniformly as possible. Reports related to cotton were released on the 3rd of the month at noon during the growing season. Reports on other principal farm crops and livestock were released on the 10th of the month at 4 p.m. Reports were handed to all interested parties who attended and to the Western Union Telegraph and the Postal Telegraph Cable companies for transmission to the press and to commodity exchanges. A short, mimeographed report containing narratives and data tables, which included previous estimates and final production figures, was sent to a mailing list of press, exchanges, and individuals that same day. A printed card with the report details was mailed to all 77,000 post offices in the United States for public display. Details of all reports released during a month were included in the 8-page monthly (except for February) Crop Reporter, which had a circulation list of more than 100,000 correspondents and other interested parties.

### ***Modifications Following Establishment of the Crop Reporting Board (CRB)***

The previous paragraphs illustrate that many physical security procedures used today were in place in the early 1900s. There were slight shifts in the procedures for Crop Reporting Board make-up in the first few years after 1905. Some of those



**Bureau of Statistics Chief Victor H. Olmsted (1910). Photograph from Special Collections, National Agricultural Library.**

changes were documented in the Crop Reporter annual reports.

A new permanent Bureau of Statistics Chief, Victor H. Olmsted, was appointed on June 16, 1906. In 1907 State Agents were located in 45 different States and 17 traveling Field Agents were in place. There were county correspondents in 2,800 counties replying directly to Washington, D.C.

By the end of 1907, the Crop Reporting Board, for any specific report, consisted of the Chief of the Bureau as the Chairperson and four other members selected from all statisticians, Agents (both State and Field), and officials of the Bureau. Board members always did their own review before recommendations were compared among the members of the CRB. In 1907, a total of 18 meetings of the CRB were held with participation by six Field Agents and eight State Agents.

Olmsted took a leave of absence to assist the Census Bureau with a special population census project and C.C. Clark served as Acting Bureau Chief for much of 1908. By the end of 1909, there were 19 Field Agents, 44 State Agents, 135,000 voluntary county reporters, 33,000 voluntary township reporters, and 25,000 individual farmer correspondents. The standard CRB make-up had the Bureau Chief chair the meetings with participation by the Assistant Chief, one Bureau expert statistician, and two Field or State Agents.



**The CRB in March 1910. Pictured (L to R): Agricultural Statistician for Washington George K. Holmes, State Statistical Agent for Indiana Duncan, Chief of the Bureau Victor Olmsted, Statistical Field Agent for Bryantown, Md., John J. Darg, and Principal Statistician for Washington Nat C. Murray. Photograph from Special Collections, National Agricultural Library.**

There were some interesting references in the Annual Summary included in the 1911 Crop Reporter. To speed up tabulation of large surveys in Washington, D.C., a system of Crop Reporting Districts (often 8-10 districts per state) was created for each State. After the proof of concept, data were summarized by district rather than by county, which greatly reduced the amount of detailed weighting needed to get State indications. There was also mention that some 2,582 questions had been asked of the correspondents in 1910, compared to 483 in 1905. However, the overall response rate in 1910 was 60.5 percent, compared to 49.4 percent in 1905.

### ***Expansion and Decentralization from 1910 through 1930***

The era from 1910 to 1920 was important as far as shaping the work and structure of agricultural statistics within USDA. State Statistical Offices with full-time employees were established. The unique State/Federal cooperative agreements that have been so important for providing efficient, unduplicated, statistical service to agriculture originated in 1917. The scope of statistics covered by

USDA also expanded during this period; additional commodities were included in traditional reports as well as new data series.

In 1913, Nat Murray, who had been serving as Associate Chief of the statistics unit, was asked for recommendations for improving the statistical procedures. Key among his recommendations was to shift from part-time to full-time employees serving all States and to provide more prestige to the role of State Agents by creating State Statistical Offices. Both recommendations were adopted, with the State Statistical Agent positions now being covered under Civil Service provisions. An agent was named for most States but single offices were created to serve the six New England States, Maryland and Delaware, and Utah and Nevada.

Funding was received for agents' salaries but not for renting office space. The State Statistical Offices during this era were located in the living space of the State Agents. Similarly, there was no budget for hiring office staff so agents often relied on family members for assistance in addressing and mailing inquiries. The agents also did their own editing and summarization.

The establishment of the State Offices and full-time State Agents in 1914 was particularly timely since there were many increased requests for agricultural statistics during the period of preparation before the United States entered World War I in 1917. After the war, demands for agricultural statistics again increased when the United States provided aid in the form of food shipments to Europe. The new statistical reports included estimates of the production of several vegetables, cotton production forecasts during the growing season, fertilizer utilization, livestock inventories, and prices and wage data. Many of these efforts led to ongoing data series that were retained as standard features of the Bureau.

Even with the tight budget constraints, there was a concerted effort to utilize similar practices in all States. One of the important mechanisms for making improvements was a 1917 conference of Bureau employees. Many of the experienced agents were called upon to discuss their suggestions for handling various responsibilities.

One major advantage of the new full-time positions was the opportunity to work closely with State officials also involved with collection of agricultural statistics. Many States had long established “state farm census” programs—often carried out by assessors’ offices. These programs varied from State to State in terms of coverage, definitions, and procedures. In 1917 in Wisconsin, Commissioner of Agriculture Alan Norgood, and State Agent William F. Callander signed an agreement to establish the first cooperative crop reporting service in the United States. This type of cooperation was endorsed by the organization now known as the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture and many other States soon followed Wisconsin’s lead.

One of the most noticeable advantages of the state/Federal cooperation was avoiding two sets of statistics for the same state. Other significant benefits were the pooling of staffing, space, and financial resources and the possibility of expanding the total coverage of statistics since duplicative data collections were eliminated.

State office structure continued to evolve and expand during the 1920s. By the middle of that decade the township and county reporter lists were merged into an expanded township list of individuals who responded to monthly questionnaires from Washington. Starting in 1927 the responsibility for the township lists was gradually turned over to the state field offices. By 1933 the field offices were responsible for mailing and receiving all inquiries. By this time, reporting of prices had shifted to mid-month and most prices were collected from dealers and merchants. With the state offices involved in the data collection, and spreading the workload out, it was possible to do more analyses. For example, acreage questionnaires usually asked individuals to report how many acres of each crop were going to be grown during the survey year, along with the actual acres for the previous years. This allowed the calculation of current to historical ratios of change. Field offices could also match up questionnaires for the individuals who reported the previous year and calculate a current-to-current ratio indication of change.

## *Impacts of the Great Depression on Agricultural Statistics*

By the end of the 1920s – a more detailed livestock statistics program was in place. Monthly egg and milk production were estimated, along with periodic information on hog production and lamb production. All estimates were at the state and national level only. However, this would change as the country dealt with the severe economic conditions of the Great Depression. Money was extremely tight and prices of agricultural commodities were at very low levels. In 1933 there was also the possibility of producing surpluses, which would drive prices even lower. In May of 1933, Congress passed the Agricultural Adjustment Act that established the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) to develop programs to balance out supplies of agricultural products and to improve commodity prices.



**A farmer reviews his accounts in April 1936.**

A program was implemented nearly immediately to plow up nearly one-quarter of the cotton acreage planted in 1933. Plans were made for a wheat allotment program, which would pay farmers to reduce the planted acreage in 1934 and 1935. One of the most ambitious programs was the effort to control the production of hogs and corn. Hog prices were already at extremely low levels when the AAA was established and large supplies were

expected to come to market in the fall and winter of 1933. More than 6 million pigs and 200,000 sows were purchased and slaughtered to reduce the future supplies, with most of the meat going into relief efforts.

To control supplies in 1934 and 1935, producers were offered favorable loans for reducing production. This required county-level information on usual corn acreages, potential corn yields per acre, and usual production of hogs. The Division of Crop and Livestock Estimates was called upon to analyze all available data and to create the necessary county estimates. Ninety-two junior statisticians were hired for state offices to handle the added workload, one of the largest staffing increases ever for USDA statistics. The CRB did not meet to approve all new county estimates but did issue instructions to be followed in creating them.



**Drought conditions and blowing soil buried machinery on a farm in South Dakota in May 1936.**

The severe drought conditions of 1934 and 1936 led to the creation of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation to lessen the economic impact of poor crop conditions on farmers. Once again, additional county estimates were requested and the agency has continued to create county estimates ever since.

### ***Founding of the Statistical Reporting Service***

Earlier sections discussed changes that took place in the statistical function within USDA and

the operational names of the statistics unit. Another significant change took place on April 3, 1961, when the Statistical Reporting Service (SRS) and the Economic Research Service (ERS) were established as separate USDA agencies. The action established SRS with one clearly defined mission—collection and dissemination of basic agricultural statistics.

Dr. Harry Trelogan was named as the first SRS Administrator. Dr. Trelogan spent some time as a college professor following his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota and was particularly known for his work in marketing economics. He spent most of the 1940s and 1950s serving in various USDA positions, including Division Chief in the War Food Administration. At the time SRS was founded, he was serving as an Assistant Administrator in the Agricultural Marketing Service and was well aware of the statistical program but had not worked with the statistics functions themselves. All later Administrators have come from within the Agency with broad varieties of experience.

Dr. Trelogan was not a “hands on” administrator as far as the details of CRB operation. He devoted much of his energy and efforts to establishing the Washington Data Processing Center within SRS. However, he expressed his vision for SRS in a 1962 statement: “To serve the whole spectrum of users, the information must be accurate, reliable, complete, and timely.”

At the state level, SRS was still often referred to as the Crop Reporting Service or the Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, depending on the traditional labels that had been used. The CRB was even more clearly defined than ever as a “function” of SRS and all reports were labeled as being released by the Crop Reporting Board.

The Statistical Reporting Service name became familiar to most people in agriculture but was often criticized as confusing. It did not specify what types of statistics were covered, unless it was referred to as the Statistical Reporting Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. There were also concerns about the term “Reporting” not indicating the full range of statistical procedures being conducted.



There were often calls for changing or “improving” the Agency name. That finally came about in 1986 when the Agency name was changed to the National Agricultural Statistics Service and each state office began to be referred to as the [State] Agricultural Statistics Service. That meant that a

number of state acronyms duplicated other states but it did establish a closer tie between the national and state organization names. At this time, the Crop Reporting Board was also renamed the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB).

## Chapter 3

# TECHNOLOGY CHANGES AND ADVANCEMENTS

### *Impacts of the Modern Era of Statistical Techniques I*

The “modern” era of USDA statistics, the shift to probability sampling, is usually measured from 1957. In response to questions and concerns from the U.S. Congress in the early 1950s about the quality of certain forecasts and estimates, funding was obtained starting in 1954 to explore improved methodologies. A long-range plan to implement improved procedures was presented to Congress in February 1957. That plan of only 15 pages included four major projects, simply referred to as A, B, C, and D.

Project A called for the implementation of area frame-based probability estimates for crop acreages through interviews of producers on randomly selected segments of land. It also proposed to improve yield forecasts and estimates by selecting random fields from the area frame survey and making field counts and measurements during the



**A USDA official reviews an area frame map with a farmer in Arkansas, 1951.**

growing season. Research studies were already underway on both area frame sampling and objective yield techniques and the Congressional funding advanced the testing and pilot work.

By 1964 the Agency had completed testing and had increased area frame sample sizes to operational levels for the 48 contiguous states. The process completely changed operations in the state offices since they needed to hire and train part-time enumerators for the June and December area frame surveys and for objective yield surveys in those states with significant acreages. Because area frame sampling works best for major crops, the traditional mail surveys were continued to provide indications for all crops and for county estimates at the end of the season.



**An IBM machine.**

Because of the rudimentary computer capabilities available around 1960, summary procedures for the new surveys shifted to Washington, much like the process of 50 to 60 years earlier. Processing the 1964 June Enumerative Survey required 360 hours of running time on an IBM 7074 computer. Headquarters staff members were assigned to shifts in order to devote 24 hours a day to the necessary data entry and computer maintenance needs of this large processing effort.

Analysis procedures changed in the states and for the CRB. States had two sets of indications. One set had statistical precision measures for the direct expansion and ratio indications but limited history (while there was a long history for the traditional surveys). The biggest impact of the new statistical tools was on the CRB. Since the greatest statistical precision of probability surveys is achieved at the highest (U.S.) summary level, by 1965 the CRB shifted to a “national board” approach. In a national board, the CRB members concentrated first on examining all indications at

the U.S. level and then examined the summary indications for specific regions made up of combinations of states. The CRB, in its face-to-face meeting, did not adopt final estimates for all states. Instead, it adopted target totals for the U.S. and each region. Once that was done, the commodity statistician assigned to the specific commodity, the Field Crops Section Head, and probably one of the field office people assisting with that report performed an intensive review and finalized the state estimates in line with the U.S. and regional targets, within rounding.

The new probability survey procedures led to another change in the CRB operations. Because of the detailed sampling procedures and the multitude of new estimates from the probability surveys, it was prudent to always assign a member of the statistical methodology staff to the CRB for its deliberations.

### ***Impacts of the Modern Era of Statistical Techniques II***

The area frame approach was extremely successful for measuring total land in farms, numbers of farms, and acreages of major crops. Lists of extremely large livestock operations in each state normally supplemented the area frame. Estimates were created for the sum of those operations and their livestock information was excluded from the area frame estimates if they did fall within an area frame segment. That extreme operation concept helped somewhat but the area frame approach still was not effective for measuring livestock numbers and minor crop acreages. Because of concerns about livestock estimates, new Congressional funding was received in the early 1970s to implement multiple frame survey techniques. The multiple frame approach was a list-sampling frame of farm operations with as much attribute information as possible about each operation. Information included size of livestock operations, total farm income, and acreages of specialty crops. The list-sampling frame could be stratified and probability selected samples drawn. The area frame samples still provided an independent estimate of state totals but now the area frame also provided an indication of

list completeness by matching the area frame operation names against the full list.

In the early 1980s, NASS began developing procedures for computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI). CATI allowed data to be collected by telephone instead of by personal visit, and the survey results were automatically captured instead of needing additional listing and data entry operations. During the 1980s the multiple frame emphasis remained primarily on improving hog and cattle inventory estimates.

By 1990 the probability sampling approach was implemented for crop yields. Yields during the growing season had been based on responses to the monthly Farm Report survey, which was an ongoing panel of individuals who were willing to report each month about probable yields in their vicinity. The improved approach conducted a large probability selected survey in June to measure actual plantings. Samples of individuals reporting crops of interest in June were then selected for monthly yield telephone calls in time for the August, September, October, and November Crop Production reports.

The new probability crop yield surveys, conducted largely by telephone, enabled NASS state offices to collect and summarize data more quickly. As a result, NASS shifted the survey dates so that data collection was centered on the first of each month, instead of the former approach in which almost all respondents had to submit their information before the first of the month to allow for mail to reach the state offices.

One new consideration for making estimates under the multiple frame survey approach was the impact of “outliers,” particularly in livestock surveys. Just as a corn plant growing in a soybean field would be considered to be a weed, an outlier is a correct report but it is unexpected within the stratum in which the reporting unit was selected. An example of the most common type of outlier is a feedlot operation that has been operating at a fairly low level and was selected as a member of a small size stratum. If the feedlot had increased its capacity in the past year or two and now had several times more cattle than expected in that stratum, that report would be out of place. Such

operations skew the results for the specific stratum and perhaps for the entire state. Outliers are to be expected and usually are accepted at the national level. (There are always operations increasing and decreasing their size across the country.) However, the survey indications for some states would not be acceptable as state estimates. This became a new part of the Board process—determining how to allocate or “smooth” the impact of the outliers in setting final estimates. A number of approaches were implemented in order to make the decision process as consistent as possible.

One other impact of the new emphasis on probability sampling and estimation was to expand the CRB membership for livestock inventory and crop acreage and yield reports. One representative of the Survey Administration Section takes part as a member of the Board to discuss any special sampling and survey operation factors that might have impacted survey results.

### *From Plastic Rulers to Interactive Tools*

During most of the first 100 years of the Crop Reporting Board, the tools available to Agency analysts were rather basic, compared with present day options. For most of that period, photocopy technology was not available and electronic communication and electronic spreadsheet analyses were unheard of. Agency personnel were always creative in adapting available technologies to provide the most consistent, accurate analysis and estimation procedures.

Because photocopies were not feasible, the Agency had to mail original documents back and



**USDA officials record receipt of the envelopes as soon as they are retrieved from the locked safe.**

forth. A shuttle sheet approach was commonly used, in which the documents, with all past and current indications, would be transmitted in special handling envelopes (with precautions that authenticated the mailing and the fact that the envelopes had not been opened before receipt). Indications and records of past recommendations and estimates were meticulously entered in ink in official record books at each end of the process.



**“The Box” contained folders for each state and was labeled with the commodity and state names on the outside.**

When the CRB met on a particular estimate, such as crop acreage, there was only one set of materials for each state. There might be four or five sheets of paper for each state, including past indications and estimates, present indications, comments from the state office, and graphs which displayed past relationships. To facilitate the work of the Board, a simple approach, often referred to as “The Box,” was used. A wooden box, which was slightly lower in height than file folders, was created with dividers which would hold the folders upright for each state. The individual slots were identified by state. Each Board member would select a folder, review all contents, enter his judgments on a summary sheet, and then return the folder to the correct slot and repeat the process for each state.

Using “The Box” did allow CRB reviews to proceed relatively efficiently. However, it usually turned out that two Board members were waiting on the same state, after everyone else had finished. If there was a delay, other Board members might

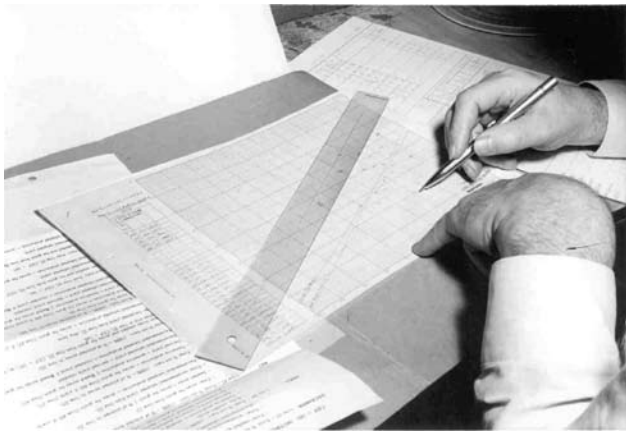


**A statistician returns his recommendations to the Chair of the Board, who compiles the recommendations.**

use the opportunity to re-examine materials for selected states. The usual process was to return their individual recommendation sheets to the Chair, who would compile the matrix of recommendations. If there seemed to be differences of opinions on a particular state, the Chair might call for all members to re-examine those materials.

Since automated charting and printing capabilities were not available, the graphs and displays for the Board were created by hand. Graphs included past indications and estimates but no current information. Typically, the first Board member reviewing a state made a notation of the current indication as a small arrowhead towards the bottom of the graph. It was often important for Board members to “read” out some bias in making their recommendations. An example of bias was the documented fact that producers who had only livestock and pasture on their operations were less likely to return crop acreage questionnaires than producers of row crops.

Before rotary calculators made mathematical regression calculations more feasible, the analysis approach commonly used involved examining past relationships and approximating the correct relationship between indications and estimates by using a clear plastic “ruler.” The plastic strips, which were about 1 inch wide, did not have any markings on them but did have a straight line etched in the middle running from one end to the other. The Board member would lay the ruler across the graph and shift it until he or she felt the etched



**The clear plastic “rulers” used actually had no markings or guides.**

line best represented the best relationship between indications and estimates. He or she would then see where the current indication would intersect that line and look to the side axis to determine the actual value to recommend.

NASS offices were also ingenious in developing quality control procedures. In the early 1900s the monthly questionnaire asked for condition of a number of crops and the answers were nicely arrayed in a single row across the page. One reference from that time period implied that the statistical assistants (who, interestingly, were referred to as “skilled computers”) overlapped the forms for a county or district to expose the lines of answers. In this manner, they could quickly add down to subtotals for that set of questionnaires. The subtotal sheets were added to district and state totals and averages.

As survey content changed and fuller explanations were needed for specific questions, Agency questionnaires mainly became rows of questions with the answer cells along the right column of the form. Someone had the excellent idea of holding questionnaires in place for calculations through a process that came to be known as “peg stripping.” (While he didn’t seem to be the originator of the approach, Glenn Simpson, who was the CRB Secretary in the mid- 1950s, pushed for experimentation in order to reduce the burden of hand tabulation.) The questionnaires were printed on paper that had a series of precisely determined holes across the top. Returned questionnaires were sorted by county and placed on metal bars con-



**A respondent completes a survey for the January 1, 1965, Grain Stocks Report. Each survey had a precise line of holes across the top that was used during tabulation.**

taining a row of short pegs, in a “shingled” fashion with just the answer cells showing. The last questionnaire in line became a summary page for that set of questionnaires. The summary pages often were printed in a separate color to make it easier to distinguish them. The questionnaires were held in place by another long bar which snapped over the pegs, holding everything tightly in alignment. For major surveys, large numbers of these peg strips of completed questionnaires were needed and a good control system was in place for how many peg strips were needed for each county. Questionnaires were not removed from their strip until counts had been verified by a second person.

The addition of photocopiers and early computer technology made it possible to provide each Board member with his/her own copies of review materials and to actually plot regression relationships on Board materials. Members could enter the new indication into a formula and determine the modeled estimate, instead of estimating it with the plastic ruler.

In the 1980s analysis of many data series indicated that a regression analysis approach was often misleading. Reasons for this included that regression could be overly influenced by one extremely good or bad year in the case of yields or might not provide much analysis power if most data points were close together from year to year. Analysis shifted to a time series approach—with additional regression analyses for more information.



**Staff prepare “release copies” of the June 1947 crop report on mimeograph machines set up inside the lockup area.**

A time series, or comparison table, approach created data arrays of indications and final estimates for past data periods (usually 10 or more). The difference (either absolute or percentage, depending on the type of data item) was calculated and displayed for each time period, along with the average difference. Adding the average difference to the current survey indication provided a recommendation for each data source. Analysts could also see the impact of unusual years in the data set and adjust their conclusions, if necessary.

Most processes today are automated for state offices, as well as for the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB), formerly known as CRB. Current indications are brought into the comparison table spread sheets and the adjusted indications are visible on the computer screen. Most NASS systems



**An official uses a comptometer to assist with the computations and tabulations for the June 1947 crop report.**

will also allow analysts to view and update charts and graphs as well as numeric data tables. Because of the new tools, Board members can spend more time looking at interrelationships in the data rather than having to worry about entering numbers and calculating by hand.

### ***Entering the Electronic Era***

NASS prides itself in being customer oriented and providing the most appropriate delivery of its products. However, it purposely delayed offering electronic access to its reports when that capability first became feasible. A number of universities and private organizations were initially interested in offering electronic access to NASS reports. However, each of them wanted files in somewhat different formats. NASS felt that offering files to any one of the organizations would obligate the agency to provide files to each of the others, which would require considerable time and personnel resources. NASS refused to provide files to any vendors until some standard format became available.

The standard format requirement was resolved when the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced a competitive bidding process for selecting an electronic dissemination vendor. This was a requirements contract, meaning that any USDA agency seeking to release data electronically needed to provide those files to the selected vendor. It also imposed strict requirements on the competing bidders. The winning bidder had to make electronic files available to other vendors (level 1 user) before they provided data to their paying customers (level 2 users).

The new contract became known as the Computerized Information Dissemination System (CIDS). During the first year of operation agencies were required to issue identical formats for printed and electronic media. Since most electronic data users at the time had limited capability in computers and printers, downloading and printing reports was time consuming. Data table lines often wrapped to multiple lines on customers' printers.

Electronic data users were quickly frustrated with the slowness and service quality. NASS

took the complaints to heart and redesigned its printed reports. For example, the signature Crop Production report, the most requested electronic report, had a traditional format that included, in order, highlights, table of contents, detailed narrative write-ups, summary data tables, and commodity data tables. Data users primarily interested in the corn or soybeans data tables might need to view or print some 30 pages before they got to the information they were seeking.

Since alternative formats could not be used for CIDS, NASS changed the printed tables and narratives to not exceed more than 79 characters per line. The report order was rearranged to include highlights, detailed data tables, summary tables, narratives, and index. Thus, all users could more quickly access the data tables. Instead of forcing electronic users to suffer through the traditional formats, NASS essentially adopted the electronic version as the de facto standard for written publications.

NASS customers were very appreciative of their actions, but the process was still quite slow, particularly if a user wanted to access both the detailed tables and the narratives for the same commodities or was primarily interested in the summary tables. Users were disappointed with agencies that did not make the adjustments that NASS did.

When the CIDS contract was re-negotiated, NASS introduced the capability of segmenting the electronic version reports – as long as the entire report was still available. By segmenting the data tables, users could select small portions of the report and greatly reduce their access time and printing costs.

Even with modifications, the CIDS contract provided only rudimentary service. However, it provided an opportunity for data users to receive faster access to data sets than waiting for mailed or faxed copies. It also provided a stopgap until the emerging Internet capability became more widely available.



## Chapter 4

### GOVERNING LAWS AND PROCESSES

#### *Laws Concerning the Agency and the CRB*

NASS and its predecessor organizations have benefited historically by the fact that their actions have not been overly specified in statutes. The Agency has normally been able to adjust to changes in data user needs and preferences because report details and timing were not locked in statutorily. However, the Agency has also benefited greatly by a few specific laws on confidentiality and disclosure avoidance. It also benefited from statistics being mentioned as a duty of the Secretary of Agriculture in the May 15, 1862 Act, signed by President Abraham Lincoln, that established the Department (then Bureau) of Agriculture and the position of Secretary (originally, Commissioner) of Agriculture.

Since there were no insider trading prohibitions in place at the time of the curtain incident in 1905, there were efforts, starting in 1905, to

provide a legal basis for penalties. Two new statutes were implemented as of March 4, 1909. The first, codified as 18 United States Code (USC) Sec. 1902, deals with the “disclosure of crop information and speculation thereon.” It states that any “...officer, employee or person working for or on behalf of the United States...” is subject to fines or imprisonment or both if they divulge any information ahead of a scheduled release. (The original wording specified a fine of no more than \$10,000 but that limit was removed in 1994.)

The second statute enacted in 1909, 18 USC Sec. 2072, deals with “false crop reports.” It calls for penalties of fines, imprisonment, or both if a government officer or employee “...knowingly compiles for issuance, or issues, any false statistics or information as a report of the United States...” The originally stated maximum fine was \$5,000

but that limit was also removed in 1994.

Another significant statute was enacted on March 4, 1909. Codified as 7 USC Sec. 411a, it deals with “monthly crop reports; contents; issuance; approval by Secretary of Agriculture.” It specifies that the monthly crop report “...shall be printed and distributed on or before the twelfth day of each month...” It also states “...it shall be submitted to and officially approved by the Secretary of Agriculture, before being issued or published.” A later act, in 1924, established the eighth of the month as the prescribed date for issuing monthly cotton crop reports. A modification in 1972 allowed cotton reports to be included with other crops in the monthly Crop Production report and the concepts from the two statutes were informally combined to set the allowable release dates for the monthly Crop Production report to fall between the 8th and 12th of each month.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, cotton was definitely the most prominent and politically sensitive crop in the United States. Reference was made earlier to the House of Representatives Hearing of 1904 on the level of cotton estimates. Similar concerns and complaints surfaced every few years whenever one side of the industry or another was upset with the impact of statistical reports on prices and income.

The high level of oversight of cotton statistics led to a number of specific statutes. In 1912 a cotton law was passed, stipulating that the July 1 Acreage report, which published the planted acres for other crops, should show the cotton acres in cultivation on that date. The concept was confusing to reporters but it illustrates the concern in the cotton industry that no USDA report should lead to an overestimate of the crop potential. The law remained in place until it was amended on May 29, 1958, to change from reporting cotton acres in cultivation to reporting cotton acres planted and remove the confusion of having two different concepts in the Acreage report.

The classic case of the impact of specific cotton legislation on the operations of the Agency was the cotton crop reports law enacted on May 3, 1924. The law (codified as 7 USC Sec. 475) had many facets, such as specifying release of USDA re-



**A farmer cultivates cotton on a farm during the Dust Bowl. CRB members were required to be familiar with techniques used to produce cotton. Photograph from USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.**

ports on cotton condition, progress, and probable number of bales to be produced simultaneously with cotton ginning reports by the Department of Commerce. The reports were to be released at 11 a.m. on the 8th day of each month from August to December. The bigger impact of the law was the requirement that the CRBs for cotton production reports had to have five or more members, including “...not less than three of which shall be supervisory field statisticians of the Department of Agriculture located in different sections of the cotton-growing States, experienced in estimating cotton production and who shall have first hand knowledge of the condition of the cotton crop based upon recent field observations...” The law finished by requiring that the majority of the CRB members for cotton reports shall be familiar with the methods and practices of producing cotton. With the communication techniques available in the mid-1920s it might have been particularly helpful to have representatives from the various cotton-producing areas. However, later in the century communications were greatly improved and the survey procedures, indications, and State office analysis procedures in place meant that the CRB did not need to depend so much on first-hand knowledge for each report. Nonetheless, Chairpersons and Secretaries of the CRB continued to name three Field Office representatives from cotton-producing states for the August to December reports until the law was repealed on April 4, 1996.

The statute that is most essential for NASS operations, Confidentiality of Information (USC Sec. 2276), was not enacted until December 23, 1985. This statute provides one of the strongest and most inclusive confidentiality protection provisions of any statistical organization. It specifies that only summary-level data, which will not allow identification of any individual or organization, can be released. It qualifies data reported to NASS as immune from mandatory disclosure in legal matters and states that copies of reports to NASS kept in respondents' files shall be immune from subpoena or other legal inquiries.

### ***Creation of the World Agricultural Outlook Board***

In 1973 the USDA made a major improvement in how commodity economics information was handled by redefining the roles of the Outlook and Situation Board (OSB), which reported to the Assistant Secretary for Economics. The impetus for the change was the frustration and embarrassment associated with the 1972 crop year. Agents working for Russia were successful in quietly purchasing large portions of the 1972 grain crop at lower prices than extra demand for the product warranted. These purchases were commonly referred to as "The Great Grain Robbery."

When the purchases were investigated, it turned out that many individuals in USDA were aware of some of the purchase activity. However, there was no mechanism at the time to compile and share information across agencies and various government programs. This led to a series of congressional hearings on how to improve USDA's economic intelligence system.

The USDA response was to create a process to bring all USDA information together for review. The OSB served as the clearance organization for the interagency commodity estimation committees that were chaired by the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service to evaluate information regarding government program crops. The reviews led to specific USDA reports: the World Crop Production report and the Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report.

The first Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report was issued on September 17, 1973, and focused on U.S. supply, demand, and trade. The domestically based reports quickly became a fixture in the commodity market information system of the United States, as well as providing valuable planning and decision-making information to USDA. The World Agricultural Outlook Board (WAOB), originally named the World Food and Agricultural Outlook and Situation Board, was established by the Secretary of Agriculture on June 3, 1977, to assure the consistency, objectivity, reliability, and timeliness of USDA's economic situation and outlook publications.

Report Number 107, on October 14, 1980, was the first report entitled World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) and the first report to analyze and provide breakouts for the world, U.S., total foreign, major exporters, major importers, and other categories. The reports did not include any individual country estimates. The WASDE reports interpreted the available information and projected the season average prices and carryout stocks. WASDE Report 177, issued on January 11, 1985, was the first report to add individual country data. For example, Argentina, Australia, and Canada were listed separately as major exporters and China and the former Soviet Union were listed as major importers.

The WAOB functions through a system of Interagency Commodity Estimating Committees (such as oilseeds, cotton, feed grains, etc.). Each committee is chaired by a WAOB specialist who convenes meetings of the knowledgeable specialists from other USDA agencies that have relevant pro-



**Jerry Bange, WAOB Chairperson, provides a briefing during a 2005 lockup.**

gram, production, and trade information for the specific commodities. The committees use a wide variety of information sources, including published NASS data, administrative data from other government and trade organizations, foreign attaché reports, reports published by foreign countries, travel reports, and weather and satellite-based interpretations.

The WAOB, from its outset, applied Agricultural Statistics Board security procedures and issued its reports from lockup conditions. At first, WAOB was located in a different part of the USDA South Building than NASS and required its own security facilities for its deliberations. Escorted by a guard, WAOB analysts would take the reports to the ASB release room just before release. By early 1982 WAOB was collocated with NASS and the ASB staff provided security and logistical support for both agencies.

WASDE reports were typically issued after each major NASS release, such as Crop Production and Grain Stocks. In 1984 a number of data users expressed concerns about “mixed messages” from USDA economic reports. Reference was made particularly to January 1984 when some data users felt they received one impression from the NASS Annual Crop Production report, a different signal from the subsequent WASDE report, and then quite different signals about 2 weeks later when the NASS Grain Stocks report and another WASDE were issued. NASS and WAOB decided to coordinate timing so that the WASDE could be finished during the lockup for the Crop Production report and both reports would be released at the same time. This change was made for the January 11, 1985, reports.

In December 1984 Secretary of Agriculture John Block named a Blue Ribbon Panel to study the timing and procedures that USDA agencies used for commodity-related reports. His news re-

lease also announced that timing would be changed so that the Crop Production and WASDE reports were released simultaneously each month.

That panel, headed by Darrel Good of the University of Illinois at Champaign/Urbana, concluded that USDA did not have too many reports but had too many report days. They recommended that NASS release the Crop Production Annual and Grain Stocks reports on the same date in January. NASS was already pursuing the possibility of shifting the corn marketing year from an October 1 start to September 1, which would fit in well with a shift of grain stocks from a January 1 to December 1 reference date. Work proceeded on making necessary changes in surveys, issuing proper announcements, and creating a historical data series for the new Grain Stocks survey months. The final changes were implemented as of January 1987.

The co-release arrangement meant that all interested parties had access to both updated U.S. crop forecasts and the economic interpretations at the same time—and the Secretary of Agriculture’s office did not need to attend lockup briefings 2 days in a row. This change was particularly helpful in avoiding situations in which the Crop Production report was released the last working day of a week and the WASDE would not be available until after the weekend.

The co-release arrangement did require modifications on the part of both NASS and WAOB. The WAOB Interagency Committees needed to do more work on preparing likely U.S. production scenarios—and their impacts on world supply and trade—ahead of the lockup day since there was less time for deliberations in lockup. The work of the CRB had to start 2-3 hours earlier to allow time for the WAOB to review the new U.S. figures and to finish its work in time for the 3 p.m. release.

## Chapter 5

### CURRENT PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES

#### *Shifting from Day to Night*



**Reporters in the press room anxiously cross the line to retrieve copies of a report once the official Crop Reporting Board clock strikes 3 p.m.**

In 1986 the CRB was renamed the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB). This renaming coincided with the renaming of the agency as the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Years later, in May 1994, one of the most significant changes in ASB delivery of statistical reports occurred when the release of major crop-related reports shifted from 3 p.m. to 8:30 a.m. Lockup periods for some of those reports now started before midnight in order to enable the Board to complete all analysis and publication operations.

Considerable review, planning, and debate went into the final decision to shift to morning releases. A small group of data users contacted the Secretary of Agriculture asking for the change. They cited the fact that major Principal Economic Indicator reports of other Cabinet departments were already morning releases. They also pointed

out that USDA data released at 3 p.m. were used for trading in futures markets around the world before U.S. markets opened the next morning.

Many major farm and commodity organizations initially opposed the proposal due to concern that security might be compromised. This was a valid concern since the individuals requesting the change suggested that NASS use its normal estimating procedures and timing to prepare the reports but then secure the reports overnight for morning release (an approach similar to that used by other Federal Government statistical organizations). However, NASS and the World Agricultural Outlook Board would not agree to such a shift in security levels. They responded that, if release timing was changed, they would continue to finalize major reports under lockup conditions and release the reports from lockup. With that assurance of continued security, major organizations agreed with USDA on a 1-year trial of morning releases.

The first morning release was on May 10, 1994, and all major crop releases the rest of 1994 were at 8:30 a.m., except for cotton-related information. Maintaining the afternoon cotton releases was due to a legislative quirk. Earlier in the 20th century, cotton forecasts were issued about the 8th of each month, separate from the Crop Production report which contained the other major crops due to a specific cotton report law. When legislation was passed to allow cotton to be added to the Crop Production report, the amendment specified that cotton information be released at 3 p.m. That time of day was listed since it was the traditional Crop Production release time, although the general Crop Report law did not specify a time.

Cotton industry representatives were not a party to the original request to shift the timing. They were not necessarily opposed to the shift but didn't want to be driven by grain industry considerations. Therefore, NASS followed the cotton-specific law. Since the 1994 Crop Production release calendar had already been announced, NASS released reports at 8:30 a.m., which contained all tables and narratives except for cotton. If cotton were to be included for a particular month, a lockup was reinstated about 10 a.m. and the cotton portion of the report was finished under secured con-

ditions. An accommodation was made to allow the WAOB cotton interagency estimates committee to work in NASS space so the WAOB workspace did not need to be secured during the day. At 3 p.m. the full Crop Production report was released. This Adouble duty@ approach required a number of changes in logistics and careful attention to which individuals were needed at particular times of day to complete all analysis, composition, and release procedures. Most individuals who worked on the overnight portion were able to go home before the 10 a.m. lockup was initiated, but the Chairperson and Secretary of the ASB ended up working both of the back-to-back lockups each month.

For the year 1995, NASS shifted the order of the reports. A shorter lockup was used to issue the cotton data at 3 p.m. one day and then an overnight lockup was implemented with the full report coming out at 8:30 a.m. the next day. This minimized the numbers of pages that had to be printed and avoided someone picking up a Crop Production release that looked complete but was missing the cotton data. By the third year, the law specifying 3 p.m. had been changed and no special accommodations were needed.

### *The Present Board Concept and Types of Boards*

Much of this story has focused on the full lockups with all outside communications cut off and an armed guard on duty. Those procedures for the most market-sensitive reports are critically important. However, NASS practices strong security procedures for all operations and all reports that are issued. The procedures and the levels of security are adapted depending on the time that is required to complete each report and the types of individuals involved.

One purpose of the ASB process, in addition to preserving security, is to ensure accuracy in compiling and interpreting survey results and indications. The Board approach of having a second level of review for all indications and recommendations is just as important today as it was 100 years ago. In fact, a case might be made that the second review is now even more important. In 1905 all

calculations were made by a relatively small group of skilled statistical assistants. With today's spreadsheets and the abundance of different surveys with relatively small sample sizes, statisticians often enter their own data. It is necessary to have an independent review to uncover entry errors not initially recognized.

Since NASS field offices evaluate survey data and formulate initial recommendations, it is clear that the State offices are performing a critical Board function. Many offices even parallel the Board process by having State mini-Boards in which multiple staff members meet to review the indications for the most important commodity recommendations to be sent in for ASB action. This is an excellent training opportunity for newer staff members to see first hand how the process will work later in Washington. Readers need to realize that each State office has access only to their data and indications so they are not previewing the actual National Board results.

There are at least five different types of "Boards" that NASS currently uses for specific reports. The most common is often not thought of as a Board by the participants. It is the Commodity Section Review Board that is implemented nearly every working day of the year. For ongoing reports, such as the Weekly Broiler Report, the commodity statistician, his or her statistical assistants, and their Section Head serve as the de facto Board for reviewing all indications and recommendations from the Field, following up on any unusual data relationships, and compiling the report.

One important approach for very detailed, less market-sensitive reports is referred to as a "Review after Summary Board." This is an important quality control procedure for reports such as the monthly Prices and the quarterly Agricultural Labor reports. Staff members work through all the calculation and review procedures on those reports and compile the full report for a Board meeting about 24 hours before release. All narratives have been drafted by that time and Board members review the major data items in the report to be sure that State-to-State and commodity-to-commodity relationships seem reasonable and are explained by the report narratives.

The annual Farm Production Expenditures report, which creates national and regional estimates for major expenditure categories based on relatively small sample sizes, necessitated a new type of Board review. An "Outlier Review Board" is held after basic editing and analysis steps are completed. Based on the underlying statistical distributions of the expanded data for the current year's reports, all records are identified that had overwhelming impacts on the estimates of any category at the regional or national level. If a particular operation appears to belong to higher strata (due to expansion of the operation after control data were determined), the Board might choose to re-summarize that operation in new strata. In some cases, the reported data are correct for a large operation in the highest strata and the Board will recommend actions to smooth the regional estimates since the operation has valid national impact.

One of the most common Board procedures is the "Speculative 'Need to Know' Board" used for reports such as Acreage, Cattle, Grain Stocks, and Hogs and Pigs. Those are very market-sensitive reports with so many State and category interrelationships that national-level figures are needed to guide all of the detailed review and estimate-setting activities. If the full speculative Board approach were to be used, the output of the several hours review after lockup would likely be one page of U.S.-level numbers. Instead, NASS conducts the formal Board meeting 4-5 days before release. Board members receive detailed information on the survey data and any unusual data situations. The members then review all indications and create their recommendations for Board targets for key elements such as total cattle, calf crop, and numbers of beef cows. After the targets are set, the commodity statistician, along with the help of field office representatives, does the intense review of the interrelationships. The Head of the Commodity Section serves as the key reviewer. All members of the Board operate on a strict need-to-know basis. Details are not discussed with any other staff members and all materials are secured when not in use. The full report is finished in time for final composition and printing of immediate release copies. At the time printing is underway, copies do not exist

outside of the lockup area.

The ultimate security setting is the “Full Lockup Speculative Boards” used for monthly Crop Production reports. The first few days of work on Crop Production reports are under the need-to-know approach. However, for the speculative crops of corn, cotton, soybeans, wheat, and citrus, the focus is to complete work on all but the speculative States. Thus, the statement is often made that “no one could have had the August 1 U.S. corn yield forecast ahead of the release morning” because that figure was not created until after lockup was in place and no one can leave the lockup area until 8:30 a.m. when the report is released to everyone.

Both the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates and the Crop Production reports, along with five other NASS data series, are Principal Economic Indicators (PEI) of the United States. One of the operating procedures for reports in the PEI series is to provide information to the Council of Economic Advisors an hour and a half ahead of release. NASS and WAOB have always maintained that no information can be provided ahead of release time but, if the Council did want the information ahead of time, Council members would be allowed to enter the lockup facility but could not leave or communicate with anyone outside lockup until release time.

The lockup facility and the reporter release room are assets for the Department of Agriculture. USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service uses the reporter release room for one of its ongoing reports. On rare occasions, analysts of the Department have used the lockup facility to make decisions on final program details and then announce those details out of lockup.

### ***Creating and Adhering to a Calendar***

The NASS record for issuing a report on time seems like the old Postal Service motto: “Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stay these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” NASS has built such detailed contingency plans into the operational procedures that it takes a massive disaster situation to delay or postpone release of a speculative statistical report.

Backup and contingency procedures for handling security for NASS reports have covered nearly every possibility, including not being able to get to the South Building work location.

During the first Gulf War, when there were concerns about possible retaliation against U.S. Government buildings, the Chairperson, the Secretary of the Board, and one other person made arrangements that would have allowed the Agricultural Statistics Board to complete work and issue a skeleton report from a non-Government location. However, that procedure dealt only with a 1-day emergency and would not have enabled orderly functioning for an extended period of time. After September 11, 2001, more detailed plans and the creation of necessary electronic file backups and alternative locations were implemented to ensure the agricultural statistics infrastructure would not be totally cut off by the loss of a key building or a number of key participants.

The work on alternatives to standard procedures has already paid off on multiple occasions. The backup system of laptop computers was able to keep operations on schedule when USDA Internet connectivity was totally cut off for a period of time. NASS has also been able to remotely release (non-lockup) reports on days when Washington, D.C., offices were closed for situations such as the World Trade Organization protests and when severe storms were expected in the aftermath of a hurricane. However, there have been three instances in the past 10 years when situations did arise that caused the delay of a scheduled report release. A description of the handling of those situations might round out the explanation of the NASS commitment to security and confidentiality.

The first situation was the East Coast blizzard of 1996. The storm deposited 20-plus inches of snow on the Washington D.C., area the second weekend of January. The January Crop Production report was scheduled for release Wednesday, January 10, and the Crop Production Annual and WASDE reports were scheduled for Thursday, January 11. The storm was severe enough that only limited road transportation was possible through Wednesday. Washington area airports did not resume service until Wednesday, which was the day



that the ASB Chair, who had been out of town, was able to return to Washington. By Tuesday, the Administrator, the Statistics Division Director, and one field representative were able to make it to the office and spent much of the day answering telephone calls and communicating with USDA officials. The ASB and WAOB notified USDA and the news services that 2 working day's notice of the new dates and times for the releases would be given to everyone. (Internally, ASB members agreed that they could put out the reports the second day after the cotton specialist could get out of his neighborhood and make it to work.) NASS worked closely with WAOB in evaluating the status of personnel and data sources and issued a Thursday, January 11, notification that all reports would be issued on Tuesday, January 16, following the Monday holiday for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday.

The second instance was caused by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The Crop Production and World Agricultural Supply and Demands Estimates reports were scheduled for release at 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday, September 12. Work was well along on the morning of September 11, when the first reports were received of the planes hitting the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Speculative State recommendations had not yet been transmitted to Headquarters. When the word came to close down government operations and evacuate, Fred Vogel, the ASB Chairperson, and Jerry Bange, the WAOB Chairperson, made some critical, appropriate decisions. They held a meeting with their joint staffs and instructed everyone to stop work, save files, shut down all computer operations, and not resume any release deliberations until order and security were restored. NASS and WAOB responded in a manner that assured that data security was not compromised by the disruption of normal procedures. Vogel and Bange prepared a simple announcement that the following day's reports would be delayed (see Appendix C). By that time, no one was in the USDA Office of Communications. However, Roger Runnigen of Bloomberg News was in the adjoining hallway and he made sure that the notice went out to all wire services—an excellent example of the press and statistical agencies working together. Once again,

NASS and WAOB gave 2 days' notice that the reports would be issued on Friday, September 14.

The third departure from the established Crop Production and World Agricultural Supply and Demands Estimates calendar occurred in 2004. In this case, NASS and WAOB decided on short notice to issue reports a day early. The change was prompted by the death of former President Ronald Reagan. The reports were scheduled to be released on Friday, June 11. President Reagan passed away the weekend before and by Monday, June 7, plans were shaping up for a National Day of Mourning on the 11th. June Crop Production is one of the smaller reports of the year and Statistics Division staff members felt that they could finish work in time for a Thursday morning release. WAOB staff members agreed but the WAOB Chairperson needed to communicate with the other agencies contributing members to the Interagency Crop Estimation Committees. The decision to release a day early was widely applauded within the agriculture community since commodity and futures markets preferred to be closed on the Day of Mourning (see Appendix C).

The ASB calendar for each year is prepared well ahead of time and is widely publicized so all interested in agriculture are aware of the upcoming releases. The calendar has been described as "stable but not static." Improvements such as additional data breakouts are constantly being added to improve the customer service value. One of the first steps in creating the calendar each year is to establish the release dates for the Crop Production reports. The releases take place between the 8th and 12th of the month. The specific dates depend on the timing needed to collect the survey data, centered around the first of the month, and to complete processing in the States and in Headquarters. Release timing is definitely affected by how the weekends fall each month. The relative timing of most other reports is similar from year to year but specific principles are built into the planning, such as the livestock industry preferring to receive most livestock reports on Friday afternoons rather than during the marketing week. NASS planners also bring in a number of special considerations such as not issuing reports on Good Friday.

## Chapter 6

### THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE REPORTS

#### *Glimpses of Secretaries and Other Report Signers*

As this write-up indicates, the Secretary of Agriculture was very closely associated with the statistics activities in the early 1900s. As the scope of the Department of Agriculture expanded and most employees came under civil service provisions, the statistical agency became independent of day-to-day communications with the Secretary. NASS contacts the office of each new Secretary and determines what procedures will work best in terms of alerting the office of all reports that require signing and of special features of any report—such as visitors who will be attending the briefing. Most Secretaries are interested in the statistics program and the opportunity to get immediate notification of important changes in production and world supply and demand and have placed a priority on signing reports when they are available. Since the major crop-related reports are now released at 8:30 a.m.,

instead of 3 p.m., it is often easier for the Secretary to incorporate the signing of a report into his or her schedule.



**Secretary Johanns signs his first USDA report in 2005.**



**A USDA official signs a report.**

Briefings for the Secretary have also changed tremendously over the past 100 years. There are some interesting historical pictures of CRB members crowded around a desk while the Chairperson highlights the report details for the Secretary. Presently, the briefing is more formal, with data tables and results projected on a screen and the Secretary is able to leave the briefing with a full-color set of the briefing materials as well as the report(s). WAS-DE briefings often contain some satellite images depicting current vegetative indexes or summaries of rainfall in major producing regions around the world. Visitors attend most briefings. Many of the visitors are producers or members of farm organizations. The earliest identified farm groups were from North Carolina in the late 1970s. However, a delegation from the Illinois Farm Bureau attended the August 1982 Crop Production release and that organization has sent a new group to visit every August since. Other producer organizations have followed suit in planning occasional visits.

Most Secretaries of Agriculture have seemed to enjoy the signing and briefing experience. As someone once said, “Why shouldn’t they enjoy it? When they come over they know they will be free of telephones and reporters for at least half an hour.” Secretaries of Agriculture have had a wide variety of personalities and they have exhibited quite different approaches to the briefings. Many have taken in the entire presentation and then asked a question or two for clarification. Some have preferred to ask for clarifications as the briefing progresses. At times, a Secretary has wanted to get a quick opinion on what actions the Department might take

and has asked questions of the Chief Economist or other advisors in attendance. In those cases, the briefing has momentarily been placed on hold.

The ASB first rule for briefings is “never surprise the Secretary.” If there are going to be any special features in the briefing, if there are going to be any visitors or reporters in attendance, or if photo requests have been made, the Secretary’s office must be notified in advance. The person escorting the Secretary to the lockup area will remind the Secretary of those special circumstances. Visitors who are attending are asked to read and sign off on the basic rules of attendance. One primary condition is that visitors are being allowed the privilege of listening in on the briefing prepared for the Secretary and they are not to ask any of their own questions.

Just as there are classic stories involving people who have ended up in lockup by mistake, there have been some interesting anecdotes involving the individuals who have signed the reports over time. Agriculture Secretary Clayton Yeutter placed a very high priority on signing reports whenever he was in town and often left other meetings on Capitol Hill or elsewhere to get back for a release. Staff members working on the reports were pleased to have such interest but they breathed easier when the Secretary did rush in just in time to sign. Just in time was also the catchword for the early reports of the Mike Espy administration. Hardly any sub-cabinet members had been confirmed and Secretary Espy was working on details such as new nominations, so he was often pressed for time. Something happened one afternoon and he got to the guard’s desk just at 3 p.m. when the guard was opening the doors. Thus, the Secretary didn’t need to show a pass and never broke stride on the way to the briefing room. (The Chairpersons of the ASB and WAOB were making plans to go to the Secretary’s office and brief him there since he hadn’t arrived.)

There are two anecdotes that perhaps will be best remembered by staff members who have been involved in Board briefings in the past 20 years or so—and they both involve a Deputy Secretary who was signing in the absence of the Secretary. The first was Ann Veneman, during her first tour with the USDA. The first time she signed a

report as Acting Secretary was a September Crop Production report. Visitors that day included a delegation from the Iowa Farm Bureau and a small group from the Mississippi Extension Service. When Ms. Veneman entered the room, the southern gentlemen from Mississippi rose as one. It was second nature to the visitors but no signer had ever gotten a standing reception and the briefing was delayed by such good-natured comments as “Gee, Mr. Chief Economist, no one ever stands when you come over to sign.”

The second story involved Rich Rominger, who was the Deputy Secretary during the Clinton administration. Mr. Rominger signed many reports during his tenure and was usually very punctual. It seemed strange that he didn’t arrive at his usual time for a 3 p.m. Hogs and Pigs release. It got closer and closer to release time and still no Deputy. Finally, at about 2:55 p.m., USDA Chief Economist Keith Collins arrived without the Deputy. Collins explained, “Rich really wanted to sign the report but Jane Fonda is in his office and didn’t

leave on time.” To finish that story, the planned briefing was presented to Collins and about half-way through Rominger did arrive. He was interested enough in the report that he found his own way over to the lockup area as soon as Jane Fonda left his office.

In addition to the value to Secretaries of Agriculture from attending the briefings, there is a great value to the staff members who work on the reports. People feel more pride in their efforts when the Secretary is willing to attend and see first hand what the staff members have compiled. Even staff members who did not work on the specific report(s) being released appreciate the Secretary’s presence at briefings and signings. Whenever a new Secretary has taken office and the word is out that he or she is coming over, there will be extra staff members in the hall to catch a glimpse of their new leader.

### *The Special Roles of the CRB and ASB Secretary*

There are several references that provide various amounts of detail about the individuals who have served as the Chairperson of the CRB and ASB. Unfortunately, the individuals who served in the crucial Secretary position were not as well documented. The Secretary always worked in close harmony with the Chairperson in setting the annual release calendar, scheduling the dates and members of the board, and assuring that all materials were ready for board action and that reports were compiled and released on schedule.

Since the late 1900s, there have been clear distinctions between the security roles of the CRB Secretary and the members of the actual estimates setting boards. Only the Secretary and immediate members of the Secretary’s staff are allowed to communicate with the guard corps. The logic is that because the Chairperson and other “voting” members of the boards worked with the numbers they should not have any contact with the guards located outside of the lockup doors.

From the 1960s into the 1990s, the CRB and ASB Secretary also served as the Chief of the Data Services Branch. That Branch was responsible



**R.K. Smith, Acting Chairman of the Board, and J.K. Pallesen, Secretary of the Board, bring copies of the approved report out from the lockup for general release, June 1947.**

for receiving data files and recommendations from the State offices, providing proofreading and editorial assistance for reports, final typing and printing of all reports, and release of physical and electronic versions of the reports. The Branch carried out all communications with State office personnel and outsiders on behalf of the CRB.

Rather than listing the duties and functions of the Secretary position, it might be more enlightening to list some characteristics that are essential for a successful Secretary. Those are listed below, along with some illustrations that indicate why the characteristics were helpful.

An ASB Secretary must be well organized and detail oriented. If the reports are going to be released on time, the proper staff and all materials must be present before the CRB lockup area is secured. Detailed time schedules need to be prepared, communicated, and constantly tracked and adjusted as needed. The range of details is extensive. When daytime lockups were the norm, details extended to being sure that all people who were going to be in lockup had placed a food order ahead of time. Arrangements were made with the cafeteria to bring up a large cart with all of the orders at about noon.

An ASB Secretary must be perceptive. They need to analyze all facets of the processes that are required for establishing a lockup and identify all things that might go wrong. The normal philosophy of an ASB Secretary is to have a backup plan for each eventuality—and at least one more backup for the backup. For example, the lockup facility currently has one very high-capacity copier/printer and a second, lower capacity, machine. Since both machines are normally pressed into service when the Crop Production and the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates reports are printed in a short period of time before the 8:30 a.m. release, another reasonably high-speed copier stands as a back-up, with the final backup being photocopy machines located in the lockup area.

It goes without saying that the ASB Secretary must be extremely security oriented. Chairpersons and Secretaries of the board were always absolute sticklers for confidentiality and never giving anyone even a hint of numbers to be released. This

extended even through the last couple of minutes before a lockup report was going to be released. When the Chairperson and the Secretary of the Board would leave the lockup area 2 minutes before release to take the printed reports to the waiting reporters, they always reminded themselves to “look neither to the left, nor the right.” Today, the ASB Secretary must constantly look to new alternatives and techniques that will ensure proper security will be maintained. This constant search for improvements has led to advances such as the acquisition of scanner technology to monitor for transmission devices within the lockup area and the installation of security cameras.

An ASB Secretary must be diplomatic. Past Secretaries have been successful in negotiating some special concessions, such as having USDA officials not schedule any fire drills during lockup hours and gaining permission to remove the special hallway emergency phones during lockup hours so there were truly no outside telephone communications. Diplomacy and perseverance have also been needed to convince the correct officials that air conditioning must be operational for overnight lockups.

An ASB Secretary must be customer-service oriented. The Secretaries have often been the main contact for news services and reporters wanting to cover releases. In addition, they have usually taken the lead in dealing with the offices of the Secretary of Agriculture and other policy officials in arranging the details for signing reports. ASB Secretaries have normally had two guiding customer service principles. First, NASS never wants to surprise the Secretary of Agriculture by having unexpected visitors present at a report signing. Secondly, the agency never wants to surprise reporters and other data users by having different formats or contents than expected.

An ASB Secretary must be flexible, yet decisive. There are always some small delays and unexpected events that need to be managed on each report occasion. The ASB Secretary needs to be thinking one or two steps ahead regarding adjustments that can be made to preserve quality and timeliness. However, he or she needs to step in and take specific actions when the unusual occurs.

Perhaps L. Duane Jewell provided the best example of decisiveness by an ASB Secretary. During a daytime lockup, a visitor appeared at the guard desk with a confusing story of “needing to pick up something.” The guard did not understand how to handle the situation and pushed the buzzer to alert Duane. Duane stepped into the area between the two sets of doors to talk to the guard. In the course of the discussion, the guard slightly opened one of the outside doors in order to better

hear Duane. The visitor then pushed on the door and stepped into the space between the two sets of doors. Duane did not hesitate. He opened the inside door and pulled the visitor through saying, “You are inside now and are going to stay inside.” The visitor was taken to a table and chair (in plain sight of NASS staff members) and required to wait there until lockup was over. For the record, no one ever completely understood what the person was really after.

## Chapter 7

# UNCOVERING TRUE STORIES AND POPULAR CULTURE

### *The True Story of the Soda Deliveryman*

Over the many years of lockup reports there have been a number of instances of individuals inadvertently ending up in the secured area when they did not belong. However, none are as well known and often repeated as the perils of the soda deliveryman.

Like many folklore stories, errors have crept into the story as it has been retold and embellished over time. The following paragraphs attempt to set the record straight for, as you will see, the real story might be more interesting than the myths.

A common version of the story is that the person was in NASS space stocking a machine when the area was locked up. Neither the timing nor the actions are correct. There was no soda machine in the NASS space and the incident occurred after a lockup was underway.

Duffy Barr was one of the ASB staff mem-

bers in charge of internal security on the infamous day and Debbie Williams was the external contact. As Duffy explains, the machine the person wanted to restock was actually in the Washington Data Processing Center (WDPC), located in the sub-basement of the Agriculture South Building's Wing 2. The most direct way to reach WDPC (except during lockup periods) was a special elevator that served only the NASS space in the Wing 2 basement and the WDPC. During lockup, that elevator was locked and WDPC had to be reached by staircases located outside the NASS space.

Lockup had been initiated at 3:15 a.m. on that August 1979 day with the release scheduled for 3 p.m. The delivery person came to the guard securing the doors about 8:30 a.m. with a full load of sodas. The guard failed to consider the proper access procedures and admitted the person. As

soon as the person went to the elevator, he asked Duffy why it was not working. The soda man was informed by Duffy, and other CRB staff members, he could not get to WDPC that day and could not leave the lockup area. He pleaded his case but was informed that no exceptions could be made to the “do not leave” rule and he would have to stay until the 3 p.m. release.

Some versions of the folk tale have the person’s soda truck double parked on Independence Avenue—or even double-parked with the motor running. Neither the location nor the double parking is accurate. The truck was in the inside parking court used for commercial deliveries, but the driver had indeed left the motor running. The driver was also concerned about money he had left in the truck.

NASS did make special accommodations in the interest of safety. The delivery person was asked for his office telephone number. The telephone number and information about truck location were verbally given to the guard and passed on to Debbie Williams. Debbie went to the court, located the truck, turned off the engine, removed the keys, and locked the truck. She then returned to her office and called the soda company supervisor. The supervisor was incredulous and did not believe that anyone, other than a law enforcement agency, could lock up his employee. Debbie stood her ground and informed the company that the truck could not stay in the court all day and needed to be moved. Someone did arrive to retrieve the truck.

Another part of the folklore is that the guard who admitted the soda man was fired. That is not known, but he never worked another lockup.

### ***Other Special Security Interpretations***

Passing out information in order to move the soda truck was not the only time that such an accommodation was allowed. A few years later, multiple Crops Branch employees had car-pooled together for a lockup, arriving just after dawn. They parked in a regular NASS car-pool spot but inadvertently left the lights on. Other staff members arrived about an hour later, recognized the car, and surmised what had happened. A note was passed

in, asking for the car keys in order to turn off the lights. That request was granted but only the keys were passed out with no note or other attachment.

There are many rumors and stories of individuals ending up in lockup when they had not intended to be there. Some of them can be documented and are presented below.

Employees of other USDA agencies entered by mistake on two occasions shortly before the change to morning releases and they did end up spending the day with NASS. The first instance involved a new Chief Meteorologist with WAOB. That person had been through at least one joint NASS/WAOB lockup and had the correct pass to be admitted. However, he missed the fact that NASS locked up three times a year in the morning (for Grain Stocks reports) without WAOB. On those days, WAOB employees had to enter their space from the front of the building and not through NASS space. The very first time one of those lockups was in place the Meteorologist entered and turned the corner to see a set of closed doors instead of the access to his office. A note was sent out to have the guard call WAOB and let them know the Meteorologist would be spending the day. It turned out to be a golden opportunity for him to learn more about NASS and for NASS staff members to learn more about the WAOB weather program.

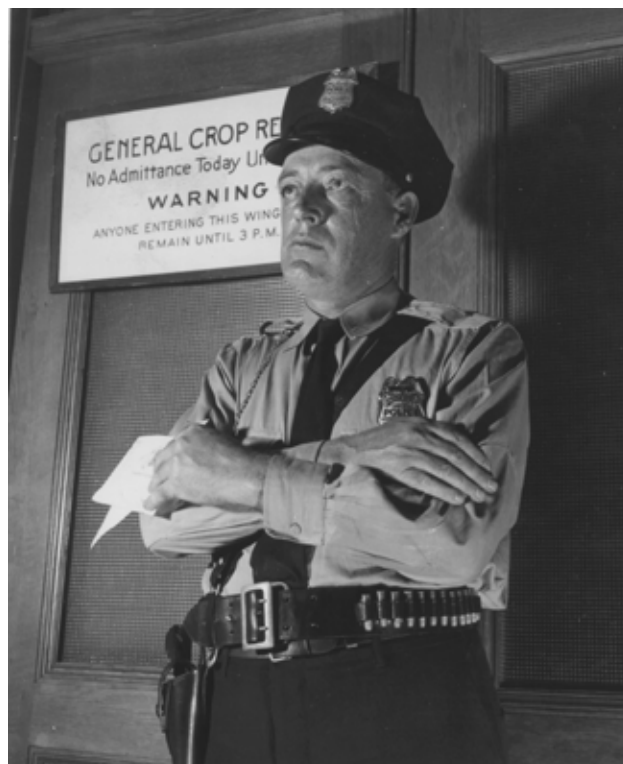
The other instance involved an employee of USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). That person had a lockup pass since she often entered Crop Production lockups shortly before 3 p.m. to obtain a disk of the current report. She then would create a file that reordered the commodities so AMS could load a file at 3 p.m., which was tailored to their data users. That person also took part in the release of a once-a-week AMS report at 10 a.m. from the NASS release facility for reporters. On a particular lockup day, she thought she was to help with the morning release but it was not going to be issued that day because of the NASS lockup. Once she entered she was not allowed to leave. However, she was asked to give the name of her supervisor and the guard was given a note to call that person and have them lock up the purse she had left in her office.



The most dramatic instance of a person inadvertently ending up in lockup occurred when Wayne Gardner was the Deputy Security Officer. This was in the fifth floor lockup area, which had a soda machine located close to the elevators. One of the procedures in implementing the lockup was to use a key to prevent the elevator from stopping at the fifth floor. As a second security measure, steel doors that covered the two elevator doors were closed and locked. On this particular day, the mechanical procedures failed. A woman was trying to reach the soda machine in the early afternoon. Instead of bypassing the fifth floor, the elevator stopped and the lights went out. The lady started screaming and pounding on the doors. It took Gardner quite some time to calm her down enough to suggest she try pushing the various buttons on the control panel. When it seemed obvious that the door was not going to open, he explained that he could get her out of the elevator but she would have to stay with us until 3 p.m. Once she agreed, Gardner opened the steel doors and was able to open the door to get her out of the elevator. She made herself as comfortable as possible in his office—and he bought the soda for her.

NASS does have emergency procedures for nearly any contingency, including evacuation during a lockup. On two occasions, word came in that a hospitalized family member of a person in lockup had suffered a severe medical setback. A decision was made that the affected person could leave but would be escorted by a guard until the time lockup was finished. The guard then prepared a detailed account of all activities and contacts after leaving lockup, up to the scheduled release time.

The closest that the ASB ever came to having to evacuate came shortly before the Crop Production reports were shifted from afternoon to morning. About 1 p.m. on release day the fire alarms went off and shortly thereafter employees could hear some fire department sirens. The ASB Secretary checked with the guard on duty. He found that the lockup area was not in any immediate danger but he asked the guard to arrange for at least two other guards to escort all of the people in lockup to another area. The Chairpersons of the ASB and the WAOB instructed their staffs to shut



**Historical photograph of a guard positioned outside of the lockup area.**

down all computers and to secure all working files. Since some copies of the reports to be released had been printed, those were placed in a briefcase to be taken to the new location. If evacuation of the South Building was required but not the Whitten Building, the two Chairpersons would have gone to the Secretary of Agriculture's office shortly before 3 p.m. and done the briefing there. The ASB Secretary would have taken the public release copies to the press office in the Whitten Building. Some employees were lined up ready to leave the area when the guard checked again with the ASB Secretary. It turned out that there had been a small fire in wing six (more than a city block from the lockup area) and the fire was now out. The people went back to their normal activities.

### ***The CRB in Print and the Movies***

The uniqueness of the CRB has often been interesting to others. NASS staff members who work in the Washington, D.C., area are often asked by new acquaintances, once they say they work at USDA, "Are you one of those people that they lock



**Today, a guard is still used during lockup to maintain security.**

up?” It is no surprise that newspaper articles and occasional television features have been prepared about the ASB and the security/confidentiality procedures.

One of the earliest articles that has been preserved is a story entitled “Drama Behind the Crop Forecasts,” which was printed in the August 1955 Readers Digest. That article, written by Ira Wolfert, particularly emphasized the physical security procedures but also added many examples of the value of the data and the need for security.

There was increased interest in the Board procedures when the monthly Crop Production reports were shifted to the morning release schedule from the traditional 3 p.m. releases. Sally Schuff, a reporter with the Colorado Rancher & Farmer, attended the first 8:30 a.m. release and printed a nicely done feature article entitled “Where are these people? And, why are they locking them up?” A month or two later, Max Armstrong of WGN radio and television in Chicago attended a lockup release and filmed the security and release procedures for his U.S. Farm Report program.

The agency prepared its own films to portray its statistical procedures, its focus on confidentiality and equal access to information, and its special release procedures on at least five occasions. The first such film was “Alice in Numberland,” created in 1962 to commemorate 100 years of statistics in USDA. The film was not widely used since many State Directors felt the light tone of the presentation would not convey well to their serious agricultural producers. The agency put considerable effort, hiring a professional actor to be the on-screen narrator, into “The Fact Finders” shortly



**Norman Bennett, chief of the Survey Administration Branch, is filmed by a USDA video crew while he speaks about the confidentiality pledge.**

thereafter. That movie followed the Statistics Division and CRB staffs through the various stages of operations on a specific lockup with multiple cut-ins that traced the activities going on in agriculture that year. It also depicted how a specific farmer interpreted the results of reports earlier in the crop year and how he decided to react when the report in the movie was released at 3 p.m. This was not an “action flick,” but it did include some Civil War cannons for effect, emphasizing the historical importance of agriculture in the United States.

A short film, “The New Numbers,” was prepared in 1967 to highlight the new enumerative survey approach and the use of computers to calculate the probability survey indications. Another movie that did not receive much play was “Facts for Farming: Crop and Livestock Reports,” created about 1980 when SRS was part of the Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service for a short period of time.

An interesting movie, “The Need to Know,” was created in 1988 under the direction of Dave Carter of the Economics Management Staff of USDA. That movie skillfully employs a “surprise beginning” and well-chosen music to cause the audience to consider how critical it would be if no statistical information were allowed to be released.

Regardless of the efforts of the agency and agricultural press representatives to portray the seriousness of its security and confidentiality procedures, much of the public relates to the work of the CRB through the 1983 feature comedy film “Trading Places.” The movie seems to be loosely adapted

from the book "The Money Harvest," written in 1975 by Ross Thomas. The book and the movie both depict somewhat accurately the special locked mailbox in which speculative recommendations from State Offices were stored until the morning of the CRB actions. Artistic license was taken by the author and the screenwriters to indicate that the CRB would simply adopt the answer in the Florida envelope (both the book and movie use the citrus forecast as the report that is manipulated) and that the CRB would not have any other information upon which to question the false materials substituted for the Florida recommendations. It has always been easy for NASS staff members to point out the fallacies in the "Trading Places" depiction.

In great contrast to "Trading Places" was an extraordinary effort to capture the essence of NASS security and release procedures by Leighton Spann and Artis Ford of the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service. They have a weekly public television show called "Farmweek." In 1999 they attended the September release of the Crop Pro-

duction and World Agricultural Supply and Demands Estimates reports. The two did a masterful job taking NASS terminology and converting it into a clear explanation of the whys and wherefores for their audience. Their television broadcast was so successful that NASS arranged to get copies for every State office to use internally and at agricultural meetings. The two gentlemen were invited to return in September 2004 in order to video the newly designed lockup security area and to better focus on the World Agricultural Outlook Board procedures.

Two other short recognitions of the CRB may be worthy of note. In 1988 The Washington Post Sunday Magazine included a picture and short article on the Chairperson in its "Talking Jobs" feature on unique jobs in the Washington, D.C. area. That was followed a couple of years later by a picture and short article on the Board Secretary in a feature by Washingtonian magazine on protecting secrets.

## Chapter 8

### OUR NASS PLEDGE AND MISSION

#### *NASS Employees— The Secret of CRB Success*

This summary has included a number of references that broadly describe the security procedures that NASS has implemented to ensure the integrity of all releases. Those procedures have not been explained in detail. That was by design. The first axiom of good security is to never reveal all security details.

The second axiom of security is that no matter how complete procedures are, the biggest potential threat comes from the employees within an organization. NASS has benefited from creating an organizational climate that makes security an operational principle. That climate starts the minute a person comes on board. Security procedures are explained and the employee reads and signs a confidentiality pledge as part of his or her immediate orientation to the agency. Every year all employees review the security and confi-

ality regulations and recertify.

Security goes well beyond a once-a-year reminder. It is reinforced in every ASB meeting. Nearly every day of the year, some staff members are working on details of upcoming reports and blue security caution signs are posted. Staff members are constantly on the alert to identify outsiders who are not allowed in the work areas. That definition of outsiders extends to NASS staff members not assigned to work on the specific report(s). One example is that each of the last three NASS Administrators readily refrained from entering restricted work areas on occasions when they stopped by to speak to field representatives who were in Headquarters to work on reports.

The employee climate of strict adherence to the daily security procedures might be best il-

lustrated by two examples. The first occurred a summer morning when lockup was not in place but most offices in the Crops Branch had the blue “Do Not Enter” signs on the doors. The ASB Chairperson was walking into the Crops Branch work area when he noticed an individual in a delivery company uniform stop in front of one of the doors and then enter. Coming from the other direction was Bill Dowdy, the Section Head for Field Crops. Dowdy and the Chairperson got to the door at the same time. Before they could enter, the door opened and the outside visitor emerged, walking backwards. He was walking backwards because Sheila Wilcox, the statistical assistant working in that office, was poking him in the chest saying, “You can’t come in here!” The visitor turned out to be a friend of Wilcox’s but she was upholding the security procedures.

The second instance was late one afternoon when most employees had left for the day. The Chairperson needed some specific information about cattle. Shirley Woodruff, the cattle statistical assistant, was the only person in the unit at that time. She explained to the Chairperson that she knew where the material was kept in the Branch Chief’s office and went on to say, “If you stay here, I will go get it and bring it back. If you don’t stay here, I need to lock up the material I am working on before I leave the office.”

The good examples of Wilcox and Woodruff upholding strict adherence to the security and confidentiality procedures are surely repeated every week in all NASS offices. Their pride and dedication to the public trust are in stark contrast to the violations committed by E.S. Holmes, Jr., one hundred years ago which were detailed at the start of this account.

### ***Commemorating a Century of Successful and Secure Procedures***

Thanks in part to dedicated NASS employees, July 12, 2005, marked a monumental day in agricultural history. On this day, the Agricultural Statistics Board commemorated a century of successful and secure procedures.

The availability of timely, informative statistical reports from the United States Department of Agriculture has become a hallmark of the U.S. agricultural system. All market participants and interested parties know these vital reports will be issued on schedule and provide a level playing field for everyone.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service and the World Agricultural Outlook Board commemorated the past 100 years with a special celebration on July 12. The celebration featured several keynote speakers, including: Rich Allen, Chairman of the Agricultural Statistics Board; Dr. Joseph Jen, USDA Undersecretary of REE; Charles Conner, USDA Deputy Secretary; Dr. Keith Collins, USDA Chief Economist; Allen Heishman II, Virginia FFA President; and R. Ronald Bosecker, NASS Administrator.

This special event celebrated the dedicated service provided by the Agricultural Statistics Board and honored the remarkable agricultural leaders, such as Willet Martin Hays, who have been instrumental in safeguarding America’s agricultural statistics since 1905. Ancestors of Hays joined in our celebration to salute him and the changes he implemented in the estimates process that laid the foundation for the Agricultural Statistics Board.

The official procedures for the Agricultural Statistics Board were established a century ago because one person with inside knowledge decided to profit on cotton estimates. The lesson provided by this experience has never been forgotten.

The procedures developed to prevent a recurrence of insider trading have been continually upheld by USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service and the World Agricultural Outlook Board. It is the dedication and commitment of the men and women in these agencies that have made NASS and WAOB successful at maintaining proper security and being adaptable to changes in USDA, the evolving needs of agriculture, and the technological advances throughout the past century.

## *The Future*

While commemorating 100 years of continuous service, we must also recognize the future needs for U.S. agricultural statistics. It is official USDA statistics that reveal the facts and fuel the markets in agriculture. These statistics have been and will continue to be vital to producers, suppliers, buyers, public officials, researchers, and many other data users. It is accurate, unbiased and on-time USDA statistics that provide a level playing field for everyone.

NASS employees realize that we are a link in a long chain of service that will continue as long as America's agriculture continues to provide food, fiber, and energy for people here and around the world. NASS employees will remain dedicated and committed to upholding ASB procedures and are prepared to confront the challenges of the future.

Our pledge, as we enter our second century of successful and secure procedures, is to continue upholding the model of security to safeguard data until they are made available to everyone simultaneously and fairly. We will continue

to maintain the trust we have established in our data and our procedures from America's farmers and ranchers, our data users, the agricultural industry, and statistical organizations and governments around the world. We will continue to ensure that the "curtains always remain sealed" so everyone benefits equally from the U.S. agricultural statistics system. Furthermore, we will continue the NASS mission of providing timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture.

We must also remember that one cannot look towards the future without first examining the trials, tribulations, and successes of the past. This historical account is an interim report, covering the past 100 years of secure and confidential reports from the Agricultural Statistics Board. The role and importance of the Agricultural Statistics Board must not be taken lightly. American agriculture is continually counted, measured, priced, analyzed, and reported to provide the facts needed by people working throughout this vast industry. We must continue to document the saga of the Board and its future technological evolutions and advances.

## **Appendix A: Chairpersons of the CRB and ASB**

About 20 individuals have served as the Chairperson of the Crop Reporting Board/Agricultural Statistics Board over the past 100 years. Particularly in the past 20 years, the ASB has emphasized contingency back-up plans and other individuals have chaired particular ASB sessions. This listing does not include those individuals who have served as Acting Chairperson for specific reports.

Before 1961 the leader of the organization responsible for USDA domestic statistics often served as the Chairperson. Since then, the Chairperson position has been separated from the Agency Head role. Information is included in the following listing to indicate the working organization name and the position title of each person designated as Chairperson, along with some background information.

### ***Willet M. Hays*** ***July 1905 to June 1906***

Hays was a relatively new Assistant Secretary of USDA and had not been involved with the statistical reports until being asked to serve as Acting Chief of the Bureau of Statistics upon the resignation of John Hyde.

### ***Victor Olmsted*** ***July 1906 to April 1907***

Olmsted had been named as Associate Statistician when Hays became the Acting Chief. In July 1906, he became the Chief of the Bureau of Statistics. Olmsted had formerly served as the Chief of the Division of Domestic Crop Reports.

***Charles C. Clark***  
***May 1907 to October 1908***

Olmsted took a temporary reassignment to lead a special population of census project for the Bureau of the Census. During his absence, Clark, who became Associate Bureau Chief when Olmsted was named Bureau Chief, served as Acting Chairperson and Acting Bureau Chief. Clark had served as the Chief Clerk of the Bureau of Statistics before the shuffling that occurred in 1905.

***Victor Olmsted***  
***November 1908 to March 1913***

Olmsted returned from his Census duties and resumed his duties. Clark took a position as the Chief Statistician of the International Institute of Agriculture in Rome. One historical account implies that Olmsted was encouraged to leave his position by newly named Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Beverly T. Galloway and was appointed as the State Field Agent for Virginia.

***Nat C. Murray***  
***March 1913 to September 1913***

Murray had joined the Bureau of Statistics in 1904 as a Field Agent assigned to Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Kentucky. He came to Washington, D.C., in 1906 as an Associate Chief. Murray was described as a good manager but not interested in serving as the permanent Chairperson, particularly under the circumstances of Olmsted's departure.

***Leon M. Estabrook***  
***September 1913 to July 1922***

Estabrook had formerly worked for Assistant Secretary Galloway. He and Murray worked well together and made many improvements to the statistical procedures. In 1914 the name of the organization was changed to the Bureau of Crop Estimates. In 1921, the Bureau of Markets and Crop Estimates was formed. Estabrook was named as Associate Chief of the new Bureau and Murray was named

the Chief of the Division of Crop Estimates. In July 1922 Henry C. Taylor was successful in merging all activities dealing with agricultural economics into the Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE). The Crop Reporting Board was now under the Division of Crop and Livestock Estimates. Estabrook apparently took on new duties within the new Bureau.

***Nat C. Murray***  
***July 1922 to December 1923***

Murray found himself again in an acting role as the Chairperson and the Division Head of Crop and Livestock Estimates. He resigned at the end of 1923 to take a position with the private firm of Curtis, Clement & Co.

***William A. Schoenfield***  
***January 1924 to September 1924***

Schoenfield was Assistant Chief of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. He served as the CRB Chairperson in an acting capacity while keeping his BAE position.

***W. F. Callendar***  
***September 1924 to August 1935***

Callendar had been statistician in charge of Wisconsin and then Ohio. He had come to Washington, D.C., in 1921 as Assistant to the Chief of the Bureau of Markets and Crop Estimates. He became the Head of the Division of Crop and Livestock Estimates when Murray left.

***Joseph A. Becker***  
***August 1935 to May 1937***

Becker became the Division Head when Callendar became the Assistant Administrator and Comptroller of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA). Becker had been the Principal Division Statistician and led most adjustments in procedures for new statistics required because of the Great Depression. In 1937 Becker took extended sick leave because of poor health.



***W. F. Callendar***  
***May 1937 to July 1942***

Callendar was recalled from the Agricultural Adjustment Administration to again take over as the Division Head and Chairman. Becker returned as a technical assistant and Paul L. Koenig, who had worked with the statistics units before July 1935, returned as Administrative Assistant to the Division Head. In October 1938 the Agricultural Marketing Service was formed with statistics and the CRB under the Agricultural Statistics Division of AMS.

***Joseph A. Becker***  
***July 1942 to August 1944***

When Callendar left Washington, D.C., to become the Florida State Statistician, Paul L. Koenig was named as Division Head. However, Becker, the Assistant for Technical Work, was designated as the Chairperson of the CRB.

***Paul L. Koenig***  
***August 1944 to January 1946***

Becker transferred to the Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations in 1944. Koenig served as the CRB Chairperson until 1946 when Callendar, who had been detailed from Florida to the agricultural census program, returned to serve as the Chairperson.

***W. F. Callendar***  
***January 1946 to December 1949***

Callendar remained as the Division Head and Chairperson until his retirement at the end of 1949.

***Sterling R. (Bert) Newell***  
***January 1950 to April 1962***

Bert Newell was appointed as Assistant Chief of BAE and Chairperson of the CRB when Callendar retired. When the Agricultural Estimates Division of AMS was formed in 1953, he became the Direc-

tor of the Division and remained as the Chairperson. When the Statistical Reporting Service (SRS) and the Economic Research Service were formed on April 3, 1961, Newell became the Deputy Administrator and Chairperson, serving until his retirement in 1962.

***Glenn D. Simpson***  
***April 1962 to May 1971***

Upon Newell's retirement, Glenn Simpson became the Deputy Administrator and the CRB Chairperson. Simpson started his agricultural statistics work as the Wyoming Agent in 1934. He transferred to New York in 1938 and on to Washington, D.C., in 1939. He served in the armed forces from late 1942 until December 1945. In April 1953, he was promoted to be the "Principal Assistant" and Secretary of the CRB. He became the CRB Chairperson in 1962, and remained until his retirement in 1971. He was an avid student of organizational structures and was instrumental in shaping the SRS functional structure.

***Bruce M. Graham***  
***May 1971 to July 1979***

Bruce Graham became the CRB Chairperson when Glenn Simpson retired. Bruce was particularly known for pioneering work directing the Survey Operations Group responsible for developing manuals and training materials when the organization started using probability surveys involving personal interviews. Graham started in the Richmond, Virginia, office in 1946 and transferred to Seattle, Washington, in 1948. He came to Washington, D.C., in 1956 and worked in various survey positions before being named Deputy Administrator in 1971. Graham continued as the Chairperson until his retirement in 1979 but his working title changed in January 1978 to being an Assistant Deputy Administrator when SRS was combined with the Economic Research Service and the Rural Cooperatives Service into the Economics, Statistics, and Cooperative Service (ESCS).

***John W. (Wally) Kirkbride***  
***August 1979 to February 1980***

Wally Kirkbride is perhaps best remembered for his leadership of the agency's estimation program and people may assume that he had long tenure as the Chairperson. However, his main CRB association was as Estimates Division Director and Deputy Chairperson from July 1972 to August 1979 when Bruce Graham retired. Kirkbride started as an agent in Kansas in 1939. He served in the armed forces during World War II and transferred to Kentucky on his return in 1946. He spent most of the rest of his career in Headquarters except for an assignment in Columbus, Ohio. He advanced through a number of positions in the Estimates Division, including serving as the Deputy Director before taking over as the Director of the Survey and Data Division in 1966. Kirkbride became the Estimates Division Director as part of a 3-way Division Director shift in 1972. He was named as the Chairperson of the CRB in August 1979 and then retired in February 1980.

***James L. Olson***  
***March 1980 to June 1981***

Jim Olson started in the South Dakota office but spent most of his early career in Colorado. During his first tour in Washington, D.C., he worked in the Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry Branch and then rotated to the soybeans statistician position. He did such a commendable job in handling the fallout from a "bust" in the estimates on one stocks report that he was soon selected as an Assistant to the Administrator. His next position was as the State Statistician in Idaho before returning to Washington, D.C., as a Branch Chief and Division Director. He served as an Assistant to the ESCS Administrator before replacing Wally Kirkbride as the CRB Chairperson. The agency name changed to Economics and Statistics Service (ESS) while Olson was the Chairperson. In 1981 he moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, as the State Statistician and retired from there in 1990.

***William E. Kibler***  
***July 1981 to April 1982***

In 1981 the ESS organization was dissolved and the Statistical Reporting Service became a separate agency again. Administrator Bill Kibler did not immediately name anyone as CRB Chairperson when Jim Olson left for North Carolina but served as the Acting Chairperson himself. Kibler worked originally as a student aid in Georgia in 1951 before starting in the North Carolina State office and later transferring to Georgia. He was one of the first individuals selected for an agency-sponsored mathematical statistics training program and spent the 1960-61 school year at North Carolina State University before transferring to Washington, D.C. He served in multiple positions in the Standards and Research Division and later became the Director of the Research and Development Division in 1970 and the Survey and Data Division in 1972. He took over as North Carolina State Statistician in late 1974 and moved back to Washington, D.C., a year later, as the Associate Administrator before becoming the Administrator in November 1976. Kibler retired as the Administrator in May 1987.

***Wilbert H. Walther***  
***April 1982 to February 1984***

Wil Walther started with the agency in New Mexico and also worked in Kansas before moving to Washington, D.C., for the first time in 1963. His first assignment was in the Field Crops Branch but he was most known for his later work in livestock statistics. He served as the Texas State Statistician from November of 1975 to April 1980. He was the Survey Division Director in 1982 when he was named as the Deputy Administrator and CRB Chairperson. He retired in February 1984.

***Raymond R. Hancock***  
***March 1984 to September 1986***

Ray Hancock started as a student trainee in Georgia in 1955 and joined the Georgia office full time in 1956. He also worked in the Florida office be-

fore moving to Washington, D.C., in 1965. He assisted with Crop Reporting Board activities and then worked in the Standards and Research Division before taking over as the cotton commodity specialist. He was serving as a Section Head in the Field Crops, Fruit, and Vegetables Branch in 1973 when he was selected as the State Statistician for Kansas. He returned to Washington, D.C., in 1975 as the Chief of the Data Collection Branch. He later served as the Deputy Director of the Estimates Division and was selected as the State Statistical Division Director in 1980. He was promoted to be the Deputy Administrator and CRB Chairperson in March of 1984. When SRS changed to the National Agricultural Statistics Service in October 1986, Hancock became the Deputy Administrator for Operations and no longer had the CRB duties.

***Charles E. Caudill***  
***October 1986 to May 1987***

Charlie Caudill was a student in North Carolina for 2 summers before starting full time in North Carolina in 1957. He also served in the Maryland State office before spending the 1961-62 school year in Ames, Iowa when the agency expanded the mathematical statistics program to include Iowa State University. Caudill served in the Standards and Research Division and then the Agricultural Estimates Division, heading up the Methods Staff. He took over as the Texas State Statistician in 1972 and returned to Washington, D.C., in 1975 as the Director of the Research Division. A major activity, while in that position, was serving as the USDA Manager of the multi-departmental remote sensing program known as AgRISTARS. In 1984, he became the Director of the State Statistical Division. Caudill became the first Deputy Administrator for Programs and Chairperson of the Agricultural Statistics Board as part of the reorganization in October 1986. Caudill was named as Administrator when Bill Kibler retired in 1987.

***Richard D. (Rich) Allen***  
***June 1987 to September 1999***

Rich Allen started with SRS in the Iowa Office in

1963. He spent the 1967-68 school year in the mathematical statistics program at Iowa State University before moving to the Standards and Research Division in 1968. He served as the Deputy State Statistician in the Illinois office between 1972 and 1976 and then transferred to the Methods Staff in the Estimates Division. He led the List Frame Team Project and served as the Chief of the Remote Sensing Branch before becoming the Director of the Survey Division in 1982. He later headed up the Estimates Division before being named as the Deputy Administrator for Programs when Charlie Caudill became Administrator. In 1995, following a reorganization, he became the Associate Administrator, while still serving as ASB Chairperson. When the Deputy Administrator for Programs and Products position was established in 1999, the Chairperson duties shifted to that position.

***Frederic A. (Fred) Vogel***  
***October 1999 to November 2002***

Fred Vogel began his SRS career while a student in Colorado in 1963 and then started working full time in California in the spring of 1964. He spent the 1968-69 school year at Iowa State University in the mathematical statistics program and moved to Washington, D.C., in 1969. He held various assignments in Research and Development, in the Methods Staff, and back to Research and Development as a Section Head before transferring to the Illinois office in 1976 as the Deputy State Statistician. He returned to Washington, D.C., in 1980 as the Chief of the Methods Staff. He became the Director of the Statistical Research Division in 1984 and later served as the Director of the State Statistical Division and the Estimates Division. In 1999 he became the first Deputy Administrator for Programs and Products and Chairperson of the Agricultural Statistics Board. He remained in that position until his retirement in November 2002 to become the Global Manager of the International Comparison Program at The World Bank.

***Rich Allen***

***November 2002 to October 2005***

After Fred Vogel's retirement, Rich Allen shifted to the Deputy Administrator for Programs and Products position and once again served as the ASB Chairperson until his retirement.

## Appendix B: Secretaries of the CRB and ASB

Throughout the history of the Crop Reporting Board/Agricultural Statistics Board there has been one key individual at all times who “made things happen.” That individual was responsible for logistics and coordination and needed to have data, people, and processes in place to complete Board analyses and issue reports on time. However, the term “CRB Secretary” apparently does not appear until 1953.

Interestingly, the first person designated as the Secretary of the CRB, Glenn Simpson, carried out quite different responsibilities than his successors. When Bert Newell selected Simpson as the Principal Assistant and Secretary, he announced that Simpson would travel extensively on behalf of the Board. Much of that travel was intended to improve and standardize agency procedures such as the use of peg strips.

Later Secretaries did not find much time for agency travel while in their position. Mel Koehn (pronounced Cane), who held the position for the longest tenure, once commented in the early 1970s that he needed to go to some agency training schools “because the younger people coming in on Board calls are calling me Mr. “Cohen.”

Every Secretary has had key assistants who took on much of the day-to-day responsibility for physical security and report logistics. Many people rotated through those positions and went on to future supervisory and management roles. Specific assignments and responsibilities varied so much over time that it is impossible to compile a comprehensive list of those major participants. Therefore, this section will focus on the backgrounds of the people serving as the Secretary.

***Glenn D. Simpson***  
***April 1953 to March 1961***

Details on Glenn Simpson's career were provided in the Chairperson section.

***Melvin Koehn***  
***March 1961 to June 1979***

Mel Koehn really defined the role of CRB Secretary. He was an excellent multi-tasker, he engaged and effectively utilized his entire staff, and he smoothly coordinated all processes, with backup procedures in place for nearly every eventuality. Koehn worked in the South Dakota State Office before coming to Washington, D.C., in 1959. He was originally assigned to Crop Reporting Board activities upon his arrival in Headquarters and ended up making that his career.

***Paul A. Walsh, Jr.***  
***June 1979 to October 1980***

Paul Walsh originally worked in the Minnesota and Iowa offices before his first stint in Washington, D.C. He then served as a statistician in Wyoming, the Deputy State Statistician in Mississippi, and the State Statistician in Alabama before returning to Washington, D.C., to take over as Chief of the Data Services Branch and CRB Secretary. In 1980, he rotated to the Systems Branch Chief position.

***Gerald L. Clampet***  
***January 1981 to September 1984***

Jerry Clampet worked in the Illinois, Ohio, and Missouri State offices before coming to Washington, D.C., in 1970. Clampet had become dually qualified as a statistician and a computer systems analyst and assisted on development of some new agency computer systems in addition to commodity assignments. He moved to North Carolina as the Deputy State Statistician in 1977 and returned to Washington, D.C., in 1981 to become the CRB Secretary. Clampet transferred to the Office of the Administrator in 1984.

***L. Duane Jewell***  
***October 1984 to November 1990***

Duane Jewell worked in the Idaho State Office early in his career before coming to Washington, D.C., in the Fruit and Vegetable statistics program. He then served as the Deputy State Statistician in Arkansas before returning to Washington, D.C., in the Livestock Section. He was next in charge of the Colorado State Office before returning once more to Washington, D.C., to head up the Data Collection Branch in 1980. He rotated to the Data Services Branch Chief and Secretary of the Board position in 1984 and remained in that position until retiring in 1990.

***Michael Hunst***  
***February 1991 to June 1994***

Mike Hunst started as a statistician in the Oregon State Office in 1965. He showed an interest in data processing applications and became dually qualified as a computer systems analyst. When he came to Washington, D.C., in 1972, his original assignments were in data processing applications. He later transferred to the Indiana State Office as the Deputy State Statistician and returned to Washington, D.C., in 1988. Hunst was the Secretary responsible for preparing new timetables and assignments in order to shift the Crop Production and Grain Stocks releases to 8:30 a.m. releases instead of the traditional 3 p.m. In 1994 he became the Minnesota State Statistician and served in that role until his retirement.

***William L. Pratt***  
***June 1994 to December 1999***

Bill Pratt started his agricultural statistics career in the Kansas State Office in 1967. He transferred to the North Carolina office and spent the 1972-73 school year at North Carolina State University in the agency's mathematical statistics program. Between 1974 and 1983, he had various assignments in the Research and Development, the Methods Staff, and the Prices and Labor Branch of Estimates

Division. He became the Texas Deputy Statistician in 1979 and then returned to Washington, D.C., in 1986 as the Chief of the Livestock and Poultry Branch. Pratt and his staff worked out the arrangements for allowing reporters to enter lockup the last hour before release so they could prepare their news stories and be ready to transmit when communications were restored. Pratt served as the ASB Secretary until his retirement in 1999.

***Brad E. Schwab***  
***December 1999 to December 2000***

When the Marketing and Information Services Office was established through reorganization, the duties of ASB Secretary were assigned to the Administrative Support Section Head. Brad Schwab had been serving as the deputy to the ASB Secretary and he became the first ASB Secretary under the new structure. Schwab was another individual who had become dually qualified as both an agricultural statistician and a computer specialist. Most of his

original assignments in Arkansas and Virginia were as a statistician but his assignments in Washington, D.C., before the ASB work were in network and technical support roles. Schwab became the Illinois State Statistician at the end of 2000.

***Forestine H. Chapman***  
***January 2001 to Present***

Forestine Chapman started in the Alabama State Office and also worked in the Iowa State Office before coming to Washington, D.C., in 1992. Among other assignments, she worked in survey training and the Fruit and Vegetable Section. However, her willingness to take an extended detail to assist with ASB report preparation and printing during the extended illness of another employee was a key factor in her selection for the ASB Secretary position when Brad Schwab transferred. One development during Chapman's tenure has been creation and testing of a network of laptop computers as a backup to regular processing equipment.

## Appendix C: News Releases



# NEWS RELEASE

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

United States Department of Agriculture • Washington, DC 20250

Ag Statistics Hotline: 1-800-727-9540 • [www.usda.gov/nass/](http://www.usda.gov/nass/)



### USDA's NASS and WAOB Suspends Release of Reports

Washington, September 11, 2001

Two U.S. Department of Agriculture forecasting agencies announced suspension of scheduled reports because of today's events.

USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service is suspending release of reports scheduled for release on Sept. 11, 12, and 13, including the Sept. 12 U.S. Crop Production Report. USDA's World Agricultural Outlook Board is suspending release of the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report scheduled for release on Sept. 12.

Both agencies plan to release all suspended reports at their normal release times on Friday, Sept. 14.

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# NEWS RELEASE

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

United States Department of Agriculture • Washington, DC 20250

Ag Statistics Hotline: 1-800-727-9540 • [www.usda.gov/nass/](http://www.usda.gov/nass/)



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### USDA RESCHEDULES JUNE 11 CROP REPORTS TO JUNE 10

WASHINGTON, June 7, 2004—The U. S. Department of Agriculture will release three reports on June 10 that were scheduled for release on June 11, National Agricultural Statistics Service Administrator R. Ronald Bosecker and USDA Chief Economist Keith Collins announced today. USDA and other federal agencies will be closed on June 11 as a mark of respect for the passing of former President Ronald W. Reagan, the fortieth President of the United States.

The Crop Production report and World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report will be released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern Time on June 10. The Dairy Products Prices report will be released at 1:00 p.m. on June 10.

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## Appendix D: Testimonials for ASB Commemoration

***The Honorable Terrence A. Duffy  
Chairman of the Board  
Chicago Mercantile Exchange Inc.***

Chicago Mercantile Exchange Inc. (CME) congratulates USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) for its 100 years of outstanding service to the agricultural industry. CME is a data-driven organization, and NASS reports play a critical role in the success of our livestock, meat, and dairy markets. For example:

The NASS Dairy Product Prices report provides the raw data for the cash settlement of CME's Class III and Class IV Milk contracts. The NASS Cold Storage, Hogs and Pigs, Cattle On Feed, and Cattle reports provide valuable supply-related information for users of CME's Frozen Pork Bellies, Lean Hogs, Live Cattle, and Feeder

Cattle contracts, respectively. The NASS Livestock Slaughter report provides official confirmation of shorter-term slaughter estimates, and the NASS Milk Production report provides similar official confirmation of milk supplies on a State-by-State basis.

In addition, NASS has been responsive to CME requests for changes that make NASS data more useful. A few recent examples include:

- NASS designed and conducted a special survey of Milkfat Prices which was used to help CME and the dairy industry assess the potential for a futures contract.
- NASS began releasing the quarterly Hogs and Pigs report earlier in December so that market participants could more easily make year-end position adjustments.

- NASS is currently conducting a special tabulation of the Census of Agriculture that will allow CME to fine-tune the locations of its Live Cattle delivery points.

All of these efforts by NASS allow CME to provide the agricultural sector with more efficient markets, and more effective risk management and price discovery tools. We are pleased to have NASS as a partner in these efforts, and we wish NASS continued success as it begins its second century as “The Fact Finders of Agriculture.”

***Mike Hunst***  
***ASB Secretary***  
***Feb. 1991 - June 1994***

Looking back on my NASS career, I regard my stint as ASB Secretary as the highlight of my career. I always took very seriously my duty of ensuring the confidentiality of ASB reports and doing everything in my power to get each report out on time. In my job as MN Agricultural Statistics Director, I often had the opportunity to explain the NASS report preparation, confidentiality, and release procedures; and my position as ASB Secretary gave me the first-hand experience to speak with authority.

***Jerry Clampet***  
***ASB Secretary***  
***Jan. 1981 - Sept. 1984***

The sense of security that surrounded almost everything we did in the Crop Reporting Board was with me virtually all of the time. That aspect of our responsibility required us to be vigilant, regardless of whether we were in lockup or not. Closing the lockup door often generated some thought of isolation. Opening the door to release the report often generated feelings of being liberated. Walking out the door with the stack of reports in hand was often a “high moment.” This was

especially true with Crop reports. “Looking neither to the right nor the left” was serious. People were anxious to see what we had done inside lockup. So when we laid copies of the reports face down on the telephone booth shelves, we were about ready to communicate real news to a lot of people. That was “heady” sometimes.

...Crop Reporting Board tasks, along with the associated accomplishments and frustrations helped many of us to grow in knowledge and management skills. I sincerely appreciate all of the support that our branch provided to our SRS colleagues and our non-SRS customers. It was very good to be a part of that team during the 1981-1984 period.

I thank and applaud the current NASS leadership for their attention to this event, the documentation through the “Safeguarding America’s Agricultural Statistics” publication, and the requests for input from many of us who were involved during the past century. My best regards and appreciation to all of you.

***Rich Rominger***  
***Deputy Secretary of Agriculture***  
***1993-2001***

I appreciated receiving a copy of the Preliminary Release of “Safeguarding America’s Agricultural Statistics.” I enjoyed reading the history of “crop reports” and the evolution of the reports and the security and confidentiality procedures over the past 100 years. As a farmer most of my life, I know the great value of accurate, timely and uncompromised statistics available to everyone at the same time. This is one of the important elements that make U.S. agriculture and our private enterprise system the envy of the world. As a Deputy Secretary who received the briefings and signed many of those reports, I was pleased to be part of the system.

...Congratulations and Best Wishes to the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and the World Agricultural Outlook Board (WAOB) for 100 years of outstanding service to the nation.

***Jim Donald***  
***WAOB Chairperson***  
***1982-1994***

Congratulations on 100 years of ever-improving statistics. Those statistics provided the basis for sounder decisions by Government officials and by all participants in the nation's food and fiber system. My knowledge of NASS capability came early in my 37-year career with USDA, following my assignment to cotton situation and outlook work. I soon learned that statisticians, like Hosea Harkness of the soybean desk, knew an awful lot about production and statistical data and methods used to arrive at sound, objective estimates.

I continued to be impressed with NASS people and products over the years in connection

with commodity situation and outlook reports. It became quite evident that statisticians were accomplishing missions through sound training, discipline, dedication and hard work.

I really got to know NASS when I became Chairperson of WAOB in 1982. I recall that SRS Administrator Bill Kibler went out of his way to congratulate me and to say he looked forward to our agencies working together. That spirit of cooperation was kept alive with subsequent NASS Administrators and Statistics Board Chairpersons and was a key to WAOB's successfully pursuing its goals.

As a responsible person leading to the publication of official USDA long-term agricultural projections, I have a new projection to share: I see a demand for NASS products for the next 100 years.

## **Appendix E: Photographs from ASB Commemoration on July 12, 2005**

### **USDA'S AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS BOARD CELEBRATES THE PAST 100 YEARS**

#### *A Century of Successful and Secure Agricultural Statistics*

July 12, 2005, marked a monumental day in the history of agricultural statistics. On that day, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) commemorated a century of the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) and its procedures. The availability of timely, informative statistical reports from USDA has become a hallmark of the U.S. agricultural system.

The official ASB operating procedures were established in 1905 in response to an insider trading scheme. A USDA employee working on the cotton estimates leaked information to a New York cotton trader and made significant profits from his inside knowledge. When the data leak was discovered, strict new procedures were adapted to uphold the integrity of the ASB and its statistical reports.

These procedures included what is known today as "lockup", the process in which USDA em-

ployees compiling speculative reports are locked in a secure area with no means of outside communication until the scheduled release time. Lockup procedures ensure that no information will be prematurely released.

Today, market participants and interested parties know that vital reports issued by the ASB will be released at the scheduled time to provide a level playing field for everyone. These procedures have been continually upheld by NASS and the World Agricultural Outlook Board for the past 100 years.

This historical achievement was celebrated July 12, 2005, at a commemorative ceremony held at USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C. The ceremony featured several keynote speakers including: Rich Allen, ASB Chairman; Dr. Joseph Jen, USDA Under Secretary of Research, Education

and Economics; Charles Conner, USDA Deputy Secretary; Dr. Keith Collins, USDA Chief Economist; and R. Ronald Bosecker, NASS Administrator.

The program focused on the past, present, and future of the ASB and agricultural statistics. Special recognition and honor were given to the dedicated members of the ASB and the remarkable agricultural leaders who were instrumental in safeguarding U.S. agricultural statistics for the past century.

A tribute was made to Willet Martin Hays, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture under President Theodore Roosevelt, for implementing changes in the estimates process that laid the foundation for the ASB. Descendants of Willet Hays were among the participants in the celebration.

Throughout the program, speakers and attendees continually touched upon the importance of the ASB and the importance of statistical reporting. Remarking on the 21st century, USDA Chief Economist Dr. Keith Collins proclaimed, "Relevant and accessible statistical and economic information will be more essential than ever for market participants and policy officials because, I believe, the challenges are more complex than ever. The 20th century gave us the rise of the science of statistics.

"In the 21st century, we're going to have new ways of collecting data, new technologies like computer power that are unimaginable, satellite technology, new forms of technology that we haven't even dreamed of yet, as well as tremendously powerful database management systems. With these advances, I think the ability of statisticians and economists will be greater than ever to reach new levels of understanding of global agriculture and thereby help world leaders make more rational and effective public policy decisions," added Collins.

As the ASB commemorates 100 years of continuous service, government officials, representatives from the agricultural industry and researchers now turn their focus to the future needs of U.S. agricultural statistics. It is the accurate, unbiased and timely USDA statistics that reveal the facts and fuel the markets in agriculture. These statistics will

continue to serve a vital role for producers, suppliers, buyers, public officials, researchers and other data users.

Pledging to uphold the mission and high standards of NASS and the ASB, NASS Administrator R. Ronald Bosecker remarked, "We realize that we are a link in a long chain of service that will continue as long as America's agriculture continues to provide food, fiber and energy for people here and around the world. We welcome the coming challenges as we enter our second century."



**Prior to the release of the July 12 Crop Production report, visitors are given a tour of the lockup facility. Carol House explains the process that occurs leading up to the official release at 8:30 a.m.**



**Visitors and special guests attend the secretary's briefing for the July Crop Production report to recognize 100 years of secure agricultural statistics.**



USDA Chief Economist Dr. Keith Collins and Deputy Secretary Charles Conner attend the briefing for the July 12 crop report immediately preceding the commemoration celebration.



Master of ceremony Rich Allen (in costume as Willet Hays) began the event by welcoming the speakers and special guests who were able to participate in the festivities.



In honor of the centennial celebration, the July 12 crop report was printed with a Crop Reporter header similar to what was used in 1905.



USDA Chief Economist Keith Collins enthusiastically shares his vision for the future of agricultural statisticians and economists.



Attendees at the celebration received handouts with historical information and photographs documenting the past 100 years of the Agricultural Statistics Board.



USDA Deputy Secretary Charles Conner addressed the audience by emphasizing how vital agricultural statistics and ASB reports are to the U.S. agricultural community.



Dr. Joseph Jen, USDA Under Secretary, offered high praise for NASS and its employees.



The patio in the USDA Whitten Building provided the perfect background for this historical occasion.



NASS Administrator Ron Bosecker closed the program with a few special words of appreciation to Rich Allen and the Agricultural Statistics Board.



To stay true to the past, present, and future theme of the celebration, Allen Heishman II, Virginia FFA President, spoke about ag leadership in the future.



Among the audience were guests including: Ruth Bascom, granddaughter of Willet Hays and her husband John Bascom, Carol House of NASS, Ewen Wilson of the Bureau of the Census, Joseph Reilly of NASS, Dwight Gadsby of USDA's Economic Research Service, and Katherine Wallman and Paul Bugg of the Office of Management and Budget.



Descendants of Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Willet Hays attended the celebration, which included a salute to Hays for his contributions to the Crop Reporting Board. Rich Allen (front row, center) was able to locate Hays' descendants in Texas and Oregon.



**Rich Allen, ASB Chairman, attended the celebration in costume as a salute to Willet Hays. Ruth Bascom, granddaughter of Willet Hays, was pleased to help him cut the ceremonial cake.**



## Appendix F: About the Author



Rich Allen dedicated 42 years of service to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). Having earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Economics from Iowa State University in 1963, he immediately began his career with NASS in the Iowa Field Office. Rich later returned to Iowa State University in 1967 to study statistics as part of the NASS full-time training program.

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Before retiring on Oct. 3, 2005, Rich's remarkable career included serving as a leader, role model, mentor, career advisor for junior employees, and a guardian of policies and procedures within the statistical community. In addition, as a representative of the agency's statistical program he traveled to Spain, Pakistan, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Canada, Mexico, Sweden, and China.

Several noteworthy career highlights include: Member, Senior Executive Service for nearly 23 years; Deputy Director, Illinois Field Office; Leader, List Frame Project Team; Director, Survey Division; Director, Estimates Division; Chair, Agricultural Statistics Board for 15 years; Chair, Program Planning Council for 18 years; Chair, Human Resources Council for 15 years; Deputy Administrator for Programs; Associate Administrator; Deputy Administrator, Programs and Products; Instructor,

USDA Graduate School; and Agency Ethics and Freedom of Information Act Officer, the deciding official on all requests for special data tabulations, data sharing, and confidential data analyses.

Rich earned many honors throughout his career, including: Fellow, American Statistical Association; Recipient, American Statistical Association Founders and Outstanding Chapter Member Awards; Recipient, Washington Statistical Society Julius Shiskin Award for Economic Statistics and Presidents' Awards; and First Recipient, Jeanne E.

Griffith Mentoring Award for which there were 43 seconding letters to the nomination within NASS and 7 outside NASS; and Twice Recipient, Senior Executive Service Meritorious Rank Award.

Publications and papers by Rich include: The Evolution of Agricultural Data Collection in the United States; Long Range Planning for a Statistical Agency; Standards for Evaluating and Using Administrative Data; Customer-Driven Quality in the National Agricultural Statistics Service; and Customer-Driven Data Suppression.

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