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## Surveys

## Census of Agriculture

The census of agriculture is the only source of detailed county level agricultural data collected, tabulated, and published using a uniform set of definitions and methodology for 3200 plus counties in the U.S. The census collects data on all commodities produced in the U.S. as well as detailed information on expenses, income, and operator characteristics.

The census of agriculture is conducted in all 50 states on a target population of all farms and ranches selling or intending to sell \$1,000 or more of agricultural products including horticulture. A census of agriculture is also conducted in Puerto Rico using a farm definition of \$500 or more in sales and intentions.

## Publications

The [Census of Agriculture, Geographic Area Series, Volume 1](#) is released in February of the year following data collection. Farm counts and totals are published for every item reported. A separate publication is prepared for each state (Part 1 through Part 50), Puerto Rico (Part 52), and the U.S. (Part 51). Subtotals and cross tabulations are included for many items. Examples include farms and totals by sales group, by size group, and by demographic class. Data are published by county (municipio), state, and the U.S.

Several additional special publications are prepared from each census. These include [County Profiles](#), [Congressional Districts](#), [Watersheds](#) and the [Atlas](#). A series of colorful [Fact Sheets](#) provide key results for special topics designed for the general, often non-agricultural, public.

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## Program Content

The census is designed to obtain data on a totally exhaustive list of commodities. Census questionnaires are designed with open-ended questions to allow respondents to report every item produced on the farm, even the rarest of commodities. Expense items and income from all sources are obtained. Operator characteristics such as race, gender, age, tenure on the farm, and operating arrangement are also collected.

## Uses

The census numbers provide the most detailed information on the structure and changes occurring in agriculture. The list of data users is long and varied. Analysts may be studying a particular industry like livestock. Planners may be focused on a geographic region. Economists and government policymakers must evaluate the impact and effectiveness of proposed actions.

Issues concerning small farms, family farms, minority farms, specialty farms, as well as large production agriculture all have their unique data needs. Every five years the census meets virtually all of those needs.

## Frequency

The census of agriculture is conducted every five years in years ending in 3 and 8 covering the preceding year.

## Methods

The reference period for crop, economic, and demographic data is the calendar year ending in 2 and 7. For livestock, the reference date is the December 31 of the reference year. NASS maintains a universe list of farms and ranches on a continual basis. This list undergoes an intensive list building effort before the start of each census to maximize coverage. The first mass mailing of census forms is done in December. Follow up mailings to maximize response are scheduled at predetermined intervals. Unique farms and special handling cases are removed

from the mailing list and data are collected using other strategies like telephone, personal visit, or using custom cover letters. Response to the census is mandatory. NASS supplements the June Area survey with additional segments to measure list incompleteness (undercoverage).

Returned census forms are computer imaged (photographed) and data are key-entered from the images. Images may be recalled on demand to help resolve data discrepancies. Data are reviewed for consistency and completeness. Imputation methodology has been developed to account for missing data cells (partial nonresponse). Unit nonresponse and undercoverage adjustments are made by reweighting techniques applied to data from reporting farms.

#### Related Programs

*June Area*

*Farm and Ranch Irrigation*

*Census of Horticultural Specialties*

*Census of Aquaculture*

*Census of Agriculture for Guam, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa,  
and the Northern Mariana Islands*

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