



## Frequently Asked Questions about the Census of Agriculture

[www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov)

Contact: USDA, NASS-PA Field Office  
717-787-5147 [nass-pa@nass.usda.gov](mailto:nass-pa@nass.usda.gov)

### What is the Census of Agriculture?

The Census of Agriculture, taken every five years, is a complete count of U.S. farms and ranches and the people who operate them. The Census looks at land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income and expenditures and many other areas. For America's farmers and ranchers, the Census of Agriculture is their voice, their future and their responsibility.

### Why is the Census of Agriculture important?

The Census provides the only source of uniform, comprehensive agricultural data for every county in the nation. Through the Census, producers can show the nation the value and importance of agriculture and they can help influence decisions that will shape the future of American agriculture for years to come. By responding to the Census, producers are helping themselves, their communities and all of U.S. agriculture.

### Who uses Census of Agriculture data?

Census data is used by all those who serve farmers and rural communities – extension, universities, agribusinesses, grower associations, lenders, federal, state and local governments and many others. For instance, companies and cooperatives use the information to determine the locations of facilities that will serve agricultural producers. Community planners use the information to target needed services to rural residents. USDA

uses the information to ensure that local service centers are staffed at appropriate levels. Legislators use the information when shaping farm policies and programs. And, of course, farmers and ranchers can use Census data to develop business plans and help make informed decisions about the future of their own operations.

### How is the Census conducted?

Report forms for the 2007 Census of Agriculture will be mailed to farm and ranch operators on December 28, 2007 to collect data for the 2007 calendar year. Completed forms are due by February 4, 2008. Producers can return their forms by mail or, for the first time, they have the option of filling out the Census online via a secure web site.

### Will my information be kept confidential?

Absolutely. Respondents are guaranteed by law (Title 7, U.S. Code) that their individual information will be kept confidential. NASS uses the information only for statistical purposes and publishes data only in tabulated totals. Your report cannot be used for purposes of taxation, investigation, or regulation. Other government agencies DO NOT have access to your information, including the National Animal ID System. Individual information is even protected from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act. **(See over)**

**Must I respond to the Census?** Yes. United States law (Title 7, U.S. Code) requires all

those who receive a Census report form to respond even if they did not operate a farm or ranch in 2007.

### What if I only have a small operation or do not participate in government farm programs?

The Census of Agriculture is the responsibility of *every* grower, regardless of the size or type of operation. Part-time, retirement and lifestyle farms are included along with large, full-time operations. For Census purposes, a farm is any place from which \$1,000 of annual gross income comes from the production and sale of agricultural products, government payments or if animal inventory is valued at \$1,000 or more.

### When will 2007 Census results be released?

NASS will release Census data, in both electronic and print formats, beginning in February 2009. Detailed reports will be published for all counties, states and the nation.

### Where can I find Census of Agriculture data?

Census of Agriculture data is available through the NASS field office in your state, as well as many depository libraries, universities and state government offices. It is also available online at [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov) or [www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov). For additional information on the Census of Agriculture or any NASS survey, call the Agricultural Statistics Hotline at (800) 727-9540.



## **Confidentiality - It's U.S. Law !** **National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA**



- ★ Lists and individual survey data are confidential. NASS can never sell or share our list of ag operators & operations with any other entity, public or private – this prohibition includes all other government agencies!

*from US Code, Title 18, Section 1905 - Employees cannot disclose "identity, confidential data, income, expenditures of any person, firm, partnership, corporation or association."*

- ★ Data is published so that no one can derive information about any single operation.

*from US Code, Title 7, Section 2276 - Data can only be published as part of a "statistical or aggregate form that does not allow the identification of the person who supplied particular information."*

- ★ Individual survey data is exempt from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

*from US Code, Title 7, Section 2276 - Data "shall be immune from mandatory disclosure of any type, including legal process."*

- ★ Individual survey data cannot be subpoenaed, including copies of census or survey forms in growers' files.

*from US Code, Title 7, Section 2276 - Data "shall not, without the consent of such person, be admitted as evidence or used for any purpose in any action, suit, or other judicial or administrative proceeding."*

- ★ There can be no early release of estimates prior to official publication time on the Agricultural Statistics Board calendar.

*from US Code, Title 18, Section 1902 - Agency requires data in HQ reports & releases "to be withheld from publication until a fixed time."*

- ★ NASS staff cannot issue false reports.

*from US Code, Title 18, Section 2072 - Employees cannot knowingly "compile for issuance, or issue, any false statistics or information"*

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### **Federal Penalty for Violating Confidentiality:**

*(Title V of E-Government Act of 2002, Public Law 107-347, Section 513)*

→ **Loss of employment**

→ **The employee could be fined up to \$250,000**

→ **and/or imprisoned up to 5 years**