



News Release
Pennsylvania Field Office

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PENN STATE DEAN URGES PRODUCERS TO RETURN THE AG CENSUS

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa, Dec 19, 2007 -- As the Pennsylvania field office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service prepares to mail 2007 Census of Agriculture forms to some 98,000 addresses across the state, an administrator in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences is urging producers to return completed forms promptly.

"The entire land-grant university system relies on ag census data to prioritize its work," says Robert Steele, dean of the college. "The research, academic and cooperative extension programs the College of Agricultural Sciences conducts extend to communities throughout the state, and the county-level data the census provides helps us decide which programs to offer and which to expand."

Steele points out that so-called formula funds from the federal government for research and extension also are dependent on ag census data. "When Pennsylvania taxpayers send tax dollars to Washington, information such as the number and distribution of farms, the size of crops and the population of rural Pennsylvania is important in determining how many of those dollars come back to Pennsylvania and to the College of Agricultural Sciences for programs that are important to the state's producers and consumers."

The ag census, which documents agricultural statistics for every county in the nation, takes place every five years. Producers will be asked about crops grown in 2007, livestock or livestock products sold and animal inventories on hand at the end of the year. Data collected is used by federal, state and local governments, land-grant universities, agribusinesses, grower associations, lenders and many others. The census helps guide agricultural and rural policy, environmental and conservation programs, land-use planning, business investment and other decision making.

Marc Tosiano, director of the Ag Statistics Service's Pennsylvania field office, says it's important -- indeed, required by law -- that forms be completed and returned by Feb. 4, 2008, regardless of the size of a producer's operation. The same law makes individual information confidential to the Ag Statistics Service; it cannot be shared with anyone, including other government agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service, the Environmental Protection Agency or the National Animal Identification System.

"About 60 percent of Pennsylvania farms gross less than \$10,000 a year," says Tosiano, "and we sometimes hear folks say, 'We're too small to count.' Although these small growers account for only about 3 percent of ag-product sales, they control more than a third of Pennsylvania's farmland, so it's important that their voice be heard, too."

Information on the 2007 ag census is available online at www.agcensus.usda.gov or by calling (888) 4AG-STAT. For more information, contact Marc Tosiano at 717-787-3904 or by e-mail at nass-pa@nass.usda.gov.

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