



Dale R. King
State Statistician

What an exciting and challenging year for West Virginia farmers and agriculturists throughout the country. There have been many changes in our lives since September 11, 2001 - the most notable in American agriculture has been a shift in focus to homeland security. In addition to unintentional threats to our food supply, we must also be vigilant about safeguarding agriculture production from intentional bio-terrorism. These challenges are being met at both the state and national levels with increased security at appropriate USDA facilities and many of us are more alert to possible irregularities and vulnerabilities of our 'normal routine.'

In March of 2003, state, federal, and private agencies from across West Virginia met with farming community representatives to discuss the 2002 Farm Bill implications for West Virginia. Overall spending on conservation and environmental programs will rise by 80 percent over the next ten years. These voluntary programs provide stimulus to farmers with cost share, land rental, incentive programs, and technical assistance to institute beneficial conservation and environmental practices. This meeting also allowed agencies and personnel in the agricultural community to share what they do, how they do it and why, where, and when it is important. Learning who other agencies and individuals are and what they do allowed for the consolidation of a wealth of segmented information. For example, when attempting to eradicate or contain the spread of disease, e.g. the outbreak of Avian Influenza in 2002, communication and coordination of all information and resources available enabled the best measures to be employed in overcoming an adverse situation.

Recently, every state in the United States, as well

as Puerto Rico, has been processing the broad range of information we received from farmers and ranchers through the 2002 Census of Agriculture. By the time this, our 34th Annual Bulletin, is published we will be in the final data reviewing stages of the Census. Volume 1 of the 2002 Census of Agriculture will be published early in 2004. The information made available in this bulletin and the consequential Census publications are entirely the result of information provided by our farm operators who completed questionnaires, agribusinesses that reported on their inventories and purchases, and employees of the Cooperative Extension Service as well as the Farm Service Agency who provided timely Crop-Weather reports on a weekly and monthly basis. To those individuals, we owe a most sincere thanks, for they have helped us provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics to the citizens of West Virginia and our agricultural community at large.

Another special group of individuals that deserve praise and recognition are the field and telephone enumerators that work with our office. They spend many hours collecting data from farmers for the surveys that produce the information contained in this bulletin. I also gratefully appreciate the dedication of our office personnel in conducting, compiling, and publishing the statistics of those surveys.

I hope this bulletin provides you with some understanding of the importance of agriculture and the agricultural community to this great state. If there is something of interest that we have left out, I would encourage you to call or visit us at the Guthrie Agricultural Center. You may also e-mail us or search for other publications at our www.nass.usda.gov/wv website.

In closing, I encourage you to support your local 4-H Clubs and FFA Chapters; these are the future of West Virginia Agriculture. Remember AGRICULTURE COUNTS!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dale R. King". The signature is written in a cursive style.

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