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National
Agricultural
Statistics
Service



National Agricultural Statistics Service

Strategic Plan for 2006-2011

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USDA



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MESSAGE FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR



We at the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) are responsible for providing timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture. We are positioned within the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Providing key statistical information is basic research for making informed policy decisions.

Our efforts also provide statistical data that are essential for orderly production and marketing decisions made by farmers, ranchers, and numerous other agricultural businesses. We are the measuring stick for the performance of U.S. agriculture.

I present to you in the following pages the NASS Strategic Plan. It has been linked to the REE plan which in turn is tied to the USDA Strategic Plan. Our role is to be the official source of comprehensive, current, and reliable information on U.S. farms and ranches. This includes inventory, production, demographics, structure, resources, prices, economic situation, and environmental practices. We have a tremendous responsibility. Our Strategic Plan must therefore be implemented by employees who believe in our basic core values: trust, respect, unbiasedness, service, and teamwork. These values are vital to fulfilling our current and future goals because we work with and in service to the public. Our values are a source of pride in our work activities and daily lives at NASS.

Agriculture is the base that supports 13 percent of our nation's gross domestic product and employs more than 16 percent of our workforce. It is vital that the American people and agricultural communities trust us to provide the reliable and unbiased information they need. As part of our commitment, NASS must continue to show high appreciation and respect for our voluntary data providers, our current and future cooperative partners, and those who use the data and services we provide.

As you read this Strategic Plan, visualize your contribution to our combined success. To be successful, we will listen to our customers, be flexible, and be responsive to changing needs. We must be unbiased in our work and in our relationships. Service is the final word in NASS and will ultimately define our success. Strong teamwork promotes our combined success and contributes to better customer decisions affecting agricultural communities and the public.

R. Ronald Bosecker
Administrator

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U. S. agriculture.

Vision Statement

NASS will:

- Be recognized as the “go to” source for useful, accurate statistics on U.S. agricultural production, economics, land, water, energy and environmental management, and farmer and rancher demographics based on timely surveys and the 5-year Census of Agriculture.
- Be acknowledged for statistical leadership by those seeking counsel, survey services, or data products relating to agricultural and rural statistics; a standard achieved by consistently demonstrating sound methodology, effective resource utilization, and a focus on customer service.
- Continually earn the trust and respect of those who provide data by protecting the confidentiality of their reported information, by minimizing their reporting burden, and by being fair to everyone through equal access to official statistics.
- Foster a close relationship among employees who are strengthened by the diversity of their cultures and backgrounds, enjoy their important and challenging careers, and share an unsurpassed level of dedication and competence in service to U.S. agriculture.

NASS Values

In carrying out the goals of this plan, NASS will adhere to the key values articulated by the President of the United States. NASS employees will be guided by the following core values:

Trust

Respect

Unbiasedness

Service

Teamwork

Trust: We will earn the trust of data providers by protecting the confidentiality of their data, data users by providing high quality and relevant agricultural statistics on time and at the same time for all customers, and colleagues in the workplace by being just and fair.

Respect: We will respect our data providers, data users, and colleagues. We will earn the respect of others for our integrity and excellence as a world class agricultural statistics organization.

Unbiasedness: We will be fair and unbiased in our dealings with our colleagues and customers, and completely objective in our preparation of official statistics.

President George W. Bush articulated this Administration's values to Federal employees on November 19, 2001, specifically:

- “First, we must always maintain the highest ethical standards. In addition to asking, ‘what is legal,’ we must also ask, ‘what is right.’
- We must confront the tough problems, not avoid them. We are here to serve the public's long-term interests, not just to apply quick, short-term fixes.
- We must remember that political and career employees are part of the same team. The American people do not distinguish between them, and neither do I. The American people and I have high expectations for our entire Government. To meet those expectations, we need to work together.
- Finally, we should always remember that every dollar we spend is the taxpayer's money. People worked hard to earn it, and we should spend it wisely and reluctantly.”

Service: We will excel at providing effective and efficient service and at being responsive to those who serve agriculture and require reliable data for decision making. We will invest in the development of our employees to ensure excellence in our products and services.

Teamwork: We will communicate openly and interact as a cohesive team within our Agency to produce products and services, and collaborate as partners with others outside our Agency.

NASS Principles

NASS employees will be guided by the following principles:

Quality: We are dedicated to the highest standards of statistical excellence.

Service: We are available and responsive to customers, providing products and services that are relevant to their needs.

Accuracy: We strive to provide the best official estimates the first time, minimizing the need for revisions.

Error-Free: We strive to release our official estimates without error, removing the need to issue errata.

On Time: We meet published due dates.

In Time: We deliver high quality service to customers as quickly as possible.

Efficiency: We use available resources and technology effectively.

Fairness: We are honest and impartial in the performance of our duty, and trustworthy in our interaction with others.

Respect: We have deep respect and appreciation for American agricultural producers, our data customers, and for each other.

NASS's core values and principles overlap with USDA's guiding principles of strong ethics, service, team work, inclusive decision making, and fiscal responsibility. To achieve NASS's strategic goals, this plan emphasizes results that rely on teamwork not only within the agency but also across USDA. As part of this plan, we intend to work hard to improve the short-term and long-term leadership abilities that the Agency needs to serve the public. All actions will be consistent with our equal opportunity and civil rights responsibilities; NASS will act in a manner that is both inclusive and open to public scrutiny.

Civil Rights Statement

The National Agricultural Statistics Service firmly supports the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Civil Rights Policy which mandates that all employees, applicants, and clients always be treated with fairness, equality; and respect. This is and shall remain a core NASS value. NASS will maintain a discrimination-free workplace at Headquarters and at the 46 field offices located throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, and related Federal statutes and regulations prohibit discrimination against employees, job applicants, program beneficiaries, and other clients based on race, color, sex, age (40 years and older), national origin, religion, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital or family status. In addition, Federal laws protect all potential victims from any non-sexual or sexual harassment and from any reprisal or retaliation while they exercise their respective civil rights as protected under equal employment opportunity and program delivery.

Legislative Mandate

The foundation of NASS began with the establishment of USDA in 1862. Agricultural supply information was one of the purposes for the new Department. The first official report on the condition of crops began in July 1863. The basic, mission-oriented program continues today in the USDA forecasts and estimates provided by the NASS Agricultural Statistics Board. NASS's responsibilities are authorized under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 and other sections under Title 7 of the U.S. Code (U.S.C.)-Agriculture; Chapter 55, Department of Agriculture; Section 2204, General duties of the Secretary; advisory functions; research and development.

Responsibility for the quinquennial census of agriculture program, which provides comprehensive information about the Nation's agriculture down to the county level, was transferred from the Department of Commerce to the Department of Agriculture in 1997. NASS thereby assumed responsibility for the 1997 Census of Agriculture and subsequent censuses and special studies. NASS's responsibility to conduct the census of agriculture is authorized under Public Law 105-113, the Census of Agriculture Act of 1997 (Title 7 U.S.C. 2204g).

The NASS program utilizes 46 field offices (FOs) serving all 50 States and Puerto Rico. About one-third of the Agency's staff is located at its Washington, D.C. Headquarters offices with two-thirds of the staff located in the FOs. Most FOs are operated under cooperative funding arrangements with State Departments of Agriculture and/or land-grant universities. These arrangements serve the agricultural data needs at both the State and Federal levels, eliminate duplication of effort, provide for State input, maintain national consistency, and minimize overall costs to Federal and State Governments. The Agency maintains a list of all farms and ranches in the United States, one of its unique federal roles. NASS also performs important reimbursable agricultural survey work for other Federal, State, and producer organizations, and provides technical assistance for agricultural statistics programs in developing countries.

Partners, Customers, and Stakeholders

As the primary statistical Agency for USDA, NASS services the data needs of many agencies inside and outside of the Department. Partnerships have been in place with State Departments of Agriculture and land-grant universities through cooperative agreements since 1917 to ensure statistical service meets State, local, and national needs without duplication of effort. This coordination maximizes benefits while minimizing respondent burden and costs to the taxpayers. NASS also considers the thousands of voluntary data suppliers as partners in the important task of monitoring the Nation's agricultural output, facilitating orderly and efficient markets, and measuring the economic health of those in agriculture.

NASS uses numerous forums to obtain program content and customer service feedback. For many years NASS has sponsored data user meetings which are a primary source of customer input that keeps the NASS agricultural statistics program on track with the needs of the user community. Data user responses have played a vital role in shaping the agency's annual and long-range planning activities. The transfer of the census of agriculture program to NASS brought with it an Advisory Committee which now provides guidance on the entire agricultural statistics program.

Critical Success Factors and Top Priorities

We have identified 12 factors which are critical to our success. Each of these factors contributes to our effectiveness and impacts the goals in the NASS Strategic Plan and the agency's ability to implement the President's Management Agenda. These factors are:

- Voluntary respondent cooperation
- Trained data collection interviewers
- Diverse, dedicated, and skilled employees
- State government cooperators
- Customer service reputation for excellence
- Timeliness, accuracy, and relevance
- Neutrality, credibility, and independence
- Responsiveness to data needs
- Confidentiality and security
- Technological efficiencies
- Data management

Additionally, the administrator and senior executives defined 10 top priorities that are important to the agency in order to assure our continued success in fulfilling our mission. Ranked in priority order, these are:

1. Enhance respondent relations and reduce reporting burden
2. Ensure security, confidentiality, and continuity of operations
3. Promote employee satisfaction and reward innovation and dedication
4. Measure our performance collectively and individually
5. Achieve operational efficiencies to assist NASS staff
6. Prepare staff for NASS career opportunities
7. Develop IT systems for timely and high quality estimates and censuses
8. Improve timeliness, accuracy, and usefulness of agricultural statistics
9. Strengthen NASS communication and service
10. Use historical NASS data and administrative data to full advantage

Key External Factors for NASS

Customers and stakeholders described the following trends and external factors as having important implications for NASS program's in the next decade:

- Globalization
- Population increase, demographic changes, and economic growth
- Changing structure of agriculture including continued concentration in production, leading to fewer, larger, and more vertically integrated and specialized farms
- Emerging forces influencing agricultural policy include food safety, consumer preferences, food security, energy requirements, terrorism, nutrition, environmental quality, and trade
- Declining voluntary cooperation while requests for information increase

- Rising expectations from the public for accuracy, timeliness, and relevancy of statistics
- Fewer employees with a background and education in agriculture
- Changing lifestyles in rural America, including more off-farm work, and less influence from agriculture in rural communities
- Explosive changes in information technology

Producers must be able to adapt to a more market-oriented farm policy, shifting trade opportunities, and changes in the structure of agriculture, such as vertical integration and concentration. Accurate and timely statistical data and economic analysis will help producers and policy makers respond quickly to economic, social, and environmental changes that affect production and the sale of agricultural products, both domestically and globally. We must be able to use innovative data collection methods, such as web-based data collection, to help reduce survey respondent burden and improve voluntary cooperation. Advances in information technologies should be adapted to increase information sharing electronically, to meet the rising demands for new information, increase employee productivity, and continue to meet the public's high expectation of accurate, timely, and relevant agricultural statistics. NASS will employ a diverse, highly technical and competent workforce that is high performing and has the ability to fully utilize all available resources to provide top quality agricultural statistics and service.

Strategic Planning Framework

NASS strategic goals are aligned with USDA's strategic goals, major program policies, and objectives as shown in the following table. This plan also focuses on developing strategies for managing human capital, competitive sourcing, eGovernment, financial management, and budget and performance integration which align with the Presidential Management Agenda initiatives.

NASS's six strategic goals mirror our commitment to provide first-class service, state-of-the-art-science, and consistent management excellence. Planning, sound management, and measuring results are an inherent part of achieving these goals. To reflect this, these goals contain important objectives that cover the statistical programs and services within USDA's responsibilities. Through these objectives, we will strive to:

- Support international economic development and trade capacity building through technical assistance;
- Promote efficient domestic agricultural production and marketing systems for agricultural commodities and products by using sound statistical data;
- Strengthen risk management by using a variety of financial tools and providing sound statistical information to help farmers and ranchers in their decision-making process;
- Provide sound statistical information for economic and business decision-making by conducting the census of agriculture to help create opportunities for growth in rural America;
- Provide chemical usage statistics to enable informed decision-making using sound science in risk analysis; and
- Manage and protect America's natural resource base and environment on both public and private lands by working cooperatively with other levels of government and the private sector.

NASS Statistical Program Alignment with USDA Goals and Objectives

USDA Goals and Objectives	Alignment of USDA and NASS Objectives	NASS Statistical Programs
Goal 1: Enhance International Competitiveness of American Agriculture		
Objective 1.1		
Objective 1.2	NASS Objective 1.2: Support International Economic Development and Trade Capacity Building Through Technical Assistance	International Programs
Objective 1.3		
Goal 2: Enhance the Competitiveness and Sustainability of Rural and Farm Economies		
Objective 2.1		Ag Production Statistics ARMS III Census of Horticulture Aquaculture Census
Objective 2.2	NASS Objective 2.2: Provide Statistical Data to Promote Efficient Domestic Agricultural Production and Marketing Systems	
Objective 2.3	NASS Objective 2.3: Provide Statistical Data for Risk Management Programs and Financial Tools to Farmers and Ranchers	Prices Received County Estimates
Goal 3: Support Increased Economic Opportunities and Improved Quality of Life in Rural America		
Objective 3.1	NASS Objective 3.1: Conduct the Census of Agriculture to Create Opportunities for Growth Through Sound Agricultural Decision Making	Census of Agriculture
Objective 3.2		
Goal 4: Enhance Protection and Safety of the Nation's Agriculture and Food Supply		
Objective 4.1		Food Safety Fruit, Vegetable, and Postharvest Chemical Use
Objective 4.2	NASS Objective 4.2: Provide Chemical Usage Statistics to Enable Informed Decision Making Using Sound Science in Risk Analysis	
Goal 5: Improve the Nation's Nutrition and Health		
Objective 5.1		
Objective 5.2		
Objective 5.3		
Goal 6: Protect and Enhance the Nation's Natural Resource Base and Environment		
Objective 6.1		ARMS II Farm & Ranch Irrigation Geospatial Statistics
Objective 6.2	NASS Objective 6.2: Provide Statistical Data to Support Management of Productive Working Cropland	
Objective 6.3		

A set of performance measures will help us track our progress in attaining our goals and objectives. Each measure specifies baseline information and long-term performance targets. Actionable strategies delineate the activities needed to reach the strategic goals.



Strategic Goal 1:

Enhance International Competitiveness of American Agriculture

Expanding global markets for agricultural products is critical for the long-term economic health and prosperity of our food and agricultural sector. U.S. farmers have a wealth of natural resources, cutting-edge technologies, and a supporting infrastructure that result in a production capacity beyond domestic needs. Expanding global markets will increase demand for agricultural products and contribute directly to economic stability and prosperity for America's farmers.

To expand overseas markets and facilitate trade, USDA assists in the negotiation of new U.S. trade agreements and the monitoring and enforcement of existing trade agreements. In cooperation with private sector producer and commodity trade associations, USDA administers an array of market development and export promotion programs designed to build long-term markets overseas. The Department helps to expand trade opportunities through programs of technical assistance and training that support agricultural development and growth in developing countries and assist them to participate and benefit from international trade. USDA works to facilitate trade through the adoption of science-based regulatory systems and standards.

USDA Strategic Result: Increased Export Opportunities for U.S. Agriculture

USDA OBJECTIVE 1.1: EXPAND AND MAINTAIN INTERNATIONAL EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES

The most effective means of expanding foreign market opportunities is through new trade agreements that increase market access and reduce trade impediments. Greater access to foreign markets requires an aggressive trade policy that

lowers tariffs and eliminates distorting subsidies. To achieve this, USDA will work with the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to push aggressively to conclude the Doha Round of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations. Doha refers to the round of multilateral trade negotiations currently being conducted under WTO. USDA and USTR also plan to complete new trade agreements with a variety of trading partners and negotiate effective market access with countries seeking to join the WTO. Other nations are pursuing bilateral or regional agreements around the world that will put the U.S. at a comparative disadvantage in many markets. Without these efforts, U.S. producers will find trade opportunities denied by others' preferential agreements.

USDA Key Outcome: Increased Access to Global Markets for U.S. Agricultural Producers and Exporters

USDA OBJECTIVE 1.2: SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRADE CAPACITY BUILDING

The President's 2002 National Security Strategy cites economic development as one of the top three priorities of U.S. foreign policy, joining diplomacy and defense. The strategy recognizes that the root of the national security threat to the United States is the lack of economic development. This situation often results in economic and political instability. For most developing countries, particularly in Africa, a productive and sustainable agricultural sector supports economic well-being. Thus, targeted

agricultural development is crucial to the President’s National Security Strategy.

Activities that support economic development also play an important role in efforts to expand overseas market opportunities for American agriculture. Most future growth in food demand will occur in developing and middle income countries, where population and income are growing relatively rapidly. As incomes increase in these countries, consumers spend a far greater proportion of the extra income on food, relative to consumers in higher-income countries.

USDA deploys its unique resources and expertise in agricultural development activities. These activities include collaborative projects with the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and other U.S. agencies and international organizations to advance market-based policies and institutions, trade and investment, sustainable agricultural systems, and research and education in developing countries. These activities are focused on improving agricultural productivity and markets as the engines for economic growth.

USDA also helps developing countries increase trade and integrate their agricultural sector into the global economy through trade capacity building activities. Through a variety of training, technical assistance, and inter-governmental actions, these activities help to strengthen other countries’ agricultural institutions and regulatory systems, encourage participation in and compliance with international norms, and develop understanding of U.S. approaches to agricultural policy and regulatory procedures.

USDA Key Outcome: Improved Ability in Developing Countries to Sustain Economic Growth and Benefit from International Trade

NASS OBJECTIVE 1.2: SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRADE CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

NASS works with the U.S. Agency for International Development and other Federal agencies supplying technical statistical assistance to improve and expand a developing or transitioning country’s capacity to produce agricultural statistics and information. Education and technology transfer can help move those methods into developing and transitioning countries. Economic and statistical research can illuminate the role of technology transfer and the degree to which it improves incomes and increases trade.

NASS Performance Measures

1.2.1 Provide technical assistance to improve agricultural statistics in developing and transition countries.

Baseline FY 2005
NASS provided technical assistance and training to 16 recipient countries.
Target FY 2011
Recipient countries make substantive improvements in producing agricultural statistics and information.

International Programs Office (IPO)

Actionable Strategies

NASS will:

- Help developing and transition countries build credible statistical systems needed for monitoring agriculture sector performance, formulating agricultural policies, implementing agricultural programs, and improving market intelligence on country and global agricultural production.
- Pursue leads for new projects in developing and transition countries, as well as funding sources to support new and existing agricultural statistics improvement programs.
- Participate in international forums where NASS capabilities can be demonstrated.
- Conduct briefings that demonstrate NASS capabilities for international visitors, including potential donors and collaborators.
- Enlist NASS domestic program technical staff to assist with international assistance projects.

USDA OBJECTIVE 1.3: IMPROVED SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY (SPS) SYSTEM TO FACILITATE AGRICULTURAL TRADE

SPS refers to the protection of human, animal and plant life and health from foreign pests, diseases, and contaminants. SPS barriers identified as trade barriers continue to grow due to the lack of regulatory capacity in various countries and/or through the lack of sound science. This growth impedes agricultural trade around the world. Reduced trade flows due to SPS barriers limit U.S. exports and efforts of developing countries to participate in and benefit from global trade. In response to these problems, USDA will use its extensive expertise and work closely with other U.S. agencies to strengthen regulatory coordination, streamline procedures to enhance

trade, and encourage the use of sound science in addressing SPS and biotechnology issues. USDA will work aggressively with its private-sector trading partners and international standards-setting organizations to develop a stronger system of international guidelines.

USDA Key Outcome: An Improved Global SPS System for Facilitating Agricultural Trade

USDA Key External Factors

A number of factors may affect USDA's ability to expand overseas market opportunities and enhance the competitiveness of American agricultural producers. These include weather and other growing conditions at home and abroad; domestic and international macroeconomic factors, including consumer purchasing power and the strength of the U.S. dollar and competing currencies; and policy developments in other countries, such as the erection of trade barriers and adoption of standards that are not science-based.



Strategic Goal 2: Enhance the Competitiveness and Sustainability of Rural and Farm Economies

An economically prosperous agricultural production sector contributes to the Nation's economic vitality and standard of living. Consumers benefit from efficiently produced and marketed agricultural products that minimize their food costs and maximize their consumption choices. The sector's success depends on the ability to expand into new markets, gain adequate capital, protect itself against financial risk, and adjust to changing market conditions. This success also depends on the economic well being of producers and their ability to increase production potential through increased farm acreage and/or other methods, maintain their farms and equipment, and utilize tools to mitigate risks associated with various aspects of production. There is much diversity in the farm sector driven by diversity in resources, climate, individual preferences, and even lifestyles. The needs, concerns, and opportunities of larger, commercially oriented farms differ from those of smaller, intermediate farms, regardless of location. For these reasons, USDA has a variety of farm related programs designed to enhance the economic opportunities for all agricultural producers while providing individual producers options in terms of what is best for them under their specific situations.

USDA provides income stability to keep producers economically viable through economic safety net programs in the form of crop insurance, direct payments, marketing assistance loans, and commodity support programs. When natural disasters strike, USDA reacts quickly to help affected producers recover from their losses and restore their lands to prior productivity levels. USDA supports much needed basic research, economic analysis, and baseline information to

identify new uses and more efficient technology for producing and marketing agricultural products.

USDA marketing programs help agricultural producers determine consumer preferences, find more efficient and effective ways to transport and market, and receive fair payment for their products. USDA constantly works with the agricultural community to monitor changes in production and processing methods, and in consumer preferences. By adjusting services or developing new market facilitating programs, USDA ensures that these programs continue to help producers to be successful in meeting the needs and expectations of consumers.

USDA Strategic Result: Expanded Domestic Markets for Agricultural Producers

USDA OBJECTIVE 2.1: EXPAND DOMESTIC MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

Technological progress is increasingly pushing the market for agricultural products in new directions. Biobased technologies promise new opportunities for energy, industrial, and pharmacological markets for U.S. farmers.

Key priorities for USDA will be development and implementation of a model procurement program for biobased products, promotion of the government-wide use of biobased products, research to support development of new markets and products, and collaborating with government officials to support these activities through USDA policies and programs, energy policy and other legislation.

USDA Key Outcomes:

- Increased use of alternative fuels and biobased products throughout the agricultural sector
- Increased production of economically viable alternative energy sources
- Researched, demonstrated, and promoted new biobased products and new energy production technologies

USDA OBJECTIVE 2.2: INCREASE THE EFFICIENCY OF DOMESTIC AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND MARKETING SYSTEMS

Fundamental to the long-term viability of an agricultural producer is the ability to manage an efficient and profitable operation. USDA activities make this possible through programs that develop and transfer to producers the technology, production practices, and business and marketing tools and information that are the center pieces for an efficient and economically sustainable agricultural sector.

To support an efficient marketing environment, efforts are directed toward providing the necessary infrastructure and market information to reduce per unit and overall production costs; improve quality and yields, and improve management and marketing decisions. These USDA programs provide the scientific, marketing, and other assistance necessary to increase the efficiency and correspondingly, the competitiveness of the agricultural producer.

USDA Key Outcome: Agricultural Producers Who Compete Effectively in the Economic Market

NASS OBJECTIVE 2.2: PROVIDE STATISTICAL DATA TO PROMOTE EFFICIENT DOMESTIC AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND MARKETING SYSTEMS

It is imperative for NASS to deliver high-quality, objective, relevant, timely, and accurate statistics to producers and other data users for them to make sound, informed production and marketing decisions. Official agricultural statistics promote a level playing field in production agriculture with impartial information available to all at a predetermined and publicized date and time. The Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) calendar of official reports is released the preceding calendar year providing data users with the date and time of each report released during the year.

The basic, unbiased data supplied by NASS on established dates and times throughout the year provide timely and accurate market-sensitive data used by the commodity and agricultural markets to operate efficiently. This is essential for maintaining a fair and equitable environment for price discovery. This information is necessary for making informed decisions by public officials and private interests. USDA policymakers and Congress use this information to help them make informed decisions and policies that promote and contribute to a strong, sustainable U.S. farm economy.

The annual Agricultural Resources Management Survey (ARMS) jointly sponsored with the Economic Research Service (ERS) is USDA's primary vehicle for obtaining information on a broad range of issues about the farm sector financial condition and agricultural resource use. The ARMS provides the most definitive, annual description of the rapidly changing structure of the Nation's farms. While a smaller number of large farms account for a growing proportion of agricultural production, other farms maintain profitability by entering into production and marketing agreements with agri-businesses. The

ARMS provides an annual measure of the effect agri-business has on farm income through such contracts. Without the ARMS, important measures such as farm income, farm operator income, and farm household income would not be available. This program also provides the critical information to analyze the effect government programs, such as loan deficiency payments, are having on net farm income by size and type of farm. Equally important, ARMS data can be used to evaluate the possible effects of alternative government policies and programs such as formulating indices, cost estimates, and farm economic indicators. Data from the ARMS are the foundation for the body of research that informs decision-makers on the diversity of the farm sector and the differential impact of alternative policies and programs across the farm sector and among farm families.

NASS Performance Measures

2.2.1 Release all Agricultural Statistics Board reports on-time.

Baseline 2005
Agricultural Statistics Board reports were released on-time 99.8 percent of the time.
Target 2011
Agricultural Statistics Board reports are released on-time 100 percent of the time.

2.2.2 Increase the percent of key survey point estimates meeting statistical precision targets.

Baseline 2004
70 percent of the key estimates met or exceeded NASS precision standards.
Target 2011
75 percent of the key estimates meet or exceed NASS precision standards.

2.2.3 Maximize the percent of total U.S. agricultural production covered annually by official USDA statistics.

Baseline 2005
Estimated total cash receipts for NASS statistical programs accounted for 94 percent of the U.S. total cash receipts.
Target 2012
Estimated total cash receipts in NASS statistical programs account for 100 percent of the U.S. total cash receipts.

2.2.4 Improve customer satisfaction as measured by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI).

Baseline 2004
The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for NASS is 77.
Target 2010
The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for NASS increases to 80.

2.2.5 Keep the annual survey development and data collection costs below the annual rate of employment cost inflation.

Baseline 2004
The annual survey development and data collection costs per sample unit when compared to the annual rate of inflation as measured by the Employment Cost Index (ECI) are .99.
Target 2011
The increase in the annual survey development and data collection costs per sample unit compared to the annual rate of inflation as measured by the ECI is less than one.

2.2.6 Provide State level farm production expenditure estimates for more States to cover a higher percentage of the U.S. total.

Baseline 2005
NASS produced State level estimates on key farm production expenditures for 15 States totaling 63 percent of the U.S. total.
Target 2011
NASS produces State level estimates on key farm production expenditures for 5 more States totaling 75 percent of the U.S. total.

Actionable Strategies

NASS will:

- Use the ASB to publicize the NASS release policy and the annual release calendar to the public.
- Conduct timely, statistically reliable surveys and field visits to enable ASB to forecast crop production, estimate livestock inventories and prices, and respond to emergency data needs such as those resulting from floods, droughts, and freezes.
- Systematically analyze each step of data collection, processing, and statistical estimation using ASB to objectively evaluate survey indications to provide unbiased official USDA estimates.
- Release crop forecasts within 12 days of the survey reference date. Release livestock inventories and crop acreages within 30 days of the survey reference date.
- Issue timely, accurate, and user-friendly reports of official estimates that are useful for the efficient and effective marketing of U.S. agricultural outputs.

- Report accuracy and coverage measures to data users.
- Provide quality statistical data for economic research and policy and program analysis with USDA.
- Ensure that security procedures protect the confidentiality of individual reported data and from improper disclosure of official statistics.
- Provide statistical services that meet agency’s high-quality customer service standards.
- Be responsive to recommendations and feedback received from the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics, USDA Data User meetings, industry meetings, customers, and other outreach activities.
- Release annual Farm Production Expenditures on or before July 30 following the reference year. Release Farm labor wage rate and hired workers official estimates within one month after the survey reference date.

USDA OBJECTIVE 2.3: PROVIDE RISK MANAGEMENT AND FINANCIAL TOOLS TO FARMERS AND RANCHERS

Agricultural producers are subject to a wide array of natural, financial, and market risks. Like other business owners, agricultural producers use a variety of tools to manage these risks, including crop insurance, non-insured crop disaster assistance, credit, and direct payments.

USDA works diligently to provide financial tools to producers. The Department strives to provide prompt and equitable assistance, and direct income payments, disaster assistance, and marketing assistance loans to farmers, ranchers, and eligible landowners. When natural disasters strike, USDA reacts quickly to help affected producers recover from losses and restore their lands to pre-disaster productivity levels.

Additionally, the Department partners with commercial lenders to guarantee farm ownership and operating loans, and makes direct loans to producers to purchase properties or finance farm expenses. USDA provides agricultural credit to beginning farmers and ranchers, and those producers who traditionally have difficulty obtaining commercial credit. USDA also provides necessary capital to producers to help them recover from emergencies.

USDA Key Outcome: Economically Sound Agricultural Production Sector

NASS OBJECTIVE 2.3: PROVIDE STATISTICAL DATA FOR RISK MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS AND FINANCIAL TOOLS TO FARMERS AND RANCHERS

NASS produces and disseminates statistical information that provides U.S. producers with agricultural facts. County and local level statistics and price information help in effectively managing the inherently risky environment of agricultural production. Agricultural production and marketability are constantly affected by such factors as unpredictable weather and growing conditions, disease and pest outbreaks, and consumer purchasing power.

NASS Performance Measures

2.3.1 Meet national quality and publication standards for county estimates.

Baseline 2007
Establish new national standards for setting and publishing statistically defensible county estimates.
Target 2011
Set and publish statistically defensible county estimates annually in all relevant States.

2.3.2 Include States accounting for 90 percent of the value of production for the commodities in the monthly field crop price program.

Baseline 2005
Twelve field crop commodities met or exceeded the 90 percent coverage standard.
Target 2011
Increase the number of field crop commodities meeting or exceeding the 90 percent coverage standard.

Actionable Strategies

To improve the effectiveness of risk management and financial tools provided to U.S. agricultural producers. NASS will:

- Coordinate official release dates for crop county estimates with the Risk Management Agency.
- Provide timely and accurate statistical information for use in the calculations of payments to farmers in accordance with the 2002 farm bill.
- Issue timely, accurate, and user-friendly reports of official estimates for the efficient and effective marketing of U.S. agricultural outputs.
- Evaluate trends and changes in production agriculture and adjust States included in U.S. market year average price calculations and States included in the county estimates statistics program accordingly.

USDA Key External Factors

There are a number of external factors that could influence the outcome of this strategic objective. They include the demand for risk management and financial tool options, the local and national economies or environmental conditions, bad weather, natural disasters, animal and plant pests

and diseases, sharp fluctuations in farm commodity prices, insufficient funding, legislative changes, shifts in the administration or USDA policies, and the extent of marketing by the private insurance companies. Producers unfamiliar with new products may be uncomfortable using tools other than those they have traditionally used and may assume that the government will provide assistance in the event of disasters (as it has through former disaster programs), leading to reluctance to utilize risk management alternatives.



Strategic Goal 3: Support Increased Economic Opportunities and Improved Quality of Life in Rural America

Rural America, home to one-fifth of the Nation's population, is a collage of people and economic activities. Today, 7 out of 8 rural counties are dominated by varying mixes of manufacturing, services, and other non-farming activities. Of the 65 million people who live in rural America, only 2 million are engaged directly in production agriculture. While farm income is an important source of revenue for some rural families, most rural residents are not dependent on agriculture. Many family farmers rely on local, off-farm employment to supplement their farm income.

A diversity of other enterprises, including renewable energy and “place”-based opportunities, such as support services for agriculture, forestry and mining, recreation, and manufacturing, provide many of the jobs and income in rural America. USDA enhances economic opportunities and quality of life for rural residents by helping to provide local demographic information, financial and technical assistance for business and industry, water and waste disposal, community facilities, advanced telecommunications and broadband infrastructure, electric utilities, and housing. The Department strives to ensure that rural residents have equal opportunity to share in the Nation's prosperity and technological advancement. USDA is the leading advocate for rural America.

USDA facilitates the achievement of Presidential initiatives, for example, by encouraging minority homeownership and the production of renewable energy. The Department will continue to work with other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and private-sector interests to achieve a coordinated effort for the realization of

Presidential initiatives as well as other activities important to rural America.

USDA Strategic Result: Contribute to the Prosperity and Technological Advancement of Rural Residents

USDA OBJECTIVE 3.1: EXPAND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BY USING USDA FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO LEVERAGE PRIVATE SECTOR RESOURCES AND CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

One of USDA's core missions is ensuring that rural residents enjoy economic opportunities equivalent to those of other Americans. Credit limitations and other market imperfections sometimes restrain the ability of rural economies to create the jobs and incomes that would allow rural families to thrive and rural youth to remain in their communities. USDA programs serve as capital enhancement tools for rural America by providing access to capital for investment in businesses and economic infrastructure. Through capital enhancement and by implementing energy-related provisions of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (FSRIA), USDA will facilitate the expansion of economic opportunities in rural areas.

USDA Key Outcome: Enhance Capital Formation for Rural Communities

NASS OBJECTIVE 3.1: CONDUCT THE CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH THROUGH SOUND AGRICULTURAL DECISION MAKING

USDA promotes the well-being of rural America through research and analysis to better understand the economic, demographic, and environmental forces affecting rural regions and communities and, using that knowledge to develop strategies that build on local assets.

NASS statistical information, particularly the census of agriculture, is designed to enhance National, State, and local information on U.S. agriculture and facilitate locality-based policy and business decisions. Detailed information from the census of agriculture on production, supply, economic, and demographic data is critical for new businesses in developing local level strategies and plans to successfully startup or relocate in rural America. The results of the census are reported in a timely and user-friendly manner to enable decision making concerning localities across the United States.

It is important to improve coverage of socially disadvantaged farm operators in the census of agriculture and involve and maintain partnerships with State Departments of Agriculture, land-grant colleges and universities, and other cooperators, local program supporters, and industry for program development and evaluation.

NASS Performance Measures

3.1.1 Publish the 2007 Census of Agriculture data within 14 months after the initial mailing.

Baseline 2004
A preliminary release of the 2002 Census of Agriculture was published in February 2004, 14 months after the initial mailing in December 2002.
Target 2009
The entire 2007 Census of Agriculture is scheduled to be published in February 2009, 14 months after the initial mailing in December 2007.

3.1.2 Improve the census list coverage of U.S. farms and farmland with sales of \$50,000 or more.

Baseline 2003
The 2002 Census of Agriculture covered 94.5 percent of U.S. farms and 99.1 percent of the farmland on farms with \$50,000 or more in sales.
Target 2008
The 2007 Census of Agriculture will cover more than 95 percent of U.S. farms and 99.5 percent of the farmland on farms with \$50,000 or more in sales.

3.1.3 Increase the list coverage of U.S. minority operated farms in the census.

Baseline 2003
The 2002 Census of Agriculture mail list covered 68 percent of minority operated farms.
Target 2008
The 2007 Census of Agriculture mail list will cover 73 percent of minority operated farms.

Actionable Strategies

NASS will:

- Conduct the census of agriculture to provide detailed data at the National, State, County, and local levels on the characteristics of America's agricultural sector.
- Systematically analyze each step of data collection and processing of the census of agriculture.
- Report the results of the census in a timely and user-friendly manner to enable decision making for localities across the United States.
- Improve coverage of socially disadvantaged farm operators in the census of agriculture.
- Evaluate trends and changes in production agriculture at the quinquennial release of the census of agriculture and adjust the NASS statistics programs accordingly.

USDA OBJECTIVE 3.2: IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE THROUGH USDA FINANCING OF QUALITY HOUSING, MODERN UTILITIES, AND NEEDED COMMUNITY FACILITIES

If new businesses are to operate in a rural community, that community must possess the amenities that businesses require and employees desire. This includes access to such basic needs as clean water, adequate housing, reliable electricity and telecommunications, and such essential needs as quality education, health care, day care, public safety services, and cultural activities. If a community cannot meet the public's essential needs, young people will neither stay in nor migrate to the rural community. USDA is an important source of credit and technical assistance for developing the economic infrastructure of rural America. These resources are essential if rural residents and communities are to improve their

quality of life through increased economic opportunity.

Availability of adequate housing is critical to the well-being of a community. Ensuring that low-income families have access to decent and safe housing is a major concern in every area, whether urban or rural. USDA provides financing for low- and moderate-income rural families who cannot obtain credit from other sources to help them own homes. Owning a home provides stability for families and gives them the opportunity to strengthen their financial condition through the accrual of equity. The President has expressed his desire to increase homeownership, particularly among minorities. He has established a major initiative to increase minority homeownership nationwide. USDA is implementing an action plan aggressively in support of the President's goal.

USDA Key Outcome: Improved Rural Quality of Life through Homeownership, New and/or Improved Water and/or Waste Disposal Facilities, New and/or Improved Electric Facilities, and New and/or Improved Telecommunications Facilities

USDA Key External Factors

The amount of loans that can be made with the budget authority appropriated will depend upon various factors that affect subsidy rates, including interest rates and program losses. USDA can maximize its resources by jointly funding projects with private lenders only if they participate and loan recipients can meet the higher payments normally required from joint funding. While the Department can reach out to rural communities, it cannot require them to apply for financial help. Applicants must compete for funding with other applicants and the recipient must demonstrate the ability to repay the government loan. Significant fluctuations in interest rates or unemployment also impact the ability of many rural residents, communities, and businesses to qualify.



Strategic Goal 4: Enhance Protection and Safety of the Nation's Agriculture and Food Supply

USDA has unique and critical responsibilities to provide consumers with a healthy food supply and a secure agricultural production system. This is achieved by ensuring that the Nation's meat, poultry, and egg products are safe, wholesome, and labeled accurately. This also is achieved by protecting the Nation's agricultural system from pests and disease outbreaks, minimizing production losses, maintaining market viability, and promoting responsible environmental stewardship.

USDA Strategic Result: A Safe U.S. Food Supply and Agricultural Production System

USDA OBJECTIVE 4.1: REDUCE THE INCIDENCE OF FOODBORNE ILLNESSES RELATED TO MEAT, POULTRY, AND EGG PRODUCTS IN THE UNITED STATES

To reduce the incidence of food-borne illness, USDA is moving toward a more scientific inspection system. A more risk-based approach to verification will allow USDA to allocate inspection resources and carry out regulatory activities on high-risk processes that may require more attention from inspection program personnel. By focusing our resources in a more risk-based manner, USDA expects to identify the establishments and processes that present the greatest public health concerns and thereby have a more effective impact on improving public health. The Department's food-safety systems, particularly those for meat, poultry, and egg products, must be assessed and updated continually. This evaluation process will help maintain consumer confidence and protect them from exposure to foodborne diseases. These

systems include activities to track the incidence of pathogens and illness-causing organisms in these products. They are also designed to raise public awareness about food safety, food security, and safe food handling.

USDA Key Outcome: Reduction in Foodborne Illness Associated with the Consumption of Meat, Poultry, and Egg Products

USDA OBJECTIVE 4.2: REDUCE THE NUMBER AND SEVERITY OF AGRICULTURAL PEST AND DISEASE OUTBREAKS

Safeguarding America's animal and plant resources from invasive pests and diseases ensures the continued prevalence of agricultural trade as the foundation of America's prosperity and its people's existence. The dynamic nature of invasive pests and diseases demands a proactive approach to exclude further outbreaks and manage established pests and diseases. Partnerships with Federal and State agencies, industry, and professional organizations provide the framework from which we sponsor prevention activities. These activities allow for the coordination of effective pest and animal disease emergency response systems to limit the severity of such outbreaks. USDA has begun phasing in a new measure of the economic damages avoided or mitigated by pest and disease eradication or control efforts.

USDA Key Outcome: A Secure Agricultural Production System and Healthy Food Supply

NASS OBJECTIVE 4.2: PROVIDE CHEMICAL USAGE STATISTICS TO ENABLE INFORMED DECISION MAKING USING SOUND SCIENCE IN RISK ANALYSIS

NASS publishes chemical usage statistics on the acreage treated with fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, and other pesticides. Each chemical product is classified by its active ingredient. Also postharvest statistics are published to provide data to develop a chemical use data base on pesticides and other chemicals applied to commodities after harvest obtained from storage facilities, processor, and packers and shippers.

Chemical use data are used for both public education and regulatory decision making purposes. These surveys are part of a continuing program which provides chemical usage data to other government agencies to respond effectively to food safety and water-quality issues.

Essential pest management practices data are provided for analyzing policy and program consequences for producers and consumers. Since 1997, Integrated Pest Management information has been collected to measure the use of pesticides and pest management practices of all farms and all phases of production agriculture.

Data are also collected on pesticides and other chemicals applied to commodities after they leave the farm. The comprehensive analyses of farm practices are made possible by measures of strategies used by growers as alternatives to chemical use.

NASS Performance Measures

4.2.1 Exceed the 75 percent standard for acres covered by agricultural chemical and pest management statistics for targeted food crops and commodities.

Baseline 2005
97 percent of the targeted food crops and commodities exceeded the coverage standard.
Target 2011
Over 95 percent of the targeted food crops and commodities will meet or exceed the 75 percent coverage standard.

Actionable Strategies

NASS will:

- Conduct surveys to provide needed information concerning quantities of chemicals applied to agricultural commodities, including livestock and facilities.
- Supply important economic information relevant to policy and production decisions associated with chemical use and integrated pest management on U.S. farms and ranches.
- Supply information relevant to measuring the adoption of integrated pest management practices in production agriculture.
- Evaluate trends and changes in production agriculture and adjust the NASS chemical use statistics program accordingly.

USDA Key External Factors

The introduction of hazardous substances, whether accidental or intentional, may threaten human health and the environment. This potential threat makes prevention, early detection, identification, and rapid control or eradication a vital challenge.



Strategic Goal 5: Improve the Nation's Nutrition and Health

USDA promotes America's health through food assistance for low-income people, and nutrition education, guidance, and promotion for the general public and targeted groups. The Department teaches, informs, and motivates Americans to use this information to improve their diets and physical activity patterns. USDA expands research and scientific knowledge about the contribution of food and human nutrition to public health. By promoting better diets, reaching children early, and ensuring access to healthy food, the Department contributes to the Nation's health.

USDA Strategic Result: Significant Change in the Nation's Nutrition Status

USDA OBJECTIVE 5.1: ENSURE ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOOD

USDA nutrition assistance programs, which serve 1 in 5 Americans, are the focus of the Federal effort to fight hunger in the United States. These programs include Food Stamps, the school meals programs, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children.

USDA Key Outcome: The Reduction and Prevention of Hunger by Improved Access to Federal Nutrition-Assistance Programs Performance Measures

USDA OBJECTIVE 5.2: PROMOTE HEALTHIER EATING HABITS AND LIFESTYLES

The Nation faces significant public health issues related to the quality of America's eating habits. One such issue is the increasing prevalence of

excess weight and obesity. USDA intends to use its nutrition assistance programs and broader nutrition education efforts as key opportunities to promote healthier eating and more physical activity across the Nation.

USDA Key Outcome: Eating Habits More Consistent with *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*

USDA OBJECTIVE 5.3: IMPROVE NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

USDA is strongly committed to maintaining a high level of integrity and efficiency in nutrition assistance programs. The Department also works proactively to prevent errors and other problems.

USDA Key Outcome: Fewer Dollars Lost Through Program Errors

USDA Key External Factors

Efforts to reduce hunger and improve diet depend on coordination between USDA and Federal, State, and local partners, and effective implementation by partners with program standards and rules. USDA's ability to improve dietary habits is influenced strongly by the emphasis the Nation as a whole places on healthy eating. This includes the kinds of products and practices in the food marketplace.



Strategic Goal 6:

Protect and Enhance the Nation's Natural Resource Base and Environment

High-quality soils and abundant supplies of clean air and water are the essential building blocks for production agriculture and forestry, as well as many rural economies and all life. America's soils, water supplies, and range and forest ecosystems produce the raw materials for food, clothing, shelter, and energy. They also provide the settings for recreation and other activities highly valued by Americans.

USDA is the steward of 192.5 million acres of National Forests and Grasslands. USDA also provides high-quality, science-based, and site-specific technical assistance to enable good stewardship on the 1.5 billion acres of non-Federal lands in the United States.

The Department's activities are designed to help ensure that the Nation's natural resources meet the long-term needs of a dynamic society with an increasing population.

USDA's conservation activities on public and private lands are cooperative efforts with State, Tribal and local Governments, conservation districts, non-governmental organizations, private land managers, and local interests. In the future, USDA will increase its emphasis on cooperative conservation to achieve natural resource and environmental quality goals. This plan will ensure that natural resource use and management decisions are made by the people most affected by the decisions and most knowledgeable about local conditions.

USDA Strategic Result: Healthy Watersheds, High Quality Soils, and Sustainable Ecosystems

USDA OBJECTIVE 6.1: PROTECT WATERSHED HEALTH TO ENSURE CLEAN AND ABUNDANT WATER

A healthy watershed is one in which local individuals and organizations, and other interested stakeholders, have defined and are working toward an acceptable balance of economic growth, environmental protection, and social activities. Healthy watersheds vary widely, depending on their resource conditions and the values and management objectives of their residents. In locally led watershed planning, people within a watershed assess natural resource conditions, develop proposals and recommendations, implement solutions, and measure success.

In the next five years, USDA will measure the success of its efforts to improve watershed health by reductions in the potential for losses of sediment, and nutrients from agricultural operations. Objectives for sediment and nutrient reduction are indicators of the general trend in managing potential agricultural challenges to water quality. As new data on the effects of conservation become available, these objectives may be replaced with more comprehensive indicators of improved watershed health.

USDA Key Outcome: Clean and Abundant Water

USDA OBJECTIVE 6.2: ENHANCE SOIL QUALITY TO MAINTAIN PRODUCTIVE WORKING CROPLAND

High-quality soils support the efficient production of crops for food, fiber, and energy. They also provide for the efficient cycling of nutrients and pesticides, help sequester carbon, and contribute to improved water and air quality, and wildlife

habitat. Soil-quality management focuses on maximizing its function for both agricultural and environmental benefits. Intensively used soils, such as for production of annual crops, are most vulnerable to degradation and damage. By reducing erosion and increasing the organic content of soil, the quality of working cropland is improved. Two-thirds of the Nation’s land belongs to farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners. USDA provides technical and financial assistance to landowners and land managers to conserve, maintain, and improve natural resources on the Nation’s private lands. These outcomes help the Nation meet society’s demand for improved environmental quality and ultimately benefit society at large.

USDA Key Outcome: Enhance Soil Quality

NASS OBJECTIVE 6.2: PROVIDE STATISTICAL DATA TO SUPPORT MANAGEMENT OF PRODUCTIVE WORKING CROPLAND

The Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey conducted by NASS provides information on irrigation practices of farmers and ranchers and how they use water responsibly to produce an abundant food supply. This important information helps industry representatives, leaders, and planners chart the best course for future on-farm irrigation. Also information from the ARMS is used to study water quality issues along with production practices such as machinery use and crop rotation help to identify tillage systems and crop residue level affecting soil erosion. Cropland Data Layer information provided by NASS, in cooperation with Foreign Agriculture Service and the Farm Service Agency, provides crop specific digital data layers, suitable for use in geographic information systems (GIS) applications used to improve the management of the Nation’s natural resources.

NASS Performance Measures

6.2.1 Exceed the 75 percent standard for acres covered by agricultural chemical use statistics for targeted field crops.

Baseline 2003
60 percent of the targeted field crops exceeded the coverage standard.
Target 2011
100 percent of the targeted crops will meet or exceed the 75 percent coverage standard for the targeted field crops.

6.2.2 Increase the number of States using cropland data layer technology.

Baseline 2005
There are 8 states using GIS cropland data layer technology.
Target 2011
Increase the number of states using GIS cropland data layer technology.

Actionable Strategies

- Conduct surveys to provide needed information concerning irrigation practices, water quality issues, and production practices affecting soil erosion.
- Conduct research on collecting crop information using satellite mapping data to create cropland data layers suitable for use in geographic information systems (GIS) applications.
- Release the Cropland Data Layer within two weeks of the release of major county estimates.
- Evaluate trends and changes in production agriculture and adjust Farm and Ranch

Irrigation and ARMS I and II statistics, and geospatial programs accordingly,

USDA OBJECTIVE 6.3: PROTECT FORESTS AND GRASSLANDS

Four serious threats pose an increasing risk to the values, goods, and services provided by public and private forestland and grassland. These threats are:

- Wildland fire
- Invasive species
- Loss of open space
- Unmanaged outdoor recreation

USDA helps landowners and operators address the risks on privately owned land. Most watersheds and landscapes are a wide variety of public land managed by several Federal agencies and private, State, Tribal, and local land managers. Thus, USDA must work with land stewards to protect forestland, grassland, and grazing land ecosystems.

Healthy, vigorous plant communities on diverse lands protect soil quality, prevent soil erosion, and provide sustainable forage and cover for livestock and wildlife. They also provide fiber and a diverse habitat for wildlife, improve water quality and sequester carbon. Active, science-based management of vegetation is essential to maintaining such healthy, diverse, and resilient ecosystems.

USDA Key Outcome: Sustainable Forest and Rangeland Ecosystems

USDA OBJECTIVE 6.4: PROTECT AND ENHANCE WILDLIFE HABITAT TO BENEFIT DESIRED, AT-RISK, AND DECLINING SPECIES.

The Nation's public and private lands provide habitat for more than 200,000 identified native species. Habitat fragmentation and loss, invasive

species and declining resource quality continue to contribute to wildlife declines. Most at-risk species move between public and private lands during their life cycle. Thus, solutions must include cooperative conservation across public and private ownerships and access to USDA programs that assist landowners with restoring, improving and protecting wildlife habitat on their lands.

USDA Key Outcome: Improved Wildlife Habitat Quality Supporting Desired Species and Species of Concern (At-Risk and Declining Species)

USDA Key External Factors

Agricultural lands are co-mingled with urban and developing land as part of watersheds and ecosystems. Activities taking place in parts of forests, lands, or watersheds outside USDA influence can work against the effects of improved management on agricultural land, so that the state of the watershed may fail to improve as expected.

Other factors include:

- The accelerated susceptibility and mortality of forest trees from drought, insects, and disease.
- The introduction of new species of insects, pathogens, and invasive plants into the United States. This will increase demands on recreational growth, accelerated land parcelization, and the continuing expansion of the wildland-urban interface.
- Extreme weather events, such as widespread flooding, drought, or other natural disasters, may exacerbate or expand resource problems, eliminate previous conservation gains, and may

result in redirection of planned activities to provide emergency assistance.

- Rising land values and the increase in absentee landowners may cause landowners to be interested in short-term profitable uses for their land, rather than the long-term sustainability of their land and natural resources. Resulting land fragmentation poses significant challenges for protecting and sustaining soil, water, and related natural resources.
- Landowners' ability to implement conservation practices or adopt new technology is strongly affected by their immediate economic situation and personal benefit-cost analysis of the value of conservation adoption. Increasing energy concerns are projected to have a significant effect on farm economics, which may stall conservation decision making.



Supporting the President's Management Agenda

OVERVIEW OF MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES

NASS is working to strengthen its management through vigorous execution of the President's Management Agenda (PMA). Better management will result in more efficient program operations that will continue to maintain high-level of customer service and more effective stewardship of taxpayer funds. NASS expects to:

- Ensure an efficient, high-performing, diverse workforce, aligned with mission priorities and working cooperatively with partners and the private sector.
- Enhance internal controls, data integrity, and financial management information and sustain unqualified audit opinion.
- Reduce spending and burden on citizens, partners, and employees by simplifying access to the Department's information. This enhancement is added by implementing business processes and information technology to make services available electronically.
- Link budget decisions and program priorities more closely with program performance and consider the full cost of programs.
- Transform IT enterprise infrastructure to be cost effective and ubiquitous across NASS and with the Department.

Detailed plans are available for each of the PMAs. Below is a brief summary of our current plans.

IMPROVE HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT

The President has identified as a priority using the strategic management of human capital to create a high-performing workforce that is more citizen-centered and results-oriented. NASS will manage its human capital according to the REE Strategic Human Capital Plan and the NASS Workforce Plan. These plans focus on strategic workforce planning, optimizing organizational structures to address current and future challenges, and improving performance management to maximize employee performance.

These plans identify NASS's human-capital challenges and the Agency is accountable to the Department in addressing these challenges. Such challenges include meeting the demand for cutting-edge research talent, creating a workforce with a combination of skills not previously required and fully supporting the Department's mission with the same or fewer staff.

In managing its human capital and delivering its services to customers, NASS will continue to focus on ensuring civil rights and equal employment opportunity for everyone, regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability, marital or familial status, or any other factor. The Agency is committed to continuous civil rights progress in the workplace, program delivery and processing complaints timely and efficiently.

NASS's plans include:

- Maintaining the links with Departmental and mission area human capital and annual performance plans.

- Integrating the human capital impacts of such Presidential initiatives as competitive sourcing and eGovernment.
- Using workforce planning and hiring flexibilities to recruit, retain, and reward employees while developing a high-performing and accountable workforce.
- Ensuring employment opportunities for all members of the workforce, while implementing programs targeted towards critical occupations with projected skill gaps and underrepresented groups.
- Ensuring the timely resolution of program and employment civil rights complaints.

IMPROVE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Effectively managing the use of taxpayer dollars is a fundamental Federal responsibility. NASS intends to ensure that all funds spent are accounted for properly to taxpayers, Congress, and the Government Accountability Office. NASS financial operations supports the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) as it works to improve financial management, in partnership with the Chief Financial Officers of USDA agencies, as a core attribute of the Department's operating culture. Through efforts to improve financial management, USDA received its first unqualified opinion on its 2002 financial audit. It also received clean opinions in each subsequent audit. OCFO is working closely with USDA agencies to eliminate all material weaknesses.

OCFO will lead efforts to improve management information by helping USDA's agencies craft and access useful, timely information. This information includes monthly financial reports, on-line access to real-time information, and program cost reporting. By enhancing the integrity of financial and administrative data, the Department will protect corporate assets and conserve scarce resources.

USDA's plans include:

- Maintain an unqualified opinion on the Department's financial statements.
- Eliminate all material weaknesses and inconsistencies in financial processes.
- Evaluate opportunities to reduce expenses in Department-wide financial processes and solutions, public/private partnerships, and competitive sourcing.
- Modernize outdated core and feeder financial systems that are no longer on a supported architecture.
- Move the Department to a single core financial system from three financial systems no longer supported by the vendor.
- Improve financial reporting processes and procedures.
- Provide transparency and accountability to administrative costs.
- Increase the use of financial information in day-to-day decision making and budget formulation.

EXPAND ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT

USDA launched a Department-wide effort in 2001 to improve the methods through which its agencies collectively executed its broad mission objectives. The Department's strategies, published in USDA's eGovernment Strategic Plan in 2002, focus on improving the delivery of its information and services and reducing costs. The plan calls for USDA to:

- Provide customers with single points of access to information and services.
- Simplify and unify business processes spanning multiple agencies.
- Establish information and service-delivery standards.

- Consolidate redundant information technology services and systems through use of shared USDA or Government solutions.

NASS plans and initiatives include:

- Updating the NASS eGovernment Tactical Plan on a regular basis.
- Implementing the 24 eGovernment Initiatives which have been categorized into 5 major categories as outlined in the NASS eGovernment Tactical Plan.
- Supporting the launch and refinement of agency specific eGovernment Programs which align with the Departmental eGovernment strategic efforts and enterprisewide collaborative solutions.
- Evaluating agency-specific environments for implementing eGovernment to anticipate and plan for the future by thinking beyond current capabilities and old business models.

USDA will continue to refine and implement its strategies, emphasizing major cross-agency business functions such as loans, grants, and supply-chain management.

ESTABLISH BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE INTEGRATION

USDA continues to improve how it integrates performance information into its budget decisions. Beginning with the FY 2005 President's Budget, the Department integrated budget with performance throughout the budget formulation process. This integration includes the use of OMB's Program Assessment Rating Tools (PART). PART is used to assess and improve program performance so that the Federal government can achieve better results. Budget priorities are aligned with USDA's strategic goals and desired outcomes. NASS continues to work to improve its performance information annually.

NASS plans to:

- Continue using performance information during all stages of the budget formulation process.
- Systematically evaluate programs and integrate the results of those evaluations into the budget decision-making process.
- Align the budget with the strategic plans to keep the focus on results and effective management.

IMPLEMENT COMPETITIVE SOURCING

USDA plans to implement competitive sourcing reasonably and rationally to achieve significant cost savings, improved performance, and better align its workforce to its mission. This initiative is aimed at improving organizations through efficient and effective competition between public and private sources. The Department will continue to simplify and improve the procedures for evaluating sources. It will also better publicize the activities subject to competition to maximize the benefits of this initiative. NASS is participating in the REE Mission Area plan for competitive sourcing.

Appendix A: Program Evaluations

USDA used several tools that fed the development of this Strategic Plan. The types of tools included:

- Continue Program Evaluations
- Advisory Committees and Inspector General
- General Accounting Office
- Other External Reviews
- Internal Management Studies
- Performance Measurement Systems

The following table highlights some of these tools as they relate to USDA’s strategic goals and management initiatives.

Program Evaluations Used in the Development of the Strategic Plan				
Goal	Evaluations/ Analyses	Brief Description	What Was The Effect	Date
All Goals	Review of the relevance and adequacy of the Research, Education and Economics (REE) agencies’ budget	As required by law, annually the National Research, Education, Extension, and Economics Advisory Board reviews the relevance, priority, and adequacy of REE funding. The Board then sends the results to the Secretary in a letter.	Influenced budget decisions	Annually
	Review of NASS agricultural statistics program including the census of agriculture	As required by law, annually the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics reviews the NASS statistical program including the census of agriculture. Schedule USDA Data User meetings.	Influence program decisions and meet data user needs	Annually
	OMB program performance assessment using the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART)	Agricultural statistics program including the census of agriculture.	Structured OMB review as part of the budget process to help determine program effectiveness	FY 2006 Budget

APPENDIX A

NASS will undertake many new evaluations over the next five years. The following table highlights some of the longer-term studies as they relate to NASS’s strategic goals and management initiatives.

Future Program Evaluations and Other Analyses				
Goal	Evaluations/ Analyses	General Scope	Methodology	Timetable
All Goals	Review of NASS agricultural statistics program including the census of agriculture	The Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics makes recommendations for program changes and assesses data needs.	Meetings conducted with NASS senior managers to discuss data needs to develop recommendations.	Annually
	Review of NASS agricultural statistics program including the census of agriculture	The outcome of the USDA Data User meeting includes recommendations for program changes and assesses emerging data needs.	Meetings conducted with NASS senior managers to discuss data needs to develop recommendations.	Annually
	Review the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS) and the census of agriculture programs	Conduct external independent program evaluations.	Influence program decisions and meet data user needs.	Regularly
	OMB program performance assessment using the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART)	PART is used to assess the management and results of selected programs.	NASS and OMB staff develops responses to a series of questions assessing program management and performance.	Every 5 years

Appendix B: Cross-Cutting Programs

USDA’s work often cuts across jurisdictional lines within USDA, with other Federal agencies, and with State, local, and private partners. This table lists the primary partnerships that will enable USDA to reach the outcomes in this Strategic Plan. Please note that for the purposes of this table, it is assumed that all USDA Departmental Offices support all strategic goals and management initiatives.

Cross-Cutting Programs		
Goal	USDA Primary Agencies	External Organizations
Goal 1	Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS)	United States Agency for International Development
Goal 2	Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, Office of the Chief Economist, World Agriculture Outlook Board, Farm Service Agency (FSA), Risk Management Agency (RMA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Grain Inspection, Packers & Stockyards Administration (GIPSA), Economic Research Service (ERS), Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS)	Department of Commerce, Department of Labor, State Departments of Agriculture, U.S. Agency for International Development, cooperators, land grant colleges and universities, commercial warehouse operators, cooperative marketing associations, and private industry trade groups.
Goal 3	Department-wide	Local, State, and Federal Governments
Goal 4	ERS	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA),
Goal 5	No cross-cuts with other agencies	
Goal 6	Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Forest Service (FS), FSA, ERS, and FAS	EPA, U.S. Geological Survey

Appendix C: Strategic Consultations

NASS stakeholders are its data providers, customers and data users, its staff, cooperators, and the public. NASS has identified its primary customers to be the farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses that not only provide data to NASS, but use NASS information to routinely make their production and marketing decisions. NASS shapes its program and products principally to serve these key decision makers: the White House and USDA program managers; U.S. Congress; other Federal agencies; State and local government officials; farmers and ranchers; and environmental, agribusiness, consumer, and other groups that use and are interested in agricultural statistics. The ultimate beneficiaries of NASS's statistical program are the American people, whose well-being is improved by well informed public and private decision making.

We regularly consult with external groups, customers, policy experts, industry, and consumer groups about the effectiveness of our programs. While many of the consultations were not conducted expressly for this Strategic Plan, their input has had a significant impact on the development of this strategic plan.

Strategic Consultations			
Goal	Date	Who	Purpose
All Goals	Ongoing	Producers, producer groups and associations, land grant colleges and universities, State and Local governments and other Federal agencies	Discuss any proposed new programs or evaluations of existing programs and share information and provide input on program delivery and outreach.
	Annually	Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics	Advise the Secretary of Agriculture on the scope, timing, and content of the censuses and surveys of agriculture. Make recommendations regarding the content of agriculture reports. Presents the views of major suppliers and users of statistics.
	Annually	Public forum for data users	Provide updates on pending changes in statistical and informational programs. Seek feedback from data users.
	Annually	USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum	Discuss developments in global agricultural markets and exchange information with customers.
	Ongoing	Outside organizations	Maintains numerous partnerships with outside entities, covering a range of topics.
	Quarterly	National Agriculture, Research, Education, Economics, and Extension Advisory Board	Advise USDA and its land-grant university partners on research, extension, education, economic policies, and priorities, and on the effectiveness of those policies and priorities.
	Fall 2005	OMB performance assessment using the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART)	OMB review as part of the budget process to help determine program effectiveness.