United States Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service
Statistics Division
Crops Branch

Contact: Lance Honig
Lance_Honig@nass.usda.gov
202-720-2127

Use of FSA Acreage Data

Producers participating in various USDA farm programs are required to self report all cropland on their farm(s) to the Farm Service Agency (FSA) each year. For each crop, farmers report acres planted, failed, and prevented planted.

The National Agricultural Statistical Service (NASS) uses the FSA data to supplement the vast array of detailed survey data it collects from producers to make reliable crop acreage estimates. The FSA data are incorporated into the estimating process along with other variables. In doing so, NASS takes account of variations between the two USDA agencies in definitions, categories of data collected, and the time of reporting.

Definitions. In incorporating FSA data, NASS reviews the exact crop definitions to account for any variation between the agencies. For example, NASS filters FSA corn data to exclude a variety of types and/or uses (i.e. sweet corn, popcorn, etc.) that are not included in the NASS estimates for corn. Such definitional reviews and adjustments are done for each crop.

Categories of Data. The FSA categories “acres planted” and “acres failed” represent acres actually planted to each specific crop, and combined are comparable to the NASS planted acreage definition. The FSA category “acres failed” also serves as a minimum level of abandonment and is useful to NASS in establishing harvested acreage estimates. The FSA category “acres prevented planted” is helpful in understanding current conditions, but does not directly correspond to any NASS acreage estimates.

Time of Reporting. Data are reported to FSA over an extended period of time, with varying due dates across the country. FSA provides the aggregated data to NASS weekly beginning in late spring and continuing throughout the year. The data change over time as more information is reported by producers and is processed by FSA field offices. NASS has carefully analyzed these data for many years to determine at what point they are complete enough to be reliable indicators of total acreage.

Based on experience, NASS uses the FSA planted acreage data along with the NASS survey data and remote sensing data at specific times during the growing season to arrive at planted acreage estimates. It makes changes, if necessary, in September for cotton, rice, and peanuts, and in October for corn, soybeans, sorghum, canola, sunflowers, and dry edible beans. Additionally, NASS considers these data in establishing the final end-of-season planted acreage estimates published in late September for the small grains and in January for the row crops, and as supplemental information in establishing county-level planted acreage estimates.