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USDA Releases 2018 Puerto Rico Census of Agriculture

WASHINGTON, June 9, 2020 – Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) released the 2018 Census of Agriculture data for Puerto Rico. The information was collected directly from farmers by the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture and the University of Puerto Rico Extension Service. The data show that the total value of the island’s agricultural production reached \$485 million in 2018, a decrease of about \$63 million from 2012 when the last Census of Agriculture was conducted. The regions of Arecibo and Ponce together comprised over 50% of the total value of agricultural production. In September 2017, Hurricane Maria devastated the island, largely accounting for the 37.5% decrease in the number of farms and the 16.6% decrease in land in farms.

Due to the conditions caused by Hurricane Maria, NASS delayed the Puerto Rico Census of Agriculture from 2017 to 2018. The delayed data collection period allowed for continued focus on hurricane recovery and a more accurate representation of Puerto Rico’s agriculture industry. The data show that popular crops like plantains and coffee experienced steep declines in value. In 2018, the value of plantain production dropped 47.5% and coffee dropped 83.7% from 2012. The new Census data show that grains now represent a large portion of the total value of production in Puerto Rico, with an increase from \$8.5 million in 2012 to \$74.4 million in 2018.

“The Census of Agriculture is the leading source of statistics about Puerto Rico’s agricultural production and the only source of consistent, comparable data at the regional level,” said NASS Administrator Hubert Hamer. “The new Census of Agriculture data documents the island’s unique agriculture industry and a record of the effects of Hurricane Maria. These data are vital to the continued support and resilience of Puerto Rico’s agricultural communities.”

Island and regional-level data are now available online via an electronic version of the publication and NASS’ online Quick Stats database. A 2018 Puerto Rico Census of Agriculture Highlights publication will also be available on the NASS website this month. First conducted in 1840 in conjunction with the decennial Census, the Census of Agriculture – a complete count of U.S. and U.S. territory farms, ranches, and the people who operate them – is usually conducted every five years. This is the 18th Census of Agriculture for Puerto Rico and the fifth conducted by NASS.

“Statistics from the Census of Agriculture allow policymakers to more accurately develop and improve farm programs, study historical trends, assess current conditions, and plan for the future,” said Hamer. “At the local level, agencies such as the Puerto Rico Planning Board and Department of Agriculture use Census data to develop policies and programs, and as a benchmark to estimate the losses and damages caused by natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and severe droughts.”

The Puerto Rico Census of Agriculture report differs from the United States publication in order to best document agriculture on the island. For example, the Census of Agriculture defines a farm in Puerto

Rico as any place from which \$500 or more of agricultural products were produced or sold, or normally would have been sold, during the Census year. The Puerto Rico report includes data on tropical commodities not included in other Census publications, such as cassava, coconuts, and plantains. The Puerto Rico Census of Agriculture also provides specialty data on agriculture production practices, including coffee dryers, emergency electric generators and greenhouse/hydronic sheds, and on unique operator characteristics such as highest year of school completed, number of persons living in the household, and retirement status.

To access the complete 2018 Puerto Rico Census of Agriculture results, visit www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus.

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