



Catfish Production Methodology and Quality Measures

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Scope and Purpose: The Catfish Production Survey is conducted annually in January. Data are collected on water area, inventory, sales, and fish sold by point of first sale. A second survey, conducted in July, collects data on water area and inventory for three States. The target population for the Catfish Production Survey is all catfish farming operations that sell fish, or have the potential to sell fish, in the selected States. A State is included for the Catfish Production Survey if it produces at least one percent of the total production for the United States.

Data collected on water area, inventory, sales, and fish sold by point of first sale are published for six States. The publication contains estimates for three States, which are combined into an “Other States” category. After each Census of Agriculture, which is an exhaustive data collection effort for all known agricultural operations across the United States, the list of published States is evaluated and modified to include the largest catfish producing States.

Survey Timeline: Data are collected for a period of approximately three weeks with a reference date for the January Catfish Production Survey of January 1. States complete data collection, analysis, summarization, and submission of estimates over the three-week period ending in mid-January. The following few weeks, a National review is completed, and National estimates are established. Estimates are released to the public at 3:00 p.m. ET in early February on the date designated by the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) on its annual publications calendar.

Sampling: This survey is a complete census of all qualifying records on the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) List Frame with positively reported catfish production from a past survey. The List Frame is a current and unduplicated list of agricultural operations, and all current catfish operations are assumed to be on the list. If a new catfish operation is found at any time, the operation is added to the List Frame. Since this is a census of catfish operations, all sample weights are equal to one. Each respondent operation accounts only for itself.

Data Collection: All federal data collections require approval by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). NASS must document the public need for the data, apply sound statistical practice, prove the data does not already exist elsewhere, and ensure the public is not excessively burdened. The questionnaire must display an active OMB number that gives NASS the authority to conduct the survey, a statement of the purpose of the survey and the use of the data being collected, a response burden statement that gives an estimate of the time required to complete the form, a confidentiality statement that the respondent’s information will only be used for statistical purposes in combination with other producers, and a statement saying that response to the survey is voluntary and not required by law.

Regional Field Office (RFO) statisticians are responsible for coordinating their own data collection strategy for their respective State and it must include provisions for respondents to report securely online. Data are collected by mail, telephone, Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI), and Mobile Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (mCAPI). Respondents are mailed a letter and a questionnaire for the respondent to complete and return by mail or use a survey code to complete the survey securely online. The letter explains the purpose and importance of the survey and that they are being contacted for survey purposes only. If a response is not received by mail or online, respondents are contacted by phone. Limited personal interviewing may be conducted, generally for large operations or those with special handling arrangements.

RFOs use the same, standardized questionnaire for data collection. For consistency across modes, the paper version is considered the master questionnaire and the web-based self-interview and Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) instruments are built to model the paper instrument. Questionnaire content and format are evaluated annually through a specifications process where requests for changes are evaluated and approved or disapproved.

Survey Edit: As survey data are collected and captured, data are edited for consistency and reasonableness using automated systems. Reported data are edited as a batch of data when first captured. The edit logic ensures administrative coding follows the methodological rules associated with the survey design. Relationships between data items on the current survey are verified. Some data items in the current survey are compared to data items from earlier surveys to ensure certain relationships are logical. The edit will determine the status of each record to be either “suspect”, “dirty” or “clean”. Records that fail edit requirements must be updated or certified by an analyst to be exempt from the failed edit requirement. Only clean records are eligible for final summary.

Analysis Tools: Edited data are processed through an interactive analysis tool which displays data for all reports by item. The tool provides scatter plots, tables, charts, and special tabulations that allow the analyst to compare an individual record to similar records. Outliers and unusual data relationships become evident and RFO staff review them to determine if they are correct. The tool allows comparison to an operation’s previously reported data to detect large changes in the operation. Data found to be in error are corrected, while accepted data are retained.

Nonsampling Errors: Nonsampling errors are present in any survey process. These errors include reporting, recording, and editing errors. Steps are taken to minimize these errors, such as comprehensive interviewer training, validation, and verification of processing systems, application of detailed computer edits, and evaluation of the data via the analysis tools.

Estimators: The Catfish Production Survey is a complete enumeration of all known catfish operations in the selected States. Catfish operations are selected from the list of all agricultural operations, and new operations are added into the sample when discovered. No coverage adjustment is made.

Response to the Catfish Production Survey is voluntary. Producers may refuse to participate in the survey, may not be located during the data collection period, or may submit incomplete reports. The nonrespondents must be accounted for if accurate estimates of catfish are to be made. For the Catfish Production Survey, nonrespondents are accounted for by adjusting the weights of the respondents. Since the Catfish Production Survey is a census, all operations have a sample weight of one. The adjustment occurs by stratum as the bounded strata represent homogeneous groupings of similar sized farms. The largest stratum is unbounded and is made up of large and, often unique, farms. Nonrespondents in this stratum must be manually imputed by RFO statisticians and their weights are not adjusted.

Two estimators are used to compute direct measures of the catfish water area, inventory, and sales items. The “reweighted” estimator and the “adjusted” estimator are computationally identical except in how the nonresponse adjustments are made. The reweighted estimator uses a global weight adjustment across all complete reports. The nonresponse weight adjustment for the adjusted estimator uses an additional piece of information. When a sampled farm refuses to cooperate, interviewers will probe to determine the presence of water area and catfish inventory and sales even though the number is not reported. This presence/absence indicator is used in the weight adjustment.

Point estimates, called direct expansions, for both estimators are calculated by multiplying the reported value by the nonresponse adjusted weight and summing to strata totals which are subsequently summed to obtain the State total.

Estimation: When all samples are accounted for, all responses fully edited, and the analysis material is reviewed, each region executes a summary to evaluate and analyze the data for which it is accountable. Since all regions conduct identical surveys, the samples can be pooled, and National survey results computed. The summary results provide multiple point estimates and information used to evaluate the quality of the survey estimates, such as response rates.

Regions are responsible for performing a detailed review of their survey results. Any irregularities revealed by the summary must be investigated and, if necessary, resolved. Using the historical relationship of the survey estimates to the official estimate, regions must interpret the survey results and submit a recommended estimate to NASS headquarters in Washington, DC for all data series in the program. The data are viewed in tabular and graphical form and a consensus estimate established.

For the National estimates, NASS assembles a panel of statisticians to serve on the ASB. The ASB reviews the National results and establishes the National estimates. The same estimators used in the State summaries are produced by the

National summary. The ASB follows the same approach the regions do to determine State estimates when determining the national estimates. In addition, the ASB examines results across all States and compares the State level recommendations. NASS determines State estimates first and these estimates are summarized to the national level. Survey based indicators can be impacted by influential outliers, individual reports with large or unusual data may have excessive influence on the estimates. NASS thoroughly reviews the survey data to identify these situations and consider their impact on the survey results when establishing the official estimates.

Quality Metrics for Catfish

Purpose and Definitions: Under the guidance of the Statistical Policy Office of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the United States Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) provides data users with quality metrics for its published data series. The metrics tables below describe the performance data for all surveys contributing to the publication. The accuracy of data products may be evaluated through sampling and non-sampling error. The measurement of error due to sampling in the current period is irrelevant for a fully enumerated data series. Non-sampling error is evaluated by response rates and the weighted item response rate.

Sample size is the number of observations selected from the population to represent a characteristic of the population. Operations that did not have the item of interest or were out of business at the time of data collection have been excluded.

Response rate is the proportion of the above sample that completed the survey.

Weighted item response rate is a ratio of reported survey data expanded by the original sampling weight compared to final nonresponse adjusted summary totals.

Catfish Production Survey Sample Size and Response Rates: To assist in evaluating the performance of the estimates in the catfish report, the sample size and response rates for 2025 and 2026 are displayed.

Catfish Survey Sample Size and Response Rates – Selected States and United States: 2025-2026

	Sample size		Response rate	
	2025 (number)	2026 (number)	2025 (percent)	2026 (percent)
Alabama	62	51	77.4	80.4
Arkansas	22	19	63.6	31.6
California	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
Mississippi	120	104	71.7	53.8
North Carolina	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
Texas	55	50	50.9	48.0
Other States	84	77	57.1	45.5
United States	343	301	65.3	53.8

(D) Withheld to avoid disclosing data for individual operations.

Catfish Production Weighted Item Response Rate: To assist in evaluating the performance of the estimates in the catfish report, the weighted item response rate for total water acres, the number of foodsize fish sold, and the value of foodsize fish sales are displayed for the 6 published States, the Other States' category, and nationally.

Quality Metrics for Total Water Acres – Selected States and United States: 2025-2026

	Weighted item response rate	
	2025	2026
	(percent)	(percent)
Alabama	77.8	65.4
Arkansas	77.9	51.8
California	(D)	(D)
Mississippi	71.8	27.1
North Carolina	(D)	(D)
Texas	72.7	21.4
Other States	51.0	35.5
United States	72.4	37.3

(D) Withheld to avoid disclosing data for individual operations.

Quality Metrics for Foodsize Fish Sold and Value of Sales – Selected States and United States: 2024-2025

States	Weighted item response rate			
	Fish sold		Value of sales	
	2024	2025	2024	2025
	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)
Alabama	69.7	57.7	71.9	59.9
Arkansas	84.3	54.4	81.0	51.4
California	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
Mississippi	69.6	29.4	69.7	24.7
North Carolina	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
Texas	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
Other States	82.8	49.4	90.6	76.6
United States	71.4	39.7	73.3	37.0

(D) Withheld to avoid disclosing data for individual operations.

Information Contacts

Process	Unit	Telephone	Email
Estimation	Livestock Branch	(202) 720-3570	HQ_SD_LB@usda.gov
Data Collection	Survey Administration Branch	(202) 720-3895	HQ_CSD_SAB@usda.gov
Questionnaires	Data Collection Branch	(202) 720-6201	HQ_CSD_DCB@usda.gov
Sampling and Editing	Sampling Editing and Imputation Methodology Branch	(202) 690-8141	HQ_CSD_SB@usda.gov
Summary and Estimators	Summary Estimation and Disclosure Methodology Branch	(202) 690-8141	HQ_SD_SMB@usda.gov
Dissemination	Data Dissemination Office	(202) 720-3869	HQSDOD@usda.gov
Media Contact and Webmaster	Public Affairs Office	(202) 720-2639	HQOAPAO@usda.gov

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- Economics, Statistics, and Market Information (ESMIS) – National Agricultural Library (NAL) website houses NASS’s and other agency archived reports at <https://esmis.nal.usda.gov>. All email subscriptions containing reports will be sent from <https://esmis.nal.usda.gov>. To receive the reports via e-mail, you will have to go to the website, create a new account and subscribe to the reports. You should whitelist notifications@esmis.nal.usda.gov in your email client to avoid the emails going into spam/junk folders.

For more information on NASS surveys and reports, call the NASS Agricultural Statistics Hotline at (800) 727-9540, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. ET, or e-mail: nass@usda.gov.

If you have specific questions you would like an expert to respond to, please visit our “Ask A Specialist” website at www.nass.usda.gov/Contact_Us/Ask_a_Specialist.

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