



# Farms and Land in Farms Methodology and Quality Measures

---

Released February 17, 2012, by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Agricultural Statistics Board, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

## Survey Methodology for Farms and Land in Farms

**Scope and Purpose:** Farms and land in farms are estimated annually in February. Estimates made for this program include the number of farms, land in farms, and average farm size. Estimates are published for the United States and by State and economic sales class.

The data are collected as part of the June Area Survey, a multipurpose survey used to estimate crop acreages and measure incompleteness of the NASS list frame for numerous other surveys. The June Area Survey is conducted every year in all states except Alaska and Hawaii.

**Survey Timeline:** Some presurvey screening is done in May to identify farm operators to be interviewed. Data collection is conducted by personal interview from the end of May through mid-June. The reference date for the June Area Survey is June 1. Field Offices (FOs) conduct the first round of editing and analysis over a three-week period, ending in late June. An additional two weeks of editing and analysis occur in July. Once editing is complete, the data are summarized. Following summarization, FOs review the survey results and submit State level recommendations to NASS headquarters. A national review is completed and national estimates are established. The Farm Numbers and Land in Farms estimates are published annually in mid-February.

**Sampling:** The target population for the farms and land in farms estimates is all farms and ranches with \$1,000 or more in agricultural sales (or potential sales). The June Area Survey utilizes an area sampling frame. The area frame consists of all land in all states, except Alaska, and thus represents all farms and ranches. Although Hawaii has an area frame, NASS does not conduct the June Area Survey in Hawaii. The frame in each state is divided into segments of land. For more intense agricultural regions, segments are about one square mile in size. An optimal sample is selected in each state with a national sample size of about 11,000. The cost of building the frame and preparing materials for enumeration is significant, so sampled segments are in the survey for five consecutive years. About 20 percent of the segments are rotated out and replaced with new ones each year.

Through personal interviews, field enumerators divide the segments into tracts, each tract representing a unique operating arrangement. Some of the tracts do not qualify under the farm definition and screen out; the remaining agricultural tracts become the sample for farm numbers.

**Data Collection:** Each enumerator is responsible for several segments of land. Enumerators must account for all operations and land contained in their assigned segments. All respondents are contacted in person by an enumerator, and a personal interview is conducted. Survey questionnaires are returned to the Field Offices where they are visually reviewed and key entered.

Questionnaire content and format are evaluated annually through a specifications process where requests for changes are evaluated and approved or disapproved. Input may vary from question wording or formatting to a program change involving the deletion or modification of current questions or addition of new ones. If there are significant changes to either the content or format proposed, a NASS survey methodologist will pre-test the changes for usability.

All federal data collections require approval by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). NASS must document the public need for the data, show the design applies sound statistical practice, ensure the data do not already exist elsewhere, and that the public is not excessively burdened. The June Area 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.

**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 the coding of administrative data follows the methodological rules associated with the survey design. Relationships between data items (i.e. responses to individual questions) 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 "dirty" or "clean" (i.e. failing or passing the edit requirements for consistency and reasonableness). Records that fail edit requirements must be updated or must be certified by an analyst to be exempt from the failed edit requirement. Only records that pass edit requirements are eligible for final summary.

**Analysis Tools:** Edited June Area 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. Atypical responses and unusual data relationships become evident and Field Office staff review them to determine if they are correct. The tool allows comparison to an agricultural 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.

**Nonresponse Adjustment:** Response to the June Area Survey is voluntary. Some producers refuse to participate in the survey, others cannot be located during the data collection period, and some submit incomplete reports. These nonrespondents must be accounted for if accurate estimates of farm numbers are to be made. The nonresponse data items and sampling units are manually imputed by Field Office statisticians, largely by observation. The weights for data items from reporting farms and ranches are not adjusted.

**Estimators:** The primary estimators used to set farms and land in farms estimates are the area frame direct expansion and ratio estimators. The direct expansion generates a total for the current year. It is calculated by summing the June Area Survey data multiplied by the proportion of the farm residing inside the segment and weighted by the original segment sampling weight. The ratio estimator measures the change from year to year and is the ratio of the current year's and previous year's direct expansions for comparable segments. The sampling weights are adjusted to account for those segments that are not comparable.

A multiple frame direct expansion is also generated for farms and land in farms. It is the sum of direct expansion from the June Agricultural Survey data, a NASS list only survey, and the nonoverlap (NOL) portion of the direct expansion from the June Area Survey data. The NOL portion of the June Area Survey refers to those operations identified on the area frame that are not matched to an operation eligible for sampling for the June Agricultural Survey.

**Estimation:** The number of farms and land in farms data are summarized from the June Area dataset. Since all FOs conduct identical surveys, the State data can be summarized and national survey point estimates, or indications, computed. FOs are responsible for performing a detailed review of the survey data. Any irregularities revealed by the analysis must be investigated and, if necessary, resolved. The summary results provide multiple direct and ratio indications for each data series being estimated. It also provides information used to assess the performance of the current survey and evaluate the quality of the survey indications. FOs interpret the survey indications and submit State recommendations to NASS headquarters, providing justification in cases where recommendations deviate from survey results.

For the national estimates, NASS assembles a panel of statisticians to serve as the Agricultural Statistics Board which reviews the national results and establishes the national estimates. Since larger sample sizes yield more precise results, NASS employs the "top-down" approach by determining the national estimates first and reconciling the state

recommendations to the national number for total number of farms and land in farms as well each of the economic sales classes. The Board also enjoys an advantage in being able to examine results across states, and compare the state recommendations. The same estimators used in the state summaries are produced by the national summary. The Board follows the same approach the states do in determining the national estimate. The historical relationship of the survey estimates to the official estimate is evaluated over time to determine accuracy and bias using tables and graphs. Each Board member completes an independent interpretation of the survey results which are shared with the other members and a consensus is reached. Often the state recommendations do not sum to the national estimate. Board members must reexamine the state results and revise some states to make the sum of the state estimates agree with the national estimate.

## Quality Metrics for Farm Numbers and Land in Farms

**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 the survey 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 evaluated by the coefficient of variation for each estimated item. Non-sampling error is evaluated by response rates.

**Farm Tract** is a portion of a sampled segment that represents a unique operating arrangement that meets the definition of a farm.

**Sample Size** is the total number of farm tracts found in the sample segments in the June Area Survey.

**Response rates** measure the proportion of total farm tracts responding to the June Area Survey.

**Coefficient of Variation** provides a measure of the size for the standard error relative to the point estimate and is used to measure the precision of the results of a survey estimator.

**June Area Survey Farm Numbers and Land in Farms Sample Size and Response Rates:** To assist in evaluating the performance of the estimates in the *Farms, Land in Farms, and Livestock Operations* report, the sample size and response rates are displayed. The sample size changes from year to year as the number of farm tracts identified within the sampled segments varies.

## Farms and Land in Farms Sample Size and Response Rate – States and United States: 2010-2011

State	Sample size		Response rate	
	2010 (number)	2011 (number)	2010 (percent)	2011 (percent)
Alabama .....	682	651	92.5	91.6
Alaska .....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Arizona .....	358	315	88.3	90.2
Arkansas .....	1,127	1,095	87.4	85.1
California .....	1,179	931	79.3	75.3
Colorado .....	686	697	65.0	64.3
Connecticut .....	24	32	79.2	59.4
Delaware .....	105	119	91.4	84.0
Florida .....	385	358	90.4	84.9
Georgia .....	786	735	80.5	76.2
Hawaii .....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Idaho .....	558	520	78.3	75.0
Illinois .....	2,010	1,991	85.7	80.0
Indiana .....	1,230	1,245	84.9	69.3
Iowa .....	2,046	2,030	84.3	83.1
Kansas .....	1,527	1,555	70.3	66.6
Kentucky .....	838	811	92.8	85.3
Louisiana .....	809	756	85.0	85.7
Maine .....	110	106	86.4	73.6
Maryland .....	217	214	83.9	82.7
Massachusetts .....	79	83	79.7	85.5
Michigan .....	724	712	83.0	75.3
Minnesota .....	1,851	1,783	86.1	79.4
Mississippi .....	885	892	95.0	92.5
Missouri .....	1,644	1,671	77.7	72.2
Montana .....	934	948	85.0	78.4
Nebraska .....	1,593	1,604	70.2	70.0
Nevada .....	30	39	90.0	89.7
New Hampshire .....	20	17	80.0	100.0
New Jersey .....	203	190	81.3	79.5
New Mexico .....	481	534	78.2	76.6
New York .....	281	299	82.6	80.3
North Carolina .....	1,104	1,077	91.9	83.4
North Dakota .....	1,472	1,389	75.4	71.2
Ohio .....	1,069	1,047	83.6	71.9
Oklahoma .....	1,123	1,138	66.5	70.3
Oregon .....	501	568	84.4	82.7
Pennsylvania .....	750	703	86.1	85.9
Rhode Island .....	26	25	88.5	80.0
South Carolina .....	363	347	84.8	83.9
South Dakota .....	1,216	1,226	80.1	77.6
Tennessee .....	1,208	1,189	92.2	89.9
Texas .....	4,564	4,447	88.1	86.6
Utah .....	292	259	88.4	82.6
Vermont .....	163	112	90.8	82.1
Virginia .....	577	591	91.5	89.5
Washington .....	720	686	77.8	74.8
West Virginia .....	384	403	89.8	85.9
Wisconsin .....	918	915	90.5	86.7
Wyoming .....	190	199	81.1	77.4
United States .....	40,042	39,254	83.3	79.5

(NA) Not available.

## Quality Metrics for Farms and Land in Farms – States and United States: 2010 and 2011

States	Coefficients of variation			
	Farms		Land in farms	
	2010 (number)	2011 (number)	2010 (number)	2011 (number)
Alabama .....	10.1	9.7	6.8	6.6
Alaska .....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Arizona .....	24.1	17.7	2.8	5.3
Arkansas .....	9.6	8.5	4.2	4.2
California .....	8.3	12.9	11.2	9.6
Colorado .....	10.4	11.8	12.2	10.9
Connecticut .....	32.0	34.6	28.5	38.8
Delaware .....	23.2	26.0	7.6	8.0
Florida .....	19.0	15.4	11.6	12.8
Georgia .....	10.7	10.4	5.8	5.7
Hawaii .....	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Idaho .....	19.3	14.4	7.2	7.9
Illinois .....	6.5	5.7	1.2	1.1
Indiana .....	6.1	5.8	2.2	2.2
Iowa .....	3.2	3.2	1.2	1.2
Kansas .....	4.6	5.3	1.4	1.5
Kentucky .....	6.8	6.4	4.3	4.7
Louisiana .....	10.3	10.6	7.8	4.5
Maine .....	24.5	25.0	16.6	19.5
Maryland .....	11.4	12.9	8.2	7.4
Massachusetts .....	14.0	15.1	28.9	27.3
Michigan .....	7.3	8.4	3.4	3.5
Minnesota .....	4.5	4.6	2.3	2.3
Mississippi .....	6.5	6.5	4.2	3.8
Missouri .....	6.1	5.5	3.8	3.4
Montana .....	12.3	13.2	3.2	2.9
Nebraska .....	4.0	3.6	0.8	0.8
Nevada .....	53.6	48.2	92.0	5.1
New Hampshire .....	55.7	50.6	66.0	77.2
New Jersey .....	12.3	12.5	11.8	9.5
New Mexico .....	13.0	15.0	12.7	14.6
New York .....	10.8	14.8	6.5	7.6
North Carolina .....	6.2	6.1	4.3	3.9
North Dakota .....	4.5	4.2	1.7	1.9
Ohio .....	6.8	6.9	2.9	2.6
Oklahoma .....	6.9	5.9	2.1	2.2
Oregon .....	17.7	14.8	9.7	8.9
Pennsylvania .....	7.3	7.3	5.6	5.7
Rhode Island .....	18.8	18.7	42.3	48.6
South Carolina .....	10.7	11.7	11.0	10.9
South Dakota .....	5.3	5.1	1.3	1.2
Tennessee .....	5.1	5.0	3.4	3.7
Texas .....	3.8	3.9	7.4	1.1
Utah .....	15.6	21.4	45.5	62.2
Vermont .....	19.7	18.5	18.8	17.8
Virginia .....	8.0	8.1	5.9	7.1
Washington .....	12.4	10.8	5.2	5.7
West Virginia .....	9.6	10.3	12.3	12.4
Wisconsin .....	6.1	6.2	4.0	3.6
Wyoming .....	31.8	17.6	13.3	12.7
United States .....	1.3	1.3	1.9	1.2

(NA) Not available.

## Quality Metrics for Farms and Land in Farms by Economics Sales Class – States and United States: 2010-2011

Economic sales class	Coefficients of variation			
	Farms		Land in farms	
	2010	2011	2010	2011
	(number)	(number)	(number)	(number)
\$1,000 - \$9,999 .....	2.0	2.0	2.7	2.7
\$10,000 - \$99,999 .....	1.8	1.9	4.1	4.1
\$100,000 - \$249,999 .....	2.4	2.7	7.5	3.8
\$250,000 - \$499,999 .....	2.4	2.5	3.7	3.1
\$500,000 and over .....	2.0	2.0	2.2	2.4
Total .....	1.3	1.3	1.9	1.2

### Information Contacts

Process	Unit	Telephone	Email
Estimation .....	Environmental, Economics, and Demographics Branch .....	(202) 720-6146	HQ_SD_EEDB@nass.usda.gov
Data Collection .....	Program Administration Branch .....	(202) 690-8747	HQ_CSD_PAB@nass.usda.gov
Questionnaires and Editing .....	Editing and Questionnaire Branch .....	(202) 720-6201	HQ_CSD_DCB@nass.usda.gov
Sampling .....	Survey Sampling Branch .....	(202) 720-3895	HQ_CSD_SB@nass.usda.gov
Analysis and Estimators .....	Statistical Methods Branch .....	(202) 720-4008	HQ_SD_SMB@nass.usda.gov
Dissemination and Webmaster .....	Data Dissemination Section .....	(202) 720-7017	HQ_DAPP_MISO@nass.usda.gov
Media Contact .....	Public Affairs Section .....	(202) 720-7017	HQ_DAPP_MISO@nass.usda.gov

### Access to NASS Reports

For your convenience, you may access NASS reports and products the following ways:

- All reports are available electronically, at no cost, on the NASS web site: <http://www.nass.usda.gov>
- Both national and state specific reports are available via a free e-mail subscription. To set-up this free subscription, visit <http://www.nass.usda.gov> and in the “Follow NASS” box under “Receive reports by Email,” click on “National” or “State” to select the reports you would like to receive.
- Printed reports may be purchased from the National Technical Information Service (NTIS) by calling toll-free (800) 999-6779, or (703) 605-6220 if calling from outside the United States or Canada. Accepted methods of payment are Visa, MasterCard, check, or money order.

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@nass.usda.gov](mailto:nass@nass.usda.gov).

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotope, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Stop 9410, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call toll-free at (866) 632-9992 (English) or (800) 877-8339 (TDD) or (866) 377-8642 (English Federal-relay) or (800) 845-6136 (Spanish Federal-relay). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.