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NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

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USDA Releases a First Look at 2012 Census of Agriculture Results

Olympia, WA, Feb. 20, 2014 – Today the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) released the 2012 Census of Agriculture preliminary results providing a first look at state and national data.

The 2012 Census reported little change in land in farms, a more diverse principal operator population and several historic changes in value of sales for U.S. agricultural producers from 2007 to 2012. The report included information on farm numbers, land in farms and farmer demographics:

- Between 2007 and 2012, the amount of land in farms in the United States declined by less than one percent, from 922 million acres to 915 million. While continuing a downward trend, this is the third smallest decline between censuses since 1950 and is within the margin of error. Land in farms in Washington and Oregon decreased by 1.5 percent and 0.6 percent, respectively, while Idaho increased 2.3 percent.
- According to the 2012 Census, principal farm operators in the United States are becoming older and more diverse. The average age of a principal farm operator was 58.3 years, up 1.2 years since 2007, and continuing a 30-year trend of steady increase. And, more minority-operated farms were also accounted for in 2012 than in 2007.
- The United States had 2.1 million farms, down 4.3 percent in 2012. In terms of farm size by acres, the decline continued a downward trend in mid-sized farms, while the smallest- and largest-size farms held steady. Washington, Oregon, and Idaho all declined in farm numbers from 2007 by 5.2 percent, 8.1 percent, and 2.1 percent, respectively.
- In 2012, the value of agricultural products sold totaled \$394.6 billion, up 33 percent (\$97.4 billion) from 2007. For only the second time in Census history crop sales (\$212.4 billion) exceeded livestock sales (\$182.2 billion). Washington’s value of agricultural products sold increased 34 percent, Idaho increased 37 percent, and Oregon increased 11 percent.

“One of the most important takeaways to remember about the Census of Agriculture is that the information is used for decision-making by producers as well as all those who serve farmers, ranchers and rural communities – federal, state and local governments, agribusinesses, trade associations and many others,” said Chris Mertz, Director, Northwest Region. “When we look at the data, we can all use it as a snapshot in time to see how agriculture in the Pacific Northwest is changing over time and how it compared to the rest of the country.”

“The release of the preliminary 2012 Census of Agriculture results is only a first look at the data and NASS is eager to publish the final report this May,” said NASS Administrator Cynthia Clark. “The 2012 Census was not conducted in a typical crop year, and drought had a major impact on U.S. agriculture, affecting crop yields, production and prices. NASS is still reviewing all 2012 Census items to the county level and therefore data are preliminary until published in the final report.”

Conducted since 1840, the Census of Agriculture accounts for all U.S. farms and ranches and the people who operate them. When available in May, the final report will provide even more detailed information for each state providing data on all farm operators and data down to the county level. The publication will also provide new insights into the agriculture industry reporting new or expanded data on Internet access, regional food systems, biomass production, agro-forestry and equine.

For more information about the Census, including access to the 2012 Census of Agriculture preliminary report and the full report when it is released in May, visit www.agcensus.usda.gov.

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