I participated in the USDA's 97th Annual Agricultural Outlook Forum on February 18-19. As you might expect, the forum included a number of discussions, forecasts and opinions on the state of the agricultural economy, commodity demand, commodity price potential and the impact of recent events on those aspects of the industry.

You might have agreed with a presenter's conclusion or maybe not. But one common thread throughout was farmer input into those conclusions. Now, it's unlikely they called you to ask your opinion or fact check their conclusions but woven into those slides was your input, and the input of thousands of other Minnesota farmers in the form of data.

You are being asked for your input, just maybe not in the way you might think. The USDA NASS is asking you to include your real-life experience and farming facts in every discussion. That's what it really means when you get another NASS questionnaire in the mail or phone call in the evening during your favorite show. Facts about agriculture are being requested.
Researchers, community leaders, lending institutions, national, state and local representatives, and commodity group leaders, represent your interests in one way or another. They all need a way to include thousands of unique independent farming and ranching situations into something that can be understood. Something that makes sense to the general public or those who are not experts in production agriculture like you are.

I'm not talking about opinions, there are many ways you can get your opinion included in a discussion. Town hall meetings, Twitter, blogs, emails are just a few modern day examples. Another important way is through the commodity groups that represent you. They work hard to summarize your opinions in the form of policy initiatives adopted at their annual meetings and work toward those goals all year long.

USDA NASS is in the business of collecting agricultural facts like acres, bushels, animals, and dollars. That is our way of summarizing thousands of unique and independent farming and ranching situations into something that can be understood as an industry.

In March and April, 2021, I am asking for your help with these important projects. Please take the opportunity to add your unique farming or ranching situation into the mix. The more individual situations included the better Minnesota agriculture will be understood.

If you've ever thought, "People just don't know what it's like out here! They just don't have a clue." This is one way to explain it to them.

Dan Lofthus, State Statistician
www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Minnesota

**Better Response = Better Data = Better Decisions**