



# New England Agricultural Statistics Service



*a field office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service  
United States Department of Agriculture*

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One of the most enjoyable aspects of my job responsibilities as Director of this office is the opportunity to personally meet many farmers and other data users each year through farm visits, association meetings, and trade shows. The vast majority are very positive about the need for accurate, reliable, and unbiased agricultural statistics. The uses are many, but often the data are needed for developing marketing strategies, obtaining farm loans, writing business plans, testifying before local or state governing bodies, justifying claims for disaster relief, evaluating and developing risk aversion plans, and monitoring crop progress during the growing and harvesting season.

We recognize the high frequency of our contacts with farmers across the region. Most understand that farmers are the very best source, often the only source, for the type of information required to satisfy specific data needs. Thank you to our farmers and agribusinesses who so faithfully and willingly provide answers to our questionnaires by mail, telephone, and personal interview.

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) recently obtained, through the Freedom of Information Act, government payments received by farmers for the past five years. This information was published on the Internet on the EWG website. Farmers across the Nation have a right to be unhappy about this public display of their private matters. Fortunately our agency, the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), has regulations that require the protection of proprietary data reported by farmers. Employees sign confidentiality statements subjecting themselves to fine and imprisonment if the regulations are violated. Specific exemption prevents others from accessing this data through the use of the Freedom of Information Act. You will not see NASS data on the EWG website! Also, by law, the Internal Revenue Service cannot access these confidential files.

In December of this year, farmers will find the 2002 Census of Agriculture questionnaire in their mailbox. Our goal is to improve on the quality we achieved on the 1997 Census. This will only happen if farmers respond in a timely, accurate manner to the 2002 Census of Ag. The results will be published on the Internet the first week of February 2004 and in printed form and CD-ROM a few months later.

A word of thanks is also appropriate to the New England Commissioners of Agriculture from the six states in the region for their funding which makes the printing of this publication possible. It continues to be a special pleasure to work with the devoted federal staff and NASDA contract data collectors who have to be among the best in the business.

Sincerely,

Aubrey R. Davis  
Director

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**Cover photograph of a moose in the Pontook Reservoir, New Hampshire  
taken by David Brownell, Andover, NH**

