

NASS Confidentiality Pledge

National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA --- Washington, D.C.

1. Names, addresses, and personal identifiers are fully protected by NASS with the force of law.

After data collection, the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) processes the data independent of names and addresses. Original paper questionnaires are kept in a secure area, and then destroyed as prescribed by law. Names, addresses, phone numbers, and other personal identifiers are held securely by NASS and used only to conduct official business. Title 7, U.S. Code, Section 2276 and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act prohibit public disclosure of individual information. Personal information, including reported data, is protected from legal subpoena and Freedom of Information Act requests.

2. Only authorized persons working for NASS as employees or sworn agents, who are subject to fines and imprisonment for unauthorized disclosure, can access individual record data and only for approved official purposes.

All information collected by NASS about individuals or operations under a pledge of confidentiality is protected by law. Every person working for or in cooperation with NASS – from the Agency Administrator to the person collecting the information – signs a confidentiality form which states that no confidential reported information will be compromised. This includes sworn agents who are authorized by NASS to provide data collection support or statistical research. Any offender is subject to a jail term (5 years), a fine (\$250,000), or both.

3. Data security is a top priority during preparation of NASS reports.

Official USDA statistics issued by the NASS Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) are prepared under tight security until public release of the reports at preannounced dates and times. The ASB restricts prerelease access to and communication about survey and census results. In many cases, a locked area with a uniformed guard is employed to prevent premature disclosure of market-sensitive information. NASS official statistics are released to everyone at the same time. Reports are available on the Internet within seconds of the scheduled release.

4. Published statistics from NASS surveys and censuses will not disclose reported data from an individual.

Individual participants in a NASS survey can rest assured that summary data will not be published in a way that would identify them or data for their operation without their written permission. For instance, if only one farm in a county produced a particular crop, then NASS will protect the privacy of that individual farm by combining the data for that crop with reports from other counties to publish only combined totals.

When NASS Collects Data for Other Statistical Purposes:

1. NASS will clearly communicate to participants the survey purpose, the names of any cooperating sponsors, how the data will be used, and the confidentiality protections provided.

Data collection for other agencies under the NASS pledge of confidentiality will afford the same protections described in 1 through 4 above. Data collected for analysis by a sponsoring agency will have all personal identifiers, such as name, address, and telephone number, removed before access by the analyst. Analysts will sign confidentiality statements as sworn NASS agents. Results of the study are released to everyone free of charge. No organization is given ownership of the data, to eliminate the possibility of its having an advantage over others. NASS will not conduct a survey for private, proprietary purposes.

2. Some data collected by NASS are required by law and subject to audit.

Requests for data required by law and subject to audit will clearly indicate that the reports have different confidentiality protections than described earlier since the data may be audited. NASS and the participating authority that conducts the audits will protect individually reported data to the maximum extent provided under the law, and will work directly with reporting entities to resolve discrepancies discovered in the audit process. Summary statistics are provided to the USDA agency responsible for administering the specific programs that rely upon the required data. Program results are released at the discretion of the administering agency without revealing data reported from an individual.