

Preface

NASS maintains a program of independent external review of its Agricultural Statistics Programs. In April 2008, USDA NASS asked the Council on Food, Agriculture & Resource Economics (C-FARE) to assemble a panel of expert social scientists from academia, government, and the private sector to conduct an “independent, comprehensive, and objective review” of the Agricultural Prices Program. The purpose of the review was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program and to recommend changes. One of the five key findings the C-Fare panel documented was that increased transparency is essential to all aspects of the Agricultural Prices Program. It is important that the purposes and conceptual basis for price statistics be apparent to users. The following documentation has been prepared to meet that need.

Other reviews of the NASS program can occur when requested. These include the Government Accounting Office (GAO) and the Office of Inspector General (OIG) program audits. The authority for government audits is provided through the following:

- Departmental Regulation (DR) 1700-1 (2/9/89), Basic Office of Inspector General Investigation (OIG)/Audit Organization and Procedures
- DR 1700-2 (6/17/97), OIG Organization and Procedures
- DR 1720-1 (3/8/90), Audit Follow-up, Management Decisions and Final Actions
- Office of Management and Budget Circular NO. A-50, Audit Follow-up

The GAO and OIG audit reports are limited to “OFFICIAL USE” of departmental and agency officials. Authority for making or approving additional releases of OIG reports is reserved to the Assistant Inspector General, Administration, and OIG. The Research, Education, and Economics Liaison Officer for audits oversees requests made for OIG and GAO audit reports on a “need to know” basis and coordinates any requests for audit reports by interested parties.

These audits seek to document accountability and accuracy of Government statistics. The NASS price data is key agricultural economic data required by law and is subject to such audits. NASS price data is used in many Government programs. The impacts can be substantial for both producers and the Government when the data is incorrect. It is critical that the NASS price program be a sound one. The NASS Price Program has undergone several audits through history. The last audit occurred in the early 1980s for the prices received for grains program. Cotton prices were reviewed by the OIG in the 1990s.