

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 29, 2008**

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**USDA ASKS NEW ENGLAND FARMERS TO SHOW THEIR STEWARDSHIP
Nationwide Survey to Focus on Irrigation**

[Concord, NH] – Water is the source of life and the U.S. agricultural industry depends upon this precious resource to meet the world’s growing need for food, feed, fiber and fuel. New England agricultural producers will soon have the opportunity to speak out about their water use when the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) conducts the Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey.

“By providing a single source of comprehensive, up-to-date information on irrigation and water use across the agricultural industry, this survey will aid in efforts to promote efficient irrigation practices and ensure the long-term sustainability of our nation’s water resources,” said Gary Keough, director the NASS New England Field Office.

The irrigation survey, which is a supplement to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, will for the first time include a focus on nursery and horticultural operations. NASS will collect information about irrigation water use during 2008, including application methods, equipment, facilities, expenditures, crop acreage and yield.

This information is used by industry, government, and producers themselves, aiding in the development of improved technology, better equipment, more efficient water use practices, and sound programs and policies.

“The nation’s agricultural producers are the first and best stewards of our land and water resources,” Keough said. “This survey provides them with a voice to help shape the future of their industry and demonstrate their commitment to the conservation and efficient use of water resources.”

On Jan. 12, 2009, NASS will mail the irrigation survey to about 1,000 producers in New England. Recipients are required to complete and return their forms by Feb. 17, 2009. As is the case with all NASS surveys, information provided by respondents is protected by law. NASS safeguards the confidentiality of all responses, ensuring that no individual producer or operation can be identified.

“As we did with the Census of Agriculture, we are reminding New England producers that the Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey is their voice, their future and their responsibility,” Keough said.

For more information about the Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey, call (888) 424-7828 or visit www.agcensus.usda.gov.