

■ National Agricultural Statistics Service

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) administers USDA's program for collecting and publishing timely national and State agricultural statistics. In 1862, the first Commissioner of the newly formed Department of Agriculture, Isaac Newton, established a goal "to collect, arrange, and publish statistical and other useful agricultural information." A year later, in July 1863, the Department's Division of Statistics issued the Nation's first official *Crop Production* report.

The structure of farming, ranching, and the agricultural industry has changed dramatically during the succeeding 135 years. The need for accurate, timely, and objective statistical information about the Nation's agriculture has become even more important as the country has moved from subsistence agriculture to a highly industrialized business that produces food and fiber for the world market.

NASS is a world leader in the use of statistical methodology to produce statistics about agriculture. NASS statisticians provide consulting services to a large number of developing countries around the world, helping them develop statistical information about their agriculture. NASS has also been a leader in making information available through electronic media. Globalization of markets is expanding as buyers and sellers have nearly instant access to market information from around the world.

The 1997 U.S. Census of Agriculture will be conducted by NASS and will begin in January 1998. The Census of Agriculture functions have been transferred from the Census Bureau in the Department of Commerce to NASS in the Department of Agriculture. This move will link all major statistical services for agriculture. All county, State, and U.S.-level data provided in previous Census periods will be made available from the 1997 Census of Agriculture.

NASS headquarters is located in Washington, DC, and 45 State Statistical Offices (SSO's) cover 120 crops and 45 livestock items annually in the 50 States. Current and historical information is published in approximately 400 reports, which feature:

- Crop acreage, yield, production, and grain stocks,
- Livestock, dairy, and poultry production and prospects,
- Chemical use in agriculture,
- Labor use and wage rates,
- Farms and land in farms, and
- Prices, costs, and returns.

An abundance of agricultural information is available to data users through our programs. In addition to the information above, estimates on more specialized commodities, including hop stocks, mink, cherries, cranberries, lentils, and peppermint oil are also available. The information is geared toward producers and can help them plan planting, feeding, breeding, and marketing programs. The data are also used by agricultural organizations, services, and businesses; trade groups; and financial insti-

tutions to determine demand for inputs, resources, transportation, and storage-related crop and livestock products. In addition, the data are used to make and carry out agricultural policy concerning farm program legislation, commodity programs, agricultural research, and rural development.

Most estimates are based on information gathered from producers, who are surveyed through personal and telephone interviews or through mailed questionnaires. In addition, for major crops such as corn, wheat, soybeans, and cotton, in-the-field counts and measurement of plant development are made in the top producing States. Other estimates are based on surveys of grain elevators, hatcheries, and other agribusinesses, as well as on administrative data such as slaughter records.

Data collected from these varied sources are summarized by the NASS SSO serving that State and sent to the Agency's Agricultural Statistics Board in Washington, DC, whose members determine and issue State and national official estimates.

All NASS reports are released at scheduled times, and the information is offered to the public in a variety of formats.