

# WEST VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE



*Under a continuing agreement since 1915, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture and the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture have operated the West Virginia Agricultural Statistics Service. The NASS mission is to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. Agriculture. This service collects, summarizes, and distributes agricultural information for the State and is recognized as the official source of agricultural statistics. Under this cooperation, there is no duplication of effort by the State and Federal agencies. Currently, there are similar agreements in 35 states, of which the West Virginia Field Office was one of the first. Funding for the WV Agricultural Statistics Service is provided entirely by the United States Department of Agriculture.*

The National Agricultural Statistics Service was established as the USDA Division of Statistics in 1863. Since 1866, it has published a continuing series of reports on major crops, livestock and agricultural prices. The ever-increasing need for data in the field of agriculture has caused the program to expand to over 100 farm products. Various reports contain current forecasts of production, annual conditions, and annual disposition of agricultural commodities. Information on the prices of items in production, prices received for output, and amount and type of labor used are also collected and published. Users of these data are farmers, processors, distributors, transportation industries, lending institutions, governments, and individuals. Price fluctuations and potential world-wide shortages have broadened the interest in agricultural data tremendously in the past several years.

## **SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

Farmers and agriculturally-related businesses are the source of practically all information gathered by the West Virginia Agricultural Statistics Service. Reporting of these data are voluntary and primarily by three methods: personal interview, telephone interview, and mail surveys. Most interviews are conducted by enumerators employed by the National

Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA). Quarterly Agricultural Surveys are conducted to collect crop and livestock information. These interview surveys combine samples of areas of land and large operators to give estimates based on known probabilities of error. Mail surveys collect information, primarily from farmers, on crop acreage, conditions and yields, as well as livestock inventories, milk and egg production, and prices. Our office maintains a List Sampling Frame of over 22,000 names and addresses of farmers and farm-related businesses to use as the source for our survey work. By Federal law (Title 7, U.S. Code), all answers provided by farmers on their questionnaires remain confidential and are used only to form State and National summaries. The personal information goes no further than the office of the West Virginia Agricultural Statistics Service.

## **DATA PROCESSING**

Survey questionnaires arrive daily, and in peak periods by the hundreds. This information must be sorted, checked, classified, summarized and interpreted as accurately and promptly as possible. Through the use of Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) most of the survey data is entered into the computer system at the time of the interview.

This saves time in not having to reenter the data, eliminates the use of paper questionnaires, and increases the security of the data. As part of the e-gov initiative, nearly all surveys are available for respondents to complete 'on-line' through the electronic data reporting system. Following data collection, the information is sent by telephone communications to the mainframe for further processing.

### STATE PROJECTS

In addition to those reports required by Federal regulations, several projects are conducted at the State's request. These projects include major crop and livestock county estimates, the State Farm Census, Orchard and Vineyard Surveys, and compiling the Annual Bulletin of agricultural statistics.

### INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

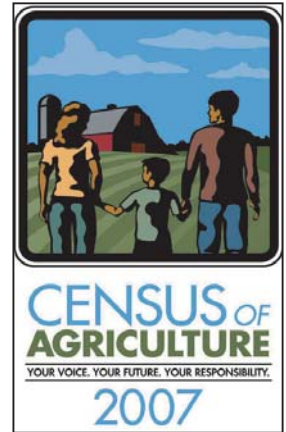
In addition to the annual statistics bulletin, our office issues press releases, weekly weather crop reports and the monthly Mountain State Reporter (a summary of the current month's press releases and previously unreleased data). These releases are available on the Internet by accessing the WV Agricultural Statistics Homepage: [www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/West\\_Virginia/index.asp](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/West_Virginia/index.asp), and are sent by e-mail to users with Internet Access. The releases are also available free of charge and are mailed to survey respondents, media, libraries, and qualified organizations; and by subscription to other interested groups or individuals. Media interviews and presentations are given to disseminate agricultural information. In addition, presentations are made to various agricultural groups to explain our programs and estimates.

### CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

The National Agricultural Statistics Service also has the responsibility of conducting the Census of Agriculture on a five-year cycle. The Census of Agriculture is the most ambitious and important compilation of all agricultural surveys and is the only source of consistent, comparable and comprehensive data on production, economics and operator characteristics at the

national, state and county levels. Responding to the Census of Agriculture is required by law (Title 7, U.S. Code). This same law also guarantees that individual information will be kept confidential and used only for statistical purposes.

The privacy of individual Census records is also protected from disclosure through the Freedom of Information Act. Census statistics are used by Congress to develop and change farm programs, study historical trends, assess current conditions, and plan for the future. Many National and State programs use



census data to design and allocate funding for Extension Service projects, agricultural research, soil conservation programs, and land-grant colleges and universities. Private industry uses census statistics to provide a more effective production and distribution system for the agricultural community. In short, people serving farmers and ranchers depend on agricultural census data to make good, solid decisions for the agricultural community. During early 2008, information was collected for the 2007 Census. This is our farmers' voice, future and responsibility. By participating in the 2007 Census, producers help show the nation the value and importance of West Virginia and U.S. Agriculture and how agriculture contributes to America by providing food, fuel and fiber. By responding to the Census, every producer can have a positive impact on the future of their own operation and their entire community. Everyone's response to the Census makes a difference! West Virginia farm operators had the highest response rate in the nation for the 2002 and 2007 Census of Agriculture. To the West Virginia FFA, County Extension Agents, and all who faithfully completed the Census report we say "THANK YOU". Detailed Census reports for all counties, states, and the nation will be available in both electronic and print format beginning in February 2009.

