

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Use these FAQs to provide information about the Census of Agriculture and/or share them as weekly or monthly “Did you know” tidbits in your organization’s communications.

1. What is the Census of Agriculture?

The Census of Agriculture is a complete count of U.S. farms and ranches and the people who operate them. Even small plots of land – whether rural or urban – growing fruits, vegetables, or raising food animals count, if \$1,000 or more of such products were raised and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year.

The Census of Agriculture, taken only once every five years, looks at land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income and expenditures. For America’s farmers and ranchers, the Census of Agriculture is their voice, their future, their opportunity.

2. Why is the Census of Agriculture important?

The Census of Agriculture provides the only source of uniform, comprehensive and impartial agricultural data for every county in the nation. Through the Census of Agriculture, producers can show the nation the value and importance of agriculture, and they can help influence the decisions that will shape the future of American agriculture for years to come. By responding to the Census of Agriculture, producers are helping themselves, their communities, and all of U.S. agriculture.

3. Who uses Census of Agriculture data?

Census of Agriculture data are used by all those who serve farmers and rural communities – federal, state and local governments, agribusinesses, trade associations, and many others.

- Farmers and ranchers can use Census of Agriculture data to help make informed decisions about the future of their own operations.
- Companies and cooperatives use the facts and figures to determine the locations of facilities that will serve agricultural producers.
- Community planners and local governments use the information to target needed programs and services to rural residents.
- Legislators use the numbers from the census when shaping farm policies and programs.

4. What's new about the 2017 Census of Agriculture:

- *A question about military veteran status.* Respondents will have the opportunity to tell NASS whether they have served or are currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard.
- *Expanded questions about food marketing practices, including the gross value of edible agricultural products sold directly to both consumers and retail markets.* In 2012, this section only included yes/no type questions to determine whether an operation marketed food items directly to consumers.
- *Elimination of specific designations or titles such as principal operator and new/beginning farmer.* Removing these designations helps to better capture the roles and contributions of women and new/beginning farmers. To maintain continuity with the principal operator data series in earlier censuses, the 2017 Census of Agriculture retains a principal operator bridge question.
- *An expanded question about who makes what kind of decisions on the farm.* The 2017 Census questionnaire includes functional decision-making categories for each decision maker listed and asks respondents to mark all that apply: day-to-day decisions, land use/crop decisions, livestock decisions, record keeping/financial decisions, and estate planning.

5. How is the Census of Agriculture conducted?

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will mail questionnaires for the 2017 Census of Agriculture to farm and ranch operators in December 2017 to collect data for the 2017 calendar year. Completed forms are due by February 5, 2018. The most convenient way to complete the census is online at www.agcensus.usda.gov. Alternately, you can return your forms by mail.

6. Must I respond to the Census of Agriculture?

Yes. United States law (Title 7 USC 2204(g) Public Law 105-113) requires all those who receive a Census of Agriculture report form to respond even if they did not operate a farm or ranch in 2017.

7. What if I only have a small operation or do not participate in government farm programs, do I have to fill out a Census of Agriculture form?

The Census of Agriculture is the responsibility of *every* individual who produces or grows any agricultural product, including field crops, fruits, vegetables, floriculture, and livestock, regardless of the size or type of operation. For Census of Agriculture purposes, a farm is any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year.

8. What if I did not receive or I lost my Census of Agriculture form?

If you have questions, need more information, or need assistance completing your Census of Agriculture form, call toll-free (888) 424-7828 or visit www.agcensus.usda.gov.

9. When will 2017 Census of Agriculture results be announced?

NASS plans to release Census of Agriculture data, in both electronic and print formats, beginning in February 2019. Detailed reports will be published for all counties, states and the nation.

10. Where can I find Census of Agriculture data?

Census of Agriculture data are available through the local NASS field office in your area and at many depository libraries, universities and other state government offices. It is also available online at www.agcensus.usda.gov. For additional information on the Census of Agriculture and other NASS surveys, call the Agricultural Statistics Hotline at (800) 727-9540.