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Agricultural Chemical Usage - Field Crop Methodology and Quality Measures

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Agricultural Resource Management Survey: Methodology and Chemical Usage Statistics

Scope and Purpose: The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) collects data about chemical use as well as pest management practices for selected field crops. These field crop data have been collected annually since the 1990 crop year. Two to six target field crops are typically selected each year, chosen on a rotational basis. The states involved (referred to as “program states”) are selected based on NASS acres planted estimates. NASS aims to cover at a minimum 80 percent of acres planted to each target commodity. The data are collected as Phase II of the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS 2). The ARMS is a cooperative agreement between USDA’s NASS and Economic Research Service (ERS).

One or both ARMS 2 components may be conducted each year: the Production Practices Report Survey (PPR) and the Production Practices and Costs Report Survey (PPCR). The PPR is conducted in support of NASS’s chemical usage program exclusively. The PPCR is conducted in cooperation with USDA’s Economic Research Service as part of the three phase ARMS costs of production program.

The ARMS is conducted in three phases. The initial screening phase identifies in-business, in-scope operations, multiple operating arrangements, and operations having commodities of interest for Phases II and III. The ARMS 2 PPR collects data on chemical use and pest management practices. The ARMS 2 PPCR collects data on agricultural production practices, chemical and other resource use, and variable costs of production for each crop for which an ARMS Phase III cost of production survey is conducted. ERS is responsible for estimating cost of production for major commodities and determines the PPCR commodity rotation.

Survey Timeline: Data collection may begin on September 1 and continue through mid-December. NASS Regional Field Offices (RFOs) along with NASS Headquarters (HQ) spend the next several months reviewing reported data for reasonableness and conduct producer follow-ups, as necessary. The estimates are released to the NASS Quick Stats 2.0 system during the second or third week in May.

Sample Size, Sampling Frames, and Methods: The ARMS 2 is selected as a follow-on survey to the ARMS Phase I (ARMS 1) Screening Survey. The ARMS 1 sample is selected from the NASS list frame using Sequential Interval Poisson Sampling to minimize overlap between the current year’s ARMS 1 sample, last year’s ARMS 1 sample, and other NASS surveys. Each eligible operation in the list frame is given a positive probability of selection. A given operation’s probability of selection is calculated based on farm value of sales (FVS) strata membership and acreage levels of the ARMS 2 commodities. After the screening phase, operations which report positive acreage for ARMS 2 target commodities are subsampled for the ARMS 2. Multiple operating arrangements are further subsampled so that only one suboperation is included in the ARMS 2 sample. The sampling weights are adjusted upwards to account for this subsampling.

Data Collection and Editing: All federal data collections require approval by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). NASS must document the public need for the data, show the design applies sound statistical practice, ensure the data do not already exist elsewhere, and show that the public is not excessively burdened. The ARMS 2 questionnaires must display an active OMB number that gives NASS the authority to conduct the survey, a statement of the survey purpose and the use of the collected data, a response burden statement that estimates the time required to complete the form, a confidentiality statement that the respondent’s information will be protected from disclosure, and a statement that response to the survey is voluntary and not required by law. Using these questionnaires, chemical use and pest management data are collected only by personal visit from an enumerator. Postcards are mailed to producers prior to field contact stating the importance of cooperation and that contact will be made in the coming weeks. Once contact is made by the field enumerator, an appointment is made to collect data. Data is collected for one field randomly chosen from all the operation’s fields planted to the ARMS 2 field crop. The field enumerator returns the questionnaires to the NASS RFO for editing and data entry. Questionnaire responses are captured and edited for consistency using automated systems, and a report of questionnaires with errors is generated. NASS statisticians will correct the errors on the report or comment to their validity if the data are deemed to be correct.

Analysis Tools: Chemical use data are processed through an interactive data analysis tool which displays data for all reports by product or commodity. This application tool provides various scatter plots, graphs, tables, charts, and listing tools that allow the analyst to compare an individual record to other similar records within a program state. Outliers and unusual data relationships are investigated by RFO and HQ statisticians to determine validity. Suspect data found to be in error are corrected.

Nonsampling Errors: Nonsampling errors are present in any survey process. These errors include reporting, recording, editing, and imputation errors. Steps are taken to minimize the impact of these errors, such as comprehensive interviewer training, validation and verification of processing systems, detailed computer edits, and the analysis tool. Re-contact with respondents is conducted on an as needed basis.

Nonresponse Adjustment: Response to the ARMS 2 is voluntary. Some producers refuse to participate in the survey, others cannot be located during the data collection period, and some submit incomplete reports. These nonrespondents must be accounted for to make accurate estimates of total chemical usage. For ARMS 2, item level nonresponse is accounted for by imputing data where there are missing values. Imputed rates of application for chemicals are calculated through an automated imputation system that calculates an unweighted mean for an imputation group based on commodity, program state, and product. When a group lacks other responses, groups are collapsed by program state to preserve as much of the homogeneity as possible.

Calibration: Calibration is a weighting technique used in survey sampling to adjust the survey weights for sampled elements so that the weighted sum of a set of benchmark variables equals a pre-determined set of values for the population. The input to the calibration algorithm is the weights generated from the sampling procedures. Sampling weights are calculated based on selection probability so that the samples are representative of the entire population of farms at the program state level for the target field crop(s) in that program state. Due to survey nonresponse, weights are adjusted through a calibration algorithm. Calibration adjusts the sampling weights so the expanded data will match planted acreage totals from the January Crop Production report [<https://esmis.nal.usda.gov/sites/default/release-files/795725/cropan26.pdf>]. This ensures that the chemical use and pest management data collected will accurately represent the chemical usage for all target field crops for the entire target population.

Estimators: The ARMS 2 utilizes direct expansions and/or ratio expansions for all survey indications. Direct expansions are calculated by summing the reported or imputed chemical data values by the calibrated weights. Similarly, ratios are calculated by applying calibrated weights and nonresponse adjustments to data when both the numerator and denominator are reported. Variance estimates are computed for all expansions.

Outliers: NASS conducts a review of outliers found in the chemical use data by reviewing application rates for all records for the same product and commodity combinations. The RFO and HQ statisticians work together to ensure the data are as accurate as possible. The RFO statisticians review outliers within their program states, and the HQ statistician examines outliers across all program states for the published categories. A determination is made as to whether an adjustment to the application data is required. Most outliers trace back to unique situations that do not exist in the target population as much as the survey weight would indicate.

Estimation: HQ statisticians execute a summary that generates program state level and national level indications. RFO statisticians are responsible for performing a detailed review of their survey results and providing comments that justify their survey results. HQ statisticians conduct a final review of survey results from all program states. Any irregularities revealed by the summary must be investigated and, if necessary, resolved. After final review, program state level summary results are adopted as official national estimates.

There are three main types of data that NASS estimates for these surveys - fertilizer application, pesticide application, and pest management data. For the application data, NASS collects information about the commercial fertilizers and pesticides applied during the crop year. For fertilizer, these applications are collected as either actual pounds or percent analysis of Nitrogen (N), Phosphate (P_2O_5), Potash (K_2O), and Sulfur (S). Fertilizer data are then published in actual pounds of nutrient used. For pesticides, these applications are collected at the product level, generally per application. These product level data are converted to pounds of active ingredient (or the acid or metallic equivalent, where applicable), summarized, and published. If there are not a sufficient number of reports, the data is suppressed from publication, along with any needed complementary suppression.

For both fertilizer and pesticide application data, NASS estimates area applied (percent of planted acres treated), number of applications, rate per application (pounds of active ingredient or acid equivalent per acre), rate per crop year (number of applications multiplied by rate per application), and total amount applied.

The standard deviation for each active ingredient is calculated to determine data distribution for each crop. Chemical distribution rates are given by active ingredient for the percent of acres treated, number of applications, rate per application, and rate per crop year. Rate distribution tables include the median, the 10th and 90th percentiles, the mean, and the coefficient of variation (CV) for an active ingredient when a sufficient number of farm operators report applying it on the specified crop.

The pest management data are generally a series of yes/no questions pertaining to specific pest management practices. Pest management data are collected for the randomly chosen field. From these data, NASS releases the percent of operations using the practice as well as the percent of acreage. The percent of acreage assumes that the operation treats all fields of a particular commodity in the same way.

Selected Terms and Definitions

Acres Treated: The number of acres of a commodity that were treated with a primary nutrient or active ingredient at least one time. Acres treated will always be less than or equal to the planted acres for a commodity.

Active Ingredient: The specific pesticide ingredient which kills or controls the target pest(s) or other target material(s), or otherwise results in the pesticide effect(s). All pesticide-use estimates in the report are published per active ingredient (rather than per product); one or more active ingredients are present in known amounts in the pesticide products reported in the survey.

Rate and Total Applied estimates were reported in a single unit of equivalence, per active ingredient. For salt, ester, or amine active ingredients, estimates were published in the parent acid equivalents. For example, the acid derivatives glyphosate isopropylamine salt and 2,4-D, 2-EHE were published in the glyphosate and 2,4-D equivalents, respectively. For copper compounds, estimates were published in the metallic copper equivalent.

Active Ingredient Code: A unique code assigned to each active ingredient upon registration with the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Pesticide Programs, to facilitate pesticide regulation.

Area Applied, Percent: Percent of total planted acres which received one or more applications of a specific fertilizer, nutrient, or pesticide active ingredient. (*In Quick Stats: Treated, Measured as Percent of Area Planted*)

Avoidance: A strategy in which the detrimental effects of pests on crops are mitigated or eliminated solely through various cultural practices. Avoidance is one of four classes of pest-management practices for which data are included in the report.

Beneficial Insects: Insects (small invertebrate animals, mostly of arthropod classes Insecta and Arachnida), which are collected and introduced onto crop acres because of their value in biological control as predators on harmful insects and parasites.

Chemigation: Application of agricultural chemicals, including pesticide products, by injection into irrigation water.

Crop Year: The period starting immediately after harvest of the previous year's crop and ending at harvest of the current year's crop.

Farm: Any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold during the year. Government payments are included in sales.

Fertilizer: A soil-enriching agricultural input which contains one or more plant nutrients. Data for three primary macronutrients, nitrogen (N), phosphate (P₂O₅), and potash (K₂O), and the secondary macronutrient sulfur (S) are included in the report.

Fungi: Various organisms of the kingdom Fungi, which obtain nutrients by decomposing plant or other organic life. This pest group includes mushrooms, molds, mildews, smuts, rusts, and yeasts. Fungal infestations have the potential to reduce crop production and/or lower the grade quality of the host crop.

Mechanism of Action (MOA): The method or biological pathway by which the pesticide or active ingredient kills or controls the target pest(s) or other target material(s).

Minimum or Reduced Tillage: Tillage practices prior to planting which result in a minimum of 30 percent or more of crop residue being retained on the surface following planting.

Monitoring: A strategy involving the observance or detection of pests through systematic sampling, counting, or other forms of scouting. Monitoring may include prediction of pest population levels through the observance of environmental factors such as weather or soil and crop quality. Monitoring is one of four classes of pest-management practices for which data are included in the report.

Nematodes: Unsegmented, parasitic worms of the phylum nematoda. Prominent animal pest of field crops with the potential to be highly destructive, lowering crop production and grade quality significantly.

Number of Applications: The average number of times a treated acre received a specific fertilizer nutrient or pesticide active ingredient. (*In Quick Stats: Applications, Measured in Number*)

Pesticide: Defined by the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) as “(1) any substance or mixture of substances intended for preventing, destroying, repelling or mitigating any pest, (2) any substance or mixture of substances intended for use as a plant regulator, defoliant, or desiccant, and (3) any nitrogen stabilizer...” (*Title 7, U.S. Code, 136*). Under FIFRA, pesticides are registered and regulated through the Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Pesticide Programs. Four classes of pesticides are included in the report: (1) herbicides targeting weeds, (2) insecticides targeting insects (3) fungicides targeting fungi, and (4) other chemicals targeting all other pests or other materials (including extraneous crop foliage).

Pheromone: A chemical substance produced by an insect which serves as a stimulus to other individuals of the same species for one or more behavioral responses.

Prevention: A strategy in which a pest population is kept from infesting a crop or field by taking various preceding actions. Prevention is one of four classes of pest-management practices for which data are included in the report.

Rate per Application: Ratio indicating pounds (lbs) of a fertilizer primary nutrient or pesticide active ingredient (or associated acid or metallic equivalent) applied in a single application per acre treated. (*In Quick Stats: Applications, Measured in Lb/Acre/Application*)

Rate per Crop Year: Ratio indicating pounds (lbs) of a fertilizer primary nutrient or pesticide active ingredient (or associated acid or metallic equivalent) applied, counting all applications per crop year, per acre treated. (*In Quick Stats: Applications, Measured in Lb/Acre/Year*)

Suppression: A strategy which involves the control or reduction of existing pest populations in order to mitigate crop damage. May include physical or biological controls, or management of resistance build-up through pesticide rotation. Suppression is one of four classes of pest-management practices for which data are included in the report.

Quality Metrics for Agricultural Chemical Usage

Purpose and Definitions: Under the guidance of the Statistical Policy Office of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), NASS provides data users with quality metrics for its published data series. The metrics tables below describe the performance data for the survey contributing to the publication. The accuracy of data products may be evaluated through sampling and non-sampling error. The measurement of error due to sampling in the current period is evaluated by the coefficient of variation for each estimated item. Non-sampling error is evaluated by response rates and the percent of the estimate from respondents.

Sample Size is the number of observations selected from the population that are used to be representative of the entire population.

Response rates measure the proportion of the sample that is represented by the responding units in the survey.

Coefficient of Variation provides a measure of the size for the standard error relative to the point estimate and is used to measure the precision of the results of a survey estimator.

Cotton Chemical Usage: Sample Size and Response Rate – Program States: 2025

State	Sample size	Response rate
	(number)	(percent)
Alabama	199	52.3
Arizona	55	47.3
Arkansas	150	46.0
California	118	18.6
Georgia	300	13.3
Louisiana	100	6.0
Mississippi	199	14.6
Missouri	100	38.0
North Carolina	200	19.0
Oklahoma	199	33.2
South Carolina	149	11.4
Tennessee	150	18.0
Texas	399	37.6
Program States	2,318	27.3

Potato Chemical Usage: Sample Size and Response Rate – Program States: 2025

State	Sample size	Response rate
	(number)	(percent)
Colorado	75	24.0
Idaho	147	20.4
Maine	125	29.6
Michigan	124	46.0
Minnesota	100	70.0
North Dakota	40	35.0
Oregon	100	23.0
Washington	125	20.0
Wisconsin	125	49.6
Program States	961	35.0

Cotton Pesticide Usage Coefficient of Variation – Program States: 2025

Active ingredient	Planted acres treated	Number of applications	Rate per application	Rate per crop year
	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)
Herbicides				
2,4-D; 2-EHE	25.6	13.4	23.4	30.8
2,4-D; choline salt	28.6	14.4	11.5	17.0
2,4-D; dimethylamine salt	24.7	12.7	9.8	21.0
Acetochlor	22.0	10.9	6.2	15.6
Carfentrazone-ethyl	28.4	4.3	7.2	8.4
Clethodium	22.1	19.8	8.9	19.5
Dicamba; dimethylamine salt	23.3	6.9	8.2	13.7
Diuron	12.4	4.9	19.2	18.1
Flumioxazin	14.7	8.2	6.9	9.1
Fomesafen sodium	24.4	8.0	12.1	9.3
Glufosinate-ammonium	8.1	6.1	4.4	8.8
Glyphosate	19.9	17.7	23.3	34.8
Glyphosate dimethylamine salt	30.8	15.6	7.2	17.0
Glyphosate isopropylamine salt	4.9	5.1	3.0	5.7
Glyphosate potassium salt	12.7	8.4	3.4	8.9
Paraquat	8.7	3.5	5.7	7.1
Pendimethalin	23.5	0.6	6.5	6.5
Pyraflufen-ethyl.....	24.4	9.1	19.8	22.1
S-Metolachlor	18.7	10.8	9.1	13.5
Trifluralin	19.8	4.2	5.4	7.0
Insecticides				
Acephate	9.7	13.5	10.1	11.6
Bifenthrin	8.5	10.2	11.0	11.1
Diclotophos	22.5	18.9	20.0	23.8
Imidacloprid	17.2	11.1	7.8	13.8
Lambda-cyhalothrin	27.6	16.6	19.3	18.3
Novaluron	28.9	27.5	9.7	26.0
Sulfoxaflor	19.4	9.0	7.6	12.9
Thiamethoxam	25.0	10.8	7.2	15.8
Other Chemicals				
Cyclanilide	19.2	7.7	13.9	14.5
Ethephon	5.1	3.6	6.7	8.4
Mepiquat chloride	7.4	6.2	13.0	12.8
Thidiazuron	7.9	5.3	8.0	9.4
Tribufos	9.5	3.8	8.4	9.6

Potatoes Pesticide Usage Coefficient of Variation – Program States: 2025

Active ingredient	Planted acres treated	Number of applications	Rate per application	Rate per crop Year
	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)
Herbicides				
Diquat dibromide	9.3	11.6	10.2	4.6
Linuron	14.7	0.0	6.3	6.3
Metribuzin	18.4	6.4	16.1	13.7
Pendimethalin.....	17.0	0.0	4.6	4.6
Rimsulfuron.....	41.8	39.0	45.2	10.7
S-Metolachlor	27.3	4.0	7.2	7.2
Insecticides				
Abamectin.....	39.2	23.8	20.7	20.2
Imidacloprid	43.3	6.9	41.8	42.2
Spinosad.....	25.2	16.9	8.5	22.6
Thiamethoxam.....	42.2	0.7	11.2	11.3
Fungicides				
Azoxystrobin	27.2	28.5	20.0	48.2
Chlorothalonil.....	14.5	7.9	5.4	10.7
Difenoconazole.....	14.6	11.1	5.5	13.5
Fluopyram.....	12.0	14.5	7.1	10.9
Mancozeb	22.5	12.5	13.4	18.4
Mefenoxam.....	8.1	6.8	14.4	11.6
Pyrimethanil.....	11.9	16.2	2.7	15.4

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- Both national and state specific reports are available via a free e-mail subscription. To set-up this free subscription, visit <http://www.nass.usda.gov> and in the “Follow NASS” box under “Receive reports by Email,” click on “National” or “State” to select the reports you would like to receive.

For more information on NASS surveys and reports, call the NASS Agricultural Statistics Hotline at (800) 727-9540, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. ET, or e-mail: nass@nass.usda.gov.

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