Row Crops County Estimates Methodology and Quality Measures

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Scope and Purpose: The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) publishes county-level estimates of planted acres, harvested acres, production, and yield for row crops on an annual basis in select states. Currently, the row crops county estimates program contains 31 states for corn for grain, 6 states for corn for silage, 4 states for Pima cotton, 17 states for Upland cotton, 10 states for peanuts, 6 states for rice, 6 states for sorghum for grain, and 29 states for soybeans. Information collected from two NASS surveys provide the data used to establish row crops county estimates: the December Agricultural Survey and the Row Crops County Agricultural Production Survey (CAPS).

Data from the December Agricultural Survey are first used to set final (end of season) crop estimates for planted and harvested acres, production, and yield at the State and National level for the row crop commodities listed above. The methodology for this survey is described in the Annual Crop Production Methodology and Quality Measures report. The December Agricultural Survey does not provide enough data to set county-level estimates on its own.

A supplemental survey, the Row Crops CAPS, is currently conducted in 36 states to collect row crops data from a mutually exclusive set of producers from the December Agricultural Survey. The responses from the Row Crops CAPS are combined with the December Agricultural Survey data. The resulting dataset is summarized and then used along with other administrative data to estimate acreage, yield, and production at the county level.

The uses for county estimates of crop acreage, production, and yield are extensive and varied. County estimates help producers find the best market opportunities for their commodities. Often, recommendations and forecasts presented in agricultural magazines, news releases, etc. are based on data found in NASS reports. Uses of data by farm organizations, financial institutions, insurance companies, agribusinesses, State and National farm policy makers, and foreign buyers of agricultural products may range from maintaining a basic data series to preparing marketing campaigns and determining needs and rates on farm loans and insurance. Government agencies at various levels are important users of county estimates statistics. County yield data resulting from this survey are used by USDA for various programs, including those administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Risk Management Agency (RMA). For example, when a natural disaster such as drought or flooding impacts crop production, these data are crucial to the agricultural industry. Other government agencies, universities, and research organizations use county estimate data to determine many production and economic values on a small area basis. County estimates are the only source of yearly localized estimates.

Timeline: The reference date for the December Agricultural Survey is the first of the month with a data collection period of approximately 15 days. State and National estimates are published in the Annual Crop Production report in early January.

Row Crops CAPS data collection begins in each state between October to November based on approximate harvesting date. Data collection for Row Crops CAPS for all states is completed by mid-January. Regional Field Office (RFO) statisticians have an additional two weeks to review and analyze data with any corrections complete and final summary run by the end of January. Creation and review of the modeled estimates occur on a staggered schedule with the estimates for most row crops being released by the end of May.

Sampling: The target population for the December Agricultural Survey and the Row Crops CAPS is all farms with cropland and/or storage capacity. The NASS list frame includes all known farms. Crop acreages, storage capacity, and other agricultural data of each farm are maintained on the list frame to allow NASS to define list frame sampling populations for specific surveys and to employ efficient sampling designs. Only list frame records with positive cropland acres, planted acreage of the desired commodities, or storage capacity are included in the list frame population.

The Row Crops CAPS sample is designed to be a supplemental sample to the December Agricultural survey list frame sample. For that reason, the two samples are mutually exclusive, and the data from both surveys can be combined after data collection is complete for both surveys.

The December Agricultural Survey and Row Crops CAPS list frame samples are selected using a Multivariate Probability Proportional to Size (MPPS) sampling scheme. Each list frame record is assigned a measure of size based on the frame data for multiple specified commodities. The MPPS design allows target sample sizes for the commodities of interest to be set at the county level. The desired number of samples for each commodity can be controlled with a minimum overall sample size. The MPPS design makes it easier to change samples to meet the needs of the crops program changes. The MPPS design is a more efficient design because operations will have a more optimal probability of selection based upon their individual commodities and size.

After the list frame samples for the December Agricultural Survey and Row Crops CAPS are drawn, the sample weights are calibrated so the sum of the weighted, targeted commodities in the sample of interest equals the sum of the list frame data for the targeted commodities. For example, the sum of the weighted soybean list frame data equals the sum of the population list frame data for soybeans.

Data Collection: All Regional Field Offices (RFO) use the same standardized questionnaire for data collection for each survey. For consistency across modes, the paper version is considered the master questionnaire and the Computer Assisted Self Interview (CASI), mobile Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (mCATI), and Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) instruments are built to model the paper questionnaire. Questionnaire content and format are evaluated annually through a specifications process where requests for changes are evaluated and approved or disapproved. Input may vary from question wording or formatting to a program change involving the deletion or modification of current questions or addition of new ones. If there are significant changes to either the content or format proposed, a NASS survey methodologist will pre-test the changes for usability. Prior to the start of data collection, all modes of instruments are reviewed, and CASI, mCATI, and CATI instruments are thoroughly tested. For consistency across the Agricultural Survey and corresponding CAPS, a basic rule requires that the acreage and yield questions be asked identically on both sets of questionnaires.

All federal data collections require approval by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). NASS must document the public need for the data, apply sound statistical practice, prove the data does not already exist elsewhere, and ensure the public is not excessively burdened. The questionnaires must display an active OMB number that gives NASS the authority to conduct the survey, a statement of the purpose of the survey and the use of the data being collected, a response burden statement that gives an estimate of the time required to complete the form, a confidentiality statement that the respondent's information will be protected from disclosure, and a statement saying that response to the survey is voluntary and not required by law.

In addition to asking the specific acreage and production questions, all instruments collect information to verify the sampled unit, determine any changes in the name or address, identify any partners to detect possible duplication, verify the farm still qualifies for the target population, and identify any additional operations operated by the sampled operator.

Sampled farms and ranches receive a cover letter with the questionnaire mailing explaining the survey and providing instructions for completing the survey on the internet. The letter also notifies them that they will be contacted for survey purposes only if they do not return the questionnaire or complete the survey on the web. All modes of data collection are utilized for each survey. Most of the data are collected by CATI in one of the five Data Collection Centers. Limited personal interviewing may be done, generally for large operations or those with special handling arrangements. A coordination tool is available to determine if any sampled farms are in multiple on-going surveys, so data collection can be coordinated.

After data collection is completed for the December Agricultural Survey but before Row Crops CAPS data collection is complete, an adaptive survey design program is executed on the combined data collected to date. The purpose is to prioritize counties to increase commodity coverage and meet publication standards. It is based on individual county crop profiles and is used to refocus nonresponse follow-up calling in an unbiased and efficient manner. When a county meets the standards for the number of reports or coverage for all targeted commodities, the adaptive survey design program will

assign the county to the lowest priority group for phoning. This will leave the county still available for calling but put the remaining records for the county at the bottom of the call scheduler list. The program is executed several times throughout the course of nonresponse follow-up calling and reports are generated to gauge the status of data collection.

Survey Edit: As survey data are collected and captured, data are edited for consistency and reasonableness using automated systems. The edit logic ensures the coding of administrative data follows the methodological rules associated with the survey design. Relationships between data items (i.e., responses to individual questions) on the current survey are verified. Some data items in the current survey are compared to data items from earlier surveys to ensure certain relationships are logical. The edit assigns a status to each record, indicating whether the record passes or fails the edit requirements for consistency and reasonableness. Records that fail edit requirements must be updated or must be certified by an analyst to be exempt from the failed edit requirement. All records must pass edit requirements, or be certified exempt, before further analysis and summary.

Since the Row Crops CAPS data are merged with December Agricultural Survey data to establish county estimates, a consistent edit logic must be applied to the data of both surveys. That is, December Agricultural Survey and Row Crops CAPS use the same edit limits and logic.

Analysis Tools: Edited data from both surveys are processed and analyzed separately through standard interactive analysis tools which display data for all reports by item. The tools provide scatter plots, tables, charts, and special tabulations that allow the analyst to compare record-level data with previously reported data for the same record and reported data from similar records. Atypical responses, unusual data relationships, and statistical outliers for all items are revealed by the analysis tool. RFO and Headquarters staff review such relationships to determine if they are correct. Data found to be in error are corrected, while accepted data are retained.

Nonsampling Errors: Nonsampling error is present in any survey process. This error includes reporting, recording, and editing errors, as well as nonresponse error. Steps are taken to minimize the impact of these errors, such as questionnaire testing, comprehensive interviewer training, validation and verification of processing systems, application of detailed computer edits, and evaluation of the data via the analysis tool. The respondent pool is monitored and reviewed during and after data collection, and data collection strategies modified where necessary, to continually minimize nonresponse error.

Estimators: Response to the December Agricultural Survey and Row Crops CAPS is voluntary. Some producers refuse to participate in the surveys. Others cannot be located during the data collection period, and some submit incomplete reports. These nonrespondents must be accounted for if accurate estimates of crop acreage, production, and yield are to be made. For these surveys, nonrespondents are accounted for by reallocating the sample weights of the nonrespondents to the respondents. No item-level imputation is performed.

Nonresponse weighting groups are based on operation size and type as well as Agricultural Statistics Districts (ASD). The nonresponse weighting groups for both samples are based on the frame data items for total cropland and on-farm grain storage capacity. ASDs are geographically defined groupings of counties in each state. These nonresponse weighting groups ensure that operation size and location are taken into consideration when reweighting.

When the two surveys are combined for summarization, two kinds of estimators are used for county-level indications: direct expansions and ratio estimators. Direct expansions are used to estimate totals such as planted and harvested acres and production. Reweighted direct expansions are calculated by summing the reported commodity values multiplied by the nonresponse-adjusted sample weights in each nonresponse weighting group. In each weighting group, the adjustment is calculated by summing the weights for all sampled records and dividing by the sum of the weights from the completed records. This ratio is applied to the weights of the completed records and assumes that the data of the nonrespondents are like the data of the respondents.

The ratio estimator takes the form of a ratio of two direct expansions which are calculated by summing the reported commodity values multiplied by the original sample weights adjusted for nonresponse as described above. Ratio estimators are used for all within-survey ratios (e.g., yield and harvested to planted acres) and across-survey ratios (e.g., current year to previous year planted acreages). Both the numerator and denominator must be complete to be included in

the ratio. If either of these components is not reported, the sampling unit is excluded from the estimate and the weights of the completed records are adjusted accordingly. Variances and coefficients of variation (CVs) are calculated for all direct expansions and ratio estimates to measure the precision of the acreage and production estimates. One advantage of the ratio estimator is that the CVs tend to be smaller than those for the direct expansions.

Estimation: When all samples are accounted for, all responses are fully edited, and the analysis material is reviewed, each RFO executes the combined summary for their region. The summary results provide multiple point estimates and corresponding standard errors for each crop being estimated at the county level. It also provides information used to assess the performance of the current survey and evaluate the quality of the survey results, such as counts of positive reports for each indication, response rates, and percent of the expansion from completed reports.

Beginning with the 2020 crop year, model-based county-level estimates were incorporated into the NASS estimation process for row crops county estimates. Bayesian small area estimation models for county-level planted acreage, harvested acreage, and yield are fit separately for each crop and are processed in batches; common methodologies are applied nationwide. The planted and harvested acreage models input current year survey expansions, survey standard errors, and administrative data from FSA and RMA. Yield models input current survey ratios, survey standard errors, and the National Commodity Crop Productivity Index (NCCPI). County-level production estimates are derived from model-based yield and harvested acreage estimates. Model based estimates and corresponding standard deviations are calculated as posterior means and posterior standard deviations, respectively. These county-level estimates are benchmarked against previously released state-level official estimates established by the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB). Coefficients of variation are calculated as ratios of standard deviations and corresponding estimates expressed as a percentage.

Once the model-based county estimates are reviewed by the RFO staff, they are submitted to the ASB. The ASB consists of both HQ and RFO staff and reviews the estimates for accuracy and consistency across state boundaries and verifies that proper procedures are followed throughout the entire process.

Estimates are open to revision on a preannounced schedule only if updated information becomes available. If changes are made to the State-level estimates during the normal annual revision period, then the model-based county estimates are recreated to ensure that county-level estimates continue to add up to state-level estimates. These previous year revisions are released at the same time as the estimates for the current year are published. Estimates will also be reviewed following the 5-year Census of Agriculture, which is an extensive data collection effort of all known farm operations across the U.S. The information gathered from the Census of Agriculture provides the last chance for revision.

To be published, county estimates for a given crop must meet certain publication standards. These standards include obtaining a certain number of reports in each county where the respondent reported both harvested acreage and yield or having the harvested acres from reports with respondent-reported yields account for a certain minimum percent of the current year's harvested acreage estimate for that county. Estimates that do not meet these standards are combined with other counties and published as “Other Counties” totals. The county-level estimates are then published to Quick Stats, the NASS online database of published estimates. The total number of counties published for each crop are displayed in the table below.

Quality Metrics for Row Crops County Estimates

Purpose and Definitions: Under the guidance of the Statistical Policy Office of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the United States Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) provides data users with quality metrics for its published data series. The metrics tables below describe the performance data for all surveys contributing to the publication. The accuracy of data products may be evaluated through sampling and nonsampling error. The CVs measure the error due to sampling as well as some nonsampling error. Nonsampling error is also evaluated by examining survey response rates.

Sample size is the number of observations selected from the population to represent a characteristic of the population. Operations that did not have the item of interest or were out of business at the time of data collection have been excluded.

Response rate is the proportion of the above sample that completed the survey. This calculation follows Guideline 3.2.2 of the OMB Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys (September 2006).

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 the model-based estimator. Percentiles of the published model-based CVs for each estimate type are displayed in the table below. All model-based CVs for published county estimates can be found using the NASS Quick Stats system.

December Agricultural Survey Sample Size and Response Rate - States and United States: 2024 and 2025

State	Sample Size		Response Rate	
	2024	2025	2024	2025
	(number)	(number)	(percent)	(percent)
Alabama	969	969	63.0	53.8
Alaska	170	174	66.5	37.9
Arizona	395	374	69.1	43.6
Arkansas	1,786	1,743	57.2	46.0
California	2,095	2,064	48.1	46.1
Colorado	1,538	1,503	46.5	43.0
Connecticut	242	246	47.5	48.0
Delaware	387	375	38.2	25.6
Florida	763	789	42.5	46.9
Georgia	1,619	1,639	42.4	43.4
Idaho	1,657	1,670	45.8	40.2
Illinois	2,644	2,656	42.0	37.5
Indiana	2,547	2,571	45.7	33.1
Iowa	2,893	2,903	42.5	39.8
Kansas	3,018	3,024	35.4	31.7
Kentucky	1,623	1,652	52.9	52.9
Louisiana	1,352	1,367	55.5	44.6
Maine	361	357	59.6	37.5
Maryland	982	1,002	45.1	37.1
Massachusetts	251	253	66.5	49.0
Michigan	1,751	1,762	50.8	40.4
Minnesota	2,798	2,772	38.8	33.5
Mississippi	1,434	1,377	51.7	48.4
Missouri	3,371	3,337	37.6	33.4
Montana	2,105	2,139	45.9	38.8
Nebraska	3,270	3,200	36.1	30.2
Nevada	192	200	46.4	52.5
New Hampshire	170	186	64.7	36.6
New Jersey	500	503	41.0	40.6
New Mexico	689	678	48.6	42.8
New York	1,118	1,154	43.3	44.9
North Carolina	1,783	1,804	58.3	41.5
North Dakota	3,092	3,132	26.6	28.0
Ohio	1,810	1,776	42.9	35.0
Oklahoma	2,541	2,466	54.9	45.9
Oregon	880	871	47.7	43.2
Pennsylvania	1,438	1,443	47.5	44.3
Rhode Island	54	58	42.6	37.9
South Carolina	998	1,021	61.0	45.2
South Dakota	2,607	2,606	36.9	29.0
Tennessee	1,471	1,480	50.6	53.3
Texas	4,455	4,382	49.6	43.2
Utah	741	736	74.6	61.0
Vermont	488	492	41.0	49.4
Virginia	1,356	1,382	50.7	42.7
Washington	1,565	1,548	42.3	36.4
West Virginia	530	550	76.6	59.5
Wisconsin	2,175	2,141	47.5	48.6
Wyoming	595	606	56.6	42.7
United States	73,269	73,133	46.0	40.2

Row Crops County Agricultural Production Survey Sample Size and Response Rate - States and United States: 2024 and 2025

State	Sample Size		Response Rate	
	2024	2025	2024	2025
	(number)	(number)	(percent)	(percent)
Alabama	664	624	47.7	44.6
Alaska	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Arizona	29	32	72.4	53.1
Arkansas	308	336	31.5	25.6
California	281	267	55.2	45.7
Colorado	516	526	43.4	36.3
Connecticut	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Delaware	299	277	27.4	35.0
Florida	42	34	71.4	32.4
Georgia	1,294	1,271	47.2	37.3
Idaho	208	246	50.0	42.7
Illinois	5,669	5,769	34.4	39.2
Indiana	2,186	2,075	34.5	37.2
Iowa	5,646	5,564	36.2	43.2
Kansas	3,355	3,234	34.1	32.4
Kentucky	2,054	2,032	38.9	44.2
Louisiana	214	206	34.1	41.7
Maine	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Maryland	312	272	34.6	44.1
Massachusetts	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Michigan	1,729	1,694	42.7	31.8
Minnesota	3,791	3,934	37.5	42.2
Mississippi	620	588	40.5	35.0
Missouri	2,144	2,274	34.3	37.0
Montana	296	(NA)	55.7	(NA)
Nebraska	3,266	3,354	38.6	33.8
Nevada	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
New Hampshire	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
New Jersey	75	68	45.3	48.5
New Mexico	639	624	54.5	36.7
New York	1,685	1,583	41.3	33.6
North Carolina	1,811	1,738	32.6	41.5
North Dakota	2,391	2,376	48.6	32.9
Ohio	3,058	3,157	36.9	38.9
Oklahoma	788	735	60.9	51.0
Oregon	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Pennsylvania	2,668	2,464	44.4	41.2
Rhode Island	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
South Carolina	432	405	61.1	51.9
South Dakota	1,598	1,931	37.1	34.2
Tennessee	1,209	1,233	36.6	40.8
Texas	2,727	2,602	52.7	40.6
Utah	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Vermont	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Virginia	1,116	1,064	34.6	41.8
Washington	104	107	52.9	39.3
West Virginia	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Wisconsin	2,571	2,653	41.4	47.6
Wyoming	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
United States [1]	57,795	57,349	39.7	39.1

(NA) Not available.

[1] Row Crops County Agricultural Production Survey conducted in 36 states.

Number of States in the County Estimates Program and Counties Published by Crop - United States: 2024 and 2025

Crop	Number of States in the County Estimates Program	Number of Counties Published [1]	
		2024	2025
	(number)	(number)	(number)
Corn for Grain	31	1,296	1,238
Corn for Silage	6	204	180
Cotton, Pima	4	6	2
Cotton, Upland	17	304	194
Peanuts	10	103	94
Rice	6	63	47
Sorghum for Grain	6	100	83
Soybeans	29	1,151	1,100

[1] Number of counties with published estimates includes estimates published for "Other Counties".

Row Crops County Estimates Quality Metrics - United States: 2024 and 2025

Crop and Estimate Type	Coefficient of Variation					
	2024			2025		
	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile
	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)
Corn for Grain						
Planted	0.2	0.3	0.7	0.8	1.9	5.8
Harvested	0.5	0.8	1.9	1.4	3.4	9.9
Yield	2.9	4.6	7.8	2.7	4.0	6.6
Corn for Silage						
Planted	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
Harvested	0.8	1.4	2.5	1.2	2.0	4.3
Yield	3.9	6.5	9.4	3.7	5.5	8.6
Cotton, Pima						
Planted	1.1	2.1	4.5	0.7	1.4	2.1
Harvested	3.4	7.1	8.1	1.3	2.8	4.3
Yield	3.6	8.5	13.8	1.8	4.8	7.7
Cotton, Upland						
Planted	0.6	1.3	3.9	0.8	1.6	5.3
Harvested	0.8	1.5	4.0	0.9	2.2	5.7
Yield	4.5	7.1	11.0	4.9	6.9	10.6
Peanuts						
Planted	0.7	1.2	2.6	0.6	1.3	2.8
Harvested	0.8	1.5	2.6	2.0	5.7	14.3
Yield	3.5	5.8	8.3	3.6	4.7	6.6
Rice						
Planted	0.5	1.1	2.5	0.4	0.6	1.2
Harvested	0.9	2.2	3.1	2.0	4.1	9.2
Yield	2.4	3.6	7.3	3.2	5.8	10.6
Sorghum for Grain						
Planted	0.8	1.5	4.4	0.6	1.6	8.0
Harvested	1.3	2.8	11.4	4.9	12.6	16.4
Yield	6.3	8.7	14.6	6.2	9.0	13.0
Soybeans						
Planted	0.7	1.6	4.4	0.8	1.8	5.4
Harvested	0.8	1.7	4.5	1.3	2.5	7.7
Yield	3.3	4.8	7.4	2.9	4.6	7.1

(NA) Not available.

Information Contacts

Process	Unit	Telephone	Email
Estimation	Crops Branch	(202) 720-2127	HQ_SD_CB@usda.gov
Data Collection	Survey Administration Branch	(202) 690-4847	HQ_CSD_SAB@usda.gov
Questionnaires	Data Collection Branch	(202) 720-6201	HQ_CSD_DCB@usda.gov
Sampling and Editing	Sampling, Editing, and Imputation Methodology Branch	(202) 690-8141	HQ_CSD_SB@usda.gov
Analysis and Estimators	Summary, Estimation, and Disclosure Methodology Branch	(202) 690-8141	HQ_SD_SMB@usda.gov
Dissemination	Data Dissemination Office	(202) 720-3869	HQSDOD@usda.gov
Media Contact and Webmaster	Public Affairs Office	(202) 720-2639	HQOAPAO@usda.gov

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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@usda.gov.

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