

Farmers and ranchers in Nebraska will soon have the opportunity to make a positive impact on their communities by participating in the 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Conducted every five years by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the Census is a complete count of all U.S. farms, ranches and those who operate them.

"The Census is the only source of uniform, comprehensive agricultural data for every county in the nation," said Dean Groskurth, director of USDA NASS, Nebraska Field Office. "It's a critical tool that gives farmers a voice to influence decisions shaping the future of their community, industry and operation."

The Census looks at land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income, expenditures, and other topics. This information is used by all who serve farmers and rural communities from federal, state and local governments to agribusinesses and trade associations.

"Your answers to the Census impact farm programs and rural services that support your community," Groskurth said. "So do your part and be counted when you receive your form, because there's strength in numbers that only the Census can reveal."

In 2007, Nebraska farmers and ranchers reported over 47,000 farms spanning across 45.5 million acres. This showed a three percent decrease in the number of Nebraska farms from the previous Census in 2002. Nebraska had 3,369 operators of farms with less than five years of operating experience in 2007, three percent less than 2002.

The 2007 Census of Agriculture revealed that only 3,353 operators were under the age of 35, an 11 percent drop since 2002. While beginning farmers are often faced with hurdles such as acquisition of land, in contrast, farmers nearing retirement are challenged by the transition of land to future generations.

In 2007, there were 13,062 operators in Nebraska aged 65 and up, eight percent more than in 2002. This telling information and thousands of statistics are only available every five years as a direct result of producer responses to the Census.

NASS will mail out Census forms in late December to collect data for the 2012 calendar year. Completed forms are due by Feb. 4, 2013.

Producers may use a secure website, www.agcensus.usda.gov, to complete the Census, or return their forms by mail. Federal law requires all agricultural producers to participate in the Census and requires NASS to keep all individual information confidential.

For more information, visit www.agcensus.usda.gov. The Census of Agriculture is your voice, your future, your responsibility.

Find agricultural statistics for your county, State, and the Nation at www.nass.usda.gov/.