



2014-2015 Organic Certifier Survey

NASS Overview

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is the United States Department of Agriculture's primary statistical agency, collecting and disseminating data on nearly every aspect of US agriculture. NASS conducts hundreds of surveys and issues nearly 500 reports annually on topics such as agricultural production, farm labor and wages, agricultural chemical use, and many other subjects that affect the agricultural economy.

NASS is committed to providing timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture. The statistical data provided is essential to the public and private sectors for making effective policy, production, and marketing decisions on a wide range of agricultural commodities. Every five years, NASS also conducts the Census of Agriculture, which provides comprehensive data on the agricultural economy, US farms and ranches, and the people who operate them. The Census of Agriculture is the leading source of facts and figures about American agriculture.

Survey Background

The USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) has maintained a series of data collected from organic certifiers for approximately 25 years. This data collection continued through 2011, but was later discontinued in 2013. At the conclusion of the 2014-2015 collection, the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service National Organic Program (AMS NOP) will be responsible for future organic certifier data collection efforts. To help maintain a consistent database in the interim, NASS will conduct the Organic Certifier Survey to collect data from organic certifiers referencing calendar years 2014 and 2015. The Organic Certifier Survey is a standalone data collection effort. It is not associated with the 2015 Certified Organic Survey, which operates under a separate initiative.

This Organic Certifier Survey is a complete enumeration of all known organic certifying agents located in the United States. The survey will collect data on certified crops and livestock operations, but not on organic handlers, processors, or wild crops operations. Information gathered will include the number of operations that are certified organic for each state, along with the number of acres certified for various crops, and the number of head of livestock and poultry certified as organic. This data allows the USDA to maintain a data series used by farmers, grower's associations, universities, and other researchers to study and project future changes to this growing and important industry.

Program Change Highlights

One notable survey change is that ERS is no longer responsible for collecting the organic certifier data. NASS has taken on that responsibility for this year only. After this year, the NOP will utilize the Organic INTEGRITY Database to take over future data collection efforts.

A second notable change is that NASS will collect operation-level data from the organic certifying agents for all operations that have been certified as organic producers in 2014 and 2015. Data will be published at an aggregate level at both the national and state level as applicable. Due to confidentiality regulations, some state level data may be combined and published at the regional or national level to prevent disclosure of data from individual operations. Participation in the survey is voluntary and participating certifiers must sign a letter consenting to the release of their data.

Data Collection

Data collection will be performed in a two-step process. The first step will involve a personal visit from NASS personnel with the managers of certifying organizations. The purpose of the visit is to introduce managers to NASS and to discuss the data collection needs. NASS will also collect some basic profile information at that time. This initial visit should take approximately 1 hour.

The second step will involve compilation and reporting of the data. This stage of data collection will occur from April to June 2016. Depending on the complexity of the certifying agency, it is estimated to take less than 15 hours to compile and report the data, as per Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval. Microsoft Excel spreadsheets will be used to collect all data. NASS expects the majority of organic certifying agents to send the data to NASS electronically. Alternatively, NASS is willing to provide assistance in accessing and compiling the data for the certifier.

Data Confidentiality

NASS takes great pride in ensuring that no individual operation can be identified. Names, addresses, and personal identifiers are fully protected by NASS with the force of the law. Title 7, U.S. Code, Section 2276 and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA) prohibit public disclosure of individual information. Furthermore, personal information, including reported data, is protected from legal subpoena and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

Timeline

NASS performs introductory visits to certifiers	March - April 2016
Data collection via electronic means or NASS personal visits	April - June 2016
Data processing and analysis	May – December 2016
Data release	December 13, 2016