

Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Reminds Producers To Complete 2012 Census Of Agriculture

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack this week continued to remind producers to complete forms for the Census of Agriculture—the only source of uniform, comprehensive and impartial agricultural data for every county in the nation. The 2012 Census of Agriculture will provide the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with current information to help ensure an abundant, safe, and accessible food supply for all of America. On Monday, Vilsack spoke to thousands of American farmers and ranchers in Nashville, Tenn. The Census of Agriculture, said Vilsack, is one of the most important tools for providing certainty to producers and sustaining the unlimited economic potential of rural America.

“It’s important for farmers and ranchers in America today to stand up and be counted by participating in the Census of Agriculture,” said Vilsack. “By participating in this survey, producers help provide a snapshot of the current state of agriculture in our country, which helps policymakers make better decisions about farm safety net programs and policies.”

Currently underway by USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the Census collects detailed data covering nearly every facet of U.S. agriculture. It looks at land use and ownership, production practices, expenditures and other factors that affect the way farmers do business and succeed in the 21st Century.

Census information helps USDA monitor trends and understand the needs in agriculture to better align its products and services. Ways the department used Census data in the past include:

Helping to ensure the future of the agriculture industry in America, by developing programs and priorities to help new and beginning farm-

ers get started and stay in business. This was supported after the Census reported the average age of a farmer continued to increase from 50.3 in 1978 to 57.1 in 2007. And, while the majority of farm operators are between the age of 45 and 64, the fastest growing group of farm operators is those 65 years and older.

Looking at where and how to provide expanded and improved Internet access and services to rural America. The Census provided comprehensive county-level data on Internet access and revealed that 57 percent of all farmers had Internet access in 2007, up from 50 percent in 2002. Of those producers accessing the Internet, 58 percent reported having a high-speed connection.

Illustrating the changing nature and needs of agriculture, the number of farms that produced 75% of production declined from 144,000 in 2002 to 125,000. At the same time, the number of small farms counted in the 2007 Census of Agriculture represented 91 percent of all farms. Overall small farms increased 1 percent from 2002 to 2007. These statistics show just how important to our food supply these very large farms are and how vital it is that programs such as crop insurance and others in the Food, Farm and Jobs bill are available. Different sized farms have different needs that USDA supports just as fervently.

All farmers and ranchers should have received a Census form in the mail by early January. Completed forms are due by February 4, 2013. Farmers can return their forms by mail or online by visiting a secure website, www.agcensus.usda.gov. Federal law requires all agricultural producers to participate in the Census and requires NASS to keep all individual information confidential. Δ

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