

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS): Importance to US Agriculture

{ agricultural data }

Background: The National Agricultural Statistics Service provides timely, accurate, and useful statistics in support of U.S. agricultural production and research needs. The American Phytopathology Society (APS) represented by its Public Policy Board (PPB) was alarmed when the Agricultural Chemical Usage Surveys budget was reduced by approximately \$8 million. The budgetary loss forced NASS to reduce the number of surveys that measure pesticide and fertilizer use in both commodity and specialty crops. This action required users of data from those surveys, including a broad array of agricultural commodity and producer organizations, to rely on less accurate and less timely information. Facts found in these surveys are useful as well for research purposes and for risk assessments performed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). When EPA does not have reliable usage surveys, they compromise pesticide risk assessments by defaulting to 100% of a crop treated when in reality, particularly for specialty produce, the chemical crop treatment may be as low as 5 to 10%. Without these data, additional risk assessments required by the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, and others are likely to be conducted by also assuming that 100% of the crop acreage is treated with a particular chemical. A lack of accurate and timely information also hinders efforts to create accurate and timely County Bulletins, which growers use in determining if there are threatened or endangered species or water bodies at risk in their production areas.



Current State: Comments are currently being solicited on the paperwork and regulatory burdens associated with the Agricultural Surveys Program (Federal Register Doc No: 2017-01666). In particular, comments are invited on the practical utility, quality, and clarity of the data and the burden of collection on the farmers and growers that respond to the surveys. The APS along with other collaborators have launched a strategic plan to advance research on a new paradigm for improving crop health and productivity as outlined in the *Phytobiomes Roadmap* (www.phytobiomes.org/roadmap). The goal of this effort is to develop systems-level understanding of crops and their environment such as soils, microorganisms, and other factors. This systems-level understanding greatly benefits from data from the NASS surveys, including data regarding on-farm chemical usage and pest and crop management practices. The recent efforts of NASS to enhance current satellite-based monitoring to provide crop condition, soil moisture, crop progress and yield data are also important.

Solution: The APS PPB encourages strong support for NASS and its work, which is of critical importance and value to U.S. growers. We request that the NASS budget be maintained, and, if at all possible, increased to ensure the continuation of these vital surveys. In addition, we also request that you submit comments to the Federal Register by March 27 in support of the chemical usage, pest, and crop management practice surveys as well as the enhancement of satellite-based monitoring. We would be happy to assist you in developing such comments.

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