

## AGENCY OVERVIEW

# NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE (NASS)

## SUMMARY OF KEY CRITICAL SUPPORT AREAS AND LEADERSHIP

### Leadership

Joseph Parsons has been the NASS administrator since June 2024, having previously served as acting and associate administrator.

### Budget

(see figure below, Table 2.2 in body of report, and our [online resource](#)):

- NASS's FY25 budget was \$187.9 million for its total budget, the same as its FY24 level. Of that amount, \$141 million is for current programs and \$46.9 million is for the Census of Agriculture. This top-line funding level amounts to:
  - an estimated 2.4% loss of purchasing power from FY24.
  - an estimated 14.5% loss of purchasing power from FY09.
- The FY26 President's Budget Request for NASS is \$185 million, which represents an estimated 4% loss in purchasing power from its FY25 level.

### Staffing

(see Table 2.1 in body of report):

- NASS has lost an estimated 41% in staffing since FY24.
- The FY26 President's Budget Request is for a staffing level of 495, approximately the same staffing as at the end of FY25.

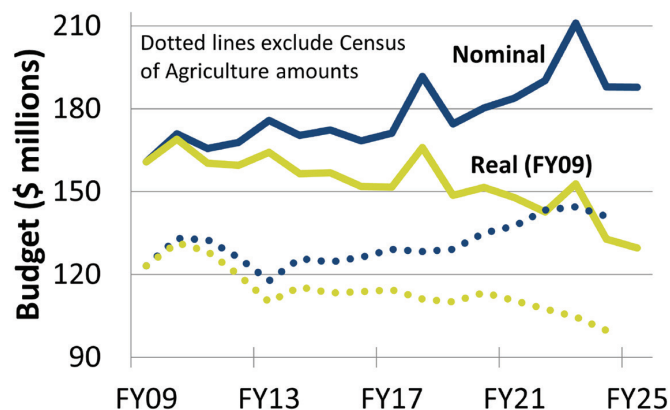
### Parent Agency

Because statistical agencies are hesitant or not allowed to communicate with outside entities, and the parent agencies are communicating little information specific to statistical agencies, we have no agency-specific updates in this category beyond USDA's plans to disperse NASS staff to possibly five regional centers around the country. The fact that the staffing cuts and the proposed budget cut occurred indicates lack of support for the statistical agency, support that is required by the Evidence Act.

### Statistical Integrity Safeguards

Because statistical agencies are hesitant or not allowed to communicate with outside entities and the parent agencies are communicating little information specific to statistical agencies, we have no agency-specific updates in this category. A degree of open communication with outside stakeholders is an important component of statistical integrity safeguards and government transparency.

## National Agricultural Statistics Service



### Appropriations for NASS in Nominal and Inflation-Adjusted ("Real") Dollars, Fiscal Years 2009–2025

NOTE: The GDP deflator is used to adjust nominal appropriations for inflation.

SOURCE: [ASA online resources](#)

## IMPACTS

NASS has been severely affected in 2025 by the administration's actions to reduce the size of the federal civil service workforce, losing 41% of its FY24 staff due to cancellation of probationary staff appointments and staff accepting offers to retire or leave the civil service early. At the leadership level, as of November 2025, the associate administrator is acting, as are staff directors of three of six units in the administrator's office (two other units have no one officially in charge). In addition, of NASS's seven divisions, four are headed by acting directors, three of whom are holding down two divisions each ([NASS Org Chart](#)).

NASS has canceled two surveys: the Agricultural Labor Survey and the Mink Survey. It has also eliminated state and regional reports, which provided valuable context for data users. However, NASS has restored, as of March 2025, the July cattle report and the monthly county estimates for crops and livestock, which the agency had canceled in April 2024 due to lack of funding. Senate and House appropriations bills for FY2025, passed by the relevant committees in August 2024, contained language directing NASS to restore the reports.

The administration has announced plans to disperse NASS's staff to 5 USDA "hubs" around the country and consolidate its current 12 regional offices into those 5 hubs.

NASS lacks resources to update its outdated IT systems (see "Critical Challenges and Vulnerabilities" in the 2024 Health Assessment below). The reduction in staff also is having a major impact on NASS's ability to keep its methods and processes up to date. If IT systems are updated but methods do not continue to evolve, then NASS users may turn increasingly to for-profit entities for agricultural estimates, potentially putting less-resourced farmers, ranchers, and other producers at a competitive disadvantage.

## SUMMARY

NASS's substantial staff reductions, including in leadership positions, and the continued loss in its budget's purchasing power, constrain its ability to fulfill its mission to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics in the service of U.S. agriculture.

While we are not updating our ratings for Parent Agency Support and Statistical Integrity Safeguards—primarily for lack of information—we rate the NASS resources as WEAK owing to the sharp drop in staffing and the consequent omissions and suspensions of reports. According to our 2024 report rubric, this rating means, "The agency's efforts to meet its Evidence Act responsibilities are severely challenged."

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the all-agency recommendations in the body of the report, we reiterate the prior NASS-specific recommendation:

- In order to meet demands of an agile, accountable agency producing relevant, timely data with minimal budget increases, USDA could help maintain products, productivity, and efficiency through support for updating NASS IT systems.

## NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE: 2024 HEALTH ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

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For full text, see: <https://bit.ly/NationsDataAtRiskNASS>.

The July 2024 NASS documents a remarkably productive principal federal statistical agency. Founded in 1862, NASS produces several hundred national reports and several thousand regional reports annually. These are relied on by producers, policymakers, the food and agriculture industry, and consumers. The Census of Agriculture, one of NASS's most important data products, is conducted every five years and provides a comprehensive picture of agricultural activities across the United States.

### KEY SUCCESSES AND STRENGTHS

NASS maintains an almost-perfect record of on-time release of its hundreds of reports and data products each year. It also has a strong culture of innovation. In recent years, NASS has achieved more efficient use of existing data, such as using statistical techniques to establish more accurate official estimates for smaller geographic areas, and has also shown a commitment to keeping staff updated on new methodologies and new technologies. In addition, NASS explores and uses additional sources of data (e.g., using administrative and other data to reduce respondent burden in the Census of Agriculture and surveys and collaborating with George Mason University and NASA to develop the web-based geospatial Condition and Soil Moisture Analytics tool). NASS also improved its communication with its data users through innovative methods, such as digital data dissemination products.

### CRITICAL CHALLENGES AND VULNERABILITIES

NASS is challenged to update its 52 largely outdated IT systems, which include 3 legacy systems (2005, 2012, 2013); 1 other system that has been updated; 12 in the process of being updated; 10 being planned for updates; and 29 others from around the year 2000. While recent successes include moving IT applications to the cloud and updating NASS's data collection portal, further updates are needed. NASS has lost 18% in purchasing power for its non-Census programs since FY09, keeping NASS from achieving substantial productivity gains that would come with much-needed IT system updates. The constrained budget also inhibits the training of staff on the latest technological and methodological advances in data science and artificial intelligence. Further, because of budget constraints, NASS announced cancellations in April 2024 of several reports and surveys, for which Congress ultimately restored funding at the behest of data users. NASS's workload is challenging, including demanding, person-intensive work to produce several hundred reports on time annually; maintaining four call centers that are open six days a week; and otherwise meeting the requirements of a federal statistical agency. Conveying the size of these challenges to new administrations and new leadership is difficult.

### SUPPORT RATINGS SUMMARY

The 2024 assessment assigned:

- Autonomy: **Challenging**, due to absence of enabling legislation;
- Parent agency support: **Good**; and
- Budget/staffing: **Challenging**, acknowledging 18% purchasing power erosion and outdatedness of IT systems