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Census of Agriculture

The 2012 Census of Agriculture forms will be mailed to over 3 million U.S. agricultural producers during the last week of December. In Texas, about 375,000 Census forms are being mailed out. The mailings include all known farmers, ranchers, and agricultural producers, plus a large number of potential agricultural producers.

The USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Texas Field Office has provided responses to some of the most commonly asked questions about the Census of Agriculture.

1. What is the Census of Agriculture?

The first Census of Agriculture was conducted in 1840, and is now conducted every five years. The Census is a complete count of U.S. farms and ranches and the people who operate them. The Census looks at land use and tenure, operator characteristics, production practices and economic information. The Census serves as a very important "voice" for America's farmers and ranchers.

2. Why is the Census of Agriculture important?

The Census provides the only source of uniform, comprehensive and impartial agricultural data for every county in the nation. Through the Census, producers will show the value and importance of agriculture in their county and can help influence decisions that will shape the future of American agriculture. By responding to the Census, producers are helping themselves and their communities.

3. Who uses the Census of Agriculture data?

Census data are used by all who serve farmers and rural communities: university research and extension, state and local officials, agribusinesses, farm organizations, commodity groups, and many others.

Companies and cooperatives use the facts and figures to determine future locations of facilities that will serve agricultural producers.

Community planners use the information to target needed services to rural residents.

Legislators use Census statistics when shaping farm policies and programs.

Producers use the information in making plans for their future operations.

Other uses of Census information:

Used to allocate block grant dollars to states

Used to allocate funds for beginning farmer, conservation and other programs

Used to help identify research priorities and to allocate funds accordingly

Used in rural economic development like broadband Internet expansion

4. I'm retired or I've never farmed, do I need to return the Census form? Yes.

Everyone who receives a Census form is required to return the Census form, even if they no longer farm or have never been involved in agriculture. A simple note of explanation on the front page will suffice. Please note: retired operators who own land enrolled in CRP or WRP are counted as farms and should complete the Census form.

I only have a small operation, do I count? Yes.

It only takes $1,000 worth of agricultural production to be counted as a farm. A few cows, several goats, laying hens for local egg sales, some hay production – it doesn't take much to be a farm. Everyone should complete and return their Census form.

Other key points:

The Census of Agriculture has mandatory reporting authority, just like the population Census. This is due to the tremendous value of the information and because of the large amount of funds and resources targeted and allocated based on Census results.

Individual information is guaranteed complete confidentiality by federal law, Title 7 of the U.S. code. Title 7 prevents NASS from sharing individual information with any other government agency and also gives NASS immunity from any type of mandatory disclosure of individual data, including legal processes and FOIA.

NASS is restricted to publishing only aggregate totals at state and county levels such that the identity of any individual is not discernible in the published totals.

The form is lengthy, but there are many commodity specific sections for which producers will simply check "No", because they do not raise those items.

There is a toll free phone number on the front of the Census form for anyone with questions: (888) 424-7828. NASS will operate calling centers from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekdays and from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays, to respond to incoming calls.

For more information about the Census of Agriculture, please call the USDA's NASS Texas Field Office at (800) 626-3142.

Area Ag Conferences Scheduled for January

January 14 - Cotton Conference, Perryton Expo - Contact Scott Strawn, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-435-4501.

January 14 - Hutchinson/Hansford Cotton Meeting, O'Laughlin Building, Spearman - Contact Kristy Synatschk, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-878-4026.

January 15 - Cotton Production Meeting, Groom Community Center - Contact Jody Bradford, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-537-3882.

January 21 - Cotton Production Profit Workshop, Morton - Contact Jeff Molloy, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-266-5215.

January 22 - South Plains Ag Conference, Brownfield - Contact Chris Bishop, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-637-4060.

January 22 - Grain Sorghum Symposium, Ollie Liner Center, Plainview - Contact Gary Cross, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-291-5267.

January 23 - Northwest Texas AG Conference, Wellington - Contact Dale Dunlap, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-447-2313.

January 24 - Caprock Crop Production Workshop, Unity Center, Muncy - Contact Caitlin Jackson, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-675-2347.

January 25 - Commercial Turf and Ornamental Workshop, Lubbock - Contact Mark Brown, CEA-AG, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-775-1680.

January 25 - Llano Estacado Cotton Conference, Bailey County Coliseum, Muleshoe - Contact Curtis Preston, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-272-4584.

January 28 - iPhone/iPad Training - Seminole Civic Building, Seminole - Contact Terry Millican, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 432-758-4006.

January 29 - Grain Sorghum Symposium, Lubbock - Contact Mark Brown, CEA-AG, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-775-1680.

January 29 - Small Farms Business Seminar, Plainview - Contact Gary Cross, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-291-5267.

January 29 - Cotton Variety and Economics Workshop, Farwell Community Center - Contact Benji Henderson, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-481-3619.

January 30 - Alternative Crops Meeting, Post - Contact Greg Jones, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-495-4400.

January 31 - Sorghum Variety Selection and Economic Management Meeting, Brownfield - Contact Chris Bishop, County Extension Agent-AG, for more information at 806-637-4060.

If you have another conference to add to this list, or if you have an agenda you'd like to link, please call PCG at (806) 792-4904 and ask for Mary Jane Buerkle, or email maryjane@plainscotton.org. All spring conferences are listed at http://www.plainscotton.org/agconferences.html.

Hormel buying No. 2 peanut butter Skippy for $700M

NEW YORK (AP) — Hormel Foods apparently has a hankering for a peanut butter and bacon sandwich. The company primarily known for Spam and other cured, smoked and deli meats said Thursday that it's buying Skippy, the country's No. 2 peanut butter brand, for about $700 million.

Skippy, which was introduced in 1932 and is a staple in American pantries, is intended to increase Hormel's presence in the center of the supermarket where shelf-stable foods are sold. It also gives the Austin, Minn.-based company a clearer path for growth overseas. Skippy is sold in about 30 countries and is the leading peanut butter brand in China, where Hormel is also looking for growth.

Hormel, which also makes canned chili, sausages and pepperoni, currently gets the vast majority of its sales in the U.S., with only about 4 percent of revenue coming from abroad. Although swings in peanut butter prices has made growth volatile, sales on average have increased about 4 percent annually on a normalized basis, according to a spokesman for Unilever, which currently owns the brand.

In the U.S., the Skippy line consists of 11 varieties of peanut butter, including Skippy Natural. Hormel noted that Skippy is the leading brand in the faster-growing subcategory of natural peanut butter. It estimated peanut butter as a $2 billion category.

Hormel expects annual Skippy sales of about $370 million, with almost $100 million of that from outside the U.S. The deal includes Skippy manufacturing plants in Little Rock, Ark., and Weifang, China. Hormel Foods Corp. said that it expects the deal to modestly add to its fiscal 2013 results and add 13 cents to 17 cents per share to fiscal 2014 earnings.

The transaction, which still needs regulatory approval, is expected to close early this year.

Unilever, based in the Netherlands and the U.K., is one of the largest consumer products companies in the world. It makes Vaseline, Dove soaps and Lipton tea. The company had indicated last year it was considering selling Skippy as part of a strategic review.

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