



United States Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service

Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2022-2026

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....1

Message from the Administrator2

About USDA-NASS3

 Mission Statement..... 3

 2026 Strategic Vision Statement 3

 Core Values..... 4

Summary of Strategic Plan5

Workforce Transformation6

 Objective 1.1: Increase employee professional growth and development, satisfaction, engagement, innovative thoughts, through a workforce that is reflective of the American people..... 6

 Objective 1.2: Appropriately size, recruit, and train the workforce..... 7

 Objective 1.3: Develop strategic workforce planning capabilities to support transition from traditional survey data collection to in-depth integration of survey data with alternative sources and methods..... 7

Exceptional Customer Experience8

 Objective 2.1: Incorporate new data sources and data collection techniques that are focused on the needs of the user to reduce respondent burden, ease reporting barriers, and increase sample coverage, while maintaining confidentiality and privacy. 8

 Objective 2.2: Increase effectiveness of stakeholder engagement..... 9

 Objective 2.3: Raise the awareness of and use of NASS products and services..... 9

Organizational Excellence10

 Objective 3.1: Create new, modern business processes to produce quality data and products at a faster rate..... 10

 Objective 3.2: Mature, expand, and enforce enterprise-level strategic and program management processes and tools to guide data-driven decision-making..... 10

 Objective 3.3: Mature ability to manage risk and ensure that proven effective internal controls are built into every process and system. 11

Message from the Administrator



I believe everyone recognizes the need to modernize our agency processes and procedures and update our infrastructure to meet the growing demands of our data providers and data users. Therefore, we must commit to modernize our systems, perform better data analysis, improve data dissemination, and improve communication and engagement with our customers. For us to be successful in these endeavors all NASS employees must join together in shaping our future. I recognize the outstanding commitment and hard work that NASS staff are already performing daily despite staff shortages and heavy workloads, which we are working diligently to resolve. However, it is imperative that we continue to work towards more efficient ways to carry out our mission.

I am excited to put the NASS Strategic Plan: FY2022 – FY2026 in place as a road map in planning the future of NASS. This plan is anchored in three strategic goals: Workforce Transformation, Exceptional Customer Experience, and Organizational Excellence. These initiatives align with the Secretary's goals to improve customer service and access to data, and to modernize IT infrastructure. These initiatives also serve as the focal point for this new and broader Agency Strategic Plan defining the future vision for NASS.

I hope that you will join me and the rest of the Senior Executive Team in championing this plan as we seek to promote NASS as the premier source of comprehensive agricultural data and reports that data providers and users trust to meet their changing needs.

Thanks for your valued commitment to making NASS a great place to work.

Hubert Hamer

About USDA-NASS

Legislative Mandate

USDA was established in 1862 by President Abraham Lincoln to provide U.S. agricultural information to the United States government and the public. The first official report regarding crop conditions was published in July 1863. The original NASS mission continues today in the USDA forecasts and estimates publications released by the NASS Agricultural Statistics Board. NASS's responsibilities are authorized under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 (7 U.S.C. 1621-1627) and the Census of Agriculture Act of 1997, Public Law 105-113 (7 U.S.C. 2204g). Public Law 105-113 transferred responsibility for the Census of Agriculture and other special studies from the Department of Commerce to USDA in November 1997 and entrusted to NASS to perform. Conducted every five years, the census provides comprehensive information about the nation's agriculture on a national, state, and county level basis. The agency maintains a current list of farms and ranches in the United States, one of its unique Federal roles. NASS also performs important reimbursable agricultural survey work for other Federal agencies, state governments, and producer organizations. NASS also provides technical assistance for agricultural statistics programs in developing countries.

Relationship with Partners, Customers, and Stakeholders

As the primary statistical agency for USDA, NASS has relationships with many partners, customers, and stakeholders whom we serve with data products and services, and who use and advocate for the data we produce. Among them are:

- State departments of agriculture and land grant universities. Through cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding dating back to 1917, NASS field offices serve jointly as the Federal field office and the state government agricultural statistical office. In this role, NASS provides data collection and statistical services to other agencies and provides statistics to the public through agreements with private producer organizations.
- The National Institute of Statistical Sciences, which brought together the best academic and NASS researchers to provide recommendations for modern day challenges facing the agricultural statistics program.
- More than 40 community-based organizations (CBOs), as well as countless local associations, facilitate USDA outreach to limited resource and historically underrepresented producers. These groups work with NASS staff to ensure their constituents are represented and that the census includes all farms and ranches, regardless of size, location, or type of operation. NASS also partners with these groups to provide hands-on assistance and support to local producers—including non-English speakers—to complete their census forms. NASS targets media outreach that reaches small, minority, and non-English-speaking producers.

Mission Statement

We provide timely, accurate and useful statistics in service to United States agriculture.

2026 Strategic Vision Statement

NASS is recognized as a modern, innovative, customer-focused organization that readily adopts cutting-edge technologies and engages its world-class workforce to produce the **most trusted, useful** statistics on all aspects of U.S. agriculture.

Core Values

- **Trust among data providers:** NASS will continue the relationship of mutual respect and our legal pledge of confidentiality with our respondents who provide their personal and agricultural data in support of U.S. agriculture.
- **Credibility among data users:** NASS will maintain credibility with our data users by issuing complete and accurate statistical information about agriculture.
- **Objectivity of Statistics:** NASS will produce and disseminate statistical information on an equitable and transparent basis, so the public understands that the data are objective and impartial.
- **Relevance to Policy Issues:** We will remain knowledgeable about the issues and requirements of the agriculture industry, public policy, and Federal programs, and will remain able to provide objective, accurate, and timely information relevant to those needs.
- **Commitment to Service:** Each USDA-NASS employee and representative is committed to these core values and takes great pride in working together to serve American farmers and ranchers, rural communities, and all who rely on the information we produce.

Summary of Strategic Plan

This strategic plan is the first step in an ongoing strategic and operational planning process. The strategic plan is anchored around three strategic goals. NASS will achieve these goals through goal-specific implementation strategies, with an emphasis on accountability and building evidence to inform decision-making.

- **Strategic Goal 1:** Workforce Transformation – Foster a workforce to meet current and emerging needs.
- **Strategic Goal 2:** Exceptional Customer Service – Proactively strengthen relationships with data users, providers, and partners.
- **Strategic Goal 3:** Organizational Excellence – Operate as a strategic, integrated, efficient organization built on sound management practices and methodological principals.

These goals will lead the agency down a path in consolidating the many duplicative systems and processes it uses to achieve its mission to an enterprise-level solution for each of the core processes of data collection, editing, and dissemination by the end of FY26.

The NASS Strategic Planning Branch will track the implementation of the plan and ensure individual and office accountability for achieving our strategic goals.

Strategic Goal 1

Workforce Transformation

NASS's long-term success is rooted in the hard work and dedication of a highly skilled workforce. Moving forward, the continued success of the organization is contingent on development of the existing workforce to meet the changing needs of customers. Accomplishing this requires a deliberate focus on training and retention in critical knowledge areas. Supporting transformational initiatives requires that the organization clearly identify capabilities, competencies, and emerging skills. Management must evaluate each opportunity to identify required skillsets and determine if current skillsets meet the need or if the organization is better served through hiring, re-training, or out-sourcing. Leadership will foster an environment of creativity and innovation and where value is placed on new ideas and a focus on professional development.

Objective 1.1: Increase employee professional growth and development, satisfaction, engagement, innovative thoughts, through a workforce that is reflective of the American people.

Objective Collaborators: Office of the Administrator, Civil Rights Office, and Strategic Planning and Business Services Division

NASS will leverage the efforts of the FY21 Organizational Analysis and the FY22 Workforce Transformation Team to implement specific recommendations aligned with fostering a workforce that meets current and emerging trends. NASS will develop a customer-centric, inclusive, and high-performing workforce by investing in and engaging employees to improve the delivery of services through modernization of programs and innovative thinking. Employees will have a broad understanding of and input into the mission and strategic roadmap to move NASS forward. Finally, NASS will afford employees equal opportunities to increase their knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet both current and emerging needs.

Implementation Strategies

- Institutionalize employee engagement strategies, foster idea sharing, and ensure diverse perspectives are truly welcome throughout all agency functional units.
- Develop an Employee Engagement SharePoint site for activities such as: access to an Employee Guidebook; Innovation Hub for employees to submit ideas to agency leadership; monthly engagement poll/surveys; peer-to-peer recognition; a place for employees to express interest in participating in a project team; and an employee skills repository.
- Use employee satisfaction and engagement surveys to increase the baseline measures by two percentage points per year.
- Leverage best practices and system changes that ensure the work environment is safe, respectful, inclusive, free from harassment, and enables all leaders and employees to cross-collaborate and do their best work.
- Implement leadership development training - soft skills, emotional intelligence, and servant leadership.

Objective 1.2: Appropriately size, recruit, and train the workforce.***Objective Collaborators: All Divisions and Staff Offices***

Using changing technologies and meeting customer demands require transformation of NASS processes to provide faster, more accessible, and diverse information. NASS must prepare for the changing work and skills needed by identifying the competencies required for success throughout various stages of transformation. Consequently, the FY2021- FY2025 Human Capital Management Plan is being implemented to execute data-driven recruiting, hiring, attrition, and retirement analysis, while upskilling the current workforce.

Implementation Strategies

- Implement “Future of Work” strategies that enable NASS to effectively oversee and implement staff, operations, and program delivery in a hybrid environment.
- Continue to review position descriptions and scope and complexity of duties to perform statistical and comparative analyses of NASS data and roles in relation to similar positions in the labor market.
- Strategically utilize existing alternative hiring sources, such as scholars’ programs, experienced worker programs, and other special hiring authorities as diverse talent pipelines to meet NASS’s increasing skillset demands.
- Establish measures of success and show an increase in established workforce transition targets over the five-year period.

Objective 1.3: Develop strategic workforce planning capabilities to support transition from traditional survey data collection to in-depth integration of survey data with alternative sources and methods.***Objective Collaborators: Office of the Administrator, Strategic Planning and Business Services Division, NASS Leadership***

A transition from full survey based statistical products to those that can be transitioned to a hybrid alternative data/survey-based approach will take a cognizant effort from leadership to identify and close new skill gaps. An initial focus will be to establish an effective and repeatable process to assess the current workforce to identify the competency gaps. Once these approaches are honed, NASS will focus on predicting how business transformation will impact the workforce so that an informed transition can occur. NASS will utilize workforce decision support tools and dashboards to provide accurate information to leaders on full time employees (FTE) numbers, occupations, and competencies.

Implementation Strategies

- Leverage strategic workforce planning predictive functions and dashboards to provide accurate information to leaders on full time employees (FTE) numbers, occupations, and competencies.
- Assess staff recruitment and selection practices as they relate to current workforce skills needs to develop partnerships and improved outreach strategies aimed at increasing access to the necessary workforce development opportunities.
- Invest in the modernization of the IT workforce to support a customer-center, data-driven environment.

Strategic Goal 2

Exceptional Customer Experience

NASS has long been the gold standard in providing timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. Agriculture. As indicated by third party customer satisfaction surveys, its statistical products have exceeded customer expectations as the primary source of these type of data due to its engagement with stakeholders, and commitment to its core values of credibility and objectivity. But technology is advancing at a rapid pace and presents not only opportunities for NASS, but also threats. Threats where others could gain the capability to also produce relevant, timely, accurate, and useful agricultural statistics which could pose a potential threat to the agency's credibility if those numbers are in conflict. Therefore, it is critical NASS modernize its technology so that it has all the tools at its disposal to produce statistical products that keep pace with modern capabilities and rising customer expectations to continue delivering gold standard value to producers, researchers, USDA policy makers, Congress, market analysts, agribusinesses, and other data users to make sound, informed decisions.

Objective 2.1: Incorporate new data sources and data collection techniques that are focused on the needs of the user to reduce respondent burden, ease reporting barriers, and increase sample coverage, while maintaining confidentiality and privacy.

Objective Collaborators: Census and Survey Division, Methodology Division, Office of the Administrator, Research and Development Division, and Strategic Planning and Business Services Division

NASS is committed to continually improving data collection and data products, while exploring ways to reduce respondent burden. Some of the methods include using alternate data sources for survey supplementation, moving toward increased Internet response, and enhancing data collection and products based on emerging customer needs. NASS will develop modernized disclosure-protection policies, procedures, and systems to support rigorous privacy protections for data providers, while ensuring timely and efficient dissemination of accurate data products.

Implementation Strategies

- Utilize a human-centered design approach to enhance our interactive portal, providing survey respondents a pathway to respond to surveys and conduct business with other USDA agencies seamlessly and securely through farmers.gov authentication.
- Develop data products using alternative data sources with no additional respondent burden.
- Continue to assess the potential to integrate precision agricultural and satellite imagery into business processes.
- Implement new business processes for surveys and/or products to include a step to review administrative and other sources of data before any new data collection effort.

Objective 2.2: Increase effectiveness of stakeholder engagement.

Objective Collaborators: Office of the Administrator and Strategic Planning and Business Services Division

NASS will enhance stakeholder engagement by leveraging technology and digital communications to raise the perceived value of NASS products and services.

Implementation Strategies

- Implement an expanded customer-centric public affairs strategy that reshapes stakeholder engagement at local and national levels by providing easily accessible and understandable data to improve the ag data user experience in making better informed agricultural community decisions.
- Integrate coordinated stakeholder engagement, diversity outreach, and customer feedback as standard practices in process improvement and program delivery.
- Determine if existing systems can be modified, or new systems created, to capture customer interactions across NASS.
- Continue to participate in customer satisfaction surveys, such as Foresee and the American Customer Satisfaction Index, and maintain an overall ASCI score that exceeds the government average.
- Implement storytelling training for staff that interact with stakeholders on a frequent basis.

Objective 2.3: Raise the awareness of and use of NASS products and services.

Objective Collaborators: Methodology Division, Office of the Administrator, Statistics Division, and Strategic Planning and Business Services Division

NASS provides value when data are accessible and understandable by audiences with different levels of knowledge and different data needs. NASS will make data more accessible and raise data literacy through ongoing stakeholder engagement and education.

Implementation Strategies

- Improved customer ability to search, visualize, and interface with statistical and geographic information.
- Products are developed to specifically target underserved and hard-to-reach populations, remove barriers to participation, and build relationships with rural farming communities to increase engagement with NASS.
- Streamline program policies and modernize application systems to reduce barriers to access statistical products and improve the customer experience.

Strategic Goal 3

Organizational Excellence

NASS will continue to explore the use of new business processes, methodologies, and technologies aiming for faster and more efficient data collection to output quality data with greater speed and relevance. These methodologies and technologies show promise in improving and enhancing the measurements of the agricultural economy and community without imposing additional respondent burden. To expedite and streamline data processing, NASS will commit to enterprise solutions, innovative tools, and data sources.

Objective 3.1: Create new, modern business processes to produce quality data and products at a faster rate.

Objective Collaborators: All Divisions and Staff Offices

NASS will take advantage of new survey lifecycle models using alternative data sources and methods. NASS will continue to modernize processes and support services and measure success by producing high-quality statistical benchmarks, measures, and geographic information.

Implementation Strategies

- Continue the adoption of enterprise cloud platforms to enable greater access to data for collaboration, enhanced analytics and reporting capabilities, and new data sharing capabilities with external stakeholders and researchers.
- Transition from duplicate legacy applications to enterprise-level solutions for data collection, editing, and dissemination.
- Expand business processes to think beyond the traditional survey lifecycle toward a broader information lifecycle model using survey and non-survey data.
- Develop a project management dashboard to track the efficient delivery of projects that support release of new technology and business processes.

Objective 3.2: Mature, expand, and enforce enterprise-level strategic and program management processes and tools to guide data-driven decision-making.

Objective Collaborators: Methodology Division and Strategic Planning and Business Services Division

NASS will leverage the newly established offices within the Strategic Planning and Business Services Division to guide the implementation of mission-critical capabilities—including portfolio management, performance management, risk management, program and project management, and formalized cost estimation. Top quality products and assistance will be provided by staff, including strategic planning, employee time-on-task reporting, and expanding cost estimation practices. NASS will focus these resources to (1) increase integration, (2) formalize knowledge management and transfer, and (3) execute capabilities consistently at the enterprise level. Execution of these capabilities will be facilitated through more formal program evaluations and consistent approaches to program management—a clear and embraced governance process—and continuous improvement feedback loops.

Implementation Strategies

- Invest and support the Project Management Office’s vision to identify and initiate projects with the highest return on investment. Conduct a gap analysis on project management artifacts, create artifact templates and an end-to-end project administration manual, and conduct a training for NASS staff.
- Assess business processes to identify, define, and document existing processes. Processes are repeatable, integrated, and scalable and help NASS meet strategic and operational goals and objectives.
- Adopt lean methods, techniques, and tools for continuous improvement.

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- Invest in the development and use of methodology and technology for record linkage, quality assessment and enhancement, data management, and modern disclosure-limitation and security procedures.
 - Develop and implement a formalized program evaluation process that provides consistency across program management and establishes continuous improvement feedback loops.

Objective 3.3: Mature ability to manage risk and ensure that proven effective internal controls are built into every process and system.

Objective Collaborators: Strategic Planning and Business Services Division

Attention to managing enterprise risk and applying internal controls ensures that NASS performs effectively and efficiently according to regulations, controls, and policy. A strong foundation of integrated risk management and internal controls ensures that data are accurate, privacy is protected, and credibility is enhanced.

Implementation Strategies

- Develop and implement an Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) framework. Utilize this framework to improve NASS's ability to surface threats and establish appropriate responses, reducing surprises, costs, and disruptions for our customers.
- Develop an ERM dashboard that provides the agency an easy way to track and respond to risks.
- Leverage enterprise risk management best practices to identify new opportunities and unique challenges associated with current opportunities. Strategic and operational risks are managed within acceptable tolerances.
- Develop and implement a risk dashboard that leverages the Configuration Control Board's formal process for approving IT configuration changes that impact all NASS IT systems.