



Increased Funding To Strengthen *USDA's* Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS)

The President's fiscal year 2003 budgets for the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) include increases for the Agricultural Resource Management Survey, also known as ARMS. With an increased budget, ERS and NASS will be able to enhance the survey's ability to meet current and emerging data needs, improve the statistical quality of the survey results, and make ARMS data more readily available through web-based dissemination.

The Importance of ARMS

ARMS is USDA's annual, national survey of farms. It is the primary source of information about the financial condition, production practices, use of resources, and economic well-being of America's farmers and farm households. Data and analysis from ARMS answer key questions from USDA policy officials, Congress, and other decision-makers within and outside the Federal Government about the differential impacts of alternative policies and programs across the farm sector and among farm families. ARMS also provides a rich database for researchers to understand the rapidly changing structure and characteristics of American farming.

The Need for More Funding

ARMS funding has not kept pace with increases in the cost of data collection and salaries for planning, managing, and processing the survey. To save money, ERS and NASS have been forced to reduce the size of the survey sample, curtail the amount of information collected on production practices and chemical use, and limit interviewer training, pre-survey publicity, and nonresponse follow-up. These program cuts have adversely affected the performance of the survey and the quality of the ARMS data. At the same time, new demands for ARMS data, such as data for States and more detailed information on different types of farms, have gone unmet.

Improvements Planned

With increased funding, ERS and NASS plan to:

- Improve the statistical accuracy of the survey results by increasing the size of the annual ARMS sample to its historical level of approximately 18,000 to 19,000 farms.
- Return to a cycle of collecting information on production practices and the cost of production for three commodities each year and collect information on field crop chemical use on an annual basis.
- Provide more geographically detailed information, particularly for the 15 States with the greatest value of farm production.
- Improve the rate of survey response with strategies such as State-specific promotion and outreach activities and improved interviewer training.
- Improve web-based dissemination capabilities to make ARMS data more readily available and easily accessible to data users.
- Initiate new research into how the ARMS survey can be better integrated with the Census of Agriculture and other NASS surveys to improve its efficiency.

