

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

**2024 Tenure, Ownership,
and Transition of
Agricultural Land**



Dear Enumerator,

Welcome! This guide will help you navigate the Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land (TOTAL) survey and assist you in getting the highest response rate and most accurate information possible. You play a vital role in this survey's success.

Your work gives producers the opportunity to provide real-world data that will help shape the policies, programs, and issues that affect farms and ranches across the United States.

On behalf of the National Agricultural Statistics Service and the Economic Research Service, I want to thank you for your efforts to collect responses in a timely and organized manner.

Lance Honig
Chairperson, Agricultural Statistics Board
National Agricultural Statistics Service
United States Department of Agriculture

Key Messages

TOTAL is a complex survey, but it is possible to explain it in simple terms. The following key messages will be useful when approaching producers about the survey and explaining its purpose and benefits. Use the key messages to help facilitate dialogue, answer questions, and address concerns.

General

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and Economic Research Service (ERS) will conduct the TOTAL survey beginning on December 27, 2024.
- By participating in the TOTAL survey, farmers and ranchers have an opportunity to provide accurate, real-life data that will help shape the policies, programs, and issues that affect them.
- Farm organizations, researchers, other government agencies, members of Congress, and state and local officials will use the information from the TOTAL survey to inform important decisions concerning the economic viability of American agriculture, rural communities, and other emerging issues.
- Every response counts. We encourage all producers who receive the survey to complete it promptly and accurately to help give a voice to U.S. agriculture.
- The information NASS collects for this survey is kept strictly confidential, as required by federal law. The results of this survey will be available for statistical purposes in aggregate form only, ensuring that no individual operation or producer can be identified.
- NASS will publish the data in the Tenure, Ownership and Transition of Agricultural Land report on October 31, 2025. All NASS reports are available online at nass.usda.gov/Publications.
- For more information on the TOTAL survey and reports, visit: nass.usda.gov/go/total or ers.usda.gov/arms.
- As part of the Census of Agriculture program, participation in the TOTAL survey is mandatory by federal law. This same law ensures confidentiality of all respondents.

Uses of TOTAL survey data

- TOTAL Survey will obtain data to accurately define the economic status of U.S. farm operations and households for and representative information to report the status of major agricultural states.
- Data from TOTAL will contribute to accurately estimating several key components of the farm sector national accounts.
- TOTAL survey will be the only data source that offers an operator-landowner perspective on the use of debt financing in U.S. agriculture.
- TOTAL survey data on lease arrangements and lease structure will play an important role in how government commodity programs affect farm production and returns.
- TOTAL survey will provide information needed to project and understand trends and impacts in land transfers in the next twenty years.
- TOTAL survey will provide the only comprehensive source of information on racial/ethnic dimensions of land ownership the U.S.
- USDA relies heavily on the cost-of-production data collected by this survey in Farm Bill discussions and decision-making.
- The U.S. Congress will use data collected in this year's TOTAL survey to evaluate annual cost-of-production estimates for more than 15 commodities covered under farm-support legislation.
- The Bureau of Economic Analysis will use income data from TOTAL survey to calculate the farm sector portion of the U.S. gross domestic product.

Tips from the Field

Simply having good information and relevant messages isn't always enough to convince a producer to respond to the survey. Here are a few tips from seasoned field enumerators that you may find useful when conducting the TOTAL survey.

- It may be valuable to call ahead and set up an appointment time that is most convenient for the producer, and let them know how much time the survey will take to complete.
- Provide producers a list of materials they need at hand that will help survey completion go faster.
- Be on time. Be courteous, confident and positive.
- Avoid conversations about politics or other divisive topics. Keep on subject as much as possible.
- Be as efficient as possible when completing the lengthy survey.
- Be prepared to answer questions. Bring promotional materials along with previous NASS publications to reinforce your answers. Some useful resources are available for download and viewing at nass.usda.gov/go/total.
- Explaining the TOTAL survey as an agriculture "report" instead of a "survey" sometimes has a more positive connotation with producers.
- Share NASS website information and highlight how survey information is available to the public.
- To reinforce confidentiality, provide a state agricultural statistics report to prove that no names or addresses are listed.
- Know your questionnaire and the questions in detail.
- Additional tips for enumerators can be found at: nass.usda.gov/nass/surveys.

Filter results by choosing "General Enumerator Training" for training resources such as "Telephone Enumerator Quick Guide For Conducting Surveys" and "Increasing Cooperation and Engagement: Dealing with Objections."

Frequently Asked Questions

Below are a few frequently asked questions you may receive from producers, news media, and the general public. Be familiar with the following information so that you are prepared to respond.

What is TOTAL?

The Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land (TOTAL) survey is a survey of farmers and ranchers conducted by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service and the Economic Research Service to gather objective information on the finances and production practices and land ownership of U.S. farms and ranches. TOTAL is a major source of data for effective policy and decision-making in government and the agriculture industry. This survey is a special study conducted for the Census of Agriculture.

What data will be collected?

TOTAL gathers information on when and how agricultural land was purchased, as well as operating costs, capital improvements, labor use, and assets and debts for agricultural production, as well as farm-related income, government payments, off-farm income, and operator and household characteristics.

Who receives the TOTAL survey?

All producers selected for this survey have produced or sold, or would normally have sold, at least \$1,000 of agricultural products during the previous year. This includes both large full-time and small part-time operations, as well as lifestyle and retirement farms and ranches.

How will TOTAL benefit producers?

Farm financial and cost-of-production information collected by TOTAL will document the current land ownership and financial conditions of the U.S. agriculture industry. The survey will benefit producers by providing objective, accurate information to farm organizations, the USDA, other government agencies, members of Congress, state and local officials, and farmers themselves to make informed decisions about various policies and programs that affect the future of U.S. farmers and farm families. The information collected from TOTAL ensures decisions are based on facts and not opinions.

What should I expect if selected to participate in the TOTAL survey?

If selected to participate in the TOTAL survey, we will mail you a survey in December. Please complete the questionnaire and mail it back in the enclosed, prepaid envelope.

Participants may also respond online at agcounts.usda.gov. Responding online is fast, and secure. To get started all you need is your survey code which is on the front page of your questionnaire.

If you don't respond, a trained enumerator will follow up with you to arrange a convenient time to collect the data by phone. Having farm financial and enterprise records readily available will ensure the accuracy of the information, help the interview run smoothly and reduce the time it takes to complete the survey.

Will my information be kept confidential?

Absolutely! The information you provide will be used for statistical purposes only. Your response will be kept confidential and any person who willfully discloses ANY identifiable information about you or your operation is subject to a jail term, a fine, or both. This survey is conducted in accordance with the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2018, Title III of Pub. L. No. 115-435, codified in 44 U.S.C. Ch. 35 and other applicable Federal laws.

