

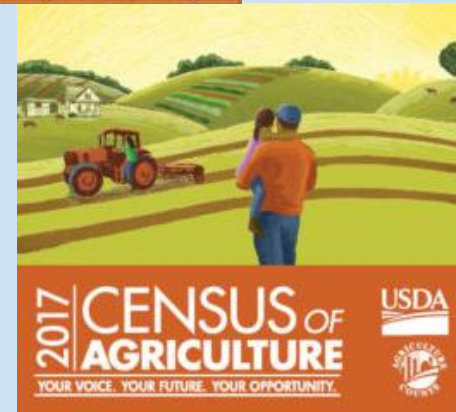
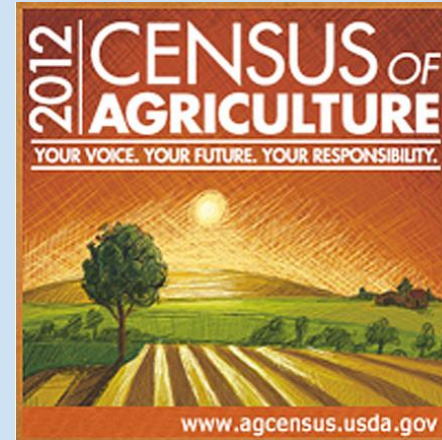
A vibrant green cornfield under a clear blue sky with rolling hills in the background. The sun is shining from the upper right, creating a warm glow and long shadows across the rows of corn.

AG Census Response Rate

Laura Exar and Sara Ramotnik

Overview

- History of the AG Census
- AG Census Framework and Timeline
- Changes from the 2012 AG Census
- Trends from the 2017 AG Census
- Response Rates
- NASS Method of Filling in Response Gaps
- NASS Participation Outreach Methods
- Why Aren't Farmers Filling It Out?
- Our Thoughts

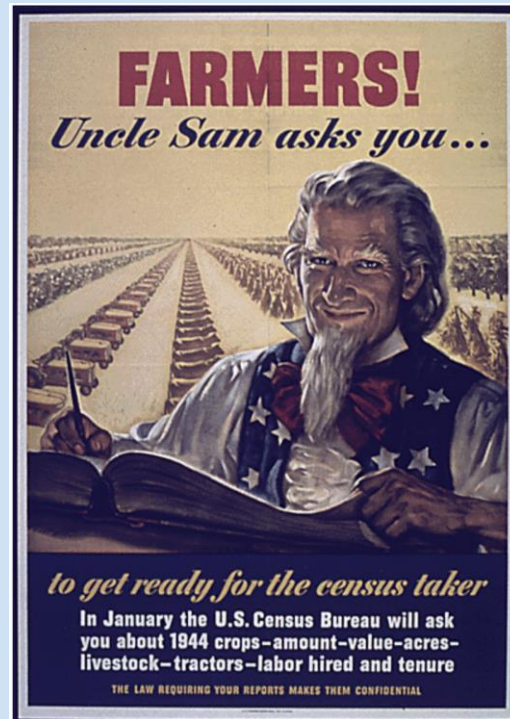




“The ‘Census of Agriculture’ provides the only source of comprehensive agricultural data for every state and county in the nation... The data are widely used by local and national decision-makers to help shape agricultural research and education programs, inform farm programs, boost rural infrastructure, determine disaster relief needs and more.”

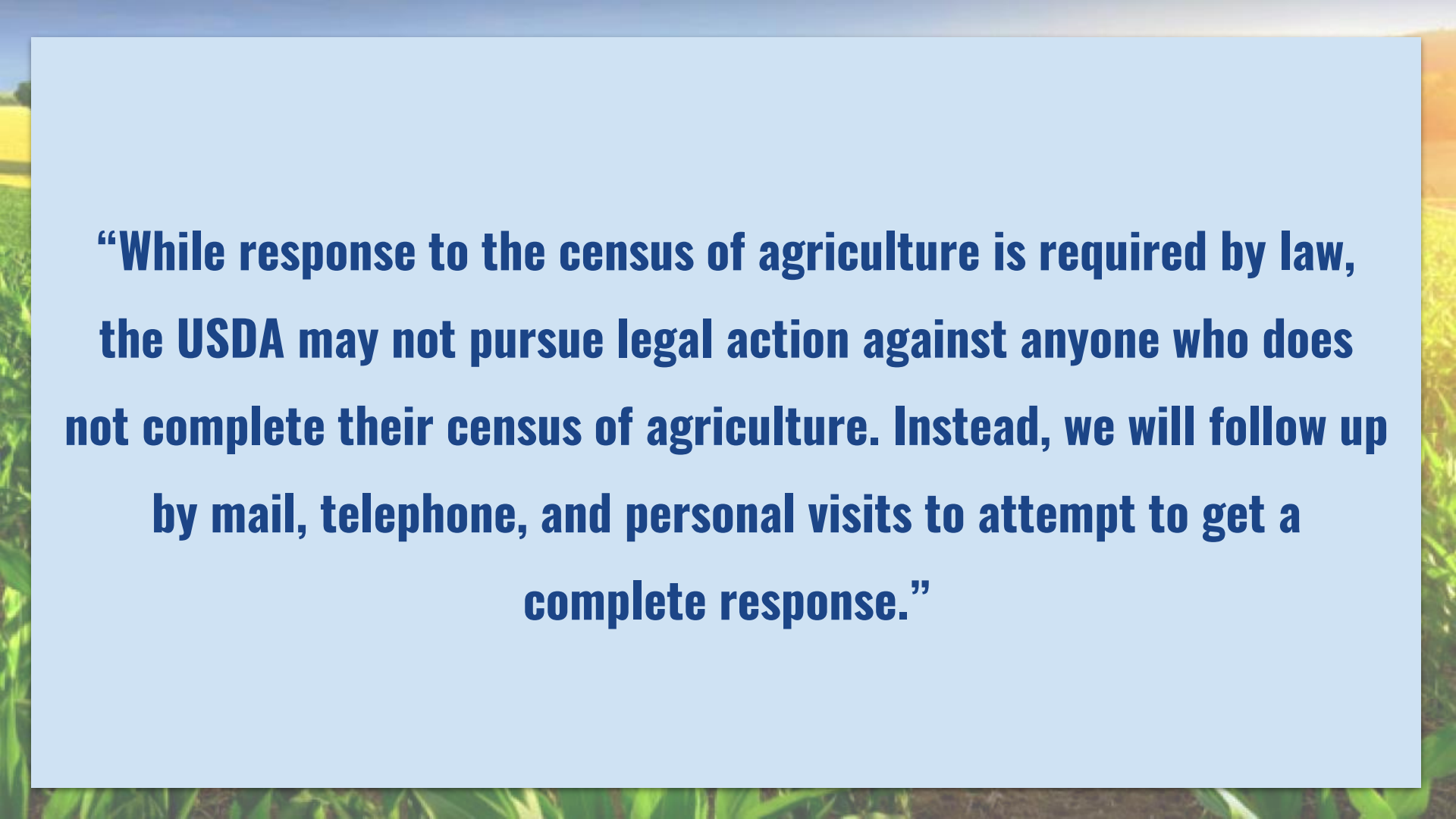
History of the AG Census

- First taken in 1840 by the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) since 1997 due to the 1997 Appropriations Act
- “The Census looks at land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income and expenditures, and many other areas” (Cornell Mann Library)



AG Census Framework

- “Farm” Definition: “any place that produced and sold, or normally would have sold, **\$1,000 or more** of agricultural products during the census year”
- Surveys can be completed online or mailed in
- AG Census data collected every five years
- NASS is bound by law to use the data for statistical purposes only.
- All data is kept confidential and are presented in aggregate form so that no individual operation or producer can be identified



“While response to the census of agriculture is required by law, the USDA may not pursue legal action against anyone who does not complete their census of agriculture. Instead, we will follow up by mail, telephone, and personal visits to attempt to get a complete response.”

2017 AG Census Timeline

- December 2017: Survey mailed to participants by NASS
 - Can register online or you will be sent a survey if you have completed the census in the past.
- February 5, 2018: Responses are due to NASS
- August 2018: Reminders sent to those who did not respond and surveys collected up until this point
- February 2019: Results set to be released (originally)
- April 11, 2019: Results actually released (due to government shutdown)

Trends from 2017 AG Census

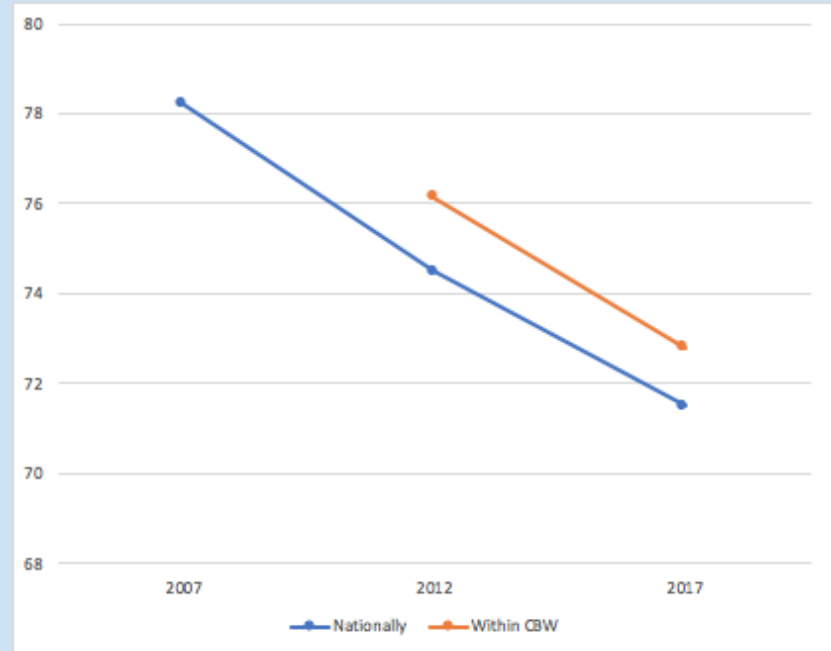
- Total number of farms declined 3% from 2012 to 2017
 - Declined 7.8% since the 1997 AG Census
 - Declines occurred among mid sized farms
 - Small and large farms showed increases
- Ninety-six percent of farms and ranches are family owned
- Farms with Internet access rose from 69.6 percent in 2012 to 75.4 percent in 2017
- The average age of all producers is 57.5, up 1.2 years from 2012
- 11 percent of all farmers have served in the military
- Total number of female producers increased by nearly 27 percent since 2012

Changes from 2012 Census

- Increased inclusivity by changing verbiage
 - “Producers” v. “operators”
 - Able to designate multiple people as the “principal operator”
 - May skew statistics with female and younger farmers
- Added new questions to expand demographic data
 - Information about farmers in the military
- More detailed information about farm marketing practices
- Improved outreach and awareness efforts

Response Rates

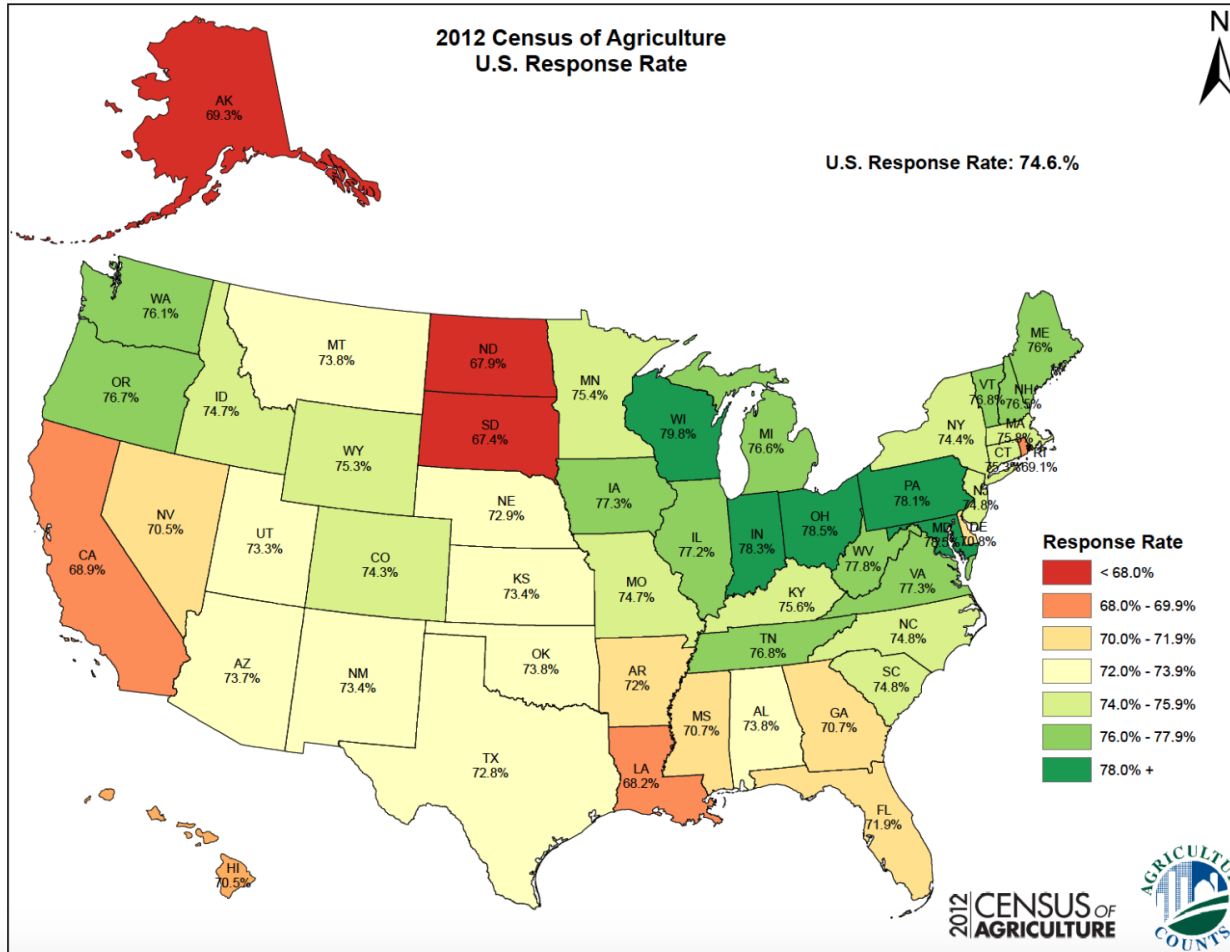
- Sent to 3 million people in 2017
- Nearly 25% of responses were completed online
- National Response Rates:
 - 2017: 71.5%
 - 2012: 74.5%
 - 2007: 78.2%
- CBW Response Rates:
 - 2017: 72.8%
 - 2012: 76.15%



2012 Census of Agriculture U.S. Response Rate



U.S. Response Rate: 74.6 %



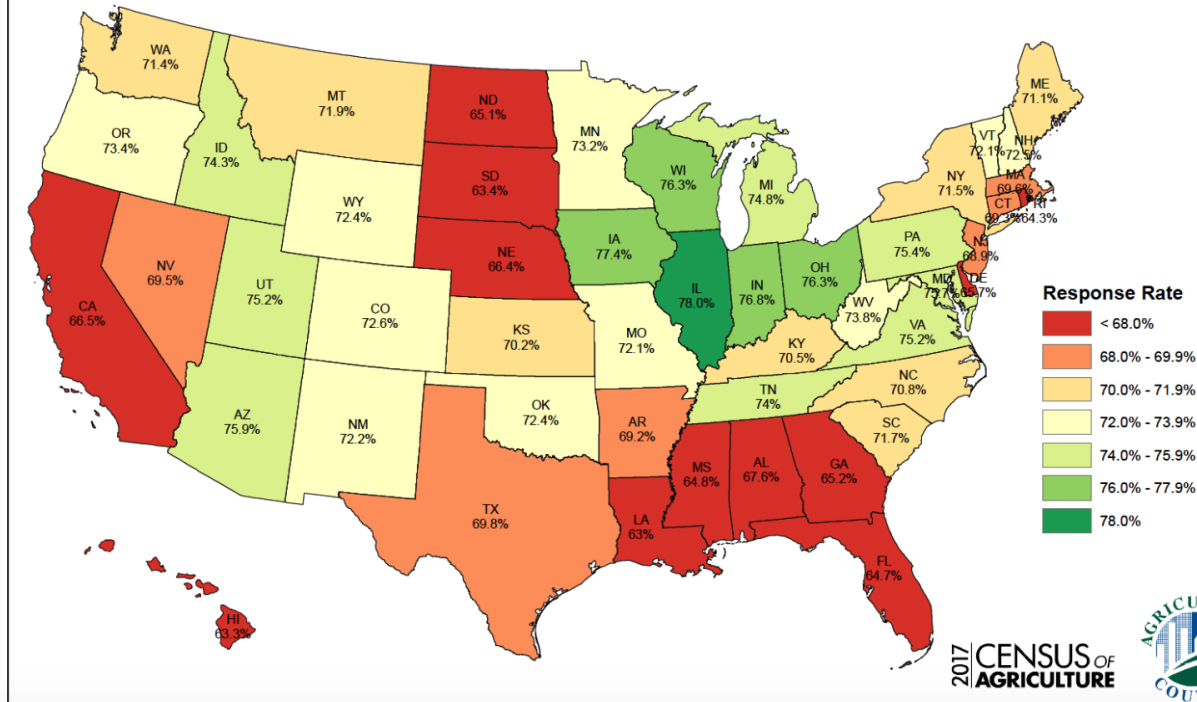
2012 CENSUS OF
AGRICULTURE



2017 Census of Agriculture U.S. Response Rate



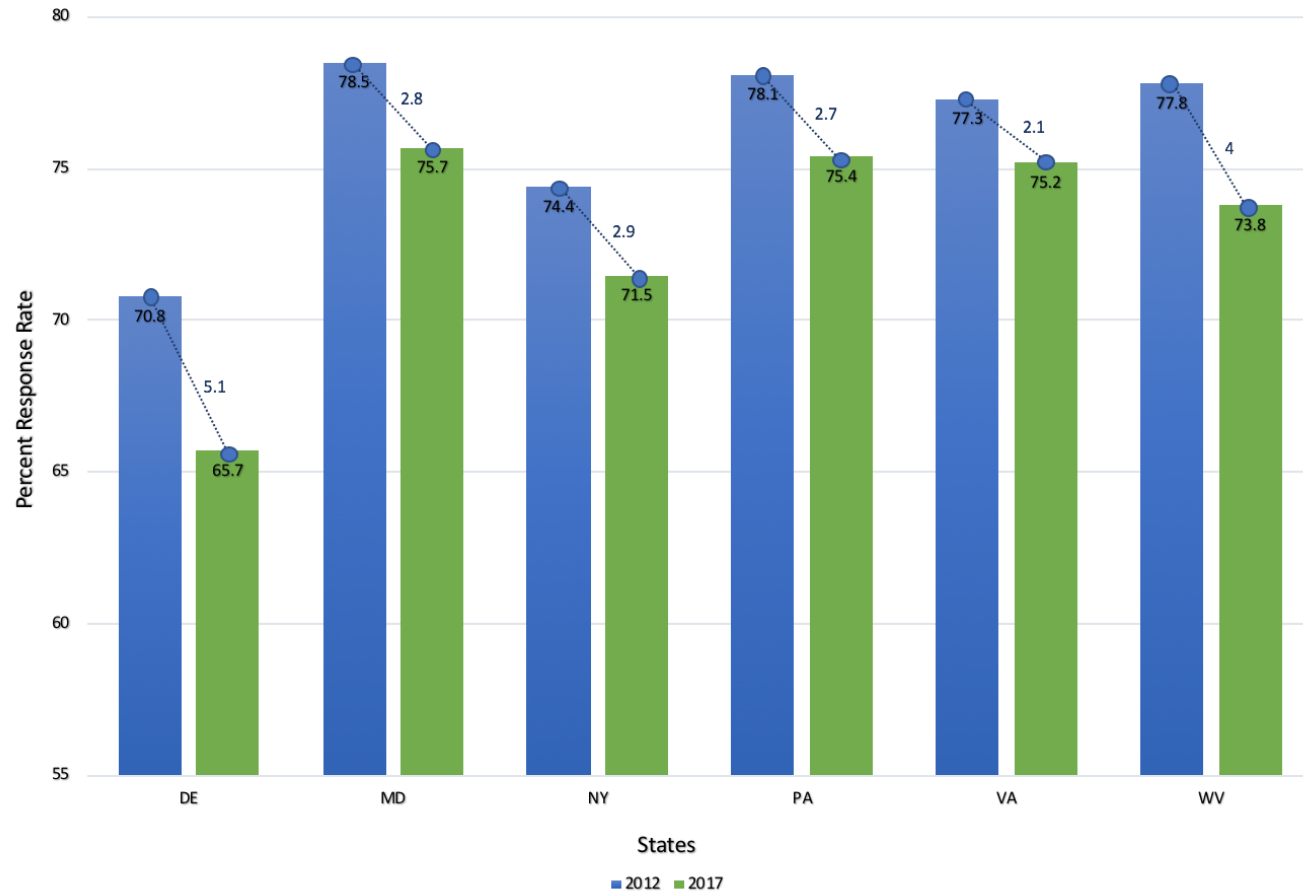
U.S. Response Rate: 71.8%



2017 CENSUS OF
AGRICULTURE



Changes from 2012 to 2017 within CBW



NASS Methods of Filling in the Gaps

- “NASS used methodology to correct for nonresponse, undercoverage, and misclassification”
- Quantify uncertainty through the use of existing data
 - Census responses are compared to data NASS already has and other administrative data such as surveys

NASS Participation Outreach Methods

- Improved online survey response
- Improved data visualization
- New ways of communicating with NASS survey recipients

Why Aren't Farmers Filling It Out?

- Someone from “Ag Web, Powered by Farm Journal” on the census: “But I have a fundamental issue with the ag census, just like I do with crop reports, and many other USDA outputs. They take far too long.”
- “Civil Eats” on how many farms produce under \$1000 of goods every year and this information is being withheld from the general public
- Potential participants are not sure of whether or not the Ag Census is mandatory

Why Aren't Farmers Filling It Out? Cont.

- Positive opinions
- Many platforms have also highlighted the importance of the AG Census

Our Thoughts

- NASS: “Response rates for all surveys are declining”
- \$1,000 a year threshold
- 1 in 4 farms do not have internet access
- Distrust of government interference
- Unclear whether the census is required
- Website is confusing
- Questions are confusing--better to not answer than give false information



Questions?

Sources

- <https://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus/FAQ/2017/index.php>
- <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2019/04/11/2017-census-agriculture-data-now-available>
- <https://www.fb.org/market-intel/net-farm-income-projected-to-drop-to-12-year-low>
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- <https://www.agweb.com/article/johns-world-why-does-the-ag-census-turnaround-take-so-long/>
- <https://civileats.com/2019/04/12/ag-census-is-it-a-farm-if-it-doesnt-sell-food/>
- https://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus/Census_Story/
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