

# Be counted—by the National Agricultural Statistics Service

*In Cheyenne, the USDA highlights the status of Wyoming agriculture and rural communities*

In an office in Cheyenne is a group of people charged with taking the pulse of Wyoming agriculture.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is an arm of the USDA whose mission is to delve directly into what is happening on our farms and ranches.

“We’re the official statistical agency for the USDA,” says Bill Meyer, regional director for NASS, “and what we do in Wyoming is collect data directly from ag producers.” The data is the basis of some of the 400-plus reports they produce a year, which are accessed by a wide variety of users interested in agriculture.

## Useful products

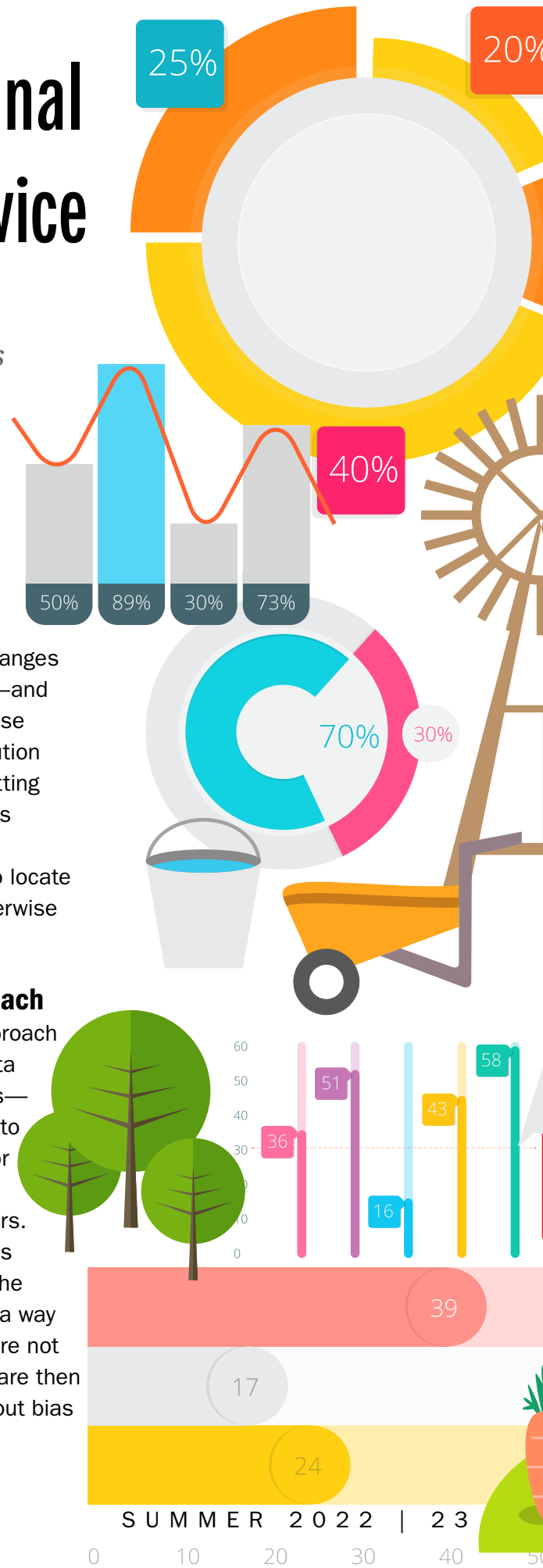
NASS statisticians are known as the “fact finders of U.S. agriculture” due to the volume and breadth of information they produce. Their publications cover a wide range of subjects, including prices paid to producers for their raw ag commodities; the number of calves born in a particular time

period; and the acreage of land used for farming and ranching.

For instance, a recent survey of hemp producers was able to quantify the changes taking place with this new—and potentially risky—crop. These changes might suggest caution for someone thinking of getting into the industry, or perhaps suggest an opportunity for someone deciding where to locate a processing facility or otherwise supporting the industry.

## A mission-driven approach

The agency’s overall approach is to begin by building a data set, mostly through surveys—either by mailing a request to complete a survey (online or hard copy), or by calling or visiting farmers and ranchers. Next, NASS creates a series of publications specific to the topic. Data are reported in a way that individual operations are not identifiable. These reports are then released to the public without bias



For the Census of Agriculture, NASS' goal is to account for any land from which \$1,000 or more in agricultural products was produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year.

NASS encourages all producers who do not currently receive USDA NASS surveys and censuses to sign up at [bit.ly/usda-nass-count](http://bit.ly/usda-nass-count).

NASS safeguards the privacy of all respondents. Information is used for statistical purposes only, so the information provided by respondents is kept confidential and will not be published in identifiable form, as required by federal law.

Visit [bit.ly/ag-census-2017](http://bit.ly/ag-census-2017) for a snapshot of the results from the most recent Census of Agriculture, conducted in 2017.

or favor to anyone so that no one can profit from inside knowledge.

Meyer says that the overarching purpose of NASS is simple: to “provide timely, accurate and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture.”

## The Census of Agriculture

Of the hundreds of surveys NASS carries out, the crown jewel is the Census of Agriculture. Every five years, the Census of Agriculture counts all U.S. farms and ranches and the people who operate them.

“In the last Census we sent 3 million questionnaires out to reach every producer we could find,” Meyer says.

The Census of Agriculture looks at land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income and expenditures, and more. The data are critical to agribusinesses and trade associations who serve producers; community planners

who supply services; policymakers who shape programs; and farmers and ranchers making decisions about their own operations.

## Accessing the data

Much of the data collected from NASS' efforts can be found at [bit.ly/nass-usda](http://bit.ly/nass-usda). For each state and county there are factsheets, plus databases of source statistics. In particular, look for the annual statistical bulletin for each state as well as fascinating spatial data maps of what is produced in Wyoming. And, if you're a data wonk, check out NASS' data briefings on their YouTube channel at [bit.ly/usda-nass-youtube](http://bit.ly/usda-nass-youtube).

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**Cole Ehmke** is the former University of Wyoming Extension agriculture entrepreneurship specialist. For a blast from the past, check out his 2009 article “Gauging farm life: Latest census shows growing diversity,” which discusses the results of the 2007 Census of Agriculture. It can be found at [bit.ly/BB-farm-life-2009](http://bit.ly/BB-farm-life-2009).

*Plant ID apps continued from page 16.*

assist when comparing the unidentified plant with suggestions from an app. Strategies to keep in mind when using apps for plant identification include limiting background interference and taking note of time of year, light quality, other plants in the area, and habitat.

Smartphone apps can be a great place to start in identifying unknown plants. However, it is important to verify with other sources. Users have found success when using the same image across multiple apps and verifying with books, reputable social media sources, or other resources.

Users can also seek out advice from University of Wyoming Extension offices, Weed and Pest district offices, UW Extension Master Gardeners, or local plant societies.

While summer is ideal for less screen time, consider making an exception to explore plant identification apps. Have fun!

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