

## **Wahpeton (ND) Daily News**

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***"Still time to respond to 2017 Census of Agriculture - Agriculture -***

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Still time to respond to 2017 Census of Agriculture

### Agriculture

There's still time. To ensure an accurate representation of the agriculture industry in this country, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service has extended their 2017 Census of Agriculture response deadline through spring, and the Rural Coalition/Coalicion Rural is calling on all farmers and ranchers to participate.

Representing thousands of diverse producers throughout the United States, the RC has worked for 40 years to promote just and sustainable rural development that brings fair returns to diverse farmers and communities. It also works to protect the environment and bring safe and healthy food to consumers. Serving as an advocacy voice, the RC was able to secure more than 30 sections of policies in the 2008 Farm Bill that provided more opportunities for small and minority producers, and developed methods and models to serve its constituencies best.

Small and minority producers need policymakers to continue to respect their value. According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, small farms make up 88 percent of all U.S. farms. It's data like this that demonstrate economic importance. With a new Farm Bill around the corner, this is the time to be counted.

The Census of Agriculture, conducted just once every five years and sent to every farm and ranch in the country, is the only source of uniform, comprehensive, and impartial agriculture data down to the county level. Providing an overall picture of U.S. agriculture, census data are then relied on when making important decisions about farm policy, disaster relief, loan programs, research, technology development, infrastructure improvements, and more. Trade associations, extension educators, agribusinesses, even farmers and ranchers themselves have used census data in support of American agriculture.

For nearly 30 years, the Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers (OASDFR) Program has been the primary tool to help historically underserved producers gain access to USDA's credit, commodity, conservation, and other services. In the four years of the 2008 Farm Bill, the program received \$75 million in mandatory funds, about \$18 million per year. According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, during that time, the number of Hispanic and Asian-American farmers increased 21 percent, African-American farmers increased 12 percent, and Native American farmers increased 5 percent. In the 2014 Farm Bill, Congress expanded OASDFR to include Veteran farmers, making increased funding all the more necessary. However, that Farm Bill reduced mandatory funds to only \$10 million annually.

If everyone is counted, data from the 2017 Census of Agriculture will help make the case for restoring the additional funding needed to bring OASDFR to its previous or better levels. But this is just one example of how census data have been and will be used. For farmers and ranchers, the Census of Agriculture is their voice, their opportunity to be represented in the data. There's strength in numbers.

This year's Census of Agriculture aims to show an even more detailed account of the industry. Producers will see a new question about military veteran status, expanded questions about food

marketing practices, and questions about on-farm decision-making to better capture the roles and contributions of new farmers, women farmers, and others involved in running the business.

What will the 2017 Census of Agriculture tell us about changes over the last five years? We will see, but now is the time to ensure an accurate representation of the industry a " not just for the future of your operation but your community as well. We urge you to respond to your Census of Agriculture today.

The writers are **Lorette Picciano**, executive director of the Rural Coalition/Coalicion; Willard Tillman of the Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, and Rudy Arredondo of the National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association and a member of the Rural Coalition/Coalicion board.

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***Highlights: There's still time. To ensure an accurat..., Lorette Picciano***