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Census of Agriculture Shows Growing Diversity in U.S. Farming

WASHINGTON, Feb. 4, 2009 – The number of farms in the United States has grown 4 percent and the operators of those farms have become more diverse in the past five years, according to results of the 2007 Census of Agriculture released today by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

"The Census of Agriculture is a valuable tool that provides the general public with an accurate and comprehensive view of American agriculture. It's also a set of benchmarks against which this Department must measure and demonstrate its performance to agriculture and the taxpayer," said Secretary Tom Vilsack.

" In the spirit of President Obama's call to make government more transparent, inclusive, and collaborative, I will be directing my team at USDA to review the findings of the 2007 Census and propose ambitious, measureable goals to make sure that the People's Department is hard at work for all the people – our diverse customers and the full diversity of agriculture."

The 2007 Census counted 2,204,792 farms in the United States, a net increase of 75,810 farms. Nearly 300,000 new farms have begun operation since the last census in 2002. Compared to all farms nationwide, these new farms tend to have more diversified production, fewer acres, lower sales and younger operators who also work off-farm.

In the past five years, U.S. farm operators have become more demographically diverse. The 2007 Census counted nearly 30 percent more women as principal farm operators. The count of Hispanic operators grew by 10 percent, and the counts of American Indian, Asian and Black farm operators increased as well.

The latest census figures show a continuation in the trend towards more small and very large farms and fewer mid-sized operations. Between 2002 and 2007, the number of farms with sales of less than \$2,500 increased by 74,000. The number of farms with sales of more than \$500,000 grew by 46,000 during the same period.

Census results show that the majority of U.S. farms are smaller operations. More than 36 percent are classified as residential/lifestyle farms, with sales of less than \$250,000 and operators with a primary occupation other than farming. Another 21 percent are retirement farms, which have sales of less than \$250,000 and operators who reported they are retired.

In addition to looking at farm numbers, operator demographics and economic aspects of farming, the Census of Agriculture delves into numerous other areas, including organic, value-added, and specialty production, all of which are on the rise.

The 2007 Census found that 57 percent of all farmers have internet access, up from 50 percent in 2002. For the first time in 2007, the census also looked at high-speed Internet access. Of those producers accessing the Internet, 58 percent reported having a high-speed connection.

Other "firsts" in the 2007 Census include questions about on-farm energy generation, community-supported agriculture arrangements and historic barns.

The Census of Agriculture, conducted every five years, is a complete count of the nation's

farms and ranches and the people who operate them. It provides the only source of uniform, comprehensive agricultural data for every county in the nation. Census results are available online at www.agcensus.usda.gov .

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