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USDA NASS
Data Lab Handbook

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Service

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1 Introduction

Welcome to the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Data Lab. NASS values agricultural research and seeks to provide accurate and useful data in service to U.S. agriculture. The NASS Data Lab is managed by the Data Lab and Data Access Group (DLDAG) in the Methodology Division and is governed by the Data Access and Disclosure Review Board (DADRB).

This USDA NASS Data Lab Handbook accompanies the NASS Policy and Standards Memorandum on Confidentiality and Security regarding Requests for Unpublished Data. It informs Special Sworn Agents (approved data users) accessing agricultural census and survey data for analytical research. **All researchers must read and adhere to all policies and regulations outlined in this handbook – compliance is mandatory**. The handbook comprises three sections detailing the policies, procedures, and support related to the NASS Data Lab and data access.

- Section 2 describes the regulations and policies that govern the use of NASS data. It explains the rules enforced to protect the confidentiality of the data and those who have provided it.

- Section 3 explains the process for obtaining access to confidential NASS data, including eligibility, application forms, and agreements. It also details security requirements including identity verification and site inspections.

- Section 4 highlights disclosure methodology at NASS and outlines disclosure review rules for all projects. It also itemizes requirements for submitting export requests and discusses NASS policy regarding the review of reports and articles prepared from the analysis performed.

- Section 5 describes select data resources available through NASS.

Send any questions to SM.NASS.Data.Lab@usda.gov if clarification of NASS policies is needed.

2 Regulations and Policies

2.1 Special Sworn Agents

Special Sworn Agents are authorized to access NASS data only for the specific project, datasets, variables, and objectives approved in their agreement. NASS collects these data directly from farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses, providing statistics that measure their agricultural practices. These data were collected under the authority of the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2018 (CIPSEA), Title III of Public Law No. 115-435, codified in 44 U.S.C. Ch. 35, which requires that all information be used for statistical purposes only.

CIPSEA gives discretionary authority to NASS to swear in Special Sworn Agents to access NASS data. No individual has a right to the appointment nor is NASS obligated to appoint any individual. Data access can be provided to US-based academia from public or private universities, other USDA agencies, state government agencies with NASS cooperative agreements, and other Federal Statistical agencies for purposes that serve the public and contribute significantly to understanding the agricultural sector or the statistical procedures used by NASS to collect and summarize data. These data are not to be used for regulatory, enforcement, or investigative purposes.

2.2 Safeguarding Confidentiality

CIPSEA requires that no information which could be used to identify or closely approximate data for an individual farm, establishment, or enterprise be released to the public. NASS Special Sworn Agents must adhere to all policies, rules, and regulations of NASS, especially those governing the usage of confidential data. Data access is restricted to the dataset(s) and variables explicitly defined in each approved agreement with NASS. These agreements include, but are not limited to, the following forms (descriptions for each are found in the sections below).

- *Standard Application Process* (SAP) *Application*
- *CIPSEA Data User Agreement* (DUA)
- *NASS ADM-042 Request to Access Unpublished Data*
- *NASS ADM-043 Certification and Restrictions on Use of Unpublished Data*
- *NASS ADM-044 User Attestation*

In compliance with CIPSEA law, violation or breach of the confidentiality of any individual is subject to fines up to $250,000 and/or 5 years imprisonment. No information, which can be used to identify operators of individual farms, ranches, establishments, or enterprises, may be removed from the secure data access point at any time, in any format. Datasets will remain accessible only through secure, authorized channels and cannot be copied or transferred to any other devices, including portable drives, phones, tablets, or laptops. Moreover, screen-sharing,

snipping, or reproducing is strictly prohibited and subject to fines and penalties.

Special Sworn Agents may not discuss any record level data from individual farms, establishments, or enterprises with anyone outside of NASS unless they are approved to access the same dataset on the same project. Research must remain within the scope of the approved project.

Any data that could be used, directly or indirectly, to approximate the level of activity of any individual farm, ranch, establishment, or enterprise must be suppressed prior to release. NASS must review all materials requested for export from the data enclave for the possible disclosure risk of confidential information. The disclosure review section of this document outlines output restrictions and necessary criteria for the disclosure review process.

NASS publishes several market-sensitive data series through the Agricultural Statistics Board. Release of these data is done in such a way to ensure everyone has access to the information at the same time and no one gains a competitive advantage. Requests for data that could compromise this objective will be denied.

3 Data Access Procedures

Access to NASS microdata requires project approval by the Chair of the Agricultural Statistics Board through the Data Access and Disclosure Review Board (DADRB). Researchers must request access using the Standard Application Process (SAP) online application process, or in special circumstances, an ADM-042. Following project approval security protocols will be completed for each team member before data access.

3.1 Eligibility

All members of the research team must be associated with a U.S. institution, agency, or company and all researchers must access the data from within the United States.

Requests by academic institutions must be made by a professor/advisor project lead; students, who are not official agents of the institution, are not permitted to be project leads.

Foreign national researchers are generally permitted to access NASS data, but under the National Farm Security Action Plan released on July 8, 2025, foreign nationals from *Countries of Particular Concern* will not receive security clearance.

3.2 Standard Application Process

The Standard Application Process, or SAP, is the primary way to apply for access to protected data from all 16 federal statistical agencies and units for evidence-building. Through this process the researcher submits a detailed project plan and CIPSEA Data Users Agreement (DUA) ready for NASS review and approval consideration. The DUA is an agreement between NASS, the institution/agency, and the project lead. The DUA must be signed by all three parties and cannot be altered.

The SAP website, sap.nsf.gov, includes a metadata catalog of confidential data assets, or "restricted data," available for research. Using this catalog, researchers can determine if restricted data are appropriate for specific statistical research objectives and apply directly online.

3.2.1 Preparing and Submitting a Proposal

A comprehensive guide on completing the SAP application can be found on the NASS website: Research Proposal Guidelines.

Data access projects are granted primarily for statistical analysis seeking modeled results (inference, regression coefficients, standard errors, cluster, and the like) and not to reproduce

summary tables of descriptive statistics. Summary statistics (e.g. variable means, totals, etc.) are allowed, but only to the extent that they support modeling output and are limited to statistics required for a journal article or research paper. In this case, sample table shells must be provided in the SAP application.

Researchers must limit the number of files they request for export from the enclave to only the output necessary to produce the final report or paper. Restrictions are applied on the type and size of research results that can be released from the enclave. The output expected to be released are the results of statistical modeling and tests and specified tables as found in an article in a peer-reviewed academic journal.

The SAP application sections *Methodology* and *Requested Output* are important in assessing both the substance of the proposal and the risk of disclosing confidential information. Applications must clearly indicate that the project will emphasize statistical modeling output. The geographic level of aggregation must also be specified in the project output. Researchers who desire access to, and thus disclosure review of, large volumes of aggregated or tabular output derived exclusively from a NASS data asset must request a Special Tabulation rather than requesting access to record-level CIPSEA protected data.

Applications are evaluated on a project-by-project basis; that is, an DUA or ADM-042 is required for each project, with specifications. Data access requests for the Census of Agriculture 2007 and newer must submit a list of requested variables using a NASS-provided spreadsheet at the time of the request. The list of requested variables is instrumental in the decision-making process. Although amending the variable list is possible, researchers are advised to submit a comprehensive list from the onset. Data ingestion fees apply. Access is granted based upon many factors, including the fitness-for-use of the data for the stated objectives and minimally selected variables that explicitly target those objectives.

3.2.2 Approval Process and Time Frames

After application submission, each research team will be assigned a NASS Data Steward, who is aware of NASS data products and specializes in the operation of the data enclave. The role of these individuals is to help researchers by assisting through the approval process, conducting all security protocols, transmitting the dataset(s), and arranging for disclosure review.

NASS complies with the timeframe for application approval allowed by the SAP; 12 weeks for single agency applications and 24 weeks for multiple agency applications. Once approval from the Data Access and Disclosure Review Board (DADRB) is received, it is recommended that researchers allow several weeks for NASS to prepare the data and for researchers to complete the necessary security protocols before access to the data enclave is granted and research can begin.

3.2.3 Projects with Multiple Institutions

If multiple organizations or institutions are participating in the project, a separate DUA is required for each organization or institution. Each DUA will require the signature of a faculty member from the institution participating in the research project as well as a signature of a Senior Official from the institution authorized to bind the institution to the terms laid out in the DUA. The project lead on the DUA cannot also sign as the Senior Official. Modifications to the DUA provided in the SAP will not be permitted under any circumstances.

3.3 ADM-042

For special circumstances, the ADM-042, Request to Access Unpublished Data, is used to request access to record-level data. This form is reserved for parties who already have an external project agreement with NASS for survey design, testing, and/or collection.

3.4 Data Enclave

The data enclave is a platform that provides secure remote data access to approved researchers. It is owned and operated by a private vendor and is fee-based; all enclave account fees must be paid by the researchers directly to the vendor. NASS highly recommends that researchers are aware of their institution/agency process for outside invoicing. Data access in the enclave is contingent upon finalized fee payment, and this process can increase the project timeline significantly.

The data enclave provides researchers with remote access to approved datasets for analysis via a secure internet connection using the researcher's computer and web browser from an approved U.S. site location. Researchers will have access to a suite of analytical software to use within the data enclave. For the researcher, the data enclave appears as a cloud-based Microsoft Windows environment.

Multiple researchers approved on a single project will share the same virtual space and have access to the same approved project folders, but each must have their own account in the enclave. NASS strongly encourages advisors to have an enclave account if they would like to see the data or output prior to the final disclosure review. Without a separate data enclave account, project members are authorized to collaborate through planning, oversight, and dialogue only.

The data enclave contains controls that prevent users from printing and transferring files to and from the environment via USB, e-mail, screen captures, or otherwise. Researchers may not conduct any research or analysis with the approved data outside of the enclave. All files intended for removal from the data enclave must first be reviewed by NASS personnel for disclosure concerns. Only files that have been reviewed by NASS and passed disclosure review may be removed from the data enclave. Requests for export are made in the data enclave environment;

training will be provided by the data enclave manager. NASS criteria for export requests can be found in the disclosure review section of this handbook.

The enclave costs involve a user-setup fee and annual project workspace fees. There are configuration options based on researcher needs including CPU, memory, storage, compute hours, data ingestions, and export requests. Additional services beyond configuration specifications may be purchased by invoice. Invoicing is handled directly by the vendor. Each enclave account is non-transferrable and cannot be shared. The data enclave vendor will discuss pricing options with researchers before onboarding.

Data enclave staff are trained to administer the regulations, policies, and operational procedures approved by NASS. Each ensures that the data are accessed only by authorized researchers and all material leaving the enclave has been reviewed for disclosure risk.

3.4.1 Data Enclave Requirements

Data enclave staff will provide complete and comprehensive training, onboarding, invoicing, and a full list of applications available from within the enclave. To access NASS data via the data enclave, the following is required:

3.4.1.1 Authorization from NASS to access unpublished data via an approved DUA or ADM-042.

3.4.1.2 A computer with internet access and a web browser. The computer must be limited to a fixed site and IP address.

3.4.1.3 An approved virtual site inspection of the access point, or place from which the data enclave will be used, conducted by NASS personnel. Access points must comply with the following:

- Located within the United States
- Free from “high traffic”
- Isolated from public areas within the building
- Accessible by authorized individuals only
- Located inside a lockable room
- Monitor is not visible from windows or doors

3.4.1.4 Completion of vendor-provided data enclave training, onboarding, and invoicing.

3.5 Data Preparation

Once an application is approved, the data will be prepared accordingly. This processing time can vary by data source and current production demands. The data will not contain personal

identifiers such as name, address, zip codes, latitude, or longitude. The default format for delivered datasets is comma-separated values (.csv), which can be easily imported into statistical packages.

If the approved project cited additional 'user-provided' data required to accomplish the objectives, consult with the NASS Data Steward for upload. Additional support documentation, including survey or census questionnaires and variable description lists, are available through the SAP metadata catalog.

3.6 Security Protocols

All research teams with approved projects requiring access to unpublished data must become Special Sworn Agents prior to data access by completing all NASS Security Protocols. This includes identity verification, confidentiality training, compliance with the stipulations outlined in the *USDA NASS Data Lab Handbook,* NASS ADM-043 *Certification and Restrictions on Use of Unpublished Data*, NASS ADM-044 *User Attestation*, and a site inspection for data enclave users.

3.6.1 Identity Verification

All approved research team members must complete an identity verification process after project approval is granted by the Data Access and Disclosure Review Board (DADRB). The Project Lead must clear the identity verification process before access to the data can begin for any other team members. Instructions for completing the identify verification process will be provided in the project approval notification.

3.6.2 Confidentiality Training

Confidentiality training explains essential aspects of NASS data access security, including regulations for data collection, rules and procedures for data access, and disclosure reviews. This training must be completed annually.

3.6.3 Confidentiality Forms

NASS ADM-043 and NASS ADM-044 forms can be signed digitally, otherwise the wet signature must be witnessed by a NASS employee. The forms attest to the understanding of the laws governing confidentiality of NASS data and the penalties of violating them. The NASS ADM-043 form contains pertinent excerpts of these laws in more detail and must be signed annually. The signed confidentiality documents convey researcher understanding that snipping, photographing, screensharing, replicating, or any such capturing or transferring of the data is strictly prohibited – even with other members of the approved project.

3.6.4 Access Point Location

In general, the access point for accessing the enclave must be from the professional offices of the institution – university, state department, etc. with the associated IP address. The approved location is not mobile; the site inspection, which must be cleared by the NASS CIPSEA security officer, is for a single chosen location only. Researchers may not conduct any research or analysis with the approved data outside of the enclave or away from the approved data enclave access point. While usually completed virtually, NASS may inspect any access point in person. Under special circumstances, a home office may be considered for approval.

3.6.5 Enclave Onboarding

After the DUA or ADM-042 has been approved and all identity verification steps and security protocols have been completed, a NASS representative will contact the data enclave vendor to request onboarding to the data enclave and transfer of the approved data to the project workspace.

3.7 Amending an Approved Project

Over the course of a project there may be a reason to amend an approved application (e.g., changes in the individuals on the project, additional variables, etc.), this can be done by amendment. The request must be submitted to the NASS Data Steward by the project lead.

Adding a new team member requires submission of their name, institutional affiliation, email address, phone number, U.S. citizenship status, and indication if they will need a data enclave account or collaborate verbally. Project leads are also required to notify the Data Lab when a team member departs or changes institutions. Due to binding signatures on the DUA, the project lead on any given approved agreement cannot be changed by amendment; a new project lead requires a new project application.

Adding variables or data to a project must be accompanied by compelling justification that the changes are essential. When reviewing a data amendment request and its justification, the DADRB will consider if the proposed changes are outside the scope of the project and require a new application.

Project extensions are not permitted beyond the signed DUA terms. Teams are expected to adhere to the timelines submitted in their approved project plan.

3.8 Project Workspace Closeout

NASS limits data access agreements to three (3) years. Researchers must plan accordingly to

accomplish the project goals in this timeframe. At the end of the access agreement, the workspace will be deleted.

The enclave vendor typically invoices for one (1) year increments of enclave access. Near the end of the enclave contract period, enclave users will receive a 60-day notification of account expiration in order to complete their work or renew the enclave contract. NASS requires at least 60 days to review export requests of output or statistical code. If the enclave contract is not renewed (up to 3 years), the workspace will be deleted.

4 Disclosure Review

All research results requested to be released from the data enclave must undergo a disclosure review conducted by NASS. This requirement is in accordance with the NASS obligation to protect the confidentiality of an individual farmer, rancher, or producer.

When the research has concluded, the disclosure review of the research results is conducted as a unit; that is, all files are reviewed together. Since the data are often correlated, multiple export requests for one project present increased disclosure risk and often increases suppressions. In addition to the current disclosure review, the NASS analyst must review all past export requests from other projects to ensure there is no overlap that results in disclosure concerns. Currently, the review process is done manually; reviewers read through statistical programming code and all output files – first individually, then against each other. For this and other reasons, large tabulations and incremental or partial submissions are strongly discouraged.

NASS requires users to limit the number of files they request to export to the necessary output required to produce a final report or paper.

Revise and resubmit for peer-reviewed journal articles will be considered, if the previously approved variables are still available and the resubmission does not create disclosure issues. Potential updates to already released research results require an active access agreement, enclave account, and the detailed specifications including the published material.

4.1 Disclosure Methodology

NASS employs disclosure limitation methodology commonly used by many Federal statistical agencies. Disclosure analysis methods use one of two criteria to determine whether a cell presents a disclosure risk.

The first criterion is a threshold rule, where a minimum number of operations must produce the item before a total can be released. For example, if only two farms produce milk in a county, releasing the total milk production allows the two farmers to deduce the production of the other. NASS uses the same threshold rule for all disclosure reviews. Each summarized estimate must be computed from a minimum of five (5) unweighted* observations. This means, anytime there are less than five unweighted operations the entire table will be suppressed. Consider removing or collapsing cells that do not meet this threshold before submitting a disclosure review.

*Note: Any output intended for publishing must be weighted.

The second criterion is a dominance rule; NASS uses different dominance rules in different circumstances.

The (n,k) rule invokes a suppression when the top *n* producers account for *k* percent or

more of the estimated total. For example, a (2,80) rule will suppress a cell when the top 2 producers represent 80 percent or more of that cell total.

The p-percent rule requires sufficient protection so that the largest producer value cannot be approximated to within a range of p-percent. For example, a 20-percent rule will suppress a cell if revealing that total allows someone to estimate the top producer value to within plus or minus 20 percent.

Federal statistical agencies do not publicly disclose the actual values of n, k, or p, as revealing them compromises the protection.

4.2 Suppressions

Cells that represent disclosure risk are defined as *primary cells*, which are always suppressed, and are called *primary suppressions*.

In many instances, a primary suppression requires another suppression to maintain protection. This is due to the additive relationships prevalent in tabular summaries; this is one reason, in part, the release of tabulations from the enclave is restricted. For example, a suppressed value that is one element of a total can be deduced by simple subtraction. If A + B + C= D, suppressing C alone gives the value of C no protection, as its value can easily be obtained by solving the equation for C.

Thus, additional suppressions are needed to ensure confidentiality. These are called *complementary suppressions*. In some instances, two primary suppressions can serve to protect one another. However, in general, selecting complementary suppressions is much more difficult and time consuming.

If NASS finds values that require suppression, the NASS analyst may apply the suppression or require the researcher to adjust and resubmit the results.

Examples of this action might be:

NASS may suppress individual table cells by explicitly replacing the cell value with an indicator identifying a suppression. NASS uses a (D), in place of the actual number in the affected cells, to indicate the value is withheld to avoid disclosure of an individual operation.

NASS may request the researcher to aggregate the data at a higher level in order to reduce the number of suppressed cells.

During every disclosure review NASS must review the results to verify fitness-for-use standards are maintained. Additionally, NASS must consider the disclosure results from all other

publications and tabulations of the approved dataset(s). NASS may require additional suppressions be applied to ensure consistency and confidentiality.

4.3 Implicit Samples

Most projects in the Data Lab create implicit samples that often get overlooked by researchers. Data Lab researchers, NASS analysts, and members of the Data Access Disclosure Review Board are required to consider the implications of the approved research project including any implicit samples created during the course of the research. Implicit samples can be difficult to conceptualize. As described by the Federal Statistical Research Data Center Disclosure Avoidance Handbook: "an implicit sample is a sample that can be identified by looking at the differences between explicitly defined populations, samples, subsamples, and geographies." If implicit samples are not considered during the course of the research project and accounted for during a disclosure review the results can pose a disclosure risk to the implicit sample population. Researchers are required to identify all implicit samples relevant to their research and may be required to submit disclosure review documentation for the implicit sample. In some cases, if the results on the explicit sample do not provide adequate protection for the implicit sample the results from the explicit sample may not pass disclosure review and will be suppressed.

Some examples of implicit samples are:

1. A research project aims to analyze cattle farms in the state of Wisconsin. The explicit sample in this case is cattle farms in Wisconsin. An implicit sample is non-cattle farms in the state of Wisconsin. Another implicit sample is non-cattle farms in the United States. Another implicit sample is cattle farms not located in Wisconsin.

2. A research project aims to analyze farms with organic sales which is considered the explicit sample. The implicit sample is farms without organic sales.

3. A research project aims to analyze government payments received by farms with at least one black producer. An implicit sample is farms who receive government payments who do not have at least one black producer. Another implicit sample is farms who have at least one black producer but do not receive government payments.

4.4 Disclosure Rules

Data access projects should be used primarily for statistical analysis seeking modeled results (inference, regression, cluster, etc.) and not to reproduce summary tables or descriptive statistics. The disclosure review process for NASS-created Special Tabulations is automated. Enclave results, however, are reviewed manually, and therefore require more stringent disclosure rules.

The following rules must be observed when submitting requests for disclosure review for all results intended for removal from the enclave. These procedures are designed to expedite and simplify the process. To avoid unnecessary delays, review the following information about disclosure prior to producing summary statistics or aggregates.

4.4.1 Output using intervals must mirror the NASS publication from which the analysis is derived. For example, if the publication from which the analysis is derived includes acreage breakouts of 1-9 acres, 10-49 acres, 50 to 179 acres, 180 to 499 acres, 500 to 999 acres, 1,000-1,999 acres, and 2,000 acres or more, the desired output must use the same acreage intervals.

4.4.2 Every aggregated cell (modeled or summarized) in the output (counts or values) must include a minimum of five (5) unweighted* contributing observations.

4.4.3 If output includes demographics, there must also be a minimum of 30 weighted contributing observations reporting that single demographic at the geographic level of aggregation.

4.4.4 Duplicative output will not be reviewed – e.g. descriptive statistics in table and report forms. In other words, any particular data value should only be found once in the export request and not be duplicated in more than one file.

4.4.5 Volume of summary (aggregate) statistical output must be parsimonious. Data Lab data exports are not meant to allow mass export of data. The Data Lab reserves the right to deny data export due to overly inclusive data exports.

4.4.6 All summary statistics must use the record-level survey or census weights that NASS provides with each data set. For modeling purposes, NASS strongly encourages the use of weighted counts or values for robust outcomes. Any output intended for publishing must be weighted.

4.4.7 All summary statistics must be rounded to four significant digits, base 10. Significant digits are those that are neither leading nor trailing zeros. For example, the following estimates are presented to 4 significant digits:

1,234,000
1,234
1.234
0.001234

4.4.8 Data points will not be authorized for removal from the data enclave. Visualizations and other graphs must be curvilinear and may not represent actual data points or maximum/minimum values.

4.4.9 Graphs and charts using bins must ensure they are wide enough to provide reasonable uncertainty as to the values of those records in the bin and must contain a minimum of five (5) unweighted* contributing observations. Any graph or chart data point, scale, or axis must be rounded to the 4th significant digit.

4.4.10 Histograms will not pass the disclosure review process. Rather, users should use kernel-density plots. Kernels with infinite support are preferred.

4.4.11 The Data Lab allows for the export of pseudo-percentiles rather than percentiles. A pseudo-percentile is constructed by taking the average value of observations around the actual percentile, with a minimum of 5 observations from both sides. For example, a pseudo-percentile for the median would be the average of the 5 observations just below the actual median, the median itself, and the 5 observations just above the median. This ensures that at least 11 observations are required to report a percentile. Each pseudo-percentile must contain individual observations. No pseudo-percentile can use observations that are also used to calculate another pseudo-percentile. No percentile reported can equal the value of the largest contributor (the max value) or the smallest contributor (the min value).

4.4.12 For model output, such as linear or nonlinear regression models, disclosure risk is less. However, NASS requires a minimum of ten (10) degrees of freedom (i.e., the number of unweighted* contributing observations minus the number of variables used in the model must be greater or equal to 10) and will review the model output to check for disclosure failures.

4.4.13 When the use of unpublished intervals is approved, the interval range must be sufficiently wide. As a rule, if 120% of the midpoint of the range exceeds the upper bound of the range, then the interval is too narrow. Two examples are provided for clarity:

Range	= $500 - $1000
Midpoint	= $750
Threshold	= Midpoint * 1.20 = $750 * 1.20 = $900

Therefore, since max of range ($1,000) is greater than the threshold ($900), the range is wide enough.

Range	= $100 - $110
Midpoint	= $105
Threshold	= Midpoint * 1.20 = $105 * 1.20 = $126

Therefore, since the max of the range ($110) is less than the threshold ($126), the range is not wide enough and must be redefined or suppressed.

4.4.14 All requested export files must be in an editable format:
MS Excel (.csv/.xlsx), or MS Word (.docx or other text file) is accepted. HTML, .pdf, and non-text Stata output are not accepted.

4.4.15 Since all outputs are reviewed as a unit, if any output does not comply, the entire submission must be rejected.

*Note: Any output intended for publishing must be weighted.

4.5 Submitting a Request for Disclosure Review

As described in the previous section, NASS must perform a disclosure review of all requested export files from the data enclave. The entire set of analysis for an approved data access agreement is reviewed at the same time. Incremental or partial submissions are strongly discouraged and may be rejected. NASS encourages users to limit the number of files they request for export from the enclave to only the output necessary to produce the final report or paper. Restrictions are applied on the type and size of research results that can be released from the enclave. The expected output to be exported from the data enclave are modeling results, regressions, statistical tests and specified tables as found in an article in a peer-reviewed academic journal.

Submit all requests for disclosure review through the data enclave managers. The enclave manager will conduct an initial review and will forward it to the Data Lab and Data Access Group for full disclosure review. The review time depends on the complexity of the output, the number of reviews currently in progress, and the completeness of the submission. NASS requires at least 60 days for this process and recommends allowing for such in the project timeline, which is requested in the SAP application.

The disclosure review submission must include documentation with the following information:

4.5.1 The contact information (email/phone) of the Sworn Special Agent who prepared the results for disclosure review.

4.5.2 A description of each output file, including modeling techniques, data used, and explanation of indication.

4.5.3 A complete list of data sources used in the analysis and summary including information on which results are derived using user-provided data in combination with NASS provided data.

4.5.4 A complete list of variables used, with descriptions – including variables created for research purposes.

4.5.5 Details on any data or variable modifications made – data subset may be required.

4.5.6 Specific geo-political areas being investigated or summarized – state, county, etc.

4.5.7 Each summarized tabulated data cell in the disclosure review submission must be accompanied by the following in the same file (see Appendix A):

- The total weighted and unweighted number of contributing observations
- The unweighted value of each of the top two largest contributing records

4.5.8 If rounding was necessary for disclosure review (See Section 4.4.7), the researcher must provide the results prior to rounding and those after rounding is applied in the same file (see Appendix A).

4.5.9 If the disclosure review includes percentiles the researcher must provide the true percentile which will not be eligible for export and the pseudo-percentile which will be eligible for export.

4.5.10 The statistical programming code used to create the analyses, with appropriate documentation. That is, every code file should have a header describing the contents of the file, including a summary of the data manipulation that takes place in the file. HTML or compiled code files are not acceptable.

4.5.11 Visualizations must be accompanied by underlying summarized data.

4.5.12 A completed *NASS Export Request Checklist*, acknowledging compliance with these and all stipulations conveyed herein regarding the use of NASS data.

NASS reserves the right to request additional information not included in the above list to conduct a disclosure review. If additional information is needed a list of requirements will be provided to the researcher. Failure to comply with disclosure rules or provide the information listed above will extend the disclosure review time as re-submissions will be necessary.

4.6 Research or Analysis Products

Many NASS data users prepare reports of findings based on their research inside the enclave. Prior to publication, data users must include a citation on the source of the data and independent conclusions derived. NASS requests that researchers provide a copy of their finalized work for documentation.

All researchers must cite the National Agricultural Statistics Service as the source of the data used in the research. The analysis, interpretation, and conclusions are those of the author and are not subject to NASS review. Researcher results do not represent the views or opinions of NASS. The following is an example statement of source and disclaimer **[***adjust specifications*, as needed] **that must be included** in any publication:

Research results and summaries were derived using data collected in the [2022 Census of Agriculture] by the National Agricultural Statistics Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Any interpretations and conclusions derived from the data represent author viewpoints and are not necessarily those of NASS.

The following is an example of an availability statement for use with a publication submission:

Due to the NASS Confidentiality Pledge, the data underlying this article cannot be shared publicly. Secure access of NASS data may be obtained by agreement and sworn status only; restrictions apply.

5 Data Resources

The Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS) data collection is conducted in collaboration with USDA Economic Research Service (ERS). All requests for ARMS data are made through the SAP and any questions may be directed to the ERS ARMS Team at ARMSTeam@usda.gov

A few of the many online resources for NASS data are available at the following sites:

ARMS Questionnaires and Manuals
Census of Agriculture 2022
Guide to Products and Services
Quick Stats (data downloads)
SAP.nsf.gov (SAP catalog and application)
Surveys and Programs

Appendix A – Example Table of Tabular Data

Eligible for export				*Required fields ineligible for export*[1]			
Geography	Variable	Rounded Estimate (See 4.4.7)	Weighted N	Unrounded Estimate	Unweighted n	Largest Observation (unweighted)	2nd Largest Observation (unweighted)
US	K###	####	####	####	####	####	####
Alabama	K###	####	####	####	####	####	####
Alaska	K###	####	####	####	####	####	####
Arkansas	K###	####	####	####	####	####	####
…							

[1] Values in these columns are ineligible for export from the data enclave but are required to complete a disclosure review.