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AG CENSUS PROVIDES AG TRENDS

Our Nation's 26th Ag Census has been taken every year since 1925. An 88 year old farmer from Saline County talked to me last week about whether he needed to bother to send the Census form in. Even if you did not farm last year and you received a Census form, the answer was yes, you need to complete the information that is required.

So, I looked at the green form (pink one is the long form) and I realized it was not easy to fill the form out. The person was proud he had been farming since 1948 and still has 9 cows and a bull, the cropland was rented out. So we called the 800 number for help (1-888-424-7828) and were able to get a nice person on the other end. She helped us find the right computer columns to put the census data in and the farmer appreciated my help. He asked, "What would have happened if I would thrown this letter away?" The response from the Census helper was, you will get another form in the mail and a letter, then another, then a phone call, and then a Census employee shows up at your doorstep. Basically, it is unlawful not to provide census data so thank goodness the Census people are there to help you, if you need help, using the 800 number.

Why is the Ag Census so important? This is the only source of agricultural data for our County, State and Nation. It is a snapshot of where we are at with agriculture at this moment in time. The privacy of an individual census record is protected by law and cannot be obtained by any one person. Farmers and farm organizations use census data to evaluate and propose policy changes and to propose programs that help the agricultural producer. Farm cooperatives, commodity groups, trade associations and agribusinesses use the data to develop marketing strategies and determine locations for facilities that serve farmers. Politicians use the data in drafting agricultural legislation in research, rural development, and extension programs. For planners and economists, the census data provides a benchmark data for current economic indicators such as gross domestic product, producer price index and farm income facts.

Farm journalists and broadcasters use census data to provide factual stories about agriculture and to evaluate current issues. USDA uses the data to help establish farm program rules and regulations. I use the data and farmers can use the data to spot trends in their area about production practices with crops and livestock.

The Ag Census is important and every farmer or rancher is required to complete it according to Title 7, U.S. Code. New this year is computer and internet use, production contracts and multiple owners per farm and more specialized livestock data, grain storage data and certified organic farming acreage.

When the Bunge Corporation called from St. Louis last year and suggested the fact they needed the farm storage figure for Saline County and surrounding areas, it became very evident to me how important census data is. The census this year has a question about farm storage capacity. This was important information to them to consider whether to build a new ethanol plant south of Crete. Unfortunately, the plans were halted. This would have meant more jobs, a new local feed



source and an additional market for our grain. On the other hand, area cooperatives had concerns about market share.

The census forms are due February 3, 2003. Results of this census and previous census data are online to all at: www.usda.gov/nass/. By responding to the census, every farmer and rancher in the nation will help make it known that agriculture counts!

Randy Pryor, Extension Educator
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Saline County
306 West 3rd Street, Wilber, NE 68465
Phone (402) 821-2151 • Fax (402) 821-3398 • e-mail: randy.pryor@unl.edu