

April 9, 2026

Ms. Nisha Murray
Economic Research Service
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

RE: Comments of the National Pork Producers Council on *Opportunities, Challenges, and Emerging Areas in Statistical Data, Analysis, and Research*, **Docket ID USDA-2026-0034-0008**.

Dear Ms. Murray,

The National Pork Producers Council (NPPC), which represents the interests of America's more than 60,000 pork producers, submits the following comments on USDA's Request for Information "Opportunities, Challenges, and Emerging Areas in Statistical Data, Analysis, and Research" (USDA-2026-0034-0008).

Pork producers rely on a variety of USDA data products and reports to conduct their daily business, assess supply and demand conditions, and make long-term business decisions. NPPC appreciates the opportunity to provide information about the value and use of these reports while offering responses to several questions posed in the RFI.

Data Products and Data Sets

Which NASS or ERS data (e.g., releases, reports, datasets) are most valuable to your work, and why?

Pork producers and industry analysts utilize numerous reports produced by NASS and ERS, as well as other USDA agencies. The following is a *non-comprehensive* list of NASS and ERS reports and data that provide significant value to the pork industry and, if no longer available, would create considerable gaps in agricultural data.

1. NASS Quarterly Hogs and Pigs Report

Of paramount importance to pork producers is the Quarterly Hogs and Pigs report, which estimates national and state hog inventories based on a quarterly survey of producers, providing information on the U.S. breeding herd, market hog inventories by weight category, and information on the number of sows farrowing, pigs saved per litter, and pig crop. In addition to inventories, the Hogs and Pigs Survey also collects information from producers on death loss and farm structure that is used to inform other NASS reports.

The results of the Quarterly Hogs and Pigs report are used by a wide array of industry participants, from analysts and researchers to pork producers, lenders, and policymakers. The inventory information reported by USDA provides the best available indication of future supply expectations, allowing private analysts and USDA economists to forecast hog slaughter and pork production for the next 12 months. Virtually no substitutes exist for this information, making its continued publication critical to the decision-making ability of U.S. producers.¹ It is also important that the sample size and response rate remain adequate to ensure reliable, representative data in which producers can have confidence.

2. *NASS Census of Agriculture*

The pork industry finds significant value in the U.S. Census of Agriculture, which provides a comprehensive snapshot of the structure and scale of U.S. hog production and farm size demographics. Similar to the Quarterly Hogs and Pigs report, the data collected and published through the Census of Agriculture are not available elsewhere and provide an essential update on structural trends and production information at the state, county, and congressional district level. The Farm Typology report is an important supplement to the Census of Agriculture.

3. *NASS Livestock Slaughter Report*

The monthly and annual Livestock Slaughter reports serve as the official tabulation of hog slaughter, weights, and federally inspected pork production. This information helps inform the U.S. pork balance sheet and provides the only official state-level total of hog slaughter and hog weights. Of particular value in the annual report is the number of federally inspected slaughter plants and the number of head slaughtered, by size category, in these plants during the previous year.

4. *NASS Cold Storage Report*

The monthly Cold Storage report offers another crucial component of the pork balance sheet, providing insight into the volume of pork being held in public, private, and semi-private refrigerated warehouses. This information is valuable to the industry, as it can serve as an indicator of supply pressure and pork demand strength or weakness at the primal level.

5. *NASS Meat Animals Production, Disposition, and Income Annual Summary*

This annual summary reconciles beginning and ending hog inventories, pig crop, in-shipments, marketings, farm slaughter, and death information for the prior year. It also captures marketings, production, and cash receipts from the sale of hogs at the national and state level. This report delivers value to the industry by combining multiple USDA surveys and reports to provide a final and comprehensive view of production and pig flows over the prior year.

6. *ERS Meat Price Spreads*

One of the most widely used data products published by ERS is the Meat Price Spreads. This data series provides a long historical benchmark for retail, wholesale, and farm level prices and the relevant price

¹ For more information on its low degree of substitutability see, “End user preferences for USDA market information,” at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2014.04.008>.

spreads. Converting wholesale pork and farm-level hog prices to retail pound equivalency creates value by allowing pork producers to compare trends across various steps in the marketing chain and monitor changes in the proportion of retail price accounted for by farm-level values.

Meat Price Spread data are also used for informing producers, retailers, foodservice, consumers, analysts, investors, academe, government agencies, market regulators, and policymakers about livestock and meat vertical market price relationships. The data are frequently cited in agricultural policy briefings summarizing the state of livestock and meat industry market price relationships. Information gleaned is used by regulators to review market activity, which can then help assess market performance and describe the market environment. The data is often referenced in market outlook reports to help understand and explain past and prospective livestock and meat market conditions. A host of academic researchers, research organizations, and governmental agencies use the data to test various hypotheses or illustrate specific market trends.

7. ERS Domestic and International Meat Reports

USDA's domestic and international meat reports provide industry stakeholders with easily accessible, downloadable information on pork balance sheet components over a long historical period. The international meat reports are of considerable interest, as they report monthly pork export values in terms of carcass weight, thus allowing for comparison in equivalent terms against total production and domestic availability.

8. ERS Agriculture Resource Management Survey (ARMS) Data

As USDA's primary source of information on financial performance, production practices, and resource use, the Agriculture Resource Management Survey gathers information on important topics otherwise left uncaptured. ARMS data is used to help inform many USDA reports on topics that include farm structure, financial health, and production costs, among others of value to the pork industry.

9. NASS Crop Production Reports

Pork producers have long relied on USDA crop reports for the critical information needed to manage feed costs, which is the single-largest production expense category associated with raising pigs. Consistent and reliable information on corn and soybean acreage, yields, stocks, and projected use help pork producers monitor supply and demand conditions for key inputs and make informed decisions for their business.

10. ERS Farm Income and Wealth Statistics

Farm income data products are valuable to pork industry stakeholders, as they provide a comprehensive view of broad farm sector financial indicators, as well as income and expectations across commodities at both the national and state levels. Understanding trends and expectations for cash receipts, net farm income, and returns to operators is important to long-term planning and has policy implications at the state and federal levels.

How often should data and information be released or updated (e.g., annually, quarterly)?

The appropriate reporting and update frequency depends heavily on the type of data and information. For many reports, such as slaughter, cold storage, and exports, monthly publications keep industry participants informed on developing trends with the smallest feasible time lag. Reducing the frequency of these reports risks harming transparency and hindering the ability of producers to understand market forces and make informed decisions.

The Hogs and Pigs report functions well as a quarterly inventory estimate, providing an indication of future supplies. NPPC supports the continued quarterly publication of the Hogs and Pigs report.

Other reports such as the Census of Agriculture are designed to capture long-term shifts in farm demographics and industry structure and are more appropriately spaced out by several years, though less frequent publication would reduce its usefulness.

What geographic granularity (e.g., national, state, county) for data best supports your work?

Where possible, state-level data provides helpful information about market conditions and industry significance beyond the national view. For example, the state-level information provided in the NASS Meat Animals Production, Disposition, and Income Annual Summary (Meat Animals Summary) provides important insight on pig flows and production levels, allowing the most accurate estimate of the pork industry's contributions and impact within the state.

NPPC supports, where confidentiality allows, the continued reporting of state-level slaughter, production, inventory, cash receipts, and pig flow information. As a result of its 2024 program review, NASS reduced the number of states represented in the December Hogs and Pigs report and Meat Animals Summary from 50 to 16. While some state-level information was already withheld due to confidentiality, this change reduced the number of states with annual pig crop information in the Meat Animals Summary from 46 in 2024 to 16 in 2025. NPPC understands the need to balance budget and resource considerations with statistical requirements but reinforces the importance of maintaining credible state-level production and inventory information wherever possible.

Are there NASS or ERS data products, data sets, and other relevant information that are duplicative, outdated, or underutilized? What improvements, changes or consolidations could be made (e.g., more timely, different data collection methods)?

One of the many benefits of using USDA information is the ability to use extended time series data to track trends over time and compare against a historical baseline. The consistency with which data series such as the ERS Meat Price Spreads are calculated provides great value to the industry, though it is possible that methods may need to be reviewed and updated periodically. For example, farm, wholesale, and retail markets and structure have changed quite a bit since the data series began in 2004, and a 2019 study identified opportunities for modernizing the series and ensuring it remains representative.² Many

² For more information on the "USDA ERS Meat Price Spread Data Product Review" see https://ers.usda.gov/sites/default/files/_laserfiche/publications/100843/CCR-71.pdf?v=52025.

of the recommendations involved updating price sources for hogs and retail pork prices, though it does not appear that any changes were made.

Similarly, NASS has engaged in review processes to evaluate its methods for producing estimates of hog inventories. In 2019, a public workshop convened industry and statistical experts to discuss the appropriateness of the models and possible improvements, technical issues of model specification, and the suitability of the data that feed into the model.³ It is unclear if any suggestions from the workshop were implemented, but it remains important to consider whether survey and data collection methods could also be modernized to improve participation and data quality.

NPPC supports USDA's continued engagement in proactive outside review processes to identify ways to improve and maintain the relevance of its data products while balancing the importance of consistent publication over time.

Economic Research, Outlook, and Forecasts

Which ERS or OCE-WAOB research or analytical products (e.g., farm income, situation and outlook reports, ERS research reports, WASDE) are most valuable to your work, and how do you use them?

Pork producers utilize many ERS and OCE-WAOB publications to understand emerging topics, market conditions, and long-term trends. The following is a *non-comprehensive* list of research reports by ERS and OCE-WAOB products that are widely used and provide considerable value to the industry:

1. OCE-WAOB World Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE)

For pork producers, the monthly WASDE report is one of the most consequential monthly data products that USDA publishes. As previously mentioned, pork producers rely on USDA crop reports to make informed decisions about input procurement and feed costs. By providing monthly forecasts for corn and soybean production, use, exports, and ending stocks, the WASDE serves as a consistent, objective resource to inform purchasing decisions, hedging strategies, and production planning.

Additionally, OCE-WAOB synthesizes multiple USDA data sources to produce quarterly and annual pork balance sheet forecasts, which serve as the authoritative baseline for supply and demand expectations used broadly across USDA and by industry stakeholders. These forecasts include imports, exports, ending stocks, annual and quarterly production, and hog prices. OCE-WAOB always adds its forecast for the next marketing year with the May WASDE report. These are some of the first available forecasts for the next year.

2. OCE-WAOB Agricultural Baseline Projections

This dataset is valuable to pork producers, as it provides a long-term, internally consistent view of how key indicators, such as feed costs, hog prices, trade, and production, are expected to evolve over the next

³ For more information on the "Using Models to Estimate Hog and Pig Inventories: Proceedings of a Workshop 2019" see <https://www.nationalacademies.org/projects/DBASSE-CNSTAT-18-08/publication/25526>

10 years. This information can be an important baseline for policymakers, lenders, and industry stakeholders and can aid in strategic planning and decision making.

3. ERS Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry Outlook

This monthly outlook publication captures the current situation and outlook for livestock markets by incorporating multiple USDA data sources, and particularly, the latest WASDE report. Importantly, the written analysis included in this publication provides producers with more detailed explanations about key indicators and trends shaping U.S. pork markets than is otherwise available.

4. ERS Rural America at a Glance

This annual publication delivers value to pork producers and other industries that face challenging labor market conditions driven by changing demographics and population trends in rural areas. The information published in this report provides critical insight into household and employment dynamics in non-metro and farming-dependent counties that otherwise would not be available. Insights into such trends are critical to producers' ability to understand the labor market and trends that may impact future business decisions.

5. ERS America's Farms and Ranches at a Glance

This publication uses ARMS data to offer the most up-to-date insight on farm typology and the financial health of family farms across multiple size categories and commodities, helping industry stakeholders, policymakers, and lenders understand trends in industry structure.

When using ERS or OCE-WAOB forecasts or research, are you more likely to use raw data files, written analysis, or both? If you use one product type more than another, why?

In many cases, USDA research and reports include charts and graphs that may represent multiple topics or commodities. Access to the raw data that make up the chart or graph can be extremely helpful for isolating the commodity of interest or further understanding trends. For forecasts, a brief written analysis is often helpful to aid in the understanding of key indicators.

Access, Tools, and Outreach

How do you currently access ERS, NASS, or OCE-WAOB data (e.g., Quick Stats, website, Application Programming Interfaces)? What challenges do you face when accessing data or research? What improvements would you suggest?

The Quick Stats system and downloadable CSV or XLS files are the most accessible current methods for typical industry data users. The Quick Stats database is very comprehensive but offers opportunity for improvement toward a more intuitive, user-friendly interface. Features such as saved queries, default selections, and fewer required clicks to arrive at the desired data product would significantly improve the Quick Stats user experience.

How do you assess the credibility and relevance of ERS, NASS, and OCE-WAOB data and analytical products compared to other providers (e.g., land-grant or private universities, commercial vendors)?

USDA reports and data products have long served as the “gold standard” of agricultural market information. USDA’s commitment to confidentiality, strict statistical standards, and non-partisan, evidence-based reporting makes it a highly credible source of information. USDA datasets also offer longstanding, consistent time series that are especially helpful for identifying trends and changes over time.

As previously stated, virtually no substitutes exist for the hog and pork-related data and reports produced by USDA, making their continued publication critically important. To ensure these reports maintain their credibility and relevance for years to come, USDA must prioritize representative samples, survey response rates, and other methods that impact producer confidence in the reported information.

Are there other data or analytical products or reports produced by other parts of USDA that you consider highly valuable, duplicative, or redundant? Are there any improvements that you would suggest to these data or analytical products or reports produced by other parts of USDA?

Beyond ERS, NASS, and OCE-WAOB publications, pork producers also find significant value in data products and reports from other USDA agencies, including but not limited to:

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

The market information reported by the AMS Livestock, Poultry, and Grain Market News Division (LPGMN), including daily price and volume information published under Livestock Mandatory Reporting, is integral to daily business and marketing decisions in the pork industry. NPPC strongly values the diligence of the AMS LPGMN division in maintaining the integrity of this reporting and commends its engagement with industry stakeholders.

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

Pork producers and industry stakeholders utilize data and reports published by USDA FAS to track global trade, market conditions, and country-specific issues and developments. Specifically, the weekly U.S. Export Sales Report and monthly agricultural trade data derived from U.S. Census Bureau statistics and made available through the Global Agricultural Trade System (GATS) are key to assessing U.S. pork’s performance in export markets. Reports such as the semi-annual Livestock and Poultry: World Markets and Trade and the Production, Supply, and Distribution (PSD) online system offer insight into global pork balance sheets and supply and demand conditions in top markets. Additionally, FAS reports published under the Global Agricultural Information Network (GAIN) provide country-specific insight and perspectives to U.S. producers and exporters.

Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)

USDA’s Food Safety Inspection Service provides critical data and information related to food safety, imports, exports, and regulated establishments. Specifically, the industry relies on FSIS’s datasets on microbiology, residue chemistry, and laboratory sampling, as well as the Meat, Poultry and Egg Product Inspection Directory and Establishment Demographic Data. Reports on outbreak investigations and imported meat, poultry, and egg product information are also valuable for tracking food safety issues

and developments. The pork industry also relies on data from the National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

APHIS publishes numerous reports and data products that are highly valuable to the pork industry. This includes, but is not limited to, swine health data and reports generated through the National Animal Health Monitoring System, targeted disease surveillance reports, and data on feral swine distribution and control efforts. This information is critical for swine producers and veterinarians to understand animal health and disease outcomes and track emerging issues.

What is the best way for ERS, NASS, and OCE-WAOB to receive ongoing feedback on its data and analysis? Are there groups or forums we should engage with more regularly?

USDA's semi-annual Data Users Meeting serves as an existing platform for engaging with stakeholders and sharing updates on USDA data and information program changes. NPPC supports USDA offering regular opportunities for feedback, whether implemented through a public comment process or stakeholder meetings. NPPC encourages USDA to engage in proactive outreach for feedback on any future reporting changes related to hogs and pork.

Conclusion

NPPC appreciates USDA's attention to ensuring data and reports are meeting the needs of the U.S. agriculture. Continuing to publish timely, accurate, and credible reports on hog inventories, production, prices, market conditions, meat supply and disappearance, and industry structure while prioritizing representative surveys and report results is critically important to the U.S. pork industry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Holly Cook Anderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "H" and "A".

Holly Cook Anderson
Economist
National Pork Producers Council