

News Release
3-19-14

**PRELIMINARY 2012 CENSUS RESULTS PROVIDE A SNAPSHOT OF
WEST VIRGINIA AGRICULTURE**

The value of West Virginia's agricultural products increased 37 percent over the past five years to a total of \$809 million, according to preliminary results from the Census of Agriculture, produced every five years by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA-NASS).

West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick met with USDA-NASS Regional Director David Knopf to go over some of the first findings to come out of the Census data that was gathered in 2012 and analyzed during 2013.

"I'm very pleased to see West Virginia's total agricultural value going up, but I caution that it's not necessarily representative of greater production or even a greater profit margin for our farmers," said Commissioner Helmick. "That figure by itself doesn't factor in the rising costs of feed, fuel and other inputs, nor does it account for the fact that we've actually lost two percent of our farmland since the last Census.

Commissioner Helmick noted that West Virginians are consuming over seven times more food than the \$800 million currently being produced in the state.

"There is an enormous opportunity for existing and prospective professional farmers to get in on the ground floor of the local food movement in West Virginia," said Commissioner Helmick. "There are literally billions of dollars that are leaving our state each year to buy food that we could be producing right here."

The Census of Agriculture is conducted every five years – the last one in 2007. First published in 1840, the Census of Agriculture accounts for all U.S. farms and ranches and the people who operate them. When available in May, the final report will provide even more detailed information for West Virginia providing data on all farm operators and data down to the county level.

"One of the most important takeaways to remember about the Census of Agriculture is that the information is used for decision-making by producers as well as all those who serve farmers, ranchers and rural communities – federal, state and local governments, agribusinesses, trade associations and many others," said Knopf. "When we look at the data for our state, we can all use it as a snapshot in time to see how West Virginia agriculture is changing over time and how it compared to the rest of the country."

Among the other preliminary findings:

- West Virginia had 21,489 farms, down nine percent from 2007.
- Land in farms decreased by only two percent to 3.6 million acres.
- The average age of a principal farm operator in West Virginia was 59.7 years, up 1.6 years since 2007, and continuing a trend of steady increase.

For more information, visit www.agcensus.usda.gov.