

USDA's Export Sales Reporting Program Turns 30!

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the USDA Export Sales Reporting Program, which monitors U.S. agricultural exports on both a daily and weekly basis. Today's Export Sales Reporting staff has only five members, but together they have a total of 74 years of experience operating this monitoring program and publishing *U.S. Export Sales*.

The Export Sales Reporting Program provides a constant stream of up-to-date information on the quantity of 39 U.S. agricultural commodities sold abroad. A single statistic gives a good idea of the magnitude of its coverage: in fiscal 2002, the Export Sales Reporting Program monitored \$23.5 billion out of the total \$53.3 billion in U.S. agricultural exports.

The program serves as an early alert on the possible impact of foreign sales on U.S. supplies and prices. *U.S. Export Sales* is the only source that has current export sales data. The publication includes data from Friday through Thursday of the prior week. *U.S. Export Sales* is one of the top five sites visited on the FAS home page. The data is used, for example, to analyze the overall level of export demand; determine where markets exist; and assess the relative position of U.S. commodities in those markets.

Why the Program Was Instituted

"The FAS export sales reporting program has its roots in the unexpected purchase of large amounts of grain by the Soviet Union in 1972," explained Tim Rocke, the program manager. "The huge, unanticipated Soviet purchases of U.S.



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wheat and corn that year produced a sizable run-up in U.S. food prices and depleted U.S. reserve stocks."

"In addition, there was concern that certain companies may have gained an unfair advantage in this situation because they had access to market-sensitive information that was unavailable to the public," said agricultural marketing specialist Carolyn Hendricks. "So that all parties involved in the production and export of U.S. grain had access to up-to-date export information, Congress mandated export sales reporting in 1973."

Before the program was established, it was difficult for the public to obtain information on exports until the products were actually shipped. The program guarantees that everyone has access to the same information at the same time. For example, in November 2001, *U.S. Export Sales* announced the first sales activity for Cuba since the program began in 1973. Today, U.S. exports to Cuba have grown substantially: Cuba is our 10th largest

market for rice, buying 118,600 metric tons in the previous marketing year.

How the Program Works

The program encompasses both daily and weekly reports. Weekly reports are required for certain designated commodities: feed grains, wheat, wheat products, rye, flaxseed, linseed oil, cotton, cottonseed, oilseed products, rice, cattle hides and skins and beef.

U.S. exporters are also required to report all "large daily sales" of certain commodities by 3:00 p.m. Eastern time on the business day after the sale is made. Large sales for all reportable commodities (except soybean oil) are defined as 100,000 metric tons or more of one commodity in one day to a single destination, or cumulative sales of 200,000 tons or more of one commodity during the weekly reporting period to a single destination. Large sales for soybean oil are 20,000 tons daily or 40,000 tons or more in one weekly reporting period.

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“The commodities covered by the Export Sales Reporting Program have been selected for monitoring through consultations between USDA and organizations that represent commodity producers and traders,” said Vivian Ramey, agricultural marketing specialist. “The Secretary of Agriculture has the authority to add other commodities to the list of those we monitor.”

U.S. exporters provide information on the quantity of their sales transactions, the type and class of commodity, the marketing year of shipment and the destination. They also report any changes in previously reported information, such as cancellations and changes in destinations.

About 370 exporters report on a weekly basis, with approximately 1,300 data entries each week. All data is confidential as required by law, and released only in aggregate form.

Checks and Balances

“We have several measures to ensure the accuracy of the information,” noted

Accessing the Information

Daily: All daily sales reported to USDA by the 3:00 p.m. deadline are summarized and released to the public at 9:00 a.m. on the next business day.

Weekly: A weekly summary of export activity, “U.S. Export Sales,” is published every Thursday at 8:30 a.m. The report is available electronically on the FAS home page at:

www.fas.usda.gov/export-sales/esrd1.html

It is also available in paper copy via annual subscription from the National Technical Information Service, at: Tel.: 1-800-363-2068

Summary and Commodity: Selected summary and commodity information is available

through a bulletin board fax. To receive it, set your fax machine for polling and dial the number for the information you wish to receive:

| | |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Summary | (202) 690-3275 |
| Cotton | (202) 690-3273 |
| Cattle hides and skins | (202) 690-3270 |

Historical: The Export Sales Reporting staff provides detailed historical data on CD-ROM. The home page also has weekly historical data for major selected commodities beginning with 1990 for weekly exports, accumulated exports, net sales and outstanding sales for the current and next marketing year.

Joyce Wallace, program assistant. “For example, we have a memorandum of understanding with USDA’s Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration to resolve discrepancies in export data.” In April 2003, USDA alerted the Census Bureau of the U.S. Department of Commerce of discrepan-

cies in official U.S. trade data on soybean exports to China. As a result, U.S. soybean exports were adjusted upward by \$280 million.

Staff members also meet periodically with exporters to verify and to reinforce sound reporting practices. “As an additional check,” said program assistant Jewell Musgrove, “exporters must submit quarterly contract information to confirm the reporting activity.”

The success of this program can be attributed to the participants’ cooperation in reporting on a weekly basis over the last 30 years. “Our staff appreciates the continued commitment of the exporters to making *U.S. Export Sales* a highly regarded and valuable report,” Rocke added. ■

For further information on the program, contact the FAS Export Sales Reporting staff at: Tel.: (202) 720-9209; Fax: (202) 690-3275; E-mail: ers@fas.usda.gov

