

DatelineERS

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Economic Research Service

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U.S. Department of Agriculture

ERS is a primary source of economic research and analysis from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, providing timely information on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America.



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Commodity Markets and Trade

ERS Outlook reports provide timely analysis of major commodity markets and trade.

This Month:

- Rice
- Feed
- Wheat
- Oil Crops
- Fruit and Tree Nuts
- Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry

All reports and a calendar of future releases are available:

www.ers.usda.gov/publications/outlook

Amber Waves

www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves

Food Insecurity Up in Recessionary Times

The number of U.S. households unable to put adequate food on the table increased sharply during the latest recession, reaching the highest level recorded since USDA began monitoring household food security in 1995.

Debt Landscape for U.S. Farms Has Shifted

Farm debt levels have risen sharply in recent years, but the growth in asset values has outpaced the growth in debt. Fewer farms end the year with debt outstanding than in the past and debt is more concentrated in larger farms. In 2009, debt repayment capacity is expected to decrease, but remains well above levels observed in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Global Economic Crisis Threatens Food Security in Lower Income Countries

The global economic downturn is expected to reduce import capacity in many lower income countries, adversely affecting their food security.

Science, Technology, and Prospects for Growth in U.S. Corn Yields

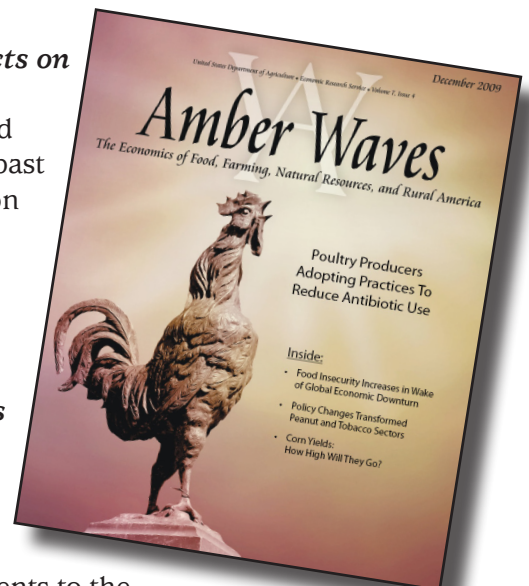
Recent increases in inflation-adjusted crop prices have sparked renewed interest in the potential for continued increases in crop yields. Continued scientific advances could accelerate the rate of growth in corn yields, but achieving a nationwide yield of 300 bushels per acre by 2030 would require a tripling of the projected growth rate, and would be historically unprecedented.

Income Volatility is Rising, With Mixed Effects on Nutrition Assistance Participation

By almost all measures, household income and earnings have become more volatile over the past 40 years. Income volatility has mixed effects on participation in nutrition assistance programs, with some households not applying when eligible and others leaving while still eligible.

Removal of Government Controls Opens Peanut and Tobacco Sectors to Market Forces

Landmark policy changes enacted in the early 2000s transformed the peanut and tobacco sectors by eliminating longstanding supply controls and geographic restrictions on production. Guided by market forces, adjustments to the new environment occurred rapidly, resulting in fewer but larger farms in the regions best adapted to production.



U.S. Food Insecurity Highest Since First Measured in the Mid-90s

www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR83

Eighty-five percent of American households were food secure throughout the entire year in 2008, meaning that they had access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members. According to *Household Food Security in the United States, 2008*, the remaining households (14.6 percent) were food insecure at least some time during the year, including 5.7 percent with very low food security—meaning that the food intake of one or more household members was reduced and their eating patterns were disrupted at times during the year because the household lacked money and other resources for food. Prevalence rates of food insecurity and very low food security were up from 11.1 percent and 4.1 percent, respectively, in 2007, and were the highest recorded since 1995, when the first national food security survey was conducted.



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Organic Dairies Becoming More Like Conventional Ones

www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR82

Organic farming is one of the fastest growing segments of U.S. agriculture, and within that segment, milk production is among the fastest in this century. Between 2000 and 2005, the total number of certified organic milk cows on U.S. farms increased by 25 percent annually on average, from 38,000 to more than 86,000, spurred by rising demand for organic milk. *Characteristics, Costs, and Issues for Organic Dairy Farming* indicates that economic forces may be pushing organic dairies to become more like conventional dairies in size, location, and types of technologies used. Most organic milk operations are small, with 45 percent milking fewer than 50 cows, and 87 percent fewer than 100. But the largest organic dairies (over 200 cows) account for more than a third of organic milk production and are far more likely to generate returns above their capital and labor costs, suggesting that organic milk production will migrate toward larger operations.



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Examining Data Sources for Retail Meat Prices

www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR88

The livestock industry uses information on meat prices at different stages in the marketing system to make production decisions. When grocery stores began using electronic scanners to capture prices paid for meat, it was assumed that the livestock industry could capitalize on having these point-of-sale data available as a measure of the value of its products. *Comparing Two Sources of Retail Meat Price Data* compares scanner price data with publicly available data collected by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Of the two data types, scanner data provide more information about retail meat markets, including a wider variety of meat-cut prices, multiple measures of an average price, the volume of sales, and the relative importance of discounted prices. The scanner data sample, however, is not statistically drawn, and complicated processing requirements delay its release, which makes scanner data less useful than BLS data for analyzing current market conditions.

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