

# Survey of Irrigation Organizations Communications Plan

## Overview

For the first time in over 40 years, the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), will reinstate the Survey of Irrigation Organizations in collaboration with the Economic Research Service (ERS). This survey, last conducted by the Department of Commerce for the year 1978, gathers statistics on irrigation organizations which are defined as a group of individuals, a company, a governmental district or agency, or an individual that operates facilities to supply irrigation water to two or more farms or ranches, or stores irrigation water. It may be either a formal legal organization, or an informal or cooperative arrangement. In many parts of the country, particularly in the arid portions of the West, irrigation is necessary for the production of most crops. Water for irrigation is obtained from two primary sources: surface water (streams and lakes) and ground water (wells and springs).

The Survey of Irrigation Organizations will include 24 States. The reference year for the survey is 2019 the estimated sample size is 6,500. The initial mailing is projected to take place in February 2020 with follow-up mailing and phoning will taking place in March 2020.

In 1978 there were two versions of questionnaires used. One for single water basin organizations and another for multiple water basin organizations.

## Communication Objectives

- Achieve a response rate of at least 75%
- Ensure the organizations understand why responding is valuable to them
- Provide assurance of respondent privacy

## Key Messages

- Please complete your Irrigation Organizations Survey.
- Your response is valuable and helps your business, government, and policymakers understand the current state of agricultural irrigation.
- We care about your privacy, and work to ensure it at every step as required by law.

## Key Audiences

- Companies that sell or rent irrigation services or equipment
- Government water district or agency
- Individuals who operate facilities to supply irrigation water to two or more farms or ranches

## Government Partners

- Economic Research Service
- Farm Service Agency
- State and regional water management districts

## Outreach Materials

- A **postcard** asking respondents to update their contact information on AgCounts.usda.gov
- A **cover letter** that accompanies the survey intended to explain the purpose of the survey, how to complete it, and who is administering the survey. Its purpose is to give direction, convey authority and engender trust.
- A **press release** template that can be used by NASS field offices and other federal partners to be sent to local and regional news outlets.
- A **survey webpage** describing the survey, with a shortened URL for easier sharing. Currently available: [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys/Guide\\_to\\_NASS\\_Surveys/Irrigation\\_Organizations/index.php](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys/Guide_to_NASS_Surveys/Irrigation_Organizations/index.php)
- A **reminder postcard** mailed out after the initial mailing, that will remind the respondents to complete their survey.
- A **brochure** may be helpful if there is in-person enumerator assistance. It is intended as a “leave behind” product if the respondent is not there. The brochure does not need to accompany the survey, since the cover letter should convey the same information.
- **Talking points** and marketing blurbs to be provided to our association and water district partners. They can use it for their own news releases, newsletters and social media outreach to their constituents. This 1-page summary is also given to conference and press outlet events as talking points.

## Opportunities

Outreach to irrigation organization communications staff in person or by email to get help spreading the messages. Partners will be provided talking points or a short blurb prepared ahead of time.

Attending related trade shows, conferences or events where NASS staff are prepared with talking points. These events should be at least six months before the survey is mailed.

- Tri-State WSWC Fall Meeting, September 1
- Western States Water Council, Fall Meeting, October 16-18, Breckenridge, CO
- National Water Resources Association, Annual Conference, November 6-8, 2019, Houston, TX
- Four States Irrigation Council (Colorado, Kansas, Wyoming, and Nebraska), Annual Meeting, January 8-10, Fort Collins, CO
- Texas Alliance of Groundwater Districts, Jan 30-31, location TBD