

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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USDA Drops Annual Floriculture Crops Summary

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If you're wondering why you didn't get your annual Christmas-time survey in the mail from USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), it's because they're not conducting said survey for the 2016 growing year. Why not? Budgetary reasons. We learned this from our in-house hortistician, Dr. Marvin Miller. Marvin combs and crunches the data for GrowerTalks every spring.

For more, we spoke with Washington insider Dr. Joe Bischoff, lobbyist for Cornerstone Government Affairs (and formerly with AmericanHort and ANLA). We wanted to know three things: is this temporary or permanent; were any other ag surveys affected; and what, if anything, can we do to get it reinstated.

According to Joe (who, with Marvin, had met with NASS officials just a week ago), each year NASS looks at its budget and looks at the research priorities that come down from the political appointees that rule over them, then decides what they will and won't do. "Pecking order and dollars," is how Joe put it. Apparently, floriculture crops didn't make the cut.

Joe doesn't know of any other agriculture commodity group that also was dropped, but he admitted that question didn't come up during their meeting. There are 57 different surveys conducted by NASS, including Broiler Hatchery, Cotton Ginning, Nursery & Christmas Tree Production and Trout Production. It seems likely that some other group also had to take a hit.

But if they haven't, they may soon: Joe says he could tell that, facing a potential 21% overall USDA budget cut (if the Trump budget passes as proposed), NASS officials were more concerned with keeping the lights on. He adds that NASS could take a bigger hit than other USDA departments if a major budget cut comes down the pike.

Lastly, what can we do to reinstate the survey? Communicate its importance to our elected officials, Joe suggests. As he stated above, it's all about pecking order, and the more the decision-makers in D.C. know about all the good things our flowers and plants do for society, the better a chance we stand. **GT**