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# Recent Meetings

## Annual Meetings of Social Scientists

In January 2004, several ERS economists participated in the annual Allied Social Science Association (ASSA) meetings in San Diego, CA. The joint meetings of more than 50 related social science disciplines, including agricultural economics and economics, provide a unique opportunity for a diverse group of professionals to interact on current developments in economics and related disciplines. Jim MacDonald, Mary Ahearn, and David Banker presented a paper on the relevance of organizational economics concepts in addressing contemporary policy issues, such as contracting. Agapi Somwaru collaborated on a paper with Shiva Makki on trade, investment, and growth in developing countries. Dean Jolliffe presented a paper on poverty differences and related measurement issues, between metro and nonmetro areas. And Ashok Mishra organized a session and presented a paper on off-farm employment, government policy, and the structure of agriculture from an international perspective.



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## Population Change in Rural America

In January 2004, ERS and Cornell University hosted a conference, "Population Change and Rural Society," that highlighted research findings from Census 2000 data on rural demographic change and its implications for economic and social well-being, land use patterns, and rural policy. The conference was organized around four critical themes: changing demographic composition; economic restructuring, globalization, and

changing livelihoods; land use contestation; and regions of chronic disadvantage and emerging opportunity. Presentations by leading social scientists consisted of overviews broadly surveying each critical theme followed by case studies that grounded themes in specific geographic regions. **William Kandel**, [wkandel@ers.usda.gov](mailto:wkandel@ers.usda.gov)

## New State-Level Estimates From ARMS

In December 2003, ERS and the Farm Foundation hosted a workshop in St. Louis, MO, to discuss opportunities to use new data from the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS). These data include statistically significant State-level estimates for the 15 States with the largest value of agricultural production, in addition to national and regional estimates. About 100 participants from commodity groups, Federal and State agencies, conservation groups, community groups, universities, and the private sector shared information on how the new data can be used to inform issues of importance to a wide variety of stakeholders. **Jim Johnson**, [jimjohn@ers.usda.gov](mailto:jimjohn@ers.usda.gov)

## Food Consumption Data Under Review

In December 2003, ERS hosted a meeting with representatives of Federal statistical agencies to discuss a forthcoming review of USDA's food consumption data infrastructure by the National Research Council's Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT). Food consumption data are crucial to a wide range of USDA activities, including assessing outcomes of food assistance and nutrition programs, the effectiveness of dietary guidelines, and the risk of foodborne illness, and conducting research and providing market intelligence on U.S. food consumption patterns. Surveys conducted by other Federal statistical agencies, such as the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (Department of Health and Human Services) and the Consumer Expenditure Surveys (Bureau of Labor Statistics) could be included in the CNSTAT review. **Nicole Ballenger**, [nicole@ers.usda.gov](mailto:nicole@ers.usda.gov)



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## Improving Efficiency of Farmland Preservation Programs

In November 2003, ERS, the Farm Foundation, and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) co-sponsored a workshop in Baltimore, MD, on how economic research can be used to improve targeting of farmland preservation program dollars. Participants included ERS and university researchers, NRCS Farm and Ranchland Protection Program specialists, CSREES land use specialists, State and local preservation program administrators, and representatives from farmer and nonprofit groups. Participants concluded that local variation in program goals and diverse community preferences, among other factors, make it difficult to incorporate economic research results into a nationwide parcel-ranking tool, such as the Environmental Benefit Index used for the Conservation Reserve Program. But more can be done to use economic research results to help inform the parcel selection process. **Mary Ahearn**, [mahearn@ers.usda.gov](mailto:mahearn@ers.usda.gov)