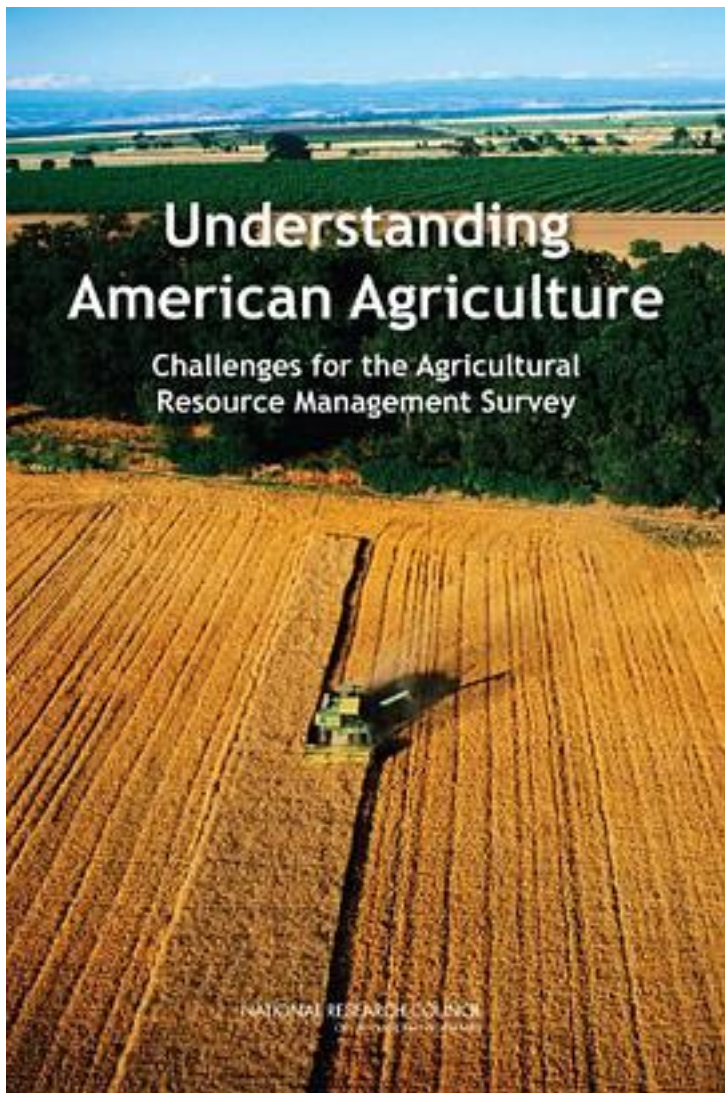


# Understanding American Agriculture



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著者:Not Available (NA)

出版者:

出版时间:2007-11

装帧:

isbn:9780309110921

The Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS) is the federal government's primary source of information on the financial condition, production practices, and resource use on farms, as well as the economic well-being of America's farm households. ARMS data are important to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and to congressional, administration, and industry decision makers when they must weigh alternative policies and programs that touch the farm sector or affect farm families. ARMS is unique in several respects. As a multiple-purpose survey with an agricultural focus, ARMS is the only representative national source of observations of farm-level production practices, the economics of the farm businesses operating the field (or dairy herd, greenhouse, nursery, poultry house, etc.), and the characteristics of the American farm household (age, education, occupation, farm and off-farm work, types of employment, family living expenses, etc.). No other data source is able to match the range and depth of ARMS in these areas. American agriculture is changing, and the science of statistical measurement is changing as well. As with every major governmental data collection with such far-reaching and important uses, it is critical to periodically ensure that the survey is grounded in relevant concepts, applying the most up-to-date statistical methodology, and invested with the necessary design, estimation, and analytical techniques to ensure a quality product. ARMS is a complex undertaking. From its start as a melding of data collected from the field, the farm, and the household in a multiphase, multiframe, and multiple mode survey design, it has increased in complexity over the decade of its existence as more sophisticated demands for its outputs have been made. Today, the survey faces difficult choices and challenges, including a need for a thorough review of its methods, practices, and procedures. Understanding American Agriculture : Challenges for the Agricultural Resource Management Survey summarizes the recommendations of the committee who wrote the survey.

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