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ANALYSIS



The U.S. Department of Agriculture's final estimates in January for how many corn acres farmers planted and harvested in 2025 represented unprecedented increases from initial estimates in June. EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS FILE

Corn harvest revision hits USDA's credibility

Final estimate shows sharp jump from June

Tom Polansek
REUTERS

CHICAGO – The U.S. Department of Agriculture, long the world's gold standard for crop estimates, faces mounting doubts about the reliability of its data from farmers, grain traders and economists following deep staff losses and a sharp upward revision in how many acres of corn were harvested.

Farmers, traders and food manufacturers everywhere closely follow monthly USDA reports on production, supplies and demand so they can anticipate prices and inventories. Thousands of employees left the USDA last year as part of President Donald Trump's drive

to shrink the federal government, and experts worry the shrinking staff hobbled the agency's ability to produce accurate and timely data.

The USDA's final estimates in January for how many corn acres farmers planted and harvested in 2025 represented unprecedented increases from initial estimates in June. Already-low grain prices sank more than 5%, at a time when growers were struggling to make money.

USDA data last month "appeared to reflect an agency in disarray," said Arlan Suderman, chief commodities economist for consultancy StoneX, citing changes to acres and other estimates.

The revisions prompted the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, which releases acreage estimates, to launch an internal review, said Lance Honig, a top NASS official.

"Given the turmoil and turnover at the USDA at the time, there were already concerns about data quality, with the miss from June to final doing everything to reinforce those fears."

Angie Setzer
Partner at advisory firm Consus Ag Consulting

At the Farm Service Agency, another USDA branch, staffing reductions hampered employees from processing

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Michigan's classroom cell phone ban is official

Here's when rules change for students

Clara Hendrickson

Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

Starting next school year, Michigan will have a new statewide policy banning smartphone use in classrooms, following in the footsteps of many states that have enacted similar restrictions with the goal of limiting digital distractions from learning, and addressing cyberbullying.

House Bill 4141, signed by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer on Tuesday, Feb. 10, requires Michigan school districts to develop a policy that prohibits K-12 students from using phones, tablets and computers during instructional time. It creates some exceptions, including for medically necessary devices and those used for special education programming or for a specific lesson. The policy also allows students to use their devices in an emergency situation. Senate Bill 495 requires school districts to update their emergency plans to include a protocol outlining when and how students can use cell phones and other devices in an emergency.

"Our action today will help Michigan students succeed," Whitmer said at an event at Waverly High School,

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Bronson Cancer Center recognized again for top-tier radiation safety

Janis Reeser
AI-assisted reporter
USA TODAY NETWORK

The American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) has reaccredited the Bronson Cancer Center in Battle Creek with its APEX Accredited Program for Excellence, according to a community announcement. The center, first accredited in 2017, has again demonstrated its com-

mitment to high-quality radiation treatment and patient-centered care.

APEX accreditation is a voluntary, multi-step evaluation that reviews a cancer center's safety standards, quality-assurance measures and patient-engagement practices. To earn reaccreditation, centers must show that they follow rigorous safety protocols and deliver coordinated, communicative and patient-focused care through-

out the treatment process.

Bronson is one of just 450 cancer centers nationwide to receive APEX status. "Achieving reaccreditation through ASTRO's APEX program reflects the commitment our physicians, physicists and care teams place on delivering radiation therapy with the highest standards of safety, precision and quality,"

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