40 percent of U.S. is farmland
U.S. ag sales total $300 billion

Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold: 2007

1 Dot = $20,000,000

United States Total $297,220,491,300

0 200 Miles

0 100 Miles

Data Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service
But coverage of agribusiness industry is inconsistent in mainstream media
A 2012 study Southern Illinois University on ag-news coverage in even Midwest regional papers found that agriculture ranked 7 out of 10 topics in frequency and prominence among front page content.

Editors cited the technical nature of agriculture and lower staffing levels as reasons for not covering the beat.

When covered, agriculture news focused mainly on market information and commodities or features on farm or harvest festivals.
Recent stories - Food
From Kansas City Star this year

The industry increasingly relies on a mechanical tenderization process, increasing E. coli risks. Meanwhile, doctors and USDA say antibiotic overuse is leading to resistant bacteria in humans. And with consumption down, beef is fighting back with efforts to influence U.S. dietary guidelines.
Stories - Farm accidents
From National Public Radio

SPECIAL SERIES
Buried In Grain
An investigation by NPR and the Center for Public Integrity examines the danger and weak regulatory response of grain bin entrapments.

Fines Slashed In Grain Bin Entrapment Deaths

The persistence of grain bin entrapments and a horrific 2010 incident expose weaknesses in worker safety laws and enforcement. An NPR and Center for Public Integrity analysis has found that among 179 deaths since 1984, fines were reduced 60 percent of the time.

Alex T. Paschal/AP
Stories - Fuel
From National Geographic

Panda Poop Might Help Turn Plants Into Fuel

The same organisms that make pandas effective at digesting bamboo may help turn plant waste into biofuels, according to researchers.

Photograph by Koren Su, Corbis
Stories - Government Subsidies
From Washington Post (a classic)

“Harvesting Cash” - An in-depth look at how the U.S. government spent $95 billion in subsidies
Stories - Government Bungling
From Kansas City Star - “Failing the Grade”

Failing the grade Betrayals and blunders at the Department of Agriculture
The Kansas City Star - Sunday, December 8, 1991
Edition: METROPOLITAN
Section: NATIONAL/WORLD
Page: A1

When Abraham Lincoln founded the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1862, he called it “The People's Department.” It’s not everyone’s department anymore.

It’s not for consumers. In grocery stores nationwide, thousands of USDA labels on meat products are misleading or dead wrong. In the nation's packing plants, poor USDA oversight leads directly to illness and death among Americans.

It’s not for minorities. Over the years, USDA county committees have helped ruin black farmers across the South. Even today, some all-white committees exclude black farmers from loans.

Departmentwide, the USDA has a record of discrimination unsurpassed in federal government.

It’s not even for small farmers. Across America, a small percentage of the nation's largest farms gobble up most of the subsidies. Many evade or violate payment limits, ripping off taxpayers. In every case, USDA employees approved the setups.

In a wide-ranging 16-month investigation, The Kansas City Star set out to examine the modern role of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the department that touches our lives in more ways every day than any other branch of government.
In agribusiness, global is local, local is global
Genetically modified corn
From Investigative Reporting Denmark

“Monsanto stops production on genetically modified corn in Europe”
Labor

From Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting

“Russia, U.S. farmers face similar challenges”
Finding reports, audits and investigations

Agencies

- U.S. Government Accountability Office
- Federal and state agriculture
- Food and Drug Administration
- U.S. and state environmental agencies
- Energy agencies
- Labor agencies
USDA Office of Inspector General

http://www.usda.gov/oig/
USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service

http://www.nass.usda.gov/
Food Safety and Inspection Service

http://www.fsis.usda.gov
Food and Drug Administration

http://www.fda.gov/Food/default.htm
Department of Labor

http://www.dol.gov
How to find and use national datasets

Economic Research Service (USDA)

Risk Management Agency (USDA)
http://www.rma.usda.gov/data/sob.html

National Agriculture Statistics Service (USDA)
http://www.nass.usda.gov/

Food and Drug Administration – Enforcement Reports
http://www.fda.gov/Safety/Recalls/EnforcementReports/default.htm

Department of Energy – Alternative Fuels Data Center
http://www.afdc.energy.gov/data/

Water Quality Information Center (USDA) National Agriculture Library
http://wqic.nal.usda.gov/databases-0
More story topics

• **Politics**
  Lobbying Influence, campaign finance and legislative bills

• **Environment**
  Pesticides and pollution

• **Food Safety**
  Government inspections, audits and recalls
More story topics

- Labor
  Safety, accidents, migrant workers

- Science
  Corporately funded research, universities, advocates

- Government Money
  Subsidies, insurance, contracts, grants
Seeking experts

Experts in agribusiness can help you shortcut through jargon and inexperience to focus on the issues you should pay attention to

But also consider how they are funded or what they advocate for

http://www.newsu.org/resources/sri/covering-agribusiness
Craig Cox
Environmental Working Group

• One of the largest environmental health research and advocacy groups
• Offers reliable data on topics like crop insurance and has good resources to data
• Diverse funding
• Has transparent agendas to focus on research and advocacy that shape government policies

www.ewg.org
Miguel C. Keberlein Gutiérrez
Illinois Migrant Legal Assistant Project

- A civil-legal services and advocacy program for low-income and underserved populations
- Has on-the-ground knowledge of issues and stories of the people impacted by agribusiness topics like migrant labor
- Can connect reporters to people and stories as well as guide suggestions for additional sources

www.lafchicago.org
Dr. Douglas Powell,  
Department of Diagnostic Medicine/Pathobiology  
Kansas State University  

• Researches and reports on our food safety system from farm-to-fork  
• Frequently called upon as a food safety expert  
• Blunt speaker  
  Serves on national and international food safety boards  

http://www.barfblog.com
Dr. Bruce Sherrick
Agriculture and Consumer Economics
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

- Researches crop insurance and farmland market performance
- Director, National Center for Farm Business and Rural Finance
- Team member of farmdoc project, which provides farmers with tools to assess risk management analysis and information

www.farmdoc.Illinois.edu
Dr. Patrick Westhoff  
Food and Agriculture Policy Research Institute  
University of Missouri

- Director, Food and Agriculture Policy Research Institute  
- Annually prepares a baseline projection for U.S. and world production of grains, oilseeds, livestock and dairy commodities  
- Provides analysis for Congress, the USDA and EPA as well as other state and federal agencies

http://www.fapri.missouri.edu/
Keeping Up With Issues

Use alerts and RSS Feeds from:

• USDA and GAO
• Congressional Committees
• Environmental Working Group
• FoodSafetyNews.com
• Harvest Public Media
• FarmDoc
• Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting
Keeping Up With Issues

Follow and read ....

• #agchat and #agnerd (a lot of trade and advocates but good alert on issues)
• #USDA
• FarmPress.com newsletters (Western, Southwest, Delta and Southeast) – a trade publication with a great roundup of issues and what’s trending in the business. Free email alerts.
www.investigatemidwest.org
F: @investigatemidwest and @agjournos
T: @investigatemidwest #agjournos

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