

Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
April 3 - 4, 2001



U.S. Department of Agriculture
NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

Executive Summary
Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics
April 3-4, 2001

Crowne Plaza Hotel
Washington, D.C.

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Attendants at Meeting

Members Present

Walter J. Armbruster	Mary A. Pamplin
Arthur R. Brown	Edward J. Pennick
Robert D. Epperson	Bobby R. Phils
Phil Fulton (ERS Ex-Officio)	Ross R. Racine
John I Gifford	James D. Rieck
Carol A. Gregg	Lee F. Schrader
Mark W. Jenner	Topper Thorpe (Chair)
Thomas H. Kimmell	Hugh A. Warren
Ling-Jung (Kelvin) Koong	Mark E. Whalon
Mark D. Lange	Ewen M. Wilson (Census Bureau Ex-Officio)
Andrew W. LaVigne	Ron C. Wimberley
Jack C. Mitenbuler	Ivan W. Wyatt

Members Absent

Charles E. Adams	Sheila K. Massey
Gumecindo Salas	

NASS Personnel Participating

Ron Bosecker, Administrator
Rich Allen, Committee Executive Director and Associate Administrator
Joe Reilly, Deputy Administrator for Field Operations
Hubert Hamer, Associate Deputy Administrator for Field Operations
Fred Vogel, Deputy Administrator for Programs and Products
Marshall Dantzler, Director of Census and Survey Division
Carol House, Director of Research and Development Division
Jack Nealon, Director of Information Technology Division
Steve Wiyatt, Director of Statistics Division

Other NASS Personnel Present

Janet Allen

Irwin Anolik

Bill Arends

Dave Aune

Norman Bennett

Rhonda Brandt

Rod DeSmet

Craig Flynn

Kent Hoover

Linda Hutton

Bill Iwig

Chrissy Jenkins

Tina McLane

Bob Milton

Greg Preston

Rick Schuchardt

Linda Simpson

Jacki Stanley-McCarthy

Dee Webb

Arnie Wilcox

Guests Present

Stephen Madden, Research Education and Economics, USDA

Kitty Smith, Economic Research Service, USDA

Margriet Caswell, Economic Research Service, USDA

Roger Cryan, National Milk Producers Federation

Day One Summary

Committee Chair Topper Thorpe opened the Advisory Committee meeting. Committee Executive Director Rich Allen discussed the meeting's focus and logistics. Topper Thorpe then introduced NASS Administrator, Ron Bosecker.

Administrator's Welcome

Ron Bosecker welcomed the Committee to Washington, D.C. He announced that NASS was celebrating its 40th birthday and highlighted some of the changes that have taken place in the Agency since 1961. He stated that he is proud of the Agency's accomplishments over the last 40 years and, with the help of the Advisory Committee, NASS looks forward to the next 40. He also commented on recent articles about NASS Cyber Security, the Agency's budget, the current status of political leadership in the USDA, and a few census of agriculture issues open for discussion over the next two days.

Census Content and Coverage

Fred Vogel provided a status report on the content and testing of 2002 Census of Agriculture questionnaires. He also presented issues related to adjusting census data to account for farms missing from the census mail list and procedures for dealing with farms reporting less than one thousand dollars of sales in a year with no intention of having sales in the future. Committee discussion led to recommendations for these last two topics.

Census Data Products

Fred Vogel also made a presentation on 2002 Census Data Products. He highlighted issues in a Decision Memorandum approved by NASS's Program Planning Council and the Administrator. The memo points out that the Internet will be the primary focus of census product development. All other paper or CD-ROM based data products will be spin-offs from the Internet products. Emphasis will be placed on developing a web-based search engine for user queries on the Internet and CD-ROM's. After discussion, the Committee agreed with this approach to data products for the 2002 Census of Agriculture. At the end of the session, Carol House provided a demonstration of NASS research into tools for data exploration.

Environmental Program and Issues

Steve Wiyatt made a presentation on NASS's environmental survey program which highlighted program history, the current survey program, and future plans. After this presentation, Hugh Warren, Chair of the Subcommittee on Environmental Issues, presented the findings of the Subcommittee. He commented that the area of environmental statistics was very expansive and that environmental issues will have a much higher profile in the future. There is concern about trying to meet the large need for environmental data as part of NASS's core program. The Subcommittee felt that the kind of detailed environmental information desired by users should not be part of the Census of Agriculture, but dealt with in separate follow-on censuses or surveys. Topper Thorpe called for a motion to have the Subcommittee on Environmental Program Issues continue to exist and provide guidance to the full Committee. The motion passed.

Future Committee Issues

Topper Thorpe led a discussion revisiting agricultural statistics issues pointed out by the Advisory Committee at their first meeting in November 1999. The Committee was asked if any new issues had surfaced that should be addressed by the Committee. Members raised issues on the definition of migrant workers versus seasonal workers; revisiting what is considered “sales” after analyzing data from the contracts section in the upcoming census; use of electronic or web-based data collection; Indian reservation data; dealing with disease threats such as hoof and mouth disease; developing geographic information systems (GIS); information on invasive species; and accounting for the use of buffer strips.

New Committee Business

Topper Thorpe called for new Committee business. There were brief discussions on the need to have definitions on the 2002 Census CD-ROM product and issuing a public use sample on CD-ROM as was done in 1992. There was also a discussion on whether NASS should seek appropriations for developing a GIS system. The Committee’s conclusion was that this technology was here to stay, other agencies are using it, and NASS needs to get involved with or without additional funding.

Topper Thorpe called for nominations for Chair elect. Mark Whalon was nominated and selected as Committee Chair for the coming year.

Day Two Summary

Mandatory Reporting

Lee Schrader, Chair of the Mandatory Reporting Subcommittee, presented a brief Subcommittee report in which he stressed that NASS should have compelling reasons before considering mandatory reporting. An example of this would be the direct use of data for making policy. NASS should make every effort to improve data quality through methodology and data verification before seeking mandatory reporting authority.

NASS Program and Budget Priorities

Fred Vogel made a presentation on NASS program and budget priorities. He asked the Committee about areas where the program needs to be expanded or reduced. He asked if the Committee felt there were data sets that needed to be improved or else dropped. Finally, he asked for advice on how NASS should reduce its program if it had to achieve a 10 percent budget cut in the future. He discussed challenges and strategies encountered during a past program review. Committee discussion centered on developing a strategy to determine what NASS's core program should be and the resources required to support it. NASS needs to develop criteria for determining which commodities are surveyed and the frequency at which they are surveyed. A set policy will put the Agency in a stronger position to defend program changes with data users. The session ended with the comment that NASS should let Committee members know when resources are needed and let the Committee help secure funding.

Public Comments and Meeting Adjournment

The Committee meeting ended with an opportunity for public comments. Roger Cryan, with the National Milk Producers Association stressed the need for NASS's milk production and price statistics. Committee member Ross Racine stressed concern over NASS's current plan to do a pilot study to improve methodology for collecting data on Indian reservations in only a few States. Joe Reilly responded by stating that the Agency is looking to improve methodology for future censuses of agriculture by learning from a pilot survey conducted in 7 States. We receive good cooperation from Tribes and have the best chance for success in these States.

Topper Thorpe called for any additional motions from members on topics discussed during the meeting. There were none and the meeting was adjourned.

Committee Recommendations

The Advisory Committee passed the following three recommendations.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that NASS continue to count all places as farms which qualify based on agricultural activity point counts and not use the intention to sell products as a criterion for qualifying as a farm.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that NASS fully adjust 1997 and 2002 census results to account for coverage error and publish both in the 2002 Census of Agriculture publications.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that compelling reasons must exist to justify the use of mandatory reporting on NASS business surveys. The issue needs to be considered on an individual survey basis when there are both NASS and industry concerns with specific reporting or data quality situations. Improving data collection methodology and communication with respondents should be the first approach to dealing with these concerns.

Appendix 1. Agenda

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE STATISTICS
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

AGENDA

April 3-4, 2001

*Crowne Plaza Hotel, Washington, D.C.
14th & K Streets NW

Tuesday, April 3

Time	Topic/Activity	Discussion Leader
8:00 a.m.	Call to Order and Introduction	Topper Thorpe, Committee Chair
8:10 a.m.	Meeting Plans	Rich Allen, Associate Administrator and Committee Executive Director
8:15 a.m.	Administrator's Welcome and Comments	R. Ronald Bosecker, Administrator
8:45 a.m.	Update on Census Content and Testing Coverage and Point Farm Procedures	Fred Vogel, Deputy Administrator For Programs and Products
9:30 a.m.	BREAK	
9:45 a.m.	Census Content, Coverage, Point Farms Committee Discussion	Topper Thorpe
10:45 a.m.	Census of Agriculture Data Products NASS Perspective	Fred Vogel
11:15 a.m.	Tools for Data Exploration Demonstration	Carol House, Director for Research And Development Division
11:30 a.m.	LUNCH	
1:00 a.m.	Census of Agriculture Data Products Committee Discussion	Topper Thorpe
1:45 p.m.	NASS Environmental Survey Program Update on NASS Program Review	Steve Wiyatt, Director of Statistics Division
2:00 p.m.	Subcommittee on Environmental Issues Update on Subcommittee Activities	Hugh Warren, Subcommittee Chair
2:15 p.m.	BREAK	
2:30 p.m.	NASS Environmental Survey Program Committee Discussion	Topper Thorpe
3:15 p.m.	Future Agricultural Statistics Issues Revisited	Topper Thorpe
3:45 p.m.	Public Questions and Comments	Topper Thorpe
4:00 p.m.	New Business and Recommendations	Topper Thorpe
4:30 p.m.	ADJOURN	

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April 3-4, 2001

*Crowne Plaza Hotel, Washington, D.C.
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Wednesday, April 4

Time	Topic/Activity	Discussion Leader
8:00 a.m.	Call to Order	Topper Thorpe
8:05 a.m.	Report from the Subcommittee for Mandatory Business Reporting	Lee Schrader, Subcommittee Chair
8:30 a.m.	Mandatory Business Reporting Committee Discussion	Topper Thorpe
9:15 a.m.	BREAK	
9:30 a.m.	NASS Program and Budget Priorities	Fred Vogel
10:00 a.m.	Public Questions and Comments	Topper Thorpe
10:30 a.m.	Committee Recommendations	Topper Thorpe
11:30 a.m.	ADJOURN	

* The meeting facilities are in the Masonic Temple's Oasis room next door to the Crowne Plaza's Franklin Exchange Restaurant.