



Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Jamie L. Whitten Building, Rm. 200A
Washington DC 20250
June 13, 2007

Dear Secretary Johanns:

On behalf of the USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS) Advisory Committee, I am very pleased to provide you with recommendations from our 2007 advisory process. These resulted from a two day meeting in Crystal City and involved a quorum of the Committee. We had an excellent discussion with a variety of viewpoints expressed, and I am very pleased with the outcome. In particular, the issue on data confidentiality protection and inherent changes occupied a large share of the dialogue between Committee members. I believe the decision to promote the resulting recommendation indicates the group's willingness to look to the future and determine new uses for our data.

We worked toward consensus support and sometimes achieved unanimity. We believe the recommendations are in the best interests of USDA/NASS, the farmers/ranchers and the data users. Despite increasing pressures to provide more data for policy decisions, the Committee also endorsed protection of that data as well as continued concern for the high level of confidentiality expected by our industry. We believe NASS remains a solid investment for the American people but the confidentiality provided for our farmers and ranchers must be maintained.

We know that NASS - by providing timely agricultural statistics, trend analysis and strategic reports essential to policymakers - may be one of the most effective and economical services in the Department. As an advisory committee, we also strongly commit to assist NASS in the continued yield of a rich harvest of vital information which contributes to the wellbeing of our industry.

On a personal note, I have enjoyed my three terms on the Advisory Committee. The staff at NASS has always been extremely helpful to me, as well as very enthusiastic about their work. It has been my pleasure to attend meetings and learn more about the organization. I know they will continue to serve agriculture well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jacklyn Folsom". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

**Jacklyn Folsom, Chairperson
2007 NASS Advisory Committee
President
Vermont Farm Bureau**

**USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service Advisory Committee
2007 Recommendations**

1. The Advisory Committee recommends release of records to the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA) with the 2012 Census, after the change to Title 7 is made. In 2006, the NASS Administrator was contacted by the National Archives and Records Administration with a proposal to work cooperatively in order to permanently preserve the contents of the Census of Agriculture questionnaires. These contain farm-level data on such information as expenses and income from all sources, labor expended, agricultural practices, size of operation and items produced. Following the seventy five year restriction, the contents of the questionnaires will be available for public access and use in preserving the story of American agriculture.

Working in cooperation with NARA will require changes to Section 2276 of Title 7, which is the legal basis for the NASS confidentiality pledge. These changes will require thoughtful consideration to avoid any negative perception by Census of Agriculture respondents and NASS stakeholders.

2. The Advisory Committee recommends conducting a pilot study to make the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS) micro data available through the National Institute of Standards and Technology and National Opinion Research Center (NIST-NORC) data enclave. Availability will be limited to no more than twenty researchers for a time period limited to no more than two years. Following the pilot study, NASS will report back to the Advisory Committee with an assessment of risks compared to the current system of data availability, as well as an evaluation of benefits of the off-site research conducted.

3. The Advisory Committee recommends maintaining a list of new content request(s) for approval on the 2012 Census. For example, currently the only farmer demographic which cannot be identified is "beginning farmer." One possible clarification may be changing the census question from "years on present farm" to "year in which you began farming." The Census of 2007 is in final production and consequently precludes the change for this round. Therefore, it is suggested the first item on a "new contents request" list for the 2012 Census be the new farmer question and other items should be added as the Advisory Committee meets and makes recommendations.

4. The Advisory Committee recommends supporting the Census Follow-on Survey Project Schedule. The timeline recommended is as follows:

2009 Completion: Farm and Ranch Irrigation, Energy, and Organics
2010 Completion: Horticulture Census; Fruits, Nuts and Vineyard Survey
2011 Completion: Land & Economic Stability Survey; Aquaculture Census