

Southeast Data Users Meeting
Summary of Questions and Comments
Atlanta, Georgia
March 13, 2006

Note: The following write-up presents a topical summary of issues discussed during the forum. Material is presented in essentially chronological order. However, all discussions on a topic have been consolidated if a specific topic came up more than once.

Egg Production Data: A question was asked to Michael Sheats of the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) about what percentage of operations are reporting their egg production data. The question was asked that since reporting the data is voluntary, what is the incentive for them to report and would it be worth it to require mandatory reporting?

Michael Sheats responded that they don't have problems getting data from the respondents as 80-90% of the operations report their egg data. He also mentioned the operations don't have a problem reporting their data and therefore mandatory reporting isn't necessary. Mr. Sheats continued by saying the information is confidential and useful to the egg industry.

Labor Wage Rate Data: A question was asked to Linda Hutton of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) about who the users are of labor and wage information.

Linda responded by saying the data are available to the entire industry, but the primary user is the Department of Labor (DOL).

After Linda's response, the comment was made that the DOL conducts Prevailing Wage surveys to collect some of this information and the questioner was concerned about the duplication of effort. For this reason, the question was asked if and how users can recommend that NASS quit collecting and publishing data because of the negative impact on the fruit and vegetable industry. A comment was made that the average wage rates from NASS are higher than what is collected from the DOL because NASS collects data differently than the DOL and publishes regional estimates whereas the DOL publishes estimates regarding geographic location and specific occupations. Lastly, it was recommended by the attendee that the DOL take over the publishing of wage rates.

Linda responded that the data are not being duplicated as both surveys are collecting different items. NASS has asked the DOL if NASS should collect and publish more or less wage rate data, but they have indicated funding is an issue and that they need everything they are currently getting from NASS.

Citrus Data: A question was asked to Linda Hutton of NASS if there were demographic statistics for the citrus industry. Also, how does Texas and California get their acreage statistics?

Linda responded by saying the only source of demographic data is the Census of Agriculture which was last conducted in 2002, but soon to be done again for 2007. Joe Prusacki stated that funding from Florida producers pays for their acreage, yield, and production data, but Texas and California are different as the producers don't fund it. Jim Smith continued by saying these two states have data available and he would follow-up with the questioner to help find the data.

Cotton Stocks: A comment was made that over the last few years there has been substantial revisions to Chinese cotton stocks. A question was then asked to Jerry Bange of the World Agricultural Outlook Board (WAOB) about how the ending stocks numbers are revised and what process is used to set initial stocks and revised stocks numbers.

Jerry began by mentioning that China information is very difficult to obtain. He mentioned they take the various pieces of usage statistics and back into the numbers. He continued by saying the governments in both China and the U.S. are putting in a lot of effort to improve the numbers and they are getting better, but it would take a lot of time and work to improve them even more.

Government Contacts: A comment was made that compared to 20-30 years ago, there has been a lot of employee turnover in many government agencies. In the past, commodity specialists would stay in the same position for a number of years which made it easier to work with because you were always dealing with the same person.

Carol House responded by saying that this is true and the agencies need to keep their contact information on the Web up-to-date.

Tobacco Program: A recommendation was made to Jim Smith of NASS that more states be added to the tobacco estimating program, in particular Illinois, Indiana, and West Virginia. There is concern that more acreage will be planted to tobacco in these states as the tobacco companies write more contracts to producers in these states in the future in order to meet demand.

Jim Smith answered by saying that NASS will evaluate this request.

Pecan Data: A question was asked to Jim Smith of NASS about who the pecan contacts are that worked import and export data.

Jim gave names and phone numbers of people from both ERS and WAOB.

Aquaculture: A comment was made about how the various aquaculture industries have benefitted from the Aquaculture Census and NASS surveys. Several examples were given about how NASS statistics have helped, such as a certain pharmaceutical company

invested the resources to produce a new antibiotic for fish (which was the first new animal drug approved in many years), an anti-dumping case was won in favor of the industry, the industry successfully fought a pollution issue with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and producers are better able to secure bank loans. NASS was thanked by the attendee for a job well done.

Homeland Security: A question was asked about the role NASS will be playing in Homeland Security. The question was expanded as to what role NASS would play in manufacturing.

Dan Kerestes of NASS responded by talking about animal ID's. He mentioned that NASS is assisting as much as possible. However, he said NASS is not providing names, of course, but helping as much as we can. He continued by saying that certain commodities are better than others when it comes to signing up for animal ID's, but only a small portion of American agriculture has signed up.

Carol House concluded by talking about NASS confidentiality rules and that NASS is protected by law not to disclose names of respondents.

Tobacco Industry: A question was asked to Joe Prusacki of NASS if the tobacco industry has been willing to help NASS get good cooperation on price and production data for tobacco.

Joe responded by saying the large tobacco companies have not been very helpful to NASS and that it has been difficult to get the information. He finished by saying NASS will continue to work with them and hopes cooperation improves in the future.

Avian Bird Flu: A question was asked to Carol House regarding NASS's involvement in the collection and publishing of data related to the bird flu if and when it arrives in the U.S.

Carol began by saying that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) would be taking the lead on this with the help of NASS as well as other government agencies. NASS would possibly be involved in providing statistics of the areas where it hits and APHIS would possibly be providing information on how to notice symptoms. She continued by saying that whatever NASS's involvement would be, no names of individual producers would be revealed.

Dan Kerestes finished by saying NASS would possibly provide statistics regarding bird deaths related to the bird flu.

Small Flocks: Linda Hutton was asked if any USDA entity knows how many small farm-owned flocks there are in the U.S.

Linda said these numbers can be obtained from the Census of Agriculture. Dan Kerestes also mentioned APHIS has already done some of this analysis and has some statistics.

Mike Sheats stated outbreaks in disease mostly occur by live birds from large flocks moving from one flock to another. Backyard flocks don't move around as much resulting in fewer disease outbreaks. He finished by saying that AMS already releases weekly reports that show how it impacts the marketplace.