



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

# National Agricultural Statistics Service

## Workforce Plan for FY 2005–2009

Revised  
May 2005

# USDA



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## MESSAGE FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR



I present to you in the following pages the NASS Workforce Plan. It has been linked to the REE Human Capital Plan which in turn is tied to the USDA Human Capital Plan. The successful implementation of this plan is important for our workforce to continue to accomplish the NASS mission, “to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture.” NASS is positioned within the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Our provision of key statistical information fulfills a basic need in both the public and private sectors for fair and efficient agricultural markets and for making informed policy decisions.

The NASS workforce faces increasing challenges in its efforts to provide necessary statistical data that are essential for orderly production and marketing decisions made by farmers, ranchers, and agricultural businesses. NASS data provide the measures for the performance of U.S. agriculture. Modern agriculture, a desire to remain at the top of our game, and the Presidential mandates require that our workforce possesses new technical skills and adopts new ways of doing business. NASS customers expect to be able to conveniently access NASS data efficiently and quickly. We need to plan for expected retirements within the next decade and prevent knowledge and skill gaps from occurring in critical areas. We also need to work proactively to continue our commitment in the areas of Equal Employment Opportunity, Civil Rights, and Workforce Diversity.

For NASS to meet these challenges and continue its role as the official source of comprehensive, current, and reliable information on U.S. farms and ranches, we need to be able to attract, develop, and retain employees who believe in our basic core values: Trust, Respect, Unbiasedness, Service, and Teamwork. These values are vital to fulfilling our current and future goals because we work with and in service to the public. Our core values are a source of pride for NASS employees in our work accomplishments and our daily lives.

Agriculture is the base that supports 13 percent of our nation’s gross domestic product and employs more than 16 percent of the workforce. It is vital that the American people and agricultural communities Trust us to provide the reliable and unbiased information they need. As part of our commitment, NASS must continue to show high appreciation and Respect for our voluntary data providers, our current and future cooperative partners, and to those who use the data and services we provide. To be successful, we will listen to our customers, be flexible, and be responsive to changing needs. We as members of an organization, will continue to show respect for each other, building on our common values and diverse strengths. We must be Unbiased in our work and in our relationships. Service is the final word in the NASS name and will ultimately define our success. Strong Teamwork is critical to our combined success and contributes to better consumer decisions affecting our agricultural communities and the public. The strategies incorporated in this Workforce Plan are designed to enhance our solidarity to achieving our mission.

R. Ronald Bosecker  
Administrator

## MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U. S. agriculture.

## VISION

NASS sees itself as:

- The world's most comprehensive, current, and reliable source of information on U.S. agricultural production, resources, food supplies, and the rural U.S. economy and environment.
- The acknowledged statistical leader for those seeking counsel, survey services, or data products regarding agricultural and rural statistics; a *standard* achieved by consistently demonstrating sound methodology, effective resource utilization, and a focus on customer service.
- Continually earning the trust and respect of those who provide data by protecting the confidentiality of reported information, by minimizing reporting burden, and by being fair to all through equal access to official statistics.
- Having employees who are strengthened by the diversity of their cultures and backgrounds, enjoy their important and challenging careers, and share an unsurpassed level of dedication and competence in service to the United States.

## NASS VALUES

In carrying out the goals of this plan, NASS will be guided by the following Core Values:

**Trust:** We will earn the trust of data providers by protecting the confidentiality of their data, data users by providing high quality and relevant agricultural statistics on time and at the same time for all customers, and colleagues in the workplace by being just and fair.

**Respect:** We will respect our data providers, data users, and colleagues. We will earn the respect of others for our integrity and excellence as a world class agricultural statistics organization serving agriculture.

**Unbiased:** We will be fair and unbiased in our dealings with our colleagues and customers, and objective in our preparation of official statistics.

**Service:** We will excel at providing effective and efficient service and at being responsive to those who serve agriculture and require reliable data for decision making. We will invest in the development of our employees to ensure excellence in our products and services.

**Teamwork:** We will communicate openly and interact as a cohesive team within our Agency to produce products and services, and collaborate as partners with others outside our Agency.

## NASS PRINCIPLES

NASS employees will be guided by the following principles:

**Quality:** We are dedicated to the highest standards of statistical excellence.

**Service:** We are available and responsive to customers by providing products and services that are relevant to their needs.

**Accuracy:** We strive to provide the best official estimates the first time, minimizing the need for revisions.

**Error-Free:** We strive to release our official estimates without error, removing the need to issue errata.

**On Time:** We meet published due dates.

**In Time:** We deliver high quality service to customers as quickly as possible.

**Efficiency:** We use available resources and technology effectively.

**Fairness:** We are honest and impartial in the performance of our duty, and trustworthy in our interaction with others.

**Respect:** We have deep respect and appreciation for American agricultural producers, our data customers, and for each other.

NASS's Core Values and Principles overlap with USDA's guiding principles of strong ethics, service, team work, inclusive decision making, and fiscal responsibility. To achieve NASS's strategic goals, this plan emphasizes results that rely on teamwork not only within the Agency but also across USDA. As part of this workplan, we intend to work hard to improve the short-term and long-term leadership abilities that the Agency needs to serve the public. All actions will be consistent with our equal opportunity and civil rights responsibilities; NASS will act in a manner that is both inclusive and open to public scrutiny.

## LEGISLATIVE MANDATE

The foundation of NASS began with the establishment of USDA in 1862. Agricultural supply information was one of the purposes for the new Department. The first official report on the condition of crops began in July 1863. The basic, mission-oriented program continues today in the USDA forecasts and estimates provided by the NASS Agricultural Statistics Board. NASS's responsibilities are authorized under: the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 and other sections under Title 7 of the U.S. Code (U.S.C.), Agriculture; Chapter 55, Department of Agriculture; Section 2204, General duties of the Secretary; advisory functions; research and development.

Responsibility for the quinquennial census of agriculture program, which provides comprehensive information about the Nation's agriculture down to the county level, was transferred from the Department of Commerce to the Department of Agriculture in 1997. NASS thereby assumed responsibility for the 1997 Census of Agriculture and subsequent censuses and special studies. NASS's responsibility to conduct the census of agriculture is authorized under Public Law 105-113, the Census of Agriculture Act of 1997 (Title 7 U.S.C. 2204g).

The NASS program utilizes 46 Field Offices serving all 50 States and a Puerto Rico Field Office. About one-third of the Agency's staff is located at its Washington, D.C. Headquarters (HQ) offices with two-thirds of the staff located in the Field Offices. Most Field Offices are operated under cooperative funding arrangements with State Departments of Agriculture and/or land-grant universities. These arrangements serve the agricultural data needs at both the State and Federal levels, eliminate duplication of effort, provide State input, maintain national consistency, and minimize overall costs to Federal and State Governments. The Agency strives to maintain a list of all farms and ranches in the U.S., one of its unique federal roles. NASS performs important reimbursable agricultural survey work for other Federal, State, and producer organizations and provides technical assistance for agricultural statistics programs in developing countries.

## PARTNERS, CUSTOMERS, AND STAKEHOLDERS

As the primary statistical Agency for the USDA, NASS services the data needs of many agencies inside and outside of the Department. Partnerships have been in place with State Departments of Agriculture and land-grant universities through cooperative agreements since 1917 to ensure statistical service meets State and local, as well as national, needs without duplication of effort. This coordination maximizes benefits while minimizing respondent burden and costs to the taxpayers. NASS also considers the thousands of voluntary data suppliers as partners in the important tasks of monitoring the Nation's agricultural output, facilitating orderly and efficient markets, and measuring the economic health of those in agriculture.

NASS uses numerous forums to obtain program content and customer service feedback. For many years NASS has sponsored Data User Meetings which are a primary source of customer input that keeps the NASS agricultural statistics program on track with the needs of the user community. Data user responses have played a vital role in shaping the agency's annual and long-range planning activities. The transfer of the census of agriculture program to NASS brought with it an advisory committee which now provides guidance on the entire agricultural statistics program.

## KEY EXTERNAL FACTORS

Customers and stakeholders described trends and external factors having important implications for the NASS program in the next decade:

- Globalization has had a major impact on American agriculture;
- Increase in global population, demographic changes, and economic growth will continue;
- Changing structure of agriculture is occurring with continued concentration in agricultural production, leading to fewer, larger, and more vertically integrated and more specialized farms;
- Emerging forces influencing agricultural policy include food safety, consumers, food security, terrorism, nutrition, environmental quality, and trade;
- Declining voluntary cooperation as requests for information increase;
- Rising expectations from the public for accuracy, timeliness, and relevancy of statistics;
- Fewer employees with a background and education in agriculture;
- Changing lifestyles in rural America, including more off-farm work, and a decline in the share that agriculture represents in rural communities;
- Explosive changes in information technology;
- An increasing need for accessing and sharing of information across agencies;
- Rising use of and demand for new kinds of information faster and in different forms; and
- Future funding will influence the ability of NASS to fulfill this critical role.

Producers must be able to adapt to a more market-oriented farm policy, shifting trade opportunities, and changes in the structure of agriculture, such as vertical integration and concentration. Accurate and timely statistical data and economic analysis will help producers and policy makers respond quickly to economic, social, and environmental changes that affect production and the sale of agricultural products, both domestically and globally. We must be able to use innovative data collection methods, such as web-based data collection, to help reduce survey respondent burden and improve voluntary cooperation. Advances in information technologies should be adapted to increase information sharing electronically, to meet the rising demands for new information, increase employee productivity, and continue to meet the public's high expectation of accurate, timely, and relevant agricultural statistics. NASS will employ a diverse, highly, technical and competent workforce that is high performing and has the ability to fully utilize all available resources to provide top quality agricultural statistics and service.

## CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS AND TOP PRIORITIES

We have identified 12 factors which are critical to our success. Each of these factors contributes to our effectiveness and impacts each of the goals in the NASS Strategic Plan and the Agency's ability to implement the President's Management Agenda. These factors are:

- Voluntary respondent cooperation
- Corps of trained data collection interviewers
- Diverse, dedicated, and skilled employees
- State cooperators
- Customer service



- Reputation for excellence
- Timeliness, accuracy, and relevance
- Neutrality, credibility
- Responsiveness
- Confidentiality and security
- Technological efficiencies
- Data management

Additionally, the Administrator and Senior Executives defined 10 top priorities that are important to the Agency in order to assure our continued success in fulfilling our mission. Ranked in priority order, these are:

1. Reduce Respondent Burden
2. Ensure Security, Confidentiality and Continuity of Operations
3. Measures Employee Satisfaction and Reward Innovation and Dedication
4. Measure NASS and Staff Performance
5. Achieve NASS Operation Efficiencies for Staff
6. Develop Staff for NASS Career Opportunities
7. Complete PRISM II Systems for Timely and Quality 2007 Census
8. Improve Timeliness, Accuracy and Usefulness of Agricultural Statistics
9. Strengthen Communication and Service
10. Use Historic NASS Data and Administrative Data to Full Advantage

## WORKFORCE PLAN FRAMEWORK AND PURPOSE

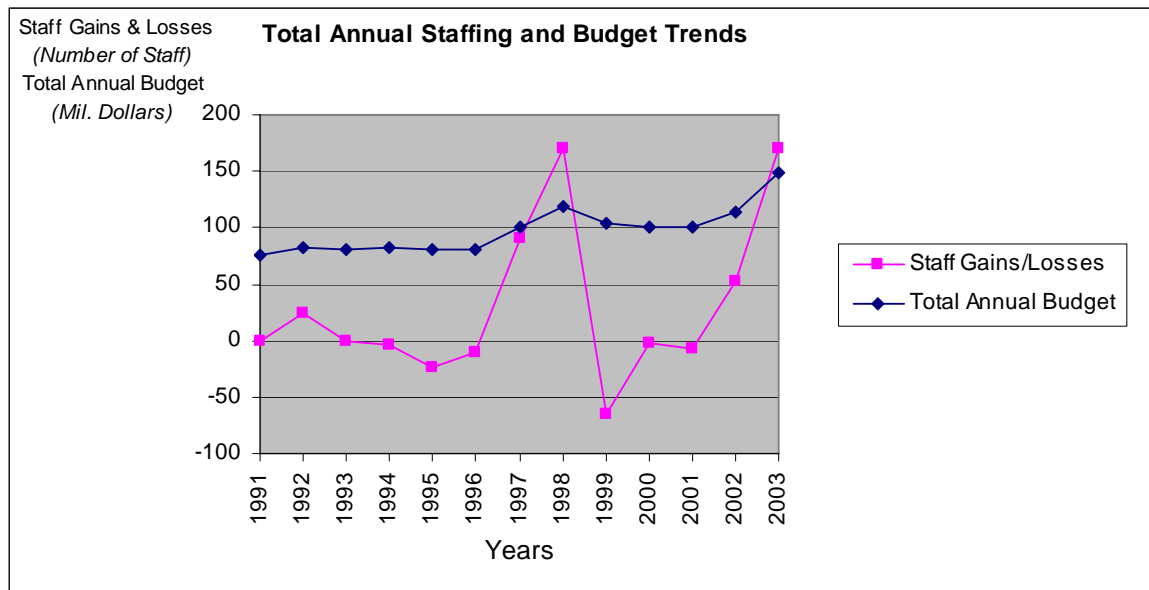
The NASS strategic goals are consistent with those of the other agencies in the Research, Education, and Economics mission area. The five strategic program goals support the Department's major program policies and objectives. Planning, sound management, and measuring results are an inherent part of achieving these goals. While the strategic plan focuses on program goals and objectives for NASS, this plan focuses on developing strategies for managing human capital and workforce planning, one of the Presidential Management Agenda initiatives. This plan also supports Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) assessment and evaluation criteria for rating NASS programs using OMB's Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART).

# ANALYSIS OF THE NASS WORKFORCE

## Overview of the Current Workforce

Historically, changes in the NASS workforce have been driven by gains and losses in programs and budget appropriations. Technological advancements and the demand for new kinds of information impacts how NASS does business. In order for NASS to be responsive to the statistical needs of U.S. agriculture, we must first identify specific areas and the changing needs for certain types of statistics data. NASS hiring practices and the rotation of assignments are important elements of NASS’s ability to be flexible and responsive.

**Figure 1: NASS Annual Staffing and Budget Comparisons**



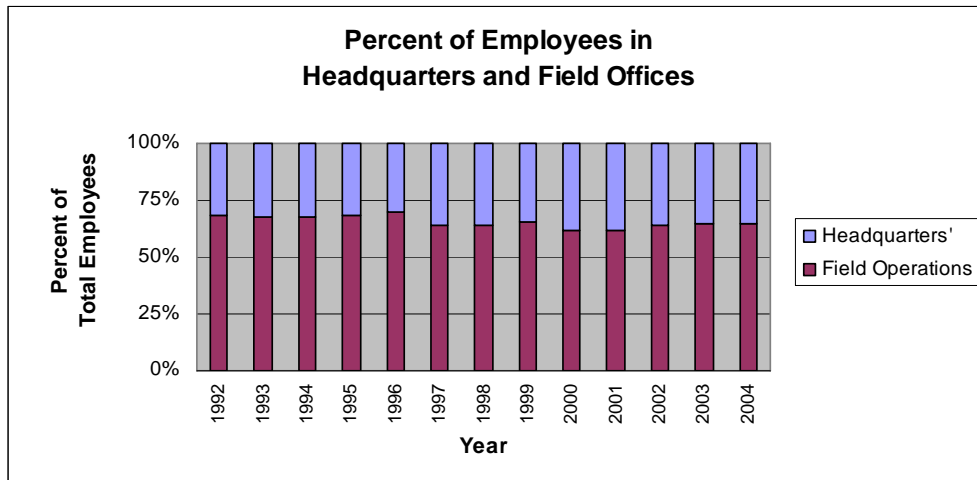
As of September 2004, NASS employed a total of 1,078 people. Of that, 1,066 were full-time permanent employees and 12 were part-time employees. There are currently 401 employees located in Headquarters (HQ) and 677 located in Field Operations (FO). There are a total of 166 State employees in the Field Offices who are not federal employees and are not included in this report.

During 1992-2003, NASS averaged 1,051 employees with HQ averaging 363 and FO’s averaging 688. In 2000, NASS reached its peak number (1,135) of employees, while 1996 showed a low of 959 employees. The largest number of employees in HQ was 435 in 2000 and 711 in FO in 1992, while the smallest was 669 in FO in 1996, as well as 2001, and in HQ the lowest was 290 in 1996. The number of State employees declined by 40 employees from 206 in 1992 to 166 in 2004 (see Figure 16 in the Appendix). The responsibility of conducting the census of agriculture was transferred to NASS in 1997 that included a major agency reorganization when 100 employees from the U.S. Census Bureau joined NASS.

NASS HQ is located in Washington, D.C. with its Research and Development Division located in Fairfax, Virginia. The HQ organizational structure has 5 levels of management consisting of 10 Senior Executives, 15 Branch Chiefs and Staff Directors, and 31 Section Heads. High level views of the organizational structure of NASS is located in the Appendix, Figure 15. NASS has 46 different Field Offices which serve all 50 States and Puerto Rico. The primary responsibility of a Field Office is to prepare official estimates of the State’s agriculture by collecting, verifying, and analyzing statistical data.

Field Offices vary in size: the smaller offices are led by grade GS-13 statisticians, the medium size offices by GS-14 State Directors (in 26 States), and the large offices are managed by GS-15 State Directors (in 17 States). The size of a Field Office is usually determined by the size of the statistical program which is measured by the State’s total gross value of sales in agricultural products. Except for Alaska, Delaware, Nevada, and Puerto Rico, each Field Office has two supervisors, the State Director and Deputy State Director. The average number of employees in a GS-14 office is 13, GS-15 offices average 19, and Alaska and Puerto Rico each have 2 employees while the State of Delaware has 1 employee.

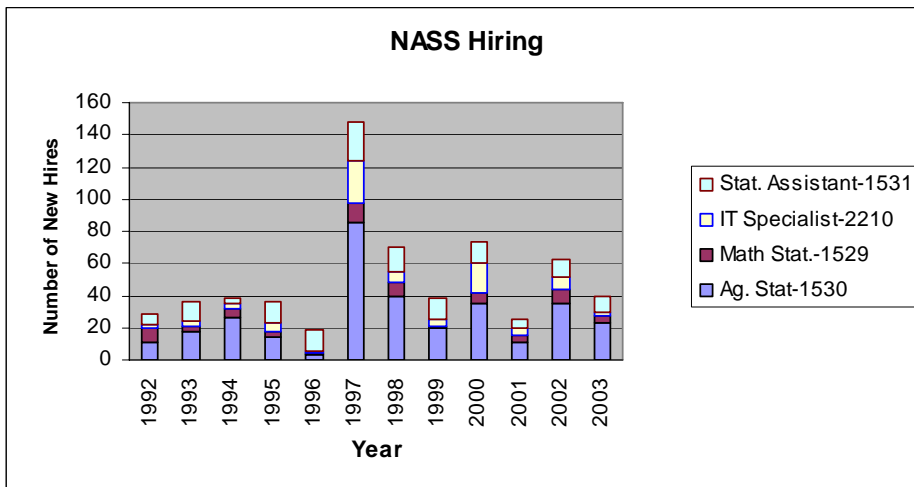
**Figure 2: A Comparison of Staff Located in HQ and the Field Offices**



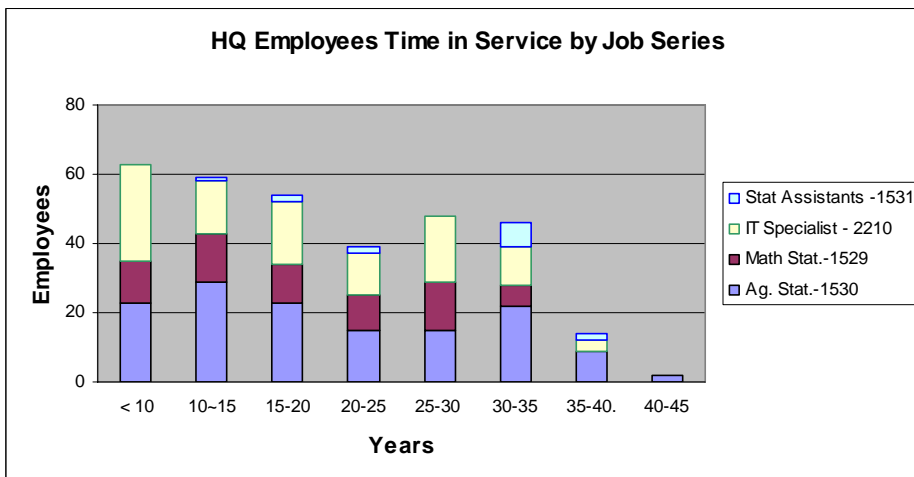
There are several basic types of Statistician positions classified (GS-1530 job series) by the Office of Personal Management (OPM). The first of these, designated simply as "statistician," is divided into 12 subject-matter specializations (agricultural, biology, demography, economics, education, engineering, health, medicine, operations and administration, social science, survey, and general). The primary duties of a statistician are to perform professional work or consultation in the application of statistical theories, techniques, and survey methods. This includes gathering and/or interpreting quantified information related to a particular subject matter field. NASS predominately hires agricultural and survey statisticians and a small percentage of mathematical statisticians.

Traditionally, NASS has hired over 80 percent of its employees from 4 major job series (Mathematical Statisticians GS-1529, Agricultural Statisticians GS-1530, Statistical Assistants GS-1531, and Information Technology Specialist GS-2210). Over the last 12 years, Agricultural Statisticians have represented nearly 50 percent of all new hires and most of these new hires start in Field Operations. Currently within Field Operations, 40 percent of employees have less than 10 years of service, 33 percent have between 10 and 25 years of service, and 27 percent have over 25 years of service. This compares to HQ staff, where only 20 percent have less than 10 years of service, 50 percent have between 10 and 25 years of service, and the remaining 30 percent have over 25 years of service. This quick analysis shows the difference in work experience between the larger FO staff who have fewer years of work experience and the smaller, more senior HQ staff who have more work experience. In the following figures, the position of Survey Statistician is always included in the Agricultural Statistician category.

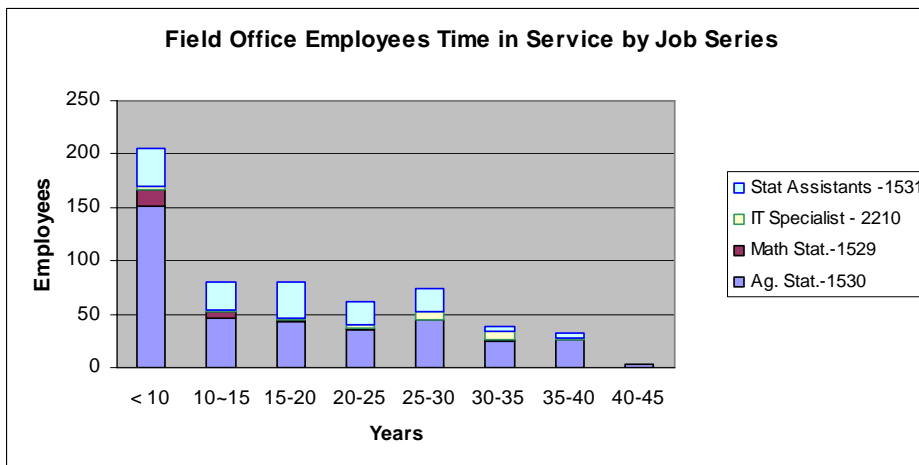
**Figure 3: A Comparison of New Hires for the Four Major Series**



**Figure 4: A Comparison of HQ Employees Time in Service for the Four Major Series**



**Figure 5: A Comparison of FO Employees Time in Service for the Four Major Series**



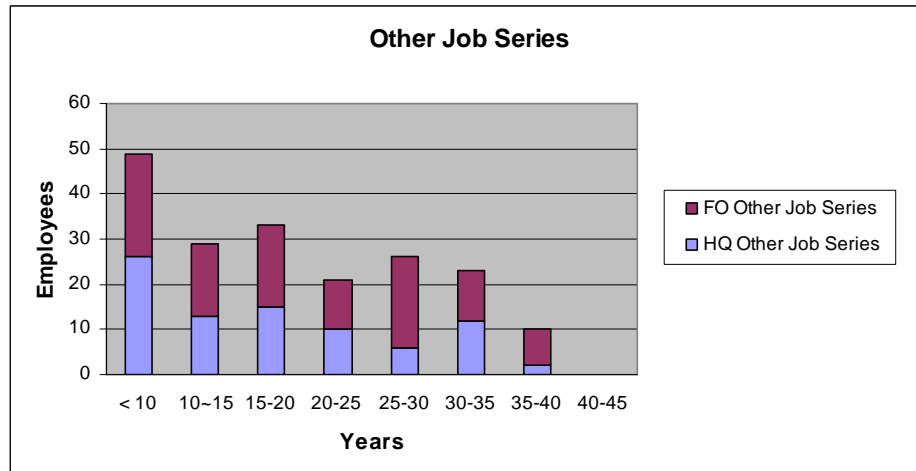
Duties for a Mathematical Statistician require work involving the design, development and adaptation of mathematical methods and techniques to statistical processes, or research in the basic theories and science of statistics. The size and complexity of statistical problems vary extensively and the solutions usually require the Mathematical Statistician to use standard research procedures. Over 70 percent of all of the Mathematical Statisticians are located in HQ and about 45 percent of them have 20 years or more of service. This is almost the opposite in the field with almost all of Mathematical Statisticians having less than 20 years of experience, and a majority having less than 10 years of experience.

Statistical Assistants role and responsibilities support the work of the Agricultural Statistician. This requires some knowledge of statistical methods, procedures, and techniques for data collection, processing, compilation, computation, analysis, editing, and presentation of statistical data. However, the work does not require the application of professional knowledge of statistics. Over 90 percent of the Statistical Assistants are located in the Field Offices. About two-thirds of them have less than 20 years of service.

In the late 1990's the growing use of information technology throughout our economy resulted in an unprecedented explosion in the demand for skilled IT workers. Jobs were plentiful and salaries were very lucrative. This phenomenon affected virtually every aspect of the IT human resources management process for recruitment, retirement, and retention. This motivated the OPM to increase grade levels and evaluate all positions within the Information Technology Division. OPM established 10 specialty positions in the IT area for all branches of government. These 10 areas included: policy and planning, security, system analysis, applications software, operating systems, network services, data management, Internet, system administration, and customer support. As more and more information, products, and services become widely available to customers by way of shared resources, the need to assure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of systems, networks, and data will become increasingly important. About 80 percent of all of the IT Specialists in the Agency are located in HQ and about 60 percent have 20 years or less time in service. This is opposite in the Field Office with about 70 percent of the IT Specialists who have more than 20 years of service.

Other job series makeup about 18 percent of the NASS workforce and are almost equally distributed between HQ and the field with a few more in the field. About 60 percent of this group have 20 years or less time in service.

**Figure 6: A Comparison of Time in Service of Employees in Other Job Series**



## The NASS Student Career Employment and Recruitment Program

NASS has maintained a very visible and successful recruitment program for entry-level statisticians and computer scientists over the past several decades. This rich history of recruitment is one of the cornerstones for building successful career paths in NASS and has helped sustain high retention rates of employees through retirement. It all begins with the work of the State Directors in each of the 46 Field Offices who are the Agency's primary leads for recruiting for these entry-level statistician positions nationwide. Students graduating from colleges and universities, including 1890 Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic-Serving Institutions, who qualify and meet the math and statistics education requirements are identified and heavily recruited. Students hired as interns are placed in the Student Career Employment Program rather than the Student Temporary Program because NASS is interested in employing students who are interested in developing a career, rather than recruiting for short-term work needs.

State Directors typically begin recruiting in January and work through April each year, but many recruit year-round. The more common approaches used are: actively participate at job fairs; make presentations in classes and clubs at colleges and universities; and attend industry meetings to make NASS job and career opportunities as visible as possible. Typically, sophomores and juniors are recruited to work as interns during the summer months with opportunities to also work during school vacation breaks or even during the school year part-time, if it is geographically feasible for the student. In some instances, students are hired in one state and begin work in another state because it works well geographically for both the student and NASS. Refer to Figure 19 in the Appendix for a map of the land grant colleges and universities.

Every State Director is encouraged to hire a student intern each year and, in some cases, they may hire several. The number of students hired for the summer is budget driven and changes annually. This program gives the student a good opportunity to evaluate their career opportunities with NASS and help understand the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to prepare agricultural statistics through work experience and counseling with the State Director. Additionally, the State Director counsels them on taking the right math and statistics coursework to make sure they qualify for job vacancies upon graduation. Graduating senior student interns who receive recommendations from their State Directors and who want to work for NASS generally receive job offers for placement in any of the NASS Field Office locations. Students have the opportunity to give their geographical preferences to help NASS managers in relocating them to another State that fits the student's personal preferences and satisfies the needs of the Agency. In some cases, they are hired to take full-time positions in their home state, but this is not a preferred practice by NASS managers. There is a tendency for the employee to want to remain in their home State rather than later transfer to another office. The goal is to create an opportunity for expanding the employee's knowledge of agricultural and survey experience.

The NASS Employment Announcement (WA-AG-2-01) is a competitive vacancy issued under a delegation Examining Unit Authority from OPM. The State Directors are instructed to encourage applicants to mark "Anywhere" on the geographical preference page. This will ensure that the applicant's name will be on the certificate (cert) that is issued by the Examining Unit when a personnel action requests them for an appointment to a particular Field Office.

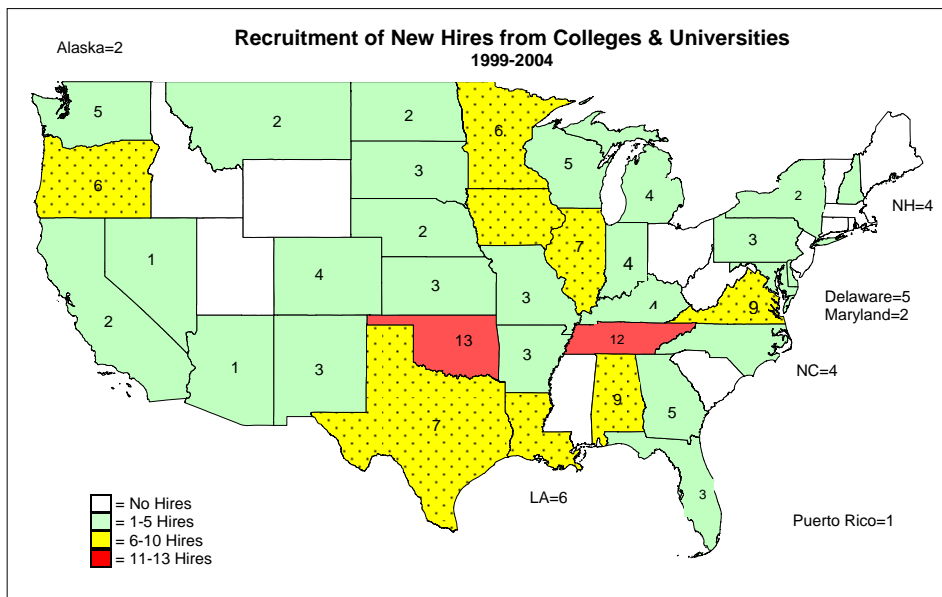
**FOR EXAMPLE:** If an applicant marks only specific states (New Jersey, New York, Maryland, Tennessee, and California) on the geographical preference page and a position in South Carolina is offered and accepted, when the action to name request that applicant for South Carolina is done, he/she will not be on the certificate for South Carolina, because South Carolina was not marked on the geographical preference page. If "Anywhere" had been marked and the person is among the top three on the list of eligible candidates, that person would be within reach on the cert and could start with NASS in the South Carolina office.

From 1992 through 2003, 737 employees were hired, averaging 61 new employees per year over this 12-year period. During this same period, 379 student interns were hired, averaging 31 students per year. Of the 379 student interns hired, 65 students were converted to career conditional and placed in full-time positions. This means that the retention rate for students hired immediately out of college is about 17 percent. Of the 65 students hired over the last 12 years, there are currently 51 employees who still work for NASS. This means that 78 percent of student interns hired continue to work for NASS. In comparison, of the 672 employees hired (excluding the student interns), 434, or 64 percent, of them continue to be employed by NASS. The average overall retention rate of new hires over the past 12 years is 66 percent.

**Table 1: Number of Students and Non-Students Recruited and Retained Since 1992**

Year	Total Hires (excluding interns)	Number of Student Interns Hired	Students Converted to Career Appt. (CCA)	Students (CCA) still with NASS in 2004	Non-Students still with NASS in 2004	Number of Hires still with NASS in 2004
1992	40	22	8	6	13	19
1993	54	16	2	1	34	35
1994	53	21	3	2	30	32
1995	36	30	2	1	18	19
1996	25	15	3	1	15	16
1997	170	40	11	9	103	112
1998	73	59	6	4	41	45
1999	35	40	7	6	14	20
2000	103	54	6	4	64	68
2001	29	13	2	2	16	18
2002	63	31	6	6	46	52
2003	56	38	9	9	40	49
<b>Total</b>	<b>737</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>485</b>

**Figure 7: National Recruitment Map for 1999-2004**



## Retaining a Diverse Workforce

Some general comparisons on diversity can be made between the civilian population, the civilian labor force, Federal employment, USDA, and NASS in Table 2. NASS employs about 3-4 percentage points more whites than the civilian population and those employed in the civilian labor force. NASS is very comparable to USDA, but about 9 percentage points more than the federal workforce in general. NASS employs about 4-5 percentage points more blacks than the civilian population and those employed in the civilian labor force, and 3 percentage points more than USDA. However, for blacks, NASS is 3 percent points below the Federal workforce. For Asian and Native American employees, NASS is 1-2 percentage points below other workforces used for this comparison. The Hispanic workforce is generally under-represented by 4-7 percentage points in the federal workforce, USDA, and at NASS.

**Table 2: Percent of Total by Race / Ethnicity**

Race / Ethnicity	Percent of Total				
	Annual Average for 2003		2004		
	Civilian Population	Employed Civilian Labor Force	Federal Employment	USDA	NASS
White	74	75	69	78	78
Black	10	9	17	11	14
Asian	4	4	5	3	3
Hispanic <sup>1</sup>	11	11	7	6	4
Native American	1	1	2	2	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100

<sup>1</sup>Hispanic ethnicity and may be duplicated in other race categories

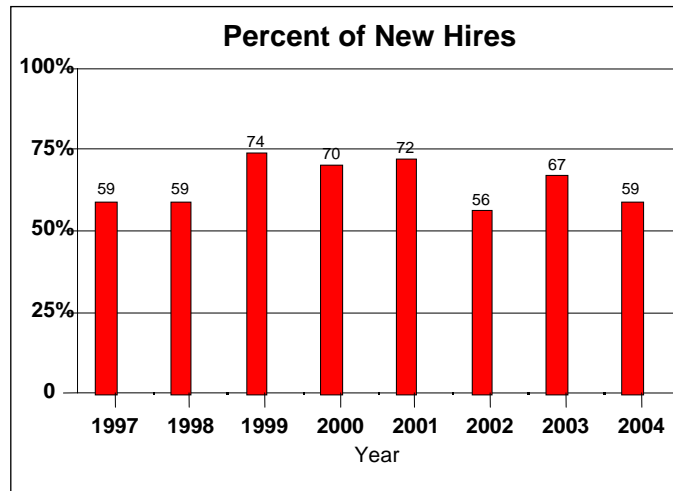
**Figure 8: Percent of Total by Race & Ethnicity**



The Agency reports and tracks minority and women hiring for the 4 major occupational series having 50 or more employees. Of the 61 new employees hired in the 4 major series in FY 2004, 59 percent of the new hires were women and minorities. Under the 2004 Student Career Employment Program, NASS hired 46 student assistants of whom 28 were women and minorities, representing 61 percent of the total.



**Figure 9: A Comparison of Women and Minorities Hired Annually (excluding interns)**



The Agency holds a week-long New Employee Orientation each year for all recently hired employees. At these sessions, the Agency’s Civil Rights Director makes presentations on a variety of topics dealing with equal employment opportunity and civil rights, including topics such as sexual harassment, affirmative action, the EEO Counseling Program, and the EEO complaint process.

## **NASS Worklife Programs and Organizational Climate**

The quality of worklife programs and the office work environment is recognized by NASS as a valued “perk” for all employees in maintaining a healthy, clean, and friendly office working environment in HQ and all of its field locations. NASS has made steady progress and has been the leader in USDA in adopting employee assistance and quality of life programs. These include:

- Leave Transfer program adopted on May 1, 1989
- Flexible work schedules adopted on July 1, 1990
- Family Medical Leave Act / Sick Leave for Family Care adopted in 1991
- Telecommuting adopted in 1997
- Transit Subsidy for metro-checks adopted in 2000
- Recruitment, relocation, retention bonuses adopted in 2000
- Gainsharing adopted on June 1, 2000

The 1999, the agency’s first Organizational Climate Survey Evaluation Team (OCSET) was chartered to conduct and evaluate the Agency’s Organizational Climate Survey. This team concentrated on all questions with negative feedback in all sections of the survey. Many of the negative responses that the team addressed revolved around employee relationships and experiences with their supervisors. The other areas of concern expressed by employees were: Training and Career Development; Rewards, Recognition, and Feedback; Communication; Innovation and Change; and Employee Programs.

The 2001 Organizational Climate Survey Evaluation Team focused on enhancing and furthering the recommendations made by the previous Organizational Climate Survey Evaluation Team. The team also concerned itself with re-evaluating the results from the 1999 survey to see if there were any leftover concerns not yet addressed by the Agency. The 2001 team concentrated on five sections of the 2001 Organizational Climate Survey : Communication and Information Sharing; Training and Career Development; Job Satisfaction and General Perceptions; Rewards and Recognition; and Innovation and

Changes. This survey produced fewer negative responses about supervisors, managers, and upper level management than the previous Organizational Climate Surveys.

The Career Opportunity Development Team (CODT) was chartered as a subteam of the 2001 Organizational Climate Survey Evaluation Team. It was created to concentrate on the five recommendations made in the area of Training and Career Development. More specifically, the Career Opportunity Development Team addressed career paths, recruiting, hiring, mobility, and training considerations associated with the Agency's career development plan.

NASS has been at the forefront in adopting government-wide and department-wide programs that benefit its employees and make their work environment a nice and desirable place to work. NASS is on the leading edge of all government agencies when it comes to teleworking. The Agency permits many of its non-supervisory employees to telework from either home or an official telework center two days per week. Supervisory employees are permitted to telework in an intermittent fashion as approved by their supervisor.

Many NASS employees take advantage of mass transit subsidies offered by the USDA. These subsidies are available for subway, train, and incorporated van or car pools to help defray the costs of transportation to and from work.

NASS understands that its employees have busy home lives aside from work. Many employees have personal and family concerns that sometimes make it difficult to stay on a pre-defined, consistent schedule at work. NASS subscribes to the flexible work schedule. Employees can start early in the morning and leave earlier or start later and end the day later. NASS employees can also flex-time within a day. This gives them the ability to start 15 minutes earlier or later than their scheduled start time. An alternate work schedule is also available to NASS employees. Within a pay period, an employee can work eight 9-hour days, one 8-hour day, and be off one day during the pay period.

NASS offers monetary incentives for various employee-related personnel actions. NASS may offer a new employee a recruitment bonus of \$1,500 for a position in a Field Office or a \$3,000 bonus in HQ. This money is paid along with the employee's first paycheck. Additionally, NASS offers many types of monetary bonuses. To encourage mobility in and out of HQ, NASS offers various relocation bonuses. These vary from \$5,000 to \$10,000. In special situations, the Agency is allowed to offer a retention bonus to keep valuable and necessary employees. To date, the Agency has not exercised this option.

In HQ, offices located in the South Building are being remodeled in four different phases. In the fall of 2004, Phase III will be finished moving the Office of the Administrator and FO into a renovated space. Information Technology Division and part of the Research and Development Division will move when Phase IV is completed. This effectively completes the entire move for NASS HQ offices into new a space. From time to time, several Field Offices may move to new spaces at different locations as well. This provides a good opportunity to update the offices and modernize office furniture, equipment, and other infrastructure.

## Retirements and Separations

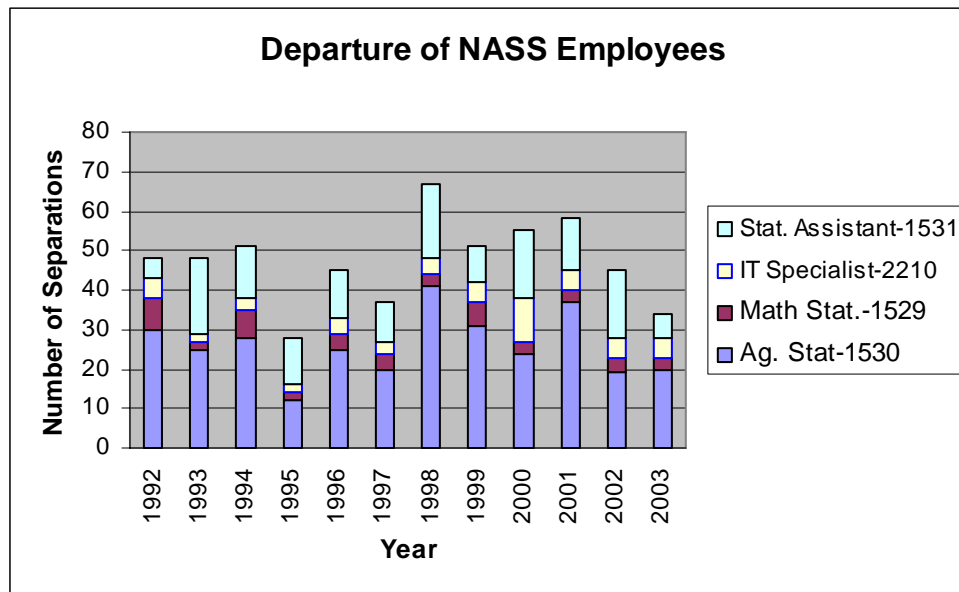
The average retirement age for the 4 major job series for the period 1992 to 2003 was between 58 and 60. Of the current number of employees in these job series, 120 employees, or 12 percent of the workforce is eligible to retire in 2004, compared to 14.5 percent for USDA. This compares to 14.2 percent government-wide for the years of 1997-2001 and 18.7 percent for the 2002-2006 period. The latest figures from OPM for 2002 indicated that 23 percent of NASS employees in the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) were eligible to retire and 11 percent of the those in the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS).

**Table 3: The Current Number of NASS Employees Eligible to Retire**

Number of Employees Eligible to Retire in 2004 (in the Four Major Job Series)			
	Total	Eligible to Retire	Percent Eligible
Statisticians	574	80	14%
<i>Supervisory Statisticians</i>	146	29	20%
Statistical Assistants	170	15	9%
IT Specialists	141	16	11%
Math Statisticians	98	9	9%
Total	983	120	12%

Over the period of 1992 to 2003, 567 employees left NASS for many reasons such as retirement, involuntary separation, deceased, etc. Separations averaged about 47 employees per year for this 12-year period yielding, an average of 4.5 percent attrition rate per year. The highest number of separations were in 1998 with a total of 67 and the lowest was 28 in 1995.

**Figure 10: A Comparison of Separations by Job Series**



## Current Business Operations

The last major Agency reorganization was in 2000 and the restructure was limited to HQ only. On April 3, 1998, the Administrator chartered a NASS Reorganization-2000 (R-2000) Team whose primary focus was to eliminate duplicative functions and streamline operations. They were charged with making recommendations for creating a dynamic organization which would improve public service, be more responsive to customer needs, and allow employees to understand their contributions to the production of quality agricultural statistics. The Administrator instructed the team that “Nothing is sacred,” and to “Think outside the box.” The second phase, focusing on field structure, would be delayed at this time.

The NASS HQ organizational structure recommended by the R-2000 Team was designed to address the objectives identified in the Team Charter which included:

- “eliminating unnecessary duplication of effort,” by integrating census responsibilities throughout the structure, in all Divisions, and by combining training units and editing units that have similar responsibilities;
- “facilitating cross-functional work,” by emphasizing and strengthening the role of cross functional teams;
- “promoting the effective use of resources to optimize the complete process,” by retaining centers of expertise in a predominantly functional structure that serve as resources to the survey and census teams and provide flexibility in assigning staff to new teams;
- “clarifying responsibilities and levels of authority,” by requiring a team charter for each survey, census, and project team which specifies responsibilities and boundaries of authority and, by documenting in this report, the responsibilities of the functional units; and
- “ensuring all mission-related work is being addressed,” by covering all mission-critical functions and by creating a new Deputy Administrator position to enhance long-range planning and product delivery.

The Team made 10 organizational recommendations that sought to preserve the strengths of the current structure while addressing structural weaknesses and accommodating new responsibilities. All of the following recommendations were implemented, except for #9 which was not implemented.

1. NASS will be structured around a functional framework supported by teams.
2. A new Deputy Administrator for Programs and Products will be created.
3. The Agency’s emphasis on data dissemination, marketing, publicity, and public relations will be increased by the efforts of the Marketing and Information Services Office attached to the Deputy Administrator for Programs and Products.
4. Census of agriculture responsibilities will be integrated throughout the functional structure to standardize procedures, eliminate duplication of effort, and consolidate resources.
5. An Environmental, Economic, and Demographic Branch will be created in the Statistics Division.
6. All training administration, including personal development and technical training, will be consolidated into an Administrative Services Office.
7. The Administrative Services Office will be directly attached to the Deputy Administrator for Field and Administrative Operations to handle all human resources (HR) and budget responsibilities.
8. Four current administrative staff positions will be retained and a new security officer position will be created.
9. The Data Warehouse Management group will be moved to the Research and Development Division from the Data Collection Branch.
10. All HQ editing specifications and coding responsibilities will be consolidated into the Data Collection Branch.

Early in 2002, the second phase began. The Field Office Operations Review Team (FOORT) was established to review the responsibilities and activities of the NASS Field Offices. The team was to identify opportunities and efficiencies within and between offices and to permit continued high levels of service to cooperators and customers at reduced staff levels. It is imperative that Field Offices be staffed, equipped and aligned to the greatest advantage to maximize the service with available resources. NASS must identify new ways of accomplishing its mission given the reality of a reduced workforce.

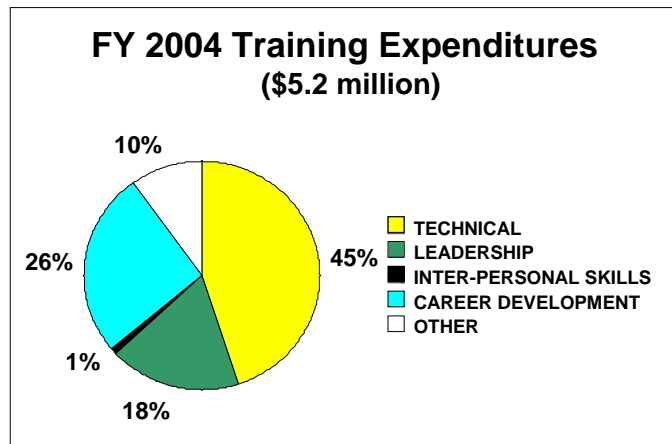
The team developed 55 action items by which the agency can gain efficiencies. While these action items have a direct impact on the Field Offices, the Headquarter staff will realize secondary impacts. Many of these recommendations contain some consolidations of activities. The team recommended NASS formally implement a consolidated data collection strategy and consolidated regional calling centers. Under consolidation, HQ interaction with the field will be more effective and efficient. As a result of the new initiatives, HQ staff may have additional responsibilities and possibly more opportunities to move back to the field.

## Current Training Needs And Career Development

Training can be defined as making available to employees planned and coordinated educational programs of instruction in professional, technical, or other fields that are or will be related to the employee’s job responsibilities. Training can be accomplished through a variety of approaches, such as classroom instruction, eLearning, and professional conferences that are educational or instructional in nature. Along with formal training, structured on-the-job learning experiences, and developmental programs such as coaching, mentoring, and rotational assignments all help assist the agency in achieving its mission and goals by improving individual and, ultimately, organizational performance.

As indicated in the figure below, in FY 2004, 45 percent of training expenditures were spent on technical training, about one-fourth on career development, and about one-fifth on improving leadership skills.

**Figure 11: A Comparison of Expenditures for Different Types of Training**



In FY 2004, NASS spent approximately 3.5 percent of its budget for training. Historically, the annual goal has been to designate about 3 percent of the budget for employee training and skills development. The Agency has been able to attain this goal 5 out of the last 10 years.

**Table 4: Total Annual Agency Training Costs Comparisons**

<b>FY 1995 - 2005</b>					
<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Out-of-Pocket Training Costs</b>	<b>Estimated Absorbed Costs</b>	<b>Total Training Cost</b>	<b>Total Agency Budget</b>	<b>Percent of Budget Spent for Training</b>
<b>1995</b>	\$ 757,700	\$2,108,800	\$2,866,500	\$ 90,000,000	3.19
<b>1996</b>	\$ 497,260	\$1,672,850	\$2,170,110	\$ 90,611,089	2.39
<b>1997</b>	\$ 856,160	\$2,506,845	\$3,363,005	\$110,363,949	3.05
<b>1998</b>	\$ 849,930	\$2,701,743	\$3,551,673	\$127,382,714	2.79
<b>1999</b>	\$1,365,807	\$2,865,417	\$4,231,224	\$114,091,733	3.71
<b>2000</b>	\$1,077,482	\$2,728,179	\$3,805,661	\$111,152,374	3.42
<b>2001</b>	\$ 961,000	\$2,238,000	\$3,199,000	\$120,050,268	2.66
<b>2002</b>	\$ 522,188	\$2,200,000	\$2,722,188	\$126,577,295	2.15
<b>2003</b>	\$ 751,807	\$2,500,000	\$3,251,807	\$156,240,103	2.08
<b>2004*</b>	\$1,420,522	\$3,800,000	\$5,220,522	\$150,038,681	3.50
<b>2005**</b>	\$1,431,525	\$3,800,000	\$5,231,525	\$157,911,249	3.31

\* Preliminary

\*\* Projected

Effective training and development programs are an integral part of a learning environment that can enhance NASS’s ability to attract and retain employees with the skills and competencies needed to achieve results for the benefit of agriculture and rural communities. Training and developing new and current staff to fill new roles and work in a variety of ways will play a crucial part in NASS’s efforts to meet its transformation challenges, as defined by FOORT and the CODT Teams. Ways that employees learn and achieve results will also continue to transform how NASS does business and engages employees in further innovation and improvements.

The CODT Team reviewed the Agency’s career development policy. The team recommendations were presented and accepted by the Agency’s senior management in February 2004. The new policy was then presented to all Agency managers at the National Performance Management Conference in Dallas during April 2004. The recommendations support USDA’s and NASS’s Strategic Plans and provide the mechanism to support the strategies recommended in this Workforce Plan.

Specifically, the career development recommendations emphasize training and the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and abilities for employees in all job series. Both of these processes support the Agency’s efforts to prepare staff for future assignments.

The Training and Career Development Office (TCDO) conducts an annual training needs assessment and report of all training programs, events, and activities NASS employees participate in each year. The most recent report was issued in July 2004 by TCDO. Interviews and information were collected from HQ Senior Executives, managers and supervisors and responses from Deputy State Directors were used to assess programs and employee performance and proficiencies.

## **Current Skills Gaps Identified**

The skills gap assessment process remains unchanged from prior years where TCDO seeks out: performance deficiencies; procedural, methodology, and technology changes on the horizon; interpersonal skills development; training priorities; and aligning training to Agency program changes. Training has been canceled or delayed based on the results of the training needs assessment and/or fiscal constraints. Thus, many needs are known and a more comprehensive training needs assessment - which would have included Senior Management, Branch Chiefs, Section Heads, State Directors, and Deputy State Directors - was not necessary. However, each was given the opportunity to voluntarily contribute as they saw fit.

### **Leadership Development Gaps**

#### **Managers Training**

- Negotiation skills
- Human resource administration:
  - Regulations and policies
  - OPM classification standards for different grade-levels
  - Relationship between OPM standards and Individual Development Plans (IDPs)
- Training Transfer Best Practices
- AgLearn - Incorporating AgLearn into employee training and career development
- Coaching and mentoring skills
- Statistical concepts and purpose of NASS applications
- Action Learning - Concepts and resources available

#### **Group Leaders Training**

- Role and responsibilities
- Coaching and mentoring skills
- Statistical concepts and completing job-related tasks with NASS applications
- Project Management

### **Interpersonal Communications Skills Development Gaps**

#### **Marketing/Data Presentation/Public Relations**

- Data presentation skills
- Public relations:
  - Media interview techniques
  - Public speaking skills

#### **Writing**

- Technical writing skills

#### **Teamwork**

- Cross-functional unit team building
- Negotiation and conflict resolution
- Cross-generational issues

#### **Political Savvy**

- Understanding the Agency's role - How NASS is perceived externally
- Understand job assignments from an agency, mission, and departmental prospective – to encourage win-win outcomes when working with other agencies or departments
- The President's Management Agenda Initiative – How it affects employee job responsibilities

## **Technical Skills Development Gaps**

### **Analytical Skills**

- Data intuition – Does the data make sense with what is happening in production agriculture
- Data acquisition – Impact of data from outside sources
- Basics of calibration and imputation
- Basic understanding of sampling concepts
- Strategies to eliminate non-sampling errors

### **Project Management**

- Introduce concepts and principles at all grade-levels
- Integrate principles into management of the 2007 Agricultural Census

### **Enterprise Architecture/Application Development**

- General understanding of the reasons for Enterprise Architecture
  - Integrated data environment
  - Standard data processing methods and platforms
- Basic understanding of database management

### **Survey Specific Training**

- June Survey Workshop
  - Latest updates on current survey procedures and/or processes
  - Standard procedures for eliminating non-sampling errors
  - Review basic survey procedures
- Objective Yield Workshop
  - Required training for states which are new to the National program
  - Emphasize data collection and analysis methods

## **Career Development and Human Resource Gaps**

### **Standardized KSAs/IDPs**

- Using the AgLearn system to receive training on how to develop KSAs and IDPs
- Understand how to align employee career goals and choices with the NASS mission and strategic goals
- Understand how to manage IDPs

### **AgLearn**

- How to use the system and the different options available
- Highlight the “Top 5 Modules” that would most benefit employees
- Provide on-line modules as prerequisites before attending NASS training workshops (Blended Learning)



## Full-Time Training Analysis

NASS began offering a full-time training program in 1960. The original idea was to provide advanced statistical training to the Agency's Agricultural Statisticians. In 1966, the full-time training program expanded to include advanced IT training to qualified employees. It expanded again in 1985 to include advanced survey methodology training. Since 1960, 147 NASS employees have successfully completed a full-time training program. Employee profiles for each program are summarized in the Appendix in Tables 9-13.

Over the past 45 years, there have been many changes in both the programs and the employees in the full-time training program. In each of the five decades of the full-time training program's existence, the average age entering the full-time training program has steadily increased. The number of years of service before entering the program has also increased slightly in each decade. Of the 63 employees who have successfully completed full-time training currently with NASS, 4 have attained the SES level and 8 have been promoted to the GS-15 level. Twenty-four full-time training program graduates have been promoted to the GS-14 level. Twenty-two have been promoted to the GS-13 level in a supervisory role and 5 have remained at the journeyman level.

NASS has collaborated with 27 academic institutions to train these 147 employees. Mathematical Statisticians have been trained at 17 colleges and universities, with North Carolina State and Iowa State Universities leading the way. IT training has taken place at 14 separate locations with 20 of the 48 participants attending USDA Graduate School programs that have not been used since 1970. Survey Methodology training has been completed at only two universities. A listing of these colleges and universities are included in the Appendix in Table 14.

In general, the number of employees per year entering the full-time training program has decreased slightly since 1995. This is mainly due to fewer employees entering the mathematical statistics training, while IT and survey methodology training enrollment has shown a slight increase during the years 1995-2004. Since 1990, 16 employees have completed mathematical statistics training and 13 are still employed with NASS. Contrast this with IT, where only 13 of 18 participants, and survey methodology where only 4 of 7 participants are still employed with NASS.

In addition to the more formal full-time training programs described previously, NASS began an Executive Potential Program in 1991. Current NASS employees apply and one or two are chosen for a year-long, full-time program of mainly self-study. Participants shadow managers in NASS and other government agencies or private companies to study different management and organizational styles.

The CODT Team was chartered to: define the requirements of the career ladder steps and determine full performance levels for each job series; and to review the current IDP process to better assist employees in obtaining their career goals. Two recommendations from that report are: NASS should use the Career Enhancement Program to fill appropriate positions, and that more temporary duty assignments be considered to broaden the agricultural and statistical knowledge of employees.

The first one would allow an employee in one job series to qualify and compete for a statistician, IT specialist or survey methodology position by completing the OPM required course work without actually obtaining a formal degree. The second one would give current employees the opportunity to obtain a diverse background without having to permanently move from their current duty station.

NASS management continues to promote participation in these Agency sponsored full-time training programs and makes it very attractive to participate. All tuition and books are paid by the Agency. Additionally, the employee is excused from their regular assigned duties for one year of training and continues to receive their regular pay rate. A service agreement is signed by the employee agreeing to

continue working for the government after completing the training. This amounts to 3 times the amount of time spent in school. If the service is not completed, the employee must repay the cost of the tuition and books, but not their salary. This cost is prorated based on amount of service not completed.

Employees who complete the training often move onto supervisory and management positions. For example, of the current Senior Executives, half of them have completed a full-time training program during their careers in NASS while 25 percent of the current GS-15 managers have completed training. Refer to table 9-13 in the appendix for more details.

Many Mathematical Statisticians have moved into management positions in non-mathematical statistics areas. This is mainly because there aren't very many managerial positions in the mathematical statistics areas in the Agency. Traditionally, Mathematical Statisticians work in Research and Development Division, Statistical Methods Branch in Statistics Division, and Sampling Branch in Census and Survey Division. There is only one Division Director, four Branch Chiefs, and eight Section Head positions in these technical areas.

IT graduates are more likely to leave the Agency for other jobs when compared to the other graduate education programs. This is due to their specialized training that is generally only applicable to the IT Division, whereas those who complete the Mathematical Statistics Training Program, Survey Methodology Training Program, or Executive Potential Program training can and do move between different positions in the Agency.

Survey methodology training is a valuable commodity in NASS. Of the eight survey methodology type graduates, only two are in positions utilizing their training directly. Graduates tend to work on the fringe of this training by spending some of their careers in Survey Administration Branch of Census and Survey Division and the Data Quality Research Section of the Research and Development Division. The Data Collection Branch is currently considering adding some survey methodology positions.

## **Current Competitive Sourcing and Contracted Services**

The Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act (FAIR) of 1998 (P.L. 105-270) requires federal agencies to prepare and submit to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) inventories of commercial activities performed by government employees. This inventory is the basis for Federal agencies to identify inherently governmental functions and commercial activities. For purposes of the FAIR Act, there are two kinds of activities that are performed by federal employees: those activities that are "commercial" in nature and those that are "inherently governmental." The FAIR Act requires each agency to prepare an inventory of activities that "are not inherently governmental functions. As a matter of policy, OMB has also directed agencies to annually issue an inventory of their inherently governmental activities performed by federal employees. This inventory is required as a part of the OMB Circular A-76 and by OMB's annual inventory guidance. The REE Competitive Sourcing Program Office was established to coordinate the overall program within REE and provide expertise and assistance to the REE mission area and agencies for all phases of the competitive sourcing process. This role includes responsibility for managing the overall inventory process for the mission area.

NASS currently has a strong outsourcing program. Approximately 15-20 percent of NASS's annual appropriated funding is spent for data collection and data capture activities which are outsourced. In the recent 2002 Census of Agriculture, NASS outsourced mailing the census questionnaires and handling of the returned questionnaires instead of hiring additional federal employees. This accounted for more than 20 percent of its FAIR Act Inventory of non-inherently government employees.

## STRATEGIES FOR FUTURE WORKFORCE NEEDS

### **Recruiting Environment in the Future**

The U.S. economy and prevailing economic and business conditions impact how successful NASS, along with other public and private organizations, are able to recruit highly qualified people with the right skill set to fit the needs of the organization. During good economic times, competition for highly qualified skilled people is keen, requiring much more effort by NASS recruiters (State Directors) to bring qualified people on board. During down swings in the economy, as unemployment increases, the number of available applicants in a soft job market makes it easier to bring highly qualified hires on board.

In 2004, NASS received many job applicants for entry-level statistician positions which made it easy for NASS to hire highly qualified individuals. We anticipate this trend to continue for the next several years. However, it should be noted that from July 2003 through 2004, 16 recruits declined offers made for openings in 9 Field Offices and 2 locations in HQ in Washington, D.C. Most accepted jobs elsewhere and some decided to go back to school for advanced degrees. With this in mind, we see more emphasis placed on offering positions to candidates who: (1) are the best qualified candidates and (2) are willing to move and transfer to multiple offices. NASS recruiters should not offer any position located in the field to anyone who: (1) is not willing to move, even though they may be highly qualified, or (2) is willing to move but lacks the high caliber qualifications NASS is looking for in individuals. Recruiters should recognize that they are National recruiters, with a National recruiting effort as their highest priority, rather than recruiting locally to fill vacancies. It should be noted that for some specialist positions in IT or research located in Headquarters employees are not required or unlikely to move or transfer.

Communication of recruitment policies and training are needed to achieve the best results. We see efforts that include developing new strategies to recruit students at universities and colleges located in different geographical locations where recruiting had not been previously done.

We see the Agency continuing to set staffing ceilings at the beginning of each fiscal year which provides a threshold for establishing hiring targets for the year. The Agency has its sights on maintaining or exceeding its annual performance goal that 55 percent of new hires are women and minorities in an effort to continue diversifying its workforce. This includes getting additional OPM authorization for temporary staff appointments during peak census of agriculture workload periods. In setting hiring targets for the year, normal annual staff attrition due to retirements and other separations are taken into account.

### **Ability to Retain Staff in the Future**

Retaining a highly skilled and professional staff is important and is key to the success of any organization. NASS is recognized as a world leader for its technical and professional abilities in producing high quality domestic agricultural statistics. NASS has achieved this level of success because it has been successful in retaining a highly skilled and professional staff who see opportunities for developing successful careers in NASS. In order for NASS to retain its quality staff, it must continue to be a progressive leader in promoting and adopting new workforce initiatives that helps NASS meet its mission, serve its customers, and continue to build a strong, efficient, and effective workforce.

With this in mind, we see mobility and transfer policies in NASS being continually evaluated to be more accommodating to employees in not only helping meet the Agency needs, but to help them achieve their long-range career goals and assist in providing them opportunities for success along the way. In comparison to other agencies, NASS has historically operated a “required” mobility policy. Typically, those who are willing to transfer get promoted. NASS will continue to make every effort to reasonably

accommodate persons with disabilities or those who have other medical issues when providing opportunities for promotions.

NASS is looking at a number of new strategies to address mobility and transfer issues. This includes a new strategy for moving the work to the staff, instead of moving staff resources to the work. This strategy has been recommended and is under review. In effect, this long-term strategy would study how NASS would begin to move some HQ programs to the field. This would result in moving fewer employees to HQ since this has become increasingly more difficult because of the high cost of living in the Washington, D.C. area, security and safety concerns since 9/11, and two wage earner families.

We see NASS endorsing individual accommodations and making more use of temporary details (TDY) to other offices for gaining job experience, skills, and training. This may include using HQ as a first duty station for new hires, requiring HQ staff to devote time and resources to basic survey and estimation training and on-the-job experience previously done in the field.

We see several issues impacting NASS culture in the future. The Agency wants to do a better job in analyzing the work it does by matching the skills of employees with the work. This would increase the responsibilities of the job and level of the grade. In matching skills of employees, the Agency needs to understand that Generation X'ers in the workforce don't want to be told how to do it, but they want to figure it out themselves. NASS processes are "engrained" in the organization and its culture in the way it gets things done. NASS needs to continue to have a growing understanding of how to successfully transition its organizational structure and processes with its ever changing workforce.

NASS employees who are enrolled in the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), an entitlement system, usually stay with NASS or remain in federal service their entire career. New hires are now enrolled in the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS), an employee contribution system. We see a higher number of FERS employees able to switch jobs and/or careers because they can take their FERS retirement system and thrift savings account with them. This would be a departure from the NASS culture of retaining employees over their entire federal career.

We see NASS continuing to promote and adopt quality worklife programs to improve the work environment for its employees. For example, the Career Opportunities Development Team Report recommends adopting a formal program to assist spouses of transferring employees. NASS will measure the success of these programs by getting feedback from its employees through the NASS Organizational Climate Survey. The results of this survey will be analyzed by OCSET who will prepare a set of recommendations for Senior Management. NASS will continue to use a scorecard for measuring success for implementation of OCSET recommendations.

We see multiple career paths and opportunities for advancement for employees who assert themselves in getting the recommended training, skills, and on-the-job experience needed to fill the specific or future needs of the Agency. Formal full-time training must continue and be promoted in order to maintain a pool of employees who have the technical skills and can help advance the organization's ability to use and adopt the latest advancements in applied statistics, survey methodologies, and modern information technologies. We see orientation being expanded for new employees and formal training done earlier in their careers. In balancing the number of job experiences with mobility issues, we see employees taking advantage of opportunities advertised for temporary duty at other offices or HQ for a minimum of 90 days, especially targeted for GS-11-12 employees.

We see NASS moving from a two level employee performance evaluation program to a multi-level performance evaluation program. Employee performance will be aligned with the Agency's Strategic Plans. In addition, goals in measuring the success of the organization and will be a reflection of the employees performance. The NASS Awards Program will be changed to align with the new performance evaluation program as an incentive for recognize outstanding achievement and accomplishments of its

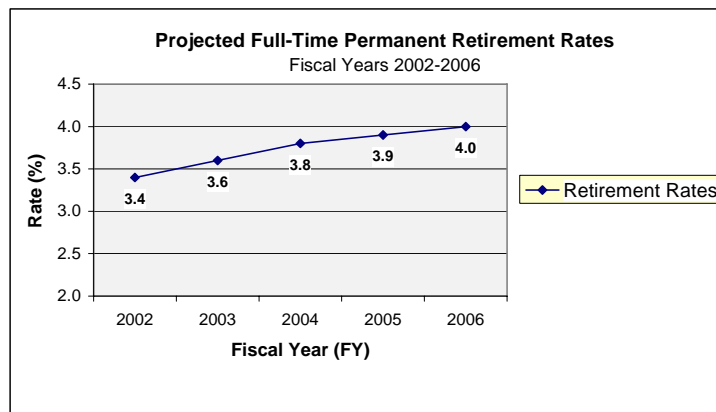
employees. We see supervisors and managers receiving more training on how to conduct effective performance appraisals and recognizing employees. This is especially critical for new employees, who are under probation during their first year of work, to ensure they are suited for a long and successful career in NASS. Supervisors need to carefully and seriously judge and evaluate new employees for continued employment.

NASS managers have implemented employee friendly benefits such as a leave donor program that is available to qualifying employees that have depleted their leave for legitimate reasons. NASS managers have considered, but not yet implemented other benefits to make the Federal Government and NASS a quality place to work. As part of a continuous re-evaluation process, NASS managers have considered increasing the hiring bonus given to new employees. A child care subsidy which would work much like the NASS transit subsidy has also been considered. A few other government agencies and many private companies offer a student loan repayment benefit to help them entice recent high-quality college graduates. Another item for consideration is developing job sharing policy allowing multiple employees to work part-time and share one full-time position. To keep pace with an ever-changing workplace atmosphere, NASS will constantly re-evaluate and think outside the box to make the Agency an employee friendly place to work.

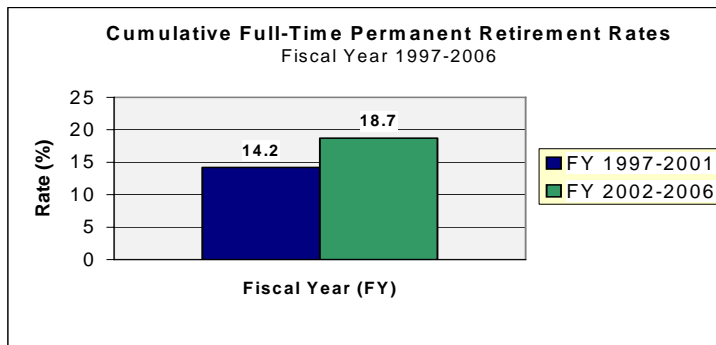
### Analysis of Future Retirement and Staff Attrition

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) projects retirement rates to increase from a rate of 3.4 percent of the federal workforce in 2002 to 4 percent in 2006.

**Figure 12: OPM Projected Retirement Rates**



**Figure 13: OPM Cumulative Retirement Rates for Selected Years**



**Table 5: OPM Retirement Rates by Selected Occupations**

<b>Retirement Rates by Selected Occupations</b>		
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Fiscal Year 1997-2001 Actual</b>	<b>Fiscal Year 2002-2006 Projection</b>
Information Technology	12.6%	16.8%
Scientist/Engineer	11.3%	15.0%
Financial Management	13.5%	17.8%
Acquisition	13.5%	17.7%

**Table 6: NASS Employees Who are Eligible to Retire by Year**

<b>Projected Number of Employees Eligible to Retire (in the Four Major Job Series)</b>							
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Statisticians</b>	<b>574</b>						
- Number Eligible		80	11	12	24	19	<b>146</b>
- Percent of Total		14%	2%	2%	4%	3%	<b>25%</b>
Supervisory Statisticians	<i>146</i>						
• Number Eligible		<i>29</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>8</i>	<b>60</b>
• Percent of Total		<i>19%</i>	<i>3%</i>	<i>6%</i>	<i>7%</i>	<i>5%</i>	<b>41%</b>
<b>Statistical Assistants</b>	<b>170</b>						
- Number Eligible		15	4	4	7	3	<b>33</b>
- Percent of Total		9%	2%	2%	4%	2%	<b>19%</b>
<b>IT Specialists</b>	<b>141</b>						
- Number Eligible		16	7	7	6	5	<b>41</b>
- Percent of Total		11%	5%	5%	4%	5%	<b>29%</b>
<b>Math Statisticians</b>	<b>98</b>						
- Number Eligible		9	1	5	5	4	<b>24</b>
- Percent of Total		9%	1%	5%	5%	5%	<b>24%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>983</b>						
- <b>Number Eligible</b>		<b>120</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>244</b>
- <b>Percent of Total</b>			<b>2%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>3%</b>	
- <b>Accumulated Percents</b>		<b>12%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>25%</b>

In comparing the projected cumulative retirement rates (employees eligible to retire) for 2002-2006, NASS's accumulated rate of 17 percent is slightly below the Office of Personnel's (OPM) rate of 18.7 percent. At the beginning of 2005, about 12 percent of the employees in the 4 major job series, which account for over 80 percent of the NASS workforce, will be eligible to retire. The data in Table 6 show no significant increases expected over the next several years with a normal rate of 2-4 percent each year through 2008. However, it should be noted that retirement eligibility rates for supervisory statisticians for 2006, 2007, and 2008 are almost twice as high as the rest of the agency's retirement rate.

A projected number of new hires can be calculated at the beginning of the fiscal year using normal attrition rates. Subtract the estimated annual attrition (currently 4.5 percent of the total staff) from the total number of employees, then subtract this difference from the Agency’s Fiscal Year Staff Ceiling to derive an estimated number of new hires for the fiscal year. Staff ceilings are normally established by the Administrator. A hiring goal can be established and communicated to the recruiters in the Field Offices.

For Example:

Number of employees on board at the beginning of the FY = 1078

Subtract the anticipated annual attrition rate for FY = 4.5% = 49

Total number of employees if no new employees were hired = 1029

NASS Staff Ceiling for the FY = 1110

Using the difference from above and subtract = 1029

New Hiring Goal for FY Established = 81

In using the example above, the Agency would need to hire an average of 6-7 new employees each month over the next 12 months to achieve this hiring goal in the example above.

## Training Needs and Skills Gap Analysis for the Future

One of the most important management challenges facing NASS is the need to transform its culture to help change the way it does business in the 21st century. NASS must continue to build its fundamental management capabilities in order to effectively address the agriculture sector’s most pressing priorities and take advantage of emerging opportunities. To accomplish this undertaking, NASS will need to invest resources, including time and money, to ensure that employees have the information, knowledge, skills, and competencies they need to work effectively in a rapidly changing and complex environment. Investments in training and developing employees are part of the Agency’s overall effort to achieve accurate, timely, and cost-effective results.

The Career Opportunities Development Team report recommended a standardized process by which the Agency can create new positions as the need for new skills arise in the future. Specifically, it involves recognizing the need for a new skill set, creating a new position description, and a justification document. These would be submitted to senior management for approval and then to Human Resources staff for rating and grade determination.

In the future, we see the work at NASS becoming more complex, requiring the workforce to be skilled and trained in new ways of doing business, including ways to defend against new types of physical and cyber threats to the nation’s security. NASS customer service goals will require employees to continually improve the ways we collaborate and share information.

As we begin to look at future skills gaps and training program needs, we should take into account the following trends occurring within the NASS workforce. The items listed below are not in any order of importance.

Workforce changes and challenges will include:

- NASS has a more diverse workforce than any time in its history. Today’s employees have different educational backgrounds, life experiences, and come from a greater geographical distribution within the United States and abroad.
- Decreasing number of employees with agricultural backgrounds.
- Accurate assessment of skills of newly hired staff.
- Lack of NASS Field Office experience for those recruited and hired in Headquarters.
- Different work experience gaps between HQ & Field Offices.
- Decreasing number of employees willing to relocate.

- The changing mix of work done by the Statisticians and Statistical Assistants.
- Decreasing number of newer employees willing to make NASS a career and take advantage of long-term career enhancing opportunities.
- Need to improve management leadership skills as perceived by employees.
- Budget and administrative staff need different types of training.
- Challenges associated with dwindling resources.
- Increasing expectation for employees to do more, better, cheaper, and with fewer resources.
- Decreasing willingness of respondents to provide their data to NASS, while the need for agricultural data increases.

In the future, consolidation will occur in data collection activities, analysis and estimation for certain commodities, many administrative activities, publications, LAN maintenance, and web site maintenance. These changes will provide new opportunities and the need for new skills in areas such as technology, training, customer service, recruiting, employee development, research, and marketing.

#### Technical Skills:

- Each telephone data collection center will have full monitoring capability and will use net-conferencing and video-conferencing.
- We see a Blaise (survey application development software) team located among several Field Offices available to help individual Field Offices as needed with assistance in either developing a new Blaise application for a State survey or by providing a previously written instrument from a repository of such instruments.
- We see gradual movement to consolidation of field data collection. Field enumerators will be equipped with portable electronic devices to collect and transmit data as well as time sheets. We see scanning technology used at data collection centers.
- We see mail surveys being returned to a few sites equipped with scanning equipment for scanning questionnaire images.
- We see increased use of web-based data collection with appropriate security measures in place.
- We see new estimation tools being written for all commodities.
- Generalized software packages for editing, analysis, and summarization of reimbursable surveys or other surveys not currently centrally supported will be developed and supported.
- The number of individual LAN's will likely be reduced and LAN updates will be automated and initiated from a central site as much as possible to save time and improve quality. Other LAN administration procedures will be increasingly automated, benefiting from eGovernment initiatives in workflow automation.
- The Internet will be the vehicle for more current data.
- We see increased use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and technologies.

#### Research Skills:

- We see a NASS with a strong research program including research units strategically co-located with Field Offices to do applied, short-term research in areas such as instrument design, non-sampling error, non-response issues, and use of previously reported data.

#### Employee Development Skills:

- We see increased opportunities for employee development including a mentor program for supervisors. We see increased use of net conferencing and video conferencing to deliver training where appropriate.



**Training Skills:**

- We see regular workshops or video conferences involving Field Office and HQ personnel to share ideas and information.

**Customer Service Skills:**

- We see administrative support for most States delivered from groups of two administrative technicians located in one Field Office and serving multiple States.
- We see better equipped print-mail centers producing more diverse products. A NASS technical expert will advise centers on the latest developments in equipment and technologies to help ensure that NASS needs in this area are met.

**Recruiting Skills:**

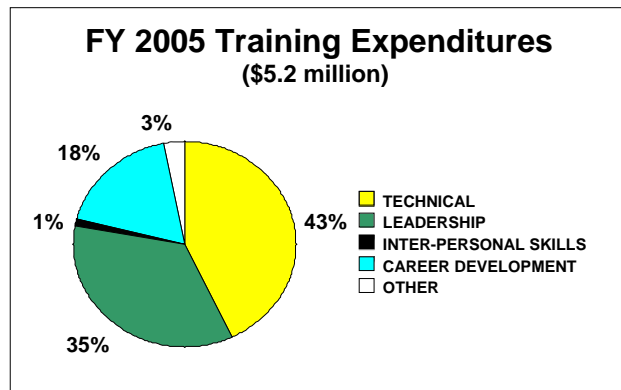
- We see NASS active in recruiting with professional materials developed by MISO including brochures, slide presentations, and other handouts.

**Marketing Skills:**

- We see a NASS with a vibrant marketing program beginning at the national level and extending to individual Field Offices.

For example: In FY 2005, NASS is planning for leadership training to increase from 18 percent spent in 2004 to 35 percent. The goal of this increase in spending, is to prepare staff to fill vacancies in senior management positions and support succession planning. Technical training will be supported at about the same level as the previous year.

**Figure 14: A Comparison of Expenditures for Different Types of Training in FY 2005**



TCDO needs to map out a 5-year long-term training strategy that includes impact analysis of the census cycle on the annual training plans, with regard to type and amount of technical and other training normally taken by employees. The annual training needs assessment should identify the gaps and the current training plan should address how the gaps will be filled.

**Future Full-Time Training in NASS**

As always, NASS is expecting to need more highly educated and highly motivated employees over the next 5-10 years. In planning for the future, the Agency must address its technical needs and plan its workforce accordingly. Another charge of the Workforce Planning Team is to identify needed changes in hiring and training for current job series. This also involves identifying those job series that may not be

needed in the future as well as those not currently utilized by NASS, but may be needed in the future. The FOORT has already made some decisions in this area. Some of their recommendations include consolidating Field Office activities such as: data collection; data analysis and estimation for certain commodities; administrative functions; publication and printing activities; and LAN and web site maintenance. This will dictate future hiring needs and practice, and have an influence on the Agency's full-time training programs.

Mathematical Statisticians are needed in both operational and research areas in NASS. Math Statisticians who work operationally in Statistical Methods Branch or Sampling Branch have very little time for pure applied research. They must partner with Research and Development Division to accomplish this work. Both our Chief Mathematical Statistician and our Senior Mathematical Statistician may retire in the next 2-4 years. We should be grooming a few current employees to move into those jobs. The FOORT is proposing to have research units located in Field Offices to do applied research in instrument design, yield estimation, sampling, non-sampling error, non-response issues, and the use of previously reported data. These requirements will necessitate the need for more Mathematical Statisticians.

Most IT Specialists are located in HQ. The Agency is consciously trying to reduce the number of IT Specialists in the field. The effects of reducing the number of IT specialists in the field will be: (1) need for potentially more LAN/WAN specialists in HQ to provide support to the field, (2) less opportunities to fill HQ IT positions with field employees so more need to have a training program in HQ so that IT employees can learn more about the NASS business (survey/census/estimation concepts and procedures), (3) greater need for HQ LAN specialists to visit Field Offices to learn more about field LAN issues (more travel), and (4) the need for more LAN training for field personnel since GS-335's will likely not have the knowledge/skills/abilities that GS-2210's have had in the field.

Survey methodology training will be more and more important in the future. With Agency directives to save money and reduce response burden, more attention will be paid to non-sampling errors and non-response issues. Survey Methodologists are needed in Census and Survey Division, Research and Development Division, and a few will be needed in regional data collection centers/offices as proposed by the FOORT.

NASS should expand its efforts to partner with one or more universities in each state to develop full-time training programs in each of these three areas. The Agency should not limit itself to training its Mathematical Statisticians at a handful of universities. Since, in the future, most of the Agency's IT Specialists will be working in the DC area, more effort needs to be given to identify all local universities for training in this discipline. Survey Methodology training has only been acquired at two schools (Maryland and Michigan). There must be more colleges and universities willing to work with NASS to develop curriculums in these areas to train employees.

NASS needs to do a better job at promoting the full-time training programs that are available. Employees should be made aware of how great a deal it is for them and how it will benefit the Agency. This will require more involvement from the Training and Career Development Office and all managers in NASS to promote these full-time training programs.

One question that is always a concern for managers trying to meet their current program due dates is, "How many positions can the Agency afford to have in the full-time training program?" For the Field Office who receives an employee entering the full-time training program, they have the benefit of this additional staff resource prior to time they enter school. However, the employee's assignments have to be reassigned to others in the office when they leave for full-time training. This gives the perception of losing office staff for full-time training since they do not get a replacement while the one employee is in full-time training. If NASS could establish more universities for full-time training programs, then the burden of the full-time training program could be rotated to other Field Offices. In HQ, employees

entering the full-time training program are transferred to the Office of the Director and then their previous position can be filled by another person.

NASS should try to keep these full-time training programs fully staffed almost every year. This goal has never been previously set, but a goal of two employees each in Mathematical Statistics, IT, and Survey Methodology Training Programs would be desirable. Full-time training could be temporarily suspended during heavy census workload periods to minimize the resource impact on the organization. The Agency has adopted a similar idea with survey specification changes during a census year. It limits or suspends changes to the survey programs during the busy census year time frame.

## Leadership Succession Plans

Much has been said about the upcoming shortage of experienced leaders in the Federal Government. With regard to human capital, the President’s Management Agenda reports that:

In most agencies, human resource planning is weak. Workforce deficiencies will be exacerbated by the upcoming retirement wave of the baby-boom generation. Approximately 71 percent of the government’s current employees will be eligible for either regular or early retirement by 2010, and then 40 percent of those employees are expected to retire. Without proper planning, the skill mix of the Federal workforce will not reflect tomorrow’s changing mission.

This topic was fully examined by the USDA Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP) team. USDA is a multifaceted Department comprised of many agencies with differing missions. The team concluded that a “one size fits all” succession plan does not exist. Solving leadership issues requires a shift in how the USDA approaches leadership development and succession. Creating a leadership culture involves a long-term sustained effort directed at changing the fundamental ways of operation, of many agencies.

Leadership succession planning is not a singular process unto itself. The environment and culture of an organization will ultimately determine the success and sustainability of the process. An organization with a strong leadership culture has an environment supportive of the time and effort needed to grow leaders. Developing leaders is seen as an investment, not a cost. Leaders support training and development and they make individual and organizational learning a priority. Mentoring and coaching are commonplace and leaders take personal responsibility for developing employees. It is an organization in which everyone continues to learn and apply what he or she learns. Development is used to set the stage for, complement, and understand learning experiences, not as a substitute for them. Virtually everyone in the Agency has the opportunity to provide leadership to some project or group, or to contribute to the development of another person.

The SESCO team identified common elements of successful succession planning by reviewing the following:

- Current leadership succession research.
- Eight USDA agencies’ leadership succession initiatives, including NASS.
- Programs currently underway at the Social Security Administration, the Government Accountability Office, and the Western Area Power Administration.

The elements were assembled into eight “Guiding Principles for Succession Planning.” These Principles provide a flexible model that leaders can use as they build succession programs. This flexibility recognizes that one size doesn’t fit all and that programs need to be built to meet the unique needs of the Agency, yet within these overarching guidelines.

**Table 7: Guiding Principles and Best Practices for Succession Planning**

<b>Succession Planning Guiding Principles and Best Practices</b>	
<b>Experience is the Best Teacher</b>	<p>Use challenging assignments that push people out of their comfort zone while allowing for failure. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work assignments that address strategic priorities</li> <li>• Cross-functional experiences</li> <li>• Cross-organizational experiences</li> <li>• Job rotations</li> </ul> <p>Use meaningful job experiences to build leadership skills. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing a major change process</li> <li>• Leading a turnaround</li> <li>• Starting something new</li> <li>• Leading an expansion</li> </ul> <p>Use team assignments that involve participation in any of the above experiences</p>
<b>Leaders Must Know Themselves First</b>	<p>Maximize opportunities for feedback and use a range of perspectives, methodologies, and tools to build a better understanding of one’s personality, preferences, and effectiveness. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 360 degree feedback tools</li> <li>• Coaching and mentoring support systems</li> <li>• Self-assessment tools</li> </ul> <p>Encourage individuals to seek, hear, and act on personal feedback by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring, communicating, and acting on personal values</li> <li>• Engaging in a variety of personal development activities</li> <li>• Being willing to implement a personal growth activity</li> </ul>
<b>Senior Leaders Take Ownership</b>	<p>“Above all, the development of leadership is a leadership issue” (McCall, 1998, p. 59). Senior leaders take ownership/responsibility in succession. For example, senior leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify meaningful learning experiences</li> <li>• Encourage relationships between current and aspiring leaders</li> <li>• Participate in team projects</li> <li>• Identify and assess developing leaders</li> <li>• Reward leaders for developing others</li> </ul>
<b>Leverage Diversity</b>	<p>“Building and maintaining a senior leadership corps reflective of the Nation’s diversity are a business imperative” (National Academy of Public Administration, December 2002, p. 34).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make senior leaders accountable for diversity</li> <li>• Actively seek relationships that stretch one’s flexibility and acceptance of diverse views</li> <li>• Capitalize on opportunities to design or teach programs dealing with diversity issues</li> <li>• Create diverse, cross-functional team assignments</li> <li>• Identify a large, diverse cadre of high-potential employees</li> </ul>

<b>Succession Planning Guiding Principles and Best Practices</b>	
<b>Adopt a Strategic Business Approach</b>	<p>“Executive development strategies need to be more closely tied to corporate and business strategies” (Karaevli and Hall, p. 63). As described in the President’s Management Agenda, implementing succession planning systems must be integrated and directly linked, defined, and developed in concert with the organizational mission, purpose, goals, objectives, and expected outcomes. This means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tying succession plans to corporate and business strategies</li> <li>• Linking leadership development to the strategic plan and to results</li> <li>• Making leadership succession an integral part of running the business</li> <li>• Using a long-term approach that does not emphasize short-term business needs</li> <li>• Holding the organization and its leaders accountable for growing new leaders</li> </ul>
<b>Maximize Return on Investment (ROI)</b>	<p>“Development is not so much about building new systems as it is about using what already happens in a wiser manner” (McCall, 1998, p. 79).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership development opportunities already exist in organizations and the cost has already been paid. The key is to identify where the best opportunities or “schools” exist within the organization. For example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Assignments that deal with specific issues</li> <li>○ Assignments that deal with organizational problems</li> <li>○ Assignments that will help prepare one for a particular challenge</li> <li>○ Working with an effective leader</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Do not consider assignments in terms of short-term demands (i.e., filling a slot), but in terms of what might be learned by the person taking the assignment</li> <li>• Place less emphasis on program approaches</li> <li>• Ignore agency boundaries by sharing and using existing, successful programs</li> </ul>
<b>Identify High Potential Candidates</b>	<p>“There is a need to properly identify people and skills gaps, keeping in mind not only the organization’s mission compliance needs in the future, but also that there is consonance with individual career aspirations” (Bhatta, p. 102).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider an employee’s interest in taking on leadership positions of increasing responsibility</li> <li>• Consider people who have potential but are “not yet ready” for developmental opportunities</li> <li>• Require candidates to apply for leadership training opportunities and describe their leadership potential</li> <li>• Provide mentors who help talented people understand what actions they need to take to advance</li> <li>• Tailor and customize training and development plans</li> <li>• Consider open enrollment for leadership training and not overly-limit the candidate pool</li> <li>• Consider input from multiple sources in assessment and the</li> </ul>

<b>Succession Planning Guiding Principles and Best Practices</b>	
	<p>selection process (i.e., supervisors, HR, and senior executives)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a central database to track senior managers’ career aspirations, status, and mobility</li> </ul>
<b>The Ability to Learn is the Fundamental Leadership Competency</b>	<p>“I have reservations about competencies. The environment is very rapidly changing. Beyond those competencies related to somebody’s ability to learn, you’d end up with a competency that would be outdated in a few years” (Briscoe and Hall, p. 48).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify learning opportunities that prepare leaders for future challenges</li> <li>• Create opportunities for developing leaders to observe senior leaders in action</li> <li>• Focus on ways to identify and foster learning competencies. Tools include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Helping individuals become more aware of one’s self through self-assessments</li> <li>○ Creating opportunities to receive and act on feedback</li> <li>○ Encouraging personal growth activities in and outside of the organization</li> <li>○ Building diversity within work assignments and job experiences</li> <li>○ Increasing one’s exposure to change and uncertainty</li> <li>○ Designing activities to keep current with areas important to the organization</li> <li>○ Constructing assignments to require collaboration across functions or organizations</li> <li>○ Working on teams</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Look outside the organization for learning opportunities</li> <li>• Learning never stops once in an SES or leader position (e.g., use coaches for senior leaders and advanced or higher educational experiences)</li> </ul>

NASS was recognized for excelling in 6 of the 8 guiding principles identified by the SESCDP team necessary to develop a leadership culture, a cornerstone for the creation of a successful succession plan.

The six principles demonstrated by NASS include:

- Experience is the Best Teacher
- Leaders Must Know Themselves First
- Leverage Diversity
- Adopt a Strategic Business Approach
- Identify High Potential Candidates
- The ability to Learn is the Fundamental Leadership Competency

**Experience is the best teacher**

While many positions require specialized knowledge, skills, and abilities, the Agency continues to emphasize diversity of background and experience in its leaders. All newly hired statisticians signed a mobility clause because NASS needs to have the ability to meet its mission and that may require the relocation of its employees.

The best opportunity available for a Statistician to obtain this understanding is to work in multiple organizational units. Moving to other positions and other States not only increases an employee’s

knowledge base, but is also a great opportunity for enhancing workforce diversity. New employees in an office always bring new ideas and viewpoints which can benefit both an office and the employee.

Today's policy allows employees to choose career paths to meet an individual's skill set and personal situations. This allows NASS to develop a pool of individuals to fill both senior-level technical and managerial positions. Employees may change career paths as personal circumstances change, increasing morale, job satisfaction, and skill diversity.

### **Employee Input**

Following a business approach, every three years an Organizational Climate Survey is conducted to gain input from employees. A cross-functional team with representatives across all divisions and job series interpret survey results and make recommendations for improvement. The survey is administered to all NASS employees. In addition, Human Resource Management Evaluation Surveys are conducted in six to eight Field Offices and headquarter units each year. Information tabulated from the Human Resource Management Evaluation is compared to the NASS Organizational Climate Survey and used to provide feedback to Field Office supervisors and managers about the office's work environment.

### **Training Programs**

Each employee in NASS is required to have an approved Individual Development Plan on record. Training and development needs and objectives, career goals, and aspirations of the employee are closely aligned with Agency career opportunities and staffing needs. Employees are encouraged to take training beyond what is sponsored within the Agency, including computer software, technical and administrative, and personal development courses.

One of the strengths of NASS is having a viable presence in each State. Professional and support staff learn and develop procedures and survey processes which gain efficiencies in their day-to-day activities. In the past, only Statisticians and IT Specialists were allowed to participate in regional and national training workshops. Employee input indicated the support staff would also benefit by attending regional and national workshops. NASS is now conducting Statistical Assistant Workshops aimed to provide Statistical Assistants a venue for sharing information and receiving training on the overall survey process, teach new tools used to support and enhance the survey process and quality of agricultural statistics, and improve customer service.

In an effort to ensure all employees understand the mission of NASS, an employee orientation is conducted shortly after employees are hired. In the past, these sessions were limited to the professional job series. Acting on feedback from the 2001 Climate Survey, the target audience for this event was expanded to all federal employees (from all job series) working in Field Offices or HQ. The goal of these sessions is to provide new employees with an overview of the NASS mission and organization.

The Career Development Intern Program is designed to provide additional training and to gain career enhancing experiences for Agricultural Statisticians. It provides an Agricultural Statistician the same training opportunities as statisticians in other series when competing for a training program that culminates in a GS-13 position in HQ.

NASS embraces USDA's Office of Civil Rights Special Emphasis training opportunities and conferences intended to enhance career executive development of employees. These training opportunities promote diversity in the Agency.

NASS sponsors Statisticians and Computer Specialists to attend Leadership, Supervisory, Management, and Executive Development training opportunities. All journey-level Statisticians and Computer Specialists are required to attain a minimum level of 80 hours of leadership training. All new supervisors

are required to attend OPM’s Seminar for New Managers. NASS uses OPM’s Executive Potential Program (EPP) for mid-level employees to provide management experience and training for individuals who are working in an occupational specialty with high potential for leadership positions. The Agency supports the USDA sponsored Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCEP). NASS employees accounted for 10 percent of the most recent SESCEP class. While NASS makes up less than one percent of the USDA workforce, this is a barometer of the success of NASS’s current leadership development program and a demonstration of NASS’s commitment to developing future leaders.

Senior executives use external executive coaches on a rotational basis. This allows them to further develop and hone their leadership skills. All members of the Senior Executive Team make use of the training opportunities offered by the Federal Executive Institute.

**NASS Strengths:**

- **Experience**—Employees feel valued as part of the team when training opportunities are made available at all levels of the organization.
- **Self-Knowledge**—Coaching opportunities provide senior executives with further development opportunities.
- **Diversity**—Training opportunities encourage employees to think differently.
- **Strategy**—A variety of training and development opportunities allows employees to meet career goals and the Agency to have a pool of trained employees for filling vacancies.
- **Identification**—Employees are both self-identified and discovered through training.
- **Learning**—The Organizational Climate Survey and Human Resource Management Evaluation Survey allow the Agency to gather input from across the workforce and adjust accordingly to increase employee satisfaction.

**Room for Improvement:**

- **Leaders Take Ownership**—Reward Leaders for developing future leaders.
- **Maximize Return in Investment**—Ignore agency boundaries by sharing and using existing, successful programs.

Leadership succession planning is just one step in the process of having a well-trained workforce in place to face tomorrow’s challenges. You must also have a workforce that believes in today’s leaders. The Office of Personnel Management conducted a survey to measure the employee’s perceptions of leadership within USDA.

According to the Federal Human Capital Survey, Federal employees had a fairly negative perception of leadership performance and, unfortunately, USDA leadership did not fare much better. Only 42 percent of the USDA employees agreed with the statement, “I hold my organization’s leaders in high regard.” NASS had the highest rating among USDA agencies with a rating of 52.8 percent. In the Federal Human Capital survey, the Best Places to Work Index NASS scored 66.8, placing NASS in the top tier of high performing organizations. NASS scored above the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile of 189 organizations surveyed by OPM.

Succession Planning should also be looked at in terms of National emergencies. The events of 9/11 have forced us to look at these plans as reality. NASS has in place a Continuation of Operations (COOP). The plan identifies backup staff to perform selected duties during emergencies and until the Administrator arrives at the COOP emergency relocation facility. The COOP lists a full order of succession, including two State Directors from different regions of the country, should a major catastrophe occur.



## Field Operations Workforce Vision of the Future

The Field Office Operations Review Team (FOORT) examined almost every aspect of the work completed by NASS Field Offices. The vision of NASS FO workforce in the future is described below. The Agency is deeply committed that no current employee will lose their job as a result of implementing this vision. As a result of this commitment, it is difficult to establish a specific timetable for completion of this plan because in many cases, particularly those involving personnel, change will occur only when opportunities arise such as retirements. The following items provide a comprehensive review of the changing field operational structure and its workforce impact.

First, we see a NASS where more activities will be consolidated resulting in more heterogeneous Field Offices. Shifting of perhaps as much as 10-15 percent of the total staff among offices will occur as a result. Consolidation will occur in data collection activities, analysis and estimation for certain commodities, many administrative activities, publications, LAN maintenance, and web site maintenance. Despite this consolidation, we also see a strong, viable presence in every location in which NASS currently has an office. We do not see offices being reduced to only a customer service presence. We see NASS continuing to take advantage of our decentralized structure and building on these advantages using the latest hardware, software, and communications technology. These tools will provide new opportunities in training, customer service, recruiting, employee development, research, and marketing.

Starting with data collection, we see more telephone data collection centers for use by Field Offices that have difficulty maintaining a good staff of office enumerators and for use in reimbursable surveys and surveys designed only for regional or national estimates.

In the longer term, we see more telephone data collection being done by telephone data collection centers for States who are unable to maintain a strong core of telephone enumerators. Each center will have full monitoring capability and will use net-conferencing and video-conferencing so that the home State, as well as HQ and sponsoring organizations, can help with training of statisticians and enumerators. Survey instruments will have multiple States consolidated into one instrument for more efficient survey management. Office enumerators in all States will submit time sheets via an electronic system similar to the NASS Time & Attendance System.

We see gradual movement to consolidation of field data collection. As Field Data Collection Centers are implemented, better tools and systems for automating survey management must be developed. First candidates will include the June area survey in States with a small number of segments, objective yield surveys, and economic surveys. Field enumerators will be equipped with portable electronic devices to collect and transmit data as well as time sheets. We see image capture scanning technology used at data collection centers to provide access to questionnaires by the home State.

We see mail surveys being returned to a few sites equipped with scanning equipment for OCR and imaging. These sites will be strategically located within USPS two day delivery service of the home States. Data and images will be accessible by individual Field Offices, or consolidated estimating States, the same day of return. We also see increased use of web-based data collection with appropriate security measures in place.

We see data collection consolidated into a few Field Offices for some surveys that are inefficiently conducted in every State. These surveys will include those involving only regional estimates, a small census of producers or processors, or those with small samples concentrated in a few States. We also see data analysis and setting of estimates in these cases being consolidated, although not necessarily at the same sites. Examples include: labor; cotton ginnings; manufactured dairy; catfish; trout; pecans; peppers; and peaches. If these data collection action items are adopted, a potential total staff reallocation of 25 to 40 positions should be realized.

We see NASS taking advantage of Field Office expertise and moving the estimating program for some commodities from HQ to a Field Office. This will be done when clear advantages in timeliness, quality, or cost savings are identified. As movement of estimation functions move to the field, NASS will evaluate the possible movement of other HQ functions.

We see a NASS with a strong research program including research units strategically co-located with Field Offices to do applied, short-term research in areas such as instrument design, non-sampling error, non-response issues, and use of previously reported data. Logical places for this work, though not necessarily limited to these, will be telephone data collection centers and offices with a large objective yield program or other field data collection program.

In the area of IT support, we see less duplication of effort in updating and maintaining the Field Office LANs. The number of individual LAN's will likely be reduced, and LAN updates will be automated and initiated from a central site as much as possible to save time and improve quality. Other LAN administration procedures will be increasingly automated, benefiting from eGovernment initiatives in workflow automation.

We see expanded use of NASSnet while improving its structure and the way information is accessed. NASSnet will be used for submitting survey evaluations, specification requests, monthly survey reports, reimbursable survey activity reports, and other Agency communications. Proper use of NASSnet will be documented along with other NASS communication standards as our communications policy is updated, improved, and enforced thanks to the NASS Communications Team who is addressing this subject.

We see NASS active in recruiting with professional materials developed by MISO including brochures, slide presentation, and other handouts. We see increased use of virtual job fairs and use of the Internet to accept applications. We see training for recruiters to improve interviewing skills and skills in following up after interviews. Training will include strategies for working with college recruitment offices and college deans. We see NASS expanding use of student trainees with a more formal program to ensure common experiences among trainees which will help in evaluations and in developing a common set of skills.

We see fewer but better equipped print/mail centers producing more diverse products. Centers will be better structured to take advantage of Postal Service delivery regions. Centers may be smaller in number but with larger staffs utilizing better equipment and better staff management. A NASS technical expert will advise centers on the latest developments in equipment and technology to help ensure that the Agency needs are met.

We see administrative support for most Field Offices delivered from groups of two administrative technicians located in one State and serving multiple States. This will increase short-term and long-term back-up capability and facilitate problem-solving and learning. This will happen gradually as opportunities arise. While the current structure of administrative technicians supporting the Field Office is effective, it can be improved while reducing the number of staff in those positions. Going beyond the current situation of a few Field Offices being supported by an administrative technician in another location, organizing administrative technician positions where there are two in one location will provide on-site back-up that is currently not possible. This additional support in one location will enable that location to serve 3 to 4 Field Offices, with a net saving, in one scenario, of nine positions.

The print/mail center concept has proven to be successful by maximizing the use of staff and equipment. The opportunity exists to restructure our print/mail centers to better utilize personnel, acquire fewer but more diversified types of equipment, and improve print/mail service. Print/mail State groupings will be restructured using postal mail service standards to define groups. Field Offices will be realigned on the condition of one day faster mail service or maintaining the current mail service capabilities. Adoption of

recommended State groupings will expedite dissemination of pre-survey material, increasing work flow efficiency.

The advanced pace of new equipment and processes for print/mail centers makes it increasingly difficult to ensure our centers are using the best available technology. A position for a technical expert would be a valuable resource to insure best practices are optimized by the available equipment highlighting the advantages of a designated technical expert. Anticipated increases in the volume of printing will result in lowering overall negotiated equipment costs and service agreements.

By restructuring how NASS collects and processes questionnaires returned in the mail and through personal interview, along with consolidating releases to include multiple States in a region, the number of print/mail centers will be reduced while increasing operating capabilities. Business reply returns will be handled through data collection sites and will have minimal impact on mail delivery speeds. Redistributing print/mail staff positions will result in a better trained staff with more back-up capabilities for various print/mail functions. Larger staff size per location will increase the effectiveness of each center, while decreasing the need for non-print/mail staff to be involved in these activities. Redistributing staff will also strengthen the ability to manage cyclical print/mail workloads.

It is the Agency vision that as these recommendations are successfully implemented, more opportunities will arise for a decentralization of HQ including the possible relocation of HQ or part of current HQ staff to a new site or sites.

## **Competitive Sourcing and Contracted Services**

A long-range plan is an important component of the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Mission Area and competitive sourcing program. Its value to the mission area is based on the plan's ability to lay out our strategy in pursuing public-private competitions as a tool to help achieve effective and efficient service delivery, while executing the Agencies' missions in a manner that reflects their unique workforce needs. General decision-making process includes the following considerations:

Evaluation Factors – The factors used by REE to evaluate whether an activity should be scheduled for competition will be developed in conjunction with a consultant contractor. The factors will incorporate the nature of the functions, organizational alignment, business processes, opportunities for flattening the organization, responsibility for stewardship of resources, accountability of financial assets, and overall return on investment. REE does not have the expertise available to properly develop an analytical tool/process for REE use in conducting Cost Benefit Analyses (CBAs). Once we obtain this support, REE will then work with the consultant to conduct the CBAs and identify those studies that are considered feasible to pursue.

Relation to Human Capital Plans – As iterated in REE's Human Capital Plan, the REE agencies will consider competitive sourcing during workforce planning efforts or major restructuring efforts.

Adoption of Lessons Learned – REE has a forum to conduct a post-review of its completed competitive sourcing studies. This is done within the mission area agencies' recurring operational meetings. Problem areas that occurred are identified, discussed, and "lessons learned" generated as a result. The REE Competitive Sourcing Program Office (CSPO) is responsible for formalizing the "lessons learned" so that this valuable information is captured as guidance for any future competitive sourcing studies that are initiated.

Participation – Decision-making in REE to determine whether an activity is scheduled for competition is centralized with the REE Under Secretary. However, there is a participative

process within REE in which the Office of the Administrator for each of the agencies consults with an advisory group of senior managers in a standing committee, the REE Competitive Sourcing Working Group (CSWG). The CSPO handles the overall coordination of the CSWG and the competitive sourcing program, providing expertise and assistance to the Under Secretary and the REE agencies for all phases of the competitive sourcing process. The CSPO is also responsible for managing the overall inventory process for REE.

Potential constraints - The most significant factors that limit REE's ability to give greater consideration to competitive sourcing, as reflected in this plan, is summarized in the following:

- *Limited resources/available funds* – The REE mission area is constrained by the availability of limited funding, contracting, and human resources. Based on ARS' (the largest of the REE agencies) historical experience with competitive sourcing in the 1980–1991 time period, there is demonstrated proof that under ideal conditions, the mission area can capably handle a maximum of two competitive sourcing studies. Current experience in our competitive sourcing program further supports this. Given these limitations, the objective of the REE plan is to target competitive sourcing studies that will provide the biggest payback.
- *Complexity of the Mission Area* – The REE agencies are not 'backroom operations'. Our core missions are either science-based or related to agricultural statistics or economic analyses as opposed to a "service" delivery.
- *Geographical Dispersion* – The REE agencies are primarily dispersed across the United States. This constitutes a significant constraint when formulating a strategy for competitions. In addition, ARS provides administrative support to all the REE agencies.
- *Business Process Modernization* – Based on the current REE FAIR Act Inventory, the major areas available for competitive sourcing are in the service delivery functions. REE agencies streamlined and reorganized their organizations in the mid 1990's. We are now at a point where modernization of business processes are needed before significant decisions can be made regarding competitive sourcing of service delivery functions. One significant area is Information Technology (IT). To adhere to the USDA-OCIO Departmental approach on IT functions and other legislative mandates on paperwork reduction and financial assistance, all available IT monetary and human resources must be devoted to meeting these requirements for electronic alternatives to customers. Consideration of these e-Gov initiatives must be assessed before significant decisions and analysis can occur for competitive sourcing opportunities.

Efforts to Minimize these constraints - In order to minimize these constraints, REE will be pursuing alternative resources, such as obtaining a consultant to work with the mission area to develop an analytical tool to identify areas of commercial activities that will provide a best approach to identifying and conducting competitions that can yield real benefits to REE and its agencies. It is expected that REE will proceed with identifying funding and take action to obtain a consultant contractor.

The REE Mission Area Annual FAIR Act Inventory serves as the baseline for NASS's long-range competitive sourcing plan and NASS will continue to use it as a management tool to ensure suitable commercial activities are carried out in the most effective and efficient manner possible. In reviewing the NASS FAIR Act Inventory and applying the REE FAIR Act guidance, NASS applied standards and measures to data collection and data capture activities associated with annual surveys and the 2007 Census of Agriculture to determine those functions appropriate for competitive sourcing. These plans will be refined as NASS gains additional experience in competitive sourcing studies currently being done in the REE mission area and gains further insight into the Agency workforce as classified in the FAIR Act Inventory. NASS will continue to review specific study functions for attaining its long range competitive sourcing goals for the annual surveys and 2007 Census of Agriculture and within the Agency's strategic plans as appropriate.

## STRATEGY 1: ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF WORKLIFE

NASS is very conscientious about identifying and addressing issues that are important to its employees. Every 3 years, the Agency gives its employees the chance to voice their concerns and make suggestions that will improve their work atmosphere. Every Organizational Climate Survey will focus on enhancing and furthering the recommendations made by the previous Organizational Climate Survey Evaluation Team. It will provide a measure for comparison with the results of the previous survey and an opportunity to re-evaluate any new or carryover concerns to be addressed by the Agency in the future. As part of a continuous re-evaluation process, NASS managers will continue to evaluate worklife options and other employee friendly benefits as they become available.

### **Performance Measures**

- The OCSET develops and makes recommendations for organizational improvement in NASS.
- Continue to implement approved recommendations prepared by the Career Opportunity Development Team.
- The next NASS Organizational Climate Survey responses show steady improvement in employee satisfaction when compared to the previous survey.
- HRME recommendations are evaluated and implemented.
- Implement an ‘exit’ interview for employees leaving the Agency to identify potential problems and address them before losing any additional employees.

### **Actionable Strategies**

- Continue to be on the forefront in adopting government-wide and department-wide programs that benefit employees and make their work environment a nice and desirable place to work.
- Continue to improve Agency communications through documentation and information posted on NASS’s Intranet (NASSNet).
- Employees continue to keep their managers informed of work related issues which includes concerns about workloads, supplies, and work environment.
- Conduct the NASS Organizational Climate Survey at least every three years.
- Management and employees respond to OPM’s Federal Human Capital Survey and compare the results with the internal organizational climate survey results.
- Continue to charter teams to evaluate the results from the Organizational Climate Surveys.
- Human Resource Management Evaluations (HRME) will continue to be conducted in the Field Offices and Headquarter Branches every year.
- NASS will constantly re-evaluate and think outside the box to make the Agency an employee friendly place to work.

## STRATEGY 2: TRAINING NASS EMPLOYEES TO MEET THE AGENCY CHALLENGES

One of the most important management challenges facing NASS is the need to transform its culture to help change the way it does business in the 21st century. NASS must continue to build its fundamental management capabilities in order to effectively address the agriculture sector's most pressing priorities and take advantage of emerging opportunities. To accomplish this, NASS will need to invest resources, including time and money, to ensure that employees have the information, knowledge, skills, and competencies they need to work effectively in a rapidly changing and complex environment. Investments in training and developing employees are part of the Agency's overall effort to achieve accurate, timely, and cost-effective results.

Training can be defined as making available to employees planned and coordinated educational programs of instruction in professional, technical, or other fields that are, or will be, related to the employee's job responsibilities. Developmental programs can include experiences such as coaching, mentoring, or rotational assignments. The essential aim of training and development programs is to assist the Agency in achieving its mission and goals by improving individual, and ultimately, organizational performance.

### Performance Measures

- A minimum of 3 percent of the Agency's Annual Budget is directed towards training.
- Technical, leadership, inter-personal skills, career development, and other training are appropriate to address the training needs as identified by the needs assessment.
- Training workshop history shows that an appropriate number of training events are conducted to address training and skill needs.
- Census training needs are completed prior to the implementation phase of the next Census.
- The number of employees completing the full-time training program each year meets or exceeds the 10-year average.

### Actionable Strategies

- Conduct an Annual Training Needs Assessment Survey to identify skills gaps and obtain an assessment of employees' proficiency in all critical areas of performance.
- Conduct a survey of senior executives to gain an insight into what proficiencies would be key to their vision of the future for the Agency.
- Develop a 5-Year Strategic Training Plan for the Agency.
- State Directors work with universities which are local to HQ or Field Offices to expand the number of universities which are "qualified" for the NASS Full-Time Training programs.
- Identify opportunities or needs within the Agency which would be appropriate for full-time training candidates after their training is completed, in order to make use of their newly acquired knowledge/skills.

## STRATEGY 3: OUTSOURCING SERVICES

NASS currently has a strong outsourcing program. Over 20 percent of its annual appropriated budget and more than 20 percent of its FAIR Act Inventory of commercial functions were outsourced for data collection and data capture activities. In the recent 2002 Census of Agriculture, NASS outsourced mailing the census questionnaires and handling of the returned questionnaires instead of hiring additional federal employees into its workforce.

The REE Mission Area FY 2003 FAIR Act Inventory, serves as the baseline for NASS's long-range competitive sourcing plan and NASS will continue to use it as a management tool to ensure suitable commercial activities are carried out in the most effective and efficient manner possible. In reviewing the NASS FAIR Act Inventory and applying the REE FAIR Act guidance, NASS applied standards and measures to data collection and data capture activities associated with annual surveys and the 2007 Census of Agriculture to determine those functions appropriate for competitive sourcing. These plans will be refined as NASS gains additional experience in competitive sourcing studies currently being done in the REE mission area and gains further insight into the Agency workforce as classified in the FAIR Act Inventory.

### Performance Measures

- Feasibility reviews for competitively outsourcing agency functions are conducted.
- Specialized services are contracted out on a project by project basis.
- All survey data collection is contracted out.
- Data entry function is contracted out during heavy or peak workloads, as needed.
- Census preparations such as printing of forms, mailing, etc. are contracted out.

### Actionable Strategies

- Renew the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) cooperative agreement to contract out all survey data collection work.
- Study NASS activities requiring further analysis to determine whether they are likely to be publicly announced for competition.
- Projects requiring specific skill sets or resources that not available in NASS should be procured from outside public or private sources.

## STRATEGY 4: NASS SUCCESSION PLANS

Like many organizations, NASS is facing a critical challenge in leadership succession planning. NASS needs to continue to emphasize the importance of succession planning as a strategic planning tool to ensure the Agency has a diverse, well prepared pool of individuals who are able to fill leadership roles at every management level of the organization.

NASS's senior leaders need to be intentional and purposeful in creating a leadership culture and relay this message to their employees through words and actions. All NASS employees need to practice succession planning and constantly remind their teams of its importance. This is a continual process that needs to work both down and up from all levels. If this process is practiced, the rewards will be well-trained leaders at all levels, prepared to fill positions of increased responsibilities.

### Performance Measures

- Number of staff qualified for leadership positions are identified.
- Evaluate effectiveness of the COOP Plan works.
- Percent of GS-12 employees who received supervisory and management training.

### Actionable Strategies

- Communicate the COOP Plan and plans for sustaining the Agency functions.
- COOP Plan exercises (stages) are completed.
- Develop a contact list for COOP.
- Support leadership and management training and the Department's SESCO program.
- NASS senior leaders improve taking ownership by: encouraging relationships between current and aspiring leaders; participating in team projects; identifying and assessing developing leaders; and rewarding leaders for developing others.
- NASS senior leaders will maximize the Agency's Return-On-Investment by advertising and promoting leadership development opportunities that already exist in the organization and to identify where the best opportunities or "schools" exist within the organization. Assignments to meet short-term demands (i.e., filling a slot) should not be considered, but in terms of what might be learned by the person taking the assignment.
- Ignore agency boundaries by sharing and using existing, successful programs.
- Strengthen training opportunities by utilizing USDA's Career Enhancement Program (CEP), specifically designed so that employees in the single-interval series positions can advance to positions of greater responsibility. The positions are competitively announced and selectees are placed under a training agreement and plan. Upon successful completion of training, in which the employee attains the required OPM educational qualifications and the necessary KSAs for the target position, the employee is then eligible for the targeted position. The NASS CEP will follow OPM guidelines and allow any current employee the opportunity to acquire the necessary college level credits to become qualified for a position in another job series. This will be another option to fill vacancies in the Agency.



## STRATEGY 5: A NASS WORKFORCE THAT IS MORE ACCOUNTABLE

This is an area of importance to NASS and is aligned to one of the Presidential Management Initiatives. It is now a requirement to link individual performance with the Agency's Strategic Goals and Annual Performance Plans and Projects. NASS will be moving from a two-level employee performance evaluation program to the multi-level evaluation process. This program must effectively differentiate between the various levels of (high and low) performance and provide consequences based on performance with linkage to individual/team/unit performance to organizational goals, desired results, and outcomes.

The NASS Awards Program has changed over the years to keep in step with changes made to the employee appraisal programs. As NASS moves from the pass/fail performance plan, changes will be made to the NASS Awards Program to realign awards with performance. NASS will continue using the Administrator's Awards for Excellence Program.

Employees in the double interval job series were generally promoted based on the amount of time they were in their job at a specific grade level. Information documenting an employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's) will now be used as the primary evaluation element for promotion.

### **Performance Measures**

- Performance of employees are appraised using a new multi-level performance evaluation in 2005.
- Employees are recognized monetarily and non-monetarily for their accomplishments and achievements.
- All supervisors and managers fairly and equitably employees performance using established performance standards and measured using documented accomplishments and agency performance results.
- Employees are evaluated and promoted based on information in their KSA documentation.

### **Actionable Strategies**

- Communicate to all employees the plans to implement a new employee performance evaluation program and awards program.
- Develop employee performance elements and standards using input from supervisors, managers, and human resource specialist.
- Align employee performance plans with the NASS strategic goals and annual performance plans.
- Provide training to all NASS supervisors and managers on how to conduct an effective performance appraisal and recognize employees using the new programs.
- Senior managers are responsible for reviewing annual performance ratings for consistency across the agency and reflect the performance results and accomplishments attained by the agency.
- Implement an employee performance evaluation program that is approved by the Department.
- Update the NASS Awards program to align with the multi-level performance evaluation program.
- The NASS Awards Program will be funded by the Administrator.
- Employees make use of the Core Development Training Program to develop their KSA's.
- Technical Reviews are conducted.
- Human Resource Management Evaluations (HRME) are conducted.

## STRATEGY 6: RECRUITING AND RETAINING A HIGH PERFORMING WORKFORCE

Recruiting the best qualified applicants and retaining a highly skilled and professional staff is critically important to NASS. It is the best means for successfully carrying out its mission to efficiently and effectively serve and meet the data needs of its customers. NASS management must continue to be progressive in: its recruitment tactics; annual and long-term training strategies; employee career advancement and placement in the organization; recognizing high performing employees; and thoroughly evaluating employee feedback with a follow-up action plan. NASS must continue to focus on the people who do the work, the places it's performed, and the processes that produce the data products to meet the needs of the customers it serves. NASS managers and supervisors must communicate, collaborate, coach, and be a catalyst for making NASS not only a high performing organization, but a valued and friendly place to work for every employee.

### Performance Measures

- Hire the best qualified candidates and job applicants.
- Annually, at least 55 percent of new hires are women and minorities.
- Pilot new quality worklife programs to assess value of program before implementation.
- Recognize high performing employees for their accomplishments and achievements.
- OCSET recommends organizational improvements to Senior Management using employee feedback from the most recent Organizational Climate Survey.
- Provide added incentive for employees/potential candidates in areas/States that are harder to place employees.

### Actionable Strategies

- Develop and provide high quality recruitment resources and materials for our recruiters.
- Identify where the hot beds of recruitment are located by State.
- Continue using the NASS Student Career Employment Program for recruiting purposes.
- Recruit new employees from colleges and universities with an emphasis on recruiting from 1890's Historically Black Colleges and Universities, 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Institutions, and members of the Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities (HACU).
- Assist employees to "qualify" for different job series in their quest for career advancement and other job related opportunities.
- NASS supervisors use the NASS Awards Program to recognize high performing individuals.
- NASS supervisors rate employees' performance fairly and accurately and provide feedback to the employee throughout the year.
- Continue to promote and adopt quality worklife programs to improve the work environment of employees.
- Conduct an Organizational Climate Survey every 3 years to provide feedback and information on internal organizational performance to NASS management.
- Establish new policies for expanding temporary duty (TDY's) for all grades levels in the field and Headquarters.
- Consider expanding the Minority Recruitment Program to include a program such as The Outstanding Scholar and Bilingual/Bicultural Programs.
- Employ interns through the Workforce Recruitment Program for students with disabilities.

## STRATEGY 7: IMPLEMENTATION OF FIELD OFFICE ORGANIZATIONAL RESTRUCTURING TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS

The Agency should move forward with the recommendations of the FOORT to consolidate Field Office activities in the areas of data collection, estimation and analysis, services, information technology, and administrative functions. The consolidation will result in more heterogeneous Field Offices. NASS will still maintain a strong, viable presence in every location in which NASS currently has an office. NASS can take advantage of the decentralized structure and build on these advantages by using the latest hardware, software, and communications technology. These tools will provide new opportunities in training, customer service, recruiting, employee development, research, and marketing.

### **Performance Measures**

- Creation of consolidated estimation and survey centers in Field Offices will result in higher quality estimates.
- Better customer service in the areas of: print/mail; information technology; and administration due to the creation of regional centers with staffing and equipment to more adequately meet customer demands.
- Fewer dollars spent on data entry contracting, more accurate data collected, and less NASDA expense as a result of the wider implementation of electronic data reporting (EDR) and the use of personal digital assistants (PDA's) by enumerators.
- Improvement in data collection methods due to the co-location of research centers with data collection centers.
- More consistency and efficiency in telephone data collection will result due to consolidation of most Field Offices calling into regional calling centers.

### **Actionable Strategies**

- Equip enumerators with appropriate mobile data collection equipment.
- Restructure print/mail centers into four locations and equip them with higher performing and more technically advanced equipment.
- Create additional and better-equipped regional telephone data collection centers.
- Expand the use of EDR.
- Consolidate administrative functions as retirements and resignations occur.
- Form regional survey, estimates, and analysis centers.
- Move appropriate HQ national level functions and/or estimate programs to Field Offices.
- Locate research staff /units and projects to field locations as appropriate.
- Automate LAN administration.

## COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

The NASS Workforce Plan is an initiative resulting from the human capital planning work completed in 2004 by the Department and the REE Mission Area in an effort to meet the goals outlined in the President's Management Agenda for improving human capital management. The NASS Workforce Plan is intended to help put the right people in the right place at the right time, thus demonstrating its usefulness of human capital planning and management in NASS and USDA.

Workforce planning must align with NASS's current and future business plans, strategies and goals, and new budget initiatives. NASS must address future business changes in an efficient and effective manner in order to minimize concerns of our employees, supervisors, and managers. Good communication and dissemination of relevant information will reduce employee stress, improve productivity, decrease employee resistance to change, disrupt speculation and rumors, and increase employee confidence in our ability to serve our customers and fulfill our mission.

Communication of information should be done on a regular basis. This should be carefully timed to coincide with other management recommendations, actions, or implementation of new programs to prevent undue anxiety or concerns of employees, which is key to smoothly making the transition to new business processes and practices. The NASS Workforce Planning Team, in concert with the NASS Senior Executives and other Agency managers, will determine what information should be communicated and when it should be directed to NASS employees. Outlined below is an overview of how this information will be communicated and when it will be distributed:

- The NASS Workforce Plan will be updated on an annual basis, or as needed, to align with current and future business plans or re-engineering efforts.
- The NASS Workforce Planning Team will meet on a regular basis.
- Workforce information and planning team activities will be distributed on a regular basis using the NASSnet; e-mails; office meetings; or memos from the Administrator.
- The most current NASS Workforce Plan will be posted on the NASS Homepage to inform our customers and other external groups.
- Up-to-date information of the NASS workforce is a management component of the Program Planning Committee (PPC), the Senior Executive Team (SET), HQ Branch Chiefs, and State Directors.
- Results of the NASS Organizational Climate Surveys and recommendations for change should be reflected in the Agency's workforce planning efforts.
- Results of Technical Program Reviews or other program reviews or evaluations should incorporate analysis and impacts on the workforce and communicate how it relates to the plan.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A key to the success of this plan is monitoring and evaluating the progress in achieving the desired results and intended changes. Changes should occur incrementally from within the Agency, but may be more sudden when changes are received externally. An important aspect of the plan is that it must outline important key indicators that can be used to measure change and report accomplishments of the Agency. This will serve as a way to assess whether the Agency is directionally correct as it moves forward with its accomplishments, whether it is achieving what the plan intended, and whether the actions of the managers and employees are aligned with the Agency's goals and values.

NASS will consider the following key questions to evaluate this plan, but not limit itself to:

- Does the workforce plan address known current and future issues, changes, internal and external drivers affecting current workforce staffing patterns?
- Does the plan address future workforce needs?
- Have all major milestones in the plan been met?
- Did NASS make the appropriate investments in education and training to help its employees build the competencies needed to achieve the Agency's shared vision?
- Has NASS's recruiting and hiring strategy supported short and long-term goals?
- Does a review of the Agency skills inventory indicate the elimination of gaps previously identified?
- Has the Agency deployed its workforce appropriately to maximize effectiveness and efficiency?
- Are the assumptions used in both the demand and supply models still valid?
- Have there been program changes that would necessitate revising the current strategies?

NASS will use other information gathered from:

- American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI).
- NASS Organizational Climate Surveys.
- Program reviews.
- NASS Human Resource Management Evaluations (HRME's).

NASS will establish baseline data for its workforce plan. Possible baseline data may include indicators that will help to assess the progress of the plan that include, but are not limited to:

- Career development opportunities.
- Full-Time Training Program.
- Succession planning.
- Employee satisfaction.
- Improve diversity of staff.
- Improve recruitment of the best candidates.
- Improve retention of high performing employees.
- Improve training opportunities.
- Exit interview feedback.

It is critical to the initial and on-going success of workforce planning and development to assess the effectiveness of the overall program direction and activities. The need for activity and program improvements cannot be identified and implemented without a comprehensive review of current efforts. A structured evaluation of the program will help assess how efficiently the Agency utilizes its resources and identifies the best opportunities to administer an effective workforce plan program.

The variables that should be considered during the evaluation of this plan include the following:

- Workforce age.
- Worker satisfaction.

- Use of high-growth occupations.
- Use of shrinking occupations.
- Use of recruitment incentives.
- Increases or decreases in headcount (or FTEs).
- Increases or decreases in employee tenure within the Agency.
- Contract dollars spent.
- Overtime worked during peak workloads.
- Changing budgets.
- Increases or decreases in retirement of skilled employees.
- Short-term skills shortages during re-engineering efforts.

NASS strategies for change include:

- Agency Commitment
- Developing a Process for Evaluating Program Effectiveness
- Evaluating Program Effectiveness
- Implementing Changes

Listed below are some of the possible constraints that may affect NASS's ability to achieve the workforce plan strategies in the manner and time frame desired. While the Agency recognizes that these factors may serve as constraints, NASS will view them only as challenges and will not let them derail its overall efforts. Some of these possible constraints are:

- Inadequate budget resources to sustain staff levels and limits on staff time.
- Possible cutbacks in staffing due to budget reductions.
- Changing promotional opportunities.
- Availability of qualified applicants in different job classes.
- Size and geographical location of the organizational units involved.
- Other related and relevant factors affecting the Agency's ability to achieve goals and objectives.

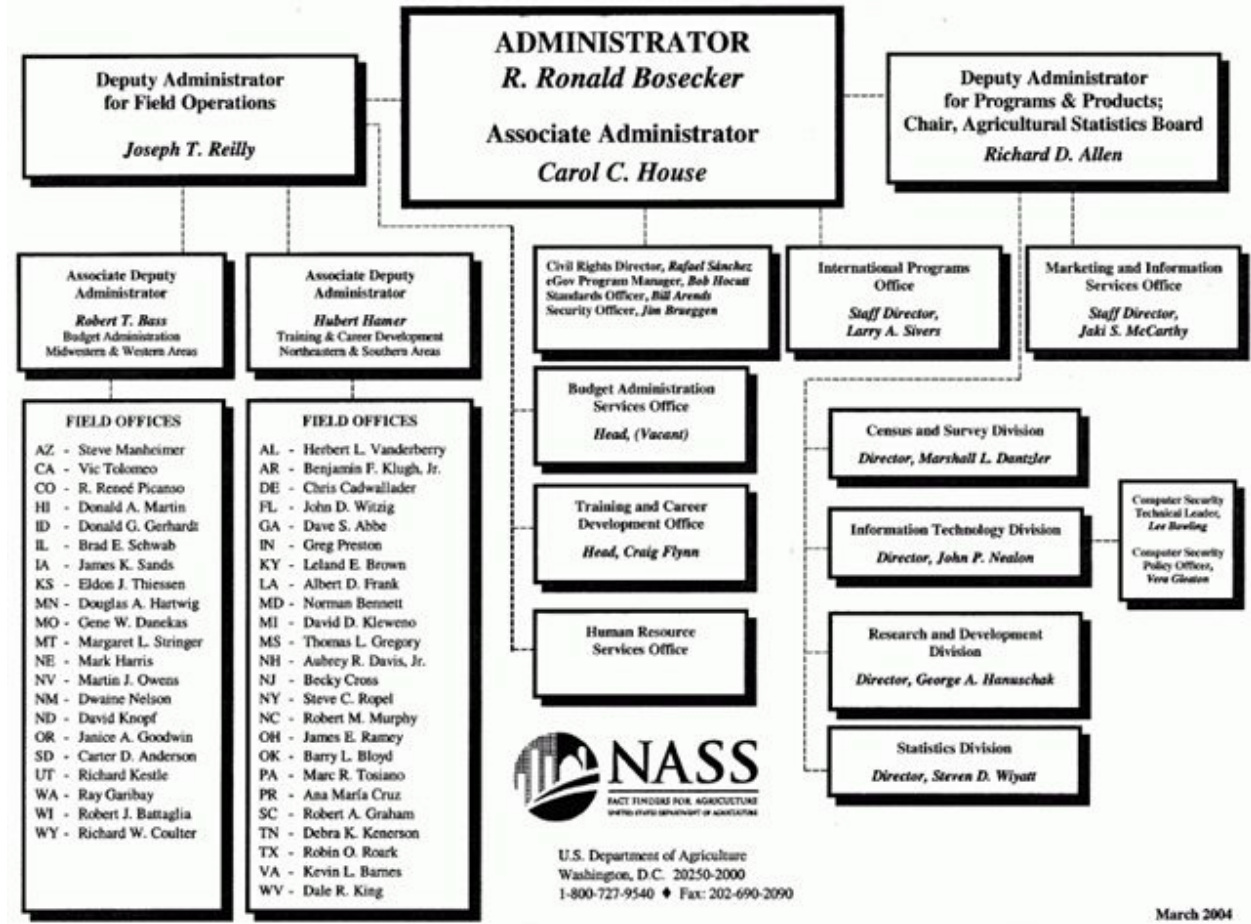
The NASS Workforce Planning Team will focus on the key components listed above and make recommendations for specific evaluation steps to implement. This plan is designed to attract, develop, and retain a quality workforce that is representative of society as a whole and that will accomplish the mission and goals of the Agency. The following table provides a list of sample questions that may be addressed, potential indicators of accomplishment, and the types of data that could be used to evaluate the NASS Workforce Plan.

**Table 8: Evaluation Considerations**

<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Potential Indicators</b>	<b>Data Types</b>
<b>Does NASS attract employees who can accomplish the mission?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Position descriptions at all grade levels explicitly describe the mission-specific skills needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Position descriptions</li> <li>• Elements and standards</li> <li>• Employee performance assessments</li> </ul>
<b>Does NASS attract employees who represent society?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All racial, ethnic, gender, etc. representation is balanced at all grade and responsibility levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographic profile of new hires and existing employees</li> <li>• Advertising and recruitment schemes and media used</li> </ul>
<b>Does NASS develop employees to better accomplish its mission?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees receive relevant mission-specific training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparison of performance assessments of employees who receive training and those who do not</li> <li>• Exit interviews from departing employees</li> <li>• Employee satisfaction surveys</li> </ul>
<b>Does NASS develop employees to increase retention?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of an effective career ladder</li> <li>• Employee perception of opportunities for promotion and reward</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparison of promotion history of employees who receive career development training and those who do not</li> <li>• Exit interviews from departing employees</li> <li>• Employee satisfaction surveys</li> </ul>
<b>Does NASS retain high quality employees?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proportion of employees departing (except retirement)</li> <li>• A high level of employee satisfaction and reward</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exit interviews from departing employees</li> <li>• Employee satisfaction surveys</li> </ul>

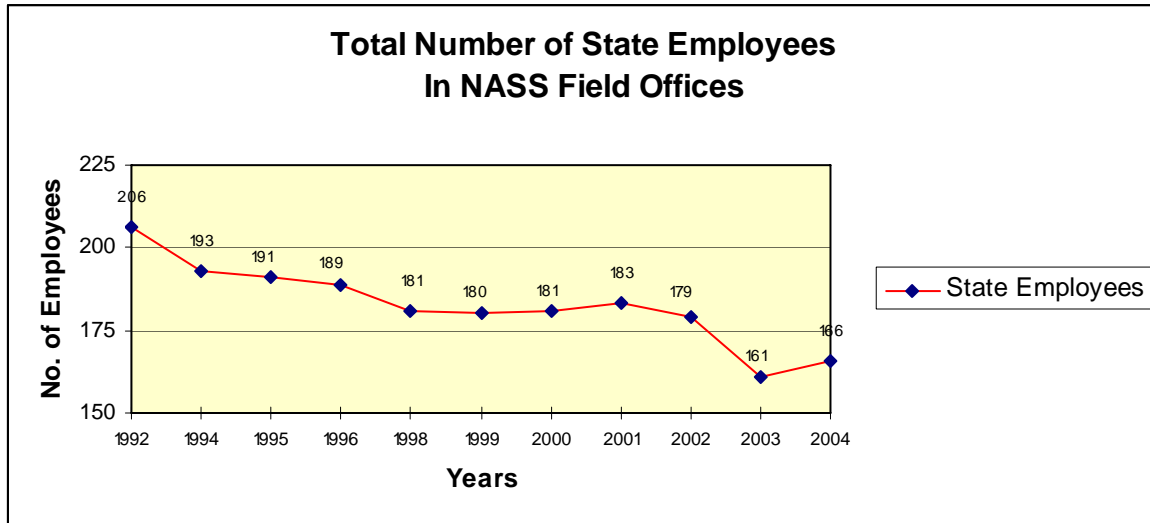
# APPENDIX

## Figure 15: NASS Organizational Structure





**Figure 16: Total Number of State Employees in NASS Field Offices**



**Figure 17: Number of State Employees by State**

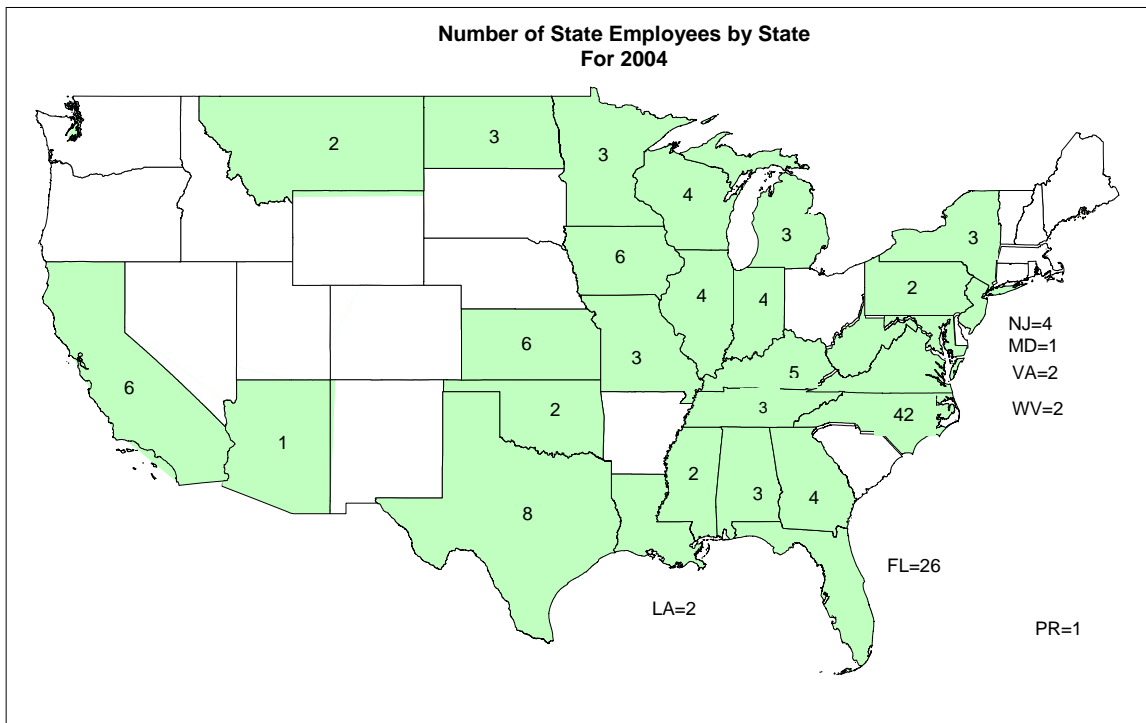
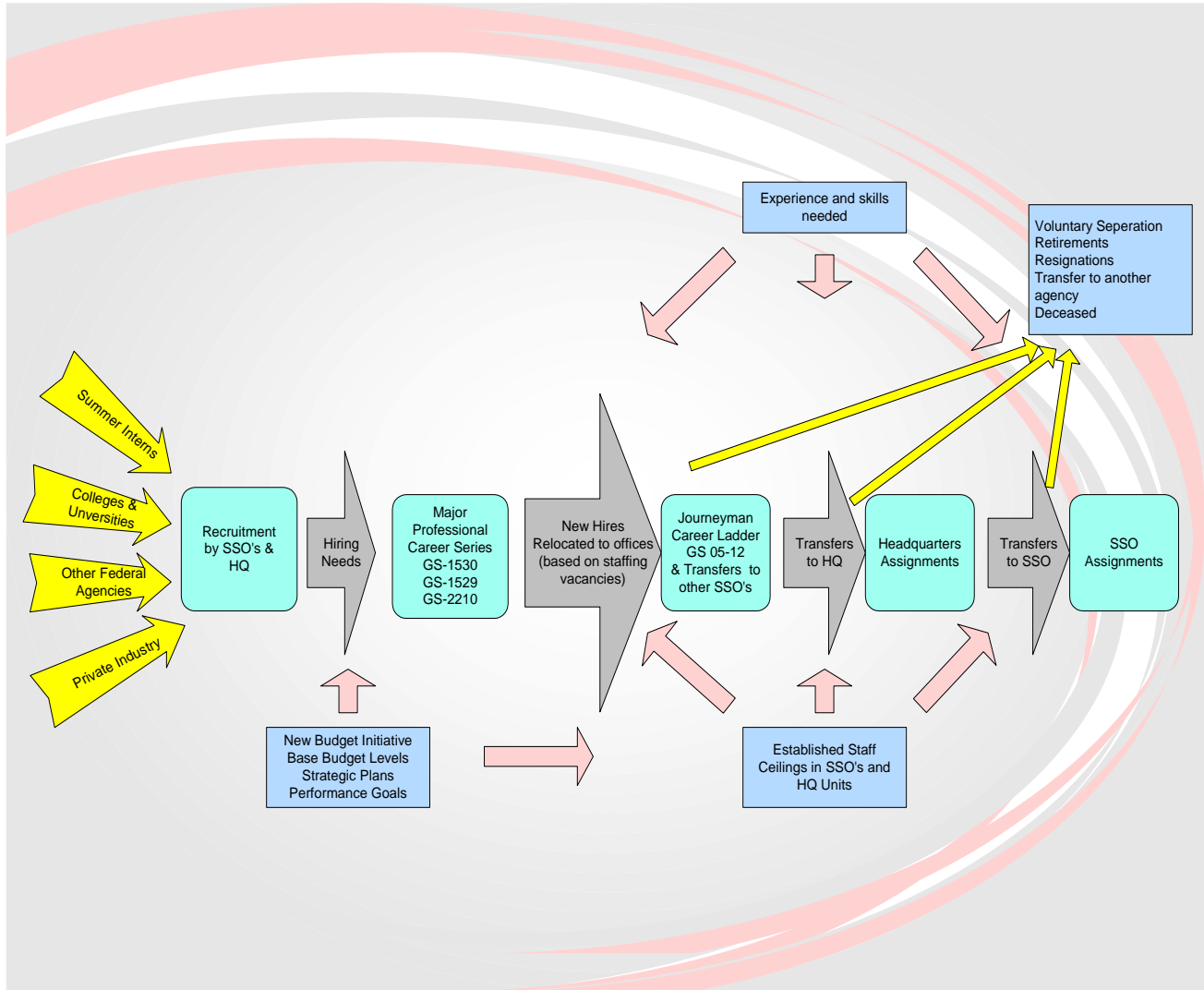


Figure 18: Recruitment and Retention Diagram



**Table 9: NASS Employee Full-Time Training Profile for the Mathematical Statistician, Information Technology, and Survey Methodology Training Programs (excludes EPP)**

<b>Profile Description</b>	<b>1960-69</b>	<b>1970-79</b>	<b>1980-89</b>	<b>1990-99</b>	<b>2000-04</b>	<b>All Years</b>
<i>Employees Completing Full-Time Training</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>147</i>
Employees Currently Employed by NASS	1	11	21	22	8	63
Current Average Age	62.0	56.5	45.5	45.3	37.7	48.2
Current Average Number of Years of Service	41.0	32.6	26.8	19.8	10.4	23.5
Avg. Number of Years On-the-Job Experience Utilizing FT Training	-	-	-	-	-	-
Average Age Entering FT Training	25.0	28.0	30.9	34.4	35.3	32.2
Ave. No. Years of Service Entering FT Training	5.0	5.1	7.6	9.0	8.0	7.7
Ave. GS Grade Entering FT Training	11.0	10.8	11.7	12.2	12.1	11.8
SES Employees: Admin/Division Director	1	2	1			4
GS-15 Employees: Br. Chief/State Director		3	3	2		8
GS-14 Employees: Sect. Hd./State Director		4	11	9		24
GS-13 Employees: Group. Leader/Deputy State Director		2	6	11	3	22
GS-12 Employees: Statisticians					5	5

**Table 10: NASS Employee Full-Time Training Profile for the Mathematical Statistician Program**

<b>Profile Description</b>	<b>1960-69</b>	<b>1970-79</b>	<b>1980-89</b>	<b>1990-99</b>	<b>2000-04</b>	<b>All Years</b>
<i>Employees Completing Full-Time Training</i>	25	26	21	13	4	88
Employees Currently Employed by NASS	1	11	13	10	4	38
Current Average Age	62.0	56.5	50.2	43.5	36.8	49.6
Current Average Number of Years of Service	41.0	32.6	26.2	19.2	9.0	25.2
Ave. Number of Years On-the-Job Experience Utilizing FT Training	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average Age Entering FT Training	25.0	28.0	30.5	31.9	34.8	30.4
Ave. No. Years of Service Entering FT Training	5.0	5.1	6.4	7.6	7.0	6.3
Ave. GS Grade Entering FT Training	11.0	10.8	11.5	12.0	11.8	11.4
SES Employees: Admin/Division Director	1	2				3
GS-15 Employees: Br. Chief/State Director		3	3	2		8
GS-14 Employees: Sect. Hd./State Director		4	7	4		15
GS-13 Employees: Group. Leader/Deputy State Director		2	3	4	1	10
GS-12 Employees: Statisticians					2	2

**Table 11: NASS Employee Full-Time Training Profile for the Information Technology Training Program**

<b>Profile Description</b>	<b>1960-69</b>	<b>1970-79</b>	<b>1980-89</b>	<b>1990-99</b>	<b>2000-04</b>	<b>All Years</b>
<i>Employees Completing Full-Time Training</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>48</i>
Employees Currently Employed by NASS	0	0	5	8	4	17
Current Average Age	0	0	50.2	48.3	37.3	46.2
Current Average Number of Years of Service	0	0	27.6	19.8	11.0	20.0
Ave. Number of Years On-the-Job Experience Utilizing FT Training	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average Age Entering FT Training	0	0	31.6	37.8	35.3	35.4
Ave. No. Years of Service Entering FT Training	0	0	9.0	9.6	9.0	9.3
Avg. GS Grade Entering FT Training	0	0	12.0	12.5	12.3	12.3
SES Employees: Admin/Division Director	0	0				
GS-15 Employees: Br. Chief/State Director	0	0				
GS-14 Employees: Sect. Hd./State Director	0	0	3	2		5
GS-13 Employees: Group. Leader/Deputy State Director	0	0	2	6	1	9
GS-12 Employees: Statisticians	0	0			3	3

**Table 12: NASS Employee Full-Time Training Profile for the Survey Methodology Training Program**

<b>Profile Description</b>	<b>1960-69</b>	<b>1970-79</b>	<b>1980-89</b>	<b>1990-99</b>	<b>2000-04</b>	<b>All Years</b>
<i>Employees Completing Full-Time Training</i>	-	-	3	7	1	11
Employees Currently Employed by NASS	-	-	3	4	1	8
Current Average Age	-	-	48.7	43.8	43.0	45.5
Current Average Number of Years of Service	-	-	27.7	21.3	14.0	22.8
Ave. Number of Years On-the-Job Experience Utilizing FT Training	-	-	-	-	-	-
Average Age Entering Full Time Training	-	-	31.3	34.0	38.0	33.5
Ave. No. Years of Service Entering FT Training	-	-	10.3	11.3	8.0	10.5
Ave. GS Grade Entering FT Training	-	-	12.7	12.0	13.0	12.4
SES Employees: Admin/Division Director	-	-	1			1
GS-15 Employees: Br. Chief/State Director	-	-				
GS-14 Employees: Sect. Hd./State Director	-	-	1	3		4
GS-13 Employees: Group. Leader/Deputy State Director	-	-	1	1	1	3
GS-12 Employees: Statisticians	-	-				

**Table 13: NASS Employee Full-Time Training Profile for the Executive Potential Program (EPP) Training**

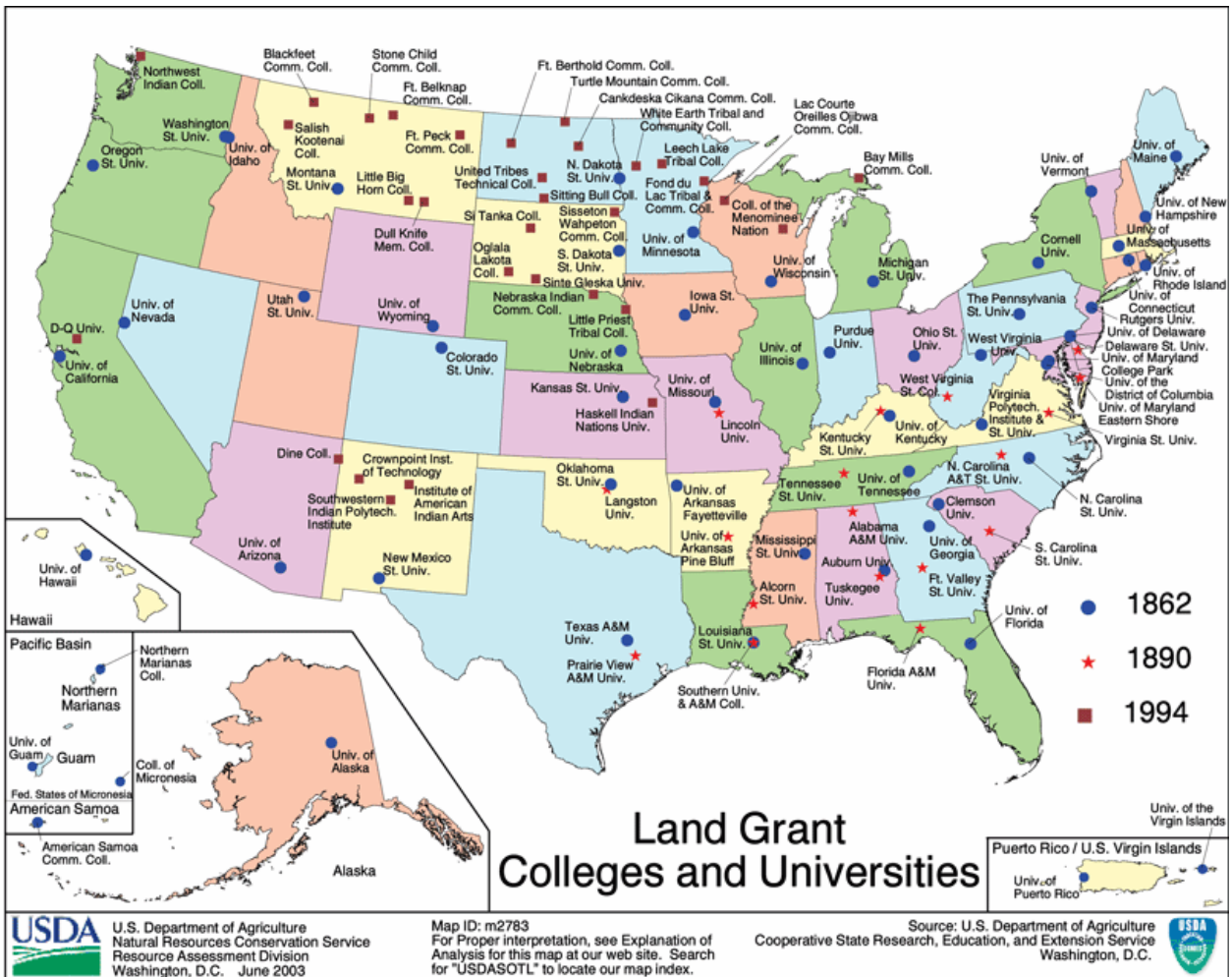
<b>Profile Description</b>	<b>1960-69</b>	<b>1970-79</b>	<b>1980-89</b>	<b>1990-99</b>	<b>2000-04</b>	<b>All Years</b>
<i>Employees Completing Full-Time Training</i>	-	-	-	7	8	15
Employees Currently Employed by NASS	-	-	-	6	8	14
Current Average Age	-	-	-	47.7	41.3	44.0
Current Average Number of Years of Service	-	-	-	25.3	16.6	20.4
Avg. Number of Years On-the-Job Experience Utilizing FT Training	-	-	-	-	-	-
Average Age Entering Full Time Training	-	-	-	37.5	38.8	38.2
Ave. No. Years of Service Entering FT Training	-	-	-	15.2	14.1	14.6
Ave. GS Grade Entering FT Training	-	-	-	13.0	13.0	13.0
SES Employees: Admin/Division Director	-	-	-	1		
GS-15 Employees: Br. Chief/State Director	-	-	-	1		
GS-14 Employees: Sect. Hd./State Director	-	-	-	4	1	
GS-13 Employees: Group. Leader/Deputy State Director	-	-	-		7	
GS-12 Employees: Statisticians	-	-	-			

**Table 14: Institutions Used for the Full-Time Training Programs**

Institution	Degree	Last Attended	Total Employees	Total Degrees	Remaining Employees	Remaining w/Degrees
Alabama	Computer	1995	1	0	1	0
American	Computer	1987	1	0	1	0
Cal-Davis	Statistics	1986	1	1	1	1
Colorado-Boulder	Computer	1998	2	1	0	0
George Mason	Statistics	1987	1	1	1	1
George Mason	Computer	2004	5	3	5	3
George Washington	Statistics	1989	1	1	1	1
George Washington	Info Sys	1999	1	1	1	1
Iowa State	Statistics	2004	23	3	5	2
Johns Hopkins	Admin Sci	1990	1	1	1	1
Johns Hopkins	Telecomm	1998	2	2	1	1
Johns Hopkins	Info Tech Sys	2000	2	1	0	0
Maryland	Computer	2004	1	1	0	0
Maryland	Info Syst	1989	2	1	2	1
Maryland-JPSM	Surv Meth	1998	5	3	3	3
Michigan	Surv Meth	1992	6	5	5	4
Michigan State	Appl Stat	2000	6	2	5	2
Michigan State	Comp Stat	1998	2	2	1	1
Minnesota	Statistics	1991	1	1	1	1
Missouri-Columbia	Statistics	1990	5	3	4	3
Nebraska-Lincoln	Statistics	2000	2	0	0	0
Nebraska-Lincoln	Computer	1983	1	0	1	0
North Carolina State	Statistics	2004	29	3	11	2
Ohio State	Statistics	1978	5	1	2	1
Ohio State	Computer	1992	1	0	1	0
Oregon State	Statistics	1979	4	0	2	0
Purdue	Appl Stat	1991	4	1	1	1
Purdue	Computer	1988	2	1	2	1
Rennselaer	Computer	1986	4	0	0	0
Strayer	Info Sys	2001	1	1	1	1
Texas A&M	Statistics	1965	1	0	0	0
Texas-Austin	Statistics	1990	1	0	1	0
USDA Grad Sch	Computer	1966	5	0	0	0
USDA WDPC	Computer	1970	15	0	0	0
VPI	Statistics	1976	1	0	1	0
Wisconsin	Statistics	1993	1	1	1	1
Wisconsin	Computer	1986	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>			<b>147</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>33</b>



Figure 19: A Map of the Land Grant Colleges and Universities



The End