

**Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics
Recommendations and Other Issues
2/22-23/2011**

Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB): Recommendation #1

BACKGROUND: When NASS has to consider possible program reductions due to budget reasons, certain criteria are taken into consideration. These criteria include: principal economic indicator data; data which directly impact the market; data necessary to implement USDA programs which provide payments to farmers and are used to administer the farm safety net for producers; and data for which there are no other publically available sources of information.

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee recommends that NASS consider adding a criteria for reducing report frequency rather than report elimination.

Agricultural Statistics Board: Recommendation #2

BACKGROUND: The Advisory Committee is concerned about repetitive questions that are asked on the NASS surveys. Specifically, question redundancy for items such as all land, cropland, grain storage capacity, and individual crop acres planted should be limited during each growing season. Increased respondent access of Previously Reported Data for these items should be made available for phone interviewers through Electronic Data Reporting.

RECOMMENDATION: The Advisory Committee recommends NASS aggressively pursue respondent burden reduction and investigate expanded use of previously reported data, where appropriate.

Public Comments (Specialty Crops): Recommendation #3

Mary Brazeau Brown – Glacial Lake Cranberries

BACKGROUND: 56% of the cranberry industry is represented by one major vertically integrated cooperative handler and 44% of the industry is independent handlers. There is a disparity in NASS reporting price paid per barrel of cranberries, since the large cooperative pays their coop members based on a “pool” price for a finished processed product, compared to the independents getting paid for their raw product. Currently there exists in the industry a price discrepancy of approximately \$50 per barrel (\$65 vs. \$15) that is being simply averaged and thereby not representing either party, and in fact, blatantly distorts reality.

Quartile reporting of the prices growers receive would be more beneficial to those who rely on NASS/USDA numbers.

RECOMMENDATION: Glacial Lake Cranberries recommends that NASS consider the nature of the unique cranberry industry, and help them and others whose decisions ultimately affect their livelihood, to have statistics that more accurately reflect the nature of our industry.

Census: Recommendation #4

BACKGROUND: Fiscal year 2011 and 2012 budget did not include any funds for the Census of Aquaculture and Land Ownership Survey. Therefore, NASS was unable to conduct these surveys.

RECOMMENDATION: The Advisory Committee is recommending that USDA support the reinstatement of the Census of Aquaculture survey as early as possible.

Census: Recommendation #5

BACKGROUND: NASS was approached by the National Archive and Record Administration (NARA) with a proposal to work cooperatively in order to permanently preserve the contents of the Census of Agriculture questionnaires and to release them for public research after a period of 75 years. NASS adheres to strict confidentiality rules, and the Advisory Committee feels that NASS should stand behind their word. The Committee also feels that response rates will be affected if the producers find out that their data will be released in 75 years starting with the 2012 Census.

RECOMMENDATION: The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS not release Census of Agriculture data to NARA and maintain control of the confidential data collected by the Agency.

Census: Recommendation #6

BACKGROUND: American Indian and Alaska Native farm and ranch operators on reservations, villages, corporations, pueblos, and nations across the United States face many unique challenges. Many of these producers have atypical land tenure arrangements and land usage agreements, especially on allotted or trust acres that are controlled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. On Indian lands, there are indigenous crops and crop uses and a myriad of cultural practices in agriculture. Many farmers and ranchers on Indian operations are small and often remote operations that function as subsistence farms. These operations are less likely to participate in USDA farm

programs, and are likely not to be on any program databases; hence, there is low probability that these operations are on the NASS Census mail list.

RECOMMENDATION : A motion was put forth to the Committee to have NASS conduct a follow-on census, similar to irrigation or horticulture census, which focuses solely on the unique sovereignty and cultural aspects faced by American Indian and Alaska Native farm and ranch operators on reservations, villages, corporations, pueblos, and nations across the United States.

The motion was tabled and referred to a subcommittee that would further develop the concept to present to the Advisory Committee at a later date. Volunteers to this subcommittee include Jose Candelaria, Lawrence Sanchez, Tammy Steele, Brian Thomas, and Linda Young.

Census: Recommendation #7

BACKGROUND: NASS was commended for all the work being done in the field to reach producers and better count the small, new, and minority-operated farms and ranches that for so long were possibly being undercounted. An added consequence to this NASS initiative is that many formerly underserved producers are learning more about available USDA programs.

RECOMMENDATION: NASS should expand its outreach and education efforts to reach all operators, regardless of size or location, by continuing to work with land-grant institutions, and both non-government and community-based organizations.

Economic/Environmental: Recommendation #8

BACKGROUND: Value Added is actually a financial term which refers to the increased value of a product as it moves through the various stages of manufacturing or marketing. There are number of ways that the value of a commodity can be increased. There are also numerous definitions/interpretations of what value added means.

NASS will need to weigh USDA and public need for the data against respondent burden as well as data quality. With such a variance in use of the term value added NASS will have to tackle the issue of defining value added and then determine whether our respondents can accurately report a number for that value. Tracking value added sales on a larger scale for all commodities would be a long term goal and could potentially add additional cost to data collections. Research and testing would be needed in order to assure proper definition, coverage, and accounting of value added products. Efforts to assess the value of farm direct sales to consumers or retail outlets will present a challenge of what product sales to include or exclude based how value added is defined.

Some examples of what is considered unique, value - added products by the Council include:

- Disease-free garlic seeds being grown for domestic and international producers;
- Native species plants grown for surrounding urban areas;
- Organic free - range chicken raised;
- Herbal soaps and tinctures;
- Unique wine grape varieties.

RECOMMENDATION: The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS pursue measurement of agricultural value added sales.

Economic/Environmental: Recommendation #9

BACKGROUND: The Chemical Use Program was cut due to budgetary decisions in 2007. This program was partially reinstated in 2009 and fully restored in 2010.

RECOMMENDATION: The Advisory Committee recommends that USDA and NASS continue to support the recently restored Agriculture Chemical Use Survey which includes fertilizer and pesticides.

Economic/Environmental: Recommendation #10

BACKGROUND: The Advisory Committee is concerned about the loss of agricultural land.

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee supports implementing a program to monitor the loss of land used in agriculture production annually.

Economic/Environmental: Recommendation #11

BACKGROUND: NASS performance metrics may include, but are not limited to: efficiency – cost per completed survey; response rates, coverage; user/usability responses, – which are users, what data are they using, etc.; and other metrics, as appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION: The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS investigate providing the NASS Advisory Committee with survey performance metrics which will help the Committee to advise NASS on the efficiency of its services.