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April 18, 2011

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Jamie L. Whitten Building, Room 200A
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

On behalf of the USDA Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics, I am very pleased to provide you with the recommendations from our 2011 advisory process. These resulted from a 2-day meeting in Washington, D.C., and involved a quorum of the Committee. We had an excellent discussion with a variety of viewpoints expressed, and I am very pleased with the outcome. We discussed a broad range of topics and issues and I believe that the recommendations reflect the breadth of this discourse.

We worked toward consensus support and in most cases achieved unanimity. We believe the recommendations are in the best interests of USDA/NASS, the farmers/ranchers, and the data users. With the ever changing nature of agriculture the Committee has recommended that NASS pursue capturing information relative to value added agriculture and the loss of agricultural land. We are also recommending that in regards to potential budget cuts that NASS look to reducing report frequency rather than report elimination as the total loss of information contained in some reports can have a devastating impact on an industry or industries within agriculture. With this in mind the Committee has recommended that the Census of Aquaculture survey be reinstated as early as possible and that the recently restored Agriculture Chemical Use Survey continue to be supported.

The Committee continues to have concern for the high level of confidentiality expected by our industry and we persist in our recommendation that Census of Agriculture data not be released to the National Archive and Record Administration as farmers and ranchers need to trust that promises made by NASS on the release of individual farm/ranch information be kept. Additionally, reducing the burden on respondents reporting is a concern and we have recommended that NASS aggressively pursue reducing reporting burdens when and where possible.

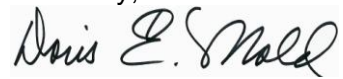
We commend the work that NASS has done to reach more producers especially those that are small, new and/or minority-operated. We recommend that NASS expand its outreach and education efforts to reach all producers. To assist in advancing this aim the Committee has set-up a subcommittee to further study how to better capture the unique nature of American Indian and Alaska Native farm and ranch operations across the United States.

We know that NASS— by providing timely agricultural statistics, trend analysis and strategic reports essential to policymakers— may be one of the most effective and economical services in the Department. As an Advisory Committee, we also strongly commit to assist NASS in the continued yield of a rich harvest of vital information which contributes to the well being of our industry. In an effort to provide better assistance as advisors, the Committee has recommended that NASS investigate

providing the Committee with survey performance metrics that will assist the Committee in continuing to provide sound advice to NASS.

On a personal note, I have enjoyed my time on the Advisory Committee. The staff at NASS has always been extremely helpful to me, as well as very enthusiastic about their work. It has been my pleasure to attend meetings and learn more about the diversity and concerns of agriculture across this country. I have developed an increased understanding of the importance of NASS and the valuable data that they provide to all of us. I know they will continue to serve agriculture well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Doris E. Mold". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Doris E. Mold
Chairperson
2011 NASS Advisory Committee