

# Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**February 19-20, 2002**



**U.S. Department of Agriculture**  
**NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE**

**Executive Summary**  
**Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics**  
**February 19-20, 2002**

Crystal City Marriot  
Arlington, VA

**CONTENTS**

Attendees at Meeting .....	ii
Day One Summary .....	1
Day Two Summary .....	3
Committee Recommendations .....	7
Agenda (Appendix 1) .....	8

## **Attendees at Meeting**

### **Members Present**

Walter J. Armbruster	Sheila K. Massey
Roger M. Cryan	Jack C. Mitenbuler
Robert D. Epperson	Mary A. Pamplin
Jacklyn Marie Folsom	Bobby R. Phils
Phil Fulton (ERS Ex-Officio)	James D. Rieck
John I Gifford	Ranvir Singh
Carol A. Gregg	Robert William Spear
Mark W. Jenner	Topper Thorpe
Ling-Jung (Kelvin) Koong	Ewen M. Wilson (Census Bureau Ex-Officio)
Mark D. Lange	Ronald C. Wimberley (Acting Chair)

### **Members Absent**

Andrew W. LaVigne	Hugh A. Warren
Ross R. Racine	Mark E. Whalon (Chair)
Gumecindo Salas	Ivan W. Wyatt
Lee F. Schrader	

### **NASS Personnel Participating**

Ron Bosecker, Administrator  
Rich Allen, Committee Executive Director and Associate Administrator  
Joe Reilly, Deputy Administrator for Field Operations  
Fred Vogel, Deputy Administrator for Programs and Products  
Robert Bass, Associate Deputy Administrator for Field Operations  
Marshall Dantzler, Director of Census and Survey Division  
Hubert Hamer, Associate Deputy Administrator for Field Operations

Mark Harris, Acting Director of Statistics Division

Carol House, Director of Research and Development Division

Jack Nealon, Director of Information Technology Division

Jaki McCarthy, Staff Director of Marketing and Information Services Office

Joseph Prusacki, PRISM Program Manager

**Other NASS Personnel Present**

Janet Allen

Keith Lacy

Janice Goodwin

Jeanne McCarthy-Kersey

Kent Hoover

Joe Miller

Wil Hundl

Greg Preston

Jay Johnson

Barbara Rater

Dan Kerestes

Arnie Wilcox

Doug Kleweno

**Guests Present**

Dr. Rodney Brown, Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics, USDA

Juan Manuel Galarza, Director General, Agricultural and Fisheries Information Service, Ministry  
of Agriculture, Mexico

Eric Hansen, Foreign Agricultural Service

Dr. Jose LaBorde, Executive Assistant and Consultant to the Secretary of Agriculture in Mexico

## **Day One Summary**

Acting Committee Chair Ron Wimberley opened the Advisory Committee meeting. Committee Executive Director Rich Allen discussed the meeting's focus: 2002 Census promotion, ARMS improvement, and input on confidentiality issues. Mr. Allen then introduced the Deputy Undersecretary for Research, Education and Economics, Dr. Rodney Brown.

### **Deputy Undersecretary for Research, Education and Economics Remarks**

Dr. Brown acknowledged that the ACAS members are appointed due to their expertise, not to represent a particular organization. He discussed the importance of data collection to producers. His father was a progressive dairy farmer and one of the first members of the Dairy Herd Improvement Association. Dr. Brown emphasized the importance of information to his father to monitor milk production. Dr. Brown also emphasized how critical it is for NASS to maintain data confidentiality and the need to be as non-disruptive to respondents as possible when collecting the important data.

### **Census Publicity/Marketing Plan**

Jaki McCarthy made a presentation on the plans for promoting and marketing data collection for the 2002 Census of Agriculture. The response rate goal for 2002 is 86.5 percent, last achieved during the 1978 Census of Agriculture. Several strengths and challenges were discussed. Utilization of short, clear messages and easy-to-use materials will help overcome some of these challenges. Testimonials from representatives of various interests will also be used to help show that the benefits are commiserate with the costs of providing the data. Jaki's presentation identified six primary groups that will be targeted: farmers and ranchers; agricultural communicators; government/academia; agribusiness; producers organizations; and NASS employees and NASDA enumerators. Each of these sectors has needs fulfilled by the census.

NASS's roadmap for publicizing the Census data collection was presented. The roadmap contains 19 action items. The success of the marketing plan will ultimately be measured based on the response rate, but several other tools will also be utilized. These include: a clipping service, response cards with the Public Service Announcements, surveying media regarding news releases, and the use of Quarterly Agricultural Survey questions to measure familiarity with the marketing plan. The presentation closed by Jaki asking Committee members to provide support statements, contacts with their respective segments of agriculture, and avenues of communication that NASS may utilize.

Several excellent suggestions followed during the Committee discussion. These included: videotape local farmers/ranchers testimony on why he/she is planning to respond to the census; avoid promotional mailings that will coincide with mass mailings associated with November elections; post notices about the census at the County Extension Offices; tailor messages to the approximately 160,000 farmers represent a vast majority of the US production [Editor Note: It is

important to remember that we are trying to measure farms, not just production]; and discuss on video why farmers should trust NASS to preserve the confidentiality of their data.

### ***'State of NASS'***

Ron Bosecker delivered the *'State of NASS.'* The presentation focused on four main topics: NASS accomplishments during 2001; budget and staffing; data security expectations; and NASS's potential role in a National emergency situation. Some issues raised by the Committee were: the need to protect our base survey program so that major statistical series do not erode due to other initiatives and salary increases that are not fully funded; the need for NASS to get more credit for the positive impact of the agricultural statistics published; and the need for NASS to measure and market the value of its data.

### **Other Business**

Ron Wimberly called for volunteers to serve on the selection committee for the 2003 Chairperson. Mary Pamplin, Bobby Phillips, and James Rieck agreed to serve as a selection committee and recommend a Chairperson prior to the closing of the meeting.

### **Census Update - Part I**

Joe Prusacki provided an update of census activities. The first part focused mainly on the timeline for the 2002 Census of Agriculture. The timeline began with OMB approval for the census on October 18, 2001 and culminated with the February 2, 2004 release of Volume 1 for the U.S., all states, and Puerto Rico. Discussion from the Committee included the possibility of mail response rates being low due to terrorist concerns and the effect the appearance of the mailing envelope will have on these concerns. Other comments emphasized the need to continue the Horticultural Census and to include the growing area of agritourism as a preprinted item on future censuses.

## **Day Two Summary**

### **Census Update - Part II**

The second part of Joe Prusacki's presentation focused on three topics including an overview of the 2002 Census of Agriculture products, new items included in the 2002 Census of Agriculture, and major changes to the 2002 Census of Agriculture.

Each of the 17 census publications, plus the 3 follow-on publications, were discussed. The use of the Internet to disseminate the data was emphasized, as some products will only be available via the Web.

New items on the census questionnaire were presented, such as the addition of hog questions relating to type of producer and operation, the addition of a grain storage capacity question, more demographic information, information on female operators, and data on production contracts.

Finally, major changes in the census publications were explained, namely presenting information on farms by economic class rather than by value of sales (government payments will be added to value of sales to determine economic class), providing the net farm income rather than net cash return, and moving the coverage table to the front of Volume 1.

Some issues raised by the Committee were: a concern about how NASS would define animal units, the sensitive nature of publishing animal units due to potential regulatory use of this information, and a concern about including government payments when deriving the economic classes. A packet showing the tables which link value of sales and economic classes will be distributed to the Committee members upon the completion of the table layouts.

### **Census and Survey Integration**

Fred Vogel and Phil Fulton outlined the continued and growing need for Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS) data essential to tracking the financial well being of the agricultural sector. These data are the basis for USDA to access the differential impacts of policy and programs across the farm sector and are the official source of farm income for the National income accounts. The authority to conduct the census was transferred to NASS with an understanding that efficiencies were to be gained by having all agricultural statistics collected by one organization.

A team has been chartered to develop a plan to implement an annual survey that integrates the ARMS, county estimates, end of year surveys, and, every five years, the census of agriculture. This integrated approach will allow NASS to maximize the use of census and administrative data and will lower respondent burden and align data collection reference periods and questions. In addition, with the census and surveys integrated, basic economic concepts can be made consistent across USDA. The census is envisioned to be the base for farm numbers, land in farms, land values, and cash rents, with the ARMS survey measuring between census changes.

The team will also study the feasibility of incorporating the Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey into the ARMS design. This census and survey integration effort will be an extended project with phased implementation requiring a long term plan for the NASS program.

The Committee raised the issue of voluntary survey reporting as compared to mandatory census reporting. They were also interested in how the Horticulture and Aquaculture Censuses were to be funded and expressed the need for accurate county estimates [Editor Note: NASS has a \$1.0 million initiative in the FY 2003 President's budget to begin investigating improvements to small area estimates].

### **Other NASS Issues**

Rich Allen addressed several other NASS issues.

**Respondent Waivers:** NASS allows disclosure waivers for individual respondents on its surveys, but not on the census. These waivers allow NASS to publish State or county level data that would otherwise have to be suppressed. Should respondent waivers be considered for the 2007 Census of Agriculture? Complicating factors include contractor/contractee situations, i.e., if a contractor controls all of the commodity in a particular county, but several contractees are located in the county, should the data be published? Currently they would be if the contractees do not violate disclosure rules. Additionally, NASS will no longer publish county rankings due to the fact that totals for counties that were not disclosed are often located between the totals for two counties with published data. This allows a data user to approximate a total which was officially not disclosed. The Committee recommended that NASS not consider waivers for the census. If some waivers were accepted, and data totals published which are based on just one or two reports, it would appear that NASS had violated its data confidentiality rules.

**Quality of Information:** Due to a concern about misleading information having been provided by a government agency, a new federal government law will require agencies to publish their information standards. Federal Statistical Agencies are planning to develop a joint Federal Register Notice on this topic. The NASS Web site will include a short summary of good statistical standards that NASS follows.

**Monthly Hog Survey:** The monthly hog program has lowered our response rates and has caused greater revisions to our quarterly estimates. NASS met with hog industry representatives to discuss the Monthly Hog Survey. Some issues will be explored during the next year, such as the appropriateness of the survey questions and how farmers record keeping aligns with our reporting period. The Committee concluded that if the survey continues to distort data for another year, the Monthly Hog Survey should be dropped.

**American Patriots Act:** This anti-terrorism act was passed after September 11 and required the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to bypass some normal confidentiality to provide training data on flight schools. This Act pertains only to NCES and does not affect NASS.



**Institutional Review Boards:** Law dictates that Human Research studies, i.e., any survey involving human beings, be cleared by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). NASS was recently requested to clear two reimburseable surveys through its internal IRB's. However, our confidentiality rules usually allow us to claim an exemption to the law. [Editor Note: Since at least one of the surveys has a voluntary follow-on contact built in, NASS did need to work through the IRB process. Assistance from an existing university IRB was requested].

**Biological and Disease Threats:** Discussion focused on how NASS can help with potential biological and disease threats. NASS will help with notifications, maintenance of external lists, etc., but will not release names or information about any operation on its list.

**Livestock Identification System:** There have been requests from many States and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to create a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) file of all livestock locations to have location data for health and safety officials. NASS would like to help with this effort, but cannot violate our confidentiality requirements.

## **Public Comments**

None.

## **New Business and Recommendations**

A Committee Member inquired as to whether there was a process of getting OMB approval to do a survey. Joe Reilly responded that there is a standard process that takes about six months to complete.

There was agreement among several Committee Members that NASS should consider measuring structural change in agriculture in the 2007 Census of Agriculture.

The question of whether a National Food and Agriculture Council (NFAC) exists was raised by a Committee Member. Hubert Hamer is the NASS representative, but NFAC has not had much activity lately.

A Committee Member expressed his excitement about the integration of ARMS and census. He can't wait to see NASS capitalize on all of the resources.

Horticulture is becoming mechanized in a way it has never before known. A Committee Member stressed that a whole new set of questions will be needed to address this changing industry.

Seven recommendations were passed by the Committee near the end of the meeting (see next page). The seventh recommendation is for the Committee to send a letter to the Secretary of Agriculture to cite the first six recommendations. Ron Wimberly, Jack Mitenbuler, Carol Ann

Gregg, and Mark Jenner volunteered to formulate and approve the letter, send it to all Committee Members for review, and then send it through Ron Bosecker, NASS Administrator, to the Secretary of Agriculture.

### **New Chairperson**

The election committee nominated Kelvin Koong to serve as Chairperson for the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics, beginning in January 1, 2003. Dr. Koong accepted the nomination and was approved by attending members.

### **Closing Remarks**

Rich Allen announced that the next meeting is tentatively scheduled for early 2003 and will be held in Louisville, KY. The meeting was adjourned.

## **Committee Recommendations**

### Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that NASS keep the topic of confidentiality as an item in the agenda for future meetings.

### Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that NASS should not publish animal units data in the 2002 Census of Agriculture, but continue to publish animal head counts as in the 1997 Census of Agriculture.

### Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that NASS work with NRCS weighting parameters to publish a joint report on animal units at the county level (utilizing census of agriculture data).

### Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Horticulture and Aquaculture surveys move forward.

### Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that NASS proceed with efforts to integrate concepts and processes of the Census, ARMS, and related year-end surveys.

### Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that NASS continue to serve as a leader in Federal Statistics by providing a successful model to promote good statistical practices.

### Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that they (the Committee) should draft a letter to the Secretary of Agriculture providing recommendations 1 through 6.

## Appendix 1. Agenda

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE STATISTICS  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

February 19-20, 2002  
\*Crystal City Marriott Hotel  
1999 Jefferson Davis Highway  
Arlington, VA

Tuesday, February 19

<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic/Activity</u>	<u>Discussion Leader</u>
10:00 a.m.	Orientation (New Committee Members Only)	Rich Allen
1:00 p.m.	Call to Order and Introduction	Ron Wimberley, Acting Committee Chair
1:10 p.m.	Meeting Plans	Rich Allen, Associate Administrator and Committee Executive Director
1:30 p.m.	Census Publicity/Marketing Plan NASS Perspective	Jaki Stanley-McCarthy, Director, Marketing and Information Services Office
2:00 p.m.	Census Publicity/Marketing Plan Committee Discussion	Ron Wimberley
2:30 p.m.	BREAK	
2:45 p.m.	Administrator's 'State of NASS'	R. Ronald Bosecker, Administrator
3:30 p.m.	Discussion on 'State of NASS'	Ron Wimberley
4:00 p.m.	Census Update - Part I	Joe Prusacki, PRISM Program Manager
4:30 p.m.	ADJOURN*	

\* A reception will take place from 5:30-7:00 and will feature a brief presentation from Fred Vogel and Juan Manual Galarza regarding major international initiatives.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE STATISTICS  
 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
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 1999 Jefferson Davis Highway  
 Arlington, VA

Wednesday, February 20

<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic/Activity</u>	<u>Discussion Leader</u>
8:00 a.m.	Call to Order	Ron Wimberley
8:15 a.m.	Census Update - Part II	Joe Prusacki
9:00 a.m.	Census Update Committee Discussion	Ron Wimberley
9:45 a.m.	BREAK	
10:00 a.m.	Census and Survey Integration	Fred Vogel, Deputy Administrator for Programs and Products Phil Fulton, Associate Administrator, USDA - Economic Research Service
11:00 a.m.	Census and Survey Integration Committee Discussion	Ron Wimberley
11:30 p.m.	LUNCH/Video Testimonials	
1:30 p.m.	Other NASS Issues Monthly Hog Survey, Livestock Identification Biological and Disease Threats American Patriots Act, Census Disclosure	Rich Allen
2:45 p.m.	BREAK	
3:00 p.m.	Other NASS Issues Committee Discussion	Ron Wimberley
3:45 p.m.	Public Questions and Comments	Ron Wimberley
4:00 p.m.	New Business and Recommendations	Ron Wimberley
4:20 p.m.	Closing Remarks	Rich Allen
4:30 p.m.	ADJOURN	