

# Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics

**SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**  
**May 2-3, 2007**



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

**Summary**  
**Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics (ACAS)**  
**May 2-3, 2007**

**Hyatt Regency Crystal City at Reagan National Airport**

2799 Jefferson Davis Hwy

Arlington, VA 22202

**Attendees at Meeting**

**Members Present**

John G. Baugh	Doris E. Mold
Dr. Patricia T. Berglund	A. Gene Nelson
Dr. Roger M. Cryan	Ronald L. Plain
Terry L. Francl	Kent G. Schescke
R. Edmund E. Gomez	Ira Silvergleit
John J. Hays	Dr. Kitty Smith (Ex-Officio Member)
Dr. Frank M. Howell	John Smylie
Dr. Karen M. Klonsky	Thomas Mesenbourg (Ex-Officio Member)
Lucy C. Meyring	

**Members Absent**

Gary M. Adams	Barry K. Goodwin
Brent W. Blauch	William G. Lapp
Carl W. Brothers	James G. Robb
Peter T. Daniel	Ranvir Singh
Janice I. Gengenbach	

**NASS Personnel Participating:**

Ron Bosecker, Administrator  
Joe Reilly, Committee Executive Director and Associate Administrator  
Carol House, Deputy Administrator for Programs and Products  
Bob Bass, Director of Census and Survey Division  
Hubert Hamer, Associate Deputy Administrator, Eastern Field Operations  
Mark Harris, Director of Research and Development Division  
Jack Nealon, Director of Information Technology Division  
Dale Atkinson, Chief, Census and Survey Research Branch, Research and Development Division  
Norman Bennett, Chief of Survey Administration Branch  
Greg Thessen, Head of Field Crops Section  
Brad Summa, Head of Census Data Section  
Amanda Pomicter  
Lee Bowling  
Jim Brueggen  
Wendy Scholetzky  
Jay Johnson  
Marlo D. Johnson, Committee Secretary

**Public:**

Christopher Burner, Office of Budget Program Analysis	Cardell Johnson, Government Accountability Office
Linda Atkinson, Economic Research Service	Ron Fecso, Government Accountability Office
Stephanie Shipp, Economic Assessment Office	Jessica Burt, Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs
Julia Lane, National Opinion Research Center	Charlie O'Brien, Agricultural Environmental Management

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## **Day One Summary - May 2, 2007**

### **I. Introduction**

The meeting was called to order by Committee Chair, Jacklyn Folsom on Tuesday May 2, 2007 at 1:00 p.m. Committee Members and NASS staff were asked to introduce themselves. Jacklyn Folsom welcomed everyone to the meeting and then asked Deputy Under Secretary of Research, Education, and Economics (REE), Dr. Merle D. Pierson, to provide an update on REE.

### **II. Welcome**

Dr. Pierson, started by welcoming the members to Washington, D.C. Dr. Pierson expressed to the committee how important their input is to guiding our statistical program and priorities. He gave a brief explanation of his background and Dr. Gale Buchanan. Dr. Buchanan was unable to attend the meeting due to a prior commitment. Dr. Pierson also discussed Title VII of the 2007 Farm Bill. One concern with the Farm Bill is the increased data needs in areas of specialty commodities, and organic agriculture. He discussed the REE Reorganization, as well as mentioned that NASS is proposed to remain an independent agency under the Office of Science. He also touched on bio-energy collaboration, water quality, food safety, and nutrition. Dr. Pierson stressed, "While there are many exciting developments in REE, it is important to know the decisions made are only as good as the data provided. The recent non-fat dry milk issue has raised awareness of the importance of the data collected by NASS. A reporting error of only a few cents can result in significant ramifications throughout an entire industry. He reminded them of the topics that were being discussed at the meeting such as:

- Annual program priorities
- 2007 Census of Agriculture follow-on survey plans
- The transfer of Census of Agriculture records to the National Archive and Records Administration (NARA)
- Access to ARMS data by researchers

Dr. Pierson mentioned that he is looking forward to the thoughts of the Advisory Committee on data confidentiality and privacy protection. The current sensitivity surrounding the release of personal data, including Personal Identification Information (PII), makes this a very relevant and timely discussion. As the request for additional access to data files increases, we must ensure we protect the personal information of every individual reporter. The Advisory Committee Members input is crucial to ensure timely, accurate, and useful data remain a cornerstone of our mission area and the Department of Agriculture.

### **III. National Opinion Research Center (NORC)**

Julia Lane gave a presentation on areas that the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) is interested in concerning Data Enclave and Data Lab's. NORC is an institution that can manage access to data needs of small statistical agencies. They discussed how to protect agencies confidentiality with people that are going onsite to do research. Using NASS as an example, NASS would provide ARMS data to NORC and the University Researchers that contact NASS to do research on the ARMS data would in turn work with NORC. If people were granted approval to do research on NASS ARMS data, NORC would contact the researcher to obtain their IP address prior to receiving approval form ADM-042, and then provide them the data file based on the level of approval granted by NASS. NORC would also make sure they signed the ADM-003 confidentiality form that NASS requires. The researchers would then be able to access the data from their desktop computer. Overview of NORC presentation:

- Enclave Mission
  - To Promote Micro-Data Access
  - To Protect Confidentiality
  - To Archive, Index and Curate Micro-data
- Data Protection
  - The Data enclave is fully compliant with DOC IT Security Program Policy
  - Employee Security
  - Rules of Behavior
  - Nondisclosure Agreements
  - Physical Access
- Metadata Documentation
  - Easy to retrieve summary statistics and supporting documentation
  - Quick diagnostics of “gaps” in data or documentation
  - Framework for internal analysis and training support
- Portfolio Approach
- Enclave Organization
- Current Status

### **IV. 2006 Recommendations Review**

Joe Reilly, Associate Administrator of NASS, reviewed the Advisory Committees recommendations from 2006. He also discussed the purpose and responsibilities of the Advisory Committee. The purpose of the Committee is to advise the Secretary on the conduct of the periodic Census and Surveys of Agriculture, other related surveys, and the types of Agricultural information to obtain from respondents. The committee also prepares recommendations regarding the content of Agriculture reports, and presents the views and needs for the data of major suppliers

and users of Agriculture statistics. The duties of the Committee are solely advisory. Joe also discussed the mission of NASS, which is to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. Agriculture. NASS is responsible for administering USDA's Statistical Estimating Program and the 5-year Census of Agriculture; coordinating Federal / State Agricultural statistics needs; conducting statistical research for other Federal / State or private organizations and other countries, and statistical research.

NASS also Supply Statistics, such as:

- The statistics necessary to manage USDA programs
- NASS statistics help to improve efficiency of these programs
- Facilitate in the development of new programs

NASS Does Not:

- Set Policy
- Regulate Activities
- Permit Influence
- Disclose Individual Reports
- Favor any group above others

- 2006 Recommendations and Responses:

- The Advisory Committee recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture, that while acknowledging the importance of maintaining individual confidentiality, NASS be granted access to the National Animal Identification System for the purpose of producing statistical data summaries.
  - *No final action or decision has been made at this time.*
- The Advisory Committee recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture that NASS work in collaboration with other USDA agencies to establish more direct links to Agricultural statistics contained in other USDA websites.
  - *NASS has already made several links to other USDA websites and continues to work across the Department in this area.*
- The Advisory Committee recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture that NASS work with the Office of the General Counsel and the Office of the Chief Information Officer to modify the required "Warning" notification on its Electronic Data Reporting (EDR) websites. NASS should make the "Warning" notification more user friendly in an effort to ease farmers concerns in reporting electronically.

- *Many changes have been made to improve the NASS Electronic Data Reporting websites.*
- The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS establish a phone number for respondents to contact multilingual operators, - especially Spanish for assistance in reporting for the Census of Agriculture. NASS should also develop questionnaires in other languages, and again especially Spanish. Also, NASS needs to hire indigenous enumerators to conduct data collection on Indian reservations for the Census of Agriculture.
  - *NASS has developed plans for providing assistance to those respondents needing language assistance. NASS has also developed plans to hire indigenous enumerators to conduct data collection on Indian Reservations.*
- The Advisory Committee recommends that a subcommittee consisting of Gene Nelson, Terry Francl, Lucy Meyring, Ron Plain, and Kitty Smith, study the need and feasibility of a National Equine Survey. If the feasibility of conducting a National Equine Survey is justified by this subcommittee, it could enhance NASS's ability to seek appropriation funding.
  - *NASS at the suggestion of subcommittee has developed a summary showing all States that have conducted equine studies and the benefits / uses of those studies.*
- The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS conduct more in-depth research concerning the new question on the Census of Agriculture asking for data on the acres operated on an Animal Unit Month (AUM). The current members felt that the worked of the AUM question might be misunderstood by operators and result in misreported data. (This same AUM question has also been added to the Agricultural Resources Management Survey ARMS).
  - *NASS will continue to study this issue and evaluate responses to the current questions to determine the best way to obtain the most accurate responses.*
- The Advisory Committee recommends that a subcommittee consisting of Terry Francl, Frank Howell, Doris Mold, Janice Gengenbach, and Kent Schescke research the feasibility of conducting an Energy Survey. With the rising cost of energy and the increased use of crops to generate new alternative fuels, the committee felt that this survey would be of more value than an Organic Follow-on Survey.
  - *NASS is working on a cross-cutting department planning team on energy related data needs.*

- The Advisory Subcommittee on Pesticide Data Usage, after meeting and studying the scope of the NASS pesticide and chemical use program, recommended that no changes to the current NASS program are advised at this time and that the subcommittee be discontinued.
  - *NASS has reduced some aspects of this program to reduce data collection costs due to overall budget constraints.*
- The Advisory Committee recommends that the priority needs for the 2007 Census of Agriculture Follow-on Surveys are: Census of Horticulture; Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey; and Economics and Land Ownership Survey.
  - *NASS has developed a proposed plan for the 2007 Census of Agriculture Follow-on Survey program.*
- The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS request the Government Printing Office add the Census of Agriculture to the “Essential Titles for Public Use in Paper Format”, to ensure that this media is available to all Federal Depository and Research Libraries.
  - *All 2007 Census of Agriculture planned publications will continue to be printed, but at a reduced volume level. The internet is however the primary release mode.*
- The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS continue its efforts in working with Community Based Organizations and with the New Mexico pilot project on Indian Reservations, to improve overall coverage of small and minority operated farms in the 2007 Census of Agriculture.
  - *NASS has developed plans with several Community Based Organizations to assist in the goal to improve coverage of minority farm operations in the 2007 Census of Agriculture.*
- The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS consider the use of outside promotional consultants and external support endorsements in development of the 2007 Census of Agriculture campaign to encourage producer cooperation.
  - *NASS has awarded a contract with Osborne and Barr, an outside promotional firm, to assist with public relations for the 2007 Census of Agriculture.*

## Day Two Summary - May 3, 2007

### V. State of NASS

Ron Bosecker, NASS Administrator, began by welcoming the advisory committee members to Washington, D.C. He then proceeded by reviewing events for the first five months of FY 2007.

FY 2007 began with a continuing resolution (CR). This CR forced some very difficult decisions. The Census of Agriculture preparations were deemed a high priority, so adjustments were made to the annual program to allow the necessary funding to continue census preparations. The budget was passed by Congress in February and some of the annual program adjustments were reversed.

NASS mailed over 1.0 million Agricultural Identification Surveys (AIS) during the first quarter of FY 2007. This mailing was a screening form used to determine the agricultural status for names gleaned from various sources. Unfortunately, the AIS acronym raised a lot of anti-NAIS (National Animal Identification System) sentiment and confusion. This will need to be avoided in the future.

The Department publicly released their Farm Bill proposal. The proposal relies heavily on statistical data and several implications for NASS. The implications include revenue based counter-cyclical payments, bio-energy/bio-based products, specialty crop research, crop insurance supplemental coverage, and organic data needs.

In February 2007, NASS received an external review report on the Census of Agriculture. This external review was conducted by a team of experts assembled by the Council on Food, Agricultural and Resource Economics (C-FARE). Some of the suggestions included the need to stay current on technology, invest additional resources in research on the census, and ensure transparency in procedures.

The *Prospective Plantings* report released in March 2007 was highly anticipated as industry was anxious to see farmers' intentions to plant corn for meeting food, feed, and fuel needs.

An unfortunate price reporting error was discovered in April for the nonfat dry milk data series. These data are used by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to establish milk marketing orders. A review is currently underway for the previous 52 weeks.

NASS was again ranked the best place to work in USDA according to the *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*. This report is from a survey of employees conducted by the Partnership for Public Service and the American University. NASS was also the top rated Federal statistical agency and was tied for 27th among the 222 government units.

Mr. Bosecker concluded by providing an overview of the President's budget request for FY 2008 and potential future data needs.

## **VI. Transferring Census of Agriculture Records to NARA**

Amanda Pomicter's presentation was based on the potential transfer of Census questionnaire records to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), which would eventually result in the accessibility of farm-level data. Title 7 section 2276 specifically prohibits the release of farm-level information from the Census of Agriculture. However, the Archivist of the United States has determined that the Census records are permanent and should be made available to the public. The resulting conflict between Title 7 and the Archivist's decision to make the Census records permanent, will likely require necessary changes to Title 7 before NASS can proceed with transferring these records to NARA. Once transferred to NARA, the Census questionnaire records would be restricted from public access for a period of 75 years. The following factors surrounding the transfer of records to NARA include:

- 1985 - Title 7 passed.
- 1986 - Archivist determines that the Census questionnaire records are permanent records.
- 1999 - Tobacco Industry Litigation Freeze goes into effect; existing Census records cannot be destroyed under this freeze until the freeze is lifted.
- 75 year restriction on access is the Federal law governing NARA and the release of personally identifiable information, such as the Census questionnaire records.
- After 1950, the Census of Agriculture is split from the Decennial Census. The Decennial Census questionnaires are permanent records belonging to NARA and will be made available for public use.
- 1997 - Census first conducted by NASS.
- Comment made: "Your word is your word," meaning that Title 7 should not be retroactive for existing Census records, however the value of the existing records acknowledged.
- Comment made: Restrictions on access should be longer than 75 years.
- Action needed to change Title 7 legislation prior to the 2012 Census of Agriculture.
- Seventy-five year restriction on access approved, however concerns were raised about the existing Census records. The status of these records will likely be determined based on legal input from the Department.

## **VII. Annual Program Priorities and Status Update**

Carol House welcomed the members to Washington, D.C. and then discussed NASS's annual program priorities and gave a status update. Presentation highlights are as follows:

- ARMS External Review – writing report now.
- Census Review – report already issued.
- Program Changes were mostly due to budget issues this year.

- Labor Survey – January not conducted; Nursery Production, Nursery Chemical Use, and Floriculture Surveys were cut, but all surveys were put back except for the Floriculture Survey, which went to less states; Post Harvest Chemical Use for soybeans and wheat cancelled (apples in 2008); Fruit Chemical Use was postponed; Field Crops Chemical Use (Corn and Fall Potatoes) was cancelled.
- Planning with Citrus Industry in Florida because of hurricane. No hurricane in Florida, but California had a freeze in January instead. Moved April Survey to March; estimated 20 percent less due to January freeze. Industry didn't like it, but utilization of change from fresh to processed can't be accurately measured that early in the season.
- Dairy Product Prices (DPP) – Agribusinesses that purchase milk and turn into products (cheese, butter, whey, and etc); survey collects data on prices received for these products (weekly).

DPP is used by AMS to set the price that farmers receive for milk. Specifications state to exclude fixed price contracts older than 30 days. One firm included old contracts and so the price was too low – non-fat, dry milk price. NASS has asked businesses to go back 52 weeks and confirm the price received for non-fat dry milk (already revised 3 weeks). Law for reporting Dairy Product Prices – mandatory reporting and will make the report public. Regulations are for mandatory reporting with auditing. NASS will not be conducting audits. We are changing the wording on the questionnaire to say mandatory reporting and will be turned over to AMS. This is very different for NASS (i.e., usually confidentiality is promised), but Carol House expects that may expand to other commodities.

### **VIII. 2007 Census Follow-on Surveys & 2007 Census of Agriculture - plans and status report**

Bob Bass covered a five year plan of NASS Census Follow-on survey plans. The timeline for the Census of Agriculture from 2007 – 2012 is as follows:

- Timeline from 2007 – 2012
  1. 2007 – Census Reference year (preparations)
  2. 2008 – Census Data Collection
  3. 2009 – Census Release, Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey (FRIS- last one in 2003), Energy, Organics
  4. 2010 – Horticulture (last one in 1998), Fruit / Nut / Vineyard Survey
  5. 2011 – Land and Economic Stability Survey (LESS- last one in 1999), Aquaculture (last one in 2005)
  6. 2012 – Census Reference Year (preparations)

Comment – Are we keeping Conservation and Energy in balance? Asking this with respect to the new Farm Bill. Maybe perform Energy in conjunction with LESS; more closely related than we think. Kitty Smith made a comment that other surveys going on annually that can tie things together (for example, ARMS); rather than the five-year cycle.

- Agricultural Census Status Report – mail list finalized in September; mail December 28, 2007.

## **IX. Subcommittee Reports – Equine**

Norman Bennett reported on Equine to address questions concerning support of a National Equine Survey.

- What has NASS done historically? Census collects data concerning horses “on-farms” (places with 5 or more). In 1998, NASS conducted the last National Equine Survey. Since 2000, 12 States have conducted “Some type” of Equine Survey. New York and Virginia plan on conducting an Equine Survey every 5 years depending on funding. Future surveys depend on funding. Each State conducted the survey for different reasons. Expensive because of list building, need for “new” Area Frame, extensive questionnaire, and different interests in each state.
  - Common theme: economic impact study. State-level Surveys have cost between \$100K - \$150K. Horses fit into different aspects of the economy (e.g. recreation, racing, etc.) and not just agriculture.
  - Recommendation – NASS should talk to Rural Development because horses have such a large economic impact in rural areas. Joe Reilly mentioned that it still needs a champion in order for an initiative to move forward.

## **X. New Chairperson**

The nomination committee nominated Lucy C. Meyring to serve as Chairperson for the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics, beginning with preparation for the 2007 meeting. Lucy Meyring accepted the nomination and was approved by attending members.

## **XI. Closing Remarks for the Advisory Committee**

Joe Reilly announced that the next meeting is tentatively scheduled for February 2008 and will be held in Jeffersonville, Indiana. The meeting was adjourned.

## **XII. Committee Recommendations**

1. The Advisory Committee recommends release of records to the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA) with the 2012 Census, after the change to Title 7 is made. In 2006, the NASS Administrator was contacted by National Archives and Record Administration with a proposal to work cooperatively in order to permanently preserve the contents of the Census of Agriculture questionnaires. These contain farm-level data on such information as expenses and income from all sources, labor expended, agricultural practices, size of operation and items produced. Following the seventy five year restriction, the contents of the questionnaires will be available for public access and use in preserving the story of American Agriculture.

Working in cooperation with NARA will require changes to section 2276 of Title 7, which is the legal basis for the NASS Confidentiality Pledge. These changes will require thoughtful consideration to avoid any negative perception by Census of Agriculture respondents and NASS stakeholders.

2. The Advisory Committee recommends conducting a pilot study to make the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS) micro data available through the National Institute of Standards and Technology and National Opinion Research Center (NIST-NORC) data enclave. Availability will be limited to no more than twenty researchers for a time period limited to no more than two years. Following the pilot study, NASS will report back to the Advisory Committee with an assessment of risks compared to the current system of data availability, as well as an evaluation of benefits of the off-site research conducted.
3. The Advisory Committee recommends maintaining a list of new content request(s) for approval on the 2012 Census. For example, currently the only farmer demographic which cannot be identified is “beginning farmers.” One possible clarification may be changing the census question from "years on present farm" to "year in which you began farming." The Census of 2007 is in final production and consequently precludes the change for this round. Therefore, it is suggested the first item on a “new contents request” list for the 2012 Census be the new farmer question and other items should be added as the Advisory Committee meets and makes recommendations.
4. The Advisory Committee recommends supporting the Census Follow-on Survey Project Schedule. The timeline recommended is as follows:

2009 Completion: Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey, Energy, and Organics

2010 Completion: Horticulture Census; Fruits, Nuts and Vineyard Survey

2011 Completion: Land and Economic Stability Survey; Aquaculture

## Appendix I - Agenda

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE STATISTICS  
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### Wednesday, May 2

<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic\Activity</u>	<u>Discussion Leader</u>
1:00 p.m.	Call to Order	Jacklyn Folsom, Committee Chair
1:05 p.m.	Welcome	Dr. Merle D. Pierson, Deputy Under Secretary, Research, Education, and Economics
1:15 p.m.	Introductions and Overview	Jacklyn Folsom
1:30 p.m.	Data User Access <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Data Enclave</li><li>• Data Lab's</li></ul>	National Opinion Research Center (NORC)
2:15 p.m.	Discussion	Jacklyn Folsom
2:45 p.m.	Break	
3:00 p.m.	2006 Recommendations Review	Joe Reilly, Associate Administrator and Committee Executive Director
4:00 p.m.	Discussion and Recommendations	Jacklyn Folsom
4:30 p.m.	Adjourn	
4:45 p.m.	Reception	

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**Thursday, May 3**

8:00 a.m.	Call to Order and Overview of Day 1	Jacklyn Folsom
8:10 a.m.	<i>'State of NASS'</i>	R. Ron Bosecker Administrator
9:00 a.m.	Transferring Census of Agriculture Records to National Archive and Records Administration (NARA) and Public Releases	Amanda Pomicter, Marketing and Information Service Office
9:15 a.m.	Discussion	Jacklyn Folsom
9:45 a.m.	Break	
10:00 a.m.	Annual Program Priorities and Status Update	Carol House, Chairperson of Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB)
10:30 a.m.	Discussion	Jacklyn Folsom
11:00 a.m.	2007 Census Follow-on Survey Plans and 2007 Census of Agriculture Status Update	Bob Bass, Director Census and Survey Division
11:30 a.m.	Discussion	Jacklyn Folsom
12:00 a.m.	Lunch	

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**Thursday, May 3**

(Continued)

1:15 p.m.	Subcommittee Reports <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Energy</li><li>• Equine</li></ul>	Joe Reilly Norman Bennett, Chief of Survey Administration Branch
1:40 p.m.	Discussion	Jacklyn Folsom
2:00 p.m.	Public Questions and Comments	Jacklyn Folsom
2:30 p.m.	Committee Requested Topics and recommendations	Jacklyn Folsom
3:00 p.m.	Break	
3:15 p.m.	Discussion and Recommendations	Jacklyn Folsom
4:00 p.m.	Recommendations and Wrap up	Jacklyn Folsom