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# 2014 Organic Survey – Promotional Materials Usability Testing

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2014 Organic Survey is a data collection project conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) for the USDA's Risk Management Agency. The survey collects information on organic production and practices. The population of interest is any operation that produces organic products according to USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) standards and is certified or exempt from certification. The population also contains operations that reported that they were transitioning to organic in the 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Prior and during data collection, NASS utilizes promotional materials to notify participants of their selection into surveys and to convey information about the survey (e.g., the purpose, potential benefits, due dates). For the 2014 Organic Survey, NASS is planning to send participants a postcard prior to the start of data collection notifying participants of the upcoming survey and the potential benefits of the survey data to the organic community. NASS will also send a cover letter with the survey at the start of data collection to inform participants of the purpose of the survey, potential benefits, how they can respond and when their responses are due. Near the end of data collection, NASS will then send participants a reminder letter asking them to respond if they have not already.

The purpose of the study was to examine whether participants:

- 1) Understood the information presented in these materials
- 2) Whether they could easily locate important information, and
- 3) How effective this information was in recruiting participants to participate in the survey.

Usability interviews were conducted with six organic operations. Participants were presented with the materials individually, in the order in which they would normally receive them. Interviewers were instructed to record participants' initial reaction to the materials and note how the participants went about reviewing them. Participants were then asked a series of questions to assess their reactions to the information provided.

In terms of the postcard, participants appreciated having information on why it is important to respond to the survey; however, they felt more salient reasons needed to be given. In particular, participants did not feel that informing crop insurance programs was a motivating factor for responding. Instead, participants would prefer to see findings from the previous Organic Survey.

Participants generally understood and could locate important information presented on the cover letter (i.e., purpose of the survey, agency conducting the survey, and how to respond). Some participants had difficulty locating the due date of the survey, and some participants had difficulty comprehending the confidentiality statement. Participants felt the most important information to include on this letter was the purpose of the survey, the agency conducting the survey, reasons why they should participate, the due date and that they can respond online. Participants did not feel the statement, which said responding online saved taxpayer money, was persuasive.

Finally, participants felt the most important information presented on the reminder letter was the reasons why it is important to respond, that they can respond online, and that an enumerator would follow up with them if their response is not received. Participants again had difficulty comprehending the confidentiality statement. Participants also felt it was best to only send this letter if their data have not been received by the due date.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Remove Reason #2 from the list of the top 3 reasons to respond to the survey on the backside of the postcard. Respondents did not feel that improving crop insurance programs was a motivating factor for responding to the survey. [This recommendation was accepted.]
- 2) Remove Reason #3 from the list of the top 3 reasons to respond to the survey on the backside of the postcard. Respondents did not feel that the statement indicating that their responses would be kept confidential was a motivating factor for responding to the survey. [This recommendation was accepted.]
- 3) Add findings from the previous Organic Survey that demonstrate why the survey data is beneficial to a broad range of organic growers. [This recommendation was accepted. The reasons now read: 1) Total organic sales by farms in the U.S. increased by 83 percent between 2007 and 2012, 2) Sales from farms with certified or exempt organic product sales totaled more than \$3.1 billion in 2012, 3) Organic agriculture produces reported direct-to-consumers sales more often than conventional producers, with 42 percent of organic farmers selling directly to consumers in 2012.]
- 4) The following statement in the cover and reminder letters: *“This survey is part of the Census of Agriculture Program which is required and protected by law (Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act). These federal laws require that NASS keeps your identity and your answers confidential”* needs to be revised for clarity. Consider simplifying this statement by breaking it down into two more easily understood statements. *“As part of the Census of Agriculture Program, this survey and your response is required by law (Title 7, U.S. Code). These federal laws also require that NASS keeps your identity and your answers confidential.”* [This recommendation was accepted].
- 5) Remove the second paragraph in the cover letter, which reads, “The 2014 Organic Survey is important because the results will help USDA’s Risk Management Agency shape policy decisions, including re-evaluating Federal crop insurance programs to ensure organic producers received equitable insurance prices.” Respondents did not feel that improving crop insurance programs was a motivating factor for responding to the survey. Replace with text similar to the text used in the reminder letter, which respondents did find motivating (*“Responses to the most recent Census of Agriculture let us know that organic agriculture is growing in the United States, with sales increasing 82 percent between 2007 and 2012. Your participation in this survey is important because every response is a step closer to Federal programs that better meet the needs of organic producers like you.”*) [This recommendation was accepted. The text in the cover letter now reads, *“According to the most recent Census of Agriculture, organic agriculture sales from farms in the United States increased 83 percent between 2007 and 2012. These data show the demand for, value of and potential for continued growth in certified organic products. Now the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is conducting the 2014 Organic Survey to gather more detailed production, sales and marketing information from organic farms in the United States. **Please complete and return your form by February 13, 2015.** Your response is critical to help support the continued future success of organic agriculture production.”*]

- 6) Respondents did not feel the statement in the cover letter which said, “*Responding online is the easiest, fastest, and safest way to complete your questionnaire and it saves taxpayer dollars too.*” Consider removing. [This recommendation was accepted.]
- 7) Only send the reminder letter if we have not received participants’ data by the desired due date. [This recommendation was accepted.]

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. METHODS .....	2
3. RESULTS .....	3
3.1 Postcard.....	3
3.2 Cover Leter .....	4
3.3 Reminder Letter .....	6
4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	8
APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol and Guide .....	10
APPENDIX B: Promotional Materials Used During Testing.....	20
APPENDIX C: Revised Promotional Materials .....	24

# 2014 Organic Survey – Promotional Materials Usability Testing

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## Abstract

The 2014 Organic Survey is a data collection project conducted by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) for the Risk Management Agency. The survey collects information on organic production and practices. NASS utilizes promotional materials to notify participants of their selection into surveys and to convey information about the survey (e.g., the purpose, potential benefits, due dates). Promotional materials for the 2014 Organic Survey will include 1) a postcard mailed prior to data collection, 2) a cover letter mailed with the survey, and 3) a reminder letter mailed near the end of data collection. The study examines the effectiveness of the messages included in these materials. Specifically, we examined 1) whether participants understood the information presented in these materials, 2) whether they could easily locate important information, and 3) how effective this information was in recruiting participants to participate in the survey.

**Key Words:** Organic Survey, Promotional Materials, Usability Testing

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 2014 Organic Survey is a data collection project conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) for the USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA). Census funds will also be used as directed by the Agricultural Act of 2014. The survey is an organic production and practices survey, parts of which have been previously administered in the 2008 and 2011 Organic Survey. The population of interest is any operation that produces organic products according to USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) standards and is certified or exempt from certification. The population also contains operations that reported that they were transitioning to organic in the 2012 Census of Agriculture. The questionnaire collects information on organic production of field crops, vegetables, fruits, tree nuts, berries, livestock and poultry, production practices, production expenses, marketing practices and value-added production and processing.

Prior to receiving the survey, participants will all receive a postcard indicating the survey will be arriving soon and reasons it is important to respond. At the start of the data collection period, participants will receive the survey questionnaire with a cover letter that details 1) who is conducting the survey, 2) the purpose of the survey, 3) how to respond, and 4) whom to contact for more information. Participants are also informed that the survey is required by law and their responses will be kept confidential. Near the end of the data collection period, participants will

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receive a reminder letter that will encourage them to respond to the survey if they have not already done so. The reminder letter will also stress 1) the importance of responding, 2) how they can complete the survey, 3) whom to contact for more information, 4) that the survey is required by law, and 5) that their responses will be kept confidential. Participants are also informed in this letter that a NASS representative will follow up with them if we do not receive their data.

Before sending these materials out to the public, NASS wanted to ensure that effective messaging is being used in these materials. That is, that the information presented in these materials is understandable, accessible, valuable, and credible. The following report presents findings from six usability interviews conducted to assess these factors.

## **2. METHODS**

Six interviews were conducted in the following states: Virginia, Maryland, Ohio, New Jersey, and New Hampshire. The sample included operations that grow organic crops and are certified or exempt from certification. Interviewers in each state were responsible for recruiting participants. Participants were informed of the intent of the testing during the recruitment process and that their participation was voluntary.

All interviews were conducted in October 2014. Interviewers were provided an interview protocol and interview guide prior to data collection (see Appendix A). Copies of the postcard, cover letter and reminder letter used during testing can be found in Appendix B.

At the start of the interview, participants were informed of the task. Participants were told NASS was testing the promotional materials that will be used for the 2014 Organic Survey and NASS wanted to make sure the materials were informative and that everyone understood the information presented. Participants were then handed the postcard and instructed to pretend they had just received it in the mail. Interviewers were instructed to record any initial reactions the participants had to the postcard and note how the participants went about reviewing the material on the postcard. After participants had reviewed the postcard, they were asked how much of the postcard they read. Participants were then asked a series of questions to assess their reactions to the information provided. Participants were asked such things as: What information stands out? Is there any information you think is missing? Is it helpful to receive a postcard like this? (See the interview protocol and guide in Appendix A for a complete list of questions).

After providing feedback on the postcard, participants were then asked to review the cover letter. Participants were handed the cover letter and a copy of the survey questionnaire and asked to review it as if they had just received it in the mail. Interviewers were instructed to record any initial reactions the participants had to the cover letter and note how the participants went about reviewing the information on the cover letter. After participants reviewed the cover letter, the interviewers took the cover letter back and asked the participants how much of the cover letter they read. Participants were then asked a series of questions to test their recall of important information presented in the letter. Participants were asked if they could recall such things as: who was conducting the survey; what was the purpose of the survey; how could they respond to the survey;



when was the survey due? The cover letter was then returned to the participants. If participants were not able to answer a recall question, they were instructed to try and find the information on the cover letter. The interviewers noted participants' ability to do so.

Next participants were asked a series of questions to assess their reactions to the cover letter. Participants were first asked about interpretation and reactions to two messages in the letter. The first message stated: *"This survey is part of the Census of Agriculture Program which is required and protected by law (Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act). These federal laws require that NASS keeps your identity and your answers confidential."* The second message stated: *"Responding online is the easiest, fastest, and safest way to complete your questionnaire and it saves taxpayer dollars too."* Participants then answered questions regarding their general reactions to the letter, such as: what information was most important to them; what information was missing; what information was unnecessary?

Finally, participants were handed the reminder letter. Once again, participants were instructed to review the letter as if they had just received it in the mail and interviewers noted participants' initial reactions to the letter and how they went about reviewing the information in the letter. When participants finished reading the letter, they were asked how much of the cover letter they read. Participants were then asked about their reactions to the letter. They were asked probing questions such as: what information stood out; what information was most important to you; what information was missing or unnecessary? Participants were also probed on their interpretation and reaction to the following statement in the letter: *"This survey is part of the Census of Agriculture Program which is required by and protected by law (Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act). These federal laws require that NASS keep your identity and your answers confidential."*

### **3. RESULTS**

#### **3.1 Postcard**

All six participants looked over the front and back of the postcard. When first handed the postcard, some participants only skimmed over the information, while others read more thoroughly.

A couple of participants commented that the postcard was attractive. One participant commented that the postcard was attractive and the word "organic" and the USDA logo grabbed his attention. Another participant thought the picture on the front should be changed to an image of a tractor. He asked, "Do you people think all organic growers are hippies with a hoe?"

For the most part, all of the participants felt the information provided on the postcard was easy to understand; however, one participant questioned why it said *"Your 2014 Organic Survey,"* since it wasn't *his* survey. Another participant also commented that it was hard to make out the NASS logo. He had to look at it very closely to make out what it was. This same participant thought it would be better to identify NASS using its acronym rather than writing out the agency name. He was also expecting to see the USDA organic logo on the postcard.

Participants felt that providing information about the survey and reasons why they should participate was helpful but they didn't agree with the information that is currently being provided. In particular, two participants did not think the second reason given was effective. Reason #2 stated: "Your input will help re-evaluate Federal crop insurance programs to ensure organic producers receive equitable insurance prices." These participants said a lot of organic growers do not use crop insurance. Therefore, the price of crop insurance was not important to them. On a related topic, in cognitive testing of Section 9 (Organic Acres under Crop Insurance) in the Organic Survey, participants often commented that they did not know crop insurance was available for the types of crops they grew or that it was too expensive for them to purchase. Crop insurance might not be a good motivator to convince operators to participate in the survey. One participant didn't feel reason #3 was a reason to cooperate. Reason #3 stated: "Your responses are completely confidential, as required by federal law." This participant said that this statement did not positively reinforce responding to the survey. Rather it indicated one would be penalized by law if they did not respond.

Several participants commented that more effective reasons needed to be given. Two participants provided suggestions. One participant suggested stating that more federal dollars would be provided to organic programs for things such as certification reimbursements and research as a reason to participate in the survey. Another participant suggested including results from past surveys on the postcard.

When asked if they felt it was helpful to receive a postcard like this prior to the survey, three participants indicated that it was helpful and three participants said it was not helpful. However, one of the participants, who said it was not helpful, indicated he reads all of his mail and responds to all legitimate requests. Two other participants, who did not think it was helpful to receive a postcard, would rather receive an email about the upcoming survey instead of a postcard.

### **3.2 Cover Letter**

Of the six participants, four skimmed the contents of the cover letter, one read it in full and one participant read "most" of the content. After participants initially read the cover letter, we probed them to see if they could recall important pieces of information included in the letter, including who was conducting the survey, the purpose of the survey, how they could respond, and the due date.

All participants could easily recall who was conducting the survey. Three participants recalled that NASS was conducting the survey; two participants recalled that the USDA was conducting the survey and another participant recalled "USDA, Ag Statistics."

When asked if they recalled the purpose of the survey, four participants indicated that the survey was being conducted to gather information/statistics on organic farming. One participant indicated the survey was being conducted to evaluate the crop insurance policy and risk management. Another participant also commented that the survey data would support RMA. One participant

could not recall reading information on the cover letter regarding the purpose of the survey but was able to locate this information after looking at the cover letter a second time.

All participants could recall reading that the survey could be completed online or by mail. One participant commented that the information about responding online should be made more visible on the letter. Three participants indicated that they preferred to respond online and three participants indicated that they would prefer to respond to the survey by mail. One of these participants indicated that he prefers to respond by mail because he can use a pencil and fix his mistakes. Another participant who prefers to respond by mail commented that he likes to flip back and forth through the pages of the survey.

Three participants recalled that the due date was March 1. Two participants could not recall the due date. Another participant also could not recall the due date but stated, "They always call me before they are due, so I don't need to know when they are due."

Interviewers also probed participants on their interpretations and reactions to two important statements in the cover letter. First, participants were probed on their understanding of the following statement: "*This survey is part of the Census of Agriculture Program which is required and protected by law (Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act). These federal laws require that NASS keeps your identity and your answers confidential.*" Three participants interpreted this statement as saying that NASS was required to keep their information confidential. Two participants interpreted this statement as saying they were required by law to complete the survey and both questioned whether anyone had ever been fined for not completing the survey. One of these participants then questioned whether this statement meant that NASS was required by law to conduct the survey or if it meant that he as a participant was required by law to participate in the survey.

Participants generally trusted that NASS would keep their responses confidential. However, one participant commented that although he was confident NASS would keep his data confidential, he was still not happy that we publish the total numbers. This participant felt that our survey data only benefited big corporations. Another participant commented that he was confident his data would be kept secure but he thought other growers might have concerns.

Participants were also probed on the effectiveness of the following statement encouraging them to respond online: "*Responding online is the easiest, fastest, and safest way to complete your questionnaire and it saves taxpayer dollars too.*" Two participants indicated that they would respond online regardless of this statement. After reading this statement, another participant stated, "It sounds like they really want me to do it online, so I guess I will give it a whirl." However, this participant preferred to respond on paper. Two other participants indicated that this statement would have no effect on their decision to respond online. One participant commented, "This does not convince me to respond online... it makes me wonder when did the government ever worry about saving the taxpayer money?" The other participant, who was not persuaded, stated that computers put people out of work and therefore he would prefer not to respond online.

All participants reported that the information presented in the letter was generally easy to understand. When asked what information they felt most important in the cover letter participants reported the following: the due date, who is conducting the survey, the purpose of the survey, why they should participate, and the web address for responding online. Three participants felt there was unnecessary information included in the letter. One participant felt it was not necessary to include the name of Title 7 (*Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act*). Two other participants felt the second paragraph, which states that the results of the survey will help RMA shape policy, was not necessary. These same participants indicated that most small organic farmers do not qualify for crop insurance.

Participants generally did not feel that anything was missing from the letter. However, one participant would like a NASS address where he could contact the NASS administrator. Another participant noted that the code/password for replying online was missing, although he presumed it would be in the official letter.

After reading the letter, all six participants reported they would be willing to participate in the survey but two indicated this with some reluctance. One of these participants indicated he would participate so he wouldn't get "pestered" about it. Another participant indicated he would only complete the survey because he is required to, but we would have to catch him at a time that "works for me."

### **3.3 Reminder Letter**

Five of the six participants, reported that they skimmed the contents of this letter and one participant read it in full. All of the participants thought the information presented in the letter was generally easy to understand. After reading the letter, participants were probed to see what information in the letter stood out to them initially. Participants commented on different information presented in the letter. One participant noted that the letterhead and the USDA logo made the letter appear legitimate. Two participants noted that the letter was reminding them of the Organic Survey and that they had not completed it yet. One participant noted that the letter stresses the importance of responding to the survey. Another participant noticed the results from the 2012 Census were included in this letter, although he felt they could be more pronounced. One participant felt there was a "subliminal message" in the letter, which indicated that his participation in the survey is mandatory. Finally, one participant commented that it seemed like the reminder letter was written by a different person than the cover letter because the messages were different. The cover letter seemed to focus on how the survey benefited the RMA and the reminder letter stressed Federal programs.

Participants were probed to see what information in the letter was most important to them. Three participants felt the information that stated someone would follow up with them if they did not complete the survey was most important to them. However, one participant commented that this statement was not definitive because of the word "may." He asked if this meant someone *will* follow up with him or someone *may* follow up with him. Two participants felt the second paragraph in the letter, which stated, "Organic agriculture is growing in the United States, with sales increasing 82 percent between 2007-2012. Your participation in this survey is important

because every response is a step closer to Federal programs that better meet the needs of organic producers like you,” was most important. One of these participants felt this information should be in the first paragraph of the letter. He felt this was a better justification for participating in the survey than the messages provided in the postcard and the cover letter. Another participant also commented that the information stating he could respond online was important to him.

Interviewers also probed participants on their interpretations of and reactions to the following statement, “This survey is part of the Census of Agriculture Program which is required by and protected by law (*Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act*).” Participants interpreted this statement in different ways. Two participants interpreted this statement as saying that NASS is required by law to keep their answers confidential. One participant interpreted this statement as saying he is required by law to complete the survey and questioned whether anyone was ever fined for not completing the survey. Once again, one participant questioned whether it meant that NASS was required by law to conduct the survey or if it meant that he as a participant was required by law to participate in the survey. Finally, one participant interpreted this statement as saying he is required to do the survey and that his responses will be kept confidential. In general, participants felt this statement had no influence on their decision to participate in the survey. One participant commented that this was just “high powered legal talk.” One participant felt this statement was not necessary because he knows he will get a phone call if he doesn’t send in his data. The statement does not convince him at this point to participate. Another participant said it would have no impact on his decision because he would respond to the survey anyway.

Participants were probed to see if there was any information in the reminder letter that they felt was unnecessary. As with the cover letter, one participant felt the name of Title 7 (*Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act*) was not necessary. Finally, one participant commented that there was a lot of text on the letter but he was not sure what could be removed.

Participants were also probed to see if there was any information that they felt was missing from the reminder letter. Once again, one participant would like an address for NASS to be included in the letter. Two participants commented that there was no due date on this letter and one of these participants also pointed out that there were no repercussions stated for not completing the survey. This participant stated that he could look up Title 7 to see if there are any repercussions for not completing the survey; however, he doesn’t think most people would do this. Finally, one participant felt more information could be included that explained how the results of this survey would benefit the growers.

Participants were then asked for their general comments on the letter. Two participants felt it was unnecessary to send a reminder letter. One participant felt it was better to just call him if we had not received his survey data. Another participant felt it was better to send a reminder postcard or an email. Finally, one participant commented that he hopes he would only be sent this letter if he hadn’t sent the survey in yet. He said he does not like receiving these letters when he has already completed his survey.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most participants understood and could locate important information on the promotional materials. However, some participants had difficulty comprehending the confidentiality statement on the cover and reminder letters and a few participants could not locate the due date on the cover letter. The information presented on these materials was in line with the types of information participants found important. That is, participants felt it was important to include the purpose of the survey, the agency conducting the survey, reasons why they should participate, the due date and that they can respond online. However, participants felt the promotional materials could provide more salient reasons for why it is important to participate in the survey. Based on the findings from this study, the following changes are recommended to increase the effectiveness of the promotional material:

- 1) Remove Reason #2 from the list of the top 3 reasons to respond to the survey on the backside of the postcard. Respondents did not feel that improving crop insurance programs was a motivating factor for responding to the survey. [This recommendation was accepted.]
- 2) Remove Reason #3 from the list of the top 3 reasons to respond to the survey on the backside of the postcard. Respondents did not feel that the statement indicating that their responses would be kept confidential was a motivating factor for responding to the survey. [This recommendation was accepted.]
- 3) Add findings from the previous Organic Survey that demonstrate why the survey data is beneficial to a broad range of organic growers. [This recommendation was accepted. The reasons now read: 1) Total organic sales by farms in the U.S. increased by 83 percent between 2007 and 2012, 2) Sales from farms with certified or exempt organic product sales totaled more than \$3.1 billion in 2012, 3) Organic agriculture produces reported direct-to-consumers sales more often than conventional producers, with 42 percent of organic farmers selling directly to consumers in 2012.]
- 4) The following statement in the cover and reminder letters: *“This survey is part of the Census of Agriculture Program which is required and protected by law (Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act). These federal laws require that NASS keeps your identity and your answers confidential”* needs to be revised for clarity. Consider simplifying this statement by breaking it down into two more easily understood statements. *“As part of the Census of Agriculture Program, this survey and your response is required by law (Title 7, U.S. Code). These federal laws also require that NASS keeps your identity and your answers confidential.”* [This recommendation was accepted].
- 5) Remove the second paragraph in the cover letter, which reads, “The 2014 Organic Survey is important because the results will help USDA’s Risk Management Agency shape policy decisions, including re-evaluating Federal crop insurance programs to ensure organic producers received equitable insurance prices.” Respondents did not feel that improving crop insurance programs was a motivating factor for responding to the survey. Replace with text similar to the text used in the reminder letter, which respondents did find motivating (*“Responses to the most recent Census of Agriculture let us know that organic agriculture is growing in the United States, with sales increasing 82 percent between 2007 and 2012. Your participation in this survey is important because every*

*response is a step closer to Federal programs that better meet the needs of organic producers like you.”) [This recommendation was accepted. The text in the cover letter now reads, “According to the most recent Census of Agriculture, organic agriculture sales from farms in the United States increased 83 percent between 2007 and 2012. These data show the demand for, value of and potential for continued growth in certified organic products. Now the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is conducting the 2014 Organic Survey to gather more detailed production, sales and marketing information from organic farms in the United States. **Please complete and return your form by February 13, 2015.** Your response is critical to help support the continued future success of organic agriculture production.”]*

- 6) Respondents did not feel the statement in the cover letter which said, “*Responding online is the easiest, fastest, and safest way to complete your questionnaire and it saves taxpayer dollars too.*” Consider removing. [This recommendation was accepted.]
- 7) Only send the reminder letter if we have not received participants’ data by the desired due date. [This recommendation was accepted.]

The findings from this report were reviewed by the Organic Team. The promotional materials were then revised based on the recommendations made in the report. The revised materials can be found in Appendix C.

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND GUIDE

### 2014 Organic Survey – Promotional Materials

#### Usability Testing Protocol

September 26, 2014

Please read this entire document before conducting any interviews to become familiar with the data collection procedures and promotional materials.

#### **Background**

The 2014 Organic Survey is a data collection project conducted for the Risk Management Agency (RMA); Census funds will also be used as directed by the 2014 Farm Appropriations bill. The survey is an organic production and practices survey, parts of which have been previously conducted in 2008 and 2011. The population of interest is any operation that produces organic products according to USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) standards and is certified or exempt from certification. The population also contains operations that reported in the 2012 Census of Agriculture that they were transitioning to organic. The questionnaire collects information on organic production of field crops, vegetables, fruits, tree nuts, berries, livestock and poultry, production practices, production expenses, marketing practices and value-added production and processing.

#### **Research Goals**

The purpose of this research study is to assess participants' comprehension of and reactions to the Organic Survey promotional materials. In this study, we will assess the postcard, cover letter and reminder letter.

#### **Sample**

Since OMB clearance was not obtained for this testing, we will only be conducting a total of 9 interviews. Interviews will be conducted in the following states: CA, MD, OH, NH, and NJ. The sample will include operations that grow organic crops and are certified or exempt from certification.

#### **Recruitment**

Interviewers in each state are responsible for recruiting participants. Interviewers may recruit known organic operations in their area that are certified or exempt from certification. We also encourage interviewers to search local CSAs for organic producers. See screener questionnaire at the end of this document.



Participants should be informed of the intent of the interviews during the recruitment process and that their participation is voluntary. Participants should also be told the interviews will be conducted in person and are expected to last 1 hour.

## **Interview Procedures**

Each interviewer is expected to conduct 1 interview. Interviewers should bring a copy of the interview guide, postcard, cover letter, blank questionnaire, and reminder letter to the interview. The following procedures should be followed during the interview.

Interviewers should explain the task to the participant at the start of the interview. Tell the participant we are interested in their impressions of the letters we will send out for this survey. We want to know how to make these letters more informative and useful to participants (see script at top of interview guide.)

### **Postcard**

After explaining the task to the participant, hand them the postcard and ask them to look it over. Tell participant: *Pretend you just received this postcard in the mail. I want you to look it over however you normally would.* If the participant doesn't look at the postcard at all and says something like "I'd throw it away" make a note of this and then ask them to look over the postcard.

Note any comments they make while looking it over (positive or negative). After they have finished looking at it ask the following questions:

*If you received this postcard in the mail what would be your initial reaction?*

*Is there any information that stands out to you?*

*Is there any information on this postcard that you find confusing or have a question about?*

*If there any information you think is missing?*

*Do you feel it is helpful to receive a postcard like this?*

### **Organic Cover Letter**

Next, hand the participant a copy of the cover letter and the survey instrument. We will not be testing the survey instrument. The reason we are giving the survey instrument along with the cover letter is we want to mimic the procedures in the field (participants receive these two items together). The instrument will provide additional context to help participants understand the information presented in the letter.

Have participants look over the cover letter. Tell participant: *Pretend you just received this letter and survey in the mail. I want you to look the letter over however you normally would.* If the participant doesn't look at the letter at all and says something like "I'd throw it away" make a note of this and then ask them to look over the letter.

Note any comments they make while reading the letter. When they are finished take the cover letter and survey instrument away and ask the following questions:

(Recall/Comprehension)

*How much of this letter did you read? Did you read this letter in full, skim, didn't read anything?*

*Do you remember who is conducting the survey? Who?*

*In your own words, what is the purpose of the survey?*

*How can you respond to this survey?*

*When are responses to the survey due?*

*Would you participate in this survey if you were selected to do so? Why or why not?*

*If so, How would you respond to survey (i.e., mail or web)? Why? If not, how would you normally prefer to participate in surveys?*

After the participants have answered the recall questions, hand the cover letter back to them. If participants could not recall the information asked about above, ask if they can locate the information after reviewing the information a second time. Note their ability/inability to do so. Then ask the following questions:

(Reactions)

*Is there anything on this letter than you don't understand or are confused about?*

*When this statement reads, "This survey is part of the Census of Agriculture Program which is required and protected by law (Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act). These federal laws require that NASS keeps your identity and your answers confidential?" What does this mean to you??"*

*How confident are you that your data will be kept confidential? Can you tell me more about that? (note positive and negative reactions)*

*What is your initial reaction to the following "Responding online is the easiest, fastest, and safest way to complete your questionnaire and it saves taxpayer dollars too"? Does this persuade you in any way to respond to the survey online? How so? (note positive and negative reactions)*

*What information on this letter do you feel is the most important to you?*

*Is there any information that you feel is unnecessary?*

*Is there any information that you feel is missing?*

### **Organic Reminder Letter**

Finally, hand the participant a copy of the reminder letter and the survey instrument.

Have participants look over the reminder letter. Tell participant: *Pretend you just received this letter and survey in the mail. I want you to look the letter over however you normally would.* If the participant doesn't look at the letter at all and says something like "I'd throw it away" make a note of this and then ask them to look over the letter.

Note any comments they make while reading the letter. When they are finished take the reminder letter away and ask the following questions:

(Reactions)

*How much of this letter did you read? Did you read this letter in full, skim, didn't read anything?*

*What information stood out to you when reading this letter?*

*What information on this letter do you feel is the most important to you?*

*Please look at the following statement: This survey is part of the Census of Agriculture Program which is required and protected by law (Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act). Can you tell me in your own words what this statement is saying? Does this persuade you in any way to respond to the survey? Why or why not?*

*If the participant does not discuss the part of the statement that says the survey is required by law, ask them about it. What is your initial reaction to this? Does this influence your decision to participate?*

*Is there any information that you feel is unnecessary?*

*Is there any information that you feel is missing?*

*Is there any information in this letter that you find confusing or have a question about?*

*If participant indicated they would not complete this survey during testing of the cover letter, ask:*

*Would this letter persuade you to complete the survey? Why or why not?*

*Do you have any other general comments about these materials?*

End the interview and thank the participant for their time.

### **Interview Notes**

Interviewers are expected to spend up to one hour per interview writing and summarizing their notes from that interview. Please provide detailed notes from the interviews. Notes should be emailed to Heather Ridolfo ([heather.ridolfo@nass.usda.gov](mailto:heather.ridolfo@nass.usda.gov)) no later than October 3, 2014.

## Screener Questionnaire

Hi, my name is <name> and I am calling from the United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. We are contacting operations to ask for help in testing the 2014 Organic Survey. This survey will provide important information on organic production across the United States. Is this something that you'd be willing to speak to us about?

In order to improve the information we distribute on this survey, we would like to get your feedback on the promotional materials we will be sending out. This would take about an hour of your time and I could schedule a time that is convenient for you. During this time I will ask you to look over our promotional materials and provide your feedback on how we can improve them. Could I schedule a time to meet with you and get your input on this?

One of the criteria for this testing is you must have organic crops according to USDA's National Organic Program standards and are either certified or exempt from certification (under \$5,000 in annual sales).

Does your operation have any organic production according to NOP standards and is certified or exempt from certification?

YES – [Continue]

NO - [Thank participant for their time and hang up]

This means you are eligible to help us out. I have the following days and timeframes open.

<dates, times>

Which of these days and times works best for you?

I will call you to confirm the appointment a day or two before. If you need to change the appointment time, please call me back at <phone number>.

## 2014 Organic Survey – Promotional Materials

### Usability Testing Interview Guide

September 26, 2014

**Interviewer:**

**Participant:**

**Date:**

*Before we begin, I want to tell you a little more about the project and what we will be doing today. I have here the promotional materials that will be used for the 2014 Organic Survey. We want to make sure that these materials are informative and that everyone understands the information presented in these materials. I'm going to have you look them over and then I will ask you some follow up questions. I'm interested in your general reactions to these materials – good and bad. Again, everything we discuss today will be kept completely confidential. Do you have any questions before we get started?*

#### Postcard

**[Hand the participant the postcard and tell them to take a look at it. Tell participant: *Pretend you just received this postcard in the mail. I want you to look it over however you normally would. If the participant doesn't look at the postcard at all and says something like "I'd throw it away" make a note of this and then ask them to look over the postcard. Note any comments they make while looking it over. After they have finished looking at it ask the following questions.]***

Comments:

*If you received this postcard in the mail what would be your initial reaction?*

*Is there any information that stands out to you?*

*Is there any information on this postcard that you find confusing or have a question about?*

*If there any information you think is missing?*

*Do you feel it is helpful to receive a postcard like this?*

### **Organic Cover Letter**

**[Hand the participant a copy of the cover letter and the survey instrument. Have participants read the cover letter. Tell participant: *Now I want you to pretend you received this letter and survey in the mail. I want you to look it over however you normally would. If the participant doesn't look at the letter at all and says something like "I'd throw it away" make a note of this and then ask them to look over the letter.***

**Note any comments they make while reading the letter. When they are finished take the cover letter away and ask the following questions.]**

Comments:

*How much of this letter did you read? Did you read this letter in full, skim, didn't read anything?*

*Do you remember who is conducting the survey? Who?*

*In your own words, what is the purpose of the survey?*

*How can you respond to this survey?*

*When are responses to the survey due?*

*Would you participate in this survey if you were selected to do so? Why or why not?*

*If so, How would you respond to survey (i.e., mail or web)? Why? If not, how would you normally prefer to participate in surveys?*

**[Hand the cover letter back to participants. If participants could not recall the information asked about above, ask if they can locate the information after reviewing the information a second time. Note their ability/inability to do so. Then ask the following questions.]**

Notes:

*Is there anything on this letter that you don't understand or are confused about?*

*When this statement reads, "This survey is part of the Census of Agriculture Program which is required and protected by law (Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act). These federal laws require that NASS keeps your identity and your answers confidential?" What does this mean to you??*

*How confident are you that your data will be kept confidential? Can you tell me more about that? (note positive and negative reactions)*

*What is your initial reaction to the following “Responding online is the easiest, fastest, and safest way to complete your questionnaire and it saves taxpayer dollars too”? Does this persuade you in any way to respond to the survey online? How so? (note positive and negative reactions)*

*What information on this letter do you feel is the most important to you?*

*Is there any information that you feel is unnecessary?*

*Is there any information that you feel is missing?*

### **Organic Reminder Letter**

**[Hand the participant a copy of the reminder letter and survey instrument. Have participant look over the reminder letter. Tell participant: *Pretend you just received this letter and survey in the mail. I want you to look the letter over however you normally would. If the participant doesn't look at the letter at all and says something like “I'd throw it away” make a note of this and then ask them to look over the letter.***

**Note any comments they make while reading the letter. When they are finished take the reminder letter and instrument away and ask the following questions.]**

Comments:

*How much of this letter did you read? Did you read this letter in full, skim, didn't read anything?*



*What information stood out to you when reading this letter?  
What information on this letter do you feel is the most important to you?*

*Please look at the following statement: This survey is part of the Census of Agriculture Program which is required and protected by law (Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act). Can you tell me in your own words what this statement is saying? Does this persuade you in any way to respond to the survey? Why or why not?*

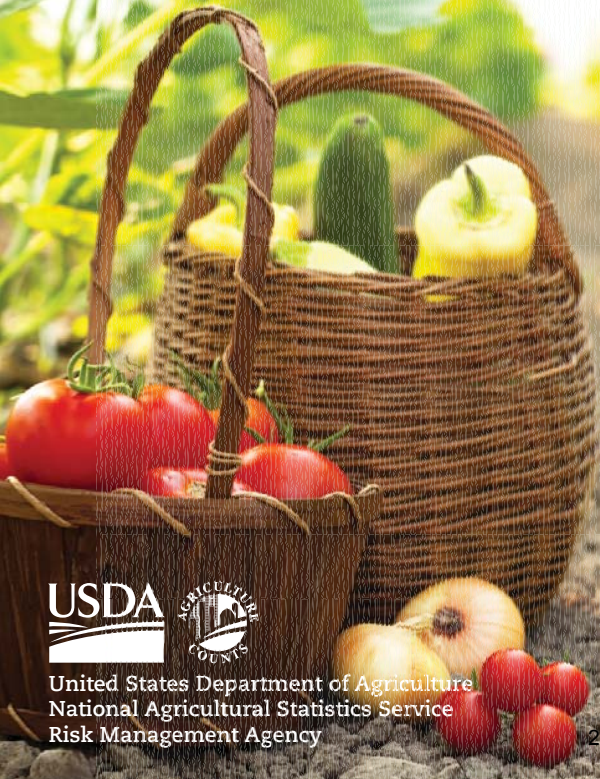
*If the participant does not discuss the part of the statement that says the survey is required by law, ask them about it. What is your initial reaction to this? Does this influence your decision to participate?*

*Is there any information that you feel is unnecessary?*

*Is there any information that you feel is missing?*

*Is there any information in this letter that you find confusing or have a question about?*

*If participant indicated they would not complete this survey during testing of the cover letter, ask:  
Would this letter persuade you to complete the survey? Why or why not?  
Do you have any other general comments about these materials?*



United States Department of Agriculture  
National Agricultural Statistics Service  
Risk Management Agency

# ORGANIC — FARMS —

*Your*

**2014  
ORGANIC  
SURVEY  
WILL  
ARRIVE  
SOON.**

**Top 3 Reasons to Respond to the 2014 Organic Survey:**

**1.** Your operation and your products are a valuable part of the ag industry and should be counted – organic products were a \$35 billion industry in the United States in 2013.

**2.** Your input will help re-evaluate Federal crop insurance programs to ensure organic producers receive equitable insurance prices.

**3.** Your responses are completely confidential, as required by Federal law.

**Please respond! Learn more at [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov).**



United States Department of Agriculture  
National Agricultural Statistics Service  
In Cooperation with Risk Management Agency



January 02, 2015

Dear Agricultural Producer,

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is conducting the 2014 Organic Survey. This survey gathers detailed production, sales and marketing information on organic farming in the United States. Please take the time to fill out your survey form.

The 2014 Organic Survey is important because the results will help USDA's Risk Management Agency shape policy decisions, including re-evaluating Federal crop insurance programs to ensure organic producers receive equitable insurance prices.

Your response is critical to help protect your investments and support your future success. Please respond promptly in either of the following ways:

- **Online** at [www.agcounts.usda.gov](http://www.agcounts.usda.gov). *Responding online is the easiest, fastest and safest way to complete your questionnaire and it saves taxpayer dollars too.* All you need is the identification number on the enclosed form to begin.
- **By mail.** Complete the enclosed form and mail it back in the return envelope provided.

This survey is part of the Census of Agriculture Program which is required and protected by law (Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act). These federal laws require that NASS keeps your identity and your answers confidential.

If you have questions, please call (888) 424-7828. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Joseph Reilly  
Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service  
United States Department of Agriculture

Enclosures



United States Department of Agriculture  
National Agricultural Statistics Service  
In Cooperation with Risk Management Agency



February 17, 2015

Dear Agricultural Producer,

According to our records, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) has not received your completed 2014 Organic Survey. ***Please complete and return your survey today.*** If you have recently responded, thank you.

Responses to the most recent Census of Agriculture let us know that organic agriculture is growing in the United States, with sales increasing 82 percent between 2007 and 2012. Your participation in this survey is important because every response is a step closer to Federal programs that better meet the needs of organic producers like you.

If you have not yet responded, you can do so in either of the following ways:

- **Online** at [www.agcounts.usda.gov](http://www.agcounts.usda.gov). ***Responding online is the easiest, fastest and safest way to complete your questionnaire and it saves taxpayer dollars too.*** All you need is the identification number on the form to begin.
- **By mail.** Complete the form and mail it back in the return envelope provided.

If a response is not received a NASS representative may personally follow up with you to gather this information. This survey is part of the Census of Agriculture Program which is required and protected by law (Title 7, U.S. Code and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act). These federal laws require that NASS keeps your identity and your answers confidential.

To learn more about this survey visit [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov). If you have questions or need assistance, call (888) 424-7828.

Sincerely,

Joseph T. Reilly  
Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service  
United States Department of Agriculture

Enclosures

# ORGANIC FARMING

*Your* 2014

**Organic  
Survey will  
arrive soon.**



United States Department of Agriculture  
National Agricultural Statistics Service  
Risk Management Agency

## **Responding to the 2014 Organic Survey is important!**

*Your agriculture operation and products are a valuable part of the ag industry and should be counted.*

- 1. Total organic sales by farms in the U.S. increased by 83 percent between 2007 and 2012.**
- 2. Sales from farms with certified or exempt organic product sales totaled more than \$3.1 billion in 2012.**
- 3. Organic agriculture producers reported direct-to-consumers sales more often than conventional producers, with 42 percent of organic farmers selling directly to consumers in 2012.**

***Please respond! Learn more at  
[www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov).***



January 02, 2015

Dear Agricultural Producer,

According to the most recent Census of Agriculture, organic agriculture sales from farms in the United States increased 83 percent between 2007 and 2012. These data show the demand for, value of and potential for continued growth in certified organic products.

Now the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is conducting the 2014 Organic Survey to gather more detailed production, sales and marketing information from organic farms in the United States. ***Please complete and return your form by February 13, 2015.***

Your response is critical to help support the continued future success of organic agriculture production. Please respond promptly in either of the following ways:

- **Online** at [www.agcounts.usda.gov](http://www.agcounts.usda.gov). All you need is the identification number on the enclosed form to begin.
- **By mail**. Complete the enclosed form and mail it back in the return envelope provided.

As part of the Census of Agriculture Program, this survey and your response is required by law (Title 7, U.S. Code). These federal laws also require that NASS keeps your identity and your answers confidential.

If you have questions, please call (888) 424-7828 or email [nass@nass.usda.gov](mailto:nass@nass.usda.gov). Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Joseph T. Reilly  
Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service  
United States Department of Agriculture

Enclosures





January 15, 2015

Dear Agricultural Producer,

According to the most recent Census of Agriculture, organic agriculture sales from farms in the United States increased 83 percent between 2007 and 2012. These data show the demand for, value of and potential for continued growth in certified organic products.

Now the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is conducting the 2014 Organic Survey to gather more detailed production, sales and marketing information from organic farms in the United States. ***Please complete and return your form by February 13, 2015.***

Your response is critical to help support the continued future success of organic agriculture production. Please respond promptly in either of the following ways:

- **Online** at [www.agcounts.usda.gov](http://www.agcounts.usda.gov). All you need is the identification number on the enclosed form to begin.
- **By mail.** Complete the enclosed form and mail it back in the return envelope provided.

As part of the Census of Agriculture Program, this survey and your response is required by law (Title 7, U.S. Code). These federal laws also require that NASS keeps your identity and your answers confidential.

If you have questions, please call (888) 424-7828 or email [nass@nass.usda.gov](mailto:nass@nass.usda.gov). Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Joseph T. Reilly  
Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service  
United States Department of Agriculture

Enclosures



February 17, 2015

Dear Agricultural Producer,

In 2012, there were 14,326 farms with certified or exempt organic product sales totaling more than \$3.1 billion. The latest Census of Agriculture data are used to help determine federal and state programs, research, and support to better meet the needs of organic agriculture producers like you. Now, the results of the 2014 Organic Survey will provide even more in-depth knowledge of your significant and growing part of the agriculture industry.

According to our records, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) has not received your completed response. ***Please complete and return the 2014 Organic Survey by February 27, 2015.*** If you have recently responded, thank you.

Please respond in either of the following ways:

- **Online** at [www.agcounts.usda.gov](http://www.agcounts.usda.gov). All you need is the identification number on the form to begin.
- **By mail.** Complete the form and mail it back in the return envelope provided.

If a response is not received a NASS representative will follow up with you to gather this information. As part of the Census of Agriculture program, this survey and your response is required by law (Title 7, U.S. Code). These federal laws also require that NASS keeps your identity and your answers confidential.

To learn more about this survey visit [www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov). If you have questions or need assistance, call (888) 424-7828 or email [nass@nass.usda.gov](mailto:nass@nass.usda.gov).

Sincerely,

Joseph T. Reilly  
Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service  
United States Department of Agriculture

Enclosures