

Advisory Committee On Agriculture Statistics

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Annual Meeting, March 29-30, 2012



U.S. Department of Agriculture
NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics (ACAS)

March 29-30, 2012
L'Enfant Plaza Hotel
Washington, DC 20024

Members Present

James M. Baise	Carl R. Mattson
Jose A. (Agapito) Candelaria	Roger S. Mix
Beth Carroll, Ph.D.	Doris E. Mold, Committee Chair
Rosalee K. Coleman	Emmett Redd, Ph.D.
Carole R. Engle, Ph.D.	Lawrence E. Sanchez, Ph.D.
John C. Foltz, Ph.D.	Brian D. Thomas
Tammy Gray-Steele	Louise Waterman
Douglas A. Huebsch	Linda J. Young, Ph.D.
Larry L. Janssen, Ph.D.	William G. Bostic, Jr. (Census Bureau ex-officio)
John D. Lawrence, Ph.D.	Mary Bohman, Ph.D. (Economic Research Service ex-officio)

Members Absent

Walter Edwin Kee	Robert D. Yonkers, Ph.D
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Special Attendees

Shirin Ahmed, Census Bureau
Mark Jekanowski, Ph.D., Economic Research Service
Mitch Morehart, Economic Research Service

Public Attendees

Carrie Litkowski, Bureau of Economic Analysis
Eliav Bitane, National Wildlife Federation

Advisory Committee Officers

Hubert Hamer, Executive Director
Michelle Radice, Designated Federal Officer
Marie Jordan, Administrative Officer

United States Department of Agriculture

Ann Bartuska, Ph.D., Deputy Under Secretary of Research, Education, and Economics
Stuart Bender, Esq., Director, USDA Office of Ethics

National Agricultural Statistics Service

Cynthia Clark, Ph.D., NASS Administrator
Joe Reilly, NASS Associate Administrator
Hubert Hamer, Chair, Agricultural Statistics Board

Robert Bass, Director, National Operations Center
Norman Bennett, Director, Eastern Field Offices
Mark Harris, Director, Research and Development Division
Joe Parsons, Director, Information Technology Division
Renee Picanso, Director, Census and Survey Division
Joseph Prusacki, Director, Statistics Division

Dave Aune, Chief, Statistical Methods Branch
Dan Beckler, Head, Information Services Section
Sue DuPont, Head, Public Affairs Section
Carolyn Foster, Data Dissemination Section
Elvera Gleaton, Senior Project Manager, Office of the Administrator
Dale Hawks, Head, Environmental and Demographics Section
Shareefah Jackson, Computer Security
Marie Jordan, Secretary, Agricultural Statistics Board
Dave Kleweno, Chief, Survey Development Support Branch
Chris Messer, Chief, Program Administration Branch
Aleksey Minchenkov, Public Affairs Section
Rosemarie Philips, Public Affairs Section
Michelle Radice, Director, Diversity and Outreach
Margie Whitcotton, Public Affairs Section
Stacy Wills, Census Section

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I. SUMMARY

1. Introduction

The Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics (ACAS) annual meeting was called to order by Committee Chair Doris Mold on Thursday, March 29, 2012, at 8:00 a.m. Present were 18 of the 20 ACAS members, two Committee ex-officio representatives, and all but one Senior Executive Service staff member from the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). Committee members, NASS staff, and meeting guests were asked to introduce themselves, after which Doris Mold welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics Committee Overview

Hubert Hamer, who serves as the Advisory Committee Executive Sponsor, gave a presentation on the Committee's function and responsibilities, reminding members that the duties of the Committee are solely advisory. The Committee represents the views and needs of both users and suppliers of agriculture statistics; it is charged with advising 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 survey respondents. In addition, the Committee makes recommendations regarding the content of agricultural reports. Mr. Hamer 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 the USDA's statistical estimating program and the every five-year Census of Agriculture; coordinating federal state agricultural statistics needs; and conducting statistical research, including research for other federal agencies, state agencies, private organizations, and other countries. NASS does not:

- Set policy,
- Regulate activities,
- Permit influence,
- Disclose individual records, or
- Favor any group above others.

Mr. Hamer reviewed the contents of attendees' packets, which included a copy of the 2011 Summary and Recommendations document and a Confidentiality Certification form (ADM-004) that had to be signed and witnessed at the meeting. Each member had been sent via email the documents explaining the confidentiality rules and standards members must follow during the meeting. Additional copies of these materials were available for members to review before signing the Confidentiality Certification form. All forms were signed and witnessed.

3. 2011 Recommendations: Review and Update

Using a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Hamer reviewed the Advisory Committee's

recommendations from the February 2011 meeting. He discussed background information and current status or NASS response to each of the 2011 recommendations.

2011 Recommendations and Responses:

- No. 1. The Committee recommends that NASS consider adding a criterion for reducing report frequency rather than report elimination.
 - *NASS thanked the Advisory Committee for recommending reduction rather than elimination of programs. NASS is in strong support of this recommendation and utilized the additional criteria when appropriate to maintain valuable data series by reducing report frequency rather than eliminating entire data series when program reductions are needed due to budget constraints.*
- No. 2. The Advisory Committee recommends NASS aggressively pursue respondent burden reduction and investigate expanded use of previously reported data, where appropriate.
 - *This challenge remains as producer data are constantly changing, so NASS has launched a very aggressive computer-assisted personal interview initiative to help reduce burden issues. NASS is also involved in the development of a USDA-wide system to help standardize nomenclature of certain crops and livestock among agencies to make it easier for respondents to report the data consistently to any USDA agency.*
- No. 3. Glacial Lake Cranberries recommends that NASS consider the nature of the unique cranberry industry, and help them and others whose decisions ultimately affect their livelihood, to have statistics that more accurately reflect the nature of our industry.
 - *This recommendation seeks quarterly prices received and production reports for cranberries. NASS regularly conducts estimation program reviews to determine the relevancy and use of various data series. NASS will further consider this recommendation during its next review of the cranberry estimation program and after the 2012 Census of Agriculture.*
- No. 4. The Advisory Committee recommends that USDA support the reinstatement of the Census of Aquaculture as early as possible.
 - *NASS agrees and is prepared to conduct the Census of Aquaculture in 2014 for the reference year 2013 as funding is available.*
- No. 5. The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS not release Census of Agriculture data to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and that it maintain control of the confidential data collected by the agency.

- *As confidentiality is a bedrock principle in NASS, control of all collected data will remain with NASS, and therefore no record level data will be sent to NARA, regardless of how old these data are. Title 7, U.S. Code, Section 2276, and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act prohibit public disclosure of individual information. Personal information, including reported data, is protected from legal subpoena and Freedom of Information Act requests.*
- No. 6. A motion was put forth to the Committee to have NASS conduct a follow-on census, similar to irrigation or horticulture census, which focuses solely on the unique sovereignty and cultural aspects faced by American Indian and Alaska Native farm and ranch operators on reservations, villages, corporations, pueblos, and nations across the United States. The motion was tabled and referred to a subcommittee that would further develop the concept to present to the Advisory Committee at a later date.
 - *A subcommittee was formed and has had three meetings since its February 2011 formation. The subcommittee chair gave a full report, which is presented in summary form in Section IX of this document.*
- No. 7. NASS should expand its outreach and education efforts to reach all operators, regardless of size or location, by continuing to work with land-grant institutions, and both non-governmental (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs).
 - *NASS field and headquarters staff continue to actively engage CBOs and NGOs where an established partnership exists, as well as to seek new organizations that have a grassroots connection with underserved operators. Land-grant institutions are long-standing partners, and the relationship with them will continue to flourish as all agencies become more resourceful in this more budget-constrained environment. NASS highly values the working relationship it has established with CBOs, NGOs, and land-grant institutions, and will always view these organizations as critical partners in finding and counting all farmers and ranchers.*
- No. 8. The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS pursue measurement of agricultural value added sales.
 - *This sales category is difficult to define and data providers find survey questions on “value added” just as confusing as data handlers. A question has been added to the 2012 Census of Agriculture regarding value added production. NASS will consult with other entities, agencies, universities, and producer groups, and report findings to the Advisory Committee at future meetings.*
- No. 9. The Advisory Committee recommends that USDA and NASS continue to support the recently restored Agriculture Chemical Use survey, which includes fertilizers and pesticides.

- *Currently, NASS continues to support the chemical use program, though the mix of data available has changed since the rotation and frequency of crops in the survey cycle have changed.*
- No. 10. The Advisory Committee supports implementing a program to monitor the loss of land used in agriculture production annually.
 - *Data released from the current NASS census and estimation programs (Farms, Land in Farms, and Livestock Operations) satisfy this recommendation.*
- No. 11. The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS investigate providing the Committee with survey performance metrics that will help the Committee to advise NASS on the efficiency of its services.
 - *NASS compiled many of the metrics suggested by the Advisory Committee for major national surveys and distributed these performance metrics to the Advisory Committee prior to this meeting.*

4. State of NASS

Dr. Cynthia Clark, NASS Administrator, welcomed and thanked everyone for taking time out of their busy schedules to help NASS chart its future. She stressed the importance of the Advisory Committee in this endeavor. Dr. Clark highlighted some of the senior staff changes, as two SES managers retired since the last meeting. She introduced the two new executives.

Dr. Clark mentioned that NASS is the only statistical agency that has a federal and state cooperative data program. It provides consultation services to agencies and organizations on statistics and agricultural matters.

Dr. Clark provided an update on the agency's current budget and the outlook for future budget planning. In June 2011, House and Senate budget marks were issued yielding \$109.6 million for programs and \$40.8 million for the cyclical Census of Agriculture; both were below requested levels. To operate with this budget reduction, NASS had options to: reduce current programs; become more efficient; or reduce the quality of the data –the last of which was not an option consistent with the agency's mission or vision. Management reviewed and prioritized programs, eliminating some and reconfiguring others. In doing so, NASS considered the timing and frequency of surveys, as well as whether commodity estimates are mandatory or discretionary. The Senior Executive Service (SES) members took on the task of putting programs in priority order, and then funding as many programs as possible with the available budget.

NASS submitted a budget plan to the Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA) and the Secretary of Agriculture identifying programs for suspension or reduction. After the plan was announced to the public, it did not take long before there was pushback from constituents. By December 2011, the budget was adjusted, and NASS was directed to “reinstate as many agricultural estimates as possible” with the new budget allotment.

In February 2012, NASS submitted a request to the President's FY 2013 budget for \$179.5 million. This includes \$117 million for the agricultural estimates program and \$62.5 million for the census.

Dr. Clark pointed out that during shrinking budget times non-NASS decisions have agency implications; examples include the elimination of some reimbursable surveys, increased survey administration costs, and declining financial support from state departments of agriculture across the nation. The agency again was forced to make survival decisions. To become more efficient, NASS needed to reduce the cost of collecting and processing data, improve data quality, and provide enhanced career opportunities for employees. Dr. Clark and the NASS Senior Executive Team developed operational efficiency initiatives to make the agency more efficient and effective. These include LAN (local area network) centralization; technology enhancements; computer-assisted personal interviewing; development of a Data Collection, Frames Maintenance and Training Center (now known as the National Operations Center or NOC); and video conferencing.

Dr. Clark reported that the objectives of these efficiencies have largely been met. NASS realized cost savings by reducing training, manual data review, server purchases, and IT staff and eliminating duplicate systems. The efficiencies have also had a positive impact on data quality as more standard processes reduce data variability and digitized data allow for real-time cost monitoring. Some initial investment was required and staff have been impacted in several ways. New jobs requiring new skills were created, and some positions shifted from headquarters to the NOC and field offices. Some support and IT staff positions were eliminated, and additional staff reductions occurred with buyouts to meet budget targets.

Staff and data collection costs are rising faster than budgets. Opportunities to remain efficient in the current budget climate include 1) increasing the specialization of individuals in field offices, which ultimately means reducing staff; and 2) eliminating the need to maintain 46 separate field offices. Regionalizing these offices would be more cost-efficient. Centralizing NASS operations in fewer offices would reduce the number of staff moves by providing more career experience and opportunities in one place such as a regional office.

A long-range planning team recommended a review of the field office structure in October 2010. A second team formed in March 2011 was tasked with finding an effective, efficient approach that would provide continuing service to data users and constituents while maintaining a NASS presence in each state. The group sought input from stakeholders on approaches that would meet the budget constraints, and then recommended a new field structure with nine larger regional offices. Each remaining state would have an office with a director and a staff person to work with enumerators. This proposal has been submitted and is currently under review in expectation of eventual Department-level approval. NASS senior staff are meeting with state agricultural secretaries, directors, and commissioners to listen to their concerns.

Dr. Clark thanked Committee members for their time and re-emphasized that she looks forward to working with the Advisory Committee to improve an already great agency.

Discussion: Advisory Committee members expressed concerns that a reduction in force could be perceived as a reduction in data quality if there is only a presence director and one other staff member in each state; a decrease in staff size may be viewed as a decrease in data quality. NASS staff remarked that regionalization means more staff specialization for crop and livestock estimates. They also noted that under the proposed structure field office directors would spend more time doing outreach and field visits with stakeholders and customers since there would be fewer day-to-day office matters to manage. NASS staff have included state department of agriculture leaders in discussions and addressed their concerns regarding the transition to a regional structure.

5. Welcome from the USDA Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Mission Area

Dr. Ann Bartuska, Deputy Under Secretary for REE, welcomed Committee members back to Washington, D.C., and remarked how much she and the Department appreciate the Committee's input to guiding the statistical program and priorities for NASS, which both directly and indirectly affect all of USDA. Dr. Bartuska provided some information on the REE and USDA organizational structure and then talked briefly about the following REE initiatives:

- **REE Action Plan.** Published in February 2012, the plan reflects input from stakeholders, identifies mission critical core areas to focus mission area efforts, and defines seven goals:
 - Local and Global Food Supply and Security
 - Responding to Climate and Energy Needs
 - Sustainable Use of Natural Resources
 - Nutrition and Childhood Obesity
 - Food Safety
 - Education and Science Literacy
 - Rural Prosperity/Rural-Urban Interdependence
- **Cultural transformation at USDA.** Secretary Vilsack has challenged the Department to undertake a cultural transformation, which ultimately means being more integrated as a Department, capable of working with people from rural areas, big cities, and everywhere in between. REE and NASS have embraced this challenge by making the commitment to remain an inclusive, high-performing organization. The main areas of focus within the cultural transformation initiative are:
 - Leadership
 - Employee Development
 - Talent Management
 - Recruitment and Retention
 - Customer Service and Community Outreach
- **USDA's Streamlining Services Initiative.** This initiative takes a hard look at USDA's infrastructure to examine whether it would be more efficient to centralize some services. Secretary Vilsack released USDA's "Blueprint for Stronger Service," which explains plans to increase USDA's efficiency and effectiveness.

Dr. Bartuska asked members to consider a wide range of topics during the meeting, including:

- **2012 Census of Agriculture.** Data collection plans, outreach efforts, and data products are all areas that require Committee members' input and ideas to make this most comprehensive undertaking inclusive, reflecting every facet of U. S. agriculture. The Census of Agriculture is an important survey to the Department as it identifies small, new and beginning, and minority and socially disadvantaged producers. This process includes these producers in the census and helps further educate them on the many opportunities and programs the Department offers.
- **Census Follow-on Surveys.** Dr. Bartuska is looking forward to the Committee's feedback on their priority for census follow-on surveys.
- **Program Changes.** Budget shifts have caused many discussions and decisions regarding changes to the NASS survey program. Committee members should discuss the updates on significant program changes and provide input and feedback on the following elements:
 - relevant criteria used to make program changes
 - best means to communicate program changes
 - emerging trends or issues that may impact the NASS program
- **NASS Operational Efficiency Updates.** Dr. Clark set forth NASS's implementation of its operational efficiencies. Many are complete and active; the rest will be discussed during the meeting.

Dr. Bartuska congratulated the Advisory Committee on taking part in the NASS Agricultural Statistics Board process for the March 2012 Prospective Plantings report Lockup. The March Agricultural Survey provided the first survey-based estimates of U.S. farmers' planting intentions for 2012 and is an important source of information for producers as they finalize their cropping and marketing plans. Dr. Bartuska noted that Dr. Clark would review recent NASS budget movement and implications for NASS operations. REE and NASS realize that as technology and internal and external customers' needs change, the mission area must adapt as well.

Discussion: Dr. Bartuska fielded questions on REE's preparedness to address future global food and water supplies, given an ever increasing world population. She replied that there is a critical need to assist developing countries in producing and sustaining agriculture for food and fiber, as well as for USDA to commit to global investment in research and development for agricultural production and practices in emerging countries as well as for farmers and ranchers at home and abroad. There was discussion on the practice and need for NASS to collect data for spoilage and loss, as well as methods to help prevent so much loss since this would equate to more food in the supply chain and hence result in more mouths fed. Dr. Bartuska noted that 25 to 30 percent of food wasted or lost in this country is generated in people's homes, and she agreed that REE needs to have more dialogue on the subject. An Advisory Committee member recommended Jonathan Bloom's *American Wasteland* as a good starting point for the dialogue.

The final discussion was on food safety, especially with regard to the disparity between U.S. standards and the often less stringent standards and regulations for imported goods, which in turn creates an inequitable price difference between foreign and domestic products.

6. General Discussion

Dr. Clark fielded several questions and comments regarding NASS current and future budget scenarios. Members expressed concern about an actual or perceived relationship between reduced budgets and reduced response rates. Dr. Clark noted that NASS is pursuing several data collection options and strategies that could prove to be more cost effective and efficient. In the 2007 Census of Agriculture, NASS offered an online response form to collect data; though it was less expensive, the instrument was somewhat underutilized. NASS has also undertaken the computer-assisted personal interview initiative, in which an interviewer visits respondents and records their responses using a portable device. Advisory Committee members asked about use of social media to reach out to producers. Dr. Clark noted that NASS has indeed been working to do more census promotion and become more visible via social media. Barriers with computer-based tools have been identified, however, such as the speed of connections in some areas or the lack of Internet in other areas. Advisory Committee members noted that USDA (especially Rural Utilities under Rural Development) needs to continue to work to provide high-speed Internet to all producers, especially those in rural and remote areas across the country.

Comments regarding the NASS reorganization centered on the effects on morale, productivity, attitudes, and outlook during the transition period. Dr. Clark commented that the Department's Cultural Transformation Initiative laid the groundwork for undertaking, coping with, and managing change. A management consultant was retained to work with management staff to counsel personnel through the "grieving" and "acceptance" stages of transition. Morale has been affected somewhat, as was to be expected; Dr. Clark remarked that she communicates internally and externally disclosing as much as she can during the transition. .

Committee members asked how a tightened budget and regionalized structure would affect NASS's list building efforts in the future. Dr. Clark reassured members that the directors in each state would be tasked with making an even more intensive effort to reach out and contact farmers and ranchers of all sizes across the state, as well as continuing to work with agribusinesses, institutions, and agencies.

The question of value added, and to what extent NASS should in the future incorporate surveys based on added value, received considerable attention. Committee members and staff recognize that the term itself needs to be standardized within NASS before anything else is done, since it means different things to different producers and in relation to different products and processes.

In the context of the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS), NASS collects information for products that fall into two categories: NAICS code 111, which represents raw crop production, and NAICS code 112, which covers animal production. Once a crop commodity becomes a processed food, it is no longer considered a raw food; the commodity to

which value has been added then falls under NAICS code 311—Food Production. It is then no longer a candidate for NASS data collection. Advisory Committee members agreed that work is still needed by both NASS and the Committee to hone in on a definition that will suit the needs of data users while being clear enough and well-defined enough for data providers to supply consistent, standard information across commodities. A poll of NASS customers was suggested to help determine a useful definition of value-added and to determine who the data users truly are and what their data needs are.

Lastly, there was discussion of program changes driven by budget considerations. Members asked whether base funding would help solve the shortfall problems, but Dr. Clark noted that base funding would cause unintended negative consequences by making changes to programs more difficult. Dr. Clark again thanked the Committee for its valuable input and advice that guided NASS through the program changes so far.

7. Status of Programs

Joseph (Joe) Prusacki, Director of the Statistics Division, provided an overview of the NASS program changes in response to tighter budget constraints in order to identify cost savings and forward-thinking business efficiency opportunities. NASS management reviewed all reports and surveys, identified core versus non-core programs, looked at ways to modify the scope of the Census of Agriculture, and added the criterion recommended by the Committee to look at reducing a program's frequency rather than eliminating it.

The review team solicited input from headquarters and field office staff for potential program changes and the associated short- and long-term impact to the NASS budget, long-term data series, and data users. On October 17, 2011, NASS issued a public notice announcing the programs that would be discontinued or reduced.

- Annual Reports on Farm Numbers, Land in Farms, and Livestock Operations – Eliminate
- Catfish and Trout Reports – Eliminate all
- Annual Floriculture Report – Eliminate
- January Sheep and Goat Report - Eliminate
- Chemical Use Reports – Reduce frequency of commodity coverage
- July Cattle Report – Eliminate
- Distiller Co-Products for Feed Survey – Cancel
- Annual Bee and Honey Report – Eliminate
- Annual Hops Production Report – Eliminate
- Monthly Potato Stocks Report – Reduce from monthly to quarterly
- Annual Mink Report – Eliminate
- Fruit and Vegetable In-season Forecasts and Estimates – Reduce from monthly and quarterly to annual report
- Nursery Report – Eliminate
- Rice Stocks June and September reports – Eliminate but continue January, March, and August reports

On November 15, 2011, Congress appropriated \$158.6 million for NASS in FY 2012 and directed NASS to reinstate as many reports as possible. On December 9, 2011, NASS issued a notice announcing reinstatement of the following programs:

- Annual Reports on Farm Numbers, Land in Farms, and Farm Income
- Catfish and Trout Reports (data collection begins Dec. 9; report released Dec. 20)
- Annual Floriculture Report
- January Sheep and Goat Report (data collection begins Dec. 23; report date is Jan. 27)
- July Cattle Report
- Annual Bee and Honey Report (data collection begins Jan. 23; report date is March 30)
- Annual Hops Production Report (data collection begins Dec. 9; report date is Dec. 21)
- Annual Mink Report
- Fruit and Vegetable In-season Forecasts and Estimates
- Rice Stocks June Report

On January 25, 2012, NASS announced the results of a review by NASS senior executives of its in-season fruit and vegetable reporting for the 2012 growing season. There would be no changes to end-of-season estimates for fruits and vegetables, but NASS would make the following changes to its in-season reporting:

- Vegetables – Reduce to one in-season report
- Apple – Forecast in October only (Eliminate preliminary summary and August report)
- Apricot – Forecast in July only (Eliminate June report)
- Cherry Production – Publish in June only (Eliminate forecast in June Crop Production)
- Grape – Forecast in August only (Eliminate July and October reports)
- Peach – Forecast in August only (Eliminate May, June and July reports)
- Pear – Forecast in August only (Eliminate June report)
- Pecan – Forecast in October only (Eliminate December report)
- Banana Revisions in May – Eliminate
- Guavas in May – Eliminate
- Olives in August – Eliminate
- Papaya Revisions in May – Eliminate
- Prune Forecast and Revisions in June – Eliminate
- Prunes and Plums Forecast in August – Eliminate

Apple industry representatives were not happy losing any production forecasts. They sent letters to the Secretary of Agriculture and held a meeting with REE Deputy Under Secretary Ann Bartuska. In March 2012, NASS announced that it will publish an in-season FY 2012 apple forecast as part of the August *Crop Production* report instead of October. Other apple estimates will be published as part of the *Noncitrus Fruit and Nuts Preliminary* (January) and *Final* (July) reports.

Recognizing the importance of NASS's data products and services to U.S. agriculture, NASS remains committed to making similar data available either less frequently or within the every-five-year Census of Agriculture and associated follow-on surveys. The next census will be conducted beginning January 2013 to reflect activities in the 2012 calendar year.

- The quarterly Farm Labor program was slated for elimination, but the Department of Labor intervened and funded data collection for two quarters in 2011. In 2012, NASS will conduct the survey in April and October. The survey will ask producers to provide data for both the current and previous quarters. NASS will continue to publish quarterly data to ensure it is easily comparable to the previously published reports.
- NASS continues to explore the value-added concept. A question on the 2012 Census of Agriculture asks, “At any time during 2012, did this operation produce and sell value added crops, livestock, or products such as beef jerky, fruit jams, jelly, preserves, floral arrangements, cider, wine, etc.?” NASS is working to identify a definition of value added that means the same for all respondents. Research within NASS and within the data user community is required to resolve this issue.
- Changes in the NASS chemical use program in response to budget issues also affect report frequency. NASS formerly published an annual comprehensive report in May titled Agricultural Chemical Usage—Field Crops. The report provided data tables by participating state, describing fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, and other chemical usage for each commodity surveyed. NASS collected chemical use information on a rotational basis, with fruit data collected in odd years, vegetable data collected in even years, and row crop data collected every year using a standard crop rotation. One year the row crops were wheat and soybeans; next year the rotation was corn, cotton, and potatoes; and the following year the crops were wheat and soybeans, etc. NASS also collected data on chemical applications after harvest by contacting storage facilities but the post-harvest program was discontinued in 2011.
- Faced with budget cuts, the NASS chemical use team recommended changing the crop rotations using the current long-range data collection plan with an emphasis on decreasing respondent burden and improving cost effectiveness. As an example of chemical use program changes for 2012, if funding levels had not changed, the commodities surveyed would have included vegetables, corn, cotton, and potatoes. With the funding changes, NASS chemical use commodities surveyed in 2012 will now include only wheat and soybeans. There will not be fruit and vegetable coverage. These decisions were made based on available resources and with consideration for respondent burden since some field crops have a greater number of pesticides applied, or have chemicals applied more frequently, than others. The current rotation provides each commodity with chemical data every other year. The proposed plan reduces the frequency of the data but preserves the data series.

Discussion: Mr. Prusacki reminded Committee members that their input is critical since program reductions and program eliminations will always negatively affect some sector of the agriculture community. NASS programs are subject to budget fluctuations, and NASS is committed to preserving data series even at reduced frequency.

8. Survey Methodology and Quality Measures

As part of the Administration’s initiative for improved transparency in government, federal statistical agencies have been directed to expand documentation of their programs and the quality of their statistics. David Aune, Chief of the Statistical Methods Branch, discussed the measures NASS is taking to meet this directive. In its quality measures project, NASS is

developing a series of methodology descriptions and quality metrics; these products align with NASS publications and will be introduced as reports are released throughout the year. Each set of materials will include a copy of the survey questionnaire(s), descriptions of the surveys used to obtain the data and how the data are summarized and interpreted, and a set of metrics to help data users assess the quality of the estimates. The metrics include, when available, sample size, response rates, percent of the estimate represented by the responding sample, and the coefficient of variation for key data series for the United States and all program states. Available quality measures documents can be found at http://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Methodology_and_Data_Quality/index.asp.

The project to date has been quite successful, but additional improvements are planned. Not all metrics are available for all releases yet, and some releases draw the metrics from multiple surveys. Some system modifications are needed if NASS is to provide all three quality measure components for each release in the future.

Discussion: The Committee was interested in determining whether coefficients of variation are becoming higher as the budget shrinks. Mr. Aune and Mr. Prusacki both pointed out that coefficients of variation are not the sole indicator for an estimate's strength and may be misleading if sample size and other factors are not considered. Mr. Aune noted that improving coefficient of variation requires increasing sample size, but increasing sample size means increasing survey costs, which is not an option in the current budget context. Dr. Clark commented that in many statistical agencies coefficients of variation have always been transparent; like NASS, many statistical agencies are beginning to determine how these metrics can be made more useful to data users.

9. Ethics Training for Advisory Committee Members

Stuart Bender, Director of USDA's Office of Ethics, gave a presentation to Committee members on ethics rules for federal advisory committee members. Members of the Advisory Committee on Agricultural Statistics fall into the category of "representative" (there are no regular government employees or special government employees on the Committee). Representatives are expected to reflect the views of the entity or interest category they were appointed to represent.

10. 2012 Census of Agriculture and ARMS Updates

Renee Picanso, Director of the Census and Survey Division, discussed preparations for the 2012 Census of Agriculture. NASS mailed 1.2 million National Agricultural Classification Survey (NACS) forms in January and February 2012 to screen and identify any potential new agricultural operations in the United States and to gather basic agricultural information about farms in order to obtain the best possible coverage for the 2012 Census of Agriculture. NASS field offices and headquarters continue to build the census mail list using national and state producer lists, farmers' market producer lists, lists of organic producers, and specialty commodity producer lists. The June Area Survey (JAS) will help identify gaps in the census and survey mail list. This year an additional 3,400 segments were added to the JAS sample.

NASS has established the following coverage goals for the Census of Agriculture:

- Coverage of all farms will be at least 75 percent for each state (8 states had less than 75 percent coverage in the 2007 Census).
- Coverage of cattle inventory will be at least 85 percent for each state (7 states had coverage less than 85 percent in 2007).
- Coverage of goat inventory will be at least 88 percent at the U.S. level (coverage in 2007 was 84.6 percent).
- Coverage of total minority-race (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (all regardless of ethnicity)) operated farms will be at least 75 percent at the U.S. level (coverage in 2007 was 72.9 percent)
- Coverage of Spanish-, Hispanic-, or Latino-origin (all regardless of race) operated farms will be at least 65 percent at the U.S. level (coverage in 2007 was 61.0 percent).

NASS enjoys collaborative outreach partnerships with over 50 larger community-based organizations (CBOs), nongovernmental organizations, faith-based organizations, and land-grant institutions that assist NASS with census list building, promotion, and data collection. A third NASS-CBO workshop is planned for late October 2012. Previous CBO workshops were held in November 2007 and April 2009.

NASS has conducted and analyzed results from several census content tests. Findings have helped develop procedures to allow for less hand editing of questionnaires, saving valuable resource time and cost. During summer 2012, NASS staff will finalize the census mailing list. The census print contract has been awarded, and NASS is actually slightly ahead of schedule in this process. In late fall and winter, the census forms will be labeled and prepared for mailing on December 29, 2012.

Ms. Picanso also discussed the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS), which is a collaborative survey effort between NASS and the Economic Research Service (ERS). This three-phase survey has experienced crop rotation program changes (as Mr. Prusacki indicated previously). When ARMS and the census have the same reference years, NASS develops one form that will satisfy the data needs for both surveys in order to reduce respondent burden.

In a comprehensive review of ARMS, the Committee on National Statistics of the National Academies recommended that the NASS Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics expand its scope to include an annual review of ARMS. Members were apprised that ERS and NASS are continuing research on providing authorized researchers secure remote access to the ARMS data using the NORC Data Enclave. ARMS also underwent a financial accounting review. The panel's summary of the review and recommendations is forthcoming. ERS is also maintaining a confidential and secure data query tool that expands access to farm survey data without compromising confidentiality.

Discussion: Ms. Picanso asked Committee members to encourage farmers and ranchers to complete census forms. She also asked for any assistance and ideas on improving response to

the census and all NASS surveys. There was discussion of the costs of various modes of data collection relative to response rate. Mailing a questionnaire and having it mailed back is the least expensive form of data collection, so NASS often conducts more than one mailing and telephone follow-up before resorting to personal data collection measures. NASS and ERS staff also fielded questions about landlords versus operators on an agricultural operation.

Sue DuPont, NASS Public Affairs Section Head, talked about the NASS census public media and relations plans and the issue of creating a consistent NASS “brand” by using a national media firm. The NASS census website (<http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Partners/>) has publicity materials available for organizations and the public to use. In response to a question regarding adding subject matter questions to ARMS, both ERS and NASS personnel stated that suggestions can be made for the 2013 survey cycle.

11. Subcommittee Report—Demographic Census Follow-Ons

Committee member Dr. Lawrence Sanchez, elected subcommittee chair, reported on the meeting minutes from this subcommittee, formed after the February 2011 Advisory Committee meeting. At that meeting, a motion was made to ask NASS to conduct a follow-on census, similar to the irrigation or the horticulture census, that focuses solely on the unique sovereignty and cultural aspects faced by American Indian and Alaska Native farm and ranch operators on reservations, villages, corporations, pueblos, and nations across the United States.

The motion was tabled and referred to a subcommittee to develop the concept. The subcommittee met via teleconference during the year to discuss the intent of the recommendation (shown as 2011 Recommendation No. 6 in section III), develop goals and objectives, and then develop a timeline for activities. The subcommittee identified the target population and the barriers this population faces compared with more traditional farmers and ranchers. Key factors needed to make this recommendation come to fruition were identified: time to develop relationships, build trust, and enhance the concept of two-way communication. These producers are commonly in more remote areas without Internet or still using dial-up technologies, so there is not a one-size-fits-all way to collect data.

Discussion: After much discussion, the Advisory Committee decided that, with the current budget situation, it is not the right time for NASS to take on new follow-on surveys. The Committee tabled Recommendation No. 6 indefinitely to focus instead on enhancing the provisions from 2011 Recommendation No. 7, which reads “NASS should expand its outreach and education efforts to reach all operators, regardless of size or location, by continuing to work with land-grant institutions, and both non-governmental (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs).” The Committee suggested that NASS should train and then use respected local figures in the community to promote the census.

For data collection, NASS must remember that the populations of interest—those who have small and remote operations—all need to be encouraged to fill out census forms, regardless of their value of sales. All agricultural data are important to NASS. Associate Administrator Joe Reilly noted that a farm is defined as an agricultural place with sales or the potential for sales

of \$1,000 annually. The Committee advised NASS to research whether population census data can inform NASS surveys.

12. Nominating Committee

The term of the current chairperson of the Advisory Committee expires in December 2012, and a new chairperson must be elected at this meeting. Four members volunteered to serve on the nominating committee, which met later in the afternoon.

13. Acreage/Crop Reporting Streamlining Initiative Update

Dan Beckler, Information Services Section Head, discussed the interagency initiative called Acreage/Crop Reporting Streamlining Initiative (ACRSI). The initiative began in 2010 and focuses on creating a common, standard framework for commodity reporting. ACRSI will allow producers to report common data once, with the ideal that the Farm Service Agency (FSA), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Risk Management Agency (RMA), and sometimes NASS can share similar data and eliminate duplicate reporting by producers to each of the individual agencies. Once operational, ACRSI will provide producers the option to report directly to a consolidated USDA reporting website instead of going to multiple sites. It will establish common RMA and FSA acreage reporting dates whenever possible. NASS will continue to survey agricultural operations. ACRSI will not replace or lessen the number and types of censuses and surveys NASS conducts. Benefits of ACRSI are that acreage data collected by FSA, RMA, and NRCS will be available to NASS in a more consistent and timely manner. No data collected by NASS will ever be provided to other agencies.

14. Census Follow-on Survey Schedule

Chris Messer, Chief of the Program Administration Branch, discussed the Census of Agriculture follow-on survey program, including aquaculture, farm water resource, horticulture, land tenure, and organic production follow-on surveys. Funding for census follow-on surveys is extremely sensitive to budget fluctuations, and the survey schedule often must be revised in response to budget pressure.

As the agency's largest data collection program, the Census of Agriculture creates efficiencies in data collection that result in cost savings to the agency while meeting the goal of providing continuing quality statistics. Follow-on populations are a subset of the main census population, and are determined by positive responses to criteria questions on the census report form. Examples for such questions for 2012 include questions on agro-forestry, biomass information, local food networks, and energy.

Plans for the 2012 Census of Agriculture began with review of the data items collected on the 2007 census along with supporting justification and suggested changes from census stakeholders. The review also identified data items that would be better obtained through

census follow-on surveys or other non-census NASS surveys. Changes from 2007 for the 2012 census include land use practices, cash rents, and capture of additional county or counties other than the principal county of operation. Improvements include revised land and acreage sections, revised government payments sections, value of sales captured with commodity, and enhanced electronic data reporting. In addition, NASS has developed and tested a customized American Indian report form that will be used in the southwestern states. Planned follow-on surveys include:

- For reference year 2013 to be collected in 2014—
 - Census of Aquaculture
 - Farm Water Resource Survey (Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey redesigned)
 - Option for a third follow-on survey
- For reference year 2014 to be collected in 2015—
 - Organic Production Survey
 - Census of Horticulture
 - Option for a third follow-on survey
- For reference year 2015 to be collected in 2016—
 - Land Tenure Survey (formerly called the Agricultural Enterprise Land Ownership Survey or AELOS)
 - Option for a second follow-on survey.

NASS requested advice from the Committee about prioritizing the potential additional surveys. In 2016, NASS also plans to conduct a content test, a screening survey, and an area frame based coverage survey in support of the 2017 Census of Agriculture.

Discussion: There was considerable discussion on the former AELOS survey, or the newly named Land Tenure Survey. The last time AELOS was conducted was 1999, and ERS published a land-tenure and land-values release based on the data. Because the survey provides such a rich and unique data set, ERS requested that NASS consider conducting this survey earlier in the schedule than planned. ERS would work with NASS to seek funding sources. Several members were in concurrence with this suggestion. Another member suggested efficiencies could be realized if floriculture and horticultural specialty studies were combined into one follow-on survey. Dr. Clark clarified questions about funding requests for follow-on surveys by explaining that NASS prepares a survey schedule and develops a funding request for a five-year period.

15. March Prospective Plantings Report Lockup

The Advisory Committee had the opportunity to attend Lockup for the release of the March Prospective Plantings Report on Friday morning. Hubert Hamer discussed the Agricultural Statistics Board process and the security measures employed during “Lockup.” The term “Lockup” refers to the area where NASS statisticians are literally locked in with armed guards posted outside the locked doors. No one gains admittance to the area without clearance and a special pass. Once inside, no one can exit the wing or use any communication devices until the report is released. Mr. Hamer also discussed why the Board process is used and why the procedures were developed. The Committee sat with Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack as

he was briefed on the results. After the NASS briefing, the Secretary entertained questions from the Committee.

16. National Operations Center

Via video teleconference, Bob Bass, Director of the National Operations Center (NOC), discussed the new center. In order for NASS to achieve operational efficiencies and continue to collect high quality data, the telephone has to be at the center of NASS survey designs. Although NASS has made progress in redistributing telephone data collection to six regional centers, this progress has been limited due to a lack of a comprehensive transition strategy and lack of funds. Likewise, sample frame development and maintenance is integral to data collection activities, as well as training for interviewers contacting the farmers and ranchers across the United States. The impetus for this proposal not only pertained to operational efficiencies but also a number of other factors/potential gains associated with data quality.

The NOC is a centralized operations center for NASS. This center is designed with the assumption that efficiency and standardization are more easily achieved in a centralized structure. All data collected by mail, telephone, online, or personal enumeration will be handled by the operations center. The design, construction, staffing, and operations of the National Operations Center is based on the premise of increased standards, more efficient use of resources, and reduced operating costs. Centralized calling and list frame operations, enhanced interviewer training and evaluation, and more closely monitored data collection will reduce survey errors, improve data quality, and reduce survey costs. Data collection, list frame maintenance, and training conducted at fewer locations by highly trained staff ensuring standardized procedures reduce the source of error inherent to all activities and improve data quality. The opportunity to improve quality while reducing costs rarely presents itself. NASS is seizing this opportunity to continue to meet the expanded data needs for agriculture. In addition, administration of these activities, by fewer staff in a centralized design, will reduce operational cost by reducing staff resources necessary to complete the tasks.

The NOC will include the following:

- Forms processing—receipt, scanning, and data keying
- Call center operations (154 seats)
- Frames maintenance
- Training
- Blaise survey instrument development
- Objective yield measurement laboratory

NASS acquired GSA space in St. Louis, Missouri, for the new National Operations Center. The business plan calls for about 100 full-time NASS staff when the center is fully operational. The call center will be staffed by intermittent staff and will require approximately 400 persons to provide the staff necessary to fully staff calling operations. List sampling frame operations will be relocated from each field office to the centralized approach employed by the NOC. Survey/census instrument design will be relocated from NASS headquarters to St. Louis over a period of time as resources allow. The National Operations Center is planned to be fully staffed and operational by October 1, 2012.

17. Operational Efficiencies Updates

Vera Gleaton, Senior Technical Project Leader, updated the Committee on two operational efficiencies established by the Administrator, Dr. Cynthia Clark. Operational efficiency no. 1 covers centralizing local area network (LAN) services, and operational efficiency no. 2 is called DOGMA, which stands for database-optimized, generalized, modular applications. The efficiencies provide cost savings while improving data quality, leading to greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Operational efficiency no.1 demonstrates efficiency in that servers are administered centrally rather than in 48 different offices, which leads to savings in staff resources and equipment. Staff resources are shared since all data applications can be accessed across the network. Network administration is more standard and security administration more streamlined and more effective. This efficiency is complete, as NASS staff has access “anywhere, anyplace, anytime” through the use of desktop machines, laptops, Smartphones, and thin client machines.

Operational efficiency no. 2 streamlines NASS survey processing activities, which reduces the number of generalized and custom applications and reduces staff resources needed for survey processing. As a result, data analysis and review, standard survey processing across surveys, and improvements to data quality have all been improved. Data metrics are available quickly, and data review at the interview happens immediately.

Discussion: Committee members were interested in whether the efficiencies are generating staff buy-in and ownership of the changes. Ms. Gleaton explained that NASS field staff were given demonstrations in their respective offices and through live meetings to learn how the consolidated systems work. As the changes occurred in each office, the benefits became obvious as well. Resources, equipment, and energy cost savings were realized immediately. As staff positions were consolidated with some of these efficiency initiatives, NASS was also able to offer buyouts for those able to take advantage of the buyout and retire.

Operational efficiency no. 1 enables NASS to move work to regional offices as well as to redistribute work among regional offices if necessary. Committee members were interested to learn more about the consolidated servers and application portfolios. The regional offices will use 90 percent of capacity where field offices each used only about 20 percent, resulting in significant energy and resource savings.

Committee members expressed concern that NASS’s proposed regional structure would negatively impact the reimbursable survey collaboration arrangement currently in effect with many field offices and universities. NASS staff assured the members that the state and regional directors would continue to work in close alliance with colleges and universities. Also, with the consolidation and standardization initiatives, questionnaires will now be more consistent and standard across states, which will help minimize costs because one central and standard editing and publication tool can be developed.

18. Computer-assisted Personal Interviewing Update

Dave Kleweno, Survey Development Support Branch Chief, updated the Committee on computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). NASS is currently training enumerators across the country to use iPads for safe transmission of respondents' data. Data collected in areas with limited or no signal can also be securely held on the iPads until there is an available WiFi network to transmit the data. The iPads are currently used to collect a barrage of NASS surveys in many NASS field offices, with plans to increase the number of surveys collected this way in the future. The CAPI development team interacts with most survey methodology and survey administration branches during each CAPI survey.

Discussion: Committee members inquired about computer security. NASS staff responded that in-house experts as well as contractors constantly monitor NASS's security systems. Members were interested in hearing more about how the NASS reorganization will affect the cooperative agreement and reporting hierarchy between the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) enumerators and NASS. The current proposed reorganization calls for a NASDA coordinator to remain in each state office. Members also raised questions regarding staffing and succession planning for current and future employees. Since NASS field staff has traditionally been very active recruiters; since each state office will continue to have a presence, there should be minimal interruptions to internships and recruitment of new hires.

19. Public Comment Period

Eliav Bitane from the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) requested that the Committee consider advising NASS on collecting more data on cover crops, specifically in the ARMS survey instrument. According to Mr. Bitane, in recent years, farmers appear to be increasing their use of cover crops, which provide significant benefit for agriculture and the environment. Cover crops build soil, provide extra forage, remove carbon dioxide, reduce flooding by storing water, and reduce fertilizer runoff, among other benefits. They have been used for centuries by many societies, and U.S. farmers are rediscovering a wide variety of such crops, but there are no available comprehensive data about who plants cover crops, what species they plant, or how many acres they plant. NWF appreciates that the 2012 Census of Agriculture includes a question about cover crops, but more information is needed.

20. Election of Advisory Committee Chairperson

As Chairperson, Doris Mold asked each of the nominees seeking the office of Committee chair to give a few remarks before the election was held. Members were then asked to write on a ballot the name of the person they wished to vote into office as chair. The nomination committee counted the votes twice and informed two of the candidates that there was a tie and a runoff would be necessary. Members were again asked to cast a second ballot, choosing between the two members who had an equal number of votes after the first election. The nomination subcommittee informed Mr. Doug Huebsch that he had received the most votes from his fellow Committee members. Mr. Huebsch accepted the position as newly elected Chairperson of the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics. His duties will begin in December 2012, when the current chair, Doris Mold, leaves office.

21. Committee Requested Topics and Recommendations

Doris Mold asked for input, views, and general observations from each Committee member. In summation, there were expressions of appreciation for the meeting, the extensive information conveyed, and the opportunity to participate in Lockup and see Secretary Vilsack. Committee members discussed the possibility of scheduling conference calls between annual meetings to engage with NASS more often and better deal with the volume of business at hand. They praised NASS's handling of the meeting as well as the many organizational changes it is making. They also commended the Department for supporting the organizational changes and operational efficiencies NASS is pursuing. Some commented on the continuing challenge of getting producers to participate in surveys and the census and finding ways to close the loop, improve response rates, and get value back to participants. Members praised Dr. Clark for her leadership and foresight in modernizing and streamlining the agency. Ex officio members offered the advice that NASS should remain transparent about the creation and staffing of the regional offices to prevent low employee morale, and that NASS should continually work on participant response issues. Suggestion was made to repackage survey results in ways organizations can use for their constituents.

Following this open-ended discussion, the Committee took up its discussion of recommendations (detailed below).

22. Closing Remarks

After the Committee discussed and passed eleven recommendations, Hubert Hamer announced that the next meeting is tentatively scheduled for March 2013, and it would most likely be held at the NASS National Operations Center in St. Louis, Missouri. Doris Mold, as Committee Chairperson, called the meeting officially adjourned at 3:30 p.m. on Friday, March 30, 2012.

II. 2012 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation No. 1. The Advisory Committee commends USDA for accepting or acting on last year's recommendations and discussions.

Background: At the 2011 meeting, the Advisory Committee made eleven recommendations to NASS. Each recommendation was reviewed and a response was submitted to Committee members.

NASS Response: The agency considered each recommendation carefully, acted upon it as it deemed appropriate, and provided a careful accounting of follow-up.

Recommendation No. 2. The Advisory Committee recommends putting the 2011 recommendation no. 6 on the backburner for now and expanding the 2011 recommendation no. 7 in an attempt to increase participation by all minorities in NASS surveys, the Census of Agriculture, and all USDA programs. NASS should explore and pursue any new, innovative, and effective ways to reach these farmers, ranchers, and producers. Possible avenues to reach more small, beginning, and underserved farmers and ranchers includes outreach to community leaders, tribal governments, Department of Interior’s Bureau of Indian Affairs, all land grant universities including tribal colleges, all USDA agencies, radio and television spots, community functions, Hispanic-serving institutions, and other minority entities throughout the United States.

Background: Of the recommendations the Advisory Committee considered at its 2011 meeting, no. 6 was that NASS conduct a follow-on census that “focuses solely on the unique sovereignty and cultural aspects faced by American Indian and Alaska Native farm and ranch operators on reservations, villages, corporations, pueblos, and nations across the United States.” Recommendation no. 7 from 2011 was that NASS “expand its outreach and education efforts to reach all operators, regardless of size or location” to better count small, new, and minority-operated farms and ranches. Recommendation no. 7 passed in 2011, but no. 6 was tabled and referred to a subcommittee to develop the concept further. This subcommittee met and attempted to develop goals, objectives, and a timeline. The subcommittee also identified physical and cultural barriers to reaching the population of interest.

NASS Response: NASS will continue to work with all media outlets to contact hard-to-reach farming and ranching population. NASS plans to conduct the third joint NASS and community-based organization (CBO) partnering workshop in early fiscal 2013. Representatives from close to 60 CBOs and nongovernmental organizations will work with NASS to develop plans for list building and promotion of the 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Recommendation No. 3. The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS perform a Land Tenure survey as early as possible but no later than 2015. This should be the highest priority “optional” follow-on.

Background: The Advisory Committee further suggested that NASS consider a follow-on in 2014 that incorporates land tenure, land use, and farm transition plans in 2014.

NASS Response: NASS is considering conducting a Land Tenure Survey and has included it in the “suite” of follow-on surveys to the 2012 Census of Agriculture. If appropriate funding is available, NASS will have this as a high priority because of the time it takes to prepare and conduct the survey. Prior to the suspension of the last land tenure survey, NASS had begun preparatory activities and identified some key modifications to the program. The timing of this particular survey is a key element to its success. A survey of land tenure arrangements comes at a significant cost and requires a tremendous amount of human capital. NASS will weigh these challenges along with other census follow-on requests when deciding the reference period for a special study.

Recommendation No. 4. The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS continue to support the Census of Aquaculture as the next follow-on survey to the Census of Agriculture to be conducted in 2014 for the reference year 2013 and to continue the catfish and trout reports.

Background: The Census of Aquaculture was scheduled to be conducted in 2011 for the reference year 2010. The previous Census of Aquaculture was conducted in 2005 and contains data that are now seven years out of date. These data support government payments and programs in USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Agricultural Research Service, Foreign Agricultural Service (Trade Adjustment Assistance), and Risk Management Agency; as well as in the Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture, the National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and others.

NASS Response: NASS will put forward the Census of Aquaculture as a planned follow-on in the FY 2014 agency request for budget appropriations. NASS is currently in the preliminary planning phases of conducting a Census of Aquaculture with a tentative mail-out scheduled for December 2013. The budget will ultimately guide the decision to conduct this follow-on. Key administrative and analytical staff has been committed, with list building and organizing documentation for Office of Management and Budget approval already under way.

Recommendation No. 5. The Advisory Committee commends NASS on its significant improvements in efficiency and the use of technology. We recognize that recent budgetary issues have posed significant challenges, but commend the agency for continuing to focus on productive change and encourage it to continue to focus on ways to maintain and improve morale in these tough times.

Background: NASS has faced significant budget challenges in recent years. In particular, the Agricultural Estimates Program has experienced reduced funding, forcing NASS to make some difficult choices. NASS has embarked on a number of efficiencies that have saved money and prevented further program cuts and eliminations. NASS has centralized its computer servers, which has streamlined hardware and software maintenance and access. NASS has installed video teleconferencing equipment in every field office and in multiple locations in headquarters, reducing the need for national workshops and travel. NASS has embarked on a computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI) initiative that will significantly reduce the cost of printing and mailing questionnaires. In 2010, a National Operations Center (NOC) was opened in St. Louis, Missouri to centralize data collection and frames maintenance and to standardize survey processing. Research initiatives are also underway to improve quality checks of reported data and to streamline estimation processes.

NASS Response: NASS will continue to pursue efficient ways to fulfill its agency mission and to maintain as many programs and products as possible. NASS currently has a proposal to regionalize its field office structure. This proposal will equate to long-term savings, increasing the chance of maintaining important farm programs. NASS is proposing this plan without any additional request for appropriations. If approved, the proposal will

standardize data processing, improve the accuracy and reliability of estimates, and offer employees the chance for career advancement with fewer relocations.

Recommendation No. 6. The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS add a new question to the Agricultural Resource Management Survey, “If you have planted cover crops this year, please indicate the number of acres by species.”

Species of Cover Crop	Acres Planted

Background: Cover crops provide significant benefit for agriculture and the environment; they build soil, provide extra forage, remove carbon dioxide, reduce flooding by storing water, and reduce fertilizer runoff, among other benefits. They have been used for centuries by many societies, and U.S. farmers are rediscovering a wide variety of such crops, but there are no available comprehensive data about who plants cover crops, what species they plant, or how many acres they plant. The 2012 Census of Agriculture has a question about cover crops, but more information may be needed.

NASS Response: After meeting with National Wildlife Federation (requestor of cover crop data), it was determined that the best most complete instrument for obtaining this information is the Census of Agriculture. Both parties agreed to wait until after the 2012 Census of Agriculture results are published to determine whether more information will be needed. If so, ARMS will be considered as an option.

Recommendation No. 7. The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS discuss with the Department of Labor expanding the existing Farm Labor Survey to include a breakdown of all farm employees, both U. S. citizens and non-U. S. citizens, to better understand labor challenges in 2012 and beyond. The Committee recommends stressing confidentiality with regard to such questions.

Background: There is interest in knowing more about who actually works on farms than the Farm Labor Survey currently provides with respect to immigrant and seasonal labor. Yet it is difficult to ask this kind of question or to repeat the confidentiality pledge on a particular question since all answers to all questions are equally and fully confidential. To find a way to get more such information while working within important privacy and confidentiality principles, the Committee recommended NASS initiate a discussion with the Department of Labor.

NASS Response: The current memorandum of understanding (MOU) between NASS and the Department of Labor is exclusively for the needs of the Department of Labor-Employment Training Administration (DOL-ETA). In late summer 2012, when discussions begin for the new MOU, NASS will ask the DOL-ETA to consider this request.

Recommendation No. 8. The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS include a brief

statement on future censuses and surveys explaining the purpose of the Census of Agriculture and other surveys. It could be above the “Thank you for your cooperation” statement. Possible emphasis could be on the fact that these surveys determine payments to producers for crop and pasture insurance, equipment, disaster payments, and other county payments and practices.

Background: Achieving adequate responses to surveys and the census is always a primary objective for NASS. Declining response rates has led to increased research regarding messaging in correspondence letters and marketing materials. An influential factor may be providing the respondent a clear understanding of the purpose of the survey or census of agriculture. Among the messages that have been explored is itemizing uses for the data collected. NASS has chosen to supply specific uses to targeted audiences and to be comprehensive in larger documents such as the NASS-CBO Partnership Handbook, which gives more specific uses of the data collected.

NASS Response: During the 2010 census content test, NASS researched various messages to determine whether a particular theme would elicit more responses. It was determined that the most effective message was that responding would prevent “continued follow-up contacts by phone or in person.” If the objective of the Advisory Committee’s recommendation is to increase response rates, research and experience have shown this approach not to be effective. Space is at a premium on the census questionnaire, which makes it hard to justify additional verbiage regarding potential benefits from reporting. NASS methodologists and Public Affairs staff will continue to develop survey-specific communication plans that include the purpose of the survey as well as attempts to answer “What’s in it for me?” questions.

Recommendation No. 9. The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS develop an agritourism/local foods follow-on and set it as a priority among any optional follow-on surveys.

Background: As a means to remain relevant and respond to emerging trends in agriculture, NASS utilizes the Census of Agriculture to identify subpopulations for potential special studies or follow-on surveys. NASS has reached out to many groups, including the Advisory Committee, for stakeholder feedback regarding which follow-on surveys may provide the most benefit to the agricultural community. Agritourism has come up before as a means for farms, especially small farms, to remain sustainable. Agritourism can be linked to local foods since communities of small farms can work together to support one another through their “specialty” or niche consumer. Information on agritourism would help determine some of the social and economic characteristics of local foods and information on local foods would help determine geographical, social, and economic divides.

NASS Response: As part of the “suite” of subsequent follow-ons to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, NASS will propose a data collection effort aimed at addressing the impact of regional food systems. Content was added to the 2012 census that will provide NASS a complete population for which to conduct a special study. NASS staff has participated actively in Deputy Secretary Merrigan’s “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food”

initiative. Meeting with this group has shed light on the need for more data for informed policy decisions. NASS will continue to reach out to this group and others to capture data needs. The budget will ultimately determine the ability to fulfill the Advisory Committee's recommendation. If the proposal for this new special study is adopted, NASS has the means to identify the subpopulation to include content related to agritourism.

Recommendation No. 10. The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS merge the nursery and floriculture reports with the horticulture follow-on census if they face future elimination.

Background: The public sector currently is dealing with shrinking federal budgets. The elimination of a data series is a serious but often necessary consideration when faced with severe budget constraints. Based on the need to preserve the major economic indicators, NASS must regrettably consider additional programs to reduce or eliminate to make up for a budget shortfall. NASS has been creative about looking for opportunities to combine data collection activities but remains cognizant of increased respondent burden. Proper determination of the survey content is necessary to reduce the average time needed to collect information as well as insure that the survey instrument has been properly tested.

NASS Response: NASS successfully integrated the annual 2009 Commercial Floriculture Survey and the tri-annual 2009 Nursery and Christmas Tree Production Survey with the 2009 Census of Horticultural Specialties. During the difficult budget times of FY 2011, NASS identified the consolidation of the Floriculture and Nursery program into the Census of Horticulture as a way to cut costs while maintaining the availability of data for this important industry. Additional planning would be required to facilitate the integration of these programs but the foundation for doing so has been laid.

Recommendation No. 11. The Advisory Committee recommends that NASS begin to investigate ways/methods to help “close the loop” with producers to help incentivize producers and give them reasons to provide data to NASS (such as providing producers with localized data, or other useful data) to maintain/improve response rates.

Background: In the face of declining producer response rates, it is important to look at all aspects of the survey process to find ways to give producers motivation to participate in new surveys. This includes providing them with information and data from earlier surveys showing how the questions relate to their interests. It also includes giving them information about the survey findings when they are released and making the connection that NASS has this valuable data because of their input and others like them.

NASS Response re: Census: For the 2007 Census of Agriculture, NASS generated new reports to address special requests such as the Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Profiles, the topic-specific Fact Sheets, and the following custom products:

- Years on Present Farm of Principal Operator: 2007
- Data Comparison: Major Crops
- Operators by Demographic Groupings

- Median Farm Size: 2007 and 2002

NASS will evaluate the reports and products for the 2012 Census of Agriculture and determine whether new reports are warranted. Data providers and data users can always request a special tabulation of the census of agriculture data or review the bibliography of historic requests to meet more unique data needs.

NASS Response re: Surveys: Survey administration teams review the report(s) produced from all surveys and evaluate new reports or tables in the reports.

NASS General Response to Census Recommendations: As NASS goes forward with its FY 2014 agency request, we will propose a change from cyclical funding to flat-line budget appropriations between production years of the Census of Agriculture. If approved, out-year planning will be determined by the level of flat appropriations. Major census-related activities have been identified for fiscal years 2014 through 2017. These activities include follow-ons but give priority to the necessary tasks associated with building toward a successful 2017 Census of Agriculture. An estimated cost for each follow-on survey and the availability of other resources will guide NASS in determining the timing of a particular special study. The Advisory Committee's recommendations reference four specific census follow-ons. Each of these has been identified by NASS as projects to be conducted if sufficient budget funding is secured.

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



March 29-30, 2012
L'Enfant Plaza Hotel
Washington, DC 20024



THURSDAY, March 29, 2012

T i m e	Topic/Activity	Discussion Leader
8:00 am	Call to Order and Introductions	Doris Mold, Committee Chair
8:20 am	Meeting Overview and ACAS Committee Overview	Doris Mold and Hubert Hamer, Chairperson, Agricultural Statistics Board
8:40 am	2011 Recommendations Review and Report, Discussion	Hubert Hamer
9:10 am	<i>State of NASS</i> Address	Dr. Cynthia Clark, NASS Administrator
9:40 am	Research, Education, and Economics Mission Area Remarks	Dr. Ann Bartuska, Deputy Under Secretary, Research, Education, and Economics
10:00 am	Break	
10:15 am	Discussion	Doris Mold
10:45 am	Status of Programs	Joe Prusacki, Director, Statistics Division
11:15 am	Discussion	Doris Mold
11:45 am	Survey Methodology and Quality Measures	David Aune, Chief, Statistical Methods Branch
12:15 pm	Working Lunch - Ethics Training for Advisory Committee Members	Stuart Bender, Director, USDA Office of Ethics
1:15 pm	2012 Census of Agriculture and Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS) Update	Renee Picanso, Director, Census and Survey Division
2:00 pm	Discussion	Doris Mold
2:30 pm	Report - Subcommittee From Recommendation #6 - Demographic Census Follow-ons	Lawrence Sanchez and Subcommittee
3:00 pm	Discussion	Doris Mold
3:30 pm	Break	
3:45 pm	Acreage Crop Reporting and Streamlining Initiative (ACRSI)	Dan Beckler, Head, Information Services Section
4:15 pm	Census Follow-on Survey Schedule	Chris Messer, Chief, Program Administration Branch
5:00 pm	Discussion	Doris Mold
5:30 pm	Wrap Up	Hubert Hamer
5:30 pm	Evening Networking Event	

FRIDAY, March 30, 2012

6:45 am	Meet in L'Enfant Hotel Lobby and Leave for Lock-up in the USDA South Building	
7:00 am	March Prospective Plantings Lockup in South Building	Hubert Hamer
9:30 am	National Operations Center Update via Video Teleconference	Robert Bass, Director, National Operations Center
10:00 am	Return to L'Enfant Hotel via Metro, Cab, or on Foot	
10:30 am	Break	
10:45 am	Discussion - Operational Efficiency #1 and #2 - Centralizing LAN Services and Database-Optimized/Generalized Applications	Vera Gleaton, Senior Technical Project Leader
11:15 am	Computer-assisted Personal Interviewing Demonstration	David Kleweno, Chief, Survey Development Support Branch
11:45 am	Working Lunch Informal Discussion - Recommendations	Doris Mold
1:00pm	Public Comments	Doris Mold and Hubert Hamer
1:30pm	Discussion	Doris Mold
1:45pm	Committee Requested Topics and Recommendations	Doris Mold and Hubert Hamer
3:00 pm	Present Recommendations	Doris Mold
3:30 pm	Wrap Up	Hubert Hamer