

ATTACHMENT D

**DRAFT NATIONAL SURVEY OF BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS
SURVEY LETTERS
FOR MAIL ONLY GROUP 1**

[Pre-notification Letter signed by Undersecretary Catherine Woteki, Mail Survey Version]

Sometime in the next few weeks you will receive a questionnaire sent from Washington State University on our behalf. The reason for the mailing is to secure your participation in an important national study of businesses. Although completing the survey is voluntary, your participation is critically important for understanding the challenges that businesses currently face.

The questionnaire will ask about issues related to the competitiveness of your business such as access to capital, technology use, the competitive environment, and the quality of the workforce. All of the questions can be answered with working knowledge of your business with no need to access business records. The survey can be completed in less than 30 minutes. We want to take as little of your time as possible, while still developing a good understanding of your needs and concerns.

There are three ways your business may benefit from participating in the survey. First, answering questions on a variety of competitiveness issues may stimulate new ideas for improving your business. Second, a summary report will be sent to all participants after the study is completed, providing a benchmark of what other businesses in your industry, region and size class are doing. Finally, a better understanding of the challenges businesses face will help local, state and Federal governments foster an environment where resilient businesses can thrive.

If you have any questions feel free to contact Tim Wojan, the principal investigator for this study. He can be reached at (202)694-5419 or via email [twojan@ers.usda.gov] at USDA's Economic Research Service.

Thank you in advance for your help. We appreciate it very much.

Sincerely,

CATHERINE E. WOTEKI Ph.D.,
R.D.
Under Secretary
Research, Education and Economics

Confidentiality: All information that is provided by participants in the National Survey of Business Competitiveness will only be used for statistical research purposes and reported in summary form. Your name and that of the business you represent will not be connected to your answers in any way. In accordance with the Confidential Information Protection provisions of Title V, Subtitle A, Public Law 107-347 and other applicable Federal laws, individual responses will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed in identifiable form to anyone outside of the research team. By law, every ERS and SESRC employee is subject to a jail term of up to 5 years, a fine of up to \$250,000 or both if he/she discloses any identifiable information about research participants.

Why is this survey important? How does it benefit businesses? Most public resources do not have a market price that conveys scarcity and value. The best way to understand the challenges that businesses currently face is to ask them. The survey results will help identify ways that Federal, state and local governments can best use public resources to increase the competitiveness of businesses like yours.

Who is doing the survey? This survey is being conducted by the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center at Washington State University for the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. ERS has a mandate for studying conditions and trends in Rural America and this survey will provide information on the competitiveness of nonfarm businesses that is not available from any other source. Responses from urban and rural businesses are equally important as information from this survey pertaining to all businesses will be used by Federal, state and local governments.

Who is asked to participate? Over 30,000 businesses in both urban and rural areas of the U.S are being contacted to participate in this survey, and you are one of them. Businesses with five or more employees in tradable sectors such as manufacturing, professional services, finance, wholesale trade, transportation, mining, the arts, and headquarters establishments in all sectors are the population of interest. Scientific methods are being used so that the businesses surveyed represent this population. It is important for you to know that this business was randomly selected to participate in the survey.

What kinds of questions will be asked? The questionnaire will ask about issues related to the competitiveness of your business such as access to capital, technology use, the competitive environment, and the quality of the workforce. All of the questions can be answered with working knowledge of your business with no need to access business records. The survey can be completed in less than 30 minutes.

[Group 1 Mail Only Prior Letter]

Date
Name
Job title
Address
City, State Zip

Dear <Fname>,

Thank you to your business for talking with us last week. We are now contacting you to let you know that the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture has asked us to contact your business for an important national study of businesses. *In about a week you will receive a questionnaire—with the title “National Survey of Business Competitiveness”—asking about the challenges firms like yours are facing in today’s tough economy.* It is very important to learn how businesses stay effective and what types of things can help businesses meet new needs that arise.

We are writing in advance because we have found that many people prefer to be notified that they have been selected to participate in a survey.

Business operators in America will face many new challenges in 2013 than in past years as changes in technology, the economy and availability of resources occur. Staying informed about how these changes impact businesses, like your own, can often be difficult.

The Department of Agriculture provides many programs aimed at helping all types of businesses throughout the country but they would like to do more. We hope this study helps government understand how it can be helpful. It is critical to understand the linkages of what keeps businesses vital and thriving and the availability of resources. We hope you will take the time to complete the questionnaire when it arrives. Gaining a full understanding of the situation U.S. firms are facing in today’s economy depends upon you and others like yourself. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and your name will not be connected to your answers in any way.

If you have any questions about this effort, or would prefer to participate by telephone, please feel free to contact us at 1-800-833-0867 or sesrcweb4@wsu.edu.

Thank you in advance for your help. We appreciate it very much.

Sincerely,

Danna L. Moore
Interim Director, SESRC

[Group 1 Mail Only First Cover Letter]

Date

Name

Job title

Address

City, State Zip

Dear <Fname>,

Every business needs workers and resources. Growth, productivity and job creation in our economy requires investment in the nation's assets that support businesses like yours. I am writing to ask for your help in improving our understanding of businesses and the linkages of what keeps businesses vital and thriving with available resources.

Your business is one of only a small number randomly selected to help in this study. We would greatly appreciate it if you or someone else who is knowledgeable about this business to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to us in the postage paid envelope provided.

Your responses are voluntary and will be kept confidential. Only grouped results will be shared in reports. If you have any questions or prefer to participate by telephone, please contact Danna Moore at 1-800-833-0867 or at sesrcweb4@wsu.edu and ask for the National Survey of Business Competitiveness.

The USDA seeks to offer programs to help businesses. The results of this survey will help the USDA learn about the challenges you face and what is needed for businesses to stay effective.

Thank you in advance for your help. We appreciate it very much.

Sincerely,

Danna L. Moore
Interim Director, SESRC

[Group 1 Mail Only Second Cover Letter]

Date

Name

Job title

Address

City, State Zip

Dear <Fname>,

A month ago we sent you a letter asking for your help with the 2013 National Survey of Business Competitiveness. We are writing to you again because our ability to accurately describe challenges firms across the nation are facing and what firms are doing to stay resilient in the present competitive environment depends on hearing from everyone in the project. Our past experience suggests those who have not yet responded may have a different point of view from early respondents. We need your help to ensure the results are as precise as possible.

The reason for the contacts was to ask for your participation in an important national study of businesses being sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. We have attached a copy of a letter describing the study from Catherine Woteki, Under Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The original was mailed to you in the past month.

Please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to us in the postage paid envelope provided at your earliest convenience.

If you have any questions about this effort, or would prefer to participate by telephone, please feel free to call me at 1-800-833-0867 or sesrcweb4@wsu.edu and mention the National Survey of Business Competitiveness.

Thank you in advance for your help. We appreciate it very much. A small token of appreciation is enclosed with this letter as a way of saying thank you.

Sincerely,

Danna Moore
Interim Director, SESRC

[Group 1 Mail Only Postcard Reminder]

Dear «FNAME»,

We are writing to follow up on the letter we sent a while ago asking you to participate in the 2013 National Survey of Business Competitiveness. If you have already completed the survey, we would like to thank you very much. If you have not answered the questionnaire yet, we hope you will do so soon.

We also wanted to let you know that if you are interested in seeing a summary of results, we hope to have them posted on the SESRC website www.sesrc.wsu.edu in May, 2014.

Sincerely,

Danna L. Moore, Interim Director
Social and Economic Sciences Research Center
Washington State University

[Group 1 Mail Only Refusal Letter]

Date

Name

Job title

Address

City, State Zip

Dear <Fname>,

We are contacting you to ask for your participation in an important national study of business competitiveness being sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. To provide programs to help businesses be more successful and competitive we want to know what problems you experience in your industry and in your region. Our goal is to develop programs targeted to overcoming barriers and to foster innovation. I have attached a copy of a letter describing the study from Dr. Catherine Woteki, Under Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The original was mailed to you in the past month.

We have taken the liberty of putting the paper questionnaire into an internet version with the hope that this might be more convenient and easier for you to answer for this business. If you prefer to answer over the Internet, type the web address below into your Internet browser and then enter your access code.

<http://opinion.wsu.edu/business/>

Access Code: <<**RESPID**>>

I hope that you will take the time to complete the questionnaire. The internet questionnaire takes about less than 30 minutes to complete. Gaining a full understanding of the challenges firms across the nation are facing in the global economy depends upon you and others like yourself who have not yet responded. Our past experience suggests those who have not yet responded may have a different point of view from early respondents.

Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and your name will not be connected to your answers in any way. The identification number on the back of the survey will only be used to remove your name from the mailing list when your questionnaire is returned.

If you have any questions about this effort, or prefer to answer by telephone, please feel free to call me at 1-800-833-0867 and mention the National Survey of Business Competitiveness.

Thank you in advance for your help. We appreciate it very much.

Sincerely,

Danna Moore, PhD.
Interim Director, SESRC