

ATTACHMENT D

**DRAFT NATIONAL SURVEY OF BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS SURVEY
LETTERS
MAIN STUDY**

[Letter of Introduction signed by Administrator Mary Bohman]

Dear Business Owner or Manager,

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 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 would complete the questionnaire. 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,

Mary E. Bohman, Ph.D.
Administrator

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 60,000 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.

[Advance Letter]

April xx, 2014

«CONTACT»

«BNAME»

«ADDR1» «UNIT»

«CITY» «STATE» «ZIP»«dash»«ZIP4»

Dear «CONTACT»:

We are writing to let you know that the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture has asked us to contact you for an important national study of businesses. *The goal of this study is to increase our knowledge on how businesses stay effective and what types of things can help businesses meet new needs that arise.*

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.

To complete the survey, type this web page address in your Internet browser's address bar (**not** the Google or Yahoo search bar), and then type in the following access code:

<http://opinion.wsu.edu/business2014/>

Access Code: «RESPID»

We hope you will take the time to complete this important survey. 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 sesrcweb7@wsu.edu.

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 L. Moore Ph.D.
Principal Investigator

[1st Cover Letter]

May xx, 2014

«CONTACT»

«TITLE»

«BNAME»

«ADDR1» «UNIT»

«CITY» «STATE» «ZIP»«dash»«ZIP4»

Dear «CONTACT»:

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. The questionnaire can be completed either by mail or over the Internet.

If you prefer to complete the survey on paper, please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to us in the postage paid envelope provided.

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/business2014/>

Access Code: «RESPID»

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 sesrcweb7@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. A small token of appreciation is enclosed with this letter as a way of saying thank you.

Sincerely,



Danna L. Moore
Principal Investigator, SESRC

[Postcard Reminder]

Dear «CONTACT»,

We are writing to follow up on the letter we sent a while ago asking you to participate in the 2014 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.

If you prefer to respond online, the website and your personal access code are included below to provide easy access to the survey website. As we mentioned in previous letters, you can respond by mail if you prefer to complete the paper questionnaire. The questions are the same in both formats.

<http://opinion.wsu.edu/business2014/> Access Code: «**RESPID**»

We plan to have a summary of the results posted on the SESRC website www.sesrc.wsu.edu in December, 2014.

Sincerely,

Danna L. Moore, Principal Investigator
Social and Economic Sciences Research Center
Washington State University

[2nd Cover Letter]

May xx, 2014

«CONTACT»

«TITLE»

«BNAME»

«ADDR1» «UNIT»

«CITY» «STATE» «ZIP»«dash»«ZIP4»

Dear «CONTACT»,

Three weeks ago we sent you a letter asking for your help with the 2014 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 Mary E. Bohman, Administrator of U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service. The original was mailed to you in the past month.

The questionnaire can be completed either by mail or over the Internet. The choice is up to you. A business return envelope is enclosed if you prefer to fill out the paper questionnaire. If you would rather answer over the Internet, type the web address below into your Internet browser and then enter your access code.

<http://opinion.wsu.edu/business2014/>

Access Code: «RESPID»

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 sesrcweb7@wsu.edu and mention the National Survey of Business Competitiveness.

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

Sincerely,



Danna L. Moore
Principal Investigator, SESRC

[Email Reminder]

July xx, 2014

«CONTACT»

«TITLE»

«BNAME»

«ADDR1» «UNIT»

«CITY» «STATE» «ZIP»«dash»«ZIP4»

Dear «CONTACT»:

Recently we sent you a letter asking you to complete a survey about challenges firms like yours are facing in today's tough economy. If you have already completed this survey, we would like to thank you very much. We truly appreciate your help. If you have not answered the questionnaire yet, we hope you will do so soon.

We are surveying a wide variety of businesses across the nation. We hope this study helps government understand the critical linkages of what keeps businesses vital and thriving and the availability of resources. The only way we have of understanding businesses is to ask directly.

To complete the survey, type this web page address in your Internet browser's address bar (**not** the Google or Yahoo search bar), and then type in the following access code:

<http://opinion.wsu.edu/business2014/>

Access Code: «**RESPID**»

The 2014 National Survey of Business Competiveness is important; we are surveying a wide variety of businesses across the nation and your input will help ensure that businesses like yours are accurately represented in the study.

If you have questions or comments, please contact me, Danna Moore, the Principal Investigator, at 1-800-833-0867 or sesrcweb7@wsu.edu. Thank you for your help. We appreciate it very much.

Sincerely,



Danna L. Moore,
Principal Investigator, SESRC

[Refusal Short Form Letter]

August xx, 2014

«CONTACT»

«TITLE»

«BNAME»

«ADDR1» «UNIT»

«CITY» «STATE» «ZIP»«dash»«ZIP4»

Dear «CONTACT»:

About four weeks ago, our interviewers contacted you regarding the study and you indicated you could not participate over the phone. I understand that your time is valuable, and we hope this short survey makes it easier to participate. It is critical to the accuracy of our study if we can get 9 questions answered by firms selected for the National Survey of Business Competitiveness.

It should take less than 6 minutes to answer. Simply enter this web address in your Internet browser, and then type in your access code to begin the survey.

<http://opinion.wsu.edu/business2/>

Access Code: «**RESPID**»

What USDA learns from this survey will be shared with Congress, the Small Business Administration, other Federal agencies and the public. These agencies create programs to help businesses throughout the nation. Your input will help identify the most pressing issues businesses face. The only way to learn about these issues is to ask businesses directly.

If you have any questions, call our toll-free number at 1-800-833-0867 and we will be happy to assist you. Thank you very much in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,



Danna L. Moore

Principal Investigator, SESRC