

Generic Testing – Farmers Feedback Focus Groups

OMB No. 0535-0248

This mini-supporting statement is being submitted to OMB under the Generic Testing docket to define the need for conducting up to six focus groups, with up to 10 respondents from farms in each focus group for a total of 60 interviews. Focus groups are planned for the fall of 2017 and the winter and spring of 2018.

As is the case for other federal statistical agencies, NASS has had declining response rates for most of its major surveys. Each region and state has made an effort to improve response rates through process improvements (e.g., removing farm operations that are out of business, adjusting data collection strategies for inaccessible operations), with varying levels of success. In addition, each NASS Regional Field Office (RFO) determines what data collection strategies to use within a single survey period. The RFOs may utilize refusal or inaccessible propensity scores, which quantify the likelihood of obtaining a response from an operator, in the process of assigning data collection modes to individual respondents. However, regardless of these process improvements, NASS in general has seen a decline in farmer cooperation in responding to major surveys. The Response Rate Research Team (RRRT) was chartered as an official NASS strategic team to analyze the characteristics of declining response rates. The Farmers Feedback Team is one of the 13 RRRT Sub-Teams formed to gather data and/or information to assist with the overall response rate improvement plan.

The purpose of these Farmers Feedback Focus Groups is to learn about why farmers are declining to respond to NASS surveys. In general, we want to talk about (1) respondents and non-respondents general impressions of USDA/NASS, (2) why respondents and non-respondents may respond, or not respond, to NASS surveys and (3) messaging that would motivate non-respondents to respond to NASS surveys that can be used to convert non-responders.

These six focus groups will take place in up to six agricultural areas yet to be determined. Up to 10 respondents will be invited to participate in each focus group, for a total of 60 participants. Both respondents and non-respondents will be invited to participate in the focus groups and will be provided an incentive for their travel to the focus groups (in the form of a \$50 gas card). Focus groups will take place at either a local restaurant or hotel near the farm operations and will last approximately 90 minutes. The topic guide that will be used for the focus groups is attached.

A. JUSTIFICATION

- 1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary. Identify any legal or administrative requirements that necessitate the collection. Attach a copy of the appropriate section of each statute and regulation mandating or authorizing the collection of information.**

As is the case for other federal statistical agencies, NASS has had declining response rates for most of its surveys. Each region and state has made an effort to improve response rates through process improvements (e.g., removing farm operations that are out of business or inaccessible operations), with varying levels of success. In addition, each NASS Regional Field Office (RFO) determines what data collection mode, or combination of data collection modes, to use within a single survey period. The RFOs may utilize refusal or inaccessible propensity scores, which quantify the likelihood of obtaining a response from an operator, in the process of assigning data collection modes to individual respondents. However, regardless of these process improvements, NASS in general has seen a decline in farmer cooperation in responding to major surveys.

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- 2. How, by whom, and for what purpose information is to be used.**

The information gathered through the focus groups will be analyzed by our Methodology Division, Research and Development Division, and our Census and Survey Division (CSD) in order to determine alternative communication strategies for converting non-respondents to respondent.

- 3. Use of improved information technology.**

These focus groups will be conducted in-person using a survey methodologist as a moderator with another NASS employee as an observer to assist the moderator during the focus groups. Focus groups may also be audio recorded. These recordings will only be used by the NASS survey methodologist in their use of transcribing notes.

4. Describe efforts to identify duplication. Show specifically why any similar information already available cannot be used or modified for use for the purposes described in Item 2 above.

Routine duplication procedures are performed before names are added to our List Frame. No additional efforts will be taken to identify duplication. Respondents and non-respondents selected for the focus groups will be recruited from our list frame and from enumerators with local knowledge of the farming in their states.

5. Methods to minimize burden of small businesses.

We will attempt to conduct the focus groups with respondents and non-respondents from operations of various sizes.

6. Describe the consequence to Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently, as well as any technical or legal obstacles to reducing burden.

This is a one-time data collection, with focus groups planned for the fall of 2017 and the winter and spring of 2018.

7. Special circumstances.

There are no special circumstances associated with this information collection.

8. Federal register notice and consultation with outside persons.

Not applicable.

9. Payments or gifts to respondents.

Respondents and non-respondents will be provided a \$50 gas card to cover travel costs and incidentals associated with getting to the location of the focus groups.

10. Confidentiality provided to respondents.

Any data provided by focus group participants will be protected under Title V of the E-Government Act, Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002 (CIPSEA).

11. Questions of a sensitive nature.

There are no questions of a sensitive nature on the current survey.

- 12. Provide estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information. The statement should indicate the number of respondents, frequency of response, annual hour burden, and an explanation of how the burden was estimated. If this request for approval covers more than one form, provide separate hour burden estimates for each form and aggregate the hour burdens in Item 13 of OMB Form 83-I. Provide estimates of annualized cost to respondents for the hour burdens for collections of information, identifying and using appropriate wage rate categories.**

The focus groups will be conducted by a survey methodologist. Our plan is to conduct up to six focus groups with up to 60 total respondents. Each focus group will last a maximum of 1.5 hours.

	Number of Respondents	Hours per Interview	Total Burden Hours
Focus Group	60	1.5	90

NASS uses the Bureau of Labor Statistics' [Occupational Employment Statistics](#) (most recently published on March 31, 2017 for the previous May) to estimate an hourly wage for the burden cost. The May 2016 mean wage for bookkeepers was \$19.34. The mean wage for farm managers was \$36.44. The mean wage for farm supervisors was \$23.47. The average of the three is \$26.42. The annual estimated reporting time of 90 hours is multiplied by \$26 per hour for a total cost to the public of \$2,340.

- 13. Provide estimates of the total annual cost burden to respondents or record keepers resulting from the collection of information, (do not include the cost of any hour burden shown in items 12 and 14). The cost estimates should be split into two components: (a) a total capital and start-up cost component annualized over its expected useful life; and (b) a total operation and maintenance and purchase of services component.**

There are no capital/start-up or ongoing operation/maintenance costs associated with this information collection.

- 14. Provide estimates of annualized cost to the Federal government; provide a description of the method used to estimate cost which should include quantification of hours, operational expenses (equipment, overhead, printing, and staff), and any other expense that would not have been incurred without this collection of information.**

Costs for conducting the focus groups are estimated at \$33,000. This will cover expenses for staff payroll, travel, analysis, and processing. NASS employees who have been trained in conducting focus groups will travel to agricultural areas, to be determined, in order to conduct the these focus groups.

Activity	Estimated Costs
Travel Costs	\$12,000 (\$2000 per trip x 6 trips)
Staff payroll (conducting focus groups, analysis and processing)	\$18,000
Travel Expense Cards to Participants	\$3,000

15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments reported in Items 13 or 14 of the OMB Form 83-I (reasons for changes in burden).

This mini-supporting statement addresses the use of burden to conduct focus groups to understand what motivates farmers to respond, or not respond, to NASS surveys.

16. For collections of information whose results will be published, outline plans for tabulation and publication. Address any complex analytical techniques that will be used. Provide the time schedule for the entire project, including beginning and ending dates of the collection of information, completion of report, publication dates, and other actions.

No data from this test will be published. Summarized results and information about the focus groups may be presented at national conferences and presented in peer reviewed journals.

17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.

There is no request for approval of non-display of the expiration date.

18. Explain each exception to the certification statement identified in Item 19, "Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions" of OMB Form 83-I.

There are no exceptions to the certification statement.

B. COLLECTION OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS:

1. Respondent universe, sampling and response rate.

These Farmers Feedback Focus Groups will purposefully sample respondents and non-respondents on the NASS list frame, in locations selected to minimize moderator travel time and costs.

2. Procedures for the collection of information.

Survey methodologists conducting the interviews will follow standard qualitative interviewing techniques as defined in the original Supporting Statement Part A for the Generic Clearance docket (0535-0248).

3. Information collected adequate for intended uses.

Agriculture operations of varying size will be selected for this test. Nonresponse is not expected to be an issue for this test.

4. Test of procedures or methods.

Not applicable.

5. Individuals consulted on statistical aspects of survey.

The survey administrator for this survey is Shareefah Williams (202) 690-3692 of the Survey Administration Branch, Census and Survey Division.

Selection of testing methods and training is provided by the Methodology Division; Senior Survey Methodologist is Kathy Ott, (202) 720-1114.

May 2017