

## Strategic Initiative 1 Focus Group Topic Guide

### Focus Group Discussion Guide

Length of Focus Group is 100-120 minutes

#### Target Population:

- Farmers/Ranchers/Farm and Ranch Operators who have responded to a NASS survey in the last 6 months on the web via computer-assisted Web interview (CAWI).

#### Research Questions:

- To what extent do farmers and ranchers use NASS data and reports available on the internet?
- Why do farmers and ranchers choose to respond to NASS surveys online?
- Would a new online portal make farmers more likely to respond to NASS surveys online?
- Would a new online portal improve the farmer's customer experience in responding to surveys and accessing NASS data and reports?

#### Materials/Supplies for focus groups to be brought by Focus Group Moderator [for face-to-face focus groups only]:

- Sign-in sheet
- 20 Consent forms (one copy for participants, one copy for the team) [for virtual focus groups, have virtual copy of consent form for participants to sign]
- 12 Name tents
- 12 Markers for respondents
- 12 copies of NASS respondent portal mockups
- Notepad for observer to take notes
- Refreshments (team member will be reimbursed by CSD)

#### Materials/Supplies for focus groups to be brought by State Statistician/Director:

- Schedule room [for face-to-face focus groups only]
- Recruit participants
- Board for notetaking (whiteboard or flip board) [for face-to-face focus groups only]
- Markers for the board [for face-to-face focus groups only]

#### Materials/Supplies for focus groups to be brought by Focus Group Moderator:

- List frame data, if available, to review before focus group
- 5 copies of Focus Group Discussion Guide
- 20 copies of screenshots of the online respondent portal.
- 1 recording device
- Batteries for recording device

#### Before focus group:

- Light continental breakfast (e.g., coffee and donuts) [for face-to-face focus groups only]

- Have farm and ranch operators sign in on sign-in sheet [for face-to-face focus groups only]
- Have them sign consent form to be recorded (Note that it is up to State Stats to decide if they want to tell respondents prior to the focus groups that we plan to audio record them. Recording will take place only if all participants sign the consent form. If even one participant declines, no audio recording will take place.) [for virtual focus groups or one-on-one virtual interviews, have participants sign virtual audio recording consent form]

### **Introduction:**

#### **a. Welcome (5 minutes)**

(Moderator) Introduce yourself and the observers/note-taker(s). Then review the following:

- Who we are and what we're trying to do:
  - Survey researchers at NASS trying to understand farmers' and ranchers' experiences with responding to our surveys online.
  - The importance NASS's online information to the operation or success of the farm or ranch.
  - What motivates farmers and ranchers to respond online.
  - What farmers think of NASS's new online respondent portal.
  - How NASS can better serve farmers with changes or additions to the online respondent portal.
- What will be done with this information:
  - We are conducting focus groups around the country and listening to farmers.
  - We will review what we learn from the focus groups and provide our senior managers with recommendations on how to better serve farmers with the online respondent portal.
- Why we asked you to participate
  - Working with our state representatives, we asked farmers from a variety of backgrounds, and experiences with USDA, to participate!

#### **b. Explanation of the process for this focus group**

- We learn from you (positive comments and constructive/negative feedback)
- Not trying to achieve consensus, we're gathering information
- There are no right or wrong answers and it's okay to disagree with each other, but we need to all treat each other with respect
- If you have any particular questions about NASS or need additional information, we will address those questions at the end of the focus group.

### *Logistics*

- Focus group will last no more than 120 minutes for focus groups, no more than 60 minutes for one-on-one virtual interviews.
- Feel free to move around

- Where is the bathroom? Exit?
- Help yourself to refreshments

c. Ground Rules

Ask the group to suggest some ground rules. After they brainstorm some, make sure the following are on the list.

- Everyone should participate.
- Information provided in the focus group must be kept confidential
- Stay with the group and please don't have side conversations
- Turn off cell phones if possible
- Have fun

d. Ask the group if there are any questions about the group and focus group format/ground rules before we get started, and address those questions.

e. Introductions (5 minutes)

- Go around table (or virtual room): First name, how long they've been farming and what they grow or raise and anything else they want to add.

f. **Turn on Tape Recorder** (if all participants have agreed to be recorded and signed the consent form)

Notes:

- City, State:

- Date:

- Moderator:

- Observers:

- Total size of focus group:

- Participants that did not show up, how many, and response history:

*Discussion begins, make sure to give people time to think before answering the questions and don't move too quickly. Use the probes to make sure that all issues are addressed, but move on when you feel you are starting to hear repetitive information.*

### **Questions - General about USDA-NASS**

g. I want to begin with a little exercise. When I say a word or phrase, I want you to tell me what comes to mind and I'll write it down on the whiteboard. **(5 minutes)**

- When I say USDA or Department of Agriculture, what do you think of?
  
- When I say NASS or the National Agricultural Statistics Service, what do you think of?
  
- When I say "survey," or "questionnaire," what do you think of?
  
- Do you remember the last NASS survey you participated in?

### **Questions - Internet Experience (10 mins)**

- Historically, access to the internet has been different between urban and rural areas. It is not uncommon for rural areas to have little or no access to the internet due to various reasons, such as there being no providers that offer internet services in the area.
  - How has your experience been with internet access in the area where your farm or operation is located?
  - Do you have reliable internet access at your farm or ranch?
  - What type of internet access available in your farm or ranch's area? Satellite, cable, other?
  - How do you usually access the internet? Through a computer (desktop or laptop), smartphone, tablet, or other device?
    - What type of operating system do you have? Apple Ios, Microsoft Windows, Android, etc.
    - What web browser do you typically use to access the internet? Internet Explorer, Chrome, Safari, Firefox, etc.
  - Would you say the internet in your area is high speed?

- Approximately how long has your operation had internet access, or has internet access been available in your farm or ranch's area?

### **Internet – Importance to Farm (10 mins)**

- Is having internet access important to your operation?
- Why is it important for your operation to have internet access?
- Is there information on the internet that can help your operation succeed?
- What types of websites do you rely on for information that is important to your operation?
- Approximately how often do you or others use the internet to search for information that is important to your operation?

### **Internet – NASS (10 mins)**

- Do you ever visit NASS's website [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov) other than to complete a NASS survey online?
  - If no, why not? What do you think is or is not on the website?
- If yes, for what reasons do you visit the NASS website?
- If you visit NASS's website to find specific data or reports, are you usually able to find what you are looking for?
- Do you find the information available on NASS's website helpful to you or your operation?
- In what ways is the information on NASS's website helpful to you or your operation?

### **Internet – Survey Response (10 mins)**

- In general, how has your overall experience been responding to NASS's surveys online?
- Is responding online your preferred method of participating in NASS surveys, or do you prefer participating by mail, or with an interviewer either face-to-face or on the phone?
- What do you like about responding to NASS's surveys online?
- What do you dislike about responding to NASS's surveys online?
- How was your experience with providing the unique survey code that was mailed to you when accessing the online survey?
- Do you think you will respond to NASS surveys online in the future?
- What improvements do you think we could make to the website where you complete NASS surveys?

### **Internet – New NASS Online Respondent Portal (20-30 mins)**

Next, we would like to show you a preview of new [product/service?] that NASS is currently developing. It is called [platform name] and it is designed to be a new online portal for farmers to use

1. to better manage access to information that is relevant to them and their operations
2. to be able to better manage their participation in NASS surveys
3. to reduce the burden of responding to future NASS surveys by accessing responses/information from NASS surveys they have previously completed.

Here are some mockups of what the new respondent portal looks like so far. [*Hand out packet of mockups to respondents*]. Let's start with the mockup on the first page. On the first page, a mockup of information that is relevant to a hypothetical [type of farm/farmer] is displayed. Please take a minute to look it over.

- Thinking about your operation, do you think having a customizable web page, such as in the mockup, would be useful for you or your operation?
  - Do you think you would customize your online respondent portal? Why or why not?
- Is there anything in the respondent portal mockup that strikes you as appealing? Unappealing?
- When you respond to NASS surveys, what type of information would you want to have on a customizable respondent portal that might help you fill out or complete the surveys?
- Do you think that you would use this respondent portal?
- Why would or wouldn't you use it?
- How often do you think you would use or visit your online customizable respondent portal?

Let's now look at the mockups on the next few pages. On these pages, mockups for managing your survey participation are shown. You can see there are icons showing what surveys the farmer was selected to participate in, which surveys they have completed, and which surveys they have yet to complete. You can also see icons for the respondent to access NASS reports and their responses to surveys they have previously completed. Please take a minute or two to review these pages.

- In your own words, can you describe the pages/portal to me?
- What is your initial reaction to it?
- Where would you start if you came to this portal?
- Do you feel like having an online portal to manage your participation in NASS surveys, such as in the mockups, would be helpful for you? Why or why not?
- What other information would you want to be able to access on a website you go to complete NASS surveys?
- What tasks would you imagine would be useful to complete on a website where you would respond to NASS surveys?
  - For instance, would you use the portal to:
    - Check the weather forecast?
    - Verify your contact information?
    - Access reports related to your operation?
    - See what surveys you may have to complete?
- Do you think you would respond to NASS surveys through an online portal such as this? Why or why not?

- Do you think that an online portal such as this would be helpful for you complete the NASS surveys you are selected for?
- What is the basic functionality you would want on a NASS survey website?
  - What are the most important things it should do and be able to provide?
- Do you think having access to the responses you gave in previous NASS surveys would make it easier for you to complete future surveys?

### **Questions – Wraps up and Final Remarks (5 – 10 mins)**

To wrap up, let's talk about this online respondent portal and NASS surveys more broadly.

- What are your biggest challenges or obstacles in responding to NASS surveys?
- Do you think an online respondent portal, such as in the mockups, would help address or alleviate your challenges in responding to NASS surveys? Why or why not?
- What could NASS change or add to the online respondent portal that would help make responding to surveys easier for you?
- Do you have any final comments or suggestions you would like NASS to know about with regard to its website, information available online, or responding to surveys online?

Thank you all for your participation! [turn tape recorder off].