

SUPPORTING STATEMENT
Generic Testing – Census of Agriculture
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 five focus groups, with up to 10 respondents from farms in each focus group for a total of up to 50 interviews. Focus groups are planned for July 2020 through December 2020. The primary objective is to conduct face-to-face focus groups. However, if social distancing guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic make face-to-face focus groups infeasible or unwise, then virtual focus groups, one-on-one virtual interviews, or a combination of virtual focus groups and one-on-one virtual interviews will take place.

Greater efforts by NASS are being made to get farmers to respond to the next Census of Agriculture online, as it will improve the efficiency and economy of data collection. A new online respondent portal factors to be one of the elements that will facilitate more online reporting in the next Census of Agriculture, and therefore it will be necessary to get respondent feedback to the portal so it can be improved to meet customer experience goals set by NASS. The goals of this portal are to 1) provide a central point of contact with NASS that allows respondents to efficiently report data to NASS, 2) enable easier access to published analytics and reports relevant to the nature of their operation, 3) improve customer satisfaction with the reporting experience by making data collection easier for respondents, and 4) to reduce response burden by providing respondents with access to their previously reported data that can help them in answering a current survey.

The purpose of conducting these focus groups (face-to-face or virtual), and/or one-on-one virtual interviews, is to evaluate the new online respondent portal from respondents' point-of-view. In general, we want to talk about (1) respondents' opinions on the utility of the portal to them, (2) how it may be changed or enhanced to meet their needs, and (3) how it may improve their customer experience.

These five face-to-face focus groups will take place in up to five agricultural areas yet to be determined. Up to 10 respondents will be invited to participate in each focus group, for a total of up to 50 participants. Respondents who have previously completed a NASS survey via computer-assisted Web interview (CAWI) will be invited to participate in the focus groups. The face-to-face focus groups will take place at facilities near the farm operations and will last no more than 120 minutes. The topic guide that will be used for the focus groups and/or one-on-one virtual interviews is attached. Should social distancing guidelines make face-to-face focus groups unwise, then virtual focus groups and/or one-on-one virtual interviews will take place. Respondents will be selected based on the same criteria as the face-to-face focus groups, and they will be able to participate virtually from wherever they are able to.

A. JUSTIFICATION

1. Circumstances making collection of information necessary.

Greater efforts by NASS are being made to get farmers to respond to the next Census of Agriculture online, as it will improve the efficiency and economy of data collection. A new online respondent portal factors to be one of the elements that will facilitate more online reporting in the next Census of Agriculture, and therefore it will be necessary to get respondent feedback to the portal. The goal of this portal is to provide a central point of contact with NASS that allows respondents to efficiently report data to NASS. The respondent portal aims to help improve the reporting experience to make data collection easier for respondents, and to reduce response burden by providing respondents with access to their previously reported data that can aid respondents in answering a current survey.

The purpose of these focus groups and/or one-on-one virtual interviews is to evaluate the new online respondent portal from the respondents' point-of-view. Specifically sought are (1) respondents' opinions on the utility of the portal to them, (2) how it may be changed or enhanced to meet their needs, and (3) improve their customer experience.

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

The information gathered through these focus groups and/or one-on-one virtual interviews will be analyzed by NASS's Methodology Division, Research and Development Division, and Census and Survey Division to determine if additional modifications need to be made to the online respondent portal. Approved changes based on the results of the focus groups will be incorporated into the development of the online respondent portal that will aid in promoting online responses.

3. Use of improved information technology.

These focus groups will be conducted using face-to-face interviews or virtually using screen sharing software with telephone call-in capabilities. A survey methodologist will be the 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. If one-on-one interviews are chosen in combination with, or instead of, the focus groups, they will be conducted virtually using screen sharing software with telephone call-in capabilities.

4. Efforts to identify duplication.

Routine duplication procedures are performed before names are added to our List Frame. No additional efforts will be taken to identify duplication. Operators

who are selected for the focus groups and/or one-on-one virtual interviews will be drawn from the NASS list of known and potential farm operations who fit particular criteria such as number and types of commodities produced, geographic location, and size of operation, as well as previous CAWI response history. The information obtained from these focus groups are not obtainable from any other sources.

5. Methods to minimize burden of small businesses.

We will attempt to conduct the focus groups and/or one-on-one virtual interviews with respondents from operations of various sizes, and participation will be voluntary. The large majority of farms/agricultural businesses meet the Small Business Administration's definition of a small business, and therefore their representation in the focus groups are paramount for drawing valid conclusions from the data collected. About 40 of the participants selected will be small operations.

6. Consequence if information collection were less frequent.

This is a one-time data collection, with focus groups (in-person or virtual) and/or one-on-one virtual interviews planned during the time period from July 2020 through December 2020.

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.

There will be no payments or gifts to respondents.

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. Hour burden and annualized costs to respondents.

The focus groups will be conducted by trained survey methodologists. The plan is to conduct up to five focus groups with up to 50 total respondents. Each focus group will last a maximum of 2.0 hours, whether it is conducted in-person or virtually. If one-on-one virtual interviews are chosen, each interview will last no more than 1.0 hour.

	Number of respondents	Hours per interview (HPI)	Total burden hours (TBH)
Focus Group	50	2.0	100
One-on-one virtual interview	50	1.0	50
Combination of focus groups and one-on-one interviews	50	1.0 to 2.0	50 < TBH < 100

We plan to conduct a maximum of five focus groups, either in-person or virtually, lasting no more than two hours for a total of 100 total burden hours. If one-on-one virtual interviews are chosen instead of focus groups, each interview will last no more than one hour for a maximum total of 50 burden hours. If a combination of focus groups and one-on-one virtual interviews are chosen, the total burden hours will be at least 50 and less than 100.

NASS uses the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment Statistics to estimate an hourly wage for the burden cost. The most recently available data is for May 2019. Using these estimates, the mean wage for bookkeepers was \$20.65. The mean wage for farm managers was \$38.63. The mean wage for farm supervisors was \$25.25. The mean wage of the three is \$28.17. To calculate the fully loaded wage rate (includes allowances for Social Security, insurance, etc.) NASS will add 33% for a total of \$37.46 per hour. Maximum reporting time of 100 hours for in-person or virtual focus groups is multiplied by \$37.46 per hour for a maximum total cost to the public of \$3,746.00.

13. Total annual cost burden to respondents.

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

14. Annualized costs to federal government.

Costs for conducting these focus groups are estimated at \$25,000 if conducted in-person. This will cover expenses for staff payroll, travel, survey 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 these focus groups. If virtual focus groups or one-on-one virtual interviews are chosen due to

social distancing guidelines related to COVID-19, then travel costs would be eliminated, reducing the total cost by \$10,000.

Activity	Estimated Costs
Travel Costs	\$10,000 (\$2000 per trip x 5 trips)
Staff payroll (conducting focus groups, analysis and processing)	\$15,000

15. Reasons for changes in burden.

This mini-supporting statement addresses the use of burden to conduct focus groups (in-person or virtually) and/or one-on-one virtual interviews for the development of the online respondent portal to facilitate online responses more broadly for NASS surveys.

16. Tabulation, analysis, and publication plans.

No data from the focus groups will be published. Summarized results and information about the focus groups may be presented at national conferences, presented in peer reviewed journals, or interagency working groups. No identifying information will be presented.

17. Request for approval of non-display of expiration date.

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

18. Exceptions to certification statement.

There are no exceptions to the certification statement.

B. COLLECTION OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS:

1. Respondent universe, sampling, and response rate.

These online respondent portal focus groups will purposefully sample respondents on the NASS list frame, in locations selected to minimize moderator travel time and costs.

NASS will use list frame data to identify operations or operators that cover a variety of types and sizes. The operators will not be statistically sampled; rather, they will be hand selected based on their characteristics, such as demographics, size, number and types of commodities produced, geographic location, and having previously completed a NASS survey via computer-assisted Web interview (CAWI). NASS regional field office staff, state office staff, NASDA enumerators, and NASS HQ staff may recruit respondents for the focus groups.

2. Procedures for the collection of information.

Interviewers will follow standard focus group 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 based on specific criteria in order to assess specific areas, features, and functionalities of the online respondent portal. Nonresponse is not expected to be an issue for this research.

4. Test of procedures or methods.

Not applicable.

5. Individuals consulted on statistical aspects of survey.

The survey administrator for this survey is Robin Gannon (202) 308-4350 of the Census and Survey Division.

Selection of focus group methods and training is done by the Survey Methodology & Technology Section (SMTS) of the Research and Development Division (RDD); Agricultural Statistician & Survey Methodologist is Joseph Rodhouse, 202-692-0289.

May 2020