

## **Appendix J**

### **Interview Guide**

#### **Exploratory Semi-structured Interviews on Retail Food Loss**

Agency: Economic Research Service

Contractor: RTI International

## Appendix J: Interview Guide

*Thank participant(s) and make introductions.*

I'm with RTI International, a nonprofit research institute. [Introduce RTI notetaker]. We are conducting a study for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service (USDA, ERS) on retail-level food loss. We are talking to your company and other retail food companies to get industry's input on our study design. We want to get a better understanding of whether and how retail food companies maintain data on food loss, food product shipments and sales, food donations, and intra-store transfers. We will use what we learn from these discussions to develop a survey with the ultimate goal of calculating national estimates of the percentage of retail-level food loss for about 200 food categories.

These discussions will help to ensure that USDA, ERS obtains the information needed with the least amount of burden on industry.

Participation is voluntary and confidential, and you can stop the interview at any time. We are not asking for any data at this time, only information on how the data are maintained. Information you provide today and in any future data collection are being collected under the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA). Information collected under CIPSEA is not subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

**Assurance of Confidentiality:** All information which would permit identification of an individual, a practice, or an establishment will be held confidential, will be used for statistical purposes only, will be used only by contractors authorized by USDA ERS to perform statistical activities only when required and with necessary controls, and will not be disclosed or released to other persons without the consent of the individual or establishment in accordance with the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (PL-107-347). By law, every employee as well as every agent has taken an oath and is subject to a jail term of up to five years, a fine of up to \$250,000, or both if he or she willfully discloses ANY identifiable information about you or your company

**[Interviewer to confirm that written (electronic) consent has been obtained via Qualtrics link previously provided, if not ask all interview participants to complete written consent (electronically) before starting the interview]**

### General Information

1. To start, please tell us a bit about your company such as number and formats of stores, number of distribution centers, geographic coverage, and, if applicable, banners under which you operate. [Note: if company owns multiple banners, we will select one banner for the interview]

### Approaches to Tracking Food Loss and Donations

2. We would like to discuss if and how the stores owned by your company currently track food loss. When we talk about retail food loss, we mean the weight of food that is received at the store but not sold or donated for human consumption. Do your stores track and measure unsold food products that are removed from the shelf? [If no, go to next question.] How is information on food loss recorded for products with a barcode?

- Are data recorded electronically or manually?
- What data fields are collected? [Probe as needed.]
  - Department or section of store in which product is located (e.g., dairy, frozen)
  - Food product category used by the store
  - Barcode (UPC or GTIN) or other product code
  - Number of units
  - Total dollar value of product (is this tracked by wholesale or retail value?)
  - Weight or volume per unit and unit of measure
  - Date entered into system

2a. How is information on food loss recorded for random-weight products?

- Are data recorded electronically or manually?
- What data fields are collected? [Probe as needed.]
  - Department or section of store in which product is located (e.g., produce, frozen)
  - Food product category used by the store
  - Barcode (UPC or GTIN) or other product code
  - Number of units
  - Total dollar value of product (is this tracked by wholesale or retail value?)
  - Weight or volume per unit and unit of measure
  - Date entered into system

3. If your store donates food to charitable organizations, do your stores track and measure the amount donated? [If no, go to question 4.]

- Are data recorded electronically or manually?
- What data fields are collected?
- Probe to determine if each of the following data elements are maintained and, if not, what is maintained.]
  - Department or section of store in which product is located (e.g., dairy, frozen)
  - Food product category used by the store
  - Barcode (UPC or GTIN) or other product code
  - Number of units of product
  - Total dollar value of product (tracked by wholesale or retail value?)
  - Weight or volume per unit and unit of measure

- Date entered into system
4. For a national study, RTI is considering an approach in which we request raw data on product shipments and sales and other information that we would use to calculate food loss percentages. [Refer to overview of data in document with list of interview questions (Appendix F).]
- Do you think an approach like this would be feasible?
  - If yes, what suggestions would you have for designing and implementing this type of approach?
  - If no, do you have any suggestions on other approaches that would be feasible for your company? [NOTE: If participant responds no, adjust questions below as appropriate]

### Shipments

The next set of questions will focus on data that could potentially be used to measure retail-level food loss.

5. Now we would like to understand the process for receiving product shipments at the stores owned by your company.
- Please tell us how your stores receive product (i.e., from store-owned distribution centers vs. direct shipments vs. wholesalers).
  - When your stores receive shipments, do you scan in the cartons or pallet for all products received?
6. Do your stores keep electronic records of shipment data on all products received?
- [If yes] What kind of information does your store maintain on shipments? [Probe to determine if each of the following data elements is maintained and, if not, what is maintained. Or would the company prefer to provide a list of the variables that they track?]
    - Department or section of store in which product is located (e.g., dairy, frozen)
    - Food product category used by the store
    - Barcode (UPC or GTIN) or other product code (If no, at what level of detail are the data maintained, e.g., department, product category?)
    - Number of units received (e.g., number of cartons [description needs to include number of units in carton to determine total units] or number of units in carton)
    - Total wholesale value of units received (cost of goods sold)
    - Weight or volume per unit and unit of measure (e.g., pounds, kilograms, liters)
    - Date received

### Sales

Next, we'd like to ask about how you maintain data on product sales.

7. Do your stores maintain data on product sales electronically, that is, scanner data? [Probe to determine if each of the following data elements is maintained and, if not, what is maintained. Or would the company prefer to provide a list of the variables that they track?]
- Department or section of store in which product is located (e.g., dairy, frozen)
  - Food product category used by the store
  - Barcode (UPC or GTIN) or other product code (If no, at what level of detail are the data maintained, e.g., department, product category?)
  - Number of units sold
  - Total retail value of product sold
  - Weight or volume per unit and unit of measure
  - Date sold

### **Random-Weight Meat, Poultry, and Seafood Shipments and Packaging**

For the next few questions, we're going to talk about shipments and packaging of random-weight meat, poultry, and seafood (fish and shellfish).

8. Do your stores cut, grind, or repackage meat, poultry, or seafood products in the store and sell them as random-weight products? [If no, go to Question 11.]
9. Do your stores maintain shipment data for the meat, poultry, or seafood products purchased to be cut and repackaged and then sold as random weight items?
- [If yes] What kind of information is maintained? [Probe to determine if each of the following data elements is maintained and, if not, what is maintained. Or would the company prefer to provide a list of the variables that they track?]
    - Food product category used by the store (e.g., beef, chicken, pork, seafood)
    - Barcode (UPC or GTIN) or other product code (If no, at what level of detail are the data maintained, e.g., department, product category?)
    - Total wholesale value of units received (cost of goods sold) (if needed: the whole carcass or fish)
    - Date raw product was received
10. Do your stores collect and maintain electronic data on the amount of random-weight product cut and packaged in the store for retail sale (e.g., does your store use a data system to track the amount of product packaged)?
- [If yes] What kind of information do you keep track of? [Probe to determine if each of the following data elements is maintained and, if not, what is maintained. Or would the company prefer to provide a list of the variables that they track?]
    - Food product category used by the store (e.g., beef, chicken, pork, seafood)

- Barcode (UPC or GTIN), or other product code (If no, at what level of detail are the data maintained, e.g., by type of meat?)
- Number of units of packaged product
- Total wholesale value of packaged product (cost of goods sold)
- Total weight of packaged product and unit of measure
- Weight of inedible portions removed before packaging
- Date packaged

### **Intra-store Transfers**

11. Do any of the stores owned by your company do intra-store transfers of food products? By an intra-store transfer we mean when products received for direct sale to consumers are instead used to make prepared foods within the store, for example, cooking chicken from the meat department to make chicken salad in the deli. [If no, go to Question 12.]
- [If yes] What data are maintained electronically on these products? [Probe to determine if each of the following data elements is maintained and, if not, what is maintained. Or would the company prefer to provide a list of the variables that they track?]
    - Department or section of store
    - Food product category used by the store
    - Barcode (UPC or GTIN) or other product code (If no, at what level of detail are the data maintained, e.g., department, product category?)
    - Number of units transferred
    - Total wholesale value of product transferred
    - Total weight or volume and unit of measure for product transferred
    - Date sold

### **General Data Questions**

12. Could you tell us more about the method (s) your company uses to maintain the types of data that we've talked about?
- Are the data maintained by one person or unit within the company or is it a different person or department for each type of data (food loss, donations, shipments, sales, random weight, intra-store transfers)?
  - Is this person at the corporate location or elsewhere? [NOTE: If interviewing one banner within the company, clarify whether "corporate" means the parent company or the banner headquarters.]
  - What software systems or platforms are used to maintain all the types of data we discussed?

- Does your company use blockchain technology to track food shipments or food loss? If so, can you please explain this process.
13. If we proceed with a national study, we plan to provide participating companies with a benchmarking report that compares their estimates of product-specific food loss percentages with national averages as a benefit for participation. Would such a report motivate your company to participate? What else would encourage your company to participate?
14. [If data discussed above are available] If we proceed with a national study, would your company be able to provide the types of data we discussed from the most recent calendar or fiscal year?
- [If yes] What steps or activities would be needed to make this happen?
    - What would be the process for your company to get the necessary approvals to share the data?
    - Who would need to be involved to (e.g., legal, IT)?
    - What information would you need from RTI to get the necessary approvals?
    - Are there any specific times of the year we should avoid when collecting the data?
  - [If yes] We will have a secure web portal for uploading data. Would it be useful if we were able to provide guidelines and/or a specific format for uploading the data? Or would it be easier for you to specify the format?
  - [If yes] The informed consent provides information on the study data confidentiality and security procedures. Do you have any questions about these procedures?
  - [If yes] We are trying to get a better understanding of the least burdensome way for retailers to provide product-level information on shipments. For the purposes of our study, we are only interested in single-ingredient foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, meat, poultry, seafood, canned fruits and vegetables, and dairy products. We don't need information on most mixed-ingredient foods such as frozen entrees, other processed foods, and most beverages. Would it be easiest—to provide us a “data dump” for all the products received and sold by your stores, or would it be easier if we provided instructions on the specific categories of food to include and exclude?
  - About how many hours of staff time and calendar time do you estimate would be required to provide the requested data for one store? How would this estimate change if you were asked to provide data for multiple stores?
  - Are there other ways to obtain the data that you think would be more efficient or less burdensome?
    - For example, would it be feasible and/or less burdensome if a data collector went to each store to obtain data either from store-level software systems or through other types of records?
15. Do you have any other thoughts or potential concerns about responding to the data collection that we've described that we have not discussed already? To provide benchmarks for all your companies' stores, we would need data on shipments, sales, and donations for all stores, not a

sample of stores. Is this something your company would be willing to do, or would your company be more willing to provide data on a sample of stores, in that case, the benchmarks would only be for the sampled stores.

- Considering how you track data in electronic systems for your stores, let's talk about how you would go about providing data for multiple stores. Would someone in the corporate location coordinate the data collection from multiple stores, or would each individual store need to provide the data?

16. For a national study, we plan to collect data from several hundred stores of different type and size. We are interested in your opinion about the best approach for identifying who (e.g., job title) to initially contact to get buy-in for the study and then identifying who collects and maintain the data we need? Will this vary by size and type of company?

17. Would you mind if I follow up by email or phone if I have need to ask you additional questions or get clarification on the information you provided?