Appendix H

Interview Guide

Exploratory Semi-structured Interviews on Retail Food Loss—Wave 2

Agency: USDA Economic Research Service

Appendix H: Interview Guide

Thank participant(s) and make introductions.

I'm with RTI International, a nonprofit research institute. [Introduce RTI notetaker]. We are gathering information for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service (USDA, ERS) for a potential national-level study on retail food loss. Food loss is an issue of national and global importance with implications for nutrition security, environmental sustainability, and economic growth. We want to get a better understanding of what types of data might be available to measure food loss in retail stores. We are talking to a small group of retail food companies to get industry's input on a potential study design. We will use what we learn from these interviews to design a study to calculate national estimates of the percentage of retail-level food loss for about 200 single-ingredient foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, meat, poultry, seafood, canned fruits and vegetables, and dairy products.

Your input will help to ensure that USDA 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, only information on the type (s) of data that might be available and how such data are formatted and maintained. Any information you provide today or in the future is protected 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: The information you provide will be used for statistical purposes only. Your response will be kept confidential and any person who willfully discloses ANY identifiable information about you or your company is subject to a jail term, a fine, or both. This study is conducted in accordance with the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2018, Title III of Pub. L. No. 115-435, codified in 44 U.S.C. Ch. 35 and other applicable Federal laws.

[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 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 know 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?
   o [If participant responds using "shrink"] Can you explain what you mean by shrink?
   o Are data recorded electronically or manually?
   o 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

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

   o Are data recorded electronically or manually?
   o 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

Availability of Food Loss Metrics

4. If USDA proceeds with a national study, we are considering an approach in which we would request raw data on product shipments and sales and other information that we would use to calculate food loss percentages. (Share screen with participant so they can see the table below)

To calculate retail-level food loss using this approach, we would need the following raw data for a 1-year period:

- Product shipments into the store for UPC and random-weight products
- Product sales (scanner data) for UPC and random-weight products
- Products packaged in the store (for example, raw meat and poultry), if applicable

- Products transferred to other departments in the store (for example, ingredients for prepared foods) if applicable
- Food donations, if applicable

For each type of data, we would need data fields like those shown below.

Data Field	Description
Store ID	Unique identification for the store
Department	Section of store in which product is located (e.g., dairy, frozen foods)
Category	Food product category used by the store, if applicable
Barcode	UPC, GTIN, or other product code
Description	Text description of the barcode or product code
Date	Year (calendar or fiscal year) for annual data or week for weekly data
Units	Number of units received, transferred, sold, or donated
Weight	Weight per unit or volume per unit
Unit of Measure	Measurement standard for product (e.g., pounds, kilograms, liters)
Value	Total wholesale value of units received (cost of goods sold), or retail value of product sold or donated

- o Do you think an approach like this would be feasible?
- o If yes, what suggestions would you have for designing and implementing this type of approach?
- o If no, do you have any suggestions on other approaches that would be feasible for a company like yours? [NOTE: If participant responds no, adjust questions below as appropriate]

General Data Questions

5. Could you tell us more about how your company maintains the types of data that we've talked about?

   o 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)?

   o 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.]

   o What software systems or platforms are used to maintain all the types of data we discussed?

   o Does your company use blockchain technology to track food shipments or food loss? If so, can you please explain this process.

6. If USDA proceeds with a national study, participating companies will receive 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? Why or why not?

   o 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.

   o What else would encourage your company to participate?

      ▪ Another company we talked with suggested providing some type of recognition from USDA. What are your thoughts about that?

7. [If data discussed above are available] For informational purposes, if USDA proceeds with a national study, would a company like yours be able to provide the types of data we discussed from the most recent calendar or fiscal year?

   a. [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 USDA to get the necessary approvals?

      ▪ Are there any specific times of the year we should avoid when collecting the data?

   b. [If yes] For a potential national study, there would be a secure web portal for uploading data. Would it be useful to a company like yours 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?

c. [If yes] For a potential national study, we would only be measuring loss for single-ingredient foods. We wouldn't need information on most mixed-ingredient foods such as frozen entrees, other processed foods, and most beverages. For stores like yours, would it be easiest to provide a "data dump" for all the products received and sold/donated, OR would it be easier if USDA were to provide instructions on the specific categories of food to include and exclude?

d. About how many hours of staff time and calendar time do you estimate would be required to provide the data that we've described for one store? How would this estimate change if you were asked to provide data for multiple stores?

e. Could you tell us what the barriers are there to measuring food loss?

    i. For example, if a secure software application was provided for you to use to collect food loss data, would you use it?

        1. Probes: A person or data collector comes out with a handheld to collect the data (is the issue due to staffing); software is created (is the issue due to cost); what are other barriers?

    ii. Are there other ways to obtain the data we have described that you think would be more efficient or less burdensome?

8. Do you have any other thoughts or potential concerns about the proposed data collection strategy that we have described that we have not discussed already?

9. For a potential 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?

10. May I follow up by email or phone if I have additional questions or need clarification?