

NASS Methodological, Operational, and Structural Transformation

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“ . . . providing timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture.”



Vision

Transforming the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service to a statistical agency utilizing defensible survey and statistical methodologies to serve the agricultural sector.



Required Changes

- Methodological
- Operational
- Structural

Timeline of Activities

- Research Planning (8/08)

Continuing Resolution (10/08 – 2/09)

- OE Business Case Development (2/09)
- OE Business Cases Approved (7/09)
- OE Project Plans Complete (12/09)
- OE Implementation Begins (1/10)

Timeline (cont'd)

Continuing Resolution (10/10-3/11)

- Field Restructure Team Chartered (3/11)

House and Senate Marks reflect a 12% cut in programs

- Field Restructure Plan Approved (7/11)
- Agency Reorganization Approved by Department (8/12)

Sparking Transformational Change

- Creating the impetus for change
- Identifying change leaders
- Establishing momentum for change

Creating the Impetus for Change

- Surviving reduced Federal budgets
 - Reduce programs
 - Reduce data quality
 - Become more efficient
 - Reduce staffing

Creating the Impetus (cont'd)

- Improving Operational Efficiency
 - Reduce cost of data collection and processing activities
 - Improve data quality
 - Enhance career opportunities for staff

Organizational Culture

- Changes to how and where business was conducted.
- Shift culture from status quo to innovation.

Identifying Change Leaders

- Six operational efficiencies championed by Senior Leaders
 1. Enhanced research initiatives
 2. Centralized LAN Services
 3. Centralized databases and generalized applications
 4. Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI)
 5. Centralized frames maintenance, forms processing, training, and telephone data collection
 6. Training via Video Teleconferencing (VTC) technology

Creating Momentum for Change

- Increased focus on the principles of a Federal statistical agency
- Long Range Plan

Focus on Statistical Principles

- Principles for a Federal Statistical Agency
 - Relevance to Policy Issues
 - Credibility Among Data Users
 - Trust Among Data Providers
 - A Strong Position of Independence
- Office of Management and Budget Statistical Standards
 - Transparency
 - Reproducibility
 - Quality Measures

Long Range Plan (LRP)

- LRP focused on four main areas
 - More opportunities for staff development
 - Aligning programs with traditional and developing agricultural needs
 - Increasing data products to support changing agriculture
 - Enhancing statistical foundation of the operational programs through research, innovation, and quality management

Required Organizational Changes

- Advanced the application of statistical and survey methodology
- Changed how and where we do business
- Resulting structural changes

Application of Methodologies

- Administrator support of an enhanced research agenda
- Increased presence of statistical practitioners
- Use of paradata and metadata for data collection and dissemination
- Advanced adoption of standardized quality assurance practices

How and Where NASS does Business

- Adopted the use of Video Teleconferencing technology
- Centralized LAN services allowing work to be done centrally and locally
- Deployed tablet technology with wireless broadband for field data collection
- Developed a centralized data collection and processing center

Resulting Structural Changes

- Streamlined decision making process by flattening the management structure
- Centralized budget and human resources functions to the Office of the Administrator

Benefits to the Organization

- Increased interviewer training and outreach efforts
- Increased dissemination capabilities
- Publication of quality measures for statistical reports
- More active research program with operational ties

Maintaining the Momentum

- Internal Momentum
- External Momentum
- Resulting 2013 Reorganization

Maintaining the Momentum - Internal

- Proposed 2013 Reorganization
 - Budget driven based on House and Senate budget cuts
 - Recommended by a team from within Field Operations
 - Initially called for 9 regions, and no changes in HQ

Maintaining the Momentum - External

- Administrator briefed NASDA partners in the fall of 2011
- Secretary Vilsack presented the proposal to NASDA in February 2012
- NASS leadership renegotiated MOUs with all NASDA partners – *accomplished in only 5 months*

2013 Reorganization

- Field Office
- Methodology Division

Redistributes Field Operations

- Redesigns into 12 regional centers
 - Three additional regions were identified through external negotiations
- Maintains a strong presence in all current locations to support relationships with local constituencies
- Centralizes the majority of field staff into 12 locations allowing for broader career opportunities

United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service



Option 4



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Establishes a Methodology Division

- Centralizes all operational survey and statistical methodology based positions in one unit
- Allows staff to have a broader experience with the program that they support
- Aligns the operational methodology staff with their counterparts in the research program

Methodology Division (cont'd)

Methodology Division
*Agricultural Statistics Board
Chair*

Sampling, Editing,
and Imputation
Branch

Summary,
Estimation, and
Disclosure Branch

Survey Development,
Quality, and
Standards Branch

Impact on Costs

- Reduced cost of training and meetings with VTC
- Reduced cost of servers and eliminated need for IT staff in field
- Eliminated duplicative systems
- Reduced manual, non quality controlled processing and data review

Impact on Data Quality

- Centralized data collection and processing facilitates formal quality control
- Standardized, centralized processes reduces variability
- Digitized data enables real time survey cost monitoring
- Published measures of survey quality from generalized systems

Impact on Budget

- Required an initial investment for the NOC, equipment, systems development
- Return on Investment expected by 2016
- Reduced salary expense (~100 FTEs), computer equipment, travel
- Required funds for the cost of additional space at NOC

Impact on Staff

- Created jobs requiring different jobs skills
- Eliminated many support positions
- Changed balance of positions in FOs, HQ, and NOC
- Reduced staff in NASS individual FOs
- Reduced number of NASDA telephone enumerators

Impact on Structure

- Staff reductions have occurred with buyouts offered to meet budget targets
- Staff in FO and HQ have transitioned to the NOC
- Individual Field Offices are transitioning to a reduced staffing model

Implications for NASS

- Survived reduced budgets while maintaining successful programs
- Allowed for the development of a centralized Census Editing Unit at the NOC
- Adjusted organizational culture
- Allowed field staff to work in a virtual environment during the transition to the proposed regional structure

Outcomes of Transformation

- Streamlined, centralized organization
- Positioned to provide flexibility in services
- Enhanced career opportunities for staff
- Higher quality data