

# USDA/NASS Data Collection Practices Across Field Offices

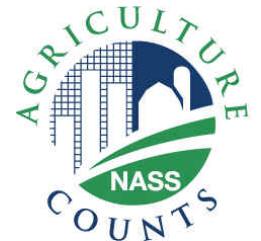
Jaki S. McCarthy

USDA/NASS

Research and Development Division

Enhancing Data Collection for Complex  
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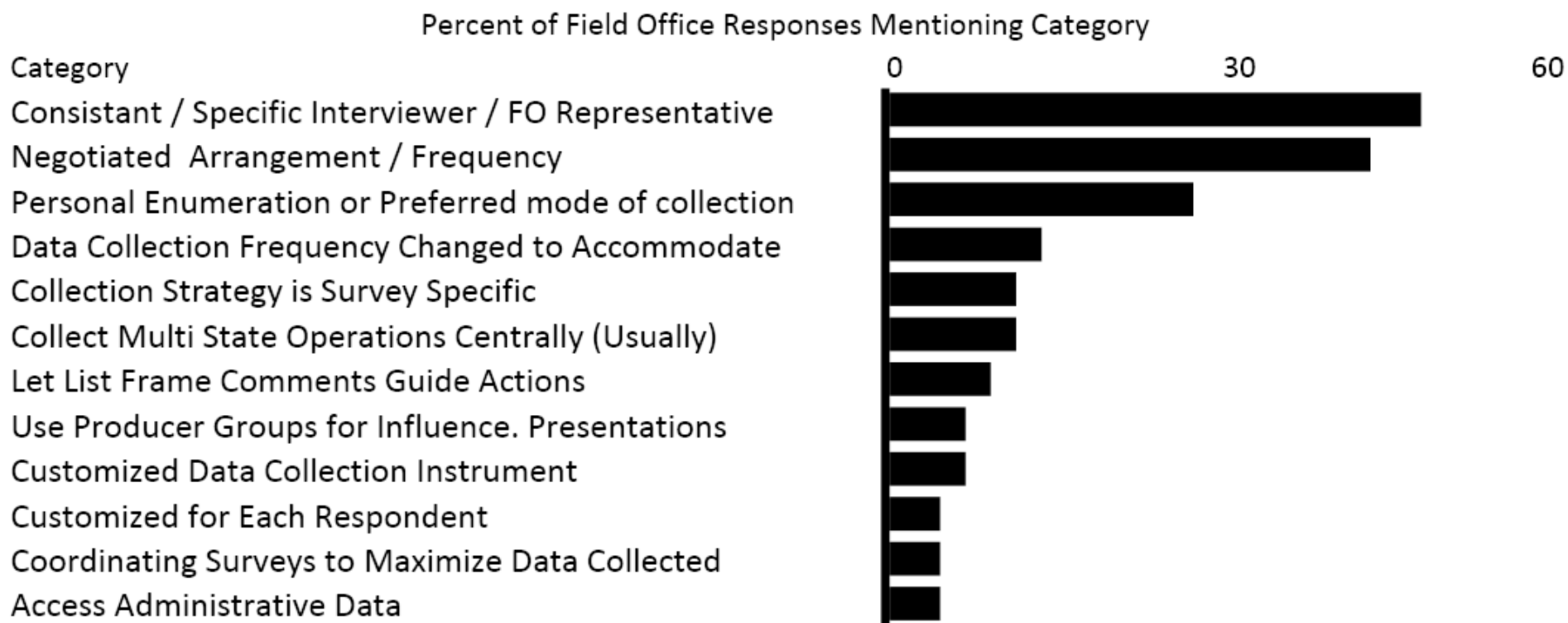


# Data collection for Complex Operations handled locally in NASS field offices

- Each field office director is responsible for data collection for operations in their state
- Multi-state operations handled by mutual agreement of field offices
- Each operation has its own unique issues



## Please describe your data collections strategies for these operations



1/ All Forty-six field offices responded, forty-four provided a codeable response to the question. Open responses were coded into all categories mentioned.

*“Please describe your data collection strategies for these operations...”*

- Use specific/consistent person to collect data
- Collect data in person
- Maintain specific contact information
  - For example, manager #1 can report for crops, manager #2 can report for livestock
- Take global reports and break it down to level needed (e.g. county)

*“Please describe your data collection strategies for these operations...”*

- Move data from one survey form to another
  - Use data from ag yield survey to complete crops/stocks
  - Use available administrative data to complete survey
- Take global reports and break it down to level needed (e.g. county)

*“Please describe your data collection strategies for these operations...”*

- Provide custom spreadsheets instead of questionnaires
- Assign agronomists for data collection
- **“Data collection strategies are customized for each operation.”**

# There is NO standard Field Office approach to data collection

- *“We just try to be responsive to their needs and wishes.”*
- *“Data collection strategies are customized for each operation.”*
- *“We want to provide the best number possible for your industry/company, tell us the best way to collect it– we’ll do it. Whatever it takes.”*

# Data collection cited as much less of a concern than **cooperation**

- *“Special handling most likely starts with a personal visit from the Field Office staff.”*
- *“We accommodate the producer’s request as much as possible while still meeting our data needs.”*
- *“It is all about building relationships and having a consistent NASS representative...”*



# The Science of Influence

- Research in social psychology on persuasion, influence, and cooperation

*(lots of work by Cialdini)*

- The intent for us:
  - to understand why respondents would want to cooperate with data requests
  - Have responding be viewed positively

# Motivation to respond can be viewed on two levels:

- Establishment:
  - Corporate social responsibility (understanding impact on society of good data – e.g. stock market, prices, etc., responsibility to public good)
  - Attention (if higher level management puts priority on response, subordinates will pay attention)
  - Prioritizing (data requests are prioritized against other company activities)
  - Statistical hub (requests must be delivered to appropriate respondent within establishment)
- Individual respondent:
  - Emotional aspects (perceived burden, personal ties with National Statistical Institutes, empathy and sympathy, mood)
  - Habits (reporting on a routine basis, familiarity with reporting task)
  - Worth attached to survey task (value for business, survey sponsor, beliefs about statistics & surveys)
  - Obligations (mandatory reporting, reporting as part of job description)

*\*Based on work by Statistics Netherland, Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden, Statistical Office of Slovenia, University of Bergamo and University of Ljubljana*

# Motivation and Influence from a Social Psychology Perspective

- Material Self-Interest
- Reciprocation
- Consistency
- Social proof
- Liking
- Authority
- Scarcity



# Material Self-Interest

- The most basic motivation, but really not much to work with here for us
- So why else do people want to cooperate?



# Reciprocation

“You do for me, I’ll do for you.”

- This goes both ways:
  - Once a “debt” has been accepted, there is a sense of obligation to return the favor
    - Providing data products, services before requests for data
    - If operations agree to report, we may make reporting concessions (limited data, extra processing, etc.)
- *“Providing useful, or even interesting feedback.”*
- *“We also do provide some personalized data products ...such as cropland data layer maps with their operations plotted on it.”*
- *“NASS needs ...to develop products specific to producers in relation to the data they provide.”*
- *“...we may have to make deals to only collect for specific surveys and not others...”*



# Consistency

“Once a responder, always a responder.”

- Individuals want to remain consistent in their behaviors and beliefs
  - If you’ve agree to report before, you should report the next time
  - If you, as a member of an commodity organization, support the agency, you as an individual business should also
- Sending same person to collect data makes each experience consistent with past visits
- *“We try to maintain consistency ...by sending the same enumerator back over time.”*
- *“The other primary strategy we employ is communication with industry leaders about the survey we are doing.”*
- *“...when an operation is asked to provide a tour or host a meeting, they respond to our surveys.”*



# Social Proof

“I’m not the only one who thinks this is a good idea.”

- Knowing what other people do, gives you a sense of what is appropriate



- *“The #1 strategy that is paying dividends is meeting with groups of producers when no data is needed, and discussing the NASS reports and their impact.”*
- *“We try to attend as many ag meetings as we can. ... Most of these groups have influential growers on them which can help spread the word.”*



# Liking

“Well, aren’t you nice.”

- You’re more likely to comply with people you like
  - Enumerators try to build rapport and on-going relationships
  - Personal visits without data collection to build rapport
- *“It is easier for the respondent to refuse USDA/NASS than Troy the guy in Trenton.”*
  - *“Experienced agronomists are assigned for data collection, and usually, they have a long term relationship with the operators.”*
  - *“I seek them out just to visit....I want them to know they can talk to us without us always wanting information.”*





# Similar to business “customer visits”

- Businesses often send out technical reps to do on site customer visits
  - “... it drives the point home that the customer information that you lack is often not a matter of facts or details. Instead, what is missing is a key perspective, a basic principle or a bedrock assumption.”
  - “customers want to have contact with vendor personnel who are intimately familiar with and have decision making power over the core product technology.”

*\*from: Customer Visits, Building a Better Market Focus*

# Authority

“This request is from someone with a respected position.”

- Requests from authority figures carry more weight
  - Statistical Agency as respected organization (versus commercial organizations)
  - Seek approval from corporate headquarters
  - Field Office director versus “regular” interviewer
  - Support from respected trade/commodity organizations
- *“When commodity association boards have buy in, it really helps to say this when talking to these complex operations.”*
- *“Attending and speaking at trade organizations allows NASS reps to generate a familiarity and legitimacy...”*
- *“...headquarters personnel of the appropriate stature should negotiate with high ranking officials at corporate agricultural firms....”*
- *“NASS needs to engage the consulting services and market advisors that these folks pay to give them advice...”*



# Scarcity

“This is a limited opportunity to be heard.”

- Limited opportunities are more highly valued
- Scheduling in person data collection also means there is a limited window for help providing the data



# More can be done to support data collection and processing

- The emphasis at the Field Office level is maintaining relationships and cooperation
- Data handling strategies are individual and likely diverse – know the individuals!
- Strategies are not formally shared
  - *“There needs to be an ‘inventory’ of these practices so that other similar circumstances can be adopted without re-inventing the wheel.”*
- What can we do to support data handling activities for the small set of “special handling” operations?

# Some possible areas to develop suggested by Field Offices

- Working with existing organization data systems
  - For example, accepting spreadsheets
- Expanding use of administrative data
  - FSA, RMA, are there others?
- Incorporate more previously reported data into current requests for data
- Formally combine data collection instruments for multiple surveys
- Formalize a NASS “dog and pony” show of highly knowledgeable & capable speakers

# Statistics are not just numbers

- Without cooperation, there is no data
- Cooperation leads to understanding the organization and how it is structured
- In person visits are key to this
- Data quality can be impacted either positively or negatively

# Hard to Evaluate Impact on Data Quality

- Without cooperation, there is no data
- Cooperation leads to understanding of the operation and how it is organized
- “Customer visits” by Field Office staff are important part of this
- Data quality can be impacted either positively or negatively

# Cooperation is Key!

- At both the establishment and individual level, social psychology principles can be employed
  - to motivate operations to respond
  - to help respondents view reporting as a positive





Thank You!

Questions?  
Comments?

