

Mr. Hubert Hamer, Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service Transcript

Next on our agenda we have Mr. Hubert Hammer. He's the administrator for the National Agriculture Statistical Service. He's been doing that for quite a while and we've known one another for quite a while as well. He's very articulate with what he does and he's the one that keep all the stats and data for us. And one thing he probably alluded to is that when you do these [inaudible 00:49:06] and what have you, he actually can use their statistics in the grants. He drills down on that because it's not all being done for normal. [inaudible 00:49:17] things we said, Mr. Hammer, I'm going to turn it over to you.

Mr. Hammer: Thank you Chairman Reed and Committee. It's great to be here with you today. I certainly wish I could be there in person, but I do have, I believe our Arizona State statistician, Mr. Dave DeWalt. I believe he's in the room. Dave, if you're in the room, would you please stand so that you can be recognized? Okay, thank you. I can see you in the corner. All right, so Mr. Reed, we're going to proceed and give you a little bit of background on NASS and we're going to end up talking a lot about the census of agriculture. I know you're very, very familiar with that program, so we're excited to be able to communicate with the committee. Can you hear me? Is the audio fine or do I need to do something different?

Speaker 2: You're good.

Speaker 4: You're good.

Mr. Hammer: Okay. Thank you. Whoever's running the slide. Next slide please, and I'll just jump right in here and provide some information. USDA NASS, we're the data collection arm for USDA. Our mission is to provide timely and accurate and useful statistics and service to US agriculture. And we do that by providing about 450 statistical reports on all segments of agriculture on an annual basis. In addition to that, we conduct the five-year census of agriculture program every fifth year, and we're working on that now. We'll talk a lot more about that at the end of the presentation as hopefully you already are aware that we're in the process right now.

Next slide. Before we go forward, we'll go back a little bit and give you a little history on the organization. Obviously, the Department of Agriculture was founded in 1862 by Abraham Lincoln for the purpose of information gathering, so that's very, very close to the mission of our agency.

And our first prop report was released in 1863. George Washington is recognized as the first agricultural statistician because he knew the value of information and data and started to survey states to find out information on

land values, prices, and yields. So these are two of our favorite presidents because one established a department and the other was a statistician and interested in collecting information about the status of agriculture in the area.

Next slide. All right. I want to talk a little bit, this graphic represents basically the field footprint for NASS. We have 12 regional offices and 23 satellite offices. Obviously in Arizona, that's part of the mountain region. And obviously you've had a chance to acknowledge Dave DeWalt being there. But basically, we want to make sure that we're able to provide support at the local level, that we have a contact to be able to go out to talk to producer groups, the university system, the commodity associations, our community-based organization partners.

So we've got boots on the ground, basically covering all of the states a little bit more on NASS, we're one of the smaller agencies in USDA. We have about 850 to 900 full-time federal employees. All of our employees are career civil servants, no political appointees in the organization because we are a principal statistical agency and independent agency, the products that we disseminate have no political influence. Our staff is augmented with about 3000 contract employees. About 500 of those employees work basically from their homes or in phone banks to call producers to collect information on our survey program. And then we have about 2,500 what we call field enumerators that go out and collect information from the very large producers to collect that information. They'll knock on the door if they're large enough significant AG producers. Next slide.

Want to say a little bit about our core values and some of the principles that guide us. The first thing is we want to be policy relevant. We want to make sure that the information that we provide is useful to policy makers and decision makers when they're, for instance, working on the farm bill or other legislation. Objectivity, we don't favor any group over the other and they don't have any influence on the final statistical products that we disseminate. We must maintain the credibility of our data user community, the trust of the data providers. Most of the information that we are basing that information on comes from farmers and ranchers, and we have a very strong commitment to customer service. If you call our office looking for information, we will be helpful and provide that information. The graphic on the right basically represents the US Federal Statistical System of which NASS is one of the 13 principles, statistical agencies and the US government.

There are two statistical agencies out of the 13 in the United States Department of Agriculture, NASS, and the Economic Research Service. In the center of this diagram basically, are the core values of the US statistical system, and ours closely align with the rest of the federal statistical system. Next slide, please. All right. I talked about some of the things we do. Obviously, we are a collector, a

processor, a disseminator of US agriculture information, about 400 surveys on an annual basis. I mentioned the 450 reports that has information on crops, livestock, economic and environmental statistics. And our flagship, our largest data collection program is the census of agriculture that's data collected every fifth year. We provide information for more than 3000 counties, parishes and boroughs across the United States.

We work very closely with the state departments of agriculture, trade associations, universities, community-based organization partners. Anyone that needs information or needs to know about what we do, we're able to partner and work with those organizations to further their data collection or their data collection appetite, I should say. Next slide.

Okay. There's some things we don't do and we want to be readily reticent about that. We don't set any policy in the organization. We don't regulate any activities. Sometimes there's some confusion, especially in the minority communities, if I provide this information to NASS, will they share that information with others? Will they share it with the Internal Revenue Service, immigration officials, or any other organization? Any information that any farmer or rancher or producer that they provide that information to NASS, it is illegal for us to share that information with any organization or any entity. So I want to be very clear about that. We don't disclose that identity of those operations, and if we do, there are fines and prison time associated with that. So the information you provide to us can only be shared and rolled up to the county level, the parish level, the state or district or US level.

So you cannot be identified in the data. Next question. I mean, next slide please. Okay. A little bit more. I'm going to jump into the census of agriculture. It has a very long and rich history. First conducted in 1840 in 22 state, 26 states, and the District of Columbia. This program was housed at the United States Census Bureau until it moved over to the USDA to NASS in 1997. We've collected the census data for every census since 1997. We collected data in '97, 2000 and 2007, 2012, 2017, and now we're collecting information for the 2022 census. Next slide.

Okay. Not only do we collect the information in the mainland, but we collect information we're collecting right now for Puerto Rico. We collect census data for Guam, the Virgin Islands, Northern Marianna Islands, and American Samoa. Again, when we finish the process, we will release about five to 6 million new data points with data for more than 3000 zip codes. We have this data also by congressional district, by watershed. We can slice it and dice it in many different ways. There are a lot of different products that come out of the census of agriculture. And in fact, if there's some data that is collected that you can't find

it published anywhere, we will run a special tabulation for you to provide some specific information that you may not be able to find in one of the publications.

When we run a special tabulation, we have a page out on our website. We have a number of clients that have asked for those special tabulations. We post all of those on the website so that other users can take advantage of that work that's already been done. So we just want to make it easy. You can see if someone's asked for something special and we were able to provide that information to them. Next slide.

Okay. I mentioned before, this program is taken every five years. Basically, when you think about the census of agriculture, it measures the structure of US agriculture, how much the most precious resources land, how much land is involved, how many farmers, how many farms, what are the demographic characteristics of those farmers? What is the average age? What is the contribution of women to US agriculture? What is the contribution of veterans to agriculture? So we're able to slice that information and provide it. There's no other source that has the rich data that the census has. Next slide.

Okay. I mentioned some of the data that's included. Ownership, producer characteristics, demographics, expenditures. Much, much more. Next slide, please. Okay. The definition of a farm. Most of the farms, we have a little over 2 million farms. The vast majority of these farms are small farms. In fact, about roughly 60% of those are less than 10,000 in sales. So we want to make sure that we locate an account for every farm, no matter where it is or the size, and no matter who's operating that farm. People talk about agriculture in terms that it's mostly big producers. It's actually mostly small producers. So we want to make sure that bar is very low for inclusion, \$1,000 in ag products and sales, and to make sure that we're able to capture most of US agriculture. Next slide.

Okay. Move on. Next slide please. Okay. I'm going to jump into and say a little bit about where we're at right now. We use this census also. One other point I want to make is as a sampling frame. I'll give you an example of commodities like organic production or hemp production. What we try to do is measure things that have been happening in agriculture a long time, and then new and emerging commodities. So we'll collect, we started out by collecting just an indicator, a check mark, do you have organic sales? Do you have hemp production? And then we'll go back after that and contact only those producers to provide a special study on that type of commodity.

And some of the decisions that are used with the census data to locate transportation and marketing locations, farm services, different programs and policies are developed based on this information. And we learn a lot about

production practices, and as I mentioned, some new technologies that are involved in agriculture. Next slide.

Okay. Next slide, please. Okay. I want to talk about currently where we're at with the census response. We're knee-deep into it. We started the data collection process back in November and December of 2022, and we had an initial date of February 6th to have that information back in. Typically, we always extend that date because some producers would like to be able to do their taxes at the same time and have all of their records together to provide this information. We are still collecting information, there's still time. We want to make sure that, again, our community-based organization partners, I know Chairman Reed is very familiar that we look to these partners to do outreach to the communities to say, "This information is important." You need to provide this information because it will help your community for community planning. It helps to have this information for farm succession planning.

So the data are very valuable. The other thing we need to be very cognizant of, if you look around the severe weather activities that are happening almost weekly, and I know about Mississippi and what's happened through Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee, but we need these types of data to help with disaster assistance. So I always say if we don't count you, you don't really count in the total. So we want producers to be able to receive relief, to be made whole after they have a disaster in their community. And these are some of the data that FSA uses for that process. RMA uses this data in the department to come up with risk management programs. So there are a lot of uses for these data to help support local communities. Next slide.

Next slide, please. Okay. I mentioned, I want to stress it again. The response, and this is included on the questionnaire, on the mailing. Your response is required by law for the census of agriculture, and it is protected by the same law. We're not going to come out. There's no penalty if you don't send the questionnaire in. But it's very, very important. And it's the only data collection that we have that's required by law, and it's stamped on the envelope to signify the importance of that information.

Next slide. Next one, please. Okay. I mentioned before, it's still time to respond. I believe we're about 48, 49% complete right now. The minority populations are running a little bit below that. So again, if you have contacts with any producers, any producer organizations, we're going to be collecting information through May and probably into June. So there's still time. We have two more mailings. The questionnaire will be mailed out a couple of more times. We'll call producers. We're going to do everything we can to give them an opportunity to be able to be counted in the census of agriculture.

Next slide. If you need information and data, you can go to our website, www.agcounts@usda.gov. Again, in addition to being able to collect information on the census program, you can get access to all of the reports that we released. Basically, several reports every week to get up to 450 on an annual basis. Some days we have multiple reports coming out. You have multiple ways to respond to the census of agriculture. The best way is online. It's secure. It's the most convenient and quickest way to do it. And we realize some areas don't have good broadband connectivity, therefore there's a paper alternative. So paper questionnaires will come to your mailbox if you don't respond online.

Next slide. Partnership. I want to mention that we're working very closely with the producer organizations, very closely with our USDA partners. If you go into an FSA or NRCS office, they should have some background information on the census of agriculture contact information for your local state statistician or your regional office. We have actual live people answering the phones, if you call, to help producers get through the questionnaire very quickly.

Next slide. I want to say something about our community-based organization partners. When we took over the census of agriculture in 1997, these relationships were not in place, and we learned very quickly that we needed to reach out and work with all of the different ethnic populations. Hmong, Asian, Black farmers, Latino farmers, you name it. We basically hosted a large community-based organization workshop in August. We had 45 to 50 different organizations, nearly 100 participants on that Zoom meeting. And we have a promise in place that after the data are released, we'll do the exact same thing. We'll bring them.

We normally have that workshop in person. Mr. Reed has attended that workshop on a number of occasions, but due to COVID, we conducted that workshop on Zoom. The release of the information will bring the participants back together in person, as we have in the past, to share the results with them, to go through the results. We generally will have someone there that's familiar with grant writing. A lot of these data can help with grant proposals and the likes. So we will always stand behind the commitment to the community-based organizations. It's been a great partnership and we look forward to continuing that as we move forward.

Next slide. I wanted to extend an invitation to this committee to join us for lockup. This is something that you can actually get out of. It's not something that you go into and you can't get out of. But basically, out of all of the reports that we produce, we have some reports that are called Principle Federal Economic Indicator Reports. These are market moving reports that are traded on the Chicago Board and Chicago Mercantile Exchange. And we have to have security around those reports so that the information cannot leak out. I don't

know if you remember saying a movie called Trading Places back in the '80s with Eddie Murphy and Dan Akroyd. They kind of spoofed taking one of our reports, our orange report.

But this lockup, basically it's a full physical perimeter around the workspace. You have to go through a security protocol to get in, pretty much like you going through the airport. It's a magnetometer to make sure you don't have any cell phones, or smart watches, or any information that you can communicate with the outside world. The staff will go in anywhere from midnight to 4:00 AM the night before. Those reports are released at noon the next day. So you can take in any food, or drinks, or whatever you need to get you through till noon the next day. Because no one, you see the armed guard, he's out there, the doors are alarmed, the windows are locked, there's no way out, once you go in, until that report is released the next day.

I would invite, and we bring visitors in to participate in that process, Mr. Chairman, if you are having a meeting in Washington that coincides with these reports, the secretaries or one of his representatives generally will come over to sign these lockup reports. And if you come at a time when we don't have a report that day, we will do a mock lockup for you. Walk you through the process, show you exactly how it's conducted, and then give you a briefing of information from the prior reports.

So with that, excited to take down the slide so I can see everyone and excited to answer any questions that you have. I did have a chance to sit through the last presentation and enjoyed hearing the question and answer session. If you come up with something really tough, I think I've got Dave there in the room. I'll turn the hard questions to him and handle. And we can talk about the census or any of our programs. So Mr. Chairman, we're open for questions.

Speaker 7:

I'd like to lead off [inaudible 01:12:27]. Now we've been together for quite a long time. Steve, what you're doing at your agency at NASS, we try to do the same thing with FSA. You are able to get there, get the information, know where the people are. [inaudible 01:12:48] at FSA, they can't find nobody. This morning I received a telephone call. One of the members of the FSA office, they wanted a CVO to go out there and find the farmer to get them to sign all the forms that they need to have in the office. This is ridiculous.

You give them data to work with, but they don't utilize the data the way they should. If they used the same template that you all do, but I know you can't release certain things and what have you, but they could do the same thing. Because we talked to them yesterday and what have you. We didn't get anywhere yesterday on that. But all I'm saying, all of us are part of USDA. You

more positionally with what you're doing. You put reports out, this, that, and the other. They can call you to get things done and what have you.

But the same information that you have applies to those farms that are out there. I guess you got more information on farmers than the FSA. If it's not true, they're not releasing it. This committee is just here to do one thing: to get information to see exactly what policy is that they need to be changed. Because [inaudible 01:14:02] said was more aggressive as NASS, we wouldn't be here today. We wouldn't be here today, because you could go [inaudible 01:14:12] some more and what have you.

They even go to the next town to tell us something. Some members, we heard that they have to go to next counties just to get things done, because the agency at their service center is not serving to them. Because it's ridiculous that these things exist today, 2023. That you can find it, and they can't find it. So I don't know why.

Speaker 6: Well, we consider ourselves a customer service organization. And anything we can do to help producers or people in the industry, we're certainly happy to do that. That's our job. And we want to make sure that you have access to our team, to our staff. I know you know a number of our staff persons. We do have accountability. If you need something, and if you're not getting it, we want to hear about it. And we want to make sure that we are accountable to this committee and the taxpayers.

They're the boss. They're the ones who pay for these services, and we want to make sure that anyone who's interested in data that they get it. But we want to be able to put out the highest quality product. We want to be able to put out the highest quality product. And we can only do that if we get very strong response from the producers. And again, we want to make sure they know that we are going to protect the integrity of their data, and we cannot share that with anyone. And we're just here to try to provide that service.

Lois Kim: Question. Lois Kim from McAllen, Texas. What is the participation rate among the producers throughout the United States of America? And what is the regional variation? And are there any areas where their participation is especially low?

Speaker 6: Yeah. You can tell some regional trends. And I'm just going to use a census of agriculture, since we were talking about that. The census of ag in 2012 and 2017, the census, we had more than a 70% response rate. And I don't know if that seems high to you, but that's very, very high. If you talk to universities and statistical and survey research organizations, they would die for that response.

We are at about 47, 48% this year on the census. That's down about five points. We're down lower than we were at this same time in the cycle.

So we're ringing the bell. We're telling everyone, "It's still time. We want to make sure you get counted. We want to make sure you have an opportunity." Especially these small, limited resource, minority producers. We want to make sure you're counted. Because these programs and policies that they're paying for, there needs to be data to show where they're located at, what commodities they're growing. And you can't do that if you don't have data.

So my ask for the committee, Mr. Chairman, if I can, that if you have contacts with organizations, we'll provide some PR material, electronic for social media, if they have electronic guides or whatever. Dave is there for Arizona. He can give you the contact for Kristen, our public affairs director. We will fix it up any way you want it. Tailor-made any way you want it.

But we just want to help. We need help getting the word out, so that we can make sure that this is a very, very accurate and reflective census. But back to her question. Yes, they're regional pockets into the Dakotas and some of those areas, the response rates are historically lower. They're generally higher in the South and across the Sunbelt area. But we noticed those trends over time.

Dave: Go ahead. You [inaudible 01:18:31].

Allison Sanchez: This is Allison Sanchez. I was wondering if you had the participation rates for minority farmers, particularly.

Speaker 6: We have them for 2017. I don't have those with me. We have also to go along with the census, we have an appendix A that talks about all the methodology and the accuracy of the data. All of that is online at our website, all the background material on the census.

Dave: I can comment on Arizona, specific 2017. First of all, approximately two-thirds of Arizona producers are American Indians. And 95% of those are Navajo. So we started out slow in 2017 collecting data from the Navajo. But we didn't have a workshop until the end of February. But when we got the newly hired enumerators out there, they went gang busters and Arizona ended up, as a whole, number six in the nation response rate. It was close to 90%.

Group: Question. Question on your [inaudible 01:19:56].

Speaker 6: We've had a strong partnership with the Navajo Nation. We ended up disseminating a special product, a visualization. Dave, you might say something about that. They asked, "Well, can you do something special?" And we heard

what they said, what they needed. And you might say something about that, Dave.

Dave: Well, we started in 2007 counting American Indian individually. Before that, it was one nation, one farm.

Group: Wow. Mm-hmm. Hm. Wow.

Dave: Indian country came to USDA and said, "We're not being represented." So in 2007 we were asked to count each individual producer, and we went about that. And just for Arizona members, we went from approximately 8000 or 9000 farms to 15,000 in 2007, 20,000 in 2012, and then 19-something in 2017. And that was the impact, what I called the Navajo effect.

Speaker 7: My question, were the enumerators from the tribal communities? Or were these just general people?

Dave: I'll address that [inaudible 01:21:20]. I'm going to mention what-

Speaker 7: Yup.

Speaker 6: No, go ahead.

Dave: We told them in 2007 that we would get the Navajo Nation a summary by chapter. There are 115 chapters on the Navajo Nation. They're like little communities, and each one is their own little community, we'll just call it. 115 of them. And there's enough data there where we can break it out to each one. We can't do that for Hopi. We can't do that for Sam Carlos. They're just too small. But for Navajo, given their size and their number of producers, we're able to provide them a summary in 7, 12, and 17. They're called chapter house summaries.

And what he referenced is a more colorful visual display of the data on Tableau. We had the regular two-sided profile of each tab there, but we also had Tableau for visual, same looking [inaudible 01:22:37]. The enumerators on Navajo Hopi. Hopi is surrounded by the Navajo Nation. We hired approximately 70 Navajo Hopi enumerators to speak the language. Nearly all of them speak Navajo or Hopi. So there's shouldn't be much of a communication barrier there.

And this is it includes Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona. And we had two workshops this year. One in Farmington, one in Tuba City. And we're fighting weather the last six weeks. It's just been unusually cold, wet, and snowy. And up there, there's a lot of dirt roads. It's just a mess. But now they should be going out like gang busters and we expect the response rate to just increase significantly over the last two months.

Speaker 8: Just interested in the size of the farms that you're surveying. What's the average size?

Dave: They're very small.

Speaker 8: Yes.

Dave: Most of them actually are what we call point farms. Less than \$1000 worth of sales. But if they had sold their livestock, sheep, vegetables that they grew, it would've been over it \$1000. That's why they're counted as producers.

Speaker 8: I thought you had to be have \$1000 minimum for be considered a farm.

Dave: Or the potential to.

Speaker 8: Or the potential. That's something that I never understood.

Dave: Six cows, three horses, two sheep.

Speaker 7: And because they're a sovereign nation.

Dave: Well, it's just that our definition of a farm is they might be point farms. So they didn't make the \$1000 actual in sales, but they could have. And we can't say that they're not producers, because they don't sell it. They could have. We don't know if they're going to sell it or not.

Speaker 7: It's value.

Speaker 8: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Dave: So a lot-

Speaker 8: I think there's a lot of misunderstanding about that issue. I've attended your live sessions in wherever they were with groups. I was there for when [inaudible 01:25:09] was at this, so he said. I never understood that a producer under \$1000, he should...

Speaker 6: Well, I can give you another example. For instance, if you put in an apple orchard, you put in 5,000 trees, you're not going to produce any apples that year.

Speaker 8: Right.

Speaker 6: But you will. You have the potential. So agriculture, there's so many nuances around this. The main thing is fill the questionnaire out and send it in. Okay?

That's the main thing. And then, we have methodology and procedures to account for them. Like I said, a lot of these are small operations. And it's a lifestyle kind of situation for some, that they might have had a career, and they come back, and they buy a few acres, they have a little hay. They may not consider themselves a farm. But if you're growing hay, and you got a... Before you know it, you are a farm.

Speaker 8: Well, that's a good question. Because I've been involved with a number of churches who have small things that they serve for the community, and I don't know. But those are all very... And they don't actually charge for their production. But you're saying that they should participate in the census.

Group: [inaudible 01:26:38].

Speaker 8: Because they have value. And even though it may be under \$1000, they still have value. They should participate.

Speaker 6: See, and that's the thing about the way we're able to slice and dice the data. We can tell you how many producers are above \$2 million in sales, above a million, above 500,000, or whatever. How many are less than 10,000? How many... So you break it down. You can see where the production is, where the small producers are. And it helps policy makers develop programs and policy to support that.

So that's why, again, the census is the only place you're going to get that data at the granular level to be able to look across the whole United States to see what's happening. And then, we have all these regional commodities and regional differences in production and production practices. So it's a big collection for us.

Terry Jr.: Carrie, Jr. I wanted to [inaudible 01:27:43] answer the question. I represent rural Black farming cooperative in Michigan. And majority of my rural farmers are between 70 and 90 years old. To this day, they will not fill out that census. Not because of NASS, maybe some of the experiences they had with other USDA departments. So I've been trying since the '12 census, when I saw it. But I went and saw the original census in '12. My farmers are in three counties. And it showed Hispanic farmers, women farmers, and general farmers. It showed no Black farmers. But yet, I did have roughly 40 farmers out there that are in the area that we're in.

So my whole idea of trying to figure out how to get them to do that. Now I do have a relationship with your office in the area. But what I'm going to ask you [inaudible 01:28:33] I'm asking about your enumerators, is that is it possible that my organization will get a cooperative agreement to hire a couple of people from the area? Because I think they would probably be more comfortable

answering questions to the people that they know than, say, a federal government employee. We're working on some other things, too, to get them engaged. Because we need to get them engaged as we try to get involved with the USDA programs.

Speaker 6: Well, we work with several community-based organizations out of Michigan. We have hired some minority enumerators in that area. You can see from our experiences in Arizona, it does help. And when you have these outreach meetings or small farms meetings with the universities and the community organizations, that's when it's critical to get that information out there to say, "Hey, you really need to be counted." And no one can make them do it.

But having that third party endorsement from someone trusted in the community, and that's really the big... You hit the key word is trust. And that's why we started these partnerships with the community-based organizations. Because they could vouch for how these data are used to support communities. Sometimes it's used in formula funding. Okay? So we may have money that should be designed for rural America, it may be going to urban America. We just want to make sure that agriculture gets its fair shot.

Terry Jr.: Yeah, with all due respect, I've been doing this for 10 years in Michigan. And I didn't even know about your outreach programs, and I don't know who else is out there that's doing this work. That's doing this work, at least from a rural standpoint. There are other rural farms. There are a couple other organizations, none [inaudible 01:30:28] socially disadvantaged farmers are aware of. But I'm saying, so you're telling me that I got to find... I'm curious who that is. Because if anything [inaudible 01:30:35], our cooperative is the only recognized Black official cooperative in the state of Michigan. So you-

Speaker 6: I don't know how they're titled or whatever, but we have a regional office in Lansing, Michigan. And we work with several groups out of Michigan. And Dave can give you the name of and phone number for our regional director in Lansing, and you can follow up. And she'll be able to tell you the organizations that we're working with.

Terry Jr.: And I do know her. I do know her.

Speaker 6: Yeah, Marlow Johnson.

Terry Jr.: We have talked on this, but I haven't heard from regards to the [inaudible 01:31:11].

Speaker 6: Okay. All right.

Lois Kim: Question. Hi, Lois Kim. So two questions. In order to participate in the census, do you have to have a farm number? Because in order to get a farm, you don't.

Speaker 6: No.

Lois Kim: And who's going to mail the producer the census? How do you participate?

Speaker 6: We do everything we can to screen operations to find out if they're farmers. We have a spot on our website where you can go and sign up. Again, we try to work with these community-based organizations. We don't hit everyone. We don't bat 1000. But we're at these small farms conferences. So we have a lot of different list sources, producer organizations, people that grow certain commodities, they'll give us their list of farmers. Because we can't share it with anyone else, but we can use it in our programs. So there are a variety of ways, but you can go directly to our website and sign up, or send people to that to sign up to be counted, as well.

Lois Kim: So the reason why I ask is I come from an area where the participation in the census is 5%. This is the Rio Grande Valley. And for whatever reason, people are very afraid of participating. Whether they're a big grower or a small grower. So I know that you recently hired two enumerators to come to the station. And they're local people, and they're chasing after the big growers. Because even the big growers are not willing to spend the time to answer.

But they were there at women in ag conference. And at that time, they were present, but they didn't come out and say, "Hey, even if you don't have a farm number, you could still participate. Or even if you're a smaller grower, you can be part of it." There was no effort on their part to market it to the people who were there in the room. And I'd like to know from the previous census, when Arizona was able to include all those smaller farmers, yesterday they presented that 50% of all farmers in Arizona have less than 10 acres.

So in our area, a lot of people are coming into farming because they're inheriting the land from their parents, and they're very interested in doing something. And by maybe hearing from Arizona how that number led to more programs or more benefits in the area will really encourage the people to participate. Especially the ones who don't have farm numbers yet, so that we could get the momentum for the smaller growers and the new farmers in the area. So what were some benefits of increasing the participation and having actual numbers?

Dave: First, I'll start off with American Indians and acreage is a problem. We actually created a special questionnaire for American Indians, because the first question out of the box is, "How many acres do you own?" That doesn't work with American Indians. So we had to make a special questionnaire. Start off with,

"How many acres are you allowed to use under your permit?" It's all under permit. Tribes allow you to live here, they allow you X-number of acres. And most of our producers up there are less than five acres.

There's 11 million acres just in Arizona. We give that as open grazing land. It's not particularly used exclusively by one individual. It's all of them in that community. So we give a vast acreage to a tribal record. So the tribal record will have by county. So Apache County has, I would say, 5 million acres. And then, all the 3000 or 4000 producers in that county will have 1 to 10 acres each. Together, that's what, 15,000 acres max, out of 4 million. The average looks a little funny there. So you asked about the benefits.

Lois Kim: Yes. What...

Dave: What we've told them is, "You are representing your community. You're showing what value American Indians contribute to U.S. agriculture." You can use this information in writing grants for funding. It's just information showing everybody in the world how much American Indian agriculture there is, how many producers there are, what they produce. And that's about it.

Arnetta Cotton: I have a question. This is Arnetta Cotton. The Zoom, that meeting that you had back in August, was that recorded? And is it accessible?

Speaker 6: Yeah, I believe it is recorded, and we can share it. I believe it is recorded. We'll have to-

Group: [inaudible 01:37:03]. It is. Yes.

Speaker 6: Am I correct? I believe that's correct.

Dave: That's correct. Yes. Yes, it is.

Speaker 6: Okay. And we're happy to share it.

Arnetta Cotton: Yes. I would like that link. The other question that I have, I work closely, when needed, with our NASS representative in Oklahoma, Troy Marshall.

Speaker 6: Troy Marshall. We know him.

Arnetta Cotton: Love him, love him. But one thing I was dealing with had to do with agriculture. Another thing had to do with gathering statistical information for a book that I was doing for a client. So when I looked at our area, the county next to Wagner County is designated as a persistent property zone, based on the income, so forth, and so on. Our area is not designated as such. From my understanding, Troy said that they take the average of the county, income-wise.

Well, we have the second-largest paper plant in the United States there. And that income that the few millionaires that exist, it does not at all. Our school system is 67% poverty. I know, because I provide the summer feeding program for them. Our residents do not make that kind of money. We have 1800 and approximately 1,889 people in Inola, and we service between 725 and 750 through our food pantry every month. So there is no way that what is represented is statistically...

And I hear what you're saying, Hubert, you can't make the people fill it out. But if the income, median income is based on the millionaires, it's just not an accurate reflection of where we live and what's happening in our area. Now because we are next to a persistent property zone. We can't use their statistics in writing certain programs and regs and so forth and establishing partnerships when we ourselves are actually that.

Chair Reed: Mr. Hamer? [inaudible 01:39:15]. We've been around a long time. It's so strange that he's on other side of the table because normally it's vice versa. So I have a chance [inaudible 01:39:51] and what have you, but Ms. Cotton is so right because those things, it's almost like gerrymandering in regards to holiday duties, these companies and what have you. So those are the things that we have to look at this committee. I'm glad that we've gone on with everything. We going to suspend our break until after the last speaker before we go because we moving too good on everything else.

I want to tell you one thing. You're doing much better than these other folks that we talked to yesterday because we getting more done today that we can drill down for us to make recommendations and what have you. And I like the dialogue that's going on. And Ms. Cotton, I got to give it to you, [inaudible 01:40:28] down on the hammer 'cause he's here and he can handle it.

Speaker 9: Do you have an answer, or suggestion or recommendation?

Mr. Hamer: Well, do you know whose data they're using to make those determinations? Is that Bureau of Economic Analysis? Is that census data? What data are they using?

Speaker 9: Well, in talking with Troy, it was the census and he was referring to the 2017 and '12 because according to him, different areas were surveyed. And as you indicated earlier, the response rate of the minorities versus the other sectors of our community, there was a big chasm in between. So it just is not representative. But you're taking that data and as in your presentations, farm programs, allocations are being made on the data.

Mr. Hamer: But to that, you mentioned a large plant. I mean we're not collecting information from a plant.

Speaker 9: I understand that. But the billionaires-

Mr. Hamer: Are they farmers also?

Speaker 9: Huh?

Mr. Hamer: Are they farmers?

Speaker 9: Now, that I don't know because again, our area we have found is that a lot of athletes, congressmen, senators, our church is surrounded by Steve Lars's thousand acre ranch. And so they end up having businesses and farms. But as far as that plant is concerned, I don't know.

Mr. Hamer: But what I'm saying is our population that we survey are agricultural producers. We're surveying them to collect information. If they have a large ranch, obviously they're included. Income from a source like a plant is not something that will be included in our survey program. So that's why I was asking about the source of data that the county or the state is using to make that determination is not going to be based on, it doesn't sound like on agricultural data.

Speaker 9: I can't say. I really can't because I'm not into other people's business like that. We're surprised. Who owns that? I don't know who owns that. Who's operating that? I don't know who's operating that and even own it. Someone else could be operating it, I just don't know. But I didn't know, per choice, information that was provided and when he gave me the medium income amount, I told him there is no way, our county, our little town, there's no way that medium income is accurate.

Mr. Hamer: And what's your county?

Speaker 9: Wagoner County, Oklahoma.

Mr. Hamer: Say the name again, I'm sorry.

Speaker 9: Wagoner, spelled wagon and then add an E-R at the end. Wagoner.

Mr. Hamer: Okay. I will follow up with Troy. I want to make sure that we get all the deliverables that we have. We needed a link to the CBO workshop. Was that right, Dave?

Ms Cotton: Dave. Yes sir. John requested that.

Dave: Yes, I think we can get it.

Mr. Hamer: Okay, so we needed a link to that workshop and we can get that through to the OPPE staff. Harvey, is that okay if we follow this back to them and then they can help you get it distributed to the committee?

Chair Reed: I'd be glad to do that. We'll be glad. Just send it all over to us and we'll get it out before we leave here.

Mr. Hamer: Okay. And what was the other ask for NASS?

Ms Cotton: [inaudible 01:44:23].

Chair Reed: What else is there? What else do we need to do?

Mr. Hamer: We can give a link also to our website that's got all of our information, all the reports, the census data on there as well.

Ms Cotton: Yeah, when we convene and we're trying to come up with recommendations to the secretary, we're going to have a list of data points that we're going to... So we are accumulating that list now and I'm sure you'll get that in a feature of all the data points that we need to put a recommendation together.

Mr. Hamer: Okay. All right then.

Chair Reed: Okay. Great.

Speaker 9: And can I repeat the link that you gave www.addcountsusda.gov for that online census, correct?

Mr. Hamer: That's where you can sign up to be on the list. And then just www.nass.usda.gov is our general website. Once you get to any of them, you can click to it, but www.nass.usda.gov.

Speaker 9: Thank you.

Chair Reed: With that Mr. Hamer, I'd like to thank you for this morning. You've been very, very, very helpful as always.

Mr. Hamer: Thank you. Appreciate it.