

How to better promote the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service

Feasibility Study

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National Agricultural Statistics Service



Overview

- What's the problem?
- Communications program review
- Potential solutions
- Risks
- Recommended path forward



Problem Statement

Due to a variety of factors, including competing resources, a wide range of stakeholders with varied interests, awareness and understanding, trust, and time, it has been challenging for NASS to effectively promote its work, services, and data. If NASS does not effectively tell its story to both internal and external audiences it risks impacts to acquiring funding, building trust, producing higher response rates, and the ability to continue to provide quality data.



Communications Program Review

NASS-
commissioned
market research
(DAI, 2017, and Sage
Communications, 2021)

- Lack of trust
- Inconsistent involvement at grassroots level
- Difficult to connect with a government entity
- Traditional, top-down communications not as effective
- Industry and government partners are more important than ever as channels



Option 1 – Pilot Project

The pilot project will shift the culture of NASS promotion by:

- Reinventing the traditional government-to-community engagement model as a bidirectional, non-hierarchical, voluntary discussion and exploration that's centered in the *ag community*, not USDA or any one stakeholder
- Being open to new ways of doing and thinking when it comes to this community conversation
- Elevating the voices of stakeholders; using this pilot as a way of seeing data collection/reporting through their eyes



Option 1 - Pilot Project

NASS Public Affairs Office

PAO members (through a shared data or human resource) continually compile examples of communications opportunities/threats in their environment for the team/coordinator to assess during the goal-setting phase

Partners

Partners bring sample processes, assets, and metrics from their respective organizations (or a best-practice example in their segment) to the team during the Task Formation phase for consideration

Continuous monitoring of the ag communications environment to identify opportunities/threat for the program to examine/address

Audiences

Team may employ NASS or vendor resources to gain greater insight into audience perceptions or dispositions. Audiences might also be engaged to provide routine inputs to team questions via panels or surveys

Channels

Team maintains open lines of communications with representative ag channels to gain insights about channel developments and innovations that might not arise through either PAO monitoring or participant contribution



Option 2 - Storytelling

Telling a human story and putting a face on the story serves to achieve these outcomes:

- Importance: data assists local ranchers/farmers/growers and the local community at large
- Impact: data tells the story of America's farms and families; informs policy; reflects nuances in our food system
- Connection: NASS employees care about agriculture and many even come from farming backgrounds



Option 2 - Storytelling

- The Art and Science of Storytelling 101 training
- Media and partner list building
- Collecting stories of data and people
- Use omnichannel approach that relies on audio, digital/print media, and virtual in-person events to maximize engagement



Risk Analysis

The top risks of implementing proposed options include:

- Organizational overload
- Staff burnout
- Staff learning curve
- Burden on partners



Recommendations

Move forward
with both
options.

- Options support agency's strategic goals.
- NASS can utilize existing contract to spearhead storytelling training, communication tactics, and pilot project support.
- Can implement within the next fiscal year.



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