

# Respondent Relations Training



**United States Department of Agriculture  
National Agricultural Statistics Service**

A Presentation by the NOD-Training Group



# The Challenge

## Convincing Operators To Respond

- We aren't technically "selling" anything - BUT we do need to "sell" ourselves and the importance of the survey.
  - Response rate: Number of operators who respond out of the total selected (Sample) for contact.
  - High response rates important for broad representation and quality of results.

"Only one opportunity to make a first impression."

# Why People Choose to Participate in NASS Surveys

- Understand the survey and the uses for the data.
- Believe that the data is important to the industry.
- Believe the information is personally beneficial.
- Trust that their privacy and confidentiality will be protected.
- Perceive that the survey is not too difficult.
- Perceive you as a professional.
- Feel a personal rapport with you.

# The Reluctant Respondent

- Who is the reluctant respondent?
  - Has been contacted frequently or recently.
  - Has never been contacted before.
  - Doesn't know you or your organization.
- Reluctance is not:
  - A Refusal
  - Bad
  - Personal
- Reluctance is:
  - A request for information.
  - A test of credibility.
  - An opportunity to identify and respond to respondent concerns.
  - An opportunity to educate.



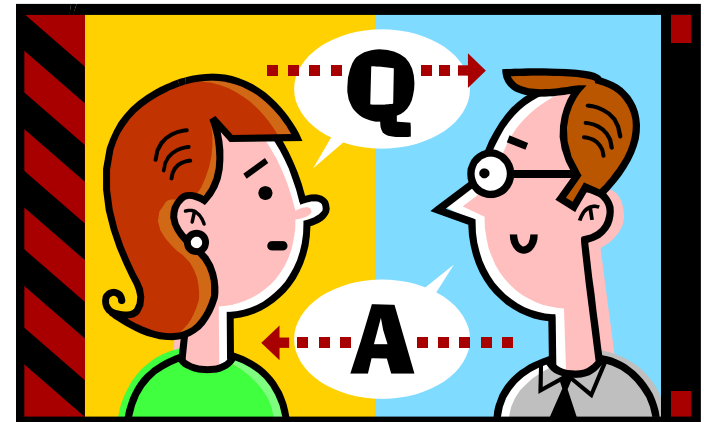
# Why People Might Be Reluctant

- Are busy.
- Have had a bad day.
- Feel their time is being intruded upon.
- May be confusing you with a “pollster” or a “telemarketer.”
- Do not like or trust the government.
- Question the legitimacy - do not want to reveal personal information to a stranger.



# What Do We Know About The Reluctant Respondent?

- Asking questions?
  - “That’s a great question!”
  - “I’m glad you asked that!”
  - 92% will participate.
- I’m too busy?
  - 80% will participate.
- Initial negative comments?
  - 52% will participate.



# Concerns ARE:



A request for more information.

**OR**

A need that has to be satisfied in order for the respondent to say YES.

# Who Am I?

- I am competing for your time & attention:
  - With other callers.
  - With your evening activities.
- You cannot see me:
  - There is no personal contact.
  - I can't show identification to prove who I am.
  - I can't show a calendar, printed list, or other visual aids to help you answer the questions I am asking.
- I cannot see you:
  - I can't see your reaction if you might be confused or concerned by a question.
  - I can't see any distractions you maybe experiencing.
  - I can't read your non-verbal clues, body language, etc.





# I Don't Have Time For This!



- Difference between “Time” concern and “Burden” concern.
  - Time – *When* they are being asked to participate.
  - Burden – *Effort* needed to participate.
- Remember the 80%.

# Confidentiality Concerns

- All information collected is confidential:
  - Employee Oath of Confidentiality.
  - Individual operations guaranteed by law that their information will be kept confidential.
  - Individual information is also protected from Freedom of Information Act requests.
  - Title 7 provides severe consequences for breaching this confidentiality.
- By Law we cannot share individual information with anybody else.
  - Including other government agencies.

# Other Concerns

- The Government
  - Intrusion
  - Distrust/Anger
  - Earnings/IRS
- The Data
  - Affects prices
  - Reports aren't accurate
  - Too personal
- The Operation
  - Too small to matter
  - Death/Crisis/Loss
- The Contact
  - Suspicious
  - “Don't do surveys”
  - Burn out
  - Pass Off/Gatekeeper
  - “Don't know”



# Prepare

Be familiar with the questions and know the survey purpose.

Why are we conducting this survey?

Who might be using the data for this survey?

Where might the data “show up?”

How might the results specifically help the respondent or people like them?

# The Call

- Maintain a courteous and respectful relationship.
- Elicit responses and listen carefully without “leading” the conversation and skewing the interview results.
- Emphasize direct, specific benefits of the data to their farm, their community, or their industry.
- Use every opportunity to increase respondent education - *even if they refuse.*

# Techniques

- Agree & Educate:
  - Assures them that their concerns are valid and you understand.
  - **“You’re right”** (To be cautious..., To be concerned..., To ask about...) **“That’s Why...”**
  - Then educate about survey purpose.
- Feel, Felt, Found:
  - Allows the respondent to feel heard and to identify with others.
  - “I understand how **you feel. Others have felt** that way too. **They found....”**
  - Then educate about survey purpose.

# Techniques

- Partial Commitment:
  - Agree to a partial interview.
  - May share more than originally intended.
- Paraphrase & Educate:
  - Shows you listened.
  - Restate their concerns as a question and get the “yes”.
  - Then educate about the survey purpose.
- “Don’t you think”?
  - Can encourage participation.
  - It asks the question AND gives the answer.
- Clarifying Questions:
  - “Would you tell me more about that?”
  - “Could you be more specific?”

# Listening Habits

Not really paying attention

**OR**

Focusing on the speaker

Rambling on, changing topic

**OR**

Paraphrasing for understanding

Interrupting

**OR**

Listening for the whole message

Focusing on your next response

**OR**

Addressing concerns with specific information



# Avoid

- Dead Air
  - Stay Engaged
  - ***(Talk & Do)***
- Repetition
  - Actively listen
  - Jot a quick note
  - Phrase follow-on questions to show you listened
- Speech Habits
  - Asking Permission
  - Over-talking
  - Interrupting
  - Habit Phrases
    - (“OK”)
    - (“Cool” - “Awesome”)
    - (“You Know”)
  - Fillers
    - (Uhm)
    - (Uh)

# Your Voice is Your Passport

- Tone of voice:
  - Show energy/enthusiasm
  - Inflection/Pitch
    - Varied
    - Animated
  - Rate
    - Too fast – Feel rushed
    - Too slow – Cause impatience
    - Match rate to respondent
- Clarity of speech:
  - More Formal
  - Enunciation
    - Articulate
  - Pronunciation
    - Familiarize
    - Practice



Show them your personality and let them hear your smile!



# Angry

- Remain calm, detached, and professional:
  - Do not argue, defend yourself, or defend the agency/government.
- Be quiet and allow them to vent:
  - Interrupting sends the message you are not listening or are not sensitive to their needs or concerns.
  - Interrupting causes the “start over.”
- When they have finished:
  - Empathize
  - Paraphrase back
  - Restate objections as questions
  - Ask clarifying questions
- May feel better after “venting”
  - May even agree to the interview.



# The Words

- “I can see how you might feel that way.”
- “That would be frustrating to anyone.”
- “That is a very difficult problem.”
- “I can understand how that must have been a problem for you.”
- “I’m sorry to hear that happened to you.”

# Respect

Should a respondent use racist, sexist, vulgar, or profane language which any employee finds offensive, that employee has the right to terminate the call solely at their own discretion.

Should such an incident occur, mark the record with a short comment about the incident and let a supervisor know what happened.

# Avoid the “No”

- Proper introduction:
  - Confident
  - Professional
  - Prepared
- **Active listening:**
  - Identify concerns
  - Keep them engaged
  - Respond appropriately
- Educating the respondent about the process:
  - Importance of survey
  - How information is used
  - Confidentiality
- Empathizing:
  - Heard what they said
  - Acknowledge how they feel
  - *Doesn't mean:* You agree with the feelings, or can do anything about them



# Things to Remember

- ***Do not ask permission*** – act “As If”
- Hang up? Call back.
  - Second hang up or straight to machine is a refusal.
- Identity Verification Call Back Requests
  - Provide a local number and the local hours of operation where they can reach a supervisor to confirm the legitimacy of the contact.

# The Final “No”

- Sometimes cannot be avoided.
- Don't take it personally:
  - Not *necessarily* rejecting you – just the survey.
  - However - take a moment to re-evaluate your approach.
- Provide as much information as you can.
- Thank them:
  - Just because they said “no” today doesn't mean they will next time.
- Maintain positivity and professionalism.
- Regroup and move on.



# YOU Are The Key

- You are the public “voice” of NASS.
- You are the key to quality information.
- You are Vital to the success of NASS



The screenshot displays the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) website. The header includes the USDA logo and the text "United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service". Below the header is a navigation menu with links for Home, About NASS, Newsroom, Publications, Data and Products, Contact, Services, Help, and Contact Us. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Search NASS:** A search bar with a "Go" button and a list of categories including All Issues, Assessment Reports, Statistics, and various reports.
- Today's Reports from NASS:** A section for August 31, 2006, listing reports such as "Healthy Slaughter", "Agricultural Prices", and "Feared Hacks and Processing".
- Quick Stats (Agricultural Statistics Database):** A section for selecting data by state and county.
- 2002 Census of Agriculture:** A section for accessing data from the 2002 Census of Agriculture.

On the right side, there is a "Want To..." section with links for "Select State from a State Farm (Quick Stats)", "Find NASS Systems", "Find Message Plans", "Request a Special Publication", "Have more time needed", "Find reports for more temporal data", "Visit the NASS Web Site", and "Career Opportunities". Below this is a "Specialties" section with links for "Today's Reports", "Press & Events", and "Public Knowledge". At the bottom right, there is a "Quick Stats" logo and the text "Statistical Data Base".