



PROCESS AND PROCEDURES FOR THE ANNUAL RELEVANCY AND ADEQUACY REVIEW

Fiscal Year 2015

Background

The National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board is statutorily required to perform an annual review of the relevancy of all agricultural research, extension, or education activities to the established Research, Education and Economics (REE) priorities and the adequacy of the funding for those activities (7 USC 7613(b)).

(b) Advisory Board review *On an annual basis, the Advisory Board shall review—*

*(1) the relevance to the priorities established under section [7612 \(a\)](#) of this title of the funding of **all agricultural research, extension, or education activities** conducted or funded by the Department; and*

(2) the adequacy of the funding.

The USDA Strategic Plan for 2010-2015 articulates a comprehensive vision for USDA. Furthermore, priorities directly related to science, education, and information are identified through the REE Action Plan, which describes a set of strategies and actions that relate to a goal that is either programmatic or supports administrative activities.

The REE Action Plan describes seven Goals that reflect the full scope and variety of REE activities; several Goals have sub-Goals to provide programmatic emphasis. These Goals are:

Goal 1	Sustainable Intensification of Agricultural Production
Goal 2	Responding to Climate and Energy Needs
Goal 3	Sustainable Use of Natural Resources
Goal 4	Nutrition and Childhood Obesity
Goal 5	Food Safety
Goal 6	Education and Science Literacy
Goal 7	Rural Prosperity/Rural-Urban Interdependence

In the past, a small subcommittee or an individual, of the NAREEE Advisory Board performed the relevance and adequacy review of the REE Goal Areas. The REE mission is responsible for numerous and various programs and activities so this review typically focused on a small percentage of the programs and the activities within the mission area. In addition, the membership of the NAREEE Advisory Board is purposefully transient with members serving staggered terms of three years. Given these conditions, and experience to date, the NAREEE Advisory Board and the REE mission area propose the following standardized and strategic approach to the relevancy and adequacy (R&A) review.

Overview of the Review

Each year, the R&A Committee of the NAREEE Advisory Board will review a selected REE Goal Area or Areas from the REE mission area. The Goal Area(s) will be reviewed on a five year rotating cycle, which will be selected in an order that considers the varied planning cycles of each of the REE Agencies. The REE Agencies refer to these Goal Areas differently as National Programs (ARS), Priority Areas (NIFA) or Program Area (ERS, NASS). For consistency, the R&A Committee will refer to all as REE Goal Area(s). The Board may use data and information that agencies' program review processes have produced. It would be valuable to both the Board and the agencies to utilize this existing pool of information, along with any mid-cycle reviews, to complete a thorough and impactful review of the REE program area.

The REE mission area agencies conduct thorough and rigorous program reviews on a 5-year cycle (Appendix 1). As part of the agency reviews, groups of highly regarded individuals in the research community are asked to perform an independent, competent review of the technical and scientific merit and quality of the research. Nomination of an expert as a qualified reviewer is a distinguished recognition of the individual's professional accomplishments in his or her field of endeavor. Experts are also evaluated on the basis of their independence so that they can maintain objectivity.

The charge given to these panels is to evaluate the programs on the basis of relevance, quality, and performance.

- The relevance criterion seeks to assess whether the research, education and extension activity is appropriate in relation to the REE mission, USDA, and priorities related to the field of study, and current and anticipated customer needs.
- The quality criterion seeks to ensure that the program maintains practices to ensure the performance of high quality research, education and extension consistent with standards within the discipline.
- The performance criterion seeks to ensure that REE management measures and tracks progress toward meeting program goals and provides evidence of the impact of its broad research, education and extension programming.

Relevance and Adequacy Committee Membership

The NAREEE Advisory members represent 25 different statutorily identified categories across all facets of agricultural research, extension, education and economics. The members represent public, private, and non-profit sectors. The R&A Committee is made up 8-10 NAREEE Advisory Board members and is established on an annual basis. The Board will encourage representative(s) with expertise in the particular program area being reviewed to participate in that year's R&A committee. For example, when reviewing Food Safety and Human Nutrition, the Board will encourage participation by members representing food science, nutrition, and human health. In addition, the Board may call upon outside experts to provide additional information and expertise only as advisors on an as needed basis.

Agency Contribution

USDA Agencies, through coordination and synthesis with the Office of the Chief Scientist (OCS), will provide information to help develop a report of the specific REE Goal Area(s) being reviewed. This report will include: a thorough description of the Goal Area programming; available programmatic resources (personnel; budget; facilities; equipment); specific goals of the programming; identified needs of the programming; and interactions with stakeholders, including other federal agencies (i.e., Action

Agencies). Agency contributions will strongly rely on existing data and resources already available through the Agencies robust program review processes.

These Agency-specific program reviews are described in Appendix 2. They are focused on examining the effectiveness and efficiency of each of the REE Goal Area and are conducted by panels of experts in the specific subject area. The results of these reviews are thoroughly documented by each Agency, and this information will be made available to the R&A Committee.

OCS will compile the Agency data and will develop an overarching synthesis that addresses the connection to the Action Plan for the R&A Committee's review. The final Relevance and Adequacy Executive Summary will contain the following information:

- Description of the REE Goal Area(s)
 - What are the mission, vision, and goal of the agency programming?
 - What activities are in place or planned to reach the goals?
 - What strategies are in place to meet the goals?
 - What resources and inputs are available to support the Goal Area(s)?
 - What evidence is there that the Goal Area(s) is making a difference?
- Description of the Available Funding – This section will present a snapshot of the Goal Area's funding by agency. The funding will be discussed as a percentage of the REE agency's' budgets; type of funding, formula, competitive, earmarks and other non-competitive funding and program funding. It may also describe recent trends in funding to help identify potential issues.
- Stakeholders, including federal partners, for the Goal Area. This should include any formal or informal relationships with the regulatory or action agencies.
- Description of Accomplishments - This section will provide a brief historical perspective of the Goal Area and highlight the status of accomplishments, which are the result of planned activities. It will discuss the types of accomplishments listed below and how they benefit the public, as appropriate.
 - Research
 - Extension
 - Education
 - International
 - Targeting minority and/or underrepresented groups

It is important to note that the R&A Committee will not be attempting to duplicate the Agency review processes. Instead, their goal is to evaluate all of the Agency inputs and determine if the Goal Area is relevant to the established REE Priorities and that the funding is adequate.

The R&A Committee will review the Relevance and Adequacy Executive Summary and then will have the opportunity for a briefing and consultation session with relevant OCS staff and REE Administrators and program leaders. This briefing may also involve the chair(s) of the Agency expert review panels.

The NAREEE Advisory Board meets two times a year and is encouraged to receive input from stakeholders. Typically, the Board holds one meeting in Washington, DC and the other in the "field." The meeting held outside of Washington, DC can be held in a location where programs and research

activities are relevant to that year’s R&A subject matter. For example, when reviewing Food Safety and Nutrition, the NAREEE Board could meet at one of the USDA Human Nutrition Centers.

The R&A Committee will be allowed adequate time for follow up and additional dialogue. Finally, the R&A Committee will draft a report and recommendations to the NAREEE Advisory Board for public deliberation and approval. Once complete, the final report and recommendations will be submitted to the Secretary of Agriculture.

The NAREEE Advisory Board’s Relevancy and Adequacy Report

Following all consultations, reviews, and deliberation, the R&A Committee will prepare and submit a draft report and recommendations for the Goal Area(s) under review. The report will answer the original questions posed and identify: (1) the relevance to the priorities established by the Department; and (2) the adequacy of the funding. In addition, the report will also contain recommendations to REE. By using the internal agency information, outputs from external expert panel reviews, and documented stakeholder inputs, the NAREEE R&A Committee will review the Action Goals with emphasis on the following questions:

- What are the key research, education and extension programming and their specific goals for this REE Action Goal(s)?
- What documented client/stakeholder needs are being addressed by the programming for this Action Goal(s)?
- Does the research, education and extension for the Action Goal(s) advance agricultural and/or natural resource science and its application? [Address strengths and limitations in answering this question.]
- Is the funding of this Action Goal(s) adequate to achieve its specific goals and how has its investment accomplished these?
- What does this Action Goal(s) need to do to address remaining gaps between the activities and accomplishments, evolving stakeholder needs and the current state and application of agricultural science?
- Is there complementarity and collaborative effort across REE in terms of intramural, extramural and infrastructure funding and short and long term research, education and extension that does not duplicate effort in REE or other federal effort?

Proposed Program 5-year Review Cycle

Based on the current timing of the agency program reviews, the following cycle has been proposed:

Year	REE Action Plan Goal(s)	ARS National Program	NIFA Priority Area	ERS Program Area	NASS Program Area
2016	4. Nutrition and Childhood Obesity 5. Food Safety	Strategic Goal 1.1, 1.2	Sub Goal 1.5 Sub Goal 1.6	Obj. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3	Goal 5
2017	2. Responding to Climate and Energy Needs (subgoals 2A and 2B)	Strategic Goals 1.3; Strategic Goals 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.6,	Sub Goal 1.2 Sub Goal 1.3 Sub Goal 1.4	Obj. 1.3, 2.2	Goal 3

2018	3. Sustainable Use of Natural Resources (subgoals 3A and 3B)	Strategic Goals 2.1, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6,	Sub Goal 1.3	Obj. 2.1, 2.3	Goal 3
2019	1. Sustainable Intensification of Agricultural Production (subgoals 1A, 1B, 1C, and 1D)	Strategic Goals 3.1, 3.2; Strategic Goals 4.1, 4.2	Sub Goal 1.1	Obj. 1.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3	Goal 4
2020	6. Education and Science Literacy 7. Rural Prosperity/Rural-Urban Interdependence	Strategic Goal 1.3	Sub Goal 1.5 Sub Goal 1.7	Obj. 1.1, 1.2,	Goals 1, 2

Appendix 1: REE Program Evaluation Overview

Background:

There is a mix of scientific, statistical, and external research support functions within the REE mission area. Program evaluations are tailored to best examine the effectiveness and efficiency of each of the agencies. These evaluations also contribute to continuous program improvement. Each of the REE agencies, as well as the mission area, has robust and rigorous processes in place for program planning and evaluation. A brief description of each of the agency and mission area program evaluation processes follows¹. A longer description of program evaluation processes for the REE agencies, updated April 2015 by agency points of contact, is attached in Appendix 2.

ARS: ARS uses a 5-year planning and review cycle that includes the 4 major program areas: Nutrition, Food Safety, and Food Quality; Animal Production and Protection; Natural Resources and Sustainable Agricultural Systems; and Crop Production and Protection. As a first step, stakeholder input is solicited to develop an overarching National Action Plan. Plans to develop supporting research projects go through quality review and evaluation prior to approval and are then implemented with annual reports over the 5-year cycle. An external panel is convened for retrospective review after project completion to assess outcomes and impacts.

ERS: ERS has three program divisions (Resource & Rural Economics, Food Economics, Market and Trade Economics). ERS planning and accountability processes evaluate performance and set priorities based on Agency performance measures, stakeholder input, requests from USDA senior officials, and Congress/Farm Bill/appropriations language. ERS commissions external review of specific program components or products over the years and recently re-established an external review process of the entire research program, with program-by-program reviews to be conducted on a 5-year cycle. The cycle began with a review of Food Access, Food Choice, and Nutrition programs in February 2015.

NASS: NASS is organized into 7 divisions; each has established its own accountability process. Agency-wide oversight is provided through a series of councils and committees including the Strategic Planning Council, Business Council, Senior Executive Team, Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics, Framers Methodology Council, and Agricultural Statistics Board. In addition NASS holds an annual data users meeting (with ERS, WAOB, FAS, AMS, and U.S. Census Bureau) and a Program Review following the Census of Agriculture.

NIFA: NIFA activities are structure into 10 portfolio areas with identified team leaders. Portfolios are the basis for a 5-year planning and assessment cycle. Each area develops a preplanning inventory and planning document and prepares annual accomplishment reports. External panels asses each portfolio at the end of 5 years on a rolling basis. Currently external panels are scheduled to begin in Fiscal Year 2017 with all portfolio assessments completed by the end of FY 2019.

REE: Evaluation activities take place for the REE mission area through monitoring of performance on the REE Action Plan. Cross-agency teams are organized around 7 major goals (Sustainable Intensification

¹ As compiled and reported by Dr. Suzanne Thornsby for the Office of the Chief Scientist, March 2014.

of Agricultural Production; Responding to Climate and Energy Needs; Sustainable Use of Natural Resources; Nutrition and Childhood Obesity; Food Safety; Education and Science Literacy; Rural Prosperity/Rural-Urban Interdependence) to report on activities for the Action Plan.

Appendix 2: Planning & Accountability Processes for the REE Agencies²

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

POCs: Bart Hewitt & Karl Maxwell

Current Planning and Accountability Process

NIFA has organized its science and their assessments into 10 portfolios. Each is led by a team leader, who works under the direction of the Deputy Directors (of the Institutes) to plan, assess, and update the activities that occur within their portfolios. These portfolios are as follows:

- **Sustainable Agricultural Systems** (plant, animal, and agricultural systems) – led by Charlotte Baer, Robbin Shoemaker;
- **Bioenergy** - led by Bill Goldner;
- **Climate Change** - led by Michael Bowers;
- **Food Safety** - led by Jodi Williams;
- **Human Nutrition**- led by Jane M. Clary;
- **Youth Development** - led by Lisa Lauxman;
- **Family and Consumer Sciences** - led by Caroline Crocoll;
- **Education/Multicultural Alliances** – led by Suresh Sureshwaran;
- **International Programs**- led by Michael McGirr;
- **Environmental Systems**- led by Ray Knighton and Catalino Blanche

The NIFA Planning, Accountability and Reporting Staff facilitates five portions of this cycle:

- 1) Stakeholder Input,
- 2) Portfolio strategic planning,
- 3) Implementation,
- 4) Portfolio assessment, and
- 5) Communication/utilization.

As of FY 2015, the cycle is progressing as follows:

- Each portfolio prepared a **preplanning inventory**, which documents the portfolio accomplishments and gaps relative to the state of agricultural science and/or national issues.
- Each portfolio then developed a **Portfolio Planning document** to plan how the portfolio will address national issues for the next five years. This includes information on the mission, vision, goals, and objectives of the portfolio; explains the stakeholder engagement process; addresses how the portfolios fill the gaps identified in the inventories, and then states the challenges as well as the expected inputs, outputs, outcomes, and performance measures used to assess their activities.

² Updated April 2015: Bart Hewitt, Steve Crutchfield, Sharon Drumm, Brad Summa

- Annually, each portfolio **reports** on their accomplishments to-date. This report explains how unaccomplished outputs/outcomes will be addressed. Portfolios that identified gaps between the planned and actual accomplishments will write a **Portfolio Quality Improvement Plan** to address how the gaps will be filled. This will be revisited quarterly to ensure continuing progress.
- An **external panel** will assess each portfolio at the end of its fifth year (pending budget availability) on a rolling basis. The panel will assess how well the portfolio utilized stakeholder input, coordinated activities with NIFA and others, and implemented the plan to address national issues. External panels are scheduled to begin in Fiscal Year 2017. We anticipate 3-4 panels per year in each Fiscal Years 2017, 2018, and 2019. All portfolio assessments will be completed by the end of FY 2019.
- After receiving recommendations from the external panel (at the end of 5 years), each portfolio team will develop responses, which they will use to prepare another preplanning inventory, launching another five-year cycle for that portfolio. Thereafter, each portfolio will run on a rolling 5 year cycle based on the year it was assessed by an external panel.

Tools to Access Information:

- [REEIS Search](#) – for specific project information. User can filter for many facets of information. This is open to the public.
- Leadership Management Dashboard – for high level budget information, etc. as it relates to certain goals – can be filtered by Knowledge Areas, Subjects of Investigation, and Fields of Study. This is open internally to NIFA with limited availability to grantees. Plans are to make this available to the public as well.
- [REEIS](#) – for high level trend reports (funding, FTEs, etc.), state snapshots, AREERA plans of work (research & extension done with formula funding at LGUs), 4-H reports, EFNEP reports, etc. This tool is available to the public.
- [FAEIS](#) – for education information. This tool is available to the public.
- [NIFA Planning, Accountability, and Reporting](#) website. Assessments and recommendations by the external panels will be published here and available to the public along with NIFA responses and Strategic Planning for the next five-year cycle based on the assessments.
- Planning and Evaluation Intranet page. Contains the internal planning documents and annual reports for each portfolio. This tool is only available internally to NIFA staff.
- STAR METRICS – This [Federal RePORTER](#) tool contains all NIFA grant projects for Fiscal Years 2012 and 2013. This tool is available to the public to search for NIFA (and other Federal Agencies) grant projects by text and topical modeling search.

Link to REE Action Plan

The NIFA Portfolios are linked to the REE Action Plan through the Knowledge Area (KA) Classification System. NIFA classifies all grantee projects and programs using KAs. These KAs are then cross walked for use in portfolios and cross walked for use in the REE Action Plan. The [NIFA Strategic Plan](#) also shows the linkage between the Science Goal and the USDA Goals and the REE Action Plan Goals and Subgoals. The Portfolios are the basis of the Science Goal in the NIFA Strategic Plan.

Economic Research Service

POC: Steve Crutchfield

Planning and Accountability Processes:

ERS planning and accountability processes evaluate performance and sets priorities based on Agency performance measures, stakeholder input, requests from USDA Administrators, and Congress/Farm Bill/appropriations language. ERS has commissioned external review of specific program components or products over the years and recently re-established an external review process, with program-by-program reviews to be conducted on a 5-year cycle.

Program Planning:

Planning: Each division (Resource & Rural Economics, Food Economics, Market and Trade Economics) follows a common program planning process that is adapted to the specific research and analysis portfolio of the Division. These processes are based on Agency principles and guidelines that emphasize quality, relevance, and timeliness. Each division has a different set of core activities that they carry out and engage with different sets of stakeholders. The planning cycles generally run two years, with adjustments made as high-priority issues emerge. The process includes the following activities: 1) Determine the scope of the Divisions' core subject areas and available resources, 2) solicit stakeholder feedback on program priorities and emerging issues, 3) Develop new priority projects to meet existing and emerging issues, including well-defined outputs (research reports, data products, market outlook, journal articles, and web and new media products) to meet the information needs of our customers.

Stakeholder input: ERS's priority customers are the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, the Under Secretary of REE and other senior policy officials. ERS also responds to requests for studies in Congressional Farm Bill/appropriations language. Senior ERS staff meet regularly with USDA agencies/Mission Areas and other stakeholders to determine their needs and priorities and to discuss ERS research and analysis that can help support their information and decisionmaking needs.

ERS participation in other REE agency processes: Though it is not routine, ERS frequently participates in ARS's stakeholder listening sessions. ERS staff are often collaborators on NIFA's agricultural economics & rural development grants, and have sporadic meetings with senior staff, but cannot know too much about the RFA since they can compete. They also participate in relevant NIFA review panels & departmental reviews. They meet with NASS regularly to discuss ARMS and Census add-on surveys.

Program Reviews:

This year ERS re-established an **external review process**, with program-by-program reviews conducted on a five year cycle. The review cycle began this year with a **Food Access, Food Choice, and Nutrition program review**, conducted in February 2015. Other program reviews will be conducted in subsequent years based on the REE Action Plan goals and suggestions from the NAREEE board. In each review, the external panel assesses the relevance, quality, and performance of program plans, activities, and accomplishments. This assessment includes an evaluation using a quantitative analysis tool to rate portfolio effectiveness on a multi-category scale (excellent, adequate, needs improvement). The panel also makes recommendations on future directions for research, market analysis, and data activities. The panel recommendations will be used in agency strategic planning and priority setting.

Other Recent Review Activities:

In FY 2012 ERS completed an internal **strategic planning process** to define core research priorities, establish communications priorities to raise visibility, and develop a civil rights strategy.

An external review of the **Market Outlook Program**, commissioned by ERS in partnership with the Farm Foundation, was completed in June 2014. The objective of the review was to obtain an objective, rigorous assessment of the demand for market outlook data and analysis across key stakeholder groups. Eleven focus-group sessions were convened to formally solicit feedback on ERS data and commodity newsletters. This information, along with data on web usage of ERS outlook products and additional input from departmental stakeholders, is being used in the formulation of a new strategic action plan to improve the timeliness, relevance, and quality of program outputs.

During FY 2014, ERS began a **Data Product Review**. As one of the Federal government's 14 principal statistical agencies, ERS provides high quality, objective statistics and data on the food, agricultural, and rural sector. Stakeholders, including those participating in the recent strategic planning interviews, indicate that ERS data products and access to the data are high-value agency services. In FY 2014 ERS conducted a comprehensive review of the Agency's data and dissemination methods in order to develop a forward-looking vision that provides high-quality, objective, timely, and useful statistics, indicators, and research data. The review included products released to the public, recurring data activities for key USDA clients, and internal data management. One outcome of the review was the establishment of an Agency Data Product Review Council that provides comprehensive evaluations of the Agency's data products to ensure adherence to the highest standards of quality and transparency, and to provide feedback and guidance to data product authors and their managers and identify areas for improvement. The resulting policies and framework for data development resulted in greater consistency of procedures across the Agency.

During 2014, ERS conducted an external review of the agency's **USDA Agricultural Productivity Accounts**. The accounts, covering the years 1948 to 2011, consist of annual indexes of farm output and ten components of output, farm input, and 12 components of total input, and total factor productivity, measured as the difference between output and input growth. The five-person external review committee of academic and government experts reviewed ERS methods, data sources, research, and reporting with regard to current best practices in each topic. The final report from the external review of the USDA Agricultural Productivity Accounts was completed in August. The review team is also preparing a series of articles in a special issue of *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*, including an ERS response, to improve the transparency and dissemination of the results.

Agricultural Research Service

POCs: Bob MacDonald, Jill Stetka

5-Year Planning and Review Cycle (for each of ARS' National Programs):

The management of all ARS research programs is organized around a five-year National Program Cycle, consisting of four sequential phases (Input, Planning, Implementation, and Assessment) designed to ensure the relevance, quality, and impact of every ARS National Program. ARS program management is responsible for the relevancy of the research, and line management is responsible for the quality of the science.

Input

The National Program Leaders, working through multi-disciplinary National Program Teams, define and articulate the scope of each program with input from customers, stakeholders, partners, and ARS scientists. The prime mechanism used by the National Program Team to seek input is through the organization of stakeholder workshops at the start of each program cycle or through technical and commodity-specific workshops throughout the program cycle. Input is also actively solicited by the program leaders through professional relationships with the Administration, other federal agencies, national organizations, and partners.

Planning

National Program Leaders define the ARS program and provide broad scientific direction to ARS scientists through the development of a five-year Program Action Plan. These plans are the central reference for defining how the program is relevant and how the program is expected to perform. Action Plans state the high priority problems that ARS research will address; and identify the actions ARS will take to solve those problems in a coordinated effort. National Program Leaders assign program direction (research objectives) and resources (personnel and dollars) to units in the field according to the Action Plan. Scientists design projects to meet the stated objectives, and the projects are peer reviewed through a rigorous process with external reviewers, conducted by the Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR).

Implementation

Research is implemented by the scientists at ARS' 90+ locations across the Nation and the world. Line managers, headed by the Area Director, followed by the Center or Laboratory Director and the Research Leader at the location, oversee the quality of science and personnel. National Program Leaders have an ongoing coordination role, and monitor and demonstrate performance at the program level through annual project and program reports.

New funds made available yearly through annual Congressional appropriations are directed and allocated by the National Program Leader, while the Area Director is responsible for the development of the research budget, executed through an annual resource management planning process.

Assessment

Toward the completion of every five year program cycle, the National Program's performance is assessed by an external panel of customers and stakeholders against the research goals, products, and outcomes

identified in the National Program Action Plan. The assessment provides feedback to customers, partners and stakeholders focusing on accomplishments relative to commitments, provides measures of efficacy to program managers, provides focus and feedback to scientists, and provides performance measures to the Administration, particularly the Office of Management and Budget.

There are four important stages for that process:

- Conducting an in-house program assessment and documenting research accomplishments and/or progress for presentation to external reviewers;
- Conducting an external review of accomplishments and/or progress, based on the preceding documentation, focused on the research's relevance, quality, and impact;
- Recording the results of the review; and
- Informing ARS leadership of evaluation results.

Project accomplishments are used for a variety of purposes including meeting the requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), providing data for the President's budget, responding to Congressional/GAO/OMB requests, ethics reports, input into strategic planning, and as reference documents for the development of international collaborations.

Communications: Stakeholders are kept abreast of accomplishments throughout the cycle by ARS's information staff, who issue press releases and maintain listservs. They also put articles into a monthly ARS digital magazine, OSEC & REE reports, and the Office of Tech Transfer works hard to push ARS information out as well. The Office of National Programs communicates plans and accomplishments by posting the Strategic Plan and the Annual Performance Plan and Reports for the agency on the web, as well as Action Plans for each National Program and project annual reports.

Tools to Access information:

- **ARS National Program** websites, found [here](#) – have annual reports, 5-year action plans, accomplishment reports, etc.
- **ARIS** – internal database, managed by Jill Stetka.
- Attend **National Program stakeholder workshops** & the **retrospective review debriefs**
- **VIVO:** searchable information on scientists, research publications, organizations, from those who participate (FS, NIFA, ERS, ARS, Cornell, etc.). Data is included in [Federal RePorter](#) as part of the Star Metrics program.
- [ARS Strategic Planning and Performance documents](#)

National Agricultural Statistics Service

POCs: Hubert Hamer and Mark Harris

NASS has organized itself into 7 Divisions (Statistics, Census and Survey, Methodology, Research and Development, National Operations, Field Operations, and Information Technology). Each Division has its own accountability process and to ensure each Division's accountability NASS has established the various councils and committees detailed below. NASS also has the Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) which is chaired by the Director of Methodology Division and the Director of Statistics Division serves as the Executive Director. The ASB is accountable for the methodology process, statistical integrity, and data security for official NASS reports. Additionally, a monthly Senior Executive Team (SET) meeting is held to provide guidance and leadership.

Planning & Accountability Process:

Strategic Planning Council (SPC): The Strategic Planning Council meets semi-annually and consists of the Directors of each Division along with two Business Council representatives, four Regional Field Office representatives, the Associate Administrator, and the Administrator. The SPC's primary goal is to provide recommendations, action items and proposals to the Administrator for long range planning within NASS. The SPC incorporates stakeholder input and provides high level guidance for development of new programs and major changes to existing programs. SPC meeting minutes are made available to NASS staff through the NASS intranet.

Business Council (BC): The Business Council consists of managers and senior project leaders at the GS15 grade level who meet on a monthly basis to discuss on-going projects and new, upcoming initiatives. The primary function of the business council is to ensure that adequate resources, primarily personnel, are available to carry out a project or that the project is tailored to meet the available personnel resources. The BC also reviews all group award submissions to ensure that the right people, especially from across work units are identified and being properly recognized.

Senior Executive Team (SET): The Senior Executive Team consists of NASS' ten senior leaders who meet on a monthly basis. The SET has number of primary focuses.

1. Discuss the budget on a monthly basis to gauge available funds against funds expended and expected expenditures. The SET continually makes decisions on projects, personnel and other resources to ensure NASS is balanced at the end of the fiscal year.
2. Meets with our Administrative and Financial Management representatives to discuss ongoing policy, personnel, procurement and financial issues.
3. Invites project managers to provide assessments on on-going projects, as well as, new initiatives. Make critical decision to either continue, expand, reduce or eliminate projects.

Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics (ACAS): The Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics consists of 20 members representing a broad range of disciplines and interests, including, but not limited to, producers, representatives of national farm organizations, agricultural economists, rural sociologists, farm policy analysts, educators, State agriculture representatives, and agriculture-related business and marketing experts. The ACAS provides input to NASS and recommendations to the Secretary on emerging issues in the agriculture community that can affect agriculture statistics activities. The ACAS is vital in keeping NASS current with shifting data needs in the rapidly changing agricultural environment. The ACAS typically holds one major meeting per year but does from time to time hold short meetings on an as needed basis. In addition NASS also contacts members of the committee for

input on an informal basis as the need arises. The ACAS meeting minutes and recommendations are made available to the public through the NASS public website.

Data Users Meeting: NASS, ERS, WAOB, FAS, AMS and U.S. Census Bureau host an annual data users meeting to discuss changes to programs and gather input on data needs. A Summary of questions and answers from the data users meeting is made available on the NASS public website.

Program Review: Following the Census of Agriculture NASS conducts a program review. The program review evaluates the States which are currently included in the various operational programs. These changes are incorporated into the operational program one to two years following the release of the latest Census of Agriculture results. NASS consults with USDA program agencies to ensure legislative data, such as Farm Bill, requirements are incorporated into the NASS statistical program given budget availability. Program changes are announced through an official Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) notice and are posted on the NASS public website.

Frames Methodology Council:

The Frames Methodology Council (FMC) will provide guidance and make recommendations on all sampling frame related issues in order to improve the overall quality of the sampling frames at the national and state levels. The Council will serve as an advisory board to the Sampling and Frame Development Section (SFDS), the Frames Maintenance Group (FMG) and the Area Frame Section (AFS) on sampling frame development, methodology and maintenance related issues. The Chief of the Sampling, Editing and Imputation Branch and the Deputy Director of the National Operations Division serve as co-chairpersons for the Council. The two group leaders from the FMG, the section head of the SFDS and a representative from the Quality Management Office will serve as core members of the Council. The remaining eight members of the Council will consist of a representative from Statistics Division, Research and Development Division, Census and Survey Division, Methodology Division and four representatives from our Regional/Field offices. The Council will meet at least bi-annually. Occasional teleconferences during the year are also expected as needed. Agendas, materials, minutes, and formal recommendations will be posted to the council's SharePoint site. All formal recommendations will be submitted to the Directors of the Methodology and National Operations Division for final approval.