



## **Telephone Enumerator Quick Guide for Conducting Surveys**

### **Workload:**

- Amount of work will vary considerably from survey to survey. There will be times when you will need to work several days in a row, and there will be times when there is no work at all.
- Specified timeframes will be given to you for each survey with start and end dates.
- You must let your supervisor know as early as possible if you will not be able to work a particular survey or a day you are scheduled to work.

### **Training:**

- A training session will be conducted for each survey before data collection begins. You will be required to attend this training to be eligible to work on the survey.
- Training presentations and other materials are posted on the NASDA website ([www.nasda.org](http://www.nasda.org)) for many of the surveys NASS conducts. Ask your supervisor or coach for help finding this training material
- Do not be afraid to ask your supervisor if you have questions about any aspect of the job. That is what they are there for, and they are a wealth of knowledge.

### **Interviewing Guidance:**

1. Be positive and smile. Yes, actually smile while you are on the phone, the respondent will be able to tell.
2. When someone answers, keep smiling and introduce yourself. State you are acting on behalf of the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service and tell them the name of the survey you are working on (as appeared on the questionnaire or letter mailed them). Ask if the person answering (or anyone else currently available) could answer a few questions related to the survey.
3. Be sure you know who you are talking to and that they know what operation you are asking questions about. Verify names and addresses for every survey you conduct.
4. Ask for permission by saying "May I ask you a few questions about your farming operation?" If you ask if they would like to do the survey, they will likely say no, but they are usually willing to answer your questions.



5. Ask the questions exactly as printed and in the same order as listed in the questionnaire or CATI or CAPI instrument. Leaving out parts, adding, or changing the wording may result in a different answer.
6. Listen to what the respondent has to say, pause to let them speak, and pay attention.
7. Probing is sometimes necessary when the respondent gives an unsatisfactory answer. A good probe would be, "what would be your best estimate to the nearest bushel?" A poor probe would be "about 35 bushels?" or "would 30 or 40 be better?" The respondent would probably answer "38 bushels" to the good probe, "yes" to the first bad probe and "40 bushels" to the second bad probe. Don't be overly helpful by putting words in the respondent's mouth, you reduce the accuracy of our data by doing so.
8. Don't rush the interview. Be honest with the time you expect the survey to take. If the respondent does not have time to complete the survey properly, try to set an appointment for when they will have time, or see if someone else can give the information.
9. Be familiar with the questionnaire. Know the meaning of all terms. Know the purpose of the survey and when and how the results of the survey will be published. If you do not know the answers to the questions, ask your supervisor or coach.
10. Speak in a normal conversational voice. Talking loudly does not normally improve the ability of the respondent to hear and may actually distort your voice. If they keep indicating they are having a problem hearing or understanding, slow down your speech and be sure you speak clearly, this is more likely to help than talking louder. Talking loudly or yelling, especially into the phone, is also very disruptive to others around you.
11. Most of us talk faster in a normal face-to-face conversation than can readily be understood over the phone. Research has shown that a pace of about 120 words per minute (two words per second) is ideal for telephone interviewing.
12. Use the respondent's name during the interview.
13. Do not use slang.
14. Always make good notes. Fully explain any unusual situations.



### **Responses to Reluctant Respondents:**

#### **I don't have time for an interview.**

"I appreciate how busy you are and how valuable your time is. This won't take very long and I can help you get through it as quickly as possible."

#### **Why are you calling me again? I gave you my report last month.**

"And we thank you for your continued participation. In order to keep our inventory and production estimates current and up-to-date we need to conduct surveys throughout the year. With regular surveys, our reports accurately reflect the most current industry conditions."

#### **Do I have to participate?**

"While this is voluntary, the unbiased crop and livestock reporting programs depend entirely on reporting from operators like you. Your participation helps keep these estimates as accurate as possible."

#### **Can't you find someone else for this survey?**

"That's a good question. Our surveys use a sample of farmers from operations of all sizes. Since you were selected to represent other operations in your area, we can't substitute someone else."

#### **My farm is too small to make a difference**

"I can understand how it might seem that way. Your farm was selected to represent other small operations—which often have very different characteristics than large farms. All farms count, and that's why it's so important that we interview both small and large operations."

#### **Why should I report; what's in it for me?**

"I'm glad you asked that question. Your report, along with the reports from other farmers selected for the survey, is the basis for unbiased crop and livestock estimates. Accurate information helps reduce market uncertainty and allows you to make better, more informed decisions"

#### **Prices went down the last time I did a survey.**

"You're right to be concerned about your prices. And while prices can fluctuate, historically they tend to go up about as often as they go down. Accurate, unbiased information from our crop and livestock estimates actually helps stabilize markets and minimize price volatility"



**I don't give information over the phone.**

"I understand your concern. I'd be happy to give you our phone number so that you can call back to verify who I am. Or, if you prefer, I can arrange to have someone come out to the farm to see you in person."

**I don't want any other government agencies having access to my report.**

"You're right to be concerned about your privacy. That's why facts about your farm are strictly confidential and used only in combination with similar reports from other operators like yourself. All information is combined for statistical purposes only, and no one outside of NASS has access to individual reports. By law we are prohibited from sharing information with other agencies."

For additional information visit the NASDA website at <http://www.nasda.org/>