

Farmer/Rancher Interview Guide

Farmer Pseudonym:

Location:

Introduction and Informed Consent

Thank you for your time. The purpose of our discussion is to learn about you, as a USDA customer. This will help us improve the experiences of farmers for services offered by the USDA. We're looking to ensure that we deliver services in way that is really valuable to the farmers and ranchers who will use them, which sometimes might be different than what we think they should be like when we start out.

I am looking to hear about you as a person and how you think and work, your relationship with the USDA, as well as your ideas and suggestions for improvement.

I will also be asking you questions specifically about the farm loans program - the steps that customers go through to enroll and participate in the program, what's going well, any barriers to participation, and your suggestions about areas for improvement.

We're interested in your honest feedback and opinion, and there are no right or wrong answers. Your answers will be confidential and we won't link your name to anything that we discuss today.

You don't have to answer any questions if you'd rather not or don't have time. Please feel free to skip over questions to tell me to stop or to go back to something you find interesting. Answer in as much or as little depth as you feel like and take as long as you like. I will change your name to an alias in any printed quotations.

[Reference camera and others that may be observing] They are here to observe the session and take notes. They will not be judging you in any way. We will also be collecting an audio and video recording of this discussion. The recordings will only be used for this study and will not be released to any third parties.

With your permission, we'd like to record the conversation to make sure that we have captured the discussion accurately. Is it okay with you if I record? (optional)

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview Guide

- Tell me about yourself
 - What about farming suits you?
 - If you weren't a farmer, what would you be doing?
- Tell me about your farming/ranching business.
 - How long have you been doing this?
 - How large is your farming operation?
 - What are your responsibilities?
 - Who are the other people who work with you? What are their responsibilities?
 - What do you grow/raise here? Is it the same or different throughout the year or from year to year?
- What does the farming process look like from the start of the season to the end?
- What does the USDA do for you?
- How has that helped you in your business?
- Have you used the USDA farm loans program?
 - Why did you apply?
 - How did you first hear about it?
 - What was the application process like?
 - Did you feel like you had the right amount of information to complete the application process?
 - What did you think about the level of effort involved?
 - What do you like about the farm loans program? How has it benefited you? Can you give me examples?
 - What do you not like about the farm loans program? What are the disadvantages of it? Can you give me examples?
 - If you could change something about the program, what would it be?
- What other alternatives to the USDA farm loans program have you explored?

- How does the USDA's farm loans program compare with similar programs offered by other companies or agencies?
- Now tell me about your experience with acreage reporting.
 - What about acreage reporting is easy to do?
 - What kinds of challenges do you run into with acreage reporting?
 - How would you describe the level of effort involved? Too much? Too little? Why?
 - Are the benefits of reporting acreage worth the effort?
 - How can the process be improved for you?
- Have you used the local USDA service center? Where is it located? Do you also go to other service centers?
 - How often do you go there?
 - Why do you go there?
 - What has your experience been like?
 - Does it meet your expectations? Why/why not?
- Were the employees:
 - Accessible? Why/why not?
 - Responsive? Why/why not?
 - Courteous? Why/why not?
 - Helpful? Why/why not?
 - Knowledgeable? Why/why not?
- How do you contact the USDA?
 - Why did you choose [CHANNEL]?
 - What was the reason for your most recent interaction with USDA?
 - How do you report concerns/complaints?
 - What do you think about the response time?
 - What do you think about the quality of responses you have received in the past?
- Does any part of your work involve being on the Internet?

- How is the Internet connection here?
- Now I'd like to run some ideas by you. How would it change your interaction if...
 1. Your farm machinery could communicate with USDA systems?
 2. TBD
 3. TBD
- You are doing great, and we are almost finished.
 - Think back on what we talked about today. Is there anything you want to add or share?
 - What, if anything, would increase your overall satisfaction with the USDA programs?
 - What do you think is the most important thing for someone considering a USDA program to know or do?

I am going to go check to see if anyone else has any questions. [AFTER FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS] That's all the questions we have for you. Thank you so much!

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