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# How to Meet Needs for Ad Hoc and Flash Statistics

Geneva, Switzerland

July 2, 2003



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Why Should a Statistical  
Agency Create Ad Hoc  
Statistics?

# Why?

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- For customer service
- To provide the best estimates
- To ensure unbiased estimates
- To carry out the Agency mission

# Presentation Goal

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Promote thinking about  
improved approaches

# Presentation Outline

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- Definitions
- Desirable approaches
- Examples

# Ad Hoc Definition

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- New or unscheduled reports or data items
- Usually without new funding

# Flash Definition

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Creation and release of  
answers in a relatively  
short time frame

# Clarification

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Flash statistics might be ad hoc or they could result from new funding



# Clarification

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An organization might seek  
new funding to build the  
capability to create  
ad hoc statistics

# Desirable Approaches

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- Baseline information
- Sufficient infrastructure
- Proper policy guidelines

# Data Base Characteristics

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- All relevant data in same location
- Good query and summary capabilities
- Detailed meta data available
- All data dimensions labeled

# Data Analyst Capabilities

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- Interested in new challenges
- Proficient with data base technology
- Able to logically compare different data sources

# Data Decisions

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- Are opinion data acceptable?
- Are probability estimates required?
- Is there a proper sampling frame?
- Are there earlier baseline results for comparison?

# Policy Decisions

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- Who will results be released to?
- How will they be released?
- Will everyone have access to the results?
- How will they be publicized?

# Suggestion #1

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Decide what types of ad hoc  
and flash statistics you want  
to create

# Suggestion #2



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Invest in good data base  
procedures



# Suggestion #3



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Invest in people by freeing up  
time for ad hoc estimates

# Ad Hoc Example #1

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NASS data system for  
interpretations of late and  
lost plantings

# Background Information

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- Plantings survey the first half of June
- Planting summary report on June 30
- Harvested area report August 10
- Plantings are late some years
- Some years have major floods

# Approach

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- Planting intentions information is collected in June
- Recontacts can be made during July if percent of intentions is high or flooding occurs
- Planted area can be updated August 10

# Ad Hoc Example #2

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U.S. Economic Research Service,  
Agricultural Resources  
Management Survey (ARMS)  
Data Base

# Background Information

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- Integrate expenditure, cost of production, farm income, and chemical use data
- Collect detailed household income data
- Collect appropriate demographics

# Approach

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- Some sections constant; others change each year
- Strata results weighted to State, Regional, and National totals
- All data saved to data bases

# Results

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- Farm income and expenditure estimates come from ARMS
- New classifications (typology and production regions) of farms have been created
- Special analysis can be quickly conducted (see document 6 of this meeting)



# Ad Hoc Example #3

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Statistics Canada  
Agricultural Division  
special unit for Ad Hoc  
inquiries

# Background

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- Statistics Canada has a Division which does cost recovery projects
- Agricultural Division often called on that office

# Approach

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- Agricultural Division receives many Ad Hoc questions
- Agricultural Division created its own unit

# Results

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- Agricultural Division can now respond more quickly to regional office internal requests

# Ad Hoc Example #4

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Proper release procedure  
for a special NASS report

# Background

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- A U.S. Senator's office requested a special publication of Marketing Data
- The Senator's office wanted advance notification

# Approach

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- NASS determined the data were releasable
- NASS announced the publication date and time
- NASS would not give the Senator's office advanced copies

# Results

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- The Senator's staff members were allowed to access the report the hour before release under Lock-up conditions
- They could not transmit any information
- NASS received good publicity on the special report



# Flash Example #1

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NASS quick evaluation of  
nitrogen fertilizer supplies

# Background

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Farmers were concerned in  
2001 about availability of  
fertilizer for planting

# Approach

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- NASS added questions once a month to the Weekly Weather Crop Survey

# Results

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- Data were collected between Friday and Monday and released on Monday afternoon
- This approach avoided more costly survey alternatives

# Flash Example #2

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Statistics Canada  
Agricultural Division  
conversion of Ad Hoc  
responses to Flash timing

# Background

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- Agricultural Division got many inquiries from Agricultural and Agri Food Canada
- Most responses took 1-2 weeks

# Approach

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Agricultural Division added  
knowledgeable staff to Whole  
Farm Program unit

# Results

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- Most responses can be prepared in 1/2 to 1 day
- Responses to Agricultural and Agri Food Canada do not require special clearance



# Flash Example #3



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NASS data base capabilities for  
quick responses

# Background

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- NASS has published estimates in a "Quick Stats" on line data base
- NASS has a data lab for special tabulations of unpublished data

# Approach

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NASS staff members were authorized to take immediate action on all Farm policy related inquiries

# Results

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- Staff completed some data lab analysis in 3 hours
- Those data sets were then listed as available to everyone
- Staff completed "Quick Stats" analysis in 1 hour