

Meeting Summary: Third Meeting of NAPDC Data Governance Workgroup

Date: July 24, 2025

Attendees: Victor E. Cabrera (U. Wisconsin Madison), Yaguang Zhang (OATS Center at Purdue University), Amy Charkowski (Colorado State University), Val Kovalsky (Nave Analytics); Scout Calvert (Nebraska University).

Facilitators NPCC: Sofia Castellanos, Kristen Wright, and Prabhas Pokharel

1. Executive Summary

The session focused on revisiting and refining the six challenge themes identified in the last meeting. Sofia opened by grounding the group in the purpose: to ensure the cluster labels are clear, meaningful, and reflect a shared workgroup understanding. The group worked toward alignment on what should carry forward into the NAPDC agricultural data governance framework.

2. Opening Check-In

The session opened with a check-in, during which participants shared updates relevant to the work. Highlights included ongoing challenges in agricultural research funding, reflections on a recent AI in Agriculture conference, and concerns from educators about AI tool accuracy.

3. Workgroup activity: Initial Cluster Review

The core of the meeting focused on reviewing and renaming six thematic clusters previously identified. Sofia guided the group through a review of each of the six thematic clusters. Due to Zoom limitations, the original whiteboard couldn't be accessed live, so the NPCC team supported by editing the board in real time and helped adjust and organize content as the group discussed.

→ Theme Discussion: Communication → Farmer Communication and Data Access

The group discussed challenges around communicating with farmers about data.

- The key issues included helping stakeholders understand basic concepts (like what data is, what privacy means, and the risks involved), building trust, and translating technical language into plain terms.
- The group also noted that some data is collected passively by equipment providers, making it difficult for farmers to access or manage their own information.
- The group also highlighted the need for cultural sensitivity when engaging with diverse farming communities.
- After reflecting on the core issues—communication gaps, data literacy, access, and trust—the group agreed to rename the cluster “Farmer Communication and Data Access” to better reflect these layered dynamics.
- This theme emerged from the conversation about these barriers farmers face in understanding and managing their data. The group emphasized the need for translating technical terms and improving trust between researchers and farmers.

→ Theme Discussion: Farmer Motivations (Concerns and Values)

The group reviewed the theme originally titled Incentives and Concerns and agreed that the label did not fully reflect the deeper dynamics at play. The conversation highlighted that:

- Data only becomes valuable when it leads to meaningful, actionable insights for farmers.
- While some viewed this as a communication issue, others in the group argued it deserves its own space given the complex interplay of trust, consent, value, and power.
- Some group suggestions included developing standard anonymization tools and exploring mechanisms like Certificates of Confidentiality to protect sensitive data, especially given potential exposure through public records.
- Also small or poorly designed incentives may be seen as coercive or dismissive, and the group recommended that real-world examples of data tools that clearly benefit farmers are needed.

- Given these layers, the group agreed to rename the theme “Farmer Motivations (Concerns and Values)” to reflect not just the idea of incentives, but also the ethical, financial, and privacy concerns shaping farmer participation.
- Theme Discussion: Managing Conflict to Managing Stakeholder Differences of Opinion

The group reviewed the Managing Conflict cluster and considered whether some points, especially those about misinterpretation and trust, belonged under Farmer Motivations. Through conversation, it became clear that these issues reflected deeper tensions among stakeholders, not just between researchers and farmers.

- Examples included disagreements over research findings that conflicted with farmer interests and challenges involving public officials with ties to ag companies.
- Concerns were also about the risks of publishing data in politically sensitive contexts.
- To reflect the complexity and importance of constructive engagement, the group agreed to rename the theme “Managing Stakeholder Differences of Opinion.” This new label better captures the interpretive, political, and relational dimensions of the issue.

→ Theme Discussion: Farmer–Researcher Working Agreements

The group explored the original Legal Agreements theme, focusing on how to help farmers and researchers enter clear, trustworthy agreements. The conversation emphasized that:

- It's not just about legal risk, it is also about clarity, trust, and shared expectations.
- Intellectual property (IP) can become a gray area, especially in interdisciplinary projects, and early legal guidance is key.
- Legal processes can slow things down, but having ready-to-use templates could make collaboration easier.
- Farmers need to be protected from being excluded from innovations their data helped create.

- To reflect these dynamics, the group renamed the theme “Farmer–Researcher Working Agreements for Mutual (Potential) Benefits: Risks and Expectations.” The new label centers legal clarity, mutual benefit, and the long-term nature of ag data collaboration.
- Theme Discussion: Creating NAPDC Network + Connections with Farmers and Extension Centers

The group discussed Theme 5, originally focused on outreach and education. The conversation emphasized the need to expand engagement beyond research projects to include education, community networks, and data literacy. Some of the key conversation points included:

- Encouraging researchers to consider how their work can support rural education and be applied directly on farms.
- Building networks that connect agricultural research, education (including high schools), and farmer engagement.
- Using participatory research methods to bring farmers and students into the research process.
- Supporting more community-centered models of agricultural research in the U.S.

The group renamed the theme “Creating NAPDC Network + Connections with Farmers and Extension Centers” to encourage building partnerships that connect data literacy with participatory research and rural education initiatives.

→ Theme Discussion: Technical Support / Making It Easy to Share

The group reviewed the final theme focused on infrastructure and technical support for data sharing. The discussion emphasized the importance of building systems that are both accessible and secure. The group had a conversation on the key points below:

- The potential for a centralized, trusted data platform—similar to NCBI in genomics, tailored for agriculture, though concerns were raised about feasibility and governance.

- Questions about the involvement of national agricultural associations, and the challenges of bringing institutional actors into the process due to concerns about oversight and trust.
- The group agreed to rename the theme “Technical Support / Making It Easy to Share” to better reflect the goal of enabling simple, secure, and farmer-friendly data sharing infrastructure.

The session concluded with consensus on the revised themes, setting the stage for further development of the NAPDC agricultural data governance framework.

The meeting adjourned at 10:47 AM Pacific Time.