

NAPDC Data Governance Workgroup Kickoff

Date: 5/24/2025

Meeting Summary

Meeting Slide Deck: [Copy of 2025-05-22 - Introductory Meeting - NAPDC Data Gov](#)

Meeting Objectives:

1. Welcome everyone, get to know each other and the work we're planning on doing together
2. Review what we've heard so far from one-on-one interviews and begin learning together
3. Agree on how we will work together as a group

Attendees: Victor E. Cabrera (U.Wisconsin Madison), Abhilash Chandel (Virginia Tech), Dan TerAvest (Our Sci LLC), Joel B. Harley (University of Florida), Yaguang Zhang (OATS Center at Purdue University), Chang Zhao (University of Florida), Ziwen Yu (University of Florida), Ben Craker (Ag Data Coalition), Matthew Spangler (Nebraska University), Amy Charkowski (Colorado State University), Jordan Lambert (Colorado State University).

NPCC Facilitators and Team: Sofia Castellanos, Dan Lussier, Prabhas Pokharel.

1. Executive Summary

The NAPDC Data Governance Workgroup held its kickoff meeting on May 22, 2025. Members got to know each other, shared ideas, and began shaping a shared data governance framework that fits the NAPDC community.

The group talked about key challenges like trust, data ownership, and technical barriers, and shared ideas for solutions that are practical and centered on

farmers' needs. There was strong interest in creating tools like agreement templates and possibly publishing a white paper.

Sofia and Dan introduced a draft of the Operating Workgroup Guidelines, which will help guide how the group works together. The guidelines and a project timeline (through mid-2026) will be shared for feedback. The group will continue meeting monthly to build a data governance approach for NAPDC that is useful, trustworthy, and grounded in real-world experience.

2. Welcome attendees and provide updates

Sofia Castellanos and Dan Lussier welcomed all the workgroup participants to the kickoff meeting for the National Agriculture Producers Data Cooperative (NAPDC) on data governance.

They set a collaborative tone for the gathering, inviting participants to reflect together on what is needed to develop a framework that allows all members of the NAPDC community to use and share agricultural data in ways that are beneficial to everyone. Following the welcome, participants were invited to introduce themselves and briefly share their organization and role:

- Victor E. Cabrera is a Professor and Extension Specialist in Dairy Farm Management at the University of Wisconsin - Madison. He is exploring advanced analytics and data management through a project called the Dairy Brain.
- Abhilash Chandel is an Assistant Professor, Precision Agriculture Technologies and Data Management at Virginia Tech. His work centers on digital tools, sensor development, and data analytics in cropping systems. He is particularly focused on promoting responsible data use and preventing exploitation.
- Dan TerAvest is the co-founder, Our Sci LLC; Soil Scientist, and he develops open-source tools for NGOs, with a focus on soil health and

governance of farm data. He is interested in how funding models affect flexibility and openness in data sharing.

- Joel B. Harley is an Associate Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at the University of Florida. He applies machine learning to improve how soil carbon and other agricultural data are collected and integrated for better insights.
- Yaguang Zhang is an Assistant Professor, Agriculture and Biological Engineering at Purdue University. He works on practical solutions for improving connectivity, and interoperability of data systems. He also helps develop data modeling frameworks.
- Chang Zhao is an Agronomy Assistant Professor at University of Florida. She specializes in machine learning, GIS, and remote sensing, with a focus on quantifying soil organic carbon. She works closely with dairy and cattle producers, especially on privacy issues related to geospatial data.
- Ziwen Yu is an Assistant Professor, Big Data Analytics at University of Florida and he researches big data in agriculture, including how contract language aligns with actual data practices. His findings are grounded in interviews and survey-based research.
- Ben Craker is the President, Ag Data Coalition and Portfolio Manager at Ag Gateway. He supports data interoperability across a large network of agricultural organizations and ADT is a neutral data repository aimed at improving data access and coordination.
- Matthew Spangler is an Animal Scientist and Professor & Beef Genetics Extension Specialist At University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is part of the leading team of NAPDC and he contributes insights from animal science and expressed his enthusiasm to be helpful wherever needed within the group.

- Amy Charkowski is a Professor at Colorado State University. She brings forward farmers' concerns around data governance and privacy. She also advocates for stronger farmer-university connections and institutional education on handling sensitive data.
- Jordan Lambert is the Director of Ag Innovation at Colorado State University. She draws from his experience in agri-tech start-ups, offering a perspective on how agricultural data powers business models and innovation in the private sector.

3. Framing our collaborative work

- Victor emphasized the importance of having a tangible outcome, such as a white paper. Sofia and Dan acknowledged this and noted that it is already part of the plan, with more details to be shared in the slides later in the meeting.

Sofia and Dan shared a reminder of what this workgroup is really about:

- The main goal is to identify what's needed to create a shared data governance framework that fits the NAPDC community. This won't be a one-size-fits-all solution—it should be rooted in the real work and experiences of the group.
- The focus is on collaboration and practicality—not just talking about governance in theory, but creating something usable in the months ahead.
- Finally, the group is also thinking long-term: how the framework can grow, scale, and serve as a model for others who want to use agricultural data responsibly.

4. Summary of One-on-One Conversations

Sofia provided an overview of the facilitation approach used by the National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State University, which is guiding how this workgroup is organized. She explained that the NPCC's work centers on collaborative methods—through services, education, and research—to help people work together in meaningful, effective ways. The focus is on solving public policy issues through collaboration by bringing people and organizations together to develop solutions that work for communities. At the heart of this approach is a commitment to building trust and creating space for shared learning and dialogue, with the goal of making decisions that are lasting and grounded in collective understanding.

Sofia also introduced the importance of data governance in the context of the workgroup. She described data governance as the framework that helps guide how we collect, access, share, and use data. It's not about government control over data, or about determining how the government uses data. Instead it is about creating a shared, collaborative process for decision-making that includes everyone involved. To ground the conversation, Sofia also introduced four key themes that emerged during one-on-one conversations with workgroup members. These themes represent both challenges and opportunities:

- **Trust and Data Ownership**

Many farmers have expressed uncertainty about who owns their data and where it goes after sharing—especially with government or agtech companies. However, there is greater willingness to share when the data stays with trusted institutions like universities or co-ops.

- **Technical Challenges**

Data is often siloed across systems that don't connect well. Issues around access control and data security remain prominent, and there's a strong call for anonymization tools that preserve both privacy and utility.

- **Benefits of Structured Approaches**

A clear, shared approach to data governance can improve collaboration, strengthen trust, and provide a foundation for better education and extension services.

- **Farmer-Centered Solutions**

Farmers want simple, transparent agreements and access to trustworthy, tools. Engagement increases when farmers see real value from sharing their data and are connected through trusted networks.

She asked participants to think about what resonates with their experience, what may be missing, and whether any adjustments are needed to the identified themes.

5. Participant Reflections on Themes

Discussion Highlights:

- Yaguang Zhang emphasized the educational value of structured resources for farmers and requested that we create templates for data-sharing agreements.
- Jordan Lambert agreed in the chat, noting from her industry experience that many companies operate without formal data governance structures or operate in ways that make collaboration challenging.
- Victor Cabrera highlighted concerns around third-party agtech vendors acting as gatekeepers to farm data, which complicates ease of access and control for farmers. This can also make it more challenging for researchers to collaborate with farmers.
- Abhilash Chandel noted the importance of trusted crop consultants as a way to build trust with farmers. He also raised the need for NAPDC data

governance tools to provide guidelines for working with, or through, crop consultants.

- Ziwen Yu proposed defining key concepts—such as trust, ethics, and governance—and recommended analyzing how contract language in agtech has evolved over time.
- Jordan Lambert responded by agreeing and cited the example of John Deere's early claim to full ownership of farm data, which sparked backlash.
- Matthew Spangler urged the group to adopt a farmer-first perspective in shaping the project scope. He drew a parallel to privacy concerns in consumer genetics platforms like 23andMe, where data usage transparency is crucial.
- Joel Harley warned about the frequent disconnect between research outcomes and farmer benefits. He noted that in many research projects, benefits to farmers are indirect or long-term, and highlighted the practice in medical studies where participants are explicitly informed that they will not benefit directly.
 - Sofia Castellanos agreed and emphasized the importance of transparency in communicating how data will be used.
 - Dan Lussier added that transparency should also include intent to publish and any potential downstream uses of the data.
- Amy Charkowski raised the need for graduate-level education on data governance topics. She questioned how such education could be integrated into formal university curricula.
- Ziwen Yu recommended involving legal experts directly in the development of data governance tools for the NAPDC.

- Amy Charkowski further proposed working through scientific societies to disseminate findings and develop training programs for students outside of traditional academic structures.
- Yaguang Zhang expressed hope that data governance resources developed through the project could help graduate students gain broader perspectives on data that go beyond purely technical skills.
- Ziwen Yu mentioned he has a copy of a John Deere user manual that could serve as a useful reference for discussions about data ownership.
- Dan TerAvest cautioned that agricultural data is often reused by NGOs (and researchers) beyond its original intent and stressed the importance of ensuring farmers are aware of how their data is being used, especially if the end use changes over time.
- Chang Zhao reiterated the issue of siloed data and recommended creating the ability of farmers to be notified when their data is shared or used. Chang believes this would help build trust with farmers..

Dan Lussier concluded by underscoring the importance of developing clear policies and responses regarding how data is used at all times. This is a key part of any data governance framework and data governance tools.

Because the group conversation was so rich and engaging, the facilitators decided to continue as a full group instead of moving into breakout sessions as had been planned in the agenda. There was strong interest in continuing the discussion to begin shaping a data governance framework for the NAPDC community—something that's useful, practical, and beneficial for everyone involved.

Another idea that came up was to explore ways to share the group's work through a white paper or other academic publication. The group will keep brainstorming on possible publication channels and next steps.

6. Workgroup Guidelines Overview

Sofia gave a brief overview of the Operating Workgroup Guidelines, which outline how the group will work together, how decisions are made, how communication happens, and how everyone involved stays connected.

Sofia shared that the guidelines are meant to give the group a shared understanding as they co-develop the data governance framework for the NAPDC. The document includes:

- The purpose of the group and what it's working toward
- Who's involved and what kind of participation is expected
- How meetings will be structured—monthly, virtual, and designed to be both consistent and flexible
- Decision-making will be consensus-based, aiming for agreements everyone can support
- Ground rules include respectful communication, inclusion, and shared responsibility

Bottom line: These guidelines are a living agreement, meant to build trust, support collaboration, and help everyone share ownership of the process.

This is a draft document and it can be updated based on input received from workgroup members. Sofia shared that the document will be sent out to the group for feedback after the meeting.

7. Closing & Next Steps

- Sofia and Dan will share the Workgroup Guidelines. Workgroup members are asked to review and provide feedback if needed..
- Victor asked if there's a timeline for the workgroup process.

- Dan said yes, there's a document that shows the project phases through mid-2026. This document will also be shared with the workgroup after the meeting.

8. Action items

- **Share Workgroup Guidelines Document.** *Responsible:* Sofia & Dan
- **Send Project Timeline Document.** *Responsible:* Sofia & Dan
- **Send out a Google Form to gather members' availability for upcoming meetings and confirm their review and agreement (and/or suggested edits) to the Operating Workgroup Guidelines.** *Responsible:* Sofia & Dan