

# Focus groups: A possible method to improve quantitative agricultural data



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## THE PROBLEM

It has been determined that IBGE's Systematic Agricultural Production Assessment (LSPA - in Portuguese, *Levantamento Sistemático da Produção Agrícola*), one of the nine agricultural research conducted by the institution, should be carried on by using *focus group methodology*. LSPA data has to be collected at municipal and state levels, through regular meetings of agricultural experts.

Focus groups were chosen as the LSPA data collection method to permit collaboration among participants, fostering their exchange and checking of information about areas planted with food crops. The groups are supposed to meet to address and update planted, producing, and harvested crop areas, crop production and price paid to producers, registering in addition, in this process, agricultural or market related matters affecting local crop production. In the State of Sao Paulo, with 645 cities and its 43.663.672 inhabitants distributed in 248.222,801 km<sup>2</sup>, LSPA's focus group methodology is still being implemented.

## THIS PROJECT

This work portrays the concentrated effort developed by IBGE's Sao Paulo State Unit, from 2010 through 2013, to train, motivate, initiate, tutor, stimulate, and overall fostering the establishment and maintenance of the LSPA meetings in the state.

## FOCUS GROUP

Method of gathering information through organized discussion with groups of experts in the issue being investigated. It can be used to clarify survey data and as primary data gathering.

## PARTICIPANTS

Producers, city hall officials, State agricultural department officials, labor union representatives, cooperative and association delegates and enterprise representatives, all those in position to provide informed data on municipal or state agriculture.

## METHOD

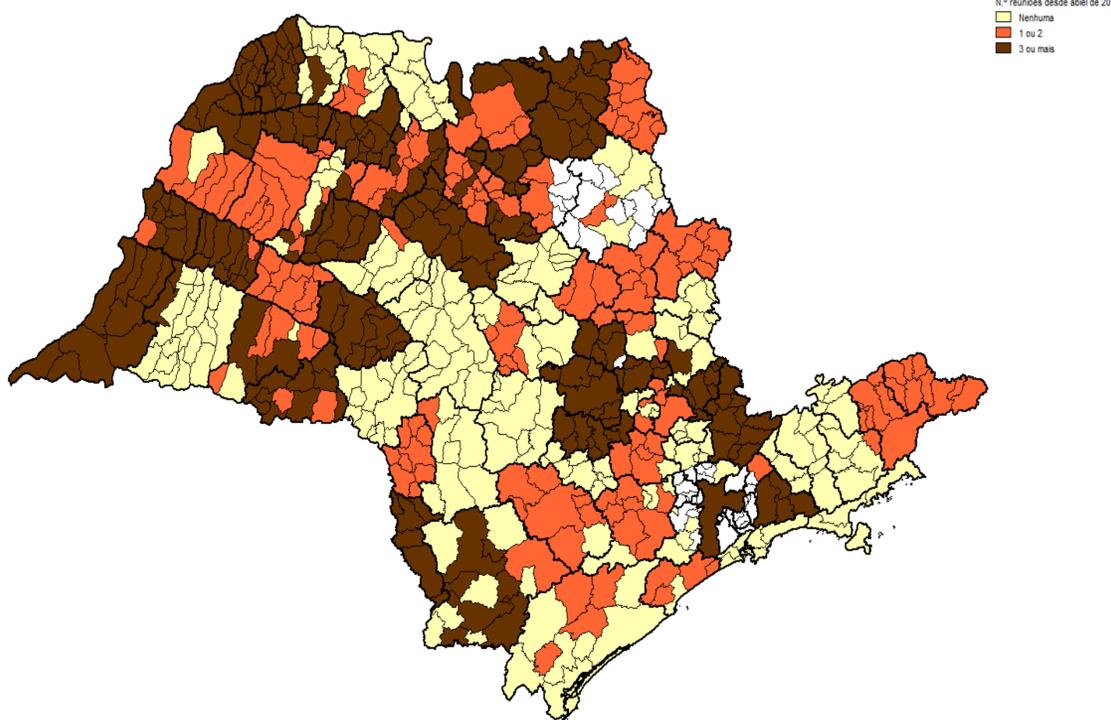
- ❖ 76 cities visited,
- ❖ 74 IBGE agencies contacted,
- ❖ 40 offices of the state department of agriculture contacted,
- ❖ representatives of municipal departments of agriculture of the visited cities contacted and brought on-board

## BEST PRACTICES

- ❖ State level intensive and extensive planning and support in the form of manuals, contact lists and suggestions of available area informants of interest in agriculture and livestock matter.
- ❖ Personal involvement of agencies' managers with informants
- ❖ Willingness to conduct the meetings even in cities away from IBGE agency home-base
- ❖ Managers constant follow-up with agency technicians, providing guidance and on-going training to address difficult or emerging problems with the method.
- ❖ Sharing other IBGE information in the groups, as a way to "pay-back" external participants' time and contribution

## RESULTS

- ✓ Almost 440 municipal and regional commissions were planned, covering all municipalities that have significant agricultural production in the state.
- ✓ 40% of the commissions planned are already running.
- ✓ At the Sao Paulo state data level group, with participants from several federal and state level institutions who discuss and settle IBGE's official data, differences between the institution's assessments and that of IBGE have significantly reduced. In addition, errors in Sao Paulo's LSPA database are reducing.



Meeting in Guaratinguetá, SP, 2012