

CHAPTER I—PLANNING AND PREPARING FOR THE CENSUS

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Chapter I—PLANNING AND PREPARING FOR THE CENSUS

The planning for the 1954 Census of Agriculture was performed largely by staff members with experience in connection with one or more prior Censuses of agriculture or other Censuses. The results of the prior Censuses were available to this staff in the form of published reports, staff appraisals, records of work performed, and copies of detailed procedures, and these were used as a basis for planning.

Planning the Agriculture Questionnaire.—Planning for the questionnaire content began in connection with the sample Census of Agriculture taken in 1953 in the States of Virginia and Utah. The questions proposed for the 1954 Census were pretested in this sample Census taken in October–November 1953. This pretest involved the use of about 130 enumerators and the enumeration of approximately 7,600 farms scattered throughout the two States. The work of the enumerators during this pretest was observed by technical staff members, the questionnaires were edited and coded, tabulations were made, and reports presenting data from this pretest were published in March, 1954.

Selecting the questions.—The questions included in the 1954 Census of Agriculture were selected from requests and suggestions received from many sources, such as the United States Department of Agriculture, State Agricultural Colleges, farm publications, farm organizations, individuals, etc. The first list of questions deemed by the technical staff of enough importance to be considered for inclusion in a Nationwide Census of Agriculture was prepared in April 1953.

The selection of questions to be included in the Census was made on the basis of the advice and recommendations of a special advisory committee appointed by the Director of the Bureau of the Census. This special advisory committee included persons recommended by, and representatives of the following organizations:

Associations of Land Grant Colleges and Universities
National Association of Commissioners, Secretaries, and Directors of Agriculture
American Farm Bureau Federation
Agricultural Publishers Association
Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union of America
Farm Equipment Institute
National Grange
The American Farm Economics Association
Census Advisory Committee, American Statistical Association
United States Department of Agriculture
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives

In selecting questions to be included in the Census, the special advisory committee and the technical staff gave consideration to the possibility of obtaining satisfactory information more efficiently in some other way than through the Census of Agriculture, to the adequacy of the information that might be obtained through the Census, to the availability of data from other sources, to the usefulness of the data, and to the cost of securing and compiling the information. A reduced facsimile of an Agriculture Questionnaire (A1) appears on pages 8 to 11.

The special advisory committee also made recommendations regarding the publication of data for the Census, and the making of special surveys and reports in connection with the Census.

Establishing enumeration districts.—In order to secure the complete coverage of all areas, and to make assignments of work to individual enumerators, it was necessary to divide the area of the United States into small areas, called enumeration districts. The size of these small areas was determined by the amount of work each enumerator was expected to perform and by boundaries of existing local minor civil divisions, such as townships, districts, etc. Generally, it was planned to establish enumeration districts that would provide 150 to 160 hours of work for each enumerator. Usually, enumeration districts contained all of one or more minor civil divisions. Records of the work time, number of farms, and number of dwellings as shown by the 1950 Censuses of Agriculture, Population and Housing were used as a basis for estimating the workload for proposed enumeration districts. Enumeration districts were established so that all parts were contiguous and so that natural barriers would not impede travel. Generally, incorporated places, unincorporated places, and urbanized areas having a population of 1,000 or more in 1950 were made separate enumeration districts. Likewise, incorporated and unincorporated places of less than 1,000 population were made separate enumeration districts if they had relatively few farms and more than 150 dwelling units in 1950.

In 37 out of the 48 States, enumeration district boundaries were established to conform to existing boundaries of townships or similar minor civil divisions. In 5 States, enumeration district boundaries conformed only in part to boundaries of minor civil divisions as the enumeration district boundaries were drawn along township or section lines, roads, or streams. In 5 States, permanent statistical areas had been established using natural features as boundaries and these areas or combinations thereof were used as enumeration districts.

The total number of enumeration districts established was 41,221 of which 11,127 were for incorporated or similar urban places. The 30,094 enumeration districts outside of urban areas contained an average 153 farms each. The 11,127 enumeration districts for urban areas contained approximately 170,000 farms or an average of 15 farms each.

Base maps for use in indicating enumerators' districts were obtained generally from State Highway Departments. For areas with a high concentration of farms, the enumerators' maps were on a scale of approximately 2 inches per mile. For sparsely settled areas, the enumerators' maps were on a scale of one-fourth inch per mile. Blue line prints were made of these base maps for use in outlining enumeration districts. The boundaries of the enumeration districts were indicated with a colored pencil on the enumerators' maps. These maps usually covered areas somewhat larger than the enumeration district so as to facilitate their use by enumerators in determining location of the enumeration district boundaries. In order to maintain records and controls for enumeration districts, each enumeration district was assigned an identification number. This identification number contained two parts—one part identified the county and the other part identified the enumeration district within the county. Each enumeration district also contained a label, that identified the name, if any, of the area comprising the enumeration district.