



Agriculture census will yield new data on use of fertilizers, market trends

FOLLOWING THE HARVESTERS and combines south this year will be a flock of nose-counters taking the 1954 census of agriculture. This census, taken every five years, is almost indispensable for farm production estimates. More than that, it proves to be almost a bible for businessmen interested in selling to the growing farm market.

The agricultural chemicals industry has a big stake in this census, the 16th taken since 1840. (The census was taken every 10 years until 1920 when the period was reduced to five years.) This year there is a special section on how much fertilizer and lime was used on the nation's farms this year. Each farmer is asked the amount of commercial fertilizer and fertilizing material he bought, how much he paid for it, and the number of acres he used it on.

In addition he is asked to break down his fertilizer consumption by crop and report the individual totals. Among the crops about which specific questions are asked are hay and cropland pasture, corn, tobacco, and fruits, vegetables, and potatoes.

The farmer will also be requested to list his purchase of lime and liming materials, including ground limestone, hydrated lime, and oyster shells. Cost and acreage figures are also requested.

But aside from specific questions about fertilizers and lime, the agricultural census does not tally the use of chemical products in farming. The census, nevertheless, helps the industry by enabling a pesticide manufacturer, for example, to estimate the needs for his new products. By showing population density trends, the census is helpful in determining the size and location of new plants.

For the market researcher in agricultural chemicals, results of the new census should be invaluable. Census figures can aid in the selecting of products "tailored" for specific groups or areas. Beyond that, the census can be used in predicting

sales and marketing trends. Following the marketing channels right down the line, the census can be used in setting up sales districts and routes. After these have been established, sales quotas can be figured and dealer performance can be measured by referring to census tabulations.

Tractors and TV Sets

Keeping track of the estimated 5.5 farms in this country, and the people that live on them, is no easy task. The Census Bureau expects that about 31,000 enumerators will be needed for the job. To make their tasks easier, the bureau already has sent out yard-long questionnaires to 9 million farmers in 41 states. The farmer hands the completed form to the census taker when he calls, thereby saving time and broadening the area the enumerator can cover.

The agricultural census will ask many of the usual questions, such as the names of the farmer and his family, the size of the farm, and the products raised. But also included will be questions on the number of tractors owned by farmers, and whether they own television sets, or whether their wives have home freezers.

These questions help businessmen determine how prosperous the farmer is—and how much he can be expected to buy in the future. The farm market, estimated at more than \$20 billion a year, makes up a sizable chunk of the nation's economy.

The farmer is an employer, too. Farm hands are numerous in many sections. Their prosperity, tied to the farmer's, can mean important money in the market-place.

In many cases the farmer's true income cannot be measured solely by the amount of crops he raises and sells. Some farmers work at industrial jobs during the slack seasons. Then too, other members of the family may have nonfarm jobs

which add to the over-all income. In a number of instances, farmers have invested spare cash in stocks and bonds and are receiving dividends from their holdings.

A doubt arises in the minds of some: Will the farmer answer all these questions truthfully? Chances are that he will, according to the Census Bureau. All information, such as farm income, debts, and acreage under cultivation, is confidential with regard to the individual farmers. The census takers are sworn to secrecy and they can be fined or jailed for betraying confidences. The Treasury Department cannot use the census files to track down income tax evaders, nor can the Department of Agriculture check them for misdeeds in the price support program.

Is a Census Really Needed?

Although censuses of agriculture have been taken regularly since the middle of the last century, the need for them was thoroughly reexamined during the last year with an eye to economy. An extensive review of all of the Census Bureau's programs was begun last October by a special committee appointed by the Secretary of Commerce. On this committee were representatives of major farm organizations, farm publications, food processors, professional associations, and other interested users of census statistics.

Regarding the agricultural census, the committee said that the agricultural economy cannot operate efficiently without dependable information. Nearly all of the various agricultural estimates are based on census figures. No private agency or group of agencies could obtain the kinds and amount of data provided by the census of agriculture, the committee believes.

After considering the need for the agricultural census, the committee recommended that the census be continued on the five-year basis as before. Even with these recommendations, the agricultural census faced a stiff fight in Congress before an appropriation of \$22 million was approved.

Several farm groups helped in making out the census questionnaire. USDA worked directly with the Census Bureau in formulating the questions, while state agricultural schools, the Grange, the American Farm Bureau Federation, and other farm organizations presented their opinions on what should be included.

In providing comprehensive information on the extent and distribution of farm production, farm activity, agricultural resources, and scores of other important subjects, the agriculture census is looked upon as not only the primary but usually the only authoritative source about farming in counties and other local areas.