



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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# About the U.S. Census Bureau

by John G. Keane

While many people are familiar with the U.S. Census Bureau's Decennial Census, fewer people know about the other vast amounts of data that the Census Bureau collects and disseminates. Following are highlights of what the Census Bureau has to offer in the other nine years.

## Current Demographic Data

If you need demographic data more current than our Decennial Census data, turn to our current surveys. Here are some of them:

- The Current Population Survey supports monthly estimates of employment, unemployment, and labor force characteristics. Supplemental data gathered in most months cover a wide range of characteristics relating to poverty, family income, displaced workers, noncash benefits, immigration, adult education, school enrollment, immunization, fertility, child support, voting, etc.
- The American Housing Survey, conducted every two years, offers statistics comparable to those of the census, such as year structure built, number of living quarters, property value, kitchen and plumbing facilities, and type of heating. Other data reflect neighborhood and housing quality, more detailed financial characteristics, and energy-related items.
- The Survey of Income and Program Participation provides continuous information on national household economic well-being and the characteristics of persons participating in such government programs as food stamps and Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

Other demographic surveys include Consumer Expenditure Survey, National Crime Survey, health-related surveys, and housing-related surveys.

## Economic Censuses

The Census Bureau conducts censuses and current surveys of most U.S. businesses. Censuses of the economy (currently underway and conducted every five years) provide complete and reliable information on virtually every

major economic sector, including retail trade, wholesale trade, service industries, manufacturers, mineral, construction, transportation, agriculture, and government. Special programs include the Surveys of Minority and Women-Owned Businesses, company-wide statistics, and irrigation practices.

Censuses data are encyclopedic, covering more than 12,000 different products and providing information for geographic areas as small as 2,500 persons. The censuses are crucial to maintaining the system of Gross National Product accounts and accurately "benchmarking" the country's economic performance. They also provide information needed to plan state and local economic development, assess individual business performance, and identify new product markets.

## Current Economic Data

More than 100 annual, quarterly and monthly surveys carry forward key national economic statistics on a current basis. Examples include the Annual Survey of Manufacturers; the annual and monthly retail, wholesale, and services surveys; and the Quarterly Financial Report. Monthly surveys cover residential and commercial construction. We also produce annual reports of federal expenditures in each state and local area.

Our merchandise trade data program provides the closely watched trade deficit number each month and gives details on the commodities the U.S. exports and imports. These data are based on import and export documents (about 15 million a year!) provided by the U.S. Customs Service.

## International Work

The Census Bureau has trained over 10,000 foreign professionals and has provided technical advisors in host countries. Its one-of-a-kind data bank contains demographic, economic, and social data for over 200 countries. Given the global competitiveness issue, this data bank has enormous potential.

## Assistance

Our data are released in varied forms — publications, tape files, floppy diskettes, maps, microfiche, and our CENDATA, an electronic transmission service. To help you work through this mountain of data, we publish reference guides and maintain sources of assistance. To get started, just call our Customer Services representatives in Suitland,

Maryland (301-763-4100). They'll direct you to technical experts at headquarters or information specialists located in one of our 12 regional offices. They can also help you purchase reports, computer tapes, other data products, and reference materials.

John G. Keane, Ph.D., not a member of the Society, is Director, Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce.

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## Life expectancy study welcomes actuarial participation

Actuaries having responsibility for valuing large blocks of annuity business will be interested in a project getting under way at the University of Minnesota.

The project is under the direction of Dr. James Vaupel, noted demographer at the Hubert Humphrey Institute and Director of the Center for Population Analysis and Policy. Vaupel has assembled an interdisciplinary seminar of faculty members consisting of demographers, anthropologists, biologists, geneticists, medical doctors, sociologists, economists, and an actuary.

The project's purpose is to determine the likelihood and the consequences of extending human life expectancy to 100 years and beyond. J. Stanley Hill, FSA, is the Principal Investigator for the part of the project to study the effect of this extension on life insurance companies and the Social Security system. Two major companies have already agreed to participate in this study, and a few more will be selected.

It appears that this project is unique. Hill has notified us of it for two reasons:

1. To determine whether projects of a similar nature might be under way elsewhere.
2. To invite inquiries from appropriate actuaries concerning possible participation in the project.

Readers are welcome to call Hill at 612-426-2508 or write to him at 5011 Lake Avenue #205, White Bear Lake, MN 55110.