



Canada's Census of Agriculture: A history of innovation

Jeffrey Smith*

Statistics Canada, Ottawa, Canada – jeffrey.smith@statcan.gc.ca

As the national statistical agency, Statistics Canada is mandated to conduct the Census of Agriculture in years ending in “1” and “6”, according to the *Statistics Act*. However, the history of agriculture data collection by complete enumeration dates back to much earlier times when the Intendant of New France (and Canada's first “official statistician”) conducted the first systematic census of the colony in 1665-66. In addition to counting the number of inhabitants and collecting information on some attributes, that census also gathered information on the wealth of agriculture, the number of domestic animals and seigneuries (parcels of land in an institutional form of land distribution), so could be considered the first census of agriculture conducted in what would eventually become Canada. Following that, censuses, including agricultural, were conducted at irregular intervals in the various provinces and territories that existed as the country evolved. Following the creation of Canada through confederation in 1867, the 1871 Census of Canada was the first regularly scheduled collection of statistics at the national level. That enumeration was conducted using nine schedules, two of which dealt with agriculture, one with “products of the forest”, and one with “shipping and fishing.” Since 1956, a Census of Agriculture has been conducted every 5 years in Canada.

Over the long history of censuses of agriculture in Canada, maintaining the relevance of the census program has been important in ensuring continued support among respondents as well as users of the data. As the funds for the census must be sought for each cycle, each census proposal also requires evidence of relevance, and an increasingly rigorous demonstration of value obtained for the investment required to maintain a census program. Another important aspect, especially more recently, has been the management of the reporting burden (actual and perceived) placed on respondents to the census. The paper will provide a brief overview of the history and evolution of the Canadian Census of Agriculture, with a focus on the innovations adopted by the Canadian Census of Agriculture, in particular those made in recent cycles related to relevance and cost-efficiency, up to and including possibilities for the 2016 and 2021 iterations.

Keywords: census; agriculture; innovation; relevance.