

The 1940 Census – Census of Agriculture

Text: There are nearly 7,000,000 farms in the United States. It will take more than 100,000 enumerators to visit all these farms for the Census of Agriculture. The success of this gigantic task requires that all enumerators have a sympathetic understanding of the problems of the farmer.

Narrator: A few basic principles must be observed in taking the Census of Agriculture. First: recognize all types of farms. In addition to the general types of farms with which you are familiar, the census recognizes many specialized kinds. Most farms will have the usual characteristics, but the highly specialized ones are frequently not thought of as farms. These too are farms for census purposes provided they are at least three acres. But even if less than three acres, they can still be called farms if their produce brought 250 dollars or more in 1939. There are many of these unusual farms and a schedule must be prepared for every one of them.

The second point is easy to remember: one schedule for each farm as defined by the census. Now what is included in a farm? The schedule says in substance that a farm may include a single tract of land or a number of separate tracts operated as a unit and used for agricultural purposes. An example will illustrate the point. Here is a place owned and farmed by one Bill Jones. In addition he rents the old Scudder place and farms it too. It's about a mile up the road. Jones says he operates two farms, but the census enumerator will report both places on one schedule, calling it all one farm.

Bill Jones: I own all my farm here, 120 acres.

Enumerator: Do you farm any more land?

Bill Jones: Yes, I rent the old Scudder place of 80 acres up the road. And I farm that too. I guess I've got two farms.

Enumerator: For the census we'll say that both places make up one farm. All the land that you operate is your farm, whether you own it or rent it from someone and whether all is in one tract or in separate tracts.

Narrator: Here is the schedule for that farm. Acres owned: 120 – that's Bill Jones' home place. Acres rented: 80 – that's the old Scudder place. Total acres in farm: 200. It's all one farm, so it's all on one schedule.

Crop failure means complete failure only. Crops with very low yields are not considered complete failures and are still considered harvested, as are crops used for some other purpose when the stand is poor. For instance:

Bill Jones: In this drought my oats and corn both failed. I only got 80 bushels of oats from ten acres. And the 15 acres of corn were so poor that I let my cows have it for pasture.

Enumerator: Neither crop was really a failure then and we will show the oats as harvested and explain the low yield with a note: drought. The corn is not a failure either and it should go here: corn grazed all.

Narrator: Then what is crop failure? Here are a few examples. Complete crop failure can result from many things: drought, flood, insects, frost, and even if a crop is left to rot in the field because the price is

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too low or because no labor is available to harvest it. A crop that fails should be reported in this way: say 40 acres of winter wheat were blown out of the ground in the spring. Here under supplemental information, in the spaces provided for reporting crop failure, we write in the first column "winter wheat," and in the third column under acres we write "40." If the land was successfully replanted to spring wheat, we would report the acres and production in the crops section on the reverse side of the schedule. And also note under supplemental information, on the same line as that on which we wrote winter wheat, we would write "spring wheat" in the second column and "40" in the fourth column. By making these entries under supplemental information we explained exactly what happened and why nothing is reported for question 14: land from which no crop was harvested in 1939 because of crop failure or destruction. Remember crop failure is complete failure, and if the field is successfully replanted after a failure the acreage is reported as replanted and the second crop is not a failure. It is shown as harvested.

Livestock: handle with care. In listing the livestock on the farm or ranch, you must watch carefully the age limits given. Note particularly the lower age limit for each kind of livestock. But why, you ask, leave out the baby animals. Every schedule is to be filled out as of April 1 even though you don't visit a farm until several days later. So let's visit a couple of farms on the first of April just to see why the different animals must have reached a certain age before they are included in the inventory.

Here is a farmer who hopes to get his hogs to market early, and so the farrowing is all over. The pigs are three or four weeks old, but his neighbor here isn't in such a hurry and there isn't a litter on the place yet. If we wanted to count the pig crop in his district we couldn't do it on April 1 because all the pigs haven't been born yet. So we deliberately leave out all pigs and all calves, colts, kids, lambs, and young chickens that were on April 1 under the age limits shown on the schedule.

Sometimes serious errors result in the careless writing of fractions. Write fractions with bar horizontal between figures. Most people have learned to write fractions with a slanting or diagonal line, and it is very easy when you are in a hurry for these fractions to slip into this form. Now is that 19 and a half or is that 19,112? Your guess is as good as mine. One such error might ruin the accuracy of your figures. Such errors are difficult to locate and expensive to correct. So please write fractions this way: keep the bar horizontal and put one figure right above the other.

Get the information from the farm operator or some member of his family. Here is a case where the farm operator could not answer the question but the enumerator got the information.

Enumerator: How many dozen chicken eggs were produced last year?

Bill Jones: I don't know. My wife takes care of the chickens. Maybe she'll know. She's around somewhere. Mary!

Mary Jones: Yes.

Bill Jones: How many dozen eggs your chickens lay last year?

Mary Jones: I don't know exactly. I didn't keep a tally sheet.

Enumerator: I'll figure it out if you can tell me two things. First, what is the greatest number of eggs you got on any one day and second, what is the smallest number you got on any day?

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Mary Jones: I remember along the first of May I got 150 eggs in one day and along in the winter for five weeks I didn't get any.

Enumerator: I'll take the high production and add the low, then divide by two which makes 75 per day average. Then multiply by 330, which is the actual number of days in which you had eggs, for there were five weeks in which you didn't have any. This makes a total of 2,062 dozen. This will come very close to your year's production.

Bill Jones: Say that's pretty neat. Why that way you could come very close to the total amount of milk for the year couldn't you?

Enumerator: Yes, and we have some conversion factors too, for use in case of necessity. For example, in determining how many gallons of milk are required to make the amount of butter churned or butter fat sold from the farm. Here also is a conversion table for fertilizer. Why this little handbook is a lifesaver when you run up against a real one.

Narrator: Principal points have been brought out in this instruction. Going over them again we have: recognize all types of farms; make up one schedule for one farm; crop failure means complete failure; report livestock of ages specified in the questions on the schedule; use horizontal bar in fractions; get the information from the farmer or some person familiar with the farm; and know and use your instruction manual.