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Bureau of the Census Update

John C. Kavaliunas, Bureau of the Census
Washington, DC

It's a pleasure to address this audience once again and tell you about some new developments at the Census Bureau. We at the Bureau are well aware of the vital link that libraries, particularly the government documents librarians, play in disseminating and explaining Census Bureau information to the public.

Before I tell you about future plans, let me preface my remarks with three general observations about data dissemination directions at the Census Bureau: Internet, fees, and future access. All three of these are very much intertwined.

Observation 1: Internet

Internet usage continues to grow, offering opportunities to reach a much wider audience than ever before. The Census Bureau, early on, saw the potential of the Internet and we are actively moving towards our goal of making the Internet a primary means of disseminating our information.

- Currently we are receiving more than 2 million "hits" per week.
- We have been on the top ten list of government sites for the last 3 years, and next to White House, probably the second most visited Federal site.
- Several report series, such as the Current Industrial Reports and the Population Estimates and Projections, are available primarily on the Internet. In March of this year we stopped printing our foreign trade reports in paper, the FT 925 series, and published the information on the Internet.
- We've also begun to make some changes--technical upgrades in some cases--to our products and begun to integrate across the various media. Let me give you two examples:

The new 1996 Statistical Abstract on CD-ROM is Internet-compatible so that users can go back and forth from the CD to the census tables on the World Wide Web with a click of the mouse.

Some topical reports in the P-series---Foreign Born Population, Geographic Mobility, for example---will be in print one year with updated tables on the Internet the following year.

We are also grappling internally with many of the same issues that are facing the library community: How do we strike a balance between print and electronic media, timeliness and archivability, and so forth. We are aware of these issues and will continue to work with you, with the Government Printing Office (GPO), and with other organizations to develop solutions that benefit the user.

But the point I want to make is that Internet has changed and will continue to substantially change the way we disseminate data.

Observation 2: Fees

What makes the Internet so attractive is that users have a virtual library at their desks. And, for the most part, it's available to anyone for free. But a concurrent development, and one that is at odds with the culture of the information highway, is that the Census Bureau, like other agencies, has been asked by Congress and the Administration to supplement budgets through user fees and from the sale of products.

Last month we began a subscription service, CenStats. CenStats is a cautious step forward for the Census Bureau in recouping additional revenues through the sale of our products. Just about all the information and features currently available on our Internet site will remain there for free, as well as similar types of information in the future. However, CenStats will provide additional enhanced access that will make it easier or more convenient for the user. Initial offerings include:

- A geocoding application--that is, the ability to code online street addresses to census tracts.
- Additional look-up capabilities for detailed information by product code for imports and exports from the FT 925 series.
- Access to several of our CD-ROM products including USA Counties, County Business Patterns and Zip Business Patterns.

Future developments planned at this time include access to historical data bases of both demographic and business data.

We are working with the Government Printing Office to provide access to the CenStats for Federal depository libraries. This free access will not be limited to a single machine, but it will be limited to the single physical location of the library.

Observation 3: Future Access

Given the availability of the Internet, shrinking budgets, and user needs, we believe we are heading in the right direction in planning for an Internet-accessible data delivery system that

will enable users to customize the information they need. We are developing a system known as DADS. This Data Access and Dissemination System will provide interactive electronic access to prepackaged data tabulations, data documentation, and online help, as well as allow users to build their own tabulations from the census records. We currently have a prototype available and have been working with the Federal Depository Library Program, the American Library Association, the Special Libraries Association and other representatives of the library community to define and beta test this initial version of the system. Eventually the various search and access features of our Internet site will merge to provide seamless access to Census data.

With this as background, let me tell you about some major activities--economic and decennial censuses, as well as some new products, just released or on the horizon.

1997 Economic Censuses

The next major data collection effort will begin in early 1998, that is the 1997 Economic Census.

The 1997 Economic Census will be the first census to report economic data by North American Industrial Classification Code (NAICS), a joint U.S.-Canada-Mexico system that replaces the old Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code based on a 1930's manufacturing economy. There are 20 NAICS sectors, as opposed to the 11 SIC divisions. For example, many new service categories such as information and health have been added. The "information sector" covers 34 industries: Software and database publishing, on-line retrieval services; Satellite, cellular and pager communications; Motion picture, video and sound recording; and Radio, television, and cable broadcasting.

The old "services division" has been divided into 8 new sectors with 154 new industries recognized. The new sectors include Professional, scientific and technical services; Health care and social assistance, including HMOs; Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services, which include telephone answering services, telemarketing, etc.; and Arts, entertainment, and recreation.

A Federal Register notice appeared earlier this month, and a NAICS manual is scheduled for release by the Office of Management and Budget this fall. If you need more information on NAICS, look behind the economic indicators clock on our Internet home page.

The first release of data from this census will be a new report that combines data from all sectors. We are looking to release this report within a year of the census--that is, early 1999.

But, in general, you can expect fewer printed reports from the 1997 Economic Census; in fact, about 75 percent fewer printed reports, but more data on CD-ROM, especially in PDF format.

For more information on the census plans, see "Looking Forward to the 1997 Economic Census" on our Web site. There you will find sample forms for all the censuses, publicity

materials, etc. Reference materials, such as what used to be available in the Guide to the Economic Censuses, will be available on the Internet.

You should also note that responsibility for the Census of Agriculture, usually taken in conjunction with the Economic Census, has been shifted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Census 2000

Let me update you on plans for the next census.

In April, as required by law, we presented to Congress the topics that we propose to put on the questionnaire.

- In response to Congress's wanting to reduce the reporting burden, we are proposing the shortest short form in 180 years. We are proposing six population and one housing question: name, age, sex, relationship, race, Hispanic origin and whether you own or rent your home. 1990 short form questions -- marital status, units in structure, value/rent, and number of rooms -- will become sample items.
- There is one new subject proposed for the long form--grandparents as caregivers-- as required by the welfare reform act. Five subjects will be dropped: children ever born (fertility), year last worked, source of water, sewage disposal, and condominium status.

It should be noted that Congress has given no indication that it supports a long form in 2000.

Next spring we will present to Congress the actual questions that should appear on the questionnaire.

There is an Interagency committee looking into a redo of OMB Directive 15, that is, how race/ethnicity are reported, particularly as regards the 2000 census questionnaire. Under consideration are the following 3 options: including a multi-racial question to the census questionnaire; allowing people to check as many racial categories as they require, rather than just 1; and lastly, combining race/ethnicity and ancestry into one question. The committee's recommendation is due this summer, followed by a public comment period and the issuance of a directive in October.

Regarding decennial census products, they are yet to be defined, but I can tell you a few things: we plan to produce printed reports from the census, CD-ROMs, and other electronic data sets or predefined tables that can be accessed through the Internet. I can also tell you there will be fewer printed reports, CD-ROMs, and even predefined tables than there were in 1990. But users will have the ability to specify and tailor tabulations through the Data Access and Dissemination System (DADS) that I mentioned earlier.

Other New Products

Zip Business Patterns - A new standard product offered for the first time this fall, Zip Business Patterns will be an annual release. Like its companion product, County Business Patterns, it provides information on the number of establishments and employees by SIC code, but for areas smaller than a county.

Statistical Abstract - The 1996 CD-ROM is available. Several different file formats are available on the disc to help you access the information you need. There are also links from the CD-ROM directly to the appropriate pages on our Internet site.

Landview III - Scheduled for release in early fall, the new Landview product, which combines mapping software with Census Bureau data, will be Windows compatible, with updated geography, and with additional software features that will make it easier to run and to import your own data. Look for information on the TIGER pages of our Internet site.

In Conclusion:

To sum up, let me reiterate:

- The Census Bureau is relying on the Internet as a dissemination medium, particularly as we move towards the 1997 Economic Census, the Data Access and Dissemination System, and Census 2000.
- Our products are changing to take advantage of the capabilities offered by the Internet.
- We are making a cautious first step to recover additional revenues through a subscription service that will provide enhanced access to data.
- Lastly, we will continue to work with GPO and the library community to develop solutions to some of the unresolved issues that we are facing together.