

**TO: Linda Gage**  
**FROM: Ken Hodges**  
**DATE: June 9, 2011**

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## **JUNE 3, 2011 COPAFS MEETING**

COPAFS Chair Felice Levine started the meeting with remarks about the value COPAFS derives from its members and encouraged reps to remain engaged with the organization. She also described a Senate act that, if passed, would among other things, make the Census director a 5 year appointment. Following brief discussion, we went to Ed Spar's Executive Director's report.

### **Ed Spar. Executive Director's Report**

Spar noted that while the FY2011 budgets have finally passed, it is not yet clear exactly how funding will be distributed. Amid all the question marks, indications are that the Census Bureau will receive funding for annual updates to the Master Address File. It also appears there will be funding for some expansion of the ACS sample, but there is concern about what happens if such funding is not provided for 2012.

At the March COPAFS meeting, we heard reports that the Statistical Abstract would be eliminated, but late word is that some type of compilation will be published on the web. One report has the Stat Abstract remnant taking the form of links to data, rather than a finished publication. In response to a question about the status of the County and City Data Book (a Stat Abstract supplement), Spar said he was unsure, and would report back.

Spar observed that the situation at NCHS has improved somewhat, as they have their 2011 budget and some supplemental funding from the Affordable Care Act. Indications are that they should be able to maintain and possibly even upgrade the National Health Interview Survey and the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey.

The Office of Government Ethics has proposed a change to a rule that limits the ability of federal employees to serve in official capacities in nonprofit organizations. For example, the change would permit federal employees to serve as board members for such organizations. The change is described in a May 3, 2011 *Federal Register* notice, and Spar commented that it could be helpful to organizations like COPAFS.

Senator Tom Coburn has issued a report in which he charges the National Science Foundation with waste and mismanagement. As part of the report, Coburn denigrates the role of social sciences, and calls for elimination of NSF's Social, Behavioral and Economics Directorate. Spar also drew our attention to a document that summarizes (decade by decade back to 1850) the questions asked on the census (decennial, long form, and now ACS).

Spar then introduced Adrienne Pilot of the Council of Economic Advisors, who described an initiative that would permit additional data sharing between the Census Bureau, BLS and BEA. As Pilot described it, the Census Bureau's business register is comingled with IRS files, and therefore falls under IRS restrictions. The proposed legislation would allow greater sharing by clarifying what could be shared. The payoff is that the Census and BLS business lists could be brought together, and the differences reconciled to produce a significantly improved database that would still be subject to IRS and CIPSEA safeguards. The next step is to identify legislation to which this measure can be attached.

### **A Review of the Upcoming 2012 Census of Agriculture Cynthia Clark. National Agricultural Statistics Service**

Clark explained that the Census of Agriculture is taken every five years, and dates back to 1840. The Census Bureau had been conducting the census until it was transferred to the Department of Agriculture in 1997.

In response to Spar's request for a NASS budget update, Clark explained that the agency has two major funding line items – the agricultural estimates program and the census of agriculture. The 2010 budget was about \$162 million, and the 2011 request included funding for initiatives, such as upgrading the county estimates from a collection produced by states to a standardized federal program. The 2011 budget came in at about \$156 million, and while the census is moving ahead with the basic plan, the budget for the estimates program took a significant hit, and the initiatives were not funded.

Getting back to the Census of Agriculture, Clark recalled that the 2007 census achieved an earliest-ever February 2009 release, with an 85.2 percent response rate and adjustments for nonresponse and undercoverage. "Follow ons" included a 2008 farm and ranch irrigation survey, a 2008 survey of organic production (the first in-depth survey of organic farming), a 2009 census of horticulture, and a survey of on-farm renewable energy (such as wind, solar and manure/methane).

In planning the 2012 census, NASS is taking a two-team approach. A Content team is focused on the information to be collected, while a Data Collection Testing team is focused on how best to collect the information. For content, input has been sought from internal and external users. Internal users have called for information on animal grazing, rented land by utilization, and expanded information on renewable energy. Recommendations from external users include expanded information on agroforestry, counts of farms that sell to intermediary outlets, a count of on-farm packing facilities, and farm use of broadband Internet.

Data collection tests are focusing on the performance of the previous form, increasing Internet response, data collection modes, and processing systems. The effort includes cognitive testing, field testing, the evaluation of historical data, and interviews. Clark described a number of tests related to increasing response. For example, the use of pre-census autodial notification increased response about nine percent, but a "web push"

actually decreased overall response. Follow-up stressing the potential of a personal visit yielded a small increase in response. With these results in mind, 2012 data collection will include autodial or postcard pre-census notification, on-line web reporting, initial mail-out of questionnaires, postcard or autodial reminder, a second questionnaire mailing, and the use of certified mailing to significant operations. A COPAFS attendee commented that 2012 (a national election year) might not be the best environment for autodial contact.

There is also an effort to increase public awareness, and in contrast to the population census, the agricultural census will use very little television advertising, instead making more use of radio. Following mail list development and the awareness effort, the data collection milestones include online web reporting available November 2012, initial questionnaire mailing in December 2012, data collection through May 2013, and the release of results in early 2014.

For more info Clark recommended contacting Chris Messer.  
[Messer@nass.usda.gov](mailto:Messer@nass.usda.gov)

### **Population Considerations for the Nuclear Field** **Danny Smith. Consultant**

Ed Spar introduced Danny Smith as a consultant in the nuclear field, and noted the timeliness of a presentation on this topic.

Before describing events at three nuclear facilities, Smith explained some basic nuclear concepts, such as the distinction between radiation (transient energy), and radioactive material (a durable substance contaminated with radiation). He also drew the distinction between chronic and acute doses radiation – chronic involving smaller exposures over longer periods leading to genetic damage, and acute referring to larger exposures over shorter time causing immediate tissue damage.

Smith then presented a slide listing levels of radiation exposure in millisieverts (mSv) per year or event. For example, a transcontinental airline flight would expose one to 0.04 mSv, and simply living on earth exposes one to about 2 mSv per year. A dose of 100 increases lifetime cancer risk, 10,000 is a fatal dose, and 100,000 is immediately fatal.

Smith then described the history of the Shoreham nuclear plant on Long Island Sound about 60 miles from Manhattan – an area that was largely rural when Long Island Lighting Company LILCO applied for Shoreham's license in 1968. However, as population and the demand for power grew, the project went way over its initial \$70 million budget. Problems mounted as the plant's output design was increased, protests killed plans for additional nuclear plants closer to Manhattan, and the Three Mile Island accident influenced public opinion and prompted more stringent NRC regulations. Population growth and Long Island's changing demographics played a part, as the NRC declared Shoreham's design safe, but Suffolk County declared an evacuation impossible.

In 1985, low power tests were initiated, but the plant was never connected to the grid, and in 1989, LILCO agreed to shut the plant down. The \$6 billion cost of Shoreham (including \$186 million for decontamination) is to be repaid with an electricity surcharge. In contrast, a similar facility at Waterford, CT continued in operation until 1998 – a major difference being that it was on the other side of Long Island Sound, where evacuation was less of an issue.

Next, Smith considered the Fukushima Daiichi plant on the east coast of Japan. With approximately 50,000 households residing within 20 kilometers, the plant was designed to withstand a 19 foot tsunami. The plant shut down automatically following the earthquake, but a 46 foot tsunami followed. Smith described the accident sequence with some technical detail, but the key is that even when shut down, nuclear plants need power to cool their reactors. With the loss of offsite power, the flooding of onsite generators, and the exhaustion of battery power, there was no way to cool the reactors, and the much publicized explosions resulted.

The radioactive release was only one tenth that of Chernobyl, but the consequences include a 20 kilometer exclusion zone (with a population of about 200,000), a 30 kilometer evacuation zone, the extermination of contaminated livestock, and the destruction of contaminated crops. The plant will never operate again, and clean up of the site will take an estimated 30 years.

Workers at the plant are receiving radiation doses high enough to increase the risk of cancer, so older workers are being asked to volunteer for clean up. The thinking is that the cancer risk takes 20-30 years to incubate, so older workers likely will die of something else before then. Smith said this “Skilled Veterans Corps” is being paid very well, and the view is that the “generation that will reproduce the next generation” should not be exposed to radiation.

Smith then briefly described the Chernobyl accident, noting that it caused dozens of deaths from acute exposure, and thousands of excess cancer deaths (a figure very difficult to pin down). A 30 kilometer exclusion zone is established, but not enforced by the Ukraine government (some people have moved back, believing the exclusion to be a government land grab). Over 100,000 people were displaced, damage was in the hundreds of billions of dollars, and clean up efforts are still underway.

Soviet government responses included the distribution of contaminated foods throughout the republics (so as to not concentrate the impact in a few areas), and a decree that “radiation from Chernobyl” could not be listed as a cause of death. Smith also showed a map of contamination levels around the plant that revealed an area of high contamination some distance to the northeast. The distant contamination resulted from rainfall, but was not natural. As Smith described it, the Soviet government saw the contaminated clouds moving toward Moscow, and seeded to cause the radioactive rain to fall in a less populated area. The impacted area’s population of about 70,000 received no warning, and there has been no official acknowledgement of the event. However, residents are

said to have been compensated with what they cynically refer to as a “coffin supplement.”

## **Rethinking Urban-Rural and the Barriers Between Statistical and Programmatic Uses**

**Michael Ratcliffe. U.S. Census Bureau**

**John Cromartie. Economic Research Service**

Ratcliffe explained that the Census Bureau does not take programmatic uses into account when developing statistical geographic area concepts or when delineating areas. The separation keeps geographic concepts from being degraded by program specific needs, desires and local biases. But Ratcliffe said the Census Bureau is increasingly aware of the need to consider how areas are used, and is committed to a conversation about the use of statistical geographies in policy making and program implementation. For example, in response to the 2010 proposed urban area criteria, local planners expressed concern raised concerns about boundary changes and disparities with their perceptions of urban areas. In particular, they expressed a desire for urban definitions that are more consistent with their program and planning applications.

Reviewing recent urban/rural classifications, Ratcliffe noted that they tend to be dichotomous, with rural and nonmetropolitan defined as residual categories. The classifications reflect both form (settlement patterns) and function (economic and social relationships). But while the Census Bureau has identified urban areas (of varying thresholds and definitions) for decades, the purpose was solely the tabulation and presentation of data.

However, the Census Bureau is now considering why urban and rural areas are being defined in the first place, and whether the existing categories are adequate for these purposes. In particular, are the current definitions and delineations adequate for planning and policy needs? And if planning and program needs are considered, how does one manage situations in which local agencies propose contradictory criteria? For example, some groups in an area might consider it urban while others might prefer a rural designation.

Looking to the future, Ratcliffe said thought is being given to the development of an urban-rural continuum, that would better reflect the variety of urban, suburban, exurban and rural landscapes, as well as the functional relationships between urban areas. The meaningful subdivision of larger agglomerations (of interest to some users) is another topic for consideration.

Cromartie commented that the USDA uses the rural concept in ways that make big differences in people’s lives. While we all share a common image of what is rural (open countryside, or small towns distant from major urban centers), it has been difficult to establish a common definition of “rural.” The difficulty traces to the need to draw a line through what is in reality a continuum with gentle gradations. The areas commonly

called “suburbs” combine urban and rural elements, and it is not clear where we could draw an urban/rural line that would suit all users.

Cromartie called the idea of a single definition needlessly limiting, and argued that research on rural issues requires different perspectives. In fact, dozens of definitions exist, including those established by the Census Bureau, OMB, USDA, HUD, HHS, and others. The differences between these definitions boil down to two questions. First, for any entity, where is the boundary between urban and rural, and second, what is the minimum population size for an entity to be considered urban?

On the first question (where is the boundary?), Cromartie explained that urban boundaries can be based on administrative areas (such as cities), land use (the view from an airplane), or economic factors (such as commuting or labor force). He then showed a map illustrating how differently these concepts would define boundaries for “Peoria.” On the second question (minimum population size), Cromartie noted that any rural definition includes some towns and villages below a chosen population threshold. The Census Bureau has long used 2,500 as the urban population threshold, but the massive urbanization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century dramatically increased the average size of cities, and left smaller towns (in the 2,500 range) with fewer central place functions. Cromartie argued that this reality suggests the need for higher urban-size thresholds, but that research offers limited guidance for setting a threshold. He also noted that USDA has adjusted its threshold upward over the years, and gently chided the Census Bureau for using a threshold that dates to the horse and buggy days.

Cromartie concluded by suggesting that we could improve the efficiency of federal programs by adopting multiple urban/rural definitions, targeted to multiple purposes, and that the choice of definition should be driven by the objectives of the program or application. While one could have too many definitions, he stressed the benefits of flexibility, as definitions suited for tracking sprawl might be different from those designed to track economic impacts, provide rural housing subsidies, or make rural business loans.

### **Overview of New Interactive BEA Tables** **Thomas Dail. Bureau of Economic Analysis**

Dail described a soon to be released web-based data access tool that provides enhanced access to BEA data that previously have been available only through five separate applications. Prompted by data user calls for single system access with a common look and feel, the new interactive system was built by a team comprising staff from all BEA units. There was a soft launch in April, and the full launch is scheduled for June 10. The system can be accessed at [www.bea.gov/itable](http://www.bea.gov/itable).

Benefits of the new system include data access with a single tool that enables more efficient table creation, downloads to more formats, customized tables and charts, saving and exporting charts, and even the forwarding of tables via social media. The interactive

tables (described as the heart of the new application) provide access to all BEA interactive data, an easier path to statistics, easier table modification, and the ability to download to .pdf, .xls, and .csv formats.

Dail demonstrated the system, showing the variety of BEA data available through the online system. Starting with the handy “Begin Using the Data” button, Dail showed how the system allows one to navigate through the many table options associated with the National Income and Product Accounts, and noted that the system provides direct access to many more tables than its predecessor. To illustrate, Dail accessed data on personal income and savings, and graphed the savings rate over a period of many years. The system does not yet allow users to make calculations, but unlike the old system, it allows users (who set up an account) to save queries. Dail even showed how one can “tweet” a table, prompting an attendee to ask, tongue-in-cheek, if the table is limited to 140 numbers.

Dail wrapped up by announcing that a Version 2.0 of the BEA system is already being developed for 2012, and will provide enhanced features, such as the ability to perform calculations.

### **Concerns From COPAFS Constituencies**

No concerns were raised, and the meeting was adjourned.