American Community Survey (ACS)

Why We Ask: Acreage, Agricultural Sales, and Business on Property

We ask about the acreage of houses and mobile homes, agricultural sales, and businesses on a property to create statistics about agricultural properties, and better understand statistics about home value.

The questions as they appear on the 2014 ACS paper questionnaire. These topics were introduced on the Decennial Census housing questionnaire in 1960 and were transferred to the ACS when it replaced the Decennial Census long-form in 2005.

Examples of Federal Uses

- Required to determine Qualified Census Tracts and Difficult Development Areas for the Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) program and to determine state allocations of credit ceilings. (The historical definition of Fair Market Rents has always excluded units on acreage of more than 10 acres to eliminate those units that might benefit from farm subsidies and therefore have lower than market rents.)
- Used to support cooperative agricultural extension work, support agricultural research, distributed to eligible institutions on the basis of a legislatively determined formula.
- Used to create state-level estimates of the owner-occupied housing portion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by state for the real estate industry.

Examples of Other Uses

State and local agencies use these statistics for land use analyses to understand lot sizes, housing density, zoning, and property values. Developers and aid groups may use this information to improve areas with desirable lot sizes.
We ask about the computers that people use, whether people access the Internet, and the types of subscriptions used to access the Internet, to create statistics about computer and Internet use. These statistics were first collected in 2013, and released to the public in September 2014. The questions were added to measure the nationwide development of broadband access and decrease barriers to broadband access.

The questions as they appear on the 2014 ACS paper questionnaire. This topic was added to the ACS in 2013.

Examples of Federal Uses
- Required to assist in the evaluation of broadband Internet access and adoption.

Examples of Other Uses
State and local agencies might choose to use these statistics to evaluate access to broadband in their communities. These statistics may also be useful to understand whether to use Internet or more expensive outreach methods for distributing important public health or safety information. Businesses and non-profits might use these statistics to analyze computer and Internet usage in their communities. Knowing how many people have access to computers and the Internet helps these groups communicate more effectively with their customers, and plan other outreach including ecommerce.
American Community Survey (ACS)

Why We Ask: Cost of Utilities and Condominium Fees

We ask about the use and cost of common utilities, and the cost of any applicable condominium fees as part of the cost of homeownership (along with insurance, mortgages, and home equity loans). When combined with income, selected monthly owner costs provide an excellent measure of affordability and excessive shelter costs. Federal agencies use this information in programs that provide housing assistance, and programs the help low-income residents afford to heat their homes.

The question as it appeared on the 2014 ACS paper questionnaire. The first question about home ownership costs were asked in the Census of 1940. These topics were transferred to the ACS when it replaced the Decennial Census long-form in 2005.

Examples of Federal Uses

- Required to describe the housing cost burden. State and Local government grantees receiving formula block grant funds from the Community Development Block Grants, HOME Investment Partnership Program, Emergency Solutions Grant and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS programs, are required by law to describe housing needs.
- Required to identify rental distribution of housing units used to determine Fair Market Rents (FMRs).
- Used to research and report on the status of drinking water and wastewater infrastructure in communities.
- Used in many programs that seek to assess poverty, and determine eligibility for housing assistance programs, including the need for housing assistance for low-income, including elderly low-income, households. (Also used to evaluate the performance of these programs.)
- Used in the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to indicate the costs of fuels used by various income groups and, by extension, to calculate block grant allocations based on expenditures for home energy by low-income households in a State (through the determination of state median income).
- Used to estimate utility costs included in rents for the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Examples of Other Uses

States and local agencies use this information to estimate residential costs of energy consumption, improve energy efficiency in their communities, and develop affordable housing. Advocacy groups use this information to determine where more affordable energy is needed. Researchers use these statistics to investigate the costs of replacing conventional home heating fuels (including electricity) with renewable energy alternatives.
American Community Survey (ACS)

Why We Ask: Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

We ask about food stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to understand and forecast participation in food assistance programs. In 2008, the food stamp program was renamed SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), but the question uses both program names to minimize respondent confusion.

The question as it appeared on the 2014 ACS paper questionnaire. This topic was introduced to the ACS when it replaced the Decennial Census long-form in 2005.

Examples of Federal Uses
- Required to streamline administration of the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program by replacing administrative paperwork with ACS estimates of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals.
- Used to support a national education program focused on the dissemination of the results of food and human nutrition education research.
- Used in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to calculate the annual Program Access Index (PAI), a measure used to award bonuses to States for strong performance in SNAP administration.
- Used in determining eligibility for assistance programs.
- Used in assessing poverty.
- Used to measure the performance of other programs such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

Examples of Other Uses
State and local agencies use these statistics to assess state food assistance needs and performance, participation rates for eligible families and individuals, and to determine gaps in services and programs. Faith-based and other nonprofit organizations use information about food assistance needs to determine where food banks, food kitchens, and other programs could be beneficial, and how needs can be met with additional resources and services.
We ask about home heating fuel to create statistics about home energy use. These statistics help governments understand community air quality and energy needs. Federal agencies use these statistics to forecast future energy demand, analyze the fuels available to community residents, and plan and fund programs that help low-income residents afford to heat their homes.

The question as it appeared on the 2014 ACS paper questionnaire. This topic was introduced on the Decennial Census questionnaire in 1940. This topic was transferred to the ACS when it replaced the Decennial Census long-form in 2005.

Examples of Federal Uses
- Required in the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to determine income-eligible households by heating fuel type.
- Used to research and report on the relationships among different development patterns (including housing and travel information) and public health and pollution.
- Used in assessing community vulnerability to natural hazards.
- Used to project residential energy demand over the next 30 years.
- Used to forecast short-term energy outlook/demand for primary space heating fuel by season by fuel.

Examples of Other Uses
State and local agencies use this information to estimate energy consumption, improve energy efficiency in their communities, decrease air pollution, and develop affordable housing. Nonprofits use this information to encourage policies that decrease air pollution.
American Community Survey (ACS)

Why We Ask: Plumbing Facilities, Kitchen Facilities, & Telephone Service

We ask questions about the presence of hot and cold running water, a flush toilet, a bathtub or shower, and a sink with a faucet, a stove or range, a refrigerator, and telephone service to create statistics about indicators of housing quality. Federal and local governments use these estimates to identify areas eligible for housing assistance, rehabilitation loans, and other programs that help people access and afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing. Public health officials may also use this information to locate areas in danger of ground water contamination and waterborne diseases.

While the presence of these facilities in the home has increased over time, there are still areas in the United States where they are not available. Individual items (hot and cold running water, etc.) are asked about separately on the ACS to allow housing analysts to evaluate individual indicators of housing quality, and determine which items are lacking in particular areas.

The questions as they appear on the 2014 ACS paper questionnaire. This topic was introduced on the Decennial Census housing questionnaire in 1940, and was transferred to the ACS when it replaced the Decennial Census long-form in 2005.

Examples of Federal Uses

- Required to define substandard housing. State and Local government grantees receiving formula block grant funds from the Community Development Block Grants, HOME Investment Partnership Program, Emergency Solutions Grant and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS programs, are required by law to describe housing needs, including substandard housing (defined as the lack of complete kitchen or bathroom facilities).

- Telephone service) required to measure extent of universal access to telephone service, including access for schools, libraries, rural health care providers, and low-income consumers.

- Used to prepare and respond to disasters. Information about disability status, income, and plumbing facilities is used to estimate the size and nature of populations in a disaster-affected area and determine how best to respond to community needs.

- Used to determine where indoor plumbing is lacking as part of research into infectious disease and contaminants. Also used in the development of exposure assessment tools that estimate potential exposures to the general public and specific demographic groups.

- Used to research and report on the status of drinking water and wastewater infrastructure in communities across the U.S.

Examples of Other Uses

State and local agencies use these statistics to identify poor quality housing by measuring the lack of plumbing. Developers and aid groups may use this information to improve areas with substandard housing, while advocacy groups may use this information to educate the public about potential water-related environmental and health hazards.
American Community Survey (ACS)

Why We Ask: Taxes, Insurance, and Mortgages

We ask about the cost of taxes, insurance, mortgages and home loans as part of the cost of homeownership (along with the cost of utilities). When combined with income, selected monthly owner costs provide an excellent measure of affordability and excessive shelter costs. Federal agencies use this information in programs that provide housing assistance.

The question as it appeared on the 2014 ACS paper questionnaire. The first question about home ownership costs were asked in the Census of 1940. These topics were transferred to the ACS when it replaced the Decennial Census long-form in 2005.

Examples of Federal Uses
- Required to describe the housing cost burden. State and Local government grantees receiving formula block grant funds from the Community Development Block Grants, HOME Investment Partnership Program, Emergency Solutions Grant and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS programs, are required by law to describe housing needs.
- Used in mass transportation and metropolitan planning to ensure compliance with the Clean Air Act.
- Used in many programs that seek to assess poverty, and determine eligibility for housing assistance programs, including the need for housing assistance for low-income, including elderly low-income, households. (Also used to evaluate the performance of these programs.)
- Used in the VA Home Loan Guarantee program to understand whether the VA home loan guarantees make the cost of home ownership more “affordable” (housing costs no more than 30% of income).

Examples of Other Uses
States and local agencies use this information to understand the cost of home ownership in their communities, and develop affordable housing. Advocacy groups use this information to determine where more affordable housing is needed.
American Community Survey (ACS)

Why We Ask: Tenure, Home Value, and Rent

We ask about whether a home is owned or rented, and the amount of the monthly rent or how much the home and property are worth to produce statistics about tenure, rent and home value. These statistics are used to analyze whether adequate housing is affordable for residents, protect owners and renters, and allocate and fund housing assistance programs.

The question as it appeared on the 2014 ACS paper questionnaire. The first question about home ownership was asked in the Census of 1890, while the first question about home value was asked in the Census of 1940. These topics were transferred to the ACS when it replaced the Decennial Census long-form in 2005.

Examples of Federal Uses
- Required to identify rental distribution of housing units used to determine Fair Market Rents (FMRs).
- Required to describe the balance of owners and renters. State and Local government grantees receiving formula block grant funds from the Community Development Block Grants, HOME Investment Partnership Program, Emergency Solutions Grant and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS programs, are required by law to describe housing needs.
- Required to determine Qualified Census Tracts and Difficult Development Areas for the Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) program and to determine state allocations of credit ceilings. (The HUBZone program, administered by SBA, uses QCTs as geographical preferences in metropolitan areas.)
- Required to allocate low-income housing assistance in a fair and equitable manner.
- Required in the enforcement responsibilities under the Voting Rights Act to determine disparities in voter participation rate for analysis and for presentation in federal litigation.
- Used to determine owner and renter market demand in support of the FHA Mortgage Insurance Program.

Examples of Other Uses
States and counties seek to create policies and programs to encourage appropriate development for the community. These governments use these statistics to understand changes in local housing markets, ensure residents have affordable housing options, qualify for assistance and grant programs designed to protect owners and renters, and reduce the tax revenue losses from vacant or abandoned properties. Businesses and mortgage lenders use these statistics to guide future operations. Advocacy groups use these statistics to influence tax, assistance and zoning policies.
We ask questions about the type of building, units in the structure, number of rooms, and number of bedrooms to create statistics about housing types and housing density. These statistics help federal agencies and programs analyze the availability of housing, understand changes in the size and structure of homes, evaluate overcrowding, and plan emergency services.

The questions as they appear on the 2014 ACS paper questionnaire. A question about units in structure and rooms were introduced on the Decennial Census housing questionnaire in 1940 and a question about bedrooms in 1960. They were transferred to the ACS when it replaced the Decennial Census long-form in 2005.

Examples of Federal Uses
- Required to allocate the annual appropriation for the Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG).
- Required to determine demand for senior rental housing, and other analyses of the housing inventory.
- Used to calculate allocations of funds for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.
- Used in enforcement efforts to eliminate and remedy unlawful discrimination in housing.
- Used to prepare and respond to disasters, by providing communities with information about the demand for public shelters.
- Used to project residential energy demand.
- Used to research and report on the status of drinking water and wastewater infrastructure in communities across the U.S.

Examples of Other Uses
State and local agencies use these statistics as part of their comprehensive housing affordability strategies for determining the needs of families residing in the jurisdiction. This information is also used to identify home structures in disaster-prone areas during emergency planning and preparation. Developers and aid groups may use this information to improve areas with overcrowded or substandard housing, while advocacy groups may use this information to educate the public about potential water-related environmental and health hazards.
American Community Survey (ACS)

Why We Ask: Vehicles

We ask about the vehicles available to people to produce statistics about vehicles. These statistics along with the place of work and journey to work questions, provide information about commuting, road congestion, and access to transportation in emergencies.

The questions as they appear on the 2014 ACS paper questionnaire. This topic was introduced on the Decennial Census long-form questionnaire in 1960. This topic was transferred to the ACS when it replaced the Decennial Census long-form in 2005.

Examples of Federal Uses

- Required in the enforcement responsibilities under the Voting Rights Act to determine disparities in voter participation rates for analysis and for presentation in federal litigation.
- Required in mass transportation and metropolitan planning to ensure compliance with the Clean Air Act and implementing regulations, particularly with respect to coordination and conformity.
- Used to summarize the conditions and performance of the nation's highways, bridges, and transit.

Examples of Other Uses

State and local agencies use these statistics to estimate clearance times for regional evacuations. Local transportation planning agencies also use these statistics to determine which modes of transportation people are dependent on; i.e. do people bike or take public transportation by choice?
Why We Ask: Year Built and Year Moved In

We ask about when a building was built, and when a person moved into that home to produce statistics about housing availability. These statistics help federal agencies and programs analyze the availability of housing, understand changes in the age of homes, and measure neighborhood stability.

The questions as they appear on the 2014 ACS paper questionnaire. A question about the age of a home was introduced on the Decennial Census housing questionnaire in 1940, while a question about the year moved in was added in 1960. These topics were transferred to the ACS when it replaced the Decennial Census long-form in 2005.

Examples of Federal Uses

- Required to understand the age of the existing housing stock. State and Local government grantees receiving formula block grant funds from the Community Development Block Grants, HOME Investment Partnership Program, Emergency Solutions Grant and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS programs, are required by law to describe housing needs.
- Required to determine Qualified Census Tracts and Difficult Development Areas for the Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) program and to determine state allocations of credit ceilings. (The HUBZone program, administered by SBA, uses QCTs as geographical preferences in metropolitan areas.)
- Required to allocate low-income housing assistance in a fair and equitable manner.
- Used to prepare public disclosure statements and reports on mortgage lending by financial institutions covered by the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, which helps detect discriminatory marketing or lending practices in lower-income or predominantly minority neighborhoods, and determine whether financial institutions are meeting the housing and financial needs of their communities.
- Used to calculate allocations of funds for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.
- Used in enforcement efforts to eliminate and remedy unlawful discrimination in housing.

Examples of Other Uses

State and local agencies use these statistics as part of their comprehensive housing affordability strategies for determining the needs of families residing in the jurisdiction. This information is also used to identify home structures in disaster-prone areas during emergency planning and preparation. Developers and aid groups may use this information to improve areas with older housing, while advocacy groups may use this information to educate the public about health hazards in older housing, such as lead.