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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-605](#), a report to the Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Government Reform

Why GAO Did This Study

One of the U.S. Census Bureau's (Bureau) long-standing challenges has been counting migrant farm workers. Although the Bureau goes to great lengths to locate these individuals, its efforts are often hampered by the unconventional and hidden housing arrangements, distrust of outsiders, and language and literacy issues often associated with this population group. To help inform the planning for the 2010 Census, we were asked to review the adequacy of the Bureau's procedures for locating migrant farm workers and their dwellings during the 2000 Census, and the steps, if any, that the Bureau can take to improve those procedures.

What GAO Recommends

The Secretary of Commerce should direct the Bureau to (1) study the feasibility of staffing partnership efforts at higher levels earlier in the decade to support address-listing activities, (2) consider developing protocols to allow the Bureau to take advantage of the address information kept by advocacy groups while preserving the confidentiality and integrity of the Bureau's master address list, and (3) explore integrating census and other data to help plan operations and target resources to those areas with large migrant farm work populations. In commenting on a draft of this report, the Bureau stated that it generally agreed with our conclusions and will work toward implementing our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-605.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Patricia A. Dalton at (202) 512-6806 or daltonp@gao.gov.

DECENNIAL CENSUS

Lessons Learned for Locating and Counting Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers

What GAO Found

The Bureau used over a dozen operations to ensure a complete address list and accurate maps for the 2000 Census. To the extent that the operations were properly implemented, their design appears to have been adequate for identifying the hidden dwellings in which some migrant farm workers live, such as basement apartments. However, the operations were not as well suited to overcoming other difficulties associated with locating migrant farm workers such as language and literacy issues and a distrust of outsiders. These challenges were surmounted more effectively by relying on local advocacy groups and others in the community who knew where and how migrant farm workers lived, and could facilitate the Bureau's access to those areas.

The Bureau's plans for the 2010 Census include an ambitious program to make its maps more accurate. However, additional steps will be needed. Local and regional census offices employed innovative practices during the 2000 Census that could help improve the Bureau's ability to locate migrant farm workers in 2010. They include partnering with state and local governments earlier in the decade when many address-listing operations take place (during the 2000 Census, the Bureau's partnership program was used largely to get people to participate in the Census, but these activities took place after the Bureau had completed most of its address list development activities). Other innovations included making use of address information from local advocacy groups to help find migrant farm workers, and using census and other demographic data strategically to plan operations and target resources to those areas with high numbers of migrant farm workers.

Migrant Farm Worker Dwelling is Hidden Behind a House



Source: GAO.