

Department Of Commerce
U.S. Census Bureau
OMB Information Collection Request
Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey
OMB Control Number 0607-0190

PART B. COLLECTION OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS

1. Universe and Respondent Selection

Sample Revision: A sample revision is the process used to re-design and re-select the samples for many of the Census Bureau's surveys of the retail, wholesale, and service industries. We do a sample revision approximately every 5-7 years. This process is performed to:

- ensure each sample is representative of its target population
- improve the efficiency of each sample
- incorporate updates to the industry classification structure
- update questions and instructions to obtain more accurate data
- redistribute burden for small and medium size businesses

The latest wholesale sample was introduced in April 2013 and the next one is scheduled for April 2018.

Sampling Frame: The sampling frame used for the MWTS has two types of sampling units: Employer Identification Numbers (EINs) and large, multiple-establishment firms. Both sampling units represent clusters of one or more establishments owned or controlled by the same firm. The information used to create these sampling units was extracted from data collected as part of the 2007 Economic Census and from establishment records contained in the Census Bureau's Business Register as updated to December 2010.

To create the sampling frame, we extract the records for all employer establishments located in the United States and classified in the Wholesale Trade sector as defined by the 2007 NAICS. For these establishments we extract sales, payroll, employment, name and address information, wholesale type of operation code (TOC), as well as primary identifiers and, for establishments owned by multi-unit firms, associated EINs. We use the TOC to distinguish between different types of wholesale establishments: Distributors, MSBOs, and Agents and Brokers. To create the sampling units for multi-unit firms, we aggregate the economic data of the establishments owned by these firms to an EIN level by tabulating the establishment data for all wholesale establishments associated with the same EIN. Similarly, we aggregate the data to a multi-unit firm level by tabulating the

establishment data for all wholesale establishments associated with the same firm identifier. In some cases, a multi-unit firm has establishments active in more than one wholesale TOC. In these situations, separate EIN level and firm level sampling units are created for each type of operation. No aggregation is necessary to put single-unit establishment information on an EIN basis or a firm basis. Thus, the sampling units created for single-unit firms simultaneously represent establishment, EIN, and firm information.

Stratification: The primary stratification of the sampling frame is by industry group based on the detail required for publication. We further stratify the sampling units within industry group by a measure of size (substratify) related to their annual sales. Sampling units expected to have a large effect on the precision of the estimates are selected "with certainty." This means they are sure to be selected and will represent only themselves (i.e., have a selection probability of 1 and a sampling weight of 1). Within each industry stratum, we determine a substratum boundary (or cutoff) that divides the certainty units from the noncertainty units. We base these cutoffs on a statistical analysis of data from the 2007 Economic Census. Accordingly, these values are on a 2007 sales basis. We also used this analysis to determine the number of size substrata for each industry stratum and to set preliminary sampling rates needed to achieve specified sampling variability constraints on sales estimates for different industry groups. The size substrata and sampling rates are later updated through analysis of the sampling frame.

Sample Selection: The first step in the sample selection is to identify firms selected with certainty. If a firm's annual sales or end-of-year inventories were greater than the corresponding certainty cutoff, that firm was selected into the MWTS sample with certainty.

All firms not selected with certainty were subjected to sampling on an EIN basis. If a firm had more than one EIN, we treated each of its EINs as a separate sampling unit. To be eligible for the initial sampling, an EIN had to have nonzero payroll in 2009. The EINs were stratified according to their major industry and their estimated sales (on a 2007 basis). Within each noncertainty stratum, a simple random sample of EINs was selected without replacement.

Sample Maintenance: We update the sample to represent EINs issued since the initial sample selection. These new EINs, called births, are EINs, recently assigned by the IRS, that have an active payroll filing requirement on the IRS Business Master File. An active payroll filing requirement indicates that the EIN is required to file payroll for the next quarterly period. The Social Security Administration attempts to assign industry classification to each new EIN.

EINs with an active payroll filing requirement on the IRS Business Master File are said by the Bureau to be “BMF active” and EINs with an inactive payroll filing requirement are said to be “BMF inactive.”

We sample EIN births on a quarterly basis using a two-phase selection procedure [OMB No. 0607-0189]. To be eligible for selection, a birth must either have no industry classification or be classified in an industry within the scope of the Service Annual Survey, the Annual Wholesale Trade Survey, or the Annual Retail Trade Survey, and it must meet certain criteria regarding its quarterly payroll. In the first phase, we stratify births by broad industry groups and a measure of size based on quarterly payroll. A relatively large sample is selected and canvassed to obtain a more reliable measure of size, consisting of receipts in two recent months and a new or more detailed industry classification code. Births that have not returned their questionnaire after 30 days are contacted by telephone.

Using this more reliable information, in the second phase we subject the selected births from the first phase to probability proportional-to-size sampling with overall probabilities equivalent to those used in selecting the initial MWTS sample from the December 2010 Business Register. Because of the time, it takes for a new employer firm to acquire an EIN from the IRS, and because of the time needed to accomplish the two-phase birth-selection procedure, we add births to the sample approximately nine months after they begin operation.

If a firm was selected with certainty and had more than one establishment at the time of sampling, any new establishments that the firm acquires, even if under new or different EINs, are included in the sample with certainty.

However, if a firm was selected with certainty and had only one establishment at the time of sampling, only future establishments associated with that firm’s originally-selected EIN are included in the sample with certainty; any new EINs that might later be associated with that firm are subjected to sampling through the quarterly birth-selection procedure.

To be eligible for the sample canvass and tabulation, an EIN selected in the noncertainty sampling operations must meet both of the following requirements:

- It must have an active payroll filing requirement on the IRS Business Master File.
- It must have been selected from the Business Register either in the initial sampling or during the quarterly birth-selection procedure.

Each quarter, we check against the current Business Register to determine if any EINs on the survey have become BMF inactive. Typically, we do not canvass BMF inactive EINs

during the reference month. Likewise, if any EIN on the survey was BMF inactive in a previous reference month is now BMF active on the current Business Register, we again include these EINs in the canvass.

Single-unit EINs selected into the sample with certainty are not dropped from canvass and tabulation if they are no longer BMF active. Rather, the firm that used the EIN is contacted, and if a successor EIN is found, it is added to the survey. For both inactive and any previously inactive EINs that are now active, data are tabulated for only the portion of the reference year that these EINs reported payroll to the IRS.

Because births are not represented in the monthly survey until they go through the two-phase selection procedure, an interim procedure is used to account for births during the period of time between the onset of activity and the time of birth selection. This interim procedure consists of imputing data for all EINs currently in the monthly survey that go out of business but are still on the IRS Business Master File.

Births are added to the monthly survey in February, May, August, and November of each year. At the same time, inactive EINs are removed from the survey. To minimize the effect of births and inactive EINs on the month-to-month change estimates, we phase-in these changes by incrementally increasing the sampling weights of the births and decreasing the sampling weights of the inactive EINs in a similar fashion. In the first month, we tabulate the births at one-third their sampling weight and tabulate the inactive EINs at two-thirds their sampling weight. In the second month, we tabulate the births at two-thirds their sampling weight and tabulate the inactive EINs at one-third their sampling weight. In the third month, we tabulate the births at their full sampling weight and the inactive EINs are dropped (sampling weight equal zero).

EINs that were BMF inactive in a previous reference quarter but are identified as BMF active for the current reference quarter are treated as births for this procedure.

Estimation procedures: Estimates of monthly sales and end-of-month inventories are derived from data collected in the MWTS. Each month, firms in the MWTS sample are asked to report their sales and inventories data for the month just ending. Monthly totals are computed as the sum of weighted data (reported and imputed) for all selected sampling units that meet the sample canvass and tabulation criteria given below. The weight for a given sampling unit is the reciprocal of its probability of selection into the MWTS sample. The monthly totals are then benchmarked to the latest totals from the AWTS. Period-to-period (e.g., month-to-month) change estimates are computed using the benchmarked monthly totals. Monthly total estimates for broad industry groups (e.g., 2-, 3-, and 4-digit NAICS levels) are computed by summing the benchmarked monthly totals for the appropriate detailed industries comprising the broader industry group. Variances are estimated using the method of random groups.

Seasonal adjustment: Sales and end-of-month inventories estimates are adjusted for seasonal variation using Census Bureau's X-13ARIMA-SEATS program. Sales estimates are also adjusted for trading day effects and holiday effects if appropriate. Seasonal adjustment models are reviewed on an annual basis.

2. **Procedures for Collecting Information**

The sample is a probability sample selected from merchant wholesale employers (NAICS sector 42), excluding MSBOs, contained in the Census Bureau's Business Register, which covers all employers who make social security payments for their employees under the Federal Insurance Contributions Act.

There are approximately 4,200 merchant wholesale firms included in the survey. Of this number, about 1,200 are large firms and were selected with certainty (100 percent chance of selection). The remaining 3,000 respondents are small and medium-sized firms and were selected with noncertainty.

Data for the MWTS are obtained at the 6-digit NAICS level with all intermediate and summary tables obtained by summation. Tabulations will include estimates on sales, inventories, and inventories-to-sales ratios. Data for the MWTS are published at the 2-, 3-, and 4-digit NAICS level and one 5-digit level for NAICS 42343, computer and computer peripheral equipment and software merchant wholesalers.

Statistical analysis of the monthly data will be based on comparison of the monthly data to:

- (1) historic monthly survey results;
- (2) the results of the Annual Wholesale Trade Survey;
- (3) the results of the most recent Economic Census; and
- (4) published trade, business, and media reports.

The last six month preliminary average response (in terms of dollar volume) to this voluntary survey was about 64 percent for sales and 64 percent for inventories. The 2016 average response (in terms of units) to this voluntary survey was about 65 percent.

3. **Methods to Maximize Response**

Contacts have the option to receive the MWTS by mail, facsimile, or both. The MWTS is mailed to businesses the last business day of each calendar month, while the facsimile is sent out a couple business days later. They also have the option to report via Internet and would receive a reminder early in the month. Responses can be provided via mail, facsimile, telephone, or Internet.

The National Processing Center in Jeffersonville, Indiana, performs a fax reminder (Attachment 8) and/or telephone follow-up for all firms that have not responded by a certain date. The telephone follow-up is also used if firms have not completely filled out the form or have reported questionable data that may be unacceptable for the wholesale sales and inventories estimates. Firms that refuse to respond to the survey are called to convey the importance of their participation.

A fax machine connected to an "800" telephone line permits fax reporting to our collection facility on a 24-hour basis. The Census Bureau also has an "800" toll-free telephone number in both Washington, D.C. and Jeffersonville, Indiana, to permit respondents to call in data or ask questions without extra expense. A Frequently Asked Questions section on our website also provides respondents a simple way to obtain answers to their questions. Respondents can also report online through the "Centurion" system, which allows respondents to report 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at their convenience.

To help maximize response, we conduct specialized efforts with companies reluctant to participate in the survey. With the introduction of our latest sample, we re-mailed surveys to companies that declined to participate on the prior sample in hopes of obtaining their response on the current sample. This effort is scheduled to take place during 2017 for the upcoming new sample in 2018.

Beginning in late 2016, we formed a nonresponse group to discuss reluctant large companies. The goal of this group is to strategize on the best approach to convince the companies of the importance of reporting on economic indicator surveys such as MWTS. This effort has already had some initial success on other economic indicator surveys.

4. Testing of Procedures or Methods

We continuously edit the reported data and monitor procedures for collecting monthly wholesale sales and inventories data in an effort to reduce reporting burden and improve data quality. Budget permitting, we plan to conduct future content evaluation surveys to measure nonsampling error and ways to reduce reporting burden.

5. Contacts for Statistical Aspects and Data Collection

Direct questions regarding statistical aspects and data collection to William Abriatis, Chief of the Current Wholesale Branch, Service Sector Statistics Division, U.S. Census Bureau, (301) 763-3686.

Attachments

- 1. Copy of MWTS-L1B**
- 2. Copy of SM4217-A**
- 3. Copy of SM4217-E**
- 4. Copy of Centurion letter MWTS-F1B**
- 5. Centurion Login Screen**
- 6. BEA Support Letter**
- 7. Burden Statement Screen**
- 8. Copy of Fax Reminder MWTS-F2B**