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How Canada Will Take Production Census

COMPREHENSIVE Annual Survey of Crops, Live Stock, Dairying, Fisheries, Mining, Lumbering and General Manufactures, Will Be Made—Reorganization of Our Government Statistics—Co-operation Between Dominion and Provinces—Outline of New Organization.

By R. H. COATS

Dominion Statistician and Controller of Census.

THERE is no great need to emphasize the importance of production, especially in young countries where it is usually the sole source of the national income. Canada's future, economically, is peculiarly a matter of her production, for we went deeply into debt during 1900-1913 on what was essentially "equipment" for production—added to which is our war debt, an anodyne while we are spending it, but to be paid in hard earnings eventually. Hence there is no one question that calls more urgently for consideration in Canada than production—no subject, in other words, on which we have greater need for the accurate and comprehensive measurements that are furnished by an adequate system of statistics. Not, of course, that we must postpone investigation of other phenomena, more particularly our "man power" (hitherto much neglected), or our various social activities. But even these are determined to a degree by economic considerations; and production is certainly anterior to trade, finance, transportation and the like, which often bulk larger in statistical publications.

To organize a comprehensive scheme of production statistics is no mean task, for it will be seen at once that it involves the closest acquaintance with an extremely wide range of activity, including such sharply differentiated operations as the growing of crops, the rearing of herds, the raising of minerals, the catching of fish, the hewing of timber,—each a world of itself,—not to mention all those complex and interlocking subsidiary processes that go on in shops, mills and factories in converting the raw materials thus won from nature into the multifarious forms in which they enter human consumption.

Existing Statistics of Production.

Naturally our first statistics of production were those of certain Dominion and provincial departments which have executive functions in different sections of this variegated field. The mines department of the provinces, for example, collect royalties upon or otherwise supervise the mining output, the process automatically yielding statistics. Similarly, departments of agriculture, fisheries and forestry came, in certain cases, to publish the statistics thrown off by or needed in their administrative activities. But while much valuable information has been secured in this way, the statistics as a whole, have not been satisfactory. Executive departments very properly adapt their methods to their executive needs, and as these often differ widely the applicability of the statistics for other than the immediate purpose is extremely limited.

One cannot, for example, with safety compare a statistic of one provincial mines department with the corresponding statistic of another. Still less can one collate the statistics of, say, a mines and a forestry department; or a fisheries and an agricultural department. Much overlapping has ensued: we have three independently collected and compiled totals of the bricks manufactured in Ontario in 1916. At the same time wide areas of the field have been left uncovered.

Again, for numerous phases common to all industrial processes, but falling outside the purview of such departments as have been mentioned, (notably the problems surrounding capital and labor), we have had still another series of departments resurveying the field with their own purposes alone in view; and still other bodies like the conservation commission and the research council have also been at work from still another standpoint. It is true that once in ten years a comprehensive census of industry has been taken by the census and statistics office. But decennial statistics of production are only a little better than no statistics at all, and for other reasons that will be mentioned further on, the decennial census was never wholly successful with production. The remedy lies, of course, in unifying the system, by bringing all its parts within the scope of a single directing agency, making good deficiencies, eliminating differences—eliminating first of all the idea that good statistics can ever be obtained as a mere by-product of administration. Good statistics must be planned as an end in themselves, and having in view all the purposes that statistics must serve.

General Outline of New Organization.

As was just said, the decennial census recurs at too wide intervals to render it a suitable means of registering production. Another feature militates even more strongly against it. The *raison d'être* of the decennial census is to enumerate the population. This is an enormous task (it has been said of the United States census that it is the largest single administrative act of the government) requiring machinery of a special character. Most of all, it requires a very numerous field force, sufficient in fact to reach by personal contact, within about three weeks time, every man, woman and child of the eight millions resident in Canada. When it has reached the individual, however, the questions are for the most part of a simple and non-technical kind, so that a low-waged enumerator may be employed. Now, the organization demanded for a production census is of an almost diametrically opposite character. There are only forty or fifty thousand producing entities in Canada—outside of fishing and agriculture—so that a much more highly centralized staff may be employed. At the same time the information required is of a complex and technical character. To attempt to collect our data of mines and manufactures through the medium of the low-waged enumerators of the population census is to invite trouble from the beginning. The best such a census can accomplish (and this is all it has accomplished in the past) is to illustrate the broad and general tendencies with which public policy must deal. It cannot illuminate details, and details are more and more demanded. In the case of agriculture the situation is different, and the population census and the final and definitive census of agriculture must always for obvious reasons be taken together.

It has accordingly been decided to create entirely new machinery in the census and statistics office for the treatment of statistics of production. The decennial census of the future