

# **Hanging in the Balance: Using Technology Without Losing Touch in the Canadian Census of Agriculture**

Claire Bradshaw and Cathy Cromey  
Census of Agriculture  
Statistics Canada  
[claire.bradshaw@statcan.ca](mailto:claire.bradshaw@statcan.ca)

In recent censuses, the Canadian Census of Agriculture has adopted new technologies in data collection and processing. While these technological innovations have made collecting and processing the agricultural census faster and have provided many tools to ensure data quality, they carry a price. The push to more cost-effective collection methodologies has coincided with increased demands for privacy and confidentiality; in combination, the two have decreased the quantity and quality of personal contact with respondents.

Each five-year census presents new content challenges in ensuring that the agriculture census addresses the important issues of a very rapidly changing agriculture industry, including an increased need by data users for better environmental indicators and small area data. The collection process, although still largely paper-based, has incorporated Internet and computer-assisted telephone interviewing, limiting opportunities for ad hoc feedback and face-to-face contact while increasing the challenge behind developing new and relevant questions. This paper presents the issues and solutions for balancing the needs and priorities of data users, respondents' privacy and confidentiality, and the growing adoption of more impersonal and fragmented data collection options.