

USDA's Economic Research Service

2021 CIPSEA Report to the Office of Management and Budget

General

The Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA) of 2002 is a government-wide law to provide strong confidentiality protections to Federal agencies conducting statistical information collections such as surveys and censuses as well as other statistical activities including data analysis. This report documents the Economic Research Service's (ERS) CIPSEA activities in 2021 for the Agency's annual report to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as required in the Implementation Guidance for Title V of the E-Government Act, CIPSEA Act of 2002. CIPSEA was reauthorized as the Foundations for the Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018; Title III reauthorizes CIPSEA.

Use of the CIPSEA Pledge

USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) did not conduct any new surveys or information in Calendar Year 2021 (CY2021) that required the use of the CIPSEA confidentiality pledge.

ERS maintains three surveys that collected data in prior calendar years under the CIPSEA.

- Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey (FoodAPS)
- Rural Establishment Innovation Survey (REIS)
- Survey on Rural Community Wealth and Health Care Provision (SRCWHCP)

Of these three, only FoodAPS had a significant number of agents outside of ERS in 2021. REIS has one team of three researchers using the data in a Federal Statistical Research Data Center (FSRDC). REIS has two outside researchers using the data at ERS.

ERS staff also accessed CIPSEA data collected and monitored by other Federal statistical agencies. These data are not covered in this ERS report. Key examples are the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS), the June Agricultural Survey, and the Census of Agriculture, which are collected and maintained by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). ERS staff accessing these data are agents of NASS. Annual confidentiality training, as required by CIPSEA, is conducted annually by a NASS Representative. In 2021, 75 ERS staff were CIPSEA agents of NASS.

Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey

USDA's National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey (FoodAPS), now referred to as FoodAPS1, is the first nationally representative survey of American households to collect unique and comprehensive data about household food purchases and acquisitions. Detailed information was collected about foods purchased or otherwise acquired for consumption at home and away from home, including foods acquired through food and nutrition assistance programs. The survey includes nationally representative data from 4,826 households, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) households, low-income households not participating in SNAP, and higher income households.

ERS and USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) jointly sponsored FoodAPS1. The survey was administered in 2013 to collect data regarding household purchases in 2012. The data became available for researchers in 2014. ERS is in the process of piloting a new survey, FoodAPS2, to be administered in CY2022.

In CY2021, ERS granted access to the following agents to use FoodAPS1:

- Federal or State Agencies working at ERS - 63 agents
- Academic and other researchers granted access via the NORC Data Enclave - 58 agents

Use of CIPSEA Pledge for FoodAPS1

ERS requires agents using FoodAPS1 to sign an ERS Confidentiality Agreement in order to access the data. In addition, each agent must have a Memorandum of Understanding between ERS and the cooperating institution and a project agreement outlining the details of the research and how the data will be accessed and used. Finally, annual CIPSEA confidentiality re-certification is mandatory for all agents with projects that extend beyond one year.

Rural Establishment Innovation Survey (REIS)

The Rural Establishment Innovation Survey (REIS) was funded through USDA's Rural Development Mission Area to collect information on rural tradable business sectors such as manufacturing and professional services. These data measure how rural businesses and their communities are dealing with the increasing competitive pressures and opportunities associated with the spread of new information technologies through our economy. This information is critical to the USDA's aim of creating jobs, developing new markets, and increasing competitiveness for rural businesses and communities.

ERS signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Census Bureau for transfer of the dataset and use within the Federal Statistical Research Data Center (FSRDC) for 5 years (2019-2024). Access to REIS was only available to approved researchers in 2021. Beyond one project in the FSRDC, there have been no requests for access.

In CY2021, ERS granted access to the following agents to use REIS:

- Federal or State Agencies working at ERS - 3 ERS researchers have access but are not currently using the REIS data
- Academic and other researchers granted access via FSRDC - 3 agents all accessing the data from the FSRDC at Penn State

Use of CIPSEA Pledge for REIS

REIS uses the Bureau of Labor Statistics Business Registry as its sampling frame. All ERS employees working on the survey are required to complete BLS confidentiality training and sign the BLS pledge:

“I, [designated agent], fully understand my responsibilities to protect confidential information. I will comply with all security requirements and avoid all improper use or disclosure of confidential information.”

This CIPSEA pledge precedes any data collection for the Rural Establishment Innovation Survey:

YOUR RESPONSE IS VOLUNTARY. YOUR ANSWERS TO ALL QUESTIONS ARE CONFIDENTIAL. All information that is provided by participants to the National Survey of Business Competitiveness will only be used for statistical research purposes and reported in summary form. Your name and that of the business you represent will not be connected to your answers in any way. In accordance with the Confidential Information Protection provisions of Title V, Subtitle A, Public Law 107-347 and other applicable Federal laws, individual responses will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed in identifiable form to anyone outside of the research team. By law, every ERS and SESRC employee is subject to a jail term of up to 5 years, a fine of up to \$250,000 or both if he/she discloses any identifiable information about research participants.

All ERS employees with access to the data collected for this survey were required to complete confidentiality training, pass a test on CIPSEA procedures, and sign a form confirming that they have read the ERS CIPSEA training package, understand their duties to maintain confidentiality with ERS data, and know the Federal penalties for disclosure of confidential information. Researchers accessing the data in the FSRDC receive CIPSEA training and sign a non-disclosure agreement. For researchers in the FSRDC, this is handled by the FSRDC administrators.

All statistical output must be prepared in a clearance package that complies with the Federal Statistical Research Data Center Disclosure Avoidance Methods: A Handbook for Researchers manual. The package is then reviewed and cleared by an FSRDC Disclosure Avoidance Officer (DAO). If a disclosure avoidance determination cannot be reached by the DAO, the package is forwarded to the Census Disclosure Review Board for final determination.

Survey on Rural Community Wealth and Health Care Provision

The Survey on Rural Community Wealth and Health Care Provision (SRCWHCP) was conducted by ERS in 2015 through a cooperative agreement with Iowa State University. The objectives of the survey were to improve understanding about how the assets and investments of rural communities affect recruitment and retention of health care providers, and about the effects of rural health care provision on economic development in rural communities. The survey was conducted in 150 small rural towns in nine states and involved semi-structured key informant interviews with administrators of health care facilities and community leaders, and a structured survey of health care providers.

In CY2021, ERS granted access to the following agents to use the SRCWHCP:

- Federal or State Agencies working at ERS - 1 agent
- Academic and other researchers granted access - 2 agents using the data at ERS under a Voluntary Service Agreement.

Use of CIPSEA Pledge for SRCWHCP

All ERS employees with access to the data collected for this survey were required to complete confidentiality training, pass a test on CIPSEA procedures, and sign a form confirming that they have read the ERS CIPSEA training package, understand their duties to maintain confidentiality with ERS data, and know the Federal penalties for disclosure of confidential information.

The materials sent to prospective respondents to the survey (both key informants and health care provider survey respondents) included the following statement concerning confidentiality:

All information that is provided by participants in the Community Assets/Community Health project will only be used for statistical research purposes and reported in summary form, either by groups of communities or groups of respondent types. In accordance with the Confidential Information Protection provisions of Title V, Subtitle A, Public Law 107-347 and other applicable Federal laws, individual responses will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed in identifiable form to anyone outside of the research team. By law, every ERS and SBRS employee is subject to a jail term of up to 5 years, a fine of up to \$250,000 or both if he/she discloses any identifiable information about research participants.

In addition, prospective respondents were informed that participation was completely voluntary, provided the OMB Control Number for the Information Collection, and provided contact information for the ERS project leader and the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board Administrator, in case the prospective respondents had questions about their rights.

Disclosure reviews are conducted by an ERS Subject Matter Expert (SME) with experience handling CIPSEA data and with the SRCWHCP dataset itself. Materials are also reviewed by an ERS manager and a product coordinator in the clearance process for any outputs presented to the public.

Other Activities

ERS requires all employees to sign a Non-disclosure Agreement (NDA) when they join ERS. And all employees are required to take an annual CIPSEA training.