



Nobody ever asked *me* if I own a rabbit!

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), 1.4 million (1.1 % of) U.S. households owned at least one rabbit in 2012. How do they know that if they didn't ask me or anyone I know about rabbits in their house? Did they pull it out of a hat?

Actually...the AVMA sampled only 222,244 U.S. households, but these households were randomly selected to be representative of all U.S. households with respect to market size, age of head of household, household size and income within each of the nine U.S. Census regions.

What's a representative sample? A representative sample is a small group whose characteristics accurately reflect those of the larger population from which it is drawn. So...if 17% of the United States' population is of Hispanic descent, a sample of 100 Americans would have to include around 17 Hispanic people to be representative.

Who cares? What if the AVMA's sample hadn't been representative of U.S. households? Say it surveyed a sample that included a greater percent of households with young children than does the U.S. as a whole. If rabbit ownership is related to having young children in the household (makes sense, doesn't it?) the survey results would have been biased and would have misled the organization about the nationwide demand for rabbit veterinary care.

Censuses are the only way to check whether a sample is representative and can be extrapolated to draw conclusions about the larger population. Businesses and organizations that conduct their own sample surveys for their own research, marketing, or other purposes obtain unbiased findings only if they have a census as the reference for the whole population of people or businesses. The fact that a census collects information for close to 100 percent of a population is what makes it the necessary reference base for others.

If a census is not mandatory, its reference base value goes hop, hop, hopping away.

