



## Asking About Age

**The population in Pennsylvania continues to increase. The new Census of Agriculture reveals that even the average age of farmers has increased in Pennsylvania from 51.1 years in 1987 to 52.2 years in 1992 and to 52.7 years in 1997. How should I phrase a question on an evaluation about age?**

Although some persons boast about their age, most are extremely sensitive about revealing their correct age, even on surveys.

To encourage accurate responses, researchers suggest two strategies:

1. If you don't need to know the *exact* number of years, consider age categories. Persons are more likely to give their correct age if it falls within a category.

Always include an age category higher than the persons you expect to find in your sample or program so that they do not have to circle the oldest answer category. Your data are likely to be more reliable and valid. For example:

*And what is your age? (circle number)*

- 1 UNDER 20 YEARS
- 2 20-34 YEARS
- 3 35-49 YEARS
- 4 50-64 YEARS
- 5 65-84 YEARS {add this category if the oldest in your program or sample are likely to be 64 or younger}
- 6 85 OR OVER {add this category if the oldest are 84 or younger}

2. If you need to know the exact number of years for statistical analysis, use this format:

*How old were you on your last birthday?*

\_\_\_\_\_ YEARS

For personal interviews, the Census Bureau has found that asking for year of birth leads to more accurate data.

*In what year were you born?*

\_\_\_\_\_ YEAR

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