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Was it the weight?

I found "Why cutting fats may harm the heart" (SN: 3/20/99, p. 181) very interesting, if perplexing. I wonder about what effect the shortness of the experimental trials—as little as 10 days—may have had. Also, no mention is made of any change in weight, even for those on the diet providing only 10 percent of calories from fat. Perhaps the observed changes in blood lipids were due to the (unobserved) fact that the subjects were losing weight on these diets and that their levels would have returned to something more normal (if not necessarily more healthy) once their weights stabilized?

Bob Rogers
Boston, Mass.

Researcher Ronald Krauss says his team tried to keep the participants' weight steady throughout the trials. And while the researchers would have liked to run the 10 percent-fat trial longer, they found they couldn't. "It was simply too extreme [and unpalatable] a diet for these people to maintain any longer," says Krauss. —J. Raloff

Count off

I believe that an important reason that so many people fail to respond to the census surveys ("Census sampling confusion," SN: 3/6/99, p. 152) is that the survey has been expanded beyond a simple "count." In the government's increasing quest for information on its citizens, there is a major resistance on our part to disclose much of this information. There is resistance to invasion of privacy. Care should be taken to restrict the information gathering to the core of what is required constitutionally.

Del Dietrich
Campbell, Calif.

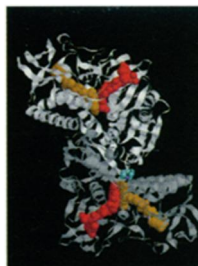
The article makes one thing perfectly clear: While most agencies are struggling to do more with less, the Census Bureau has a long history of doing less with more. In 1790, each of the 650 census counters counted about 6,000 citizens. In 1890, each of the 47,000 counters only counted about 1,300 citizens. In 1990, with all the high technology tools available to them, each member of the army of 510,000 counters counted less than 500 citizens.

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Cover: A proposed structure for the enzyme flavin monooxygenase 3 (grey and white ribbons). The enzyme normally breaks down the smelly compound trimethylamine (blue, green, and purple) but is defective in people with fish odor syndrome. The compounds shown in gold and red help drive the enzyme's action. **Page 316** (Daniel M. Ziegler, University of Texas at Austin)

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This is of course good news, because it shows that the Census Bureau is on course toward resolving the problem about using statistical sampling. At this rate, in the year 2340, there will be one census counter for every citizen.

James I. Mangi
Falls Church, Va.

The difference between direct enumeration yielding 248.7 million and the "other surveys and analyses" indicating 253 million is only 1.7 percent. Suggesting that those missing are "mostly" children, racial and ethnic minorities, and the poor sounds to me like the well-used strategy for getting media and political attention by interested bureaucracies.

Has it ever occurred to anyone that the federal government documents the existence of each and every citizen of this country every April 15? Those who don't file a tax return are listed as someone else's dependent. Add a few lines to the decade tax return, and the census is accomplished with one less bureaucracy.

Thomas P. Becker
Kenosha, Wis.