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(OECD)**

**USE OF ADMINISTRATIVE DATA FOR CROP AND LIVESTOCK STATISTICS
IN AUSTRIA**

Invited paper submitted by Statistics Austria*

I. General

1. In most countries, official statistics are coming increasingly under the pressure of cost reduction. The situation is aggravated by the declining readiness of respondents to provide information; this has a correspondingly negative effect on the quality of answers. Although only a relatively small proportion of the administration of businesses is spent on statistics, the completion of statistical questionnaires is felt to be a burden and disagreeable. On the other hand, the demand for statistical data is constantly on the rise. A possibility of countering these difficulties could come from the increased use of administrative data.

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Positive effects of the use of administrative data for statistical purposes

- **Offering relief to respondents**
Experience shows that holdings do not appreciate the same questions being asked on the one hand for administrative purposes and on the other for statistical surveys. With duplicated questions, the readiness to provide information declines and the quality of data is adversely affected.
- **Avoiding conflicting results**
Statistical surveys and investigations in the course of administrative activity often lead to conflicting results. Although these can of course in part be explained (differing sample dates, definitions, and so on), the credibility of statistics is severely impaired.
- **Reducing costs**
Statistical surveys - above all censuses and those by interview procedure - are for the most part extremely cost-intensive. If a census could be fully replaced by the derived statistical assumption of administrative data, this would lead to considerable cost reductions; if replacement is only partially possible, the effect is correspondingly less manifest.
- **More detailed results**
In most cases, surveys for administrative tasks are essentially more detailed and more frequent. It is therefore possible to publish results more often - annually in many instances - which also show a higher degree of detail.
- **Higher response rate**
Administrative procedures are mostly obligatory, and will be considered necessary and also useful by holdings.
- **Audits are possible**
Within the context of statistical surveys, an audit of statements is extremely difficult to implement.

Possible disadvantages

- **Lack of data quality**
Since the data is obtained for other purposes, its quality is determined by the requirements of that system. Above all, these may be based on different definitions and systems.
- **Distortion**
The purpose for which information is obtained can have a decisive influence on the quality of data. If, for example, subsidies are dependent upon certain answers, this can lead to their being systematically over- or under-estimated.
- **Completeness**
In general, only such holdings are included which are concerned by the administrative procedure, for example those applying for subsidies.
- **Hardly any opportunity to exert influence**

As a rule, statisticians have hardly any opportunity to influence administrative systems. This is of significance above all when introducing modifications to the system.

Prerequisites for the transfer of administrative data

- Clarification of the legal situation
In several countries passing on administrative data is not possible on the grounds of data protection.
- Harmonisation
The complete alignment of both systems is necessary, both in terms of content and definition.
- Common system of references
A vital prerequisite for the optimum utilisation of data from administrative sources is an operational register, which enables the unambiguous identification and classification of statistical units.
- Co-operation between the respective agencies
Co-operation between administrative agencies and statistics offices is not always free of tension. On the one hand, there is a certain competitive relationship and, on the other hand, through derived statistical transfer, statistics offices will be deprived of work in the core area. In this context, however, it is absolutely vital that both agencies are associated in the development of enquiry programmes. Above all in forthcoming changes to the system, intensive consultation is necessary.

II. Statistics on crop production

Crops on arable land

2. In 1995, the Integrated Administrative Control System (IACS) was introduced in Austria. Agrarmarkt Austria (AMA) was entrusted with the organisation of agricultural subsidies. Hence, compensation payments were made for the crop sector for the first time in accordance with EU market organisation. Of all the member states of the European Union, Austria had established the most extensive and most complex environmental programme in accordance with Council Directive (EEC) 2078/92 (Austrian term "ÖPUL"). On the basis of these relationships, almost all businesses took part in this subsidy programme.

3. Applications are made using the so-called "multiple application". That is a collection of all the relevant subsidy applications which can be made in connection with agricultural areas. Applications are made at the latest by May 15 of each year. Receipt of the applications and formal examination is undertaken by the local Chambers of Agriculture. The formally examined applications are recorded on a decentralised basis. The recorded data is brought together centrally to AMA, and a calculation made of the amount of subsidy, and payment.

4. AMA is obliged by EU provisions to subject all applications to administrative examination. Furthermore, for a certain percentage of applications, on-site inspections are carried out, in order to

check the data given by the subsidy applicant through a visit to the location. It can be assumed that the answers will thus be of higher quality.

5. As mentioned above, up until May 15, 1995 farmers had to make detailed parcel-by-parcel statements on the cultivation of individual crops, if they wished to obtain subsidies. Day of reference for the Agricultural Structure Survey was June 1, 1995. Within that context, the cultivation of arable farmland was also recorded. Therefore, within the shortest time farmers had to provide information on the same set of facts, a double burden which was hardly reasonable.

6. It was therefore agreed, for the establishment of yield statistics to consult the area statements of IACS in the future. The use of this data was relatively simple for the following reasons:

- In the AMA law, use for statistical purposes is expressly provided;
- IACS and the official statistics offices work on the same code numbers of holdings;
- Comparison of the lists of characteristics;
- Almost identical results in terms of agricultural areas.

7. Assumption of the IACS data was thus to take place from 1996. On that basis, farmers and local authorities, on the one hand, were given some relief and, on the other hand, costs were cut. The otherwise normal random sample survey of crops on arable land was dropped. The results were classified by Austrian experts as plausible and realistic. As expected, horticulture became a sub-record, since only around one third of horticulturists took part in IACS. The data on this sector had to be completed by expert appraisal.

Agricultural structure surveys

8. Within the context of the Agricultural Structure Surveys carried out in 1997 and 1999, data on the areas of different crops on arable farmland was also taken from IACS. This involved considerably more work, since the answers had to be entered on a holding-by-holding basis into the overall agricultural structure survey.

Crop yields

9. Establishment of the yields of the most important crops took place within the context of the AMA inspection activities. The bills of weight for the amount of grain sold had to be submitted to them. Yields were reckoned on sold quantities and areas under cultivation. On this basis average yields were estimated for Austria and for the provinces.

Vineyard area survey 1999

10. To record the vineyard areas, growers were no longer asked directly for the first time, but reference was made to the vineyard register kept by the wine-growing provinces. For the (minimum) areas in other provinces, the growers simply had to be addressed directly.

Grape harvest, wine stocks, and wine storage capacity

11. For this data, the yield and stock announcements under §§ 43 and 44 of the Austrian Wine Law 1985 were consulted.

III. Animal production

Cattle surveys

12. In stead of the official cattle surveys, data from the cattle database has been used since 2000. The cattle database was established on commission from the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry by "Agrarmarkt Austria". It was recognised as fully operational by the European Commission with effect from October 1, 1999. It is known that all movements are recorded in this database, that is to say births, departures, arrivals, slaughters and so on had to be notified by farmers, cattle breeders, slaughterhouses, etc. in the central database of AMA. The time limit for notification is 7 days after the event for all sorts of notification.

13. In the course of preparations for the statistical use of the cattle database, the results of the cattle counts were compared with excerpts from the cattle database. For the most important items, variations were minimal (for "total number of cattle" without exception less than 1%). In any event, in contrast to the area survey, not all the data required under the EU guidelines was available in the cattle database. There was no distinction between calves for slaughter and for other use, heifers for slaughter and for use, or suckler cows and dairy cows. The missing data therefore had to be obtained in another manner. From the point of view of suckler cows, reference was made to Common Market Organisation on beef, and the distinction between calves resp. heifers for slaughter and other use was made with the help of a small statistical sample survey. Instead of the previous 15,000, some 1,000 holdings were questioned this time.

14. The stipulations placed by the European Commission on Austria are relatively strict. Approval was only granted for three years, the results are to be assessed by an expert body, and there must be continuous evaluation and reporting to the Statistics Office of the European Union. It is necessary to emphasise in this regard that Austria is the first and only EU Member State to use the cattle database in stead of statistical counts.

Cattle varieties

15. In the past, the recording of cattle varieties took place at five-year intervals. Now the cattle database is analysed according to these criteria.

Slaughter statistics

16. For the calculation of slaughtered weights, the notifications under § 3 of the Austrian Cattle Breeding Law are used. The number of investigated slaughters is assumed from the notifications under the Austrian Meat Inspection Law.

Game statistics

17. Notifications of local administrative authorities are statistically assessed for shot and fallen game.
