

**OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION WITH CES MEMBER COUNTRIES ON  
THE IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS**

**Note prepared by the UNECE secretariat**

**I. BACKGROUND**

1. The CES Bureau in October 2008 agreed that the outcome of the review on agricultural statistics should be consulted electronically with the CES member countries before the Bureau meeting in February 2009. The UNECE secretariat agreed to conduct the consultation and report back to the Bureau in February 2009.
2. The secretariat circulated the note on Agricultural statistics prepared by Eurostat to member countries on 7 January. The countries were asked to reply by 24 January 2009.
3. The CIS-STAT has provided an overview paper of agricultural statistics in CIS countries, which is included as addendum 1 to the review note of Eurostat (ECE/CES/BUR/2009/FEB/3). The World Bank has provided extensive comments to the review of agricultural statistics which are included as addendum 2 to the review note of Eurostat. The main points of both the CIS-STAT and the World Bank are included in the summary below.

**II. PROPOSAL**

- The Bureau is invited to consider the comments submitted.
- The Bureau is also invited to:
  - (a) Decide on the next steps concerning the outcome of the consultation, taking into account the strategic plan in the *Report on global initiatives to improve agricultural and rural statistics* (available on the UN Statistical Commission website at: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/commission.htm>) that will be proposed to the UNSC in February 2009; and
  - (b) How to communicate this to the plenary session of the CES.

**III. COMMENTS FROM CES MEMBER COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS**

4. 17 countries and 4 organizations have provided comments, which are summarized below:

### Brazil

- IBGE has suggested minor corrections that have been forwarded to Eurostat.

### Hungary

- The Review provides a comprehensive overview of the most developed agricultural statistical systems and presents best practices. The elaboration of a strategic plan – applicable for both developed and developing countries – should be given first priority.
- **International governance:** An international group functioning as coordinator and governing centre should be established. Its mandate should cover issues specified in the scope of a strategic plan. The task of the group would be the coordination among different countries and international organizations.
- **National governance:** At national level there is a need for close cooperation between producers of agricultural and other statistical data.
- **Theoretical framework:** The establishment of links between agricultural statistics and other related statistics is paramount, and a similar approach might be pursued for other statistical domains.
- **Data collection methods:** The development and implementation of more cost-efficient data collection methods should be supported.
- **Analysis and Dissemination:** More information on the value added of joint analysis of agricultural and related statistics is needed.

### Italy

- Supports the recommendations while stressing the importance of including a clear link among different economic sectors in order to set up statistics by areas.
- In paragraph 101, the role that NSIs are asked to play as direct data producers and as points of reference on data quality should be better underlined.

### Lithuania

- Supports fully the strategic plan proposed to the UNSC in February 2009.
- There is a growing need for agricultural statistics for agricultural and environmental policy making. Existing data sources should be fully utilized.

### The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

- Supports the recommendations of the review, including the need for high quality core agricultural statistics.

### The Netherlands

- For some countries there continues to be a need for integration of the agricultural sector into business registers and harmonization of standards, practices and outcomes.
- Integration of agricultural statistics with other survey statistics is important. However, the development of good basic agricultural statistics, also in the developing countries, and statistics about "agriculture and sustainability" should have priority.
- There is a need to extend agricultural statistics while at the same time the needs to continue and improve the existing statistics remain. The demand is increasing while resources are restricted.

- The use of administrative data should be further investigated. A shift in the paradigm on how to work with register data is called for.

#### New Zealand

- Welcomes the proposal to set up an international working group for the improvement of agricultural statistics. New Zealand would have a keen interest in membership of the group and wishes to be kept in touch with progress made in setting up the working group.
- The CES Bureau should consider updating the Review with a more extensive overview of sources, etc. Statistics NZ can contribute to an update paper and would welcome the opportunity to do so. (Much of this is already available in the "Agricultural, horticulture and forestry domain plan" which is currently being prepared by Statistics New Zealand and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry).

#### Poland

- The demand to cover the growing scope of agricultural statistics and at the same time improve the quality of existing agricultural statistics places an increasing burden on the statistical offices – and the respondents. It is thus important to analyse the possibilities of integration of related statistics and of data sources.
- The unit of observation should be the agricultural farm defined by geographical coordinates (geo-references), rather than the farm household. It is a secondary issue whether a household or an enterprise conducts the farm. Some agricultural surveys might be supplemented with additional questions concerning the farm households to provide information also on e.g. living conditions and income.
- Taking into account the already extensive response burden on farmers – at least in Europe – further extension of the scope of surveys is not recommended. The core set of indicators should consider a set of very basic indicators.
- Decision makers need to be informed of the substantial costs of agricultural surveys, especially when no administrative data are available.

#### Slovak Republic

- Supports the development of the strategic plan to meet the goals identified.
- Problems may arise in merging agriculture, forestry and fishery statistics in connection to life cycle and property issues. Inclusion of environmental impact, ownership of rural areas, water and energy use in agricultural statistics could cause problems in reorientation of surveys.
- Farming may be integrated in statistical business registers through the basic identification characteristics, but the structure and type of information is different.
- The conducting of farm surveys and censuses 2010-13 will be problematic because of the reduction of EU financial sources.
- Agree with the simplification of the questionnaire for integrated environmental and economic account of forestry (IEEAF) as well as with its five-year periodicity.
- There are 28 indicators declared in the field of agro-environmental statistics. However, it is necessary to state that in total there are 75 indicators.
- Changes in agriculture, forestry, fishery, and rural development statistics are necessary while at the same time it is important to maintain the basic frame of these statistics to be able to react on specific needs of constituents.

### Slovenia

- An up-to-date register of agricultural holdings is a prerequisite for a coherent infrastructure for agricultural statistics. However, there are technical and coordinating problems with up-dating of EU-level farm registers and protection of individual data.
- The reductions in response burden as a result of e.g. replacement of national surveys by LUCAS or other EU sample surveys may be smaller than expected. With small and heterogenous countries, the resulting statistics may not be useful for national purposes but require some completion at a national level which will increase response burden.

### Switzerland

- The main issues relevant for Switzerland are: development of new statistics (agro-environment, agro-society, rural development) under constraints of limited resources, response burden and privacy of the farming community; traditional agricultural statistics vs. statistical integration; and modernisation and use of registers and administrative data. The recommendations in the review are supported with the following comments:
  - **Governance of international agricultural statistics:**
    - organise regular reviews on joint questionnaires, decrease response burden, organise their proper updating;
  - **Governance at the national level:**
    - exhaustive overview of sources, possible data and stakeholders;
  - **Theoretical framework for agricultural statistics:**
    - to follow-up to the new Intersecretariat Working Group, a CES seminar in 2010, dealing with integration of agricultural statistics with other statistics (environment and socio-economic issues) would be useful;
  - **Data collection methods:**
    - farm Structure Surveys designed as multi-source multi-domain surveys, combining registers, area frames and administrative data;
    - best practice of modern IT tools;
  - **Analysis and dissemination:**
    - use of micro data enhances the value of costly basic statistics (i.e. Census of Agriculture), but decreases the readiness of farmers to respond: find the balance between benefits and response burden and ensure legal issues on privacy;
    - more emphasis should be given to accounting systems and integrated synthesis and accounts statistics;
    - work on relations between agriculture, forestry, fishery and other domains of economy, society and environment.

### United Kingdom

- Supports the main recommendations and recognises the need for increased international coordination of work. For those within the EU, Eurostat has a strong role to play.
- The range and frequency of the comprehensive statistics required on commodities could be expected to reduce given reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy and pressure to minimise administrative burdens on farmers. Conversely, more comprehensive and consistent statistics on the environmental impact of farming are needed, though these need to be captured in the most cost efficient way.

### CIS-STAT

- There is a general understanding of the need for further improvement of agricultural statistics on the basis of international standards.
- In CIS countries, the main priorities would be to improve the quality of data on productivity and income and financial measures within agriculture.
- The statistical quality of basic agricultural indicators requires serious attention in a number of countries and sampling practices need be improved; small- and medium-size farms raise serious problems of coverage and representativity.
- Some countries face serious problems associated with the compilation of data according to the SNA concepts as the transition from the Material Product System to the SNA is not yet completed.
- Revision of historical series has high priority in some CIS countries.

### ILO

- Supports the recommendation to better integrate agricultural statistics into national and international statistical systems.
- In the second-last sentence of para. 89, the text in parenthesis should be deleted because labour force surveys are specialized rather than multi-purpose surveys.

### World Bank

- The CES Bureau review concentrates on current issues while the Strategic Plan to be presented to the UNSC in February focuses on long-term issues. It is important that the CES fully participates in the strategic planning and supports the capacity building.
- There is a need for more information from countries about practices on farm registers, sample surveys and censuses – who does what and how?
- The Brazilian approach of an integrated list frame plus an area frame is central to the methodology proposed in the Strategic Plan. Is this approach being considered by the EU?
- The CES review should provide an overview of the governance at the national level where agricultural statistics are often not well integrated into the national statistical system; in particular, the respective roles of the national statistical offices vs. the ministries of agriculture should be investigated.
- On the use of joint questionnaires, it should be more strongly stated that a country should have to report overlapping information only once.
- Overlap reporting has led to an effort between Eurostat and FAO to develop joint questionnaires for agriculture and fishery. However, each country is required to report to both organizations which begs the question why does FAO not obtain data for EU countries from Eurostat?
- A formalized UN communication structure on agricultural statistics is consistent with the goals in the Strategic Plan which calls for international coordination.
- The CES Bureau should provide information about who does what at the national level and include the CIS countries in this review.
- The need for a theoretical framework for agricultural statistics is consistent with the strategic planning effort.

Other countries

- The statistical offices of the following countries and organizations have informed the secretariat that they have no comments to the document: Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Japan, Turkey, Ukraine and IMF.

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