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**STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE****CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**Forty-eighth plenary session  
(Paris, 13-15 June 2000)**MODALITIES AND STRATEGIES FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN  
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE AREA OF AGRICULTURE  
STATISTICS**Prepared by the Secretariats of ECE, Eurostat, FAO and OECD**IWG.AGRI and assistance to countries in transition**

1. The need to assist countries in transition in the early 1990s to set up new agriculture statistical systems gave an impetus to the international organizations (IOs) of reinforcing their cooperation. In order to coordinate their activities, the UN/ECE, Eurostat, FAO and OECD created the Intersecretariat Working Group on Agricultural Statistics
2. (IWG.AGRI). In the period 1992-1998, IWG.AGRI organised 6 joint seminars tailored for the specific needs of countries in central and eastern Europe as well as for the CIS, see figure 1 below. A particular feature of these seminars was that the IWG.AGRI-organisations not only shared costs, but also complemented each other with respect to geographical coverage of attendance and support in kind (e.g. free translation of papers into Russian). This modus operandi allowed to keep costs to a minimum and to avoid any overlap or duplication of activities.

**New focus**

3. In recognition of the progress made so far in transition economies, the 1997 Budapest Seminar for countries in central and eastern Europe and the 1998 St Petersburg Seminar for CIS marked the end of IWG.AGRI Seminars covering more general and basic topics. Instead, a new

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series of seminars was launched which will address specific topics in a much more in-depth manner. Another novelty with the new series of seminars is that they are oriented not only towards the previously mentioned countries but equally to the advanced economies in Western Europe, North America and Asia. The first of these new Seminars, which is the 7<sup>th</sup> IWG.AGRI Seminar, will be held in Luxembourg on 5-7 July 2000. It will focus on agricultural economic statistics with in-depth review of :

- economic accounts for agriculture;
- agricultural modelling;
- agricultural price statistics;
- income indicators; and
- labour input.

4. Pending decision, an 8<sup>th</sup> IWG.AGRI might be held in Paris in 2002 focusing on agricultural statistics for policy makers.

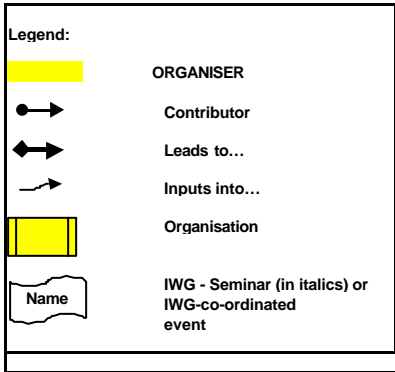
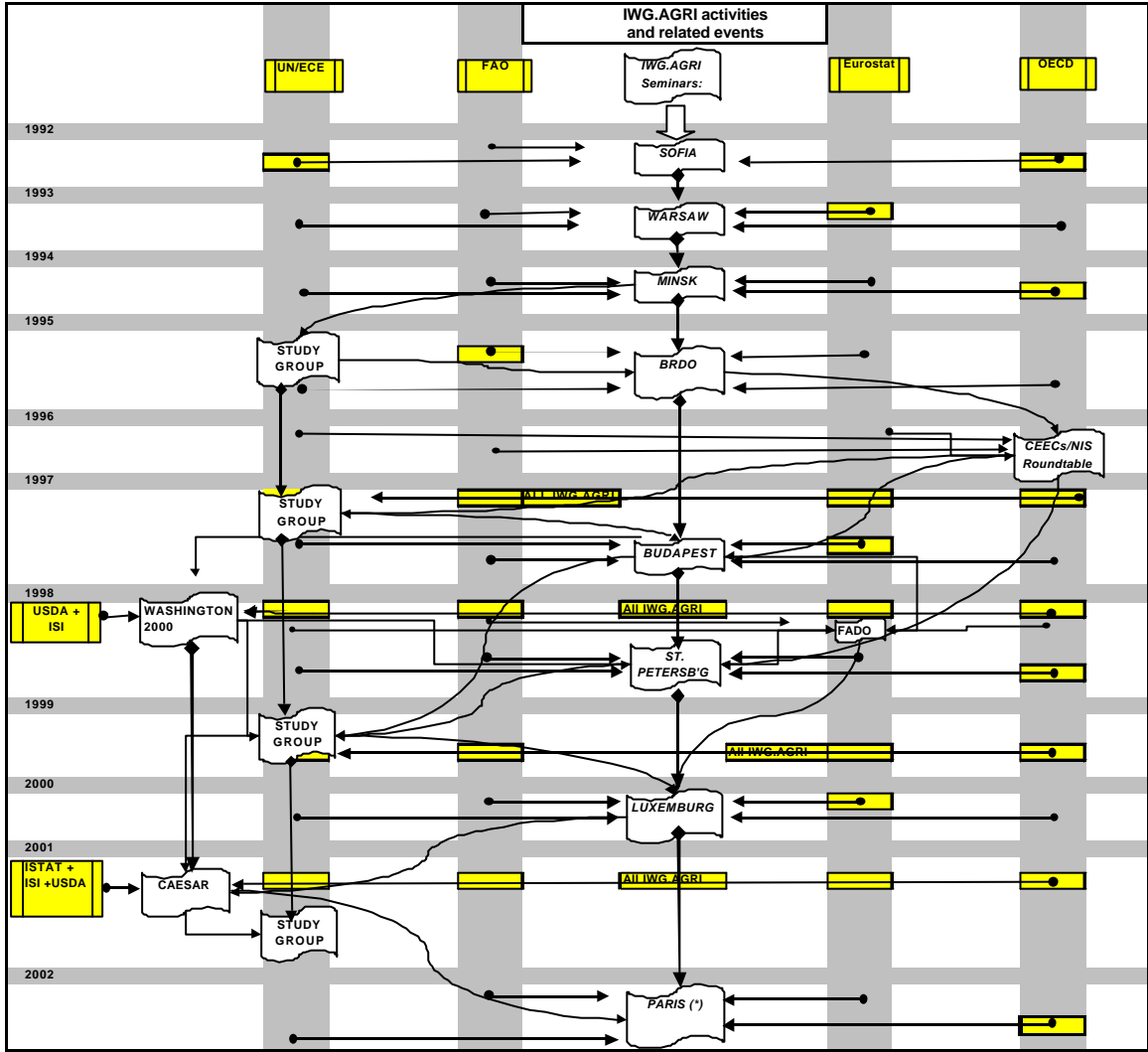
### **Joint meetings**

5. Parallel to the organization of joint seminars, the previous ECE/FAO meetings on Food and Agriculture Statistics are now organized as joint ECE/Eurostat/FAO/OECD meetings. An organizing committee, consisting of the four organizations and selected member countries participating on a rotating basis, prepares proposals for future work which are discussed and adopted by the joint meetings.

### **Outreach to the rest of the world**

6. IWG.AGRI was one of the major players behind the organization of the first World Conference on Agriculture Statistics (Washington DC, 1998). It also took the initiative of creating an organizing committee for the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Conference - Conference on Agricultural and Environmental Statistical Application in Rome, CAESAR. It is hosted by ISTAT and takes place in Rome on 5-7 June 2001. Back-to-back with CAESAR, satellite meetings for transition countries and for African countries will be organized.

Figure 1: International co-ordination of agricultural statistics



(\* ) Requires approval by OECD and by IWG.AGRI

7. IWG.AGRI, especially Eurostat, FAO and OECD, are also providing assistance to China, in particular in conjunction with the 2000 agriculture census. With almost 20% of GDP and over

half the population in rural areas/agriculture, the dimension of the problems is such that a sustained and co-ordinated co-operation between IWG.AGRI and China is necessary.

### **Joint data collection/Common data consultation**

8. Scarcity of resources and budgetary constraints have given new impetus to exploring feasible and satisfactory ways of lowering the statistical response burden for NSOs (National Statistical Offices) vis-à-vis IO's. In addition, there have been growing pressures to identify and clarify common areas of regular statistical needs across IO's, not only to avoid unnecessary duplication in requests to NSOs, but also to reduce discrepancies in published data and to explore scope for joint activities.

9. A number of joint data collections already exist amongst IO's in agriculture. For instance, OECD and Eurostat closely co-operate on the EAA without duplication.

10. When discussing joint data collection, great care has to be taken to distinguish between regular and new and/or ad-hoc needs (which may become regular needs later on), and between IO requirements for Member countries and for Non-Member countries (in the field of agriculture they are not necessarily the same), as well as the different time-scales of needs across IO's. Therefore, any sharing agreement has to be looked upon on a case by case basis.

11. IWG.AGRI has developed a detailed model for how joint data collection/data sharing, can be achieved. Although not yet applied, it was discussed by member countries during the 1999 ECE/Eurostat/FAO(OECD meeting in Geneva and approved by participants.

12. Parallel to this IWG.AGRI has also carried out an in-depth survey among a few member countries in order to explore the volume and content of the requests of data from IOs and the degree of duplication. With the exception of EU candidate countries, neither the response burden nor duplication was felt to be a problem.

13. As for the EU candidate countries a large amount of requests originated not only from OECD, FAO and Eurostat but also from DG VI. With the candidacy also followed the requests for long time series data which was felt being in particular burdensome as they also cover the early period of the transition period when data were scarce or incomplete. In this context it is also interesting to note that even if International Statistical Offices try to harmonize data collection there are many surveys that they have very little control over. For instance, in a survey carried out by FAO on its statistical questionnaires it was found that out of a total of 78 questionnaires dispatched by FAO only 11 originated from the FAO Statistical Division.

14. Another activity initiated by IWG.AGRI with the view of facilitating joint data collection is the Handbook of Concepts and Definitions Used in International Collections of Food and Agriculture Statistics.

15. Similarly, IWG.AGRI is currently compiling together all available proceedings of IWG.AGRI seminars on CD-ROM for dissemination. This initiative will provide a unique statistical knowledge base for both producers and users of agricultural statistics.

16. Clearly there is still quite a lot to do in joint data collection not only in order to minimize response burden of member countries and resources used by IOs but also, and in particular, to reduce discrepancies in published data which is extremely annoying for the final consumer of agriculture statistics.

### **Orientation of the future work**

17. Although much has been accomplished as concerns assistance to countries in transition, many of which have significantly raised the quality of their agricultural statistics in the last few years - the success story of Estonia just being one example -, there are still a number of countries, the CIS in particular, that need further "tailor-made" assistance of different kind.

18. Having said that, member countries concluded in the most recent joint meeting on Food and Agriculture statistics that the work of IWG.AGRI in the years ahead should focus on the following areas:

- (a) More work in the area of standardisation, similar to the Handbook, which was mentioned above.
- (b) Focus the work on the areas of:
  - agro-business/agricultural economic statistics;
  - interaction of agriculture with environment and rural development;
  - use of administrative and other non-survey data;
  - more in depth studies of income statistics;
  - productivity measurements; and
  - measurement and forecasts of food supplies.
- (c) The use of new technologies for collecting, processing and distribution agriculture statistics.

19. With the help of new technologies to further pursue joint data collection and joint data consultation.

20. It goes without saying that parallel to the above joint activities of ECE, Eurostat, FAO and OECD, each organization has a programme of work which is focusing on the specific needs of the member countries of each respective organization. These programmes of work are described in CES/2000/4/add.3, programme element 3.10.

21. As part of the efforts to improve the capabilities of national staff in assessing and monitoring the food situation, the FAO Statistics Division has conducted two workshops; the

first one in Nitra (1998) and the second in Prague (1999). In the workshops, the main uses of data from household income/expenditure surveys (HIES) for analysis of food consumption levels and distribution were demonstrated through selected country applications within a general framework leading to the harmonisation of methods and presentation of results.

22. FAO's Statistics Division, in collaboration with the Budapest Economic University, is organising a one-week Workshop on Economic Accounts from 14 to 19 May 2000 for Central and East European countries in Budapest, Hungary. The objective of the Workshop is strengthen the technical capabilities of the staff of the National Statistical Offices in the preparation of economic accounts for agriculture. To make the presentation comprehensive, OECD and Eurostat have also been invited to participate in the workshop and present their activities and viewpoint in this field.

### **Issues for discussion**

23. IWG.AGRI tries to be sensitive to the needs and wishes of member countries as well as to avoiding duplication. The present in-depth review of agriculture statistics by the CES gives an opportunity to exchange views about IWG.AGRI's future role and desirable focus on topics in the next few years.

24. IWG.AGRI is aware of the fact that the relationship between agricultural statistics and environmental statistics has to be reinforced as well as with rural development. There is, however, much conceptual work to be done when linking these areas.

25. There is also a need to strengthen the analytical part of the presentation of statistical data. More investigation is needed, although this has not yet started, on the reasons for differences between published data. Too often a consumer is confronted with different data for the same variable and year, depending on which publication and organizations is consulted. Here, technology might facilitate things. Already now, the Web pages of the organizations of IWG.AGRI are linked together. In the future, virtual databases might very well be created by IWG.AGRI that alert to differences in data and give explanations why there are differences.

26. IWG.AGRI pays a lot of attention to the use of technology not only from the latter point of view but also in the whole process from the collection of data in member countries to their processing and distribution and integration. There is no doubt that technology will play a much larger role in the production of the statistics in the next few years and therefore IWG.AGRI should perhaps seek a more active role in this respect, in particular in the area of standardization.

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