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IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF AGRICULTURE STATISTICS

Paper Submitted by Statistics Canada 1/

1. The United Nations Statistics Division has been recognised for hosting a responsive international forum for discussion and offering leadership on such issues as statistical standards and methods for agriculture but it has become less influential in recent years. The OECD appears to be assuming more responsibility for such matters but unfortunately not all countries are members.

- There is a need to rebuild the capacity for renewing and adjusting statistical standards for agriculture to address changing conditions, maintain international comparability and meet the requirements of data users.
- The Intersecretariat Working Group on Agricultural statistics (IWG.AGRI), is attempting to co-ordinate much of the current international consultation but representation is weighted in favour of developed and transition countries with only one organisation, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, in a good position to represent developing countries.
- There is the potential of undermining the linkages between national economic accounts and those for agriculture when national accountants are absent from the deliberations on economic accounts for agriculture.

1/ Prepared by Mr. M. Trant. The views expressed in this note are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of "Statistics Canada".

- Is there an appropriate international forum for reviewing agriculture statistics issues?

2. Consolidation and vertical integration are rearranging the face of agriculture and agribusiness in many countries. Farm numbers in developed countries have been subject to dramatic declines and sales per farm have risen correspondingly. This has also happened in the food processing and retailing sectors, and vertical integration has blurred the dividing line between the farm and the processor.

- Current industry and commodity classification systems are built on a conceptual model that may no longer reflect reality or aid in understanding the economy and how it is believed to work and evolve.
- Statisticians need to step back and take a strategic look at the direction in which they would like to see classification and statistical systems develop and evolve.

3. There are now many well-established concepts, conventions and statistical models that countries are encouraged to follow in developing their data collection systems. Developing and transition countries have an opportunity to implement the most successful methods and "best practices" of the systems that have been established in developed countries. They are however challenged to make substantial adjustments in a short time frame, develop their human resources and at the same time keep pace with the rapid advances in technology.

- Are there some lessons to be learned from past experiences that can assist to improve and advance the exchange of ideas and the transfer of technology among countries?
- There is a need to share and improve access to information on "best practices" and successful methods for improving statistical information with limited resources.
 - extending the content and links among existing Internet sites
 - increasing the use of administrative data
 - reducing response burden
 - increasing the use of geographic information systems (GIS) and remote sensing

4. It would be very helpful for purposes of environmental management, to have reliable measures at both the national and international level. Policy analysts concerned with environmental monitoring want to identify what agriculture is doing to the environment. They would also like to evaluate the effects of agricultural support programs, policy reform and freer trade on the environment. The OECD has been nurturing the development of statistically sound environmental indicators for agriculture and there has been progress in improving the availability and quality of indicators.

- The production of relevant and sound statistical standards for agricultural environmental indicators, however, still lacks an international forum to foster their application and development.
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