

COMMENTS TO THE REVIEW OF AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS

Note prepared by the World Bank

I. OVERVIEW

1. The Bureau's action to review agricultural statistics in depth is very timely and constructive, given the increased attention paid to the need to improve existing statistics and meet new challenges such as those posed by global warming, the use of food products for bio-fuels, and environmental issues.
2. The review takes note of a recent initiative to develop a strategic plan with a UN mandate that will provide the framework to integrate a core set of agricultural and rural statistics into the national and international statistical systems, identify a suite of methodologies for data collection, and address the need to improve statistical capacity.
3. The review also noted that the strategic planning exercise is long-term in nature, while the review by the CES Bureau concentrates on the current situation.
4. The comments below about the Bureau review take into account the fact that the strategic planning effort is underway. Section II provides comments about the main elements of the report; Section III provides comments about the recommendations.

II. COMMENTS ABOUT THE REVIEW

5. The review addresses the importance of **Farm Registers** and the need to integrate them with national business registers. It points out that the availability of a farm register for survey sampling purposes could call into question the cost effectiveness of a full agricultural census. However, the review also says that there is no common approach or acceptance of the need to develop farm registers. This raises some questions since this issue is relevant to the strategic planning effort.

- How many countries actually have a farm register, and which are they? It would be helpful to know the characteristics of those countries with registers vs. those without one;
- Where there is no farm register, what is the basis or frame for the census of agriculture and sample surveys?
- Do all countries conduct agricultural censuses on a regular basis?

- The input from Brazil concerning their integrated list frame plus an area frame was interesting and encouraging. This is central to the methodology being proposed in the strategic plan. A primary question is whether the approach implemented by Brazil is being considered by the EU?

6. The review states that **Farm structure surveys** are the backbone of the agricultural statistics system, followed by mention of the **Farm accounts data network**. It appears that the farm structure surveys are conducted by the national statistical offices, and the farm accounts data network by ministries of agriculture. One of the problems identified in the strategic planning effort is related to the fact that agricultural statistics are often not well integrated into the national statistical system.

- It is suggested that the CES review provide an overview of the governance at the national level; in particular the respective roles of the national statistical offices vs. the ministries of agriculture.

7. The review discusses the overlapping of data requested from countries by Eurostat and FAO. The method used for forestry sets a good example, where each piece of information is collected only once from each country, and there would be only one value for each transaction in all the international data sets. This has led to an effort by Eurostat and FAO to develop joint questionnaires for the agriculture and fishery sectors.

- However, each country is required to report to both organizations which begs the question why FAO does not obtain the data from Eurostat for EU countries?

8. The issue about including data from small and diversified farm operations could be explained in more detail. In other words, it is not clear whether or not they are fully included in the statistical system, and if so, how. The same applies to households with large plots which contribute significantly to the food supply in many countries.

- In the developing world, it is the rural households living off subsistence agriculture that are most likely to be poor, therefore, it is essential that their situation be considered in the statistical system.

III. COMMENTS ABOUT THE RECOMMENDATIONS

9. The first recommendations concerned governance.

10. The recommendation that there should be a formalized UN communication structure on agricultural statistics is consistent with the goals in the strategic plan which calls for coordination across the international statistical system.

11. The next recommendation suggested that the use of the joint questionnaires should be better organized—this should more strongly state that a country should have to report overlapping information only once.

12. Governance at the national level was also addressed. The CES Bureau should provide information about who does what at the national level and include the CIS countries in this review.

13. The next recommendations were on the need for a theoretical framework for agricultural statistics. This also includes the need for stronger integration between agricultural statistics and other fields of statistics. These issues are very consistent with those being considered in the strategic planning effort.

14. There is general agreement with the remaining recommendations.

IV. SUMMARY COMMENTS

15. A closing comment is to return to the relationship of the CES Bureau review of agriculture statistics and the effort to develop a strategic plan for agriculture. It is important that the CES fully participate in the strategic planning effort and be able to support the capacity building efforts.

* * * * *