

**DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR FUTURE WORK IN AGRICULTURAL  
STATISTICS IN THE UNECE REGION**

**Note prepared by Eurostat**

**I. BACKGROUND**

1. At its first meeting of the 2008/2009 session on 20 and 21 October 2008, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) discussed the in-depth review on Agricultural Statistics as prepared by Eurostat, USDA and Brazil. The Bureau deliberated on recommendations for future work on agricultural statistics in the UNECE region but considered these proposals to be conditional to the outcomes of the Expert Meeting on Agricultural Statistics held in Washington on 22 and 23 October 2008.

2. The main result of this global Expert Meeting in Washington was a general consensus on the current unsatisfactory situation of agricultural statistics and the need for a strategic plan to improve them. The main results are described briefly in document ECE/CES/BUR/2008/OCT/3 Rev.1 and more in detail in the document as submitted for discussion in the 2009 session of the UNSC.

3. The Bureau of the CES requested Eurostat to prepare Terms of Reference (ToR) for future work on Agricultural Statistics in the UNECE region taking the outcome of the Expert Meeting into account. This draft ToR for a UNECE Task Force should be seen as a logical follow up of the review and the relevant outcomes for the UNECE from the Expert Meeting.

4. The result of the Expert Meeting, a strategic plan to improve agricultural statistics, will be discussed at the United Nations Statistics Committee in its 41st session in February 2009. If approved, the strategic plan will reflect agreement among national and international statistical organisations and donors, and other stakeholders. It will provide a framework to integrate a core set of agricultural and rural statistics into the national and international statistical systems, identify a suite of methodologies for the data collection, provide a framework for integrating agricultural and rural statistics with the overlapping data requirements of other sectors, and address the need to improve statistical capacity. It will also propose a governance structure for coordination not only between the national statistical organisations and other country ministries, but also between national statistical organisations of other countries, donors and regional and international organisations.

## **II. OUTCOMES OF THE IN-DEPTH REVIEW ON AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS**

5. The main results of the in-depth review concentrate on an improvement of the governance structure of international agricultural statistics in the UNECE region by enhancing the priority of agricultural statistics and cooperation between countries and international organisations. This concerns cooperation via Joint Questionnaires and improving the sharing of experiences and strengthening of leadership.
6. On the governance of Agricultural Statistics, the CES Bureau considered the usefulness of a formalised UN communication structure on agricultural statistics. It discussed the set up of a group (for example, in the form of an Inter Secretariat Working Group (ISWG)) with a mandate that explicitly covers the relations with the related domains of statistics and a membership which includes those organisations active at the margins of agricultural statistics and which can identify the links to other statistical areas, like environment, water, energy, land use, natural resources, etc. The Bureau concluded on this that such an overarching mandate is not needed but that the focus of such a group in principle should be how agriculture should make optimal use of existing infrastructures.
7. Eurostat was asked to prepare a proposal for such a group with a restricted mandate as described above for the February meeting of the Bureau.
8. On cooperation between international organisations, the review concluded on the available mechanisms for coordination in collecting information from countries and a certain dilution of current coordination. It therefore recommended discussions on burden on national statistical institutes as an obligatory part of the regular reviews on the burden on data providers as well as on methods to decrease the burden or to keep it to the minimum via the so-called Joint Questionnaires.
9. The Bureau concluded that in the UNECE context there is a need for strengthening cooperation between the European Commission and FAO. This strengthening has also to be seen in the context of support to FAO in regaining its leading position in global Agricultural Statistics.
10. The Bureau also recommended a regular update of the review with a more exhaustive overview of countries possible data and stakeholders in agricultural statistics. Such an update could enhance the efficient use of available information as it would give a better description of the needs for statistics and the feasibility of collecting certain types of data.
11. The CES Bureau supported as a direct follow up of setting up a possible group the organisation of a CES seminar, possibly in 2010, on the issue of integration of agricultural statistics and other domains of statistics.
12. The CES Bureau concluded that a stronger link with the UNCEEA and London Group could be a useful way to tie agricultural statistics to environmental statistics as overseen by the UNCEEA.

### **III. THE MAIN OUTCOME OF THE EXPERT MEETING IS THE RECOMMENDATION OF AN ACTION PLAN.**

13. The Expert Meeting on Agricultural Statistics had as a major outcome the general consensus of the approximate 60 participants on the current unsatisfactory situation of agricultural statistics and the need for a strategic plan to improve them. The long-term goal of such a strategic planning exercise is a set of internationally agreed core indicators. This plan foresees a number of steps ranging from identifying the minimum sets of statistics to enhancing advocacy on agricultural statistics. As such the strategic plan covers many of the advancements in general in agricultural statistics in the UNECE region, but ties in also to the challenges for agricultural statistics as described in the UNECE review with the emphasis on links with other statistical domains.

14. The document to be submitted to the UNSC proposes the preparation of the strategic plan in stages and describes follow up meetings to further elaborate the strategic plan. To develop the strategic plan and then to implement it, a governance structure needs to be set up, involving international organisations, regional organisations and other stakeholders. It is expected that the UNSC might choose a Friends of the Chair (FoC) construction to follow up this strategic plan.

### **IV. PROPOSAL FOR A UNECE TASK FORCE IN AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS**

15. Eurostat was asked to prepare the Terms of Reference for future work on agricultural statistics in the UNECE region, but considered that these ToR should explicitly take into account the outcomes of the Expert Meeting on Agricultural Statistics held in Washington on 22 and 23 October 2008.

16. Therefore, in enhancing the coordination in Agricultural Statistics and related fields Eurostat proposes to establish for the UNECE region a group in the format of a 'light' Task Force with a restricted life span constituted between UNECE, Eurostat, OECD and FAO, and a limited number of countries. Even taking into consideration that the direct involvement of OECD and UNECE in agricultural statistics is rather limited, such a Task Force is considered essential for maintaining a network that facilitates bilateral contacts on related fields (agro environmental, rural statistics, etc). This Task Force aims to improve coordination in the UNECE region, and to communicate effectively via existing structures and the structures related to the global project.

17. It is proposed to merge UNECE actions as far as possible into the actions proposed by the Expert Meeting on the global scale, this to avoid double work and to use the cooperation in the UNECE region as an example of possible good cooperation between the involved parties for other parts of the world.

18. The Expert Meeting will recommend for the Strategic Plan a governance structure via a Friends of the Chair Group to be established by the UNSC. It is proposed that the Task Force actively participates in this FoC group. This will also facilitate maximum coordination between other (global and regional) stakeholders and UNCEEA.

19. In the UNECE region, the Task Force can play an important role in the outreach and implementation of the global Strategic Plan on Agricultural Statistics. Such an outreach can

take place via the organisation of conferences and seminars. The special CES seminar as mentioned above can be considered to be part of that.

20. In addition to gathering more detailed information for the implementation of the global strategic plan, the preparation of the update of the review can be considered part of the work in preparing for this seminar.

## **V. OBJECTIVES OF THE TASK FORCE ON AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS**

21. The main objective of this proposed Task Force is the follow up of the recommended actions by the CES Bureau in the field of Agricultural Statistics. In principle, this embraces three fields of action:

(a) the improvement of cooperation and coordination between organisations and other stakeholders in agricultural statistics in the UNECE region,

(b) further improvement in the quality of agricultural statistics and further integration with new methodologies and developments,

(c) coordination of actions in the UNECE region with the global Strategic Plan to Improve Agricultural Statistics to be endorsed by the UNSC in its 41st session in February 2009.

22. Based also on the proposed road map for the Strategic Plan, it is proposed that the Task Force have a mandate for the period 2009-2011. It is further proposed that the Task Force be reviewed on its effectiveness in 2011, the Bureau of the CES then to decide on an eventual extension for another two years.

23. Concrete initiatives of the Task Force that can already be mentioned are the organisation of the CES seminar on Agricultural Statistics in 2010, and the update of the in-depth review on agricultural statistics including information from other stakeholders.

24. The Task Force is supposed to use existing meeting structures of its participants (Eurostat and FAO meetings, ISI and ICAS meetings, etc) as much as possible.

25. The Task Force will be asked to establish a regular reporting mechanism to the CES Bureau.

26. It is proposed that the membership embrace the international and supranational organisations currently active in agricultural and neighbouring fields (Eurostat, FAO, UNECE, OECD), a limited number of interested countries and eventually some other international organisations/stakeholders.

27. After approval of the setting up of this Task Force and after its initial meeting, a more detailed description of the mandate and working modalities has to be drawn up.

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