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COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

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The World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020

Executive Summary

One of the most important elements of FAO's statistical work is the development and promotion of the decennial World Programme for the Census of Agriculture (WCA). Every ten years, FAO reviews the country experiences and revises and publishes a new set of census guidelines. In 2015, FAO published Volume I of the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020 (WCA 2020) which is the tenth census decennial programme. It is expected to provide the basis for the implementation of agricultural censuses in FAO member countries in the 2020 census round, which covers the period between 2016 and 2025. WCA 2020, Volume 1 is available at <http://www.fao.org/publications/card/en/c/506491e2-2ed4-4a7d-8104-6358d0e40adc/>

The WCA is the only data collection instrument that produces national statistical information on farms at the lowest administrative level and, as such, is an essential source of information for decision makers in member countries. The census is crucial for governments to implement evidence-based policies and programmes for agricultural and rural development, access to land, food security and reduction of the adverse environmental impacts of agricultural activities. Census data are also essential for the private sector to make informed decisions that guide their investments in agri-business activities.

Countries are expected to make use of the WCA 2020 guidelines for conducting their national censuses of agriculture over the next ten years. The use of the standards, concepts and definitions proposed by these guidelines will ensure the international comparability of the data collected, and the possibility for countries to benchmark their performance against other countries. Using of these guidelines will also help countries to develop an integrated census and survey programme, use innovative and cost-effective methodologies, and broaden the dissemination of census data for informed strategic decisions.

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Suggested action by the Committee

The Committee is invited to:

- 1) Note that the 2020 global round of agricultural censuses has started and will cover the period 2016 to 2025.
- 2) Support FAO's leading role on the development and promotion of the WCA 2020.
- 3) Express its satisfaction regarding the publishing of Volume 1 of the WCA 2020 that will guide the implementation of agricultural censuses in the 2020 census round.
- 4) Encourage FAO's Members to use the guidelines developed under the WCA framework to facilitate the harmonization and international comparability of the national censuses results.
- 5) Encourage resource partners to support developing countries in conducting an agricultural census.

Queries on the substantive content of the document may be addressed to:

Jairo Castano
Senior Statistician and Leader of the Agricultural Censuses and Surveys Team
Tel: +39 06 57055166

I. Introduction

1. FAO has provided guidance to countries on conducting national censuses of agriculture through decennial programmes¹. The World Programme for the Census of Agriculture (WCA) 2020, also known as the tenth decennial programme, is an international standard that is expected to drive the implementation of agricultural censuses in all countries in the period between 2016 and 2025.

2. A census of agriculture is a large-scale statistical operation for collecting, processing and disseminating data on the structure of agriculture, covering the whole, or a significant part of the country. Typical structural data collected in a census of agriculture are the size of holding, land tenure, land use, crop area harvested, irrigation, livestock numbers, labour and other agricultural inputs. In an agricultural census, data are collected at the holding level, but some community-level data may also be collected.

3. During the 2010 census round, which covered the period 2006-2015, 132 countries conducted censuses of agriculture, a new record surpassing the earlier record of 122 countries of the 2000 census round.

II. Importance of the census of agriculture

4. The census of agriculture is one of the principal instruments for collecting basic agricultural statistics in a country. It should be included as part of an integrated programme of data collection and compilation aimed at providing comprehensive statistical information for agricultural policy purposes, as well as for research and private sector business decision-making, in addition to standard statistical uses.

5. The census of agriculture gives a snapshot of the structure of the agricultural sector in a country and, when compared with previous rounds, it provides an opportunity to identify trends and structural transformations of the sector, and points forward areas for policy intervention. Census data are also used as a benchmark for current statistics and their value is increased when they are employed together with other data sources. Often, data users see the need for more in-depth studies of specific domains of the agriculture sector and rely on the census as the frame for focused sample surveys. In this way, the census satisfies several needs of both data users and data producers.

6. For data users' needs, the census of agriculture:

- a) Supports evidence-based agricultural planning and policy-making.
- b) Facilitates research, investment and business decisions.
- c) Contributes to evaluating the impact of agricultural activities on the environment.
- d) Helps to assess food security in agricultural holdings and the role of women in agricultural activities.
- e) Provides baseline data both at the national and small geographic levels for monitoring and evaluation of projects and interventions.
- f) Collects essential information for the estimation of the non-observed economy, compilation of the national accounts and for the economic accounts for agriculture.

7. For data producers' needs, the census of agriculture:

- a) Provides a reliable benchmark for reconciling and improving current crop and livestock statistics.

¹ The WCA 2020 is the tenth round in the decennial programme of agricultural censuses, which started in 1930. The 1930 and 1940 rounds were sponsored by the International Institute of Agriculture (IIA). The seven subsequent rounds – in 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010 – were promoted by FAO, which assumed the responsibilities of IIA following its dissolution in 1946.

- b) Provides frames for sample surveys in the agricultural survey programme, as well as information for building the Master Sample Frame.
- c) Supports the establishment or update of the farm register

III. Structure of the WCA 2020

8. The preparation of the WCA 2020 involved a review of experiences and lessons learned by countries in the 2010 census round, as well as consultations with stakeholders and development partners, which resulted in establishing a strengthened approach and improved census methodologies.
9. The WCA 2020 consists of two volumes to clearly separate two distinct aspects of the census:
- Volume 1 “Programme, concepts and definitions” deals with the methodological and conceptual aspects of the census of agriculture. This volume is available at <http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-wca/wca-2020/en/>
 - Volume 2 “Operational aspects”, under preparation, will include the practical details on the steps involved in actually conducting an agricultural census.

IV. Main features of Volume 1

10. Some of the main features of Volume 1 of the WCA 2020 are discussed below.
11. **Synergies with other initiatives:** One of the main and new features of the new programme is its close linkage to the “Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics” (2010²), an initiative developed by several international partners, including FAO, and national stakeholders. The census of agriculture is one of the cornerstones of the Global Strategy as a major source for the minimum set of core data and information (first pillar of the Global Strategy) and the integration of agriculture into the national statistical system through a master sample frame and an integrated survey system (second pillar). Further information about the Global Strategy is available at <http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-capacity/ess-strategy/en/>.
12. **Integration in the statistics system:** The WCA 2020 further emphasizes the integration of the agricultural census within the overall framework of the system of integrated agricultural censuses and surveys. Countries with an established system of agricultural surveys may use the classic approach as a frame for the system while countries without such system may find the modular approach or the integrated census-survey modality as a first step in that direction.
13. **Census methodologies:** It is recognized that countries use a range of census methodological approaches according to their circumstances, development levels and needs. A review of experiences and lessons learned in the 2010 census round showed that the census of agriculture can be conducted in many different ways. In this light, the WCA 2020 features the discussion of four modalities for conducting a census of agriculture: the classical (one-off) approach, which is still widely used; the modular approach, which was introduced in the WCA 2010 as a cost-effective approach to collecting a wider set of data; the integrated census/survey modality, involving rotating survey modules over the years between two censuses; and the combined census modality, which uses administrative data. Each modality has advantages and limitations and its use depends on the needs and statistical and technical development of the country.
14. **Essential and frame census items:** A new feature of the WCA 2020 is the reintroduction of the notion of ‘essential’ items, and a clear distinction between ‘essential’ items and ‘frame’ items. It is recommended that all countries collect the essential items regardless of the approach to their agricultural census, which can be classic, modular or census-survey integrated. The frame items are

² World Bank, FAO & UN 2010. Global strategy to improve agricultural and rural statistics. Report No. 56719-GLB.

intended specifically for inclusion in the core module of a census using the modular approach, to provide data for the frames for the supplementary modules. In addition to the essential and frame items, other items, referred to as ‘additional’ items, are presented. These are provided for countries wishing to collect more in-depth (supplementary) data on specific themes and are suitable for inclusion irrespective of the approach adopted for the census.

15. **Improved and new census themes:** The WCA 2020 has improved the approach for assessing the distribution of intra-household managerial decisions and introduced the identification of land/livestock ownership within the household. The approach is useful for understanding better the decision-making process within the holding and the generation of sex-disaggregated data. The approach for assessing food security has also been updated by reviewing the severity of food insecurity as experienced by individuals in the population. The approach, developed by FAO’s Voices of the Hungry project, uses the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), to measure household food security through an experience-based survey.

16. The WCA 2020 also provides a revised list of themes and data items to better address emerging data needs, including two new themes: “Fisheries” (capture fisheries activities conducted at household level) and “Environment/Green House Gases (GHG)” (basic agro-environmental data on GHG and ammonia emissions).

17. **Information technology:** Another feature of the WCA 2020 guidelines is an increased emphasis on the use of information technology in data collection, processing and dissemination. The increasing use of technology in census and surveys operations results in significant efficiencies and drastically reduces the time lag between data collection and data analysis. This includes the use of computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI), internet-based data collection methods and geo-referencing. Similarly, the use of interactive outputs and web-based data (tables, graphs, maps) as well as access to anonymised micro-data has brought new opportunities for census dissemination. Novel and user-friendly dissemination tools support informed-decision making, unleash the analytical creativity of users and elevate the value of census data for agricultural policy purposes, research and business, in addition to the usual statistical uses.

18. **Updating of concepts and classifications:** Concepts and definitions of work and employment in the holding have been updated to be consistent with the new statistics framework developed by ILO (2013). The concept of forest and other wooded land has also been re-defined to bring it into line with the SEEA (System of Environmental-Economic Accounting) Central Framework adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2012. The classifications for land use, areas of economic activity, crops, livestock, machinery and equipment have all been updated in line with the latest international statistical standards.

19. **Retained features:** The WCA 2020 retains three key features introduced in the previous 2010 programme. Firstly, the integration between the population and housing census and the agriculture census is re-emphasized. Secondly, the possibility to collect community-level data remains in the programme due to the strong demand and increased use for this kind of data vis-a-vis the marginal field cost. Thirdly, community-level data are collected with a view to building an information base on the infrastructure and services available to agricultural holdings.

V. Way forward

20. The main features of Volume 1 of the WCA 2020 highlighted above are the result of a review of countries’ experiences under the WCA 2010 round, extensive consultations with countries as well as global and regional experts and the recognition of new and emerging needs.

21. Countries are expected to adopt the WCA 2020 guidelines for conducting their national census of agriculture. The use of the standards, concepts and definitions proposed by these guidelines will ensure the international comparability of the data collected, and the possibility for countries to

benchmark their performance against other countries. Adopting the guidelines will also help countries to develop an integrated census and survey programme, use innovative and cost-effective methodologies, and broaden the dissemination of census data for informed strategic decisions. By collecting the recommended number of “essential” items regardless of the census approach, countries will ensure that the historical continuity of time series remains intact. This continuity will allow the identification of trends or structural breaks in the agricultural sector.

22. As part of activities to roll out the WCA 2020, FAO is organizing regional roundtables to disseminate the new guidelines among FAO member countries. These workshops aim to help countries gain a deeper understanding of the new approaches and methodologies to data collection being advocated by FAO through this new Programme. Country plans for implementing the 2020 round of agricultural census and surveys are also reviewed.

VI. Suggested actions by the Committee

23. The Committee is invited to:

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- 2) Support FAO's leading role on the development and promotion of the WAC 2020.
- 3) Express its satisfaction regarding the publishing of Volume 1 of the WCA 2020 that will guide the implementation of agricultural censuses in FAO member countries in the 2020 census round.
- 4) Encourage FAO's Members to use the guidelines developed under the WCA framework to facilitate the harmonization and international comparability of national censuses results.
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