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Preparation of the New Guidelines for the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020

1. FAO is currently developing the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020 (WCA 2020), which is meant to guide all those agricultural censuses carried out by countries in the period between 2016 and 2025. It is the tenth round in the decennial programme of agriculture censuses, which started in 1930. Also in the next decade, the agricultural censuses will play a key role in the collection of structural and basic data on the agriculture sector in many countries. The WCA 2020 will ensure that data collected are comparable at the international level and address the primary information needs of the 21st century.
2. A considerable number of countries around the world conducted an agriculture census during the 2010 round. Out of a total of 194 FAO Member Nations, 105 countries have already conducted an agricultural census and about 43 are planning to carry out one during the next two years. This will result in a record participation rate, even topping the success of the WCA 2000 round in which 122 countries participated.
3. The main objectives of the agriculture census are:
 - a) to provide accurate statistical information at the lower territorial administrative level in order to facilitate the design, monitoring and assessment of regional/territorial agricultural policies and rural development programmes;
 - b) to provide data to benchmark current agricultural statistics;
 - c) to provide the frame for all agriculture-related surveys.
4. The WCA 2020 Programme aims at providing a set of methodological approaches that can be used when organising an agriculture census. The approaches provide various options for different types of agricultural structures and levels of statistical development in order to capture different country situations. This includes a growing use of administrative records and combining complete enumeration with sample surveys. General information for each method will be provided together with its strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for the context in which they are applicable. The WCA 2020 will benefit from the methodological work of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics (the Global Strategy) to provide new, low cost and improved methods for data collection in agriculture.
5. The modular approach recommended by FAO in the 2010 Programme will be retained but will represent just one of several options for conducting an agriculture census. The modular approach recommends the collection of data on key structural variables through a core module by complete

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enumeration, and more detailed thematic modules by sampling. The modular approach to census data collection was advocated as a strategy to increase efficiency by meeting the increasing data demands from an agriculture census within a limited budget.

6. The Programme will underline the necessity of providing greater efficiencies in data collection and the need for producing more timely data by taking advantage of recent advances in technology, including digital/mobile/geo-referenced information; this includes tools such as the use of computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) and internet-based data collection methods and mobile devices (PC, smartphones, tablets) as well as the use of existing updated administrative records for statistical purposes. The WCA 2010 review highlighted the increased use of CAPI and the different practices implemented by countries. The WCA 2020 will incorporate the lessons learned from these experiences. Further support will be provided to countries through operational guidelines such as the Statistical Development Series 6 on 'Conducting of Agricultural Censuses and Surveys', which will be updated and expanded.

7. Other cost-effective methods of data collection that were first proposed in the WCA 2010 Programme will be retained in the new guidelines. An important example is the inclusion of an agricultural module in the population and housing census and the other linkages built with the agriculture census. The relevant guidelines have been further elaborated in a joint publication by FAO and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)¹. Another example refers to the collection of community-level data. Given the strong demand for this kind of data, in the WCA 2010 Programme countries were encouraged to include a component for collecting community-level data in their agriculture census questionnaire. These community-level data are to be collected taking into account national contexts, particularly with a view to build an information base on the infrastructure and services available to agricultural holdings. These data would be very useful to formulate, execute and evaluate community wide projects. Other methods of data collection will be explored, including “big data” and other options commonly associated with the call for a “Data Revolution”. The potential benefits of these new approaches notwithstanding, there is still a need to establish their usefulness in the context of taking an agriculture census.

8. The Global Strategy has recognized the increasing demand for agricultural data covering a broader context, not only from the traditional economic dimension, but also social and environmental dimensions. As such, the WCA 2020 proposes revisions to the thematic modules to address the new and emerging needs for statistics, such as data for Green Growth analysis, monitoring of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, food security and sustainable agricultural development. These new areas of work require the collection of data on the environment, climate change, as well as land and water use. The WCA 2010 review confirmed that the thematic modules proposed in the WCA 2010 programme have been implemented by the countries and have been seen in general to meet the needs of countries. The modules included most frequently are those for crops, livestock, farm labour, and agricultural practices. Other modules which are included with lower coverage are on household food security, aquaculture, forestry and the management of the holding. Special attention has been given in WCA 2020 to improve the concepts and make them more relevant towards country data needs.

9. Responding to the needs expressed by countries, as well as regional and international fora, the WCA 2020 proposes several new items. For instance, to meet the needs of this broader scope of data outside the statistical remit of an agricultural holding, the agriculture census should be linked to the System of Integrated Agricultural Censuses and Surveys. Special emphasis will be placed on providing additional instructions in the WCA 2020 Programme and related guidelines to help countries operationalize the above system.

10. The WCA 2020 will also place greater emphasis on archiving and disseminating census results and will recommend countries to share more of their data in standardized machine-readable formats. This will encourage greater availability of data for users, while respecting the 6th UN Principle of Official Statistics on data confidentiality, as well as countries' statistical laws, frameworks

¹ FAO and UNFPA, “Guidelines for Linking Population and Housing Censuses with Agricultural Censuses”, 2012

and principles on data access and dissemination. In turn, this will allow governments and policy-makers to better monitor development progress and give citizens the information they need. By promoting the use of data it will encourage greater sustainability of agriculture statistics and its integration into the broader national statistical system.

11. The WCA 2020 will build on the success of the previous round and will continue to play an important role in providing structural data for world agriculture and rural areas.