



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations

# **Agricultural Cost of Production : Determination of Cash Costs**

Short Training Course on  
Agricultural Cost of Production  
Statistics

## 1- Definitions (1/3)

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- Cash costs are the **out-of-pocket expenses** paid in cash.
- Cash costs depend **on production practices** and on **quantities and prices of inputs**.
- **These inputs are used during the production year** and further and can be owner or exchange supplied.
- Farmers, for example, might want to know the return of their operations above cash costs **in order to estimate available cash at the end of the production period**.

## 2 – Definitions (2/3)

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This section covers the methodological approaches for estimating the following cash costs:

- **Seed, animal feed, fertilizers, pesticides**
- **Custom services**
- **Veterinary expenses**
- **Paid labour**
- **Machinery/Equipment Repairs**
- **Costs related to land preparation – set aside**

## 1- Definitions (3/3)

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- These costs generally vary according to the **quantity produced**, the **surface** or the **number of head** of cattle.
- **Some may however be fixed:** insurance expenses, licenses or taxes independent of the production level of the operation (eg. fee for access to water).
- These inputs may be used **in whole or in part** during the crop year.
- **These inputs have a one-time effect**, that is to say, immediate or limited to the crop: feed consumed by livestock, pesticides, fertilizers, etc.
- Residual effects of longer-term can sometimes be observed: effect of fertilizers on soil fertility, for example.

## 2- About the units

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- **Revenues and costs must be expressed in a common unit:**
  - **For crops:** unit area (hectare, etc.) or production (tonnes, kilograms, etc.)
  - **For Livestock:** by head or by quantity produced
- **It is recommended to adopt the current sales unit used by producer:** liter of milk, bag of rice, etc. because users and data providers can more easily relate to these unit.
- **To ensure comparability of data on income and costs, it is necessary that each of these indicators are calculated based on the same base:** the same area of culture, the same size of livestock, etc. Otherwise, profitability measures will be biased.

### 3- Determining cash costs : general considerations (1/2)

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- **Cost** = Quantity of input used effectively \* purchase price including all fees and taxes.
- If the quantities and input prices are not available, **the values** can be directly used. Often accounting records do only include values.
- If one and / or other information is missing, an estimation based on **a current practices and / or local agricultural markets** may be made by the statistician or the enumerator.

#### Examples:

- **missing quantities, prices available**: the technical coefficients prevailing in the locality are used (example : seed rate per hectare amount of feed per day per head, etc).
- **available quantities, missing prices**: input prices used in local markets.
- **quantities missing, missing prices**: combining the two methods above

### 3- Determining cash costs : general considerations (2/2)

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**Cost of Variable Input** = Volume of the input effectively used \* the purchase price inclusive of all tariffs and taxes;

**In cases where volumes or prices of the input are not available**, then the production values can be inferred from farm expense records

**In the absence of the first two alternatives**, a statistical imputation based on local farm practices can be made by the statistician or enumerator.

## 4- Estimating fertilizers and plant protection costs (1/2)

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### Recommended approach:

- **Quantities:** the information is collected at the farm level on the quantities of inputs used during the reference period of the survey, in the unit used by the operator (kilos, bags, etc.).
- **Price:** the price actually paid by the operator per unit of input. If it is self-produced inputs, market prices at the time of the application of inputs are used.
- **Cost:** price\* quantities and adjusted to a common reference period with an appropriate inflation rate.

## 4- Estimating fertilizers and plant protection costs (2/2)

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### Alternative approaches

**If information is available only on the quantities of fertilizers purchased and not used** but if it is common practice in the region or country for farmers not to stock these inputs, then the cost estimate can be computed by multiplying the quantities by the appropriate market price as explained above.

**If information is available only on the amounts purchased (and not the quantities),** then the cost can be estimated by adjusting these values to the chosen reference period.

**If the information collected is too scarce to provide reliable estimates,** a standard commodity and region specific application rate can be used (e.g. kg per Ha) to estimate the quantities of fertilizers and plant protection used and costs computed by applying the appropriate market price

## 5- Determination of costs for seeds

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### Recommended approach

- **Costs** can be estimated by multiplying quantities and unit prices paid to purchase seeds, adjusted to the reference period.
- **Quantities** can be inferred by multiplying standard seed rates by the sowed area.

### Alternative approaches

- **Expenses on seeds and other planting material reported by the farmer can also be directly used to estimate costs**, after the appropriate adjustment to the reference period.
- **If neither information on quantities nor unit prices/expenses is reported by the farmer**, using standard seed rates and market prices can impute the expenses.

## 6- Determination of costs for animal feed

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- **Purchased feed:**

**Costs** can be estimated by multiplying the quantity of feed used by the unit price paid for the feed, adjusted to the reference period.

- **Self produced feed:**

If the farmer supplies his own feed, then it should be valued at the price he would have received had he sold the feed in the market place.

- **Measurement issues**

**Markets for farm-produced feed such as straw may be very thin or non-existent → impedes the use of market prices to impute costs for owner-supplied feed.**

## 7- Customs operations: definitions

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- Refers to the **services hired by the farmers** such as machinery, contracts for fertilization, etc.
- Customs operations range from simple farm tillage or harvesting to virtually any and all of the farm operations.
- **It usually consists of hiring a combination of inputs** such as machinery together with fuel, animals for draught, labour and in some cases expendable inputs such as fertilizer or pesticides.
- **In some cases, neighbouring farmers might choose to exchange services on each other's farms.** These “rental” markets are widespread among smallholders

## 7- Customs operations: valuation methods

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- **General principle:** custom services should be valued at the cost to the farmer of the services purchased.
- In the case of valuing services traded with a neighbour (no money) then the statistician should **value the input at the cost of purchasing the service from the market or by building up the cost as if it was owner supplied.**
- In the cases in which these services are not purchased but are provided at no charge or as part of an exchange agreement with other farmers, **the opportunity cost should be imputed.**

## 8- Veterinary expenses : definition

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- **These costs should include medications and supplements administered to animals that are not mixed with feed, if included.** Some examples include administered vitamins, hormones, medications used to counter external and internal parasites.
- **Veterinary fees and costs associated with products (needles, gloves and other supplies) used to administer these products should also be included.** These costs are generally attributable to one commodity, unless different types of animals are raised on the farm.
- **These costs are often recorded separately.**

## 8- Veterinary expenses : valuation methods

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- They should be estimated by **multiplying quantities (e.g. number of visits) by unit prices**
- **OR by using the values provided in farm records.** This might be more relevant if farmers purchase a given package of veterinary services and do not pay on a per visit basis.

## 9- Estimating cost related to fallow land

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- Farmers may leave part of their land **fallow** as a risk management strategy to improve the prospects of improved production on that land in the following year
- If this occurs, **costs incurred on this fallowed land should be included** and attributed as part of the cost of production.
- The expenses of maintaining and working the fallowed land should be estimated and charged against the cost of production **using the pre-productive cost methodology** or by including the area and associated costs of the fallowed land with the planted area of the crop in question.

## References

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- **AAEA Task Force on Commodity Costs and Returns** (2000). *Commodity Costs and Returns Estimation Handbook*. United States Department of Agriculture: Ames, Iowa, USA.
- **Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics** (2016), Handbook on Agricultural Cost of Production Statistics, Handbook and Guidelines, pp.58-62. FAO: Rome.