25th Session of the Committee on Forestry – Written Correspondence Procedure

Item 8.1.a: International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture: Terms of Reference

Secretariat response to written questions from the Committee

The Secretariat expresses its appreciation for the comments received from Members on item 8.1.a of the Agenda - *International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture – Terms of Reference*. All comments are well noted.

1. At its 164th session, the Council endorsed the proposal for hosting by FAO of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture (the Platform) and requested review of the terms of reference for this Platform by the COAG, COFI, COFO, the Programme Committee and the FAO Council. In this context, document COFO/2020/8.1.a *International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture - Terms of Reference* was submitted to the Committee on Forestry for comments. The Secretariat expresses its thanks and appreciation for the feedback received. The comments and inputs are duly noted, and these will be subsumed into future iterations of the document.

2. Regarding questions related to the mission and objectives of the Platform in formulating policy recommendations, best practices and voluntary guidelines, it may be recalled that the Platform will not be an autonomous legal entity or FAO body. The Platform will facilitate the exchange of knowledge on best practices and policy frameworks that promote the digitalization of food and agriculture within the mandate of FAO, and its recommendations will be voluntary and non-binding.

3. In response to comments regarding the risk of duplication of activities under the mandate of other International Organizations, it is important to note that the Platform, through its Advisory Committee, will create close synergies with International Organizations, including those mandated in policy areas related to digital technologies and the digital economy (such as the International Telecommunication Union - ITU). The Platform will specialize in food and agriculture and will by no means duplicate any activity or mandate of other International Organizations. The objective will be to strengthen collaboration and, more importantly, awareness in the Organizations mandated with the digital economy on issues related to digital technologies in food and agriculture and include these issues in their discussions, without duplicating or prejudging their activities.

4. Regarding questions on the linkages of the Platform with FAO's Governing Bodies and the development of a reporting mechanism for FAO Members, the Secretariat would like to propose that the Platform reports periodically to the FAO Council so that all Members can monitor its work and assess its value added. In addition, should the Inter-Governmental Group decide that the Platform's voluntary guidelines have implications for policy-makers, the Inter-governmental Group, either as Members or through the Secretariat, would bring those to the attention of FAO's Council and/or relevant technical committees as appropriate.

5. In response to questions on the structure of the Platform and the locus of responsibility, the Secretariat wishes to note that Members participating in the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group will identify issues and priorities, review and discuss the analysis,

endorse recommendations, best practices and voluntary guidelines, and bring those to the attention of FAO Governing Bodies as appropriate.

6. In response to questions regarding participation in the Online Multi-stakeholders Forum, the Secretariat would like to note that this could be based on the FAO Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum, an online platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue on food security in the FAO ES Stream) to create synergies and cost-savings. This will allow the inclusion in the dialogue of national and local actors, smallholder farmers and small-scale food and agriculture businesses across the world. FSN Forum dialogues are open to everyone and all actors can register, ensuring safe interaction and participation in the context of data privacy. As the Online Multi-stakeholder Forum would specifically focus on digital food and agriculture issues, a number of specialized organizations, associations or NGOs could be invited to participate subject to approval by the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group.

7. Regarding questions on the mechanism to discuss the benefits and potential risks of digital technologies on food and agriculture, it should be noted that the International Organizations and stakeholders that comprise the Advisory Committee would undertake studies and analyses on the various dimensions of digital technologies' impacts in line with their respective mandates. Depending on the issue analyzed, the Advisory Committee will review and synthesize state-of-art analyses and evidence, and will engage the Online Multi-stakeholder Forum to gain additional evidence and ensure a bottom-up approach. The Advisory Committee will submit documents for consideration and discussion by the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group for consideration. All documents produced by the Advisory Committee will be public to promote transparency and knowledge-sharing.

8. In response to questions on the budget of the Platform, it should be noted that the initiative shall be funded through voluntary contributions from Members and other partners (extra-budgetary contributions). The Secretariat is working to develop a sustainable funding plan for the initiative. The Platform will be managed by FAO under its mandate and institutional framework.

9. Regarding questions on the inclusion of issues related to the impacts of digital technologies applied on land use, land use change and forestry in the initiative, the Secretariat would like to note that these will be included in the Terms of Reference.