



Providing better agricultural statistics to inform policy

WORKING FOR farmers and policy-makers around the world who rely on sound statistics

WORKING TO raise national capacity to gather and disseminate agricultural data

WORKING WITH World Bank, regional development banks

EUROSTAT, UN commissions and national statistical offices

WORKING THANKS TO EU, US Department of Agriculture, UK Department for International Development, Government of Italy, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funding

Hard to imagine in these days of remote sensing and GPS that agricultural statistics are often still based on measurements taken by hand with a rope and a compass – making them costly, labour-intensive and time-consuming. In many developing countries, the main tools for collecting agricultural statistics have changed little since their development 50 years ago, creating obstacles to their accuracy. FAO developed the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics and now heads an international partnership for implementing the strategy, supporting pilot projects to help countries improve their statistics – statistics that can be used by farmers when deciding how to plant, harvest and market their production, and by governments in developing and monitoring policies addressing poverty and food insecurity.

In Ethiopia, the national crop production estimates from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Central Statistical Agency often differed greatly, making it difficult for policy-makers to develop sound agricultural policies or to plan food aid allocation and distribution. In Niger, with its large population of nomadic and semi-nomadic herders, it seemed impossible to gather good statistics on the number of livestock in the country. And in Pakistan, after the devastating 2010 flood, the country was hard pressed to identify the areas facing the most food scarcity and damage to crop production.

Now, in all three cases, the countries are benefiting from pilot projects established by FAO and its partners – projects that will be scaled-up under the new Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics.





Ethiopia, Niger, Pakistan

In Ethiopia, FAO brought the Statistical Ministry and the Ministry of Agriculture together in a joint project that introduced new technologies such as GPS, personal digital assistants and satellite imaging to improve harvest area measurements, yield estimates and market price monitoring. Today, production estimates have converged and provide reliable data to underpin food security and agriculture policies.

In Niger, the FAO project introduced new modular methodology that accounts for livestock on the move. The census revealed unsuspected agricultural riches, showing that Niger had 30 percent more livestock than previously assumed and the biggest stock in West Africa. Based on this data, Niger upped its GDP figures by two percent and substantially increased its livestock sector budget. Niger's National Statistics Institute determined that Niger could satisfy its domestic demand for milk and also could become an exporter of meat.

In Pakistan, a satellite-based crop monitoring system introduced to measure crop yield and forecast production now provides monthly data but can also monitor crop production during events such as droughts and floods, allowing the government to plan food security policies during crises.

The food price crisis of 2007–08 provided a wakeup call, raising awareness that the quality of agricultural statistics had declined in parallel to a general lack of international support to the agricultural sector in the final decades of the twentieth century.

The Global Strategy – developed by FAO and the World Bank in consultation with national statistics organizations, ministries of agriculture and international agencies, and endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2010 – supports the much needed development of agriculture statistics. This means statistics for use in the design and monitoring of policies that target poverty and hunger but also for improving understanding of the social, economic and environmental dimensions of agriculture. This includes statistics that quantify the impact of agriculture on climate change and the amount of greenhouse gas emitted due to agricultural activities and, conversely, how the changing weather patterns affect agricultural production and farmers' coping strategies.



Agricultural component

Under the Global Strategy, tools are being developed to enable this integration by including agriculture components in ongoing surveys and censuses. Adding an agricultural component to a household survey will make it possible to link the number of people, their income levels, consumption patterns and agricultural production. Linking social, environmental, economic and agricultural surveys will also increase efficiency and reduce costs while giving a much fuller picture of the on-the-ground situation.

FAO is coordinating implementation of the Global Strategy and its Action Plan, working with regional and national actors and other international organizations to update and upgrade statistical methods and tools, and raise national capacity to gather statistics and apply them when setting national agricultural policies. Thanks to the consultation process, there is strong buy-in at national and regional levels. With FAO's facilitation, each region is preparing its own programme for improving agricultural statistics with the close involvement of countries. The process is very much country driven as it will require the preparation of a National Agricultural Statistics Plan, signed by the government and based on an in-depth assessment and prioritization of country needs. Results of the pilot initiatives already show the impact of using improved methodologies to gather accurate agricultural statistics – enabling countries to design short-term interventions alongside longer term policies to support their agricultural sectors.