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The World Programme for the Census of Agriculture (WCA) 2020

Executive Summary

FAO is the lead UN agency responsible for preparing, advocating and supporting the implementation of the decennial programmes for the World Census of Agriculture (WCA). These programmes provide guidance to countries in conducting agricultural censuses following standard concepts, definitions and classifications, and at the same time promote the availability of internationally comparable structural data on the agricultural sector. Every 10 years FAO revises the Programme based on countries' experiences, lessons learned and new data needs.

The paper presents the guidelines for the new 2020 World Programme for the Census of Agriculture – WCA 2020. The guidelines were developed so that they are implemented - in the agricultural censuses for the period 2016-2025. The document highlights the new features of the Programme as well as the components retained from the previous round. Special emphasis is put on experiences of the agricultural censuses conducted in the Europe and Central Asia region under the previous WCA 2010 Programme (during the period 2006-2015) and their implications for the development of the WCA 2020 Programme.

The Conference may wish to call on the member countries to use the WCA 2020 guidelines in order to ensure that the census results are harmonized and internationally comparable, allowing countries to benchmark their performance against others.

The Conference may also wish to call on development partners and international organizations to assist member countries in conducting their agricultural census in the 2020 round, in line with international standards.

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I. Background

1. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is the lead United Nations agency responsible for preparing, advocating and supporting the implementation of the decennial programmes for the World Census of Agriculture (WCA). These programmes provide guidance to countries for conducting agricultural censuses following standard concepts, definitions and classifications, and at the same time promote the availability of internationally comparable structural data on the agricultural sector. Every 10 years FAO revises the Programme based on countries' experiences, lessons learned and new data needs.
2. A census of agriculture is a statistical operation for collecting, processing and disseminating data on the structure of agriculture, covering the whole or a significant part of a country. The statistical unit of the agricultural census is the **agricultural holding** (holding), i.e. an economic unit of agricultural production under single management comprising all livestock kept, and all land used wholly or partly for agricultural production purposes, without regard to title, legal form or size. Typical structural data collected in a census of agriculture are size of holding, land tenure, land use, crop area, 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. While the history of agricultural censuses started in 1840 in the USA, the idea of the World Census of Agriculture (i.e. censuses of agriculture conducted in all countries practically simultaneously, along similar lines and on the basis of the same principles) was conceived in the 1910s by the International Institute of Agriculture (IIA) in Rome, Italy, the precursor of FAO. The development of this idea led to the first World Census of Agriculture carried out in 1930 under the auspices of the IIA.
4. It was the intention of the IIA that the 1930 World Census of Agriculture should be the first of a series of World Censuses of Agriculture to be undertaken every ten years. Another WCA, therefore, was planned for 1940. Preparations were made, but the Second World War interfered with the full implementation of the 1940 WCA programme, leaving it incomplete.
5. FAO, succeeded the IIA after the Second World War, and launched the 1950 WCA and the successive decennial programmes. Since then, the World Census of Agriculture has become an established international activity. The Programme for the 2020 WCA is the tenth programme in the series, and covers the agricultural censuses to be conducted during the period 2016-2025.
6. The guidelines for the WCA 2020 Programme are unique because they not only build on past experiences and lessons learned, but they also look forward and take the emerging data needs of users into consideration. They address requirements of both developed and developing countries, and provide the foundation for countries to develop an integrated census and survey programme, to use innovative and cost-effective methodologies, and ultimately to make better informed strategic decisions.

II. Main Features of WCA 2020 Guidelines

7. The WCA 2020 guidelines are set forth in two volumes, to clearly separate two distinct aspects of the census: methodological and operational aspects. **Volume 1 “Programme, Definitions and Concepts”** deals with the methodological and conceptual aspects of the census of agriculture while **Volume 2 “Operational Aspects”** includes the practical details on the steps involved in actually conducting an agricultural census.

Volume 1 has already been published in English (FAO 2015). Translations into the other five FAO languages – Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish will follow during this year. Volume 2 is currently under development and is expected to be ready by the end of 2016.

A. Volume 1

8. The main features of Volume 1 of the WCA 2020 Guidelines highlighted below are the result of a review of countries' experiences under the WCA 2010 round, through extensive consultations with countries, as well as global and regional experts and the recognition of new and emerging needs. As in the past, it is expected that countries will adapt the guidelines to meet national needs.

Synergies

9. One of the new features of the new programme is its close linkage to the "Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics" (WB, FAO and UN 2010). The Global Strategy was developed by several international partners, including FAO, in response to the declining quantity and quality of agricultural statistics worldwide. 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).

Methodologies

10. It is recognized that countries use a range of census methodological approaches according to their circumstances, development levels and needs. 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 (FAO 2005); the **integrated census/survey modality**, involving rotating survey modules over the years between two censuses; and the **combined census modality**, which uses administrative data.

Integration

11. 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 classical approach as a frame for the system, while countries without such a system may find the modular approach to be a first step in that direction.

Items

12. 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 modality of their agricultural census, which can be classical, modular, integrated census/survey or combined. The frame items are 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.

Improved and new themes

13. The WCA 2020 has improved the approach for assessing the distribution of managerial decisions and introduced the identification of ownership within the household, which is useful for the collection of sex-disaggregated data. It 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).

Information technology

14. 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.

Retained features

15. The WCA 2020 retains three key features introduced in the previous 2010 programme (FAO 2005). **Firstly**, the integration between the population and housing census and the agriculture census is re-emphasized. More detailed guidance on collecting agriculture data in the population and housing census, including suitable data items, can be found in “Guidelines for linking population and housing censuses with agricultural censuses” (FAO and UNFPA, 2012). **Secondly**, the possibility of collecting 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. Community-level data is collected with a view to building an information base on the infrastructure and services available to agricultural holdings. **Thirdly**, the recommendation to collect sex-disaggregated data in the census is retained. At the same time, the approach has been improved to facilitate the collection of such data.

B. Volume 2

16. The second volume of WCA 2020 will deal with the practical steps involved in actually conducting an agricultural census. It will be a revised and updated edition of “Conducting Agricultural Censuses and Surveys” (FAO 1996).

17. Volume 2 of WCA 2020 will be more than an update of the previous publication; it will entail a wholly new approach. It will consider innovative approaches, taking into consideration new features of the Volume 1, advances in statistical methodology and fast growing digital and mobile technology (so called “data revolution”). It will build synergies and complementarity with a wide range of existing results and publications of relevant statistical programmes, such as: Cost-effective methodologies and tools developed under the Research Programme of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics, other methods and tools developed by FAO and other organizations (UNSC, World Bank, etc.).

18. Volume 2 of the WCA 2020 will provide clear guidelines that will serve as reference for statisticians in designing and implementing agricultural census operations. It will provide:

- a) Guidance on how to prepare a strong national census proposal, which demonstrates value for money with good examples of factors that can facilitate the mobilization of resources in-country.
- b) Guidance on how to implement the four above mentioned census modalities: (i) classical census, (ii) modular census, (iii) integrated census/surveys and (iv) combined census with administrative sources, explaining the requirements, advantages and limitations.
- c) Guidance on the legal and institutional framework, work planning, budgeting and expenditure control, staff recruitment, and training with examples of good practices.
- d) Examples of good practices in preparing census instruments and other practical material.
- e) References to cost-effective methodologies and tools such as building and using Master Sampling Frames (MSF), Agricultural Integrated Surveys Programme (AGRIS), use of

remote sensing for agricultural statistics, improving the quality and use of administrative data, improving data collection methods, CAPI package, safe access to anonymized agricultural micro-data.

19. The structure of the new Volume 2 will be flexible and easy to update to address the following aspects:

- a) **Aspects that change less rapidly** such as: legislation, governance, management, planning, budgeting, staffing, and some technical aspects. These aspects will be presented in detailed text in hard copy.
- b) **Aspects that change frequently** such as those related to technology, tools and methods. Short introductions/summaries will be provided for these aspects in the hard copy with hyperlinks to more detailed resources, publications, examples and other materials.

20. Examples and country practices will be part of a web-based knowledge and information system and could also be included in electronic format such as CD-ROM or a pen drive attached to the back cover. This approach will provide practical guidance to countries in a flexible manner with periodical updates.

III. Experiences of the Agricultural Censuses Conducted in the Europe and Central Asia Region in relation to WCA 2020

21. As mentioned above, the WCA 2020 Guidelines build on past experiences and lessons learned. From this point of view, the experiences of the Europe and Central Asia Region, along with those of other regions, have also contributed to several aspects of the Programme. Some of these are highlighted below.

22. During the 2010 round of WCA Programme which covered the period 2006-2015, 42 out of 53 countries in the Europe and Central Asia Region (almost 80 percent) conducted an agricultural census.¹ All of these censuses were conducted using the classical approach, i.e. with a complete enumeration of all agricultural holdings in a single one-off operation. This experience was especially relevant for maintaining the classical approach as one of the possible census modality, as compared to the WCA 2010 guidelines, where special emphasis was given to the modular approach.

23. Another important experience in the region, which influenced the development of the WCA 2020 was the use of administrative data by a growing number of countries in the region for collecting at least part of the census items. A key feature of the WCA 2020 is the adoption of a combined approach, which envisages use of registers and administrative records as well as traditional census taking modalities.

24. Finally some new items were introduced in the WCA 2020, which take European countries' experience into account and include indicators of particular relevance for the Region.

IV. Guidance by the Regional Conference

25. The Conference may wish to call on the member countries to use the WCA 2020 guidelines in order to ensure that the census results are harmonized and internationally comparable, allowing countries to benchmark their performance against others.

26. The Conference may also wish to call on development partners and international organizations to assist member countries in conducting their agricultural census in the 2020 round, in line with international standards.

¹ www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-wca/en/

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