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**The new FAO World Programme for the Census of Agriculture
2020**

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Abstract

This paper outlines the main features of the new FAO World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020 (WCA 2020) for the period 2016–2025.

I. Introduction

Every 10 years FAO revises the countries' censuses experiences and lessons learnt, and then prepares, publishes and disseminates the revised census guidelines with improved census methodology. The WCA 2020 launched recently is the tenth decennial census programme. It is an international standard that is expected to drive the implementation of agricultural censuses in all countries in the period between 2016 and 2025. The WCA 2020 occurs at a time when demand increases for integrated, synergetic and cost-efficient national agriculture statistical systems.

II. Main features of the new WCA 2020

The WCA 2020 consists of two volumes to clearly separate two distinct aspects of the census:

- Volume 1 "Programme, Definitions and Concepts" deals with the methodological and conceptual aspects of the census of agriculture.
- Volume 2 "Operational Aspects", under preparation, will include the practical details on the steps involved in actually conducting an agricultural census.

Below are some of the main features of Volume 1 of the new WCA 2020.

Synergies: One of the main and new features of the new programme is its close linkage to the [Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics](#)" (2011). 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).

Integration: 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 classic approach as a frame for the system while countries without such system may find the modular approach as a first step in that direction.

Methodologies: 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; the integrated census/survey modality, involving rotating survey modules over the years between two censuses; and the combined census modality, which uses administrative data.

Essential items: 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 approach to their agricultural census, which can be classic or modular. 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: The WCA 2020 has improved the approach for assessing the distribution of managerial decisions and introduced the identification of ownership within the household, 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: 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: The WCA 2020 retains three key features introduced in the previous 2010 programme. Firstly, the integration between the population and housing census and the agriculture census is re-emphasized. Secondly, the possibility to collect 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.

III. Country adoption

The main features of Volume 1 of the census guidelines highlighted above are the result of a review of countries’ experiences under the WCA 2010 round, extensive consultations with countries as well as global and regional experts and the recognition of new and emerging needs. Countries are expected to adopt the WCA 2020 guidelines for conducting their national census of agriculture. The use of the standards, concepts and definitions proposed by these guidelines will ensure the international comparability of the data collected, and the possibility for countries to benchmark their performance against other countries. Adopting the guidelines will also help countries to develop an integrated census and survey programme, use innovative and cost-effective methodologies, and broaden the dissemination of census data for informed strategic decisions.