

# The Argentine National Census of Agriculture of 1998

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**ABSTRACT:** Argentina is a very large and heterogeneous country. There are around 430,000 agricultural holdings, with an average area of 470 hectares and a remarkable diversity of size, productive orientation and management practices. During the ten years elapsed since the last National Census of Agriculture (CNA 88), substantial structural changes have taken place in the national economy. They were coupled by equally substantial changes in the composition and spatial distribution of agricultural production as well as by increased links to the industrial production of food and to other agribusinesses.

Data collected by the 1998 National Census of Agriculture (CNA 98) will enable the assessment of these structural changes. The Census will also help generate a system of environmental, sustainability and natural resource management indicators. Finally, it will provide an updated list of holdings that will serve as a new sample frame for the system of surveys in the agricultural and food sectors. Other topics that the Census will take up include the new organizational patterns, the participation of women in production, and the extent of the specialized agricultural services.

Argentina is a federal nation with an approximate mainland South American area of 2.8 million square kilometers and great climatic and topographic diversity, stretching as a narrow southwards pointing triangle between the parallels of 22 and 55 degrees South. It may be divided into: (a) the Pampa region, 0.75 million sq km of very fertile humid and sub-humid temperate cropland and rangeland constituting the country's agricultural core, (b) the Northwest, a sub-humid, semi-arid and arid subtropical area including high altitude deserts, large mountain ranges, warm and fertile valleys, and a vast tract of low altitude woodlands and scrublands, (c) the Northeast, a low humid subtropical woodland and grassland area with both flat and rolling surfaces, (d) to the West of the Andes, in the central portion of the country, the arid and semi-arid plains of Cuyo, where large irrigation works allow intensive farming, and (e) Patagonia, mostly a vast arid cold windswept plateau.

There are about 430,000 holdings with an average size of 470 hectares. There is a great regional and local diversity of farm sizes, productive orientations and management approaches, ranging, for example, from highly technified, highly mechanized farms owned and operated by large corporations to small, family owned, goat raising farms where not even land area can be accurately defined.

Argentina's National Agricultural Census of 1988 (CNA 88) was carried out in each of the nation's twenty-three provinces by the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC) and the respective Provincial Agency of Statistics (DPE). It was organized on the principles of centralized norms and decentralized operation, with full and open interdisciplinary cooperation with provincial agencies. It greatly increased the amount and accuracy of the available data on the agricultural sector, and provided a new starting point for the construction of an integrated system of agricultural information.

In the ten years elapsed since the completion of the CNA 88, there have been substantial changes in Argentine agricultural activities as a consequence of the structural changes that have taken place in the nation's economy. These measures of economic policy were coupled to changes in the composition and spatial distribution of agricultural produce, increasingly linked to the industrial production of food and other agribusinesses.

The National Agricultural Census of 1998 (CNA 98) will update the data on the basic structural variables of all the agricultural holdings. With these new data, the structural changes will be measured

and appraised, and the new productive patterns detected. The information will also help generate a system of environmental, agricultural sustainability and natural resource indicators.

The 1998 Census will help generate the national list of holdings, thus updating it as the sample frame for the system of surveys in the agricultural and food sectors. The CNA 98 will thus allow the further build-up and expansion of the system of continuous agricultural statistics, a set of periodical surveys gathering information on livestock, sown and harvested areas, and production estimates.

Other related goals include identifying and quantifying the new organizational patterns in agricultural production, and furthering the inquiries on the participation of women as managers and laborers in agricultural holdings, thus amplifying the gender perspective already introduced in the 1988 Census.

The substantial changes which the agricultural sector is undergoing, however, demand a deeper analysis of intra- and inter-sectorial articulations, and of the connections between the farms and companies inside and/or outside the agricultural sector. In order to allow for these analyses, the Census will include a set of specific questions.

An effort will also be made to assess the extent and import of the specialized agricultural services in the performance of productive activities. These services have given rise to new organizational forms of agricultural production, in addition to the traditional practices of farm operation and management by the farmer himself or by a paid farm operator or manager, and their increasing relevance is yet to be quantified.

The definitions of the 1998 Census will be consistent with those used in 1988, thus ensuring data compatibility between successive surveys. Moreover, the EAP (Spanish acronym for agricultural holding as defined by the Census) is the traditional statistical unit that best reflects the sectorial structure, inasmuch as it is the basic organizational unit of agricultural production.

The CNA 98 field survey procedure is based on the systematic “sweeping” of every agricultural area in the country. Data will be collected by directly interviewing the producers or qualified informants at their holdings. The interviews will be conducted by census enumerators specifically trained for this purpose.