

Toward a Metadata Framework for National Agricultural Statistics

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Abstract: To establish metadata databases for food and agricultural statistics is considered as one of the key components for improving data quality and statistical development. The concept of metadata in its broad sense describes all aspects of the national system of Agricultural Statistics on how, when, where, why, and by whom the data are collected. Thus, metadata is a primary tool in describing and managing information resources, and useful and beneficial to both users and producers of statistics. The challenge faced by the management of metadata at the international level is how to design a framework so that it can be used by countries to collect the relevant and succinct information in a manageable and comparable way on the current stage of the national Agricultural Statistics for assessing data quality, identifying areas of further development, assisting to plan, design, implement, and coordinate national and regional statistical capacity building programs and activities.

Based on its long history of experience in assisting countries to document their agricultural statistical systems and methods, in 2006 FAO Statistics Division distributed an “Annotated Outline for Preparing Country Report on Metadata for National Agricultural Statistics” to two groups of countries with 16 each in two continents, Asia and the Pacific and the Middle East. The Outline provides a framework for countries to prepare metadata focusing on three main areas: (i) the national system of agricultural statistics; (ii) major domains and selected indicators of agricultural statistics; and (iii) major data sources for agricultural statistics. The idea is to view the national system of agricultural statistics as a production function and to ask what inputs, data sources, are used to produce what outputs, domains and indicators. The framework has since been improved with the benefit of feedbacks from consultation and discussion with countries, and the application of the framework in selected pilot countries for preparing country reports on metadata for national agricultural statistics.