

**ASIA AND PACIFIC COMMISSION
ON AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS – 25th Session
Vientiane, Lao PDR, 18-22 February 2014**

**Address at the Opening Session
by
Dr. Josef Schmidhuber, Deputy Director
FAO Statistics Division**

Your Excellency, Mr Vilayvanh Phomkhe,
Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Lao PDR

Mr Nguyen Van Lieu,
Outgoing Chairman of the 24th Session of APCAS,
Deputy Director General, General Statistics Office, Viet Nam

Dr Samaychanh Bouphe,
Head, Lao Statistics Bureau

Mr Xaypladeth Choulamany,
Director General, Department of Planning and Cooperation,
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Lao PDR

Dear FAO colleagues,

Distinguished Delegates,
Honourable Guests,

It is both a privilege and a pleasure for me to welcome you all to the Twenty-fifth Session of the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics.

At the outset, I would like to thank the Government of Lao PDR for assisting FAO in hosting this Commission Session. We are particularly grateful to our colleagues from the Department of Planning and Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, who worked closely with the staff of the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, to complete on time all organisational and logistical arrangements. We would also like to extend our warm welcome to the Delegates who, in spite of the long journeys, are attending this Commission Session in large number.

This is the first time that the Commission meets in Lao PDR, 48 years after the first APCAS meeting in 1966. And importantly, Lao PDR did not only host the meeting of the Commission, it also organized an important side event back-to-back with APCAS, focusing on crop monitoring for improved food security. At this point it shall suffice to say that the event was carefully and professionally organized and rendered results way in excess of our expectations. My colleagues from FAO will provide you with a more detailed account of the outcomes later in the session.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to highlight here some of the key developments in the area of agricultural statistics that have emerged since the last APCAS session in October 2012.

Within FAO, statistics continues to gain higher priority and benefits from greater internal coordination. The Director of the Statistics Division, Mr Pietro Gennari, is now also the Chief Statistician of FAO. He coordinates FAO work at headquarters through an Inter-departmental Working Group on statistics and receives external advice from the International Advisory Group on FAO Statistics (IAGFS); this advisory group met in Rome in

September last year and provided a comprehensive and new set of recommendations on statistical priorities, best practices, and on the design and implementation of major FAO statistical projects and capacity development programmes.

We are generally pleased to see a growing importance placed by the international community on strengthening agricultural statistical systems in developing countries. For instance, the recent call by the High Level Panel of Experts that advises the Secretary General of the United Nations on the post-2015 development process for a “data revolution” could mark a turning point in recognizing the contribution that better data can make to improving people’s lives.

As another example, the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics has now moved into its implementation phase. The first in-depth assessments are underway in a number of countries of the region, inter alia, in Bhutan, India, Samoa, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. In addition, the Global Office in Rome is working on “quick wins” to improve and roll out new methods to collect, compile and analyse data. An illustration is a Handbook on Cost of Production, which will be presented in this session, and finalized and field-tested later this year.

Since the last Commission session, we have also continued to promote and assist countries in completing the implementation of the 2010 World Census of Agriculture programme. The FAO has helped countries in the region through Technical Cooperation and donor-funded Projects. 28 Asian and Pacific countries have completed their censuses during the 2010 WCA round, and another 6 plan to do so by 2015. Since the last meeting of the commission, 5 countries have started a census and another one plans to do so in the next year. The FAO has helped countries in the region such as Bangladesh (2008), Cambodia

(2013), Cook Islands (2011/2012), Fiji (2009), Lao PDR (2010), Mongolia (2012), Myanmar (2010), Nepal (2011/2012), Niue (2009), Pakistan (2010), Sri Lanka (2013), Tonga (2014 - ongoing) and Vanuatu (2007) through Technical Cooperation and donor-funded Projects.

There are also important developments underway at FAO Headquarters with direct impacts and benefits for Asia and The Pacific. For instance, FAO has completely overhauled the FAOSTAT platform and vastly extended its content. Its corporate database is now offering faster, easier and more user-friendly access to a rapidly growing set of data domains. These include databases on Agri-Environmental Indicators, Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Agriculture, Forestry and land use change, government expenditures on agriculture, and producer and consumer prices and price indices. FAOSTAT will soon expand to include price volatility and transmission indicators, and statistics on capital stocks in agriculture and investment financing.

In parallel with the improved corporate information platform, FAO has put CountrySTAT onto a new, vastly improved and royalty-free IT system. CountrySTAT has only been adopted by a few countries of the region at the moment, but the positive feedback from these pilots has encouraged other countries to adopt the platform. There is already an agreement with Afghanistan and a request has recently been received by Vietnam.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 25th Session of the Commission has a comprehensive agenda to address. In addition to the topics mentioned above, papers will be presented on a vision for the 2020 round of the World Census of Agriculture, a new suite of food security statistics, a new

framework for Food Balance Sheets and supply-utilization accounts, and proposals to improve the measurement of agriculture capital stocks and country-level investment profiles, or the System of Environmental-Economic Accounts (SEEA) to mention just a few.

The underlying documentation has been prepared by the secretariat and by member countries and has been made available in advance of the meeting for discussion and decision by the Commission.

I encourage the Commission to exchange views in a constructive and open manner, and to widely share the wealth of knowledge and experience present in the region for the benefit of all. We look forward to the Commission's recommendations which will assist FAO in orienting its work programme in food and agricultural statistics.

Finally, I wish you a successful meeting and a pleasant stay in Vientiane. Thank you.