

CONCEPT NOTE

Second Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture of Central Asia on **Digital Agriculture: Opportunities and Challenges**

Date: 8 December 2020

Venue: Virtual

SDG-2 objective: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture¹

Background:

The growth of digital technologies in the Central Asian countries, even in rural areas, opens up unprecedented opportunities for accelerating the transformation towards more sustainable and inclusive agriculture and food systems and achieving the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that governments and the private sector have the ability to rapidly scale up existing technologies and implement policies and frameworks to find solutions to the crisis. Digital solutions such as mobile money and e-payments, e-commerce and ICT-enabled information and advisory services can enhance the resilience of the agrifood system and the provision of vital support services to farmers.

The countries of Central Asia have already made good progress towards adopting digital technologies in their agricultural sectors such as precision agriculture, crop and livestock monitoring and digital soil maps. However, the full potential of these efforts can only be realized when they are part of a coherent digital agriculture strategy. The Central Asian countries have expressed interest in developing and implementing such comprehensive digital agricultural strategies.

Developing and implementing such strategies requires a multi-stakeholder approach, with an explicit focus on gender, the digital divide, literacy, social linkages and related aspects. The challenge lies in ensuring that agricultural stakeholders can take advantage of the digital transformation to improve productivity, inclusiveness, efficiency and environmental impacts.

In this context, a virtual Meeting of the Agricultural Ministers of the CA countries will be organized on 27 November 2020 involving FAO officers, representatives of other UN agencies, and representatives of International Financial Institutions.

Objectives

This Meeting aims to help FAO member states in Central Asia achieve a shared understanding of the scope of the term “digital agriculture” and of the requirements for developing and implementing a digital agriculture strategy to transform agriculture. An additional objective is to identify potential areas where innovative applications of digital technologies can be implemented over the short-term.

¹ The Sustainable Development Goal to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” (SDG-2) recognizes the inter linkages among sustainable agriculture, empowering small farmers, promoting gender equality, ending rural poverty, ensuring healthy lifestyles, tackling climate change, and other issues addressed within the set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Meeting will focus on sharing good practices, policies, and future directions in addressing the opportunities and challenges of digitalization in Central Asia. It will identify potential areas for intra-regional collaboration and exchange. It will further discuss the need for a coordinated approach among key ministries and government entities (Agriculture, ICT, Finance, banking regulators, etc) in order to strengthen the enabling environment for digital transformation of the agrifood system. Specifically, the Meeting will:

- a. Raise awareness and achieve a common understanding of the concept of digital agriculture;
- b. Share good practices, lessons learned from innovative digital agriculture initiatives and applications, particularly from the Europe and Central Asia region;
- c. Share current priorities and plans of Central Asian countries in introducing and upscaling digital solutions in agriculture;
- d. Achieve a shared understanding of the requirements for developing and implementing a digital agriculture strategy to transform agriculture, using examples from the ECA region and outside it;
- e. Identify a few digital-agriculture solutions that can be implemented on a priority basis in a relatively short period of time.

Expected outcomes

The main outcome of the Meeting is a shared understanding of the concept of digital agriculture and the requirements for developing and implementing a digital agriculture strategy. An additional outcome is that some “quick win” digital agriculture solutions will be identified, where innovative applications of digital agriculture technologies can produce immediate gains.

Participants

The meeting will be co-organized by FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan. Invitations will be sent by the FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia and the Minister of Agriculture of Kazakhstan to the Ministers in charge of agriculture and food security in Central Asian countries. The other participants will include (regional) representatives of other UN agencies and IFIs such as ITU, IFAD, WB, ADB, EDB, EBRD, IDB and possibly others.

Working languages:

The working language of the Online Conference will be Russian with simultaneous translation into English.

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The zoom link will be sent by email one day prior to the meeting.