



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**Fourth International Conference
on Agriculture Statistics (ICAS-4)
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Opening Statement

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Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the United Nations and the Secretary General, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the Fourth International Conference on Agriculture Statistics (ICAS-4). I would like to thank the National Bureau of Statistics for being a wonderful host and for the hard work they have put in preparing for this conference.

At the outset, let me re-affirm that agriculture plays an important role in the economy and in the social structure of both developed and developing countries. It constitutes the largest economic sector of many developing countries around the world, and is directly linked to the well being of rural households. A large portion of the world population, estimated at nearly 45%, depends directly or indirectly on this sector for a living.

As for agricultural statistics, we learnt from the last International Conference in Cancun, Mexico that the need for timely and high quality agricultural statistics remains strong. We also learnt that we need to move from basic agriculture statistics to rural development indicators. This means that we must not only focus on core agricultural data like production values, but on other dimensions of agriculture as well. The responsibility of national producers of agricultural statistics is, in that sense, considerable.

Traditionally, agricultural statistics have focused on the supply side, and neglected the demand side as well as the environmental considerations. Moreover, agricultural statistics have been isolated from the rest of the statistical system and have been limited to domestic issues. However, in the last decade, demand for agriculture data has broadened, in response to the need to better measure aspects of, among others, economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, and social and community sustainability. In this context, the most significant and urgent challenges today are (1) to integrate agricultural statistics related to demand, supply and markets; (2) to integrate agricultural statistics into the rest of the national statistical system; and (3) to integrate them into international statistical systems.

Integration means, on the one hand, the use of common classifications and definitions; the adoption of data and metadata exchange standards; and the employment of integrated conceptual frameworks. On the other hand, it implies expansion in the scope and coverage of agricultural statistics, with linkages between agriculture and the rural society; between resources and production; production and consumption; primary production and agro-industry; domestic production and trade; and also between agriculture and the rest of the economy.

Aside from the challenges of compiling agricultural statistics from a variety of sources, we also must face the challenge of disseminating the data more effectively to a very heterogeneous community of users including policy makers, researchers, business and private sector, as well as the development community with its international and regional partners. This International Conference on Agriculture Statistics is a good forum for us to begin this process of communication between the users and producers of agricultural statistics within the international agricultural statistical community. This is also highlighted in the theme chosen for this Conference, “Advancing Statistical Integration and Analysis”, focusing on the fundamental issue of development of agricultural statistics within an integrated national statistical system.

The concept of integrating agricultural statistics into the larger national statistical system is extremely important. This mirrors well with what is happening within the UN system. As you may know, the UN System has been strengthening the coordination and effectiveness of United Nations operational activities worldwide, better known as the “One UN” project, in order to overcome systemic fragmentation and move to a more integrated UN system. In the area of statistics, the United Nations System as a whole, through number of coordination mechanisms, has been playing an instrumental role in establishing and supporting the Global Statistical System. Our work has focused on three main activities: (1) developing statistical standards and methods, in order to ensure data comparability across countries; (2) managing global statistical data, through the collection and dissemination of national data; and (3) strengthening the national statistical

system in member countries, through wide-ranging targeted technical cooperation programmes.

The coordination within the global statistical system has been ensured by the work of the UN Statistical Commission, which is the apex entity of the global statistical system, and other established coordination mechanisms, such as the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) and the Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs (ECESA), with representatives from national and international statistical offices working together to bring coherence to and common approaches in normative, analytical and technical work in all areas of official statistics.

In the area of agriculture statistics, I assure you that with FAO in the lead, the UN Statistical System will work together to ensure a higher level of integration at national and international level.

I am very pleased to see that this conference has brought together experts from many different regions with their diverse talents and experiences. I look forward to your active participation and contribution.

Thank you.