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Report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on agricultural and rural statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2023/325 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on agricultural and rural statistics, which is submitted to the Commission for discussion and decision.

* E/CN.3/2024/1.

Report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on agricultural and rural statistics

I. Introduction

1. This report provides an update on recent developments in agriculture and rural statistics as well as actions and efforts undertaken by FAO in this area since its previous report to the fifty-third Commission in 2022.

2. The report is divided into five main sections. Part II of the Report presents an update on the implementation of FAO's Strategy for the Modernization of Statistics, particularly the development of an integrated governance and quality assurance framework for statistics, big data and geospatial information, as well as the establishment of a centralized Statistical Data Warehouse and data dissemination platform for FAO statistics. Part III updates members on the implementation of the key capacity development programmes in the areas of agriculture and rural statistics and the SDG indicators under FAO custodianship. Part IV provides a summary of the Committee on World Food Security's (CFS) Policy recommendations on Strengthening Collection and Use of Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Data and Related Analysis Tools, and reflects on their implications for the Commission. Part V describes the main achievements and the proposed new areas of work of the UN Committee of Experts on food security, agricultural and rural statistics (UN-CEAG), whereas part VI synthesizes the recommendations of FAO's biennial Regional Commissions on Agricultural Statistics.

II. Progress on the implementation of FAO's Strategy for the Modernization of Statistics

3. At its fifty-first session, FAO informed the Members of Commission on its Strategy for the modernization of FAO statistics. The Strategy is based on the inputs from FAO technical divisions and independent evaluation of FAO's Work in Statistics. The essential content of the Strategy is fully aligned to the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics[1], the Secretary-General's Data Strategy[2] and the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31[3]. It is articulated across four cross-cutting priority action areas, including the priority to (1) integrate and improve the governance of FAO data and statistics and (2) improve the quality of the IT infrastructure supporting data and statistics work. The next paragraphs provide an update on the implementation of these two priority areas.

Development of an integrated governance and quality assurance framework for statistics, Big data and geospatial data

4. In the report of its fifty-third session, the Commission "expressed its appreciation for the efforts of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in implementing an integrated governance structure for data and statistics"[4] and "encouraged the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to develop an integrated quality assurance framework for statistics, big data and geospatial data, in close collaboration with other United Nations agencies and in line with already established recommended international methods and standards"[5].

5. Since its latest report to the Commission, FAO adopted and disseminated a new Statistics and Data Quality Assurance framework (SDQAF)[6]. This framework builds on FAO's first Statistics Quality Assurance Framework (SQAF) promulgated in 2014, which included 14 principles and related best practices to guide and manage quality at the level of FAO's statistical outputs, processes and institutional environment.

1 https://unsceb.org/system-wide-road-map-innovating-united-nations-data-and-statistics
2 https://www.un.org/en/content/datastrategy/index.shtml
3 https://www.fao.org/strategic-framework/en
4 E/CN.3/2022/41 Paragraph 53/122/b
5 E/CN.3/2022/41 Paragraph 53/122/c
6 FAO. 2023. FAO Statistics and Data Quality Assurance Framework. Rome. https://www.fao.org/3/cc6683en/cc6683en.pdf

6. The new SDQAF reflects the fact that several of the 2014 SQAF recommended best practices and new quality assurance mechanisms have already been integrated into FAO's corporate quality assurance culture and consolidated into statistical standards, policies and governance mechanisms.

7. The scope of the new SDQAF was also extended to the use of non-traditional data sources in the production of FAO statistics as well as data-related concerns related to the right to privacy, data protection and intellectual property rights. Among others, it takes into consideration the UNECE's suggested framework for the quality of big data[7], the CCSA's Recommended Practices on the Use of Non-Official Sources in International Statistics[8] and FAO's policies on data protection and intellection property rights. As a result, the new SDQAF includes a new principle on Suitable and trustworthy data sources and new key implementation modalities (previously referred to as best practices) in principles related to cooperation with data providers, data protection and statistical confidentiality, accessibility and clarity, and accuracy and reliability.

8. The endorsement of the SQDAF by the Data Coordination Group, FAO's highest governance and coordination body for data and statistics, in the summer of 2023 was followed by the development of a new FAO standard on the acquisition and use of non-statistical data sources (including big data) for statistical purpose[9]. This Standard aims at better managing the quality of statistics produced by FAO using non-traditional data sources and their associated risks. FAO also reviewed its SDMX-based reference metadata standards for statistical databases[10] to ensure that the use of non-traditional data in FAO statistics are adequately communicated to users. Finally, the corporate tool used to measure and report on the quality of FAO data and statistics was updated to reflect the recommendations and implementation modalities promoted in these key quality assurance documents. In the fall of 2023, close to one hundred FAO statistical processes, databases and information systems were assessed using this tool and the results of the exercise will serve as a basis to report on the quality of FAO data and statistics, identify areas for improvements and continue to strengthen the overall integrated governance for FAO data and statistics.

Development of a Statistical Data Warehouse and a central dissemination platform

9. In the context of its strategy for the Modernization of Statistics, in 2022 FAO launched the project "Modernization and integration of the FAO statistical system", supported by a dedicated FAO Capital Expenditure (CapEX) fund. The project consists of (1) improving its internal data production system (the so-called 'Statistical Working System) and (2) setting up an integrated Statistical Data Warehouse (SDW) with a central dissemination platform as a front-end visible to end-users, which has been called "FAODATA Explorer".

10. The overall objectives of the SDW and FAODATA Explorer are to (1) respond to end-users' and evaluators' requests to make FAO statistical data more accessible, interoperable, comparable and coherent; (2) integrate data from disparate sources into a cost-effective central source and eventually reduce the maintenance costs of multiple IT platforms and technologies; and (3) expand FAO's outreach of statistical data thereby serving an increasing number of data users and providing more services and channels to respond to the demands of a larger audience.

11. The first, current phase of the project (2022-2024) covers the migration of FAO data currently disseminated through FAO's SDG data portal, FAOSTAT and FishSTAT. As a first milestone, the FAODATA Explorer[11] was made public on the 15th of September 2023 with the data series pertaining to the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship, also disseminated in FAOSTAT and the UN Global SDG Database.

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7 UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe). 2014. *A suggested framework for the quality of big data.* Deliverables of the UNECE Big Data Quality Task Team. Geneva, Switzerland. Available at: https://cros-legacy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/Task%20Team%20Big%20Data%20Quality%20Framework_937_unblinded_v1.pdf

8 Committee for the Coordination of Statistics activities. 2013. *Recommended Practices on the Use of Non-Official Sources in International Statistics.* Available at: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/documents/practices.pdf.

9 To be released in 2024

10 https://www.fao.org/3/cb9292en/cb9292en.pdf

11 Available at: https://dataexplorer.fao.org/

12. The FAODATA Explorer is currently a beta version as it is still under development. During this phase, data will be incrementally added, by incorporating existing FAO statistics on food, agriculture, nutrition, fisheries and aquaculture, disseminated through FAOSTAT and, FishSTAT. The subsequent phases of the project aim to integrate other relevant FAO data assets disseminated through other statistical and data dissemination platforms (e.g. AQUASTAT, DAD-IS, VIEWS…). The various platforms will continue to operate in parallel until the completion of the project. This will allow users to provide feedback and get accustomed to the new FAODATA Explorer before some of FAO existing platforms are permanently discounted.

13. The deployment of the SDW and FAODATA Explorer supports FAO's efforts to harmonize and standardize its data and metadata in compliance with FAO's Statistical Data Quality Assurance Framework (SDQAF). It implements and support the development of corporate statistical standards, definitions and classifications, as well as methodological guidelines for the harmonization of the procedures implemented by different statistical processes, all aimed at achieving a more integrated data and statistical system.

14. The project harnessed internationally agreed SDMX standards and related information model and tools to introduce additional efficiencies to FAO business processes. SDMX was used to standardize data and metadata exchange and dissemination, with the aim of increasing the quality of statistics disseminated by FAO, in compliance with the FAO SDQAF.

15. As for IT infrastructure, FAO selected an open-source scalable platform, called dotStatSuite. It is an SDMX native platform, and its development strategy is guided by the Statistical Information System Collaboration Community (SIS-CC)[12] according to the plans set by the community priorities. FAO also uses the SDMX native tool "Meta and Data Manager" to create and manage structural metadata and to prepare SDMX compliant data. This is a free and open-source tool released by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT).

16. The SDW will provide an internal centralized location of FAO statistics that caters to the diversity of FAO's statistical data products and services. It will be a data source able to feed modern interfaces, the SDMX registry, and will incorporate data visualization functionalities to improve end-users' experience. For instance, the SDG data currently disseminated on the FAODATA Explorer feeds a set of interactive visualizations, generated using Tableau software, which are available in the FAO SDG data portal.

17. The SDW and FAODATA Explorer will also open new channels and services of data exchange with national and international statistical organizations and offer the dissemination of interoperable structured data, concepts and classifications that can be harvested through APIs, according to FAIR principles (Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reuse) to global users, UN agencies, the UN global data portal and the global SDG database.

III. Update on the implementation of FAO capacity development interventions

18. The world is still reeling from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and recovery has been slow, hampered by the emergence of new armed conflicts and the escalating climate crisis. With 2023 marking the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, the year has seen a flurry both of reports sounding the alarm bell on the 2030 Agenda's current predicament and of initiatives trying to "rescue" the SDGs. Within this landscape, the High Impact Initiative on Food Systems Transformation, led by FAO (17 September 2023), emphasized the importance of data as a catalyst for agrifood systems transformation. Another High Impact Initiative on the Power of Data highlighted the multiplier effects of investing in data, citing recent analysis by GSPDD showing that every USD 1 invested in data systems creates an average of USD 32 in benefits. In a similar vein, the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF), 18-19 September 2023, recommitted to "increasing the availability of SDG data and closing SDG data gaps at all levels, increasing financing for data and statistics, and enhancing capacity building support to developing countries".

[12] Statistical Information System Collaboration Community: https://siscc.org/who-we-are/

19. As such, over the past two years, FAO has led a number of initiatives aimed at building statistical capacity at national and regional level. These activities contribute toward improving the information base upon which policy decisions are made. They are also reflected in a higher quality of the data supplied by member countries to FAO and made available through the harmonized datasets published by the Organization. Capacity development in food and agriculture statistics happens in four main areas, notably through the 50 by 2030 Initiative; the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics; the support offered to countries on monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals; and the World Census of Agriculture Programme. These are described in the next four sub-sections.

The 50 by 2030 Initiative

20. Launched in September 2018 during the "Data to End Hunger" event on the margins of the high-level segment of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, the “50 by 2030 Initiative”[13] began operating in July 2019. The Initiative seeks to empower and support 50 low- and lower-middle-income countries by 2030 in establishing robust national agricultural data systems. These systems will generate high-quality and timely agricultural survey data to inform policies, enhancing countries' capacity to produce, analyse, and utilize data for decision-making in the agricultural sector. The Initiative holds strategic importance in augmenting the quantity and quality of data available to stakeholders for reporting on agricultural statistics, addressing current data gaps related to national policies and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicators 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.4.1 and 5.a.1.

21. The main foundation of the 50 by 2030 Initiative rests on the implementation of a system of farm-based integrated agricultural surveys that use the methodology developed by FAO through the AGRISurvey program. Countries can implement this modular program over a 10-year cycle, with the option of including a household-rural component based on the World Bank's household-based rural socioeconomic survey program. FAO oversees the implementation of this data production component and ensures linkage with other capacity-building initiatives such as the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics (GSARS) and the World Census of Agriculture programme (see relevant sub-sections below).

22. Complementary efforts focus on building the capacity and motivation of decision-makers to enhance the use of survey data collected by the Initiative, with the overall goal of increasing sustainable agricultural productivity, improving food security and nutrition, and, ultimately, achieving SDG 2. This component focussing on data use is led by IFAD.

23. Alongside survey programs, the Initiative prioritizes critical methodological research for agricultural and rural surveys. The World Bank spearheads this component, developing methodological solutions for the efficient implementation of modular survey systems.

24. The estimated total cost of the Initiative, shared by partner countries, donors, multilateral implementing partners, and the private sector, ranges between USD 500 million and USD 700 million. A 70/30 financing strategy allocates 70 percent of the financing to partner countries through the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) resources for data production, with the remaining 30 percent financed by donors and philanthropic organizations to enable the Initiative to provide much-needed technical assistance for data production and use and promote evidence-informed agriculture. Recently, USD 200 million of IDA funding was mobilized to co-finance relevant data collection activities at the country level.

25. Important partnerships for covering the technical assistance part were also forged from the beginning of implementation. In 2023, the Programme Management Team was able to have three initial donors renew their commitments for an additional three to five years. Over the past two years, implementing partners have achieved significant outputs in collaboration with partner countries:

(i) In terms of data production, the Initiative has been active in ten countries in terms of data collection (Armenia, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Malawi, Nepal, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda), with 25 survey rounds

[13] More information available at: https://www.50x2030.org/

completed. Several countries are now able to compute key SDG indicators and release micro-data sets. Preparation work has also commenced in 19 new countries in 2023 (Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Indonesia, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Togo).

(ii) Regarding data use, four countries (Cambodia, Ethiopia, Georgia, and Uganda) received support through specific trainings (trainings on statistical concepts and data analysis, policy briefs writing, data awareness workshops). Several data use assessments were completed in 2023, and 66 local researchers were also supported through research grant competitions.

26. The Initiative has continued developing global public goods, contributing to improved survey tools and instruments through its three pillars: survey instrument and tools (recall bias in fisheries, mixed-mode surveys, survey management system), survey methodology (integration of a WEMNS -Women's Empowerment Metric for National Statistical Systems- module, new tools for land area measurement, post-harvest crop losses), and data integration (training data for satellite-based estimations, georeferencing protocols).

27. In 2023, the Initiative expanded its partnerships to reach a total of 29 countries. In 2024, the Initiative aims to expand its programme to more countries, with a view to providing steadfast support in developing national agricultural statistical systems. It also plans to strengthen partnerships with existing donors and intensify efforts to reach out to new donors for enhanced resource mobilization.

The Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics (GSARS)

28. The Global Strategy to improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics (GSARS)[14] was developed in 2009 as a blueprint for a coordinated and long-term initiative to address the decline in the agricultural statistical systems of many developing countries during that period. The GSARS was endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) during its 41st session in 2010. It was designed as a long-term process to be implemented in three phases over 15 years to provide a framework for national and international statistical systems that would enable developing countries to produce the necessary data for the 21st century.

29. The implementation of Phase 1 of the GSARS (2012-2018) significantly impacted the agricultural statistical systems of many developing countries and demonstrated its ability to respond to the needs of the evolving international and regional agendas.

30. The second global action plan endorsed by the GSARS's Global Steering Committee in December 2018, builds upon the successful achievements of and lessons learned from Phase 1. The goal is enhancing investment in new methodologies, while at the same time starting technical assistance, and nurturing a new generation of agricultural statisticians. This will translate into enhanced capacity and increased ability to produce and disseminate data at the national level.

31. The second phase of the GSARS (Action Plan for Africa 2021-2024) is being implemented by three partners (FAO, the UN Economic Commission for Africa and PARIS21). This is coordinated by a Global Office hosted by the FAO Statistics Division in Rome. The focus of Phase 2 is on training and technical assistance at national level. The aim is to enhance the practical use of data for both accountability reporting and national policy needs. To meet this objective, the GSARS has taken into account lessons from Phase 1, specifically:

(i) simplifying the governance and entrusting FAO with a more prominent role for providing direct technical assistance at country level to increase efficiency;

(ii) adopting a modular approach which breaks GSARS activities into "modules" to make donor engagement more feasible and better tailor partner responsibilities to their comparative advantages;

[14] More information available at: https://www.fao.org/in-action/global-strategy-agricultural-statistics/en

(iii) scaling back in terms of geographic focus to prioritize use of outputs at national level and enhance the sustainability of the capacity built;

(iv) attachment of data use support to particular use cases (for example the CAADP Biennial Reviews and SDG 2) and collaboration with key partners on these use cases;

(v) enhanced ownership of the work at a regional and national level through capacity development activities.

32. To maximize efficiency in data collection, the Action Plan for Africa 2021-2024 targets five main issues in 25 African countries. These countries are eligible to participate in the 50 by 2030 Initiative (see preceding sub-section), and the GSARS contributes to building the required capacity on the following five issues:

(i) SPARS (Strategic plans for Agricultural and Rural Statistics) are designed at country level and endorsed by national authorities;

(ii) Agricultural statistical units are equipped with a) human resource policies that allow them to hire, develop and retain the skilled workforces they need to deliver their missions, and b) leadership and communication skills.

(iii) Young agricultural statisticians in countries are offered scholarships at master's level and serve in the national statistical system once the training is completed. Theoretical knowledge and skills in agricultural statistics should be offered to staff of national agencies for potentially increasing the critical mass of agricultural statisticians which is missing.

(iv) Countries are prepared to engage rapidly in the administration of agricultural surveys through the provision of targeted technical assistance on relevant topics.

(v) Countries eligible to join 50 by 2030 Initiative are prepared to acquire the pivotal technical capacities to process, analyse, and disseminate data according to the best standards and understand the information by producing performance indicators (national, SDG and CAADP indicators).

33. Since the beginning of the project, implementing partners have achieved significant outputs in collaboration with partner countries. The UN Economic Commission for Africa has granted 50 scholarships to young statisticians and organized two trainings for trainers on agricultural statistics methodologies. PARIS21 organised successful trainings for top and middle – level managers on HR policies and on strengthening leadership and communication skills in statistical agencies; as well as trainings on identifying data gaps and facilitating data planning in the SPARS process using the ADAPT tool.

34. FAO provided trainings and technical assistance for preparation of SPARS in seven countries. In-country technical assistance on the use of cost-effective methods, Master Sampling Frames, data processing and analysis, data dissemination, compilation of national, SDG and CAADP indicators and Food Balance Sheets has been provided by FAO to all 25 African beneficiary countries, according to their priority needs.

35. In 2024, the GSARS Phase 2 aims to expand the trainings and information sharing at regional and Continental levels, respectively with African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and STATAFRIC. It also plans to strengthen partnerships with existing donors and reach out to new donors for enhanced resource mobilization for the continuation of the programme and potential expansion to other geographical areas.

Support to countries on Sustainable Development Goal reporting

36. Over the past two years, FAO has continued supporting countries report on the 21 SDG indicators under its custodianship. While the two preceding major statistical capacity development programmes in this part of the report focus on a small subset of the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship, FAO has, in parallel, been implementing a comprehensive initiative on Improving country data for monitoring SDG achievements and informing policy decisions. Active since 2019 and with an expected closing date of 31 December 2023, this programme's main objectives have been to provide additional methods, guidance and tools to assist countries in producing SDG underlying data on SDG indicators under FAO custodianship; develop the capacities of the national institutions responsible for collecting and computing the SDG indicators; and develop the capacities of

national institutions for improved dissemination, communication, and use of SDG data in policy analysis and formulation.

37. Over the past two years, FAO continued supporting countries in their efforts related to SDG monitoring and reporting, with a particular focus on those indicators with a relatively low country coverage. To this end, FAO provide comprehensive training and technical assistance, with a view to enabling country experts to adeptly collect, compile, and report SDG indicators. Most recently, for example, capacity development support was provided to three African countries and two Central Asian countries in producing SDG indicators 2.3.1/2.3.2 (productivity and incomes of small-scale producers) and 5.a.1 (women's access to land), whereas four countries in different regions received technical assistance in the compilation of indicator 2.4.1 (sustainable agriculture). Twelve Pacific SIDS countries participated in a training workshop covering all four "farm-survey based" indicators (2.3.1/2.3.2, 2.4.1 and 5.a.1). Targeted technical assistance on indicator 5.a.1 was also provided to seven countries across Africa, Asia and Oceania. FAO further provided training to 14 Arab countries on indicator 2.a.1 (government expenditures in agriculture), whereas training was provided on indicators 6.4.1/6.4.2 (water use efficiency and water stress) to six African, 15 Arab, and 13 Latin American and Caribbean countries. On indicator 5.a.2 (protection of women's land rights), FAO provided technical support to 9 countries as well as organized trainings for seven Central Asian and 21 MENA countries. On indicator 12.3.1.a (food losses) – a particularly complex indicator requiring measuring food losses along the key stages of the value chain – FAO has enlisted the support of national consultants in four countries in Latin America, one in Africa and two in Asia to spearhead technical assistance efforts.

38. As part of its overall statistical capacity development efforts, FAO continues to pioneer innovative learning methodologies and delivery solutions. In November 2023, the cumulative number of registered learners for the 16 e-learning courses on the SDG indicators under FAO custodianship (available in 47 additional language versions) stood at 36,475. Of these, 3,536 learners have earned a "digital badge", confirming that they had successfully completed the training. Besides the FAO e-learning Academy, the suite of FAO e-learning courses on SDG indicators also features prominently in a number of external platforms, such as UN SDG: Learn, hosted by UNITAR and UNSSC; the SDG Monitoring and Reporting Toolkit for UN County Teams, hosted by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat; and the SDG Academy hosted by SDSN.

39. Supported by these wide arrays of complementary statistical capacity development initiatives, the average reporting rate on the SDG indicators under FAO custodianship has continued to rise since the most recent report of FAO to the Commission, increasing from 42 per cent in 2019, to 53.7 per cent in 2021, and then again to 62.5 percent in 2023. As such, in 2023, for the first time, countries were able to report, on average, on over three fifths of the 21 indicators under FAO custodianship.

40. In the past two years, FAO has invested in two additional major areas of methodological support for SDG monitoring: the development of guidelines for data disaggregation and the development of a statistical progress assessment method for SDG Goals and targets. With regard to the first area, FAO has supported the implementation of the guidelines on data disaggregation for SDG indicators that it developed in 2021 and first reported in the preceding report to the Commission. As a result, in 2022, data disaggregation activities on SDG indicator 2.1.2 were initiated with two countries, and a set of training materials on data disaggregation and small area estimation for SDG indicators based on survey data was developed, including a module on indicator 2.1.2. The training material has been used to deliver two virtual trainings and thereby train national staff of six countries from Asia and Africa on direct and indirect estimation methods for SDG indicators based on survey data.

41. In the area of statistical progress assessment, FAO played an active role in the UN Task Team on the SDG Progress Chart. However, to date, such efforts has focussed on the development of methods for statistically assessing progress at individual indicator level, rather than at goal and target level. While various approaches have been proposed by different organizations, such as UNESCWA, OIC, Eurostat, the OECD and SDSN, these may be limited in scope with respect to geographic areas, or the coverage of the universally adopted SDG indicators and targets.

42. To fill this gap, in 2023 FAO developed a new method for producing a goal- and target-level assessment[15]. With the year 2023 having marked the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, and considering the growing need to more accurately assess progress towards the SDGs as we move toward the finish line, FAO invites the international statistical community to consider incorporating this method in the SDG Progress Chart, and, by extension, the global and national SDG progress reports.

The World Programme for the Census of Agriculture (WCA)

43. The World Programme for the Census of Agriculture Programme continues to be one of FAO's key statistical capacity development programmes. It aims to provide guidelines, training and country-level assistance to strengthen the knowledge and technical skills of national staff in charge of planning and conducting agricultural censuses and, therefore, support the data production, dissemination and use of internationally comparable figures on variables defining the structure of agriculture.

44. Since its latest report to the Commission, FAO has been proactively monitoring, reviewing and documenting censuses of agriculture conducted under the current WCA 2020 round (2016-2025). This work involves the preparation of Metadata Reviews (MRs), Table with Main Results (TMRs), and the collection of census reports and materials. These documents are regularly posted on FAO's website for countries to consult[16].

45. FAO has also continued to provide technical assistance at the national level to the implementation of agriculture censuses, through projects and ad-hoc requests. FAO provided online and in situ technical assistance to an average of 78 countries per year in 2022 and 2023. Interventions were conducted in different countries of Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Pacific. It is expected that about 150 countries and territories will conduct a census of agriculture in the WCA 2020 round, compared to the record 127 observed in the WCA 2010 round.

46. In 2022, FAO launched a new domain in FAOSTAT, which disseminated structural agricultural data gathered from the last three completed WCA rounds (1990, 2000 and 2010). Some of the data, such as the number and size of agricultural holdings, were available over longer time series, starting as early as from the WCA 1930. Apart from the number and size of holdings, the new domain contains data such as holder gender, land tenure, legal status of holders, farm labour, among others. The domain aims to provide a one stop-shop for agricultural structural data.

47. Finally, every 10 years FAO revises the countries' experiences and lessons learnt on agricultural censuses. The outcome of this exercise is published and disseminated as revised guidelines on agricultural censuses, that include improved census methodologies. FAO is currently in the process of preparing the guidelines for the eleventh census round, the WCA 2030, which will cover the period 2026-2035.

48. The preparation of the WCA 2030 guidelines is based on a review of countries' experiences under the WCA 2020 round, and on a wide consultations of FAO technical divisions and member countries. The reviews and consultations allow the recognition of new and emerging trends and requirements, which in turn guide the preparation of the new WCA 2030. While the preparation of the Guideline is still underway, the approach that will be followed entails due consideration of emerging themes impacting global agriculture such as climate change, and the use of new technologies and innovations.

49. At the same time, the WCA will continue to play a key role in the collection of structural statistics of agriculture, and to provide the baseline and frame for other agricultural surveys. Censuses provide frames for variables collected with high frequency, such as agricultural production or prices; for variables that are collected with an intermediate frequency, such as farm labour, or production methods; and also for inter-censual surveys on structural variables. In undertaking the review of the WCA 2030, special attention will be paid to identifying and establishing the relevance and coherence of the objectives of data collection.

[15] Methods available at: https://www.fao.org/3/cc7088en/online/cc7088en.html#/annex
[16] More information available at: https://www.fao.org/world-census-agriculture/wcarounds/wca2020/countries2020/en/

50. A concept note, table of contents and work plan have already been completed; whereas an internal consultation, a consultation with countries and experts and the preparation of the first draft are ongoing and will be completed by early to mid-2024. Subsequently, during the period July – September 2024 a second draft will be prepared based on comments received, whereas in November 2024 an international Expert Review meeting (involving the UN Committee of Experts on Food security, agriculture and rural statistics as described in Part V of the report) will be organized to discuss the second draft. Following this meeting, a third draft will be prepared by early 2025, for its endorsement by the Commission in its 56th session. The manuscript will hence be finalized with appropriate editing and layout and publishing in English by late 2025. Translation into other UN languages and regional dissemination workshops of the new WCA 2030 guidelines will follow from 2026 onward.

IV. Committee on World Food Security's (CFS) Policy recommendations on Strengthening Collection and Use of Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Data and Related Analysis Tools and their implications for the Statistical Commission

51. The CFS is the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together to ensure Food Security and Nutrition for all. It ultimately reports to the General Assembly of the United Nations through the Conference and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). At its 46th session, the CFS adopted its Programme of Work for the period 2020-2023[17]. This programme included a workstream on *data collection and analysis tools* as a recognition of the central role that relevant, timely and granular data play in strengthening a virtuous process of evidence-based policy making to eradicate hunger and all forms of malnutrition. It constituted the first time that this Committee included data in its programme of work in its 50 years of history.

52. The primary objective of the workstream on Data Collection and Analysis tools was set to develop actionable recommendations that will strengthen the capacity of countries to collect, analyze and use quality data to improve critical decision making around food security and nutrition policies as well as to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

53. As an outcome, in October 2023, during the Committee on World Food Security's (CFS) 51st Plenary Session, member countries endorsed the *Policy Recommendations on Strengthening Collection and Use of Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Data and Related Analysis Tools to improve decision-making in support of the progressive realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the context of National Food Security*[18]. These policy recommendations are the result of a multi-year and inclusive process, informed by the CFS High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE-FSN) Report 17 "Data Collection and Analysis Tools for Food Security and Nutrition: towards enhancing effective, inclusive, evidence-informed decision making" (2022)[19]. The resulting policy recommendations document is a call for action targeting different range of stakeholders with the objective of strengthening FSN data systems for improved decision-making, for which the Commission and its Members can play a crucial role.

54. First, a key challenge recognized by the CFS in the policy recommendations is the need for a more systemic view of FSN data, which are often not standardized and fragmented across different international agencies, government sectors, public and private institutions (para. 9). Therefore, the recommendations promote collaboration among parties on the harmonization and sharing of FSN data to improve its quality and utility. In particular, "governments, international organizations and their regional bodies are encouraged to consider the need of addressing FSN statistics as a potential new domain within the United Nations Statistical Commission…" (para 4.b). International organizations are also "encouraged to provide guidance to countries […] outlining a minimum

[17] Available at https://www.fao.org/3/na703en/na703en.pdf
[18] Available at: https://www.fao.org/cfs/workingspace/workstreams/data-workstream/en/
[19] HLPE. 2022. *Data collection and analysis tools for food security and nutrition: towards enhancing effective, inclusive, evidence-informed, decision making*. A report by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome. Available at: https://www.fao.org/cfs/workingspace/workstreams/data-workstream/en/

set of core FSN data, with respective recommended methodologies and indicators, to help countries identify priorities when collecting FSN data" (para 2.d).

55. The recommendations also call for countries and international organizations to work together to find solutions to the constraints that hamper the production and use of FSN data by building capacities and raising awareness, as well as by closing data gaps to effectively guide responsible action and inform policymaking, especially timely and sufficiently granular data on peoples' ability to produce and access food, on food and nutrient consumption, and on nutritional status, while recognizing the importance of safeguarding privacy (para. 6). In this sense, different type of gaps affects FSN statistics: i) in specific domains, such as the gaps on data about diets and the quality of diets; ii) geographically, as there are entire regions of the world where data availability and access are severely limited; iii) and group-specific, such as data disaggregated by sex and age, or data for small-scale food producers. The Commission and its Members, under its work on the new proposed FSN data domains, could work together to identify solutions to fill these gaps.

56. CFS also emphasizes the need to alleviate the financial constraints that low and lower-middle income countries face, which prevent them from investing in data. The recommendation calls for increasing and sustaining investment of FSN data, while optimizing and/or repurposing current resources, to improve decision-making. In this way, governments should strive to elaborate national plans to define priorities for FSN data collection and analysis, to be integrated in their national strategies for the development of statistics, if available, and to improve and optimize existing national FSN data systems (para 2.b). Together with the international donor community and International Organizations, governments are called to coordinate and scale up investments aimed to overcome the data gaps.

57. Finally, the recommendations address the objective of defining governance frameworks for the different types of data in a productive way towards strengthening coherent and reliable FSN data systems at the country and global level. In this sense, Governments are encouraged to include FSN data within national statistical and other relevant data systems to promote a broader national data governance in a way that is consistent with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (UNFPOS), and informed by emerging international multilateral discussion on data governance frameworks. Also, the private sector, civil society, academia and philanthropic foundations are encouraged to share FSN data and analytics for the public good with governments and public institutions, and among each other, for policy and research purposes, respecting confidentiality and data privacy, and exploring mechanisms to make their FSN data more promptly and widely available, while working to ensure proper protection of the data.

58. The endorsement of these recommendations marks a significant milestone, promoting the discussion on FSN data at the international level to raise awareness and foster greater use of FSN data in policies to end hunger and enabling statisticians to improve collaboration and develop a systemic view of data production, overcoming fragmentation in favour of more harmonized data systems. Therefore, FAO supports these recommendations, and, as the mandated agency of the United Nations to achieve food security and promoting healthy diets for all, is fully committed on their implementation. Following the call of the CFS, FAO also calls the Commission and its Members to do the same and take collective actions to support their implementation.

59. To this end and in line with Member countries' endorsement of CFS Policy Recommendation para 4.b, FAO and other relevant international organizations (including WHO and UNICEF) propose the immediate creation of the FSN Statistical Domain under the Statistical Commission, with the aim of catalysing higher and more focused attention on this issue and better coordinating the efforts and proposed actions for addressing the challenges as outlined in the policy recommendations. For this new domain, FAO, WHO and UNICEF could jointly report to the Commission every two years or as deemed appropriate. It is also proposed to give a particular role to the UN Committee of Experts on food security, agriculture and rural statistics in the implementation of para 2.d of the CFS recommendations (see UN-CEAG proposed programme of work 2024-2027 in Part V below).

V. Report on the work of the UN Committee of Experts on Food Security, Agriculture and Rural Statistics

60. At its fifty-first session, the Statistical Commission endorsed the terms of reference and the 2020–2023 programme of work (PoW) of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Food Security, Agricultural and Rural Statistics (UN-CEAG)[20]. At the fifty-third session, the Committee chaired by Mexico reported for the first time on progress made in the implementation of this programme of work, which focuses on three topics: (a) improvement of methods for food security and food consumption measurement; (b) national quality assurance frameworks for agricultural statistics; and (c) the use of Earth observation data for agricultural statistics. As the 2020-2023 PoW has come to an end, this year report of the UN-CEAG focuses on the main deliverables and achievement of the group since the fifty-third session and on the proposed areas of work for the period 2024-2027.

Improvement of methods for food security and food consumption measurement

61. The final deliverable of the 2020-23 PoW developed under the aegis of UN-CEAG Task Team of food security and food consumption measurement is the guidelines *"Processing food consumption data from HCES - Guidelines for countries collecting data in line with the United Nations Statistical Commission-endorsed guidelines on food data collection in HCES"*, provided as background document to this report. It was prepared under the chair of the task team (Statistics Norway) by a team of experts on food security and consumption statistics from Statistics Norway, the World Bank, FAO and SPC with several rounds of consultation with a large group of experts from national statistical offices, international organisations and academia.

62. The guidelines describe how to process data collected in the food consumption modules of household consumption and expenditure surveys (HCES). They build on the guidelines *Food Data Collection in Household Consumption and Expenditure Surveys: Guidelines for Low- and Middle-Income Countries*[21], endorsed by the Commission at its forty-ninth session[22].

63. Different HCES data users have different priorities in processing the data. When these users process the data independently of each other, it may lead to inconsistent results despite being generated from the same survey. It is also inefficient and costly. Thus, the guidelines intend to provide countries with standard methods to follow when preparing their food data that so that it is readily available as input for national accounts, Consumer Price Index, poverty and food security analysis. The guidelines draw on published and unpublished material, presenting the main steps of the process that go from raw data as collected to distribution of quantities (such as grams), kilocalories and monetary value of all food consumed.

64. A first version of the guidelines was discussed during a workshop held in Rome in October 2022 with members of the UN-CEAG group and COMESA countries. Following the workshop, a new version of the Guidelines was drafted and circulated for comments to the UN-CEAG in July 2023. A revised version of the guidelines including comments received from UN-CEAG experts was then circulated to Statistical Offices in 206 countries and territories from low to high income countries. NSOs were requested to provide their comments and fill in an online questionnaire to collect additional input on the information collected in their survey and on the potential usefulness of the guidelines.

65. Seventy NSOs filled the questionnaire of which 24 sent their comments to the Secretariat. Out of the 24 NSOs who responded, 16 acknowledged the Guidelines and provided no substantive comment. The comments received during the global consultation were incorporated in the document when relevant. A summary of the responses received during the consultation and how comments to the guidelines were addressed in the final document is provided as background document to this report. The UN-CEAG seeks the Commission's

[20] E/2020/24-E/CN.3/2020/37 Paragraph 51/111/e

[21] Food Data Collection in Household Consumption and Expenditure Surveys : Guidelines for Low- and Middle-Income Countries (English). LSMS Guidebook Washington, D.C: World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/793601587034078451/Food-Data-Collection-in-Household-Consumption-and-Expenditure-Surveys-Guidelines-for-Low-and-Middle-Income-Countries

[22] E/2018/24-E/CN.3/2018/37, decision 49/112, para. (e)

endorsement of these Guidelines and invites Members to encourage their implementation to improve the quality and comparability of statistics produced from HCES food consumption data.

Use of EO data for agricultural statistics

66. The Joint Task Team on Earth Observation data for Agricultural Statistics created under the umbrella of both the UN-CEAG and the UN Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics (UN-CEBD) supports countries through the provision of methods, tools and training on the use of Earth Observation (EO) data for estimating crop acreage and crop yield and producing thematic crop maps. The joint task team shares experience and technical advice on the key components of earth observation analysis protocols such as i) optimization of in-situ field survey design, ii) efficient preprocessing of satellite imagery, iii) extraction of pheno-spectral features, iv) use of different classification algorithms, v) validation of results. Lastly, the joint task team develops solutions for the efficient sharing of EO data and tools and develops EO training curricula and training apps using free and open data sources.

67. In 2022-2023, the joint task team has continued its work on a series of key use cases through collaborations with countries to optimize the design of field surveys and data georeferencing protocols, with a view to increasing the accuracy of crop type maps developed using in-situ data. For instance, in Senegal and Mali, experimental protocols were or are being tested so as to provide recommendations on how to optimize in-situ data collection, improve the quality of crop type maps, and extract crop acreage and crop yield.

68. In Rwanda, a pilot project was implemented in collaboration with Digital Earth Africa and Planet teams, to produce a wall-to-wall map of crop field boundaries at national level. In Ecuador and in Cameroon, the integration of EO data with process-based crop growth modelling for the forecasting of crop yield was piloted. The adopted crop model, SALUS (Systems Approach to Land Use Sustainability), developed by Michigan State University, simulates the daily response of crop growth to soil, climate and management factors. It was trained using crop yield time series data provided by the countries at national and district level, and geospatial data including soil, topography, NDVI, daily soil temperature, solar radiance, and precipitation. Results consisted in national crop-specific yield maps (e.g. rice and maize for Ecuador) at 10 meters resolution. In both countries, the predicted crop yields were very accurate compared to official reports and evaluations by national counterparts.

69. In Mexico, INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía) is using its Internal Data Cube containing analysis-ready data from Landsat and Sentinel sensors, with Machine learning algorithms to map the cropland across the whole country (known as Agricultural frontier), using different training data sets. The most recent exercise was performed in 2022 in concomitance with the implementation of the Agricultural Census 2022. The outputs of the new Census will be used to validate and further improve the results of the Agricultural frontier estimates produced using EO data.

70. In terms of outreach and capacity development efforts, the joint task team participated in the Seminar on EO for Agricultural statistics with the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) of China, and in the 9th International Conference on Agricultural Statistics, sharing main achievements in training, data sharing and applications of EO in different countries.

71. In support of Regional Hubs under the UN-CEBD, the joint task team participated in the advisory meetings of the Brazilian regional Hub to strengthen the organization and functionality of the center. It also participated in the kick-off meeting with China's Regional Hub and contributed to a webinar on EO applications for agricultural statistics. Members of the joint task team will also participate as members in the International Expert Committee on remote sensing for agriculture statistics created to advise China's Global Big Data Hub and build synergies on relevant activities.

Development of national quality assurance frameworks for agricultural statistics

72. Since UN-CEAG's latest report to the Commission, experts of the UN-CEAG task team on the development of national quality assurance frameworks (NQAF) for agriculture statistics finalized the development, pilot testing and supporting documents of NQAFs meant to help assess the quality of three

agriculture statistics subdomains: (a) crops and livestock production statistics; (b) statistics on producers' prices of agriculture commodities; and, (c) statistics on land used for agriculture purposes.

73. These frameworks were developed based on the notion that the quality assessment of food and agriculture statistics requires tailored tools, that compared to general data quality standards, are more effective and capable of identifying strengths and weaknesses. They consist of domain-specific self-assessment quality checklists, with corresponding supporting material to facilitate the self-assessment and quality reporting exercise.

74. The IMF DQAF and UN NQAF (2019 edition) inspired the work. In particular, the proposed self-assessment checklists share the same structure as that of the UN NQAF, with the exception of levels related to the management of the whole NSS (level A of UN NQAF) and the management of institutional environment within each national statistical agency (B). The section of the checklist concerning the statistics production process (level C) focuses on the key phases needed for obtaining the statistics in the considered sub-domain, using the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM, v. 5.1) as a general reference. Compliance with sound methodologies is assessed in terms of implementation of recognized international standards and manuals, developed or promoted by FAO.

75. The self-assessment checklists are designed to be compiled by the officer(s) in charge of the division producing the targeted statistics. They include both informative and assessment questions. Responses to assessment questions can then be scored[23] and combined to obtain quality measures by NQAF levels, main phases of the statistics production process, and quality dimensions.

76. Quality reports can then be produced, summarizing the results according to a four-point rating scale[24] and identifying the strengths, weaknesses and proposed improvement actions to address the major weaknesses.

77. All the tools and procedures were developed under the guidance of FAO experts, with the active contribution of task team members. A series of pilot studies were carried out to test the various checklists and implementation procedures.

78. The proposed self-assessment checklists represent a good compromise for evaluating compliance to both general quality principles as well as to standards and guidelines specific to domain-specific statistics. They are an excellent starting point for improving key elements of the national statistical production process in a given sub-domain or as a general reference in designing ex-novo the statistical process itself. They also provide a valid reference for future work aimed at developing checklists in other sub-domains of agriculture statistics not yet covered.

Development of UN-CEAG Programme of Work 2024-27

79. At the time of writing this report, the Committee is in the process of developing its Programme of Work 2024-27. UN-CEAG Members are exploring the possibility of focusing on three areas of work: (a) food security and nutrition statistics; (b) the World Programme of the Census of Agriculture 2030, and (b) EO data for agricultural statistics and disaster impact monitoring and reduction (together with the UN-CEBD).

80. The focus of the first area of work on food security and nutrition statistics would be the implementation of some of CFS recommendations presented in Section IV of this report. The key outputs of the task team would be to (1) propose a multilaterally agreed definition of Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Data, (2) establish a

23 For example, when applicable, practices that are fully implemented receives a score of 1; those partially implemented a score of 0.5; and those not implemented a score of 0.

24 The 4-point rating scale is assigned follow: average scores > 0.80 receive a score of "O - practice observed" indicating that the current practices generally meet internationally accepted best practices/guidelines without any significant deficiency; average scores > 0.50 and <= 0.80 receive a score of "LO - practice largely observed" indicating some minor departures from internationally accepted best practices/guidelines; average scores >= 0.20 and <= 0.50 receive a score of "LNO - Practice largely not observed" indicating significant departures from internationally accepted best practices/guidelines which will need the urgent implementation of improvement actions; and, average scores < 0.20 receive a score of "NO - Practice not observed" indicating that the internationally accepted best practices/guidelines are not met.

minimum set of core FSN data with references to their respective recommended methodologies and indicators, and (3) develop guidance to help countries prioritize the collection of relevant FSN data.

81. The second proposed area of work could focus on the 2030 Round of the World Census of Agriculture (WCA). A dedicated UN-CEAG task team could support the development of FAO Guidelines on the WCA 2030, to be endorsed by the Commission at its fifty-six session (as described in the previous section of the report).

82. Finally, the UN-CEAG proposes to continue its work on the use of EO data for agricultural statistics in collaboration with the UN-CEBD. The joint task team is discussing the possibility of investigating methods and tools for (1) the integrated use of Radar and Optical satellite images to produce crop type and crop yield maps and monitor and reduce disaster impacts; (2) the use of drones to collect in-situ data; (3) the enhancement of time series analysis of satellite images for the development of country-level and global-level Satellite Image Data Cubes; and (4) the data protection and sharing framework for in-situ data. The joint task team also aims to make data, tools and information generated in its last programme of work more accessible to NSOs and statistical systems. Finally, the group suggests contributing to the improvement of EO training curricula.

VI. Report on FAO Regional Commissions on Agricultural Statistics

The FAO-OAS/CIE-IICA Working Group on Agricultural and Livestock Statistics for Latin America and the Caribbean

83. The 31st Session of the FAO-OEA/CIE-IICA Working Group on Agricultural and Livestock Statistics for Latin America and the Caribbean convened from March 28 to March 30, 2023, in a hybrid format, hosted by the National Institute of Statistics of Chile. The event brought together approximately 40 participants, including delegates and observers, representing 29 countries across the region. This gathering was not just a routine meeting but a platform where strategic recommendations were put forward, aimed at revitalizing the working group and fostering collaboration with other regional initiatives.

84. One of the most significant recommendations is to transition from the current name of the group, the FAO/OEA-CIE/IICA Working Group on Agricultural and Livestock Statistics for Latin America, to the Latin American and the Caribbean Commission for Agricultural Statistics (LACCAS). This proposed change aims to align the working group with similar bodies in Africa (AFCAS) and Asia (APCAS). Furthermore, it sought to better convey the strategic significance of the recommendations and update the list of participating institutions, acknowledging that CIE no longer exist, and OEA is no longer engaged in the initiative.

85. Another crucial recommendation focuses on the establishment of a working group on agricultural statistics within the framework of the Statistical Conference of the Americas (CEA). This proposed working group has a specific mission: to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the utilization of multiple frame sampling designs for agricultural surveys. The results of this assessment will then serve as a foundation for developing projects, tools, and south-south cooperation initiatives, all geared towards enhancing the region's capacity to create, implement, and maintain area frames for national agricultural surveys.

86. To bolster collaboration and information exchange between the working group and the CEA, another recommendation called for the creation of a permanent mechanism to facilitate the systematic reporting of the working group's activities to the CEA. This will help unlock opportunities for synergies, allow the endorsement of recommendations by heads of National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and elevate the prominence of agricultural statistics within the broader context of the CEA.

87. Recognizing the pressing need for technical support and training in the region, the group put forward recommendations for FAO's involvement. These recommendations encompassed several vital areas, including the enhancement of administrative registers for agricultural statistics, improved methods for measuring food losses, and the comprehensive compilation of food balance sheets. By addressing these areas, FAO would contribute to more accurate and informed agricultural policymaking in the region.

88. Moreover, the group urged FAO to initiate a series of webinars to foster regular information exchange among countries. These webinars will focus on critical topics such as geospatial data collection in agricultural surveys, the implementation of AGRISurvey methodology, the integration of SDG2 indicators into national agricultural surveys, resource mobilization strategies, and more. This initiative is aimed to create a vibrant platform for knowledge-sharing among countries, promoting best practices and innovative approaches in the field of agricultural statistics.

The African Commission on Agricultural Statistics

89. The Twenty-eighth Session of the African Commission on Agricultural Statistics (AFCAS) convened in-person in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 4-8 December 2023. At the time of writing this report, the AFCAS had not taken place. As a result, its main conclusions and recommendations are provided to the Commission as background document.

VII. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

90. **The Commission is invited to:**

a. Express its views on the progress with the implementation of FAO's Strategy for the Modernization of Statistics;

b. Express its views on the Committee on World Food Security's (CFS) Policy Recommendations on Strengthening Collection and Use of Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Data and Related Analysis Tools;

c. Approve the creation of a new data domain on food security and nutrition statistics under the Statistical Commission;

d. Endorse the Guidelines on Processing Food Data from Household Consumption and Expenditure Surveys;

e. Express its views on the work programme of United Nations Committee of Experts on food security, agricultural and rural statistics; and

f. Take note of the Recommendations recently formulated by the Regional Commissions on Agricultural Statistics