

## The State of Agricultural Statistics and New Challenges

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**Abstract:** Thanks to the advances in information technology the quantity of statistical data compiled, processed and disseminated has grown significantly over the past decade. In addition to the increased volume of statistics disseminated by the primary suppliers, we observe an even faster growing dissemination of re-packaged and re-processed data by secondary national and international suppliers.

It is difficult to say the same for the quality of these statistics when we consider the six dimensions of quality, namely relevance, reliability, comparability, consistency, accessibility and timeliness. We observe that achievements have been greater in some dimensions (such as timeliness and accessibility), modest in some (such as consistency, relevance) and less so in others (such as reliability, comparability). This picture which is valid for statistics in general is also valid for agricultural statistics.

Agricultural statistics is probably one of the most neglected and taken for granted domains both at the national and international levels. This has partly been the result of the diminishing priority given to agriculture as an engine of growth and partly due to the apparent diminishing share of agriculture as an economic entity. Furthermore, the supply of agricultural statistics has not adapted itself to the changing demands of users; hence despite its growing volume the gap between supply and demand for agricultural statistics has been widening.

As others, agricultural statistics can be improved significantly by responding better to new user demands such as vertical integration from producers to consumers, horizontal integration between agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, spatial integration from farm to sub national to national to international, and integration of real and monetary dimensions.

The key to these integrations and to harvesting the associated value added is the use of international standards, norms, definitions, and classifications. As markets for statistics have not developed and as they are still considered as free public goods, there is an important role for the international organizations to play in coordination, capacity building, and standards setting for the compilation, dissemination, and exchange of statistics without limiting their flexibility to adapt to national needs. As the economies are globalizing so are the statistics which are the reflections of such developments. The value added in reflecting the total picture can not be realized if the parts are not functioning simultaneously. Better agricultural statistics depends on better statistics overall and vice-versa.