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PARALLEL RESPONSIBILITIES OF INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL
STATISTICAL OFFICES AND MINISTRIES OF AGRICULTURE,
THEIR COOPERATION AND SOLVING COMMON PROBLEMS

Invited paper submitted by Eurostat*

Summary

The European System of Agricultural Statistics (ESAS) and its main actors are described. How can this system be "maintained" with its high degree of "subsidiarity" and its mixture of Community surveys and harmonised national data, only partially under legal cover? How can future data needs be defined? How can basic problems like missing data and the use of administrative information be tackled in an environment of 15 Member States having to integrate the agricultural statistics of 11 Candidate Countries?

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I. Introduction

1. The collection of agricultural statistics (from the latin "statisticum": which refers to the State) has for a long time held the attention of monarchs pre-occupied with knowing their power. While remembering the existence of an agricultural census in China in 2200BC, the more recent work of Vauban in 1686 and de Lavoisier in 1784 fix the start of agricultural statistics by sampling in Europe (Tassi, 1988).

2. At the outset the need to assure the feeding of the population, and by that the war effort, motivated the early applications. Today, our farmers although less numerous and with less influence on the GDP, still hold the attention of the authorities. Modern technology and production economies increase environmental risks and oblige the political decision-makers to foresee excesses, generating potential conflicts with our principal export competitors.

3. The current reorientation of agricultural support, towards rural development and a sustainable production better respecting the environment and the health of consumers, reinforces the need for information on the sector, covering both the operation of the current system and monitoring its developments.

4. The resulting problem is thus that of directing the development of statistics for which the present justification rests on needs other than those which led to the formation of the initial statistical services in the 19th century. This against a background of reductions in resources, integration of agriculture and environment, technical developments in collecting data (telematics, satellite earth observations, computing power) as well as the globalisation of the need for information. There has to be an overall reflection, in which the objectives and the role of the players (region, Member State and Union) can be redefined with the objective of a better public service.

5. We try in the following to give you some insights into the system of EU agricultural statistics :

- How does this complex system work, a system comprising the European Commission and various statistical services (in Ministries of Agriculture and National Statistical Institutes) in 15 Member States with different organizational structures and historical backgrounds ?
- How can such a system provide comparable basic data of good quality for all those interested and that at reasonable costs ?
- How can the present system be further developed and adjusted ?¹

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the present system and how can they be overcome?

II. An outline of the European System of Agricultural Statistics (ESAS)

A. The basic principles of official EU statistics

6. In recent legal texts² on official EU statistics "Community statistics" are defined as "quantitative, aggregated and representative information taken from the collection and systematic processing of data produced by the national authorities and the Community authorities" (Eurostat). The "technical autonomy" of Eurostat within its area of competence is underlined, especially with view to the selection of scientific techniques, definitions and methodologies best suited to the attainment of the principles and objectives. A Community statistical program adopted by the Council defines the approaches, the main fields and the objectives of the statistical actions. This five-year framework program is executed on the basis of annual work programs in close cooperation with Member States. National and Community authorities are - at their level - responsible for the production of Community statistics in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity.

7. The basic principles of Community statistics are :

- "Impartiality" is an objective and independent manner of producing Community statistics, free from any pressure from political or other interest groups. It implies the availability of statistics, with a minimum delay, to all users.
- "Reliability" is the characteristic of Community statistics to reflect as faithfully as possible the reality which they are designed to represent. Any information on the coverage, methodology, procedures and sources will also improve data reliability.
- "Relevance" shall mean that the production of Community statistics is a function of clearly defined requirements determined by the Community objectives. Data collection should be limited to what is necessary for attaining the desired results.
- "Cost-effectiveness" shall mean the optimum use of all available resources and the minimization of the burden on respondents.
- "Statistical confidentiality" shall mean the protection of data related to single statistical units which are obtained directly for statistical purposes or indirectly from administrative or other sources against any breach of the right to confidentiality.

- "Transparency" shall mean the right of respondents to have information on the legal basis, the purposes for which the data are required and the protective measures adopted.

B. Aims and scope of Agricultural statistics

8. The aims of EU Agricultural statistics can be summarized in three main purposes:

- To provide comparable official data for a large volume of basic statistical data and for syntheses and analyses, on land use, production in the fields of crops, animals and fisheries, on agricultural structures, prices and incomes, on agro-industry and forestry at the level of the European Union (EU), the European Economic Area (EEA) and Member States (MS).
- To make available these data to the main actors of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), i.e. DG VI and DG XIV, to all other European institutions, to national statistical bodies, to international partners and to the general public.
- To meet EU obligations in data delivery in these fields to international bodies for discussion and basic negotiation needs.

9. The Community statistical program 1998-2002³ attributes Eurostat's main work themes to the main areas where policy data needs occur.

For the domain of agriculture (incl. fisheries) (Title II of the Treaty) this looks as follows :

Policy needs and Eurostat outputs

Treaty title

Eurostat work themes

TITLE II : AGRICULTURE (INCLUDING FISHERIES)

Principal themes of work necessary for this policy area	61	Land use and countryside
	62	Agricultural structures
	63	Agricultural incomes and prices
	64	Crop production
	65	Animal production
	66	Agro-industry statistics
	67	Reforming agricultural statistics
	68	Forestry statistics
	69	Fisheries statistics
	53	Trade in goods

Other important contributory themes 72 Regional and geographical
information

10. Themes 61-69 are genuinely Agricultural (Fisheries') themes, whereas "trade in goods" (53) and "regional and geographical information" (72) are themes which can contribute important supplementary information for agriculture.

11. One important statistical (panel) survey, the "farm' accountancy data network" (FADN) is run by DG VI. Cooperation between Eurostat and DG VI is assured and well established.

12. The main developments in Agricultural and Fisheries' statistics are summarized in the Statistical Program as follows :

During the program period the Commission will strive to :

- apply the TAPAS scheme for progressive improvements to the existing set of agricultural statistics, mainly as far as quality, comparability, efficiency savings, simplification and timeliness is concerned,
- plan the development of agricultural statistics with the aim of meeting the future needs of the CAP,
- assist in the development of comparable data for the negotiations on the enlargement of the Union,
- consolidate and improve the quality of the fishery statistics.

C. Full Community surveys vs. harmonisation of national data

13. Conducting a full Community survey, i.e. surveying a statistical population (or a sample of it) with a common list of characteristics (questionnaire), at the same period and with the same frequency in all EU Member States, provides highly reliable and comparable results throughout the Union. The two most important surveys of this kind within the European Statistical System are the Labour Force sample survey in social statistics and the survey of the structure of agricultural holdings (EUROFARM) in the agricultural domain.

14. This "royal" way to obtain comparable official EU statistics has, of course, its price : The costs of these statistical surveys are considerable and convincing budgetary authorities to finance these activities is not always easy. In addition, it may take some time before the last Member State has transmitted the survey results and, thus allowed EU 15 aggregates and totals to be calculated.

15. In many areas of work it is therefore necessary to look at existing data at national level and to try to harmonise them according to common standards and definitions so that the data meet certain minimum requirements as to their quality. The advantages of this approach are obvious : normally information is readily available and is not too costly for the Union. The limits of this approach: Data quality, especially comparability is very difficult to assess. This obstacle can only be overcome by close and intensive cooperation with Member States on documentation of the methods used at national level and by permanent validation and analysis of the data submitted. Examples of this type of harmonisation approach are the regulations on crop products statistics⁴.

D. EU statistics under legal cover vs. "agreement" statistics

16. If one looks at the overall demand for statistical data on agriculture, fisheries and forestry about 60% of these data needs are covered by specific Community legislation, i.e. Council Regulations, Directives or Decisions and corresponding Commission decisions. Important "agriculture" statistical domains under Community legislation are the farm structure survey, the animal surveys, milk products statistics and fish catches.

17. The remaining 40% of agricultural data delivery is based on "agreements" between the Commission and statistical services of Member States which have been reached within the framework of the ESAS, especially in the Agricultural Statistics Committee and its working groups (see under (21)-(23)). Important statistical work fields fall into this category, agricultural accounts, price statistics and supply balance sheets, for example.

18. The methodological "know-how" of agricultural statistics as it is documented in manuals and handbooks, in methodological reports from Member States, in glossaries, in seminar and workshop proceedings, may refer to both types of EU statistics, to those under specific legal cover and to those under "agreement".

E. The basic actors

19. At EU level Eurostat has the task of implementing the Statistical Program so especially to develop a set of standards and methods for the production of statistics in accordance with the basic principles outlined above (7) and to make these Community statistics available to services of the Community and of Member States, to economic operators, to academic circles and to the public in general.

20. Main users of agricultural and fisheries statistics of Eurostat are the Directorates General VI (Agriculture) and XIV (Fisheries) which need the data

for implementing, monitoring and managing the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries' Policy. There is also a growing demand for comparable data on forestry although this sector is not subject of a Community policy. DGs VI and XIV play an important role in the process of adapting agricultural and fisheries statistics, a role which goes beyond the simple definition of their real data needs.

21. Demand and supply of agricultural statistics are coordinated and organized within the Agricultural Statistics Committee (ASC) with as members the Directors of Member States' Agricultural Statistics' services and DG VI and Eurostat. ASC members look at the overall functioning of the existing system and how to assure a good "maintenance" of it. The ASC tries also to define future data demands and how to meet these requirements.

22. The detailed statistical work is done in numerous specialised working groups of the ASC, where Member States' experts in the different fields, like agricultural accounts, structure survey, crop products statistics, milk statistics, are represented.

23. Meeting as the Standing Agricultural Statistics Committee⁵, ASC members can give their opinion and vote on all the matters on which responsibilities have been attributed to this Committee by Community legislation (typical cases are technical annexes in EU statistical legislation).

24. At national level the national statistical institutes (NSI) and the statistical services of the Ministries of Agriculture (MINAGRI) (with associated bodies, like Agricultural economic institutes or specialised fishery boards) are the main actors. The distribution of tasks between the NSI and the Ministries can vary considerably from country to country, so that, for example, in countries like France and Spain, nearly all work in agricultural statistics is attributed to the statistical services of the Ministry, whereas in other countries, like Denmark, nearly all the work is done by the NSI. Other countries having intermediate solutions. A further important organisational point is that in countries with a more "federal" structure, like Germany, Spain and Italy, relatively independent regional statistical services are the basic units of data collection and thus coordination is necessary at national level.

III. A look into the functioning of the ESAS : some shortcomings and attempts to overcome them

25. In the following we firstly give some insights into the way how the existing ESAS is "maintained" and how future data needs can be described (sections A and B) and, secondly, we raise two typical questions and sketch possible answers (sections C and D).

A. "Maintaining" the existing system : the Technical Action Plans for Agricultural Statistics (TAPAS)

26. On 25 June 1996 the Council adopted Decision 96/411/EC⁶ on improving Community agricultural statistics, better known under the name of TAPAS. The aim of this decision is to ensure that Community agricultural statistics better meet the needs for information resulting from the reform of the common agricultural policy.

27. Within the framework of the implementation of this Council Decision, up to 1 January 1999, the Commission has approved, in all, three annual technical action plans. The basic framework for these technical action plans has been as follows : DG VI (Agriculture) provided financial resources. Interested Member States cooperated with Eurostat and DG VI on a voluntary basis; work was coordinated by the ASC and technical and methodological details were discussed in the corresponding working groups.

28. The TAPAS Council Decision 96/411/EC referred in its annex I to areas where the workload for national statistical services could be reduced or economies have been considered possible.

Reductions / Economies

The following fields were concerned :

- Surveys on the farm structure : simplification and restructuring of the list of the characteristics.
- Surveys on the areas under vines : a more flexible approach with regard to, in particular, the date of the basic survey; use of the data coming from the vineyard register as well as, in certain cases, collected information.
- Surveys on the fruit trees : optional transmission of certain data.
- Surveys on the animals : application of the concept "agriflex", i.e. adaptation of the frequency of the surveys and of their timetable to the importance of livestock in each Member State.
- Pig surveys : exemptions granted to certain Member States with regard to the number of surveys and easing of the survey dates.
- Farm income index : suppression of the first estimates of October and suppression of details of secondary importance.

- Dairy statistics : suppression of weekly statistics; reduction of certain annual statistics and reduction of statistics on the structure of the dairy farms.

29. In its annex II the TAPAS Decision foresaw new fields of work.

Fields characterized by a new or growing interest

Improvements

The following fields were concerned :

- Fruit and vegetable production statistics : improvement and rapid transmission of the production data of certain fruit and vegetables.
- Supply balance sheets and fodder balances.

New applications

The Commission contributed financially to development work started by the Member States in the following fields :

- Early estimates of sowings
- Protein levels in milk products
- Forecasts of production of meat
- Use of pesticides.

30. A first evaluation of the three TAPAS action plans leads to the following conclusions :

- The presence of the TAPAS tool has enabled the Member States to undertake a number of adaptations of their agricultural statistics system, that would not have been possible without a contribution, even if only partial, on the part of the Community; it is true that the return from the amounts invested in TAPAS seems rather high.
- The approach which has been followed up to now in establishing the technical action plans, to give priority to the Community needs in the definition of the priority fields, has avoided the dispersal of the financial resources on a too high number of actions, which would have had a lower added value on the Community level.
- The implementation of TAPAS contributed, and should contribute, to the reorientation of the system of agricultural statistics towards

the practical needs of the users at the Community and national level.

31. A major problem remains : how to consolidate the progress achieved thanks to the TAPAS actions, once the action plan was carried out and that Community support is no longer available ?

32. Reflections on the future of TAPAS up to the end of the current Statistical program are being made at the moment. The following considerations have to be taken into account.

- The next Council Decision concerning the extension of TAPAS should cover the period 2000-2002 (i.e. a three-year period), in order to be able to fit it in the Community statistical program 1998-2002.
- The voluntary character of the participation of the Member States in the various actions should not be challenged.
- The financial resources which will be available at the Community level will be relatively limited. It would be necessary therefore to concentrate them, as far as possible, on the actions and the Member States where needs are most acute.
- With regard to pilot projects aiming to test new techniques or to develop more effective means to meet the needs as regards statistical data, it is advisable to limit the cover to some Member States or to only one Member State, in order to avoid a waste of the resources available.
- Even if one moves towards a more targeted country specific use of the TAPAS resources at the level of the various Member States, all the projects financed within this framework should keep a clear Community interest.
- The Commission departments have to be in a better position to evaluate the quality of the projects which are submitted to it and the reliability of the results obtained. Moreover it is important to ensure greater transparency on methodological progress achieved in the various Member States within the framework of the TAPAS actions; the specialised Working Parties within Eurostat should play a more important role in the choice of the actions to be undertaken and in the evaluation of the results obtained.
- Further elements to annex 1 (economies) have to be sought since most of the original list has now been achieved.

B. Looking at future data needs (FADO)

33. Over the last three years the ASC members, Eurostat and DG VI (and other interested DGs like DGs XI (Environment) and XVI (Regional policy)) have - together with other users of agricultural statistics outside the Commission - conducted a thorough reflection on the data needs in the field of agriculture including its interaction with the environment and rural development.

34. In 1997 EU Member states worked together in four parallel groups, chaired and hosted each by a volunteer country, on the whole range of statistical topics. In addition, a one-day workshop in November 1997 in Brussels brought together suppliers and main users of agricultural statistics, like other European Institutions (especially the Parliament), professional associations, the Agricultural press and researchers. All relevant ideas, reflections and considerations were brought together in a three-day seminar in May 1998 in Portugal. Therefore the "portuguese" acronym FADO has been chosen being interpreted here as "Future Agricultural Data Outline".

35. A follow-up of the FADO seminar was done in a special ASC meeting in January 1999, a main result of this meeting is a new FADO steering document comprising two annexes:

- Annex A covers FADO relevant activities within the regular Work Program on Agricultural Statistics, whereas
- Annex B covers activities going beyond the regular Work Program.

36. FADO relevant activities within the regular Work Programme are divided firstly in a set of relatively clearly identified early needs and secondly a set of actions aiming at improved collective efficiency. The immediate usefulness of the following broad actions envisaged should be readily accepted :

ANNEX A

A. Some clearly identified early needs

1. Develop to the economic accounts for agriculture (EEA).
2. To illuminate the integration of environmental concerns into the CAP requires the extraction of information concerning the agriculture/environment interaction.

3. Water is a unifying theme of rapidly increasing importance. Agriculture issues are an important component of the overall situation on water.
 4. Agriculture has been identified as a priority area for accession preparations. Work to help Candidate Countries improve their capacity and their output on agricultural statistics is urgent.
- B. Actions to improve collective efficiency
5. There is often scope to meet new needs or to fill gaps without new data collection (and the costs to respondents and to administration that this entails)
 6. The agricultural statistical services are faced with new information needs and yet pressure to reduce the resources used to meet the large existing needs. By adopting innovative approaches more of these needs can be met
 7. By improving overall efficiency resources can be released to ease the pressures on current work and to allow the evolution to meet new or changing needs.
 8. Dissemination. The main customers for Community agricultural statistics are (a) Community institutions, starting with the Commission; (b) national administration. It is capital that these are efficiently served. CAP needs and resources determine almost completely what agriculture statistics are available. A second issue is how to make the best possible use of what is available to benefit the general public. Of special importance are the farmers, market operators, etc. who are affected by Community policies and who are the origins of our agricultural data.
37. FADO activities going beyond the regular Work program refer to methodological issues, the territorial dimension, marketing and policy aspects and the wider impact of agriculture.

The strategy proposed is:

- continued checking of the need
- choice of a limited number of actions for progressing being either:
 -
 - (a) preparatory work better specifying the issue and its implications for agriculture statistics

- (b) actions which have become urgent by virtue of recent developments
- (c) actions for which a practical opportunity of making progress at low resource cost has been identified.

ANNEX B

A. Methodology

1. Develop new conceptual framework for enlarged agricultural statistics.
2. Identify and develop any major new concepts and definitions.

B. Territorial

3. Develop the territorial dimension of Community agricultural statistics.

C. Economic

4. Identify and develop the agricultural statistics required by a CAP more open to the agricultural situations outside the EU.
5. For a CAP where (EU) market play a larger part in determining farmers' returns from production of agricultural products, identify and develop the statistics needed for efficient markets.

D. Wider impact of agriculture

6. Identify and develop the statistics and indicators which are needed to provide objective information on emerging issues of public awareness (e.g. food quality, humane treatment of animals).
7. The agro-industry complex with all its interaction with farming.

38. The foregoing sections A and B have described the two main approaches to "maintaining" and to adapting the body of community agriculture statistics. These approaches are conditioned by the need not only to maintain the relevance of this body of statistics but to do this in the face of i) even tighter resources ii) frequent hostility to statistical operations (burden on respondents, intrusion into personal privacy...). It is thus essential both to optimise the use of the statistics we receive and to find

ways of capitalising on new data sources. On the next two sections we illustrate this by describing ongoing work on : firstly more rapid but adequately reliable estimates of EU 15 figures ; secondly the use of administrative data.

C. How can reliable EU 15 aggregates be calculated when data are missing ?

39. When analysing the situation in certain sectors of EU agriculture it is one of the most important criteria for DG VI that data for EU 15 as a whole are available and that they are available relatively early. How can reliable EU 15 aggregates be calculated when - at such relatively early dates - some Member States have not yet transmitted their data?

Let us briefly examine two concrete cases :

40. Important Crop products EU 15 totals : In accordance with the Working Group on "Crop Products Statistics" it has been decided for a number of important crop products that EU 15 estimates can be made if the available data (e.g. on common wheat production) already transmitted in the current year t represents more than 85% of the production observed in the previous year t-1. The EU 15 total in year t can then easily be calculated by taking the results of year t-1 for the countries' data which are missing. Eurostat will then "publish (i.e. to make them available in the data bank NEW CRONOS) this EU 15 total (flagged as an Eurostat estimate) and also give the data of Member countries which have already been transmitted. Member States not having sent their data yet are meanwhile shown in the public data bank NEW CRONOS as "data not available".

41. EU 15 supply balance sheets : In close cooperation among DG VI, Member States and Eurostat over the last 2-3 years the feasibility of preparing EU 15 supply balance sheets for important crop products three months after the end of the agricultural year has been shown. Compiling data on production, external trade and (if available) variations in stocks gives a first rough idea of what is available for EU 15 internal use altogether. Several estimates and assumptions have to be made to put together an EU 15 balance sheet at such an early stage. Next one tries to establish national supply balance sheets which are compatible with the EU 15 balance sheet. Figures on extra- and intra-trade are scrutinized. Revisions of early estimates may lead to more precise information at national level and, consequently, the EU 15 balance has to be revised. In this iterative procedure involving Member States and Eurostat, supply balance sheets for important crops are gradually improved.

42. In the two cases sound methodological work in the Working Groups and transparency of the procedures used are the prerequisites of good results.

D. How to use other data sources, especially administrative sources ?

43. Where data are available from other sources than statistical surveys it is a natural reaction to try to use these other data and to avoid apparently double work, double work both for respondents and for administrations. This is not without problems however, especially in a context of international comparisons..

44. Statistical surveys have been developed to provide a certain level of precision and comparability. They are based on common concepts and standardized and linked nomenclatures which allow results from differing surveys to be related. The respondents, benefiting from the protection of statistical confidentiality, can answer in completely honest way. Statistical surveys are designed to provide information on certain topics related to chosen observation units in a chosen population. The choice of questions and the methodology are designed by specialists to provide significant data which are as useful as possible in illuminating the issues under examination. Repeat surveys can measure change effectively since they can remain unchanged (or be slightly adapted if necessary) from one period to another.

45. Data from other sources are often more comprehensive perhaps covering all individuals. The data furnished, sometimes on a voluntary basis as a condition for participating in some scheme, sometimes obligatory, may be subject to more detailed checking than is normal for statistical data. Use of such data as a substitute for statistical data has three main disadvantages however. The first is that the data are not collected for the information purposes of the statistical survey. The observation units, population, concepts, frequency are not chosen with information in mind. Secondly the respondents usually have an interest in colouring their answers in relation to the context in which they give them. Thirdly comparability over time and from country to country can be damaged by changes and differences in the operation of the system in which the data are collected. These are not found insupportable obstacles by certain countries and much work has been done and continues on how best to use non-survey data as a substitute for survey data.

46. In the context of international statistics however, where adequate comparability between national results is essential, the problems are particularly acute. There is hot debate on whether it is acceptable to require a majority of farmers to make detailed annual declarations of dropped areas (in the context of IACS, the Integrated Administration and Control System) as a condition for receiving average subsidies and at the same time to continue the traditional annual statistical surveys. It is instructive to examine the results of a detailed comparison recently carried out by the statisticians of the SCEES (Service Central des Enquêtes et Etudes Statistiques) of the French Ministry of Agriculture.

47. On the one hand one has administrative data which are the result of the farmers' voluntary acts, enabling them to get subsidies. On the other, the statistical data result from obligatory surveys, by interview or direct earth observation. Farmers are obliged to give answers in exchange for the confidentiality of the individual data provided.

48. The differences between the two sources can arise from (i) differences in the population effectively covered, e.g. in the administrative data, (ii) undetected erroneous declarations, (iii) random errors in the statistical data resulting from surveys⁷.

49. The sources of difference for these 1996 figures for France have been examined. In some cases, the farmer ignores his rights to receive subsidy payment, for lack of information or refusal to undergo the administrative procedures. More than 200.000 hectares of cereals do not appear in the administrative source, without clear explanation why farmers haven't declared them. In other cases, the farmer can prefer limiting his statement to surfaces or livestock for which he asks for subsidies, thus truncating the total production of the holding. That could explain the difference of 20% on the annual green fodder area between the two sources. However, some items are over-estimated by the IACS, e.g. temporary grasslands (+25%). By declaring permanent meadows (more than 5 years, excluded from arable land) as temporary grasslands (included in arable land), the farmer thus increases his reference area for arable crop subsidies.

50. Some classification codes are strictly based on administrative criteria, impossible to determine by direct observation. Fallow land from the 88/1094/CEC Regulation (40.000 ha) is not different, by earth observation, from a "normal" fallow land. Non-food cultivated set-aside (281.000 ha) like rape seed or sunflower is recorded in the relevant crop codes of the statistical classifications. The administrative file suffers from a scope defect. Designed for the subsidy payments to arable crops, it "does not know" some part of permanent crop areas. The grasslands managed by owners of grazing livestock not allowed to get subsidy (sheep, goats) are not declared. Permanent grasslands outside holdings (common rough grazing and mountain pastures) are not taken into account either. Permanent crops, often grown by specialised farmers, are not included. More than 2,5 millions hectares of permanent meadows and 820.000 hectares of vines and orchards are missing!

51. This example illustrates some of the complexity of using non-survey data to allow us to economize on surveys. The general view which seems to be emerging, driven by the needs for economy in administrative resources and for reduction of response burden, is that one cannot rule out use of non-survey data. In the first instance it is the responsibility of national statisticians to judge whether use of non-survey data can meet the requirements laid down for community statistics. This judgement however should be subject to critical scrutiny in transparent procedures involving the Commission services and national agricultural statisticians. Work is going on to build on the experience in certain countries, to define the conditions for acceptable use of non-survey data.

IV. Some concluding remarks

52. In the ESAS with its complex network structure and its high degree of subsidiarity the main role of Eurostat is to assure the harmonisation of statistics. This can only be done in close and direct cooperation of Eurostat with "main user" DGs in Brussels (like DGs VI, XIV, XI and XVI) and Member States statistical services within the framework of the Agricultural Statistics Committee.

53. At Member States' level a clear distribution of tasks and work fields in agricultural statistics between the Ministry of Agriculture and the NSI is indispensable. On the basis of such a clear distribution of work a close cooperation and coordination on methodological and organizational matters has to be established. Clear work distribution and coordination are the prerequisites of successful work at national level.

54. Some priorities for development work are obvious :

- Harmonised EU 15 totals and aggregates are of the utmost importance.
- More early estimates of adequate high reliability are needed.
- Comparable data on the interactions of agriculture with the environment and with rural space are of growing importance.

55. The use of administrative data is surely one option in a world of shrinking financial and human resources. Nevertheless, this use has to be carefully considered in every case, i.e. by type of data concerned, by type of methods used and by the institutional framework at European, national or regional level.

56. Serious work within the European System of Agricultural statistics is impossible without a thorough methodological documentation and thus,

transparency on methods and techniques, survey organisation and necessary institutional arrangements at European, national and regional level.

57. Finally, we should not forget that statistics - especially at European level - could not be more than an approximation to reality. Or, to put it in the words of the Director-General of Eurostat : "We are very ambitious in our work, but we are very modest as to our results. At its best, statistics can (only) reduce uncertainty" (Franchet, 1999).

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Secondary Community Legislation, Agricultural Statistics, Vol. I and II, Eurostat, Luxembourg, 1998

END NOTES

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- ¹ As far as one of the most important aspects of developing the system in the next five to ten years is concerned - the integration of candidate countries from Eastern and Central Europe into the European Statistical System - we refer to the papers of I. Orešnik and G. Cal .
- ² Council Regulation N° 322/97 of 17 February 1997 on Community Statistics : OJ N° L52 of 22.2.1997, p. 1
Commission Decision 97/281/EC of 21 April 1997 on the role of Eurostat as regards the production of Community statistics : OJ L112 of 29.4.1997, p. 56
cf. also Article 285 of the Treaty of Amsterdam.
- ³ Council Decision 1999/126/EC of 22 December 1998 : OJ L42, 16.2.1999, p. 1;
cf. also : Sigma, The Bulletin of European Statistics, 01/1999.
- ⁴ Council Regulation of 26 March 1990 concerning statistical information to be supplied by the Member States on cereals production : OJ L88, 3.4.1990;
Council Regulation No. 959193 of 5 April 1993 concerning Statistical information to be supplied by Member States on crop products other than cereals : OJ L98, 24.4.1993
In the context of these Regulations Member States had to prepare methodological reports on their national survey systems ; on this basis D. Bradbury prepared two comparative methodological publications : Bradbury (1995) and Bradbury (1997).
- ⁵ The Standing Committee was created in 1972; cf. OJ No L 179, 7.8.1972, p. 2.
- ⁶ OJ N° L 162, 1.7.1996, p. 14.
- ⁷ This random error, of course, become weaker, as samples become larger and as the variables under consideration cover an increasing part of total agricultural production.
- * for memory, already split up by species Source : SCEES, Paiements compensatoires, 1996.
