

A 2020 Round of Agricultural Surveys

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Considering the conferences that preceded and resulted in “The First World Agricultural Census” campaign, it is possible to say that the World Census of Agriculture (WCA) rounds constitute the main recommendation that guided the production of agricultural statistics for almost one hundred years. Moreover, in this entire period and still nowadays, the census stands as the major accomplishment in the statistical program regarding agriculture, even though its objectives had been strongly modified over time. In its first editions, under the International Institute of Agriculture (IIA), the census main goal was to obtain more reliable global production data; afterwards, under the FAO, its focus changed to structural aspects, with a continuous broadening of scope. Later, the census’s register role was enhanced with the establishment of a set of few essential items, allowing for more flexibility in the adoption of other recommended items. In its last editions, it incorporated the strategy of complementary surveys from this central core and thus virtually presenting itself as a system of surveys, aiming, however, only the details of certain specificities. In the course of its existence FAO has published several textbooks on continuous surveys, many of them dedicated to methodology and to a lesser extent devoted to standardization of concepts and priorities. These documents are still too sparse, with no clear connection, and no systematic update. As a result, it lacks a general orientation similar to what occurs with the censuses. The Global Strategy largely aims to meet these needs, highlighting the need of structuring integrated surveys systems. This study (a) indicates the need for further these trends in recommendations oriented for the integration of national agricultural survey systems in compliance with all the current information needs; (b) examines the evolution of the goals of the WCA program; (c) argues that although indispensable to reveal aspects of rare events and small domains, and the best alternative for frame structuring, the agricultural census by itself does not meet the main statistical demands in a world eager for the latest information; and (d) advocates in favor of recommendations for a 2020 World Round of Agricultural Surveys, presenting some ideas for its structure and guidance.

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