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REPORT OF THE

SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE ASIA AND PACIFIC COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS

Held in Hobart,
2 - 6 November 1998

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (RAP)
FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
BANGKOK, 1999

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Seventeenth Session of the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics (APCAS), organised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), was held in Hobart, Tasmania, Australia from 2 to 6 November 1998 at the invitation of the Government of Australia. The Session was attended by 56 delegates and observers from 21 member countries, three United Nations organisations and specialised agencies, and two international organisations.

2. His Excellency Sir Guy Green, Governor of Tasmania addressed the inaugural session. He welcomed and extended the warm Tasmanian hospitality to all the delegates of the Commission's Seventeenth Session. Mr. Tadashi Tsuchiya, Director, Marketing and Consumption Statistics Division, Statistics and Information Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Japan, represented Mr. Fukushima, outgoing chairperson, and presided over the inaugural ceremonies.

3. In his inaugural address, the Governor expressed appreciation to the Commission for accepting the invitation of the Australian Government, extended during the Commission's Sixteenth Session in Japan, to host the Seventeenth Session of APCAS in Hobart, capital city of Tasmania. He informed the Commission that Hobart served as the ideal location for the Commission's Seventeenth biennial Session as it was the Australian Bureau of Statistics' s National Project Centre for Agriculture. The University of Tasmania, the country's premiere educational institution for aquaculture, was also located in the city. Moreover, the Secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources was likewise based here. This project was undertaking pioneering research and development activities in the field of predictive microbiology for predicting the survival and growth of microorganisms in food products under various conditions.

4. He emphasised the importance of the availability of reliable and timely statistics to help in the development of policies for reducing malnutrition and rural poverty, increasing international agricultural trade and for other related socio-economic concerns.

5. He reminded the Commission that the role of the statisticians was not confined to data collection and processing activities. He advised the statistical community to exert more effort to increase public understanding of statistical data. An education campaign should be systematically set aimed at disabusing common misconceptions on statistical outputs. He cited as an example that the existence of correlation between two variables did not automatically indicate connection between them and should not therefore be used as basis for extrapolation.

6. Mr. Tsuchiya, in his capacity as outgoing chair, thanked the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia for its excellent accommodation and complete preparation for the conduct of the Seventeenth Session at Hobart. He also extended his gratitude to the delegates for coming to Hobart to participate in the Session. He noted that since the establishment of the Commission in 1966, the biennial forum had been held without fail and these had greatly contributed to the development of agricultural statistics among member countries.

7. He expressed his concern on the economic crisis faced by member countries. He noted that the crisis would seem to persist for some time in the Region. He was disturbed that the crisis was being further aggravated by the recent natural disasters which were adversely affecting the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors. He then extended his sympathy to the countries that had suffered extensive damages from these natural calamities.

8. He nonetheless opined that even under such severe circumstances, agricultural statistics would continue to be accurately prepared through surveys and would thus, immensely contribute to addressing long-term food and agriculture problems in the world.

9. Moreover, he expressed hope that Japan's positive support to the previous Session's recommendation for a regional information dissemination project, would serve as a catalyst to

improve the accuracy of member countries' agricultural statistics and pave the way for a unified statistical information and mutual data exchange mechanism.

10. In ending, he wished that the Seventeenth Session of the Commission would contribute further to the development and improvement of agricultural statistics and that the Session would be held under a cordial and cooperative atmosphere.

11. Speaking on behalf of the FAO Assistant Director-Genera/Regional Representative for Asia and Pacific, and as Director, Statistics Division, Mr. Ladislav Kabat, welcomed the participants of the Seventeenth Session of the Commission. He also thanked the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia for hosting the Commission Session and expressed admiration for Australia's sound statistical system.

12. He noted that this was the first time that the Commission was meeting in Australia and that, also for the first time, the Session was being held outside the capital city of a member country. He recognised that this was one meeting where a large number of member countries (21 out of 24), were represented. He specifically mentioned that Bhutan, for the first time, was able to send a delegation.

13. Mr. Kabat also noted that many countries in the Region had been hit by a severe economic crisis in the recent months. The recessions being experienced by most Southeast Asian countries were expected to adversely affect the lifestyle, and subsequently, the food consumption pattern of the people in the sub-region. The economic crunch was being compounded by the devastations caused by El Niño, which could worsen further with the expected setting in of La Niña. As these two natural phenomena were expected to result in reduction in crop production, he expressed concern on the most likely further deterioration of the nutritional status of malnourished people in the Region.

14. He informed the Commission that the Plan of Action formulated in the 1996 World Food Summit guided the current FAO Programme, which gave highest priority on Food Security. The Action Plan included the development and maintenance of the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS). He was pleased to note that FIVIMS had been included as the major agenda item of the Commission Session. In this regard, he encouraged the Commission to carefully deliberate on this topic particularly during the planned working session.

15. He also noted that the Commission had included several items on tools for improving the national statistical systems. He particularly highlighted the importance of the Japan-supported regional project on the improvement of agricultural statistics. The project would help countries identify priority areas for improvement and develop a statistical development plan. He informed the Commission that the outputs of the project should complement and further enrich FAOSTAT, the statistical component of WAICENT. It could also enhance the participation of member countries in the emerging global electronic information highway.

16. He acknowledged the valuable support of the United States of America and Australia to the Commission. These two countries contributed papers on different agenda items related to national statistical systems. He further called the attention of the Commission to two important papers on statistics and information relating to forestry and fisheries, respectively. He encouraged the Commission to devote adequate attention to these agenda items.

17. Mr. William McLennan, Australian Statistician, provided the participants a comprehensive overview of the country's statistical system. He stated that organically, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) served as the central statistical authority for the Australian Government. It was not completely centralised as it had several national project centres located in State Offices. Mr. McLennan mentioned that Tasmania, for example, was the centre for agriculture. He also indicated statistical priorities were set by the Australian Statistician based on recommendations of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council. He shared with the Commission the ABS Operating Principles which included the following: equal access to statistics for all users; simultaneous release of statistics to all users; advance notification of schedule of release of data; public access to documentation on concepts, sources and methods used; provision of information about the reliability of statistics; quick response to unjust criticisms on quality and integrity; and maintenance of confidentiality of information provided by respondents.

18. He also informed the Commission that in recent years, the national statistical service, particularly its agricultural statistics had undergone significant re-programming. In view of the democratic process of governance in the country, the Federal Government had decreed that the Australian Bureau of Statistics exert efforts in reducing the number and frequency of statistical inquiries to ease the citizenry's statistical reporting obligations. He informed the Commission that in response, the ABS restructured its statistical programme and its current major agricultural collections now consisted of five-yearly agricultural census; large-scale agriculture survey in intervening years; annual survey of agricultural finance; and monthly/quarterly livestock production collection.

19. He mentioned that, in addition to these major statistical activities, ABS continued to include in its regular programmes provision of technical support such as statistical consultancy, workshops, study tours, documentation of statistical methods, and participation in international conferences. Despite recent budgetary cuts, ABS still endeavoured to provide active support for concerns affecting the Asia-Pacific region which included: sharing knowledge and contributing to international fora; active membership in UN Statistical Commission, APCAS, SIAP, ESCAP; and provision of statistician for the South Pacific Commission.

20. Mr. Hiek Som, FAO Senior Statistician, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP) and APCAS Secretary, on behalf of the Commission, thanked the ABS for organising and hosting the Session. He acknowledged that the enthusiastic response of the member countries to the Commission's invitation to participate in the Seventeenth Session could be attributed to the two-year preparation that the Government of Australia devoted for the organisation of this Session.

21. He expressed his gratitude for the continuing support the Commission was receiving from member countries, particularly the USA and Australia, which contributed papers for this Session. He also acknowledged the support of the FAO Assistant Director-General/Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific and the Director of Statistics in the various activities of the Commission. He further acknowledged the support of his colleagues at the FAO Regional Office and at FAO HQ.

22. Finally he thanked the Chair of the Sixteenth Session of the Commission for his active participation in the activities of the APCAS.

23. Mr. Robin Slater, Assistant Statistician, Australian Bureau of Statistics, delegate from Australia was unanimously elected Chair of the Seventeenth Session. Mr. Sugiarto, Deputy Director-General, Statistics Indonesia, and Head of the Indonesian Delegation was elected First Vice-Chair and Mr. Noor M. Larik, Director-General, Federal Bureau of Statistics, and Head of Pakistan Delegation, the Second Vice-Chair.

24. The Commission constituted a Drafting Committee. Ms. Jirawan Boonperm (Thailand) was elected Chair. Members of the Committee were: Mr. Kolin Toivonen (Australia), Mr. Togar Napitupulu (Indonesia), Mr. Romeo Recide (Philippines) and Mr. Larry Sivers (USA). Mr. Loganaden Naiken (FAO, Rome), Mr. Hiek Som (FAO/RAP) and Mr. Generoso de Guzman (Consultant, FAO/RAP) were co-opted to the Committee.

25. The Session adopted the Agenda given in Appendix A. A list of delegates and observers is given in Appendix B, and a list of documents in Appendix C. Speeches of the guests are in Appendices D-F. The list of member countries as of November 1998 is given in Appendix G.

FAO'S ACTIVITIES IN FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS DURING 1996-98 IN THE ASIA AND PACIFIC REGION

(Item 4 of the Agenda)

26. The Secretary of the Commission introduced Document No. APCAS/98/3 on "FAO's Activities in Food and Agricultural Statistics During 1996-98 in the Asia and Pacific Region". The Commission appreciated the FAO's efforts in this field during the last two years.

27. The Commission noted that the FAO's main activities were in the following areas: maintenance of data base and information dissemination; food insecurity and vulnerability

information and mapping systems; World Census of Agriculture; cooperation on the improvement of agricultural statistics in the Region; forestry and fishery statistics; system of economic accounts for agriculture; technical assistance; and serving as Secretariat of the Commission.

28. The Commission recognized FAO's continuing efforts to improve and expand the mechanisms for disseminating information. It particularly noted the user-friendliness of the internet-based WAICENT, specifically its FAOSTAT component. The Commission observed that FAOSTAT contained mostly historical data. It also indicated that in a number of instances, country-specific statistics in the FAO website and publications were not consistent with the member countries' official statistics. The Commission was informed that in general, statistics released by FAO were those provided by member countries. In a few instances, FAO made its own estimates and these were properly footnoted. The Commission was further informed that statistics used by FAO in its publications like the yearbooks were as of fixed cut-off dates. Revisions made after the cut-off dates may be accessed on the website.

29. While the Commission acknowledged that some forecasts were included in the FAOINFO component of WAICENT, especially the Food Outlook, it stressed the need for FAO to provide more forward-looking types of information, such as crop forecasts and early warning information. The Commission recommended that more forecasts of crop production at country level be incorporated in the FAO data base. It also recommended that FAO improve the user-friendliness of its website in the area of accessing country level forecasts and early warning information through the establishment of hyperlinkages between FAO's and individual countries' forecast webpages. The Commission further recommended that countries with existing websites should create a separate forecast webpage to help FAO operationalize such hyperlink.

30. The Commission recognized FAO's lead role in the establishment of the global Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information System (FIVIMS). It appreciated the Government of Japan's support to the five-year Programme "Development of a Vulnerability Information Base, Mapping and Dissemination System for Asia in Support of the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS)". It noted that FIVIMS constituted a major programme for FAO, both at global and national levels.

31. The Commission commended the FAO/RAP and the Government of Japan for their fast action on the recommendation the Commission made at its Sixteenth Session regarding the project on the improvement of agricultural statistics in its developing member countries. This led to the immediate project formulation and subsequent implementation.

32. The Commission was pleased to be informed that the aquaculture and employment supplements to the Programme for the World Census of Agriculture 2000 had already been issued.

33. The Commission commended FAO for its sustained efforts to organize training, workshops and expert consultations. The National Demonstration Centre on Agricultural Census held in the Philippines was a training programme for member countries with limited experience in conducting agricultural censuses. The Round Table Meeting on Trends in Agricultural Censuses in Bangkok, on the other hand, provided an appropriate forum for exchange of experiences among countries in the Region that had undertaken a number of agricultural censuses. The organization of the Expert Consultation and Regional Workshop on the Development of Guidelines for the Routine Collection of Capture Fisheries Data in Bangkok were likewise appreciated by the Commission.

34. The Commission, meanwhile, was looking forward to the successful conduct of the joint SIAP/FAO Workshop on System of Economic Accounts for Agriculture scheduled in China at the end of November 1998. It supported FAO's plan to organize a Seminar on Use of Remote Sensing in Agricultural Statistics, in early 1999.

35. The Commission noted with appreciation the technical assistance provided to a number of countries, including projects that were successfully completed, on-going, or in the pipeline. It appreciated FAO's continuing concern to help countries in the region improve and/or develop their national agricultural statistical services. The Commission was pleased to note that FAO had maintained its close cooperation with UN and international organizations involved in food and agricultural statistics in the Asia and Pacific region. The Commission noted that areas for future

assistance included livestock statistics, agricultural census and economic accounts for food and agriculture. It recommended that FAO take appropriate measures to provide support in these areas, in cooperation with the donor community

36. The Commission expressed satisfaction that its biennial Sessions had been convened as scheduled. It also appreciated the interest and support of member countries in the activities of the Commission.

REVIEW OF THE PRESENT STATE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS IN MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE COMMISSION – COUNTRY STATEMENTS

(Item 5 of the Agenda)

37. Statements outlining the situations of food and agricultural statistics in the countries of the Asia and Pacific region represented in the Session were presented to the Commission. The country statements were generally structured according to a format established in previous sessions. They included discussions on: (i) recent and proposed changes in the statistical organisations relating to food and agriculture; (ii) agricultural and related surveys undertaken and plans for the future, including those on the census of agriculture; (iii) recent innovative activities and measures undertaken since the last Commission Session; (iv) progress on environmental statistics and (v) outstanding problems.

38. The Commission noted that although country presentations gave the discussion points varying degrees of emphasis, according to their priorities, they shared a common underlying theme – that of a recognition of the limitations and deficiencies of their current practices in obtaining food and agricultural statistics, and a strong commitment to improve them at every opportunity.

39. The Commission was pleased to hear that continuous progress was being made in improving the quality of statistical services through a combination of measures. These included: improvement of methodologies; providing increased training; extending the scope and coverage of programs; developing and improving computer processing systems; and enhancing dissemination systems, particularly with respect to the utilisation of Internet facilities. The Commission was also pleased to hear that some of the progress was achieved with assistance from bilateral and multilateral donor organisations.

40. The Commission noted the continued importance of agriculture to the economies of countries in the Region, where it formed a significant part of gross domestic products. The Commission further observed, however, that the recent regional economic crisis could limit the amount of resources made available to improve statistical systems in member countries, at least during the next several years.

41. The Commission noted the wide variation in the statistical organisations of countries in Asia and the Pacific. Some countries had highly centralised systems; others had adopted varying degrees of decentralisation coupled with a national statistical coordinating body. The Commission noted the strengths and weaknesses of the different statistical systems in the Region and country-specific problems arising from the existing arrangements. It took particular note of the problems associated with coordination, validation, duplication and inconsistencies in food and agricultural statistics in some countries. The Commission was pleased to note that some of the countries had enacted laws that would strengthen their national statistical systems.

42. The Commission was pleased to note that many countries in the Region now had regular programmes for agricultural censuses. Some countries had started implementation of their first censuses mostly with technical assistance and training from FAO with funding from donor agencies. The Commission noted with interest that the collection of annual commodity statistics by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) had changed from a census to a sample survey basis beginning with the 1997-98 reference year.

43. The Commission noted that the accurate estimation of cropped areas continued to present problems for some countries, but was pleased to hear that a range of strategies were being adopted to improve area estimates.

44. The Commission was interested to learn that differences existed in the priorities between and within countries on data quality issues. In some countries timeliness was given foremost importance, while in others, priority was given to other user-driven considerations. It also acknowledged the need for diversification in statistical activities to cover forecasting, early warning systems, and market information systems.

45. The Commission recognised the interest expressed by some countries in the development of environmental statistics alongside agricultural data. It also recognised the need to take a balanced and global approach in measuring the impacts on the environment of both agricultural and non-agricultural activities.

46. The Commission was pleased to receive a report on the activities of ESCAP, SEAFDEC and SIAP as they relate to the work of FAO in general, and the Commission in particular. It acknowledged ESCAP's invitation for RAP to present a paper on the agricultural statistical activities of the Commission in the next ESCAP Committee on Statistics meeting.

REPORT ON JAPAN/FAO COOPERATIVE PROJECT "IMPROVEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS IN ASIA AND PACIFIC COUNTRIES"

(Item 6 of the Agenda)

47. The document APCAS/98/5 "Progress Report on Project GCP/RAS/171/JPN – Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries" was presented to inform the Commission of the progress made on this project. The Commission was reminded that this task had been undertaken as a follow-up to a recommendation made during its Sixteenth Session in Tokyo.

48. The Commission was informed that immediately after the Session in Tokyo, continuous consultation between the APCAS Secretariat and Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries had been made to facilitate the formulation of the Project Document. The document was approved in early 1998. The Project was funded by the Government of Japan, and FAO was designated as the executing agency.

49. The Project would cover the following 18 developing member countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Republic of Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

50. The Commission was informed that the Project had set two immediate objectives, thus: (i) national development strategies and plans drawn up for improvement of food and agricultural statistics and information, for implementation in participating countries; and (ii) plan for the establishment of a data base and equipment facilities, in a number of countries, to provide a capability to transfer data in electronic format both to and from countries in the Region, and FAO, using common concepts, standards and classifications.

51. The Commission welcomed this Project as a timely step to improve information sharing and dissemination. It, however, forewarned that some member countries might be unable to provide financial support necessary to meet their respective obligations to institutionalize and maintain the envisioned regional information exchange. The Commission though expressed optimism that, through the Project, bilateral or multilateral donor agencies might be willing to fund technical assistance to member countries as needed at the earliest opportunity.

52. As an initial activity of the Project, a draft questionnaire had been prepared as a tool for collecting basic information for the in-depth studies on the national food and agricultural statistical systems in participating countries. The member countries were requested to review and comment on the draft questionnaire at the earliest opportunity.

53. The Commission recommended that in order to increase the utility of the expected outputs of the Project, consultations with the private sector as possible data user of the system should be included in its activities.

54. The Commission also requested member countries to expedite the nominations of focal points to facilitate project implementation.

FOOD INSECURITY AND VULNERABILITY INFORMATION AND MAPPING SYSTEM

(Item 7 of the Agenda)

55. The document APCAS/98/6 "Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS)" was presented to the Commission by the Director, Statistics Division, FAO, Rome. The Commission was informed of the World Food Summit (WFS) Plan of Action which stated that governments would:

> "develop and periodically up-date, where necessary, a national Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS) indicating areas and populations, including at the local level, affected by or at risk of hunger and malnutrition, and elements contributing to food insecurity, making maximum use of existing data and information systems in order to avoid duplication of efforts".

56. The Plan of Action also called on FAO to play a catalytic role, within the UN family, for the further elaboration and definition of the System and for its development in a coordinated manner.

57. Among the initial actions undertaken by FAO were: (i) the establishment of an interagency mechanism, at the technical level, to oversee the development of FIVIMS internationally and to ensure the necessary collaboration and coordination of all FIVIMS related efforts; (ii) the designation of country focal points for all matters related to FIVIMS; and (iii) the preparation of guidelines for national FIVIMS.

58. The Commission was given an overview of the considerations made so far regarding the development of FIVIMS which included: (i) the problems to be addressed in developing national FIVIMS; (ii) the current state of national information systems related to FIVIMS; (iii) the goals, purposes and objectives at the national level; (iv) the expected benefits and main users of national FIVIMS; and (v) the tasks ahead at the international level.

59. The Commission was informed that food insecurity was a complex phenomenon attributable to a range of factors that, over time, varied in importance across regions, countries and social groups. Policies aimed at promoting food security, if they were to be effective, required accurate and timely information on the incidence, nature and causes of food insecurity and vulnerability. It was reported that most countries had established statistical services and information systems that generate and analyse such information. These national systems were, however, constrained by a number of related factors such as lack of political commitment and institutional, technical and financial constraints.

60. The Commission was informed of the categories of possible national information systems related to FIVIMS. These were: agricultural information systems; health information systems; land, water and climatic information systems; early warning systems; household food security and nutrition information systems; market information systems; and vulnerability assessment and mapping systems. However, although a number of national information systems had already been established around the world or were in the process of being developed, they varied widely in the following aspects: the number of systems established, their content, how well they are integrated, their geographic coverage, the indicators and analytical techniques used, the quality and reliability of the information produced, and their institutional sustainability.

61. The Commission was further informed that there could be no single formula for strengthening national food insecurity and vulnerability information systems. Each case must be considered individually to determine its unique set of objectives, particular constraints and specific needs.

62. The Commission noted that the FIVIMS work programme at the international level included the provision of support to countries in the following areas: (i) national workshops to stimulate awareness of, and interest in FIVIMS; (ii) inventory of national information systems with specific relevance for FIVIMS; (iii) regional and sub-regional training and the sharing of national experiences in the development and use of FIVIMS-related information systems; (iv) methodological guidelines on specific technical issues of particular interest to countries experiencing different food security situations; and (v) design and implementation of pilot FIVIMS activities.

63. The Commission was pleased to learn that, in supporting countries, FAO would place emphasis on strengthening the existing information systems rather than creating new ones.

64. The Commission recommended that the selection of indicators for FIVIMS at the country level should be guided by the specific causes of food insecurity and vulnerability (e.g. caused by market instability or crop failure) in the respective countries/regions. The Commission also emphasized the need to formulate a minimum set of indicators for FIVIMS at the global level.

65. At the Working Session organised on FIVIMS the delegates present were given illustrations of the kind of data/indicators (including the respective sources) that would be required for FIVIMS and the related statistical issues. Particular emphasis was placed on the methodology for estimating the number of undernourished and the use of data from food balance sheets as well as household income/expenditure surveys.

66. The delegates welcomed the plans of the Statistics Division, FAO to promote the use of data from existing household income/expenditure surveys for estimating the prevalence of undernutrition. The promotion would be done through the organisation of regional/sub-regional seminars/workshops.

GEOCODING FOR LAND USE MAPPING

(Item 8 of the Agenda)

67. The document APCAS/98/7 “Geocoding of Agricultural Establishments in Australia” was presented to the Commission by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

68. The Commission was advised that the ABS had made a decision in principle to geocode farm businesses on the ABS Business Register. Geocoding involved a process of identifying farm properties by spatially coding the farm entrance, the farm house, the centroid of the property, or property boundaries.

69. The main benefits of geocoded data to the ABS and users of agricultural data were the ability to: (i) classify units to non-standard classifications and provide users with data on user-defined geographical areas; (ii) provide a coverage check; and (iii) produce time series data for geographic areas.

70. The Commission was informed of the difficulties experienced by ABS in geocoding agricultural properties. These included location of the farm entrance in relation to the property, location of the centroid of an irregularly located property and multiple parcels for many farms. Ideally, the ABS would want to capture property boundaries and store them digitally in a Geographic Information System (GIS). The Commission was advised that, in Australia, the development and maintenance of land owner registers was a State Government responsibility and each State had developed its own Digital Cadastral Data Base (DCDB). However, as information about agricultural farms on the ABS’ Business Register was based on the land operator, and not on the owner of the land, very low matching rates had been achieved.

71. The Commission was advised that a number of geocoding trials had been conducted by the ABS with the most recent being done in 1997, using a MapInfo GIS containing physical data (roads, railway lines, rivers), Local Government Area boundaries, cadastral line work and locality names. The GIS plotted a map of the area based on this information and information from the Business Register. Respondents were asked to mark on these maps either the boundaries of their land holdings or a single point corresponding to their farm gate. The trial confirmed the feasibility of this methodology and enabled the ABS to determine the costs of geocoding farms.

72. The Commission was advised of ABS' involvement in a joint project with the Bureau of Resource Sciences (BRS) to map land use throughout Australia. The proposal involved geocoding data from the 1996-97 Agricultural Census so that land use, commodities produced and land management practices available at the farm level, could be used along with a range of other data, including remote sensing data, to produce detailed land use maps.

73. It noted, however, that a critical issue for this activity would be the need to ensure that confidentiality requirements for use and release of information relating to individual farms were preserved.

74. The ABS advised that a recent proposal from BRS to produce both broad national land use maps and finer detailed maps for selected Key Implementation Areas (KIA's) using this approach had been approved. This work would enable the activities on land use mapping to progress. However, the major obstacle to advancing this work on a national scale was the initial cost of geocoding all agricultural establishments.

STRATEGIC VIEW OF THE FUTURE REQUIREMENTS FOR AGRICULTURE STATISTICS FROM A WORLD PERSPECTIVE AND THE CHALLENGES TO BE FACED BY COUNTRIES

(Item 9 of the Agenda)

75. The APCAS/98/8 document entitled "Strategic View of Agricultural Statistics for the Next Millennium" was presented by the Director, Estimates Division, National Agricultural Statistics Service, US Department of Agriculture. Document APCAS/98/9 entitled "Issues and Concerns for Developing Countries" was presented to the Commission by the Chief, Statistical Analysis Service, Statistics Division, FAO, Rome. Document APCAS/98/10 on "Future Role for Governments in Providing Agricultural Statistics Services: Issues for Discussion" was presented by the Manager, Land and Water Economics Section, Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE).

76. The document APCAS/98/8 stressed that there were fundamental forces sweeping across agriculture that would have significant implications for organizations that produced agricultural statistics. Any one of these trends would be significant and the fact that they were all occurring at the same time was unprecedented. In addition, these trends were occurring at a faster pace than had been experienced in the past. The Commission was informed about these trends along with the resulting implications, and the data requirements they would present.

77. It was emphasized that these changes and their consequences called for strategic planning to be ready to meet the data challenges that would result. It would be important for agricultural statisticians to have a strategy to review statistics programs so that the new data requirements could be met. Future data requirements would require statistical organizations to have more than one statistical systems, one to provide national level forecasts and the other for small area statistics.

78. The Commission was advised that as statistical organizations shaped statistical programs to meet the new data challenges, they would need to search for new solutions to meet the new demands for data and information.

79. It was suggested that the major trends affecting agriculture were being influenced by technology, changing role of governments, changing structure of agriculture, and the globalization of

world markets and trade. These trends were creating data needs that went beyond the traditional census and survey methods. Countries should consider a statistical program that satisfy data needs for efficient marketing, public policy, and investment purposes. Data needs for efficient marketing could be met by national level sample surveys. Data needs for public policy and investment could be met using a combination of sample surveys and annual sample censuses. Several approaches were offered to the Commission, with a challenge for the future that national statistical organizations would need to work in cooperation to ensure consistent data were provided.

80. The Commission observed that while the private sector needed statistical information and did collect data, the role of governments to provide unbiased data for all users was necessary. The private sector collected information for its vested interests and not for the benefit of its competitors or society in general.

81. The Commission also suggested that it was proper for government to finance the collection of data used by the private sector. In addition to the needs of the private sector for data in a market economy, there was also a public good component to such data.

82. The Commission further observed that while rapid technological changes were occurring in these areas, in many countries a significant proportion of food production was still produced at the household level.

83. The document APCAS/98/9 focused on the data requirements arising from the evolving approach of agriculture planners over the years to consider issues relating to the welfare of the population dependent on agriculture, food security of the population, depletion of natural resources, and environmental concerns. Moreover the need to examine the impact of agricultural policies on the welfare of the population dependent on agriculture had led to a renewed interest in household surveys collecting agricultural data concurrently with welfare data.

84. The Commission was informed that despite the increased awareness of the importance of statistics for policy and planning for agricultural development, most developing countries still did not have systems of statistics that were adequate to address the above-mentioned issues. The problem was multifaceted in nature and in order to improve the situation it would be important to consider a comprehensive approach that went beyond the traditional focus on agricultural censuses and surveys.

85. The Commission was given an overview of the steps involved in the development of a comprehensive approach that also reflected the socio-economic and environmental concerns associated with agriculture as follows: (i) identifying a core set of data; (ii) critical review of the existing systems of data collection; (iii) processing data within the framework of supply/utilisation accounts and economic accounts; (iv) identifying additional data that may be collected through the existing census/survey programmes; and (v) considering the need for a household survey collecting key agricultural data concurrently with welfare data.

86. The Commission noted that attempts to improve the situation through the comprehensive approach should be supported by adequate financial resources and national capacity building such as provision of appropriate infrastructure and training. In view of this, implementation would have to take into account the country's specific priorities regarding data needs and the available resources. The Commission noted that the comprehensive approach would build on earlier programmes involving integrated household surveys, such as National Household Survey Capability Program (NHSCP) or the Living Standard Measurement Study but would have the additional feature of a panel survey.

87. The Commission welcomed the intention of FAO to organise in collaboration with SIAP, a seminar/workshop on agriculture-related environmental indicators and accounts for APCAS countries in 1999.

FORESTRY STATISTICS

(Item 10 of the Agenda)

88. The Commission had before it Document No. APCAS/98/11 "Forestry Statistics and Information in Asia and Pacific Region". It was informed that this paper reviewed the current state of statistics and information of FAO about forestry for the Asia-Pacific region and described improvements undertaken during the past two years. Opportunities and options for improvement of statistics and information systems as recommended by the Seventeenth Session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission were introduced.

89. The Commission was informed that most of the information about forestry in the Asia-Pacific region currently compiled by FAO fell broadly into two areas: (i) forest product information**,** including information and statistics on the production (including capacity), consumption, trade and utilisation of forest products; and (ii) forest resource information**,** including information and statistics on the area, stocking, growth, condition and type of forest resources in countries.

90. The Commission noted that this information was usually collected by means of questionnaires sent to all countries and, therefore, depended heavily on the cooperation and capacity of countries to supply timely and accurate information.

91. It was pointed out that forest product trade was one area where information compiled by FAO was currently quite good. In contrast to trade, production statistics currently compiled by FAO were not as complete or reliable. Roundwood production data were even less reliable. The Commission was informed that statistics on production and trade of non-wood forest products (NWFP) were also fairly weak; information on production capacity was only partially complete, but covered most major producing countries.

92. The Commission observed that FAO collected information on forest resources through the decennial Forest Resource Assessments (FRAs). The only forest resource information which was compiled annually was on forest area and forest fires.

93. The Commission was pleased to note that as a first step towards improving forestry statistics and information, FAO held a series of consultation meetings on the subject, including regional seminars and a global review of forestry statistics.

94. It was reported that FAO was continuously improving the quality of data in the Forest Products Yearbook by validating and cross-checking them with other sources. FAO, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Statistical Agency of the European Union (EUROSTAT) met in September 1998 to design a joint forest products production and trade questionnaire. Joint administration of this questionnaire was planned for 1999 depending on the concurrence of each organization's governing body. The FAO Forestry Department had also been working extensively on the harmonisation and standardisation of information about fuelwood and other NWFPs.

95. In the area of forest resources, the Commission was pleased to note that FAO was, in consultation with member governments, continuously reviewing and improving the techniques used to compile data for FRAs through several working groups. One of the major ways in which data collection could be improved was through capacity building in countries, which had been implemented through several projects. A major improvement in the dissemination of statistics had been the development and updating of forestry statistics databases on the World Agricultural Information Centre (WAICENT) available on the FAO Internet site.

96. The Commission was informed that statistics on the following areas needed improvement: roundwood production; area of trees outside the forest; data on services of the forest, including emerging ones like ecotourism and age-old ones like watershed functions; non-wood forest products and fuelwood production.

97. The Commission concurred with the following recommendations of the Seventeenth Session of Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC):

(i) APFC noted positively the ongoing efforts by FAO and ITTO to develop a joint forestry statistics questionnaire for use by FAO, ECE, EUROSTAT, and ITTO. It requested FAO and ITTO to monitor these efforts closely, and develop a similar joint questionnaire for Asia and the Pacific.

(ii) FAO should establish a network of statistics correspondents, or focal points, throughout the region. To accelerate communications, APFC recommended that questionnaires and other related correspondence be sent directly to the designated national correspondents.

(iii) FAO should establish an *ad hoc* Working Group on Forestry Statistics and Information; and ITTO and FAO should work in partnership to support the activities of the Working Group.

98. The Commission noted that one issue which needed to be resolved was the treatment of trees planted on agricultural holdings. It observed that products from such trees represented a large proportion of farm income in some countries. USA reported that these products were considered as agricultural production. It was pointed out that areas under forest of agricultural holdings were to be enumerated in agricultural censuses.

99. The Commission reiterated its recommendation made at the Sixteenth Session, that FAO should provide more precise definitions and guidelines on which aspects of emerging agro-forestry activities should properly belong to the agricultural sector and which ones should remain within the confines of forestry.

100. The Commission heard a presentation of forestry statistics activities which were reported in the New Zealand country statement. The forestry situation in the country was reviewed.

101. The Commission noted that New Zealand monitored its planted production forests through its National Exotic Forest Description Programme (NEFDP), which was run as a partnership between the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the forest industry. It was informed that two data sets were maintained: area by age; and yield.

102. It was mentioned that forest area data were collected annually with large forest owners providing data electronically. Data were collected from other forest owners with more than 40 hectares as an annual postal census. Information from owners with between 1 and 40 hectares was collected periodically through sample surveys.

103. The Commission was informed that forest areas were validated against New Zealand's Land Cover Database, and that the NEFDP provided quantitative information on the extent, composition and future development of New Zealand's planted production forests. This information were used principally: (i) to derive new government policy, and to determine the effects of current policy; (ii) to provide strategic planning information for agencies involved in providing infrastructure to the forest industry, in areas such as energy, roads, rail, port and shipping; (iii) to meet the needs of the international community, particularly with regard to monitoring and reporting on environmental concerns; (iv) to improve conditions for the operation of a free market for the forest industry, by providing information that would not be released by companies competing with one another.

104. The Commission noted with satisfaction that New Zealand also monitored new forest planting, harvesting, wood processing, domestic consumption and trade in forestry products.

STRIKING THE BALANCE BETWEEN CENSUSES AND SURVEYS, THEIR FREQUENCY, SCOPE AND COVERAGE

(Item 11 of the Agenda)

105. Two documents, APCAS/98/12 "The Introduction of a Sample Survey for the Collection of Agricultural Commodity Data in Australia" and APCAS/98/13 "Striking the Balance Between Censuses and Surveys, Their Frequency, Scope and Coverage" were presented to the Commission.

106. The Commission was informed that Document APCAS/98/12, which was presented by the Assistant Director, Economic Statistics Branch, ABS, articulated the challenges confronting the Australian Bureau of Statistics as the result of the recent shift from annual commodity censuses to quinquennial censuses and sample surveys.

107. The Commission was informed that following a decision by the Australian Federal Government in May 1997, the ABS moved from conducting annual censuses of agriculture, which it had done for more than 100 years, to quinquennial censuses, with the implementation of large sample surveys in inter-censal years. The first Agricultural Commodity Survey (ACS) was conducted in respect to the 1997-98 reference period. Prior to implementing ACS, an extensive consultation process was organized to inform users of the decision and to seek their views on the objectives, scope, coverage and contents of the new survey. Members of the User Advisory Group accepted the proposal to adopt a large stratified random sample approach for the collection of Commodity Statistics.

108. The Commission was informed that ABS endeavoured to make the scope, coverage and content of the ACS comparable with that of previous agricultural censuses. Thus, in the ACS, the reference year was retained as the year ending 31 March, similar questions were asked and the scope of the collection consisted of all agricultural establishments on the ABS' list frame having an Estimated Value of Agricultural Operations (EVAO) of A$ 5000 or more. This strategy ensured the continued availability of the full range of commodity data required to provide estimates of the value of agricultural production, a major requirement for most users, and essential for the compilation of the national accounts.

109. The Commission noted that the 1997-98 ACS used a stratified random sample of agricultural establishments. It was informed that stratification was used to improve the efficiency of the sample and to control the quality of statistical output.

110. Some agricultural units though, were selected with certainty. Units were completely enumerated if they were: (i) located in one of Australia's 2 territories which each contained relatively few farms; (ii) extremely significant in terms of EVAO, area of holding or their contribution to production for a given commodity; and (iii) multi-establishment units (i.e. those operating a number of properties in distinctly separate geographical areas); (iv) producers of rare commodities, defined as those commodities that are important in terms of value of production, but produced by a few farmers. ABS found this sector to be too large and was considering to have it significantly reduced in future surveys.

111. The Commission was informed that ACS used "number-raised" estimation procedure which was proven in earlier exercises to produce more reliable commodity estimates between years than ratio estimation due to the impact of significantly changed agricultural production resulting from atypical climatic conditions.

112. The Commission was informed that historically the principal source of updating information was obtained from census forms. This information related to business name and address changes and details of purchases and sales of land. In addition to Agricultural Census feedback, a range of other coverage sources were also used to update the Business Register. These included group employer registrations for farms that employ labour (from the Australian Taxation Office); details of land ownership changes from relevant state government agencies; lists of producers obtained from industry associations; and information from agriculture-related publications.

113. The move to a sample survey, had accelerated the need to investigate other coverage sources. The ABS was currently investigating the feasibility of using lists of sales tax exemption registrations from the Taxation Office as well as Australian Customs Service lists of diesel fuel rebate applicants. However the loss of coverage of the population list frame during the inter-censal period remained a major concern.

114. The Commission noted that major implications of the shift to sample surveying included a A$ 1 million reduction in the budget of the ABS' Agriculture Program as well as significant reductions in the statistical reporting load placed on small agricultural businesses.

115. These advantages, had, however, been offset by the considerable loss of “small area” regional data. While census data were released at the Statistical Local Area (SLA) level, the ACS results would only be available at the Agro-Ecological Region (AER), and possibly, the Statistical Division level.

116. Many clients also believed that quinquennial censuses were too infrequent to accurately measure inter-year variations in agricultural production deriving from varying climatic conditions, changing farm management practices or the volatility of international markets. They were also concerned that a sample might not sufficiently identify growth in emerging industries.

117. Another implication of the move to a sample survey approach was the introduction of sampling error and the effect this might have on the quality of estimates, particularly for minor commodities at the regional level. Any reduction in the quality of estimates also had the potential to impact upon the quality of other ABS data series, such as the Value of Agricultural Commodities Produced (VACP) and the Apparent Consumption of Foodstuffs series.

118. During intercensal years there would be an additional effect on the quality of estimates due to progressive deterioration of the population list frame. A degraded list frame had implications for future ACS samples and would impact upon other surveys conducted by the ABS, such as the Agricultural Finance Survey (AFS) as well as Farm Surveys conducted by ABARE.

119. The Commission was informed that Document APCAS/98/13 provided a discussion on the issues that might be considered by member countries in planning whether to use complete enumeration or sample survey techniques for the census of agriculture.

120. The Commission was informed that in recent years, many countries had seen a growing demand for a large variety of data attributable in part to the rapid changes in the agricultural structure as the sector responded to market globalization. However, available resources for data collection had been on the decline. A tendency had therefore developed to increase the frequency of censuses or to shift to structural surveys (sample enumeration).

121. The Commission noted that the FAO Programme for the World Census of Agriculture 2000 (WCA 2000) was the eighth decennial Programme. Unlike earlier programmes on census of agriculture, the WCA 2000 did not advocate for the simultaneous conduct of the census in all countries in a given year. It recognized the wide disparity in the current status of economic and statistical development in different countries. WCA 2000 encouraged countries to develop and implement an agricultural census according to their unique situation. The Commission noted that WCA 2000 encouraged standardization of a minimum core programme and a complementary relationship between the census and the more frequent food and agricultural sample surveys.

122. The Commission also noted the need for country-specific multi-year integrated statistical programme as component of a national information system for decision-making in food, agriculture and rural development. The Commission also recognized the need for all statistical development efforts to be oriented toward the long-term goal of establishing a national statistical programme that was user-driven. This implied that the system should be able to provide a continuous flow of timely and accurate data covering all relevant aspects of food, agricultural and rural development.

123. The Commission likewise noted that at the minimum, country-specific programme on agricultural census should meet the three basic objectives of WCA 2000, thus: (i) provide aggregate totals for fundamental agricultural data to use as benchmarks for inter-censal estimates; (ii) provide a frame for other agricultural surveys; and (iii) provide data for small administrative units and detailed cross-classification of farm structural attributes.

124. The Commission recognized that the decision on whether a census or structural survey should be undertaken in any one country should consider the actual needs of the prospective users. It noted that when agricultural censuses were infrequent, and especially when they were undertaken by an agency different from that conducting agricultural surveys, loss of institutional knowledge often occurred. That, as well as the availability of a suitable frame from a population census were elements to be factored into the decision process along with the availability of resources and organizational capability of the institution.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GUIDELINES ON THE COLLECTION OF STRUCTURAL INFORMATION ON AQUACULTURE

(Item 12 of the Agenda)

125. The document APCAS/98/14 "Progress on the implementation of the Guidelines on the Collection of Structural Aquaculture Statistics - Supplement to the Programme for the World Census of Agriculture 2000" (hereafter referred to as the Supplement) was presented to the Commission by the Aquaculture Statistician from Fisheries Information and Data Unit, FAO, Rome.

126. The Commission was given an overview of the following: (i) the importance of aquaculture in the Asian region and the role it played in food production at the national level; (ii) progress on dissemination of the Supplement; (iii) uptake of the Supplement; and (iv) advantages of including aquaculture as a Supplement to the census of agriculture.

127. The Commission was informed that in 1996 Asia accounted for over 91% of global aquaculture production and that at the national level, aquaculture could make a significant contribution to total fisheries production. In China for example, aquaculture accounted for up to 62% of total fisheries production; therefore aquaculture was of high importance as a food production sector.

128. The Commission was informed that the English version of the Supplement had been published and disseminated to relevant national agricultural and fisheries offices in January - February of 1998 and the French, Arabic and Spanish versions should be printed by the end of this year (1998). In addition, the commission was informed that the feasibility of translating the Supplement in Chinese was currently being explored.

129. The Commission was informed that as the Supplement to the Programme for the WCA 2000 was relatively new, the momentum of its uptake was likely to become clear in the next biennium and beyond. In particular it was pointed out that the Supplement made provisions for collecting structural information on aquaculture either as an independent aquaculture census or, as in the case of some countries with their fisheries census or as part of their agricultural census programme. The commission was further informed that irrespective of the mode of collection, the adoption of the guidelines in the Supplement should be encouraged as it provided harmonised terminology and definitions for the collection of structural information on aquaculture.

130. The Commission was informed that although the need for including aquaculture in the Programme for the WCA 2000 was acknowledged by countries, the extent to which the Supplement was incorporated to date might also depend on the timing of preparatory activities for the national census. In China, for example, preparation for the 1997 Census of Agriculture, which included fisheries questions, preceded the Supplement and so it was not possible for it to be fully considered in their census programme. Nevertheless, the Supplement provided important guidelines for harmonising the definitions for the fisheries questions and the Commission was pleased to note that the definitions would be considered.

131. The Commission was informed that even though the Supplement was relatively new, the importance of aquaculture and capture fisheries was recognised by FAO member countries and that China and India had included elements of these activities in their census programmes. Three of the four questionnaires used for the preliminary trial of the First National Agricultural Census of China contained at least one direct question on fisheries.

132. The Commission was further informed that in India, the collection of quantitative structural information on aquaculture could not be included as part of their agricultural census but discussions were underway to evaluate the feasibility of including aquaculture items as part of the livestock census.

133. The Commission was made aware of the serious problems faced by many countries in the region on developing methodologies for conducting aquaculture surveys and took note of the emphasis placed by countries for FAO to provide guidelines on the collection of structural as well production statistics.

134. The Commission was pleased to learn that countries such as China and India would actively pursue the inclusion of aquaculture census items in their future programmes. The Commission further noted the interest of several other countries to explore the feasibility, mechanisms and logistics of collecting quantitative structural information on aquaculture.

135. The Commission recommended that to increase the probability of uptake, the relevant offices responsible for agricultural census should be made aware of the Supplement and encouraged to collaborate closer with the relevant fisheries offices.

136. The training of enumerators was recognised as being important. The Commission recommended that as the enumerators may be new or unfamiliar with the full spectrum of aquaculture activities, countries including aquaculture in their agricultural census should involve national experts in aquaculture and fishery statistics in the planning and execution phase of the agricultural census.

137. The Commission recommended, in view of the long term nature of the census activities, that FAO also consider developing guidelines or harmonised indicators and terminologies for aquaculture for use in inter- censal surveys

OTHER MATTERS

(Item 13 of the Agenda)

a) Other Business

138. The Commission visited in the afternoon of 4 November 1998 the historic town of Richmond and the Bonorong Wildlife Reserve. This was an opportunity for countries' delegates to observe Australian native animals, especially the endangered species.

139. The Commission appreciated the positive response of the delegates to the invitation of the Secretariat for them to bring copies of their statistical publications and materials for exhibition during the Session.

140. The Commission took the opportunity to observe a major Australian cultural event, the horse race for the Melbourne Cup, during the afternoon coffee break on 3 November 1998.

b) Venue of the Eighteenth Session of APCAS

141. Indonesia volunteered to host the Eighteenth Session of APCAS, planned for the year 2000. The head of Indonesia's delegation invited the Commission to meet in his country for its next Session. The Commission welcomed this offer by acclamation and conveyed its thanks to the Government of Indonesia. It requested the Secretariat to pursue the matter with the relevant authorities.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT AND CLOSING OF THE SESSION

(Items 14 and 15 of the Agenda)

142. The Commission concluded its Seventeenth Session on 6 November 1998 after considering and adopting the report prepared by the Drafting Committee. It was followed by a vote of thanks.

Appendix A

SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE ASIA AND PACIFIC COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS

Hobart, Australia, 2 - 6 November 1998

AGENDA

1. Opening of the Session
2. Election of Chairman, Vice-Chairmen and Drafting Committee
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable
4. FAO's Activities in Food and Agricultural Statistics during 1996-98 in the Asia and Pacific Region
5. Review of the Present State of Food and Agricultural Statistics in Member Countries of the Commission - Country Statements
6. Report on Japan/FAO Cooperative Project "Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries"
7. Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System
8. Geocoding for Land Use Mapping
9. Strategic View of the Future Requirements for Agricultural Statistics from a World Perspective and the Challenges to be Faced by Countries
10. Forestry Statistics
11. Striking the Balance between Censuses and Surveys, their Frequency, Scope and Coverage
12. Implementation of the Guidelines on the Collection of Structural Information on Aquaculture
13. Other Matters
14. Adoption of the Report
15. Closing of the Session

Appendix B

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Appendix C

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Doc. No.	Agenda Item	Title of Documents
APCAS/98/1	3	Provisional Agenda
APCAS/98/2	3	Provisional Timetable
APCAS/98/3	4	FAO's Activities in Food and Agricultural Statistics during 1996-98 in t the Asia and Pacific Region
APCAS/98/4	5	Country Statements on the State of Food and Agricultural Statistics (see List of Country/Agency Papers, on next page)
APCAS/98/5	6	Progress Report on Project GCP/RAS/171/JPN – Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries
APCAS/98/6	7	Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System
APCAS/98/7	8	Geocoding of Agricultural Establishments in Australia
APCAS/98/8	9	Strategic View of Agricultural Statistics for the Next Millennium
APCAS/98/9	9	Issues and Concerns for Developing Countries
APCAS/98/10	9	Future Role for Governments in Providing Agricultural Statistics Services : Issues for Discussion
APCAS/98/11	10	Forestry Statistics and Information in Asia and Pacific Region
APCAS/98/12	11	The Introduction of a Sample Survey for the Collection of Agricultural Commodity Data in Australia
APCAS/98/13	11	Striking the Balance between Censuses and Surveys, their Frequency, Scope and Coverage
APCAS/98/14	12	Progress on the Implementation of the Guidelines on the Collection of Structural Aquaculture Statistics – Supplement to the Programme for the World Census of Agriculture 2000

Country/Agency Papers (document APCAS/98/4) were presented by delegates from the following countries/agencies (titles, if any, are given in brackets):

- Australia (Agricultural Statistics)
- Bangladesh
- Bhutan
- Cambodia
- China (Rural Statistical Reform and Development in China)
- Fiji
- New Caledonia
- India (System of Agricultural Statistics in India – The Recent Development)
- Indonesia
- Islamic Republic of Iran (Situation of agricultural statistics)
- Japan (Present State of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries Statistics and Information)
- Republic of Korea (System of Agricultural Statistics and Information)
- Lao PDR (Current Agricultural Statistics System)
- Malaysia
- Nepal (State of Food and Agriculture Statistics)
- New Zealand (Review of the Present State of Food and Agriculture Statistics)
- Pakistan (Status Paper on Agricultural Crops Estimation System)
- Philippines (Agriculture Statistical System : Gearing Toward the New Millennium)
- Sri Lanka (Present State of Agricultural Statistics)
- Thailand (Agricultural Statistics)
- United States of America
- SIAP (The Training Programme of the United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) and its Collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO))

Appendix D

INAUGURAL ADDRESS
BY
THE HONOURABLE SIR GUY GREEN AC KBE
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA

I add my welcome to you all to this meeting. I extend a special welcome to Tasmania to all our visitors from overseas. Whilst I know that you are here to do important work I do hope that you find time to enjoy some of the many attractions which this island State of ours has to offer.

We are honoured that you have chosen to hold the 17th Session of the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics in Australia and we feel especially privileged that it is being held here in Tasmania.

During this Session other speakers will be talking to you about Australia's work in agricultural statistics. I would like to say something about some of the activities in which Tasmania is engaged which are relevant to your field and which I think make it an especially appropriate venue for this meeting. First of all the National Project Centre for Agricultural Statistics in Australia is located here in Hobart. Tasmania is also an important centre for research and training in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture. Indeed the Department of Aquaculture in the University of Tasmania was the first and I think still is the only university aquaculture department in Australia. Tasmania is a major producer of food and forestry products of all kinds and has a thriving and innovative aquaculture industry which is rapidly expanding, production having trebled over the last five years.

Hobart is also the location of the Secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. By coincidence the Commission created by that convention is holding its annual series of meetings in Tasmania at the moment. One of the topics on its agenda is the development of a project to assess the size of the largest biomass on earth – the Krill resource in the Southern Ocean. A crucially important component of that project will be the collection, organisation and dissemination of the statistical data which it will produce.

Tasmania is also making contributions to specialised areas of research and development relevant to your field. One is the pioneering work done by Tasmanian workers in the increasingly important field of predictive microbiology. This involves the development of mathematical and computer models which increase the precision with which predictions can be made of the survival and growth of microorganisms in food products under various conditions. These models significantly increase the capacity of food producers and distributors to maximise the protection which they can give to consumers without having to employ the wasteful over-cautious practices which must be adopted when the precise limits of the risk against which they are guarding are not known. Predictive microbiology can thus be instrumental in increasing the productivity of the food industry without any increase in demands upon resources. As well, the techniques employed in predictive microbiology for the development of its models and for the validation and adjustment of those models in the light of observed behaviour are closely related to the sort of techniques employed in much of your work.

I do not refer to these Tasmanian endeavours in a boastful way, although we are proud of them. Rather I refer to them to illustrate why Tasmania feels it has a close affinity with the mission and the important work in which your Commission and FAO are engaged. So whilst you are here I do hope that you feel that you are amongst friends and colleagues who share your commitment to your important endeavours.

The availability of reliable, uniform and relevant agricultural statistics is of crucial significance for the work of the governments of this region and for the discharge of the mission of FAO. They are an essential precondition to effective planning, the formulation of policy and decision making generally. But the creation and dissemination of such data also serves a wider purpose. Reducing undernutrition is not just a simple matter of increasing the world's agricultural and marine resources. It also involves socioeconomic issues concerning population growth, rural poverty and international agricultural trade and questions such as how we reconcile the development of agricultural and marine resources with the preservation of the environment. The proper resolution of issues of that kind does not just involve technical considerations but also requires the making of value judgements and the weighing up of competing interests which have to be undertaken in the wider political and public domain. But debate about those larger issues can be ill informed or distorted because of popular ignorance or misconceptions about statistics and statistical methods. I think that professional statisticians can make a real contribution to increasing public debate about such issues by the way in which they present statistics, by educating laymen about their proper use and by disabusing them of some of the more common misconceptions about statistics. Examples of the sort of principles which it would be useful to make people aware of are that a correlation between variables does not demonstrate a casual connection between them, that uncontrolled extrapolation can lead to absurd results and that the reliability of statistics is always limited by the reliability of the physical measurements or observations from which they are derived.

The commitment, the professional detachment and the skill of the Commission and those who serve it make a significant contribution to increasing public and political understanding of food and agricultural resources and facilitating the resolution of the technical and wider issues which face the FAO and the governments of the Asia-Pacific region.

This meeting will I am sure be a most valuable vehicle for advancing the important objectives of the Commission.

I have much pleasure in declaring the 17th Session of the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics open.

Appendix E

JOINT STATEMENT BY THE FAO ASSISTANT DIRECTOR-GENERAL/ REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AND THE DIRECTOR, FAO STATISTICS DIVISION

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellency the Governor of the State of Tasmania,
Mr. McLennan, Australian Statistician,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome you all, on behalf of the FAO Director-General and on my own behalf to this Seventeenth Session of the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics.

May I express my heart-felt thanks to the Australian Statistician and through him to the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia for hosting this Commission Session.

This is the first time that the Commission meets in Australia and it is also the first time that its Session is held outside the capital city of a member country.

We admire Australia for its sound statistical system and for its unique decentralisation policy in statistics: major activities are conceived in Canberra (or rather Belconnen) while implementation of the programme in an area of statistics is piloted from one of the States. We are lucky that Australian agricultural statistics operations are launched from Hobart, Tasmania which allows us to meet here today, that is practically at the Southern-most of the Asia and Pacific Region. We look forward to learning more from the Australian statistical system during this conference. And we will also experience a memorable event during the period of our stay here: the Melbourne Cup will be held this week.

It is very encouraging that member countries and International Organizations respond so enthusiastically to the invitation to this Seventeenth Session of the Commission. Twenty-one countries out of 24 members have sent delegates and five UN and International Organizations are attending this Commission Session. I may mention here that Bhutan is sending a delegation to the Commission Session for the first time. All of us, old and new members, will certainly benefit from each other's experiences and expertise

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Many countries in the Asia and Pacific have been hit hard by a severe economic crisis during the last eighteen months or so. Most Southeast Asian countries are experiencing recessions that will badly affect life styles of the people and of course their food consumption. These difficulties are compounded by the effect of El Niño, which sees a number of countries facing drought or less-than-normal rainfall in parts of Asia while floods which seems to be the early indications of the coming in of La Niña are damaging crops in some other areas of the Region.

We fear that these calamities and economic problems will further deteriorate the nutritional status of malnourished people in our Region, the number of which was last estimated at 512 millions. The World Food Summit, held in Rome in November 1996, adopted a Plan of Action, which has guided FAO's Programme of Work and Budget.

ANALYSIS OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL DATA AND INFORMATION

The highest priority in FAO Programmes is on Food Security. The Plan of Action includes the development and maintenance of Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping Systems (FIVIMS), both at global and at national levels. Identification of the food-insecure and vulnerable people is the main purpose of these systems. It is opportune that you will discuss FIVIMS as the major agenda item of this Commission Session.

You will also have the opportunity to debate on actions to be taken at country level for the establishment of national FIVIMS, during a working session on this topic.

TOOLS FOR IMPROVING NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS

Following a recommendation of the previous Commission Session in Japan, FAO and the Government of Japan have closely cooperated in the formulation and execution of a regional project on "Improvement of Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries". The project will help countries identify priority areas for improvement and develop a statistical development plan. A progress report on this project will be presented at this Session, according to the Commission's wish, expressed during the Tokyo meeting. In the end the outputs of this project are expected to complement and further enrich FAOSTAT, the statistical component of WAICENT. These developments will enhance the participation of our member countries in the emerging global electronic information highway.

We are honored and privileged to have Australia and the United States of America to substantially contribute to this Commission Session, on different agenda items related to national statistical systems. These are: Geo-coding for Land Use Mapping; Strategic View of Future Requirements for Agricultural Statistics from a World Perspective and the Challenges to be Faced by Countries; and Striking the Balance between Censuses and Surveys, their Frequency, Scope and Coverage. You will find their papers and those of FAO on these topics thought provoking for future course of actions in food and agricultural statistics.

STATISTICS AND INFORMATION ON FORESTRY AND FISHERIES

Two important papers have been prepared for statistics and information relating to forestry and fisheries. They will be discussed under separate agenda items. It is important that they receive adequate attention, as activities in forestry and fisheries have major impacts on the environment.

The paper on forestry statistics and information will discuss major statistical activities in the region and future course of actions in this field.

For fisheries, the emphasis this time will be on structural aquaculture statistics. This is in line with the opinion of the Commission when it last met in Japan.

Finally, I would like to reiterate my thanks to the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia for hosting this Session of the Commission. The Australian and American technical contributions to the conference are also highly appreciated.

I would like to thank members of the Organizing Committee, set up by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, for their tireless efforts and important work to ensure that the Session meets in an environment conducive for fruitful deliberations and friendly atmosphere. I thank my colleagues from the FAO Headquarters and the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific for their dedication to servicing the Commission.

To close this address, I wish you success in your discussions and deliberations. FAO looks forward to your recommendations to guide our future activities.

Thank you.

Appendix F

ADDRESS BY THE AUSTRALIAN STATISTICIAN

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

- Welcome delegates to Conference and Australia.

- The recent financial crisis in many Asian countries has highlighted the importance of good statistics. A particular concern is whether there will be enough food for the citizens of the countries. Agriculture statistics are important contributor to knowledge on the supply of food. The theme of the Conference is very topical.

STRUCTURE OF STATISTICAL SYSTEM IN AUSTRALIA

- Centralised statistical system - i.e., the ABS is responsible for the majority of statistical activity, including most subject matters.

- Furthermore, the ABS is responsible for State Government statistical requirements as well as national requirements. This happened as a result of the national and State governments agreeing that there should be one national statistical agency.

- The ABS's mission is to assist and encourage informed decision making, research and discussion within governments and the community by providing a high quality, objective and responsive national statistical service.

- Statistical priorities are set by the Statistician after consultation with users; at the highest level, Australian Statistics Advisory Council provides advice to the Statistician. The members of the Council represent the broad community of users, not just Government.

- Nevertheless, there are important statistical activities taking place outside the ABS. These might be conducted by other national government agencies, State agencies or private organisations. For example, the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics, which is represented at this meeting, conducts a number of important agriculture collections. The national government has recently provided the ABS with a clearing house responsibility for statistical collections conducted by other national government agencies.

- This is consistent with the ABS's legal responsibility to co-ordinate the statistical activities of national government agencies.

- A large number of separate collections are undertaken by the ABS - range from regular surveys to periodic censuses, the 5-yearly Population Census being the largest.

- Also the ABS produces a range of outputs that bring together data from a range of collections generally using international statistical frameworks; these include the national accounts, balance of payments and social indicators.

- There is increasing reliance on administrative by-product data as a source for national statistics, particularly taxation data and data from State and regional authorities to support regional data requirements.

- This reduces the cost to the ABS and to businesses who might otherwise have to complete ABS questionnaires.

- The integrity of the statistics produced by the ABS are extremely important to our public reputation. We believe that reliable social and economic statistics are fundamental to open government. We achieve this in several ways:

    - all users have equal access to statistics; the government does not have access to information which is not available to other members of the community;

    - statistics are released simultaneously to all users, usually a printed publication is provided at the time of the first release of statistics. (The only exception is that Ministers and a limited number of government officials have access to selected statistics about two hours in advance of embargo time to enable Ministers to be briefed for media enquiries);

    - the release dates for all key publications are notified well in advance;

    - the concepts, sources and methods of key statistics are documented and available to the public;

    - we provide information about the reliability of the statistics we publish;

    - we are quick to respond to any criticisms about the quality and integrity of statistics;

    - we absolutely maintain the confidentiality of all material provided to us by respondents.

STRUCTURE OF ABS

- About 3000 permanent staff with some 800 temporary staff; budget in excess of $250M; more staff required for the five-yearly Population Census.

- Decentralised structure with Central Office (CO) in Canberra and an office in each State capital; about half our staff are located in State capitals.

- Statistical programs are partitioned into two groups - Economic and Population and Social, with support provided by four service Divisions - Methodology, Information Services, Technology Services, Corporate Services.

- Each field of statistical activity is the responsibility of a subject matter unit, with the responsibility for collection activity concentrated in subject-specific National Project Centres, mostly located in State Offices to take advantage of the skilled staff in these locations; the overall subject matter program management is in CO in all cases. For example, the Agriculture Program is managed from Central Office in Canberra but the statistical collection responsibilities are located in Tasmania.

AGRICULTURE STATISTICS

- The major ABS agriculture collection activities are:

  - the agriculture census; used to be annual but now five-yearly;
  - a large scale agriculture survey in intervening years;
  - an annual survey of agriculture finances;
  - monthly and quarterly livestock production collections.

- Statistics from these collections are available in publications and electronic releases. Copies of the publications will be made available to you.

- Significant changes are taking place in the interest of users and we are currently working out how to respond to these changes

  - there is a growing interest in regional economies which have not progressed as well economically as other parts of Australia;
  - there is also interest in the access that rural communities have to a range of facilities, particularly communication and IT facilities;
  - land management practices and other environmental issues are of growing interest;
  - there is interest in emerging industries such as aquaculture;
  - there is interest in the effective management of resources in agriculture activity.

SUPPORT FOR THE REGION

- ABS is committed to sharing knowledge and contributing to international forums.

- ABS is a member of the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) and is an active member of Asia/Pacific forums.

- In recent years, the ABS has provided support to the region, including some of the APCAS member countries (e.g., Indonesia, Bhutan, Nepal, Malaysia, China, India, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Thailand).

- ABS has very close relationship with Stats NZ and has exchanged staff at senior levels in recent years.

- Objective is to assist countries to establish good statistical policies and methodologies. We do this with the knowledge that Asian statisticians are among the best in the world. Our highest priority for technical assistance is the Asia/Pacific region. Almost all our technical assistance effort is devoted to the region.

- Technical assistance is achieved in a variety of ways:

  - ABS staff undertake statistical consultancies abroad; our approach is to help countries to do the job rather than do the job for them;

  - ABS staff participate in courses and workshops as teachers;

  - we host study tours to ABS by staff from overseas agencies;

  - we provide documents about the statistical methods used by the ABS;

  - active participation in international conferences such as APCAS.

CONCLUSION

- To conclude, I hope you have frank and interesting discussions and that the Conference is worthwhile. Of course, that depends on you! Please express our views, even if they may be critical. That is the Australian way!

- Please let me know if you have any questions or comments on what I have said.

Appendix G

FAO ASIA AND PACIFIC COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS

Members as of November 1998

Australia	Indonesia	New Zealand
Bangladesh	Iran, Islamic Rep. of	Pakistan
Bhutan	Japan	Philippines
Cambodia	Korea, Rep. of	Sri Lanka
China, People's Rep. of	Lao PDR	Thailand
Fiji	Malaysia	United Kingdom
France	Myanmar	United States of America
India	Nepal	Vietnam

DATES AND PLACES OF SESSIONS OF THE ASIA AND PACIFIC COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS

First	-	Tokyo, 26 September - 3 October 1966
Second	-	New Delhi, 9 - 14 December 1968
Third	-	Bangkok, 26 - 31 October 1970
Fourth	-	Seoul, 6 - 12 October 1972
Fifth	-	Kuala Lumpur, 16 - 20 July 1974
Sixth	-	Manila, 25 - 31 March 1976
Seventh	-	Bangkok, 17 - 23 August 1978
Eighth	-	Kathmandu, 26 - 31 October 1980
Ninth	-	Dhaka, 2 - 7 December 1982
Tenth	-	Jakarta, 26 July - 1 August 1984
Eleventh		Seoul, 29 May - 3 June 1986
Twelfth	-	Colombo, 10 - 16 August 1988
Thirteenth	-	Bangkok, 29 October - 2 November 1990
Fourteenth	-	Beijing, 8 - 13 June 1992
Fifteenth	-	Manila, 24 - 28 October 1994
Sixteenth	-	Tokyo, 28 October - 1 November 1996
Seventeenth	-	Hobart, 2 - 6 November 1998