The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) develops and promotes international standards and guidelines on conducting agricultural censuses.

FAO, through its agricultural census team, provides countries with technical assistance and capacity building to support the production and dissemination of relevant, sound, harmonized and internationally comparable structural data on agriculture that underpin evidence-based decision-making at the national, regional and international levels, including the monitoring of some key indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Area of work

Since the 1940s, FAO is responsible for improving and updating the decennial World Programme for the Census of Agriculture (WCA) to support countries with their national agricultural census, while applying the latest international standards and methodologies. The WCA 2020 is the tenth and latest programme, covering the 2016–2025 decade, and is supported by two dedicated volumes: one on the programme, concepts and definitions and one on the operational guidelines.

FAO regularly organizes regional roundtables and workshops to advocate the use of the census guidelines, disseminate among FAO Members the latest census standards and best practices, and facilitate the exchange of country knowledge and experiences.

FAO develops country capacity by supporting the planning, designing and implementation of national censuses of agriculture. Knowledge-sharing activities include documenting agricultural censuses worldwide and publishing the census reports and other materials. At the end of each census round, national census practices, methodologies and results are reviewed, with findings published in FAO's Statistical Development Series.

Key census data are also published on the FAOSTAT digital platform, where a domain gathers structural data from agricultural censuses conducted since the 1930 round, enabling comparison and assessment of trends over time.
Core objectives

> Develop appropriate methodological guidelines (including concepts, definitions and standards) for the collection and analyses of data on agricultural censuses and associated surveys.
> Build country capacity to design, conduct and analyse agricultural censuses and associated surveys through technical meetings, promote the use of standards and facilitate the exchange of methodological experiences.
> Formulate concept notes and technical assistance projects on agricultural censuses while providing project backstops.
> Monitor, document and disseminate national agricultural censuses and associated surveys.
> Assess national census practices, methodologies and results, and publish the findings in FAO’s Statistical Development Series.
> Provide ad hoc technical assistance on censuses of agriculture to countries, partners, stakeholders and census practitioners.
> Disseminate structural data from agricultural censuses on the FAOSTAT digital platform.

Key outputs

Data collection and dissemination

> Develop and disseminate methodological guidelines and operational guidelines on the WCA in the six official languages of the United Nations system.
> Provide country census metadata and methodological reviews.
> Provide country census reports and materials for each census round (only electronically).
> Update the FAOSTAT domain on structural data from agricultural censuses.

Methodological work

> Develop and update conceptual, methodological and operational guidelines to collect statistical information on the structure of national agriculture sectors through agriculture censuses.
> Document and assess national census methodologies and practices.

Capacity development

> Provide technical assistance to countries to build capacity in the planning, preparation and implementation of agricultural censuses, in line with WCA guidelines.
> Provide training to countries by organizing regional meetings to facilitate the exchange of country knowledge and disseminate updated guidelines and best practices.
> Provide in-country training on agricultural census standards (concepts, definitions, methodologies) and field operations.

Census of agriculture


>> FAO statistics

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)