

ISI Committee on Agricultural Statistics

A brief history of an influential Committee

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This year marks the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the ISI Committee on Agricultural Statistics. This article revisits the history of the Committee showing its role in promoting the visibility and standing of agricultural statistics worldwide and its contribution to the advancement of the statistical system at the national and global levels.

1. Foundation of the Committee on Agricultural Statistics, mission and objectives

In 1992, the International Statistical Institute (ISI) took the initiative to found the *Gregor-Johann Mendel Committee on Agricultural Statistics (CAS)* in order to reflect the importance of Agricultural Statistics. Zoltan Kenessey and Fred Vogel, two ISI members, played a key role in that decision.

The CAS held its first formal meeting in Florence in 1993 and adopted the mission statement which stipulates that its main goal is *'to provide a forum to foster a spirit of cooperation in the sharing of ideas and statistical methodology among the nations of the world to provide continual improvement in the accuracy, timeliness and relevance of agricultural statistics'*.

Another key objective of the CAS is *'to promote the development of, and interest in, agricultural statistics on an international basis'*.

Since its creation, the CAS has remained very active and has attracted an increasing number of agricultural statisticians across the world. One of the major activities undertaken by CAS is the organization on a regular basis of the International Conferences on Agricultural Statistics (ICAS).

2. International Conferences on Agricultural Statistics

Over the 25 years of its existence, the CAS has successfully organised seven International Conferences on Agricultural Statistics as a way of achieving its mission and objectives. These Conferences, held every three years since 1998, have convened senior agricultural statisticians from all over the world, especially representatives from national statistical offices and ministries of agriculture. Over the years, the Conferences have progressively catered to the interests not only of the producers, but also of the users of agricultural statistics, promoting the participation of economists, statisticians, researchers, analysts and decision-makers from government entities, the academia, development partners and international organizations. The Conferences have significantly contributed to the development of

Global initiatives such as the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics. The seven ICAS are briefly introduced below.

ICAS I: 18-20 March 1998, Washington, DC, USA: *Agricultural statistics 2000*:

This was the first ICAS hosted by USDA/NASS with support of ISI and several international and national partners. This first conference brought together statisticians from 50 countries and focused on the future needs for agricultural statistics and the statistical and technological requirements for its development. More information at:

<http://isi.cbs.nl/iamamember/Books/agric2000/index.htm>

ICAS II: 4-8 June 2001, Rome, Italy: *Conference on agricultural and environmental statistical applications (CAESAR)*

The conference was hosted by Istat and brought together 400 statisticians and policy experts from 53 countries around the world and from all the main international organizations active in the field of agriculture. The conference discussed: the demand for agricultural statistics in the new millennium in both developed and developing countries, as well as new methods and technologies for collecting, processing and disseminating agricultural statistics. The close interactions between agriculture, the environment and the social sphere were also discussed. Two satellite meetings were organized to discuss the situation of agricultural statistics in transition countries and the FAOSTAT database.

More information at: <http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-events/ess-icas/icas-ii/en/>

ICAS III: 2-4 November 2004, Cancun, Mexico: *Defining and measuring sustainable agriculture indicators (MEXSAI)*.

ICAS III was hosted by Mexico SAGARPA and INEGI. The main theme of ICAS III was defining and measuring sustainable agriculture in its three dimensions, economic, social and environmental. The conference covered economic sustainability indicators such as profits from agricultural products, use and conservation of forests, water, and other natural resources. The conference also addressed the development of social sustainability indicators such as the impact of education, health, and cultural activities on rural households and their social welfare. More information at <http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-events/ess-icas/icas-iii/en/> and <https://www.nass.usda.gov/mexsai/papersabstracts.htm>

ICAS IV: 22-24 October 2007, Beijing, China: *Advancing Statistical Integration and Analysis*

ICAS-IV was hosted by the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS) and sponsored by FAO along with other international, regional, and national organizations. The Conference focused on the fundamental issues related to the development of agricultural statistics within an integrated national statistical system. More information at

<http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-events/ess-icas/ess-icasiv/en/>

ICAS V: 12-15 October 2010, Kampala, Uganda: *Integrating Agriculture into the National Statistical System*

ICAS-V was hosted by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics. The theme of the conference, "Integrating Agriculture into the National Statistical System" represents one of the three pillars at the heart of the initiative lead by FAO and the World Bank to assess and improve the quality of agricultural statistics through the development of a "Global Strategy for Improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics", under the auspices of the UN Statistical Commission.

A pre-conference seminar on "Methodology for Agricultural Censuses and Surveys" was organized by USDA-NASS and a side event on "Integrating Agricultural Food Security Statistics in the National Statistical Systems" was held by FAO. More information at:

<http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-events/ess-icas/icas-v/en/>

ICAS VI: 23-25 October 2013, Rio, Brazil: *Improving statistics for food security, sustainable agriculture and rural development. Linking statistics with decision making.*

ICAS-VI was hosted by the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics (IBGE). The focus of the conference was on improving the use of food and agricultural statistics in private and public decision making, by establishing a closer link between the producers and users of data . Before the Conference, USDA organized two-day training sessions for young statisticians from developing countries and FAO organized a training session on Deriving Food Security Indicators from Household Surveys using the ADePT Food Security Module. Country experiences. More information at:

<http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-events/ess-icas/icas-vi/en/>

ICAS VII: 26-28 October 2016, Rome, Italy: *Modernizing Agricultural Statistics to Support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*

ICAS VII was co-organized and co-hosted by FAO and Istat and was attended by 440 participants from all regions of the world. The focus was on Modernizing Agricultural Statistics to Support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The conference was preceded by a series of training courses, including a training programme for young statisticians organized by the US Department of Agriculture on Methodology for Agricultural Censuses and Surveys, a GS Training and Outreach Workshop on Agricultural Surveys and a Seminar on Strengthening Collaboration between Agricultural Economists and Agricultural Statisticians.

Three side events were also organized, including (i) an Expert Meeting on Rural and Urban Area Definition by Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics; (ii) the launch of the sourcebook on National socio-economic surveys in forestry -

Guidance and survey modules for measuring the multiple roles of forests in household welfare and livelihoods¹ jointly produced by FAO, CIFOR, IFRI, LSMS and PROFOR of the World Bank and (iii) the launch of the new FAOSTAT Platform² organized by FAO.

More information at: <http://icas2016.istat.it/>

3. Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics and Implementation Plan

One of the major outcomes of the International Conferences was the development of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics and its implementation plan. The development of the Global Strategy started in October 2008 following ICAS IV in October 2007, Beijing, China. The preparation of the Global Strategy started with an assessment of the statistical capacity of developing countries in this domain which showed a decline in the quantity and the quality of agricultural statistics available worldwide. The assessment also underlined the importance of agriculture in the global fight against hunger and poverty and the need of strengthening food and agricultural statistics for designing effective and informed food security policies. The Global Strategy defined a broader conceptual framework for agricultural statistics addressing new data requirements concerning land and water use, the impact of agro activities on climate change and the increasing use of food and feed commodities to produce biofuels. The GS was developed under the auspices of UNSC and adopted at its 41st Session in 2010. The Commission recommended the preparation of an implementation plan at global level (Global Action Plan) and regional levels (Regional action plans).

The implementation of the Global Action Plan is led by the Global Office hosted by FAO and supported by inclusive global governance mechanisms. The Global Action Plan includes three components, a comprehensive methodological research agenda, a technical assistance programme and a training programme. After intense and successful resource mobilization activities, the implementation started in 2012 for a period of five years (further extended by one year). The major outcomes at Global Level include the development of guidelines, handbooks and manuals on 30 different topics, including crop forecasting, livestock statistics, use of remote sensing and development of master sampling frames. More recently, with the adoption of the SDG agenda, new research topics have been added on the measurement of productivity and income of small-holders, the sustainability of agro-forestry-fishery production and agro-environmental indicators. To date more than 5,000 pages of statistical methodology have been published, and another 5,000 are expected to be published by the end of the project. More at <http://qsars.org/en/resource-center/>

The implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Asia-Pacific and for Africa is led by the regional partners, who provide technical assistance to countries and liaise with regional and national stakeholders. To date, the Global Strategy partners are the African Development Bank (AfDB), the UN Regional Economic Commission for

¹ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6206e.pdf>

² <http://faostat3.fao.org/>

Africa (UNECA), the UN Regional Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the FAO Regional Office in Bangkok. Efforts are underway to accelerate the speed of the implementation of the regional plans with support from the Global Office focusing on the use of the new cost-effective methods at country level in order to strengthen countries' capacity to produce and use agricultural statistics.

A key tool for data production at country level will be the Agricultural Integrated Survey (AGRIS) methodology and tool kit which is also a major output of the research programme of the Global Strategy. The implementation of AGRIS in countries will be carried out in partnership with the World Bank and USDA NASS. Thanks to the generous support from donors like DfID, USAID and BMGF, a multi-year AGRIS survey programme will start in four developing countries (two in Sub-Saharan Africa, one in Latin America and one in Asia) and is expected to be scaled-up to cover 15 additional countries in the next few years.

4. More active contribution to ISI World Statistical Congress

The CAS is playing an active role in securing more active contribution of Agricultural Statistics to the Scientific Programme of the World Statistics Congress. During the 60th WSC in 2015, there was five Invited Paper Sessions plus a number of Special Topics Sessions on themes related to agricultural statistics. This was by far the largest presence at the World Statistics Congress. This trend was continued for the 61st WSC in Marrakech for which eleven invited papers sessions have been accepted. This signals the increasing visibility and importance of agricultural statistics in the ISI.

5. Supporting young agricultural statisticians communicating on Facebook

Recently the ISI CAS has initiated a network of Young Statisticians interested in agricultural statistics. This initiative took off in October 2013 after ICAS VI in order to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences among young statisticians on methodological and applied statistical issues related to agriculture and rural development. This discussion group is hosted on Facebook at [youngstatisticiansicasvi](https://www.facebook.com/youngstatisticiansicasvi).