

Agricultural statistics: improving and extension until 2007

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This report refers to the implementation of Council Decision 96/411/EC, as amended by Council Decision 2298/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 September 2000, on the improvement of Community agricultural statistics, best known as TAPAS (Technical Action Plan for Agricultural Statistics). Its aim is to take stock of the situation concerning the implementation of the Decision and to put forward if necessary proposals for its extension. Four annual action plans have been approved by the Commission since 1996. A fifth is currently being drawn up for implementation in 2002. The Community budget has allocated over EUR 3.8 million to work on improving Community agricultural statistics. With TAPAS 2002, the final annual action plan to date, a further EUR 1 million will be allocated to this work. This plan will be the last unless the period of implementation for Decision 96/411/EC is extended beyond 2002. The Community system of agricultural statistics will face the key challenges over the coming years (enlargement, incorporation of the environmental dimension in the common agricultural policy, consideration of the "multifunctional" role of agriculture, continuation of multilateral trade negotiations, dwindling resources allocated to agricultural statistics in the Member States, technological development of new data collection tools, etc.) In addition, the process of adapting the national statistics systems to the needs arising from the reform of the CAP is far from complete. As a result, TAPAS should continue for some years yet. This would make it easier to effect the anticipated changes in the systems of agricultural statistics so that they provide a better response to users' needs, particularly those of political decision-makers. In order to improve the access to the results and to facilitate the methodological developments achieved in the framework of the TAPAS actions, the Commission will continue the realisation of dissemination actions (workshops, publication of reports, etc). Nevertheless, when such decisions on renewal are taken, it is important to examine which improvements or adaptations would be desirable, in the light of experience gained and bearing in mind current developments in the Common Agricultural Policy. It is the Commission's view that all deliberations on the future of TAPAS should take the following considerations into account: 1) with regard to the guidelines: - any forthcoming Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on extending TAPAS should cover the period from 2003 to 2007, i.e. a five-year period, so that this action can fit into the Community Statistical Programme scheduled for the same period; - the extension of TAPAS not only meets the needs for adaptation of the current Community statistical system, but also takes on a specific interest for the candidate countries considering the next enlargement of the European Union; - the adaptations introduced in 2000 into Council Decision 96/411/EC seem to meet the sought aims of simplification and effectiveness. Thus it is not necessary to envisage new substantial amendments of the basic decision; - the voluntary nature of participation by the Member States in various actions should not be called into question. 2) concerning the optimisation of resources: - the financial resources available at Community level will be relatively limited. They should therefore be concentrated, as far as possible, on those actions and Member States with the most pressing needs; - with regard to pilot projects to try out new techniques or develop more effectiveness means of meeting statistical information requirements, coverage should be limited. 3) concerning work programming and assessment, the above points would suggest that the planning of TAPAS should continue to be carried out between the Commission and the Member States through the Standing Committee on Agricultural Statistics; - in this regard, specialised working parties in Eurostat should play an important role in the follow up of actions undertaken and in the assessment of the results obtained.