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**Strengthening Regional Data Exchange System on Food and
Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries
(GCP/RAS/184/JPN)**

**TECHNICAL CONSULTATION
ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGIONAL
DATA EXCHANGE SYSTEM**

Bangkok, Thailand, 8 August 2002

Report of the Consultation

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific**

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I. BACKGROUND: MEETING AND VENUE

1. The Technical Consultation for the Project GCP/RAS/184/JPN was held in Bangkok on 8 August 2002, immediately following the First Meeting of Focal Points which had been held in the same venue. The Consultation was intended to firm up a configuration and an implementation strategy for the Regional Data Exchange System. (The agenda and timetable is shown in Annex 2.)
2. Participants were the Focal Points from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam; technical persons involved in agricultural statistics in the region, representatives from the Donor Government, FAO headquarters and the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, and the Royal Thai Government. (The list of participants is shown in Annex 1.)
3. The objective of the Consultation was to firm up a configuration and an implementation strategy for the Regional Data Exchange System. Repeating his role as Chair of the First Meeting of the Focal Points and upon unanimous acclaim from the Focal Points and other participants, the delegate from Indonesia, Mr. Choiril Maksum, presided over the technical consultation.

II. OPENING STATEMENT

Agenda item 1

4. The opening statement was delivered by the FAO Senior Statistician for Asia and the Pacific, who said that the foundation for establishing the Regional Data Exchange System had been built into the Focal Points Meeting, and that the technical session would give additional insights into the options that existed and the path that would be followed in achieving the Project objectives efficiently and as effectively.
5. He welcomed the presence of the delegation from Japan that would participate in the Consultation, and acknowledged the financial and technical support from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries which had been crucial in the strengthening of food and agricultural statistics in the Region.
6. He said that the Deputy Regional Representative, at the opening of the Focal Points Meeting, had stressed that the ultimate beneficiaries of the Project interventions were the individual countries. Their active participation during the preceding activity had resulted in a better work plan and strategy for development of the Regional Data Exchange System.
7. The Technical Consultation, he added, would include a discussion of project objectives, an update of progress in the region and enable comparisons of several existing formats for data dissemination. He extended his wishes for a successful meeting with positive outputs and hoped that the participants would continue to have an enjoyable stay in Bangkok.

III. SUMMARY OF THE FOCAL POINTS MEETING

8. The summary of the Focal Points meeting was provided by the Agricultural Statistics Expert, who gave a perspective of the Project, stating that the Technical Consultation would develop an implementation strategy for the partnership with AFSIS. He informed them of the results of the evaluation mission and summarized the major recommendations of the Focal Points meeting as follows:
 - The Regional Data Exchange System, as outlined and discussed, was relevant and appropriate. Accordingly, in order to meet project targets, participating countries not having a WebPage for food and agriculture statistics should endeavour to establish WebPages; while the participating Countries having WebPages should further develop them. Common formats should be used whenever possible.
 - The proposed "Project Workplan" discussed in the Meeting was comprehensive and appropriate, and accordingly the country focal points should pursue it actively during its implementation at their countries.
 - In order to avoid any duplication of activities, there should be close cooperation and coordination with the projects on food security information in Asia and the Pacific region. The Agricultural Statistics Expert of the Project should maintain a close contact with the proposed ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS) Project and with FAO projects related to food and agricultural information. Likewise at the national level, there should be strong coordination and cooperation among the concerned agencies.
 - The Regional Data Exchange System will be implemented on a pilot basis in certain countries. These countries should be selected on the basis of priorities as outlined in the "Guidelines" during the meeting and after taking into account certain country-specific conditions.
 - The meeting of the Focal Points should be held once a year, as suggested by the Evaluation Report of the predecessor Project GCP/RAS/171/JPN. The Second Meeting should be planned for March 2003 and the agenda should include, *inter alia*, the plan for implementation of the Regional Data Exchange System in detail, including hardware/software installation, application of the model WebPage, and related training.
 - To ensure sustainability of the Project after the Project period, approaches and/or mechanisms would be identified and discussed at a later time. PARIS21 and the establishment of the Trust Fund for Statistics Capacity Building may have implications for national systems of food and agricultural statistics in the Region. Countries should explore the possibilities of using these resources.

IV. REVIEW OF NATIONAL DATA DISSEMINATION IN ASIA AND PACIFIC COUNTRIES: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Agenda item 2

9. A review of national data dissemination was presented by the Consultant in Agricultural Statistics. The review was based on a study of yearbooks available from the FAO Regional Office, supplemented and updated by information obtained from the participants at the First Meeting of Focal Points. This review will be published in a separate volume.
10. The FAO Project for Strengthening Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries (GCP/RAS/184/JPN) was intended to start building country WebPages containing statistical data from participating countries. High priority would be placed on production data that would represent sub-national level production. He added that production data was one of the most important types of data to be collected and disseminated in all countries.
11. The review was undertaken in order to have a good grasp on the data available in the WebPages as well as the statistical data available in the participating countries. The review covered 14 out of 16 participating countries; only six had opened WebPages. It was based on existing WebPages and yearbooks published by the participating countries and available in the FAO Regional office. The suggested actions arising from the review were as follows:
 - *WebPages would be constructed for all participating countries*, with major efforts to focus on the eight countries with no existing pages. Further improvement in the WebPages of the advanced countries would be done.
 - *A study of data availability in the countries*, since the review showed disparities in the volume of data accumulated in the various countries - certain countries had only a small volume of data.
 - *The country yearbook format to be followed in setting up the WebPages*, although it was acknowledged that the formats varied from country to country. However, standardization of concepts and definitions as well as formats would be studied and dealt with at a later stage.
 - It was proposed, in the matter of data coverage, that (1) production data be the minimum requirement for the WebPages and (2) other data be considered on a case to case basis, with a view to gain maximum benefit from available budget.
 - Two languages were proposed: English and the national language.
12. The following comments and points relevant to the review were discussed.
 - The Consultant stated that his review was incomplete and was based on outdated information and publications available at the FAO RAP Library. He had consulted with the Focal Points during the meeting and found that besides the availability in-country of more recent and comprehensive yearbooks in several countries, the state of information technology had advanced in some other countries. These

developments were not taken into account in the review for lack of information. Updating and the required revisions would be made to the review.

- On the query from the delegate of Viet Nam on the indicators used, the sources of data and the method of publication of the yearbooks, by country, it was conceded by the Expert that his information base was imperfect, having used one yearbook for Viet Nam for instance, and realizing only after the review had been completed that the country had published a yearbook covering 25 years of data and including many commodities.
- The need for a common format was raised by several delegates. It was reiterated that a standard format would be discussed at a later time and the yearbook format used as a matter of urgency for the project. The representative from the FAO headquarters said that while the provision of a standard format would take a longer time, FAOSTAT2 would include a component that would contribute to the common formats requested by the body. FAOSTAT contains data on country production, while the RDES would eventually contain data for country and sub-national levels.
- There was needed to be aware of the problems of security, such as hacking for various reasons including political and other purposes. However, the issue of security and the management of their own WebPages was to be the responsibility of the individual participating countries,
- From the technical point of view, regional networks did not physically exist and were just a "virtual" presence; the delegate from Iran said that there was no value added in asking countries to provide data through the Internet. The Consultant stated that no linkages existed between and among the websites.
- The need for more software, new services and development or upgrading of capacity to manage the WebPages was deemed important; the participating countries requested that action be taken to address these issues. The Consultant reminded the body that the previous day's session had included a discussion on the resources available in the region. The Project, he continued, would assist the pilot countries to convert data where needed, and that assistance would be provided in language translations where necessary.
- The Consultant expressed his appreciation for more comments on value added as well as on new services that would be required, and that the Regional Project would take these into consideration. He also thanked the representative from FAO headquarters for his comments on data sources and availability and endorsed these to the participants for their information for referencing purposes for further project planning and development.
- There was more discussion on the need for formats. The delegate from Sri Lanka suggested that there could be a two-part format – one common to all countries, and the other to be left open for the preference of the individual countries. The delegate from Nepal expressed his opinion on the inclusion of the data source within the format, and his concern that there should be a standardization of concepts. When the FIVIMS becomes operational, linkages between the Regional Programme and the FIVIMS would be made.

- On the other hand, the delegate from Viet Nam stated that a common format would not be possible at this stage as the Regional Programme would need to make an in-depth study of the various formats used by the various countries.
- The delegate from China proposed that statistical indicators be included in the WebPage – for instance, marketing and supply information which users would find more useful than only production data. Daily updating of market information was also essential. The Consultant responded that the intention was not to exclude data other than production, and that other important data could/should be included. He also noted the sparseness of production data in some WebPages, - three to five commodities at the provincial level, in some cases - and suggested that larger commodity coverage would be desirable.

V. CONCEPT OF THE RDES ON FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS IN ASIA AND PACIFIC COUNTRIES

Agenda item 3

13. The Agricultural Statistics Expert presented the concept of the Regional Data Exchange System or RDES. (The presentation will be included in a separate volume.) The System was a network of computers among the participating countries and FAORAP, and consisted of three major components: WebPages, Data and Hardware. He explained the procedure for the creation of the WebPages. In the first procedure, the data would be obtained from the agricultural statistics yearbooks in English and input into the PC.
14. In case the yearbook was in the national language, the data would be input into the PC after translation into English. Translation costs would be funded by the Project. The second procedure would be for the data inputs to be placed in an index file, and then in the table files. The third procedure was for the index file and table file to be the bases for the WebPages creation and management information support system. The fourth procedure was for the WebPages created at the PC in the focal point to be transferred into the web server managed by the government or the private company.
15. There would be two types of Internet connection - for Type A countries to be serviced by a private Internet service provider; and Type B countries to be connected by LAN to the government network.
16. The following comments and points were made as a result of the presentation.
 - The delegate from Nepal said that the reality would be more complicated than that presented by the Expert, who responded that the concept was not sophisticated and was still possible to amend. The units of measurement would naturally vary, depending on the systems of measurement used in the country.
 - The delegate from Bhutan inquired as to whether the Project had already identified the types of data to be included, particularly with reference to the point that some commodities may not be relevant to the needs of other countries. If these had not been identified, would there be a separate technical session to work on these?

- The second query referred to the fact there was no mention of an oft-stressed point during the preceding Focal Points meeting, which was the need for upgrading of human resources. The Expert replied that during his visits to the pilot countries, he would discuss the issue of capacity building with each country.
- On the identification of data items, it was preferable not to make this mandatory, as all countries would need to follow this selection. Guidelines existed and there was the intention to ask countries to collect data for commodities that they had not covered. As a starting point, it was suggested that the Selected Indicators publications of the FAO be used as a basis.
- It was noted that users were both international and domestic, and commodities which may not be relevant to international users may be in demand by those within the country. There was therefore no intention to limit countries to specifics. On the question from the Fijian delegate on the capacity specifications required by the Project if the government service provider were used for the WebPage construction, the response was that the maximum would be about 50 megabytes.
- The delegate from Indonesia inquired as to whether there would be two WebPages - one for the RDES and another for the Asian Food Security Information System or AFSIS – and whether the hardware and software would be provided to AFSIS at the same time as RDES. The response was that in the case of Indonesia, both RDES and AFSIS would construct their own WebPages.
- The Expert also clarified the demarcations (with reference to hardware) of the FAO project and AFSIS. The representative from FAO headquarters said that related government agencies with their own web server (or computer centre) would also be an option. The suggestion would be to look at government agencies before going on to private service providers.
- A final comment from the delegate from Iran was that the process would be facilitated if the Project could provide the software for creating the WebPage.

VI. WEBPAGES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS DATA: EXAMPLES FROM INDIA AND THE PHILIPPINES

Agenda item 4

A. INDIA

17. The delegate from India demonstrated the type of website on agricultural statistics which his institution had created. (The presentation is found in Volume 2 which is published as a separate document.) He said that the minimum agenda on the implementation of e-governance required that each government department maintained its own website to provide at least a set of minimum information. Accordingly, the Ministry of Agriculture had established a website with the address: www.agricoop.nic.in. The contents covered the range of information as illustrated in the presentation.

18. The National Informatics Centre (NIC) under the Ministry of Information Technology maintained web servers at its headquarters in Delhi, while Local Area Network (LAN) connections had been established in buildings of the central Ministries. Internet access was provided to all the users. WebPages were designed and constructed by NIC in consultation with the user. The main advantage of the WebPage was that information was available to anybody at any time and place. The search engine and links enabled the user to navigate through different sites of government and other national international agencies for collating information on the specific topic.
19. Several issues were involved in the development and maintenance of webpage and data exchange system: these included the development of a database at the Directorate of Economics and Statistics in Delhi, which contained a basic set of information at the national and state/district level; creation of databases at the level of source agencies, which were capable of providing information to the central data base in the required format online; and establishment of computer network connecting all concerned data sources.
20. The Ministry of Agriculture was fully committed to using information technology in all spheres of their activities, while the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, which was the main source of agricultural statistics, was be equipped with database and web servers shortly. Land records had been computerized in some states. It would be done in all other states in the course of time, which opened up the possibility of collecting land use statistics online. One issue was the interconnection between villages.
21. The following points arising from the presentation were made.
 - The representative from FAO headquarters commented that it was not surprising that India had an advanced level of website technology as it had the “Indian Silicon Valley.” He noted the presence of the NIC which worked on all the websites of the government. He also expressed concern on the possibility of power failure in which case all systems would be out. It was clarified that the NIC assigned information technology professionals in each government office with the task of developing whatever the state or central Government wished in relation to IT matters; these professionals were also responsible for the management and implementation as well as maintenance of the websites. In instances when electricity failed for a few minutes, there were back-up systems.
 - On the query on who updated the website, the delegate from India said that it was his final decision which was followed on the updating of agricultural statistics, for which he was responsible. He would then ask the IT staff to put in his updating. The delegate from India was from the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation.

B. PHILIPPINES: THE BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS (BAS)

22. The delegate from the Philippines said that the preceding speaker had covered most of the points that a model website on food and agricultural statistics would have. He wished to focus on the process by which his country website had been developed, and hoped that the Project would learn from the lessons of the Philippines in website development.

23. As legislation provided the impetus for the expansion of website development in India, so was it in the Philippines. The Agricultural Food and Modernization Act of the Philippines set a blueprint for the modernization of agriculture and assigned the BAS to the information technology process. The Bureau's website was developed in 1998 by external experts, but in the end, the Bureau was unable to maintain it or to download data. The conclusion was that there was a critical need for internal capacity building.
24. At the beginning, the Bureau Web was created to serve as an alternative method of disseminating some of its statistical data holdings. The first edition of the Bureau WebPage had many areas that needed improvement. (The main features of the Bureau website are shown in the full report in Volume 2 which would be published separately.) The Bureau website was registered in all major search engines such as Google and Yahoo.
25. The Bureau website required new features and upgrading as web technology advanced and as new demands emerged. In response to the requirements of the Philippine E-commerce Act, new features and services were mandated especially for administrative procedures. These additional services were possible only with proper infrastructure support.
26. The Bureau would need powerful Web servers fortified with security software or firewalls. It also needed to upgrade its Internet bandwidth and at the same time acquire other communication facilities and computing peripherals. The Bureau website was open from 07.00 hours to 19.00 hours daily and operated for 24 hours at the most twice a week only because of hardware constraints. With the acquisition of new hardware and facilities, BAS would operate its website round the clock seven days a week.
27. He concluded by highlighting the importance of two points: capability and ownership. Although there were risks to Internet and data security, these were something that the countries must be able to live with.

VII. A MODEL FOR THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS NETWORK SYSTEM

Agenda item 5

28. The representative from the National Statistical Office (NSO), Thailand explained the nature of agricultural statistics in her country, focusing initially on the type of data - micro, macro or meta - and then on the structure of agricultural data, which had similarities to agricultural census data. The Office of Agricultural Economics (OAE) had started an agricultural registration record which was household-based and similar to the census data, and merging these two surveys would be an issue. Too much information was available, with similar statistics being produced; in many cases, the OAE and the Bank of Thailand generated the same statistics.
29. A directory of sources existed but this was in Thai. There were similar data items but these were collected in different time frames and using different methodologies. The information overload placed the burden on the users. Alternative approaches to alleviate the problem of the data overload were cited - data warehouse development and a data network, as well as the collection and processing of correct statistics.

30. It was added that the issue of standards and common concepts was important, and that Thailand was now using the same definitions, which would enable cross-checking as well as linkages. She demonstrated the oncoming use of a data warehouse for Thailand, which would be in operation after the conduct of next year's census. Data would be collected from different surveys, interlinked and processed.
31. The importance of using common standards that would facilitate dissemination was reiterated. There was need to talk with the various offices handling surveys, and to facilitate their working together to have a single data centre. Linking with various databases was also possible - for instance, registration records with the national identification database, but security and privacy were considered important. Finally, she concluded by saying that the subject matter specialists rather than the information technology specialists should define the data categories. There should also be a definition of standard meta data.
32. The points arising from the presentation included comments on the format used by Thailand for the data dissemination system; this could well be a platform for the standardization of formats and may well clarify the earlier discussions on common formats. A similar system could be used for an agricultural data WebPage. The use of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) model could also be used as a reference point since it had quality assurance besides having a template for data dissemination.
33. The representative from FAO RAP commented that the presentation was helpful as it showed the connectivity among the institutions in a country which was the same principle for countries within the region.

VIII. RELATED FAO ACTIVITIES IN DATA INFORMATION SYSTEM:

THE CASE OF FAOSTAT2 AND THE SPFS - ASIA INFORMATION SYSTEM

Agenda item 6

A. Related FAO activities in data information system: the case of FAOSTAT2

34. The FAO senior statistician presented an overview developed by FAO Rome of the proposed FAOSTAT2 system. The anticipated end result of the FAOSTAT2 initiative would be a new system that would meet the Strategic Framework objective of “an integrated information resource base with current, relevant and reliable statistics, information and knowledge made accessible to all FAO clients.” The new system would be composed of four components, as follows:
 - **Working System**, which supported all divisional activities related to compiling and processing time series data. This included data entry, data collection, data validation, data generation, data analysis, and creation of system outputs.
 - **Dissemination System**, which would allow data elaborated in the working system to be made available to internal users, through the FAO Intranet, or to external users, through various dissemination mechanisms: the Internet, FAOSTAT2, CD-ROMs, and FAO Statistical Yearbooks.

- **Reference Data Management System**, which allowed users to maintain common codes, other supporting data and the system rules which are required to edit, validate and describe FAOSTAT2 data.
 - **Meta Data Repository**, which supported the entry of “data about the data,” or textual information used to further describe and define the statistical data to be maintained in FAOSTAT2. (Sub-national data were more in demand. Other data types were annual time series, time series data with less frequent periodicity, projections, metadata, data from external sources, spatial data and ancillary or supporting data for data analysis.)
35. Statistical data were received at FAO in both hard and electronic forms. While a major focus of the FAOSTAT2 project was to facilitate the receipt and entry of electronic data into the system, it still expected to receive hard copy country questionnaires. Data collection involved receiving, loading, editing and converting data on electronic media from FAO’s external partners. This was a cumbersome process, due primarily to the fact that the data were not received in a standard format. Routines for processing the data and converting it into a form useable by FAOSTAT were customized to each format.
 36. In the area of data validation and generation there was significant scope for implementing major improvements to the process. The major requirements to support this process were: first, to provide, within the FAOSTAT2 system, a series of validation and editing rules that could be applied at appropriate points in the data entry and data validation process; and, second, to facilitate the downloading of FAOSTAT2 data into external data analysis software.
 37. The system could not possibly cater to all the possible ways in which users may want to analyse the data. In attempting to meet all potential user needs for analytical support, a generic macro and calculation facility was developed. This facility enabled the users to formulate custom data extraction definitions, extract the data from the database, and manipulate it according to their specific requirements.
 38. CountrySTAT was envisaged as a country-level version of the FAOSTAT2 running at headquarters. Its main objectives were to facilitate the collection of data at the country level while at the same time improving the quality of the data. Additionally, it would provide countries with a tool for maintaining, analysing and disseminating their data.
 39. The comments arising from the presentation referred to the time frame, nature and mechanisms as well as other details which impacted on the RDES. It was explained that FAOSTAT2 was a proposal which was being presented to the body, with the same concept as that being planned for the RDES. It is estimated that it would take three years to develop the system; the dissemination part of the system would be developed after the working system had been accepted. There was no estimate of the costs as yet, but funding for this proposal was given a high priority due to the recognition of the importance of statistics.
 40. On the sub-national data, FAO would utilize those sub-national data that were already being collected by offices within FAO. Finally, the representative from FAO headquarters expressed his hopes for a better system of transmitting country data to the FAO and for better access for countries to FAO data.

B. The SPFS ASIA Information Management Systems (SAIMS)

41. The presentation was made by the Information Management Specialist of the FAO Regional Office, who said that SPFS Asia was targeted at food security, and was working in four countries, funded by the Japanese Government, and intended as an information management system. It was also an information-sharing project better known as SAIMS. In its development, there was need to define the system goals, the users, the information and the workflows. SAIMS was working with at least six languages. The workflows are the hardest. The information comes from the village, but it is not going to be used at the village level.
42. The goals of SAIMS were to facilitate management and dissemination of project data and documents; foster information exchange among project stakeholders; and promote SPFS by disseminating information on project to various audiences. Users were project management units, regional coordination unit, FAO units, host governments, project donor and general public. There were four main benefits: it reduced time spent to fulfil reporting requirements; served as authoritative source of information on project activities and outputs; had the ability to compare and consolidate information produced by four different projects, and improved communication among project stakeholders.
43. SAIMS information comprised public information which was available to anyone; and limited access information which consisted mainly of high level reports. The information was located in the local LAN in each of the four countries, and was shared by the server (regional server) which did not exist here. This information exchange may be either on line or offline. SAIMS was web-based, had a central data warehouse, and eventually would have search facilities. It was simple and available only in English, with information access to be controlled by an identification process.
44. One comment made based on the presentation was that SPFS was one of the FAO's top priority programmes as it fitted into the rural livelihood programme. It was already in 63 countries but four countries in Asia were now going to benefit from the programme. It was not going to be an ORACLE-based programme, but an "open" development, useful for project management. FAO headquarters had a field programme management information programme which stored reports produced by the various countries and which could be accessed, but only internal. However, SAIMS would be accessed externally.

IX. CLOSING SESSION

Agenda item 7

45. The Agricultural Statistics Expert expressed his appreciation to the participants and the resource persons who attended the Technical Consultation. The discussions brought up many issues that would be included in the project, and he hoped that the participants would continue to be actively involved in the project. He mentioned the many people and experts who assisted in the successful implementation of the project.
46. The Regional Statistician also reiterated his appreciation to Dr. Choiril Maksum for his role as Chair of the two meetings. The Chair expressed the hope that they would again meet in March 2003, and declared the Consultation closed.

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AGENDA AND TIMETABLE

Thursday, 8 August 2002

- 08.30 - 09.00 Registration
- 09.00 - 09.30 Agenda Item 1 - Opening Session
- Opening Statement, Dr. Frederick Baker, Senior Statistician, FAO/RAP
 - Introduction of the Participants
 - Organization of the Consultation and Summary of the First Focal Points Meeting for GCP/RAS/184/JPN, Mr. Kimihiko Eura.
- 09.30 - 10.00 Coffee break
- 10.00 - 10.30 Agenda Item 2 - Review of National Data Dissemination in Asia and Pacific Countries: Preliminary Findings, Mr. Yoichiro Kawasaki, International Consultant on Agricultural Statistics.
- 10.30 - 12.00 Agenda Item 3 - Concept of Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries, Mr. Kimihiko Eura.
- 13.30 - 14.30 Agenda Item 4 - Expert Presentation of Web Page for Food and Agricultural Statistics Data
- Mr. Shri D.K. Trehan, MOA, India
 - Mr. Romeo Recide, BAS, Philippines
- 14.30 - 15.00 Coffee break
- 15.00 - 15.30 Agenda Item 5 - Model of National Agricultural Statistics Network System, Dr. Malee Wongsaroje, National Statistics Office
- 15.30 - 16.20 Agenda Item 6 - Related FAO Activities in Data Information System: the Case of the FAOSTAT2 and the SPFS (the Special Programme for Food Security) ASIA Information Management System (SAIMS)
- FAOSTAT2, Dr. Frederick Baker, Senior Statistician, FAO/RAP
 - SAIMS, Michael Riggs, Information Management Specialist, FAO/RAP
- 16.20 - 16.30 Agenda Item 7 - Closing Session

Opening Statement

By

Dr. Federick Baker

FAO Senior Statistician for Asia and the Pacific

Distinguished Participants,

FAO Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to extend to all of you a warm welcome to this “Technical Session on the Development of a Regional Data Exchange System” sponsored by the project "Strengthening Regional Data Exchange System on Food and Agricultural Statistics in Asia and Pacific Countries" (GCP/RAS/184/JPN).

The importance of strengthening mutual co-operation and the establishment of a system for collection and dissemination of statistics among member countries were discussed in 1996 in Hobart during the Sixteenth Session of the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics (APCAS). As a result two regional projects have been developed and carried by FAO with the generous financial contributions of the Government of Japan.

It is good to have with us for this technical session the focal points for the ASEAN Food Security Information Systems (AFSIS) project as well as persons involved in agricultural statistics from Ministries of Agriculture in the Region. For the last two days the focal points for the FAO Regional project have been discussing the activities and work plan for that project. So far the meeting has been very productive and I am excited about the foundation that we have built for establishing the Regional Data Exchange System. I hope that the technical session will give additional insight into the options that exist and the path that we should follow in achieving our objectives as efficiently and as effectively as possible.

The AFSIS project will also be funded by the Government of Japan which, as you can see, has taken a strong interest in the development of agricultural sector statistics in the Region. I am greatly pleased that a distinguished delegation from Japan is present for this technical session and will be participating in its discussions. The financial and technical support from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has been crucial in the strengthening of food and agricultural statistics in the Region.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Governments need food and agriculture statistics. The objective of national agricultural statistics programmes is to provide to the users timely and reliable information about the food and agriculture sector. These data are used by governments to assist in the

determination of policies related to a sustained and stable food supply and to the development of rural areas; after the policies are implemented, data are collected to monitor and evaluate their impact.

Globalization has made the world much smaller and with the improvements in storage and transportation, one can find in the local markets fresh agricultural produce from countries in other parts of the world. The private sector needs and demands reliable and timely food and agricultural statistics in the development and carrying out of decisions affecting their businesses and personal welfare.

International organizations and donor agencies use information about the food and agricultural sector to set priorities and to develop project proposals and use the data to evaluate the progress of the project in meeting its objectives. For example, following the World Food Summit in 1996, a major initiative to reduce the number of undernourished has been initiated. Food Insecurity Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS) projects have been formulated and funded as countries begin to identify those persons who are undernourished and hungry as well as to determine the potential of the country to meet this challenge. These data are targeted for national FIVIMS databases which will feed this information into Regional and Global databases.

The Regional Data Exchange System will facilitate access to these data and provide a mechanism for regional comparisons. The information obtained through food security informations systems is a vital component and I am encouraged about the enthusiasm and support for its integration into the Regional database.

Many countries are introducing the more modern information technology system for data processing, analysis and dissemination. These projects are expected to benefit national agricultural statistics programmes as they analyse and disseminate information.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Two days ago in the opening speech for the Meeting of the Focal Points, Mr. Dong Qingsong, Deputy Regional Representative stressed the fact that the ultimate beneficiaries of the project interventions are the individual countries participating in this project. He encouraged participants to contribute to the discussions and to provide inputs to the planning of the project. The participants did so and the result was a much better work plan and strategy for development of the Regional data exchange system.

Today the meeting is more technical. You will hear about the project objectives, will receive an update of progress in the region and then have the opportunity to make comparisons of several existing formats for data dissemination. Although there is no specific discussion period during the day I am sure that your comments will be appreciated.

Finally, let me extend my best wishes for a successful meeting with positive outputs and for an enjoyable stay in the City of Bangkok.

Thank you.