

Striving for Continuity and Comparability in Agricultural Statistics - a National Experience

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During the second half of the 20th century the main features of the Norwegian agri-statistical system remained unchanged; i.e. a regular alternation between full censuses every tenth year and yearly sample surveys for intermediate years. Towards the end of the century, several driving forces called for considerable changes to the old system:

- new user needs, e.g. tailor-made and sometimes rapid results
- increasing efficiency of IT-tools
- exploitation of administrative data to relieve pressure on respondents and budgets
- establishment of a national Farm Register
- adaptation to EU demands
- budgetary constraints

Uniting local, national and international concerns of statistics in the rapidly changing world of agriculture is an interesting, but sometimes daunting task. The point of departure is to maintain a common understanding of "what is agriculture". Furthermore, a new order has to replace the once so simple world of farms and farmers. Today we are confronted with a complex mix of farm owners and holders, farmers and households, professional farms and "hobby farms", group holdings and companies etc. A third challenge is to strike a balance between common features at international level and distinct features at regional and national level.

In Statistics Norway we are in the midst of a transition process where we might end up with a situation where traditional full censuses are no longer a vital part of the system. However, future decoupling of governmental support from production could lead in the opposite direction. Anyway, international and supranational bodies should serve us with clear definitions and guidelines, but at the same time allow for a certain freedom of choice of methods for data collection.