
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

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Dear Commissioner

THE USE MADE OF EUROPEAN AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS

I am writing to ask whether the European Commission would be willing to research and publish information on the use made of certain statistical information collected under EU regulations. The UK Statistics Authority is a statutory body, operating independently of Government. The Authority's responsibilities include ensuring that UK official statistics serve the public good, and that requires us to be sure that statistical resources are being used to meet identified needs.

In a recent statutory assessment of UK agricultural statistics¹ (against the UK Code of Practice for Official Statistics) we noted that some of these statistics are produced primarily to meet European Union requirements, but that there appears to be little or no documentation about the use actually made of the statistics, or the types of decisions that they inform.

While recognising the importance of the CAP and the need for statistics to guide and monitor it, we would like to understand more fully what use is currently made of the large volume and detail of the statistics; and which institutions and organisations make that use of the statistics.

We note that:

- Within the UK, agriculture accounts for less than 1 per cent of GDP and only 1.7% of employment – yet a full census of agricultural holdings (with very detailed labour requirements) is being conducted in 2010.
- Changes to the CAP over recent years, with reduced emphasis on market management and production support, do not appear to have been fully reflected in the requirements for statistical information.

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-22---assessment-of-agriculture-in-the-uk-and-selected-crop-and-livestock-statistics.pdf>

- Very detailed accounts have to be prepared on the sample of businesses in the Farm Accounts and Data Network (FADN) system.
- Agricultural sector accounts are produced on a much more detailed basis than other sectoral accounts.
- Large surveys of agriculture in both June and December are required each year to provide information on crops and livestock.
- There is a strong case for statistical requirements to be joined-up with administrative requirements which impose similar demands for information but with different definitions and timescales - for example the Council Regulation establishing a system for the identification of ovine or caprine animals.

Subject to establishing what use is made of the statistical information currently provided, the UK Statistics Authority would also be grateful to receive Commission views on:

- how you see the requirements for agricultural statistics developing – might the 2013 CAP reform be a good opportunity to take stock of what information is needed?
- the likely impact of the Commission's Communication on the production method of EU statistics in the next decade on the methods of production for European agriculture statistics – in particular, whether you consider that adopting a European Approach to agricultural statistics would result in significantly lower burdens in the UK, where agricultural production and employment is relatively small compared to the contribution of agriculture to the economy and labour market of many other Member States.

I am copying this letter to Jim Fitzpatrick (Minister for Food, Farming and the Environment), Walter Radermacher (Director General of Eurostat), Jil Matheson, (UK National Statistician), and to Richard Alldritt (Head of Assessment in the UK Statistics Authority).

Yours sincerely



Sir Michael Scholar KCB