

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Agricultural accounts, agricultural prices and farm business statistics

*(produced by the Department for
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)*

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About the UK Statistics Authority

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*.

Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment Reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, Reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment Reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment Reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment Report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics³. The report covers the following agricultural accounts, agricultural prices and farm business statistics, produced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra):

- *Farm Accounts in England*⁴;
- *Farm Rents – England*⁵;
- *Farm Diversification in England*⁶;
- *Farm Household Income and Household Composition: England*⁷;
- *Farm Business Income, Net Farm Income and Cash Income*⁸;
- *Total Income from Farming and Farm Business Income*⁹;
- *Total Income from Farming: 1st estimates*¹⁰;
- *Agriculture in the English regions*¹¹;
- *Agricultural Price Indices, UK*¹²; and
- 15 sets of agricultural price statistics (listed in paragraph 2.5).

1.1.2 The statistics covered in this assessment will be divided into three topic areas in this report. The first five outputs in the list above will be referred to as statistics from the Farm Business Survey¹³ (FBS); the subsequent three outputs will be referred to as agricultural accounts; and the final 16 outputs will be referred to as agricultural prices.

1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to the caveats in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in Defra's agricultural accounts, agricultural prices and farm business statistics are

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

² http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

⁴ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/farmaccounts/index.htm>

⁵ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/farmrents/index.htm>

⁶ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/diversification/index.htm>

⁷ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/farmhouseholdincome/index.htm>

⁸ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/fbsincomes/index.htm>

⁹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/farmincome/index.htm>

¹⁰ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/farmincome/index.htm>

¹¹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/ag-eng-regions/index.htm>

¹² <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmgate/agripriceindex/index.htm>

¹³ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/fbs/index.htm>

designated as National Statistics, subject to Defra implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by April 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 Defra engages well with the main users of agricultural accounts, agricultural prices and farm business statistics. The statistics meet the needs of these users and comply with the relevant EU and national requirements.
- 1.3.2 The statistics covered in this assessment are presented clearly and impartially on Defra's website. Good commentary and analysis are provided for the outputs from the FBS. However Defra provides little information about methods, quality and reliability for the agricultural accounts and agricultural prices outputs. Improvements to the commentary and explanatory notes that accompany some of the agricultural accounts and prices outputs would improve their accessibility to a wider audience.
- 1.3.3 Extensive processes are in place for peer review of methods for all the agricultural accounts, agricultural prices and farm business statistics, both by internal Defra experts and independent sector experts. Defra also works to ensure administrative data are used as far as possible, by investigating data sharing possibilities and using data from a variety of administrative sources.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the Defra could strengthen its compliance with the Code. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

Requirement 1	Take steps to develop a greater understanding of the use made of agricultural accounts and agricultural prices statistics; publish the relevant information and assumptions and use them to better support the use of the statistics (para 3.3).
Requirement 2	Publish more details of the methods used for agricultural accounts and agricultural prices data (para 3.10).
Requirement 3	Publish quality guidelines setting out in particular how quality is assured and monitored (para 3.12).
Requirement 4	Prepare and disseminate appropriate commentary for agricultural accounts and agricultural prices

statistics to aid interpretation and understanding (para 3.23).

Requirement 5

Provide information on the quality and reliability of agricultural accounts and agricultural prices statistics in relation to the range of potential uses (para 3.23).

Requirement 6

Publish the name of the responsible statistician in all publications (para 3.29).

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 The FBS is an annual sample survey of 1,850 businesses carried out by a consortium of FBS Research Centres¹⁴ on behalf of Defra. The survey collects a range of management accounting information on all aspects of farmers' businesses, such as data on the revenues from, and costs of, the farm business, assets and liabilities; how the land is used; areas and sales of crops, sales and purchases of livestock; and the amount of labour used. The annual publication *Farm Accounts in England* is the main output from the FBS. It brings together data about farm incomes and farm diversification activities. Data from the FBS are also released in the annual publications: *Farm Rents in England*, *Farm Diversification in England*, *Farm Household Income and Household Composition* and *Farm Business Income*.
- 2.2 The FBS collects data under the requirements of Council Regulation 79/65/EEC (amended)¹⁵, to provide farm-level economic data to the European Commission Farm Accountancy Data Network¹⁶ (FADN). The UK Government, the farming industry, banks and development agencies use FBS data to assess the economic state of the farming industry. In addition, Defra uses the FBS results to develop and evaluate farming policy, respond to enquiries and to meet other legislative requirements for farming data. Farmers can also use the data for benchmarking business performance and prices.
- 2.3 Agricultural accounts for the UK have been produced since the introduction of the Agriculture Act 1947¹⁷, which obliged Ministers to carry out an annual review of the general economic condition and prospects of the agricultural industry. The agricultural accounts bring together valuations of agricultural output, intermediate consumption, Gross Value Added and total income from farming activities. They form the Economic accounts for agriculture¹⁸ (EAA) which is a satellite account to the European System of Accounts and the UK National Accounts. They play an important role in the design, implementation and monitoring of the Common Agricultural Policy¹⁹ (CAP) and are also used in the evaluation of the impact of the CAP on the economic and financial situation of the agricultural community. The provision of data to the EU is governed by Council Regulation 138/2004²⁰.
- 2.4 Agricultural accounts data are published in *Total Income from Farming: 1st estimates* and *Total Income from Farming and Farm Business Income*. Two measures of farm income are presented: Total Income From Farming (TIFF) which shows the performance of the whole of the agricultural industry; and Farm Business Income which compares performance across different types of farming and is generated by the FBS. Regional agricultural accounts data are published in *Agriculture in the English regions*.

¹⁴ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/fbs/how-coll.htm>

¹⁵ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CONSLEG:1965R0079:19951213:EN:PDF>

¹⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rica/index_en.cfm

¹⁷ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1947/pdf/ukpga_19470048_en.pdf

¹⁸ [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Glossary:Economic_accounts_for_agriculture_\(EAA\)](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Glossary:Economic_accounts_for_agriculture_(EAA))

¹⁹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/policy/capreform/index.htm>

²⁰ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32004R0138:EN:NOT>

- 2.5 Agricultural prices data are published as the monthly and annual Agricultural price indices (API) and as a series of commodity data²¹ on a weekly or monthly basis:
- Quantities sold and price of cereals – England & Wales (weekly);
 - UK price series for cereals (weekly);
 - Animal feed – GB (straights) (monthly);
 - Hay and Straw – England & Wales (monthly);
 - Wholesale prices for selected fruit, vegetables, flowers and pot plants – England (weekly and monthly);
 - Bananas – wholesale prices (Birmingham & Spitalfields Markets) (weekly);
 - Eggs and Poultry – wholesale prices (Birmingham & Spitalfields Markets) (weekly);
 - Price series for finished cattle, sheep and pigs – UK (weekly);
 - Livestock – finished stock (England & Wales) (weekly);
 - Livestock – store stock (England & Wales) (weekly and monthly);
 - Price series for barreners, heifers in milk and freshly calved heifers – UK (weekly);
 - Cattle compensation prices (monthly) – England; and
 - Price series for poultry, eggs, butter, cheese, potatoes and sugar – UK (weekly).
- 2.6 Prices are collected weekly by market inspectors. Statistics based on these prices are primarily produced to comply with EU agreements and international obligations. They are used for monitoring the CAP by analysing price developments and the effect on agricultural income. They contribute to the Producer Price Indices, the National Accounts and the EAA. The statistics are also used by the media and the farming industry, in particular by farmers wishing to check price movements.
- 2.7 Defra carried out an internal review of food and farming statistics²² in 2009, covering agricultural accounts, agricultural prices and farm business statistics. The purpose of the review was to ensure that the services and statistics on food and farming that Defra provide were fit for purpose and a number of recommendations were made, such as to improve harmonisation of methods, investigate new administrative data sources and review the timing, frequency and detail of some of the publications. The NAO reviewed agricultural accounts data in their Third Validation Compendium Report²³ on data systems used to monitor and report on Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets.
- 2.8 The costs for the FBS in 2009/2010 were estimated to be just under £2 million the majority of which went to the consortium for recruitment of respondents and collection of data.

²¹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmgate/commodity/index.htm>

²² <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/natstats/documents/NSR-2009-Review.pdf>

²³ http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0607/third_validation_compendium_re.aspx

3 Assessment findings

Principle 1: Meeting user needs

The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.

- 3.1 The FBS team has regular contact with users via an FBS Advisory Group, a Technical Group and a Project Board. These groups consist of Defra experts, academics and experts from within the private sector. Consultation with users and stakeholders also takes place in annual Quality Reviews²⁴ carried out by an independent Quality Assessor. The FBS team carried out a consultation in 2007²⁵ on the best ways of measuring farm income.
- 3.2 For agricultural accounts and agricultural prices, Defra statisticians told us that they participate actively in the EU Agricultural Accounts and Prices working group and regularly meet other users, such as the Office for National Statistics and the National Farmers Union (NFU). Defra uses events such as the *Agriculture in the UK* (AUK) annual seminar to reach users although there is little evidence of systematic engagement with users in the wider community.
- 3.3 Defra documents the uses of statistics from the FBS²⁶ on its website, although there is little documentation on the uses of agricultural accounts or agricultural prices statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should take steps to develop a greater understanding of the use made of agricultural accounts and agricultural prices statistics, publish the relevant information and assumptions and use them to better support the use of the statistics²⁷ (Requirement 1).
- 3.4 The statistics covered in this assessment are published according to a timetable that takes account of the needs of the main users, such as the EU and the UK National Accounts.

²⁴ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/fbs/standard.htm>

²⁵ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/fbs/consult.htm>

²⁶ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/fbs/main-use.htm>

²⁷ In relation to Principle 1 Practices 1, 2 and 5 of the Code of Practice

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.

- 3.5 Defra publishes agricultural accounts, agricultural prices and farm business statistics in an impartial and objective manner. They are available free of charge on Defra's website.
- 3.6 Defra publishes information about changes in agricultural accounts data in *Economic Trends*²⁸ and in *AUK*²⁹. Defra published a note³⁰ in the *Farm Accounts in England* report about changes made to the methodology of the FBS in allocating fixed costs. The note clearly outlines the changes being made and the effect on comparability with previous years' data.
- 3.7 Defra has published a statement on revisions and errors in its National Statistics Statement of Compliance³¹. In 2008 the agricultural accounts team detected an error in a non-headline figure and republished the statistics with a note on its website. An error was also detected in 2008 in the fertiliser price series in the API. Defra republished this series with a statement of explanation.

²⁸ *Economic Trends*, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=308>

²⁹ *Agriculture in the UK*, <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/general/auk/index.htm>

³⁰ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/farmaccounts/2009/Appendix2.pdf>

³¹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/natstats/documents/defra-compliance.pdf>

Principle 3: Integrity

At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.

- 3.8 No incidents of political pressure, abuses of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.

- 3.9 Defra told us that it produces agricultural accounts, agricultural prices and farm business statistics in line with EU legislation and agreements. The EU provides comprehensive guidelines on the collection and analysis of the data, such as in the *Handbook for EU agricultural price statistics*³², in the methodology pages for the FADN and in the Manual on Economic Accounts for Agriculture and Forestry³³.
- 3.10 Defra publishes methods information for the FBS on its website, for example on data collection, sampling and farm classification. Little or no metadata are provided for the Agricultural Price Index and other weekly and monthly prices data. Eurostat publishes easily accessible information³⁴ on calculating agricultural prices but this information is not linked from Defra's website. Similarly, the agricultural accounts publications contain some explanation of the different farm income measures but there is little other information about methods. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should publish more details of the methods used for agricultural accounts and agricultural prices, such as providing links to guidelines from Eurostat and providing standard methods and quality information for weekly and monthly prices outputs³⁵ (Requirement 2).
- 3.11 Defra carried out an internal review³⁶ of farming and food statistics in 2009. We suggest Defra publish a report on the progress made on the review's recommendations. Independent Quality Assessors review the methodology and planning for the FBS annually. Defra carried out a special review of farm rents source data in 2009 which recommended the discontinuation of the Tenanted Land Survey (see further comments under Principle 6). As part of the work of the Agricultural Accounts and Prices Working Group, the EU carries out regular reviews of how well countries are implementing the methodology for agricultural accounts. The EU review in 2009 resulted in no requirements for the UK being made.
- 3.12 Quality assurance procedures for the FBS are well documented in the contract with the consortium carrying out the data collection. Prices and accounts data are also subject to a range of automated validation checks, including checks on individual price changes and comparisons with the national average. Defra tells us that the agricultural accounts are peer reviewed annually by sector experts.

³² http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product_details/publication?p_product_code=KS-BH-02-003

³³ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product_details/publication?p_product_code=KS-27-00-782

³⁴ For an example of easily accessible methods information from the EU, see http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Agricultural_output,_price_indices_and_income

³⁵ In relation to Principle 4 Practices 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice

³⁶ See footnote 23

We suggest that Defra publish the findings of these peer reviews. Defra has not published any quality guidelines for its agricultural and farm accounts outputs. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should publish quality guidelines setting out in particular how quality is assured and monitored³⁷ (Requirement 3).

- 3.13 The early estimates of TIFF required by the EU can be subject to significant revisions when final data are available. This is because farm income is subject to significant fluctuation due to weather conditions and world commodity prices. Defra has approached the EU with proposals to change the timing of the release to avoid such large revisions having to be made. Defra also now provides clearer explanations of the revisions and the main contributing factors.
- 3.14 The UK Devolved Administrations produce agricultural accounts and farm data for their respective countries. Defra publishes a joint release providing UK-level farm income data. Defra also meets with representatives from the Devolved Administrations twice a year to discuss issues arising from the harmonisation of the data. The FBS team also engages with other UK countries on measuring farm business income and provides links to data for the other countries from its website³⁸.

³⁷ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 4 of the Code of Practice

³⁸ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/fbs/sub/similar-survey.htm>

Principle 5: Confidentiality

Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.

- 3.15 Defra has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects. The arrangements include quarterly data handling risk assessments to review how data are kept secure. Defra is in the process of requiring staff with access to disclosive data to sign confidentiality statements.
- 3.16 The instructions for the FBS include information about the confidentiality of the data. The recruitment brochure for respondents and Defra's *Policy Statement on Confidentiality of FBS Data*³⁹ also provide information about confidentiality. Defra reviews all requests for data from the UK Data Archive and keeps signed confidentiality statements for all approved requests.

³⁹http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/fbs/documents/reference/Confidentiality_Policy.pdf

Principle 6: Proportionate burden

The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

- 3.17 The Farm Business Survey is a voluntary survey carried out annually. Defra publishes an annual estimate⁴⁰ of the costs of responding to the survey.
- 3.18 Defra's review of data on farm rents⁴¹ in 2009 recommended the discontinuation of the Tenanted Land Survey, which collected data primarily on farm rents, as the FBS collected comparable data. The FBS data are now used to produce farm rents statistics. Defra also reduced the level of detail in some prices data (for fruit and vegetables) in order to minimise costs while still meeting user needs. The review of farming and food statistics (see paragraph 3.11) considered opportunities to introduce efficiencies, such as publishing monthly instead of weekly data and coordinating datasets more effectively. Some of the prices publications are now released monthly rather than weekly.
- 3.19 For agricultural prices, data are collected by market inspectors from the Rural Payments Agency⁴² from a variety of wholesale markets on a specific day of each week. The agricultural accounts make use of data that has mostly been collected for other purposes.

⁴⁰ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/natstats/survey/documents/2008-09-Review.pdf>

⁴¹

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/farmmanage/farmrents/documents/NatStatsReportRents2009.pdf>

⁴² <http://www.rpa.gov.uk/rpa/index.nsf/home>

Principle 7: Resources

The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.

- 3.20 Defra has a three-year business plan which is monitored quarterly and resources are balanced across the range of outputs. An Agriculture and Environment Theme Group, within the Government Statistical Service (GSS) committee structure, has been set up to take a high level view of overarching priorities and issues and will report on strategy and planning. This group also aims to provide input from users into statistical planning.
- 3.21 Defra has an organisation-wide staff development programme and appraisal system. Defra follows GSS guidance for statistical staff and competencies.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.

- 3.22 The FBS outputs contain good commentary, with key points and analysis to help users interpret the data. However some technical terms used in the publications are not clearly explained. We suggest that Defra include a glossary of terms in, or linked from, the FBS publications.
- 3.23 The weekly and monthly prices publications do not include any commentary. Defra publishes a monthly brief⁴³, giving commentary and analysis of the various price series, but this is not easily accessible from the statistical publications. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should prepare and disseminate appropriate commentary for these statistics to aid interpretation and understanding⁴⁴ (Requirement 4). Similarly there is little information about the quality and reliability of the agricultural accounts and agricultural prices statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should provide information on the quality and reliability of the statistics in relation to the range of potential uses⁴⁵ (Requirement 5).
- 3.24 Defra publishes a range of different outputs for agricultural accounts, agricultural prices and farm business statistics, often with overlaps in the data presented or using similar measures, such as TIFF, farm business income, net farm income and cash income. To aid clarity, we suggest that Defra publish an overview of the various income measures and publications to enable users to identify and access information relevant to their needs.
- 3.25 Defra manages a website⁴⁶ which allows farm businesses to compare their prices and performance against other businesses in their region. The Assessment team considers this to be a useful presentation of data for this purpose. Defra's website has also been recently restructured to make it more accessible. We suggest Defra seek feedback from users to assess the accessibility of their redesigned website. Agricultural accounts, agricultural prices and farm business statistics are available in PDF and Excel formats. FBS data are also available via the UK Data Archive.

⁴³ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/general/monthlybrief/index.htm>

⁴⁴ In relation to Principle 8 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

⁴⁵ In relation to Principle 8 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

⁴⁶ <http://farmbusinessbenchmark.defra.gov.uk>

Protocol 1: User engagement

Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.

3.26 The requirements for this Protocol are covered elsewhere in this report.

Protocol 2: Release practices

Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.

- 3.27 Defra publishes a timetable of statistical releases on its website and all statistics are available via the National Statistics Publication Hub.
- 3.28 Defra publishes its pre-release access lists⁴⁷ for agricultural and farm accounts statistics on its website. Defra told us that it regularly reviews these lists.
- 3.29 There is no named statistician on some of the FBS outputs. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should publish the name of the responsible statistician in all these publications⁴⁸ (Requirement 6).

⁴⁷ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/natstats/prerelease.htm>

⁴⁸ In relation to Protocol 2 Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes

Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.

- 3.30 Defra has a data sharing programme and uses a range of administrative data sources, such as from the Rural Payments Agency, Cattle Tracing System⁴⁹, and the Single Payment Scheme⁵⁰. Defra also regularly reviews the opportunities for sharing data between business areas.
- 3.31 Defra has published a Statement of Administrative Sources⁵¹ on its website.

⁴⁹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/movements/cattle/cts.htm>

⁵⁰ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmmanage/singlepay/>

⁵¹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/natstats/adminsources.htm>

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to Defra's agricultural accounts, agricultural prices and farm business statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Suggestion 1 | Publish a report on the progress made on the recommendations set out in the 2009 Defra review of food and farming statistics (para 3.11). |
| Suggestion 2 | Publish the findings of peer reviews of agricultural accounts statistics (para 3.12). |
| Suggestion 3 | Include a glossary of terms in or linked from the FBS publications (para 3.22). |
| Suggestion 4 | Publish an overview of the various income measures and publications to enable users to identify and access information relevant to their needs (para 3.24). |
| Suggestion 5 | Seek feedback from users to assess the accessibility of the redesigned website (para 3.25). |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from June to December 2010.

A2.2 The Assessment team – Cathy Kruger and Elspeth Maclean – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of Defra in June. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 25 June and 19 July. The Assessment team subsequently met with Defra during September to review compliance with the Code of Practice, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A2.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare assessment reports.

A2.4 The Assessment team received 15 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Defra	7
Other government departments	1
Private sector	2
Media	2
Suppliers	3

A2.5 The majority of users responding came from within Defra or other government departments. Such users were satisfied with the statistics and found them comprehensive, timely and relevant. Frequent users found the statistics easily accessible while less frequent users found it difficult to find some of the data required and would find better signposting helpful. Some users mentioned that data were sometimes significantly revised and felt these revisions were not sufficiently explained. This caused problems in terms of using the data reliably. Both internal and external users considered that they had a good relationship with the statistics producers, with the team responding to enquiries promptly and helpfully.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

