Opening of the Sixth International Conference on Agricultural Statistics
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 23 October 2013.

Welcome Address

delivered by
Mr. Pietro Gennari
Chief Statistician, FAO

Honourable Esther Bemerguy de Albuquerque, Secretary for the Department of Planning and Strategic Investments of the Ministry of Planning and Budget

Mr Pedro Silva, President-Elect of the International Statistical Institute

Ms Wasmalia Bivar, President of the Brazilian Institute of Statistics and Geography (IBGE) and Chair, National Organising Committee of the Conference

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the acting director of the United Nations Statistics Division, Mr Stefan Schweinfest, and myself, as chair of the Agricultural Committee of the International Statistics Institute, it is both a privilege and a great pleasure to welcome you all to this sixth International Conference on Agriculture Statistics.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Government of Brazil for hosting the conference and the Honourable Secretary, for his presence today. We are very grateful to IBGE and Department of Agriculture of the US government, for their remarkable efforts to make this event possible and for taking care of all the organisational and logistic arrangements.

Dear colleagues,

This Conference follows a very successful event in Kampala where the Action Plan to implement the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics was reviewed and endorsed by more than 300 senior experts from around the world. This Plan is now being fully implemented and we will hear the important results achieved so far during the Conference in various dedicated sessions.
It is not the intention of my short intervention to recall all our achievements over the last three years. I would just like to remind everyone that we have come a long way, covered a lot of ground, and are well positioned now to make a difference in advancing rural and agricultural statistics at global level.

This conference and its core theme of “Improving Statistics for Food Security, Sustainable Agriculture, and Rural Development. Linking statistics with decision making” takes this agenda forward, emphasizing that the Global Strategy, this extraordinary effort of capacity development in agricultural statistics, has a strong user perspective. In fact, the final goal of the GS is to substantially increase the capacity of national statistical systems to respond to emerging data requirements and to better inform decision-making processes and policies in the critical areas of food security, sustainable agriculture, and rural development.

This conference could not come at a more opportune moment. Nor could we have chosen a more appropriate venue. It was, after all, here in Rio that the global community came together – twice - to formulate its joint vision and commitment for sustainable development in the future. The outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference reconfirmed that integrated social, economic, and environmental data are crucial to decision-making processes. Therefore, statistics will have to play a central role, and the United Nations are now working towards the formulation of a concrete post-2015 sustainable development agenda, enshrined in a framework of sustainable development goals and targets. Only with the help of sound and comprehensive ‘sustainable statistics’, will we be able to monitor the progress towards our future Sustainable Development Goals.

This Conference also joins the celebrations around the globe of the International Year of Statistics in recognition of the important achievements of official statistics and the core values of Service, Professionalism and Integrity.

Dear colleagues,

We are all aware that agricultural statistics do not exist in a vacuum. At this moment there are other statistical domains being developed further and other global initiatives, such as the integration of geospatial and statistical information, the implementation of the 2008
System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) and the Global Gender Statistics Programme, to name just a few. I hope this conference will also provide yet another opportunity to reflect upon the important challenge of how we can establish the necessary synergies between all these programmes.

Partnership is an essential element of all these initiatives and it as at the core of the Global Strategy, which is a broad multi-stakeholder programme implemented in collaboration with many international and regional organizations. The objective of the Global Strategy to build solid national statistical information systems in support of policy decision making, is comprehensive and ambitious; but I am confident that it is possible to realize this vision, especially with a strong partnership with international and regional stakeholders and the essential contribution of countries.

This conference is an important platform to forge this kind of partnership. I commend the Organizing Committee for bringing together such a diverse audience, consisting of experts from national statistical offices and ministries of agriculture, analysts and decision-makers from government entities, the academia, resource and development partners, the private sector and international organisations.

We, at the UN Statistics Division and FAO, are working to support your efforts in all these areas, and I would like to reiterate our commitment to continued close cooperation with all stakeholders, at the national and international level.

I would like to conclude now by wishing you all a successful and enjoyable conference.