

Standard Report on Methods and Quality For Farm Structure Survey

This documentation applies to the reporting period:

June 2016 onwards

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1 Overview

Farm Structure Surveys were carried out on three occasions in the 1980s ('83, '85, and '87), 1990s ('93, '95, and '97) and 2000s ('03, '05, '07). There has also been one subsequent Farm Structure Survey in 2013 since the 2010 Census of Agriculture.

The data for the 2013 Farm Structure Survey was collected using an 8-page postal questionnaire. This questionnaire data was, for the first time for an FSS, supplemented using administrative data from the Irish Ministry of Agriculture. The administrative databases utilised were the IACS and Bovine Registers. The use of these administrative databases has continued in subsequent years including Farm Structure Survey 2016. The 2010 Census of Agriculture was the first instance that utilised these administrative databases.

The statistical register compiled for the 2010 Census of Agriculture was updated for FSS 2013 and FSS 2016 by adding new administrative records of agriculture holdings or livestock herds created since the 2010 Census. These administrative records were provided by the Irish Ministry of Agriculture, known as the Department of Food, Agriculture and the Marine (DAFM). New administrative 'births' were added to the existing register of holdings from the 2010 Census giving a total sample frame of approximately 145,000 holdings while also accounting for deaths.

Questionnaires were issued to approximately 55,000 holdings in the week preceding the reference date of 1st June 2016. Three reminders were issued at approximately fortnightly intervals to maximise the response rate.

2 General Information

2.1 Statistical Category

Combination of administrative data and agricultural surveys.

2.2 Area of Activity

Agricultural statistics.

2.3 Organisational Unit Responsible, Persons to Contact

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2.4 Objectives and Purpose; History

A Farm Structure Survey (FSS) is carried out between Censuses to measure changes in farm structure. The first Census of Agriculture in Ireland was carried out in 1847, and annually thereafter until 1953. Between 1960 and 1980 Censuses were carried out at 5 yearly intervals. From 1980 Censuses were carried out at 10 yearly intervals.

The objective of the survey is to compile data on farm structure, land utilisation, livestock numbers and farm labour at State and regional level.

Up until June 2009, agriculture surveys (e.g. FSS and Crops and Livestock Survey June) and the Census collected data on the number of cattle held on farms under different cattle categories (e.g. dairy cows, male cattle 3 years and over etc.). From 2010 the CSO does not collect data on cattle. Published cattle numbers come from administrative data held by the DAFM. The DAFM's Animal Identification and Movement (AIM) system is a database which records all bovine birth, movements and disposals. The system captures details of all animal movements and this administrative data enables the CSO to publish cattle category totals at county, regional NUTS 2 & NUTS 3 levels.

The Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) was introduced in 2015 as part of the new measures agreed in the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. The BPS has replaced the Single Payment Scheme (SPS). Under the BPS a farmer applies to the DAFM in which the farmer declares all of his land specifying the crop type of each parcel of land. This administrative data enables the CSO to publish crop statistics at a regional level. This means that the number of crop related questions on CSO agriculture survey forms has greatly reduced since the CSO commenced using administrative crop data from the DAFM. The use of administrative data improves the quality of the statistics and reduces respondent burden.

2.5 Periodicity

Triannual

2.6 Client

General EU & National Requirements

2.7 Users

- Eurostat (the statistical service of European Commission)
- EU Commission
- DAFM
- Other sections within the CSO.
- Semi-State organisations such as Teagasc.
- General Public

2.8 Legal basis

Regulation (EC)No. 1166/2008 on farm structure surveys and the survey on agricultural production methods.

3 Statistical Concepts, Methods

3.1 Subject of the Statistics

Land Utilisation, Livestock Numbers, Farm Structure and Farm Labour.

3.2 Units of Observation/Collection Units/Units of Presentation

An agricultural holding was defined, in line with the definition in Article 2 of Council Regulation 1166/2008 as *'a single unit, both technically and economically, which has a single management, and which undertakes agricultural activities within the economic territory of the European Union, either as its primary or secondary activity'*.

Activities considered 'agricultural' for the purposes of the definition above as outlined in Annex I of Regulation 1166/2008, include the growing of perennial and non-perennial crops, plant propagation, animal production, mixed farming and/or those maintaining agricultural land in good agricultural and environmental condition (under 01.61 of NACE Rev. 2).

3.3 Data Sources

Crops: The results for crops are based on data obtained from the DAFM's BPS.

Cattle: The results for cattle are obtained from DAFM's AIM system.

Pigs: A specialist pig survey is conducted by the CSO due to the intensive nature of this activity and the results are published separately.

A statistical survey is conducted by the CSO to compile statistics on Farm Labour, Poultry and Sheep totals. The sampling frame for this survey was compiled using a combination of the pre-existing CSO Farm Register and two administrative databases held by the DAFM, namely the Corporate Client System (CCS) and the Animal Identification and Movement (AIM) system.

3.4 Reporting Unit/Respondents

Farms where the agricultural area used was at least 1 hectare (2.47 acres) may be included in the Farm Structure Survey. Farms with less than 1 hectare may also be included if they were engaged in intensive production.

3.5 Type of Survey/Process

Postal Survey & DAFM administrative data.

3.6 Characteristics of the Sample/Process

3.6.1 Population and Sampling Frame

The Farm Register was compiled using a combination of the pre-existing CSO Farm Register and two administrative databases held by the DAFM, namely the Corporate Client System (CCS) and the Animal Identification and Movement (AIM) system:

(i) The pre-existing CSO Farm Register was created for the last FSS which took place in 2013. This register was maintained by the CSO Agriculture Register Section and updated with births and deaths identified in the annual June and December surveys between 2013 and 2016 which incorporates BPS (IACS) data. It was used as the sampling frame for every agriculture survey that was carried out by CSO since 2013. The availability of administrative files since 2010 ensures that now all entries on this register can be checked on an annual basis for activity and accurate contact details. The CSO register holds only contact information and location details. The register does not hold any structural variables.

(ii) The CCS database was received from DAFM in Spring 2016. This contained records consisting of the name, address, telephone number, email, date of birth, and herd number of every farmer considered to be active by DAFM. The CCS database is separate to the IACS database but contains all of the holdings that are on the IACS system. The CCS database was used solely for the purposes of building the register. No statistical data was extracted from the CCS.

(iii) The AIM database was received from DAFM in Spring 2016. Any record without a corresponding entry in CCS (ii above) were added to the Register.

The resulting register was used as the frame for the FSS2016.

Type of frame is multiple list frames.

3.6.2 Sampling Design

The sample was a stratified one-stage sample of holdings (probability design).

The selection process was based on 53 initial strata. There were many strata for whom we wanted to have a 100% sample. Farms selected for strata 1 and 2 were defined due to their specialist nature and their relatively small population. Sheep farms were selected in stratum 3, as we do not have an administrative data source for sheep and a matched sample is required annually for which we have a minimum sample size. Stratum 4 included all new births. The remainder of the sample was selected in strata 5-53.

The strata are:

- 1.All Poultry farms (farms with greater than or equal to 100 birds),
 - 2.All Mushroom farms (farms with mushrooms in FSS2013)
 - 3.Sheep farms, we generated a matched sample with the June 2015 survey, which resulted in 5 426 sheep farms.
 - 4.Stratum 4 consisted of all new births according to administrative files. Once the births were checked and duplicates identified, the final number of births was 5 273.
 - 5.Strata 1-4 initially resulted in 11 229 units selected into the sample. To generate a final sample of approximately 56 000, 45 000 units needed to be selected from the remaining 96 409 units on the sampling frame that were not included in strata 1-4.
- These units were selected based on NUTS3 region and farm size and resulted in 49 additional strata.

3.7 Survey Technique/Data Transfer

The survey is carried out by post and follow up reminders are sent to non-respondents.

3.8 Questionnaire (including explanations)

The questionnaire is an eight-page questionnaire which is simple in design to allow easy usage.

Please see the following URL to view the survey form =>

https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/methods/farmstructuresurveyfss/Farm_Structure_Survey_2016_Survey_Form.pdf

3.9 Participation in the Survey

An 8-page A4 sized questionnaire (see [Annex A. FSS 2016 Questionnaire](#)) was issued to all farm holdings in the week prior to June 1st 2016 to be completed and returned to the CSO by Tuesday 8th June 2016. This was accompanied by an information booklet (see [Annex B. FSS 2016 Information Booklet](#)) with detailed notes on each section of the questionnaire. Three reminders were issued in order to maximise the response rate.

A separate 2-page A4 sized questionnaire (see [Annex C. Pig Survey Form 2016](#)) was also issued to all specialist pig-producers.

The paper questionnaires returned to the CSO were batched, receipted and scrutinised. They were then electronically scanned, verified and edited.

The FSS survey data were collected entirely by post (i.e. no interviewers). Each questionnaire issued included a pre-addressed freepost reply envelope. The return address on the reply envelope was to some dedicated Post Office Boxes which were used exclusively for the Census of Agriculture. The advantage of this method was that post was segregated from other post when it was delivered to the CSO and the national Post Office was able to provide an exact count of how many envelopes were returned this way. The envelopes were mechanically cut open across the top and the questionnaire held within was removed manually.

The survey is a voluntary survey on respondents.

3.10 Characteristics of the Survey Process and its Results

Data are collected for the following main categories

Sheep

- Breeding Females
- Other Sheep

Cattle (from administrative source)

- Dairy cows
- Other cows
- Bulls
- Male cattle 2 years and over
- Female cattle 2 years and over,
- Male cattle 1-2 years
- Female cattle 1-2 years
- Male cattle under 1 year
- Female cattle under 1 year

Crops (from administrative source)

- Cereals
- Pulses
- Potatoes
- Fodder roots and brassicas
- Industrial plants
- Vegetables for sale
- Fruit
- Flowers
- Seeds and seedlings
- Nurseries, horticulture etc.
- Other crops (includes fallow land, miscanthus and other energy crops)

The final results publication also reports the area covered (in hectares) by silage, hay, pasture and rough grazing at a NUTS2 & NUTS3 level.

Pigs

Data are collected for the following categories of pig in the Farm Structure Survey

- Piglets under 20 kg
- Breeding sows over 50 kg
- Other pigs

Poultry

Data are collected for the following categories of poultry in the Farm Structure Survey

- Broilers
- Laying hens
- Other poultry

Labour Force

Data are collected for the following Labour Force categories in the Farm Structure Survey

- Farm holder – Age, Sex and Farm Work

- Farm manager – Age, Sex and Farm Work
- Farm work of family members
- Farm work of non-family members
- Other Gainful Activities

3.11 Classifications used

The classifications used are listed at 3.10 above and are based on Eurostat legal requirements.

3.12 Regional Breakdown of Results

A regional breakdown of the Farm Structure results is published as part of the Farm Structure Survey publication. A Farm Structure Survey micro data set is submitted to Eurostat for validation.

The composition of the Regions breakdown is outlined below.

Border, Midland and Western NUTS 2 Region

Border Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo

Midland Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath

West Galway City & County, Mayo and Roscommon

Southern and Eastern NUTS 2 Region

Dublin Dublin City, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin

Mid-East Kildare, Meath and Wicklow

Mid-West Limerick City & County, Clare and North Tipperary

South-East Waterford City & County, Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford and South Tipperary

South-West Cork City & County and Kerry

4 Production of the Statistics, Data Processing, Quality Assurance

4.1 Data Capture

Forms are scanned, and the dataset is then entered into the Data Management System (DMS) for edit checks etc. Administrative data from the DAFM is then merged with the scanned returns.

A clean dataset is exported from the Data Management System to SAS for analysis.

4.2 Coding

No coding used within survey process.

4.3 Data Editing

Data editing is performed using the DMS. Edit rules focus on difference between current and previous year's returns. Cases where the change from one year to the next is outside certain bounds are examined to ensure that the change is not due to an error on the returned form. Data from administrative sources is not edited.

4.4 Imputation (for Non-Response or Incomplete Data Sets)

Sheep: The annual Sheep & Goat Census carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture, which provides a register of all sheep producers with a reference date of December of each year. This was used to impute for missing sheep data. The number of breeding females was taken from the Census and an expected non-breeding flock per unit of breeding female was derived controlling for whether the farm was an upland or lowland holding (as this factor influences productivity per breeding female).

Labour: Where the age of the holder was not provided, or a unit was not sampled, administrative files were first checked for a date of birth. If this failed, the age at the last FSS in 2013 was checked if available and adjusted accordingly. Finally, if the age could still not be confirmed, the distribution of holder ages across all returns was examined and this distribution was used to randomly assign ages to the missing cases. In returns

where the labour force section was left completely blank or in cases where the farm was not directly surveyed in 2016, regression techniques were utilised to provide a model for labour component of farms based on all available explanatory variables including area farmed, number of livestock, age of holder, gender of holder amongst others. Time spent was also regressed on explanatory variables.

Grass: Where no grassland area was provided for farms with bovines, the number of bovines in each category were used as explanatory variables in predicting a value for area of grassland.

Also, imputation from administrative data or previous surveys was also used to account for unit non-response.

4.5 Grossing and Weighting

Results are based on the created full population data set, so no grossing or weighting is used.

4.6 Computation of Outputs, Estimation Methods Used

The results for crops and cattle are obtained from administrative sources. The pig survey is a de facto census of the specialised pig farms that are responsible for the vast majority of pig farming within the State. A series of SAS programmes are run to identify all farmers who responded in the current year and in the previous year. Then, for each category of livestock (where matched sampling is used for total estimation) the percentage change between the two years is calculated. This percentage change is then applied to the published totals for the previous year to come up with estimates for the totals for the current year. Using the matched sampling methodology and administrative sources the "Crops and Livestock Survey June 2016 Provisional estimates" are released on September 8th, 2016.

The Farm Structure Survey data is processed and merged with all administrative sources. Final areas of crops and numbers of livestock for June 2016 were published on March 10th, 2017 as "Crops and Livestock June 2016 Final Results". This publication provided details of crops at national and regional level and cattle at national, regional and county level, and results for sheep, pigs and other livestock at national and regional level.

A final FSS publication detailing farms by size, type, economic size and detailed farm labour force data is published once NMR and FSS2016 dataset have been validated and accepted by Eurostat. The data tables will be accompanied by background notes on data collection, derivation of farm typology, livestock unit coefficients and a copy of the questionnaire.

4.7 Other Quality Assurance Techniques Used

- Cross referencing of surveys results against DAFM's Sheep & Goat and Pig Censuses.
- Consistent Macro edits within DMS are performed which compare totals over a number of years.
- Consultation with experts within industry to ascertain reasons behind emerging trends.

5 Quality

5.1 Relevance

The main groups of national characteristics surveyed are decided based on EU FSS legislation, i.e. Regulation 1166/2008.

A small number of additional variables were collected for national purposes. The need for these variables was identified through a consultation process with the main stakeholders prior to the survey design stage. Specifically, these variables related to:

- Sheep: A more detailed breakdown of sheep, consisting of rams, ewes (both under and over 2 years) and other sheep (both under and over 1 year).
- Poultry: The sub-division of both broilers and turkeys into breeding birds and table birds.
- Equidae: The sub-division of equidae into thoroughbred, other horses and mules, jennets and asses.
- Deer: Number of farmed deer.

Administrative Burden: the number of minutes taken to complete the FSS2016 questionnaire.

5.2 Accuracy and Reliability

5.2.1. Sampling Effect & Representativity

As administrative sources are used for crop and cattle totals and the pig survey is a de facto census of the specialised pig farms that are responsible for the clear majority of pig farming within the state, the focus of the June survey is on the correct measurement of sheep totals. Farm Structures Surveys are carried out at intervals in the period between each complete Census of Agriculture. The last Farm Structures Survey took place in 2016. The Farm Structures Survey is considered a representative sample of all farms in the state and includes new farms obtained from administrative records held by the Department of Agriculture. The June sample is selected in a manner that ensures a representative sample of farms with sheep. In addition, emphasis is placed on ensuring that there are adequate farms in the sample for year N (reference year), which responded to the June survey (or FSS or Census) in year N-1 (preceding year). This is required to support the matched sample methodology for estimating sheep totals.

5.2.2. Non-Sampling Effects

5.2.2.1 Quality of the Data Sources used (other than survey register)

No other data sources (besides administrative) used in preparation of results.

5.2.2.2 Register Coverage

All necessary steps are taken to ensure full coverage of the population. The Agriculture Register, finalised after FSS 2013, was further updated in April 2016 (prior to FSS2016) to add approximately 5,000 new 'births' which had been identified as newly-active holdings on Ministry of Agriculture's administrative databases. Therefore, the Agriculture register was considered very comprehensive. The only units that could have been excluded were those farming but not registered on either of the two administrative databases (IACS & Bovine Register). However, the likelihood of a new farm not falling into one of these two databases is considered low.

While new 'births' were added to the register, it is not always easy to identify farm 'deaths'. However, page 1 of the FSS questionnaire asks the respondent to indicate if the holding has been sold or leased or if the registered holder has retired or is deceased. These units are subsequently marked as inactive and considered 'out-of-scope'. These out-of-scope units are taken into consideration when calculating survey weights, in that only in-scope responses are included when calculating the non-response weight.

5.2.2.3 Non-response (Unit and Item)

Unit Non-response

Unit non-response occurred when a sample unit declined to respond to the questionnaire, despite the issuing of three reminders. Non-response was assumed (as opposed to out-of-scope/inactivity) when a form wasn't returned. Administrative data was utilised where possible for farms which were found to be active on administrative files despite providing no response. Otherwise, imputation was used to impute certain characteristics for the non-sampled units to compile a full census.

However, there was no administrative data or robust imputation method available for a small number of FSS characteristics (other gainful activities, crop rotation and manure management). Therefore, these are available for the responding units only and as such are weighted variables. Non-response was taken into consideration when calculating weights for these variables.

Full non-response was addressed by using administrative data to confirm level of activity and provide data. Therefore, bias due to non-response is considered to have been addressed. The unit non-response rate is 31.8%, non-responding units with unknown eligibility status are treated the same way as the ineligible units.

Item Non-response

As all data on bovines and crops were collected from administrative records, only variables collected in the FSS paper questionnaire were affected by item non-response. This seemed to occur mostly in the farm labour, OGA, crop rotation, manure management and training sections. The FSS is a self-completed postal questionnaire (8 pages) and as such there may be respondent fatigue by the time these sections are reached. The data being collected are complex and do not work well in a postal questionnaire with no trained interviewer

present during completion. It can therefore be difficult also to determine if the cells are empty due to non-response or are in fact real zero.

Where available, administrative data is used to impute for item non-response or to confirm real zero. In the absence of administrative data, data were imputed using regression if appropriate explanatory variables could be identified.

5.2.2.4 Measurement Errors

Measurement errors are not formally calculated for the Survey. The questionnaire is clear and unambiguous and easily understood by respondents. Crop, cattle and goat published totals are taken from DAFM administrative data.

5.2.2.5 Processing Errors

The potential for processing errors are limited due to well defined processes within the DMS. Numerous edit checks are performed to ensure reasonableness of the data used at aggregation stage. Macro edit checks, where totals for each category are compared with previous years are performed on all results to ensure consistency and identify processing errors.

5.2.2.6 Model-related Effects

No known model related effects.

5.3 Timeliness and Punctuality

5.3.1 Provisional Results

No Provisional results for the Farm Structure Survey.

5.3.2 Final Results

Farm Structure Survey 2016 results will not be published until the dataset and National Methodological Report have been validated and accepted by Eurostat. However, totals for crops and cattle for 2016 gathered from administrative data sources were published in March 2017 as part of annual time series publications for crops & livestock required under EU Regulation 1165/2008 (Livestock) and EU Regulation 543/2009 (Crops). There is a three-month time lag between the end 2016 (reference) year and the final crops & livestock publication.

5.4 Coherence

At micro level data was examined throughout the editing process. Different data sources were used to evaluate the data that was to be processed. Sources included the FSS 2013, Census 2010 and administrative sources from the Ministry.

Wherever possible, FSS data were also compared with other available sources and data in other domains. For example, the results were compared with FSS 2013, Census of Agriculture 2010 as well as annual crop and animal production surveys.

Examination of the animal production data showed some very slight differences which were deemed acceptable. Production of crops data show some differences with the FSS 2016 results which can be explained by differences in definitions and/or reference periods and as such can be of limited use.

Consistency checks are also performed against other data providers, namely Teagasc, Bord Bia and DAFM.

5.5 Comparability

As a common legislative framework is in place across the European Union for this survey, results are comparable against other European Union countries.

In terms of times series, results are comparable from 2005.

5.6 Accessibility and Clarity

5.6.1 Assistance to Users, Special Analyses

All assistance within the bounds of maintaining confidentiality is given to users. Decisions on whether to perform special analyses are taken on a case by case basis.

5.6.2 Revisions

Revisions do not usually occur from one survey to the next, but revision may take place due to changes in methodologies and data collection methods.

5.6.3 Publications

5.6.3.1 Releases, Regular Publications

Crops and Livestock Survey, June Provisional Estimates
Crops and Livestock Survey, June Final Results
Farm Structure Survey, Final Publication

The releases are available on the CSO website at 11am on the day of publication.

<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/agriculture/>

5.6.3.2 Internet

Area under crops

<https://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=AQA06&PLanguage=0>

Livestock Numbers

<https://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=AAA09&PLanguage=0>

Cattle Numbers

<https://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=AAA10&PLanguage=0>

And on the Eurostat website at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

5.6.4 Confidentiality

All data from respondents are treated as strictly confidential in accordance with the Statistics Act 1993. Care is taken to ensure that disclosure of potentially confidential results is avoided.

6 Additional documentation and publications

The entry for this statistic under StatCentral (the portal to Ireland's official statistics) is at

<http://www.statcentral.ie/viewStat.asp?id=144>