



## **Agricultural Census – an opportunity to obtain a realistic picture of the state of agriculture in Montenegro**

In preparation for the Agricultural Census, which will be conducted from 1 October to 1 December 2024, Statistical Office of Montenegro organized a presentation aimed at familiarizing both broad and professional public with the methodological concepts and organizational aspects of its implementation.

The event was opened by Ms. Nataša Vojinović, Assistant Director of the Statistical Office, who emphasized the importance of the Agricultural Census for the further development of this economic sector.

She particularly highlighted that the implementation of the Agricultural Census will provide a realistic picture of the state of agriculture in Montenegro, as well as internationally comparable data on the structure of agriculture and agricultural holdings, which will serve as a basis for decision-making and the development of future strategies.

Special attention should also be given to ensuring reliable data, which are essential for continuing the process of European integration through negotiation chapters assessing the development of agriculture and environmental protection, Ms Vojinović stated.

The key objective is to collect structural data on: area of utilised agricultural land by type of use, livestock numbers by type and category, persons engaged in agricultural production, with a particular focus on gender, machinery, facilities, and similar.

“Through the dedicated work of the Statistical Office staff, in cooperation with representatives of other institutions, a draft Law on the Agricultural Census has been prepared and is currently in the parliamentary procedure,” Ms Vojinović stated.

Statistical Office has established expert teams and an organizational structure consisting of around 40 statisticians who have been working on setting up this process since 2021, in order to harmonise European and national requirements. In this regard, the census methodology and questionnaires have been prepared, and a pilot survey is planned for July to test the CAPI method, which enables electronic data collection, replacing the previous paper-based approach.

An overview of the census threshold and related changes was also provided. It was emphasized that the European threshold is clearly defined as five hectares of utilised agricultural land, while the new national threshold includes half a hectare of utilised agricultural land, or 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> of arable land, or ownership of one cow, or ten beehives, etc. Thus, all agricultural holdings meeting the defined threshold will be covered. Additionally, data collection will not be conducted door-to-door as in 2010, but based on

a predefined list of holdings compiled from available statistical and administrative sources, Ms Vojinović explained.

In addition to structural data, the Agricultural Census will also collect, on a sample basis, data on crop and livestock production, logging and production of forest assortments, as well as data related to climate change, explained Ms Melinda Perović from the Department of Agricultural, Fisheries, Business Statistics, Environment and Forestry.

Support for today's presentation, as well as for the Agricultural Census itself, was provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management. The event was attended by Mr Miroslav Cimbalević, Director General of the Directorate for Agriculture, who emphasized the importance of cooperation with the Statistical Office.

"It is a great pleasure for us that the Agricultural Census will be conducted this year, as it is of great importance for the further development of agricultural production in Montenegro. The Ministry and Statistical Office have excellent cooperation, we are in constant communication, and I believe this will be a major step forward, as we have been waiting for this census for a long time. The methodology and overall approach are at a very high level. As a Ministry, we are eagerly awaiting the results, which are essential for designing agricultural policy measures and strategic documents. The end of this year and the beginning of the next will be of vital importance for Montenegrin agriculture, as we will obtain a comprehensive overview of the situation and identify key bottlenecks and future priorities," said Mr Cimbalević.

Taking into account the importance of this activity for the European integration process, the participants were also addressed by international expert Ms Irena Orešnik.

"The census is the backbone of the statistical system and a key tool for designing and monitoring agricultural policy. I am confident that this census will contribute to the overall improvement of statistics, not only due to the introduction of the CAPI method, which enables better control and faster data processing. Most importantly, we must ensure that farmers understand the importance of these data and provide accurate information. In the coming months, significant efforts will be needed to engage those who are most important in this process – the farmers," Ms Orešnik underlined.

The strong interest of representatives of Montenegrin agriculture in the Agricultural Census was demonstrated through a constructive discussion, during which farmers discussed with panelists topics such as sampling criteria, the definition of utilised agricultural land, and methods for collecting data on milk processing at the farm level.

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