

Environment and Forestry Directorate
Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services
Division

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RESAS: REVISED SCHEDULE OF AGRICULTURAL SURVEYS AND OUTPUTS

24 April 2020

First of all I would like to pass on my best wishes to you and your staff during this extraordinary time.

As you know, Rural and Environmental Science and Agricultural Services (RESAS) collect a range of statistical information on the agricultural sector which is the evidence base for the majority of our analysis on agriculture. However, in light of the current guidance from the Scottish Government and the Chief Medical Officer we have had to change our planned schedule of statistical surveys in agriculture for 2020.

The proposed changes are set out in the annex to this letter. These changes have been developed in consultation with our colleagues in DEFRA and the other devolved administrations. While Wales and Northern Ireland are still assessing the options for their June Census collection, we have all agreed to take a common approach to ensure UK figures can still be produced on all major agricultural surveys.

This approach ensures we comply with current legislation and guidance provided by both the Government Statistical Service and the UK Statistics Authority. The approach being taken is also in line with guidance being issued on all major and face-to-face surveys conducted by the Scottish Government.

I will keep you up to date with any other revisions we have to make but I hope this explains clearly our proposed schedule for 2020. The staff in RESAS will be happy to discuss any other thoughts or additional needs you may have so please feel free to get in touch.

This letter is being sent to the Chief Statistician of Scotland, Roger Halliday, and will be made available on the Scottish Government website.

Alastair McAlpine

Senior Statistician, Agricultural Statistics
Annex

Surveys we are temporarily stopping

Farm Structure Survey

RESAS will be delaying the Farm Structure Survey (FSS) until 2021. The FSS is a large mainly paper-based survey and delaying it will help reduce the burden on farmers at this time. Delaying the survey will also ensure that we continue to fully comply with all relevant Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance.

Cereal Harvest Survey

The Cereal Harvest Estimates are the main statistical publications monitoring cropping farms and are our source for the economic estimates for this sector. By combining industry intelligence on predicted crop yields and other statistics we provide an 'Initial-Estimate Cereal Harvest' report in October. Instead of using surveys to produce a final estimate at the end of the harvest period, we will base our final estimates on a similar method used for the initial estimate.

Surveys we are changing

June Agricultural Census

We will conduct a June on-line survey, with voluntary participation, to provide evidence to help assess the impact of COVID-19 on the agricultural sector. A sample of around 20,000 holdings will be sent an email with a link. This link will take them to their account on the Scottish Government's Rural Payments and Services website and holdings will be asked to complete the online survey form there.

In previous years, the June Census was collected between June and August and we are currently revising how soon we can deliver this survey. A decision will be announced shortly, based on the current IT developments that are required to deliver this survey.

An online-only survey will have limitations, but it is a proportionate method of gathering the necessary information to deliver a similar level of detail as in previous years whilst ensuring that we can continue to comply with all relevant Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance.

We may have to delay the publication of the June results but we will provide a provisional report in the autumn with final estimates published later in the year and we will be shortly consulting on changes to the December Survey to help us fill any gaps.

Farm Business Survey

The Farm Business Survey (FBS) is based on the financial accounts of around 500 commercial farms. This regulatory requirement examines a sample of agricultural

business accounts and is currently contracted to SAC Consulting. Their staff complete all the data collections using trained specialists who visit farm businesses or the home address of the farm manager.

RESAS have been in discussion with SAC Consulting and in line with the current policy on physical distancing and we have instructed them to discontinue farm visits for now. We anticipate that the current delays will not affect the overall results from this survey or the timing of the report in 2021. We continue to review the situation and I will be in touch with you again if this timetable changes.

Following the recent Farm Business Income report based on this survey, the additional supplementary tables for 2020 will be produced shortly and we are working hard to get these ready.

Other Surveys and Annual Reports

Last year I wrote to you to advise the postponement of the Economic Report for Scottish Agriculture (ERSA). I am pleased to announce that we will be producing this report for 2020 and also providing the 2019 report at the same time this summer.

Currently we are revising the Total Income From Farming (TIFF) report which was due for publication on 28 April 2020, a future date for publishing this report will be announced in the near future.

Specific requests for data tables can be made through our agric.stats@gov.scot mailbox and a revised publication date will be announced in due course.