

**Farm Structure Survey 2007
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FARM STRUCTURE SURVEY 2007

NATIONAL METHODOLOGICAL REPORT

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SUMMARY

The Farm Structure Survey 2007 is the third survey to be carried out by the National Statistics Office since the Census of Agriculture undertaken in 2001. Previously, it was normal practice for the NSO to carry out a comprehensive survey on the whole population in the agricultural register.

As from the date of accession, Malta has followed the legislation as laid down in Council Regulation 571/88 and has carried out a Farm Structure Survey every two years. The National Statistics Office was the official body responsible for undertaking the FSS in 2007.

While, the survey covered the crop year from the 1st September 2006 to the 31st August 2007, the reference date for livestock referred to the 1st of September, 2007. The reference period for labour force referred to the 12 months preceding the reference day of the survey.

The Agricultural register contains the details of all agricultural holdings and is maintained and updated by the NSO on a regular basis. Updates are either sent by the Ministry of Rural Affairs and the Environment or through the number of surveys undertaken by the Agriculture and Fisheries Unit. A final sample 1,332 agricultural holdings from a population of 11,017 agricultural holdings was taken into consideration for the FSS of 2007.

No pilot exercise was carried out and the questionnaire was modified according to the list of characteristics as laid out in Commission Regulation (EC) No 204/2006.

The survey was given media coverage and notices in the Government Gazette gave it the official authority to collect the required information under the Statistics Act. All holdings which were selected to take part in the survey were informed by post prior to the actual interviewing.

Data collection was carried out by experienced enumerators from the National Statistics Office and the Ministry of Rural Affairs and the Environment. All the data collection was verified and compared to data collected in previous surveys that were carried out by the Agricultural and Fisheries Unit.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 History, scope

Since 1955/56 right up until 1982/83, the Central Office of Statistics used to undertake an annual Census of Agriculture. Since then, another two censuses were carried out, one in 1991 and the most recent Census of Agriculture undertaken in 2001. No thresholds were used in any of these censuses and the entire population on the agricultural register were interviewed. All farmers in the census were interviewed directly with the exception of the 2001 census, where farmers with less than 0.3 ha of utilised agricultural area were surveyed through a postal questionnaire. The requirements within Council Regulation No. 571/88 were incorporated into the Census of Agriculture undertaken in 2001. Since the last Census of Agriculture, two Farm Structure Surveys were carried out in 2003 and 2005. These were carried out in accordance to Council Regulation No. 571/88.

1.2 National legislation

In Malta the legal basis for the collection of agricultural statistical data is the Malta Statistics Authority Act No XXIV, enacted in the year 2000. This places full responsibility on the National Statistics Office to carry out any statistical survey and to produce official statistics. Extracts from the Act, of the main functions of the office are:

Section 10

(2a) “to provide on an impartial basis, quantitative and representative information about the economic, demographic, gender issues, social and environmental situation in Malta, to all users including the Parliament, the Government, institutions, ; where possible such data should be provided on a regional basis”.

(2b) “produce the data, and shall be subject to the principles of reliability, objectivity, relevance, statistical confidentiality, transparency, specificity and proportionality”.

(2c) “Supply the information necessary to evaluate the quality of official statistics and make accessible to the public the methods used for their production.”

Section 35

“The Director General may prepare forms, questionnaires and other records for the collection of information under this Act and the instructions necessary for their proper completion, and shall specify the date or period within which these completed forms, questionnaires and other records or the required information shall be returned to the Authority.”

All individual data collected during the survey is strictly confidential. No data, which might single out individual information, may be published. Data collected through the survey is intended for statistical purposes only and may only be used for statistical publications, tables and analysis.

All persons engaged in the data collection, handling and processing of data are obliged to keep the confidentiality. The filling in of statistical questionnaires is compulsory, under the Statistics Act.

2. CONTENT

2.1 Characteristics and reference period

The information was collected according to the Commission Decision 204/2006 amending Annex 1 to Council Regulation 571/88/EC.

Some characteristics were not included into the FSS 2007 because they are either not existent (NE) or not significant (NS) in Malta. The list of these characteristics is presented in the following table.

Table 1: List of NE, NS, and NA characteristics

Field Id	Unit	Label	
A2	Y-N	Less-favoured area – mountain area	NE
A3	Y-N	Agricultural areas with environmental restrictions	NE
C3	Ha	Agricultural area utilised for shared farming or other modes	NS
C5 (a)	Ha	UAA on which organic methods are applied according to EC rules	NE
C5 (d)	Ha	UAA on which organic methods are under conversion	NE
C5 (e)	Y-N	Is organic farming applied to animal production	NE
D1 to D8	Ha	Cereals for the production of grain	NE
D9	Ha	Protein crops for the production of grain	NE
D11	Ha	Sugar Beet	NE
D12	Ha	Fodder roots and brassicas	NE
D23 to D35	Ha	Industrial Plants	NE
D14 (a)	Ha	Open Field fresh vegetables, melons, strawberries	NS
D18 (a)	Ha	Forage plants - Temporary grass	NE
D18 (b) (i)	Ha	Forage plants - green maize for silage	NE
D19	Ha	Arable land seeds and seedlings	NE
F	Ha	Permanent grassland and meadow	NE

G1 (b)	Ha	Fruit and berry species of subtropical climate zones	NE
G1 (c)	Ha	Nuts	NE
G4 (d)	Ha	Raisins	NE
G6	Ha	Other permanent crops	NS
G7	Ha	Permanent crops under glass	NS
H2	Ha	Wooded area	NE
I8 (b)	Ha	Areas used for the production of raw materials	NE
I8 (c)	Ha	Areas converted into permanent pastures and meadow	NE
I8 (d)	Ha	Former agricultural areas converted into wooded area	NE
J16 (b)	No.	Ducks	NS
J16 (c)	No.	Geese	NS
J16 (d)	No.	Other poultry not mentioned elsewhere	NS
J18	No.	Bees	NS
J19	No.	Other livestock	NS
M 1 (a)	Y-N	Other gainful activities – tourism, accommodation ...	NE
M 1 (b)	Y-N	Other gainful activities – handicraft	NE
M 1 (d)	Y-N	Other gainful activities – wood processing	NE
M 1 (e)	Y-N	Other gainful activities – aquaculture	NE
M 1 (f)	Y-N	Other gainful activities – renewable energy production	NE
M 1 (h)	Y-N	Other gainful activities – other	NE

All data was collected through the survey and administrative sources were not used for the scope of the survey.

2.2 Questionnaire

A twelve page (12) questionnaire was used on all the holdings surveyed. It was similar to the questionnaire used in 2005 with minor changes to cater for the changes implemented in Commission Regulation 204/2006.

The questionnaire was split into fourteen (14) parts and covered all fields required in Commission Regulation 204/2006. The data was collected over a three month period starting from the 1st of September. It was decided that the survey was to be carried through direct interviewing, and thus no facility for the questionnaire to be filled on-line was made. Through experience, the use of lap-tops for interviewing proved to be very laborious and highly impractical during the interviewing stage. A copy of the questionnaire is found in Annex 1.

3. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

3.1 Survey organisation

In Malta, no FSS committee was set up as all staff members who were involved in the organisation and implementation of the FSS 2007 were all staff members within the Agriculture and Fisheries Unit of the National Statistics Office. The Agriculture and Fisheries team is responsible for all domains in Agriculture. The unit co-ordinated all requirements required for the survey. These requirements included the questionnaire design, briefing of interviewers, printing of forms, running the survey, data capture, validation, analysis, transmission and the dissemination of the results.

3.2 Work Process

The timetable of events is shown in the table below.

Table 2: Calendar of events for FSS 2007

Stage	Date
Survey design completed	June, 2007
Sample chosen	July, 2007
Survey date	1st September, 2007
Survey closed	30 th November, 2007
Follow up	December, 2007
Checking of data	January, 2008
Provisional results	April, 2008
Initial transmission to Eurostat	April, 2008
Final Results	May, 2008

3.3 Preparing the survey operations

3.3.1 Population and frame

The holding is the unit of enumeration. The holding comprises land and/or buildings on which agricultural activities are carried out. The holding is operated by the 'holder' who is a single individual, a partnership of individuals or a limited company. The initial population which were eligible for the farm structure survey stood at 11,058 agricultural holdings. No thresholds were used.

The agricultural register is maintained by the Agriculture and Fisheries unit and is continuously updated through administrative sources and the frequent surveys undertaken by the unit. The main sources for updating the agricultural register are the following:-

- Changes that are captured directly by the AFU through surveys
- Updates compiled from the Horticulture division of the Ministry of Agriculture
- Updates compiled from the Veterinary Serviced Division namely:-
 1. Cattle register
 2. Pig register
 3. Poultry register
 4. Sheep and goats register

There were no changes in the definition of a holding from the previous survey.

The Agriculture and Fisheries Unit maintains the agricultural register, which consists of a central database having the personal details of the holding and the data from previous surveys. This enables the unit to compile and extract an updated list of holdings for the farm structure survey.

The agricultural register is updated frequently and new units may be found through:

1. the animal register maintained by the Department of Veterinary Services
2. the farmer's register maintained by the Department of Agriculture
3. other administrative sources
4. the Farm Structure Survey itself

3.3.2 Survey design

Maltese agriculture is diverse and limited in size. As a result, it was not feasible to sample all farm types at the 4-digit level of typology. In order to overcome this phenomenon and to obtain a representative sample from each stratum, certain farm types were clustered according to the following typology codes.

Table 3: Clustering of typology codes for sample design

Farm type	Typology codes
1	141, 1443, 605, 813, 821
2	2013, 2031, 2032, 2034, 601, 602, 6061, 8232
3	311, 312, 3141, 603
4	3211, 322, 323, 34, 604, 6062
5	411, 412
6	441, 443, 444, 814
7	5011, 5012, 5013, 5021, 5022, 5023, 5031, 5032, 722, 723
10	Other types

The target population was stratified according to the typology and economic size of the holding and region. The stratification can be seen in the following tables. The economic sizes of the holdings were also clustered in order to obtain a representative sample.

Table 4: Initial distribution of agricultural holdings by region

Stratum	NUTS 3 Region	Holdings	SGM (€)	Initial sample	Initial weight
1	Island of Malta	2,643	3,089,134	148	17.858
2	Island of Malta	105	1,306,875	24	4.375
3	Island of Malta	2,832	6,644,955	203	13.951
4	Island of Malta	790	13,549,480	318	2.484
5	Island of Malta	385	782,488	29	13.276
6	Island of Malta	841	2,556,781	68	12.368
7	Island of Malta	267	3,893,239	92	2.902
8	Island of Malta	53	1,462,370	25	2.120
9	Island of Malta	128	359,929	10	12.800
10	Island of Malta	58	816,922	19	3.053
11	Island of Malta	143	483,399	11	13.000
12	Island of Malta	148	3,258,274	69	2.145
13	Gozo and Comino	543	375,004	19	28.579
14	Gozo and Comino	1,224	2,566,376	77	15.896
15	Gozo and Comino	106	1,596,557	36	2.944
16	Gozo and Comino	23	22,202	2	11.500
17	Gozo and Comino	165	429,427	12	13.750
18	Gozo and Comino	38	555,121	11	3.455
19	Gozo and Comino	105	220,317	6	17.500
20	Gozo and Comino	23	393,231	6	3.833
21	Gozo and Comino	61	117,265	4	15.250
22	Gozo and Comino	25	476,189	11	2.273
23	Island of Malta	259	17,488,272	259	1.000
24	Gozo and Comino	93	4,898,193	93	1.000
Total		11,058	67,341,999	1,552	

Table 5: Final distribution of agricultural holdings by region

Stratum	NUTS 3 Region	Holdings	SGM (€)	Final sample	Final weight
1	Island of Malta	2,626	3,082,393	91	28.857
2	Island of Malta	104	1,306,875	22	4.727
3	Island of Malta	2,815	6,634,255	143	19.685
4	Island of Malta	779	13,506,278	290	2.686
5	Island of Malta	385	782,488	21	18.333
6	Island of Malta	835	2,551,950	43	19.419
7	Island of Malta	261	3,860,818	84	3.107
8	Island of Malta	51	1,446,188	22	2.318
9	Island of Malta	127	359,009	9	14.111
10	Island of Malta	54	771,060	14	3.857
11	Island of Malta	142	483,399	9	15.778
12	Island of Malta	141	3,209,500	58	2.431
13	Gozo and Comino	542	374,942	11	49.273
14	Gozo and Comino	1,222	2,560,645	48	25.458
15	Gozo and Comino	103	1,596,557	31	3.323
16	Gozo and Comino	22	21,542	1	22.000
17	Gozo and Comino	162	428,919	7	23.143
18	Gozo and Comino	38	555,121	11	3.455
19	Gozo and Comino	104	219,951	2	52.000
20	Gozo and Comino	22	393,231	5	4.400
21	Gozo and Comino	61	117,265	3	20.333
22	Gozo and Comino	23	476,189	9	2.556
23	Island of Malta	299	17,286,340	299	1.000
24	Gozo and Comino	99	4,865,552	99	1.000
Total		11,017	66,890,469	1,332	

Holdings with an economic size class of 8 and over and holdings in certain typology classes were exhaustively surveyed. In total, 398 agricultural holdings were surveyed exhaustively. These holdings represented 3.6 per cent of the total number of agricultural holdings and contributed to 33.1 per cent of the total standard gross margin at 2004 values.

The optimum allocation method was the preferred method for selecting agricultural holdings by minimising the variance within the stratum. Initially, the total amount of agricultural holdings to be surveyed amounted to 1,552 holdings and these holdings were split as follows:

Holdings to be surveyed using random sampling	→	1,200
Holdings to be surveyed exhaustively	→	352

The total amount of holdings to be surveyed can be expressed as:

$$S_t = S_{rs} + S_{tot}$$

where S_t is the total sample size

S_{rs} are those holdings that will be extracted using sampling techniques

S_{tot} are those holdings that will be exhaustively surveyed

Thus, the holdings in each stratum, except for those exhaustively surveyed, were chosen on the proportion of the total standard deviation of the total standard gross margin of the holdings within each stratum.

The formula for extracting the number of holdings to be surveyed under the optimum allocation method is

$$n_h = S_{rs} \cdot \frac{\sigma_{SGM_h} \cdot N_h}{\sum_{h=1}^H (\sigma_{SGM_h} \cdot N_h)}$$

where S_{rs} is the sample size for those holdings to be sampled using sampling techniques

N_h is the total number of holdings in the population within each stratum

n_h is the total number of holdings in the sample within each stratum

σ_{SGM_h} is the standard deviation of the holdings within each population stratum

h is from stratum 1 to stratum H

3.3.3 Pilot Survey

A pilot survey was not required as the structure survey for 2007 was very similar to the structure survey undertaken in 2005 with slight modifications.

3.3.4 Informing and training the staff and respondents

Training of enumerators

One briefing session were held for all interviewers. During the briefing session, all the interviewers were provided with a detailed instruction manual on each characteristic of the survey, a list of farmers to be interviewed, and the leaflet sent to the farmers. At the beginning of the survey, all interviewers were instructed to interview not more than two holdings and take the booklets back to the unit for an assessment to identify any errors undertaken during the interviewing stage. This assessment helped the interviewer in reducing the number of errors during the interviewing stage. This method, which is also used in other surveys, helped the unit to reduce the total number of initial errors.

Informing the agricultural holdings / farmers

A leaflet was sent to all holdings chosen in the sample to highlight the importance of the Farm Structure Survey. The leaflet explained the process on how the office was going to implement the survey, the obligation as to which the holdings had towards the Statistics Act, the specific data that was going to be collected and the documents which the holdings were expected to prepare for the interview. In order to increase the response rate, the farming community was also informed through their organisations.

3.4 Sampling, data collection and data entry

3.4.1 Drawing the sample

A simple random sample stratified by farm type, economic size and region was drawn from the population as described in Section 3.3.2. The sample was extracted using Microsoft Excel.

Tables 4 and 5 illustrate the initial and final population and sample distribution of agricultural holdings respectively. While the former table shows that from the 11,058 agricultural holdings, 1,552 holdings were to be surveyed, the latter table refers to the 1,332 holdings that were actually surveyed from an adjusted population of 11,017 agricultural holdings. The adjustment of the final population can be seen in the table below.

Table 6: Adjustment of final population frame

Initial population	11,058
New units found in the survey	6
	11,064
Holdings no longer engaged in agricultural activity deleted from sample and population frame	46
deleted from population frame only	1
Final population	11,017

Through the survey, it was found that 46 agricultural holdings were no longer engaged in agricultural activity and have been out of agriculture for quite some time. These holdings were removed both from the sample and from the population frame. Coincidentally, another agricultural holding that was not in the sample did not have any agricultural activity was removed from the population frame. At the same time, the survey revealed 6 new units. These were included in both the population frame and in the sample. An additional 2 units were included in the sample. These 2 units emerged from holdings that were split in the population. These were not considered as new units because these holdings already existed in the population frame.

Table 7: Adjustment of final sample

Initial sample	1,552
New units found in the survey	6
New units surveyed already existing in population	2
	1,560
Holdings no longer engaged in agricultural activity deleted from sample and population frame	46
Final sample	1,514
Non-response	182
Final response	1,332
Response rate	88.0%

Although every effort was made to contact all holdings, 182 agricultural holdings could not be traced. The final sample of 1,332 agricultural holdings was split as follows:

Holdings to be surveyed using random sampling	→	934
Holdings to be surveyed exhaustively	→	398

A correction factor was applied where the final sample within the strata differed from the initial sample.

The final weighting was thus

$$Wt_h = \frac{N_h}{n_h} \cdot \frac{n_h}{n_h^*}$$

where Wt_h is the weight applied to each holding surveyed in stratum h

N_h is the population holdings in stratum h

n_h is the initial number of holdings to be sampled in stratum h

n_h^* is the actual number of holdings surveyed in stratum h

The final weighting of the sample can be seen in Table 5.

3.4.2 Data collection

Data collection methods

Agricultural holdings surveyed were split into two groups; those holdings with an economic size class three (3) and below (>0 – <6 ESU) were surveyed by telephone while holdings with an economic size four (4) and above (≥ 6 ESU) were interviewed at the holder's address. A total of ten (10) enumerators, eight (8) enumerators from the NSO and two (2) from the Ministry of Rural Affairs and the Environment, were engaged in data collection. All of the interviewers had previous experience in other surveys carried out by the Agriculture and Fisheries Unit.

Supervision was carried out and monitored on a daily basis and the performance of the enumerators was checked for consistency.

The average time to fill in the questionnaire varied according to the method of interview. Telephone interviews took approximately 5 minutes to fill in, while agricultural holdings with an economic size class of 4 and above did not take more than 15 minutes to compile.

Many of the agricultural holdings produced IACS documentation to help in filling out the questionnaire.

Data entry modes

Since the compilation of data was carried out by the NSO officials, the filled in questionnaires were collected on a weekly basis and were checked instantly for any inconsistencies. Data entry started during the third week of September 2007.

3.4.3 Utilisation of administrative data sources

No administrative sources in compiling the data were used.

3.4.4 Control of the data

A thorough check of completed questionnaires is an integral part of the processing system. Data control started at the collection stage. The interviewer was obliged to verify the totals for consistency during the actual filling in of the questionnaire.

Once field checking was completed, interviewers had to submit the questionnaires to the staff of the National Statistics Office, where the questionnaires were subject to a manual verification for completeness. In cases where information was either missing or not clear, the holder was contacted by telephone for clarification.

This phase was then followed by the data entry stage where computer validations of the individual data were made. This involves logic and consistency checks with previous data, checks for extreme values and reconciliation of the total declared area information to the area declaration covered by the crop. Moreover, the computer application was designed in such a way that for any error encountered a dialog box displaying the error message popped up.

After the data inputting stage, all data was again validated and verified through Eurostat's validation rules as laid out in Annex 6 of the regulation. The locally built program has been designed in such a way in order to minimise errors encountered through the validation rules as stipulated in Annex 6. The validations set up by Eurostat helped to clear any final anomalies. The data was then converted into the data format as required by Eurostat.

3.4.5 Non-response

Non-response referred to those holdings which, either refused to co-operate or holdings that could not be contacted.

There were no partly completed questionnaires, and the number of non-respondents amounted to 182 holdings, all of which were unreachable. The high response rate was the result of a collective effort from all interviewers to minimise non-response. The response rate declined slightly when compared to the previous structure surveys because the further you move away from one agricultural census the more difficult it is to contact certain farmers.

3.5 Data processing, estimation and analysis

3.5.1 Methods for handling missing or incorrect data items

Among the 1,552 agricultural holdings initially chosen in the sample of the Farm Structure Survey, 46 holdings were no longer engaged in agriculture activity. This was due to:

- land has been sold or transferred – this could lead to closure of holdings due to combination of holdings themselves
- land isn't used any more for agricultural purposes
- duplication of holdings

After the adjustments for non response were made, the response rate was 88.0 per cent.

The data validation process on the data inputted was done as explained in Section 3.4.4. As this procedure was completed, quality checks on the aggregated data were performed to analyse the consistency of the results. Although these checks did not indicate any abnormalities in the data collection process, they helped in confirming the results obtained.

3.5.2 Estimation and sampling errors

The table below shows the results of some of the most important variables within the structure survey. Statistical results obtained from the data include the standard error and the co-efficient of variation.

Variable	Ha/hd	Standard error (ha/hd)	Coefficient of variation (%)
UAA	10,326	346	3.35
Bovines	18,906	586	3.10
Pigs	79,186	3,410	4.31
Broilers	660,215	92,731	14.05
Layers	563,814	28,287	5.02
Ovines	8,788	1,019	11.60
Caprines	5,738	1,011	17.62

The standard error for each variable was calculated using the formula below:

$$Se = \sqrt{\sum_{h=1}^H N_h \times (W_{t_h} - 1) \times S_h^2}$$

where W_{t_h} is the weight applied to each holding surveyed in stratum h

N_h is the number of holdings in stratum h

S_h^2 is the variance within stratum h

The results at 1 standard error seem highly satisfactory for UAA, Bovines, Pigs, and Layers. The main problem with broilers is that the total number of broilers is difficult to estimate due to the resting periods of some poultry farms. The coefficient of variation of the caprines and ovines is still high mainly due to under representativity of these holdings within the Farm Structure Survey.

Variable	Coefficient of Variation (%) – 2003	Coefficient of Variation (%) – 2005	Coefficient of Variation (%) – 2007
UAA	2.42	2.71	3.35
Bovines	4.80	5.00	3.10
Pigs	5.73	3.92	4.31
Broilers	15.19	8.94	14.05
Layers	13.13	3.39	5.02
Ovines	12.05	10.04	11.60
Caprines	16.50	18.25	17.62

The table above compares the coefficient of variation of 2007 when compared to the previous structure surveys of 2005 and 2003. The coefficient of variation for the UAA and Bovines has increased slightly whilst the coefficient of variation for Pigs, Broilers, Layers and Ovines has decreased considerably.

3.5.3 Non sampling errors

No coverage errors were evident in the structure survey as there were no holdings that refused to respond. No processing errors were encountered as a result that the data was thoroughly checked in the data input stage. In fact, the only non sampling error observed was the unit non-response, which was already examined in Section 3.5.1. The final response rate of 88.0 per cent can be taken as a relatively high response rate.

3.5.4 Evaluation of results

Variable	FSS 2007	FSS 2005	%
UAA	10,326	10,254	100.7
Bovines	18,906	19,847	95.3
Pigs	79,186	73,165	108.2
Broilers	660,215	575,152	114.8
Layers	563,814	469,189	120.2
Ovines	8,788	10,995	79.9
Caprines	5,738	5,130	111.9

The results of the Structure Survey 2007 are highly satisfactory when compared to the structure survey in 2005. The results from the survey have also been compared to other agricultural surveys for consistency. In fact, the UAA for Malta has remained practically unchanged, while the number bovine heads has declined slightly. It is evident that the number of pigs increased, and this has been verified through the annual pig survey carried out every December. Broiler slaughters were on the increase, resulting in more broilers on the holdings, while the egg production has also registered an increase, coming from an increase in the number of layers found on the holdings.

4. PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION

A news release disseminating the final results of the Farm Structure Survey will be published in second quarter of 2008 and after the transmission of the final data to Eurostat. These results, broken down in detail by subject matter and region, will be available on the National Statistics Office website in PDF-format.

Tables include information on the structure of agricultural holdings, land use, livestock and labour force. A short methodological description on the implementation of the survey will also be included.

ANNEX

- Questionnaire