

## Abstract

### **The National Agricultural and Forestry Census in Chile during the COVID pandemic**

The VIII National Agricultural and Forestry Census of Chile was planned to be conducted from 2 April to 31 July 2020 in the southernmost regions of the country and from 14 May to 13 August 2020 in the remaining regions. This census gathers data on approximately 284,000 agricultural production units with an estimated agricultural area of 62.6 million hectares. For the first time in Chile, the census employs two collection strategies: a field survey that uses mobile capture devices (MCD) and an online survey originally planned for a determined group of larger and more complex production units.

After the confirmation of the first cases of COVID in Chile and the rapid spread of the pandemic across the world, the government declared a state of emergency for the entire country on 18 March 2020. In consideration of the difficulty in conducting the agricultural census under these circumstances, the uncertainty about the health risks, and the need to protect the health of enumerators and participants, it was decided to defer the commencement of the census until August. However, this date had to be postponed two more times (first, to September 2020, and finally, between 10 March and June 2021).

The pandemic forced the census project to modify operational aspects of the dissemination plan and the budget. The constant uncertainty in the starting date of the census and in the sanitary conditions led to the implementation of prevention protocols and sanitary safeguards, based on the specifications of the national health authorities, in all operational manuals of the census. To protect the health of the enumerators and the agricultural community, resources were reallocated to purchase personal protective equipment (such as masks, face shields, and alcohol gel for individual use) for all census personnel in the field. In addition, presentations on self-care and prevention were given to census personnel. At the beginning of the census, all field personnel were tested for COVID-19, and they were assisted in obtaining vaccination while the census was being conducted.

The pandemic had a great impact on the training of field personnel. Initially, training was planned to be in person throughout the country. However, new training modalities were developed to adapt to the restrictions in mobility, the training required by the health authorities, and the risk of contagion. These modalities include in-person training (20%), online training (65%), and mixed modalities (15%), in addition to special training modules for island territories where access was not possible. Online contingency training was also conducted for all personnel who replaced those who contracted COVID-19. It should be noted that during the entire survey there were no instances of contagion among field personnel attributable to the census. Of the more than 2,400 people deployed in the field, less than 1% contracted the disease. Those who contracted COVID-19 did so through their close contact with family circles.

Another measure implemented to reduce the need for the movement of enumerators and thus to reduce the health risks was to change the collection method from in-person to online collection. This modality was originally planned for a limited number of large producers, but it was later made available to all producers regardless of their size.

The dissemination of information on the census had to incorporate protection measures and sanitary safeguards. This was the primary topic of concern for the press and the public. Thus, clear communication played an important role in limiting the rejection of the census by the agricultural community.

At the time the census began on 10 March 2021, Chile had already begun the vaccination process, and more than 4 million people had received the first dose, 2.6 million of whom were aged over 60.

Although many communes have been under quarantine throughout the months of the enumeration of the census, the census was recognized as an essential task by the institution, thus the collection of data never had to be suspended.

Currently, the census is in its final period of enumeration, and although it is still too early to provide numbers, all indications are that we are exceeding the established goals for the census in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic.