

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN MARKET ECONOMY OF POLAND

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Summary:

Based on new agricultural strategy and on principles of reorganization of extension system in Poland in 1991, author shows results of investigations dealing with priorities, which are being faced by Polish agriculture and by the extension system. The results were collected by using nominal group technic (NGT). The range of different goals dictates the need for extension system to be adopted to meet particular needs in given regions. This is illustrated by two models which define factors effecting the efficiency.

Anotace:

Autor prezentuje výsledky zkoumání zabývajícího se prioritami, s nimiž se střetává polské zemědělství a poradenský systém, založené na nové zemědělské strategii a na principech reorganizace poradenského systému v Polsku v roce 1991. Výsledky byly získány za použití techniky nominální skupiny (NGT). Šíře rozdílných cílů diktuje potřebu, aby poradenský systém byl upraven tak, aby řešil speciální potřeby daných oblastí. Toto je ilustrováno dvěma modely, které definují faktory ovlivňující efektivnost.

Key words:

agricultural extension, regional modeling of extension, market economy, restructuring of agriculture.

Klíčová slova:

zemědělské poradenství, regionální modelování poradenství, tržní hospodářství, restrukturalizace zemědělství.

Economical reforms introduced in agriculture in 1990 resulted in specific "shock" among agricultural producers in Poland. The situation of individual private farm owners has change quite radically. Previously their production was based on several certain points:

- State guaranted market for all agricultural products produced by farmers,
- Low interest rate of agricultural credits which were however not available to everybody,
- Limited supply of agricultural inputs,
- Purchasing system based on coops and state firms, which were buying the whole production from farmers.

Polish market was tied with world market only to a small extent. Agricultural policy was based only on the income concept and to a large extend on maintaining food self-sufficiency. Supply was regulated by state prices, state subsidies without the obligation to pay them back, regulation

of import and export setting up rigid limits. Because prices did not reflect real production costs and the distribution was centrally controlled, this resulted in extensive deformations and losses.

New agricultural strategy is based on:

- No subsidies for food production,
- No preferences for farmers in obtaining credits,
- Repayment of previously received credits at current interest rate,
- Full liberalisation in food exchange.

In spite of the fact that Polish farmers always demonstrated high ability for survival while facing all kinds of difficulties, "shocking therapy" applied in agriculture showed that many producers were not prepared for it both psychologically and economically. Farmers were shocked not only by rapidly raising interest rates but also by difficulties connected with marketing their goods and products, appearance on the market new enterprises with low credibility, and especially opening of imports of extensive subsidised goods from Western Europe.

Along with implementation of economical reforms in agriculture, certain changes in extension system were also made. These changes resulted mainly from critical remarks, from farmers who expected different type of agricultural consulting than the type offered previously.

Reorganisation in the extension system started in January 1, 1991 by creating extension centres (ODR) in each of 49 voivodships in place of existing province extension centres (WOPR). ODRs were created by separating WOPR into two parts: farm and ODR which main function is to serve in the area of agricultural consulting addressed to farm communities.

Secondly the management of ODR has been socialized by creating Social Extension Councils (SRDR). Councils serve as an advisory, and opinion creating body in the area of extension planning and evaluating efficiency of ODR performance. As a rule 70% of Council members (SRDR) are elected from farmers.

ODRs are controlled by the governor and financed almost in 100% by the state budget.

Reorganization resulted in considerable reduction in the number of extension agents (50%). In 1992 the number of state extension agents was 5846 people. From this number 1069 were extension specialists employed in centres, 3528 agents working in rural communities, 673 administration employees, and 576 others. One extension specialist serve from 212 farmers (Pila voivodship) to 1790 farmers (Siedlce voivodship). Statutes of ODRs are adopted to specific needs of particular voivodships and regions in the country. There is no central instructions concerning organization and planning. Hence each ODR formulates its own extension program based on priorities indicated by farmers organizations and farmers unions, farmers-members of Social Extension Council, agents own experience, and by governors office.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS OF INVESTIGATIONS

What are the most important tasks for extension service in your region in aspect of problems faced by Polish agriculture? This question was addressed to participants of the seminar on "Structuring new cooperation between science, education, extension and agricultural practice", held in Bielsko-Biala. The seminar was attended by 55 people from the region of southern Poland and by American specialists from Polish-American Extension Project. The answer to this question was obtained by using one of the small working group methods so called nominal group technic (NGT), which is the type of systemized discussion. Its purpose is to obtain as many ideas as possible concerning one problem from many people in orderly fashion, arranged according to the value. Results of discussion in chosen working groups are presented in the following reports:

Group No.1

1. Economic advisory on maintaining competitiveness in commercial farming.
2. Assistance in stabilizing agricultural market.
3. development of market information system for agriculture.
4. Raising of consciousness and activity among farmers to joint enterprises to help themselves.
5. Agricultural marketing: brand, quality, standards.
6. Increasing of emphasis on the development of possibilities for alternative incomes.

Group No.2

1. Economic advisory for farmers to cope with market economy requirements.
2. Development of small businesses and food processing industry in rural areas.
3. Development of ecological education and ecological methods of production.
4. Restructuring of farms in respect to their sizes, techniques and technologies.
5. Multifunctional development of rural areas - new agrobusiness enterprises, agritourism, horse riding, forestry etc.
6. Assistance of extension service in organizationing farmer's partnerships, coops, unions and councils.

Group No.3

1. Profitability of agricultural production:
 - decrease of production costs,
 - improvement of farm management,
 - increase of productivity, quality and production scale.
2. Alternative sources of farmer's income.
3. Marketing of agricultural products.
4. Creation of new rural cooperatives.

5. Ecology in rural farming:

- production of high quality food,
- rational family nutrition,
- protection of the environment,
- health care of rural population.

6. Education policy (extension, consulting, seminars, courses, fairs, auctions, conferences) in cooperation with agricultural universities, agricultural vocational high schools, and research institutes.

Group No.4

1. Creation of new market institutions responsible for purchases of agricultural products and market information.
2. Development of economical, organizational, legal and marketing consulting for farmers.
3. Education of farmers in the area of privatization of state agribusiness sector.
4. Participation of ODR advisors in transformation of state farms with full information for local farmers.
5. Promotion of coop movement and ODR's assistance in organizing new processing, service, supply and purchase cooperatives.
6. Development of new production methods of higher quality food and protection of environment.

Priority tasks for extension service in different regions of southern Poland raised by particular working groups are very similar and deal with similar problems. Hence, we can assume, that these are the problems, which are being encountered in the whole country, which need to be solved, and are addressed to people and institutions on different levels of agricultural administration or to institutions serving agriculture. This can be the basis for working out extension programs and can indicate the directions for ODR activities.

Agricultural policy in developed European countries emphasizes the development of agricultural regions. This problem is of a great importance also in our country, because of a great agro-economical diversification and because of differences in technical infrastructure of food industry between regions. As an example, the changes in northwestern region in Poland are directly connected with restructuring and privatizing state farms and its accompanying marketing and processing industry.

These processes are stimulated by modern specialized consulting, mainly organizational-economical directly tied with broad practice through developing of information systems in agriculture. market economy is associated with higher risk connected with business and

decision making activities. This way regional specialized type of consulting is being developed specific for given region in the country.

Example of regional type of agricultural consulting is the Western Pomerania, region where restructuring of state farms is the main problem. Advisors, along with traditional cooperation with farmers, also work with new farms, which are being created as a result of structural changes that is:

- family farms, which increased their size by renting the land from previous state farms,
- farms managed by people organized in workers partnership employed by previous state farms,
- farms of a typical capitalistic nature, which are own by new physical or legal owners from outside,
- farms owned by state treasury before and after restructuring,
- other farms functioning as joint-venture with foreign capital.

Market economy increases the risk connected with the production activity and with decision making. In extension work market information should be processed, that is analyzed and evaluated.

Other regional extension model, which was based on American system is being applied by the Agricultural University of Kraków. This model assumes that the basic object for extension is the producer of food, that is the farmer, businessman, and food processor, who depending on scale and the importance makes current and strategic production decisions:

- on his own based on knowledge and experience,
- after consultation with local extension agents,
- after consultation with specialists from voivodship extension centre (ODR),
- after consultation with research scientists through local extension agent or after directly contacting the scientists from research-educational institution.

Development of this type of cooperation with the involvement of research scientists in extension work requires reorientation from agricultural universities, which along with research and teaching should also include an extension work and consulting.

Organization, which integrates all representatives from different social communities both institutions as well as people representing different fields and disciplines in science and in practice is Southern Poland Extension Association located at the Agricultural University of Kraków. The goal of the Association is joint problem solving in regional agriculture and improvement of the information flow from farmers through extension agents to science and vice versa. Association's goals and tasks are stated in its statute.

CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing I would like to emphasize, that introduction of free market economy in agriculture resulted in greater expectations from farmers and producers for professional advice. During such revolutionary changes in agriculture extension advisors are an indispensable factor of economical changes. Independently from the future organization of chambers or agricultural extension system in our country (ODRs supervised by the governor, agricultural universities), element which decides about its efficiency will be:

- educated management of extension service,
- highly qualified extension specialists,
- close cooperation between extension and science,
- availability of necessary financial resources,
- good educational program for extension workers to raise their qualifications,
- cooperation with advisory councils, which represent farmers.

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