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1. Name

Achievements and tasks of state agricultural advisory in Poland in scope of using IT – e-learning.

2. Annotation

The presented paper shows the need and possibilities of applying e – learning in career development of agricultural advisors. It is an essential tool to manage with high scale of training demand and to ensure the quality and efficiency of education. But for sure the whole process must be well prepared and additionally supported by network. Some new methods of advisors work should be applied in parallel in order to enrich the advisory system and to obtain better results of e-learning.

3. Key words

E-learning, IT, GPS, network of Open Advisory Centers

4. Introduction

The country and agriculture, particularly in the last period, has entered the period of radical reforms. The state policy concerning country and agriculture has changed dramatically and as result also the requirements for farms on the topic of environment protection against threats resulting from agricultural production. Farms which adapt their production to the EU standards, undergo rapid changes. But changes are also forced by the consumer market demanding food safety (foremost hygiene of production and quality of products).

If such big economy sector undergoes changes and the expectations are so dynamic, it is essential to create the broad spectrum of advisory services meeting these demands.

In case of polish agriculture this demand is particularly big, because with total area of arable land of 16,2 mln ha a middle size farm is unfortunately very small and amounts about 7 ha. If take into account the amount of farms (1,4 mln) registered in IACS and expecting help from advisors, then for one advisor falls about 300 of them. It is a problem impossible to solve reliably.

Now we should ask the following question – what should be done in order to meet the market expectations and with limited means of budget not to loose the liquidity of state advisory centers. Activities in this field were already made. Activities concerning organization of labor and methodology have already began. Advisory centers with local partners set up consortiums, which enable to make use of non budget funds. Also Advisory Centers Law gave other possibilities of gaining funds for operation of agricultural advisory in Poland.

In order to create the efficient system of advisory it is essential to apply IT, which will help to educate advisory staff and support advisors in work on the field. Agricultural Advisory Centre has already made such operations and is training advisors, teachers and farmers by means of e-learning method. This paper is dealing with such a problem.

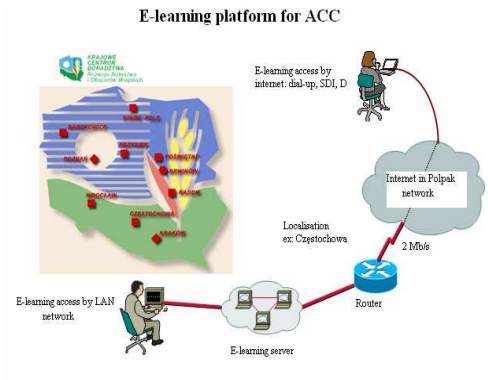
5. Appropriate text

For sufficient operation of e-learning system it is essential to build an extensive network, which enables fast and effective service of clients raising in such way their professional qualifications.

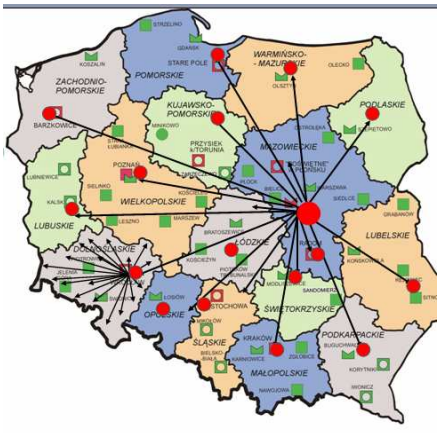
In 2003 Advisory Centre bought within a framework of Phare Program PL0104.02 „State Agricultural Advisory System", essential hardware. These were servers for 17 centers in Poland, with one big server for training platform Lotus Learning Space Collaboration 5.01., which was placed in Brwinów. Hardware with 20 – stands computer workroom were bought for 16 voivodship Open Advisory Centres. Moreover local network was build and centres were equipped with additional multimedia and office equipment.

It should be outlined that creation of technical conditions that make e-learning possible is only the necessary requirements, but is not guarantee success.

In 2004 the realization of two e-learning courses has begun. These were: "Quality standards in agricultural production with elements of Sector Operation Program and Program for Rural Area Development" concerning two specializations (plant and animal production). For such undertakings the following rules on each stage should be observed: construction of course, requirement of participants, appointing examination committee, examination etc.



Another task was to perform the whole training. There was an urgent need to train as many advisors as possible (total amount: about 4000 advisors) because of implementing the operation of Program for Rural Area Development. Passed exam entitled advisors to sign the application of these Program. For that purpose 16 examination committees were established. In order the following process runs smoothly, the professional help was ensured in every center thanks to the group of teachers. They were accessible by means of e-mail and on telephone. However, it turned out, that further network in poviats with minimal data transfer of 128 kbs is needed and should be rebuilt.



At the end of the year poviat structures of our net in every voivodship were accessible. Today the number of poviat advisory groups making use of e-learning amounts about 200 stands. It is a big success, but still needs improving. It should be outlined that this net is also used for every day transfer of information, communication or holding conferences. It is also designed for HELPDESK, which is a system for agricultural advisors help.

First edition of courses, finished in November, resulted in new experience. The number of 827 advisors attended the course, of which 630 advisors passed the exam receiving authorisation.

At present lasts the second edition of this course, which attend also teachers of agricultural schools and farmers. This experimental extension of group by teachers and

farmers let us be orientated in needs and expectations. At present the focus group consists of 430 members with more than 40 teachers and farmers. It is our duty to organize trainings for advisors, but we would also like to make an offer for other professional group.

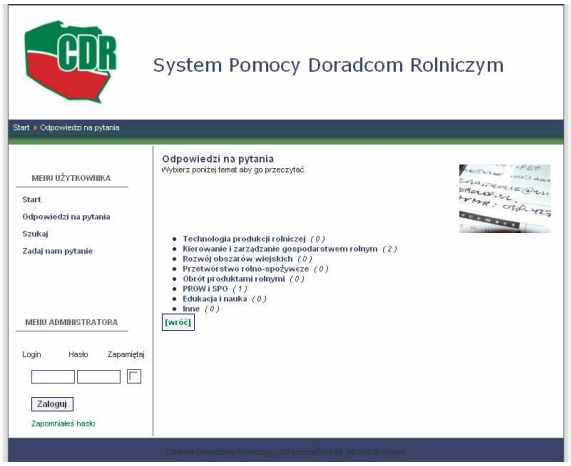
Although e-learning courses are expensive, they have their economic explanation.

In order to meet the needs of advisory centers, we have prepared the following courses in the scope of organic farming and agri-environment programs: "Ecological methods of agricultural production – plant and animal production" and "Running organic farms". Such courses will begin on the 15th of May and will last to the end of June.

We assume that maximum of 500 people can participate in the first edition of courses. It is a strictly technical requirement, which enables to serve the participants well.

Up to now achieved results encourage us to prepare other courses. On the Warsaw University and Warsaw Agricultural University we are planning to start e-learning postgraduate courses in the scope of agricultural accountancy. Maybe in the nearest future we will perform courses in the range of farm complex service using e-learning method financing from INTERREG funds.

Advisory Centre offer in terms of using IT is broad. It is mainly aimed at advisors. Apart from the implementation of e-learning courses we hold audio conferences within the management structure. Advisors, which need help concerning explaining their professional doubts, have at their disposal 48 hour answer system. The complex software on the topic of farm management is being prepared. It will enable advisors to help farmer efficiently to fill up the application forms concerning subsidies from the EU, but also to prepare business plans and hold agricultural accountancy.



The following courses in the range of applying GPS in professional career of advisors from all voivodship centers will start in June. It is an interesting matter and worth further explanation.

6. Conclusion

We should ask ourselves, if all of these activities are sufficient so as to meet permanently changing requirements for agriculture and rural areas. I believe that Agricultural Advisory Centre and other advisory centers are at present at the very beginning of their way. Modern IT all the time supplies us with new possibilities and making use of them can in many cases stabilize our situation on the advisory service market. However, we should take into consideration that in the nearest future reforms in the polish agriculture will tend towards reducing the number of farms and means of budget for operation of advisory. This problem forces us to look for new securities, which can be modern methods of advisory service enriched by different modern technologies.

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