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Achim Spiller, Julian Voss

University of Goettingen, Germany

jvoss@uni-goettingen.de



**Contributed Paper prepared for presentation at the 105th EAAE Seminar
'International Marketing and International Trade of Quality Food Products',
Bologna, Italy, March 8-10, 2007**

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Vocational training in the field of agriculture: empirical results

Achim Spiller, Julian Voss
University of Goettingen, Germany
jvoss@uni-goettingen.de

The pressure of change within agriculture confronts farmers with regularly upcoming and new challenges: the structural changes as well as technical, economical and ecological improvements increase the requirements for the farm manager's knowledge. Thus, being successful in profession and business is not only a matter of qualified and fundamental professional knowledge but also of the constant participation in vocational trainings (N. N. 2006). Therefore the trend of lifelong learning, being already realised and traced in other fields of economic, has now also become a must in the business of agriculture (KRUSE 2003).

However, it appears that this development is only slowly and limited adopted by those working in the business of agriculture and forestry. Current studies again and again are showing that a backlog demand concerning the participation in vocational trainings exists. For example, in a statement about the employment situation in agriculture, the EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE (2004) declared that agricultural labour – compared to the average of all employees in the European Union (EU) – are taking less frequently part in vocational trainings. Especially the new EU member states denote a high demand on qualification for techniques, technologies and social competencies (ibid.). Not least by reason of this awareness is vocational training an essential element of the promotion of the rural development by the EU: the new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) for 2007 up to 2013 ascribes a high value to vocational training (EBERHARDT (2005): 198).

Up to now hardly any studies on agricultural vocational training exist. Statements and information on to what extent the offered vocational trainings correspond to the farmer's requests and cover the demand on vocational training are missing. For this reason we evaluated the demand on vocational training of German farmers using an empirical study. The investigation gives information on how farmers estimate the current offerings for vocational trainings in agriculture and points out the farmer's requirements.

During our study 2.000 farms were invited to take part in the survey and an online questionnaire was pointed out to them. The rate of return reached 6,1 % means an absolute number of 122 completely filled in questionnaires.

First of all, the survey points out that the agricultural vocational training market is altogether seen as transparent and that the offering is classified as multifaceted. The relevance of vocational trainings and their positive effects on the economical development is basically realised by the asked farmers. Even though vocational trainings are not seen as a waste of time, the factor time is always categorised as critical. Due to this fact, the questioned farmers showed only limited participation in vocational trainings for the last two years. After all, 89% stated to have taken part in a one-day speech based seminar. Seminars lasting for several days were only attended by 47 % and 29 % respectively. At this stage, the beforehand statement of the European Union, concerning the attendance frequency of vocational trainings, is approved. Regarding the vocational trainings quality (seminars, speeches, courses), the questioned farmers have made middling experiences. A majority of 53 % is rather unsatisfied with the attended event. Nevertheless, 42 % of the questioned participants are planning to attend more vocational trainings for the future.

To enable a deeper picture and to identify target groups for the vocational training market, a factor analysis was conducted subsequently. As a result, three factors were extracted. Once more, all of them described the basic advantage of vocational training, the willingness of the farmers to spend money on trainings and the opportunity costs as well as the estimation concerning the offering. On the basis of the factor analysis' results, concerning the overall attitude towards agricultural vocational trainings, a cluster analysis was accomplished. In the context of the cluster analysis, four groups were identified (table 1):

Cluster 1 36,6 %	Satisfied with the offer, cautious regarding investigations and the interest in vocational training, „ <i>satisfied and modest persons</i> “
Cluster 2 27,7 %	Regarding the sense reserved, high price acceptance, unsatisfied with the offer, „ <i>investment prepared market customer</i> “
Cluster 3 8,9 %	„ <i>severe adversaries</i> “
Cluster 4 26,8 %	High perceived benefit, low price acceptance, estimate the offer as rather poor, „ <i>Smart-Learner</i> “

Table 1: Results of the cluster analysis

The accomplished analyses highlights that the customer's high price acceptance has been „spoiled“. However, on the farmer's part an increased interest and basically a positive attitude towards the participation in vocational training exist. Altogether, the questioned farmer's categorise it as a necessity to optimize the current seminars. Consequently the providers of the agricultural vocational trainings are confronted with the challenge to up value the quality of their seminars. Anyway, it seems to be questionable whether those providers run by the government are able to bear the challenge, taking the declining subsidy into account. Not to forget the fact that even the agricultural associations are facing a precarious budget caused by the shrinking number of members. Moreover, vocational training is normally not a core competence of those institutions. Last but not least, the low price acceptance neither contributes a solution to this dilemma nor supports the upgrading of professionalism.

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Contact information

Julian Voss
University of Goettingen,
Institute for Rural Development and Agricultural Economics
Platz der Goettinger Sieben 5
37073 Goettingen

Phone Number: + 49 551 39 4822
Fax Number: + 49 551 39 12122
Email: jvoss@uni-goettingen.de