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Evaluation of Educational Measures of the Austrian Rural Development Programme – Results and Experiences

Abstarct: *The Austrian Rural Development Programme of the current period 2000 – 2006 includes the measure "Vocational training" to improve the qualification of persons involved in agriculture and forestry as well as to help them convert their operations to other uses. The educational measures play an important role in the implementation of the whole programme, and the acceptance of the programme rises due to the accompanying education and training measures. Firstly, the measure "Vocational training" is designed to support their participation in training and qualification courses (participant support) and, secondly, it was developed to provide assistance in the preparation, implementation, processing and post-processing of training and courses (support provided to educational institutions). Between 2000 and 2004, as much as 0.6% of the total funds of the rural development programme was spent on the "vocational training" measure. Total costs of 53.8 million euros were borne by the EU (28%), by the Austrian Federal Government (17%) and by the provincial governments (11%) – while the remaining 44% were contributed by the applicants themselves. 63% of the supported participants were males, but they received only 58% of the subsidies. The majority of participants attended computer – and telecommunication courses, courses in animal production and business management. The participants' were predominantly in the age between 35 and 49 years and nearly all of the participants were farm managers.*

The evaluation results suggest that the range of beneficiaries should be widened, and that there should be an increased support given to women and young people as well as higher endowments granted for vocational training. Additionally, the results make it clear that high-quality data are absolutely vital to achieve meaningful evaluations.

Key words: *evaluation, subsidies, vocational training, rural development*

Introduction

The main objective of the Austrian Programme for the Development of Rural Areas is the implementation of an integrated policy for rural areas using a single legislative instrument. The Austrian programme embarks on the basic strategy

that promotes sustainable, competitive and multifunctional agriculture and forestry in intact, viable rural areas. The development plan defines improvement and maintenance of structures, improvement of competitiveness as well as output-related payments and an incentive system as proper ways to target this main goal. Educational measures are important tools to impart necessary knowledge and requirements to the persons working in agriculture and forestry. In particular, such vocational measures improve their skills and make it easier for them to switch to other activities. Educational measures, therefore, play an important role in the implementation of the whole programme, and the acceptance of the programme rises due to the accompanying education and training measures. An evaluation establishes whether the intended aims can be reached and whether the actual effects are in accordance with the effects planned.

This article intends to provide an insight into the Austrian Programme for the Development of Rural Areas, introduce the Austrian vocational measures and their evaluation and present the updated results of the mid-term evaluation.

General information about the Austrian Programme for the Development of Rural Areas and its evaluation

As part of the Agenda 2000 the policy for the development of rural areas was anchored as the second pillar of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The general framework for the development of rural areas was laid down in Regulation (EC) 1257/99 and the implementing Regulation 817/2004.

The Austrian Programme for Rural Development promotes sustainable, competitive, and multifunctional agriculture and forestry in intact, viable rural areas with sets of measures, relating to "Structural improvement and preservation of substance", "Improvement of competitiveness", and "Compensation for services and incentive scheme". The programme contains the following subsidy measures:

- Agri-environmental Programme (ÖPUL),
- Compensatory allowance in less-favoured areas,
- Support, adaptation and development of rural areas (= Article 33, formerly objective 5b aid),
- Support for investment granted to agricultural holdings,
- Setting-up premium for young farmers,
- Improving processing and marketing of agricultural products,
- Forest management measures and
- Vocational training.

From 2000 to 2006, a total of € 6.9 billion of public funds (European Union, federal and provincial funds) were earmarked for the Rural Development Programme – this is a share of 9.7% of the EU-wide money allocated for Rural Development. Until 2004 about € 4.85 billion were spent, equalling approxi-

mately 70% of the earmarked funds. Table 1 gives an overview of payment distribution and programme measures.

Table 1. Sum of payments (in millions of euro) spent on measures financed through the Austrian Programme for the Development of Rural Areas 2000–2005

Measures	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005*	2000–2004 total (rounded)
Agri-enveromental Programme (OPL)	543	586	608	631	642	642	3010
Complesoly allowence in less	181	274	275	275	275	275	1279
Support for in agricultural	35	42	31	34	43	45	184
Support for in agricultural	15	15	13	13	10	10	66
Support for in agricultural	3	3	15	15	18	14	53
Support for in agricultural	15	28	28	32	37	35	140
Support for in	3	6	7	7	7	7	30
Support for in	15	19	15	16	18	18	83
Sum (rounded)	**810**	**973**	**991**	**1022**	**1050**	**1046**	**4846**

* Preliminary values (BMLFUW, Section II 6). Source: BMPUWAWA

Monitoring surveys the delivery of programme outputs (i.e., goods or services financed and provided by the programme) to the intended beneficiaries thanks to the inputs (i.e., financial and administrative means mobilised). It is a continuous process, carried out during the execution of the programme, with the intention of correcting any deviation from operational objectives and improving programme performance. In a joint effort with Member States, the Commission has drawn up and agreed a set of common indicators for monitoring rural development programming for the period 2000–2006 (http://ec.europa.eu/comm/agriculture /rur/eval/index_en.htm).

Evaluation examines particular results and impacts at certain stages in the life cycle of a programme. Recognised procedures are used to judge the supported interventions. Evaluation helps in designing rural development programmes, in improving and adjusting them at the mid-term stage, in planning an appropriate follow-up and in informing the public or the budgetary authorities about the effects and the value of the public intervention. Guideline documents and evaluation questions regarding measures of the current Rural Development Programmes (2000-2006) can be found on http://ec.europa.eu/comm/agriculture/rur/eval/index_en.htm.

Evaluation is divided into three phases (Figure 1). The **ex ante evaluation** assists in preparing the rural development plan and facilitates its implementation. In particular, it helps to outline the objectives and define their relevance to the needs. But ex ante evaluation also contributes to assuring consistency between the proposed strategy and the selected targets with the existing situation. The

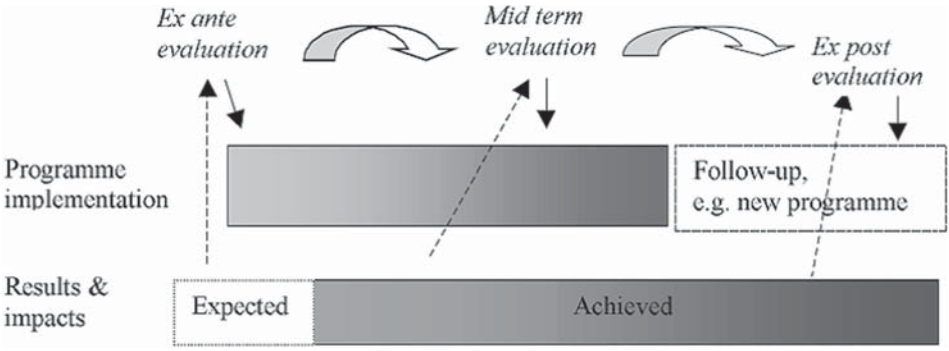

Figure 1. Evaluation process
Source: European Commission, Directorate General for Agriculture (1999)

mid-term evaluation helps to realign the programme, where necessary, to improve implementation. An update of the mid-term evaluation can be useful for various reasons. In Austria, an update took place to draw conclusions for a new programme after 2006, and to obtain more detailed information about the measures.

The **ex post evaluation** recapitulates and judges each intervention when it is over (European Commission, Directorate General for Agriculture, 1999).

The „Vocational training" measure and its evaluation

After the general introduction of the Austrian Programme for the Development of Rural Areas and its evaluation, the following part of the report concentrates specifically on the "Vocational training" measure and its evaluation.

Description of the "Vocational training" measure

The „Vocational training" measure aims at improving and diversifying the vocational qualification of persons working in agriculture and forestry. Subsidies are granted primarily for participating in training and qualification measures (subsidies granted to participants) and, secondly, for preparation, monitoring, implementation and follow-up of qualification and training measures (subsidies granted to educational institutions). Additionally, financial support is granted to finance the purchase of educational materials, the development of vocational projects, nationwide projects, educational infrastructure and exemplary projects. The educational measures target the following aims (Reg. (EC) 1257/99):

- Improvement of technical, economic, and ecological qualifications;
- Optimisation of procedures at agricultural and forestry enterprises;
- Implementation of new methods of cultivation and production in agriculture and forestry;
- Enhancement of the quality of agricultural and forestry products and their regional processing and marketing;
- Increased application of renewable energy;
- Support of innovative sources of income and development of new services;

- Improvement of infrastructure for qualification, in particular of educational co-operations.

The total amount of subsidies granted (European Union, federal and provincial funds) covers up to 83% of the eligible costs for courses with certificates, working groups and other nationwide projects. Projects with national interests can be subsidised up to 100% as an exception. All other projects may receive grants covering up to 66% of the eligible costs.

Requirements for subsidisation of participants are minimum course costs of € 72.67 with a minimum attendance of 80% of the course term. In order to receive subsidies, educational institutions should be approved by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW). Additionally, the following requirements are necessary: minimum eligible costs are € 363.36, minimum length of course is eight lessons, definition of aims and contents of the course, evaluation and pre-calculation of the course and the qualification of instructors as well as qualification of the head of the institution.

Evaluation of the "Vocational training" measure

First of all, the evaluation of the "Vocational training" measure intends to assess to what extent the assisted training courses are in accordance with needs and whether they are coherent with other measures of the programme. Secondly, the evaluation seeks to discover to what extent the acquired skills have helped improve the situation of the trainees and of the agricultural sector (Table 2). An analysis of the structure of participants can provide the defined indicators of the first question. However, in Austria no ex ante evaluation of the measure "Vocational training" took place, which is why a comparison of evaluation results and gaps or potentials identified by ex ante evaluation is not possible.

The second question deals with long-term effects of vocational training. Answering this question additionally requires surveys at a later date, in relation to which the ex post evaluation will add related results.

Due to the aforementioned circumstances and the data available, the update of the mid-term evaluation concentrates on answering the first evaluation question.

Material and Method

The market regulatory body AMA (Agrar Markt Austria) acts as paying agency of the approved subsidies. The monitoring data, on which the evaluation is based, consist of information derived from the application forms as well as data received from the paying agency AMA. The participant subsidisation data include the following relevant information: name of applicant, year of birth, position in the agricultural enterprise, eligible costs, amount of subsidies from the EU, federal and provincial funds, organiser's name, term, location and name of the course.

The educational institution subsidisation data include the following relevant information: name of educational institution, eligible costs, amount of subsidies

Table 2. Set of common evaluation questions with criteria and indicators

Questions	Criteria	Indicators
III.1. To what extent are the assisted training courses in accordance with needs and coherent with other measures of the programme?	III.1-1. The training responds to the needs and potential for adaptation (conversion, reorientation, improvement) at the level of individuals, sectors or regions (including gaps/weaknesses or potential/opportunities identified during programming or ex-ante evaluation)	III.1-1.1. Share of assisted training accommodating issues identified as gaps/weaknesses or potential/opportunities during programming/ex-ante evaluation (%) (a) of which thanks to the type/mix of participants (e.g., young people, women …) (%) (b) of which thanks to the topic/contents of the courses (%) (c) of which related to co-financed actions of other chapters of the programme
III.2. To what extent have the acquired skills/competence helped improve the situation of the trainees and of the agricultural/forestry sector?	III.2-1. The skills/competence acquired by the trainees help improve their employment conditions	III.2-1.1. Share of assisted trainees (both holders and employees) experiencing job improvements related to the training (%) (a) of which farm/forest holders (%) (b) of which employees (%) (c) of which thanks to better remuneration (%) (d) of which thanks to non-pecuniary job quality (e.g., seasonal/contractual work security, exposure to risk and adverse conditions, job-variation/enrichment …) (%)
	III.2-2. The skills/competence acquired by the trainees facilitate the adaptation of agriculture and forestry (conversion/re-orientation/improvement)	III.2-1.2. Share of holdings with an assisted trainee, initiating conversion/reorientation/improvement related to the assisted training (%) (a) of which new/additional activities (b) of which improved quality/hygiene/added value concerning existing activities (%) (c) of which management related (%) (d) of which environmental benign methods/practices (%) (e) of which farming (%) (f) of which forestry (%)

Source: European Commission Directorate General for Agriculture, December 2000

from the EU, federal and provincial funds, term, location, type and name of the course, prospected number of participants in general, prospected number of subsidised participants in particular. The analysis of the data was done using descriptive statistics.

During the analysis of data severe problems occurred, such as missing data, wrong data entries, missing information on participants attending courses at subsidised educational institutes. Another problem was that the database was repeatedly complemented each time a new set of data was sent to the evaluators, who had to keep repeating their basic analyses.

Evaluation results of the “Vocational training” measure

The following evaluation results relate to data from the years 2000 to 2004 and, due to the reasons mentioned above, will specifically give answers to the first evaluation question.

Amount of money granted for the “Vocational training” measure

From 2000 to 2004, altogether 18,794 applications were approved and a total of about € 30.2 million was granted. The eligible costs amount to € 53.8 million –

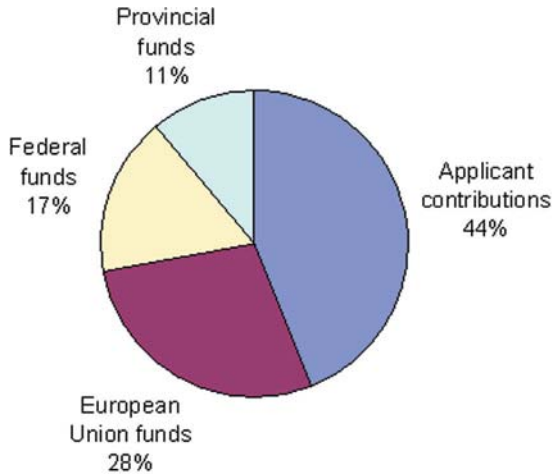

Figure 2. Structure of eligible costs 2000 to 2004
Source: Own calculation

which means that applicants contributed 44%, in other words, € 23.65 million of their own resources to vocational measures. In general, the subsidies are borne half by the EU, 30% by federal funds and 20% by provincial funds.

Financial support in the amount of € 3.34 million (11%) is spent on subsidisation of participants while € 13.36 million (44%) is spent on subsidisation of educational institutes. € 8.5 million (28%) were spent on nationwide educational projects while the remaining money was used to support the purchase of educational materials, development of educational projects, educational infrastructure and exemplary projects.

Participant analysis

As mentioned above, no ex ante evaluation of the "Vocational training" measure to identify strengths and weaknesses took place, which is why the update of the midterm evaluation is an attempt to identify existing strengths and weaknesses in vocational training by analysing the structure of participants. However, as the educational institute subsidisation data do not include information about single participants, the analysis is restricted to data concerning participant subsidisation.

From 2000 to 2004, 17,408 applications were approved – half of which came from male applicants. 3,437 applications came from enterprises or married couples, so that gender classification was not possible. Focusing on the participants with known gender, 63% were males and 37% females – a percentage that has remained unchanged since the last evaluation conducted in 2004. However, 56% of the unpaid workers in agriculture are women (Tamme 2004, 26), so it should be an objective to increase the share of participating women.

Women get higher subsidies: 29% of the participants received 35% of the money. It is likely that female participants attend longer and therefore more expensive courses than men (table 3).

Table 3. Number of participants by gender and amount of subsidies received

Gender	Number of participants		Amount of subsidies	
	absolute	in %	absolute	in %
Male	8842	51	1572240	47
Female	5129	29	1161654	35
Unknown	3437	20	605706	18
Total	17408	100	3339600	100

Source: Own calculation

The supported courses cover a wide variety of topics: courses with general contents are offered as well as activities for experts. All course categories support the general aim of improving qualification in technical, economic, and ecological terms and of the related personal, social and communicative competences. Whether the courses offered cover the demands of people working in agriculture and forestry can be answered at a later date once the results of interviews concerning people's satisfaction with the offered courses, topics, instructors, etc. are available.

Taking into account the participants with known gender only, the courses with an emphasis on computer and telecommunication, animal production as well as business management showed the highest attendance rates. Women prevail in computer and telecommunication courses. The gender ratio was nearly balanced in direct marketing and self-development courses while men favoured animal production courses (Figure 3). The gender ratios within the courses mirror the traditional division of work between men and women in agriculture and forestry.

One half of the approved applications came from persons aged 35 to 49 years. On average, the applicants were 37 years old. People younger than 20 years and

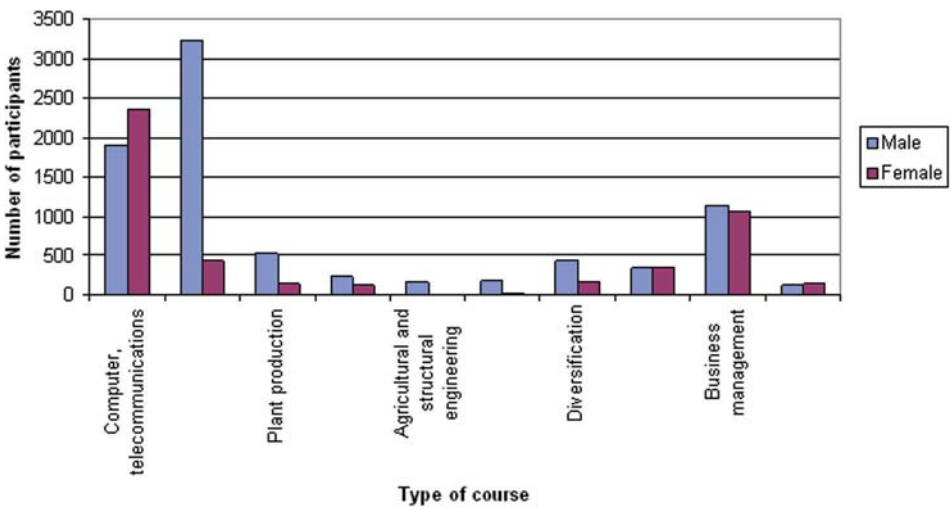

Fig. 3. Participation of men and women in different types of courses
Source: Own calculation

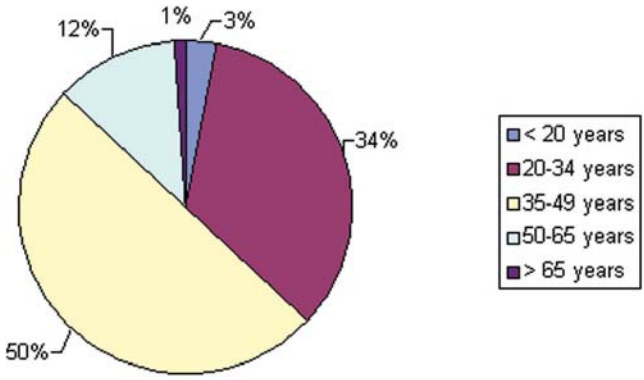

Figure 4. Age distribution of participants
Source: Own calculation

older than 65 years hardly attended courses. On average, participating women were 38 years old, whereas participating men were three years younger (Figure 4).

In the age classes under 35 years, there were comparatively fewer female participants than there were male participants. 52% of all participating women and only 40% of men were in the age class 36 to 49 years.

This result reflects the fact that fewer young women work in agriculture than young men. It is likely that female children receive primarily non-agricultural education and return to rural areas and agriculture in a later period of life following marriage or the birth of a child.

Most of the participants in vocational training were farm managers (68%) or family workers (26%). Only a few participants were hired workers, managers of production operations or managers of agricultural cooperatives.

Coherence of vocational training courses with other measures of the rural development programme

The analysis of coherence of the "Vocational training" measure with other measures of the rural development programme took place in the midterm evaluation in 2004 (Pfusterschmid 2004). As radical changes have not been expected, no update of the results has been necessary.

It is an essential requirement that all measures of the programme are to form a holistic package of actions, which act together to reach the targeted development aims. The supported measures shall neither be inconsistent with one another nor have an isolated existence, but shall interact optimally by perfect coordination. Overlapping with other measures exists in some areas of vocational training. This is necessary because of the key role of vocational training in a successful implementation of projects. Table 4 shows the coherence of the "Vocational training" measure with the other programme measures. The magnitude of "X"-s corresponds to the level of interaction.

Table 4. Coherence of vocational training with other programme measures

	Training topics										
	General vacationaly training	Computer, telecomunications	Animal productions	Plant production	Enviroment, organic farming	Agricultural and structural engineering	Power engineering	Diversification	Direct marketing	Business management	Self-development
Support for investment granted to agricultural holdings	**X**	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x
Settind-up premium for young farmers	**X**	x				x				x	x
Agri-enveronmental Programme (ÖPUL)	**X**				**X**						
Compensatory allowance in less-favoured areas											
Improving processing and marketing of agricultural products	**X**	x							**X**	x	x
Forest management measures	**X**										
Support, adaption and development of rural areas (= Article 33)	**X**	x			x		x	x	x		

Source: Pfusterschmid, S. 2004

Table 4 contains bold and bigger marks "X" pointing at very important interactions of vocational measures and other programme measures, such as the importance of courses with environmental and organic farming topics for the implementation of the agri-environmental programme, the relevance of trainings in direct marketing for the improvement of processing and marketing of agricultural products and the importance of vocational training in general for the whole programme except compensatory allowance in less-favoured areas. The smaller marks identify interrelations of trainings with different emphasis and the programme measures, e.g. trainings with emphasis on computer and telecommunications, agricultural and structural engineering, business management and self--development facilitate the implementation of the setting-up premium for young farmers and its goals. No "X" means that no relevant relations between training and measure exist.

Conclusions und recommendations to the evaluation results of vocational measures of the programme period 2000–2006

As a result of the mid-term evaluation update, the following recommendations can be derived for the next programme period:

- The current "Vocational training" measure data disallow drawing direct conclusions about educational demand, however, the results show that while the current courses predominantly address farm managers, persons with other

functions within the enterprise are hardly ever addressed. This points to a demand for extending the offer of courses so as to enlarge the target group. More information supplied by the educational institutes about the number of course participants is necessary to balance supply and demand. In the end, this information may help to identify regional educational demand and to state the level of regional interconnectedness of vocational training. Information about the participants of courses financed through subsidisation of educational institutions is desired for the new programme in order to widen the database and to increase the significance of results.

- An enlargement of the circle of beneficiaries is desirable. Persons closely involved in agriculture and forestry, such as forest owners without agricultural enterprises or employees in downstream industries should be included. Also regional actors with multiplier functions (e.g. teachers, stakeholders, consultants) should receive subsidies for participating in vocational trainings.
- The results point to deficits in the support of vocational training for younger people in general and younger women in particular. A targeted support of younger people (aged under 35 years) can contribute to their entry into agriculture or to ease the farm transfers. Women need targeted support to raise the female quota in vocational training to a level equivalent to their efforts in agriculture. This seems to be all the more necessary since the share of female farm managers in Austria is increasing.
- The contribution of education to economic, social and ecological development is very important both at an international as well as regional level. Agricultural education is a vital factor in rural development and plays a key role in understanding and implementing the aims of the Austrian Programme for the Development of Rural Areas. This is why the „Vocational training" measure needs more financial support in the new rural development programme.

Outlook on the "Vocational training" measure in the new programme period 2007–2013

The new Austrian Programme for the Development of Rural Areas 2007-2013 is still under construction, but the ex ante evaluation has already taken place. The Austrian National Strategy Plan embraces qualification and specification as central elements to accompany structural changes. Educational measures support people working in agriculture and forestry as well as other economic actors in the rural areas in their efforts to adapt to changing technical, economic and social circumstances. With the two education-related measures "Vocational training and information" and "Education and information" being scheduled in the new programme, education will play a major role and gain increased importance. The first measure contributes to the increase of economic efficiency and competitiveness of agricultural and forestry enterprises with the support of technical and personnel qualification activities, whereas it is the priority objective of the second measure to create alternative income options in agriculture and for-

estry as well as to enable the transfer to non-agricultural activities, also by including other economic actors in the rural areas to maintain economic vitality and quality of life within rural areas.

The new programme has extended its circle of beneficiaries and is expected to receive higher allocations than in the period 2000–2006, but it will not be possible to solve the specific problems of certain population groups (e.g. young people, women) the vocational measures.

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