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## Marcin Wójcik

University of Lodz, Department of Regional and Human Geography,  
ul. Kopcińskiego 31, 90-142 Łódź, Poland

wojcik.moskwa@gmail.com

# The Farmers' Calendar as an example of a cultural factor shaping the knowledge about the countryside and agriculture in Poland<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *The modern scientific discourse on economic development increasingly emphasises the role of cultural factors. Social sciences reach for the cultural theories when they cannot explain the lack of economic growth despite favourable conditions, especially the financial and institutional ones. In Poland agriculture is the sector where the changes are strongly conditioned by the cultural background. Increasingly, the transformation of agriculture is broadly referred to the concept of "rurality". The study of modernisation of rural areas should take greater account of the cultural dimension (factors, determinants) and its influence over the economic transformation. A cultural perspective allows understanding the historicity of the countryside as a kind of the social survival which, whatever the prevailing economic trends, is based on certain values.*

*Social scientists (sociologists, anthropologists, human geographers and other specialists) often criticise the perception of the peripheries as being economically backward and underdeveloped, especially in the context of the depreciation of the rural lifestyle. What is emphasised is the role of rural communities in fostering traditional values, including forms of cultural landscape, and their contribution to the phenomena shaping the modern mass (global) society. In recent years, the concept of "social representation", which uses qualitative methodology (mainly the analysis of visual and written materials), has become very popular.*

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*The paper presents The Farmers' Calendar – a source of knowledge about agriculture addressed to farmers, which carries not only useful information but also a specific cultural transfer. This information is in fact embedded in the traditional cultural pattern, strongly associated with religious practices, the sphere of the family values and all the elements which stress the specific (magical and religious) dimension of the relation between a farmer and the nature. Although they cannot be regarded as the main source of knowledge about agriculture, these materials should be considered as an important expression of the cultural transmission and the way of thinking of a large group of people engaged in farming in Poland, especially in the eastern and southern regions of the country. The information from The Farmers' Calendar was divided according to different criteria, including the volatility of the information over time (since the 1990s), the promoted interpretation of the vision of farmers' work and the changes that have been taking place in the Polish agriculture.*

**Keywords:** *knowledge, cultural factors, agriculture, Poland*

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## Introduction: Visual culture

For a long time the contemporary social sciences have been experiencing the culture change. In the post-socialist states the new anti-positivistic research proposals were adopted relatively late. This resulted primarily from the ideological factors, the influence of which weakened along with the transformation and democratisation of the political and social structures. The growing importance of the qualitative approach in the social sciences (e.g. sociology and human geography) is associated primarily with the changes in the theoretical model (Burrell, Morgan, 1979). The general direction of the change can be represented in two dimensions, i.e.:

- from objectivity to subjectivity, which can also be described as a tension between realism and idealism;
- from regulation to a radical change, which is in turn an expression of a dispute about the nature of the society.

The last 30 years in the social sciences have been a kind of a methodological revolution, manifested primarily in the interest in culture in different contexts and dimensions. The whole theoretical and methodological transformation that occurred during this period often referred to as the "culture change". The number of research problems undertaken by cultural researchers (anthropologists, sociologists, geographers) is so huge that it is difficult to construct a clear classification of such studies. The common denominator of most of the work is appealing to everyday life as a specific social scene. Various fields of knowledge "discover" and interpret everyday life in relation to a variety of its manifestations. One of them is the search for meaning, which is denominated by the people in the process of organising (structuring) the surrounding reality (Rose, 2010).

The key element of this entire more or less conscious process of taming the reality by humans is actually the visual sphere. The nature of the images that surround us as well as their public perception is, according to many researchers, an important element of the cultural process of the social life construction in the Western civilisation (Forster, 1988; Cosgrove, 2006; Rose, 2010). G. Rose (2010, p. 20-21 after Foster 1988) suggests that visuality relates to different ways of constructing the image, what is seen, and this in turn is split into a number of perspectives, depending on who sees, how one sees, what one sees, what one wants to see, etc. The saturation of reality with the enormity of pictures and the ways they are viewed is one of the most characteristic elements of the era in which we live. Complex visuality, as one of the key aspects of social life, creates a special kind of the postmodern culture in which the image is used, in its various forms, in the development of modern societies, their tastes, habits, ideas. As a result, visual culture, and especially the tools it possesses today (especially the electronic media), is a powerful weapon in the hands of the "wizards" of the social reality. On the other hand, the democratisation of the process of creation and dissemination of images means that the right things, people, events, etc., have different, often opposite images. The forms of representation (transmitting meanings) in the visualisation process are in constant collision (attrition) of views, values and attitudes towards the world. The way of reporting is, thus, a reflection of certain ideas, and the struggle between the competing views moved today largely into the realm of iconography (Cosgrove, 2006).

The purpose of this article is therefore to present some way of communicating and preserving knowledge about the countryside and agriculture based on a selected example from the iconographic realm. The paper presents *The Farmers' Calendar* – a source of knowledge about agriculture addressed to farmers, which carries not only useful information but also a specific cultural transfer. This information is in fact embedded in the traditional cultural pattern, strongly associated with religious practices, the sphere of the family values and all the elements which stress the specific (magical and religious) dimension of the relation between a farmer and the nature. Although they cannot be regarded as the main source of knowledge about agriculture, these materials should be considered as an important expression of the cultural transmission and the way of thinking of a large group of people engaged in farming in Poland, especially in the eastern and southern regions of the country. The information from *The Farmers' Calendar* was divided according to different criteria, including the volatility of the information over time (since the 1990s), the promoted interpretation of the vision of farmers' work and the changes that have been taking place in the Polish agriculture.

## **Social Representations Theory and its application in rural studies**

Since the turn of the 1980s and 1990s the specialist literature has been developing the cultural approach to the studies of the rural areas, which put the emphasis on their image expressed by the society. The proposed solutions

move away from defining the countryside by the functional aspect in favour of the normative approach. These studies, particularly in the UK, evoke the stereotype of the rural idyll, the positive evaluation of the countryside as environmentally friendly, healthy and close to man (Halfacree, 1993, 1995). The vision of the rural idyll is an expression of human longing for harmony resulting from the contact with the nature and social closeness. For example, K. Halfacree (1993, 1995) gives two types of definitions that describe the countryside from this point of view. The first one is derived from the critical realism approach and identifies the countryside with the local social structure. Localism means being in the place and undertaking local activities.

The second type of the definition is constructed on the basis of the concepts developed by social psychologists in the poststructuralist methodology. In this perspective, the concept of the countryside and rusticity refers to the social idea which can be identified on the basis of what people think and say about themselves as well as how they express their commitment to the space in which they live (Halfacree, 1993). The countryside is therefore a representation of the surrounding environment. This identification refers to a certain community of residence or history, i.e. the image of the social environment is built on the relationship with a particular local whole (social and territorial).

As a result of the decreasing importance of agriculture in the economy of rural areas and the modernisation of the agricultural sector, looking for signs of rusticity should focus on the local dimension of the life and activity of the rural population. What is stressed in such an approach is the rural characteristics of different areas of economic activity (in contrast to urban areas), including those based on agriculture, as well as the cultural identity (social needs, ideas, lifestyles). The rural idyll is a reaction and a response to the rapid, and difficult to assess, ethnic, racial and class differentiation of large European cities. Idealisation of the image of the countryside and the escape into locality expresses the longing for simplicity and legibility of the landscape and the social environment of the countryside to the complexity of urban processes and homogenisation, brought by globalisation the development of superstructures such as the European Union.

### ***The Farmers' Calendar as a form of communication of knowledge about the countryside and agriculture and their changes over the past 20 years***

The countryside in Poland, its economic and cultural nature, is unique on the European scale. The unique character of the Polish countryside is due to the preservation of the agrarian structure, and thus, to a large extent, the social structure during the times of the socialist economy. Late modernisation of rural areas and agriculture, which really only began to occur in connection with the European funds, has a completely different dimension than in most post-socialist countries. The most important aspect of this difference is still a strong rural identity,

which has roots in the peasant system of values (cf. Bukraba-Rylska, 2008), and, what is very important, in connection with Christian values. In particular, it is characteristic for the regions of eastern, southern and central Poland.

In Poland, a significant position of agriculture, especially in employment, and the difficult restructuring and the related problems in social development is an important component of the political and scientific debate. This also has a clear historical and cultural connotation in the context of the evaluation by the farmers. The land, as a symbolic value, and associated with it a kind of social and territorial identity, is still an important factor of the space indexation. Owning land is not only an economic value, but also a sentimental one, especially in a society whose cultural urbanisation is not that strong, and much of the urban population comes from the countryside or remembers rural life directly from the family relations.

Strong identification of rural residents with traditional values (family, faith, patriotism) has specific consequences for the production of media discourse, especially since the establishments associated with this social environment have their own, individual achievements in publishing. The example presented in this article – "Farmers' Calendar" published annually for 20 years – is part of an extensive publishing offer proposed by the Catholic Church (Pastoral Farmers Publisher: *Wydawnictwo Duszpasterstwa Rolników*). These calendars are a source of synthetic knowledge about the traditional view of rural and agricultural issues, as well as the volatility of looking at the countryside from the perspective of the Catholic circles in the two decades. To highlight the variability in the range of issues and their visualisation, two calendars were selected – from 1993 and 2012. This choice allowed emphasising the differences between the way the countryside and its problems are presented at the beginning of the transformation and at the stage after the entry into the European Union, as well as the impact of the new factors of change in agriculture and other spheres of social activity of the rural population.

### **Mission of the *Farmers' Calendar***

For a few years the formula and the range of the content of the modern form of *The Farmers' Calendar* has been worked out. The reader first meets with a specific type of mission of the publication, the nature of which is open, i.e. it not only highlights the thoughts directed to farmers, or generally rural population, but also those that have a universal dimension, and therefore refer to a cultural pattern common to Christian heritage, and the national values. In this transmission it is stressed that the work of a farmer is a particular type of mission, a specific contribution to the development of the state and the nation, where the key role is played by the relationship between man and land. Farming is presented as a unique occupation, a noble profession and service to the land, which is based on the cooperation between man and nature within the Christian ministry to God and neighbour.

The formula of the introduction (foreword) has changed significantly in 20 years. Comparing the introductory information in the publications in 1993 and 2012 what is clearly seen is the increased diversity of interpretation of the functions which calendar should play in shaping the outlook of farmers. In the early 1990s the calendar's editors wrote that the content contained within it is primarily intended to assist in running the farm in a new challenging reality of the beginning of the transformation. The main message and function of the calendar was primarily to emphasise the immutability of rural life and work towards the rapidly changing social and economic environment of agriculture. This was justified in such a way that family farming and the land which is in the family's possession are one of the pillars of the state and the nation's freedom.

In recent editions of the calendar the introduction is more varied. In addition to the traditional foreword by the ecclesiastical hierarchy a separate place falls to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Such introduction informs that an important place in the calendar content is taken by the information related to the functioning of the institutions responsible for the disposal of the European Union financial support, and of the other related support institutions (banks, insurance). The recent issues of the calendar are increasingly characterised by a duality of the worldview. On the one hand, the traditional values associated with agriculture and social life in the countryside are still the guiding motive. On the other hand, more and more content is devoted to the pragmatic issues, especially to explaining the intricacies of the financing of rural development and the activities of the institutions responsible for the modernisation of the rural areas.

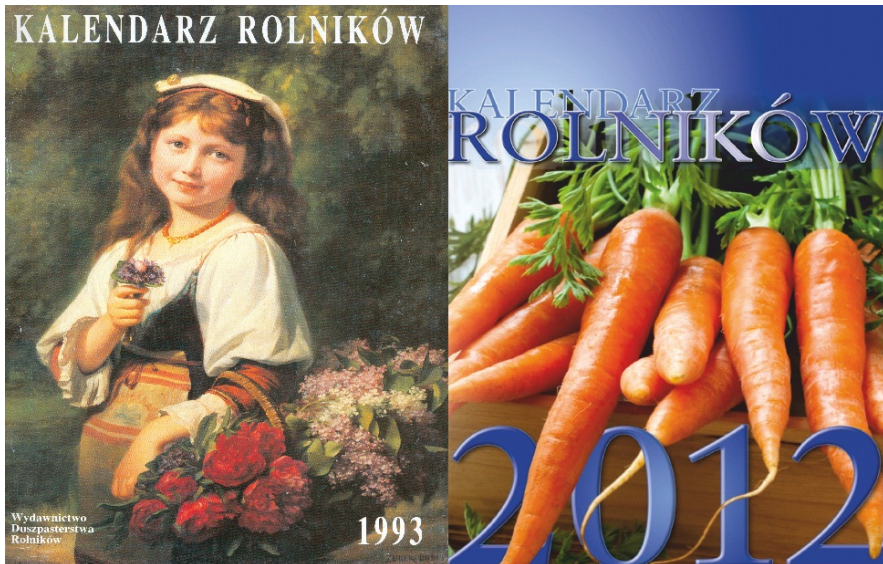


Figure 1. The covers of *The Farmers' Calendar* of 1993 and 2012

A specific evidence of the changing content of *The Farmers' Calendar* is posed by its covers. In the 1990s the dominant motives were patriotic paintings and scenes from the Polish countryside of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> c. In the following years, up to now, most of the introductory iconography of the calendar focuses on the contemporary landscape and the unnaturally embellished crops and agricultural products (see figure 1). To a large extent this was due to the opening of the publication to the urban population, who have been increasingly interested in the space to implement their social needs (temporary residence, producing their own organic food, recreation and tourism).

### Vision of agriculture in the *Farmers' Calendar*

The vision of agriculture presented in *The Farmers' Calendar* is rooted in the Christian interpretation of the cultural reality. A special role is assigned to a professional farmer who is regarded as a specific missionary on earth. What is primarily emphasised is that in everyday life of rural residents the economic and social activities are closely related to the rhythm of nature. The land is therefore a workshop of a farmer, and is personified as a mother who gives birth to and nourishes. The materials included in *The Farmers' Calendar* give the union of the farmer and the nature a religious dimension, i.e. from this relationship a specific model of the world emerges, where the work on the land is the way to holiness. This is particularly evident in the first editions of *The Farmers' Calendar* published in the early 1990s. The authors of the then published articles use specific symbols, such as bread as the effect of labour and thanks to God, work on a farm as the bulwark of human and the national freedom, the parish as a keystone of both religious activities and the local community. The content is enhanced by the images presented, focusing on the existential dimension, i.e. the daily meal (bread), crops and the fruits of labour, as well as the human physiognomy, which reflects both pride in work, as well as physical fatigue (see figure 2.)

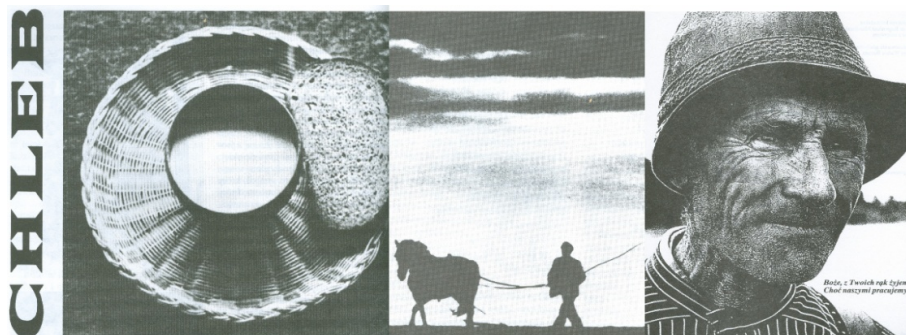


Figure 2. Examples of graphics accompanying the articles relating to the vision of agriculture in Poland in *The Farmers' Calendar* 1993

In later editions of *The Farmers' Calendar*, especially those issued after 2000, the editors were looking for a new vision of agriculture which would combine the traditional religious way of looking at the work of the farmer with the



changes taking place in the Polish countryside. A special role was attributed to organic farming, which is characterised by limited interference in nature, and, on the other hand, is the recipient of a variety of technological innovations, especially for maintaining human health and ecological balance (see figure 3). In this way, for ten years *The Farmers' Calendar* has been promoting the type of agriculture which is opposed to excessive intensity and the genetic modification of food.

## ROLNICTWO EKOLOGICZNE

**Podstawowe zasady produkcji ekologicznej**

- zwiększenie żyzności gleby poprzez uprawę roślin motylkowatych oraz prawidłowy płodozmian;
- ograniczenie stosowania środków produkcji pochodzących spoza gospodarstwa. Produkcja ekologiczna oparta jest na substancjach naturalnych i wolnorozpuszczalnych nawozach mineralnych pochodzenia naturalnego;
- dbałość o zdrowie zwierząt przez dobór odpowiednich ras, chów zwierząt zgodny z wymaganiami gatunku;
- wzmocnienie naturalnej odporności zwierząt, w tym zapewnienie regularnego ruchu oraz dostęp do terenów na wolnym powietrzu oraz pastwisk;



*Stara rasa owcy Olkuskiej doskonale dostosowana do miejscowych warunków*

- żywienie zwierząt paszą ekologiczną;
- dobór odpowiednich gatunków i odmian roślin odpornych na szkodniki i choroby;
- odpowiedni płodozmian;
- ochrona naturalnych wrogów szkodników;
- wykluczenie stosowania GMO i produktów wytworzonych z GMO lub przy ich użyciu.

**Materiał siewny i dobór odmian**

Rolnicy ekologiczni prowadzący produkcję roślinną zobowiązani są do stosowania w produkcji materiału siewnego i wegetatywnego rozmnożeniowego pochodzącego z gospodarstw ekologicznych, prowadzących tego rodzaju produkcję. Jeżeli jednak na rynku nie

jest on dostępny, wówczas rolnik, aby wykorzystać w produkcji materiał konwencjonalny, musi zgłosić taki zamiar do Wojewódzkiego Inspektora Ochrony Roślin i Nasiennictwa z wnioskiem o zgodę na użycie konwencjonalnych nasion lub sadzonek. Dopiero po otrzymaniu z Inspektoratu decyzji pozytywnej w tej sprawie, może zastosować w produkcji konwencjonalny materiał siewny i rozmnożeniowy.

**Znakowanie żywności ekologicznej**

Ekologicznym produktom spożywczym są także stawiane wymagania dotyczące sposobów pakowania i znakowania. Muszą być zapakowane w opakowania jednostkowe i właściwie oznakowane. Tego wymogu nie muszą spełniać:

- rolnicy którzy sami prowadzą sprzedaż swoich produktów i posiadają certyfikat, w którym wymienione są sprzedawane przez nich produkty;
- sklepy sprzedające produkty ekologiczne w opakowaniach jednostkowych.

Etykieta ekologicznego produktu żywnościowego musi zawierać obowiązkowo następujące informacje:

- nazwę i adres podmiotu gospodarczego oraz, jeśli jest różny, właściciela lub sprzedawcy produktu;
- nazwę produktu wraz z odniesieniem do metody produkcji ekologicznej;
- numer kodowy jednostki certyfikującej, któremu podlega podmiot gospodarczy (umieszczony poniżej logo wspólnotowego);
- logo wspólnotowe (w przypadku żywności paczkowanej);
- okres przydatności do spożycia.

Produkt przetworzony może być oznakowany etykietą produktu ekologicznego tylko wtedy, gdy co najmniej 95% komponentów rolniczych wytworzonych było według zasad rolnictwa ekologicznego. Pozostałe 5% składników jest ściśle określone w załączniku do rozporządzenia.



*Logo ekologiczne UE umieszczone na opakowaniach*

Figure 3. Examples of contents promoting ecological farming in *The Farmers' Calendar* 2012

Preference for greater effort in agriculture favours at the same time the maintaining of a multi-generational agriculture, woven into the local community, which also has an impact on the maintenance of the countryside as an important social component in Poland, and the forms that are emanations of community actions (the local community, neighbourhood, parish). This model largely corresponds to the preferences towards the development of multifunctional agriculture and rural areas, but the source of this concept is not so much the idea of progress (modernisation), but far more historical and cultural persistence of the values referring to the community of faith and work, and the key role of the family. The new interpretation of agriculture speaks with visual material included in the calendar. In contrast to the 1990s, the graphics moves away from drafts in favour of photographs. The consequence of this change is the reduced impact of symbolism, and thus the presentation of metaphorical scenes in favour of those idealizing the countryside and rural life.

### ***The Farmers' Calendar as a source of knowledge about agriculture***

The content of *The Farmers' Calendar* has significantly evolved in 20 years. One of the major manifestations is the increase in the information that farmers can use in practice. In the first years of the issuance of *The Farmers' Calendar* (the 1990s), its function was primarily to promote Christian values and emphasise the role of faith in the work of farmers. *The Farmers' Calendar*, as well as other publications for farmers published by Catholic organisations, also led the countryside dwellers through the hardships of the economic transformation, which largely worsened the financial situation of farm families. Therefore, a lot of space was devoted to highlighting the essence of the work of the farmer, the role of local communities in sustaining the family model and traditional agriculture in response to the external projection of the foreign (Western) cultural patterns, and self-doubt in a particular role of the farmer in the period of declining economic and social prestige of the profession.

In the 1990s the block of information related to the economic recommendations was not large. Low innovativeness of most of the Polish agriculture was due to limited information on the economic diversification of farms, specialisations of production, technical innovations, etc. The source of knowledge was primarily the immediate environment, the older generation, the neighbours, the local community. Apprenticeship was mainly inter-generational (passed down through generations) rather than the multi-source contemporary model of the knowledge acquisition for adaptation to a rapidly changing economic environment. Big changes in the institutional environment of agriculture in the 1990s were mainly reflected in the presentation of new public organisations purchasing agricultural products, trading in land, offering financial assistance and forming legal basis for the new production and financial cooperatives, as well as the first foundations co-operating with the European Economic Community (cf. figure 4). *The Farmers' Calendar* then included application and agreement forms for financial support of farms.

<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>AGENCJA INICJATYW LOKALNYCH</b></p> <p>Agencja Inicjatyw Lokalnych pomaga w realizacji małych i średnich projektów gospodarczych, zwracając szczególną uwagę na walkę z bezrobociem oraz projekty zaspokajające potrzeby społeczności lokalnych. Agencja jest instytucją doradczą, sama nie udziela kredytów. Praca z klientem oparta jest na dyskusji. Jej celem jest opracowanie projektu działania i weryfikacja jego realności ekonomicznej — wspólnie znaleźć odpowiedź na pytania czy projekt będzie opłacalny i jak doprowadzić do jego realizacji.</p>	<p><b>2</b></p>  <p><b>KASA ROLNICZEGO UBEZPIECZENIA SPOŁECZNEGO</b></p> <p><b>Emerytura rolnicza</b></p> <p>Jakie warunki wymagane są do uzyskania emerytury rolniczej?</p>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>UWAGA!!! ROLNICY MAJĄ WRESZCIE SWÓJ BANK!</b></p> <p>Wielkopolski Bank Rolniczy S.A. jest bankiem, który ma na celu służyć rolnikom i przedsiębiorcom z sektora rolnego. Bank oferuje szeroki zakres usług, w tym: kredyty, pożyczki, leasing, faktoring, ubezpieczenia, usługi doradcze. Bank jest członkiem Stowarzyszenia Banków Rolniczych w Polsce. Bank ma siedzibę w Poznaniu, ul. Św. Józefa 1, 65-800 Kalisz.</p>  <p><b>Wielkopolski Bank Rolniczy S.A.</b> Pl. Św. Józefa 1 65-800 Kalisz</p>
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**Figure 4. Examples of practical information on organisations connected with the development of agriculture in *The Farmers' Calendar 1993***

1. Local Initiatives Agency - an example of the democratisation of social action
2. The reorganisation of the pension insurance – an example of the changes in public impact
3. New financial services – an example of economic changes

In the last few years the publishers of *The Farmers' Calendar* have put a very strong emphasis on the information function and, consequently, enhanced the knowledge of farmers. Practical information can be divided into several types. The first part of *The Farmers' Calendar* includes not only the information on the influence of the moon phases on farmers' practices (sowing, harvesting, etc.) and traditional folk sayings and proverbs, but the primarily focus is put on the monthly economic recommendations to farmers. *The Farmers' Calendar* highlights constantly the influence of the objective order (the rhythm of the cosmos and thus the will of God) on human action. In 2012, for example, a lot of space is devoted to explaining the functions and organisational basis of ecological agriculture, with its traditional (old) as well as the contemporary circumstances in accordance with the principles of the European Union's agricultural policy. Promotion of healthy food production is not just supported by the Christian philosophy, but what is emphasised is its relation to the multifunctional development of agriculture. Multifunctionality is thus presented not as something new, the discovery of the European policy, but as a continuation of a multi-dimensional rural life, based as much on agricultural production, as on social persistence in harmony with nature.

One large part of the calendar is devoted to practical information about the operation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. It especially presents those activities that contribute to the promotion of Polish rural values such as organic food production and the creation of action groups on the basis of informal associations (social capital). *The Farmers' Calendar* shows its readers the leading research and consulting institutions, and the forms of potential cooperation (cf. figure 5). The publishers of *The Farmers' Calendar* show the directions in which the Polish agriculture can go, using what used to be criticised as an advantage, such as traditional crafts, tradition, community bonds, etc.



**Figure 5.** Examples of practical information on organisations connected with the development of agriculture in *The Farmers' Calendar 2012*

1. Program “Healthy Food” – example of the promotion of Polish food
2. Experimental Centre – example of the innovation centre in agriculture

## Conclusions

The paper presents one of the sources of knowledge about agriculture, addressed to farmers, which brings with it not only useful information but also specific cultural content. This information is in fact embedded in the traditional cultural pattern, strongly associated with religious practices, the sphere of family values and all the elements which emphasise the specific (magic and religious) dimension of the relation between a farmer and the nature. These materials, though cannot be considered as the main source of knowledge about agriculture, should be treated as an important expression of cultural transmission, that is the way of thinking of a large group of people engaged in agricultural occupations in Poland.

*The Farmers' Calendar*, the variability of its content, is a specific study of the transformation of agriculture. Changes in the content, the layout, the development of graphics also show a change of mentality of farmers under the influence of the institutional as well as social and economic environment. **The traditional vision of agriculture as a special profession, enclosed in the religious justification and interpretation, has been significantly disintegrating. What is clearly visible is the duality of *The Farmers' Calendar*. The ideological sphere and social family values as well as multifunctional agriculture are shown in parallel with the knowledge strongly associated with the institutional environment, in particular those which transfer innovation and financial resources from the European Union.**

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