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# **Organizations of farmers in Poland - their power and influence on agricultural policy**

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## **Organizations of farmers in Poland - their power and influence on agricultural policy**

Influence of interest groups on formulation and implementation of agricultural policy is often analyzed in the literature. For example such approach is used to explain differences in the pattern of protection in rich and poor countries (e.g. Anderson, 1995) or a design of Common Agricultural Policy (e.g. Pappi and Henning, 1999). Researchers emphasize also (explicitly or implicitly) power of different groups affected by changes in agricultural policy and the role of interest groups of farmers (e.g. Deininger, 2002; Rausser, Swinnen and Zusman, 2011; Swinnen, 1997). However, measurement of power of interest groups is undertaken relatively rarely. The main reason results from operationalization problems. There are also only very few works on an influence of farmers' organizations on agricultural policy in Poland (e.g. Domagalska-Grędys, 2011). The research on power of farmers and organizations of farmers in Poland is rather marginal (e.g. Milczarek-Andrzejewska, 2014).

Power of farmers' organizations is a very interesting research topic especially in Poland. On one hand, there are several preferences for individual farmers within agricultural policy, social security system and tax policy in Poland (Dzun and Józwiak, 2009). Agricultural sector receives substantial public transfers and farmers enjoy several privileges in comparison to other professional groups. This could be explained by the role of strong interest groups shaping the state policy to receive special benefits. This would also fit into a research showing negative effects of interest groups' activity, which receive benefits at the expense of the whole society (Milczarek-Andrzejewska, 2014). On the other hand, an assessment of activity of farmers and rural societies in Poland is not clear. The social activity of rural citizens in Poland is often presented as being low. Also, a picture of farmers' organization is not clear and some authors suggest that they cannot be treated as strong representatives of farmers' interests (e.g. Halamska, 2008).

The main goal of the research is to analyze power of organizations of farmers in Poland and their influence on agricultural policy. The research focuses on formal organizations of farmers including agricultural chambers, labor unions and business organizations. The main hypothesis states that organizations of farmers in Poland are weak and they can influence the state policy and the Common Agricultural Policy only to a small degree.

The analysis is based on literature review, farmers' organizations websites as well as in-depths interviews with: parliament representatives, NGO representatives, experts, government representatives and agricultural chamber representatives. The following determinants of power of farmers' organizations are analyzed: number of members, organization structure, cooperation with other organizations, sources of financing, etc.

According to the results, organizations representing farmers in Poland are generally weak. The results of the study suggest also an asymmetry of power in favour of the government and administration compared to weak organizations of farmers.

Even though official data of organizations shows optimistic picture (a large number of members, the developed regional structures, etc.), additional research proves this data to be unreliable. For example, according to the respondents of qualitative study, labor unions of farmers are not very active especially at the local level and their membership is continuously decreasing. Business organizations of farmers (e.g. association of crop producers) – although also judged as weak in relation to government – have greater potential to represent farmers'

interests than labor unions. Their advantages result mainly from relatively larger economic resources (measured by number of members as well as a share of agricultural production).

Participants of a qualitative study have indicated the following as key factors in the weakness of agricultural organizations: the farmers' reluctance to pay membership fees, their lack of awareness of the benefits of organizing, divergence of interests, and lack of knowledge.

According to the respondents, the weakness of farmers' organizations has a negative influence on certain aspects of quality of governance in agricultural policy. The results of the study show that of all attributes of good governance, the principle of participation is the most significantly undermined by asymmetry of power between entities in the public sphere. The respondents emphasized mainly problems related to the participation in the design and implementation of programs and projects. Organizations representing farmers are rarely invited for a preparation of documents, there is not enough time to present remarks and there are not enough multilateral meetings.

Other attributes of good governance negatively influenced by asymmetry of power include responsiveness to the needs of the people and accountability. This dependency was not indicated with reference to other attributes of good governance – cohesion, efficacy and efficiency.

To summarize, the results of empirical study indicate that organizations of farmers in Poland are weak and that power asymmetry in favour of the government and administration compared to weak organizations of farmers may decrease quality of governance with regard to principles of participation, responsiveness and accountability. These results could also suggest that organizations of farmers in Poland may influence agricultural policy only to a small degree.

However, a further research on an influence of farmers' organizations in Poland on the state policy and the Common Agricultural Policy is needed. A quantitative approach (with a use of e.g. Structural Equation Models) could allow for analysing a direct relationship between power of farmers' organizations and their influence on agricultural policy.

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