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Studies in Agricultural Economics

Volume 117, Number 1

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Foreword

This issue of *Studies in Agricultural Economics* is the second (after volume 116 number 1) to be produced by AKI in cooperation with the European Rural Development Network (ERDN, www.erdn.eu). ERDN was set up in 2002 to integrate the work and competencies of various research institutions in central and eastern Europe, and AKI has been an active participant in the network almost from its inception.

Much has been written in the scientific literature about the challenges faced by the countries that have joined the European Union (EU) from 2004 onwards (especially the post-socialist countries) when trying to adopt and comply with regulations and procedures that were primarily designed for western Europe. This cannot be more relevant than for farming, the agri-food value chain and rural development. Privatisation and restitution of property, technological change, the globalisation of agricultural and food markets, and institutional weaknesses with regard to implementing programmes and absorbing funds are just some of the issues affecting agriculture and rural areas in the region.

ERDN brings together agricultural economists, rural geographers, rural sociologists and others to address such challenges through collaborative research designed to identify new approaches to agricultural and rural development that can be applied in the eastern EU. The papers published in this issue of *Studies in Agricultural Economics* are contributions to this collective effort.

Research by Vőneki, Mándi-Nagy and Stark shows that, in contrast to some other projections, the Hungarian dairy herd and milk production may increase slightly in the years following the abolition of the EU milk quota system. This reflects the concentration, modernisation and selection processes that have taken place in the sector in recent years, and increasing global demand.

The decline in agricultural employment is a widely recognised trend in Europe. Čapkovičová and Hlavsa map (LAU1) regional employment by sector in Czechia (Czech Republic). In ‘predominantly rural’ regions the rate of change in service employment is more favourable than in ‘intermediate’ and ‘predominantly urban’ regions and the sector now accounts for over 50 per cent of jobs there.

Building an entrepreneurial environment can help rural areas to benefit from these changes. The results of Bótáné Horváth, Katonáné Kovács and Szőke show that, to achieve this, more emphasis should be placed on ‘pull’ type of learn-

ing designed to draw out people and resources, and that government, science/university, business/industry and civil society actors should all play a role in this process.

The path dependency of Romanian small-scale agriculture, its efficiency and contribution to socio-economic security are demonstrated by Tudor. For these reasons, the disappearance of Romanian small farms is neither likely nor desirable. Instead, they should be helped to become more resilient through investment in equipment and human capital, with emphasis on their cultural, landscape, touristic attributes and capability to provide traditional food.

The point about the efficiency of small farms is reinforced by Galluzzo, using the example of Italy where more than 90 per cent of farms have less than 9 ha usable agricultural area. In the period 2000–2011 small and cooperative farms had higher levels of scale efficiency than limited company farms and small farms had the highest levels of technical efficiency.

Efficiency can be improved via investment but Wieliczko shows that in Poland, although investment in farm machinery, equipment and means of transport is increasing, it is still insufficient given the average level of usage of fixed assets. Only about 12 per cent of farms make use of public support in their investment projects, most of which are financed from own resources.

Farm innovation in general is strongly influenced by the quality of the relationship between farmers and farm advisors. Takahashi, Todo and Degefa found that a participatory research and extension approach can greatly enhance the adoption of new varieties by farmers, and that both the trust network with extension agents and the reputations of farmers play important roles in farmers’ adoption behaviour.

Finally, Athiyaman reports that consumers perceive biomass residential heaters as natural and visually appealing but dirty and difficult to use. An analysis of the industry’s marketing communications suggests that although it is focusing on brand attributes such as ‘green’ and ‘clean’, it is not addressing this latter ‘ease of use’ issue.

I hope that the contents of this issue of *Studies in Agricultural Economics* are of interest to researchers and practitioners in the eastern EU and beyond.

Andrew Fieldsend
Budapest, March 2015

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Audience

Researchers, academics, policy makers and practitioners in agricultural economics and rural development, especially in eastern central and south eastern Europe.

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Submission of an article implies that the work described has not been published in English in any other peer-reviewed journal, is not under consideration for publication elsewhere, and that its publication is approved by all authors and tacitly or explicitly by the responsible authorities where the work was carried out. The author will retain the copyright of the article but agrees to identify AKI as the original publisher. Papers will not normally exceed 6000 words including the reference list and figure and table captions. Authors intending to prepare a book review should first consult the Editor-in-Chief and such a review should not exceed 2000 words.

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