



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>

aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

No endorsement of AgEcon Search or its fundraising activities by the author(s) of the following work or their employer(s) is intended or implied.

A NEW ROLE FOR THE RENEWED AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE IN THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA, YUGOSLAVIA

Vlado Schlamberger B.Sc.

Agricultural Extension Centre of Republic Slovenia,
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food

ABSTRACT

The agricultural policy of the northernmost country of Yugoslavia, the Republic of Slovenia, faces characteristic agricultural problems: a small average farm holding, high average age of farmers and a low formal level of education. The society owned, so called social sector had significant priorities in the development of Slovenian agriculture till now.

With the recent political and economic changes in Eastern Europe, in the Republic of Slovenia the management conditions of the social agricultural sector and the private sector became equal. The main objective of the new Slovenian Government is to support the changes which will encourage initiatives by individuals in the private agricultural enterprises. The new organisation of Agricultural Extension Service in Republic Slovenia is described. The study of reorganisation has been done and reorganisation of former Agricultural Extension Service in Co-operatives into the Public Agricultural Extension Service in Regional Extension Units is described.

1. Development of the Agricultural Sector after Second World War

The status of Slovenian agriculture is reflected in the development of socialism in Slovenia and Yugoslavia after the second world war. The general opinion of that time was that socialist and communist society needed concentration of the economy in the communist way. The magic word "industrialisation" led to the paradise of communism. The main objective of agricultural policy was to exterminate private property. The farmer was a permanent threat to the builders of socialism.

Soon after the war a compulsory delivery of agricultural products to the state was introduced. It took course violently and the farmers who resisted, finished in jails. In August 1945 the Agrarian Land Reform process started. The private agricultural enterprises with more than 35 hectares of agricultural land were confiscated. Agricultural land was divided among former farm labourers and other people, who lived in rural areas. They became small farmers. Most of the land, mainly flatland, became so called "General Property of People" and became a base for big state enterprises.

After the litigation with the Informbiro in 1948 the authorities had to prove their communist orthodoxy and started to establish the Agricultural Working Co-operatives by a Soviet model. Farmers resisted heavy pressure. The action was not successful and the agricultural production started to decrease.

In 1952 the authorities cancelled the project of Agricultural Working Co-operatives. The development of the private agricultural sector was prevented by the Agricultural Maximum Law which limited the amount of privately owned agricultural land to 10 hectares. After 1953 the development of the classical co-operative system started again and repeatedly recovered. Slovenian private agriculture sector quickly restored to life and the agricultural production in next years rapidly increased. But the communist authorities in Slovenia had a different objective: they declared only the big agricultural enterprises should increase the agricultural production and produce enough food to feed the working class.

In the beginning of the sixties the Agricultural Co-operatives were abolished. Since then agricultural production in both sectors decreased and the price of food increased. There was a shortage of agricultural products in the market and the difference between Republic Slovenia and Western European countries had enlarged.

The liberalism at the end of the sixties and the recognition of the fact, that the efficient economy needs the farmer enabled various stimulations for development of the private agricultural sector (various incentives, credits with low interest rates, tax reimbursements etc). Farmers took advantage of this chance and Slovenian agriculture recovered a little.

In the last few years big changes occurred. In December 1987 the Communist Party of Slovenia renewed some of its political standpoints about economy. In 1988 the Slovenian Farmers' Alliance was founded. In its programme there is a demand for improvement in conditions for farm management. Solving of the problems of the people who live in the rural areas of Slovenia is required. In 1990 Slovenia got its first freely elected government after Second World War. These changes in political life do not also mean immediate changes in Slovenian agriculture.

2. Present situation in the agricultural sector

Slovenia is the northern most Republic of Yugoslavia. Its total area is 2.025.304 hectares, the agricultural land area is 872.795 hectares. The population of Slovenia is 1.891.864 persons. The 1981 Population Census marked 192.090 rural households, 95 percent of which have less than 10 hectares of agricultural land. The average Slovenian farm holding has 5.5 hectares of agricultural land and forest of which 2.6 hectares is arable land. Because of the small average Slovenian farm holding the majority of the rural population generates its income from non agricultural sources, mainly industry.

The proportion of the rural population has been reduced from 49 percent in 1948 to 9.2 percent in 1981. In this year, 721.103 inhabitants or almost 38 percent lived in rural areas. 107.772 of total 333.882 active were full time farmers. The number of full time farm holdings was about 30.000 or 15 percent of total.

The agricultural production was in 1987 8.9 percent of the Gross Domestic Product of Republic Slovenia. The self sufficiency rates for agricultural products is 94 percent compared to the countries of Western Europe, where it is 114 percent. The basic problem of Slovenian agriculture is the lack of a normal family farm holding from 30 to 100 hectares of agricultural land. The past agricultural policy, which held back the development of private agricultural sector and encouraged huge social agricultural enterprises, is the main reason for the present situation. Today in Slovenia, there are the agricultural giants, so called society enterprises with big estates over 1.000 hectares and on the other hand small private farm holdings with up to 10 hectares of agricultural land.

3. Agricultural production and the farmer

The average farm holding in Slovenia is irrational in the modern age of agricultural machinery and enables only an extensive employment in agriculture and/or in unproductive industrial enterprises. It is stated that one third of the rural population requires an additional income. For most of the rural population farming is no longer the main economic activity. As farm machinery is concerned, Slovenian farm is well equipped. Compared to that in Western Europe, it is similar and differs only in the fact that it is not up to date, it is yesterday's technology and design. The Slovenian farmer is overmechanised and continuously increases his productivity.

Big social enterprises own most of the flatland in Slovenia. Contrary to the farmer, they have chronic problems with agricultural machinery and with productivity also. They often find themselves in the situation that they are late with their work, which is not done in time.

Key problems of agriculture are:

- i) small average Slovenian farm holding,
- ii) low technological level of agricultural production,
- iii) farm holding owners are old (56.6 years on average),
- iv) low level of farmers' education (40 percent didn't finish primary school),
- v) concentration of social enterprises on flatlands,
- vi) non adequate structure of agricultural production regarding natural conditions.

4. Present organisation of the Agricultural Extension Service

At the end of the sixties the liberalism in political life had already had an impact in agriculture. In the fifties the Agricultural Extension Service was founded in the Regional Co-operative Societies. After the abolishment of the co-operative movement in 1962 most of agricultural extension officers got lost somewhere in the agriculture and some of them found their employment outside it. With the reanimation of the co-operative movement after 1972 the authorities started to improve farming conditions in the private agriculture sector with the system of incentives and the Agriculture Extension Service started to work in the Agricultural Co-operatives again. In 1975 the Centre for Agricultural Extension Service was founded and connected to the Co-operative Society of the Republic of Slovenia.

The economic crisis of the eighties in Yugoslavia and Slovenia reflected as well in the agriculture. There was high demand and low supply in the agricultural market and because of a shortage of agricultural inputs only the members of the co-operative had a chance to buy. In contrary, when a farmer became a member of a co-operative, he was obliged to sign a production contract and was forced to sell his products to the co-operative. The prices were fixed in spite of inflation and because of the shortage of agricultural products, the parallel market emerged. In this situation the extension service lost its basic function and became the tool, by which the authorities forced the farmers to co-operate.

5. The present organisation of the Agricultural Extension Service

The Agricultural Extension Service exists in Yugoslavia only in the Republic of Slovenia. In the year 1989 there were 483 extension officers in the basic service in 63 co-operatives, 48 extension officers - specialists in the regional agricultural stations and 7 specialists in extension centre, a total of 538. The education level of the officers in the co-operative was high: 143 of them were technicians, 209 finished agricultural college and 126 B.Sc. degree. The proportion of their administrative to professional work was 38:62 percent. Professional work included commercial and other activities because of the specific position of the service in the co-operative, eg., production contracts with farmers, purchasing and trading of goods etc. A great deal of their time was occupied by administrative work. Although they were mostly generalists, some of them were specialised and the number of officers who worked 50 percent or more in the specific field of agriculture was 142 or 30 percent.

In the year 1989 the extension officers dealt with 27.099 full time farm holdings, 16.144 of them in hill land area, and with 58.137 part time farm holdings, 38.972 of them in hill land area, a total of 85.236 farm households. The most frequent extension method was the farm visit, which is most expensive and the total number of visits was 149.450. The extension emphasised educational work, especially in winter time: 1.485 lectures with over 41.000 participants and 843 group sessions with 15.873 farmers.

1.330 demonstration trials were made with wheat (365), maize (349), sugar beet (71), potatoes (56), other tillage trials, (155) fodder crops and grass (334). They were involved in the group work with so called production communities also.

Generally, the officers in the basic service were involved more in the organisation of a specific agricultural production than in the professional and advisory work with the farmers and the members of their families. They represented the business interest of the co-operatives, where they earned their incomes. These interests were not identical with the interests of the farmers.

The extension workers position is odd: the co-operative staff estimates his work by low mark because it is long term work and is not profitable in short term view. All these facts, stated above have strong influence regarding his wish to find a more appropriate job. The figure of 3.5 years for the average employment time in a co-operative proves this.

The second level of extension service is specialistic service in 7 Regional Agricultural Institutes. In 1989 there were 48 extension workers - specialists with the average age of 42.7 years. 39 of them were B.Sc. graduates, 8 of them M.Sc. and 3 of them Ph.D. of agriculture. The basic task of the extension specialist was professional work in a specific field of agriculture. There was the lack of applied research in the system and their function was to provide some applied research together with research institutions also. They supported the extension work with development and research activities and their basic task was to solve the specific professional problems beyond the professional knowledge of the extension worker in the basic service.

The Extension Centre of the Republic of Slovenia, joined to the Society of the Co-operatives of the Republic of Slovenia provided the transfer of research and development results, planned, coordinated, executed and monitored the extension work in the Republic of Slovenia. In 1989 there were 7 experts employed.

The service in co-operatives was financed 1/3 from the agricultural fund of the Republic, 1/3 from the agricultural fund of the commune and 1/3 from the co-operative incomes. Specialistic service was 2/3 financed from the agricultural fund of the Republic and 1/3 from the agricultural fund of the commune.

6. The new trends of Slovenian agriculture

The agricultural experts estimate that Slovenian agriculture will need 40 to 50 years to reach the socio-economic level of agriculture in Western Europe. They stated three starting points of the long term objectives for the agricultural policy:

- i) market oriented agriculture,
- ii) equality of opportunities in agriculture (social and private sector),
- iii) agriculture has to become the element of national economy.

These three demands start to bring their claims forward in Slovenia. One could state that the Slovenian agriculture is at the beginning of the marathon run. The key problem is the property. On the one side the agricultural land is crumbled into the small pieces, on the other, there are the huge enterprises in the flatlands. The farm holdings from 20, 50 up to 100 hectares, which are competitive and most successful in the Western Europe almost do not exist in Slovenia. So agriculture finds itself as part of Europe's tail.

The action for the concentration of agricultural land didn't start yet. It will not be easy to start the action: the milestones extend to the hell and even small changes will cause great difficulties. The Slovenian Farmers' Alliance proposes the New Agricultural Land Reform. The present agricultural land in flatland, today called General Property of the People and managed by the huge social agricultural enterprises (better known as agricultural combinats) will become the property of the state. The next step should be the public competition under specific terms in which only the citizens of Slovenia could take part: a candidate has to be a farmer with an agricultural education with a family and experienced in farming. The land will be leased for 99 years with a possible chance for a succession. These tough terms should enable the formation of new farm holdings: there is a need for a new tax policy with higher taxes for non farm holdings with an agriculture land.

7. The new Agricultural Advisory Service

The main objective of the new economic reform is to assure the changes which should loosen the initiatives of the individuals and their abilities. The farmers start to search for the production connections and the new classic agricultural co-operatives and also the various possibilities for a private food industry and trade emerged. The market oriented economy and agriculture request also changes in the mode and the quality of extension work.

While preparing the new proposition of the changes, the results of the study "Effectiveness and working methods of Agricultural Extension Service in Slovenia" as the basic standpoints have been taken into the consideration. It was stated that extension service should be reorganised into the new Agricultural Advisory Service from August to the end of December 1990.

The new Agricultural Advisory Units as the part of the regional agricultural stations were formed with the generalists and specialists. The location of the advisers - generalists is as close as possible and the general tendency is that they stayed in the same locations where they have been till now. The close

contact with advisors - specialists will enable them to be more efficient. The head of the Agricultural Advisory Unit has the responsibility for the extension programme execution. The advisors - generalists at the farmer's level are responsible for the education of the farmers and the members of their families and for the proper transfer of the technologies to the farm holdings. Their basic objective is to advise the farmer how to enlarge the farm holding profit. The recommended education level is B.Sc. degree. There are 180 advisers for the whole territory of Slovenia and another 50 for socio-economic extension and rural youth work.

The function of the specialist advisory service will remain the same. There are 50 advisors - specialists.

At the republic level, the institution called the Extension Administration of the Republic is formed in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food with four departments: advisory service, animal and plant breeding, land operation and statistic and finance department. In the advisory service there are employed 300 advisors in the service and the service is financed from the budget of the Republic.

The Agricultural Extension Board should have the monitoring and controlling function. The members are the farmers and their organisations. In the study, mentioned above, the linkages between the extension, education, development and research are still not clarified and one should expect that this should be the most important task in the near future.

REFERENCES

1. The Agricultural Co-operative Movement in Slovenia, Ljubljana, 1982.
2. Zagozen, F. The Agricultural Policy of the Free Slovenia, Nova revija No 95, Ljubljana, 1990.
3. The Efficiency and the Methods of Work of the Agricultural Extension Service, the study analysis, Novo mesto, 1988.
4. Schlamberger, V. Agricultural Extension - Independent in the Market Economy, Sodobno kmetijstvo, No 5, Ljubljana, 1989.
5. Agricultural Extension Service Organisation in Slovenia - the Proposition for Reorganisation, The Agricultural Extension Center of Republic of Slovenija, Ljubljana, 1990.