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NEW TRENDS IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION
AND MANAGEMENT TRAINING

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SUMMARY

The political, social and economic changes of recent years in Hungary accelerated in 1990 and have led to a complete change of the system.

The agricultural and food sector has been considered for long the key sector of the country's economy; it can perform its role and meet the expectations successfully in the future only if it implements an ownership reform and a restructuring. For this reason it is necessary to improve also in this important segment of the economy the adaptability to the rapid changes of social and economic circumstances. The role of managers working in the agricultural and food sector is significant in the transformation of the economy.

Without enhancing the human resources of the sector the international competitiveness of its production and servicing activities cannot be achieved.

Of the institutions of management training the institutes of third level education and continued training both play an important role in spreading the modern management methods and skills.

Management training and continued training will help the managers in performing successfully their changed tasks only if it leaves off the traditional "classroom" style of training based on courses, and instead offers the managers what they in fact need.

1. BACKGROUND

The political, social and economic changes of recent years in Hungary accelerated in 1990 and have led to a complete change of the system.

Still we are participating in a complete shift from the centrally planned economy to the market economy at present.

The agricultural and food sector has been for long considered the key sector of the country's economy, which is illustrated by the fact, that 22 % of all employees work in this field, who produce 20 % of the GDP and 30 % of convertible exports, respectively.

Moreover, many of its subsectors enjoy comparative advantages as well.

The agricultural and food sector will be able to perform its role and meet the expectations successfully in the future only if it implements an ownership reform and a restructuring. For this reason it is necessary to improve also in this important segment of the economy the adaptability to the rapid changes of social and economic circumstances.

The role of managers working in the agricultural and food sector is significant in the transformation of the economy.

For the quick adaptation to new circumstances they need to change their management philosophy, their attitudes and utilize those under the conditions of the changing, export oriented market economy. The absence of the required management skills may become a crucial factor from the point of the economic transition of the country, as from the 50 thousand agricultural intellectuals there are about 20 to 25 thousand managers, who need new skills, attitude and behaviour.

Without enhancing the human resources of the sector the international competitiveness of its production and servicing activities cannot be achieved.

This interrelationship necessitates, the the secondary, third level and postgraduate training change their subject matter and organization according to the interests of the sector, and that the international standards must be achieved.

The criteria of international standards should be asserted the most rapidly in the third level education and continued training, which define the intellectual life of the sector. Therefore, the objectives of training should be reset by taking into account the changing environment, and based on this the establishing of personal and material conditions making possible the closing up to international level must be accelerated at the third level education institutions. It is a most urgent task to improve the practicability of training throughout the entire professional training.

2. EVALUATING THE PRESENT STATUS OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

2.1. Under the present system of secondary vocational training, in the school system based on the elementary school qualification, the options are either a three year skilled worker training, a four year vocational training cum maturity examination, or in certain skills technicians are trained by a five year professional education.

The professional training outside the school system - and based on the elementary school - is performed in the form of courses held at companies or various educational institutes, and consists mostly of training the so-called semi-skilled workers. A further type is represented by the skilled worker training at companies by courses and the skilled worker training for adult employees.

2.2. The third level education is of two levels; at the end of a three year education the graduates receive works engineer qualification, at the end of five years training the qualification is of engineer level. The transition between the two levels of training is created by the correspondent supplementary training based on the works engineer level. It is characteristic of the educational system prevailing that the training time is uniform at the various levels, independent of the actual requirements of the specific field in question. This results in certain professions an inefficiently long training period, whereas in the case of other fields demanding higher quality criteria and deeper theoretical foundation, the skills, practical abilities of the graduates do not meet the levels expected by the employers.

Specification within the training has first of all adapted during the past decades to the requirements of large scale farming.

The prevailing curricula, developed in 1982 were introduced in 1984-1985, and the basic concept of their preparation was a broad professional basic education, the training of professionals suitable for a synthesising planning, organizing, management and development work, capable of adapting to the continuously changing environment, which provides a basis for specifying. The elements described were actually implemented to a small extent only, which was caused by both objective and subjective factors.

It is apparently a difficult job to modernize the habitual, traditional elements of the training process (fix curriculum, training in semesters, learning focused on examinations).

3. THE TRENDS OF DEVELOPMENT

3.1. The development of the secondary education in agriculture is determined by the changes expected in the structure

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of agriculture and in regard of the ownership forms. Which means, that the forms of training should be changed so, that it becomes suitable for meeting the needs of the professionals in family and private farming. This implies, that the training of skills related to farm management, private venture, village tourism, household economics, etc must also be considered.

The recently established agricultural chambers must be given a major role in these changes, and the system of the agricultural extension service must be formed.

On the basis of international experience the secondary level of vocational training is frequent at the small scale farming and the application of this is advisable also under the Hungarian circumstances. With an experimental nature the training of farmers and farmer wives was started in 1990, and also training courses at people's academy began.

In the changing system of secondary level education it is necessary to develop the integration of vocational training within the school system and without it in order to improve efficiency.

3.2. The modernization of the curricula of third level education is an urgent task, so that the quality of trainers and students improve. The present system of training measured by the length of training period and the itemized examinations should be replaced by the development of individual talents and the acquiring of synthetic approaches.

It is expected that the graduates of third level education will continue to participate at three and five year training, but this is at present a matter of dispute.

It would be reasonable to modify the main trend of the three year training in the direction of satisfying the needs of

small scale farming ventures.

The five year training should be developed by concentrating the present curricula, and by introducing new skills for training - such as those of management, marketing, finance, entrepreneurship and extension services. The number of optional subjects should be increased, so that the students may acquire more specific training.

The following basic professions trained at third level are operating under the authority of the Ministry of Agriculture:

- general agricultural engineer
- veterinary
- horticultural engineer
- forestry engineer
- geodesic engineer
- agricultural and agroprocessing mechanical engineer
- agro-economist.

3.3. The development of post-graduate training presents an important task, so that the curriculum of training becomes internationally equivalent. The changes should take into account the characteristics of the new type of manager, the general and professional education based on international values, language proficiency, entrepreneurial attitude, a strategic approach, marketing activities.

With the participation of foreign business schools the possibility of acquiring M.B.A. degree in Hungary must be established, this progress can be accelerated by developing curricula, inviting guest lecturers, organizing study trips.

It appears to be useful to adapt the "Open University" system applying correspondence methods, and utilize also in this case the possibilities of international cooperation.

It should be expected, that the new law on education will create the opportunity for establishing private schools and continued training institutions, and it will also become possible to draw in foreign capital and establish foundations for this purpose.

Special attention should be paid to the development of practical training at the companies. The network of pilot-farms and companies must be developed, and these should undertake a significant role in the extension service, continued training and retraining equally. The exchange of students with foreign institutions should be made regular.

Major changes must be made in the personal conditions of training, because the universities function with high levels of staffing (the student/trainer ration is low, the number of administrative staff is high).

The management of universities must be modernized, their autonomy improved; the state supervision must guarantee the international equality of diplomas, and in this process the interests of employers should be represented as well, namely by the participation of the Chamber of Agriculture and the producers associations in the elaboration of development trends.

3.4. Of the institutions of management training the institutes of third level education and continued training both play an important role in spreading the modern management methods and skills. However, it is essentially the practical experiences, solution of concrete problems, environmental opportunities and emergencies, that contribute to the forming and developing of abilities and skills.

As the life of enterprises runs more and more in an uncertain environment characterized by accelerating changes, growing competition, those enterprises will have a comparative advan-

tage under such circumstances, which have "competitive" managers of a strategist nature. It is not enough if only the senior managers are strategists. Each medium and lower level manager, and even all of the staff should act and behave as strategists at their own job and position.

The growth of skills should become a part of the farms and enterprises strategy, should serve it and assist its implementation.

The learning process should shift from that of specialized training based on curricula to one raising and solving problems, building and improving human abilities needed to implement the solutions discovered.

Therefore, the primary objectives of training and continued training should be (a) the modification of behaviour; (b) the changing of the management style; and (c) the developing of the problem discovering and solving abilities.

Management training and continued training will help the managers in performing successfully their tasks only if it leaves off the traditional "classroom" style of training, based on courses, and instead offers the managers what they in fact need: (a) strategic skills; (b) successful methods of treating people; (c) methods for transforming the company organization, to make it more flexible.

With the thoughts raised on management training and continued training - not aiming at completeness - the aim was to describe the new needs, requirements of training, and the new trends for meeting those.

I am convinced, that the efficiency, market orientedness and improvement of management training and continued training may have a determining impact on the improvement of the performance of the Hungarian agricultural and food sector.