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Problems and Perspectives for Agricultural Economics Education in Bulgaria

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PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS EDUCATION IN BULGARIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the changes in education of agricultural economics in Bulgaria in the transition period and makes evaluation of basic problems of education.

Agricultural economics education in Bulgaria had eighty years tradition and experience.

The paper includes three parts – experience, problems and future.

The first part shows three periods of historical development and experience of agricultural economics education till 1990:

**1921 – 1949 in Sofia State University;*

**1949 – 1976 in Higher agricultural institute in Sofia;*

**1976 – 1990 in Higher economics institute in Sofia.*

The second part contains analysis and evaluation of main problems in education in several directions:

** Programs for education and textbooks;*

** Qualification of lectures;*

** Problems with new computers and products:*

** Transition period in high education from one to three degrees system (bachelor, master, doctor).*

The last section shows tendencies for improvement of the education with regard to Bulgaria`s integration with European Union.

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural economics education, as with all other areas of public sector, has been under transformation for the last 10 years.

The paper presents the level and changes in education of agricultural economics in Bulgaria in the transition period and makes evaluation of basic problems of education.

Conclusions and suggestions summarized some results of discussion for agricultural education in Bulgaria in December 2000.

EXPERIENCE AND TRADITION

Agricultural economics education in Bulgaria had eighty years tradition and experience. The first higher agricultural department in Bulgaria have been established in 1921 in Sofia State University (Table 1). In period before Second war in department worked lectures and scientifics with high qualification obtained in European universities. This is main reason for successful adaptation and utilization of knowledges of well known scientific schools. The number of agricultural economics programs increased and improved education of management and marketing problems.

In 1936 in Bulgarian scientific academy was founded Agricultural economics institute in Sofia.

In 1949 the Higher agricultural institute was founded in Sofia. There were university faculties of Agronomy, Zootechnika, Veterinary

Medicine and others. Agricultural economics faculty was founded in 1965.

In 1976 Bulgarian government decided to reform agricultural education and were founded two new higher institute – High agricultural institute in Plovdiv and High institute for zootechnika and veterinary medicine in Stara Zagora. The faculty of Agricultural economics was involved in Higher economics institute in Sofia together with Industrial economics and Transport economics departments.

The brief overview of historical development of agricultural education creates perquisites for main conclusions:

- In first period (before 1949) agricultural economics education was developed as part of agricultural education and added preparation for agronomist and zootechnicst with economics knowledge.
- Creation of big cooperatives and state farms in second period (1949-1990) and separation of technological and management functions were required to develop agricultural economics education as independence speciality.
- Agrarian reform and new private farms demand introduction of new subjects and concerns into education.

Table 1. Brief history of agricultural economics education in Bulgaria

Years	E v e n t s
1921	Agricultural department in Sofia state university

1921-1945	Agricultural economics programs for subjects Agronomy, Zootechnika
1936	Agricultural scientific institute in Bulgarian scientific Academy
1945-1949	Agricultural economics programs in Sofia university
1949	Agricultural economics speciality in Higher agricultural institute in Sofia
1965	Agricultural economics faculty in Higher agricultural institute
1976	Agricultural economics subject in Higher economics institute in Sofia
1990	New Agricultural economics subjects in Higher economics institutes in Varna and Svistov
After 1993-94	New Agricultural economics subjects in Agricultural University in Plovdiv and Trakian university in Stara Zagora.
Present	Agricultural economics subjects in 5 state universities and colleges and Agricultural economics programs in 2 private universities

EVALUATION OF MAIN PROBLEMS OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS EDUCATION IN TRANSITION PERIOD

University Autonomy Law of 1990 creates conditions for foundation of new programs, subjects and universities. Before 1990 agricultural economics education as subject were only in Sofia. In same year

were opened agricultural economics subjects in economical institute in Varna and Svistov.

After 1993-1994 new agricultural economics subjects were created in agricultural universities in Plovdiv and Stara Zagora.

The result for agricultural economics education was 5 subjects in state universities and 2 in private universities.

Since the boom that established different economics programs and various economics colleges, the Ministry of Education and Science has begun to regulate economics education. Since the enforcement of the Higher Education Law (1995) economics curricula in the different universities have become similar, because of introduction of general criteria, requirements and uniform standards.

The evaluation is made on both the institutional level and program level. The institutional accreditation process entails a complex evaluation of the condition and the activities of the university or of its main structural unit. Features evaluated are: organization, management, social activities and use of relevant means for improving the educational process and research.

Program accreditation involves a complex evaluation of the quality of the educational process and research within a single program. It includes a number of grades, mainly concerning educational content, methods of teaching, teaching staff, research, modes of teaching, exams, students' grades and their future performance.

Last ten years agricultural economics education has been develop with regard to Bulgaria's integration with European Union. In oldest agricultural economics subject in University of National and World economy were involved new programs: Agricultural policy, Rural

development, Agrarian marketing, Agrarian management, Economics and management of Family Farms and others.

The bachelor's degree programs include obligatory (fundamentals), optional and elective courses. The Ministry of Education determines which subjects are fundamental courses. The universities 's governing body is free to determine economics programs in regard to program specialization.

The requirements for bachelor's degree include passing a final comprehensive examination or defending a bachelor's thesis.

Some of assistant professors and associate professors specialized at various European and American universities. They published new textbooks in cooperation with European colleagues.

Teaching methods have changes significantly. The dominant method is lectures. Some of the younger member of department "Agribusiness" such games, simulations, case studies, computers, etc. Lack of financial resource to purchase new and modern equipment is the reason for using old computers and products.

The evaluation system has changed. Test examinations have been introduced. Some of professors prefer final exam.

Part of lecturers take participation in various international and regional projects, devoted of land reform, organizational structural reform in agriculture, functioning and management of private organizational structures in agrarian sector, agricultural policy, etc.

FUTURE

The fundamental challenge facing Central and Eastern Europe's agricultural educational system is to transform itself from a system

that worked under central planning to one that works under market conditions. Organizational changes and transformation is an extremely difficult process.

The reform of agricultural economics education is part of an overall effort to modernize higher education. A new, more competitive, way of financing education has been created, and the universities have begun playing an increased role in agricultural research.

The participation of higher education institutions in research activities needs to be planned as part of the regular activities of the teaching staff and their students. The credibility of these activities, and the possibility of obtaining the necessary research resources, depends on the activities being relevant to farmers and to national research priorities. For agricultural education institutions to participate more fully in research, the role of research should be clearly defined in the institutional policies and in the responsibilities of faculty members.

As with research, close working relationships between agricultural education institutions and extension systems are indispensable in order to ensure the relevance and contribution of agricultural education. As with research, however, the involvement of agricultural education institutions in extension and community outreach is often limited. Even in those countries where extension and agricultural education are not separated into different ministries, the lack of resources and linking mechanisms greatly limits joint activities.

Notable exceptions are those institutions, which have been organized with outreach or extension responsibilities and are provided with the

necessary means to carry them out. One way for universities and technical institutes to implement development outreach activities is by follow-up technical support to graduates working in agribusinesses or managing their own production enterprises. Also, short courses of continuing education can be designed to update extension officers' knowledge and to qualify extension staff for career advancement. Continuing education should, wherever possible, make use of farmers' associations, graduate associations, commercial enterprises and research and extension centers.

Environmental and sustainable agricultural development problems require an inter-disciplinary approach to curricula since sustainable development relates not only to economic or technological concerns, but also to social, cultural, ecological, and public policy matters. Furthermore, curricula need to provide students with opportunities to observe first-hand the technological and social aspects of natural resource uses for agriculture through learning activities that are experiential and problem-focused.

Experience shows that institutions of agricultural education can play a vital role in bringing about changes in peoples' attitudes and practices so that they are more environmentally responsible. Developed countries have for some time included environmental concerns in their teaching curricula, research activities and outreach programs. Current practice in agricultural education in Bulgaria does not demonstrate widespread integration of environmental and sustainable agriculture topics into academic programs. Rather, these topics are added piecemeal to existing curricula, if at all.

Three main issues can be identified which affect the challenge of integrating environmental and sustainable development themes or issues into agricultural economics education programs. First, such issues are complex and diverse. They involve social, cultural, political and economic aspects as well as technical and scientific information. Thus, an interdisciplinary approach is essential.

Second, agricultural education institutions are not always structured to deal with the complexity of these issues. Substantial institutional reorientation and attitude change among faculty members may be necessary. In order to achieve such changes, the training and redeployment of teachers may be needed along with greater involvement of students, younger, environmentally aware staff and rural communities in the design of new curricula.

Third, new approaches to learning and knowing which incorporate the environmental knowledge of local people are needed. These new approaches should involve people (students, teachers, producers) learning together in collaborative, knowledge-sharing situations on campus and in the field. The ultimate aim should be to make environmental issues inseparable from the professionalism of graduates, the production practices of farmers, the commercial objectives of agri-businesses and the interests of society for a safe and secure environment.

Agricultural education institutions, working with appropriate government agencies and research institutes, need to develop research and demonstration plots that directly address farmers' needs. This requires that farmers be valued for their contribution to production through their innovations and sharing of local knowledge.

For their part, farmers' organizations need to do a better job of communicating the needs of their members to agricultural education institutions. Farmer advisory boards are one way to improve communication between agricultural education institutions and local producers.

Extension, as a non-formal educational input, can make important contributions to sustainable agricultural production and rural development. There is a critical need for well-trained extension workers in many developing countries. However, the extension methodology portion of the curricula and programs of study of many agricultural education institutions is inadequate and in need of review and revision.

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