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## THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF STUDIES ON AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS AND AGRARIAN ISSUES

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**ABSTRACT:** This article contains a theoretical proposal for classifying the agrarian economic theory as a separate school of heterodox economic thought, encompassing more than a dozen research streams. In this sense, it fills a gap in the general economic theory, in which, so far, the agrarian economic thought is not considered a separate school of economics. The study proves that for the development of agrarian economics, it is not necessary to adopt the monistic, reductive, and consolidative approach that characterises mainstream economics. We treat agricultural economics as a pluralistic science, taking into account different viewpoints and research paradigms of development, from industrial to sustainable. Raising the need to integrate agrarian thought, the study points to the designations of the substantive distinctiveness of agricultural economics, including the immobility of the land factor, the price and income specificity of food demand, and the compulsion to consume food. The considerations are supplemented by a conceptualisation of the studied issue concerning the situation in Poland, presented in the form of a case study.

**KEYWORDS:** agricultural economics, agrarian issue, heterodox economics, orthodox economics, conceptualisation Outcomes index

## Introduction

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The richness and diversity of the inquiries of modern economic thought can be the reason for the fascination with economics. This is how Kielczewski (2021) writes about his motives for taking the trouble to write his highly topical and anticipated monograph, and he is right. Kielczewski is the author of a fundamental work on modern economic thought (Kielczewski, 2021). His consideration of the concept of integrated economic theory under conditions of sustainable development, between mainstream and economic heterodoxy, arouses the enthusiasm of readers. This is the case with the present work, which drew inspiration from the need to fill the gap in general economic theory regarding agrarian thought, referring both to the theory of agricultural economics, which takes into account rural areas in addition to agriculture and, within its framework, the agrarian (agricultural) issue, expanded to include the rural issue.

On the wave of this enthusiasm, we present a theoretical proposal (attempt) to classify the theory of agricultural economics as a distinct school of heterodox economic thought encompassing more than a dozen research streams. The proposal assumes the need to identify integrated agricultural economics. By defining this concept, we simultaneously point out the designations of the distinctiveness of this theory, differentiating it from many other heterodox schools of economics, which have so far allowed, as it were, to 'hospitably' allocate the research problems that make up modern agrarian thought in the fields of, for example, institutional, post-Keynesian, ecological, or environmental economics. What happened was that these schools of economic thought tried to consolidate (reduce) the theses presented to such an extent that they were in harmony with monistically conceived mainstream economics. The presented article proves that this is not necessary. The orthodox approach to the problems of agrarian economics often degenerates into schematic, not to say dogmatic, thinking. The school of agrarian economics, on the other hand, should be pluralistic, taking into account different viewpoints and research paradigms, from industrial to sustainable, balanced growth. The determinants of heterodox economic thought are related to its substantive distinctiveness, which is determined, among other things, by the immobility of the land factor as a productive resource in input-output flows, price, and income barriers, with regard to their elasticity, and which, combined with the compulsion to consume food, create an income disparity in agriculture and rural households. Mainstream economics ignores these designations, limiting the diversity of agricultural and rural economics research. Hence, the heterodoxy of economic considerations enriches the theoretical assumptions of this theory. For example, the stock of land and its annuities must not be treated in the same way as labour and capital. In addition, the contemporary achievements of a number of schools and currents of heterodox economics, as well as the findings of other social sciences, can be fully taken into account under the conditions of openness and interdisciplinarity of research.

However, agricultural economics, as a distinct heterodox school of thought, must be internally integrated through multi-stage information processing using a specific research methodology. The search for complexity and its ordering, rather than avoiding the relativity of assessments, is in its praxeological sense. We prove in this article that it is developing in an evolutionary way, constantly expanding the field of substantive reception. This benefits the 'new mainstream' of modern economic thought, accepting the need for interdisciplinary research. Thus, we justify in this paper the need for a heterodox-integrated theory of agricultural economics.

The second part of this study raises the problem of the agrarian issue as a leading object of research on agricultural economic theory. It goes about the evolutionarily expanding space of its field of reception, including the rural issue. The historical approach makes it possible to point out the formation of the civilisation gap between agriculture (and rural areas) and industry and to emphasise the role of technical progress as the causal factor of changes in labour productivity, which exacerbated the disparity of agricultural and farm incomes in rural areas. The presentation of the mechanism of the creation and reproduction of the agrarian issue indicates the economic determinants of these phenomena and the need for rational, well-addressed state interventionism, mitigating the imperfections and unreliability of the market mechanism, which discriminates against agriculture. It contributes to the income deprivation of farmers and their farms, and the drain of the economic surplus generated in agriculture in favour of non-agricultural uses of capital defines not only the economic but also the politico-economic dimension of the agrarian issue. The globalisation of the world economy perpetuates the agrarian issue, further polarising agricultural incomes. It also raises the problem of food self-sufficiency for countries and regions. Expanding its field of reception also brings the 'rural issue' into consideration, which means the social deprivation of rural households relative to urban standards and the protection of rural welfare, the natural environment, and climate.

The considerations of the two parts of the study are supplemented by the third, which is an example of a case study of the conceptualisation of the agrarian issue concerning the situation in Poland. The sequence of the selected problems linked thematically identifies them in the field of reception of the agrarian issue and with the theory of agricultural economics. It also substantively broadens the scope of consideration and multiplies theoretical assumptions. At the same time, it is a contribution to the model of sustainable development of agriculture and rural areas in the optics of modern heterodox economic thought. They are concerned, among other things, with the failure of agricultural income to keep pace with the growth of labour productivity (efficiency) in agriculture and the increasing pressure to create public goods in rural areas threatened by environmental and climate destruction. One of the reasons for this is the functioning mechanism of technological direction in agriculture, which forces further industrial development. Under these conditions, while agricultural incomes are growing, they are

not keeping pace with income growth in non-agricultural sectors. This income disparity is accompanied by the social deprivation of farmers. As a result, agricultural production structures are changing, but space for eco-efficiency measures is also being created. This is because the need for a supply of environmental public goods is emerging. A model of sustainable agricultural and rural development is rationalised. The agrarian issue is evolving to include the reception of new institutional conditions and state interventionism. At the same time, a natural need arises to incorporate environmental public goods, their valuation, and quality measurement into the economic calculus. These circumstances determine the further evolution of the agrarian issue.

The scale of production becomes more important than its intensification. In turn, the change in the paradigm of agricultural development implies a change in the mechanism of influence of state agricultural policy on the allocation of annuities in agriculture and the food economy more broadly. This includes macroeconomic factors, agricultural development strategy and its dilemmas, and state intervention. Adjustments also include farm families and changes in employment in non-agricultural sectors. In an effort to achieve a balance of economic, environmental, and social orders, the need to take into account the full external costs and benefits in the economic calculus towards the compatibility of the microeconomic and social optimum was revealed.

Expanding the field of reception of the agrarian issue stimulates further development of multifunctional agricultural and rural areas, including the production of non-market goods and services that affect the state of the rural environment and the socio-cultural environment in rural areas. The sequence of selected problems in the agrarian issue is an example of expanding its research space. According to the thesis, there are no unimportant problems in this area. The agrarian issue, that is, in a social sense, the rural issue, includes many diverse aspects of the farming process. It assumes a universal character, making an important contribution to the theory of agricultural economics.

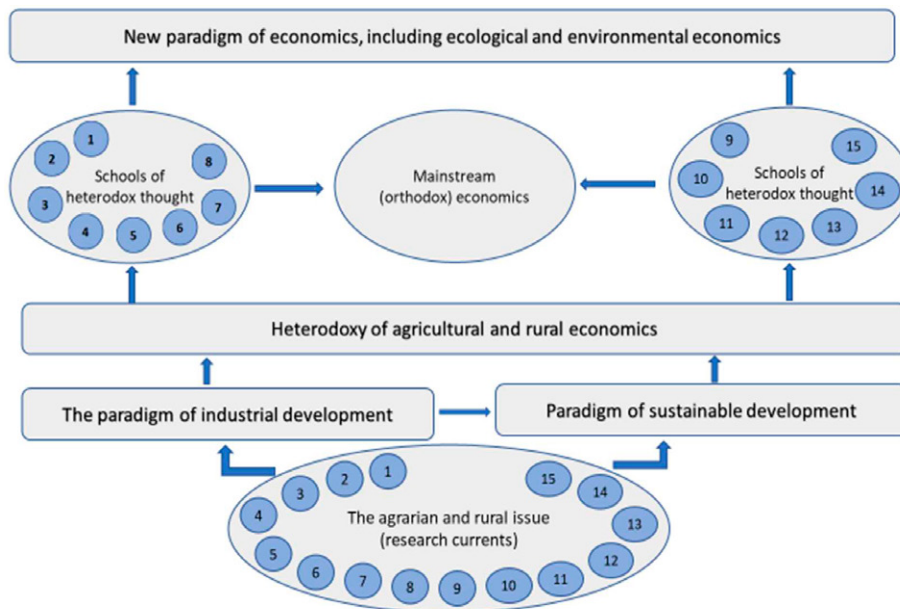
## The need for an integrated theory of agricultural economics

In the following, we assume that agricultural economics is the study of the resources and peculiarities of the flows of factors, including land, labour, and capital in agriculture, in rural areas to their various uses in the national economy and the place and functioning of agricultural and domestic households in rural areas, taking into account issues of environmental well-being and social relations. The dominant research area of agricultural economics understood in this way is the agrarian (agricultural) issue, that is, the rural issue at present, to which we will pay special attention in the study, treating it as a subject of research, constantly expanding the space of the field of reception of the agrarian issue. The main objective of the present discussion is, as mentioned earlier, to attempt to fill the gap in general economic theory that resulted from the lack of recognition of

the distinctiveness of agrarian economic thought as a heterodox theory, whose distinguishing feature among the many schools of thought of this type in economics (cf. Figure 1) is the non-transferability (lumpiness) of land as a factor of production, combined with the compulsion to consume human food as 'homo agricola'. These objective designations of the theory of agricultural economics determine the next concern on demand for food, with low price elasticity and relatively low-income elasticity, and the structural transformation of agriculture and rural areas, which is dependent on invested income. However, owing to the limited mobility of the land factor (allocation), otherwise the impossibility of achieving the optimum in the Pareto sense in various applications of capital in input-output flows (Czyżewski, 2022), they remain in disparity with non-agricultural income. This directly affects the behaviour and expectations of agricultural households (food producers) and rural households, determining their social relations and behaviour towards the closer and further environment, including rural areas. The distinctiveness of agricultural economics justifies addressing the present topic.

An additional purpose of the discussion is to highlight the multiplicity and diversity of schools and research currents in heterodox economics, including agricultural economics. In addition, it is important to discuss the relationship of agricultural economics to mainstream economics and to other schools and currents of heterodox economic thought. We hypothesised that the theory of agricultural economics, supported by the richness and diversity of economic and social thoughts on the agrarian and rural issues manifested in the paradigm of industrial and sustainable development of agriculture and rural areas, is an area of science that escapes neoliberal economic concepts.

Owing to the reductionist nature of the research process, in an effort to consolidate economic theses, mainstream economics is unable to explicate and develop the far-complex economic and social reality of agricultural and rural economics and thus formulate scientific judgments, theorems and theories. Thus, the accusations of some researchers about the pre-theoretical nature of agrarian research, in principle, are unjustified in view of the experience of modern economic science and its emerging new paradigm (Zamad, 2003; Wojtyna, 2009; Borys, 2016), the challenges of economic practice, or changes in the natural environment in rural areas. On the other hand, the heterodoxy of the theoretical considerations of agricultural economics influences its development, enriching the assumptions of this theory, particularly relating to land as a productive resource and the rents and income that flow from it (Czyżewski, 2013, 2017; Czyżewski & Kryszak, 2022). Thus, as long as the factor of land is treated in neoliberal economics, as does the factor of labour or financial capital, to the exclusion of the distinctive designations of agricultural economics, it will develop in this model as a science belonging to a heterodox thought within the framework of various research currents and interdependencies between them (cf. Figure 1), regardless of the assumptions of mainstream economics and its orthodoxy.



**Research currents in heterodox agricultural and rural economics**

- 1 Agriculture and forestry (AI)
- 2 Agricultural markets (AI)
- 3 Bioeconomics (AI)
- 4 Political and historical economics of agriculture and rural areas (AaRI)
- 5 Rural development (AaRI)
- 6 Agricultural and rural social insurance (AaRI)
- 7 Socioeconomics of agriculture and rural areas (AaRI)
- 8 Ruralsociology (AaRI)
- 9 Rural and agricultural demography (AaRI)
- 10 Green economy (AaRI)
- 11 Agricultural and rural ecological economics (AaRI)
- 12 Economics of agricultural and rural space (AaRI)
- 13 Agricultural and rural environmental economics (AaRI)
- 14 Rural urbanization (RI)
- 15 Postmodern economics (RI)

AI – agrarian issue, AaRI – agrarian and rural issue, RI – rural issue

**Selected schools of heterodox thought**

- 1 Institutional economics
- 2 Post-Keynesian economics
- 3 Behavioral economics
- 4 Evolutionary economics
- 5 Historical economics
- 6 Ecological economics
- 7 Environmental economics
- 8 Marxist political economy
- 9 Postmodern economics
- 10 Economics of complex systems
- 11 Feminist economics
- 12 Experimental economics
- 13 Radical economics
- 14 Public choice theory
- 15 Neo-Austrian school

**Figure 1.** Agricultural, rural and rural economics in contemporary economic thought (attempt at classification)

Source: authors' work based on Czaja (2016).

However, the concept of heterodoxy, as understood by the authors, means the acceptance of dissenting views that do not fully conform to the prevailing contemporary doctrine of mainstream economics, usually understood as neoliberal orthodoxy, assuming views that are only right and right-thinking (Czaja, 2016). Disagreeing with such an understanding of modern economics, we have included a scheme situating agricultural economics and the agrarian and rural issues as its leading research currents, belonging to the heterodox school of thought. The literature on the subject makes it possible to distinguish more than a dozen currents that develop the field of reception of this theory, while we have presented an exemplary attempt to conceptualise its theses in the third part of this discussion. In addition to agriculture and forestry, it includes strands of research on agricultural markets, rural development, agricultural and social insurance of rural populations, bio-economics, green economy (Ryszawska, 2013), ecological and environmental economics (Żylicz, 2005), and agricultural and rural spaces.

The hard core of considerations of the agrarian issue, as well as the rural issue, which includes the political and historical economics of agriculture and rural areas, socioeconomics, the sociology of the rural population, and some issues of rural urbanisation and postmodern economics, which recognises that the detection of universal, strict, and non-trivial economic laws, on the basis of which current economic issues could be solved, still remains a future goal (Czerwinski, 1996). Accordingly, it assumes that in the current social and economic reality, no theory of economics can be unequivocally considered mainstream or side-stream, as each theory addresses specific practical economic problems. In this situation, a specific theory is used to solve a specific problem, and the science of economics becomes hybrid, tool-oriented, and pluralistic (Kiełczewski, 2021; Poniatowska-Jaksch & Sobiecki, 2016).

The dozen or so research streams within agricultural economics, distinguished in the diagram, are characterised by the fact that they deal with the study of both agriculture and rural areas in a convention referring to industrial and sustainable paradigms of development (Poskrobko, 2012), in the sense of 'sustainable development', which we consider more accurate. The interactions of economic and social problems studied in this way mostly fall within the field of reception of agrarian issues or agricultural economics more broadly. However, this does not exclude the fact that, to some extent, they are connected with the field of research of other heterodox schools outside agricultural economics, such as the subject of research of institutional (neo-institutional) economics, behavioural economics, post-Keynesian economics, or public choice economics. Thus, various streams and schools of heterodox economic thought influence each other, becoming interdependent, interacting with mainstream economics, and consolidating and reducing their research methods, theorems, and concepts.

At this point, let us ask where the popularity (prevalence?) of heterodox economics over orthodoxy comes from in relation to agriculture and rural areas.

First, it should be pointed out that heterodox economics broadly takes into account the modern achievements of economic and natural sciences, holding to mechanistic dogmas. For example, it notes the distinctiveness of the functioning of the land factor compared with labour and capital. In addition, it uses the findings of other social sciences such as socioeconomics, sociology, and economic psychology to understand economic behaviour, taking an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach. In this approach, economics is no longer limited by what is material. This becomes the result of a broader research strategy (Hardt, 2015). It does not lock itself into a system of abstract models and remains open to real economic problems. It rejects a static, linear, and arbitrary approach to the economy and management (Kiełczewski, 2021), using current analysis and problem-solving approaches. Contrasting this heterodox approach to science, mainstream economics notes the differences. By definition, the latter limits the diversity of economic approaches. It considers them a transitional state related to the formation of a mature science of economics. According to this approach, different schools of economic thought define what to study differently and with what specific tools and axioms. However, in doing so, contradictions arise within the proclaimed theories. Mainstream economists preaching the need to overcome them talk about the need to consolidate claims (Fiedor & Gorynia, 2020), which necessarily leads to their reduction and dramatisation. Economic truths are not discovered but constructed, and regularities are not learned but produced. This implies a reductionist and monistic approach, which assumes only the transitivity of different approaches to economics in an effort to consolidate it (Czerwiński, 1996). However, the price of this consolidation is the aforementioned dramatisation of economics, which involves, as Galbraith (2005) put it, 'the economics of innocent deception'.

In agricultural economics as a science, the prevailing view is that the development of the social sciences, which, after all, includes economics, must involve a move away from simplicity and elegance towards the complication of simplicity to deepen scientific truth in accordance with the maxim, 'Seek complexity and put it in order' (Colander, 2000; Wilkin, 2009; Fiedor, 2016). The complexity and diversity of issues become an asset for agricultural economics, but this requires it to abandon simplistic descriptions of the observed diversity. In addition, the description of facts without an attempt to explain and generalise them and, therefore, without bringing new knowledge to them, cannot be qualified as scientific (Poskrobko, 2016). This is because the creative process of scientific cognition requires the use of a research method that conforms to the canon of scientific procedure (Wojtyna, 2009). The heterodoxy of agricultural economics, present in many research currents expanding the field of reception of agrarian and rural issues, legitimises it as a scientific procedure. However, the question arises whether, and if so, how we understand the need for their integration within agricultural economic theory.



Let us make a general assumption that pluralism of economic thought is a strong point of science, as opposed to orthodoxy, which leads to monism and, consequently, to dogmatism of economic thought. At the same time, we know that the currents of heterodox economics more accurately diagnose the problems of the modern economy as they take into account historical, cultural, social, and ecological contexts and so forth (Kiełczewski, 2021). They usually present a narrative, multi-paradigmatic, non-dimensional approach without monopolising a particular economic theory (Fiedor, 2019). This is in contrast to the position of mainstream economists, whose research results are supposed to be strict and precise (Coldwell, 2001), avoiding uncertainty and relativity of assessments, such as in sociological research (Ratajczak, 2014). Agricultural and rural economics do not assume such designations. Its various streams form research subsystems, integrating it from within and through the identification of common determinants of development, which are often factors that are not directly observable but explain the stock of variation in the common observation matrix under study.

The many theorems and interdependencies formulated and functioning form an internally interconnected system, which is supposed to function in such a way as to effectively solve the economic and social problems encountered in the development of agriculture and rural areas. Such integration of the theory of agricultural economics makes it possible to explain the essence of the economic processes more fully under study, more accurately forecast them, and more realistically formulate application postulates. Thus, the theory understood in this way provides diverse economic information on agrarian and rural issues, and the adopted method of research makes it possible to transform this information into scientific, economic knowledge, expanding the field of reception of the theory under discussion. Let us emphasise that arriving at such an integrated theory is a multi-stage process. First, it requires the accumulation of various, unstructured, often contradictory economic and social information within a certain scope that is factual, temporal, and spatial and then the adoption of a specific methodology and research methodology, organising them in a mutually compatible manner, to present an ordered, non-contradictory scientific knowledge as a result. However, a prerequisite for scientificness is the inclusion of falsifiable (shrugged-off) claims obtained through broken positive and negative theses in the research process. The theory of agricultural and rural economics takes into account the fact that, like any scientific theory, it is a simplification of economic reality and should be placed in a broader context that complements it, makes it credible, and allows it to be used applicationally. The research process simultaneously assumes a dynamic and pluralistic character (Detel, 1995).

The theoretical proposal presented earlier to classify agricultural economic theory as a separate heterodox school of economic thought, encompassing more than a dozen research currents, cannot be reduced to either positive or normative economics, according to Fiedor (Hausman, 1992; Fiedor, 2019). Both are

equal. On the other hand, it benefits the 'new mainstream' of economic thought, accepting the concept of studying various streams of heterodox economics, such as agricultural economics alongside ecological and environmental economics. In conclusion, let us emphasise that the theory of agricultural and rural economics encompasses a diverse, multifaceted, multi-faceted science. It is developing in an evolutionary way, expanding the field of methodological and substantive reception, as will be discussed below.

## Agrarian issues as a subject of agricultural economic theory: The space of the field of reception

Let us ask at the outset what determines the viability of any economic theory. First, it is so that those who verify it empirically can make rational use of the views of others, enriching them accordingly. Second, it is so when it is expanded with new, non-contradictory assumptions, stimulating its dissemination in the direction of universality so as not to soften its core, dilute its rationality, or weaken the eloquence of its content. The agrarian issue as an object of theoretical research is a 'soft' (heterodox) construct. This means that it does not find a clear, quantifiable solution. In this sense, it is like the number, with an infinite and ambiguously defined relation with the diameter of a circle to its circle. Nevertheless, it has accompanied the development of agriculture since the dawn of time. Enriched with new assumptions and research areas (symptoms), it evolves, but its essence remains the same. It is the developmental disparity between agriculture and rural areas, expressed primarily by the depreciation of agricultural incomes in relation to non-agricultural uses of capital, mainly in industry and services and, consequently, in the urbanisation of cities and other non-agricultural centres. The living conditions of the population, as measured by income (generated and distributed) and other measurable parameters, stimulate, to a greater extent than in agriculture and rural areas, the development of civilisation and the convenience of life associated with it. It is important that when studying the agrarian issue, we talk about the relationship of its observed manifestations in agriculture and rural areas to the essence of the phenomenon and thus to the development determined by changes in the environment in pursuit of sustainable development. Hence, we should definitely agree with Ludkiewicz (1932), who claimed that in each period, different issues make up the content of the agrarian issue. These issues broaden the theory of agricultural economics, enriching its manifestations and the assumptions made. It is clear that there was a beginning of this somewhere so that the seed could germinate in a way that determines the inevitability of the development of the agrarian issue.

Let us examine the historical vitality of this discourse, as written by many researchers today, including Bernstein (2009), Czyżewski and Matuszczak (2011, 2022), Czyżewski and Kryszak (2021), Czyżewski and Kułyk (2015), Czyżewski

(2017), Kowalczyk (2021), Kowalczyk and Sobiecki (2021), Matuszczak (2020), Wilkin (1986), and Zegar (2010, 2018). Let us leave aside the ancient times, periods of slavery, or feudal relations, when the agrarian issue also occurred, manifesting itself in income, property, and system-determined disparities (Leszczyński, 2020). In modern economics, starting in the first half of the 19th century, during the First Industrial Revolution, expanding industries pumped labour out of rural areas and agriculture, as urban growth required agricultural raw materials. The market economy was developing, and the relations of production in agriculture and rural areas were changing, but the development of the commodity-money economy resulted in the emergence of a development gap between agriculture and industry (Runowicz, 1984). The initial accumulation of capital accelerated, but mainly outside agriculture; nevertheless, it also affected rural areas through various routes, albeit far less actively (Kowalczyk & Sobiecki, 2021). The civilisation gap between agriculture and industry was increasing. As a result, technical and social progress was spreading, mainly outside agriculture. This revealed the first manifestation of the modern agrarian issue, and various attempts to solve it perpetuated it rather than resolved it, such as the socialisation of agriculture, the socialisation of land, the proletarianisation of peasants, or the development of family farms and peasant families (Chayanov, 1966; Kautsky, 1958; Krzywicki, 1903; Marks, 1959). However, these measures had some effect because it was recognised that technical progress was the driving factor behind changes in agricultural production, mediated by new tools and methods of cultivating the land. It was thus assumed that as a result of the increase in crop and livestock productivity, there would be an increase in the supply of food and, thus, in agricultural income, which would offset, at least in part, the growing civilisation gap between agriculture and industry and services. This gap widens even more because of a decline in the demand for agricultural labour due to, among other things, advances in transportation and, consequently, the concentration of farm areas and further changes in production methods. Unfortunately, as the economic histories of rural areas and agriculture have shown, more was produced but sold more cheaply, and the relatively increasing income from agriculture did not keep pace with the income and standard of living outside agriculture. The agrarian issue remains alive and timeless (Kowalczyk, 2021).

Nevertheless, the discussion became more in-depth and broad by including the relationship of land ownership, the relationship of agriculture to industry and the national economy, the adequacy of social solutions, and the role of the market and capital. At a higher stage of perception, new solutions were sought, which caught the attention of the most enlightened minds of the era, including the Nobel laureates of the Bank of Sweden. Thus, Lewis (1954) broadened the field of reception of the agrarian issue, adopting the claim that its basis is the disproportion in the dynamics of development of industry and agriculture (not just the difference in the level of development). He considered this to be the primary factor that is increasing the income disparity between agricultural and

industrial employment. As a result, the overcrowded, impoverished rural areas were unable to secure parity in farmers' incomes, despite the fact that demand for food was increasing owing to urban development, but the prices were not necessarily increasing to a similar extent. Under these conditions, the appropriation of the surplus produced in agriculture by the owners of capital, which are multinational corporations at present, was increasing. The income of the owners of capital is increased not only by capturing land or absolute rents from agricultural production but also by the discriminatory distribution of profits to farmers through the dilation of the price scissors of items sold and purchased or differences in agricultural labour productivity. Thus, the suggestion that only intervention from outside (outside the market) makes it possible to level these disparities becomes obvious.

On the other hand, the second Nobel laureate, Schultz (1964), known for his thesis that agriculture as an economic activity is productive but poor, emphasised the rationality of the peasant economy and the possibility of modernisation and adaptation to new conditions, with equal treatment of knowledge and capital. Again, indications of state interventionism in innovation and pro-development activities as a path for the growth of capital stock are justified. In turn, the third Nobel laureate, Stiglitz (1987), took for granted the existence of the agrarian issue, accepting its mechanism and manifestations as a consequence of the disparity in the development of agriculture and industry and in the income received. However, he broadened the consideration to include the question, 'What kind of interventionism exists towards agriculture?' He created a new theoretical premise, claiming that the imperfection and unreliability of the market mechanism are the cause of economic disparities in agriculture. He concluded that the market mechanism discriminates against agriculture (in Polish literature, such a thesis was first made by Woś (2004)). He also concluded that only well-addressed state interventionism can alleviate the agrarian issue. He mentioned insurance in agriculture, availability of credit, stimulation of large infrastructure investments, availability of full information, and proper income redistribution.

Studies by other authors have primarily emphasised the political and systemic dimensions of the agrarian issue, pointing to the need to align labour resources in agriculture with the potential of farmland, the necessity of the state's accumulation contribution to the financing of agriculture-related infrastructure, or the drain of the economic surplus generated in agriculture in favour of non-agricultural uses of capital (Chołaj, 1966; Czyżewski, 2007; Czyżewski, 2013; Ignar, 1968; Pohorille, 1966; Runowicz, 1979; Strużek, 1968; Wilkin, 1995; Woś, 1979; Woś & Zegar, 1983, 2002). It was this discourse that linked the agrarian issue to the deep systemic deprivation of agriculture and found the antidote to this in a thoroughly addressed state interventionism. For the theory of agricultural economics, this means further expansion of the field of its reception. In

turn, the globalisation of the world economy means a further enrichment of this theory (Kowalczyk & Sobiecki, 2021).

There is a growing maladjustment of agriculture to the general development trends of the world economy, as a result of which the state's partner in solving the agrarian issue is changing. The national capitalist is being replaced by a global corporation. On the one hand, this means a certain unification of the problem at hand, but on the other hand, it means a sharpening of national and regional manifestations of the problem. Nevertheless, the novelty of the research has become an allocative openness in agricultural activity. In practice, this means that it is possible to move agricultural production from less efficient to better-managed places, which entails the possibility of acquiring land anywhere in the world. Globalisation leads to unlimited competitiveness of farms, working, after all, in different economic, spatial, and social conditions. Moreover, there is a subordination of producers of agricultural raw materials to transnational processing corporations, not only in the food economy. The globalisation of agriculture also frees (expands) agricultural markets, which in practice means an increase in price competitiveness and subordination to corporations but not in the incomes of primary producers. On the contrary, these incomes will relatively decrease, and the industrialisation of manufacturing processes violates the welfare of the natural environment (Czyżewski & Matuszczak, 2016). Globalisation is changing attitudes towards the marginal conditions of agricultural production, as a result of which some are no longer competitive. On the other hand, the effects of the aforementioned immobility of the land factor, that is, its lack of portability, are drastically revealed. While capital flows freely from one use to a more efficient one, as does the labour factor, land treated as a resource does not. At most, the rents from its use (land and absolute), profits from income distribution, and land trade flow, but land allocation remains unchanged (Czyżewski & Grzelak, 2012). This is because agricultural activity is determined by the return on the capital put out and not by the imperative of production, abstracting here from the non-productive functions of agriculture. Thus, the globalisation of agriculture as a microeconomic process forces the reduction of production costs without recognising the non-economic functions of agriculture. This includes a reduction in labour costs, which leads to unemployment, thus changing the added value produced and its distribution. Competitive entities get richer, and weaker ones drop out or are marginalised. Incomes are polarised by subject, both nationally and internationally, which widens the field of reception of the agrarian issue.

Another aspect worth raising is the problem of food self-sufficiency of a region, country, or continent. A secondary issue is where food is produced under globalisation. A country may not produce food as long as it can afford to buy it. However, it can develop a certain branch specialisation, win distance from its competitors, and finance the expenses necessary to buy the missing food by selling the effects of this specialisation and improving the income parity of its producer-farmers.

Considering the multifaceted nature of the agrarian issue, it is worth asking where its core lies. In the model of the sustainable, balanced development of agriculture and rural areas, we are dealing with the need to take into account the autonomously occurring barriers. On the other hand, let us reiterate that land as a factor of production (a resource) is immobile in the sense of input-output flows, which results in relative discrimination of agriculture against the market environment under conditions of social compulsion to consume food. How, then, do we solve the dilemma of functioning barriers and constraints on agricultural production related to land as a factor of production? First, the agrarian issue, the subject of research in agricultural economics, cannot be detached from it. Second, the problem appears to be timeless; it has been, is, and will be in the future. Third, it is necessary to launch a rational state interventionism that is deliberately well addressed, which can mean a rational scale of financial support and its appropriate adjustments in time and space and consistent control. This makes it possible, in part, to reduce the negative effects of the agrarian issue, particularly the income disparity of farmers and the feeling of social deprivation.

In conclusion, we believe that the agrarian issue is multidimensional and timeless. In this sense, it expands the field of theoretical discourse and is an open option. The transformation of social relations, contained in its evolution, does not change the essence of this problem because it is permanently determined by the aforementioned designations. These circumstances fundamentally determine production relations in agriculture, production, distribution, and management of food. On the other hand, it is difficult to hope that the process of draining the surplus produced in agriculture to non-agricultural branches of the economy will end and that the market direction in European agriculture, which stimulates its industrialisation, will fully cease to operate. The need to protect the environment and climate will probably reduce the negative effects of this direction but will not completely rule them out. The hope is the increasingly effective interventionism of the state (including the EU) and the process of marketisation of public goods as a novelty in alleviating the agrarian issue (Hardt, 2015). This can improve the incomes of farmers and rural inhabitants, reducing disparity in relation to non-agricultural activities.

## An attempt to conceptualise the agrarian issue in Poland: Sequence of the selected problems as a case study

The practice of researching the agrarian issue deals with secular processes occurring in the agricultural sector worldwide. The mainstream of many research projects that have been conducted makes it possible to identify the determinants of agricultural productivity growth, which are most often investments in new technologies that increase the scale of production of agricultural products, which does not provide the expected increase in income (Czyżewski, 2017). The attempt

to conceptualise the agrarian issue under these conditions requires the identification of more important problems, which, on the one hand, would expand its field of reception and, on the other hand, multiply theoretical assumptions and signify the contribution to the model of sustainable development of agriculture and rural areas in modern research optics (Czyżewski & Kułyk, 2016). We indicate the sequence of selected problems, integrated with each other and thematically related, concerning Poland as presented in publications as follows:

1. The contemporary conditions of agricultural transformation are characterised by, on the one hand, a decrease in the number of farms and labour inputs and, on the other hand, an increase in production potential, production itself, and the productivity of land and labour on these farms. This is because the price elasticity of demand for food (mainly agricultural commodities) is low, and price flexibility (considered as the ratio of price growth to output growth) is high, usually greater than 1 (Tomek & Robinson, 2001). Hence, income from marginal production is declining, which means that producers are faced with the need to use increasingly efficient technologies (Kusz, 2012). This failure of agricultural incomes to keep pace with productivity (labour productivity) growth broadens the impact of the agrarian issue towards increasing pressure on the creation of public goods, threatened by environmental and climate destruction and by the industrial development of agricultural production.
2. The income impulse within the industrial paradigm of agricultural development is reaching its limits. The technological treadmill (Cochrane, 1958; Lewins & Cochrane, 1996) is making itself known, demonstrating that income growth through increased productivity and scale of production produces marginal, diminishing effects. This is described by the following sequence of events: an increase in production (supply over demand) means a reduction in prices, which in turn forces changes in production technology, increasing labour productivity, but mainly through intensification, concentration of resources, and specialisation. This causes another increase in supply (overproduction) and an iteration of the aforementioned sequence of events (Czyżewski, 2017).
3. This is not accompanied by changes in agricultural income. In absolute terms, they are growing, but they are not keeping pace with incomes in non-agricultural sectors, which are growing faster. Thus, the disparity of these incomes persists, albeit to a decreasing degree, accompanied by the social deprivation of farmers. This situation creates a strong stimulation for changes in agricultural structures, including agrarian, employment, and production, having a broad impact on the reception field of the agrarian issue.
4. The disproportion in the growth dynamics of agricultural income and labour productivity in relation to non-agricultural activities stimulates efforts to increase the income of agricultural producers and their eco-efficiency by creating the need to increase the supply of environmental public goods, which



are an opportunity to improve the livelihoods of agricultural and domestic households in rural areas. At the same time, growing public resistance has emerged because of the need to reduce the pressure of agriculture on the natural environment, which, in essence, means a paradigm shift in agricultural development from industrial intensification to agroecological intensification. There are new implications for the practice of sustainably balanced agricultural development (Czyżewski & Kułyk, 2016). The narrative is also changing with regard to the spread of such a model of agricultural development, which would improve the eco-efficiency of farms and the relationship between agricultural and non-agricultural incomes. In this view, the agrarian issue is evolving to include the field of reception of new institutional conditions and state interventionism, financially supporting the incomes of farmers and, more broadly, households in rural areas.

5. The evaluation of environmental public goods towards their incorporation in the economic calculation requires their valuation (at least for some of them) and measurement of quality, which intensifies the impact of this circumstance on the evolution of the agrarian issue under the conditions of acceptance of the model of sustainable development of agriculture and rural areas, in which the scale of production rather than its intensification (as it was before), comes to the fore. This is accompanied by a parallel increase in the production potential of farms, including land concentration. Also accelerating is the change in agricultural production structures, especially the area structure of farms.
6. The change in the paradigm of agricultural development entails a change in the mechanism of influence of state agricultural policy on the allocation of annuities in agriculture and the food economy, more broadly taking into account the following:
  - The impact of macroeconomic factors on the financial support of agriculture and rural areas. The economic and social disparities of rural farms are reduced mainly through transfers of funds from the National Agricultural Budget and the budget of European funds, mainly under the Common Agricultural Policy and the EU Cohesion Policy (Czyżewski et al., 2022a),
  - changes in the conditionality of the long-term strategy of agricultural development with regard to food, environmental, and economic security (Zegar, 2021),
  - the long-term strategy of changing the paradigm of agricultural and rural development must also take into account the dilemmas of agricultural production (Maciejczak, 2018) and its conversion, appropriate adjustments of the agricultural system (Gorlach, 2001), and new areas of state intervention (Felber, 2014) and its role in the process of steering the agricultural and food economy (Zegar, 1981).



7. The paradigm shift in agriculture to a more pro-environmental one (Maciejczak, 2018) must be accompanied by adjustments in its environment concerning such things as the demand for labour leaving agriculture and the accompanying increase in wages in non-agricultural sectors. Farming families are becoming smaller, which entails demographic and cultural changes, including regarding the successors of family farm managers.
8. Transformation of the agricultural development model under the conditions of the changing paradigm of industrial development requires striving to balance the economic, environmental, and social orders (Matuszczak, 2009). The sustainable, balanced agriculture model should combine the requirements of competitiveness and modernity of farming with social and local interests (Czyżewski & Kryszak, 2021). Owing to the internal integration of variables in the model, it is important to require the inclusion of full externalities in the cost-benefit account so that there is full compliance with the microeconomic and social optimum.
9. Expanding the field of reception of the agrarian issue under the conditions of a sustainable development model of agricultural and rural development stimulates the further development of multifunctional agriculture, which will include non-market goods in addition to material and market products (Hardt, 2015). These include goods and services that are important because of their impacts on the states of the natural and socio-cultural environments. Thus, it is necessary to account for negative and positive externalities and the need to internalise costs, that is, negative according to the 'polluter pays' principle (Zegar, 2021) and positive, responding to the social demand for public goods, among others, which is increasingly rewarded by transfers of public funds, a significant component of agricultural income (Matuszczak, 2020).
10. The exemplary sequence of problems of the agrarian issue exemplifies the expansion of its research space, significantly enriching the theory of agricultural economics. According to the principle of the ultimate rationale, or 'Nihil est sine ratione', by Leibniz (1668), 'nothing is without reason' (Antognazza, 2018). This authorises the thesis that there are no unimportant problems in the field under discussion. As can be observed from the sequence of problems presented, the agrarian and contemporary rural issues include many micro- and macro-economic and social aspects of economic processes, which determines their vitality in the economic theory.

## Summary

Among the most common and widely discussed topics in economics by many researchers are those relating to various models of economic development and discussions regarding the proportion of market and state participation. They

also include the topic of the agrarian issue, of which, despite having been discussed for at least 150 years, a clear, unambiguous view is still lacking (Kowalczyk & Sobiecki, 2021). This is because, among other reasons, the place of this problem in economic theory, or more broadly in the history of economic thought, is not fully defined, despite the fact that research on this topic has been conducted by many distinguished researchers, such as Woś (1979, 2004), Wilkin (1986), Zegar (2010, 2018), Kowalczyk and Sobiecki (2021). In the present study, we tried to partially fill this gap, which, if considered a successful attempt, will allow many agricultural economists and economic practitioners to find an answer to the question of the subjectivity of this problem. After all, we have proven that agricultural economics is a heterodox science; it is concerned with rural areas in addition to agriculture. However, there is a lack of premises and designations to classify it as orthodox mainstream economics. Instead, it is defined by distinctions that allow it to be considered as a separate heterodox school of economic thought, in addition to the dozen or so schools of this type operating today.

Representing various currents of research, its inquiries are located in two paradigms of development: industrial and sustainable. It is important at this point to identify the common interactions of research currents with schools and 'mainstream' economics. Research currents related in kind and methodology to the agrarian issue influence each other. The research results relate to both the matrix of observation of characteristics in the industrial development paradigm and the sustainable development paradigm, with the presence of the latter being increasingly marked in agricultural economic theory. It is interesting that the heterodoxy of agricultural economics, which also applies to rural areas, also influences other schools of heterodox thought, creating a new paradigm of general yet heterodox economics, including ecological and environmental economics.

On the other hand, the theoretical relevance of mainstream economics is declining because of the aforementioned monistic and reductive approach to modern economic problems, characterised by the dogmatism of theses and their excessive consolidation in accordance with the orthodoxy of mainstream research. We discuss all these when presenting the need for an integrated theory of agricultural economics in science, including the agrarian issue that fills it and the contemporary one extended to the rural issue. We recognise these research areas as increasing the space of the field of reception of the agrarian issue, accompanying the multiplication of its theoretical assumptions and the heterodoxy of results.

The discussion is crowned with an attempt to conceptualise the agrarian issue in Poland through a sequence, as reported by researchers, of selected economic and social problems, treated here as a case study. By this means, we also wanted to emphasise the universal character of the theory under discussion as a subject of research, which is part of the contemporary heterodox thought of agri-

cultural economics, rich in various research currents. It also existed in the past and still functions today and is still alive in a holistic interpretation. It applies inquiries complementary to other heterodox schools of economic thought using different economic paradigms. In this way, it contributes to the construction of the new mainstream of contemporary economic thought, in line with its need for interdisciplinarity (Gorynia, 2016, 2021). However, it is in opposition to some of the claims of neoclassical economics. It takes into account, for example, the complexity and limited predictability of management processes in agriculture, highly characterised by uncertainty and limited risk management, as well as a particular understanding of the relationship between the micro- and macro-economic spheres. For example, it takes into account the fact that optimisation at the micro-scale does not always lead to one at the macro scale. On the other hand, controversy is aroused by the ways in which it can be solved or, more accurately, mitigated. This is evident in many of the conclusions of empirical studies (Kowalczyk & Sobiecki, 2021), which, however, is the subject of separate considerations. As long as agriculture produces food and people depend on it, the agrarian issue understood both in the strict and large sense, will continue to function as a universal economic and social phenomenon and the main subject of research in agricultural economic theory.

### The contribution of the authors

Conception, A.CZ. and A.M.; literature review, A.CZ. and A.M.; case study, A.CZ., editing, A.M.; conclusions, A.CZ. and A.M.

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## O TEORETYCZNYM ASPEKTCIE BADAŃ NAD EKONOMIĄ ROLNĄ I KWESTIĄ AGRARNĄ

**STRESZCZENIE:** Artykuł zawiera propozycję teoretyczną, dotyczącą próby klasyfikacji teorii ekonomii rolnej, jako odrębnej szkoły heterodoksyjnej myśli ekonomicznej, obejmującej kilkanaście nurtów badawczych. W tym sensie wypełnia lukę w ogólnej teorii ekonomii, w której dotychczas agrarna myśl ekonomiczna nie była traktowana jako odrębna szkoła ekonomii. Opracowanie dowodzi, że dla rozwoju ekonomii agrarnej nie jest konieczne przyjęcie monistycznego, redukcyjnego i konsolidacyjnego podejścia, które charakteryzuje ekonomię głównego nurtu. Traktujemy ekonomikę rolnictwa jako naukę pluralistyczną, uwzględniającą różne punkty widzenia i paradygmaty badawcze rozwoju, od przemysłowego po zrównoważony. Podnosząc potrzebę integracji myśli agrarnej, w opracowaniu wskazujemy na wyznaczniki merytorycznej odrębności ekonomiki rolnictwa, w tym na niemobilność czynnika ziemi, cenową i dochodową specyfikę popytu na żywność oraz przymus konsumpcji żywności. Rozważania uzupełnia konceptualizacja badanego zagadnienia dotycząca sytuacji w Polsce, przedstawiona w formie studium przypadku.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** ekonomia rolnictwa, kwestia agrarna, ekonomia heterodoksyjna, ekonomia ortodoksyjna, konceptualizacja