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CHANGES IN AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY IN OPINION OF FARMERS FROM THE REGION OF SIEDLCE

ZMIANY W DORADZTWIE ROLNICZYM W OPINII ROLNIKÓW REGIONU SIEDLECKIEGO

Key words: advisory, consulting, agricultural farm, changes

Słowa kluczowe: doradztwo, gospodarstwo rolne, zmiana

Abstract. The aim of the study was to present changes taking place in agricultural advisory in opinion of Siedlce region farmers. On the basis of the results of the survey conducted in the eastern part of Mazovian voivodeship in Siedlce region the farmers were claimed to notice the changes taking place in agricultural advisory (78.3%) and to assess them positively (53.9%). The farmers point mainly fast adjustment to the changing conditions – 52.6%, service improvement – 27.8% as well as having of the latest information and knowledge – 19.6%. Lack of changes is observed by 21.7% of the respondents who claim that it concerns mainly the state advisory. Farmers are mostly interested in obtaining detailed information about the benefits associated with the accession of Poland to the European Union – 73.3%. A lot of attention is also focused on new technology and technical equipment of farms – 57.8%. The other needs in service connected with marketing advisory, entrepreneurship or economic and organizational advisory attract minor interest.

Introduction

Nowadays organizations operate in an environment that is a multi-element system characterized by a high degree of complexity, instability and unpredictability. In order to survive on the market and adjust to the changes taking place in the surrounding and stimulate these changes in relatively active way, companies must search for new research capabilities, ideas and concepts of management. Unsteadiness of the environment and first of all target on more and more demanding clients enforces the organizations to look for innovative solutions in structural, organizational and procedural spheres. The solutions that will aim for an increase of the flexibility of a company to offset the dissonance between the company and a turbulent surrounding. In such a situation business operating on the market should be characterized by speed and intelligence to meet the increasingly sophisticated demands. [Cisek, Domańska-Szaruga 2007].

Modern economies are based largely on knowledge. They base on the production, distribution and use of knowledge, which is one of the basic resources of an organization, institution or company. In the new reality competitiveness determines not only the economic potential of the organization, as its ability to rapid change. The organization should use the changes in the environment as an opportunity affording opportunities for development.

Every organization needs the interaction with the environment to survive. In recent decades, changes in the environment and their dynamics have become very extensive and increasingly affected the operation of the institution. Each factor, regardless of whether located inside or outside the company can become a force for change [Niewęglowski, Niewęglowska 2009].

Advice to farmers on behalf of the State in accordance with the law on agricultural advisory units provide advisory centers. In recent years, also commercial advice has become more and more significant. It is presented mainly by private companies. Such counseling is also provided more and more by commercial companies which deal with the distribution of agricultural machinery, feed, chemicals or fertilizer. Their advice is mainly focused on issues concerning the industry, they are involved in. Although, more often it happens that they provide other services such as those associated with the filling of applications for EU subsidies, etc.

In the area of Mazowiecki voivodeship institution that has in its task, providing consultancy services to farmers are Mazowiecki Agricultural Advisory Centre in Warsaw (MODR). MODR is a local provincial legal entity operating under the Law of 22nd October 2004 on the agricultural advisory units (Journal of Laws No 251, item in 2507, as amended) and the Statute conferred by the Parliament of Mazovia, to which it is subjected from 1st August 2009 [Nowogródzka, Niewęglowski 2011].

MODR advisory activity aims mainly for improving the competitiveness of Polish agricultural sector, improving working and living conditions in the Polish countryside, and improving the professional qualifications of people in rural areas Mazovia province. Lines of action of Mazowiecki Agricultural Advisory arise from the strategy of Mazovia development, programs of agricultural and rural areas development and the current needs and expectations of the rural community. In carrying out the tasks of Mazowiecki Agricultural Advisory Centre collaborates, among others, with the institutions of government and local administration, farmers' organizations, science and research centers, schools and educational institutions [Niewęglowski 2011].

Dynamic changes related to systemic and socio-economic transformations, affecting the level of agricultural development causes the need to adapt agricultural advisory to the current needs. These changes result in the evolution of advice centers customers' needs. This implies a transformation of the organization, scope and financing of agricultural advisory services. Given the dynamic changes of the food economy, centers specialized in agricultural advisory are inspired to adapt the scope of their activities to the changing needs of farmers.

The aim of this study was to analyze changes in the advisory in opinion of farmers in the region of Siedlce. Simultaneously, attention was drawn to determine the preferences and expectations in the subject area of counseling on farms.

Materials and methods

Ambitious objective of the work was fulfilled on the basis of surveys conducted in 2011, which were provided among agricultural producers from the region of Siedlce. The area covered districts of Siedlce, Łosice, Sokółów, Węgrów, Mińsk and Garwolin in Mazowieckie voivodeship. The study sample included 180 households which were selected by simple random sampling. The analyzed farms are located in a typically agricultural region with low, medium, and large area. In this area advisory services for farmers is provided by MODR in Warsaw Siedlce branch and private entities.

The study includes current expectations in the farm advisory, its assessment and the changes. Attention was drawn to the tasks set for the counselling and the expected forms of assistance from the advisory were indicated. In the studies it was used the method of direct interview conducted on the basis of a questionnaire with closed questions and the possibility of multiple choice.

The results

Socio-political changes in 1990s and Polish integration with the European Union have brought big changes in agriculture. They also increased the demand for modern knowledge. According to research conducted in the farms of the region of Siedlce, farmers most often seek for the sources of professional information in the technical magazines, on the internet and television – 87.8%. With regard to the professional information 46.1% of the respondents sought for help in the counseling centers (public and private). In another position there were neighbours – 28.9% and the knowledge gained at school (secondary schools, universities) – 12.8%. A large share of the responses received the information passed on from generation to generation – 32.8%. However, this result when it comes to obtaining new knowledge and information it is difficult to interpret. Many respondents indicated that information obtained in the press, on television and the internet had inspired them to look for detailed information on specific topics in other places.

Among the studied population any contact with the state agricultural advisory was declared by almost 81.1% of respondents (146 people). While the continued cooperation and the use of professional help is declared only by 27.2% (49 people). Small farms to 5 ha and large over 30 ha generally do not use the state advisory services. Small farms producing for their own needs rarely or never use the services and the big ones use most of all the advice offered by commercial companies, providing the farmer with some goods or technology they need for production. The services provided by private consulting firms were used by more than 21.1% of all respondents. The main recipients of services provided by MODR are medium-sized farms.

Farmers are mostly interested in consulting, which results from Polish accession to the EU – over 73.3% – as well as technological and engineering one – 57.8%. Other needs for services relating to marketing, entrepreneurship or economic and organization advisory amounted altogether to – 51.6% (Tab. 1). The greatest interest in information related to the Polish accession to the European Union is due to the potential benefits to agricultural producers for raising money from EU funds. The only needs mentioned by the respondents are the material factors of progress. They shows no interest in factors non-material, such as science or agricultural education.

Assessment of the professional background of farm advisory staff to work is varied. Assessing a group of employees of state advisory center, respondents reported that 29.4% of advisors have appro-

appropriate knowledge and skills for this purpose. More than 46.1% provides services on a satisfactory level, and the remaining 24.5% do not have sufficient knowledge to work on the occupied post. Such a poor assessment of consultants work is a result of many factors. Undeniably wages is one of them. Low salary paid in the state advisory makes the best counselors go to other institutions or fertilizer, feed or genetic commercial companies which are looking for people with knowledge of the agricultural sector to distribute their products and technology among farmers. The assessment of private firms' employees is much higher. At this point the respondents in more than 75.6% claim that the counselors are well prepared, and the remaining 24.4% fulfill their duties properly.

As the most desired forms of assistance the respondents listed personal advice – 79.4%, and training courses – 76.7%. More than 32.2% of farmers also mentioned the brochures and flyers as an expected form of assistance from advisors (table 2). Strong interest was pointed to the agricultural fair – 28.3%. It is probably effected by the fair organized in Siedlce by Mazowiecki Agricultural Advisory Centre that goes by the name of International Days of Agricultural Consultancy that every year gathers hundreds of exhibitors from the agricultural sector. This exhibition is very popular and attracts farmers not only from the region of Siedlce, but from the rest of the province of Mazovia, Lublin and Podlasie as well. It is the largest agricultural exhibition in the Polish eastern wall, which gathers 40-50 thousand visitors every year. Other responses were a smaller percentage of responses provided.

Changes in agriculture are made through an organized activity aiming to provide aid to farmers in the application of the achievements of science, technology and experience in their farms as well as in the sphere of the countryside social life. These changes largely depend on the characteristics of people who are supposed to promote them (table 3).

Making changes and bringing progress to agricultural producers in the opinion of the respondents require

Table 1. The need for agricultural advisory on the basis of Siedlce region

Tabela 1. Potrzeby w zakresie doradztwa rolniczego na przykładzie regionu siedleckiego

Specification/ Wyszczególnienie	Number of responses/Liczba odpowiedzi	Structure/Struktura [%]
Associated with accession to the EU/ Związane z przystąpieniem do UE	132	73.3
Engineering and technical/ Technologiczna i techniczna	104	57.8
Economic and organizational/ Ekonomiczno-organizacyjna	47	26.1
Non-agricultural entrepreneurship/ Przedsiębiorczość pozarolnicza	29	16.1
Marketing/Marketingowa	17	9.4

Source: own study

Źródło: opracowanie własne

Table 2. Forms of assistance expected by agricultural producers on the example of Siedlce region

Tabela 2. Oczekiwane przez producentów rolnych formy pomocy na przykładzie regionu siedleckiego

Specification/ Wyszczególnienie	Number of responses/Liczba odpowiedzi	Structure/Struktura [%]
Individual advisory/ Porady indywidualne	143	79.4
Training courses/Kursy i szkolenia	138	76.7
Brochures and leaflets/ Broszury i ulotki	58	32.2
Agricultural fairs/Targi rolnicze	51	28.3
Specialized exhibitions/ Wystawy specjalistyczne	29	16.1
Professional literature/ Literatura fachowa	16	8.9

Source: own study

Źródło: opracowanie własne

Table 3. Qualities of advisors crucial in the possibility of promoting progress in agriculture on the example of Siedlce region

Tabela 3. Cechy doradcy decydujące o możliwości upowszechniania postępu w rolnictwie na przykładzie regionu siedleckiego

Specification/ Wyszczególnienie	Number of responses/Liczba odpowiedzi	Structure/Struktura [%]
Advisor's effectiveness (of advice)/ Skuteczność doradcy (jego porady)	167	92.8
Practical knowledge of advisor/ Praktyczna wiedza doradcy	154	85.6
Advisor's openness on cooperation/ Otwartość doradcy na współpracę	83	46.1
Availability of advisor/ Dyspozycyjność doradcy	76	42.2
Theoretical knowledge of advisor/ Teoretyczna wiedza doradcy	38	21.1

Source: own study

Źródło: opracowanie własne

Table 4. Kinds of agricultural progress which the respondents are interested in Siedlce region*Tabela 4. Rodzaje postępu w rolnictwie jakim zainteresowani są ankietowani regionu siedleckiego*

Specification/ Wyszczególnienie	Number of responses/ Liczba odpowiedzi	Structure/ Struktura [%]
Technical progress/ <i>Postęp techniczny</i>	82	45.6
Biological Progress/ <i>Postęp biologiczny</i>	61	33.9
Production Progress/ <i>Postęp produkcyjny</i>	26	14.4
Economic Progress/ <i>Postęp ekonomiczny</i>	11	6.1
In total/ <i>Razem</i>	180	100.0

Source: own study

Zródło: opracowanie własne

The comparison of the answers provided in table 4. is related appropriately to the previously mentioned needs in terms of services provided (Tab. 1). The structure of the response is related to the fact that the development of farms in terms of technical and biological ones, new plant varieties and animal breeds, will affect positively their production and economic results.

The payment for the service was another issue raised in the polls. The respondents claim that they are willing to pay only for such services, which bring them tangible financial results (93.9% of responses) e.g. raising funds from the EU. More than 35.6% is also willing to pay for specialized technology consulting. This type of counseling is free in MODR. Unfortunately, respondents argue that there are few appropriate specialists to provide such services (26.1%) or there are not any of them (54.2%). So farmers are forced to pay private operators for such advice. The respondents include in here service of commercial companies as well. The cost of such services is usually included by these companies in the cost of products purchased by farmers or machinery needed for production on the farm.

The fees for delivered services is generally similar between private entities and the ODR. However, as the respondents notice, MODR reacts in slow and little flexible way while fixing the prices comparing to personal counseling. Therefore, some respondents, especially those who are not strongly associated with the Centre, use such services provided by private competition. It is easier there to negotiate a better price, there is less bureaucracy and better efficiency and they adapt better to the needs of the farmer. Slow reaction to the changes in pricing of MODR is due to the necessity of its acceptance by the Social Council of MODR and a supervisory authority viz. the Parliament of the Mazowiecki Voivodeship. This procedure affects the substantial lengthener of the time, even up to more than ten weeks. 12.8% of the surveyed farmers (23 people) are not going to use the non-voluntary service at all.

Respondents point that There are some changes to have been made in agricultural advisory – 78.3%. They are positively assessed by most farmers – 53.9%. Among the changes taking place the farmers mention mainly rapid adaptation to changing conditions – 52.6%, improvement in service – 27.8% and having current information and knowledge – 19.6%. No changes were observed by 21.7% of the respondents. They claim that it concerns primarily the state advisory. The main reasons for the lack of change is incompetent farmer support – 79.5%, and poor management – 20.5%.

Steadiness of the performance is listed as the main advantage of the state consulting. For 94 farmers (52.2%) the fact of permanent existence of counseling is very important. Simultaneously, the respondents claim that the rapid changes in commercial consultancy, where such entities are founded temporarily (e.g. periods of proposals) and are immediately closed down, do not give assurance that it will be possible to use their services in the future and this is the biggest weakness of private counseling (109 people – 60.6%).

Conclusions

This study reveals that farmers notice changes ongoing in agricultural advisory and assess them positively. They point to quick possibilities of adaptation to changing conditions, service improving and advisors having the current knowledge and information.

The issue of improving agricultural production on farms including advice is very wide. Increasing concentration and specialization of production on farms is a factor for strengthening the role of advisory especially commercial one in the process of implementation of biological progress associated with new plant varieties and animal breeds. This issue seems to be crucial in obtaining high economical and production effects.

The current situation of Polish agriculture is beneficial to the functioning of government advisory

first of all counselors' efficiency – 92.8% and the possession of practical knowledge – 85.6% (table 3). Simultaneously, farmers point out the need for openness of the advisors to their problems – 46.1%, and the availability of consultants – 42.2%. It creates a tremendous opportunity for personal counseling, which is more flexible and can react quickly to the changes in the environment.

Among the advice given by advisers, the advice on technical and biological progress is in major, less interest is focused on the economic and production issues (Tab. 4).

bodies. This is mainly due to the low level of agricultural development, insufficient state funds, as well as still too low farm incomes. The state consulting, will be increasingly complemented by a private consultancy, and in some cases it will replace the state one. Indeed, the recipients of services have been increasingly paying attention to the flexibility of the advisory and to the openness of the counselors to cooperation what is indisputable advantage of commercial advisory.

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Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono opinie rolników regionu siedleckiego na temat zmian zachodzących w doradztwie rolniczym. Przeprowadzone badania ankietowe wskazują, że rolnicy zauważają zachodzące w doradztwie rolniczym zmiany i pozytywnie je oceniają. Wskazują na szybkie przystosowanie się do zmieniających się warunków, poprawę obsługi oraz posiadanie przez doradców aktualnej wiedzy i informacji.

Aktualna sytuacja polskiego rolnictwa sprzyja funkcjonowaniu państwowych jednostek doradczych. Wynika to przede wszystkim ze zbyt niskiego poziomu rozwoju rolnictwa, niedostatecznych nakładów finansowych państwa, a także wciąż zbyt niskich dochodów gospodarstw rolnych. Doradztwo państwowe, będzie w coraz większym stopniu uzupełniane doradztwem prywatnym, a także przez nie wypierane. Odbiorcy usług coraz częściej zwracają uwagę na elastyczność doradztwa oraz na otwartość doradców na współpracę, co daje niewątpliwą przewagę doradztwu komercyjnemu.

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