

THE AGRICULTURAL CONSULTANCY SERVICE FROM ROMANIA

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Abstract

The paper is aimed to present the manner in which the agricultural consultancy service has evolved until now and how it operates in Romania. The analyzed material is represented by the legislation in force and the agricultural consultancy services manner of operating. The agricultural consultancy services represent a vital element in the field of agricultural information and technological transfer, providing flows of information which can contribute to the improvement of the living conditions for population from rural area. The consultancy also plays an important part in the transfer of the research results by adapting them to the local agricultural ecological conditions and to the farmers' resources. The reorganization of the agricultural consultancy service occurred following the intention to make it closer to the needs of the farmers and the inclusion, thereof, in the decisional process. The agricultural chambers represent the deliberative body in the promotion of the Romanian and European agricultural policies.

Key words: *agricultural consultancy service, rural area, agriculture, Romania.*

INTRODUCTION

Having a total surface of 238,391 km², Romania is the ninth largest state of the European Union from the point of view of its size and the seventh largest state of the European Union considering its population. Of its total area of 23.8 million hectares, the agricultural surface amounts to 14.7 million hectares, i.e. 61.6% of the total surface. The rural population represents 44.9% of the total population, 60.3% of them carrying out agricultural activities, that placing Romania above the average of 5.9% of the EU27 countries. Romania has a great agricultural potential that is given by the favourable climatic and soil conditions, agricultural traditions, but also by the rural population carrying out agricultural activities as well as by the specialists well trained in agriculture.

The village is the starting point of the society and human civilization is the birthplace of culture, where there are stored values and strong traditions which need to be discovered, recovered and preserved.

As shown in many European research projects, in comparison to other EU countries, Romania ranks last or penultimate place at many indicators considering living conditions for the

population and rural unfavourable hangs heavy balance in the case of our country (Alber, Jens, Tony, Fahey "Perception of Living Condition in an Enlarged Europe, the Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Luxembourg, 2004).

However, after 1990, it has been observed the migration of active population from industry and urban to agricultural and rural areas.

In 2009, Romania counted 320 towns, 2860 communes and approximately 12960 villages.

In rural areas, 50.3% of the total employed population works in households, cultivating land or raising animals [4].

The discrepancy between urban and rural areas manifests itself strongly in school instruction and access to vocational training during secondary and higher education period. About 67% of the people living in the villages complete secondary education [5].

The counties with the highest degree of ruralization (excluding the Ilfov County, which surround Bucharest, the capital of Romania) are Dâmbovița, with 69.96% of the population living in rural areas, followed by Giurgiu, with 69.15%, Teleorman (66.73%), Suceava (66.38%), Bistrita Nasaud (63.88%), etc. On the other side, highly urbanized counties are found: Hunedoara with only 23.04% population living in rural areas, Brasov (25.45%), Constanta

(29.10%), Sibiu (33.46%), Cluj (33.80%), Braila (34.68%), Timis (39.27%), etc.

At national level, the average value of UAA (agricultural used area) in a farm is 3.45 ha. Agricultural holdings without legal personality have an average of 1.95 ha and the holdings with legal personality have 190.84 ha [6].

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The analyzed material is represented by the legislation in force, the agricultural consultancy services manner of operating and system evolution over time. Statistical data to highlight the situation of Romanian agriculture were also analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Why Was Agricultural Consultancy Needed?

After its accession to the European Union, Romania received support for decreasing the differences between the economies of the Member States. In order to absorb and use more wisely the funds granted by the EU, a complex system was developed for allocating financial resources based on European projects for accessing the available funds. Accessing these funds requires the recipient's commitment to follow specific steps and duties in a given period of time, which requires the setting of a goal, an objective analysis of the project, the establishment of the activities within the project, the financial calculations, the prediction of project results.

The agricultural consultancy service helped farmers by providing support for drawing up projects and the accessing such funds. By Government Resolution no. 676/1998 the set-up, organization and operation of the National Agency for Agricultural Consultancy (ANCA) was decided as well as by law no. 283/2010 the set-up, organization and operation of the chambers for agriculture, forestry and rural development was decided.

The emergence of an agricultural consultancy service was determined by the following farmers' needs: to be aware of the changes in the agricultural field; to acquire the necessary knowledge for performing modern technologies; to ensure the profitability of the activities

that they usually carrying out, by actions of training, qualification, and improvement; to have access to the latest technical, technological, economic and legal information, to the information regarding the development of template projects, the drawing up of the documentation related to the implementation and monitoring of the structural funds accessing projects and other domestic and international financing programs; for the transfer of the results from the research field to the farmers and vice versa. Farmers need the agricultural consultancy service in order to obtain information and correct their actions, in order to make progress and to bring new elements in the work that they perform. The consultancy service is necessary for improving the decision-making skills of the farmers and to improve the promotion policy by marketing activities so that production can be exploited efficiently.

Professional training is an essential component of adult education. People are different one from each other, the differences consisting in the knowledge, the skills and abilities they have, and in the relationship between what they say and what they do. For adults, learning is not an issue of knowledge accumulation or supplementation but of reorganization, restructuring or unlearning [1]. Consultancy service contributes to farmers training and knowledge reorganization with courses it organizes and the materials it distributes.

Who Are the Beneficiaries of the Agricultural Consultancy Service?

The beneficiaries of the agricultural consultancy service are: farmers, the rural population engaged in various income-generating rural activities, the foreign investors and the agricultural consultants in training.

The objectives of the agricultural consultancy services are:

- the transition from the subsistence farming stage to the family farm stage with commercial character and the set up of associations, the development of the exploitation, the adaptation and diversification of production in order to increase profit, the accessing of structural funds and other internal and external instruments of financing means;

- the sustainable development by updating marketing and improvement for agricultural and fish products;
- the promotion of organic farming and traditional products;
- the setting up of national and international partnerships by attracting investors in order to identify the investment possibilities and opportunities in the rural area and especially in the agro-food production.

The professional training and continuous improvement of knowledge is an important step in the implementation of the measures established by the Romanian Government in the National Rural Development Program 2007-2013.

Who Provides Agricultural Consultancy Services?

In Romania agricultural consultancy service providers are represented by the Agricultural Chambers, the public service of Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR), the scientific research units of the agricultural field, the higher education institutions, the Zonal University Offices for Agricultural Consultancy, the local agricultural consultancy centers, private consultancy companies, private companies which sell inputs, consultancy foundations, farmers organizations and associations.

Agricultural consultancy methods

Consultancy in agriculture can be transmitted by training, information, improvement courses, the setting up of experimental plots, the organization of symposia, seminars, meetings, roundtables, workshops, fairs, exhibitions, competitions and festivals, the distribution of informational materials, films or audio-visual materials, local radio and TV shows, the development of standard projects, the provision of technical assistance.

The professional training of adults entails the practical exposure in a much higher ratio than the theoretical presentation, as sometimes it is necessary to replace the knowledge accumulated over time with new elements - action which can be hampered by the reluctance of the trainees. The increase of the training level helps to improve the work force quality and the decision-making skills of the farmers.

In 2009, the impact of graduation of qualification courses organized by the National

Agricultural Consultancy Agency contributed to the accessing of European funds (out of which 3.5% for measure 121- Modernization of Holdings, 13% for measure 112- Establishment of Young Farmers, 26.9% for measure 141- Supporting Semi-subsistence Farms), as well as to the setting up and modernization of the agricultural undertakings (42.2%).

Generally, the requests regarding the granting of specialized consultancy and technical assistance refer to the specific agro-industrial fields: the correct application of production technologies; the identification, accessing and use of inputs; the correct management of the production processes; products' marketing; the performance of the activities in compliance with the specific legislation, the subsidies and facilities granted by the government, the EU regulations, the land register, the agricultural real estate register, the agricultural life income, the milk quotas, etc.

The Organization of the Agricultural Consultancy Activity (1998-2010)

The National Agricultural Consultancy Agency was a specialized institution of the central public administration, with legal capacity, subordinated to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, financed from the state budget and from its own incomes. As organization at national level, it had as subordinates: the Agricultural Consultancy County Offices (O.J.C.A.), and at local level the Local Agricultural Consultancy Centers (C.L.C.A.) and the Farmer's Houses.

ANCA activity in 2008-2009

According to annual reports from the period 2008 – 2009, ANCA recorded in 2009, 300 training courses more than in 2008, but the number of participants decreased with 5,547 [2]. In a period of two years a total of 135,961 participants attended training courses. The topics of these courses included subjects as: new technologies in the field, legislation, good agricultural and environmental condition (GAEC), insurance and agricultural credit.

The total number of training courses in 2009 had a rate of only 12.5% (of all training courses that took place in those two years), the number of participants represented 32.8%.

For training the trainers, ANCA received the support of the agricultural universities in the country, universities that participated in MAKIS Program supported by World Bank. These courses have prepared 34 groups of students and 399 consultant specialists graduated.

Between January to December 2009, ANCA contributed to the establishment of 32 agricultural cooperatives, 28 associations and 10 groups of manufacturers under the Government Ordinance no 26/2000 [3].

Generally, the requests about the advice and technical assistance were related to the management of production processes, proper application of technology, facility and grants provided by government and EU regulations.

During the two years there were carried out a number of 2,521 demonstration plots on an area of 6,865.38 ha for various crops, and also 449 lots of livestock demonstration, lots that are aimed at popularizing the breeds and lines of animal performance and technology by growth and exploitation of animals.

Several technical and scientific events were organized: 192 fairs, 196 exhibitions, 217 contests, 95 festivals, 530 symposia, 849 seminars, 13,774 meetings, 2,339 roundtables and 2,505 debates.

In addition to the development and free distribution of informative materials by its own publications or specialized newspapers, consultancy service made the subject of 1,046 broadcasts to local and national radios, and 539 TV shows.

All the actions pursued: increasing economic dynamism of rural areas, increasing educational levels, training and employment of residents, and increased adaptability to socio-economic changing, growth rate of innovation using and technology transfer to the production processes, increasing agricultural competitiveness, diversification and its orientation towards new markets.

The Reorganization of the Agricultural Consultancy Service – Agricultural Chambers (in the period after 2010)

The Agricultural Chambers were set up under law no. 283/2010 and are public nonprofit institutions, with legal capacity, and set up

in order to represent, promote and protect the interests in agriculture, zootechny and forestry, with all their branches, as well as to contribute by all means to the increase of all agricultural, zootechnical and forestry fields production. The members of the agricultural chambers, comprising representatives of the farmers, are elected by uninominal vote by all citizens who carry out agricultural activities.

The powers of the Agricultural Chambers are:

- administrative, legal and budget related, according to the legal provisions;
- related to the development of regulatory proposals at regional and national level in their respective business field;
- of a consultation institution, as institutional dialogue partner of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, as well as of the local and central structures subordinated to, coordinated by or under the authority of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development;
- with approval part and consultative character, at the request of local and county's authorities for projects regarding the land set up and rural space management;
- of professional training, in collaboration with specialized public and private institutions, within the country or from abroad, providing specialized professional training for youth and adults;
- of mediation, as a voluntary way of amicable settlement of disputes;
- of representation and promotion for specific professional and local interests, as well as for general interest of the persons who carry out agricultural and related activities;
- the promotion of good agricultural practices and animal welfare rules;
- the implementation of agricultural policies, according to the powers delegated by state institutions;
- of advice and technical assistance to farmers and those who carry out similar activities in products' manufacturing and marketing activities and in the professional organization;
- of professional training sessions organization.

The financing of the operational technical unit is ensured by its own funds and the resources obtained from the state budget.

Agricultural consultancy provided by other public bodies

There are other public institutions that besides current activities in agriculture give consulting services. Among these there are: universities, research centers, the Agency for Payments and Intervention in Agriculture (APIA), the Paying Agency for Rural Development and Fishing (APDRP), Regional Development Agency (RDA), Local Action Groups (GAL), Agricultural Unites of Rural Development (DARD), ONG (represented by associations, federations and unions of producers). All these institutions contribute to the improvement of the farmers' knowledge informing them, implementing and disseminating the various changes occurring in agriculture and represented farmers' rights in relation with different institutions. The services offered by public institutions are transmitted indiscriminately to the target group.

Private Agricultural consultancy in Romania

Besides public agricultural consulting services farmers can benefit by private agricultural consulting services. Most of them give advice in many areas not just in agriculture. Their number has registered significant growth in recent years as a result of accessing EU programs. Generally companies that ask private consultancy service are large companies that pay a tax for services rendered, but the advantage of buying these services is that private companies deal exclusively with their application and the time for request resolution may be lower. Besides private companies that offer only consulting services, there are private companies such as those that sell inputs, which in addition to marketed products and give information about how to use them. The latter provides these services and only occasionally in order to increase sales without additional charge for technical information.

CONCLUSIONS

Agriculture has a great potential in Romania, determined by its favourable natural resources. Romanian rural economy is dominated by

agriculture, and the progress of the rural area leads to the welfare of the inhabitants of both rural and urban area, as well as of farmers.

The agricultural consultancy services contribute to the educational training of the adults from the rural areas by a series of actions such as qualification and improvement courses, the popularization of the European agricultural practices, the dissemination of the Romanian legal provisions, etc.

Agricultural consultancy is an important component of the agricultural policy in Romania, contributing to the modernization and sustainable development of the rural area.

The role of the agricultural consultancy is to guide and train farmers so that they can take the right decisions and improve their marketing activity in order to have a better capitalization of their production, which will contribute to the increase of their income and the improvement of their living standards.

The main task of the consultant agent is to detect the need for change and to identify ways to achieve it. Change refers to the change of mentality and actual activities of the farmers who must be able to identify the problem they are faced with and find a solution with the support of the consultant.

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