

STATE OF HUMAN RESOURCE OF AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISES IN THE SOUTH GREAT PLAIN REGION

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Abstract

People who are involved in agricultural production may have special or different attitude to the LLL programs, to the knowledge developments and innovations, than owners and employees have in other sectors. A survey was carried out at South Great Plain Region of Hungary to study the preparedness and willingness of agricultural entrepreneurs to innovation. A part of the research was a study about the readiness for the knowledge improvement of the agricultural producers. The investigation was based on survey with 265 completed questionnaires. The questions were focused on the language knowledge, the use of advisory, mass media, LLL courses, study tours, Internet, etc. It seems that all the examined traits (e.g. qualification level, farm size) can have influence, but with different significance on the willingness of innovation, the development of agricultural enterprises and the competitiveness of Hungarian agricultural production. The study was financed by the support of BAROSS DA_ELEM_07_MGK_INNO project (NKTH).

1. Introduction

The future situation of Hungarian agriculture is basically determined by the accession to the European Union. Hungary became a part of an integration that has been operating successfully for decades and where the income conditions deriving from the connection between agriculture and food industry can be regarded as stable.¹ All these are perfect and would show a perspective for an adequately prepared society. However, opinions are divided on the issue how much Hungary has done for that purpose.

The other form of obtaining financial resources is to apply for agricultural subsidies. The system of agricultural subsidies within EU consists of two groups basically. These are the national (governmental) supports and supports financed by the common budget. Within the frame of CAP the largest sums of money were spent on interventional arrangements, export subsidies and direct payments, on the account of market support. The respectively smaller ratio of resources are made up of provisions for rural development to promote, within that, the investments, the processing and selling of agricultural products, to help new farmers in their career, to encourage establishing new producer organizations and to work out a new (early) retiring system as well as to advance the development of rural infrastructure.²

One of the greatest informational program of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development after 2000 was called „*The preparation of producers for the access to the European Union*”. The main objective of the national program was to provide information for farmers about EU regulations concerning them, personally, on the premises. The program comprised training advisors, organizing events, publishing practical handbooks for the lectures, contact with media and the maintenance of the programme. All this happened with the intention that communication should lay special emphasis on the persons who are directly affected by the changes.³

According to the results of Horváth's investigations (2010) most of the farmers do not want to do significant changes in their enterprises. As their data represents, 78% of farmers do not plan to give up their activity meanwhile two thirds do not want to establish any new activities. More than half of the farmers do not want to increase the number of their employees. The lack of competency in the farm enterprises could be handled by the organisation of integrated producer organisations.⁴ In the North Great Plain region the handicap of the people is based on the low level of education and on the poor accentuation of human resource development.⁵

In this survey it was tried to get an answer to the question what the opinion of the regional agricultural producers is, if they consider themselves adequately prepared to meet the demands of the European Union.

2. Material and method

In order to obtain the information a survey of questionnaire was designed and carried out. During the survey agricultural producers were asked (n=265) about their learning and information gathering habits and attitudes to innovation. Data were collected with random walking method from different settlement types in the South Great Plain Hungary. The data recording was carried out through face-to-face interviews. The producers had equal chances to get into the group of interviewees. Due to the relatively small size of the sample group the

compositions of the data were distorted, so the survey can not be regarded as a representative one, but the data of further study will be corrected, if it will be necessary.

Recent study is a part of a survey project, and the work was financed by NKTH by the support of BAROSS DA_ELEM_07_MGK_INNO project.

The questionnaire contained mostly closed questions in some cases interval scale was applied. To make some answers more exhaustive free contextual answers could also be given. The questions were focused on the following areas:

- basic information about respondent producers;
- educational level and foreign language knowledge of the farm managers;
- importance and frequency of the usage of:
 - study tours in Hungary and abroad,
 - gradual studies,
 - courses,
 - own research and observations,
 - information from other farms,
 - agricultural radio and TV programs,
 - books and journals,
 - agricultural extension,
 - opinion of business partners,
 - consumers' opinion,
 - local technical assistance,
 - Internet websites, thematic mail news, RSS.

The original questions were: What pre-requisites are important in the competitiveness in your firm, and sign the importance a number between 0 and 5. 0 = absolutely not important, 5 = very important. Data obtained were submitted to statistical analysis by using SPSS 17.0 software package.

3. Results

The major purpose of this survey is to look at the economic impact of innovation activity. During our investigation 265 questionnaires were filled in mostly by large-scale agricultural companies in South Great Plain and were interviewed as well. The enterprises investigated cultivate 160 thousand hectare in total and have approximately 5700 employees in South Great Plain. The sample is not representative, bigger firms are intentionally overrepresented, because principally large-scale companies can do or more familiar to do innovation activities. Of course none of the smaller enterprises have been excluded from the survey since their general attitude (how they can accept or refuse human resource development) is important very much in respect of agricultural market.

The average age of farm managers and farmers was more than 50 years (51.9 ± 10.4). A very important element of their attitude was found when they were asked: if they need a feedback about the results of the survey or not, only 168 of them wanted to know this information.

36.6% of the farm managers (*Table 1.*) working for large scale farms has a diploma in agriculture, but 8.3% of the primary producers educated on elementary school level without any professional knowledge, and this level is not competitive.

Table 1. Level of qualification of the interviewees

Level of qualification	Number of answers
Elementary school	22 (8.3%)
High school	40 (15.1%)
High school + vocational graduation	61 (23.0%)
University or college degree (BSc, MSc)	37 (13.9%)
University or college degree (BSc, MSc) in agriculture	97 (36.6%)
No data	8 (3.0%)

Source: author's data

The foreign language knowledge and the usage of the languages (*Table 2.*) are very poor among the farmers, because only 10.9% of them do not need help in communication on foreign languages.

The importance of different information resources was measured by the frequency of usage of them (*Table 3-4.*). It seems that own observations, books or journals and consumers opinion are the most important resources in information gathering of agricultural farms.

Table 2. Language skills of farmers

Foreign language knowledge	Number of answers
English	20 (7.54%)
English and German	8 (3.02%)
French	1 (0.38%)
Croatian	3 (1.13%)
Croatian and German	1 (0.38%)
German	13 (4.90%)
Russian	3 (1.13%)
English and Russian	1 (0.38%)
Slovak	4 (1.51%)
No language knowledge	105 (39.62%)
No data	106 (40.00%)
Who use this knowledge	29 (10.94%)
Who do not use	181 (68.30%)
No answer	55 (20.75%)

Source: author's data

Table 3. The importance of used information resources (%)

Grade	Study tour abroad	Study tour in Hungary	Research institute, university	Courses, LLL	Own experiment, observation	Results of other farms	Radio, TV program
0	30.2	13.2	18.1	6.8	8.3	4.5	9.8
1	6.8	4.5	4.9	3.8	2.3	1.9	4.9
2	12.8	9.4	12.1	7.5	3.8	9.4	16.2
3	17.0	23.0	23.4	20.4	12.1	30.2	24.2
4	14.3	23.4	16.2	27.9	24.9	27.5	18.1
5	8.3	17.0	12.8	25.3	41.9	16.6	18.5
No data	10.6	9.4	12.5	8.3	6.8	9.8	8.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: author's data

Table 4. The importance of used information resources (%)

Grade	Book, journal	Extension service	Business partners	Local technical assistance	Consumers' opinion	Internet, thematic mails	Other
0	0.8	6.4	3.8	7.2	4.2	6.4	18.1
1	2.6	4.2	3.4	5.7	3.4	2.6	2.3
2	4.9	4.2	4.2	6.4	5.3	5.7	1.5
3	16.6	23.4	20.8	24.2	13.6	22.3	15.5
4	30.9	28.3	29.1	21.1	24.5	26.4	1.9
5	35.8	24.5	29.1	29.4	41.1	28.3	3.8
No data	8.3	9.1	9.8	6.0	7.9	8.3	57.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: author's data

4. Conclusions

The aim of the study was the estimation of the farmer's ability for collecting professional information by their precognition, language skills, and the frequently used information resources. This information is indispensable in the development of structural educational programs for establish a successful and innovative agricultural producer society in Hungary.

The main steps of the work are: first the knowledge and requirement analyses in our region and in the next phase the preparation of a complex Lifelong Learning program.

Most of the questions were answered middle-aged farmers/producers from the South Great Plain Region. A little more than half of the respondents had some qualification related to agriculture.

The most significant information sources were the consumers' opinion and the professional journals. Although farmers can get informed easily through these sources but it is not enough. Many of them, mostly the

elderly, have problems with operating a computer; this is why Internet information has no decisive role for them.

In the forthcoming period those agricultural producers who will not try to maintain the human resource in their own enterprise on the current European level, most of them reckon with decreasing possibilities, or should ask for the help of the extension services.

We found that those farmers who planned to develop and expand their enterprise, regardless of the type of the enterprise, had knowledge about financial resources, application-systems and application possibilities at approximately the same rate.

In the future we need more young farmers with agricultural diploma (BSc. or MSc.), foreign language skill, with professional experiences in foreign countries and with the usage of as much information resources as possible to maintain their knowledge. Without these parameters producers can not be competitive among the European producers on the common market of the European Union and also on national level.

Notes

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