

Cultural and social accomplishments of agricultural companies as contributions to the development of rural areas

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Abstract: Agricultural companies play a key role in enriching the cultural and social life of the rural areas in which they function. Therefore, these companies serve towards preserving a quality of life necessary for rural communities to survive and to develop rural areas. However, the financial, human resource and material expenditures necessary to sustain rural communities are difficult to quantify. These studies, on the basis of internationally focused case studies, attempt to measure, systemize and evaluate the charitable engagement of farmers.

Key words: Cultural and social accomplishments, agricultural companies, development of rural areas, quality of life, agricultural resources

1. Introduction

The main task of agricultural companies lies in the production of qualitatively high value nourishment and raw materials for industry, as well as the maintenance of the cultural landscape. They create workplaces and contribute to the added value of rural areas.

The development of agriculture, as that of other sectors of the economy, is influenced by the fluidity of structural changes, and reflects social changes. These structural changes influence the sociocultural development of villages and rural communities. Agriculture is the source of positive impulses which serve to improve the quality of life in rural areas and thereby constitute the foundation upon which an attachment to one's home is built. (Rückert-John, 2001).

Especially following the social upheaval which has been seen since 1990, the agricultural structures in the former East Germany and Eastern European countries have undergone fundamental change. This means that the role of agricultural companies in the economic/employment and cultural life of the villages has retreated. This becomes especially apparent in those villages in which agricultural production provided the sole basis of income.

More important still is to have a comprehension of and appreciation for engagement of agricultural companies in sponsoring cultural and sporting events in the villages they supported. Additionally, there is the impact of the individual initiatives of farmers in choosing to become receptive to the importance of environmental education and social services, in addition to their roles as agricultural producers. This

engagement has a long tradition, varies greatly region by region in its impact and is dependant upon a wide variety of influencing factors. Yet, the perception and appreciation of these, in some cases, rather considerate social accomplishments may remain limited in some regions, or even completely out of the public consciousness in others.

Seen historically, this tradition goes back, on the one hand, to the time of the manorial systems and, on the other, the cultural and social engagement of agricultural companies for rural populations were of great significance especially in East Germany, and brought about through the establishment of agricultural cooperatives and products belonging 'to the people'. In some cases, for this reason, some responsibilities which should have been those of the state, e.g. the construction and running of facilities for children, were transferred to agricultural companies.

Sociocultural activities have either completely disappeared or seen dramatic cutbacks in the face of increasing privatization and commercialization in the agricultural sector, the winding up or e.g. the transformation of companies. The focus of our joint study is to discover the actual status quo of the cultural and social initiatives of agricultural companies and what fundamental changes have occurred in this area.

This topic was adopted for study within the framework of a university consortium consisting of the Faculty of Agronomy and Rural Development (University of Debrecen), the Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (University of Rostock), as well as the Faculty of Economics and Management of the University of Agricultural Sciences in Prague/Suchdol.

Using case studies, the following key areas are to be investigated:

- the motivation of farmers to promote social activities
- the nature and scope of such activities
- the nature and scope of the utilization of agricultural resources
- the effect on, as well as the appreciation of such activities by, the rural population

Our goal is to utilize the results of this study to represent the multifunctionality of agriculture from a different point of view, in order to clarify the contribution made by agricultural companies to securing a high quality of life in villages and to thereby improve the image of agriculture in the public consciousness.

The contribution we now present contains an explanation of the objectives of our study, of the investigatory methods used, an initial systematization of the manifold initiatives, as well as an appraisal of the initial results of the preliminary investigations. Our study is initially focused on the cultural and sporting services, as well as on environmental education and honorary positions. Social engagement, which includes the role of agriculture as a job market for socially disadvantaged people, remains for the time being outside the scope of our initial focus, as a proper investigation of this element would require more manpower than is presently at our disposal, and also because such investigation would require us to consider a range of country-specific determining factors

2. Investigatory methodology

The study contains to some extent a quantitative, but primarily a qualitative appraisal of selected agricultural companies in each of the three mentioned countries. By using partially standardized interview compendium, from 5 up to a maximum 10 agricultural companies are selected and interviewed in a predetermined region for each country. The selection of case studies is made on the bases of three criteria:

Farmed area, the manpower demand, as well as the animal demand, for which at least 2 of these criteria should be above the national average for each country. Furthermore, a fundamental condition is that the agricultural company had to have already existed prior to 1990.

The interview compendium is divided into 3 sets of questions. In the first set, the current condition and resource inventory of the company is recorded using a few figures. The second set contains the motivating factors behind the company's engagement. The third set contains questions primarily concerning the nature and scope of these activities.

3. Initial results form the primary investigations

The variety of engagement and initiatives, as well as their productive activity, is manifold and derives from *overview 1*. We differentiated between their types on the basis of whether

the activities were sporadic, i.e. performed on the basis of an external request and therefore are one-off in nature, or whether they are offered continuously. Furthermore, one must consider whether a financial subsidy is being provided in the form of a sponsorship of the cultural or sporting organization located in the villages or whether preservation, or rather maintenance work is being done in the communities, or even agricultural machinery and equipment are placed at the communities' disposal.

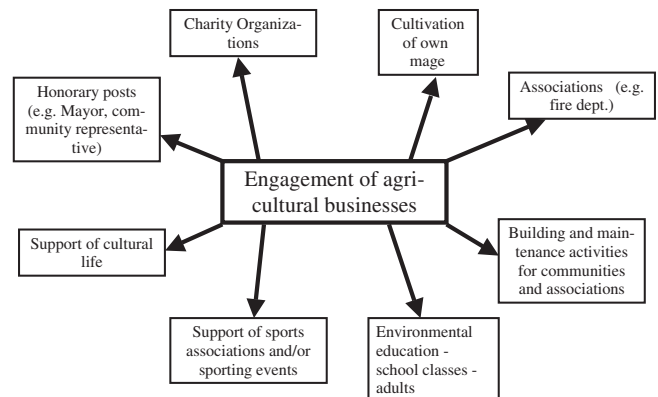
Of great significance is the role played by a company in serving in one or several honorary positions through its agricultural managers. The motivation to open their businesses to concerns for environmental education is generally pronounced and of sustainable importance, as the results from our preliminary studies prove.

The main reasons for social engagement and the many different types of initiatives were named:

- Continuation of traditions in rural areas
- Cultivation of one's image
- Participation in social processes and preservation of quality of life in the villages

Overviews 2 and 3 provide a brief look at the engagement of 2 agricultural company managers from the area around Rostock.

Overview 1: Variety of business engagement of agricultural businesses



Overview 2: Case Study – An Agricultural Joint Stock Company

Company background:

Founded in 1991 (previously an agricultural production cooperative); 3 agricultural earnings public limited companies, 1 dairy farm, 1 technical services and 1 trade pl.; a total of 3,745 ha farmland; 44 employees and 4 trainees; 1.2 employees/100ha; 320 dairy cows with offspring; territorial location: 2 cities; 7 villages; operational spread 13 km in length, 17 km in width

Engagement:

1. *Financial services (300 to 500€):* On individual donation per year, as necessary, to a single village (e.g. a local chapter of the German Red Cross for the care of elder residents, in support of a goodwill

- clothing shop) or to a horseback riding club – to support activities with children and youths
2. *Non-cash benefits (material)*: Appropriations of bales of hay; maintenance of sports fields (drilling, weeding); appropriations of water trucks for sports fields; care of bodies of water, renaturation of areas; participation in pathway and road construction within the framework of land division cases;
 3. *Cultivation of one's image*: Care of tenancies, "Field Trips"
 4. *Honorary posts*: Honorary mayors of 3 villages; member of the community association and community board, respectively; member of various professional associations

2. *Material services*: Support of activities in the community through in-house technology; construction works, tanks for residents of the village in the yards of businesses;
3. *Environmental education (personnel)*: "Field trip" for school children; "Field trip" and short botany lesson for kindergarten kids with a quiz
4. *Cultivation of one's image(personnel)*: "Field trip" for all interested residents of the community
5. *Honorary posts (personnel)*: Community representative board, Vice-mayor; member of the board of directors of the sugar beet association; supervisory board member of HAGE in the city of Kiel(agricultural cooperative)

Overview 3: Case Study Landbau Non-trading partnership

Company background:

Re-formed in 1991(previously an agricultural production cooperative); 2000 ha farmland, mixed company with grain propagation: 430 dairy cows with offspring; 21 employees (0,5 employee/100ha) 1 incorporated community with 6 villages

Engagement:

1. *Cultural services (financial, sponsoring)*: Advancement of community life; Organization of harvest festival for all residents of the village; Benefits for the cultural society and for the volunteer fire department;

4. Conclusion

Agricultural employers make an important contribution to the enrichment of the cultural and social life of villages and therefore assist in ensuring a high quality of life.

The financial, manpower and material expenditures for this contribution are not able to be exactly quantified.

By using case studies from different countries, this study hopes to collect, systemize and evaluate data on the charitable engagement of farmers.

5. Reference

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