

AGRICULTURAL CONSULTING SERVICE IN SOUTH MUNTENIA REGION DURING 2009-2011

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Abstract

Agriculture is a branch with huge potential in Romanian economy. Its reorganization along with EU integration requires a series of actions in sense of modernization and production increase. Romania has a privileged position from point of view of agricultural resources. Arable land represents 39.5% of the total area and only five other countries in the world have a more comfortable position than that of our country. European funds that can be drawn by the Common Agricultural Policy - approximately 7.5 billion euros during 2007-2013, contribute to agricultural potential improvement. Full exploitation of the advantages of integration into the European Union could open new opportunities for Romanian farmers who can supply a population exceeding 80 million inhabitants. In conditions of a better absorption of EU funds with direct significant investment and with an appropriate government support, the productive potential of agriculture substantially increase. Agricultural Consulting Service has a significant role in agriculture modernizing through qualification and training activities for farmers, disseminating information on funds that can be accessed and news in the field, also can meet the claim of farmers, setting with these the sell strategies for marketing of products.

Key words: agricultural advisory service, South Muntenia Region, agriculture.

South Muntenia Region is situated in South-Eastern of Romania, with an area of 35,453 km², representing 14.45% of its surface. Being an administrative structure, South Muntenia Region includes 7 counties (Argeș, Călărași, Dâmbovița, Ialomița, Giurgiu, Prahova and Teleorman), 16 municipalities, 32 towns and 509 communes with 2018 villages. Agricultural surface mainly concentrated in the counties of South owns 71.1% of the total area of the region from which 80.6% is arable land. According to the Regional Directorate of Călărași Statistics the region's population is 15.4% of the country population. A significant percentage of the populations (33.20%) perform activities in agriculture field.

The social dimension of agriculture is important, because this sector contributes significantly to engaging workforce in rural areas and ensures a fair standard of living for farmers.

Agricultural Consulting Service is present as service in South Muntenia Region from 1998, in 2010 the Agricultural County Offices being reorganized into the Agricultural Chambers County. In the South Muntenia Region there are seven Agricultural Chambers that perform specific consulting each county, they being subordinated to the county councils.

The approaches that agricultural consulting service makes help to correct actions of farmers and their information, for progress and to bring new elements in the work they perform. The Agricultural Consulting Service is necessary to increase the decision capacity of farmers and to improve policy promotion through marketing activities so that productions can be efficiently exploited.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

To evaluate the role and contribution that agricultural consulting service has brought in the South Muntenia Region, we have reviewed the annual reports of agricultural county chambers of the seven counties.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

South Muntenia Region is one of the most important agricultural areas in Romania. Exploiting at the true value with protecting of environment can contribute significantly to the country's economic growth. In the 2009-2011 period, Agricultural Chambers have developed various information activities and training courses.

In this region over 600 training courses, qualifications, and instruction classes attended by

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over 14,000 people were conducted. The large number of courses is due to absence of qualification of some farmers in the field, qualification necessary to access the measures of National Rural Development Plan. (PNDR). The lack of specialists in the territory is another problem that the agriculture is facing and to prevent this problem, Agricultural County Chambers organized training courses of instructors and training of specialists.

Excessive crumbled of agricultural land is one of the problems that make their exploitation difficult. Rural population is not yet open to the idea of land merging and the potential benefits that may arise, particularly productivity growth.

Due to the action of Agricultural Chambers were set up: 31 agricultural cooperatives according to Law no. 566/2004, 3 associations according to Ordinance 26/2000, 518 individual enterprises and authorized individuals (PFA), 3 recognized groups of producers, 2 companies according to Law no. 31/1990 and 7 professional associations.

Between 2009 and 2010, the consultants have noted reductions of the Agricultural Cooperative numbers, because landowners are reluctant, but last year the number had risen because of realizing association benefits. The large

number of authorized individuals, individual enterprises and familial enterprises is due to the condition imposed by Measure 141 - Financial support for subsistence farming and Measure 112 - Setting up of young farmers.

The practical demonstration makes it easy to understand and then to apply technology or information transmitted. County Agricultural Consulting Offices and after 2010, Agricultural Chambers have conducted 262 demonstration plots on crop production, most of them being made in Dâmbovița County (51.5% of them) and 48 demonstration plots on animal production, 75% of which were made in the same County.

According to *Figure 1*, activities of popularization are: meetings, roundtables and debates, followed by meetings with members of target groups. Counties with the most activities of publicizing are: Dâmbovița, Teleorman and Călărași. Besides these actions, radio and TV shows took place, which were intended to inform farmers about the measures that can be accessed and about specific seasonal works of certain crops from area. Most information shows were registered in Argeș County where only in 2009 were broadcast over 78 television programs through local television, Muscel TV.

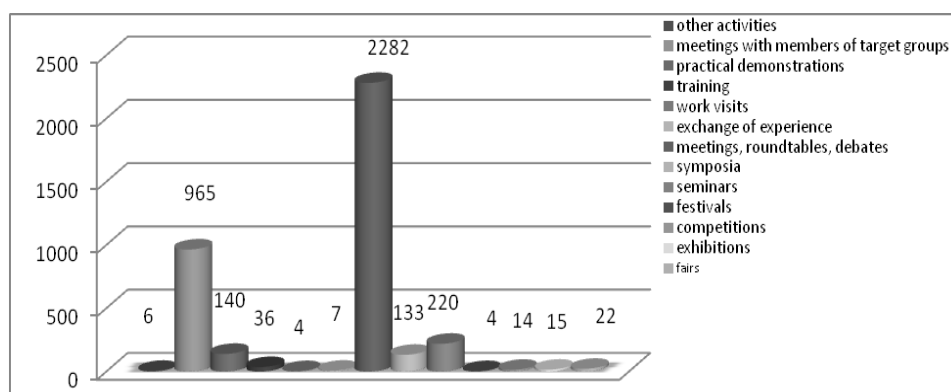


Figure 1. Activities of popularization development by the Agricultural Chambers from South Muntenia Region during 2009-2011

Special attention was given and to the promotion of materials like leaflets, flyers, brochures and articles in specialized publications.

Consultants from county and local level were continuously involved in providing expert advice directly to farmers, particularly those of small and medium-sized family farms, including technico-economical services and specialized services. In addition, it was accorded individual consulting to interested persons at the county office, local, telephonic, by e-mail and correspondence.

Generally, the requests for advice and expert technical assistance aimed at specific areas of agro-industry: proper application of technologies of production, the identification, access and use of inputs, proper management of production processes, product marketing, activities in accordance with specific legislation, government subsidies and facilities, EU regulations, the land fund, agricultural life annuity, milk quota and so on.

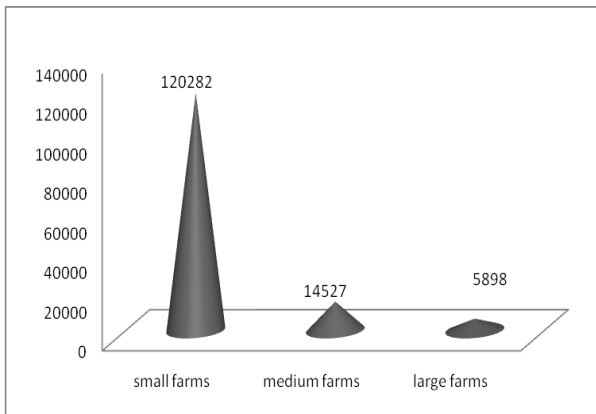


Figure 2. Technical assistance given to agricultural exploitations according to unit size.

From the observations of the last three years, it was found that the vast majority of those

who seeking agricultural consultations are small farms.

The distribution on activity fields of technical assistance during 2009-2011 was as follows (Figure 3):

- ✓ 34008 consultations in cereals production field;
- ✓ 15852 consultations in vegetables field;
- ✓ 12950 consultations in horticulture field;
- ✓ 1857 consultations in viticulture field;
- ✓ 19159 consultations in livestock production field;
- ✓ 14666 consultations in mechanization field;
- ✓ 2756 consultations in economic field;
- ✓ 19120 consultations in juridical field;
- ✓ 20105 consultations in other fields (accessing European funds, subsidies and so on).

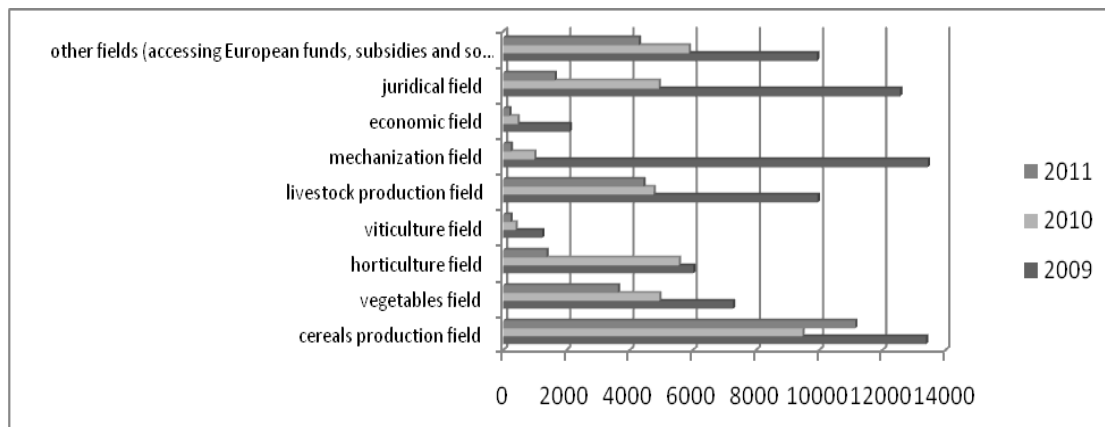


Figure 3. The distribution on activity fields of technical assistance during 2009-2011

It was found that technical assistance accorded to farmers varies according to farm size and field of activity in which they performs:

- the cereals cultivation, 79.5% of consultations was offered to small farms, 14.5% of medium and 6% of large farms;

- in vegetables field, 90.1% of consultations was offered to small farms, 9% of medium and 0.9% of large farms;

- in horticulture fields, 97.9% of consultations was offered to small farms, 1.7% of medium and 0.4% of the large farms;

- in viticulture fields, 81.4% of consultations was offered to small farms, 14.4% to medium and 4.2% of the large farms;

- in zootechnical fields, 92.5% of consultations was offered to small farms, 6.2% to medium and 1.3% of the large farms (figure 4).

Practical demonstrations were an important contribution to acquiring knowledge, therefore Agricultural Chambers in collaboration with various research units have conducted 181 demonstrations attended by 2728 people.

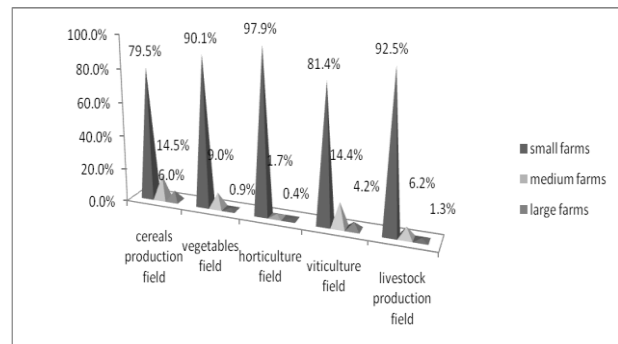


Figure 4. Technical assistance granted according to activity fields and categories of exploitations

Following action taken by specialists from the County Agricultural Chambers of Agricultural Consulting and Local Centres, for the dissemination among the rural population of the National Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 and the presentation of measures to be funded, many farmers were interested to accessing these funds. The consultants permanently monitor the potential beneficiaries of EU funds and take action to support design collectives by professional training, model projects and exchange of information.

The impact of information and publicizing actions realised by Agricultural Chambers from South Muntenia Region has led to the following number of projects (figure 5):

- 61 projects with a total value of 4,644,193 euros, which access 121 measure - Modernisation of agricultural farms,

- 2882 projects totaling 17,899,500 euros, which accesses 141 measure - Supporting semi-subsistence farms,

- 853 projects totalling to 10,703,500 euros which accesses 112 measure - Setting up of young farmers.

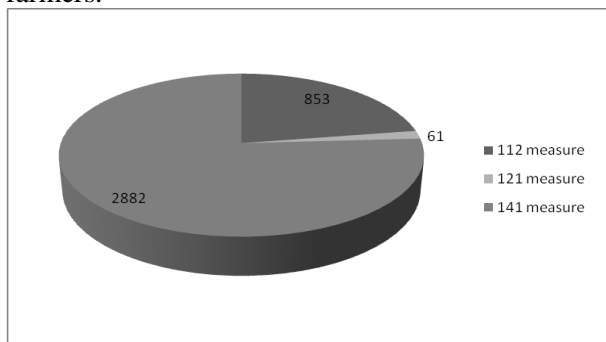


Figure 5. **Technical assistance accorded for development projects to access European funds**

Accessing these measures contribute to adaptation of agricultural exploitations to EU standards, encouraging the phenomenon of association, increasing production and improving quality, increasing the number of farms and their economic power, improved management and diversification of activities according with market requirements.

Restrictive elements

Activities and performances of Romanian farmers are limited by several factors such as agricultural economic environment (which is unstable and less predictable), unbalanced competitive environment, friendly for retailers and distributors but unfriendly for farmers, insufficient profesional training of most managers from agricultural units in economical and financial area, a surplus of workforce in agriculture, the absence of small farms in modern trade networks of vegetable and animal products.

Favorable elements

Supporting small farms contribute to strengthening competitiveness and maintain the vitality of rural areas and supply of local markets.

Possibility of accessing European funds to young farmers is an opportunity to attract them in the agricultural sector considering the ageing population which is still active in agriculture, but also obtaining a decent income.

CONCLUSIONS

The majority of requests for consulting services come from the small exploitations and concern to the agro-industry specific fields.

Most demanding areas of specialized tehcnical assistance were given in the field crop production, accessing EU funds and subsidies and in the field of animal production.

The partnership between farmers and agricultural consultants help improve the agricultural performances and incomes in rural areas.

The lack of funds and land crumbled are problems that make difficult farmers activities.

In 2009-2011, in South-Muntenia Region, were developed 3796 projects to access European funds with a value totaling over 33 million euro.

Accessing the measures of National Programme for Rural Development help to adapt to EU standards agricultural holdings, increased production and product quality.

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