

Linking Agricultural Production and Marketing Team to The Entrepreneurial Development of Small Farms in Taiwan: Achievement, Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

The land area of Taiwan is about 36,000 square kilometers. Among them, mountains, slopelands and plains account for 33%, 38%, and 29%, respectively, agriculture mostly locate in plains. In 1997, total cultivated land is about 864,817 hectares, and total numbers of agricultural household is roughly 780,246. In other words, cultivated land per agricultural household is about 1.11 hectare, and is scattering into 2~3 plots.

Talking about "Taiwan Experience", the agricultural policy and its achievement is one of the vital parts. Factors accelerating and supporting the Taiwan's agricultural development are very much complicated. The institutional viewpoint, however, Agricultural Production and Marketing Team (APMT) is employed in this paper, the technological and economic relevant aspects will also be indicated whenever appropriate.

In Taiwan, the APMT has been in existence since 1992, and is believed to be one of the reasons in fostering the entrepreneurial development of small farms. This paper emphasizes the following three-folds: (1) to introduce the approach and major achievements of APMT, (2) to explore the current challenges of APMT, and (3) to discuss the future development of APMT.

Key words: Agricultural Production and Marketing Team (APMT), Taiwan.

I. Introduction

Inefficient resource allocations and lack of scale economies have long been nervous facts confronted by the prevailing small family farms and government authorities in Taiwan. To effectively improve farm operations on production and marketing, agricultural authorities have put great efforts on promoting the managerial integration of small farm units and created the Agricultural Production and Marketing Team (APMT) (農業產銷班) since the early 1990's. It was expected that APMTs may significantly improve not only the

efficiency of farm operations and product marketing but also the product quality and the creation of new products and technologies under government assistance. Nevertheless, further examination for better performance on the process of such entrepreneurial development of small farms in Taiwan is needed.

The initiation of farm unit integration was originated from the need on the re-organization of major agricultural production and marketing forces in Taiwan. In 1992, the Council of Agriculture (COA) started to emphasize the importance of building up a modern and systematic agricultural production, marketing, and extension system for the purpose of allocating the agricultural policy resource in the most

efficient way After the processes of integration were experienced, the targets of entrepreneurial development on APMTs were finally settled Many more assistance from related government programs were then implemented to strengthen the agricultural development through the improved market oriented APMTs

The following sections are first to explain the approaches and achievements of APMTs in terms of the development of cooperative organization and entrepreneurship, next to synthesize the existing challenges for future development of APMTs, and finally to explore the future prospects of APMTs

II. Approaches and Achievements

Farm units are small in Taiwan by means of the cultivated land ownership and its spread The 1997 cultivated land area was 864,817 hectares which constituted 24.01% of the total land area (33,602,042 hectares)¹ The cultivated land was owned by 780,246 farm families Thus, the average cultivated land area per farm household was about 1.11 hectares which were usually owned in several different pieces The blamed inefficiency of farm management was mostly due to the small size and scattered farm land ownership

The organizational purposes of APMTs were defined as to perform a multifunctional system (COA and DAF, 1995) The purposes included

1. assisting cooperative utilization of equipment and materials for lower production cost,
2. promoting mutual support of skill and capability among members for managerial efficiency,
3. increasing managerial ability of current core farmers and farming successors through organizational activities and education,
4. improving agricultural production environment

¹ Reported by the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Provincial Government of Taiwan (DAF) Cultivated land refers to land under temporary and permanent crops, and can be classified into registered paddy field and upland field as well as non-registered river alluvial land, tidal land, slopeland, and virgin field Most cultivated land locate in the plain region which is low-altitude plain areas including plain, basin, delta, valley, and part terrace

cooperatively for the operational convenience of farm management,

5. building up orderly production and marketing system through the production plans and market development for reasonable prices,
6. upgrading product quality and marketing efficiency through cooperative grading, and reducing marketing margins via cooperative marketing, direct marketing, and cooperative negotiations for the enhancement of consumer confidence,
7. raising value-added of the agricultural product and farm management through team efforts on the development of new products and technology,
8. helping institutional advocacy on policies and regulations as well as the exploration of team members' opinions

The approaches to the execution of organizational integration on agricultural production and marketing operation may be explained by detailed principles and works of four measures listed below

A. Integration Registration Works of APMTs

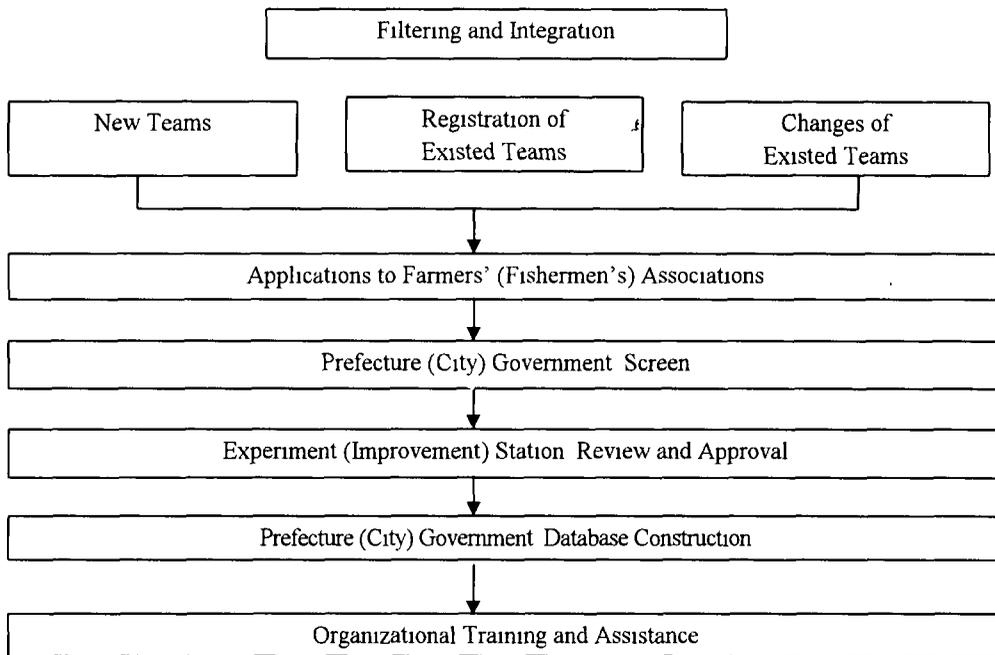
The execution of registration works on teams of each APMT follows several principles, including (1) the participation of each farmer for a particular industry is in one APMT, (2) the administrative area (Hsiang, Chen and City) is the basic boundary of team organizations, (3) the organization of the same teams in terms of the same agricultural product category, land location, and development aims, (4) the maintenance of teams with excellent organizational operation, (5) the organization of new teams and the re-organization based on farmers' willingness, (6) the assistance on the re-organization of teams with unsound organizational operations, (7) the integration of different teams or groups under various industry categories, assistant units, and the same program into APMT, and (8) the exclusion of team organization for farmers without legal operation The names of teams in one APMT are unified in registration orders

The flow chart of APMT integration, registration, and database construction amended in

1995 is shown in Figure 1. Before the filtering works on new and existed teams, the COA had significantly promoted the integration plans on APMT since 1992. The Bureau of Agriculture (Bureau of Construction) in each prefecture (city) government (hereinafter referred to as local government) played an important role of coordinating community administrative and local farmers' (fishermen's) associations and cooperative farms (hereinafter referred to as local farmers' organizations) for policy advocacy. It has been

requested that local farmers' organizations have to submit information of initial evaluation on newly applied teams and existed teams. The local government operates the filtering works on such integration plan. After the inspection of local government, experiment (improvement) stations provide reviews and approvals. The new database about team members is constructed by the assistance units in local government. Finally, the relevant executive departments of DAF provide plans of the organizational training and assistance.

Figure 1. Flow Chart of APMT Integration, Registration, and Database Construction



B. Assistance on APMTs

The assistance on APMTs includes the organizational and business operations. The organizational operation works, such as the setup of necessary team boards including team head and vice head, document processor, bookkeeper, job leaders, etc and their responsibilities, as well as the support of constant team offices by team members, the holding of team meetings, the establishment of team rules, and the management of team capital and accounting, are embraced. As to the business operation works, the assistance focuses on the organizational development and the improvement of

managerial ability, farming environment, and operational efficiency, the implementation of production and marketing plans, and the expansion of product sales. The assistance results are expected to be successful by imposing necessary business and technological training and financial supports on equipment and input materials.

C. Team Training for APMTs

The most important training purpose is the strengthening of team managerial ability through the enhancement of team quality, consensus, business concepts, entrepreneurship, and cooperation. Three

training levels including preliminary, secondary, and advanced training classes are provided by experiment (improvement) stations, universities, and private training centers. The preliminary class focuses on the understanding of marketing environment, and the operation and development of APMTs. The secondary class emphasizes the cultivation of leadership and ability of creation and handling risks. The advanced class provides specialty training on business management,

marketing and management, financial management, and management information system.

D. Evaluation and Rewards of APMTs

The purpose of the evaluation is to understand the development of APMTs for future assistance. Farmers' organizations are invited by local government to complete initial evaluation. Better

Table 1 The Integration Performance of APMTs in Taiwan(1)

Team Category	Number of teams	Number of Team Members	Operation Scale of APMTs	Total Scale in Taiwan ^a	Participation Ratio
	(team)	(person)	(ha, head, case)	—	(%)
Total	6,415	121,194	—	—	49.12
Vegetable	2,115	39,977	42,520 ha	174,955 ha	24.30
Flowers	517	6,250	5,259 ha	9,861 ha	53.33
Fruits	2,256	47,613	94,211 ha	229,230 ha	41.10
Rice	136	3,026	4,744 ha	346,756 ha	1.37
Feedgrain	44	1,537	1,433 ha	360,000 ha	0.39
Special Crops	263	4,890	5,736 ha	21,040 ha	27.26
Aquarium	164	2,093	3,337 ha	57,855 ha	5.76
Poultry	180	2,493	38,280,052 head	73,841,000 head	51.84
Layer	62	783	7,417,889 head	31,462,000 head	23.58
Ducks	8	108	53,000 head	12,884,000 head	0.41
Geese	27	431	2,731,200 head	3,021,000 head	90.40
Hog	371	9,664	8,235,598 head	10,684,549 head	77.08
Dairy	56	566	80,716 head	62,784 head	128.56 ^b
Goats	75	1,227	192,938 head	307,000 head	62.84
Beekeeping	34	335	208,737 case	140,434 case	148.63 ^b
Others	7	201	—	—	—

a. Data drawn from Taiwan Agricultural Yearbook, 1998 edition.

b. The operation scale of APMTs is greater than the total Scale in Taiwan probably due to the statistical error.

teams judged by local government are then put into the second-round evaluation in five regions by the DAF and regional experiment (improvement) stations. The final evaluation and approval to gain rewards as the best teams are implemented by

academic units. Teams gain low scores will be put into further assistance or re-organization if necessary. After the aggregate evaluation of economic and non-economic, software and hardware, production and marketing, quality and quantity considerations, 10

best and 100 excellent teams are rewarded publicly every year

The achievements of the organizational integration on APMTs have been significant mainly since 1994. Until September 30, 1997, the registered and filtered APMTs were 6,315 teams (Table 1). Many agricultural sub-sectors better performance except for rice, feed grain, and duck industries. For training performance, there were 410 classes opened to 18,054 members of APMTs between 1993 and 1997. The achievements have also included the annual awards of 10 best and 100 excellent teams since 1995. Most of the best 10 teams were in the vegetable, fruit, and flower industries during the last three years. Hog industry lost its award while bee industry became one of the top 10 teams in 1997.

III. Challenges

It is aware the program direction of APMTs has been on the right track with great contribution to agricultural policy performance. However, the exploration of many existing unsound facts may provide the space of improving current design and implementation of such program. The works and principles involved in the integration programs that are considered as future challenges on APMTs are listed as followings.

A. Integration Principle, Multidimensional Operation, and Database Management

1. The integration principle on the administrative area as boundary for team organization may restrict the possibility for farmers with land close to each other and similar interests to organize teams.
2. Quite a few team members mentioned that the possibility of receiving government financial assistance is the main purpose of organizing APMTs.
3. The farmers' organizations such as APMTs, farmers' associations, fishermen associations, cooperatives, cooperative farms, associations, etc. have been very complex and contradictory among each other in terms of assistance

resources and functions

4. There is a minimum scale requirement of APMTs. The scale in operating may still create inefficient in scale economics.
5. The formation of a team is highly related to mutual harmonization, participation, and human motion among members but not under the consideration of scale economics of efficient farm and market competitive conditions and as scale economics in transportation, and bargaining power, etc.
6. The movements toward multi-dimensional operations are highly expected by team members due much to changes of agricultural production and marketing environment such as age and labor structure of team members and market liberalization & internationalization. However, the principle of team organization based on similar products may limit the expectations on the abandon of low-profit products, the increase of producing organic fertilizer, the production of organic products, and the change of management toward leisure and recreational farms.
7. Some excellent APMTs in the past have already out of business due to industrial weakening and labor shortage. The unchanged registration data of such teams have challenged the effectiveness of database maintenance.

B. Assistance and Use of the Team Office and Processing Plant Facilities

1. Financial assistance of APMTs may be received from many institutional units without a certain degree of integration. The establishment of simpler process and one outlet working system associated with clearly defined assistance content and coordination ratio becomes necessary.
2. Financial assistance may be blamed as uneven in terms of industry categories, assistance sources, team establishment timing, and the public relationship of team cadre, especially

the team head. Moreover, the situation that teams with excess facilities not willing to share with other teams may lower capital productivity.

3. The fixed assets such as team offices and warehouses are usually registered in the name of head, cadre, or individual members. There are problems resulting from asset ownership when team ceases to operate, or individual team member decides to terminate membership or new member applies for membership.
4. Processing plants are also mostly registered in the name of head, cadre, or individual members and are often not legally registered. The vertically related plants centered by APMTs provide beneficiary' assistance for team members who may be vaguely recognized as real farmers and with weak linkage to vertically related plants. The assistance on offices, warehouses, and plants may finally become assets of small numbers of farmers or non-farmers.
5. The APMTs, to some extent, depend on so much public assistance to become excellent or best teams. The wrong treatment on public assistance as income source and the lack of reasonable profit distribution plans create problems of cumulating large enough team funds.

C. Cooperative Use, Support, and Field Management of Farm Machinery and Labor Forces

1. The use of farm machinery without any charge for APMTs team members may create unfair arguments in terms of dissimilar operation scales, field distances, use frequency and quantity, and maintenance fee charge.
2. The voluntary and scarified participation of some team members on the works of field management, product harvesting, grading, and sales may not be a nice permanent model to follow up.

3. It seems hard to achieve consistent operational results due to different degrees of specialization, time and care inputs in field management, and certain degrees of selfish among team members. As a result, many inconsistent product quality, packaging, and grading have been detrimental to their market competitiveness.
4. The policy preference of agricultural automation assistance on middle to large size farms under the consideration of scale economies and easy to assist may have ignored the real and survival needs of small-scale farms to a certain degree. It is significant that small farms are not easy to receive assistance and cost inefficient to be competitive in the market place. The agribusiness firms such as Taiwan Sugar Corporation (TSC) producing (hogs, and orchids etc.) should reduce domestic sales to avoid farmer's blames.

D. Educational Training and Evaluation

1. The course contents and training subjects at preliminary, second, and advanced levels are not strictly regulated but designed with free will by training units. The proper contents and teacher selection may need further integrated discussions. Some APMTs respond that many important themes or practical needs, including "how to get low-rate loans", "how to use computer to deal with daily works and finance", "how to receive market information", and "how to effectively sell products", were not included in the class offerings.
2. Some APMTs recognize the importance of independent development and self-finance. They are however, facing difficulty of finding low-rate financial sources from private sectors to purchase fixed capital of agriculture and aquaculture. The providing of legal and interest saving sources such as "agricultural credit guarantee fund" and "agricultural development fund" from training and assistance agencies is expected.
3. Some APMTs of the best 10 and excellent 100

complain the over-loading and over-disturbed preparation of guest visits from everywhere. Some know how will be even imitated, and weaken the market competitiveness of their products.

4. The evaluation of APMTs should further take into account the product category, age and education structure of the mummer, member structure in training participation, the degree of excess facilities, the amount of financial assistance received, the amount of fund cumulated, the ability to develop markets, the satisfactory results of team members, the environmental maintenance, etc. In other words, the evaluation needs to consider not only the performance but also understanding of farm scale, and its distribution, location characteristics, and industrial structure of the respective sub-sector. The evaluation on the ratio of "real" farmers among team members is especially necessary.
5. Some aquacultural APMTs believe in the necessary establishment of a water-cleaning pond to avoid disease due to the impacts of waste water release from other industries. This external diseconomies (third party effect or spillover effect) may increase costs of aquacultural APMTs and reduce profitability and managerial performance. It is expected that such effects should be taken into account in the process of evaluation.

E. Opinions of Related Integration and Training Agencies

1. Some farmers' organizations such as farmers' associations and the like played important role in offering material inputs, team offices, and warehouses, assisting field works, implementing sustainable operation, assuring product outlet (even guaranteed price), product storage, disease prevention, and breeding.
2. The related persons in crop, livestock, and aquacultural experiment (improvement) stations and their divisions providing assistance to APMTs responded the following unsatisfactory facts: (1) insufficient personnel

allocation, (2) insufficient and slow budget supply and release, and (3) too wide range assistance. Some APMTs complained about the delayed assistance from livestock (aquacultural) experiment (improvement) stations and their branches, and found convenient assistance from neighborhood pesticide salesman.

3. Some local agencies of integration and training expressed the problem of understanding the function and operation of APMTs. Still some related persons of farmers' associations, local government, and experiment (improvement) stations expect to have more budget released as important energy for them to assist APMTs to gain performance.
4. The related offices such as agriculture, assistance, marketing, fishery, etc. in local government do not have clear-cut missions and enough manpower which sometime in turn create the attribute problem of responsibility. It is acknowledged that the enthusiasm of related persons in local government and APMTs must be trained in order to increase the quality of services.

F. Product Marketing and Market Bargaining Power

1. For large-scale APMTs, graded and packaged products sold through the consignment with several merchants turning out to be more profitable than that through other channels. However, most APMTs with limited members and scale confront with low and unstable prices due to marketing channel dependence and middleman profit squeezing problems. In other word, cooperative marketing has become the weakest part of APMTs. Therefore, those few farmers' organizations providing stringent functional assistance on field management and guaranteed purchase, and even to ensure the product price and payment, as well as product processing and packaging deserve much more encouragement and awareness.
2. The investment and scale efficiency displayed by TSC on hogs and butterfly orchids in terms

of its low cost in land, easy access to the information of market and policy and automation are beyond the competition of farmers APMTs of these two industries highly expect that TSC would export all its hogs and butterfly orchids, abort the production, or ship these industries abroad

- 3 There are unstable prices and more leftovers through the fruit & vegetable and flower wholesale markets, especially the fruit & vegetable wholesale market Generally, the outlet of merchant consignments provided higher average price than those of wholesale markets but with higher risk on idle receipts As a result, many issues on marketing system other than the production techniques attract more attention
4. The lack of reliable market information creates coordination problems between production and marketing. Consequently, some members of APMTs have to check out the market situation at the major production zone for proper decision of production and marketing Some APMTs hope that government authorities could evaluate the possibility of promoting "supply management" regulations and establishing exporting company with unique outlet on individual farm product
- 5 The profitability of organic products and products with the label of Good Agricultural Practice(GAP) (吉園圃) have not been as good as expected The limited increase of demand for organic and GAP products may be caused by unsatisfactory field management and/or lack of consumer confidence and awareness
- 6 The small-scale processing plants of APMTs do not commonly have serious sanitary and safety inspections during processing stages As a result, no labels of Food Good Manufacturing Practice (FGMP) and Chinese Agricultural Standard (CAS) create weak market competition In addition, most plants were not formally registered as legal plants Those who run the plants expect to be legalized immediately under the existing situation

IV. Prospects

The consideration of solving current challenges of APMTs in Taiwan provide several policy prospects listed as followings

A. Integration Principle, Multidimensional Management, and Database Management

- 1 It is realized that the existence of APMTs is based on the common needs and this need must be succeeded by cooperative efforts The most important service for individual members offered by APMTs may be the economic incentive which, in turns, determines membership application and termination
2. The purposes of APMTs include the decrease of material costs, technique exchange, the labor sharing, the increase of product quality, the assurance of product outlet, the diversification of risks, and the higher sale prices Basically, the participation and termination of membership should be free of will In addition to the team rule, the contracts requesting members to abide by production and marketing promises may be considered, however
- 3 The design of systemized tables for the construction of database on situations and member information of APMTs are suggested Regional experiment (improvement) stations and local government should assign specific persons to be responsible for updating the database

B. Assistance on the Team Office and Processing Plant Facilities, and Team Fund Cumulation

- 1 It is not encouraged that the business funds of APMTs are supported by government in the long run To cumulate team funds, the application of "member ownership" and "return of surplus" of the two cooperative principles are suggested One other measure to be considered may be the encouragement on

APMTs to register as cooperative firms which become the organizations with legal status and with system of share holdings on revenue to induce re-investment willingness of the members

- 2 Most assets of APMTs may be coming from government assistance at first and is proposed to be mostly from revenue share holdings in the subsequent business operations. It is known that the source of team funds from business operation income is minimal. Certain portion of the APMTs' revenue should be reserved as members' assets to enhance the ability of cash flow. In so doing, members of APMTs may be aware of their ownership which in turn raises incentive to handle products under the operation of APMTs. Moreover, the clearly defined share return system must be incorporated for the belief of valuable investment among members.
- 3 To collect operational capital of APMTs, "revolving fund" and "per unit capital retains (PUCR's)" are two other possible measures to adopt. In detail, part of current team revenue being automatically kept for the use of APMTs and returned after certain period of time is the purpose of revolving fund. PUCR's is defined as reserving a certain portion of paid prices per unit of the team members with products sold by APMTs. Currently, part of APMTs with products such as sugar apples, hogs, flowers, eggs, and some aquacultural products perform PUCR's to raise team funds. Believing that most assistance on the effective use of team fund is necessary, foremost of the team funds are currently spent on religious ceremony, festival, touring, and sightseeing, it is believed that more assistance on the effective use of team fund is necessary.
- 4 Major support and assistance of APMTs from government are fixed equipment, low interest loan, periodical training, research and development expense, fixed financial assistance for the increase of cooperative marketing, product sanitary experiments, etc. It may be better that the fixed asset support to legal organization such as farmers' organization and then be rented for the use of

APMTs or team members at a low rate. Except for the beginning establishment of APMTs, the long-run dependence on government support is improper for the continuous development of APMTs. As to the training and integration of APMTs, not only economic incentives but also concept correction should be incorporated as important class designs.

C. Educational Training and Evaluation

- 1 Part of the training courses may be treated as fixed format for different levels of classes to gain more completeness and effectiveness. The subjects chosen to participate training may include persons of assistance and evaluation units in farmers' organizations, and government agencies in all tiers and should avoid overlapping selections. The establishment of class offerings design group may be considered. Some courses may be edited by specialists and supplemented by video tapes and transparency to provide the introduction of policy measures, successful APMTs, loan sources, market information, reception.
- 2 Some training programs may be flexible as to be held at experimental stations, the related colleges of agriculture, and also team offices or the places where farmers' organizations locate for cost and time saving.
- 3 Practical experience may be introduced by inviting the cadres of the best 10 and excellent 100 as course instructors. It may also be necessary to set up financial assistance to APMTs which provide service of guest visits. This is necessary because visiting services provided by the related APMTs may create opportunity for potential competitors to be more competitive in the market place which in turn may generate external economies for the whole society.
- 4 The Distance Lecturing (遠距教學) may be coordinated and implemented by related colleges of agriculture. It also deserves to establish new departments of agribusiness production and marketing or polytechnic colleges of agriculture at the Current National

Open University (國立空中大學)

- 5 It seems proper to treat the complete policy welfare measures as a major focus in the integration, training, assistance, and evaluation of APMTs. In other words, the integration, training, and assistance should take the support of small scale farmers and farmers in remote areas as relatively an important factor. It is clear that more cares and supports in the integration process are necessary for those farmers with low levels of education, weak economic power, and small and scattered scale

D. Product Marketing and Market Competitiveness of APMTs

1. Better operations on product outlet and sale of APMTs are of two kinds. The first one is using dominant quantity as the pricing strategy to deal with merchant buyers. The other one is to increase product utility through further processing. Since the lack of product outlet and price instability is of common situation, it is suggested that the evaluation on the possibility of cooperative sales by product as well as regional characteristics under the assistance of farmers' associations or through the united actions among neighboring APMTs
2. The suggestion is also to the evaluation on the possibility of coordinating the urban-type farmers' organizations or producers' associations playing the downstream role of vertical integration such as establishment of chain supermarkets and processing centers of fresh products and the rural-type farmers' organizations specializing on the assistance of farming and production. In so doing, certain effectiveness may be achieved through such strategic alliance. The operation of supermarkets by farmers' organizations usually exhibits only few market niche without significant competitiveness to hypermarkets or large-scale retail stores in the urban area. Under the consideration of scale economies and specialization, upperstream such as feeds, pesticide, fertilizer, material inputs, and agricultural machinery and downstream such as processing plants, traders, and retail

markets of APMTs may not be necessarily operated by farmers' organizations

- 3 There exists ineffectiveness of increasing sale prices and revenue for products with organic or GAP labels. Major reasons are considered as the unsound field management, bad marketing strategy, the unavailable correct information for consumers, etc. APMTs are therefore reluctant to apply pesticide carefully and record actual data which becomes a vicious circle. Current disadvantageous situation may include the inactive inspection and arrest on pesticide residuals and the use of prohibited pesticide. It is hard to see the execution of destroy, punishment, and label-use cancellation. It is thus important to offer complete assistance and inspection of related institutions, education on producers, middlemen, and consumers, and with the help of opinion leaders in providing correct information and guiding consumer purchases. The production and marketing of organic and GAP farm products are also proposed to be incorporated into training materials
- 4 It is necessary to execute, advocate, and investigate on the safety and sanitary identification of agricultural products such as CAS, FGMP, GAP etc to become clearly and easily understanding regulations. Financial budget on the printed brochure for hospitals and schools as references may be considered. In addition, the advocacy through the invitation of specialists for the opinion expressions on TVs, newspapers, broadcasts, etc may be effective and worth of planning
- 5 The common issues faced by APMTs are the lower and unstable product prices in the fruit & vegetable wholesale markets. Existed major bottleneck may include the designed vague identification of public or private ownership on operational entity of wholesale markets and their connection to politics and elections. It is believed that the promotion on the privatization with public ownership or fully privatization of wholesale markets will be the long-run solution

Note

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台灣農業產銷班和小農企業化發展的關聯： 成就、挑戰和前景

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摘 要

台灣的土地面積 3 萬 6 千平方公里，其中之山地、坡地和平地分佔 37%、38%和 29%，大部份農業位居平地。1997 年，總耕地面積 864,817 公頃，農家 780,246 戶。換言之，每戶農家的耕地面積約 1.11 公頃，且散處 2-3 坵塊。

提及「台灣經驗」，農業政策及其成就應列要因之一。加速和支持台灣的農業發展有許多複雜因素，本文從制度面的觀點研討農業產銷班，至於技術面和經濟面，於文內有作必要性的說明。

在台灣，農業產銷班始自 1992 年，是推動小農企業化發展的重要因素之一。本文強調以下三個方面的探討：(1)引介農業產銷班的整合方式和主要成就，(2)分析農業產銷班的當前課題，以及(3)討論農業產銷班的未來前景。

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