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PEOPLE'S APPROACH TOWARDS AGRICULTURAL FUNDS IN THE GHEORGHENI REGION

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Abstract

After five years of Romania's accession to European Union, there have taken part several changes in Romanian economy, especially in agriculture. All participants of agriculture and food industry have to exist in a new, changing environment. There are numbers of applications opened for agricultural producers, but many of them are not able to obtain, they are unsuccessful often, and there are serious problems in calling the financial budget pro-rata. In this study we examined the activity of producers for European Union's subsidies in Harghita County between 2007-2011, which priority goals were identifiable, that will show the characteristics of the future's development of agriculture for the coming years. We focused on the role of vocational training and the role of qualification among the applicants. We assumed that in the second half of the CAP period, it will increase – not only the numbers of submitted applications – but the demand for those trainings, that give such qualifications and knowledge that are requirements of the authorities. We carried out a structured deep interview personally the notoriety of the subsidy projects, the qualification, the background of applicants, their intentions why they took part in the projects in Gyergyó Region et cetera.

Keywords: Rural area; Agriculture; Funds; Adult Education; Self-sufficiency

INTRODUCTION

According to Law No. 351/2001, in Romania rural areas take up 207,3 km², that is 87 percent of the country's territory. 45 percent of the country's population lives in these rural areas. The average population density is relatively low, 47 inhabitants/km², about one-half of the country's overall population density. According to OECD, rural areas in Romania cover 94 percent of the territory, and the rural population accounts for 48 percent of the country's total population [7]. The significant disparities between rural and urban areas represent a specific social problem for the rural areas. About 10,1 million inhabitants represent the rural population, this being the total population of the 13. 000 villages organized in around 2.700 communes. The percentage of poor people residing in rural areas makes 2/3 of the country's poverty rate. About 70 percent of the workforce is employed in primary agriculture (compared with the country's average of 40 percent). In general, income in agricultural activities is relatively low and the employment structure of the poor is advantageous for employment in primary agriculture. Thus, 25 percent of the poor population is employed in primary agriculture. The majority of them work on self-supplying farms that are managed mostly by pensioned people. Only 1 percent of the rural population holds a college degree, compared with the 9 percent of the urban population; over 7 percent has little or no formal education, compared with the 2 percent of the urban population. Social indicators show considerable regional disparities [6]. Considering the country's regional character, it is justifiable to analyze rural people and population.

Earlier several studies carried out and analyzed the human resource situation in rural areas, and stated that the level of education is lower than in urban regions and must be developed. [3, 2, 5, 1, 4, 8].

Taking into account both the rural-urban disparities, and the low rate of the social and human indicators, this study sets out to answer the following research question: After Romania's accession to the European Union, how far do agricultural funds for rural development help rural population?

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted between May and July 2012. As member of the Caritas Alba Iulia Rural Development staff one has the opportunity to see the huge demand for vocational education and training in the field of animal husbandry as well as the large number of applications for agricultural funds for rural development and this made possible to formulate the present research's question: „In this region, what is people's approach towards agricultural funds?“ Searching for answers to my research question, with the help of anonymous surveys and deep structured interviews such people were addressed who took advantage of one of the above mentioned organization's services, may it be adult education or professional consultation. By the evaluation, both the fact that I conducted the interviews personally and that I used the method of structured interviews has proven to be useful. At the same time, the answers to the open-ended interview questions revealed many new interesting areas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Romania joined the EU in 2007. Following Romania's accession to the EU, various sources of agricultural subsidies became available. From the point of view of the analyzed region, the following funds are relevant: funds for lawn farmers; Measure No 141: funds for semi self-supplying farms; Measure No 112: setting up of young farmers. In point of presenting the results of in-depth research, the present report takes into consideration the importance of rural development funds. One can benefit from rural development programmed grants by writing a project proposal according to the criteria that have been announced in the call for proposals. In the case of rural development measures, at the time of application, farmers do not have to prove their expertise in the given field. Nevertheless, they have to assume responsibility that during the implementation period (5 years) they acquire professional knowledge within this field. These vocational qualifications may be obtained both in educational institutions and in adult education programmes, but the qualification title must correspond to the field listed in the project. After analyzing the country's application activity for rural development grants, one can affirm that 45.722 grant applications are submitted amounting to 18.272.019.588 RON. In Harghita County 1.595 applications were submitted amounting to 529.644.902 RON. In the Central region, Alba County was over-represented concerning submitted applications and granted amounts. Alba County is followed by Harghita with 1.595 submitted applications and more than 529 million RON [8].

Anonymous survey questionnaire results

23 people, who recently has participated in any kind of adult education programme, were questioned (16 people took part in vocational training for dairy operators and 7 participants in introductory courses in animal breeding). Half of the respondents possessed a high school diploma, while the other half had certificate of secondary education. The majority of the people being questioned were males (12), there were also a few females (4) as well as some respondents who did not mark any of the given answer concerning their gender. Two of the questioned were living in urban areas, the others were from one of the city's rural area. Most questioned possess pasture, this being followed by meadow and then ploughland. Principally, the ploughland is used for production of forage (wheat, oat, barley, rye), or potatoes. Only a few of the questioned marks corn, grass or sweet pea. The 23 questioned persons have in total 677 animals, at least this was the total sum they found worth mentioning. Most of the people being questioned have cattle (288), fowl (191), sheep (112) and pigs (86). Concerning the questioned persons' agricultural equipment, in general, one can talk about a normal condition. Most questioned marked to be in the possession of agricultural equipment in the following order: tractors, soil cultivating machine and milking-machine. Those in the possession of 10 - 15 cattle have in general one tractor, while those owning 15 – 20 – 70 cattle have two or three tractors. From the 23 questioned 5 were interested in agricultural funds, 8 have

already submitted applications and 4 were being implementing their projects. One person noted that „I have not get any information about funds, yet”; 4 respondents did not answer the question at all. From the 14 respondents 6 were satisfied while 4 were rather dissatisfied with the system of agricultural funds. At the same time 4 had various opinions, such as „yes and no”, „it is slightly bureaucratic”, „it is acceptable”. The raw materials produced on one’s own farm is used by the people of this region in their own household, for trade or for processing products for themselves and for trade. From the 16 questioned persons 5 answered that they use the raw milk for processing dairy products (cheese, cream cheese). The majority of the people questioned uses the processed products in the own household (10), 7 sell it to wholesalers, 4 sell their products directly.

Results of Semi-Structured Interviews

After the anonymous survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews followed which were conducted with persons who were interested in agricultural funds, who have submitted an application or who have heard about these grant opportunities, but did not submit any application. Among the 7 persons that were questioned, there were 2 females and 5 males. From the point of view of their age, the youngest was 32 and the oldest one was 49. From the 5 male interviewees 3 indicated agricultural work as their main occupation, without having an official job title. Those having full-time jobs are either specialists (carpenter) or enterprisers. The female interviewees’ main occupation besides domestic work and child rearing is agricultural work. However, none of them is officially employed. The people being questioned had at least a minimum educational qualification (8th grade), respectively the highest educational degree they possessed was second bachelor’s degree. Each interviewee has already taken part in a kind of adult education course, the types of courses varying from animal breeding to selling agent. None of the questioned acquired agricultural knowledge in educational institutions. Most of them (7) participated in adult educational programmes with the desire to acquire this knowledge. Concerning the size of farms, one can say that those people whose main occupation is agriculture hold a larger number of animals (15 – 22 cows, 39 pigs), while those for whom farming is a secondary occupation have less animals and process products for their own household only. The results suggest that there are significant differences between the two female interviewees: one of the two women is not completely involved in the farm work, but only helps on the farm that has 40 sheep, 40 chickens and 5 goats, while the other one does the majority of work on the farm, taking care of a cow, two pigs and 10 chickens. Concerning agricultural equipment, most of the questioned possessed at least a tractor. Other agricultural equipment that they frequently have are hay making and soil cultivating machines. To the question concerning the quality of agricultural equipments all the questioned answered by marking the category: used. The objective of this research was to analyze people’s approach towards agricultural funds. From the 7 interviewees 3 did not submit any application and are not interested anymore in doing it; 3 persons did submit an application which are now under evaluation and one person would like to submit an application in the near future. One can say about those who did not submit any application, that they definitely do not want to apply for a grant; they were both actually over the age (40) at which one can apply for a larger amount of funding. The third person, who is not applying for a grant anymore, would have liked to do it in 2011, but because of family matters decided not to assume the responsibilities that would occur with the implementation of a project. From those who did submit an application, two applied for the grant that supports the setting-up of young farmers and one for grants supporting self-supplying farms. „Seeing that there are good opportunities, I said to myself why to struggle on one’s own. I saw that without financial support we would only remain with our plans” (E.V. interviewee). On the basis of those said in the interviews, one might think, that the questioned are afraid more to miss the opportunity of receiving a given amount of money, rather than to consider how the agricultural fund system functions and how to apply for such grants purposefully. To the questions about farmers’ objectives with the obtained agricultural funds many responded that they would buy agricultural equipments which would help them above all in hay making. „We are getting old, we are all growing old, thus we

need to ease up on work,” says farmer B.B., thus explaining the reason for the demand for agricultural equipment. The respondent who would like to submit an application affirmed that *„one needs financial support because without it one cannot come along. We would be able to develop (...), so that we do not have to ask others for help.”* It is rather interesting that, while in the past smallholder farms relied on mutual help, in the present farmers do not want to rely on the community help anymore, they want to be independent, they want to have their own agricultural machines and are even ready to pay all the costs for those. Most of the questioned people think that mutual cooperation hardly exists anymore. The respondent, who lives in the city, supposes that mutual cooperation exists only in the country. The interviewee from the country claims that *„mutual cooperation is barely functioning as today anyone who would help you in agricultural work would expect in return some money. Sometimes, it does function, but only in case of very close friends; if you need them they come to help and you go and help them as well.”* The following quotation might reflect well the farmers’ approach: *„Why not to take use of this opportunity when you can get it? (...) One can renovate the stables, or maybe buy some agricultural equipment. So why not? According to my theories, there is no agriculture without subsidies. Thus, nowhere in Europe can agriculture function without subsidies”* (J.P. interviewee). The above mentioned quotation confirms, that the farmer does not want to miss the opportunity and that is why he/she submits an application. At the end of my interviews, I wanted to find out which family member is going to take over the operations on the family farm. I can affirm that none of my interviewees was able to say with conviction, that his/her child is going to continue to farm. *„Well, where does today’s youth like to work? They somehow like animals, but they have no idea what does animal husbandry mean, as they are not obliged to work on the farm”* (G.CS. interviewee).

CONCLUSIONS

In the researched region there is a large number of farmers whose main occupation is farming and animal breeding. However, officially, these people’s main occupation is farming only when, as a consequence of an agricultural grant application, they have to register their enterprise. The interviewed male and female farmers have low educational levels, but there is a high participation rate in adult education programmes, independent of the fields of study. From the point of view of agricultural equipment, the rate of used tractors is rather high. In most cases, the reason for an application is to purchase further agricultural equipment which would help farmers’ work. One can say, that in most cases the interviewees submit an application, if they possess the land and livestock needed to guarantee the adequate number of points required. Those who are decided not to apply for a grant, do this because of being afraid of the consequences or because of not finding the system safe. In general, people write a project proposal in order not to miss the opportunity of obtaining a given amount of money, rather than to consider how the agricultural fund system functions and how to apply purposefully for such grants. They are mostly informed about grant opportunities from a close acquaintance, who had already submitted an application. That the acquaintance submitted an application functions as a motivational factor. Most farmers consider that these grants are a form of financial security as due to it they can become independent and do not have to rely anymore on other farmers’ help and agricultural equipment. This is also confirmed by the fact that the idea of mutual cooperation is vanishing, as nowadays people go to places where they receive some money for the work they have done.

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