

The Management of Collective Farms in Poland

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The statute of a collective farm lays it down that such a farm is a free association of those farmers who bring the means of production into the farm and work there. The capital fund of the farm is formed in addition by an annual writing off of part of the income produced by the members. According to the statute the management of the farm is in the hands of the general assembly, the elected governing board and the chairman.

Thus a collective farm is a self-governing economic organism. The structure of its management differs substantially from the management of other enterprises, even the cooperatives. This characteristic is due to the fact that it does not employ hired workers. The members have equal rights both as to management and to farm work. The persons carrying on the managerial functions are subject to a specified group of members (the governing board) who, according to the statute, take decisions appropriate to the managerial staff. These same members in turn have to subordinate themselves very often the next day to a person (or persons) to whom these duties have fallen. Lack of understanding of these interdependencies often leads to conflicts between the operative management and the workers, which impede the farm work. The provisions of the statute dealing with the duty of the members to submit to an elected governing board during the periods between general assemblies in practice are inclined to lose their force. There are other reasons also why the governing board or the chairman are not always able to manage a big collective farm adequately. Often there are no persons with professional qualifications among the members elected to the governing board to perform the tasks of management. Thus as long ago as 1959 some collective farms started hiring adequately qualified persons from outside to help in the management.

In 1966 there were 1225 collective farms in Poland covering 238.8 thousand ha. of land, with 106.6 thousand head of cattle (73.6 thousand head of these being collectively owned), 122.2 thousand head of hogs (48.3 thousand head collectively owned). They comprised 21.9 thousand

families and 32.2 thousand members. So far as size is concerned, collective farms with less than 100 ha. comprised 27.2 the total; from 101-200 ha., 35.4%; 201-300 ha., 20.0%; 301-500 ha., 13.0% and more than 500 ha., 4.4%. The total income amounted to 3875 zlotys per ha., and that for division between members, 30,274 zlotys per family. For the salaries of the so-called agronomists (the production managers) the collective farms get state subsidies. At present there are about 500 agronomists on the collective farms.

Farming Results Obtained by Collective Farms with Hired Agronomists

(Production per ha. Results without agronomist = 100)

Arable lands	
cereals	105
potatoes	88
Agricultural lands	
live animals	125
milk	113
Yields	
cereals	111
potatoes	110
sugar beets	96
winter rape	115
Average annual milk yield per cow	133
Total income per ha.	175
Income per family	150

Investigations [3, 4, 5] indicate that collective farms on which qualified agronomists have worked for several years obtain better results than those where the members rely on their own capabilities. The scale of the differences are illustrated in the Table 3.

Although in general the work of agronomists is appreciated, their position is not yet stabilized and clarified. Self-government is well developed and organized but the opportunities for agronomist are limited. In principle they are advisers and assist the management, but almost every operation initiated by them and designed to fit in with the economic working of the farm must be cleared with the chairman or the governing board. If an agronomist disregards the opinion or the wishes of even a small group of the members he exposes himself to serious consequences or at least to the loss of the work of unsatisfied members who stay away from work. His activities must be based upon his special knowledge and on the tactfulness with which he cooperates with members, the owners of the farm and the workers.

He cannot order the staff about because he cannot apply compulsion or any sanctions whatsoever. Member-workers are not afraid of losing their

jobs. For these reasons agronomists try to leave the duties of direct supervision and the allocation of manpower to the foremen-members or to the chairmen while performing intermediary functions themselves, i.e. suggesting what should be done and why, and what methods should be used. In other words they are concerned mostly with planning. The character of a collective farm implies that the agronomist's role is subsidiary so far as the members and governing bodies are concerned. His status as a manager rises when there is a change of elected governing bodies. By cooperating with them he secures continuity of economic activity while their terms rotate.

So far as technical progress is concerned, the final decisions are in the hands of a collective governing body if not of a larger group of members. In this respect it is like the farming on an individually owned holding. Thus, if on a collective farm there are members who have better professional training, the farming results are better and the work of the management easier. The Union of Collective Farms lays great emphasis, therefore, on the training of members and preparing them to work in cooperative self-government.

From investigations which have been carried out:

(1) It appears that limiting the self-governing character of a collective farm and making it more like a state farm, or any other, does not seem to be reasonable. In spite of all the difficulties in the organization of the production processes resulting from its character, self-government is an important incentive towards increasing production and improving economic results. This self-government however is subject to some changes.

(2) From among the members there emerge persons well able to be leaders and managers who at the same time respect the opinions and suggestions of the members. Hired specialists whom the members come to know join as members themselves and thus increase their opportunities to act. However, the process of crystallizing an appropriate model of self-government approved by all members, is a long one, especially when a collective farm and the number of members are large.

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