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THE TRAINING ACTIVITY OF THE MASOVIAN AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY CENTRE IN WARSAW FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MASOVIAN FARMERS

*SZKOLENIOWA DZIAŁALNOŚĆ DORADCZA MAZOWIECKIEGO OŚRODKA
DORADZTWA ROLNICZEGO W WARSZAWIE Z PUNKTU WIDZENIA
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Słowa kluczowe: szkolenia, doradztwo, gospodarstwo rolne, Mazowsze

Abstract. The aim of the study was to diagnose the needs of farmers within the scope of training courses conducted by the Masovian Agricultural Advisory Centre in Warsaw, in the area of the Masovian Province. 1331 farmers were questioned, who had 21 areas of training and four types of training to choose from. Based on the survey results, it was found that farmers chose the proposed themes and types of training a total of 8234 times. On average, one respondent was interested in more than 6 ranges of thematic training. Of the four isolated thematic groups, the most popular were subjects on new technologies of agricultural production (chosen 2471 times). This was followed by general agricultural production (2371 times) and economics of agricultural production (2337 times). The slightest interest was observed in issues related to agritourism as well as regional and traditional products (1055 times).

Introduction

Contemporary economies are largely knowledge-based. The production, distribution and use of knowledge is considered to be one of the primary resources of an organization, institution or company. In new reality, competitiveness is determined not only by the economic potential of an organization, but also by its ability to change rapidly. The organization should take advantage of changes taking place in the environment because they offer development opportunities.

Every organization needs to interact with the environment to survive. In recent decades, changes in the environment and their dynamics have become very extensive and increasingly affect the operations of any institution. Any factor, regardless of whether it is inside or outside the company, can be a force producing change [Niewęglowski, Niewęglowska 2009].

Advisory services to farmers, on behalf of the State, in accordance with the Act on advisory bodies, are provided by advisory centres. In recent years, commercial consulting has been becoming more and more important. It is mainly represented by private companies. Such advisory is also more often provided by trading companies that deal with the distribution of agricultural machinery, feed, pesticides or fertilizers. Their consultancy services focus primarily on issues relating to the industry they represent. However, it is becoming more widespread for such companies to provide other services e.g. connected with filling out applications for EU subsidies, etc.

In the region of Masovian Province, the institution that is responsible for providing advisory services to farmers is the Masovian Agricultural Advisory Centre, based in Warsaw (MODR). MODR is a local provincial legal entity, operating under the Act dated 22nd October 2004 on agricultural advisory units (Journal of Laws No. 251, item. 2507, with subsequent amendments) and the Statute conferred by the Masovian Regional Assembly, under which it has been operating since 1st August 2009 [Statut Mazowieckiego... 2010, Ustawa o jednostkach... 2004].

MODR advisory activity is focused mainly on improving the competitiveness of the Polish agricultural sector, improving working and living conditions in Polish rural areas as well as raising the level of professional qualifications of people living in rural areas in the Masovian Province. The course of action of the Masovian Agricultural Advisory Centre result from the development strategy of Masovia, agricultural development programmes and rural areas and the current needs and expectations of the rural community. Tasks are fulfilled by the Masovian Agricultural Advisory Centre in cooperation with the institutions of central and local government, farmers' organizations, scientific research institutes, schools and educational institutions [Niewęglowski 2011].

Dynamic changes related to systemic and socio-economic transformation, affecting the level of agricultural development create the need to adjust agricultural consulting to current advisory needs. These changes result in the evolution of customer needs of advisory centres. This entails the transformation of the organization, diversification of its activities and changes in financing agricultural consulting. In view of dynamic changes in food economy, centres specializing in agricultural advisory are inspired to adjust the scope of their activities to the changing needs of farmers.

The aim of this study was to analyze and identify the training needs of Masovian farmers. Special attention was placed on defining the expectations of farm owners towards the thematic area of MODR training activities.

Material and methods

The objective of the study was accomplished on the basis of surveys conducted in the fourth quarter of 2012, which concerned agricultural producers in the Masovian Province. The sample consisted of 1331 farms and was determined by a simple random sampling. The analyzed farms are located in the largest province in Poland, with an area of 35 598 km², which constitutes approximately 11.4% of the area of the country, in an area with a high diversity in terms of agriculture. The largest farms in the region are located in the following counties: Ciechanów, Ostrołęka and Płock and their average size is 9 hectares. The smallest farms are located around Warsaw, with an average 3 hectares of agricultural land. A characteristic feature of this structure is a large number of small farms, which are relatively well organized. In this area, advisory services for farmers are provided by MODR, based in Warsaw as well as private entities.

The expectations of farmers in the field of training and courses in four thematic groups were studied. The four groups being: agricultural production, new technology in agricultural production, economics of agriculture and agritourism concerning issues of regional and traditional products. The study was conducted on the basis of the method of direct interview carried out with the use of a questionnaire containing closed, open and multiple-choice questions.

Results of the study

Social and political changes in the 1990s and Polish integration with the European Union have brought about major changes in the agricultural sector. They have also increased the demand for modern knowledge. According to research carried out on farms in the eastern part of the Masovian Province in 2011, concerning the changes in agricultural advisory in the opinion of farmers [Niewęglowski 2012], respondents, among expected forms of assistance, paid close attention to courses and training – 76.7%. The results of this study inspired researchers to extend the study and ask more detailed questions about training needs of farmers. In 2012, the study covered 1331 farmers from the area of Masovia region. Most of the respondents were male – 63% and people over 40 years old – 54.4%. 37% of respondents were males over the age 40, whereas only 17.4% were females over 40.

The results of the research are presented in four thematic groups: new technologies of agricultural production, agricultural production, economics of agricultural production, agritourism and regional and traditional products. The respondents had 21 areas of training and four types of training to choose from. They included: training courses – one-day classes with coaches, on-

Table 1. The training needs of farmers of Siedlce in the area of new technologies of agricultural production
 Tabela 1. Potrzeby szkoleniowe rolników regionu siedleckiego z zakresu nowych technologii produkcji rolniczej

Specification/ <i>Wyszczególnienie</i>	Trainings/ <i>Szkolenia</i>		Courses/ <i>Kursy</i>		Workshops/ <i>Warsztaty</i>		Away trainings/ <i>Szkolenia wyjazdowe</i>	
	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%
Crop production/ <i>Produkcja roślinna</i>	401	30.1	46	3.5	72	5.4	105	7.9
Animal husbandry/ <i>Produkcja zwierzęca</i>	292	21.9	45	3.4	91	6.8	111	8.3
Vegetable production/ <i>Produkcja warzywnicza</i>	198	14.9	21	1.6	32	2.4	75	5.6
Horticulture/ <i>Produkcja ogrodnicza</i>	183	13.7	32	2.4	44	3.3	63	4.7
Farming with the use of alternative methods/ <i>Produkcja metodami alternatywnymi</i>	187	14.1	37	2.8	24	1.8	42	3.2
Livestock housing/ <i>Budownictwo inwentarskie</i>	228	17.1	27	2.0	35	2.6	80	6.1
Total/ <i>Razem</i>	1489	111.9	208	15.6	298	22.4	476	35.8

Source: own calculations on the basis of the questionnaire

Źródło: obliczenia własne na podstawie badań ankietowych

the-spot courses lasting a few days, workshops – practical classes and demonstrations, as well as training courses – meetings held away from home and work. Overall, respondents reported demand of proposed topics and types of training courses 8234 times. This suggests that, on average, one respondent was interested in more than 6 thematic training fields. Among the four thematic groups, the most popular were new technologies of agricultural production – 2471 times, followed closely by farming issues – 2371 times. Economics of agricultural production was the third most popular group – 2337 times. The least popular issues related to agritourism and regional and traditional products – 1055 times.

The group of trainings on new technologies of agricultural production (Tab. 1) included the following areas of training: crop production, animal husbandry, farming with the use of alternative methods, vegetable production, horticulture and livestock housing.

Among the trainings concerning new technologies of agricultural production, respondents paid close attention to trainings in the area of crop production (46.9%) and livestock husbandry (40.5%). Less popular were: vegetable production – 24.5%, horticulture – 24.2% and alternative methods – 21.8%. Slightly more popular was livestock housing – 27.8%. In this group, preference was given to one-day trainings (111.9% of responses) and away trainings (35.8%).

Another group in the field of agricultural production (Tab. 2) consisted of the following areas of training: Common Agricultural Policy after 2013, Cross-compliance, agri-environmental programmes, RDP 2007-2013, environmental protection and others.

Respondents are mostly interested in training in the field of Common Agricultural Policy after 2013. 50.2% of the respondents would opt for such trainings and would expect them to last one-day. Trainings on adapting the farm to cross-compliance requirements (44.8%) and agri-environment schemes (35.3%) are very popular with respondents. The next two areas: RDP 2007-2013 and the environmental protection on a farm are less interesting, 24% and 20.1% respectively. In the field of RDP 2007-2013, interest concerned the possibility of financial support under the following actions: modernization of agricultural holdings, young farmer set-ups, pension schemes, early retirement schemes, diversification into non-agricultural activities. However, in the area of environmental protection on the farm, respondents were mostly interested in topics concerning pollution control and alternative sources of energy. Other proposals (3.8%) were related to various issues such as integrated pest management, agricultural pension schemes, cooking courses and professional trainings e.g. courses on hairdressing, etc.

Table 2. Training needs of farmers of the Siedlce region in agricultural production

Tabela 2. Potrzeby szkoleniowe rolników regionu siedleckiego z zakresu produkcji rolniczej

Specification/ <i>Wyszczególnienie</i>	Trainings/ <i>Szkolenia</i>		Courses/ <i>Kursy</i>		Workshops/ <i>Warsztaty</i>		Away trainings/ <i>Szkolenia wyjazdowe</i>	
	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%
The Common Agricultural Policy after 2013/ <i>Wspólna Polityka Rolna po 2013</i>	586	45.0	61	4.6	8	0.6	13	1.0
Cross-compliance/ <i>Cross-compliance</i>	360	27.0	82	6.2	81	6.1	73	5.5
Environmental programs/ <i>Programy rolnośrodowiskowe</i>	392	29.5	49	3.7	17	1.3	12	0.9
Environment protection/ <i>Ochrona środowiska</i>	183	13.7	20	1.5	25	1.9	40	3.0
RDP 2007-2013/ <i>PROW 2007-2013</i>	269	20.2	32	2.4	10	0.8	8	0.6
Others/ <i>Inne</i>	28	2.1	18	1.4	2	0.2	2	0.2
Total / <i>Razem</i>	1818	136.6	262	19.7	143	10.7	148	11.1

Source: own calculations on the basis of the questionnaire

Źródło: obliczenia własne na podstawie badań ankietowych

Table 3. Training needs of farmers of Siedlce region in the field of economics of agricultural production

Tabela 3. Potrzeby szkoleniowe rolników regionu siedleckiego z zakresu ekonomiki produkcji rolniczej

Specification/ <i>Wyszczególnienie</i>	Trainings/ <i>Szkolenia</i>		Courses/ <i>Kursy</i>		Workshops/ <i>Warsztaty</i>		Away trainings/ <i>Szkolenia wyjazdowe</i>	
	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%
Agricultural accounting/ <i>Rachunkowość rolna</i>	519	39.0	57	4.3	51	3.8	7	0.5
Taxes and insurance in agriculture/ <i>Podatki i ubezpieczenia w rolnictwie</i>	532	40.0	42	3.1	22	1.6	6	0.4
Computer programs on the farm/ <i>Programy komputerowe w gospodarstwie rolnym</i>	287	21.6	174	13.1	84	6.3	36	2.7
Economics of farming/ <i>Ekonomika w gospodarstwie rolnym</i>	168	12.6	33	2.5	18	1.4	3	0.2
Legal requirements for agricultural production and trading/ <i>Prawne wymogi prowadzenia produkcji rolnej i sprzedaży produktów</i>	246	18.5	34	2.6	11	0.8	7	0.5
Total/ <i>Razem</i>	1752	131.6	340	25.5	186	14.0	59	4.4

Source: own calculations on the basis of the questionnaire

Źródło: obliczenia własne na podstawie badań ankietowych

The group of trainings in the field of economics of agricultural production (Tab. 3) consisted of the following areas of training: agricultural accounting, taxes and insurance in agriculture, computer programmes on the farm, farm economics and legal requirements for agricultural production and trading.

Among the issues concerning economics of agricultural production, respondents paid the most attention to trainings in the field of agricultural accounting – 47.6%, and taxes and insurance in

agriculture – 45.2%, as well as the use of computer programs – 43.6%. Issues concerning legal requirements for agricultural production and trading (22.4%) and economics of farming (16.7%) did not raise quite as much interest. Most of the respondents would be most willing to take part in one-day trainings.

The last group of trainings in the area of agritourism and regional and traditional products (Tab. 4), included the following areas of training: rudiments of agritourism and rural tourism, agritourism and rural tourism – for those already engaged in this activity, traditional and regional products – promotion, marketing and trading, regional and traditional products – identification and registration.

Among the trainings concerning issues of agritourism and regional and traditional products, respondents paid most attention to trainings involving the basis of agritourism and rural tourism (28.4%). Next, agritourism and rural tourism – for those already engaged in this activity (18.2%) as well as promotion, marketing and trading of regional and traditional products (18.6%) were chosen by a similar number of respondents. The lowest interest related to the identification and registration of regional and traditional products (14.1%), i.e. listing on the “List of Traditional Products” or “Network of Masovian culinary heritage”. In this group, the most successful trainings would last one-day (35%) or would take place away from home and work (19.2%).

The survey reveals what kind of training issues agricultural advisory staff should place most emphasis on. Precise identification of training needs is a prerequisite for the good motivation and involvement of farmers in the training process. The research suggests which fields farmers feel lack of skills and knowledge in as well as what and in what kind of training they would most like to participate.

Table 4. Training needs of farmers of the Siedlce region in the field of agritourism and regional and traditional products

Tabela 4. Potrzeby szkoleniowe rolników regionu siedleckiego z zakresu agroturystyki oraz produktu regionalnego i tradycyjnego

Specification/ <i>Wyszczególnienie</i>	Trainings/ <i>Szkolenia</i>		Courses/ <i>Kursy</i>		Workshops/ <i>Warsztaty</i>		Away trainings/ <i>Szkolenia wyjazdowe</i>	
	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%	number/ <i>liczba</i>	%
Rudiments of agritourism and rural tourism/ <i>Podstawy agroturystyki i turystyki wiejskiej</i>	188	14.1	64	4.8	39	2.9	87	6.5
Agritourism and rural tourism – for those already operating/ <i>Agroturystyka i turystyka wiejska – dla osób już prowadzących działalność</i>	76	5.7	37	2.8	45	3.4	84	6.3
Traditional and regional product – promotion, marketing and trading/ <i>Produkt regionalny i tradycyjny – promocja, przygotowanie i sprzedaż</i>	117	8.8	35	2.6	46	3.5	49	3.7
Regional and traditional product – identification and registration/ <i>Produkt regionalny i tradycyjny – identyfikacja i rejestracja</i>	85	6.4	26	1.9	41	3.1	36	2.7
Total/ <i>Razem</i>	466	35.0	162	12.2	171	12.8	256	19.2

Source: own calculations on the basis of the questionnaire

Źródło: obliczenia własne na podstawie badań ankietowych

Conclusions

The farmers of the Masovian region are aware of the necessity to improve and update knowledge and skills by means of training. This is facilitated by the process of improving agricultural production on farms. Increasing concentration and specialization create demand for professional knowledge in the process of implementing biological progress concerning new plant varieties and animal breeds, which, in turn, has an impact on production and economic results gained by the farm.

To sum up, farmers were mostly interested in trainings related to the following fields: Common Agricultural Policy after 2013 – 50.2% of respondents, agricultural accounting – 47.6%, taxes and insurance in agriculture – 45.2%, new technologies of crop production – 46.9%, livestock husbandry – 40.5%, cross-compliance requirements – 44.8% and the use of computer programs on the farm – 43.6%. Among the different types of training courses, the most popular were one-day trainings, which were chosen 5525 times, out of a total 8234 answers.

Analysis of the research material provides indispensable information enabling the precise management of MODR activities concerning training schemes. The accurate identification of training needs permits the working hours of counselors to be used in an effective way and provides farmers with necessary knowledge.

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Streszczenie

Celem badań była ocena potrzeb rolników w zakresie kursów i szkoleń prowadzonych przez Mazowiecki Ośrodek Doradztwa Rolniczego w Warszawie na terenie województwa mazowieckiego. Ogółem zankietowano 1331 rolników, którzy mieli do wyboru 21 obszarów szkoleniowych oraz cztery typy szkolenia. Na podstawie wyników ankiety stwierdzono, że rolnicy ogółem wybrali 8234 zaproponowane tematy i typy szkoleń. Jeden ankietowany średnio był zainteresowany sześcioma zakresami tematycznymi szkoleń. Spośród wyodrębnionych czterech grup tematycznych największym zainteresowaniem cieszyły się tematy z nowych technologii produkcji rolniczej wybierane 2471 razy. Na kolejnych miejscach znalazła się tematyka ogólnej produkcji rolniczej – 2371 i ekonomia produkcji rolniczej – 2337. Najmniejsze zainteresowanie towarzyszyło zagadnieniom związanym z agroturystyką oraz produktami regionalnymi i tradycyjnymi – 1055.

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