

Improved Peasant Farming as a Result of the Social and Professional Activities of the Farmer

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THE METHODS OF PRESENT INVESTIGATIONS ON IMPROVED PEASANT FARMS IN POLAND

The first work on the so-called improved peasant farms appeared in Polish agricultural economic literature in 1899 [1]. It is a popular description of the best peasant farms after the first decade of enfranchisement in Poland. Between the two World Wars many authors dealt with this problem. They presented suggestions on how to organize model or improved farms which in their opinion could perform the role of "progress pilots" in agriculture. The improved farms described were selected by both subjective and objective methods as an analysis of the literature shows.

The subjective methods comprised a selection of such farms on the basis of external features such as the general state of buildings, the condition of fields, cowshed, livestock, tidiness and well-being of the farmers' house, the material and social status of the owner and his family in the village, etc. For instance, Bronikowski in order to define the nature of an improved farm sent an enquiry to 124 persons throughout the whole country (agronomists, those active in self-governing institutions, teachers, educated farmers) asking for their opinions on the characteristics of improved farms and the reasons for their success [2].

Galaj did the same after the war, asking all the farmers living in a village Bochen selected by him for their opinions on which farms could be regarded as improved, and the reasons for their economic success [3].

Objective methods of selecting improved farms comprised the application of strict standards of cultural or economic efficiency by which farms qualified to be included in the group of improved farms. These would be those which were distinguished by optimal economic or cultural and financial indexes.

A similar method was used by Wojtaszek [4] who in his investigations

selected a number of peasant farms in the northern Mazowsze region from among those which kept agricultural accounts and which were distinguished by the best cultural and profitability indexes. An objective method

Some Data on Improved Farms and Advanced Farmers in the Plock District

Denomination	All farms	The advanced farms
The number of farms	2735	287
Average size of farms, ha.	7.91	7.44
The soil fertility index (in points)	1.83	1.84
Average number of parcels per farm	1.9	1.7
The value of production assets, thous. zlotys per ha.	11.9	15.7
Annual value of investment input, thous. zlotys per ha.	961	1480
Labour resources in full employment units per 100 ha.	37.1	40.5
Number of working days put in per fully employed person	237	237
Mineral fertilizing kgs NPK/ha.	58.6	83.9
Manure fertilizing kgs NPK/ha.	55.6	69.1
The value of final production, zlotys per ha.	6742	10561
The value of market production, zlotys per ha.	5143	8210
The value of the contract production	2325	3651
The share of industrial crops in the sowing programme	10.6	14.2
Percentage of farms contracting sugar beets	55.3	88.3
barley	24.1	46.1
rape	13.0	22.0
hogs	82.5	76.0
young cattle	12.5	17.1
The number of products contracted on one farm, average	2.03	2.69
The value of final production per working day, in zlotys	76	98
The percentage of farmers with primary education	1.7	7.0
The percentage of farmers with agricultural education	1.3	4.2
The percentage of farmers subscribing to a paper or journal	60.4	73.4
The number of journals per family	0.8	1.2
Percentage of farmers having agricultural books in their possession	20.7	32.5
Percentage of farmers		
being members of political parties	15.4	23.1
farmers circles	12.5	20.2
agricultural cooperatives	7.3	11.2
council members or mayors	6.4	12.9
using farmer-circles' services	16.8	21.2

of farm selection was applied also by the present author when investigating improved peasant farms of the Plock district [5]. As an index the amount of harvested product per hectare was a criterion here. As a result I covered a total of 287 improved farms which comprised 10.5% of all the farms in the region.

DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES FOR PEASANT FARMS IN POLAND'S PLANNED ECONOMY

During the last 12 years a system of production incentives has been part of state agricultural policy so far as peasant farms are concerned. It means that profits gained by peasant farms come almost exclusively through the production and market processes. In general there are no other development incentives for peasant farms besides those resulting from the growth of production for market. All other incentives (as, for instance, by means of credits, investments or education policy) in the final result materialize through the production and marketing processes, between peasant farm and state economic agencies. Thus the expansion of the production process and the process of exchange with the state increases almost automatically the total profit of a given peasant farm. At present this is the main feature of the incentive system for peasant farming.

The second feature is the institutional character of incentives. More and more economic incentives reach a peasant farm through the system of local institutions (organized by peasants' cooperatives, farmer circles) and those organized from above by the state, such as the food processing industry, the extension service institutions, those dealing with purchase contracts. Still fewer state incentives (such as independent systems of prices) reach the farms directly, excluding the above-mentioned institutions.

The close cooperation of the farmers with this institutional system broadens their ability to take better advantage of the number of incentives provided by the state.

Such a system of incentives influences the sort of activity the individual farmer is willing to take advantage of, an advantage open to everybody taking part in it. It appears in the form of maximization of production and exchange with the national economy and also by the strength of the contacts with institutions dealing with the distribution of goods, the means of production and the extension services in the fields of economic orientation and agricultural science.

The more farmers participate in these processes the greater is the number of incentives available to them.

A MODEL OF AN ADVANCED FARMER AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF PLANNED ECONOMY INCENTIVES IN POLAND

With the above system of incentives available to the Polish peasant farms during the period of the so-called new agricultural policy after 1956, a new model of an advanced farmer is being formed, along with specific

features of his personality and of his behaviour as a producer and member of the local community.

An advanced farmer in these conditions, as appears from the investigations of Galaj and my own is, first, a man fully charged with production and creative forces, the opposite of the old type to be found in the traditional semi-natural system of peasant farming, who belonged mainly to the older generation. Younger men are more elastic in their way of thinking and reacting to external impulses, more rapidly absorbing the frequent changes in the relative profitability of particular products, adopting more eagerly the suggestions of the agricultural advisory services, and of industry or trade offering novelties in the way of equipment and so on.

An advanced individual farmer in Poland today broadens his activities. He does not limit his interests within the confines of his farm, but looks for economic contacts with his neighbours, and among institutions offering him cultivation services and taking his products. An advanced farmer goes outside the closed local community and makes contact with social structures beyond his locality.

There result certain changes of direction which appear more attractive for farmers when planning their production. At present in Poland there is rather strong competition among producers looking for incentives, such as contracting to grow some industrial crops, seeds, pedigree animals, products prepared for export etc.

On the farms investigated by me in the Plock district as well as those in Bocheń village investigated by Galaj — the advanced farmers secured contracts attractive from the point of view of profitability several years earlier than other farmers, contracts for growing seeds, rearing young pedigree cattle, planting certified potatoes, sugar beet seeds or growing bush fruit. It is fighting for the so-called novelty prices, which include some sort of innovator rent, which compensates for the risk. They are obtained first by advanced farmers who have the ability to make contracts with agricultural marketing institutions, and to recognize the market needs and incentives. The agencies of the state enterprises (or rather the people working in them) who deal with contracts made with farmers also make some profits by distributing these attractive contracts, because they obtain products of high quality, and more of them, from these advanced farmers and so earn bonuses. The advanced farmers are members of the governing bodies of local economic and self-governing institutions. This also facilitates contact with institutions at higher levels. By cooperation within these concerns they get a sort of rent through being in touch with the field of new incentives, which at first can be used only by a few farmers (the limitation of available state resources). This does not mean that anyone who is not a member of the social organs of his local institutions is entirely prevented from taking advantage of the incentives offered by the state.

Rather, one can say that being a member increases his chance of taking advantage of the incentives and using them intensively.

My investigations in the Plock district confirm the view that advanced farmers are much more often members of Farmers' Circles than are farmers in general, as also of cooperatives of various types and of political organizations at work in rural areas. They belong to the so-called social elite of the village, and are leaders in the social and professional organizations active there. Similar observations were made also by Galaj.

So far as so-called cultural activity and professional consciousness are concerned, the advanced farmers are much above the "average" farmer. They distinguish themselves (in general) by a higher level of education, both general and agricultural, and most of all by a distinctly higher level of general culture, wide reading of books-letters and especially of agriculture. They willingly take part in various forms of extension service (professional courses, lectures organized by agricultural advisers or the society of general knowledge etc.).

In this way advanced farmers try to take advantage in their farm practice of this new form of profit, namely the profit of education and orientation. Investigations of a sample of about 300 advanced farmers, showed that the agricultural knowledge factor (quantified by means of a so-called education index) is second only to the factor of the turnover of capital in defining the function of agricultural production. The knowledge of advanced farmers is thus exactly correlated with the level of production of farms run by them.

CONCLUSIONS

In conditions of planned economy in Poland a group of improved farms has been formed, where improved production processes can be observed at work, because their managers have adopted the scheme of production incentives appropriate to the planned economy so far as individual farming is concerned. These incentives are arranged so that only farms where production has been intensified can take advantage of them. The remaining farms, which are unable to do so, undergo a process of economic decline. Only the enterprise of the manager (owner of an individual peasant farm) decides the scale of benefits which a peasant farm can take from this system. A intensification of contacts with the outside world, elasticity in taking decisions, quick orientation towards new introductions in the field of technology, the profit system, contacts with local institutions—these are more and more decisive so far as the effects on farming are concerned.

The attitude and personality of the individual farmer are of great

importance as are his agricultural and economic knowledge, his cultural activities, his ability to make contracts, and his observation of human relations often within a community far away geographically and socially from his local community.

The state resources directed towards creating desirable production improvements on still new branches of production are limited. The group of advanced farmers is also limited but not exclusive. Along with the expansion of the productional effect caused by the state, the advanced farmers shift their productive activities in new directions, where they earn the innovator's profit and leave the present level of production to the average of typical farmers.

A drive towards progress is an attempt to avoid economic decline and the liquidation of individual farming. This is a very strong incentive.

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