

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EDUCATION IN PROMOTING THE IDEA OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN AGRICULTURE IN THE POMERANIAN VOIVODESHIP

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**Abstract.** At present, agricultural production is required not only to meet goals related to producing food, but also to observing the laws of environmental protection. Farmers should be aware that agricultural production is part of the environment and farming cannot destroy the natural world. Therefore, it becomes necessary to implement the principles of sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture through developing the environmental awareness of farmers. The aim of the study was to identify and evaluate the significance of education for sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture in the opinion of farmers themselves. The poll included 386 respondents from the Pomeranian Voivodeship. The study showed that farmers are not particularly interested in the problems of sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture, and they have little knowledge about the subject, which means that there is an urgent need for a constant transfer of knowledge to farmers, with the most significant role played by school education as well as training and workshops ran by Agricultural Advisory Centres.

**Key words:** education, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development

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## INTRODUCTION

For the last several years, there has been a noticeable increase of interest in management based not only on achieving profits and effectiveness, but also broadly defined social and environmental interests. This stems from increasingly larger awareness of businesses about the significance of the principles of sustainable development and from the common belief that taking voluntary initiative with regard to corporate social responsibility can contribute to a better attractiveness and credibility of companies on the national and international markets, where good business practices are highly valued.

Responsible business is a new approach to conducting business where it is not only money that counts, but also the company's activities for the benefit of the environment, which are difficult to appraise [Zuzek 2012].

The aim of this study was to identify the significance of education for sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture in the opinions of farmers from the Pomeranian Voivodeship, whose dominant economic activity was conventional farming. The questionnaire included closed and semi-open questions. 500 questionnaires were sent out, with 386 respondents from 19 *powiat* (counties) of the analysed Voivodeship sending in their responses before the deadline set by the authors. This means that on average questionnaires from 20 farmers from each *powiat* were received. The obtained data underwent a statistical analysis. A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used to prepare the calculations.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Sustainable development, although a widely used phrase and idea, has many different meanings and therefore provokes many different responses. In broad terms, the concept of sustainable development is an attempt to combine growing concerns about a range of environmental issues with socio-economic issues [Hopwood et al. 2005]. A similar point of view have or Giddings et al. [2002] or Dobson [2007].

Due to the diversity and multitude of factors which impact the natural environment, three important areas have been identified which should be focused on in order to achieve sustainable development. The first area is environmental protection and rational management of natural resources (such as protection of endangered species of animals and plants; limiting environmental pollution; promoting renewable energy sources). The second area is economic growth and the resultant fair division of profits (changing irrational consumption and production models, financing development; facilitating access to markets, etc.). The third area concerns social development (health protection, combating poverty, access to education, environmental education) [Kozłowski 2002]. Socio-economic development cannot be separated from the natural environment, and ecological (environmental) education should play a key role along with modifying the dominant system of values: changing people's way of thinking from the point of view of conqueror to the position of a partner of the natural environment [Pawul and Sobczyk 2011].

The concept of sustainable development is in accordance with the model of corporate social responsibility (CSR), which is defined as an obligation to conduct business activity in an ethical and transparent way in accordance with the principles of sustainable development, according to the law and norms of behaviours, and consequently striving for social welfare taking into consideration the expectations of the stakeholders [Adamczyk 2009]. More broadly, social responsibility is “an organisation’s responsibility for the impact of its decisions and actions on the environment and society, through transparent and ethical behaviours, which contributes to sustainable development, health, and social welfare; takes into consideration the expectations of the stakeholders; is in accordance with the applicable law and consistent with international behaviours; is implemented in the entire organisation, and practiced in its activities within its sphere of influence” [Olejniczak 2013]. The concept of CSR therefore means both complying with work standards, environmental protection, obeying the principles of human rights, counteracting corruption, as well as voluntary socially useful activities [Chlebicka 2010].

The high ranking of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on research agendas [Maignan and Ralston 2002, Greenfield 2004, Pearce and Doh 2005, McWilliams et al. 2006] appears to be reflected in theoretical and managerial discussions. Model of CSR can also be defined as an effective process of management which contributes to an increased competitiveness of the company by responding to the expectations of the stakeholders of the company (farm) while ensuring the sustainable development of the company. It is essential that the two overlapping conceptions (of sustainable development and of corporate social responsibility) should be implemented in practice. However, a low level of awareness of the interrelations between economy, society, and the environment is the basic obstacle to sustainable development [Klamecka-Roszkowska and Muczyński 2011].

Education plays a key role with regard to removing gaps in the environmental awareness and social responsibility in agriculture of inhabitants of rural areas. Environmental education should be of particular concern in the implementation of the state’s environmental policy [Sobczyk 2007]. One of the main assumptions of the new directions of this policy is departure from a traditional, narrowly defined environmental protection towards sustainable development, i.e. subordinating the needs and aspirations of the society and state to the possibilities offered by the environment at our disposal [Alberski et al. 2002]. The framework of this policy assumes that respecting the principle of sustainable development is of primary importance, which means far-sighted management of natural resources due to their limited nature, harmonising economic, social, and environmental development goals, a long-term approach to analysing, planning, and implementing development objectives and wide-scale environmental education [Lorens 2003].

In order to effectively develop education for sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture, all available educational means, both public and private, should be fully taken advantage of, such as: school systems, non-school education, agricultural and environmental counselling, and other forms of multilateral information transfer. The basic objectives of education in this regard should include:

- building the sense of responsibility for natural goods, developing environmentally friendly behaviours;
- teaching the basics of a sustainable use of the natural environment and ways of its protection;
- building the ability to see a connection between the state of the environment and agricultural activity, the quality of an individual's and an entire society's life, preparing for interdisciplinary thinking;
- implementing the need to observe the norms and bans in the behaviour of both individuals and social groups, as well as whole communities significant from the point of view of environmental protection, and opposing behaviours which threaten nature;
- building the ability to cultivate crops and farm animals while using natural resources sparingly and protecting them as much as possible;
- building an attitude of international solidarity with regard to environmental protection in rural areas [Domka 2001].

The specificity of education for sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture can be characterised by several factors: transfer of knowledge and skills, inseparability of implemented objectives, integration, complementary contents. This education should impact farmers' awareness with regard to environmental protection and create a dynamic structure of three interrelated and mutually conditioning elements:

- knowledge about man's (society's) impact on the natural world and interdependencies in ecosystems;
- rules, norms of behaviour, system of values;
- the ability to predict environmental consequences of the undertaken actions [Domka 2001].

These actions are all highly useful, necessary, and beneficial in the policy of sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture.

## STUDY RESULTS

The idea of sustainable development, which constitutes a system of values and political conceptions facilitating harmonious socio-economic growth that take into consideration the protection of natural resources, requires promoting knowledge about the environment as well as developing sensitivity to environmental reality and modelling attitudes that protect it.

A tool for implementing the above tasks is broadly defined environmental education, which leads to an increased environmental awareness and developing correct behaviours between man and the environment, and thus strengthens the hope that the biodiversity of life on Earth can be preserved [Wiąckowski 2001].

In the opinion of 33.2% of the respondents, the knowledge of the principles of sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture is definitely poor, and according to 42.2% it is rather poor. Only 7.8% of farmers stated that they have definitely good knowledge of sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture, and 15.3% of the respondents admitted that they had rather good knowledge of the subject matter (Table 1).

Table 1. Knowledge of the principles of sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture in the opinion of the respondents

Specification	Number	%
Definitely good knowledge	30	7.8
Rather good knowledge	59	15.3
Difficult to say	6	1.5
Rather poor knowledge	163	42.2
Definitely poor knowledge	128	33.2
Total	386	100.0

Source: Own research.

Farmers, especially older ones, did not tend to show high interest in the problems of sustainable development. Almost 60% of the respondents admitted that their interest in the idea is rather low, and almost 20% stated that it was definitely low. Some farmers (16.9%) stated that they were interested in the subject matter. Share of 5.4% of the respondents did not choose a specific response (Table 2).

Table 2. Interest in farmers' knowledge about sustainable development and social responsibility for agriculture

Specification	Number	%
Definitely high interest	23	6.0
Rather high interest	42	10.9
Difficult to say	21	5.4
Rather low interest	223	57.8
Definitely low interest	77	19.9
Total	386	100.0

Source: Own research.

The need to transfer knowledge about sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture to farmers is noticed increasingly more. This is also confirmed by the study. According to the respondents, the demand is definitely high (54.7%) or rather high (28.5%). 7.8% of the polled farmers stated that it was rather low, and 9% did not have an opinion on the matter (Table 3).

Aiming to introduce the farmer to the principles of sustainable development and social responsibility for agriculture, education should:

- develop a responsible attitude to the problems of life and work in rural areas, conditioned by a solid knowledge based on respect for nature and its inalienable rights;
- make changes in the system of farmers' values contributing to respect for nature and responsibility for the environment;
- develop and strengthen motivation for cultivating plants and farming animals in accordance with the model of social responsibility.

Table 3. The need for knowledge transfer to farmers about sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture

Specification	Number	%
Definitely high demand	211	54.7
Rather high demand	110	28.5
Difficult to say	35	9.0
Rather low demand	30	7.8
Definitely low demand	–	–
Total	386	100.0

Source: Own research.

What is also needed is providing farmers with a system of knowledge about the causes and effects of cultivating land, and teaching them to respect the natural environment and cultivating crops and farming animals in a sensible way. The most beneficial methods of education concerning sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture are highly diverse. First of all, it should be provided by schools; this was the opinion of 91% of the respondents. The respondents also consider the work of advisors as a good method of education, since advisory services are one of the most beneficial methods of teaching sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture, as confirmed by 88.6% of the respondents. The respondents also considered workshops and trainings as a good method of knowledge transfer (almost 68%). Additionally, what is important for acquiring knowledge about sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture is non-school education (58.5%) and brochures and informational materials (53.9%), which farmers can read at home (Table 4).

Table 4. The most advantageous methods of education about sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture

Specification	Number	%
School education	351	91.0
Non-school education	226	58.5
Mass-media (press, radio, TV, the Internet)	178	46.1
Advisory (agriculture and environment advisors)	342	88.6
Workshops, trainings	261	67.6
Brochures, leaflets, etc.	208	53.9

Source: Own research.

Education for sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture should lead not only to the development of a clear system of knowledge, but also some values which the farmer will apply in cultivating crops and farming animals (Table 5).

Table 5. The importance of education about sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture for farmers, in the farmers' opinion

Specification	Number	%
Definitely high	196	50.8
Rather high	169	43.8
Difficult to say	21	5.4
Rather low	–	–
Definitely low	–	–
Total	386	100.0

Source: Own research.

For this reason, the respondents considered the significance of education concerning sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture to be definitely high (50.8%) and rather high (43.8%).

The result of introducing these educational measures should be the education (through the process of building environmental awareness) of a generation of farmers who will manage their farms in accordance with the principles of sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture.

## CONCLUSIONS

Dangers to the environment are usually unintentional, side-effect of human activity, including agricultural activity. Management harmful to the natural environment led to the necessity to implement the principles of sustainable development and social responsibility. The following conclusions have been drawn from the study:

1. The polled farmers admitted that their knowledge of and interest in the problems of sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture is not considerable and that a constant transfer of knowledge to this group of producers is needed.
2. In order to effectively develop education for sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture all educational methods, both public and private, should be used. The polled farmers considered school education and trainings and workshops ran by Agricultural Advisory Centres to be the most important.
3. The significance of education concerning sustainable development and social responsibility in agriculture should be regarded as high, since it helps to shape a system of farmers' knowledge about the functioning of nature, interdependencies between the natural world and civilisation, and a sense of responsibility for the environment.

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## **ZNACZENIE EDUKACJI W PROPAGOWANIU IDEI ZRÓWNOWAŻONEGO ROZWOJU I SPOŁECZNEJ ODPOWIEDZIALNOŚCI ROLNICTWA W WOJEWÓDZTWIE POMORSKIM**

**Streszczenie.** Obecnie od produkcji rolniczej wymaga się realizacji nie tylko celów związanych z wytwarzaniem żywności, ale także przestrzegania praw ochrony środowiska naturalnego. Rolnicy powinni zdawać sobie sprawę z tego, że jest częścią tego środowiska a praca na roli nie może niszczyć przyrody, dlatego niezbędne staje się wdrażanie zasad zrównoważonego rozwoju oraz społecznej odpowiedzialności w rolnictwie poprzez kształtowanie świadomości ekologicznej rolników. Celem badań było wskazanie i ocena znaczenia edukacji na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju i społecznej odpowiedzialności rolnictwa w opinii samych rolników. Badaniu sondażowemu poddano 386 respondentów z województwa pomorskiego. Badania wykazały, że rolnicy nie są specjalnie zainteresowani problematyką zrównoważonego rozwoju i społecznej odpowiedzialności wobec rolnictwa, ich wiedza w tym zakresie jest niewielka, stąd też istnieje pilna potrzeba ciągłego transferu wiedzy do rolników, a najbardziej znaczącą jest edukacja szkolna oraz prowadzone przez Ośrodki Doradztwa Rolniczego szkolenia i warsztaty.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja, społeczna odpowiedzialność, zrównoważony rozwój

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