

## **FARMERS' ASSESSMENT OF TRAINING SERVICES AND THE IMPACT OF AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY ON SELECTED DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS AFFECTING FARMING**

**Piotr Prus**<sup>1</sup>, PhD; **Ksenia Drzazdzynska**<sup>2</sup>; MSc., PhD student

<sup>1,2</sup> Department of Economics and Advising in Agribusiness  
UTP University of Science and Technology in Bydgoszcz, Poland

**Abstract.** The research aim of the paper is to provide assessment of the influence of actions of advisors employed in the District Advisory Team (DAT) in Klodzko on selected developmental factors affecting farms located in the Klodzki District. Moreover, the farmers were surveyed for their satisfaction with advisory services they were provided with. A diagnostic poll method was used for the survey. The results have revealed that the surveyed farmers were mostly interested in services in the field of new European Union regulations and entrepreneurship development, as well as assistance in completion of applications for direct payments and support within the RDP (Rural Development Programme). The respondents' satisfaction with services provided by the analysed advisory centre was most often found to be at satisfactory level.

**Key words:** agricultural advising, training courses, developmental factors.

**JEL code:** Q10, Q16

### **Introduction**

The system of agricultural advisory in Poland has been evolving over time following the constantly changing structure and needs of agriculture (Dorofiejczuk-Paradny J., Zawisza S., 2011; Kania J., et al., 2014; Mickiewicz A., et al., 1998; Wawrzyniak B.M., 2003; Zawisza S., 2012). It needs to meet the demands connected with technological and technical progress. Integration of Poland with the European Union confronted agricultural advisors with new challenges (Dutka B., Mickiewicz B., 2015), which today are significant part of their work. Functioning of agricultural advisory centres is now focused on the advisor-producer relations and aims at meeting the needs of consumers and farmers through improving the quality of products to be supplied to the market and improving the economic situation of farmers. In order to achieve these goals the agricultural advisory system needs to be efficient and effective. Therefore, it is important to choose appropriate communication forms and suitable methods and the content of advising must be adjusted to the needs of customers. Integration of Poland with the EU had a positive impact on the income of farmers (Roman M., 2014). Financial support from the EU budget has considerably contributed to the present situation of the Polish agriculture. According to Poczta,

Czubak and Pawlak (2009), in the post-accession period (years 2004-2008), as compared to pre-accession (years 2000-2003), the average annual level of financial support for the agricultural sector has increased by 11 times. It is estimated by the authors that an average annual growth of income from the Polish agriculture in the post-accession period was in 70 % due to the increase in financial support, whereas the share of other factors (the production volume growth, technological progress – advances in production technologies) accounted for the remaining 30 %. Due to constant support from the EU, the Polish agriculture has gone through complex processes of technological, structural and logistic modernization (Satola L., et al., 2014) thanks to which it has become more competitive in relation to other countries. Factors which affect competitiveness also include growth in productivity, referred to as an increase in effects for given outlays, creation of development tendencies and efficient development of a product market through extension of a relation network, close collaboration with customers and reliability in cooperation with foreign partners (Dzieza G., et al., 2015). Agricultural Advising Centres are units which play an important role in the support system provided by the European Union. They provide assistance in the field of farming technologies, technical, economic and

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author. Tel.: +48 601916150; E-mail address: piotr.prus@utp.edu.pl

structural solutions, (Prus P., 2007) and information how to implement innovations that lead to additional sources of income. Currently, the national agricultural advisory is focused on activities outlined by the European Commission as part of the Rural Development Programme (Kania J., Bogusz M., 2010), which over the years has also evolved from a strategy of intensive production volume increase (mainly through direct land payments) into sustainable development and ecological production. This is supposed to provide the environment with protection and change of the production model from quantitative into qualitative one, which is reflected in the newest Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020, as well as in current reports from the debate of the European Commission for Agriculture and Rural Development, and results, among others, from changing demands of consumers in the EU (Koreleska E., 2016). According to Kielbasa and Krysztoforski (2009), since 2004 farmers have shown a special interest in these issues and it has not decreased so far. Farmers usually search for such services that are related to new requirements of the Common Agricultural Policy and an opportunity to increase the production quality and obtainment of financial support to increase production quality and competitiveness.

After the integration of Poland with the European Union, functioning of the agricultural sector including the system of agricultural advisory services have undergone substantial transformation, the latter one having to adapt its services to the introduced reforms so as to satisfy the needs of farmers shaped by the Common Agricultural Policy. Under the Act of 22 October 2004 on Agricultural Advisory Units (Journal of Laws 2004, no. 251, item 2507), as many as 16 provincial agricultural advisory centres were founded including district agricultural advisory teams. The goal of this study is to analyse the impact of services provided by advisors employed in the District

Advisory Team (DAT) in Klodzko functioning within the structure of the Lower Silesian Agricultural Advisory Centre in Wroclaw, on selected factors affecting development of farms which come under this centre, as well as assessment of the satisfaction levels of farmers with the advisory services.

### Material and the research method

In order to collect empirical data, a method of diagnostic poll involving a survey was used. The survey was carried out on owners of farms situated on the territory of the Klodzko County who used services of the District Advisory Team in Klodzko. Klodzko County is, after Wroclaw County, the largest county of Lower Silesian Voivodship, where there are 6419 individual farms. The survey did not include owners of farms with area smaller than 5 hectares, as these are subsistence farms run only to satisfy the needs of their administrators. The analysis included a population of 2449 farms, which identified a sample group of the size calculated by means of the below given formula (1):

$$N_b = \frac{N}{1 + \frac{4d^2(N-1)}{Z_\alpha^2}} \quad \begin{array}{l} N_b - \text{sample size} \\ N - \text{population size} \\ d - \text{permissible estimation error (5 \%)} \\ Z_\alpha - 1.64 \text{ for } \alpha=0.1 \end{array} \quad (1)$$

Hence, the size of the surveyed sample group with permissible estimation error 5 % was 242. The survey was carried out with participation of employees of the District Advisory Team in Klodzko, who were given 250 questionnaires. However, only 185 of them were sent back to be analysed, so the estimation error increased by 6 %.

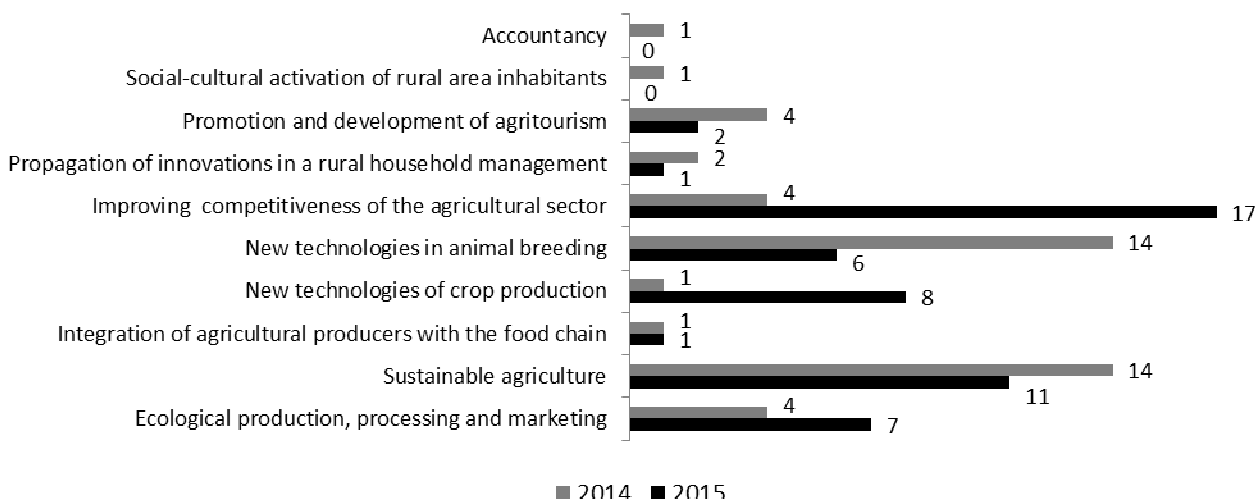
The questionnaires were completed during training courses in the period from June 2015 to November 2015. The respondents were asked to indicate areas of agricultural advisory services they most frequently took advantage of. They were also supposed to provide the number of training courses in particular areas. Respondents were also requested to provide assessment of the level of satisfaction with the training courses,

consistence of the subject matter with the profile of their farms, clarity of the provided information, quality of rooms where the courses were held and general evaluation of advising capacity of the District Advisory Team in Klodzko to adjust their operation to the needs and expectations of farmers. The farmers were also supposed to define the influence of the received services on selected factors affecting development of farms.

**Research results and discussion**

The processes of restructuring and modernization of the Polish agriculture have been carried out for many years with a big support of funds coming from the EU budget. The funds that are available to farmers as part of direct support systems aim mainly at stabilization of farmers' families incomes and maintenance of production processes, whereas the means dedicated to Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 and Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 are meant to improve the structure of the Polish agriculture (Wojewodzic T., 2016). In order to make it happen, farmers need to learn how to successfully apply for financial support offered by the EU, which is hardly possible without the help of agricultural advisors. Therefore, farmers who

want to develop their farms engage into cooperation with agricultural advisory centres where they are provided with individual services or can hire a consultant to perform a specific task (Kania J., 2008). They can also take part in training courses and shows. According to literature, being able to take advantage of professional support largely contributes to achieving success in farming (Sroka W., Dacko M., 2010). The subject matter of the training courses offered by particular centres is highly diversified and depends both on the demands of farmers and the range of training programmes launched at the national level. The District Advisory Team in Klodzko offered a diversified training programme (Figure 1). The most popular subject in 2014 included new technologies to be used in farms specializing in animal production, and farming consistent with the rules of sustainable development (protection, conservation and improvement of the natural environment). In 2015, most of the training courses were devoted to improving competitiveness of the agricultural sector through increasing productivity of farms by introduction of innovation and restructuring.



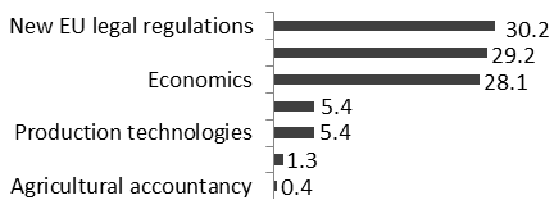
Source: authors' construction based on materials provided by the District Advisory Team in Klodzko

Fig. 1. Subjects and number of training courses provided by the District Advisory Team in Klodzko (2014 and 2015)

According to the survey results, the respondents most often took advantage of professional support offered by consultants

employed in the District Advisory Team in Klodzko in the areas of new EU regulations set out in the Common Agricultural Policy including:

plant cultivation, cross-compliance and integrated protection of plants, agricultural and non-agricultural entrepreneurship, assistance in completion of applications for subsidies and other services of the Lower Silesian Agricultural Advising Centre. Training courses covering the subjects connected with agricultural production technology and mechanization of agriculture, or finally on the subject of farm management and accountancy (Figure 2).

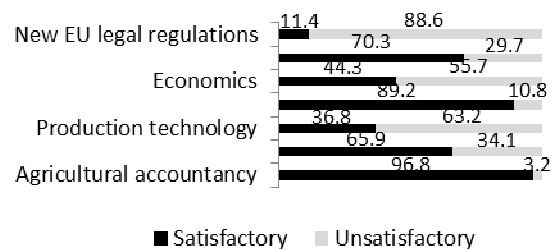


Source: author's calculations based on research

Fig. 2. Areas of agricultural advisory that enjoy the most popularity among the surveyed farmers (in %)

According to the respondents, there were not enough courses offered by the DAT in Klodzko that would cover all areas of their interest. Only slightly over one third of the respondents were of the view that the number of courses on the subject of agricultural production technologies was sufficient. As far as agriculture mechanization is concerned, a great majority of respondents were satisfied. More than half of the respondents thought that the advisors should provide many more meetings on the subject of completion of applications for financial support available within the Rural Development Programme. Only few farmers were not satisfied with the amount of time devoted to agricultural accountancy. Nearly two thirds of the respondents thought that the number of courses concerning organization of production and farm management was sufficient. It should be mentioned here that the ability to successfully manage an agricultural farm through utilization of the available resources and production means is gaining more and more significance (Prus P., 2010) especially in light of economic recession that is slowly taking over Poland (Plonka A.,

Paluch L., 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to develop entrepreneurship skills among farm owners (Mickiewicz B., 2015), which will allow them to find alternative, including non-agricultural sources of income. It is optimistic though that more than two thirds of respondents were satisfied with the number of training courses on the subject of agricultural and non-agricultural entrepreneurship. Unfortunately, a great majority of farmers indicated existence of a significant "information gap", regarding training courses on the subject of the EU legal regulations within the Common Agricultural Policy (Figure 3). An increasing interest of farmers in the new requirements connected with the Common Agricultural Policy has already been mentioned along with the results of Kielbasa and Kryzstoforski (2009) research results.



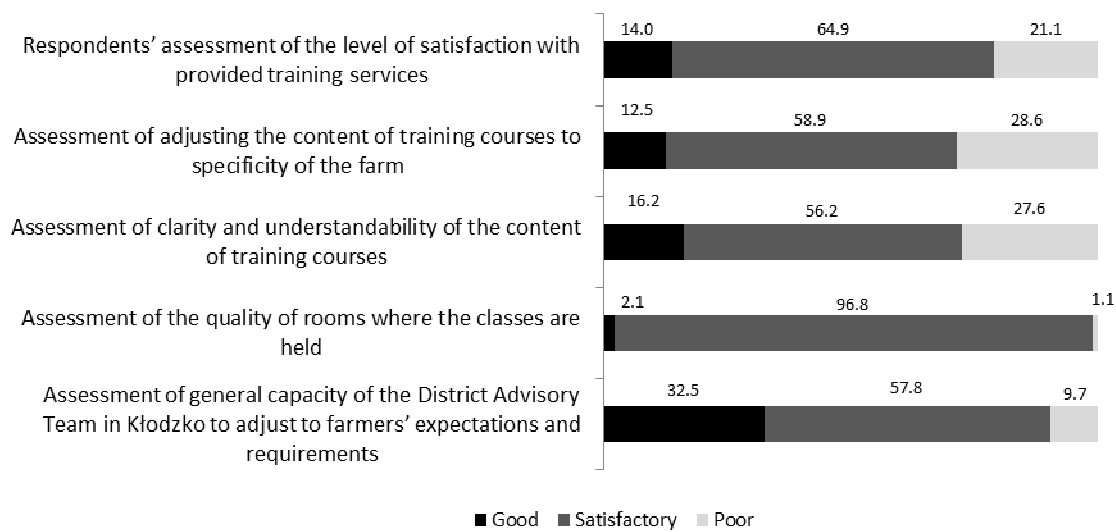
Source: author's calculations based on research

Fig. 3. Respondents' opinion on the number of training courses organized by the District Advisory Team in Klodzko (in %)

Nearly two thirds of the respondents found their satisfaction with services provided by the District Advisory Team in Klodzko to be at a satisfactory level, whereas every fifth farmer found them to be poor. As many as 14.0 % were very satisfied with the services. Adjustment of the subject matter of provided training services to the farm specificity was found to be satisfactory by most of the respondents. Unfortunately, a sizable group of farmers considered it to be poor, whereas only every tenth respondent thought it was good. A good advisor has to be able to choose the content of training courses but they also need to make sure that their lectures are clear and understandable. The choice of subjects chosen for the courses

were considered by slightly more than a half of farmers as satisfactory, however more than one fourth of respondents found it to be poor. This can be due to failure to adjust the communication form to the needs of farmers as it should not be too colloquial but should not contain too sophisticated or difficult phrases, either. It should not be too abstract because too high level of abstractness can lead to misunderstandings (Zawisza S., 2003). If advisors want to successfully introduce new and complicated ideas, they must know how to communicate with

their customers (Van den Ban. A.W., Hawkins H.S., 1997). A great majority of respondents were of the opinion that the rooms where training courses were held were satisfactory. More than a half of respondents found the general capacity of the District Advisory Team in Klodzko to adjust to expectations and needs of agricultural producers to be satisfactory whereas nearly one third thought it was high. On the other hand, nearly every tenth respondent indicated poor capability of the DAT in Klodzko to adjust to producers' expectation and demands (Figure 4).



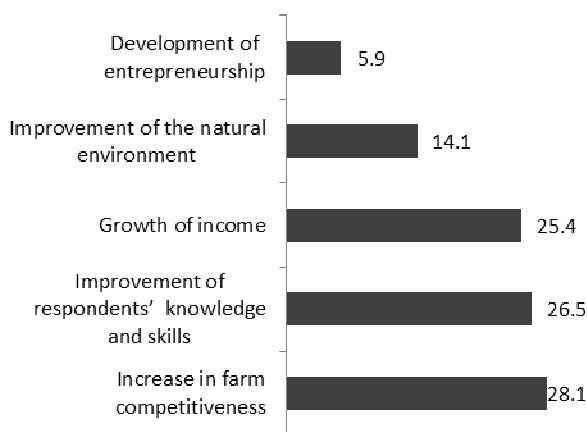
Source: author's calculations based on research

Fig. 4. Respondents' assessment of the level of satisfaction with provided training services, subject matter of training courses, clarity of teaching, quality of rooms and capacity of the District Advisory Team in Klodzko to adjust to farmers' expectations and requirements (in %)

More than one fourth of the surveyed farmers thought the advisors had contributed to their farms competitiveness. A similar number of respondents declared that the effects of the advisors' actions from Klodzko found reflection in an increase in farmers' skills and knowledge. Similarly, one fourth of respondents were of the opinion that the services offered by the District Advisory Team in Klodzko contributed to their farms' income increase. The influence of agricultural advisors on the natural environment and development of agricultural or non-agricultural entrepreneurship was found to be positive by fewer respondents (Figure 5). The answer to the question about the importance of actions aiming at improving one's own

competitiveness seems to be obvious. However, there appears another issue concerning the consequences of poor participation in market activities and resignation from qualification improvement. Kalinowski (2013) focuses attention on the fact that there is not enough awareness among some households and their family members that raising competences brings both measurable and immeasurable benefits including the capital to be invested in the market as well as the prospect of personal development not related to economic factors. He also notices some dysfunction of the surveyed groups (including inhabitants of rural areas), who lack the ability to explore the market of training services and find ones that will meet future

challenges of the market. Demanding attitude of the surveyed farmers who blame the advisers for not enough information on the possibilities of qualification improvement is also an issue. Thus, it is necessary to boost inspiration as knowledge and competences are commonly desired benefits. It means that raising skills and qualifications will positively shape the social structure to become the basic economic resource providing new social, political and economic forces.



Source: author's calculations based on research

Fig. 5. The impact of the District Advisory Team in Klodzko activities on the above listed factors affecting farm development in the opinion of the respondents (in %)

## Conclusions

The results of the discussed survey show that the respondents were mainly interested in courses on the subject of new EU legal regulations connected with the Common Agricultural Policy (including plant cultivation, cross-compliance and integrated plant protection), development of entrepreneurship

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(agricultural and non-agricultural), as well as assistance in completion of application forms for direct payments and in other activities within the Rural Development Programme. The District Advisory Team in Klodzko did provide services in these areas; however, the respondents signalled there were not enough courses of this type. They indicated that there was a significant "information gap" as regards the above mentioned EU legal regulations, therefore, great majority of respondents were not satisfied with the number of courses. The satisfaction level of the surveyed farmers with the offered training courses in terms of the subject adjustment, clarity of communication, and the quality of lecture rooms was most often assessed as satisfactory. According to almost every third farmer, the capacity of the District Advisory Team in Klodzko to customize their services to meet requirements and expectations of farmers, was good. Flexibility and capability to adjust their offer to customer demands is connected with efficiency of the advisers' work. Fast pace of changes occurring in every sphere of life (legal, economic etc.) imposes on farmers the necessity of quick response. An efficient system of agricultural advisory centres is necessary to provide agriculture and rural areas with professional support. Therefore, it is essential to constantly monitor farmers' expectations from the system of agricultural advisory centres and provide quick response to new requirements and demands.

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