

### Study regarding the situation of agricultural consultancy in the North–East Region of Romania

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**Abstract.** The undertaken study aimed to diagnose the situation of agricultural consultancy from the North – East Region of Romania, 12 years after its foundation. For the realization of the study the questionnaires method has been utilized which have been completed by a number of 80 agricultural consultancy specialists from 6 counties in the North – East Region. From the responses analysis, the following aspects emerged. All persons that ensure consultancy develop general activities from all fields of agriculture. There is a shortage of specialists, a person providing services to several thousand farmers. The consultants have benefited from training courses in consultancy, a short period of time, 2-8 weeks, fact that reflects on the services rendered. The local consultancy centres have a precarious endowment (office, computer, telephone), lacking transport means, training rooms, endowment with specific auxiliary means. Between consultancy methods, the biggest share is held by individual office consultancy. Group consultancy, which has the highest efficiency, is done sporadically because of reduced financial means. A lack of interest from local authorities is manifested for consultancy activity. Specialists are unhappy with the level of salaries, reduced training possibilities, high work volume, lack of endowment and transport means, and political interference in the recruitment process.

**Key Words:** consultancy, agriculture, diagnosis, weaknesses, North-East Region of Romania.

**Rezumat.** Studiul întreprins a urmărit să diagnosticheze situația consultanței agricole din Regiunea de Nord-Est a României, la 12 ani după înființarea acesteia. Pentru realizarea studiului s-a utilizat metoda chestionarelor care au fost completate de un număr de 80 specialiști în consultanță agricolă din cele 6 județe ale Regiunii de Nord-Est. Din analiza răspunsurilor au rezultat următoarele aspecte. Toate persoanele care asigură consultanță desfășoară activități cu caracter general din toate domeniile agriculturii. Există o lipsă acută de specialiști, o persoană asigurând servicii pentru câteva mii de fermieri. Consultanții au beneficiat de stagii de perfecționare în domeniul consultanței, o perioadă scurtă de timp, 2-8 săptămâni, fapt care se reflectă asupra calității serviciilor prestate. Centrele locale de consultanță au o dotare precară (birou, calculator, telefon), lipsind mijloacele de transport, săli de instruire, dotarea cu mijloace auxiliare specifice. Dintre metodele de consultanță, ponderea o deține consultanța individuală la birou. Consultanța în grup care are eficiența cea mai mare se desfășoară sporadic datorită mijloacelor financiare reduse. Se manifestă un dezinteres al autorităților locale pentru activitatea de consultanță. Specialiștii sunt nemulțumiți de nivelul de salarizare, de posibilitățile reduse de perfecționare, volumul mare de muncă, lipsa dotărilor și mijloacelor de transport, precum și de ingerințele politice în procesul de recrutare a personalului.

**Cuvinte cheie:** consultanță, agricultură, diagnostic, puncte slabe, Regiunea de N-E a României.

**Introduction.** Agricultural consultancy represents a professional counselling service and, at request, of involvement, realized free of fee-based, by specialists or authorized organizations, aimed at supporting farm managers or other interested person in solving problems in the agriculture area (Greiner 1983). Agriculture and agricultural extension service are facing numerous problems in present times when good solutions are not easy to find (Zivkovic et al 2009).

It is unanimous recognized the fact that without consultancy services performance in agriculture is not achievable. Through consultancy the introduction of modern technologies is ensured, as well as the information or agricultural producers on news arising following research on national and world level in agriculture.

In fact, with the development of modern agricultural extension and introduction of the audience-centred communication theory, agricultural extension itself is more characterized by communication activities. In the process of agricultural extension, the agricultural consultants delivery technology, information or services to farmers through the information carrier by communication and other means and methods so as to enhance the farmers` knowledge, improve their skills, change their beliefs and attitudes so that they can consciously change their behaviour (Zhao Di & Wang De-hai 2010).

In Romania, the organization of consultancy services has been realized starting with 1998, with the support of the European Union, representing one of the accession conditions to this organism.

The undertaken research proposed to evaluate the situation of agricultural consultancy from the North-East Region of Romania, based on the opinions of those that ensure consultancy services for agricultural producers.

**Material and Method.** For the study, 80 specialists that work in local agricultural consultancy centres have been questioned. The research was based on the information obtained from these by completing some questionnaires, with a number of 20 questions, to which were added some personal data, except the name. The questions have a varied nature and referred to: type of consultancy practiced, share of domains, structure of activity times, thematic, methods used, type and duration of trainings, positive and negative aspects of the consultancy activity, improvement proposals of this activity. The sample of respondents had an equal share for each of the 6 counties of the North-East Region of Romania. The data were processed and interpreted using the classic analysis methodology.

**Results and Discussion.** A first aspect refers to the base specialisation obtained during university. Half of the specialists have a specialisation in agriculture, 35% - animal husbandry, and 15% have other specialisations: horticulture, economy, food industry. Only 20% of them have post-university master courses.

In regards of sex, 55% are male and 45% are female, respecting, in general, the proportion between sexes, between students of the profile economic units. The majority have an experience between 20 and 35 years, the average, 60%, being held by the specialist with an experience of up to 30 years.

Experience in their profession, respectively in the consultancy activity, varies. Most of them - 55%, activate, the majority, from the start of the consultancy services. Persons with a reduced experience in this activity exist, of up to 5 years - 35%, the difference - of 20% having an average experience of 5-10 years.

Through the nature of the position, but, especially, the endowment of the low number of personnel, they all are generalists, giving consultancy on all matters relating to agriculture. However, from the given answers, it results that they focus, in the consultancy activity, on aspects tied to the specialization they achieved in university. And this thing is normal if we take into consideration that the expertise obtained in university and the activity done in the field, before being employed in consultancy.

Analysing the given responses, it results that over 70% of the activity is done in the vegetal production field and only 20-25% in the animal production area.

In general, consultancy activities in animal production are given in mountainous and pre-mountainous area counties (Suceava, Neamt, Bacau, Vrancea), where animal growth is more developed, and part of the consultants have university degrees in animal husbandry.

The study also followed the situation of the content of consultancy on fields of activity. Thus, in the vegetal production field, the responses have shown that all have given specialty assistance from crop production with shares between 50% and 80%. A 70% share of all specialists gives consultancy services in viticulture and fruit production, depending on the area in which they work.

With few exceptions, they all declared that they have advices and information also from other fields such as economic and community legislation, community payments, European funds etc.

In the field of animal production, the share of consultancy services referred to the bovine species – 80%. This is followed, in order, by pigs with 70% and by sheep with 50%. There have been more special requests such as consultancy in the fields of snails, ostriches growth, apiculture etc.

A reduced number of requests (5-10%) have been in agro-tourism, new machines, animal and horticultural constructions, animal nutrition and veterinary medicine.

Although the specific of the profession and the job description specifies only agricultural consultancy activities and managerial consultancy for farm managers, all respondents declared that they have done activities also in other fields. Thus, 65% are used by city halls, in their specific activities, and 80% are involved in other activities, with community character (cultural and even political). These last two categories don't exceed together 20% of the work time.

In regards of the utilized methodology, from the three method groups specific to consultancy (individual, in group and mass-media), consultancy specialists declared that they mostly used the first two groups of methods. From these, predominant is office based individual consultancy (70%), as well as on the field or in the beneficiaries household (for consultancies in animal husbandry or fruit production).

One of the reported causes by consultants for limited field movement, to the beneficiaries' household, is the lack of transport means at the local agricultural consultancy centre.

Group consultancy, the most efficient method in regards of impact among the beneficiaries, occupies a share of 20-30% of total activities and of the time consumed for organizing and conducting them.

The majority have a scheduled character, some proposed by the county consultancy bureaus, most of them being solicited by beneficiaries.

Organizing these actions, to produce the required effect, is laborious and costly, and the consultants complained of difficulties, especially financial and of logistical support for their realization.

The topic that consultants proposed to beneficiaries and have identified as necessary and specific to the area, referred to the following aspects: new technologies, business ideas, internal and community legislation, conducting training courses, the importance of certified seeds, farm management.

From the beneficiaries a number of suggestions came which refer to: ways of accessing European funds, chemical control of pests and diseases, establishment of experimental plots, the latest technology in animal husbandry, purchasing of modern equipment, technologies for mushrooms and strawberries growth, snails and bees growth.

When asked what type of individual consultancy they use, the majority declared that they use in the office consultancy (50-60%). In the second place, was situated in the field or animal shelters consultancy with 25-30% of the cases, the difference being represented by other situations.

The methodology used by consultants was utilized differently. The majority used the counselling method, combined with the diagnosis-treatment model. From the total consultations, only 30% used the participative model, the consultants preferring not to engage themselves too much, one of the causes being the lack of financial motivation.

According to researchers of (Kubr et al 1986), but also in the case of respondents, group consultancy represents the most efficient way of transmitting news to beneficiaries. In the case of this method, a widening of the action over a large mass of beneficiaries is ensured, and the time needed for consultancy, as well as the cost reported per beneficiary is lower compared with the method of individual consultancy. In addition, the consultants control is assured and, through the beneficiaries, group dynamic processes can be utilized, aspect that accelerated the transmission of information, as well as decision making by farmers.

Among the various types of group consultancy, 45% of consultants use al 5 types (farm demonstration, multiple farms demonstrations, information days, thematic trips and training courses). They all use farm demonstrations, giving 30-50% of consultancy

time through this method. The other methods are used in a variable share of 20-50%, the least used being the thematic trips type.

Mass consultancy is utilized sporadically, with the occasion of fairs and expositions, farmers' participation being low, because, especially, of the lack of transport means.

In order to realize consultancy activities, respondents showed that they use a series of auxiliary means. The most used mean is the mobile phone, but also brochures, pamphlets, posters, flyers. Through group consultancy they use practical demonstrations in some pilot-farms of the beneficiaries. All have shown the lack of financial means to strengthen the logistics represented by the auxiliary means.

During the career, all consultants have benefited of training courses, with duration of two to eight weeks. They were held without a prescheduled appointment. The specializations made are insufficient to ensure a thorough grounding in agricultural consultancy. There are shortcomings in pedagogy and adult psychology from the rural area and knowledge regarding the methods used for the realization of consultancy destined for farmers' lack.

Because of the type of general consultancy, as well as due to age and type of university specialization, all consultants have considered necessary some training courses in fields such as: agricultural business management, modern technologies, computer applications, improvement of English language, plant protection, ecology etc.

The research consisted in the weak endowment of the local agricultural consultancy centres. Approximately 80% of these centres don't have an own building, don't have experimental fields, don't have transport means to ensure on the field assistance. The only amenities are a bureau, a computer and a mobile phone and some auxiliary means (brochures, flyers).

Among the needs that consultants consider necessary for the proper endowment of consultancy centres we mention: a training room equipped with the necessary equipment, field surfaces in order to organize experimental fields, determinations and analysis kits, transport means, internet access. Also, all signalled the lack of personnel, a consultant to 3-4 communes with thousands of farmers being totally insufficient. They all appreciated at a local agricultural consultancy centre must be at least 3-4 specialists in different areas of activities.

Among the shortcomings noted, besides the lack of necessary amenities, are mentioned, the low salaries level, the reduced level of specialists in consultancy, the tense relations with local authorities that don't understand the importance of agricultural consultancy and don't support it, the reducing contact with agricultural research, the double subordination and, in many situations, the politization of the recruitment process.

## **Conclusions**

1. Agricultural consultancy represents one of the most important levers meant to determine the increase in performance in agricultural exploitations.

2. The undertaken research presents the current stage of agricultural consultancy in Romania with the obtained results from its start – in 1998, but especially with the present deficiencies.

3. Among the weaknesses of Romanian agricultural consultancy, the most important are: the small number of specialists, poor professional training in the consultancy field, insufficient endowment of local agricultural consultancy centres, lack of transport means, and lack of interest from local authorities in agricultural consultancy activity.

4. Among the complaints from specialists that ensure the agricultural consultancy activity in the North-East Region of Romania counties we mention: the exaggerated large number of beneficiaries per consultant, the low salary level, reduced training possibilities in agricultural consultancy, lack of specific motivational factor for realizing the consultancy activity.

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