

Elżbieta Psyk-Piotrowska

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION COOPERATIVES
IN THE RURAL MILIEU

The presence of three sectors in Polish agriculture gives special character to the perspective of stability and development of the peasant village, as well as to the place and role of its productive partners. The coexistence of three different forms of farms need not have competitive character, given proper policy of the state and creation of the same (in compliance with the needs) chances of development for each of these forms.

Nationalized farms, being given (in case of state-owned farms) or having confirmed (in the situation of production cooperatives) the rights to independent management, increasingly acquire the character of local establishments. Bound, in their functions, with a social and group (production cooperative) interest, they meet a number of needs of the rural milieu.

In the article, the attention has been focused on the production cooperative as one of the elements of the Polish countryside. The keynote is the statement that economically strong production cooperatives have potential abilities and they actually realize environmental functions, playing also an essential role in the process of modernization and modification of the countryside.

Production cooperatives functioning in Poland nowadays constitute remnants of the unsuccessful attempt at the country collectivization at the end of 1940s and in the beginning of 1950s or structures brought into being at the end of 1960s and 1970s. In the oldest cooperatives, a high percentage of employees are descendants of the founders of these cooperatives (now pension-

ers who did not return to individual farming in 1950s). It is the old cooperatives that seem to be more strongly integrated with the local social milieu of the village than others. This type of a production cooperative serves as an example illustrating the problems dealt with in the further part of the article.

Agricultural farms in the private, state and cooperative sectors function on the basis of separate legal regulations, different organisational principles concerning the work process, its results, settlement, distribution of income, etc.¹ The decision possibilities of staffs and their self-management activity are diversified.

The population employed in the agricultural sectors (individual farmers as well as employees of the state-owned farms and members of the cooperative employed directly in the production) constitutes a considerable percentage of the population living in villages². Agricultural employees are not only food producers but also participants of a definite rural socio-cultural and material milieu, are consumers of goods and users of facilities and institutions found in this milieu. "Food producers" in rural districts, in which there is a state-owned farm or/and an agricultural production cooperative apart from individual farms,

¹ The sectors have different participation in the global agricultural production and area of farmland. According to the Rocznik Statystyczny GUS (Statistical Yearbook of the Central Statistical Office) of 1985, the area of farmland as regards forms of ownership in 1984 amounted to:

total	18 945 000 ha.
socialized economy	5 395 000 ha.
(in this: state-owned farms	3 511 000 ha.

production cooperatives	669 000 ha.
non-socialized economy	13 530 000 ha. (table 4, p. 277)

number of production establishments pursuing agricultural activity	
state-owned farms	1 278
production cooperatives	2 342
individual farms of above 0.5 hectare	284 400

average total area of the farms:	
state-owned farms	3 169 ha.
production cooperatives	330 ha.
individual farms of above 0.5 hectare	5.6 hectares (table 7, p. 279)

² According to the Central Statistical Office data - the Rocznik Statystyczny (Statistical Yearbook) of 1985 - the rural

have different access and chances of using material, social and cultural goods. The inhabitants of a district (including farmers) can make use of services of the institutions and the equipment generally accessible in this milieu, of the possibilities being at the disposal of a state-owned farm or an agricultural production cooperative first of all as regards, socio-cultural activity (and in relation to some forms of activity), exclusively those employed in them and their families can make use of the above-mentioned possibilities.

Individual farmers are practically deprived of an institutionalized, local organizer and sponsor for this kind of activity to meet their needs.

Different accessibility, for the employees of three sectors of agriculture, to the facilities and social services is not the only feature differentiating their situation of life. There are significant differences in the situation itself, understood generally, and in the working conditions.

1. Some features of work in the socialized and individual economy

Work in the so called social sector (cooperative or state) is collective work of many people, organized in formalized structures where, by virtue of legal regulations, there is division of labour within a definite scope of activities for particular posts and functions. The division of duties related with the whole production process is connected with different decision possibilities at particular posts, and responsibility for partial tasks and overall production effects of the establishment. The employees' decision possibilities, the responsibility for production-economic results formally exercised and subjectively felt, differentiate the staff of a state-owned farm and an agricultural production cooperative, but the responsibility for prosperity of

population in 1984 amounted to 14 839.7 thous. (p. 4), 8 173.4 thous. were at the working age (p. 40), 4964 thous. worked in the agriculture, in this: 4626 thous. in state-owned, cooperative and private farms (p. 301).

the whole establishment is greater among the employees of Agricultural Production Cooperatives (APC) than those of State-Owned Farms (SOF). This is conditioned by the regulations of the cooperative law which make it possible to form an employees' team as a community of aims. The degree and range of satisfying individual needs and interests is more, than in a state-owned farm, conditioned by effective realization of aims and successes of the whole "establishment".

Any failure and sanctions for ill or incorrect management of the cooperative brings financial losses upon the members of the cooperative, deprives them of the possibility of increasing the daily rate, causes a reduction or loss of a bonus, and can even cause a decrease in the basic rate of pay.

One-man decisions, concerning all the activities connected with the production on his farm, made by a farmer are the result of conscious actions in the interest of his own, his family and the farm itself. Failures in the production sphere have a negative effect (as in the socialized forms) not only upon economic results of the family farm, but bring about wide social repercussions. This broader context of one's own activity is only observed in the situation of making calculations by a farmer, concerning the possibility of developing his own farm. No interventions of the state in the production activity of individual farms have been able to change efficiently and permanently a peasant's basic decisions concerning the established practice towards the economy managed³. He follows his own logic, calculation and simplified economic calculus, on the grounds of life and professional experience obtained on the family farm, increasingly supported by school and handbook knowledge derived from mass media and other sources. He utilizes more and more, the services of rural agricultural institutions for the good of modern economy, and including market interrelations of the macro-sy-

³ In the countryside, there are agricultural associations and other organizations entitled to the socio-educational and cultural-educational activity. However, their financial and organizational possibilities are much less than those of the production cooperative, especially in the sphere of social services (flats, nurseries, nursery-schools, canteens, holidays, etc.).

stem of the food economy it facilitates synchronization of social interests and those of the family farm.

As compared with potential possibilities of running and development of individual farms and production cooperatives, the following features should be pointed out. In relation to at least part of agricultural production cooperatives it can be said that they constitute a form of (genuinely) self-dependent collective farming. They are large farms whose organization is ensured by at least a sufficient number of labourers (which is not always the case on an individual farm - the problem of farms without successors, run by the old people, etc.), by being well-equipped with agricultural machinery which secures efficient realization of all the operations and activities connected with different phases of the production process.

An average farmer is, to a considerable degree, dependent on the services of local agricultural institutions which do not always render their services efficiently. He has much more difficulty in obtaining materials and machinery for production and in selling his products. Products of a cooperative are sold wholesale to a centre of purchasing of farm products or to other institutions within the scope of cooperative contracts. Farmers in the neighbourhood of socialized agricultural farms are often deprived of possibility of contracting some profitable crops (pea, rape), monopolized by these establishments.

The production scale and range on an individual peasant's farm is generally smaller than in an average production cooperative. On his own farm, he is a manager, a production organizer, a performer of many various activities related with all the production phases. This multiplicity of functions is for an average farmer more difficult to cope with than for a well-organized socialized establishment.

Both members of a cooperative and individual farmers are aware that their standard of living and financial situation depend on the production effects. In the opinion of both these categories members of a cooperative are in a better financial position. They also have better socio-cultural conditions due to the facilities being at the disposal of a cooperative.

Proper equipment of socialized establishments for pursuing production activity, subordination of the organizational structure

and posts to the fundamental lines of production, taking into consideration auxiliary departments and non-farm production make it possible to draw on reserves which can, to a different degree and in a different way, be utilized by a state-owned farm or a production cooperative for services in favour of the local rural milieu.

Production cooperatives go out of its out-the-way locality more often than state farms, which is justified by the character of these two structures. The state-owned farm is an economic state institution, an agricultural establishment situated in the rural area. From the start, its organization, activity and development were stimulated by the decisions of state authority as in other non-farm enterprises. They were structures rather isolated from a local rural milieu. The latest economic reform conferred also to state-owned farms greater rights to self-dependent activity with all its consequences. A better chance cropped up to create closer links with the rural-district milieu and its agricultural community.

Production cooperatives function on the basis of regulations of "Cooperative Law", the statute and internal regulations. They have always been relatively more self-dependent and independent than state-owned farms, even during the periods of the state interference in 1950s and the latter part of 1970s. They are an association, where the self-management factor has generally played a substantial role. Agricultural production cooperatives, especially those having long traditions, functioning since 1950s and 1960s, were relatively well-prepared to realize in their economy three "S's" (self-dependence, self-management and self-financing). The cooperatives that survived a difficult early stage, did not "become affected" and were able to utilize state assets rationally during the period of pro-cooperative policy of 1970s constitute prosperous organisms.

Many of them have become a structure set into the system of economic-service institutions and organizations of the rural district and they often distinguish themselves by efficiency, multiplicity of functions, utility for a rural milieu at large. Generally speaking, they are the cooperatives that obtained efficiency in the activities through proper management mechanisms:

1. They have a well-educated management staff, competent for

the matters concerning agriculture, organization and economics of agricultural production and financial settlements. Orderly and requiring work discipline from the employees' teams and, at the same time, showing concern for proper human relations and realization of social-economic needs of the staff.

2. They decentralized management, which improves functioning of the establishment. Within such structures, employees' teams are intergrated, engaged in work. Mutual inspection of quality of work is better for the amount of payment depends on it.

3. They create chances of the staff's participation in making decisions important for the establishment and production, which makes the employees identify themselves with the establishment. They work efficiently for they realize that production results and income and, consequently, their own pay depend on their work.

4. They use, according to the establishment needs, casual transfers of persons to undertake some other activities, thus, making efficient use of the staff's work and ensuring continuity and efficiency of production in the establishment.

5. a) a general manager president, apart from wide competence and knowledge, has qualities facilitating proper inspection and coordination of all the matters in the establishment,

b) the manager who represents interests of the staff and establishment in contacts with other institutions,

c) who has good knowledge of the market position and reacts quickly to all changes⁴.

2. The activity of a production cooperative in favour of the milieu

In compliance with the "Cooperative Law" act, production cooperatives can, apart from agricultural production, pursue manufacture and service activity within the scope established in the statute.

⁴ In the light of the law, outer interference, including the taking over of the farm by the state, is possible only in relation to some farmers (of the so called unattended-to farms, having no prospect of further development, etc.).

The so called fundamental activity pursued to a proper extent brings considerable benefits to the cooperative and the milieu. It not only constitutes an additional source of income, but, first of all, is a guarantee of continuous work of the members of the cooperative even during a period of poorer demand for work on the farm (thereby, it allows to utilize human labour more efficiently). The cooperatives pursuing extra-fundamental activity spend some financial means on realizing investment, thus reducing their needs as regards banking investment credits, and they even become entirely self-financing (without subsidies and state credits). Allocation of all the income of extra-fundamental production (as it happens in the cooperative K, where the share of this production in the total income amounts to 30%) to an increase in the statute allowances permits to accelerate the cooperative development, among other things, by increasing the investment fund, and brings benefits to the members by an increase in collective consumption (socio-cultural and housing) funds. They are not immediate financial benefits expressed by an increase in monthly wages. Acceptance of such a situation by the members is possible at a high daily rate ensuring reasonable monthly wages, with understanding the mechanisms of the cooperative development and the relation between this development and a better economic situation of their own.

Building-repair brigades play an important role in non-farm activity. Creation of their own brigade makes it possible to build and maintain apartment and farm buildings according to their own needs and possibilities without having to use services, often questioned, of agricultural building enterprises. These working gangs also provide services for rural inhabitants and institutions.

Agricultural production cooperatives complement a system of institutions important for the whole rural milieu, solve a number of its problems acting as a contractor or co-investor of such undertakings as: the building of schools, nursery schools, pharmacies, village libraries, sacral buildings (e.g. a chapel). They meliorate and recultivate farmland, build and repair roads. As can be seen from practice, the possibilities of a production cooperative are abundant. For instance, the cooperative, given here as an example, has built two hydrophore systems for its own

needs but the inhabitants of the district also use it. It has started building a sewage-treatment plant. It has built access roads to its seven establishments. Now, thanks to the cooperative president's efforts, in agreement with central and district authorities, it has started building a district school (above the territorial plan). The cooperative plays the role of a co-investor. The building is due to be put to use in a year and a half. It is a workable date of completion, taking into account the tempo of realization of the investments undertaken so far. For example, the social building of high standard, with a recreation room for four hundred persons, a nursery school for 120 children (50% of places for the villagers), a large canteen for the members of the cooperative, three large flats for the employees (including the president), four guest-rooms, comfortable rooms for the administration, etc., was built in 9 months.

The participation of a production cooperative in the complement of the communal and institutional infrastructure serving the inhabitants of the whole village is one of the forms of activity for the benefit of the milieu. Production cooperatives play a certain role in the sphere of culture and entertainment of the rural population. They usually have large recreation rooms which are a place of general meetings, other meetings and performances organized for members of the cooperative. Theatre and music groups as well as a mobile cinema are invited and then a number of the tickets are sold to the non-cooperative community in the district. Recreation rooms of the production cooperative are, beside accommodation of the voluntary fire-brigade, a place for wedding parties, funeral banquets and dances. There, national holidays are celebrated and at the time of election to the parliament or the people's council they are a seat of committees. Many cooperatives run restaurants, using partly their own products, even with amusement activity (e.g. a dancing-hall).

They are the elements integrating cooperative and rural communities (hermetic and isolated in 1950s and 1960s from the social environment of the village).

Services and aid of a cooperative are also connected with the production activity of agricultural population of the countryside. Production cooperatives - according to farmers - lend some machines, render mechanization and chemization services better,

cheaper and at their convenience. They generally are great competitors of agricultural associations.

To sum up, production cooperative operating in Poland are not uniform structures as regards economy, production and organization but among them, there are good agricultural establishments achieving remarkable effects, ensuring good economic conditions to the members who relate their work with the effects of the "firm" and identify themselves with it. These cooperatives are strong potentates in the rural milieu in the region of their activity. They do not constitute, as it was in 1950s, one of weaker elements in the set of rural institutions.

Production activity of the production cooperative, work of its members and its effects as well as their socio-economic situation are closely observed by the villagers, especially farmers, and are evaluated quite fairly. They are the cooperatives whose organization of work, production results and diligence of the staff are admired by farmers. However, they are still sceptical about socialized forms and they are not likely to join an agricultural production cooperative. They also notice its advantages as: work for a definite number of hours, less arduous due to division of labour and possibility of being replaced, better mechanization, free time, holidays and a number of various social benefits, regular earnings. However, work on the farm is the work "on one's own", for oneself, and what is most important under one's own management. A farmer determines the time-table of his activities himself, no one gives orders to him. Peasants' servitude of many hundred years old has left its impress on their consciousness. Independent activity, self-dependance on one's own farm are the values appreciated better than advantages of team work. Farmers of poorer farms, with a lower grade of the soil, without successors are categories that would be likely to join a production cooperative but they realize that there is no place for them in a well-organized cooperative.

The cooperatives of long tradition that elaborated their own forms of activity, operate on the basis of a good (qualified and orderly) body of workers, and they have bright prospects. They are not in opposition to individual farmers, and intensification of service activity for the benefit of this category can even be observed. Farmers look forward to formal-legal provisions

and warrant for the cooperation with cooperative forms. The employees and organizers of production cooperatives are preparing amendments to the statute of the agricultural production cooperative, where the principles of such a cooperation are to be determined. As can be seen from practice, the socialized form of production can, apart from realizing their fundamental aims, constitute one of institutions of the rural life system and can play an important role in it, rendering many services for the rural milieu⁵.

As for the outlook, good cooperatives and peasant farming strive for symbiotic systems, profitable for both sides. Agriculture cooperatives do not menace the stability of peasant farms in present conditions, but affect the increase in productive efficiency on the farm. Non-productive activity improves the standard of meeting economic and socio-cultural needs of the whole rural population.

Elżbieta Psyk-Piotrowska

ROLNICZE SPÓŁDZIELNIE PRODUKCYJNE W ŚRODOWISKU WIEJSKIM

Trzy formy produkcji rolniczej w Polsce - indywidualne gospodarstwa, Państwowe Gospodarstwa Rolne (PGR), Rolnicze Spółdzielnie Produkcyjne (RSP) nie oznaczają trzech różnych dróg zmian i przeobrażeń produkcyjno-ekonomicznych i społeczno-kulturowych naszej wsi. Jak wynika z prowadzonych badań (1981-1985) występujące na terenie jednej gminy różne sektory w mniejszym czy większym zakresie stają się współgospodarzami terenu. Szczególnie dużo działań na rzecz środowiska wiejskiego podejmują na niektórych obszarach RSP. Są to: w sferze produkcji - usługi mechanizacyjne i chemizacyjne dla rolników indywidualnych, naprawy i wypoży-

⁵ The theses and conclusions presented in the article have been formulated on the basis of the results of the studies carried out by the author in the years 1984-1985 in some selected agricultural production cooperatives in one of the voivodships in the centre of Poland. These researches have been sponsored by the Institute of Sociology at the University of Łódź. The results from these empirical studies connected with agricultural production co-operatives do not lead to generalizations. However the experience of these economically strong co-operatives which are functionally linked with peasant village community can be patterns for the similar type of co-operatives.

czenie sprzętu rolniczego; inwestowanie i wykonawstwo w zakresie urzędzeń komunalnych dla wsi - budowa dróg, wodociągów, oczyszczalni ścieków, szkół i innych obiektów; udostępnianie własnych urzędzeń (przedszkola, świetlice, sale) szerszemu ogółowi dla celów socjalnych oraz rozrywkowo-kulturalnych itp.

Aktywność produkcyjna silnych ekonomicznie RSP, jak i ich działalność dla środowiska gminnego oceniana jest przez rolników indywidualnych z terenu, na którym działają pozytywnie. Mimo to, ci sami rolnicy, dla których "ich" RSP jest wzorem, zdecydowanie przeciwni są rozszerzaniu formy spółdzielczości produkcyjnej na większą skalę.