

Wiktor SZYDŁO

Wrocław University of Economics (Poland)

RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN POLAND – PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF EUROPEAN BUDGET SUPPORT AND DETERMINANTS OF PROGRESS

1. Strategy and policy of interventionism in agriculture

Rural areas dominate the Polish landscape. In 2002 they accounted for 93.4% of the territory, while the share of agricultural land was 54%. According to GUS, in 2003 the population living in rural areas amounted to 14 677.2 thousand, *i.e.* about 38.4% of the total.

The European Council in Lisbon set a new strategic goal for the Union: “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”. The European Council then decided that a strategy for sustainable development should complete this commitment by adding an environmental dimension. It is now recognized that in the long term, economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection must go hand in hand.

Woś [2001] states that without transferring funds from consumers and taxpayers to farmers, the sustainable development of the agriculture and food sector is not possible. Other Polish agricultural economists point to the extremely low productivity of Polish agriculture. In the opinion of Czyżewski and Henisz-Matuszczak [2005, 21], this results from the malfunctioning of the system. They state that a rational agricultural policy aimed at attaining a dynamic equilibrium of productive structures has to transfer surplus from non-agricultural sectors to agricultural produc-

ers. Polish agriculture requires [Czyżewski and Henisz-Matuszczak, 2005, 26]:

- financial support, in order to achieve sustainable development in relation to other, non-agricultural sectors;
- introduction of new methods for redistributing financial surpluses to farmers, both under expansionary and restrictive fiscal policies. In turn, monetary policy, as a tool affecting the food sector, should appropriately (in line with other policies) adjust the levels of interest rates on long term bank deposits.

The form of any policy of interventionism in agriculture is conditioned by various factors. The aforementioned pair of economists point to macro-economic conditions, but at the same time policy should be tailored to set goals and exercised in stages. In the first phase a growth in income should be ensured. When the problem of the transfer of surplus is permanently solved and farm income is stable, excess factors of production are released which can be utilised in non-farming activities. Only in the third stage will there be stronger integration of the agricultural sector with other sectors thanks to vertical and horizontal integration. In the last stage farming is internally and externally integrated, thus it does not hamper economic growth [Czyżewski and Henisz Matuszczak, 2005, 21].

Taking into account the differences in income between Poland and the EU-15 countries, economic interventionism in the sector should be concentrated on boosting income. Gorzelak calculated on the basis of the 2002 National Agricultural Census (Pol. Powszechny Spis Rolny) that the average value of wholesale production in farms producing mainly for market sale amounted to 29 122 zł in 2002. Yet, total spending connected with production was 22 090 zł. Therefore, Polish market orientated farms were left with only about 7000 zł to spend on consumption in 2002 [Gorzelak, 2005, 9]. Because of the continually wide discrepancy in the level of CAP support between old and new Member States, this gap has been only partly reduced. In comparison, since 1996 average total income of agricultural households in the U.S. has been greater than average U.S. household income, with income levels in 2000 of 61 947 USD and 57 045 USD, respectively [Mishra and Holthausen, 2002]. These income disparities are the result of:

- low acreage in Poland, where the average area of an individual farm only amounts to 7.4 hectares, while in the EU it is about 16 hectares. This discrepancy is even larger in comparison with Australia where the average area is over 5 000 hectares for broad acre and dairy farms [Fischer Boel, 2006];
- relatively low profitability per hectare (although some estimates show little discrepancy between Poland and the EU);

– the disadvantageous situation in terms of financial support as the estimated level of subsidies to agricultural producers in Poland (1.2 billion USD in 2003) was much lower than in the EU-15 countries (118 billion USD) and the USA (35.6 billion USD) (comparing the incomparable again). The nominal level of support was higher even in Hungary which has about $\frac{1}{4}$ the population of Poland (1.7 billion USD). In the Czech Republic 1.2 billion USD was channeled to the agricultural sector [OECD, 2005, 26].

Another cause of this income gap lies in the continually insufficient diversification of sources of income. In the US, for example, it is estimated that approximately 58% of farms carried out professional activities outside of farming, while in 1939 it was 29%. According to the Agricultural Census, the number of farms doing business outside agriculture increased from 249 thousand in 1996 to 363.4 thousand in 2002, *i.e.* by 46%. The vast majority (93.2%) of them only did business within one section of non-agricultural production. Despite progress Poland still lags behind. In developed countries farming is no longer the sole source of income for most farmers and their families.

It is often argued that too much funds are spent on the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS) at the expense of measures promoting rural development. There is no doubt that this system needs well-considered reform. Wealthy farmers should be charged more than those operating semi-subsistence farms. At present farmers are charged four times a year. The total premium for the second quarter of 2006 amounted to only 251 zł irrespective of acreage and income of a farmer. On the other hand, the average monthly pension (including disability pension) of farmers was quite low. It amounted to 754.17 zł (gross), while outside the system of agricultural social insurance it amounted to 1 178.30 zł in December 2005.

The requirements of rural development should be addressed by a new tax system. The introduction of income tax to the agricultural sector will probably be postponed. Devising a fair method for redistributing funds to the agricultural sector will be a complex task.

2. The Rural Development Plan for Poland

The Rural Development Plan for Poland (RDPP) consists of nine measures that “set out the objectives, priorities and rules for supporting the sustainable development of rural areas” and concentrates on social, economic and environmental (ecological) aspects. Despite its scope, none of the measures of the Plan is aimed at non-landowners living in rural areas. This seems to be the biggest weakness of RDPP.

Measure 1 – early retirement is meant to accelerate the turnover of farming generations and improve the profitability of agricultural holdings. By the end of January 2006 40 083 applications had been submitted. The Agency for the Reconstruction and Modernization of Agriculture (ARMA) has made 30 162 decisions to grant funds. As a result, beneficiaries have received 29 963 payments totalling 450.36 mln zł. This kind of support is attractive to farmers. Since the plan allows the transfer of agricultural holdings to other family members, it will only partly improve the structure and increase the acreage of the holdings. RDPP assumes that potentially about 81 thousand farmers who are the heads of agricultural holdings are likely to take part in this measure, while it is estimated that 55 thousand farmers will eventually participate in the years 2004–2006. Taking into account the number of applications submitted (almost 42 thousand by the end of February 2006), there is still scope for about 13 thousand applications.

In the case of Measure 2 – support for semi-subsistence farms undergoing restructuring – 116 870 applications have been submitted. The agency has dealt with 113 717 of them. By 31st January 2006 82 734 positive decisions had been made and 33 343 beneficiaries had received funds totaling 172.7 mln zł. Farmers were very interested in this kind of support. The funds available for the present 3-year programme were rapidly depleted. As a result, on 22nd March 2005 ARMA decided to close these funds – farmers cannot presently submit applications. Initially it was estimated that the number of potential beneficiaries was 126 thousand (*i.e.* about 10 thousand more than the actual number of applications).

Measure 3 – support for less-favoured areas (LFA) turned out to be very popular among farmers, as it is not very complicated. Applications for payments are submitted together with those for direct payments. In 2004 628 762 applications were submitted, the agency made 608 359 decisions and paid out 1 144.6 mln zł. In 2005 there were even more claims.

By February 170 350 (of the total of 708 418) had been positively assessed.

Between 1st September 2004 and 15th June 2005 23 935 claims for support were submitted under Measure 4 – support for the agro-environment and animal welfare. At present, the popularity of this measure is even greater, as in a much shorter period (between September 2005 and 2nd February 2006) 23 197 claims were received. As the necessary computer system was not ready, only 3 540 positive decisions had been made. The total payments amounted to 35.34 mln zł.

In the case of applications submitted in 2004 under Measure 5 – afforestation of agricultural land – 1 969 decisions were made. As a result

of afforestation, 43 mln zł of subsidies were given in spring 2005. 4238 applications submitted in 2005 met all the criteria.

Measure 6 – meeting EU standards (like measure 2 – Support for semi-subsistence farms) – was also very popular among farmers. Since 15 March 2005 farmers cannot submit new applications. By the end of February 2006 the number of submitted and considered applications was 73 435 and payments amounted to 56.1 mln zł.

The financial allocation for both these measures should be increased in the next budget for the years 2007–2013. Thanks to Measure 6, farmers will be better prepared for the implementation of cross-compliance, hence the threat of cuts in direct payments will be lessened. Measure 2, in turn, helps to reduce the pressure of farmers on the labour market. This is vital because of high unemployment in urban areas (with the exception of large cities) and hidden unemployment among farmers. According to Rosner [1999] the latter has risen to about 1.2 mln.

Poczta and Kiryluk [2005] come to roughly the same conclusions. Their research shows that producers from small and medium-sized farms would most like an increase in funds for Measure 2 – support for semi-subsistence farms (by about 550 mln Euro), Measure 3 – support for less-favoured areas (by about 800 mln Euro) and Measure 6 – meeting EU standards (by 600 mln Euro). This would be achieved by reducing the funds for Measure 7 – agricultural producer groups, Measure 1 – early retirement, Measure 4 – the agro-environment and animal welfare and Measure 5 – afforestation.

As far as larger producers are concerned (*i.e.* those with an acreage above 20 ha), the most important (an increase of funds in comparison with current allocation by about 1500 mln Euro) is Measure 6 – meeting EU standards, because it plays the biggest role in improving the competitiveness of Polish farms and is a prerequisite for their development and full utilization of CAP support (they suggest an increase in funds by about 1 500 mln Euro). Farmers in this group would also increase funds for Measure 3 – support for less-favoured areas – by about 400–500 mln Euro and for Measure 4 – agro-environment and animal welfare – by a similar amount.

As the research was only done in the Wielkopolska voivodeship on 90 farmers, the results are not fully reliable for optimising the distribution of funds in the whole country. However, they are confirmed to some extent by the preliminary analysis of applications submitted by farmers. Unfortunately, the data from the Agency for Reconstruction and Modernization of Agriculture do not show the amount of funds that have been requested in the applications for these measures. Only the number of applications and the number and value of finalized payments are available.

Development of agricultural producer groups (Measure 7) is perceived by many economists as vital. For example, according to Bingen [2000], "especially for small-scale, less highly capitalized producers, the promotion or encouragement of viable producer groups will be a critical component in the continued development of agricultural markets and agro-enterprises in an ever-changing global economy."

Unfortunately, this type of collective action is not popular in Poland. In July 2004 only 76 producer groups with 12 377 members were operating (less than 1% of farms that applied for direct payments). By 28th February 2006 only 47 applications for Measure 7 – support for agricultural producer groups – had been submitted and the percentage of available funds that had been utilized was only 2.4%. This is well below 170 – the estimated number of potential beneficiaries according to RDPP. However, even full utilization of this kind of support will have negligible influence on the development of collective action among farmers.

The aversion to forming producer groups in Central European countries is often attributed to forced collectivization. Despite pressure from the socialist government, Polish farming managed to remain almost entirely private. The low popularity of Measure 7 may be the result of both negative experiences from the first years of transition to a market economy (when many farmers' organizations and cooperatives were destroyed) and the relatively low level of financial support from EU funds. In the first and second years after accession the assistance to new producer groups cannot exceed EUR 100 thousand, in the third – EUR 80 thousand, in the fourth – EUR 60 thousand and in the fifth – EUR 50 thousand per group. Producer groups set up before 1st May 2004 cannot benefit from the programme. It seems that the biggest obstacle to the development of producer groups is the difficulty in choosing the leader of a group. Another problem is that there is a long delay before farmers receive such support. It is estimated that at the earliest a producer group receives a grant one and a half years after establishment. During this period farmers have to spend their own funds.

The funds available for Measure 8 – technical assistance – amount to 146 mln, while only 29 applications have been submitted and considered.

Despite the relatively high interest in financial support for rural development from the Rural Development Plan for Poland (most significantly in the case of Measures 2, 3 and 7) farmers have received only a small percentage of the total limit for the years 2004–2006 – 17 147.8 mln zł. As of the end of February 2006, in the case of Measure 1 the level of utilization was 23.9%, 18.7% for Measure 2, 11.4% for Measure 5, only 1.9% for Measure 6 and 2.4% for Measure 7. Thanks to the relatively high

payments from Measures 3 – LFA – and complements to direct payments, by the end of February 2006 farmers had received 37.5% of the total allocation for RDPP for the years 2004–2006.

3. Operational Programme for the Agricultural Sector

Among the first set of priorities in the Operational Programme for the Agricultural Sector (OPAS), entitled Restructuring and Modernisation of the Agricultural and Food Sector, Measure 2 – supporting the setting up of young farmers – is the most popular among farmers. Both positively reviewed submissions and payments have already reached almost 100 per cent of the limit. As for all the other measures, the value of funds requested by submitted applications significantly exceed the available funds.

The same applies to the second priority of OPAS, *i.e.* sustainable development of rural areas, where the funds already applied for exceed the limit by 21%. Unfortunately, by the end of March 2006 the payments already made accounted for only 3% of the limit. The lowest interest was in the Leader+ type measure (the funds applied for were below 50% of the limit), which is not a good prognosis for the utilization of support from the new Leader Programme (Axis 4) for 2007–2013.

Also in the case of the third priority – Technical assistance of the Operational Programme for the Agricultural Sector “Restructuring and Modernisation of the Food Sector and Rural Development 2004–2006” – the funds applied for substantially exceeded the limit (by 50%). Although, as for the second priority, the payments already obtained by the farmers are relatively small. By the end of March the proportion of the funds already paid to farmers amounted to less than 40% of the limit.

The Funds received by farmers from RDPP by the end of February 2006 amounted to 6 428.7 mln zł and 1 332.26 mln zł from OPAS by the end of March. Therefore, the total payments were 7 760.96 mln zł. This sum is high in comparison with spending on agriculture before accession, when the agricultural budget rarely exceeded 4 000 mln zł a year. In 2006 only about 2 900 mln zł was spent from the four main sectors of the national agricultural budget. However, present support for rural development in Poland from the two previously mentioned programs only amounts to 3 484.36 mln zł when the 4 276.6 mln zł spent on complements to direct payments are excluded from calculations. This measure should not be treated as support for rural development as it only increases agricultural income. However, it is worth noting that in order to receive direct payments, farmers must fulfill the Code of Good Agricultural Practice.

Table 1. Results of the implementation of the Operational Programme for the Agricultural Sector “Restructuring and Modernisation of the Food Sector and Rural Development 2004–2006”– First Priority (as of 30th March 2006)

Measures	Limit for measures 2004–2006 (mln zł)	Submitted applications		Concluded agreements (% of the limit)	Payments (% of the limit)
		Number	% of the limit		
Priority I – Restructuring and Modernisation of the Food Sector and Rural Development	5 187.9	49 305	139.2	68.2	24.7
1. Investment in agricultural holdings	2 364.7	28 448	126.7	58.8	19.8
2. Setting up of young farmers	708.8	18 852	133	99.9	97
1.3. Training	78.9	307	210.9	41.7	4.6
1.4. Agriculture advisory and service support	212.3	56	101.1	73.2	32.3
1.5. Improving processing and marketing of agricultural products	1 823.2	1 642	159.2	68.7	2.8

Source: Tygodniowe Spotkania, 2006.

Table 2. Results of the implementation of the Operational Programme for the Agricultural Sector "Restructuring and Modernisation of the Food Sector and Rural Development 2004–2006"– Second Priority (as of 30th March 2006)

Measure	Limit for measures 2004–2006 (mln zł)	Submitted applications		Concluded agreements (% of the limit)	Payments (% of the limit)
		Number	% of the limit		
Second priority – Sustainable development of rural areas	1 673	10 921	120.8	47	3.04
1. Restoring the potential of forestry production	50.3	57	163.6	100	0.03
2. Land re-parcelling	82.3	32	124.1	67.6	*
3. Rural renewal and the preservation and protection of cultural heritage	353.1	2 453	148	91.5	0.83
4. Diversification of agricultural activities and similar activities	415.8	6 050	107	36.9	8.1
5. Management of agricultural water resources	540	213	111	18.3	*
6. Development and improvement of the infrastructure related to agriculture	158.7	4 321	150.5	51.8	8.5
7. Leader+ type measure	72.8	248	42.9	29.8	0.93

* no data available

Source: Tygodniowe Spotkania, 2006.

With the introduction of compulsory cross-compliance (legislative acts applying directly at farm level in the fields of the environment, public, animal and plant health and animal welfare) in 2009, Polish farmers will find it even more difficult to receive support from the EU budget. They will be sanctioned in the case of non-compliance by the partial or entire reduction of direct support. For this reason, this new regulation favours ecological development in agriculture. However, it may be at a great expense to social and economic development, which also needs to be sustainable. In order to reconcile these priorities, it seems that support for rural development should focus more on measures which prepare farmers for the introduction of the strict agro-environment requirements which will become compulsory. Despite their efforts, Polish farmers still have problems with ensuring the appropriate storage of natural fertiliser. According to Liro [2003], in 2003 only 5% of farmers complied with the requirements of manure storage. Manure is mostly kept in direct contact with the ground and liquid manure in low capacity containers with a storage capacity of 1–3 months.

4. Unemployment

According to data from the Labour Force Survey [Quarterly Information, 2005] from the fourth quarter of 2005, the unemployment rate in rural areas was 15.7% and was slightly lower than in urban areas – 17.4%. Rural employment policy should target individuals in non-farming households to a much greater extent. The rate of unemployment in this group was 24.8%, whereas among individuals in farming households it amounted to 8.5%. Therefore, despite the high level of hidden unemployment in Polish agriculture, the problem of joblessness in rural areas may be even more acute among non-farmers and their families. Neither the Operational Programme for the Agricultural Sector nor the Rural Development Plan for Poland have had much success in this field. In the near future, the measures of these two programmes are unlikely to bring about the much needed changes. Employment policy is fragmented and lacks coherence. Non-farmers living in rural areas seem to have been left behind.

5. Depopulation

Unsustainable economic and social development have had a negative impact on the demographic situation in rural areas. Despite the continuous increase in the rural population in Poland (an average increase of

about 30 thousand a year in 2001–2003), some rural areas are subject to depopulation. According to Kłodziński [1999, 19], migration of young people to big cities (recently even emigration) has led to a specific deformation of the demographic structure. The strongest deformation appears in the ratio of women to men especially among the age-groups which are most fertile. Research by Frenkel shows that serious problems are found not only in Eastern Poland, but also in central Poland, roughly within the borders of former Królestwo Kongresowe (the Congress Kingdom) [Rosner, 1999]. There is a relatively high number of municipalities (gmina) with a very acute demographic situation in Lower Silesia.

Synthetic typology of rural problem areas [Rosner, 1999] proves that not only rural communities in the north-east of Poland need special support. Many regions in the centre of the country, not only around Łódź and Konin, but also near Kielce, Radom, Częstochowa, Ciechanów, Piła have serious structural problems. The same applies to municipalities in the Lubuskie, West Pomerania and Lower Silesia voivodeships, especially in the southern, mountainous regions.

6. Commitments of the EU to agriculture and rural development

The European Council agreed in December 2005 on an overall budget of 862.36 billion Euro, or 1.045% of the Gross Income (GI) of the EU. Initially, members of the European Parliament wanted to increase this sum by 12 billion Euro. In April 2006 the Parliament and the Austrian Presidency reached a compromise on the long-term budget for the period 2007–2013. They agreed to 864.4 billion Euro, 2 billion Euro more than the previous deal of December 2005. This adds 15 billion Euro to the UK proposal of 1.03% of GI. Compared to the Luxembourg June 2005 compromise it is still a decrease of 20 billion Euro, whereas in comparison with the initial Commission proposal of 1000 billion Euro (1.14% of GI), it is a fall of about 135 billion Euro. A substantial decrease in the budget was advocated by the so-called 'club of six', which opted for a 815 billion (1% of GI) budget. As a result, in the years 2007–2013 the EU budget will decrease in relation to GI which is unfavourable to Polish rural areas [The EU budget..., 2006]

There is a positive tendency of increasing the share of funds devoted to rural development in the total agricultural budget. Funding for rural development and accompanying measures increased by 13.6% from 6 841 mln Euro in 2005 to 7 771 mln Euro in 2006, while expenditure on agriculture (excluding rural development) was raised by only 2.6% (from

42 185.45 mln Euro in 2005 to 43 279.72 mln Euro in 2006). Despite this positive trend, spending on rural development accounts for only 14.8% of the total agricultural budget in 2006 [General budget..., 2006].

7. Development of rural areas in 2007–2013

The Council decision of 20 February 2006 on EU strategic guidelines for rural development (programming period 2007 to 2013) identifies the areas important to the realisation of the Göteborg goals for sustainability and to reforming the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs. This decision provides the basis on which all member states should prepare both their national strategy plans and reference frameworks for preparing programmes of rural development. There is no doubt that the strategy for rural development in the highly developed Western European countries should be different to such a strategy in the new member states. There are also diverse conditions within the new Member States – mainly Central European countries. The rural development strategy for 2007–2013 must recognize these differences and should be flexible enough to address specific needs. Some scope of flexibility is given in the Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development (programming period 2007 to 2013). These guidelines set by the Council decision of 20 February 2006 assume that the new generation of rural development strategies and programmes will be built around four axes: axis 1, improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector; axis 2, improving the environment and the countryside; axis 3, the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy; and axis 4, on Leader type measures. It seems that a strategy for rural development should focus even more on non-agricultural forms of rural development.

The Luxemburg reform decoupled payments from the level of production and reduced the incentives to produce more. Hence, it has had a positive influence on sustainable rural development. Some EU countries, however, continue to use their right to retain a link between subsidies and the level of production in some sectors of agricultural production, where there is a possibility of abandoning land. It is assumed that by 2012 direct payments will be 90% decoupled – milk 100%, arable crops 93%, beef 78%, sheep 73% [Prospects ..., 2005, 4]

As a result, direct payments will have only a slight negative impact on sustainable rural development. The current level of direct payments, however, depends on historic production. Hence, support is still the highest in the countries with the most intensive production. Thanks to decoupled payments, a much smaller proportion of subsidies are captured by third

parties, mainly by intermediaries and suppliers, but still only 47% of the value of such direct payments actually benefit farmers [Wichern, 2004]. In the case of protecting the market price, it is estimated that only around 10% reaches farmers [OECD, 2003].

It can be observed that the recent reforms have fostered sustainable rural development, but there is still much room for improvement. Modulation, for example, which was supposed to alleviate the differences in the level of support between large and small farms is a very weak instrument. The reduction of payments to big farms (receiving above 5 thousand Euro of support a year) is small, ranging from 3% in 2005 to 5% from 2007. The bulk of the savings will be distributed in the countries in which the savings took place. There is only a limited shift of direct payments to countries with smaller, less intensive farming.

The sustainable development of agriculture and rural areas might be under threat because of insufficient quotas. In Poland milk production has already surpassed the limit. The analysis carried out by Szydło [2004] proves that similar problems may apply to other kinds of agricultural production, since the agreement signed during the Copenhagen summit in December 2002 was only partly satisfactory to Polish agriculture.

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