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Investigation of the Hungarian and Austrian agricultural advisory system among the farmers based on questionnaires

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SUMMARY

In this study a comparison of the Austrian and Hungarian agricultural advisory system has been accomplished. Both advisory systems have been described. The authors have investigated the Hungarian and Austrian agricultural advisory system among farmers using questionnaires. In both countries 100 questionnaires were completed. In Hungary questionnaires were used in 3 counties (Győr-Moson-Sopron, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar). In Austria questionnaires were used in 3 provinces (Burgenland, Lower-Austria and Tirol). We examined the answers of the farmers, and made conclusions with a connection of the operation. Evaluation of the questionnaires showed the differences between the Hungarian and Austrian structure. In Hungary almost 27% of the farmers were in connection with experts from the agricultural association. This number in Austria is 80%. It was also stated that the farmers in Austria are using the advisory system in animal breeding (47% raising cattle, milk production). Most of the farmers in Hungary (80%) need advice in plant production. In summarizing the above mentioned, it can be stated that many adoptable elements are in the Austrian structure, and the goal would be to build an advisory system that is based on the farmers needs.
Keywords: agricultural consultancy, rural development, adaptation, questionnaire.

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2005 reconstruction of the agricultural advisory system begun using the arrangements of Hungarian government and EU regulations (since fall 2003). The purpose of the reconstruction was to develop a system which takes into account the need and the opportunities of the farmers. It is based on more posts, it is easy and cheap to use and it provides a high level of service. The structure has to match the EU directives 1782/2003/EK, 1698/2005/EK and 1974/2006/EK these have been compulsory – where the Farm Advisory

System is working – for every state member since January 1, 2007. The harmonization and practical use of EU directives have accomplished only part of the dangers as to the support of the advisory system from EU rural development bases; therefore, the reformation is a national interest. The initiation of Farm Advisory System in Austria was accomplished in January 2007 and is working fine. There are several solutions in the Austrian system which can be easily adapted into the Hungarian structure, which was the reason why we have chosen a deeper investigation of this theme. With the initiation of KAP reform, the EU has attached collective case-maps to the payments of direct subventions these help to protect the environment, animal well-fare, and ensures safe food and the proper farming on agricultural land.

Literature review

The expression ”technical advice”, as used to mean spatial extension of university education, is connected with the name of James Stuart. The first practical steps were made in 1867–68, when Mr. Stuart gave lectures to clubs for women and for working men in North England. These presentations were the first ”group technical advice”. In Hungary, Wittman gave technical advice in 1832 about irrigation to the members of Vienna Agricultural Association. We could not name it by the concept of today's meaning, as a classical technical advice, but it was the contemporary form. In several countries different expressions are in use for a technical advice as an activity. In Germany the word ”Beratung” is used stating, ”an expert can give you an advice to reach the goals, but the farmer has the choice which way to go” (*van den Ban* and *Hawkins* 1996). In the earliest time in Austria ”subservience” (Förderung) was used, but today the word ”Beratung” is the most common. The agricultural advice in several countries is defined by local specialties and tradition; therefore, a real heterogeneous picture is formed by regarding the concept. In the explanation of *Rheinwald* and *Preuschen* (1956) the agricultural technical advice gives instruction to people who would like to reach their goals and aims. In the approach of *van den Ban* and *Hawkins* (1996) the technical advice is a conscious form of influencing the society. The conscious information flow helps people form their opinions and make right decisions. According to *Cser* (2001) the agricultural technical advice contains knowledge, information and maintenance in the decision making process. The deliverance of knowledge and judging practice serve the qualification and further training and it belongs to the technical advice. The different advisory associations are delivering different interests (technical advice supported by the government relays interest of the society). According to *Kozári* (1993) the agricultural advisory systems in Hungary have to be a service which helps the farmers with educational and local advisory methods to reach the most adaptable knowledge. By *Soltész* (2000) opinion, the technical advice is a special mental service and has a valuable and economical benefit which helps the decision making process for the user. The head of the biggest district of agricultural chamber in Austria, *Traxler* (2008), states that according

to agricultural advice, focusing on real agricultural advice concerning subventions has been handled separately.

The advisory system containing subventions are:

– subventions according to area, animal breeding and company,
– investment subventions, agricultural trust, and subventions aiming on production.

Beside technical advice, the personal willingness of the farmer, status of the company and financial state is also necessary. The purpose of an agricultural advisory system is to make a model for a farmer which deals with the subventions, personal terms and market relations, so that he can reach the marked financial goals *Traxler* (2008). The director of the Agricultural Institute in Tirol (LFI Tirol) – *Schweiger* (2008) – stated that an agricultural advisory system could be successful only on the highest level of knowledge. The terms of success motivate advisors, to give advice on a level above the average, under optimal working circumstances. Only with this highly supported personal contribution could the advisors be kept in the group of the highest qualified people. *Falschlunger* (2008), who is an expert in ecological farming, summarizes the essence of agricultural advice:

The agricultural advisory system is a useful tool for farmers. Its basic element is assistance in professional questions. The advice has to show further perspectives based on actual knowledge together with community requirement. The advice has to wake up the farmers' responsibility according to the environment and the sustainable farming has to be in foreground.

The advisory system should be determined as a process which:

– helps farmers in analyzing their situation in the present and in the future;
– helps farmers to recognize problems, which were revealed;
– raises the knowledge of the farmers, develops sensitiveness toward problems and helps in activation of extant knowledge;
– helps farmers to gain some information which is connected with solving of such problems so they can act according to the changes;
– provides advice to farmers to choose the best alternative which is optimal in their situation;
– enhances the motivation of the farmers in order to accomplish their decision;
– helps farmers in forming and evaluating their own opinions (*van den Ban* and *Hawkins* 1996).

According to *Vér* (2008), the agricultural consultancy is exploitation of agricultural subventions on a high level and subservience however; decision-making of the rural people by strengthening the professional competence could result in a durable and profitable farming separation.

The ideas are different but generally it is stated that the technical advice helps people in forming their opinion and decision making, with a conscious flow of the information. The workers in Hungarian agriculture desperately need this service despite the fact that the production of "mass products" needs less labor. The living of our farmers is becoming questionable (*Nagy* 2010).

Materials and methods

The investigation of the Hungarian and Austrian agricultural advisory system has been tested by questionnaires. They contained 28 questions in Hungary and 24 questions in Austria. The difference in the number of the questions comes from the differing structure of the advisory system. This study shows the results of the two asked questions:

– What are the information resources according to the sales and production?
– In which theme have you already received technical advice?

The questionnaires were filled in by farmers, who mostly work in agricultural production. Our method during the investigation has been done by using questionnaires and also we have used the empirical form of information collection. The questionnaire method was used in Hungary and in Austria too. In both countries 100–100 of farmers' opinions was investigated according to the theme. In Hungary questionnaires were used in 3 counties, (Győr-Moson-Sopron, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar). In Austria questionnaires were used in 3 provinces, (Burgenland, Lower-Austria, Tirol). In many cases personal interviews were used because during the excursions abroad, we had several opportunities to participate in a group advising event which alleviated the collection of the data. The finalized questionnaires were processed by statistical software SPSS 14.0 for Windows Evaluation Version. During the 14 weeks of training in both regions (Burgenland and Tirol) we had an opportunity to meet advisors and follow their work. This gave us a better picture as to how the agricultural advisory system works in Austria. During the personal interviews with the farmers, we gained information as to what kind of opinions had been formed about the ministries, about the operation of agricultural association and in many cases about Hungary and Hungarian agricultural production.

Results

Our hypothesis was – in view of the summarized answers – that we can show the results in numerical form how the farmers are making their decisions and on what level they use the opportunities in an advisory structure. In the figures below, only the significant differences are shown between the two opinions in the devious countries. According to the answers of the farmers, as to what information sources in connection with sales and production are being used, we come to the following results. The percentage of the gained information from agricultural newspapers is relatively high, because the use of the Internet is not common. Also, we have to take into account that of questioned farmers in Austria – almost the half of them – (46%) were between the ages of 35–50 while, in Hungary (38%) were between 51–65 years of Age *(Figure 1.)*.

It can be demonstrated that advisory activity of the agricultural associations in Austria is on a much higher level than in Hungary. Unfortunately, the two working agricultural associations have similarities only in name. When investigating the efficiency of the two networks, great differences could be noticed. In Hungary, between years 2007–2013, members of the Hungarian Agricultural Association (MAK) were giving advice to the farmers free of charge. Their task is to inform the farmers who are registered into the system of Agricultural and Rural Development Bureau.

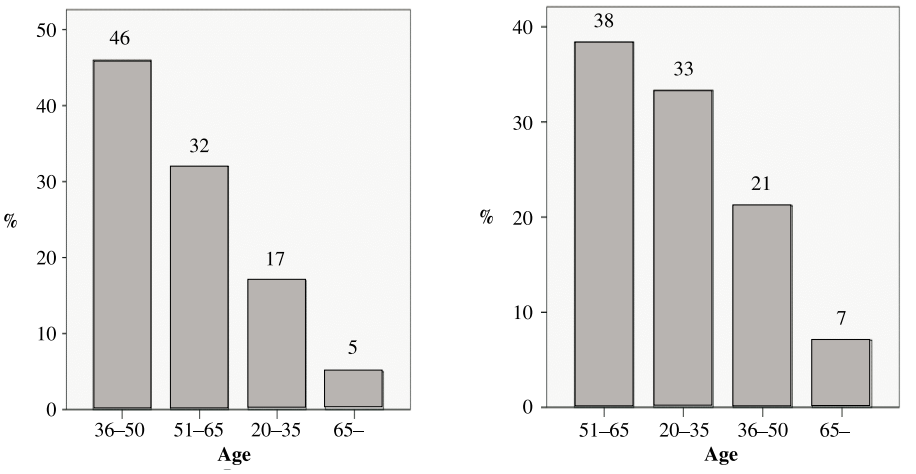

Figure 1. The age classes of investigated farmers in Austria and in Hungary

The main tasks of the advisors are:

– to list the requirements of cross compliance with the farmers;
– references about the direct subventions;
– references about the different rural development subventions (content, judicial background, obligations);
– the advertisement on the actual agricultural policy.

In Austria the agricultural ministry (Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Umwelt- und Wasserwirtschaft) regulates the agricultural advisory system, ensures the subventions for advice, organizes country wide training and takes a big role in editing of proceedings. However, the official advice is done by the Austrian Agricultural Association (LK: Landwirtschaftskammer Österreich). A member fee (compulsory) is required but advice is free of charge.

In the contract of the workers at the Austrian Agricultural Association (LK), the following tasks were recorded:

– strengthening the affection of the venture and enlarging business success;
– upgrading agricultural ventures toward the capability of competition;
– creating a durable, friendly agricultural subvention environment;
– protection of the local products in a rural area;
– strengthening the communication between producers and consumers;
– production and sale of high quality agricultural goods;
– improving the working and living conditions;
– development of durable forest;
– production of utilized raw materials and renewable emery resources.

The scopes of duties in these two mentioned countries differ. We know from the questionnaires that in Austria, 80% of the farmers have a connection with workers from the agricultural association *(Figure 2.)*.

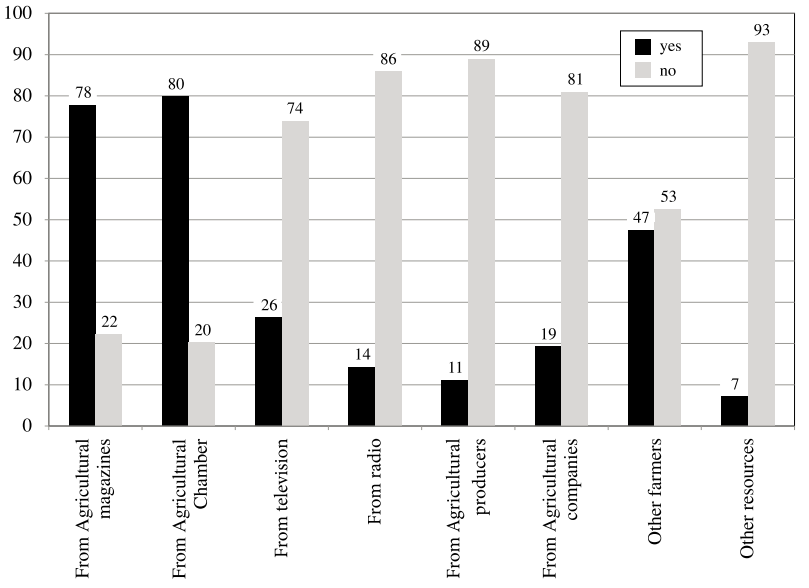

Figure 2. What kind of information resources are used by the farmers in Austria, according to the sales and production?

Our empirical investigations have shown that in Austria the advisor at the agricultural association has a high rank, participates in regular trainings, and orientates about actualities in agriculture. Its operation always serves the interests of the farmer. By the farmers answers, in Hungary only 27% have a connection with an advisor. The numbers reveal that only 36% of the farmers have not used the agricultural advisory system yet. A debate with other farmers in Hungary reveals 54% and 47% in Austria. From our investigation, it can be concluded that the farmers in Austria gain information mostly from the agricultural association and from agricultural newspapers *(Figure 2.).* In Hungary the percentage of the used resources is much more equal *(Figure 3.).*

After Hungary entered into the EU, animal breeding decreased and the plant production became a bigger role. The goal of the agricultural ministry was not to facilitate the animal breeding and rural development. The rural development subventions were not so intensive as in Austria. It is a good example of how the government, several times, initiated regrouping from the EU. After the decreased resources, payments could be raised. This is not useful for rural development or also for the newly organized agricultural advisory system. These efforts reflect on the Copenhagen treaty: under the old type of agricultural subvention frame, which is bonded to the production, quantities, quotas, Hungary reached the second biggest rate according to the hectare. These subventions are improving mostly the best agricultural areas (3–3.5 million ha) and the position of mid and big ventures on the market, which produce primarily cereals, oil-, protein-fiber plants. According to the eco-social agricultural subventions, Hungary has the last position of the 10 countries because it has reached the smallest value in hectare (*Ángyán* 2005). Our results clearly

demonstrate that a big percentage (81%) of farmers in Hungary have used the advisory system in plant production but only 14% in animal breeding *(Figure 4.)*. The activity of advisors on different areas was poor, except in plant protection, where the ratio was 27%.

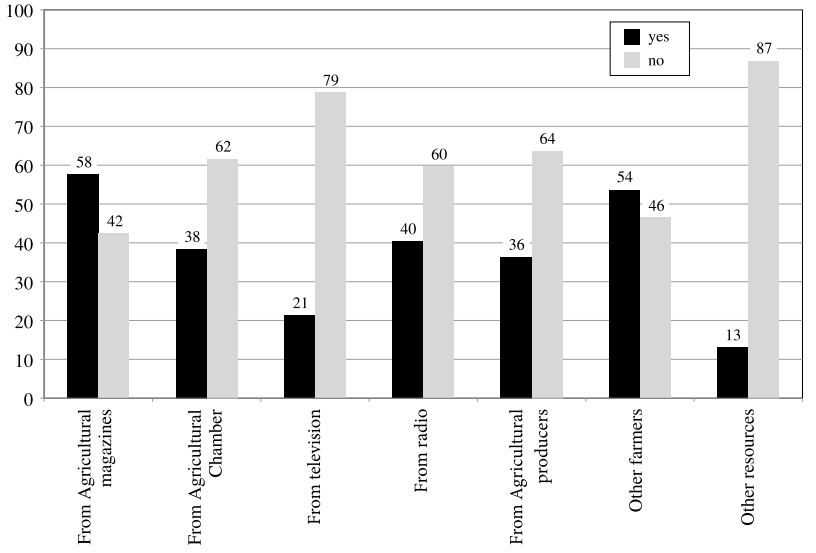

Figure 3. What kind of information resources about sales and production are used in Hungary by the farmers?

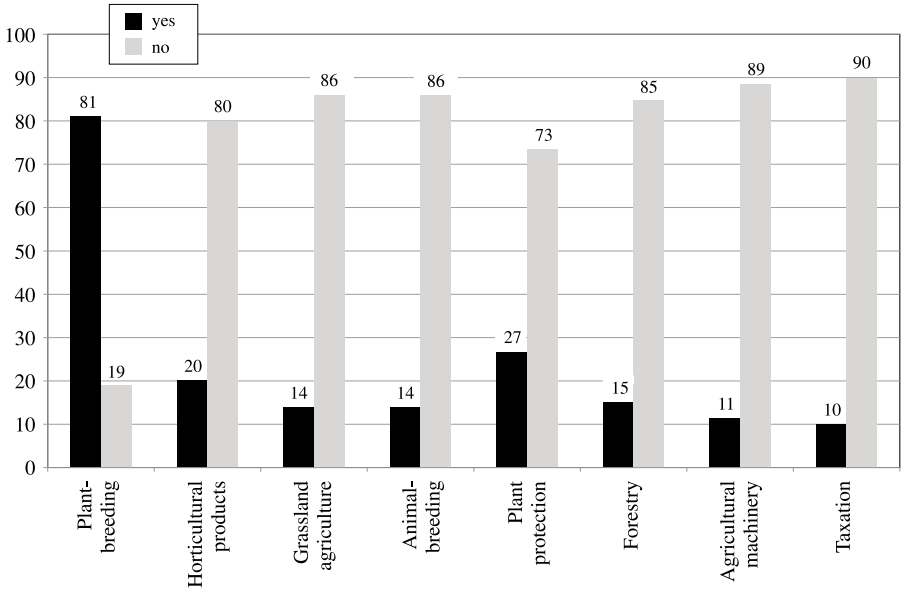

Figure 4. In what themes did the questioned farmers in Hungary already received advice?

This question in Austria shows a more distributed picture *(Figure 5.).* It is revealing that those areas connected to animal breeding, are representing a high percentage. There is a big difference among farmers questioned in bio-farming theme. In Austria 15% have already asked for help while in Hungary the number can not detected.

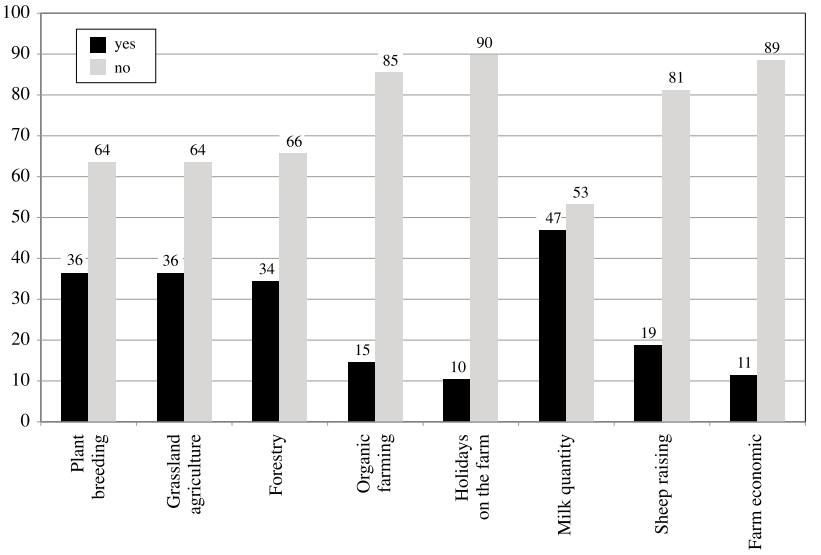

Figure 5. In what themes did farmers in Austria already receive advice?

The effects of the well working program (Village Holiday at the farmers yard) in Austria, could be detected. Every 10 questioned farmers had already used the opportunity to ask for advice, according to the village tourism *(Figure 5.)* Participation in the above mentioned project, for many farmers, results in a high percentage of the family income, this gives an opportunity to continue farming and also gives possibility to save and improve social and cultural merit. The program helps the farmers to keep their job as a main activity and therefore they do not have to search for different jobs.

Conclusions

After comparison of two advisory systems the conclusions are:

- In Hungary the advisory system temporarily is not working. The tasks are not clear and overlaps are experienced.
- In Austria the advisory system works under well maintained structure. The tasks are clear. The problem of training advisors is solved. And it is clean-cut for the farmers who to ask for the advice.

– In Hungary several countrywide networks exist, which help in the decisions of the farmers and rural development. But, it is difficult to identify, what makes a big problem for the users of the advisory system.
– Moreover, it also makes problems in that the working advisory associations are consuming all the national and EU resources, which sweep away the farmers from the real suggestion.
– In Austria the subventions provide major income for the farmers. Without this, many of them would end farming, would not be able to cultivate the land and also tourism would decrease. Many farmers are successfully combining tourism with agriculture. The active advisory system plays a big role in it.
– The existence of agricultural advisory system in Hungary is not clear for most of the farmers. It should be addressed more clearly for farmers in Hungary. Many of them could use the services of the advisory system.
– To reach this goal, a farmer friendly, sector neutral, one window system would be desirable.

A magyar és az osztrák agrár-szaktanácsadási rendszer vizsgálata, gazdálkodók körében végzett kérdőíves felmérés alapján

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Összefoglalás

A tanulmányban Ausztria és Magyarország agrár-szaktanácsadási struktúrájának összehasonlító vizsgálatát végeztük el. Bemutattuk mindkét ország szaktanácsadási rendszerét. A szerzők Magyarország és Ausztria agrár-szaktanácsadási rendszerét vizsgálták a gazdálkodók körében végzett kérdőíves felmérés alapján. Mindkét országban 100–100 kérdőívet töltöttek ki a gazdálkodók, Magyarországon 3 megyében (Győr-Moson-Sopron, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar), Ausztriában 3 tartományban (Burgenland, Alsó-Ausztria, Tirol).
Megvizsgáltuk a gazdálkodók által adott válaszokat, és következtetéseket vontunk le a szaktanácsadási rendszer működésére vonatkozóan. A kiértékelés során kiderült, hogy a magyar agrár-szaktanácsadási rendszer hol különbözik az osztrák struktúrától. Magyarországon a megkérdezett gazdálkodók csupán 27%-a van kapcsolatban agrárkamarai szakemberrel, ez a szám Ausztriában 80%.

Kimutatásra került, hogy az osztrák gazdálkodók nagy része (47% szarvasmarhatartás, tejtermelés) az állattenyésztés valamely szakterületén igényelnek szaktanácsadási szolgáltatást. A magyar gazdálkodók döntő többsége (81%) a szántóföldi növénytermesztés területén igényel szaktanácsadást.

Összegzésként elmondható, hogy számos adaptálható megoldás van az osztrák struktúrában, és egy olyan hazai rendszer kiépítése lenne a cél, amely a gazdától és annak igényeiből indul ki.

Kulcsszavak: agrár-szaktanácsadás, vidékfejlesztés, adaptáció, kérdőív.

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