

PHD THESIS SUMMARY

In the context of global competition, European Union countries tend, in common policies, towards the unification of domestic markets, which causes a competitive environment at an European level. For our country's agriculture the association of the farmers represents a viable alternative to competitive strategies.

The research and studies conducted for the thesis entitled "Research on sustainability and impact of the project Improving farm management through the development of agricultural cooperatives on the vegetable producers in Romania" were performed during 2009 - 2012 and included areas in our country where were established new agricultural cooperatives. The need for the analytical assessments incorporated in the present paper emerge in the way the analyzed project was designed and implemented.

The aim of this thesis was to analyze and determine the effects of the impact that the activities undertaken in the Romanian - Japanese cooperation project entitled "Improving farm management through the development of agricultural cooperatives" had on the Romanian vegetable growers.

The objectives and activities of the research proposed in the paper followed to determine the results of the methodological study regarding the following elements:

- History of the agricultural cooperatives in Romania, the evolution and characteristics of the agricultural cooperatives created after 1989;
- The evolution of legislative regulations and democratic forms of association of Romanian agriculture;
- Presentation of the project entitled "Improving farm management through the development of agricultural cooperatives in Romania";
- Project evaluation;
- The evolution of agricultural cooperatives with a horticulture profile established during the JICA project;
- Sociological analysis regarding the impact and sustainability of the project;
- The initiation and development of follow-up projects of the initial project;
- Case studies on the management of agricultural cooperatives with a vegetable profile;
- Develop a framework model of a horticultural cooperative with a vegetable profile.

The PhD thesis has a total of 249 pages, 35 tables 38 figures, 21 original photographs and 60 references. The paper is comprises of nine chapters and is divided into two parts:

The first part of the paper consists of three chapters of general information on sustainable rural development issues and forms of association in agriculture in the EU and our country, the history and their development in the Romanian agriculture. These chapters have been prepared on the basis of documentary studies with various sources including books, textbooks and specialized treaties, scientific papers, magazines and publications but also recent information available online, accessed through websites like FAO, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, final reports activity of The National Agricultural Consultancy Agency for the years 2006, 2007, 2008).

Following the documentary study performed, in Chapter 3 of the thesis the following are highlighted:

The concept of cooperative appeared in Romania in the nineteenth century and evolved until the start of the Second World War, managing to empower a large part of our country's agricultural resources. During the communist period, agricultural cooperatives have been reduced to a state of permanent intervention instruments in agriculture. 2004 marked the first appearance of agricultural cooperatives based on democratic principles.

The legislation regarding the associative forms in agriculture, adopted in Romania, has experienced a series of laws, including 4 representative, which are currently regulating the functioning of association of agricultural producers. Agricultural cooperatives constitute the organism that can provide the exercise of a performing agriculture to the producers.

The second part of the thesis contains the author's own studies and analyzes on the impact of the project "Improving farm management through the development of agricultural cooperatives" over the vegetable producers in Romania. Among the results obtained in these analysis must be detained as important:

Presentation of the project – its necessity, initiation, implementation and evaluation (ch. 4).

Both in the preaderation phase and after our country's integration into the European Union, the main mission of the various national organisms, in this case the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (MAFRD) through The National Agricultural Consultancy Agency (ANCA) has been developing associative forms in agriculture. Thus, through the ANCA, the Romanian government asked the Japanese government, represented by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), for support in the initiation and implementation of a project with the urpose of developing democratic agricultural cooperatives in our country.

The project activities aimed: the elaboration of guides and handbooks, seminars and courses, support for the registration of agricultural cooperatives, the inventory of services to farmers and cooperatives, support for implementation of business plans and management of agricultural cooperatives, providing information on channels marketing, suppliers of inputs and services, monitoring of agricultural cooperatives.

During the implementation of the project, a mid-term evaluation report was made for the period November to December 2007 and, also, a final evaluation report. The PhD thesis followed and analyzed the results of the two project evaluations using predetermined criteria in order to monitor the evolution of the project, identify the encountered constraints, performance achieved, compliance with the activities and strategies described in the Matrix of the project.

The evaluation revealed that the project "Improving farm management through the development of agricultural cooperatives" was relevant, efficient and effective, both because of the need to implement such a system, and also because of the good results obtained in a relatively short time of implementation.

As regards the development of agricultural cooperatives with a horticulture profile, established under the JICA project, was showed that most agricultural cooperatives constituted in Romania under Law 566/2004, had the predominant field of activity horticulture (41%) and are spread throughout the country. Of these, as shown in Figure 1, the largest share is represented by the vegetable cooperatives (83%), followed by the wine-making (10%) and fruit (7%).



Fig.1. *Percentage distribution of the cooperatives whose field of activity consists in horticulture*

The project impact, appreciated by participants and beneficiaries, was positive with long lasting effects. The project has managed to change the parameters of agricultural management and even institutional relations between farmers and state agencies.

The sustainability of the project and the results achieved through its implementation are discussed in Chapter 5 of the thesis. Assessments conducted revealed that the project has proved sustainable through government sources in the implementation phase, developing self-sustainability, over time, of each group.

At 2 years after project closure a sociological survey was conducted in order to gather information from all parties in order to assess the impact and sustainability of the projectx.

Of the 30 members of the vegetable cooperatives, questioned as direct beneficiaries of the project, the majority acknowledged its usefulness and positive influence that it had over the economic situation of the structures they belong (Fig. 2).

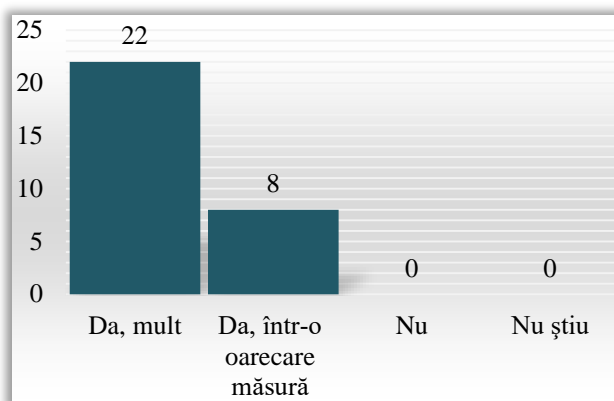


Fig. 2 *The Improvement of the economic situation of agricultural cooperatives through the project*

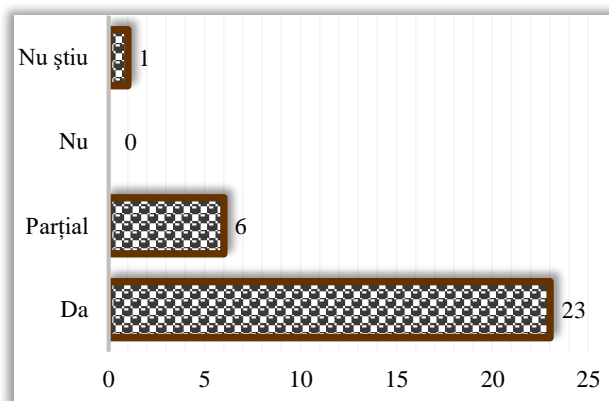


Fig. 3. *Strengthening the managerial skills of cooperative members through the project activities*

Between the vision of ANCA/OJCA staff and the members of agricultural cooperatives were no major differences, only different positioning. Thus, farmers have formulated opinions on the economic benefits that have been mentioned, of their professional development and management of associative forms but have also mentioned the existence of asperities on economic support in their relationship with the authorities. By comparison, public officials had a vision based more on actions for providing consulting services in the project (Figure 3).

We believe that one of the main benefits brought by this project was that of overcoming the barrier of mentality about the concept and terminology of agricultural cooperative that existed before its debut.

After 4 years after its closure, the project "Improving farm management through the development of agricultural cooperatives" has initiated two follow-up projects which aimed at developing agricultural cooperatives, with the purpose to continue the changes initiated, to promote cooperation, to always improve management, marketing and business plans, to access funds or initiate projects beneficial to their association, to coordinate the associates' actions (Chapter 6).

The two consecutive projects entitled - "Development of the top marketing of agricultural cooperatives" and "Continuous cooperation for developing agricultural cooperatives" have contributed significantly to the development of marketing and management capacity of agricultural cooperatives and facilitated the establishment of bilateral relations between Romania and Moldova.

Through the implementation of the second follow-up project were created assumptions for consolidating a consultancy and continuous professional training system dedicated to agricultural cooperatives and other forms of association in agriculture.

In the two projects dedicated to agricultural cooperatives a total of 310 people received training in marketing and other areas of wide interest.

In 2011 was made a comparative analysis of the chronological evolution of two agricultural cooperative of vegetable profile namely: Agricultural Cooperative Agroecologica 2002 and Agricultural Cooperative Progresul taking into consideration the results obtained from a managerial, organizational, and financial and yields achieved point of view. This analysis, presented in Chapter 7, is a case study for assessing the impact that the projects implemented by JICA have had over the cooperatives with a vegetable profile in Romania.

Both agricultural cooperative cultivate a wide range of vegetables on top, as surface and volume of production, being the tomatoes and cabbage. In addition, the Agricultural Cooperative Progresul cultivate, with good results, potatoes and zucchini.

After the analysis, there was a more favorable evolution of the Agricultural Cooperative Progresul which, after 4 years of existence, there have been increases in the number of founding members by 17 times, and the share capital by 29 times compared to 12 times and respectively 20 times for Agricultural Cooperative Agroecologica 2002 (after 5 years of existence).

Although the cultivated area of Agricultural Cooperative Progresul was 60% smaller compared to the Cooperative Agroecologica 2002, the total production was only 24% lower and, due to a careful election of assortment tillage and application of modern technologies were obtained 23% higher yields (22.45 t / ha as compared to only 17.33 t / ha Cooperative Agroecologica 2002).

Since there establishment, the two agricultural cooperatives have distinguished themselves by many positive actions such as:

Agricultural Cooperative Agroecologica 2002 benefited, after a year of its establishment, of the benefits of the recognition as a producer group and was selected as a pilot agricultural cooperative in the vegetable – fruit area. It collaborated with two similar bodies abroad (cooperative Raiffeisen in Austria and a cooperative in Szeged, Hungary). It participated, in 2009, at the establishment of the National Union of Agricultural Cooperatives Branch Producing vegetables and fruits.

Agricultural Cooperative Progresul benefited from a very good management, which has initiated a plan to standardize the cooperative activities and has been working seasonally, boosting the local workforce, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of the area. Through its activities, well-coordinated, it managed to establish a development sustainable through its own financial resources. Thus it invested its revenues in the modernization of the logistics base for vegetable production and used its savings for purchase of modern equipment for processing and packaging of the products.

Both agricultural cooperatives face particular problems specific to the development stage where the associative structures are. Among them we can mention: the reluctance of cooperative members to the sales system, the existence of intermediaries, lack of storage, processing and packaging space, as well as those of trading.

The lack of financing solutions in a direct relation with the banks which do not offer functional agricultural credits and limited opportunity to access European structural funds, are also significant financial difficulties in the development of both agricultural cooperatives analyzed.

In chapter 8 of the thesis are presented, in detail, the procedures for setting up an agricultural cooperative with a vegetable profile. This chapter is intended to be a showcase for vegetable growers who want to join in an agricultural cooperative and also a landmark for representatives of association forms in our country.

The establishment of agricultural cooperatives is a complex process through which prospective members associate for the promotion and achievement of goals, objectives and values. To achieve this the following must be taken into account:

Preparation of the constitutive act and the status of agricultural cooperatives are key to the existence of future forms of association.

Members must consider a number of issues concerning the degree of the cooperative, the share capital, the indication of the areas of activity according to the CAEN code and other important elements.

Chapter 9 is reserved for the general conclusions resulting from the study undertaken. Based on these conclusions, the recommendations are also noted.