SOCIO-ECOMOMIC DIAGNOSIS OF SMALLHOLDERS IN RO04 MACROREGION - II. LIFE LONG LEARNING

DIAGNOZA SOCIO-ECONOMICĂ A FERMELOR DE SUBSISTENŢĂ DIN MACROREGIUNEA RO4- II. EDUCAŢIA CONTINUĂ

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Abstract: *The aim of paper is to reveal the preliminary results of socio-economic diagnosis carried out on smallholders in RO04 Region of Romania - West and South West Regions of Romania. The multi-layered, probabilistic sample volume, representative for the macro-region (maximum permitted error of ±1.6%) consisted of 4.100 persons aged 18 and over. The interviews were conducted using CATI method. Fieldwork was conducted between 5 to 19th September, 2010. For the studied sample, the respondents with numerous LUs are more available for professional association ($p<0.05$), having greater expectations for their children ($p<0.001$), are more interested in training courses ($p<0.001$), farm management courses ($p<0.001$) or to start business ($p<0.001$), for a period of 1-3months ($p<0.001$), they are more demanding on results of educational activities (competences and skills - $p<0.01$), but willing to pay better courses ($p<0.001$). The responders with low LUs are easier to satisfy through educational activities ($p<0.01$) on a short or long period ($p<0.001$),and more interested in a new possible reconverting in nonagricultural areas ($p<0.001$). New models based on self-directed learning or lifelong learning programs for stallholders/farmers must be adapted and promoted in RO04 in order to increase knowledge in rural area by University outreach.*

Key words: *lifelong learning, rural area, RO04 macro-region, smallholders, Livestock Unit (LU)*

INTRODUCTION

Through *RO4 RuralBIZ* project – *Initiatives for a sustainable rural development* it was initiated and carried a study, a macro-regional diagnosis

of the rural environment.

The objectives of the diagnosis were: i) assessment of the existing skills among the rural populations ii) identifying the domains for next lifelong learning programs and iii) identifying the sectors and non-agricultural branches with a potential increasing in the next 3-5 years.

The aim of this paper is to present partial results of the *Socio-economical diagnosis of rural area in the macro-region RO04 (West and South-West Regions)*, performed only on the sub-sample of smallholders generated by Livestock Unit (LU) variable.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

To identify the consultancy needs it was used the focus-group method with farmers and the half – structured in depth interview method with experts or employers came from the branches of consultancy, training, qualifications and opportunities in developing business.

From 5th to 19th September 2011 there were organized 18 focus-groups with farmers and 40 interviews with experts or employers, in each of the 9 counties of the macro-region RO04. The survey took part in the *RO4 RuralBIZ– Initiatives for a sustainable rural development*[4] project.

Projected number of participants for each focus group was 6 to 8, the composition variables of the groups being: recipients/non-beneficiaries of the advice, the type of firm (individual, family and association), level of education (average, higher education).

From the resulting database there was conducted a study only on smallholders (cattle, sheep and poultry). From the initial data base (4.100 respondents), only breeders were extracted, who had in their household activities of raising animals (3.592 respondents); the activity was quantified using as indicator the Livestock Units.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Romanian farmer regrets the period before 1989, his choice is being justified through the advantages represented by the security of having a job, access to education and prices stability *(Păun, 2000)*.

At the level of Macro-region RO04 the control variable (LU) has an

[4] Contract nr. POS DRU/83/5.2/S/47717

average value equal to 3.01±0.24 UVM[5], minimum of 0.01 UVM and maximum of 479.09 UVM. Averages of the two regions are significantly different, those being 3.75±0.55 UVM for Western Region and 2.63±0.22 UVM for South –West Region (F=4.99 at p=0.05) but comparable with South Serbian Banat area *(Subici & Huţu, 2009)*.

Perceptions on agricultural activity

As regards the profession that respondents would wish for their children, the answers are represented in Fig. 1; no major differences occur between the West and South West areas. Respondents who expressed their wish that their sons to became farmers have on average 4.86±0.87 LU; moreover, we may support the hypothesis that the wealth of respondents (expressed in LUs on F=3.74 at p<0.001) influence parents' aspirations for their children; engineer, doctor or teacher (6.62±1.42 LU) are on the list of

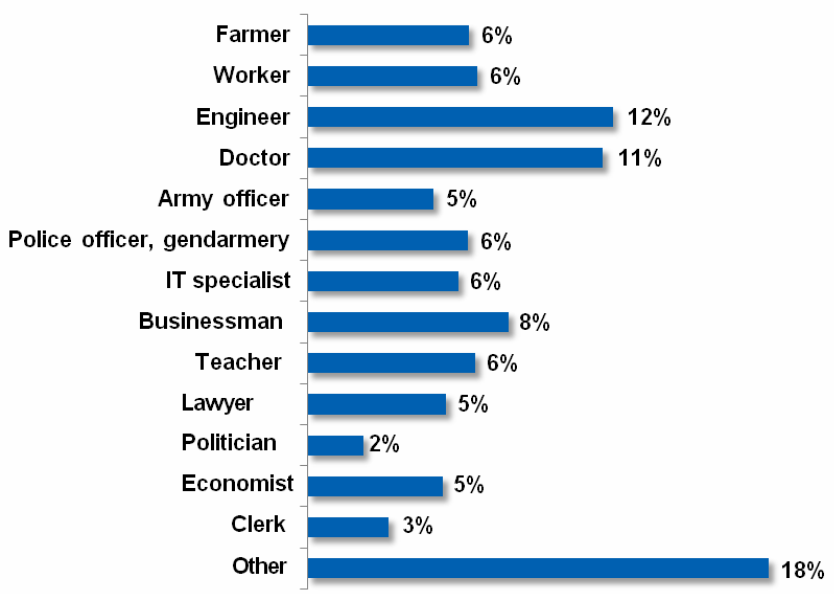


Fig. no. 1 – The distribution of smallholders' wishes for their children's' profession

aspirations. People in the Western largely consider that it would be better for their children abroad – 51% vs. 44% of those in South West.

[5] Mean and standard error of mean

The share of people in rural areas who are part of an agricultural association is found to be higher in the South West: 20% vs. 14% in West. Association is more frequent for farmers who have more animals (4.44±0.58 LU) than in those with small herds (2.67±0.26 LU); the study may support the hypothesis of association between wealth (expressed in LUs) and professional association (F=4.431 at p<0.05). Comparing the two regions, respondents with professional associations largely consider that agricultural associations are mutually beneficial to their members (30% vs. 24%) and to a lesser extent as they would create more advantages for those with large properties (31% vs. 35%).

The survey found that women risk more and wish more frequently to associate than men ($\chi 2$ = 37.29 at p<0.001), hypothesis sustained by other authors *(Oancea şi Bruno, 2010)*.

Training and qualifications

Among those who were surveyed at macroregion level, 45% say they attended a training course or qualification (the proportion is similar in the two regions).

When it comes to satisfaction with this courses in terms of knowledge acquired, people in West tend to be less satisfied that those in South West: 36% were very satisfied with the first region, while 51% declare the same thing, in the second region. However, we cannot talk about discontent, because only 11% in both areas declared not to be content or at all dissatisfied.

Breeders who were very satisfied (2.47±0.37 LU) and content (2.93±0.42 LU) are detached from those who were less satisfied (1.69±0.31 LU) and those not satisfied with 1.88±0.68 LU; differences between averages generated can support the hypothesis that satisfaction with courses in particular, or educational activities in general, is associated with wealth (F=10.34 at p<0.001).

Also in the case of satisfaction with achieving qualifications or skills, people in Southwest, in a greater extent, tend to declare being very satisfied, although the cumulative percentages show a similar percentage of those who are satisfied: 81% vs. 79%. 16%, respectively 17% were dissatisfied. The survey surprised different needs and appreciations depending of the livestock; LU's of responders very satisfied (1.53±0.14 LU), of those satisfied (2.78±0.37 UL) compared with the unsatisfied

(4.42±1.18 LU) or completely unsatisfied (5.88±1.64 UVM) is significant different (F=3.51 at p<0.01). Basically, it can be supported the hypothesis that respondents with more animals have a higher level of expectations for achieving skills and abilities. The same distribution occurs when respondents express their satisfaction concerning the diploma recognition: South Western people are very content with the rate of 40%, while those in the West at a rate of 30%.

Most residents in the macroregion RO04 consider themselves as uniformed on existence of training courses (76% - percents accumulated for all variants of not to informed or uniformed), while 21% declare themselves enough informed or very informed. Sources of information on this topic, shared in similar proportions of the populations of both areas are: mass media -31%, internet - 11%, mayoralty -8%, friends -9% and flayers -4%.

People in South West states concerned to following the next three years a qualifying course or training in the agricultural sector, to a greater extent that in the West: 35% vs. 29%. Also, respondents with more animals (3.46±0.32 LU) are more interested in following a training course than those with fewer animals (2.53±0.31 UVM) - F=13.91 at p<0.001.

In figure no. 2. are presented preferences for agricultural areas in which responders would like to achieve qualification; preferences differ somewhat between regions:

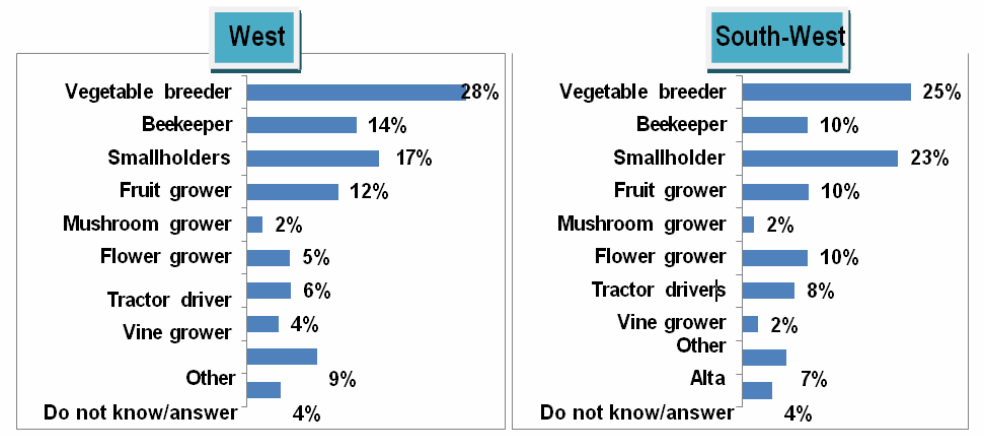


Fig. no. 2 – The preferences of smallholders' regarding domains of new possible requalification

The responders with more animals would choose the job as animal

breeder (6.34±0.85 LU). There are breeders who would combine their job with the fruit grower (4.28±1.38 LU) a beekeeper (3.48±0.81 LU) and a small amount with vine grower (4.43±1.50 LU); the survey sustains the assumption that the acquiring knowledge would support the growth by economic efficiency of the branch or related branches of the base (F=3.58 at p<0.001).

Although it is appreciated as valuable, most of the responders consider that the farm is a difficult occupation, with far too low benefits in comparison with the efforts made. Availability for changing, adapting is very low, most of the farmers being convinced that their traditional way of doing agriculture is a good one. Experts regard farmers as being conservative, unprepared for an European agriculture, neglected by the authorities, lacking in financial resources needed for modernizing and resistance to change.

Regarding responders' interest to pursue a training course in nonagricultural areas in the next three years, the situation is similar in both regions: 37% of respondents would be interested in this on macroregion level. Respondents with large herds (61% with 2.90±0.33 LU) are not interested in changing their qualification, in comparison with those with a smaller number of animals (37% with 2.80±0.28 LU); the hypothesis is statistically sustained with F=9.15 at p<0.001.

In the case of responders with small amount of animals, the most accessed vocational courses would be such as: cooker, electrician, waiter, automobile mechanic or housekeeper.

In this survey, 37% of the interviewees would be interested to attend a farm management course – they have 3.57±0.31 LU, with 1.35 LU more than those who do not wish that (2.22±0.30 LU); the results sustain the idea that the respondents with large livestock are interested in improving farm management (F=48.86 at p<0.001).

The situation is similar for respondents who show interest in attending a course of business start; in this case also, the respondents with many animals (also 37% 3.20±0.33 LU) reinforce the assumption outlined in the previous paragraph (F=55.18 at p<0.001).

A training course on accessing European funds would enjoy even more success, 44% of interviewees showing interest in such a course (41% in West, 45% in South West). Among these there are especially those with large lots of animals (3.23±0.27 LU); in fact, seeing from the perspective of

differences in LUs, among those who wish, do not wish or not respond to this kind of challenges, we can sustain the hypothesis that people with larger herds are more interested in accessing European funds.

For respondents, mostly matter the knowledge they acquire from completing a training course, perfecting or reconverting one – this aspect is being less important to South West residents (41% vs. 37%), but the most important for smallholders (2.75±0.30 LU).

The acquired practical skills are more important to those from West – 28% vs. 22%; diploma recognition matters for 13% of the West and only 11% of the South West (but is more important for breeders 2.39±0.44 LU), while the new relationship that may form that way countless for the Western people: 13% vs. 17%.

Comparing the differences between averages LUs generated by the item on which is based the discussion supports the hypothesis that farm size makes the breeder more interested in anything that may add value to his holding.

Responses are similar about the maximum duration of such a course on the level of both regions, so, at the macro region, the data gathered show the next distribution: 1 month 13%, 1-3 months 22%. 3-6 month 21%, more than 6 months 24%.

Responders with the most LU (2.76±0.36 LU) prefer 1-3 months as duration for training; those with a smaller number of animals are available for either for a month or 3-6 months and even more; statistical sample result support the statement (F=6.17 at p<0.001) that a course of training for smallholders should spread over a period of 1-3 months, preferably during the winter months.

Not when it comes to costs that responders would be able to pay, the responses from the two areas do not show significant differences. Considering livestock, most of the responders (40%) agree the sum of 500 lei (2.69±0.27 LU), 20% of respondents with 2.14±0.23 LU consider that 500-1000 lei is acceptable, while those with large herds (4.03±0.87 LU) are whiling to pay more than 1000 lei. To these persons, there are 25% more respondents who are not whiling to pay for courses required; this data (F=4.90 at $p\leq$0.001) sustain that large herds claim taxable specialization training on level which can cover the running costs of them.

Looking at RO04 as an educational market a new models based on self-directed learning or develop of Lifelong Learning for Farmers must be

adapted, introduced and promoted in order to increase the role of University or Structure of University (Extension Unit, Professional Center of University from Voiteg) in farmer society knowledge. This fairly simple process is providing access to knowledge through open and distance learning, and proving to be a powerful tool for positive change.

CONCLUSIONS

For the representative sample in the RO04 macroregion, the **respondents with a larger number of animals**, considered in LUs are:

- greater expectations for their children future development
- more available for professional association
- more interested in training courses, farm management courses or to start business, for a period of 1-3 months
- more demanding on results of educational activities (competences and skills) but willing to pay better courses.

Treated from the amount of LUs, **respondents with fewer animals** are:

- easier to satisfy through educational activities on a short or long period, being more interested in the diploma's value
- less likely to associate
- more interested in a new possible reconverting in nonagricultural areas

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