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**FARMERS' OPINIONS ABOUT EXPECTED
COMPETITIVE POSITION OF POLISH AGRICULTURE
AFTER INTEGRATION WITH THE EU
– RESULTS OF A SURVEY IN THE ŻNIN DISTRICT
IN THE KUJAWSKO-POMORSKIE PROVINCE**

1. Introduction

The integration of Poland with the European Union was a long expected effect of economic and social reforms initiated at the turn of the 80s and the 90s of the XX century in Poland. It gave a chance for the rural communities and farmers to solve numerous problems. On the other hand the integration brought new challenges to be faced by these communities, both of organizational and production character, connected with the need to compete successfully on the European market. As A. Kotala [1999] points out transformation and modernization of agriculture requires acceptance on the side of farmers, therefore the awareness of the fact that farmers can play a very important role in the integration process is of great significance. Surveys carried out before the integration revealed vast areas of ignorance which resulted in numerous fears of the rural communities [Halamska 2000; Gutkowska, Kosicka 2001; Wieruszewska 2001; Pankowski 2002; Kłodziński, Fedyszak-Radziejowska 2003]. Those fears and doubts were mainly expressed by older people with poor education making a living only from farming [Perepeczko 2004]. However, according to some surveys the fears connected with the integration did not always depend on the age or the size of the farm [Niemczyk 2001] thus, they were of common character.

2. Data and methods

Research carried out aimed at getting familiar with the opinions and attitudes of farmers on the subject of the influence of Polish membership in the European Un-

ion on the development and functioning of agribusiness and rural areas. The surveys were held in the Żnin district of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province in 4 communities: Żnin, Rogowo, Łabiszyn and Janowiec Wielkopolski. The inquiry was carried out in the form of a survey interview, and took place in September and October 2004¹. The surveys followed the integration of Poland with the European Union on 1 May 2004 but were carried out before activating the system of subsidising the agricultural production which might have affected the expressed opinions.

The questionnaires were filled in by 84 randomly selected farmers, thus because of the choice and number of the respondents the results refer to the population of the surveyed farmers. Majority of the respondents were men – as many as 82.1% whereas the percentage of women was only 17.9%. They were of different ages though persons aged 31-50 were predominant. The same number of people 32.1% were between 31-40 and 41-50 years old; at the age of 51-65 were (19.1%), 15.5% of respondents were aged below 30. The smallest number were aged more than 65 (1.2%). Vocational education was represented by as many as 46.4% of respondents, elementary education by 4.8%, whereas 35.7% had graduated from high school and only 13.1% had University or College degree. The number of respondents who had farms of the size 1-5 ha were 7.1%, whereas 10.7% owned farms of the size 5.1-10 ha. The largest number of farmers 36.9% owned farms of the size 10.1-20 ha. Farms with the area 20.1-30 ha were 19.1% and those ones from 30.1-40 ha were 15.5%. Farms of the size more than 40 ha were owned by 10.7 of respondents.

3. Survey results

Free market economy is characterised by competition of its participants. For the surveyed farmers the competition from the side of foreign farmers was of some concern. The respondents were afraid that compared to UE farmers they were not competitive enough in the field of product sale. Many respondents (36.9%) were of the opinion that these kinds of problems would occur, whereas 27.4% said 'rather yes'. 28.6% of farmers had a different point of view: 20.3% said 'rather no' and 8.3% 'no'. 7.1% had no opinion on this subject. Owners of all kinds of farms: small, medium and large expressed fears of being too little competitive. However, there were noticeable differences between the farmers. The most doubts had owners of farms with the area: 20.1-30 ha (81.3%), 1-5 ha (66.6%), 30.1-40 ha (61.6%). Farmers who owned the largest farms more than 40 ha were much more optimistic (55.6%) most of them though being also afraid of the foreign competition. 44.4% when asked about it said 'yes', 11.2% said 'rather yes' and 44.4% did not fear being uncompetitive and said 'no' 22.2% or 'rather no'. Among the owners of farms of the area 5.1-10 ha the responses of pessimists and optimists were 44.4%

¹ Surveys were carried out by Ewa Rochowiak.

and 44.5%. Those whose attitudes were definitely negative were 22.2%, their answers were 'yes' and 22.2% 'rather yes'. Those with positive attitudes said 'no' 11.1% and 'rather no' 33.4%. 11.1% of respondents had no opinion on this issue.

At the same time Polish farmers said that the Polish agriculture could be competitive for other European countries (59.5%). Among them 32.1% did not feel much threatened by other countries and 27.4% of persons were not afraid at all. However, 29.8% of respondents had fear of this competition saying 'yes' (17.9%) and 'rather yes' (11.9%). 10.7% were of no opinion on this subject.

Among farmers with University education the percentage of those who were not afraid of the UE competition was 36.3% – who said 'rather no' and 18.2% whose answer was 'no'. However, quite a significant number of respondents (36.4%) were not able to decide on this matter. Only 9.1% of respondents thought that they were not afraid of other European countries' competition. People who had graduated from high school were rather more optimistic. As many as 43.3% of persons did not notice the problem and the opinion 'rather not' was expressed by 30.0%. 20.0% were afraid of the competition including 16.7% who said 'yes' and 3.3% who said 'rather yes'. In this group there were fewer persons who were not able to express their opinion on this subject (6.7%) Respondents with vocational education were not so positive about whether they were afraid of the competition or not. Their opinions were quite diversified. 51.2% did not worry (30.7% 'rather no', 20.5% 'no'), and 41.1% had doubts (23.1% 'yes', 18.0% 'rather yes') with 7.7% having no opinion. Farmers with only elementary education were more hesitant. As many as 50.0% claimed that they did not see any problems connected with potential competition from foreign farmers and 25.0% were rather afraid of it. The same number of people (25.0%) were definitely afraid.

Similar attitudes were expressed on the subject of likelihood of losing their position on the agricultural market after integration. The surveyed farmers were rather not afraid of losing their position on the market (41.6%), and 9.5% did not have such fears at all. This opinion was not, however, shared by all the respondents because 16.7% expressed their doubts in a very definite way, whereas 14.3% said 'rather yes'. 17.9% of the surveyed farmers had no opinion.

Although majority of farmers (63.1%) were not afraid of high requirements for the quality of products and claimed that it would bring positive effects for the consumers, their opinions on the sale prospects were diversified. The most of farmers 48.8% were concerned about the sale of products, and 44.0% did not show any fear in this respect. The opinions of farmers who had doubts were more decided (29.8% 'yes', 19.0% 'rather yes') contrary to persons who did not expect problems with sale of their products. (33.3% 'rather no', 10.7% 'no'). Only 7.2% had no point of view in this respect.

Opinions on the prospects for enlarged markets after joining the UE were mostly sceptical (41.7% 'rather no') and negative – 13.1% 'no'. 38.1% of respon-

dents hoped to see the agricultural market bigger after the integration, including 26.2% who said 'rather yes' and only 11.9% 'yes'. Only 7.1% had no opinion on this subject. Thus, we can say that the respondents were quite hesitant on the subject of market extension prospects with tendency to pessimistic attitudes. Negative opinions were expressed by the majority of farmers regardless of their age and farm size. Owners of 5.1-10 ha farms (66.6%) were more hopeful about the prospects of increasing the sale market for their products.

The surveyed farmers were also hesitant about chances of Poland in participation in the agricultural trade after the integration. A significant group of respondents (23.8%) expressed rather negative opinions on the matter, and definitely pessimistic were 23.8% of them. Rather positive opinions were shared by 22.6% with 7.1% being definitely positive. 22.7% of the surveyed farmers expressed no opinion. As far as the question of Poland's participation in the international agricultural market was concerned the size of owned farms as well as the respondents' ages had no influence on their opinions which were mainly negative.

Changes that were supposed to come along with the integration included also introduction of production restrictions. Limitation of production may, however, be a serious obstacle for competing with other economic entities. The majority of surveyed farmers (52.4%) were absolutely aware of the fact and had a fear of this kind of limitations but 25.0% of respondents said 'rather yes'. No fear was expressed by merely 17.9% of the surveyed farmers including those whose answer was 'rather no' 13.1% and 4.8% 'no'. Only few persons (4.7%) were not decided what to say.

4. Conclusion

Integration of Poland with the European Union has had an influence on people's attitudes and opinions on many different subjects, especially these connected with economic transformations and competition occurrence. The surveyed farmers were rather more doubtful than trustful about the integration effects. These attitudes can be the result of a relatively short time of Poland's membership in the European Community and not many visible positive changes. It in turn may have caused some feeling of disappointment, especially that the survey was carried out before launching the system of subsidizing agricultural production. The reason of those doubts and fears was the conviction that Polish farmers might not be able to meet the requirements of competition from the side of foreign farmers in the field of product sale. However, as far as the competitiveness of the Polish agriculture is concerned the respondents were much more optimistic. They considered the Polish agriculture as being able to face this competition and they were not afraid of losing their position on the market. Persons representing the lowest education level were among those who had most doubts and fears in this matter. Most respondents were

concerned about introduction of production limitations which could result in decrease of their competitiveness on the market. Regardless of age and the farm size the respondents were sceptical about participation of Poland in the international agricultural trade as well as the likelihood of enlarging markets after the integration with the exception of the owners of smaller 5-10 ha farms. Access of Poland to the European Union evoked different emotions in farmers. A significant group were pessimistic or hesitant and sceptical about the results of integration. They did not believe it could bring definite benefits for themselves and possibilities of being competitive on the international market. Thus, we can say that many surveyed farmers were eurosceptics.

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OPINIE ROLNIKÓW NA TEMAT KONKURENCYJNOŚCI POLSKIEGO ROLNICTWA PO INTEGRACJI Z UNIĄ EUROPEJSKĄ – WYNIKI BADAŃ SONDAŻOWYCH W POWIECIE ŻNIN W WOJEWÓDZTWIE KUJAWSKO-POMORSKIM

Streszczenie

W artykule zaprezentowano wyniki badań przeprowadzonych we wrześniu i październiku 2004 r. wśród 84 rolników województwa kujawsko-pomorskiego. Badani rolnicy byli pełni obaw i często wyrażali pesymistyczne opinie na temat możliwości konkurencyjnych; ich sceptycyzm dotyczył jed-

nak bardziej ich własnych gospodarstw niż polskiego rolnictwa na wspólnym rynku UE. Badani uważali, że polskie rolnictwo jest w stanie sprostać konkurencji innych krajów Unii Europejskiej. Takie postawy były wyrażane częściej przez osoby lepiej wykształcone. Wielu respondentów jednocześnie negatywnie oceniało udział Polski w międzynarodowym handlu artykułami rolnymi. Badani właściciele gospodarstw w większości bali się, że sami nie będą w stanie sprostać silnej konkurencji po wstąpieniu do UE. Największe obawy mieli rolnicy z gospodarstw o średniej powierzchni. Wielu badanych rolników obawiało się problemów ze zbytem swych produktów, zwłaszcza wobec konieczności konkurowania z farmerami UE oraz limitowania produkcji. Badani sceptycznie też oceniali możliwości powiększenia rynku zbytu po wstąpieniu do Unii, chociaż raczej nie obawiali się utraty swojej pozycji na rynku rolnym.