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Organization of the extension services in Spain: Case of the Murcia region

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SUMMARY - An outline of the evolution of Agricultural Extension is presented with regard to its structure in Spain and the dynamics of its organization in the Murcia region, whose most appreciable activities are currently related to Technology Transfer from the results of R&D Projects and to Training Programmes.

Key words: Agricultural extension, technology transfer, training programmes, Murcia.

RESUME - "Organisation des services de vulgarisation en Espagne : Le cas de la région de Murcia". On présente une vue d'ensemble de l'évolution de l'Extension Agraire, pour ce qui est de la structure en Espagne et de la dynamique de son organisation dans la région de Murcia, dont les activités actuelles les plus remarquables ont rapport au Transfert Technologique des résultats des Projets de R&D et aux Programmes de Formation.

Mots-clés : Extension agraire, transfert technologique, programmes de formation, Murcia.

Introduction

The Agricultural Extension Service (AES) was created in Spain in 1995 (by Decree of the Ministry of Agriculture of 15 September) and began operating through 10 Regional Agencies; it subsequently went through a phase of rapid expansion and in 1971 joined the Directorate General of Training and Agricultural Extension (Madrid).

The branch division dependent on this Directorate General by 1976 is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Branch division dependent on the Directorate General of Training and Agricultural Extension (Madrid)

Regional centres	Agricultural Training Schools and Centres	Provincial Agencies	Regional Agencies
Galicia	7	4	69
Cantabria	4	5	59
Sub-plateau North	13	9	126
Ebro basin	6	4	61
Sub-plateau South	13	7	89
Extremadura	2	2	52
West Andalusia	4	4	75
East Andalusia	4	4	72
Catalonia-Baleares	4	5	60
Levant	7	4	69
Canaries	2	2	25
Totals	66	50	757

The Directorate General, through the Supervision and Programme Division, coordinated the activities of the Regional Centres, which in turn coordinated those of the branch divisions.

The Agricultural Extension Agencies worked on Programmes on: Farm Enterprises, Rural Youth, Home and Family, Community Development and Cooperation.

The Agricultural Extension Agents dealt with the counselling promotion, diffusion and training of youngsters and active farmers. And the Domestic Economy Agents focused their activities on family members as a whole.

A total of 16 Regional AES Agencies were created in the Murcia region between 1961 and 1977, all depending on the Regional Centre of Levant. Subsequently, in 1980, the AES was transferred to the newly created Autonomous Community of Murcia.

Evolution of the organization of the agricultural extension service in the autonomous community of the Murcia region

In 1985 the 16 Regional Agencies, after a restructuring process, were transformed into 10 Regional Bureaus of Agriculture (RBAs), with the Agents now entrusted with more specialized work.

The work programmes of the RBAs have since undergone changes in both content and name: in 1981 they were known as Agricultural Extension Service Programmes and now they are called Technology Transfer Programmes (TTPs).

Furthermore, the staff assigned to the RBAs has been increased to deal with other programmes such as: Farm modernization, Plant and Animal Health, and Aids for the Farming Sector. The former AES Agents are now known as RBA Specialist.

The Staff of each RBA is made up of: Manager, Specialist (in technology transfer and aid management), Veterinary Inspectors, and Animal Health and Administration Personnel. Of these, only some of the former AES Agents work occasionally on TTPs on farms.

The RBAs, within the Murcia Local Ministry of Environment, Agriculture and Water, currently form part of the Directorate General of Research and Technology Transfer, on which the Agricultural Training and Experiment Centres (ATECs) and Farm Modernization Teams (FMTs), together with the Agro-Food Research and Development Centre (CIDA) and Chambers of Agriculture, also depend.

Technology transfer programme 1997

With this Programme the Local Ministry of Environment, Agriculture and Water inform farmers and stockbreeders, their Farm Organizations and Cooperatives, of the projects and activities planned by the Directorate General of Research and Technology Transfer to be developed through the CIDA, the ATECs and the RBAs, in order to speed up the processes of technological innovation that might be beneficial to farms, but maintaining a balance that is compatible with environmental protection.

This global objective requires them to obtain, develop, transfer and incorporate new material and technologies into production processes, as well as to increase the vocational skills of agriculturalist and stockbreeders.

Faced with the difficulty of carrying out regional research into all the problems posed by the various production activities, the Programme also includes activities aimed towards the Transfer of Technology from the results of R&D Projects, both national and international, that can be applied to the region, and incorporates the results from the observations of the Specialist in technology transfer when developing their personal work experience.

The structure of the TTP is made of a series of specific programmes, among them the farm programme, which include, on the one hand, the matters being experimented on and investigated on

Local Ministry farms and those in the process of being transferred to the sector on collaborating farms and, on the other, the activities of counselling, diffusion and technological training.

In this year's Programme it is worth noting the incorporation for the first time of the projects of R&D and transfer of technology to meet the demands of the sector. It also includes Programmes of Collaboration with the Farm Organizations and Cooperative Federations for the introduction of new technologies by means of tests and demonstrations.

Considering the dynamic quality of the Programme, it may incorporate other activities during the year, depending on the demands of the Sector and on the possibilities of new work.

Aims

The general aims of the Programme can be summarized as follows:

- (i) To transfer to farms the technological innovations arising from R&D projects in order to improve production processes.
- (ii) To incorporate innovative avant-garde technologies which improve farmers' revenue and are compatible with environmental protection.
- (iii) To improve the quality of production.
- (iv) To rationalize the use of inputs in production processes.
- (v) To improve technical business assistance.
- (vi) To train young farmers.
- (vii) To impart technology.

The Programme is financed by the Autonomous Community (Murcia) and also by the Operations Programme of the FEOGA as part of Subprogramme-3, measure number 6, entitled Extension and Transfer of Technology.

Programme of technology transfer to farms

Currently, the projects/experiments listed below are being carried out depending on the Centre/Farm in which they have been implemented:

- (i) Agro-Food Research and Development Centre (La Alberca, Murcia)
 - Improvement of artificial insemination in goats of the Murciano-Granadina race.
 - Pilot Project for Guidance on Goat Diets.
 - Characterization of the quality product "Cheese in wine".
 - Sheep-grazing compatible with the natural vegetation in Sierra Espuña.
 - Free-range grazing with forage shrubs for dry areas.
- (ii) Agricultural Training and Experiment Centre (Lorca, Murcia)
 - Hydroponic forage crops for animal feeding.
 - Reproduction with artificial insemination in dairy goats.
 - Reproduction rates: fecundity and prolificity in sheep of the Segureña race.
- (iii) Collaborating farms: Demonstration experiments
 - Cultivation and goat exploitation of forage shrubs in the Altiplano region.

- Evaluation of forage shrubs with grazing sheep, together with their capacity for recovery in the Northwest region.
- Cultivation and sheep exploitation of forage shrubs in the Alto Guadalentín region.

Specialized vocational training

Aware of how important it is to train agriculturalist permanently, the Local Ministry of Environment, Agriculture and Water, in collaboration with the Professional Farm Organizations and Cooperatives, establishes yearly the Regional Training Programme which is developed in the ATECs and based on the following four basic points:

(i) *Specialized Vocational Training* (Middle-Grade and Upper-Grade Training Cycles), authorized by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC).

(ii) Incorporation into the farming enterprise (Royal Decree 204/1996 on structural improvement and modernization of farming enterprises).

(iii) Update and/or vocational readaptation activities.

(iv) Tests and experiments which, in coordination with regional agricultural research, lend coherence to the technology transfer processes.

The ATECs in Jumilla, Lorca and Torre Pacheco are also imparting farm incorporation Courses on Goats, Ruminants, and Sheep and Goats, respectively; and the RBA in Caravaca on Sheep and Goat, all lasting 200 hours. These Courses consist of six 25 hour modules relating to Technology and Practical Training, and ten Specific Programmes of 50 hours in total, which are coordinated by Farm Organizations.

The two main objectives of these courses are:

(i) To train agriculturalist joining family farms or others in the best conditions of technology, practical training and business capacity.

(ii) To meet the training requirements of Royal Decree 204/1996 for the Improvement of Structures and Modernization of Farming Enterprises, which is committed to providing financial aid for those with sufficient Vocational Training.

Final consideration

The evolution of Agricultural Extension in Murcia has assimilated the changes occurring in the Political and Administrative Structure of the Spanish State, the Rural Environment and Enterprises operating in the Farming Sector.

We can stress that the Regional AES Agencies have been restructured into RBAs, centres that in addition to the Transfer of Technology develop other programmes implemented by the Local Ministry of Environment, Agriculture and Water. Furthermore, the Agricultural Training and Experiment Centres impart Courses in Training and Experiments to increase the possibilities of this Transfer of Technology. All these Programmes are being designed with the increasing collaboration of the Farming Organizations.