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Organization of extension services. National case studies: Cyprus

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SUMMARY - The policy of agricultural development of Cyprus, the situation of sheep and goat production systems, the marketing of sheep and goat products, and the institutions supporting Animal Husbandry Development are described. The role and the activities of the three Institutions of the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment for sheep and goat development is examined and suggestions are given for better efficiency of the extension service at the farm level. Since the number of extension Officers is limited, the sheep and goat extension service, in Cyprus, uses the Milk Recording Scheme at a small number of private sheep and goat units owned by progressive livestock keepers for demonstration purposes, and also for the promotion of genetic improvement of the sheep and goat population of the island. When new developments and methods of management in these units are proved successful, the results are easily adopted by other sheep and goat-keepers. It is concluded that it is very important for the Extension Officers to be kept up to date by continuous training and practical field experience, to be trusted by the livestock keepers and their advice to be easily accepted.

Key words: Sheep, goats, extension, Cyprus.

RESUME - "Organisation des services de développement. Etude de cas nationaux : Chypre". La politique de développement agricole à Chypre, la situation des systèmes de production ovine et caprine, la commercialisation des produits ovins et caprins et les institutions de développement des productions animales sont décrites. Le rôle et les activités des 3 institutions du Ministère de l'Agriculture, Ressources Naturelles et Environnement pour le développement de la production ovine et caprine sont analysés. Des suggestions sont proposées pour une meilleure efficacité des services de développement au niveau de l'exploitation. Depuis que le nombre de techniciens de développement est limité, les services de développement ovine et caprin à Chypre utilisent un programme de Contrôle Laitier dans un nombre limité d'exploitations privées de production ovine et caprine appartenant à des éleveurs modernes dans un but de démonstration et aussi pour la promotion du progrès génétique des populations ovines et caprines de l'île. Quand de nouveaux types de développement et des méthodes de conduite dans ces unités ont démontré leur succès, les résultats sont facilement adoptés par d'autres éleveurs de moutons et de chèvres. En conclusion, il est très important pour les techniciens de développement de rester performants vis-à-vis des éleveurs grâce à la formation permanente et à des expériences concrètes sur le terrain, de garder la confiance des éleveurs et de faire accepter leurs conseils par les éleveurs.

Mots-clés : Ovin, caprin, extension, Chypre.

General situation

Agriculture constitutes one of the most important sectors of Cyprus economy, despite the rapid expansion of other sectors, such as tourism and services. The agriculture sector contributes 5.5% to the Gross Domestic Product and provides employment to 10% of the economically active population.

The development of the agricultural sector is among the priorities of the Government. Special attention is paid to the technological improvement and management, modernization of the agricultural sector, in view of the rising competition with foreign products both at the local and overseas markets. In addition, great emphasis is given to the rational utilization and development of natural resources and the protection of the environment.

Situation of sheep and goat production systems and market organization

The population of sheep and goats accounts about 300,000 and 200,000 respectively. These are owned by 2,300 sheep keepers and 3,900 goat keepers. About 400 (17%) sheep keepers and about 1,950 (50%) goat keepers own small units, having less than 20 animals. A number of about 540 (24%) sheep keepers and 670 (23%) goat keepers own 20-49 animals. As a result only about 2,400 families are earning a satisfactory income from sheep and goat farming. Out of these 2400 families only 500 own units with more than 200 animals which amounts to 39% of the whole sheep and goat population.

Due to the lack of adequate area for grazing the semi-intensive production system is prevailing in the country followed by the intensive and the extensive system of production. This is far more obvious after the Turkish invasion, in 1974, and the occupation by Turkey of 38% of the island of Cyprus, the area of which is only 9,600 square kilometers.

The marketing of lamb and kids is done through the middlemen: Producers-Middlemen-Buchers-Consumers. Despite the fact that the total 130,000 tons of cows milk is marketed through the Cyprus Milk Industry Organization only 10% of sheep and goat milk is marketed through the Cyprus Milk Industry Organization and the rest (90%) is sold direct from the producer to the Dairy Industries. The milk products from the factories are sold through the shops to the consumer. Some sheep and goat livestock-keepers produce the traditional halloumi cheese which is sold directly from the farm to the consumer.

Existing extension services structure

Description of institutions at national and regional level

There are three institutions under the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment, supporting Animal Husbandry Development, which are the following:

(i) The Department of Agriculture is the main agency for extension services. At the Head Quarters, apart from the Agricultural sections, there are two Animal Husbandry Sections, the Animal Production Section (sheep and goats, cows, pigs and poultry) and the Animal Genetic Improvement and Nutrition Section, represented at the District, close to the farmers, by their own Animal Husbandry Officers for better individual contact, solving local problems, introducing new improvements and suggesting better methods of management.

(ii) The Department of Agricultural Research Institute is the agency for the technological upgrading of agriculture, and through its Animal Production Section research work is focussed on nutrition, improved livestock management and genetic improvement of cows, sheep and goats.

(iii) The Department of Veterinary Services is the agency for the control of animal diseases and for the implementation of artificial insemination to the Dairy Cows as a means for improving the genetic value of the animal stock.

Kind of specific organization - Agricultural extension service activities

The Agricultural Extension Programme of the Ministry aimed at the dissemination of information to the rural population, focussing on new and improved production methods and techniques. The implementation of this programme includes personal contacts, training courses, lectures, demonstrations, field days and the systematic use of audiovisual aids and mass media, such as television and radio programmes as well as the publication of the quarterly agricultural journal, "The Countryman".

Furthermore, sheep and goat keepers are persuaded to accept and apply new technology and improved farming techniques and methods through an Integrated Livestock Development Scheme which has been introduced, by the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment, offering agricultural credit covering up to 80% of the investment. To encourage the efficient utilization of this loan, a subsidy of 4% on the commercial interest rate is given for a 15 years repayment

period when approved installations, new equipment and new developments are introduced by the livestock-keepers.

Some Extension activities are carried out by the merchants in their effort to promote their products (animal medicines, agricultural equipment, etc.).

Today, it is generally accepted that there is an increasing demand for advisory services. Farmers require more sophisticated services, more individualized advice, production adjusted to market requirements through research advice of highly specialized experts, search for new markets, especially exports. Furthermore farmers seek advice tailored to their own situation, both of a *highly specialized* individual and *counsellor* who can take an overall view, to enable the farmer to take the right decision.

As there is a limited number of Extension Officers, it is not possible to cover all the above needs of farmers, the Sheep and Goat Extension Service in Cyprus uses a small number of private Sheep and Goat units (target is 5% of the total sheep and goat) owned by progressive livestock keepers for demonstration purposes, but also for the promotion of the genetic improvement of the sheep and goat population of the island. These demonstration units are members of the Sheep and Goat Milk Recording Scheme and are under the strict supervision of the Extension Officers of the Department of Agriculture. Records such as date of birth, stocking, purchases and sales of animals, feedstuffs, animal products, etc., are kept by the livestock keeper but milk recording (once a month for 3 continuous months after weaning) and 98/120 days liveweight of lamb/kids are kept by Government recorders. The records kept are analysed by computer and the genetically superior animals are selected, resulting in genetic improvement of the flocks but also by selling the top selected males to other units the whole sheep and goat population of Cyprus is upgraded. These males are subsidized by the Government at \$30 each.

Apart from genetic selection all the records kept are carefully examined and evaluated by the Sheep and Goat Section and are used to improve livestock management. Among other improvements, some sheep and goat farms, have accepted the individual feeding idea for minimizing the feeding costs increasing milk production and generally the productivity of the unit. To give an example, 5 years after joining the Milk Recording Scheme, a Chios Sheep Farm with 200 productive animals, succeeded to increase the milk and meat production by 68% and 27% respectively, increasing the gross income from \$36,000 to \$52,000 and achieving an extra income of \$16,000 (\$12,000 from milk and \$4,000 from meat). The extra income is the outcome of genetic improvement, better management and individual feeding according to milk production, making use of the records kept.

It is obvious that this farm is the best to show for demonstration purposes. Therefore all new developments and advanced technologies introduced are adopted easily, especially by progressive livestock-keepers.

Critical analysis of the organization (Extension Service)

There is a co-operation among the three institutions and services are offered free of charge. The Extension Service of the Agricultural Department brings up the problems from the field and suggests improvements with economic soundness to be searched experimentally by the Agricultural Research Institute, such as *early weaning of lambs and kids for increasing commercial milk production, whole barley feeding for older animals lambs and kids, different levels of energy and protein for milk production and fattening, etc.* The results from research are tested at the Government Livestock farms and then applied to private livestock units. The exchange of experience among the Animal Husbandry Officers of Agricultural Research Institute and Department of Agriculture is very well established but the Veterinary Department and the Department of Agriculture are cooperating when there is a common problem to be solved, for example hygienic milk production.

Following the world trend, the Government of Cyprus cuts down the National budget by reducing the number of Extension Officers, but nevertheless the priority to help livestock-keepers is still very important. The objective is to prepare them for the competition they will face in the European market when Cyprus joins the European Union, but also internationally.

Actual and future development, suggestions

Extension Officers, researchers and veterinarians are all working with animals and they have the same target, to increase productivity. Therefore, there must be a close cooperation of the three under one Directory. This will save personnel and the experience of specialists especially the researchers will reach the Livestock-keepers directly. Furthermore serious involvement of the team either from the beginning of the planning of a new farm or for the study and renovating of existing ones for introducing improvements and better management will give better results and increase productivity.

It is important for Extension Officers to be retrained but it is also essential for them to earn practical experience in the field if they want to be accepted and be believed by the farmers, otherwise they will fail and their suggestions, will not be adopted.

There are two categories of farmers:

(i) The educated and usually progressive ones who want to have direct access to information of value to them, must be trained and given all the facilities required. These farmers can be used by the trainer during educational seminars, organized by Extension Service, to present their successful farm results and also the improvements and management methods used. The trainer and the successful livestock-keeper, together, have more impact on other livestock-keepers than the trainer alone.

(ii) The non educated, usually old and less progressive farmers who want to see the results on other farms (Demonstration units) and then only are persuaded to accept the value of improvements and methods of management to be introduced.

A producer's organization is needed to improve the productivity, cost-effectiveness, the quality of the end product its attraction to the customer and better selling price. The Extension Services have to help in this direction, because transfer of knowledge and introduction of new developments will be more efficient and with low costs through this producer's organization. It will be a great advantage for the less progressive livestock-keepers to join the producer's organization than to work alone.