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The development of extension services in Bulgaria and needs of sheep and goat farming

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SUMMARY - As a consequence of political changes in Central and Eastern European countries, the old "socialist" structures in the agricultural sector in Bulgaria have been disrupted. Multitude of individual farmers, leaseholders and companies took their place. To cope with the new reality, the Ministry of Agriculture undertook actions to build National Agricultural Advisory System -adequate structure for serving the new subjects and organizations. At the beginning of 1997, 98.89% of the sheep and 99.95% of goat population are in the private sector. According to the official statistics in Bulgaria, sheep and goat keeping is concentrated in small family farms (486 thousand sheep farms and 374 thousand goat farms). This is a favourable environment for the implementation of a "Extension services" system in the small ruminant sector of Bulgaria. Developing new sustainable production and breeding strategies in sheep and goat farming involving farmers is necessary. Pilot-projects and common research with the rest of Central and Eastern European Countries is suitable for this purpose. All factors which could lead to sustainability of the small ruminant sector have to be profoundly investigated.

Key words: Extension services, sheep, goat, breeding, farmer organizations.

RESUME - "Le développement des services de vulgarisation en Bulgarie et les besoins de l'élevage ovin et caprin". Suite aux changements politiques dans les pays de l'Europe du Centre et de l'Est, les vieilles structures dans le secteur agricole ont été désorganisées en Bulgarie. Une multitude d'agriculteurs individuels, de propriétaires louant leur terre et des sociétés ont pris la place. Face à cette réalité, le ministre de l'agriculture entreprit des actions pour mettre en place un système national de conseil et de développement agricole, structure adéquate pour se mettre au service des nouveaux objectifs et des nouvelles organisations. Au début de 1997, 98,89% des effectifs ovins et 99,85% des chèvres appartiennent au secteur privé. Selon les structures officielles en Bulgarie, l'élevage ovin et caprin est concentré dans des petites exploitations familiales (486 000 fermes de moutons et 374 000 de chèvres). C'est un environnement favorable pour établir un service de développement dans le secteur des petits ruminants en Bulgarie. Il faut développer une nouvelle production durable et des stratégies d'élevage impliquant les éleveurs ovins et caprins. Des projets pilotes et des recherches communes avec le reste des pays de l'Europe du Centre et de l'Est peuvent contribuer à atteindre cet objectif. Tout facteur qui peut conduire à la durabilité du secteur des petits ruminants doit être examiné.

Mots-clés : Services de développement, brebis, chèvre, élevage.

Introduction

After 1990, great changes took place in the agricultural sector in Bulgaria. All changes have developed in the context of political changes run in the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC). The old structures, like large co-operative farms of old "socialist" type, were liquidated. A great number of individual farmers, leaseholders and companies took their place. These new subjects and organizations of agricultural activities are not well oriented in new market conditions. They have not the possibility of supporting administration or corresponding specialists.

At the end of 1995 the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR) started project for building the National Agricultural Advisory System (NAAS) with co-operation of Agricultural Academy and financial support of the programme PHARE (Bachvarov and Tsvetanov, 1997). This is the governmental politics to transfer the management experience of the developed western countries into the field of agricultural production in Bulgaria.

The structure of the National Agricultural Advisory System

National level

On the national level there are four centres: Agro-business and Management Centre, Information Centre, Training Centre and Laboratory for soil, water and plant analysis. All are situated in Sofia. The Centre of Agro-business and Management gives practical and technical assistance in developing of business-projects, book-keeping serving, consultations, diagnose of the state and prognostication of farm development, preparing credit documentation. The information centre investigates the farmers' needs from literature or technical information, publishing and distribution of different issues, provides contacts with mass-media. Training centre prepares different syllabus and organize training course for specialists and farmers. The national Laboratory for Agricultural serving performs: analyses of soils, water, plants; gives recommendations of type and quantity of fertilizers; nutritive value of forages, etc.

On the regional level there are 9 regional commissions for Agricultural Management. These commissions co-ordinate the tasks of Local Advisory Offices.

Local Advisory Offices (LAO)

So far 19 LAO have been built up throughout the country in the experimental stations of Agricultural Academy. The Ministry of Agriculture has employed 5 specialists in every LAO. They form a work group for direct contacts with the farmers. The tasks of these work groups are to supply the farmers consultations, planing and successful management of the farm. These work groups perform the services free of charge. It is considered that Extension Services have to be free of charge until 2000.

In accordance with the purpose of this symposium it is important to estimate how the NAAS corresponds to the needs of sheep and goat farming? Before giving of the answer it is worth while to survey the present situation in sheep and goat farming.

Present situation of sheep and goat farming in Bulgaria

Total number, production and farm structure in small ruminant sector have been drastically affected by the process of reinstatement the ownership of the land. In the sheep and goat farming two fully opposite tendencies can be observed. In comparison with 1990, total number of sheep decreased (-62.85%) (Table 1). Production of ewe's milk during 1996 in comparison with 1990 decreased (-58.04%) (Table 2). In contrast of this trend, the total number of goats increased (+96.04%) of the same period and production of goat's milk was increased (+123.81%).

Table 1. Number of sheep and goats in co-operative and private farms of Bulgaria (1990-1997)

Farms	01.01.1990 [†]		01.01.1997 ^{††}		Change 1997/1990 (%)
	Number	From total (%)	Number	From total (%)	
Sheep					
Co-operative	5,580,305	68.64	33,286	1.11	-99.40
Private	2,549,364	31.36	2,986,314	98.89	+17.00
Total	8,130,305	100.00	3,019,600	100.00	-62.85
Goat					
Co-operative	3,958	0.92	450	0.05	-88.63
Private	428,965	99.08	848,292	99.95	+97.75
Total	432,923	100.00	848,742	100.00	+96.04

Source: [†]Bulletin of the Ministry of Agriculture (1992); ^{††}Mikhailova (1997) (pers. comm.)

Table 2. Total production of milk from sheep and goat in co-operative and private farms of Bulgaria (1990-1996)

Farms	1990 [†]		1996 ^{††}		Change 1997/1990 (%)
	Milk (t)	From total (%)	Milk (t)	From total (%)	
Milk production from sheep					
Co-operative	138,317	52.60	705	0.64	-99.49
Private	124,594	47.40	109,603	99.36	-12.03
Total	262,911	100.00	110,308	100.00	-58.04
Milk production from goat					
Co-operative	233	0.38	33	0.02	-85.84
Private	61,873	99.62	138,972	99.98	+124.61
Total	62,106	100.00	139,005	100.00	+123.81

Source: [†]Bulletin of the Ministry of Agriculture (1992); ^{††}Mikhailova (1997) (pers. comm.)

While the tendency in goat farming from quantitative point of view is positive, the tendency in sheep farming is negative and fairly disturbing. Most people give negative opinion on the shortage of sheep population saying that "Changes (meaning mainly political once) must lead to better". Such appraisals are completely emotional. The careful and objective analysis point out an other cause. According Mikhailov (1995) sheep farming in co-operative sector of Bulgaria is not profitable and since 1970 it had existed under administrative pressure. Before 1990, dominated part of sheep population were Merino and Semimerino breeds. When large co-operative farms were disrupted after 1991-1992, private sector couldn't accept these breeds because they were not profitable. Private farmers in Bulgaria from the lowlands give preferences to local dairy sheep like Pleven Black-head, Stara Zagora, local Maritza and dairy crosses. In the mountains Cigaja, Karakachaska and other local sheep are dominant breeds.

Actually, the reduction of sheep population is on account of the former co-operative sector. While in private sector there is slight increasing of the number of sheep (+17%), but production of seep milk is less with 12.03%. In the beginning of 1997, 98.89% of sheep population and 99.95% from goats are in private sector. As far as political changes are non-reversible, obviously the restoration of sheep population is connected with the sustainability of private sector.

Nowadays the high interest in goat farming is due to the low standard of rural and mountain population. Many people keep goats to satisfy their own needs of milk, milk products and meat. Because of the comparatively high milk yield (more than the needs of the families), people sell the rest of it. In comparison with cattle, goats keeping is easier. They are unpretentious to the forages and they require less expenses. In recent years there are tendencies some of the farmers to increase the number of goats in their flocks in order to sell more milk on the market.

NAAS and needs of sheep and goat farming

As a project and implementation NAAS and LAO principally are oriented to agricultural producers. NAAS strives to follow an interest of the agricultural producers. After one year activities of NAAS and LAO, the interests of the producers can be ranged as follow: (i) bank service, credits and investment plan; (ii) market information about fertilizers and effective realization of agricultural products; and (iii) different technological information.

There is a poor interest in technological questions: for example in animal production sector like nutrition, breeding and reproduction. Shepherds and goatherds have a low interest to draw credits for expanding their production.

A number of problems exist in small ruminant sector which can not be solved in short term plan because of the next causes: (i) at the present time sheep and goat farming are not target for modern agricultural business; (ii) the process of reinstatement the ownership on the land have been delayed -only 50% from arable land are really returned, but only 8% of the farmers have a document of property; (iii) large areas suitable for sheep and goat farming are depopulated -demographic collapse; (iv) general absence of initiative and effective farmer's organizations with sufficient financial resources to protect economical interest of the farmers; and (v) general lack of good connection between production-processing-market.

Particular, NAAS at present satisfy the needs of some initiative people practising sheep and goat farming. But small ruminant sector requires better marketing and management. In this aspect it is very important for the activity of breeding and farmer's organizations to exist!

Breeding and farmer's organizations in Bulgaria

Before 1990, 27 government services functioned in the animal breeding area. They were served mainly former co-operative sector. During 1994 they were reduced to 9 centres and they remained their existence in big cities like Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas, etc. By recommendation of EAAP Task Force on Central and Eastern Europe (Meyn, 1996) these services were saved. These services now are normatively authorized to continue livestock improvement programmes of the government.

During 1990, the first non-government breeding organization was established -Breeding Association of the local Maritza sheep. This is a small organization with forty members. The main task of this association is to preserve the Maritza sheep as valuable genetic resource. In the beginning of 1993 milk recording programme of local Maritza sheep was started with support of private farmers from Plovdiv region and the National fund of scientific research. Actually, two types of local Maritza sheep exist in Plovdiv region: White and Patch-Faced. They breed like two separate breeds. Because of the local distribution of the Maritza sheep the Breeding association of Local Maritza sheep obtained definitely regional contribution of Bulgaria. Unfortunately this initiative has not been followed by the farmers who kept Pleven Black-head and Stara Zagora breeds which are larger populations. Instead, by initiative of former government services, an other structure it was established -National Union of Sheep and Goat Farming (1994). This process was prompted by the government structures because it was obvious that the process of grouping and confederating between shepherds and goatherds was delayed. The expectations are that this union will be able to support farmers. Now this National Union has to prove its existing.

It is not real to expect that these comparatively new structures will immediately start to work effectively. Conceptual clarifying of the term "Breeding Association" and "Farmers' Organization" and their tasks is fairly important for the people who want to establish such structures and their successfully work. At present, there is a lack of well trained people for breeding associations management.

Restoration and achievement of sustainable sheep and goat production

In 1995 an optimistic forecast showed, that the number of sheep in Bulgaria can be restored to 5 million towards 2000 (Mikhailov, 1995). It is very likely this forecast not to come true. Stabilization of small ruminant sector in Bulgaria has to be considered in the process of running agricultural reform. First of all, reinstatement the ownership of land must be finished. Development and modernization of sheep and goat farming depends on the farmers who will accept sheep and goat farming like long term perspective in their life. For that purpose, they need a service for modern technologies and effective realization of their production. According to official statistics in Bulgaria by 01.01.1995 keeping of sheep and goats is concentrated in small family farms (486 thousand sheep farms and 374 thousand goat farms). This is a favourable environment for implementation of "Extension services" system in small ruminant sector of Bulgaria. Developing of new sustainable production and breeding strategies for sheep and goat farming with involving of farmers are necessary. This can be achieved through pilot-projects and common researches with the rest of Central and Eastern European Countries together with co-operation of international organizations. Before, all factors which can contribute to reach sustainability of the small ruminant sector have to be investigated.

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