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Problems Related to Food Security and Agricultural Research in Albania

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Abstract. As a result of the demise of Communism in Albania, the agricultural sector has been disorganized. The economy is actually being restructured, but the deficit for food products is likely to prevail for several years to come.

Agricultural research should benefit from an in-depth reorganization, including agricultural information, plant breeding and improvement of species, conservation of the existing bio-diversity.

Key words. Food Security – Research – Training – Agricultural Information – Albania

Titre. *Les problèmes de la sécurité alimentaire et de la recherche agronomique en Albanie.*

Résumé. *La chute du régime communiste a désorganisé la production agricole albanaise. Le programme de réorganisation de l'économie est en cours mais le déficit en produits alimentaires devrait continuer quelques années encore.*

La recherche agricole doit être profondément réorganisée en insistant sur l'information agricole, l'amélioration des variétés et des races, la conservation de la bio-diversité.

Mots clés. *Sécurité alimentaire – Recherche – Formation – Information agricole – Albanie*

The demise of communism in Albania over the 1991–1992 period was accompanied by an economic and political chaos. After 45 years of an implacably totalitarian regime, no alternative political or economic institution were in place once the ancient regime crumbled. Albania, which used to be a net exporter of food products, become heavily dependent on food aid as a result of the collapse of agricultural production. The decline results from a combination of factors including the dismantling of agricultural cooperatives, the scarcity of inputs and lack of foreign exchange, a breakdown in public distribution channels and work stoppages in the food industry. The supply fell from 60 to 80% and public food industry and related sectors were unable to supply sufficient food for population.

After the elections of March 1992 the Democratic Party came in power and took decisive steps for the restoration of macroeconomic stability. Quick mobilization of international aid supported the program of the new Government.

Over the last 12 months Albania has achieved progress toward reforming the agricultural sector. 90% and 60%, respectively, of the land controlled by the ex-cooperatives and state farms have been distributed to the farmers. It is supposed that now exist over 400,000 of small private family farms. Some major reforms in price and trade liberalization have been achieved. Also the Ministry of Agriculture and Food has prepared a good plan for agricultural enterprise privatization. As a result, the agricultural production in 1992 was 16% higher than in 1991. This year a significant increase of approximately 30% in comparison to 1992 is expected.

Table 1 represents the food balance sheet for the period July 1993–July 1994. From that table we can observe that it is indispensable to cover the deficit of:

– wheat	83,500 tons
– vegetable oil	40,700 tons
– milk products	4,250 tons
– sugar	37,800 tons

with food and commercial aid. So the status and urgency of food security in Albania still remains a problem.

In a market economy the role of the Ministry of Agriculture should be to provide a policy environment within which private farmers can decide for themselves what to produce according to how they see the risk and the reward. The policy environment should provide the farmer with production opportunities at an acceptable level of risk and reward. Research must provide the necessary and required knowledge to the decision-makers in order to create a suitable policy environment. Government should also assist the farmer to respond to the policy environment, to increase production and/or improve his income by helping him to improve his technical and business management skills. This is done through the medium of extension using the knowledge produced by research.

The current structure of research is not appropriate to new situation and there are severe financial constraints. The research organization will have to be more responsive and more cost-effective. But, whatever development occurs, the research will have to give greater emphasis to applied and adaptive (on-farm) research. We have started the restructuring of our agricultural research organisms creating in each of those institutes and stations sectors with only 2-3 permanent (full-time) researchers. They will have some additive staff according to the requests of the projects on which the research organism is working on. We have also proposed that the Directorate of Research in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food be changed into the National Centre for Agriculture Research. So we shall have a more powerful unit and the most important thing is that we will separate the scientific work from the bureaucratic and the production routine. Its fundamental duty would be to cover the true scientific research in all the fields of agriculture and food. It would result in quite a new research practice essentially different from that of the past. The conclusions drawn from the real research and study will be put at the disposal of the farmers to enhance production and to create the conditions for the sustainable agriculture. The recommendations and conclusions will be of service to the decision-makers in the Ministry too.

Since the early 1970s the Government of Albania has created a number of institutes and regional research stations to serve as a technical base for carrying out research and providing technical guidance to the state farms and cooperatives throughout the country. These centres of research have grown to include institutes for the study of problems in soils, agronomy and oil seeds production, agricultural food processing, fruit production, forestry and pasture, animal production, vegetables and pest management. In the past, research in each subject matter area was concentrated on increasing production, and improving plant and animal sanitation and resource management on very large state and cooperatives farms. Though considerable progress have been made over the past fifty years in increasing production in most subject matter areas, yields and the cost of production are still well below those in other non-command type economies.

The institutes, over the past fifty years, have conducted many experiments, produced an array of good annual and perennial crops varieties and improved animal yields. Practically all of their research was done on individual annual or perennial crop or animal studies. Limited research also has been carried out on sequential production of annuals (primarily in vegetables). Most of the

researchers were obliged not only to carry out research studies but also to serve as field inspectors to see that weeding, irrigation and other farm practices were being completed on timely basis. As a result, the real research output of their scientists was well below their potential, had they concentrated only on scientific studies. Moreover, they were severely handicapped by not being allowed to exchange ideas and information with other scientists throughout the world. This isolation of scientists severely restricted their ability to exchange and test superior germplasm from other countries in Albanian conditions. In spite of limited availability of information, laboratory and field equipments and access to outside technical literature or state of the art research carried out in other countries, many of Albanian scientists have done the remarkable job of carrying out their mandate. A large amount of their research results have been published in Albania. A few have presented their findings for publication in international journals or on the occasion of scientific symposia.

With the change in the basic structure of the agricultural system in Albania from command economy to a free market system and the division of the arable land into small farms, there is a need to change the priorities in research and revamp the extension services to meet the needs of the thousands of new independent farmers. Already the farmers are beginning to realize that they will have to provide food for their families as well as generate more and more substantial income through the production of crops and livestock for the local market. In the near future, they will also be sending their products to export markets in the world or sell to food processors. Since most of these new farmer operators have not had experience in making farm management decisions for themselves in the past, they will urgently require the assistance of Government research extension and marketing agencies to provide them with the information needed to make good farm management decisions.

Requests are already coming into the District offices from large number of farmers in the region, asking what to plant and where to sell their products. Soon they will be requesting an expanded range of information from researchers and the new extension service which is just being developed. Much of information requested will not be in areas that the research system has worked on to date. It may include questions such as: how to meet the family food needs for a year on the least amount of land in order to have more land to dedicate to commercial production; how to mix family and commercial production with animal production and how to use the farm residues efficiently; how to preserve the home

food supply to meet the family needs throughout the year; how to store production on farm until it is sold; what crops or livestock will bring the greatest income; how to become more efficient in the use of the family labor; how to use agricultural inputs most efficiently; can fuelwood be produced on the family's own farm, etc.

It sounds more reasonable that the research goals for the next five years period be the following:

1. To provide the best production information available, as quickly as possible, to the thousands of new farmers so that they can increase their output of high quality products, improve farm efficiency and income, while guaranteeing them and their family self-sufficiency in food in the shortest time frame possible.

a) Researchers in Albania have been conducting for many years research on a wide range of agricultural commodities. Much good has been done in this area. This information must be organized into technological packages or written bulletins on each individual crop or animal system of production—containing all the best available recommendations known today in our country including the best varieties for each region, cultural practices, fertilizer recommendations, pest control measures, marketing instruction, etc.—in order that it can be used by extension workers and farmers.

b) It is indispensable to conduct some farm family food supply research for establishing inter-disciplinary teams to undertake studies on how this family food need can be accomplished in the smallest area of land possible.

2. Further improve single crop and/or animal production for sale in the local markets to the existing or new food processing industries, and for the agricultural sector to contribute to the national economy and state budget.

a) Introduction and testing of superior germplasm. Albania has been isolated from the Western world for fifty years. During that time agricultural scientists in the West have made major progress in the development of high yielding pest resistant new varieties of almost all crops, etc. It is the duty of our researchers to evaluate these new varieties and hybrids in the Albanian conditions before introducing them for use by the farmers.

– Research on efficiency of inputs applications, expand irrigation research, standardization of soil analysis system, microeconomic studies on crop/livestock production.

3. Conserve the existing native plant and animal germplasm and Albania's natural resources. We have to establish first a germplasm bank (gene bank), and also we have to be very careful in order

Table 1. Food Balance Sheet (1 July 1993–30 June 1994) (in MT)*

	Wheat	Vegetal Oil	Meat	Dairy Products	Sugar
Production estimates	425.000	1.500	66.000	511.000	7.500
Opening stock	35.000	1.000	5.000	—	—
Total	460.000	2.500	71.000	511.000	7.500
Use:					
- Food use	624.000	43.200	70.400	502.400	64.000
- Non food use	37.500	—	—	—	—
- Losses	42.000	—	—	51.000	1.800
- Exports	—	—	—	—	—
Total	703.500	43.200	70.400	553.400	65.800
Import requirement	243.500	40.700	0	42.400	58.300
Commercial food aid already committed**	160.000	—	—	**	10.000
Uncovered imports requirements total	83.500	40.700	0	4.240	48.300
Commercial food aid	83.500	40.700	0	4.250	48.300

* 42.400 T of fresh products = 4.240 of DWM

** Butter : 5.000 T (USA) ?

Eggs : 600 T (EC)

to conserve our national resources such as land, forests, pastures, etc.

but also will help to increase the income and the living standard of the country as well.

At the end of this paper, I want to stress the fact that the full restructuring of our research work will take place when we shall develop an extension service for Albania. Only in this way the research will help not only to secure the food for the Albanians

Note

1. Recently, the author of this paper has got a new nomination as Adviser for Agriculture to the Cabinet of the President of the Republic.



