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ECOLOGICAL AGRICULTURE VERSUS AGRO-TOURISM

1. Introduction

Since the Second World War Polish industry has gone through two major system transformations. The first of them, in the late 1940s led from a market system to a state planned distribution system. The other one, at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, was in the opposite direction *i.e.* returning to the rules of market economy after 50 years. In the second half of the previous century, until the early 1990s, a model of social tourism predominated, supported financially by the state.

Several attempts to reform the Polish Economy were made before 1990 [Józefiak, 1986, 171], but the greatest changes occurred in the 1980s. Among others "the three S rule" (*samodzielność, samorządność, samofinansowanie* meaning: self-dependence, self-government, self-financing) [Dzun, 1993, 38] was introduced to agricultural collectives in 1981 and in the following year all forms of agricultural enterprise became equal in the view of the law and the inviolability of private agricultural property was guaranteed by a constitutional amendment (the act dated 20th of July 1983 on an Amendment to the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic, Journal Of Laws (*Dziennik Ustaw*) No 39, Item 175). This caused the formation of new farms, whose owners had lived and worked in the city. They were better educated than an average Polish farmer, and quite often had graduated from schools of higher education, not necessarily connected with agriculture [Hasiński, 1999, 202]. Their farms were characterized by specialist production and additional

profits were made from rural tourism or agro-tourism.¹ In the 1980s an increasing tendency was noted in the 150-year-long Polish tradition of taking rural vacations. Rapid development of this trend was stimulated in the 1930s [Czerwiński et al., 2003].

The 1990s were also years of accelerated development in rural tourism, introducing the rules of market economy to agriculture and, what is more important, of paying more and more attention to the issues of protecting the natural environment. The result of this is the present co-existence in Polish agriculture of a system of industrial, integrated agriculture (conventional) and ecological agriculture and a gradual introduction of activities aimed at sustainable development of tourism, especially after the Earth Summit in 1992 [Łabaj, 2003].

As mentioned above, farms involved in rural tourism, especially agro-touristic and ecological farms have existed in Poland for many years. The spatial disposition of the first type is determined mainly by environmental factors. However, the location of ecological farms depends on many factors: the quality of the natural environment in the surroundings, the distance to organizations supporting and promoting their development, the proximity of outlet markets for ecological goods, the ecological consciousness of their potential owners, existence of models to follow, financial support from the state etc. More and more often ecological farms not only produce healthy food, but also offer tourist services. In this way, they become eco-agro-touristic farms, offering rural vacations in a relatively clean natural environment, they promote ecological agriculture and also educate in the field of environmentally friendly activities within rural areas. Additionally, the healthy food they produce is used to provide for the needs of their guests. The following question should be asked: does the present situation and further transformation of Polish agriculture permit and will it permit eco-agro-tourism to develop?

2. Ecological agriculture in Poland

The beginnings of ecological agriculture in Poland date back to the year 1930, when Stanisław Karłowski started the first ecological farm in Szelejewo in Wielkopolska, in which he used biodynamic methods of cul-

¹The notions of rural tourism and agro-tourism are not synonymous [Agroturystyka, 2003], because the latter is defined as a form of rural tourism closely connected with the productive activity of a farm located within a rural area. A maximum of five guest rooms are rented out and at least 50% of the income obtained by the farm comes from agricultural activity. See also Medlik [1995] and Wiatrak [2003].

tivation. After the Second World War, at the time of the state planned economy, the priority was to produce the greatest possible amount of food. Therefore, the emphasis was put mainly on the development of conventional (industrial) agriculture. The situation changed in the 1980s when former city dwellers, more educated than the average farmer, became farm owners. Unlike in the EU, dynamic development of ecological agriculture occurred in the 1990s, especially in the late 1990s and is still proceeding. In 2003 there were 2,286 ecological farms in Poland. This number also covers the farms undergoing the two year transformation period necessary for shifting from conventional production to certified ecological production. In total they occupy 49, 928.38 ha of arable land. Approximately 1/4 of them (27.1%) do not exceed 5 ha, and 5.5% range from 50–100 ha. Only 3.2% of such farms occupy over 100 ha.

As far as the spatial arrangement of certified ecological farms is concerned, the largest number are in the Świętokrzyskie province (20.3%) followed by the Lubelskie, Mazowieckie and Podkarpackie provinces (15.9%, 12.8% 11.2% and 10% respectively). The largest number of farms carrying out the transformation to ecological production can be found in the Małopolska province (26.3%), followed by the Podkarpacie (15.9%) and Świętokrzyskie (12.1%) provinces. The worst situation, concerning the number of certified ecological farms occurs in the Opole province (0.9%), and concerning the number of farms undergoing the transformation process in the Lubuskie province (0.4%).

3. Agro-tourism in ecological farming

The beginnings of tourism on Polish ecological farms, that is to say eco-agro-tourism, became noticeable in the 1980s, but its dynamic development started with the foundation of the Polish department of the Ecological Center for Ecological Agriculture and Tourism (ECEAT), registered in January 1994 (www.poland.eceat.org). At present the department is based in Bukówka near Lubawka in the province of Lower Silesia (Dolny Śląsk). Its main objectives are to promote ecological agriculture through tourism on ecological farms and educate children and teenagers on the issues of pro-ecological activities in rural areas [*Urlop u Ekorolników*, 2004]. The Polish department of ECEAT, along with 15 departments in other European countries (among others: the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Germany, Latvia, France and Sweden), belongs to ECEAT International, based in Amsterdam.

In 1994 only 16 Polish farms belonged to ECEAT-Poland. In the course of 10 years this number has increased up to 100. These are farms which are certified as producers of healthy food and their methods of

farming and cultivation are ecological. The largest number can be found in the Karpaty and Sudety regions, and the smallest number in the Mazowsze and Pomorze provinces.

4. The transformation of agriculture and eco-agro-tourism in Poland

At the beginning of the transformation of the political system Polish agriculture lagged behind agriculture in the European Union countries [Hasiński, 1999, 17]. The main reasons for this situation were the low level of technology and infrastructure in rural areas resulting in a very large proportion of the population being employed in this sector of the national economy and the low level of education amongst farmers.

As time passes, the factor that determined and still determines the slow development of this sector of the national economy, *i.e.* the huge number of small farms, appears to be at least partially helpful in the further restructuring of agriculture and enabling preservation and revitalization of rural areas. There are many farms occupying just a few hectares existing alongside huge production farms and rare collectives of farmers or newly formed producer groups. These farms do not only absorb unemployment, and thus ease social tensions, but are also favourable for the widespread development of rural areas. However, farms still do not produce enough goods to obtain a satisfactory income, as before the economic transformation. Thus, they are forced to run additional businesses, which are not strictly connected with agriculture.²

Agro-tourism has now become a significant form of business activity in Polish rural areas and supplies additional income to many Polish arable farms. Promotion and financial support for agro-tourism from outside Poland, which can be obtained by anybody wanting to run this kind of business, enable the further development of agro-tourism. Before 20th February 2004 agro-tourism could be financed by SAPARD- activity 4, and in the near future it will be aided by the Sector Operating Program, "Restructurization and Modernization of the Food Production Sector and Development of Rural Areas."

Having joined the European Union, Poland, just like other European countries, has to follow programs relating to agriculture and the environment, which are financed by the European Fund of Orientation and

²This phenomenon is quite common, as Kłodziński [2004] claims "only 8% of the population involved in agricultural business get their entire income from agriculture and 47.5% of arable farms in Poland supply to the market, the others produce only to provide for their own needs or do not produce at all".

Agricultural Guarantee (Ordinance of 17 of May 1999 – 1257/1999/WE). The main objective of these programs is to support farms which are environmentally friendly and operate in a way that preserves the natural environment and rural landscape. Costs incurred by farmers as a result of using extensive methods of production or stemming from the need to preserve the natural environment of rural areas will be returned. Small Polish farms will soon get a lot of financial support, and in return they will have to, as Wilkin [2003] argues, “be the guardians of rural areas”. There are 7 packages of the program relating to agriculture and the environment which emphasize the need to develop eco-agriculture all over Poland, as well as introducing balanced agriculture in areas which are unique as far as the natural environment is concerned [Kozaczuk 2004].

The funds involved in various programs related to the restructuring and development of rural areas, as well as preservation of the landscape and natural environment, promote the development of other businesses not necessarily strictly connected with agriculture, for example agro-tourism. They also strongly support the development of the ecological farms already existing and encourage the founding of new ones. Soon more and more ecological farms may be gaining additional income from agro-tourism.

5. Conclusion

The past transformation of Polish agriculture clearly indicates that the future income of the inhabitants of rural areas, both involved and uninvolved in agriculture, will come from business activity not necessarily related to agriculture itself. Financial support that can be obtained by Polish farmers applies not only to increasing agricultural production, but also to strategies connected with producing healthy food, extensive agriculture or starting a business that is not strictly related to agriculture, but supplies additional income to a farm. Thus, conditions for the further development of tourist services, especially agro-tourism and eco-agro-tourism, in rural areas have already been established.

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