

## EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF FARM WOMEN

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### ABSTRACT

The main problem of recent years in Czech Republic we see in maintaining and enhancing the employment rate of women in agriculture with special respect to young and educated women. The trend of moving people from country regions to towns has come to light in many European countries. Assuring employment and feasible living conditions for women in productive age is crucial for keeping families living in countryside and generally for sustainable regional development. The modernization and industrialization of agriculture brought more working places for technical professionals which are generally preferred by men. Great potential for women is in rapidly developing areas as agro-tourism, ecological husbandry, local specialties in foodstuffs and crafts, living style in harmony with nature, creating and developing village and country space, etc. The preparation for such new employment or own business call for special type of education which is not provided by current school system. Because regular attendance of any type of school might be a problem we propose a system of women mentors coming from the communities who would be able to work as mediators and guides for e-learning courses or other materials placed on web.

### KEY WORDS

rural women, educational needs, employment rate, regional development, mentors, e-learning

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### INTRODUCTION

In the framework of an international project on farm women education we made analysis of situation in Czech Republic and we tried to compare it with situation in partners' countries.

In the Czech Republic, the proportion of the labour force engaged in agriculture and forestry is only 3.8 percent (4.8% of all men, 2,7% of women) while agricultural production accounts for 3.6 percent of the GDP. Highly intensive land cultivation is typical of Czech agriculture. There were 94,300 people employed in agriculture (including fishing and quarrying) in Denmark in 2004, 674,000 were men and 20,300 women. A total number of businesses in agriculture in Germany today is 421,400. In 2003, a total of 1,304,900 people worked in agriculture in Germany, it represents 3,36% of all gainful workers.

The statistical limit, commonly used for determination of rural villages in the Czech Republic, is 2 000 inhabitants. There are 5 612 villages in the Czech Republic that are considered rural, this represents 89,82 % of all Czech villages. These villages administrate 73,6 % of the total area of the Czech Republic but only 26,3 % of inhabitants live in these villages. It represents 2 690 thousand inhabitants at 1st January 2005. Prague is the only predominantly urban area. The rest (except region Vysočina) represent significantly rural regions.

BEDNAŘÍKOVÁ (2006) states that in terms of administrative statute at 1st January 2005 the Czech Republic comprehends in total 5 716 villages with municipal offices, 527 towns (municipalities with municipal offices or town councils) and 5 military units (in total 6248 municipalities at 1st January 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> Bednaříková, Z., Vávra, V, Trávníček, Z. (2006): *Regional differentiations of rural villages in the Czech republic* Paper prepared for presentation at the 96th EAAE Seminar "Causes and Impacts of Agricultural Structures" Tänikon, Switzerland, January 10-11, 2006

Towns represent municipalities where town municipal office was situated before 1990 and municipalities that acquired this statute after 1990. According to the current law of municipalities, it is not possible to assign the statute of town to the municipality with less than 3 000 inhabitants. However, early assigned privileges have not forfeited their validity, so currently there are 137 towns with less than 3 000 inhabitants including 54 towns with less than 2 000 inhabitants and 3 towns with less than 1 000 inhabitants in the Czech Republic.

2.6 million inhabitants (25 percent of the population) live in rural areas, half of which are women. In the active age group there are more men than women in rural areas, but in the older age groups there is a majority of women. There are only 207 000 men over 65 years in rural areas, as against 375 000 women. The educational level of the rural population is lower than that of urban residents, and the educational level of men is higher than that of women in both rural and urban settings. Migration from rural areas to urban areas is higher than vice versa, and more women than men are migrating.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

To identify and explore educational needs of farm women we used several research methods. At the beginning, literature and web based retrieval were used to describe the general situation of farm women.

The objective of the first stage of our research was to identify the most frequent groups of rural women in the regions of the Czech Republic. In cooperation with professional organisations we prepared and organized 13 sessions where we discussed current situation of rural women. Then we distributed questionnaires among rural women to get a list of educational needs ordered according to their importance.

The main objective of our study was to identify the most frequent educational needs of rural women in the Czech Republic. And identify and describe similarity and difference in the educational needs of farm and rural women in six EU countries – both old and new member states.

The training needs of the Czech rural women were explored via focus groups and questionnaires during November and December 2005. The participants and informants were farm women, women living in rural areas, female consultants and farm managers. The questioned women should have rate the importance of 18 proposed topics of education from 1 (the most interesting) to 18 (least interesting).

The results from the primary research were compared to the results of similar studies conducted by our partners in other countries - approx. 1,200 women were contacted in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Italy, and Slovakia. The training needs in these countries were explored by questionnaires and by attending key events, presenting the Building Bridges concept, and discussing with the participants, by interviewing research and regional development representatives, female consultants of agricultural organizations, and selected farm women.

## **RESULTS**

We can distinguish following groups which should be targeted with different offers of educational models in the Czech Republic:

- ☒ Women who own farms and are decision makers.
- ☒ Women who are active on the farm (employee, not decision maker).
- ☒ Women employed by other entrepreneurs in their regions.
- ☒ Self-employed women in other business field than farming.

#### ■ Unemployed women.

The borders between these groups are not definite, because some of the women work in non-agricultural professions but also in the family farm business. This division is similar to a division in Germany and in Slovakia, but differs from division in Denmark and is strongly unlike to the Italian and Icelandic model. This rises mostly from differences in the structure of the agricultural enterprises and historical development in partner countries.

It will be very interesting to trace the processes of transition between the target groups in the course of educational activities, especially for the group of unemployed women.

#### **Educational needs of farm and rural women**

Based on the results from our surveys we can state that the most significant educational needs of the Czech farm and rural women is entrepreneurship and business innovation, funding, application for grants, facilitating articulation and preparation of business plans, mostly developed to implement diversification strategy. It is strongly similar to the situation in Germany, where they stated a wish:

*"To be able to stand on their own feet by developing multiple sources of income"*

Czech rural women are looking for training in accounting and financial issues including taxes and subsidies provided. They consider also time management and personal development (or career plans) to be very important and lacking skills.

Here we can identify strong differences among countries. Similar findings appeared by German partners. The tourism is seen as a future source of income in Germany, therefore topics like marketing, agro tourism, and language training is very interesting for the informants. Also financial issues seem to be very important for the target groups. This includes managerial knowledge about planning, budgeting, etc but also tax issues and bookkeeping.

Slovak women (in contrast with Icelandic and Danish) do not perceive their position as disadvantaged. They would embrace further development of the practical skills and knowledge than "gender issues" or empowerment. Courses like PC, languages, accountancy, agro-tourism potential of farms, marketing, new trends etc are preferred.

In contrast to these results the situation is quite different in Iceland and in Denmark. Iceland results show that farm women prefer farm skills (short and informative), coping with life and farm work, value-added, handicraft, and farm shop.

In Denmark, most farm women have their own work identity, i.e. have employment outside the farm. Most interviewees suggested practical courses to learn a specific skill. Comparing to the Czech or Icelandic women the Danish informants prefer first of all languages and practical courses in fields quite different from fields referred by Czech women - Sheep herding with dogs, repairing a tractor and other machines, crafts, etc.

The third set of very often mentioned education topics in the Czech Republic were: ICT knowledge (not just applications) and legal enactments. Informants mentioned an overall fact that women are less computer literate than men. This is yet more apparent in rural areas. They see this as their big disadvantage which they want to relieve. They want to exhaust ICT potential fully to develop their success stories, for marketing. It is the same conclusion as in Denmark and in Italy. As one Italian woman informant expressed:

*"Learn how to use simple and effective tools, systems and software to better run and manage the company from the economic and financial point of view (control, administration, budgeting, etc.)<sup>2</sup>"*

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<sup>2</sup> Valentina PICCIONI Impruneta (Firenze)

We can see significant differences among countries in ICT literacy. In Germany, basic computer-related skills exist already with most of the women as there is a variety of educational offers available on this issue. As relatively unimportant educational need is it in Iceland. Less important but missing is this skill referred by the Czech and Danish women. In comparison with this finding the Slovak informants mentioned lack of re-qualification courses and PC literacy very often.

The Czech informants expressed also strong wish to get knowledge on farm marketing (both products and services), food processing and active products presentation. A strong gap is in education in this field in the Czech Republic. Czech farmers usually offer their product to business customers who are bigger and therefore stronger in negotiation than small and less experienced entrepreneurs. Women noticed very often, that the perspective way is orientation toward consumer markets and it requires value added.

## DISCUSSION

There are several groups of women with different background and different expectation in the Czech Republic. The level of their education and experiences influences directly the structure of demanded education and trainings. The main stumbling blocks of further training are the spatial problems and differences in individual time schedules caused by different lifestyles, activities, families etc. Therefore it is difficult to find groups of farm and rural women with same or similar profession, interest, level of education and same size of a farm. An opportunity is sharing knowledge and skills with women with similar profiles in other countries.

We believe that there exist stakeholders strongly influencing both the decision of a woman to start own business or to build her career and her preferences concerning educational needs and required education. The main important are farm owners, employers, family member and other community members. Interviewed women often mentioned conflicts of their roles:

*“Striking a “work life balance” and managing the double role of being a woman entrepreneur and a woman, a mother, wife, companion. In some cases the agricultural activity requires a lot of physical effort too.”<sup>3</sup>*

We found out that there are similarities in the educational needs in some countries - Germany, Slovakia and Czech Republic as one group and Italy, Denmark and Iceland as a second group. There were differences in order of demanded educational topics between these groups. Two of the most significant gaps in opinions were related to the ICT skills and language.

Consensual was need of practical skills on managing the bureaucratic matters and the information deluge connected to being an entrepreneur. To get knowledge and skills to find and use the information related to bureaucratic obligations, norms, rules, financial contributions and to use them effectively as one Italian interviewee articulated:

*“Sometimes knowing in advance the implication of a specific norm may help you to decide whether to invest or not in a specific activity” ... “Can I learn how to do this?”*

Based on finding in all countries we discovered that self-empowerment is a real need as well as building up self-confidence. It is a precondition of a success in negotiation with business partners, in getting into decision-making boards, and in building networks.

## CONCLUSION

During our research we identified some possible obstacles of the introduction of new e-learning system. One of the most significant success factors is convincing women to be

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<sup>3</sup> Sara MORI, a young farmer (wine, olive oil and, agri-tourism)

participants or mentors for others and tell their own success stories. We could expect some technical problems as well as one interviewee stated:

*“Networks, the availability of Internet and broadband, and the availability of computers are not an issue, what is an issue is getting the computer to work and getting the computer on the net. Many people buy the computers in supermarkets. Then they do not get them connected to the net, or they have problems and do not know how to solve this. “Learning places” could provide technical support for the women.”*

However, despite of some specific topics of courses for some countries (sheep herding) we believe that it is possible to develop a unique educational system close to the needs of farm and rural women in all participating countries. We see a big opportunity in a combination of the different national and cultural aspects such as social skills, network, leadership skills, getting involved in education. Networking should enable our target group to access and share new information and trends, both at national and international level.

The fact that almost no person interviewed has any experience of e-learning and distance education may it be a positive thing as local experiences in eLearning in other sectors have not been successful and have not met the expectations of users. On the other hand this means we need to ensure a very high quality in the courses and a strong innovative dimension, in particular by adopting blended learning approaches and setting up, for instance “study circles” among entrepreneurs.

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#### **LITERATURE**

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