

AGROTOURISM AND OTHER KINDS OF DIVERSIFICATION IN RURAL AREA OF THE SOUTH BOHEMIAN REGION

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ABSTRACT

Agrotourism creates a basis for diversification of agricultural activities and for the rural development at all. In the Czech Republic there are about 500 farms oriented on agrotourism. The competitiveness of the agricultural sector in Europe is supported by the Common Agricultural Policy also in the programming period 2007 – 2013.

The activities for raising the global competitive advantages of European farmers are mainly based on the EAFRD Programme. In the Czech Republic the EAFRD implementation connected with the Rural Development Plan for the period 2007 – 2013 contains also the Diversification of agricultural activities in its Axis III. The main aim of this axis is an emphasis on increasing economic growth, creating new job opportunities and sustainable economic development in rural areas. The diversification means here the improvement of used technologies (but not the raising of production), the start of finalizing food on farms, the offer of local goods, or the providing of services like agrotourism.

The article deals also with the question how will be this programme used in the South Bohemian Region. The analyses for this research work were carried out in the time period of May 2007 – September 2007 and they will show which activities will be preferred by the farmers, which amount of money will the farmers like to use from the programme in the budget period 2007 – 2013, and which support would they like to get from the regional authorities like the Regional Agrarian Chamber with its advisors.

SUMMARY

There is a high potential of usage of the tradition and experience in tourism and in craft work. As the previous programming period showed the more will one activity be run in practice the higher will be the willingness of the others to adjust a similar project. This is well noticeable on the example of rural and agrotourism. A similar development should be supported in the case of craft work in the nowadays programming period, too. The results of the project will be used for next steps in the support of the competitiveness of farmers in the South Bohemian Region. The membership in common organisation like Holidays in the Countryside or European Centre for Eco Agro Tourism – which is voluntary – is also very useful in this case.

Keywords: Diversification, Czech Republic, EAFRD, South Bohemian Region, agrotourism

INTRODUCTION

The rural development in the Czech Republic should be based on activities which will bring a sustainable economic profit, which will stabilize the local population in regions, and which will raise the quality of life there. One possibility how to give support to these efforts is the objective of the Axis III of the Rural Development

Plan – diversification of agrarian activities. A wide range of business activities, services and production processes could be financed by the EAFRD Programme.

The question of agrotourism development was newly solved after 1989, when the state owned agrarian sector was privatized. The new structure of private owned farms enabled the development of tourism activities there. The accommodation possibilities and gastronomy directly on the farm were first of all used by foreign guests from Germany, Austria, or Netherlands, who knew such holiday facilities from their countries as a nice family oriented offer. In the Nineties also Czech people find this kind of spending holidays very interesting and this branch of tourism began to develop more rapidly.

Today there are more than 500 agrotourism farms which are mainly offering accommodation together with some sport activities. The most popular offer is nowadays hippotourism. It is because the horseback riding or the ownership of a horse is very usual as a status symbol for well doing entrepreneurs and their families in the Czech Republic.

The South Bohemian Region is very popular for its tourism sights and there are also very well developed agrotourism farms in its offer, too. The Region of South Bohemia is mainly agrarian and is facing common problems of rural regions such as structural unemployment in villages, migration of young population into cities, or limitation of public services. Therefore it is very important to use the possibility of development support from the EU in the period 2007-2013.

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METHODS

In the frame of a research project granted by the Czech Ministry of Agriculture (Project No. 11408/2007 – 14110) the main objective deals with the question how will be the programme EAFRD and its Axis III used in the South Bohemian Region. The analyses for this research work were carried out in the time period of May 2007 – September 2007 and they will show which activities will be preferred by the farmers, which amount of money will the farmers like to use from the programme in the budget period 2007 – 2013, and which support would they like to get from the regional authorities like the Regional Agrarian Chamber with its advisors.

In the case of traditional local goods and diversified activities like handicrafts we asked for help 47 museums in the South Bohemian Region. This was a questionnaire-based inquiry. The rate of return of questionnaires was 38 per cent.

The second analyse was based on inquiry among 340 farmers in the region, in which they could summarize their experiences with the previous support programmes and with the diversified activities at present, inform us about their future plans according to the diversification, and we also asked about the needy help with the projecting work and the implementation of projects. The rate of return of questionnaires was 34 per cent.

The statistical evaluation of the data collected in both waves of inquiry was a basis for the synthesis results of the project.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the Czech Republic the EAFRD implementation based on the Rural Development Plan for the period 2007 – 2013 contents also the Diversification of agricultural activities in its Axis III. The table No. 1 shows the whole amount of support for the period 2007 – 2013 in euro. For the Axis III there is the support in the height of 75 per cent and the prepared amount of financial sources is EUR 635 553 634 in which the share from EAFRD presents the amount of EUR 476 665 226.

TABLE NO. 1: EAFRD BASED PUBLIC FINANCES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN 2007-2013

AXIS	Public Finances in EUR		
	Total amount of public finances	Share of support	Support from EAFRD
Axis I	840 522 497	75%	630 391 873
Axis II – objective convergence	1 936 012 557	80%	1 548 810 045
Axis II – objective competitiveness	9 726 295	55%	5349 462
Axis II	1 945 738 851		1 554 159 507
Axis III	635 553 634	75%	476 665 226
Axis IV	175 969 147	80%	140 775 318
Technical help	18 019 241	75%	13 514 430
Total sum	3 615 803 370		2 815 506 354

Source: Czech Ministry of Agriculture, 2007.

The first wave of inquiry showed that the typical activity in South Bohemia – farming – is traditionally connected with production of craftsmen. The traditional range of craft production is mostly represented by carpentry, smithery, glassmaking, stonework, pottery, basket-making, beekeeping and garden-husbandry. Some craft production can be run as own businesses but some of them (like beekeeping or basket-making) are more like a hobby activity. For the preservation of the traditional craftwork is important to arrange frequent and repeated events like fairs, workshops, hobby courses, as the results of the inquiry showed. Not so frequent but very important are parades and carnivals. In South Bohemia are such parades connected with typical local productions – like Fishery Parade and Fair in the town Vodňany or the Trade Fair in Holašovice (UNESCO protected typical village).

The second important activity is finalizing food on farms, and that in bio quality. Typical products of South Bohemia are potatoes, barley, beans, poppy, vegetables, beef, pork, poultry, fish, milk; then finalized products like malt, beer, cheese, honey. From the craft work there are typical glassware, wooden toys, and ceramic ware.

The institutions also mentioned mostly that the renewal of traditional hand craft is the best way of diversification in the future.

After these results we asked 340 enterprises from the agrarian sector, which importance has the diversification for them at present and in the future. We asked them about their experiences with the previous support programmes and with the diversified activities. They should inform us about their future plans according to the diversification, and we also asked about the needy help with the projecting work and the implementation of projects.

From the sum of questionnaires sent to the farmers 118 returned back and the results were very interesting. Only one quarter of the farmers are concerned not only by primary agricultural production but they have experience with diversified activities. It was also really typical that such activities which were supported in the previous planning period are highly developed and the farmers want to support them again. Because of this trend, the mostly mentioned diversified activity was agrotourism (41 per cent of the farmers with diversification). The second popular diversification was running of biogas stations. Although the craft work has such a high potential, only 4 farmers run such a workshop.

The results according to the next planning period are also highly interesting and important. About 30 per cent of farmers are willing to register a project in the Axis III. As we realized from the inquiry there are now prepared 34 projects for this year, but there can be more in the practice because of the return rate of 34 per cent. Therefore the amount of support finances could not be predicated.

The theme of the projects was also a part of the inquiry. The mainly mentioned project theme was agrotourism and tourism with 25 answers, the biogas stations with 5 answers, and the craft work with 3 answers. Craft work seems to have a high development potential but the farmers do not have the knowledge or experience with it and it could be a good motion for the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Chamber to extend the farmers knowledge by courses and training.

We also asked the reasons for negative answers, why do the farmers not want to register a project in this programme. The most frequent answer was that the process of projecting takes a long time (21 answers), the second frequent answer concerned the absence of advisors, which would be needy for project adjustment, and the third common answer was that the projecting process is difficult.

A statistic χ^2 -analysis of the data obtained by the inquiry validated also the dependence of the willingness to register a project in the Axis III and on the practical experience with diversified activities.

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