

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Voluntary Public

Date: 3/7/2013

GAIN Report Number: PL1309

Poland

Post: Warsaw

Extension Service Authorities Tweaked in Pursuit of Efficiency.

Report Categories:

Agricultural Situation

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Report Highlights:

Poland amended the Law on Extension Service changing oversight of the Provincial Extension Service Centers from joint supervision between the Marshal's Office and Provincial Parliament to exclusive dependency from the Marshal's Office. The aim of this change is to improve current management and to increase efficiency of the extension service at the provincial level. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development simplified the process for accreditation as provider of advisory services to farmers.

General Information:

On January 1, 2013, amendments to the Law on Extension Service entered into force with the most significant change occurring with oversight of the Provincial Extension Service Centers (PESC) shifting from joint supervision between the Marshal's Office (governing administration of the province) and Provincial Parliament (Sejmik) to exclusive dependency from the Marshal's Office. The aim of this change is to improve current management and to increase efficiency of the PESC.

The Polish Extension Service (PES) consists of two branches – the National Extension Service Center (NESC) and the Provincial Extension Service Center (PESC). The National Extension Service Center (NESC) is headquartered in Brwinów near Warsaw, and consists of three regional branch offices in Poznan, Krakow, and Radom. The NESC reports to and receives funding directly from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The NESC is responsible for all nation-wide activities related to agricultural extension, training, and farm/market information systems. Provincial Extension Service Centers (PESC) are 16 in number, each reporting to, and receiving funding from the provincial governments and communities. The PESC's coordinate work of the County Extension Service Points (CESP) which is responsible for daily work with farmers. The PESC's organize trainings, provide technical expertise, and through the CESP extension service officers advise farmers directly on their farm. An important function of their job is to assist farmers with completion of paper work necessary to receive direct payments or to apply for programs available through the Rural Development Programs of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Currently, the PES faces difficulties related to proper funding and adequate attention from the central government. Historically the PES strength had been the well organized framework of extension service centers reporting to the central authority and receiving funding directly from the Ministry of Agriculture. In early 1990ties the PES received significant support from the United States within the Extension Service Project funded by the U.S. Government. U.S. Extension Service Officers were assigned to each of the 55 Provincial Extension Service Centers existing during that period for six months to provide training to local staff including development of skills need to build relations with farmers.

In 2009, authorities defining supervisory and funding oversight of the NESC and PESC's were realigned resulting in the weakening of their operational efficiencies. PESC's responsibilities shifted to provincial governments and provincial parliaments. Due to limited budgets these provincial governments preferred to direct resources towards local infrastructural or social programs rather than towards extension service activities. In turn, the provincial and county extension service centers were forced to generate own income, mainly through charges to farmers for services preparing business plans or assisting with applications for the EU agricultural programs. The new structure also exposed extension service operations to the vagrancies of political patronage for resources to implement farm programs. The impact of the new resource environment was perception by farmers of the organization's relinquishment of its independency and objectivity, of near total cessation of cooperation and coordination with Polish Universities, and of termination of programs designed to transfer research into application.

As of January 1, 2013, oversight of PESC's narrowed while funding opportunities were expanded to

include authority to now seek additional funds through grants obtained directly from local governments. Other changes include adjustments to the composition of the Social Advisory Board operating at the PESC and to deadlines for submission of annual reports.

In addition to the amendment of the Extension Service Law, on December 18, 2012 the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development amended the rule on accreditation of providers of advisory services under the measure "Use of advisory services by farmers and forest holders" outlined under the Rural Development Program for the years 2007 - 2013. The amendment simplifies the procedure for receiving accreditation. In order to better control the services rendered by extension service (public and private), the new rule introduces the possibility of exchange of information on the quality of the services providing consultancy between the Centre for Extension Service in Brwinów and the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture. The amended rule allows for withdrawal of accreditation from advisory bodies, which not only affect the legal or economic interests of farmers, but also the financial interests of the European Union.