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**МУЛТИФУНКЦИОНАЛНИТЕ МЕРКИ ПО ПРОГРАМА ЗА РАЗВИТИЕ
НА СЕЛСКИТЕ РАЙОНИ – ЕДНА ДОБРА ОСНОВА
ЗА МУЛТИФУНКЦИОНАЛНО ЗЕМЕДЕЛИЕ
MULTIFUNCTIONAL MEASURES IN THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMME - A GOOD BASIS FOR THE MULTIFUNCTIONAL
AGRICULTURE**

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Abstract

The implementation of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) in Bulgaria has a great influence on the agricultural development in the country. However, it is difficult to find a special measure specifically designed for the multifunctionality. The aim of the paper is examine various measures that make use of the multifunctional agriculture and their impact on improving the economic and social life and protected environment in the rural area in North Eastern Bulgaria. By using interviews conducted with experts and farmers participating in the RDP in the study region, it will be analyzed preferred range of measures used by farmers for the implementation of multifunctional agriculture. The results of the study show that farmers have directed their interest to modernization of agricultural holdings and agri-environmental payments, and also to diversification to non-agricultural activities or just for the development of integrated tourism in rural area.

Key words: rural development programme, multifunctionality, economic and social life, environment

INTRODUCTION

Rural areas in Bulgaria, in the last years, are progressively differentiated and started gradually to lose their specificity in the agricultural sector. There are two sides leading to these differentiations: in one side is supplied agricultural and forestry products by farmers, on the other side are the various demands from the locals and seasonal tourists (Kopeva, 2011). Therefore, the role of the Rural Development Policy (RDP) improves the farming conditions and provide sustainable environment for the future of the rural areas. The goals of the RDP are

related to improving economical and environmental conditions of the agricultural and forestry sectors (National Programme for Rural Development – NRDP 2007-2013). These improvements are important for development of rural areas, diversifications of agricultural and forestry activities and implementation of the multifunctional agriculture. The aim of the paper is examine various dimensions that make use of the multifunctional agriculture and their impact on improving the economic and social life and protected environment in the rural area in North Eastern Bulgaria. The expected results of the study show that farmers have directed their interest to modernization of agricultural holdings, setting up of young farmers and agri-environmental payments, and also to diversification into non-agricultural activities or just for the development of micro-enterprises and integrated tourism in rural area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Rural Development Programme (NPRD 2007-2013) is the main document for the RDP's implementation in Bulgaria. The thematic areas (axes) are aimed to improve competitiveness of agricultural and forestry sector, to protect the natural resources and the environment of rural areas and forestry sector, to improve the quality of life and to diversify the rural economy (Programme Leader). However, only first three axes are corresponded to the three dimensions of sustainability (economics, environmental and social) and focus on the improvement of places in the rural areas (Peneva and Kopeva, 2010). Therefore, they have an important role for improving the agricultural sector and land management, for implementing good farming practices that protect natural resources and the environment of the rural areas and for improving quality of life in the countryside.

Multifunctionality is a new paradigm to prepare modern agriculture for new social and environmental demands. It is stressed that in addition to the production of commodity goods, agriculture produces a range of non-commodity goods and services, affect social and culture systems and contributes to economic growth (Huylensbroeck, et al., 2007). The term "multifunctionality" emerged in 1992 as a response to a wide range of concerns about worldwide changes in agriculture and rural areas. The OECD Declaration of Agricultural Ministers Committee defines multifunctional agriculture as follows: "Beyond its primary function of producing food and fibre, agricultural activities also shape the landscape, provide environmental benefits such as land conservation, the sustainable management of renewable natural resources and the preservation of biodiversity, and contribute to socio-economic viability of many rural areas. Agriculture is multifunctional when it has one or several functions in addition to its primary role of producing food and fibre" (2001). Therefore, the introducing multifunctionality in the agriculture can become an important modification for improving economic and social life in rural Bulgaria. The paper analyze the three dimensions of sustainability - economic, environmental and social and their impact on improving the economic and social life and protected environment in the rural area in North Eastern Bulgaria. By using semi-structural interviews conducted with experts and farmers participating in the study region, it will be analyzed preferred range of dimensions used by farmers for the implementation of multifunctional agriculture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study focus on the three key questions related to economic, environmental and social dimensions. The first question is related to the economic impact on the multifunctional agriculture. The main variables for analyzing the level of implementing multifunctionality are income, market and sold agricultural products. The results show that the agricultural producers, who participate in different development measures under the first axes, increase their income with 55%, the volume of the sold production with 25% and the new markets with 20%. The most successful implemented rural development measures in North Eastern Bulgaria are modernization of agricultural holdings (development measure 121) and setting up of young farmers (development measure 112).

The second question focus on environmental dimension, where agricultural producers participate in the rural development measure 214 for agri-environmental payments. The results show that the farmers, who participate in this measure in the study region, have positive impact on the quality of the soil (85%) and the biodiversity (90%) and less impact on the water and climate.

The last question is related to the social dimension. The main rural development measures concerned on this dimension are diversification into non-agricultural activities (development measure 311), support for the creation and development of micro-enterprises (development measure 312), encouragement of tourism activities (development measure 313), basic services for the economy and rural area (development measure 321) and village renewal and development (322). All above measures were successfully implemented in the study region. Results show that implementation of multifunctional agriculture depend on farmers' education. More educated farmers will lead to preserving the traditions (55%), heritage (25%) and culture (20%) in rural area. There is strong relation among farmers' age and level of education for introducing multifunctionality. More educated and young farmers are ready to implement the new technologies in their agricultural production and to increase the flow of knowledge and information. They often participate in the one or a few rural development measures to increase their own incomes.

The rural measures are important because they encourage alternative activities, expand the market and diversify the products. Creation of the small enterprises in tourism, services and the trade has social impact on locals and create a new opportunity for employments. Other development measures (321 and 322) have strong social effects on development of rural areas. Development measures with economic effects of the farming has important role of increasing farm incomes and agricultural products' markets, while measures with environmental effects preserve soil exploration and biodiversity. Therefore, multifunctional agriculture and rural development policy in study region is closely linked and has a significant role of Bulgarian farming.

CONCLUSIONS

Multifunctional activities in Bulgarian agriculture have great potential for sustainable rural development. It will provide opportunities for more stable rural development by reducing poverty and increasing farm incomes. The analysis

shows that current EU policy has important role of economic, environmental and social life for the farmers and have directed their interest to modernization of agricultural holdings and agri-environmental payments, and also to diversification to non-agricultural activities. These measures were aimed to improve the rural life, business environment and to achieve these with environmental friendly way. Therefore, the implementation of the multifunctional agriculture may stabilise the social and economic life in rural areas and protect the environment in Bulgaria.

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