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THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY POST 2020 - FARMERS` PERCEPTION AND POLICY IMPLICATION

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Abstract

The Common agricultural policy post 2020 is still under consideration and discussion among Member-states, farmers' organizations and other stakeholders. The purpose of the survey is to analyse Bulgarian farmers' perceptions and attitudes towards the CAP and to outline the prospects for national implementation in the 2021-2027 budgetary period. The paper is based on a survey covering 74 Bulgarian farmers from all regions of the country. The study applies the comparative, historical and statistical methods of analysis. The results indicate high expectation for income stabilization and support in bigger farms, while there are some variations and negative trends in smaller holdings. The national priorities for 2014-2020 period are directed in favour of high value-added crops and livestock sector. Bulgaria also implements measures as Redistributive payments, Coupled support and Small farmers' scheme. However, the financial support allocation is not giving the expected results and the structural imbalances remains. The national policies should be revised and the implementation of the CAP post 2020 in Bulgaria should have better targeting and more equal distribution.

Key words**:** *income support, agricultural holdings, agricultural policy*

INTRODUCTION

The Common agricultural policy post 2020 is still under consideration and discussion among Member-states, farmers' organizations and other stakeholders. The CAP post 2020 is redesigned and new priorities related to innovation and green growth are addressed. The financial support under Pillar I and Pillar II is important for farmers and contributes for their income stabilization and business development. Therefore, they are affected directly by the CAP as key stakeholders, and both farmers and institutions should express their opinion on the new options and measures. The flexibly and subsidiarity are in the centre of the new programming period agenda. The better understanding of farmers' attitudes and perceptions toward the CAP framework are important for designing the national strategy and priorities [41].

The aim of the survey is to analyse Bulgarian farmers' perceptions and attitudes towards the CAP and to outline prospect for national implementation in the new budgetary period.

The study is structured as follows: First section presents the materials and methods of the survey. Second, the characteristics of the farmers and agricultural holding are observed. The study focuses on farmers` opinion on 2014-2020 period support and comparison to the expectations and perceptions for the new programming period. In the third section some opportunities for national implementation of the CAP are outlined.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The attitudes and perceptions have long been considered as important determinants of behaviour [4]. According to Beedel and Rehman [5], the research on farmers attitudes and motivations in the past tended to be subjective, and, theoretically, imprecise. However, there are number of studies related to the topic applying Theory of Planned Behaviour [7, 12, 25, 28, 33, 37].

Drews and Van den Bergh [13] have carried out a literature review and registered many explanatory variables for policy support, among which the knowledge of correct information, both with regards to the effectiveness of the policy, and to the topic of the policy. Several of the recent studies examine the climate and environmental aspects of CAP and reveal the importance of trust in political actors who create and enforce the policies [13, 21, 26].

Previous researches have shown that farmers are afraid of increased policy restrictions on production processes [9], or already feel restricted by agricultural policy [24]. Another issue related to the CAP is so called "administrative burden". It is observed that farmers conceive most policies as over-regulation [1, 8, 22]. Therefore, it is important to analyse farmers` expectations and perceptions in order to design the national policy. The direction of the priorities and results could affect Bulgarian agriculture and lead to various outcome and consequences.

The analysis is based on a survey conducted in the period 2018-2019 among 74 agricultural producers. The methodology is adapted to the agricultural sector following the example of [27, 34, 40]. Farmers were asked to rate statements on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree). The importance of agriculture, is ranked from 1 to 3 (1- major occupation, 3- subsidiary occupation).

The survey is based on Regulation (EC) №1059/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 May 2003 [32] on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS). The study covers all NUTS2 regions of Bulgaria. However, it focuses on South Central Planning Region, where over 70% of the interviewed farmers are located. According to the Farm Structure Survey 2016 [30], South Central Region accounts for 30% of the total number of farms and 31% of the workforce in Bulgarian agriculture. Another important feature of the South-Central Planning Region is that it presents all types of crops and animals in Bulgaria. The results of the study include three main directions. The first one is related to the analysis of the characteristics of the farmers. The second is linked to the characteristics of the agricultural holding. The third direction is orientated to the financial support allocation and farmers' perceptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first direction of the analysis is linked to the farmers` characteristics. The majority of the farmers are men (71.63%). The share of women among the farm managers is relatively low and corresponds to the data on a national level. Based on the Farm Structure Survey in 2016, the registered ratio of male to female farmers is 40:60 [31]. The role of women in agriculture and rural areas of Bulgaria, although not the subject of this study, is a key topic and a challenge for the country's regional policy.

The increased potential of women in decision-making as well as overcoming stereotypes are important steps towards more balanced and sustainable regional development [36].

Descriptive statistics on the characteristics of the farmers is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics – farmers‘ characteristics

Indicators	Age	Education	Experience	Level of cooperation
Mean	44.27	2.32	15.58	0.19
Standard Deviation	12.87	0.47	10.91	0.39
Minimum	23.00	2.00	1.00	0.00
Maximum	73.00	3.00	50.00	1.00
Count	74.00	74.00	74.00	74.00

Source: Own survey.

The farmers in the survey are relatively young, with average age of 44 years. The oldest producer is 73 and the youngest one is 23 years old. The age structure in the country is associated with less than 14% of farmers below 40. On the other hand, more than 36% are above 65 years [29, 30]. Bulgaria has better age structure compared to EU-28 average levels [17, 20].

Many retires in the country are engaged in agricultural production, as an additional income to their pensions. In the study however, only two farmers are part of this group.

The educational structure of farmers is another major challenge for the rural development in Bulgaria. The lack of agricultural education and the high proportion of people relying on practical experience are barriers for improvement of agricultural productivity and competitiveness.

Education of the farmers in the survey is predominantly secondary, with none of them with a primary or lower education. In addition, their average agricultural experience is relatively high - over 15 years. It varies within a very wide range of a maximum of 50 and a minimum of 1 year.

On the basis of this data it can be concluded that most of the farmers have started their business activities relatively young. One of the reasons for that can be associated with the agricultural generation renewal. The latter is of crucial importance and is one of the nine objectives of CAP 2021-2027. According to some researchers, generational renewal can have a positive effect on the implementation of innovation [42].

Another characteristic is related to the level of cooperation. The data reveal low level of cooperation activities with other farmers. These results are not surprising and are similar to the trends in the level of social capital in Bulgaria [35]. The majority of the producers do not participate in cooperatives or any other agricultural associations. This characteristic is a significant challenge for Bulgarian agriculture. The lack of well-functioning producercs' organizations is an important issue for farmer's access to markets and their position in the value chain.

Based on all of the above, we can summarize that the producers in the survey are relatively young, with higher education, decent agricultural experience, and low level of cooperation.

The second direction of the study is linked to the characteristics of agricultural holdings. (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics – farms` characteristics

	UAA, ha	Importance of agriculture	Persons working on the holding		
			Family members	Full time	Seasonal
Mean	96.49	1.76	2.64	9.36	22.27
Standard Deviation	117.06	0.76	1.99	51.19	82.21
Minimum	0.10	10.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Maximum	900.00	3.00	10.00	430.00	500.00
Count	69	74	74	74	74

Source: Own survey.

The majority of the farms in the survey is specialized in crop production (59%), which corresponds to the structure of Bulgarian agriculture. On the other hand, over 35% of the farmers have a mixed crop and livestock specialization. The data highlights some trends of diversification in the holdings. The average size of the farms is higher compared to the average in the country [30]. The number of holdings with UAA is 69 of 74 observations.

Agriculture is of significant importance to the families in the survey. For 47% of farmers in agriculture is the only occupation, while 36% of holdings consider it as the main activity. Agriculture is an additional source of income for 13% of producers.

In terms of workforce in the farms, 2-3 family members are involved in the business. There is considerable variation in the full-time employment due to the different types of holdings. There are several companies and sole trades that have a large number of workers, which increases the average number of full-time employees.

The crop specialization in the majority of the interviewed farms and the features of Central South region associated with vegetable and fruit production can explain the observed trends of greater number seasonal workers. Therefore, there is serious variation from a maximum of 500 workers to 0 in the smaller holdings.

Based on the study 97% of the farms are market-oriented, while only 2.7% produce for their own consumption. The farmers who sell their production to markets or proceeding factories are 72%. Only 13.5% are processing their own production (mainly farms in the dairy sector and permanent crops).

The results show low level of vertical and horizontal integration in the value chain. The majority of farms do not add value in their production. The integration and diversification are important for balanced rural development [2].

The third direction of the study is related to the farmers' perceptions. It highlights the impact of the CAP support on holdings activity and individual aspects of farming.

Over 79% of the farmers in the survey receive basic payments per hectare under Pillar I. Results are not surprising due to the predominant crop specialization and greater average size. The data show high level of support and farmers' awareness on the possibilities for financial aid.

Direct payments are crucial for Bulgarian agriculture. However, financial support has been the subject of debate not only among farmers but also among scientific and political circles. The distribution of these payments and their size by sector create imbalances in the regional development [6].

Unlike the direct payments, only 40.5% of the interviewed farmers receive financial support under Pillar II (mainly for modernization and investments in physical assets). The latter can be explained with the higher administrative burden related to the application process. There is a number of procedures and serious paperwork that require expensive consultancy services.

Farmers` opinion on the effect of the CAP support on their activities in the planning period 2014-2020 is presented in Fig. 1.

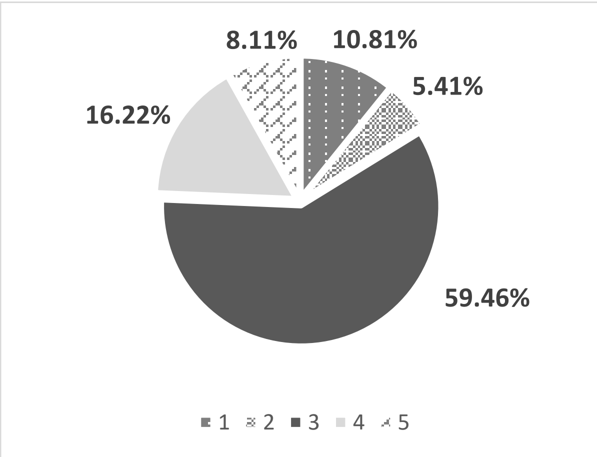

Fig. 1. Impact of the CAP support on the overall activity of agricultural holdings 2014-2020
Source: Own survey.

The data show significant differences between the producers' opinion for the current period and the expectations for the future.

In the 2014-2020 period, the majority of farmers do not see any real change in their activities. In their point of view, the financial support of the CAP has not contributed to a significant improvement in the economic results of the farms. Another interesting finding is that there is no strong negative assessment of the agricultural policy instruments.

Only 15% of interviewed farmers have experienced negative changes in their activities. On the other hand, 24% of the farmers consider that financial support had a positive impact on their activities in planning period 2014-2020.

Comparison with the expectation of farmers for the post 2020 period is made (Fig. 2).

The expectations for the new programming period are predominately positive. Fig. 2 presents different observations in farmers` opinion. More than 78% of the farmers conceive that the new programming period will have a positive impact on their business, while only 6% think that the effect will be negative.

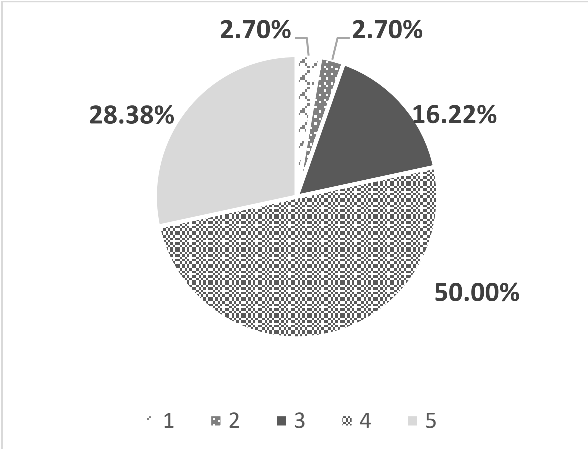

Fig. 2. Perceptions and expectation for the impact of the CAP support on the overall activity of agricultural holdings 2021-2027
Source: Own survey.

Based on the data several basic conclusions might be drawn. Firstly, the farmers do not consider that the CAP support has influenced their activities. However, they expect a positive impact during the new programming period.

Based on farm structure in the survey, larger holdings have more positive perceptions, while smaller farms are with predominantly negative views. It should be emphasized that farmers over 60 years old have negative assessment on the post 2020 CAP.

Larger structures are of the opinion that the CAP support will have greater effect on their business. On the other hand, some studies show that the younger farmers are more positive and innovative [38, 43].

Considering the young average age structure of the farms in the survey, it is not surprising that the perceptions and the expectations are more positive.

Important aspects of the farmers' activities are observed for wider analysis of their behaviour (Table 3 and Table 4). Based on the farmers' opinion, the agricultural policy in 2014-2020 period had a positive impact on their income.

Table 3. Impact of the CAP support 2014-2020 (%)

Indicators	Strongly positive	Positive	No changes	Negative	Strongly negative
Impact on income	13.51	40.54	25.68	10.81	9.46
Impact on investments	13.51	25.68	36.49	13.51	10.81
Impact on employment	10.81	45.95	31.08	6.76	5.41

Source: Own survey.

On the other hand, farmers do not consider that changes in the policy stimulate the investment activities. However, it should be noted that there are not significant negative comments.

In regards to the employment the results are more positive. Nearly 46% of the farmers in the survey increased the number of employees in their holdings. The survey is not directed to a specific group of employees (family workers, full-time or seasonal workers). The results, however correspond with the high number of full-time and seasonal workers in the surveyed holdings.

Table 4. Perceptions and expectation for the impact of the CAP support 2021-2027 (%)

Indicators	Strongly positive	Positive	No changes	Negative	Strongly negative
Impact on income	31.08	48.65	14.86	2.70	2.70
Impact on investments	20.27	47.30	24.32	5.41	2.70
Impact on employment	10.81	45.95	31.08	6.76	5.41

Source: Own survey.

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the CAP support in 2014-2020 period has mainly positive impact on all aspects of farmers` activity except the investments. The findings are in parallel with national tendencies [3].

The lack of investments and innovations, is hindering the development in precision agriculture, and therefore is one of the major challenges for Bulgarian agriculture.

By contrast, farmers expectation for the post 2020 period related to the investment activities are more optimistic. They anticipate to adopt new technologies and to improve their production potential.

In terms of employment, the expectations of farmers for the new programming period vary. The lack of skilled workers and the challenging demographic situation are issues for Bulgarian farmers.

The expectations of the farmers in the survey for the new programming period post 2020 are generally positive. However, these results are surprising. Based on different studies in Bulgaria related to the attitudes in the country [19], Bulgarians are less likely to have positive assessments.

In the present study related to the farmers` perceptions there is not a negativism or overwhelmingly positive evaluations.

The observed trends can be explained with the younger age structure, as well as the higher level of education of the surveyed farmers.

On the other hand, several studies [6] pointed out that the implementation of the CAP in Bulgaria led to transformation and sectorial and structural changes. The allocation of direct payment caused serious imbalances and polarization in Bulgarian agriculture. The financial support under the CAP could not help the sector to overcome major challenges as misbalances among farmers and sectors [23].

Policy implication and implementation of CAP Post 2020

Based on the survey some conclusions can be highlighted and some policy lessons outlined. First, the CAP financial support is very important for Bulgarian farmers. The majority of the surveyed holdings receive direct support under Pillar I. On the other hand, less than 50% of the interviewed farms benefit from Pillar II measures. It can be concluded that the rural development program is associated with more procedures and requirements. These difficulties lead to limited access and greater administrative burden. The requirement to plan the rural development expenditure in order to achieve the identified priorities, although generally considered positive, has been criticized as insufficiently focused on results [18].

The application of the direct payments is easier for the farmers. However, this type of support is area-based. Therefore, it is concentrated in larger structures specialized in extensive crops. The direct payments are also unequally distributed among farmers and sectors and ineffectively targeted. In 2016 in the EU-28, 81% of farmers received 20% of direct payments. About 75% of farmers receive up to € 5,000, while about 16,000 farmers (0.2%) receive funding in excess of € 150,000 [14, 15]. The income support is progressive - farmers with high income receive higher payments, which do not correspond with the basic principles of the CAP [39].

By contrast, farmers do not use the full potential of the main interventions under Pillar II. The Rural Development Program can help to overcome some of the challenges in Bulgarian agriculture. According to Copus et al. [10] rural policy instruments have broader scope and potential that affects socio-economic development and opportunities in rural areas. Some authors consider that the Regulation under Pillar II does not address the challenges in the rural areas of the new Member States [24]. OECD report has highlighted the necessity of progress in various aspects that can increase the contribution of rural areas to national growth [31].

Other main conclusion is related to the investment activities and innovations. Based on the farmers` opinion the CAP support is not orientated to investments and modernization. The results are in parallel with some other surveys [11] which indicate that negligible share of the support in directed to investment support. The new CAP after 2020 could address some of these challenges and the proposal of the European Commission include few major directions: (1) Simplification (2) Modernisation of CAP (3) New budget and new model. The main features of the new model are subsidiarity and the adaptation based on the local conditions and needs [16].

CONCLUSIONS

The new CAP post 2020 has more flexibility and Bulgaria should benefit from the new opportunities and overcome some of the issues and imbalances. The study implies several basic recommendations for the implementation of national policy:

-In order to increase the effectiveness of a policy, it must be more focused.

- Several questions arise in connection with the Commission proposal for a Pillar II budget reduction. The relative burden of RDPs within the budget can be increased by transferring funds from the Pillar I. With regards to priorities like fostering sustainability and promoting the long-term viability, it is not logical to reduce the Pillar II budget. Options for transferring funds between the Pillars are voluntary and object of serious debate. However, if Bulgaria chooses to strengthen the support under Pillar II, the rules and procedures for farmers' participation need to be seriously revised and simplified.

- Other challenges of particular importance to Bulgaria are knowledge transfer, innovation and cooperation, as well as LEADER (CLLD) activities. The latter should be of particular interest, as they are essential for raising the level of social capital at local and national level, and consequently, for accelerating the processes of achieving sustainable rural development. In the new programming period, the CAP opportunities vary considerably. In order to achieve balanced and sustainable development of the Bulgarian agricultural sector, the role of direct payments should be reduced. Secondly, the RDP funding should be effectively directed to each region based on its characteristics. Third, the investments, research and innovation should be prioritized.

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