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Opinions of owners of family farms on the problems of integration of our agriculture into the European Union

1. Introductory remarks

This paper was written on the basis of a questionnaire research project carried out in the current year on a random sample of 360 farms in the Macroregion of Central Poland. (More specific information on the surveyed farms is shown in Table no. 1.)

The research conducted this year is a continuation of the research commenced last year. We were induced to continue the research by the fact that none of the reasons for which we had undertaken it a year earlier disappeared (see Wspólnoty Europejskie nos. 7-8/97 and no. 9/97). On the contrary, there arose new arguments for carrying it out. Among them there are such as: the stiffening of the stand taken by representatives of the EU authorities on the deadlines and rules of the accession process following - as it seems - not only from the planned changes in the rules of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) but also from the more and more openly expressed fears of the EU farmers (especially in Austria, Germany, Portugal, Spain and Greece); the impact of current political determinants (e.g. the election campaign in Germany), which is not inconsequential for the state of public opinion in our country.

Euroscepticism is more and more conspicuous not only among farmers but also among their "political representatives"; it is also expressed by the head of the Committee for European Integration.

Table 1. Characteristics of the examined sample (in the years 1997 and 1998)

Years	Size of farms			Information about owners						
				age			education			
	up to 5 ha	5.1-10 ha	above 10 ha	up to 30	31-50	51 and more	primary school	vocational school	secondary school	higher
1997										
in absolute terms	84	106	130	32	230	58	59	124	118	20
share in %	26.2	33.1	40.7	10	71.9	18.1	18.1	38.8	36.9	6.2
1998										
in absolute terms	102	103	155	43	245	72	64	148	125	23
share in %	28.3	29.6	43.1	11.9	67.8	20.3	17.8	41.1	34.7	6.4
Changes in legal basis (property rights)	+2.2	-4.5	+2.4	+1.9	-4.1	+2.2	-0.3	+2.3	-2.2	+0.2

As it was before, the basic objective of the research is to specify more closely the different aspects of Polish farmers' attitude to integration with the EU. Our interest was focused on the following issues:

1) Degree of our respondents' familiarity with the integration problems both in general and in sectoral terms concerning the goals, rules, institutions and instruments of the Common Agricultural Policy.
2) Opinions on integration of Polish agriculture into EU agriculture, and thus: degree to which our membership of the EU is accepted by farmers, standpoints to these issues in their local communities, fears and reservations, and on the other hand, the related hopes and expectations. In this context, we also examined Polish farmers' standpoint to the freedom of purchasing land in Poland by foreigners.
3) Respondents' attitudes to integration into the EU and degree to which their farms are prepared for the expected changes in the conditions of farming.

2. Familiarity with the integration problems

Analysing this issue we encountered problems similar to those faced last year. Firstly, it is difficult to formulate precisely and unequivocally the criterion by means of which it might be possible to evaluate the attitude of the examined sample to integration. It is necessary to underline that the obtained replies inform not so much about farmers' real knowledge of integration as about their current emotional attitudes to these issues and about their own evaluation of their conversance with these problems. Secondly, trying to identify the attitudes of the farmers covered by the questionnaire we used a set of questions probing their familiarity with integration issues both in a broader and narrower aspects. The former was aimed at identifying their general familiarity with these problems and the latter at their knowledge of the rules and requirements of the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU. To our surprise, knowledge of integration was declared by over 69% of the respondents, which constitutes an increment of over 18% in positive replies in comparison with the previous year.

Interestingly enough, as shown by Table no. 2, the biggest increment in knowledge of integration was recorded in the group of farmers aged 50 and over (by almost 24 percentage points) and among persons with secondary-school education (an increment by over 17 percentage points). The figures quoted above weaken the conclusions drawn by us last year about strong correlation with respondents' age and education.

For it turns out that contrary to the previous year, young age and higher education were not the essential factors determining this knowledge. On the basis of the figures given in Table no. 2 it is possible to draw another conclusion, namely that younger and more educated people are more critical in evaluating their knowledge of integration.

Thus it is difficult to formulate a more general evaluation of the level of familiarity with the integration problems. Certain premises for this evaluation follow from the analysis of the sources from which farmers derive knowledge of it. It was confirmed that the basic and in fact the only source of this knowledge comprises the mass media (television, radio and to a smaller extent the press). The farmers state again this year that the media do not provide them with enough information. This opinion is expressed by a vast majority of the respondents. Direct forms of popularisation of these problems in the rural community is rare. Against this background it is not surprising that their knowledge of the CAP of the EU is also very limited and superficial. Even respondents boasting higher education state that they in fact know very little of the EU CAP.

Table 2. Knowledge of integration problems declared by respondents and their age and education (1997 and 1998)

Specification	Age			Education			
	up to 30	31-50	over 50	primary	vocational	secondary	higher
Positive replies in absolute terms							
1997	20	120	24	18	62	72	18
1998	28	175	47	17	72	98	21
In % in relation to the size of the group							
1997	62.5	52.2	41.4	30	50	61	90
1998	65.1	49.0	65.3	26.6	57.9	78.4	91.3
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	+2.6	-3.2	+23.9	-3.3	+7.9	+17.4	+1.3

The opinion which our respondents expressed last year on the reasons for this state of things remains topical. Almost all of them state that the mass media cannot substitute for the active form of popularisation of knowledge of integration, that is to say courses, training sessions, direct meetings with representatives of scientific institutions and centres.

3. Opinions on integration

The data included in Tables nos. 3 and 4 point out unequivocally that - as it follows from our earlier information - although the declared level of familiarity with the integration problems rose, the level of acceptance of Poland's membership of the EU went down. Let us remind that a year ago 60% of our respondents were for Poland's membership of the EU whereas in the current year the acceptance level fell to 45.8% (or by 14.2 percentage points). The obtained results prompt the following results:

- contrary to the situation last year, not all of those interested in integration are integration supporters,
- the difference between those who declare their knowledge of integration problems and those that accept the idea of integration amounts to as much as 23.2%.

This conforms with the general trend of rising Euroscepticism in the Polish society recorded in the public opinion polls. More detailed data on that issue are given in Tables nos. 3 and 4.

Table 3. Acceptance of membership and size of farms (1997, 1998)

Specification	Size		
	up to 5 ha.	5.1-10 ha.	above 10 ha.
Positive replies in absolute terms			
1997	60	42	68
1998	65	36	64
In % in relation to the size of the group			
1997	71.4	39.6	52.3
1998	63.7	34.9	41.3
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	-7.7	-4.7	-11.0

The biggest decline in acceptance was recorded among owners of farms above 10 hectares (by 11 percentage points) and - to our surprise - among respondents under 30 years of age and with vocational education. A slight increase in support for the integration idea was recorded only among respondents with higher education. Thus there arises a question of how to interpret the reasons for the occurrence of this phenomenon.

It seems that it was influenced among others by:

- the ossification of the attitude of the EU authorities to the requirements which Polish agriculture is to meet,
- the cases of Polish agricultural products being blocked from access to the EU market as vividly exemplified by the much talked and written about embargo on import of milk,
- negative signals from the interested EU circles (agricultural organisations and farmers themselves),
- manifestation of claims by German compatriot associations, etc.

There is confirmation of and even a rising support for the standpoint expressed last year that stricter controls over purchases of land by foreigners for agricultural purposes are necessary not only at present but also in the so-called transition period after Poland's accession to the EU.

Our respondents did not change their opinion that Poland's accession to the EU should gain society's acceptance expressed in a national referendum, revealing in this way the lack of trust in the politicians.

Table 4. Farm owners' acceptance of membership and their age and education (1997, 1998)

Specification	Age			Education			
	up to 30	31-50	above 50	primary	vocational	secondary	higher
Positive replies in absolute terms							
1997	18	108	30	16	56	72	12
1998	19	98	34	13	51	70	14
In % in relation to the size of the group							
1997	56.2	46.9	51.7	27.6	46.5	61.0	60.0
1998	44.1	40.0	47.3	20.3	34.2	56.1	61.1
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	-12.1	-6.9	-4.4	-7.3	-12.3	-4.9	+1.1

It seems that a drop in the acceptance of accession to the EU follows from the realisation by the farmers that both the gaining of access to financial aid, access to new technologies and new more efficient institutional solutions and the possibilities of expansion of the sales market are more restricted than they seemed to be earlier. On the other hand, the difficulties in preparing their farms for the requirements of the EU agricultural market and ensuring competitiveness of Polish agriculture were realised.

4. Preparation of farms for the requirements of the EU agricultural market

The decreasing but still relatively high level of acceptance of Poland's membership of the EU is still in contrast with the respondents' awareness that their farms are unprepared for the EU requirements. This is shown by the data contained in Tables nos. 5 and 6.

Only 9.7% of the farms (an increase of 0.3 percentage point) are - in the opinions of their owners - prepared for acting under conditions created by the EU agricultural market. Taking into account farm owners' age and education it should be underlined that there is a 27% increase in the conviction of respondents with higher education that their farms meet the integration requirements. Furthermore it should also be noted that this same conviction is expressed by a greater percentage of farmers aged 31-50 (an increment by 6.8 percentage points). An increase in pessimism regarding this issue was recorded in the remaining age and education groups.

Table 5. Declared preparation for membership in the European Union and number of farms (1997, 1998)

Specification	Size of the farm		
	up to 5 ha.	5.1-10 ha.	above 10 ha.
Number of persons considering their farm prepared for membership of the EE			
1997	2	4	24
1998	3	5	27
In % in relation to the size of the group			
1997	2.4	3.8	18.5
1998	2.9	4.8	17.4
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	+0.5	+1.0	-1.1

Table 6. Respondents' declared preparedness for membership of the EU and their age and education (1997, 1998)

Specification	Age			Education			
	up to 30	31-50	above 50	primary	vocational	secondary	higher
Number of persons considering their farm prepared for membership of the EU							
1997	8	18	4	2	6	10	12
1998	12	15	8	3	5	7	20
In % in relation to the size of the group							
1997	2.5	7.8	6.9	3.4	4.8	8.5	60.0
1998	18.8	14.6	5.2	4.7	-3.8	5.6	87.0
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	-6.2	+6.8	-1.7	1.3	-1.0	-2.9	+27.0

5. Future of the farm

The recorded high degree of their farms' unpreparedness for the integration requirements declared by our respondents induced us to answer the question of whether and to what degree the surveyed farm owners intend to attempt to adjust to the integration requirements.

The data on that topic are provided by the information in Tables nos. 7, 8 and 9.

Table 7. Reasons why respondents do not plan adjustment actions to requirements of the EU and size of the farm (1997, 1998)

Specification	Size of the farm		
	up to 5 ha.	5.1-10 ha.	above 10 ha.
Lack of familiarity with requirements			
1997	38	70	74
1998	47	82	105
In % in relation to the size of the group			
1997	42.3	66.0	56.9
1998	46.0	79.6	67.7
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	+3.7	+13.6	+10.8
Lack of financial resources			
1997	70	74	74
1998	4	89	105
In % in relation to the size of the group			
1997	83.3	69.8	56.9
1998	72.5	86.4	67.7
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	-10.8	+16.6	+10.8
Good state of the farm			
1997	0	6	16
1998	0	11	23
In % in relation to the size of the group			
1997	0	5.7	12.3
1998	0	10.7	14.8
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	-	+5.0	+2.5

From Table 7 it follows that over 47% of the respondents (or 4 % more than last year) do not intend to undertake any adjustment actions. The main reasons for such an attitude are:

- lack of familiarity (according to the respondents) with the integration requirements, which is declared by owners of farms of all the size groups,
- lack of financial resources, which still constitutes the main reason for the respondents' passive attitude,
- a good state of their farm which is declared by only 9.4% of our respondents, which is an improvement compared with last year's findings when this reason was pointed out by 6.8%.

Additionally, our respondents pointed also to some other reasons such as:

- advanced age,
- lack of a successor,
- job outside the farm.

Let us thus reiterate the question asked last year - if no adjustments are planned to the new agricultural conditions what alternative does the farm face? The data in Tales 8 and 9 permit answering these questions.

Table 8. Plans concerning farms in the context of integration into the EU and size of farms (1997, 1998)

Specification	Size of the farm		
	up to 5 ha.	5.1-10 ha.	above 10 ha.
Sale and transference			
1997	54	40	48
1998	64	47	63
In % in relation to the size of the group			
1997	61.5	37.8	36.9
1998	62.7	45.6	40.6
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	+1.2	+7.8	+3.7
Changes in production structure and specialisation			
1997	16	26	24
1998	14	27	31
In % in relation to the size of the group			
1997	19.0	24.5	18.5
1998	13.7	26.2	20.0
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	-5.3	+1.7	+1.5
Modernisation and enlargement			
1997	16	32	62
1998	14	35	69
In % in relation to the size of the group			
1997	19.0	30.2	47.7
1998	13.7	33.9	44.5
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	+5.3	+3.7	-3.2
Upgrading of qualifications			
1997	8	16	36
1998	10	18	34
In % in relation to the size of the group			
1997	9.5	15.1	27.7
1998	9.8	17.5	21.9
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	+0.3	+2.4	-5.8

Table 9. Plans concerning farms in the context of integration into the EU and respondents' age and education (1997, 1998)

Specification	Age			Education			
	up to 30	31-50	above 50	primary	vocational	secondary	higher
Sale and transference							
1997	2	90	44	44	60	42	4
1998	6	93	66	57	64	39	5
In % in relation to the size of the group							
1997	6.2	35.1	47.9	75.8	48.4	35.6	20
1998	13.9	37.9	91.7	89.0	43.2	31.2	21.7
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	+7.7	-1.2	+15.8	+13.2	-5.2	-4.4	+1.7
Changes in production structure and specialisation							
1997	8	56	6	6	22	36	4
1998	17	70	5	7	37	42	11
In % in relation to the size of the group							
1997	25.0	24.3	10.3	10.3	17.7	30.5	20.0
1998	39.5	28.6	7.4	10.9	25.0	33.6	47.8
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	+14.5	+4.3	-2.9	+0.6	+7.3	+3.1	+27.8
Modernisation and enlargement							
1997	10	92	12	14	58	42	4
1998	17	121	15	18	72	57	6
In % in relation to the size of the group							
1997	31.2	40.0	20.6	24.2	46.8	35.6	20.0
1998	39.5	49.4	20.8	28.1	46.6	45.6	26.1
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	+8.3	+9.4	+0.2	+3.9	-0.2	+10	+6.1
Upgrading of qualifications							
1997	12	56	6	14	40	24	2
1998	15	167	5	18	85	81	3
In % in relation to the size of the group							
1997	33.3	23.5	10.3	24.2	32.2	20.3	10.0
1998	34.8	68.1	6.9	28.1	57.4	64.8	13.0
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	+1.5	+44.6	-3.4	+3.9	+25.4	+44.5	+3

It should be underlined that in the current year there is an increase in the percentage of farmers ready to sell or hand over their farms (conspicuous especially in the group of farmers owning 5-10 hectares and above 50 years of age and with primary school education). This proves that an ever-increasing percentage of our respondents are aware of the difficulties in meeting the integration requirements.

The active forms of adjustment include:

- changes in the structure of production and specialisation,
- modernisation and increase in the size,
- upgrading of qualifications.

What attracts attention is the ever-rising interest in the above adjustment forms. In fact all the active respondents, who account for a majority of the surveyed (about 65% of total sample) declare their willingness to apply these forms of adjustment, i.e. they intend to change the production structure, specialise, modernise and enlarge their farms, and raise their qualifications.

The fact that apart from a few exceptions, increased activity in this respect was recorded in all the size, age and education groups gives rise to optimism. Such forms of adjustment actions as organisation of agricultural processing, establishment of companies, etc. were pointed out sporadically.

It is still possible to uphold the opinion expressed earlier that farmers do not treat the broadly understood modernisation of farms, qualification upgrading, search for alternatives to traditional agricultural production as actions adjusting their farms to the requirement of the common market although they result in this. The key to solving this discrepancy is the unfamiliarity with the integration realities underlined many a times in this paper. Their ignorance in this respect forces farmers to play by the ear and their experience, which as it follows from our research is conducive to the disclosure of attitudes of uncertainty and even resignation.

As it was last year, relatively few respondents (about 47%) answered the question concerning types of assistance serving to modernise their farms (Table no 10.)

Table 10. Type of expected assistance and respondents' age and education (1997, 1998)

Type of assistance	Age			Education			
	up to 30	31-50	above 50	primary	vocational	secondary	higher
Financial							
1997	12	84	10	12	56	28	10
1998	16	152	22	31	75	68	16
In % in relation to the size of the group							
1997	37.5	36.5	17.2	20.7	45.2	23.7	50.0
1998	37.2	62.0	30.5	48.4	50.7	54.4	69.6
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	+03	+25.5	+13.3	+27.7	+5.5	+30.7	+16.9
Advisory and training							
1997	10	35	6	4	26	14	7
1998	13	26	8	5	25	11	6
In % in relation to the size of the group							
1997	31.2	15.2	10.3	6.9	21.0	11.9	35.0
1998	30.2	10.6	11.1	7.8	16.9	8.8	26.1
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	-1	-4.6	+0.8	+0.9	-4.1	-3.1	-8.9
Organisational							
1997	0	15	0	2	4	2	7
1998	3	17	0	1	7	6	6
In % in relation to the size of the group							
1997	0	6.5		3.4	3.2	1.7	35.0
1998	6.9	6.9	-	1.6	4.7	4.8	26.1
Percentage change in relation to the previous year	+6.9	+0.4	-	-1.8	+1.5	+3.1	-8.9

As it was last year, financial aid is the most expected form of assistance. It should be stressed here that a dynamic increase in the number expecting it was recorded. For instance there was a 30.7% increase in the number of farmers expecting this aid in the secondary-education group. The figures characterising expectation of financial assistance contrast with the data on willingness to use education and organisation assistance.

In this case - with a few exceptions - we recorded a marked fall in interest in these forms of assistance, particularly strong among respondents with higher education. This gives rise to concern especially in the context of the policy which lays special stress on these forms of farm modernisation which are discriminated among our respondents.

6. Final conclusions

The comparison of the data gathered during the researches conducted in 1997 and 1998 allow formulating the following conclusions:

1. Polish farmers' acceptance of the idea of integration with the European Union has been falling;
2. The observation of the general and insufficient knowledge of the rules and institutions of the integrated Europe and especially knowledge of the functioning of the integration mechanisms in the area of agriculture and agricultural market is still confirmed;
3. Interest in access to active forms of increasing knowledge of these problems is growing;
4. The survey reveals the farmers' deepening pessimism about their ability to stand up to the competition on the part of the EU producers and to farm profitably as well as their rising scepticism about obtaining real aid from the EU;
5. The fact that the percentage of farmers intending to undertake adjustment actions gives rise to optimism;
6. It should be underlined that on the one hand farmers manifest their scepticism about the possibility of getting sufficient assistance of the financial character but on the other the percentage of those expecting this assistance is growing;
7. It is noticeable that apart from financial aid the surveyed are at present less interested in other forms of assistance.
8. An important observation (especially from the viewpoint of social policy) is that a sizeable group of the respondents have pessimistic evaluations of the possibilities of adapting their farms and they are inclined to look for jobs outside the farm or look to from the government for assistance of a social character foreseeing their further degradation.