

## Continuing vocational training of farmers: the case of young farmers in the Greek district of Imathia

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**Abstract:** This paper aims at identifying the views of young farmers of Imathia Prefecture for continuing education and explore their expectations of future programs, in order to exploit the design of new educational programs. The survey involved 14 young farmers of the county. Research under the qualitative approach, used the semi-structured interview as a tool for data collection. Research findings showed that young farmers understand the benefits and importance of continuing education although is difficult to define precisely. As for future projects they wish to include more practical to approach issues of new crops and farming techniques, but also issues about promotional products such as marketing. Although they learn mainly through non-formal learning, they consider that the most appropriate way of learning is the organized educational programs with greater specificity. They want to participate in the design of programs that concern them and are ready to accept different teaching methods such as problem solving and travel a short distance to participate in education.

**Keywords:** young farmers, continuing education, opinions, expectations, trainings farmers.

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### INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector still plays an important role in the economy of Europe and Greece, and employs 13% of the total workforce of the country (2009). The economic crisis and the new conditions seem to push people to look for opportunities to return to the countryside. The challenge for the Greek farmers is great and they in order for them to respond and survive the intense competition they must have the necessary qualifications. The agricultural education, if aligned with the needs of the farmers, will be able to lead the Greek farmer on top of the EU and to upgrade the Greek economy.

The statistics show that only 20% of the European farmers have some kind of education in rural issues while Greece is among the countries with the highest rates of farmers without any type of agricultural education. The majority of farmers have experience in the agricultural sector through workshops on farm and the main source of learning is the parents and older farmers. This informal learning, although it has a major contribution to the development of the agricultural sector to date, is providing dubious information which may not provide a boost to the agricultural sector as the new data and the rapid changes occurring globally require systematic training of the rural resources. Therefore, the need for reliable and modern education of Greek farmers is visible and necessary for the sustainability of the agricultural sector.

Research is localized to young farmers of the district of Imathia. The research questions are:

- Opinions of farmers for their profession
- Views of farmers for the provided agricultural educational programs

### Theoretical part

Education and training play an important role in the globalized economy, both for individuals, and for communities and businesses. Education and training improve the willingness and ability to create successful changes [1]. The modern world changes at all levels and there is intense competition and flexibility in labor relations. Consequently, continuing education is a means to achieve the desired growth and adaptation to any changes.

The continuing and lifelong learning encompasses all the activities with a purpose, whether it is formal education or non-formal. Its main objective is to improve knowledge and skills. Continuing education can take place either within or outside of formal education, while investing in people and knowledge, promoting the acquisition of basic skills and giving opportunities for more flexible forms of learning. The purpose of lifelong learning is to be provided to people of all ages equally and to create opportunities to high quality learning and a variety of learning experiences.

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The expansion of lifelong learning is mainly driven by the strengthening of the "knowledge society" as a result of globalization of the competition. The constant technological changes and the prevalence of part-time led people to learn throughout their lives in order to meet the needs of today and ensure a job. Learning the required knowledge and skills could be promoted by the formal education system for those who have already passed this stage of education, while changes in people's lifestyles and other factors led to the development and adoption of lifelong learning as a versatile way of learning in accordance with the requirements of the globalized market.

Within this context with the many changes in the technological level, nutritional needs and intense competition in the primary sector, active farmers must adapt to become competitive and efficient. The viability of the agricultural sector depends on its ability to adapt to new conditions, to win the competition and markets. Lifelong education and training of farmers will help to create professional culture develop the professionalism of farmers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Research tools*

In order to cover all the topics covered by the research questions, semi-structured interview was chosen as the most appropriate type of interview. The semi-structured interview is characterized by pre-questions that constitute the context in which the debate ranges but has some flexibility as to the number of queries and adapting the content of the questions depending on the interviewee[2]. According to Smith [3], a semi-structured interview is mainly used when a detailed picture of the beliefs, attitudes and opinions of the individual for a specific topic is required.

The interview questions (derived from the study of literature and related research) attempt to answer fully and accurately the research questions. Questions were pre-structured and the same wording was given to all participants. Some answers were open, increasing the validity of the research. In some questions, in which the respondent should be helped to recall some information from memory or to include as many choices as possible, closed questions were chosen with the option for the farmers to add their own opinion.

### *Sample*

The sample of the survey was based on the qualitative sampling as reported by Mantzoukas[4]: the appropriateness and adequacy. The sample selected should be suitable for the investigation and sufficient in providing information. With this kind of process, people who really care about their education were chosen. The researchers performed 14 interviews.

## **FINDINGS**

### *Views of the farmers regarding their profession*

In an effort to explore the views of farmers for their profession, we analyzed the reason why someone

chose to become a farmer, the satisfaction of his profession (in economic terms, as to the quality of life it offers and the reciprocity) the prospects of the profession and the prospect of certification of agricultural profession.

The majority of new farmers in the survey said they chose to become farmers because farming was family business and they decided to pursue it. Five said they chose to be farmers because they like the rural occupation. Therefore, the decision for them to become farmers is a conscious choice, sometimes mandatory and sometimes not.

However, there divided opinions as to the satisfaction of the agricultural profession. 7 out of 14 people felt satisfaction of their profession. The other seven said they are dissatisfied with the profession. There seems to be better opinion in terms of quality of life offered by the profession, with 7 people being satisfied with the quality of life, 6 to indicate quite satisfied and only one farmer stating that the job did not offer good quality of life. Instead 8 farmers say they are not satisfied by the money they earn and another 3 answered they are neither satisfied not unsatisfied, it seems that the rural occupation, although offering relatively good quality of life, is not sufficiently profitable.

Equally divided are the opinions of farmers about the growth prospects of the agricultural profession. Half said the situation will become worse while the other half are more positive that the profession will be better in the next 10 years. Several of the farmers noted the urgent need for the state to support the agricultural profession and consider it necessary to change basic elements in order for the profession to be developed. be able to meet the challenges of the era.

The view of the farmers for their work completed by investigating their perceptions about the prospect of certification of their profession. As to the manner and process by which it could be made, the prevailing view is that the applicant farmer could acquire professional competence through courses or seminars. It seems that farmers seek and are ready to accept the certification of their profession that will allow the separation of professional farmers with those who simply deal with the rural area.

### *Views of the farmers regarding the provided programs*

In an effort to explore the views of farmers for their educational programs, factors that make up a training program were analyzed and presented. Such factors are: the purpose of the programs, the timing and structure of the programs, the content and the educators.

12 out of 14 farmers believe that the main purpose of educational programs should be the acquisition of knowledge and awareness of agricultural issues. Three of the respondents were more specific and they believe that the purpose of the programs should be the change

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in the behavior of farmers with a regards for them to be transformed from simple producers to businessmen.

Although farmers recognize the importance of educational programs, only 5 to 14, consider that they fulfill the needs of young farmers. The majority of the interviewed farmers believe that programs should be more specific and longer. Therefore, the question arises for the duration and structure of programs in order for them to be more appropriate and useful for farmers. 8 to 14 farmers believe that the programs should last 20-30 days. These views differ from those of Chinese peasants [5] who proposed a program which lasts less than 19 days. As of the distribution of theory and practice in these programs, most farmers in this survey (8 to 14), suggest programs with more practice ranging from 60-80%.

Interesting are the opinions of farmers about the format of the programs. Half propose that trainings should be continuous especially during the winter, due to the reduced activity in the field and the other half propose courses that are periodically or in cycles and will take place throughout the year in accordance with the relative activities in the field.

As to the choice of the location of the education, most of them said that there should be certified structures that have the appropriate means, to be in the worst case in the limits of the county or in the best case close to home and to be within farms in order to practice the new knowledge. This view coincides perfectly with that of Chinese farmers [5], who choose the farm as the location of their education.

Equally important factor for making programs are the instructors. 12 of 14 farmers prefer to be taught mainly by agriculturists experience gained in the field, while about half prefer agriculturalists that combine their knowledge with the educational experience and ability, communication skills and transmissibility. A significant percentage of farmers, 5 at 14, thought that farmers with great experience could be an asset to these programs and work with the agriculturists.

As to the content of the education the most important topics were the 'new alternative crops', the 'Common Agricultural Policy', 'marketing' and 'lubricated-nourishing plant / animal consumption'.

Under the same light, that of improving the effectiveness of training programs, young farmers were asked what could help in this area. Their responses are as follows: 12 people chose "more practical", 9 people chose 'emphasis on improving the skills of farmers' 9 people chose 'methods of problem solving ', 8 people chose " focus on new technological developments "and 2 people chose "methods of non-formal education". "

## CONCLUSIONS

Young farmers realize the important role they hold and seem to have consciously chosen to continue the

family profession. This conclusion is consistent with that of Papavasiliou [6] for young farmers in the Cyclades Prefecture. Despite their love for rural areas, farmers do not seem to receive the corresponding benefits in terms of economics, although things are better in terms of quality of life. In light of this interest is the view of the prospects for farmers and the development of the agricultural profession as everyone believe that the support of farmers by the state is a necessary condition of the development of the profession.

The success of this objective is ensured by vesting the agricultural profession and can be achieved by the certification of farmers after attending seminars and training or evaluating the proven experience in the rural areas. Training may, therefore, be the "weapon" in the hands of farmers to cope with the difficulties they encounter.

The outline of the views and the understanding of the desires of young farmers could be a tool to be used by organizations, which are already responsible for designing and implementing educational programs for farmers. This combined with the positive attitude of farmers towards learning and their positive view of rural training confirmed in other studies [6], suggests that farmers are willing to accept training which covers their needs and has visible benefits to the improvement of their profession and daily life.

The active participation in educational programs and learning in combination with the use of experience generously offered by older farmers will be able to meet the demands of a difficult era in the country and the society giving hope to the new generation of the country and creating an efficient pool of human resources in the agricultural field.

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