

CONDITIONS AND ASSESSMENT OF ADEQUACY OF SUPPORTING AGRICULTURE IN POLISH CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS¹

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Abstract. Agricultural activities are an indispensable element of landscape development. They play a particularly important role in areas valuable in terms of nature, including mountainous areas. The Carpathian village and agricultural holdings demonstrate a high level of economic viability and a high economic activity, however, support is required for agricultural activities performed in difficult natural conditions. Due to the fact that inhabitants of the Polish Carpathian Mountains are very attached to their land, place of living as well as tradition and culture of the region, recessive processes pertaining to the durability of village and agriculture are slower than in other parts of Poland. However, the absence of firm aid activities protecting these areas may soon lead to the rapid acceleration of recessive phenomena. EU's economic policy applied to rural areas and agriculture will materially impact the speed and directions of the processes, including addressing problem areas and additional solutions applied domestically. The purpose of the study was to assess and propose modifications of the system of support to agriculture in mountainous areas, including, in particular in the area of the Polish Carpathian Mountains. Solutions proposed in the summary should be broadly discussed which would allow their implementation as part of the new period of programming the CAP.

Key words: agriculture, rural areas, mountains, the Polish Carpathian Mountains, agricultural policy

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODIC REMARKS

Poland is a country where structural changes in agriculture are considerably delayed compared to the majority of the Western European countries where agriculture usually functions in more favorable economic conditions and frequently also in more favorable natural conditions. Transformations in the Western European agriculture of mountain areas are also better known in the European literature which results from, among other things, greater interest in such agriculture among competitive entities of agriculture, science or agricultural policy than in Poland. Hence, it is worthwhile to pay attention to a specific nature of current structural transformations within the area of the Polish Carpathian Mountains, region whose development was materially affected by natural disadvantages and economic conditions. The specific nature and autonomy of the Carpathian Mountains (*vis-à-vis* other regions of the country) mostly stems from the land form that exacerbates living and working conditions (especially in agriculture) and increasing the costs of development and maintenance of economic infrastructure to a material degree. The above are also affected by the significant distinction of historic transformations occurring over centuries as well as cultural autonomy being the product of ethnic composition of the mountainous population, its translocations and mutual permeation which caused a different development of social behaviors and tangible culture [Musiał 2008].

The study attempts at filling in a gap in the description of the transformations occurring in rural areas of the Carpathian Mountains. It also strives to assess a current system of state intervention (also, at present, the Community intervention) in this area. Drawbacks of the current support system as part of the Rural Development Program 2007–2013 were pointed out. Comments were also made on accumulating problems with land management in the mountains and the need of structural transformations which are an opportunity for preserving the agricultural use of land, keeping up animal production.

CONDITIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CARPATHIAN VILLAGES

Territorial and population transformations which occurred in agricultural economy after World War II limited mountain area in Poland to a considerable degree, divided the Polish Carpathian Mountains into two distinct parts: one mainly populated by Ruthenians (in particular, that populated by Lemkos) and the other, highlanders', part mostly populated by Poles. Tragic consequences of the war (and the so-called Cold War felt here for a few years) along with the policy of the so-called collective responsibility for extensive military operations resulted in displacing Ruthenians to western and northern parts of Poland which caused the population to thin down drastically in the sub-region [Dolata, Jurga 1997]. In these areas depopulated peasants' farms were replaced with state ownership of land and collectivized large-area agricultural production. The part of the Carpathian Mountains which did not suffer from ethnic problems, retained its previous fragmented agrarian structure, including, in particular, the structure of land occupation. Overcoming postwar difficulties with supplies of agricultural production resources (as well as consumer goods), in the 1960s Carpathian village slowly but methodically reconstructed itself

and peasants built their economic position and gained their previously disparaged civic dignity. New opportunities unknown before emerged in the area of employment outside agriculture, education of children, opening to broad social contacts. Immigration of local population abroad, especially to the USA, played a great, perhaps even, critical role affecting the standard of living, economic transformations and even cultural changes. Even though immigration from poor Galician villages had a long history here, the next wave of labor-related migration (back then illegal) which occurred between 1960s and 1990s, helped many local families, entire villages and sub-regions, gain considerable wealth. The US to zloty exchange rate which was very beneficial back then, significantly contributed to such state of affairs. It was possible, for example, to build a large house for many generations on an own piece of land in the country at the expense of an annual income earned by a craftsman working in the USA [Guzik, Leśnicki 1995]. Even though the fertility rate for families of highlanders was above-average compared to the all-Polish fertility rate, many families continued the tradition of immigration and left their homes, or their younger generations built new homes after returning to Poland with funds earned overseas. Tourist, including agritourist services, flourished here thanks to excellent lodging facilities in an area, which is attractive in terms of landscape, combined with the tradition of renting accommodation dating back to the second half of the 19th century. The past period of socialism or *communism* was the source of many disappointments or bad experiences for this region just like for all the other regions of Poland. Especially in the sub-regions where the share of state-owned and co-operative holdings was high, doctrinal *inclinations* towards the collectivization of agriculture were visible which returned and were expressed in different ways. The system durability of a prevailing local peasant economy which was particularly important to the local population, was challenged while state-owned farms and its agricultural produce were preferred in legal and market (pricing) terms. After the 1970s which marked a good period for rural areas and agriculture during which the Carpathian village replenished its holdings with production resources and buildings thanks to excellent price relations, the 1980s followed proving to be a very difficult period. After the martial law and the decomposition of the impaired market of production, a huge decline was observed in plant and animal production rates along with the deterioration of price relations and general atmosphere of economic life in the country [Otoliński 2007].

Socially and culturally conservative and more hermetic population of the mesoregion of the Polish Carpathian Mountains which was *infatuated with the overseas*, supported political transformations in the 1990s with great commitment and hope. The introduction of the market economy in the early years of the transformation which was much more liberal than in rich EU member states, caused high expectations and hopes for a better future for the country, local population, rural areas, agriculture and holdings. Fast-paced market reforms and the privatization of agricultural and food companies were a cause of great disappointment to farmers because fragmented, multi-directional, technologically backward holdings were unable to measure up to competition, especially in terms of costs and prices of agricultural products. Deregulation of the economy and reforms undertaken by different links of agribusiness resulted in the quick deconstruction of old economic structures, including processing, companies rendering services to agriculture and trade. Previous food purchasing and distribution channels were broken up. Such transformations could have been beneficial to farmers running small farms who were poorly organized,

usually uneducated and lost in new economic and political realities, but ultimately it was not the case. Hence, local farmers who had rather negative experiences with market transformations accompanied by local work establishments going bankrupt and mass unemployment, were pessimistic in their evaluation of the effects of economic reforms. They embraced further transformations resulting from Poland's integration with the European Union with great reserve and distance. Announcements regarding the support of agriculture, including the introduction of special compensation payments for mountainous areas, putting agricultural markets in order, higher prices of agricultural products and food, inspired hope for the improvement of living conditions and economic situation of farmers. The need to restore special mountainous legislation was stressed which was in force for five years during the period immediately preceding Poland's accession to the EU.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT OF AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN MOUNTAIN AREAS

The support of mountain areas is justified with environmental factors, including features of the landscape which cause technological problems, and a harsh climate. They directly translate into lower productivity of local agrosystems, lower crops, limited choice of plants that can be cultivated in terms of their kinds and varieties. They can also be justified with a political doctrine adopted by states (and economic blocks) according to which there is a need or even a duty to equalize opportunities in the area of the creation of incomes from agriculture and to prevent economic degradation of mountain areas and areas with other natural and economic handicaps. As a result of the negotiations of Poland's membership in the European Union, a division of problem areas in Poland into three major and two minor categories was adopted. Legal regulations and categorization applied only to rural areas which, given the situation of mountain areas, produces considerable negative results for agricultural holdings located in gminas forming small towns. According to a definition provided for in the 2004–2006 RADP, a mountain area is such agricultural production space where agricultural production is handicapped mostly owing to disadvantageous climate conditions and land form (due to the location above the sea level and mountain slope). Mountain areas include gminas rather than villages or individual holdings where more than 50% of arable land is situated above 500 m above the sea level. As a result of such regulations, in total approximately 190,000 ha of arable land were classified as mountain areas accounting for 2.12% of a total area of disadvantaged areas (DA) and approximately 1.1% of arable land in Poland. A bit different delimitation criteria were applied to areas characterized by specific, natural handicaps of agricultural production, that is, actual upland areas. The classification unit adopted was gminas and geodesic precincts (villages) of upland regions which did not satisfy the criterion of the location above 500 m above sea level. Such delimitation resulted in the classification of gminas and villages located at 350–500 m above seal level of a total area of 790.000 ha, that is, 4.4% of Poland's arable land.

Considering the criteria of delimitation and valorization of mountain areas in Poland against the backdrop of corresponding mountain areas in other European Union member states, it should be noted that they are definitely advantageous when it comes to the adopted limits and the qualified territory being eligible for support. The evaluation of the

level of the support of Polish mountain holdings even though critically rated especially by farmers, is quite difficult to verify. This is due to the fact that the support granted to agriculture in EU's mountain areas is, despite many regulations aimed at its standardization, highly differentiated. It is usually based on historical systems of domestic support which are frequently regionally differentiated, multi-variant or (i) individualized for individual holdings [Klepacka 2006]. Such differences in the amounts of compensation payments paid to farmers in individual states, are based on many criteria formed in the past which are currently difficult to justify. Another issue is rigid amounts of the compensation payments and their non-revalorization which, given changes in the general level and relations of prices in agriculture, reduces their incentive effect. The above serves as grounds for and even necessitates reforms in the area of the system of support to agriculture and villages in mountain areas of Europe [Musiał 2004].

Assessing the Polish system of support to agriculture in mountain areas which has been valid since Poland's accession to the European Union, it should be noted that with regard to direct area payments, a solution consisting in connecting the amount of payments to keeping grass-eating animals and their minimum stocking density is a legitimate and pro-environmental instrument introduced as part of the 2007–2013 RADP. Apart from a uniform area payment for arable land eligible for support, since 2006 also supplementary payments for an area of basic crops or, alternatively, a supplementary payment for an area of plants for forage cultivated on permanent grassland, has also been granted. That system is more adequate in case of mountain areas as the payments contribute to supporting ecological functions of these areas and may contribute to decreasing the setting aside of grasslands, letting the grasslands fallow and grassland reforestation. As part of applicable requirements for the support with direct payments, no upper limits for stock density were set which, in mountain areas, seems unjustified as it allows to introduce undesired breeding of animals in large herds and a high rate of stock density per forage area. Apart from posing a threat to natural environment, excessive concentration of animals is also dangerous to the sub-region's economy. The breeding of large herds of animals on areas characterized by dense rural development, especially in tourist and recreational locations with high concentration of agritourist farms, may effectively change their *image* and lead to the regression of important non-agricultural functions of the countryside (e.g. the recreational and leisure function). Hence, the goal of ensuring better protection of mountain areas with regard to the part being used for agricultural purposes; the problem of determining admissible intensity of animal production on mountain disadvantaged areas should be re-addressed. Limits to the animal stock density should be included among the so-called basic requirements to be met by farmers eligible for the support of mountain holdings (as well as other holdings in other disadvantaged areas). It is also purposeful to include the condition of a ban on letting the farmland fallow for the whole or part of the land as part of the so-called basic requirements. Holdings which set aside or let at least a part of land fallow should not receive area compensation payments and mountain compensation payments as well as other forms of support owing to their ecological and production inadequacy. Such solution will contribute to the improvement of the effectiveness of pro-environmental measures and will also help preserve animal production in such area.

In the most part of the Carpathian Mountains there is a problem of small fields abandoned by farmers the use of which is unprofitable or needless owing to limiting the number

of stock. In the first place plots located on the peripheries *vis-à-vis* holdings and less productive plots are eliminated from agricultural activities. Very often arable plots of land are eliminated from agricultural production due to their extreme fragmentation (many divisions among family members) which frequently prevents access thereto, the use of technological resources and area compensation payments. Land which is no longer used for arable purposes is subject to natural succession which results in its automatic transformation into wasteland that in turn is a major problem for landscape protection, including, the protection of an agricultural and forest border. Holding land registered as arable land in mountain areas frequently entails no costs on the part of its owner. To a prevailing part of arable land tax exemptions are applicable for the poorest arable land. Hence, current solutions do not motivate landowners to sell or lease such land to entities that need it (they need more forage for enlarged herds of animals or are engaged in common sheep or cattle grazing).

A separate issue that requires changing is the support to mountain and other holdings located in disadvantaged areas, but outside administrative rural areas. Due to omitting agricultural parts of small towns being sizeable rural areas, however, formally situated within the administrative borders of towns, they are not eligible for the mountain support system which in turn causes the regression of agriculture. Similarly as in the case of the delimitation of non-mountain disadvantaged areas, the territorial criterion should not be based on the whole area of gmina but rather on a geodesic precinct, i.e. a much smaller formal territorial and geodesic unit which covers a part of the town or actually a village that was annexed to the territory of the town in the course of its establishment or growth. Agricultural holdings located within the area of towns have currently lost eligibility for EU aid, including in the area of investment and development of infrastructure. These problems occurred at the stage of implementing the 2004–2006 RADP, however, they were not taken into consideration and solved in the projection of the support to holdings in 2007–2013.

Looking for solutions aimed at improving the system of support to holdings and agriculture in the mountains, it is worthwhile to consider, as part of the CAP, resignation from mountain payments criticized in the EU for years which, due to the absence of the revalorization of their amounts, have lost their significant, and replace such payments with agri-environmental payments adjusted to mountains. These payments could, to a much greater degree, fulfill ecological goals which are very important here and, at the same time, in a strictly addressed manner support economically these holdings and producers who are actually involved in environment protection programs, including the protection of biodiversity and mountain landscape. The list of special measures aimed at supporting mountains can be very extensive. For example, within the area of the Bieszczady Mountains and Beskid Niski range, damage caused by wolves has become a production-related problems. It frequently happens that seeking an easy prey numerous population of wolves attacks grazing flocks of sheep both in daytime and during night when they are in enclosure (in a sheep pen). Thus, the desired support should, according to farmers, consist in reimbursing them for the construction of a portable and wolf-proof fence of the sheep pen and serve as an additional financial compensation for watching the flocks at night as well as co-financing the construction of shelters for the supervision of the flocks and installations scaring predators away.

Following solutions applied in Austria, Switzerland or Germany, it seems purposeful to introduce agricultural and economic zoning of the mountains. Applying uniform rates of

support to holdings engaged in the production, for example, on the Gubałówka Mountain (approximately 900 m above the sea level) and in the Czarny Dunajec gmina (the upland area with insignificant topographic impediments) does not seem to be sufficiently justified in conceptual terms. It would be best to refer zoning to a specific holding just like in Austria and Germany, however, owing to paramount costs of the valorization of a few dozen thousand mountain holdings, it seems purposeful to base zoning on geodesic precincts or a village. Agricultural production space valorization rates (WWRPP) developed many years ago would be helpful in the process and could be at present supplemented to include Chief Sanitary Inspectorate [GIS] data pertaining to the land form. The development of a 3–4 degree mountain zoning scale would improve the objectivism of the assessment of management conditions and the appropriate compensation for the related losses as well as preventing land abandonment in areas which are least favorable in terms of agriculture.

Owing to the fact that the problem of the reduction in the raising of grass-eating stock in the mountains intensified, including nearly a collapse of sheep breeding, it is purposeful to consider the legitimacy of supporting preservative (extensive) stock breeding, in combination with seasonal grazing and cultural common grazing. Two entities should be the beneficiary of such support, that is, a farmer (*a hill farmer* or *gazda*) who owns animals entrusted for grazing for which he prepared forage (mostly hay) for winter on his farm as well as a head shepherd (*baca*) who grazes animals on a seasonal basis. The aid should be directed at sustaining the use of permanent green land involving mowing (or grazing). The head shepherd organizing common grazing (mostly in wintertime) and the shepherd grazing animals, obtaining and processing milk would be granted aid for the area of green land covered by grazing or, alternatively, per single animal being grazed. At present such support is received by holdings engaged in breeding small herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. Milk processing and production of regional products is a separate problem of the institutionalization of the support and the system currently in use seems to be bureaucratized.

Excessively fragmented holdings of the prevailing part of the sub-region results in the fact that land concentration – not necessarily with regard to the ownership but rather with regard to its use – now seems to be a major obstacle preventing economic plausibility and rationality of technological agricultural production. Owing to particularly strong attachment of highlanders to land passed from generation to generation, especially with respect to its ownership, at present there are hardly any opportunities for its concentration through sale. The only sensible way for the improvement of the agrarian structure (when it comes to the use of land) is the popularization of lease and lending arable land. Given the conditions specified above, one may conclude that two management zones should be distinguished in rural areas of the Carpathian Mountains, namely, the zone of dense rural development and accompanying residential plots of land, homestead adjacent plots of land and plots of land for social purposes as well as an agricultural zone located remotely from the village. In the first zone, land should be sold to family members and neighbors without any legal obstacles or it should be divided or used for residential building, business and developing small agricultural homestead adjacent plots of land. In the other zone, the agricultural one, limited division of land is justified, e.g. for one successor only, and any and all undertakings aimed at formal and actual land fragmentation should be limited. In the separate zone of agricultural production in the mountains environment protection regimes should be reinforced, that is, a ban on setting land aside, as well as on

letting the land fallow and abandoning it (reforestation). Such land should be concentrated mostly by a lessee, e.g. by several farmers within one village (or neighboring villages) who will guarantee its rational and adequate agricultural use in terms the environment and good agricultural practices suitable for mountain conditions [Musiał 2010].

After Poland's accession to the EU, farmers from mountain areas became considerably interested in regulating land ownership. They started to appreciate the need of a clear ownership (or occupation) status which is related to the necessity of performing various formal and legal activities by farmers related to following EU support-related procedures, including obtaining mountain area compensation payments, investment assistance etc. Research confirms that in the mountain areas the regulation of ownership is the most important for land management [Wojewodziec 2010]. The above especially applies to mountain and upland sub-regions where the processes of land divisions and agrarian fragmentation were particularly intensive. After the EU integration the interest in managing fallow land and land set aside rose which, owing to area compensation payments, became new and quite an easy form of obtaining additional financial resources. The interest in leasing arable land also rose; however, this phenomenon may be explained not directly with the increase of that form of obtaining land by purchasers but with enforcing formal lease contracts by a payment agency – holder of aid funds. At present even cursory knowledge of the essence of the Common Agricultural Policy makes farmers aware of the importance of the size of the holding and its significant impact on its management, level of production and economic performance.

The consequences of agriculture's economic integration with the European Union with regard to the impact of the Common Agricultural Policy and structural policy on mountain areas are diverse and refer both to agriculture itself and the development of rural areas. Even in agricultural holdings which limit their agricultural activities there is still considerable potential which can be used, among other things, in non-agricultural business activities. Very often the limitation or discontinuation of agricultural activities results in wasting a substantial portion of the assets. Only a part of the resources is used in alternative manners [Wojewodziec 2011].

Research conducted to-date fails to confirm that the scope and strength of impact of the agricultural policy in place are important enough to visibly and clearly affect structural transformations in the Carpathian agriculture. The integration was followed by relative stabilization and predictability of the agricultural policy which previously wobbled. The system of supporting holdings with area compensation payments and structural support seems to create new perspectives for holdings with growth potential and considerable confusion among small farms which are going bankrupt or cease their production. The reason for such phenomenon is land owners' willingness to receive area and mountain subsidies even if the land was abandoned (set aside) or leased without a contractual basis. Such payments are still very important to usually poor households and are at the same time quite easy to obtain in procedural terms.

Institutional measures taken as part of the Common Agricultural Policy should be mostly addressed to supplementary households² and agricultural holdings with growth

² A supplementary holding is a holding whose income from agricultural activities serves to supplement income of a family that earns its living otherwise.

potential. It should be expected that the economic fall of the majority of agricultural holdings in fragmented areas is an irreversible phenomenon. Processes in progress should not be delayed but care should be taken to ensure an efficient transfer of resources released to entities where they will find a better use [Wojewodzic 2010].

Research shows that over the next twenty years new tendencies will emerge in the mountains with regard to land use. The share of meadows and pastures will be increased which would be justified in all terms. One could also expect that the land area of forests (and its share in landscape) will increase. One of key priorities behind the transformations expected in the coming years in the structure of land use, is a decrease in the number (and share) of land set aside and let fallow even though the process may be difficult and less effective in sub-regions which are fragmented when it comes to population.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Agricultural production in mountain areas is a necessary condition that must be met in order to improve the economy of rural areas and preserve valuable landscape and cultural values of these areas. The Carpathian countryside is characterized by great demographic vitality and a high level of business activities involving various forms of non-agricultural entrepreneurship and activities related to holdings as well as alternating labor migration. Great attachment of the inhabitants of the Polish Carpathian Mountains to land, place of living, culture and tradition of the region helps slow down recessive processes pertaining to the durability of the countryside and agriculture in a relative manner compared to other parts of Poland. However, the absence of firm measures protecting these areas may in the nearest future lead to the rapid acceleration of recessive phenomena. EU's new economic policy to be implemented as of 2014 in respect of rural areas and agriculture in nature-related problem areas is bound to materially impact the speed and direction of the current processes. Also a domestic policy, especially decisions in the area of fiscal and social insurance policy, will be crucial here. The most important measures which should be taken to preserve agricultural activities in the mountain areas are:

- making the amount of the support to land owners conditional upon the location of the holding (precinct stratification),
- determining limits for animal stock density for holdings applying for support with supplementary area compensation payments,
- transforming compensation payments for disadvantaged areas into agri-environment payments,
- making tax preferences applicable to arable land in the mountains conditional upon their good agricultural culture,
- introducing support to entities engaged in seasonal animal grazing,
- putting spatial management in order by, among other things, establishing two management zones, that is, the zone of dense village development and accompanying residential plots of land, homestead adjacent plots of land and plots of land for social purposes and the typical agricultural zone being remote from the village where only agricultural or forest (proprietary) activities could be undertaken.

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UWARUNKOWANIA I OCENA ADEKWATNOŚCI WSPIERANIA ROLNICTWA W KARPATACH POLSKICH

Streszczenie. Działalność rolnicza stanowi niezbędny element kształtowania krajobrazu. Szczególnie istotną rolę należy jej przypisać na obszarach cennych przyrodniczo, w tym na obszarach górskich. Wieś karpacka i gospodarstwa rolne wykazują tu dużą żywotność ekonomiczną oraz wysoką aktywność gospodarczą, potrzebują jednak wsparcia dla prowadzonej, w trudnych warunkach przyrodniczych, działalności rolniczej. Duże przywiązanie mieszkańców Karpat Polskich do ziemi, miejsca zamieszkania, a także tradycji i kultury regionu sprawia, że procesy recesywne odnoszące się do trwałości wsi i rolnictwa przebiegają tu wolniej, aniżeli w innych częściach kraju. Jednakże brak zdecydowanych działań o charakterze pomocowym chroniących te obszary może w najbliższym czasie doprowadzić do gwałtownego przyspieszenia zjawisk recesywnych. Istotny wpływ na tempo i kierunek zachodzących procesów będzie miała polityka gospodarcza UE, stosowana wobec obszarów wiejskich i rolnictwa, w tym adresowania do obszarów problemowych oraz dodatkowe rozwiązania polityki krajowej. Celem opracowania było dokonanie oceny oraz zaproponowanie modyfikacji w systemie wsparcia rolnictwa na obszarach górskich, w tym szczególnie na obszarze Karpat Polskich. Proponowane w podsumowaniu rozwiązania powinny zostać podane szerokiej dyskusji, która umożliwiłaby ich wdrożenie w ramach nowego okresu programowania WPR.

Słowa kluczowe: rolnictwo, obszary wiejskie, góry, Karpaty Polskie, polityka rolna

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