Agriculture in Poland

Polish agriculture seems to be closer to environmental solutions than any other country in Europe. Almost 50 years of communist efforts to collectivize this sector of economy did not bring any spectacular success. Most of the farmland is still in private hands (92.2%, only 7.8% is owned by the government), farms are small, multi-functional and land management is extensive.

38% of the Polish population live in rural areas, 19% of which work directly in agriculture. Furthermore 43% of all unemployed people live in the rural areas (15% of the Polish people are unemployed). At the same time the educational level is low, only 1.3% of the habitants living there have a university degree.

Polish agriculture is differentiated: you find very well developed (in the modern, western meaning) big farms in the western part of Poland and poor small farms in the East. So it is not easy to find one recipe for the whole country.

Agriculture plays an important role in the Polish economy. However, since the last decade the decreasing share of farming in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is observed (11.8% of GDP in 1988, 6.4% in 1994 and only 3.3% in 2001). Arable lands in Poland account for 59% (18.4 million ha) of the total area of the country with a rate of 0.48 ha of arable land per capita. But the Polish soils are quite poor (mainly III, IV class of fertility).

The last decade brought great economic changes, which touched Polish farmers more than other groups of citizens. Now Polish agriculture is extensive and sustainable in an environmental sense more by the default then by the farmers will. The yield of extensive farming is relatively low due to low usage of pesticides and fertilizers.

Therefore vast areas of the arable farmland could easily be converted into organic agriculture. On the other hand there is a tendency to intensify the agriculture production, linking up with structural changes and an increasing pesticide use.

Pesticide Use

Compared to highly industrialized EU member states the average use of pesticides in agriculture in Poland is very low. But it is different from region to region and mainly depends on the size of the farms.

The list of the pesticide active ingredients authorized in Poland, obtained from the Polish Plant Protection Institute in 2001, includes 385 substances authorized for the use in pesticide
products and 63 pesticide active ingredients which are banned in Poland. Figure 1 shows an overview of the authorization process. In 2002 a new monitoring system, based on the English example, came into force. It is a four-year-cycle of monitoring 10 of the most important Polish crops (potatoes, cereals, legumes, sugar beets, oil plants, fibre plants, corn, vegetables, strawberries and orchards). The new monitoring system showed data very different from the previous ones.

The use of pesticide products on potato plantations was monitored in 2002. Inspectors collected approx. 7,500 questionnaires - every farmer is obliged to record and keep evidence of measures, which gave the base for this analysis. The average use was 3.5 kg/ha (of active ingredient). The research showed also how Poland is divided in terms of pesticide use - the very high amount of pesticide products in the western part of Poland about 6 kg/ha and a very low in the eastern part - about 1.5 kg/ha. The previously collected data (with a different system) had shown much lower use: 0.5-0.6 kg of active ingredient per ha.

However, the average amount of pesticide used is increasing (Figure 2).

**Pesticide issues**

The policy related to the pesticide issues in Poland seems to be going in the right direction. The harmonization process with EU legislation is very advanced. FAO recommendations concerning technical conditions and safety rules during storage and handling of plant protection products are fully implemented, which has resulted in better state and continuously improving of storage and handling. Also a list of 63 banned active substances has been established and all active substances mentioned on the Helcom list are forbidden.

On the other hand, the results of the EU pesticide residue monitoring in 2001 showed that 40% of the samples of fruits, vegetables and cereal contained detectable pesticide residues, in contrast to 14.6% in Poland (2001). From this point of view the EU agriculture and pesticide policy is not the best model for Poland respectively. Poland should avoid the mistakes the European policy made in the past.

In fact the very big pesticide problem still seems to be the old forgotten storage places (obsolete pesticides stocks). The chemicals found there are usually mixed and utilization of such mixture is very difficult, dangerous or permitted. More over many of those places were not well prepared for storing hazardous substances, so the environmental damage is very big - caused by i.e. leaching the pesticides into the ground water. The data on the extent of the problem is inaccessible and variable. In Poland numbers of pesticide stocks diverge widely from the official

The evaluation of pesticides authorized in Poland\(^2\) regarding their human and environmental toxicity showed that:

- 385 pesticides (active ingredients) were authorized for use in pesticide products in December 2001,
- 20 pesticides are classified as Extremely or Highly Hazardous (acute toxicity, WHO) and 54 substances are classified as Very Toxic or Toxic (acute toxicity, EU),
- 32 pesticides are neurotoxic cholinesterase inhibitors (U.S. EPA, WHO),
- 7 pesticides are characterized as endocrine disruptors of high concern (EU),
- 18 pesticides are possible carcinogenic (carcinogenicity category 3, EU) and 4 are possible mutagenic (mutagenicity category 3, EU),
- 5 substances may cause harm to the unborn child, and 10 pesticides present possible risks of harm to the unborn child (EU),
- 121 pesticides are „Dangerous for the Environment“ (EU).


Towards organic agriculture
The EU accession brings many questions for Polish agriculture and rural areas. Very weak Polish agri-policy and reforms of Common Agriculture Policy of European Union do not clearly define the way of how Polish agriculture will develop in the future. It still seems that it would be easier to develop environmentally friendly practices in agriculture, especially in the regions where the farms are extensive.

Organic agriculture could be the solution for the farmers, who could get higher prices for their products and state support for this kind of production, and for the environment, where the natural values would not be broken. But at the same time it is very important to develop rural policies, which would activate a rural society and improve living conditions in these areas. All these changes need political will. In 2001, when the organic agriculture law came into force, we could have been very optimistic, because it created the legal bases for the existence, the development and the support of organic agriculture in Poland. For 2004 the situation with subsidies for organic production is unclear. The close accession date will probably cause much change – governmental payments will be replaced with EU subsidies due to the Rural Development Plan framework. In 2002 0.11% of arable land was under organic cultivation.

Main Targets for NGO Actions
NGOs working on pesticide issues are very few in Poland. The most important actions taken were actions for proper utilization of pesticide wastes and the installation of an obsolete pesticides stocks inventory. As the pesticide use in Poland is not very big compared to the use in other European countries, the introduction of environmentally friendly practices in Poland may be easier than anywhere else.

NGOs should:
⇒ cooperate to strengthen the development of organic farming as well as sustainable solutions in agriculture (i.e. agri-environmental measures or promotion of replacing artificial pesticides with biological ones),
⇒ actively participate in policy debates on agriculture policy on a national and European level,
⇒ demand to be fully included in the consultation process for harmonization with EU laws and policies, especially strategic documents and monitoring of their implementation,
⇒ participate in the monitoring bodies for agriculture and pesticide policy.

National Contacts and Links in Poland

Laws related to plant protection products issues:
Decree of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Economy of 12 March, 1996 concerning detailed principles of granting authorization of plant protection products (PPP) to be placed on the market, amended by the Decree of 5 March.


Decree of the Minister of Agriculture and Food Economy of 20 September, 2001 concerning detailed demands from a training unit (Journal of Laws, No 114, 1222).

Decree of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of 4 October 2001 on technical requirements for sprayers (Journal of Laws, No 121, 1303).

Decree of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of 15 November 2001 on the inspection of sprayers (Journal of Laws, No 137, 1544).


Responsible ministries and authorization bodies:
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Ministry of Environment
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Ministry of Health
ul. Miodowa 15, 00-952 Warszawa
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State Inspection for Environment Protection
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Plant Protection and Seed Service
ul. Wspolna 30, 00-930 Warsaw
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Web page: www.iorin.gov.pl

Institute of Plant Protection
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NGOs working on sustainable agriculture issues:
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