

## THE ROLE OF THE INFORMATION TRANSFER TOWARDS THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS IN ORDER FOR THEM TO ACCESS THE EUROPEAN AND THE NATIONAL FUNDS

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### Abstract

Through the Strategic National Plan 2007-2013 and afterwards through the National Rural Development Programme priorities have been outlined in order to receive funding through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. In this context, the transfer of the information towards the agricultural producers represented an important factor for attracting the European funds between 2008 and 2014. In the same time, Romania also supported the agriculture and the rural development by national funds, the information transfer having a positive impact for accessing these. The paper presents the information needed at an individual, group or community level for sustaining the development with European or national funds, the methods used, the difficulties met, as well as the specific results obtained after this transfer. The paper also analyses the funds attracted at a wider level, emphasizing the results of this approach following some financing measures highly demanded in the rural area. The information for the agricultural producers and for the members of the rural communities is also important during the implementation of the European funded projects, as the non-compliance or the late submission / failure to submit the paperwork in due time can invalidate the funding. The previous experience of attracting the European and the national funds between 2008 and 2014 clearly shows that the information and the transfer methods had an impact over the total accessed value for agriculture and rural development, providing opportunities for growth for the period 2014-2020.

**Key words:** funding, information, European funds

Once integrated in the European Union, Romania follows the principles of the Common Agricultural Policy regarding the agriculture and the rural development.

The National Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020 represents a new step in attracting the European and the national funding to sustain the development of the rural area. The consultative version of the European funding sheets possible to be accessed also in the future and their final approved version represent a new approach needed for the information to be transferred towards the potential beneficiaries.

### MATERIAL AND METHOD

The paper presents the information required by the agricultural producers or by the members of the rural communities, the methods and the means of information transfer, consultancy and training. There are also analyzed the funds attracted by the National Rural Development Programme between 2007 and 2014, as well as the most popular funding measures.

The paper analyzes the role of the information transfer towards the agricultural producers in order for them to attract the European and the national funding

and also the specific methods used to inform, advise and train them, the difficulties met, the results and the impact of this approach, as well as its current status.

There is also highlighted the importance of this information transfer during the projects implementation period and, based on the knowledge gained between 2007 and 2014, there are analyzed the needs of information, advise, consultancy and training in order to implement the National Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

The data shown are extracted from the official reports of the institutions involved in attracting the European and the national funding, from the specific aspects recorded in Iași county, as well as from the activities carried out by the specialists from the Chamber for Agriculture of Iași County.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to access the European and the national funding in the rural area, the agricultural producers and the members of the local communities required information transfer, advise, consultancy and training (Apetroaie C., 2009).

The information required by the potential beneficiaries referred to:

- the main directions in the development of

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the rural area financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development starting from March 2008, after the National Rural Development Programme being approved: increasing the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry, improving the environment and the rural areas, improving the quality of life in rural areas and diversifying the rural economy, LEADER;

- financing measures, categories of eligible beneficiaries, requirements to be met, needed documents, possibilities to write the projects, selection criteria, sessions and deadlines;

- when implementing the projects with European funding there are cases where the business plan needs to be amended during the development of the activities; non-compliance implies losing the funding;

- the National Rural Development Programme 2014-2020: the consultative version of the European funding sheets possible to be accessed: for each funding measure, presenting the information about beneficiaries, eligibility requirements, calculating the economical size of the farm, selection criteria, ways of accessing the funding, implementation criteria;

- direct complementary national payment schemes in the zootechnical area: the legislative basis for determining the implementation method, the specific requirements, the eligibility criteria and the terms of reference for applying these national payment schemes in accordance with the regulations in force;

- the quality requirements for processing and selling the raw milk: specific standards of hygiene and quality for the raw milk, the obligations regarding the delivery of the raw milk to milk collection centers or directly to milk processing units, the possibilities to sell the raw milk directly to the final consumer in accordance with the sanitary-veterinary legislation in force, the conditions required for the dairy farmers and operators, the obligations of the individual producers when selling dairy products;

- the submission of the annual milk quota statements concerning the deliveries and the direct sales made each year: types of beneficiaries (the operators buying milk, as well as the producers holding a milk quota for direct sales), the period for submitting the annual statements corresponding to the quota year, the completion of the statement according to the data from the Farmer's book;

- the submission of the applications for the gas subsidy: deadline, eligibility, requirements, needed documents;

- the sanitary-veterinary actions included in the programme of surveillance, prevention, control and eradication of the animal diseases and of those

diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans, the animal and environmental protection, the identification and registration of the cattle, pigs, sheep, goats and equine: the legislation in force, the tariffs for the sanitary-veterinary actions included in the programme, aimed for the non-professional exploitations, also applicable when the costs are borne by their owners, according to the law;

- the legislation regarding the organization, the administration and the exploitation of the permanent grasslands: methodological norms, contracting authority, obligations, documentation for grasslands concession or rental, location of the buildings serving agricultural activities, management, calculating the optimal number of animals needed per hectare;

- granting the minimis aid for buying milk cooling tanks: beneficiaries (associations of breeders with 1-5 milk cows), eligibility criteria, obligations of the beneficiaries, needed documents, schedule, changing the initial period, amending the documents, database with the processing units for contracting the milk production, offers of the firms distributing milk cooling tanks;

- Groups of Local Action: creation, objectives, functioning, attracting European funds, eligibility criteria (exploitation, professional qualification), selection criteria. There are 6 Groups of Local Action in Iași County that received European funds for rural communities and for individual members.

- the legislative provisions regarding the measures to develop and sustain the family farms and to facilitate the farmers' access to funding: types of microcredit, grant requirements, terms of payment, grace period, interests, guarantees;

- legislative changes regarding the certification of the traditional products: needed documents, certification requirements, procedures of verification and control, production capacity;

- cross compliance, good agricultural and environmental conditions, legal management requirements, minimum requirements for using fertilizers and plant protection products, adaptation to climate change effects;

- mutual funds: legal basis, principles, financial resources, types of risks that can result in loss allowing compensation, eligible losses;

- the creation and the operation of the associative forms, the development of the production by using these structures (MADR, APDRP, 2007 – 2014).

Counseling and consultancy were needed for the agricultural producers and for the members of the rural communities to create business plans, as well as to correctly identify the development

possibilities during the projects implementation period, and the professional training represented a prerequisite in order to access the funding (OJCA Iași, 2008 – 2009).

The methods and means of information, counseling, consultancy and training applied by the specialists from the Chamber for Agriculture of Iași County consisted of: individual and group events, training sessions for the agricultural producers, debates, seminars, conferences, practical demonstrations, visits and knowledge exchanges, fairs (CAJ Iași, 2010 – 2014).

In order to inform the potential beneficiaries about the national and European funding, several institutions involved in attracting this funding (APDRP, APIA) organized road shows, while in Iași county there was a collaboration with the specialists from the Chamber for Agriculture with significant results regarding the accessed funding.

Between 2007 and 2014 in the National Rural Development Programme there were submitted 145733 projects, from which there were selected 92481 projects with a public value of 6863.9 mil. Euro, and the most popular measures were those regarding the renovation and the development of the villages, the modernization of the agricultural holdings, the increase of the added value of the agricultural and forestry products, the setting of the young farmers, the support of the semi-subsistence farms, etc. (MADR, APDRP, 2007 – 2014).

The funds accessed on the most popular measures between 2007 and 2014 were as follows:

- Measure 322 „Village renewal and development, improving the basic services for the rural economy and population, upgrading the rural heritage”: 3225 projects submitted, 830 projects selected, 1,933.7 mil. Euro public value.

- Measure 121 „Modernization of the agricultural holdings”: 8154 projects submitted, 3373 projects selected, 1248.6 mil. Euro public value.

- Measure 123 „Increasing the added value of the agricultural and forestry products”: 1762 projects submitted, 923 projects selected, 908.4 mil. Euro public value.

- Measure 313 „Encouragement of tourism activities”: 3703 projects submitted, 2584 projects selected, 392 mil. euro public value.

- Measure 112 „Setting up of young farmers”: 22494 projects submitted, 13446 projects selected, 339.1 mil. euro public value.

- Measure 141 „Support for semi-subsistence farms”: 88846 projects submitted, 63543 projects selected, 476.5 mil. euro public value (MADR, APDRP, 2007 – 2014).

The difficulties met in the process of accessing European funding can be represented by: amending some requirements from the applicant's guide after the start of the projects submission session, extended periods for evaluating the submitted projects and the payments made after submitting the documentation, amending the payment documents, the local public administration not complying with the standard templates specified in the applicant's guide, the co-financing requirement for some measures and the difficult access of the beneficiaries to credit.

The role of the information transfer towards the agricultural producers and the members of the local communities is outlined by: the need for accurate and timely information, the importance of the individual counseling for each potential beneficiary holding a farm, the amendments made in the process of accessing the national and the European funds (schedule, deadlines, documents, requirements), the support offered to the beneficiaries by counseling and consultancy in all the stages (accessing the funds and implementing the projects).

The specific results of this information transfer are represented by the funds accessed, the investments made, the modernization of the rural communities and the holdings, the creation and the operation of organizational structures composed by agricultural producers, the creation of partnerships between communities, the identification of shared needs and the support offered for their implementation, the development of specific skills, the examples of good practice.

The impact of the information transfer process on the rural area population in general and on the agricultural producers in particular is characterized by the development of the entrepreneurship, the increase of the involvement in creating or developing certain activities, the stimulation of collaborative relationships, the interest shown by requesting information and counseling after the sessions organized by the public consultancy and other institutions involved in the rural area, the initiatives on local or regional level regarding the organization of such sessions.

The information, counseling and consultancy are needed for the agricultural producers and for the members of the rural communities during the projects creation phase, but also during the implementation phase. Failure of the beneficiaries to comply with the agreed requirements such as the deadlines to submit the payment documentation, the lack of reporting to the contractual institution of any changes occurred during the course of the project may result in losing the funding.

There were some difficulties during the analyzed period regarding the reorganization of the public consultancy system in Romania and its decentralization, but the results obtained and the impact of the specific activities show its key role especially in the light of information, counseling, consultancy and training needs in order to implement the National Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020.

## CONCLUSIONS

Attracting the European and national funds by the agricultural producers and the members of the rural communities is an opportunity to develop and modernize the rural area.

The information transfer process, more precisely the informing, counseling, consultancy and training, has a key role in accessing the funding for development.

The experience of the applicants and specialists in accessing the European and national funding, as well as the analyze of the difficulties met, can have positive results in the light of the new funding for the future period 2014-2020.

The specific results of the information transfer are the funds accessed and the impact of this process can long-term stimulate the confidence of the potential beneficiaries.

The specialists from the Chamber for Agriculture of Iași County were involved in informing, counseling, consultancy and training of the population from the rural area.

The National Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 represents a new phase in attracting the European and national funding in order to sustain the development of the rural area.

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