Current social structure of agricultural workers in the Czech Republic

Současná sociální struktura zemědělských pracovníků v České republice

Věra MAJEROVÁ[1], Gabriela PAVLÍKOVÁ[2], Pavlína MAŘÍKOVÁ[2]

[1]Department of Humanities, Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Life Sciences, Prague, Czech Republic
[2]Sociological Laboratory, Department of Humanities, Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Life Sciences, Prague, Czech Republic

Abstract: Although the character of countryside is still changing as a consequence of the historical development, agriculture (farming of the land) always represents one of its essential attributes. The authors of this paper analyze the current structure of agricultural workers, their views, opinions and attitudes toward their work, as well as the perception of agriculture by the public.

Key words: agriculture, rural area, agricultural workers, employment, private enterprise

Abstrakt: Ačkoliv se charakter venkova ještě stále mění v důsledku historického vývoje, zemědělství (obdělávání půdy) vždy představuje jeden z jeho základních atributů. Autoři analyzují současnou strukturu pracovníků v zemědělství, jejich názory, mínění a postoje k práci i vnímání zemědělství veřejností.

Klíčová slova: zemědělství, venkovské oblasti, zemědělští pracovníci, zaměstnanost, soukromé podnikání

Although the character of the countryside is still changing as a consequence of the historical development, agriculture (farming of the land) always presents an important element, which is connected with rural life. The context of its significance is continually changing.

It represents one of the key attributes connected inseparably to it from the ancient times. Industrialisation, which had started in the second half of the 19th century and proceeded in the following century, made labour in agriculture still more efficient. One of the consequences is the decreasing demand of labour and the growing demand for its qualification. Throughout the whole 20th century, the number of agricultural workers decreased. The pronounced decrease of workers in agriculture was recorded in the Czech Republic namely at the beginning of the 90s of the 20th century, when it was influenced by the ongoing social changes, namely by the transformation and restitution processes. Also at present, this trend is further continuing. The prevailing lower level of incomes compared to other sectors and the specifics of work in agriculture leads to the majority of rural population choosing other job opportunities. The process of reduction of the staff in agriculture with the significantly changing requirements on its expertise involves highlighting the problems of the socio-economic development in the countryside.

The development of European rural areas had certain similar features in the past, which continue to the present time. The significant changes were caused by the division of the European space into two competing political and economic blocks after the World War II.

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The economic and social development of Central and Eastern Europe was, first owing to the industrialization and urbanization, characterized by the decline of rural population in all countries (except Moldova) in the course of the second half of the 20th century. This fact reinforced their demographic transition. However, the former Czechoslovakia contrasted with them by a higher scope of the rural areas urbanization (Eberhardt 1993).

The existing concepts of rural development take into account the progress of social structure. They result from the historical background; however, they make provision for the specific features of the individual countries and regions. Nigel Swain emphasizes in the general picture the significance of "three pillars". *"Three pillars of the socialistic countryside: First, agriculture policy supported and agriculture based on integrating large-scale, socialistic (first economy) with small-scale, private (second economy) farming, which achieved the overriding policy goal of agricultural self-sufficiency (near self-sufficiency in the case of Poland). Second, it stimulated non-agricultural production in villages. Third, it facilitated working class commuting through subsidized transport."* (Swain 1996). Other authors are concerned with more general approaches (Jeníček 2010) as well as a partial illustration (Vavreinova and Lüpsik 2007; Svatošová 2008, 2010; Dufek and Minařík 2009; Spěšná et al. 2009). The scope of theoretical attitudes is broad, anyway, there are, as a rule, blended together two aspects in thinking about the next development of rural areas – changes of the social structure of agricultural workers in connection to the changes in the structure of rural population. In this respect, the scope of urbanization plays an important role. Therefore, the contemporary economic crisis opens again the question of agricultural and rural employment and turns attention to the conditions, which can either contribute to its positive development, or sharpen the already existing antagonism. The time distance allows for a more precise evaluation of some phenomena and setting them into the frame of the newly emerging connections.

AIM AND METHODOLOGY

The Sociological Laboratory of the Faculty of Economics and Management CULS Prague paid attention to the empirical research of Czech countryside from different viewpoints during the last ten years. The prevailing part of the data analysed in this contribution comes from the research "The Life Strategy of People in Rural areas", which was realised in the frame of the project Socio-Economic Development of Czech Countryside and Agriculture 1J 016/04-DP2, financed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs CR[1]. The data were collected in the period from November 2005 to Spring 2006. Social structure of the population naturally influences its possibilities of existence and making of living in the rural areas and, vice versa, it influences its development possibilities. Rural population was defined as a set of persons living in rural areas of the CR of the age 18+. The level for defining rural communes was set at less than 2000 permanent inhabitants. The selection of the representative sample was made through the quota method, so that the selected sample had a representative structure compared to the whole population with regard to age categories, education categories and gender. On the level of communes, the structure was observed according to the size categories of rural communes and the representation of all regions of the CR on the NUTS 3 level. With regard to the topic of the research, the demand was that the numbers of agricultural workers were overestimated, that is that their share in the sample was purposefully increased over their common share in the population. The reason of this methodological requirement lays in the fact that the social stratification of the population depends on the possibilities of settlement and nutrition in rural areas. Then, this dependence effects in various ways the local and regional development as a feedback. The intention to stay in the place of residence and to look for a job there or in the surrounding area was taken for life strategies of the economically active inhabitants in the countryside. Therefore, were surveyed their work perspectives, the real and potential social mobility, status, equal opportunities between men and women and other aspects of work and community life in the countryside.

The selection of respondents as well as the data collecting itself was performed by the Empirical Research Centre STEM, which is a specialised sociological research agency. The questionnaires were filled in during the interview of the respondent with the researcher. In total, 2266 interviews were realised.

[1]The outcomes of the research "Life Strategies of People in Rural Areas" included in this article were already presented in the publication of Majerová V. et al. (2006) and in "The Analysis of Sociological Researches Aimed at the Problematic of Agriculture", Sociological Laboratory, November–December 2008. This material was prepared for the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic.

After the following control, 2144 questionnaires were utilised for further processing. According to the qualified estimate, this sample represented the population of 2 187 481 persons (according to the Census data by January 1, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Concise delimitation of rural space

The research of certain social phenomena or of the given social groups is always connected to the delimitation and knowledge of the whole context in which they are functioning. On the European and world level, an extensive literature exists regarding this problematics, the definition of rural space and its typology. The typologies are constructed according to the research or practical purpose for which they are to serve; eventually, they are supplemented according to further criteria.

Lewis Dijkstra and Vicente Ruiz present the following typology:

The OECD regional typology classifies regions as Predominantly Urban (PU), Intermediate (IN) or Predominantly Rural (PR) on the basis of the share of the regional population living in the local rural areas and on the existence of important urban centres where at least 25% of the regional population resides. The extended regional typology reclassifies the regions within the PR and IN categories by considering the commuting time of at least 50% of the regional population to the closest populated centre with more than 50 000 inhabitants. For North America, the threshold for the commuting time is set at 60 minutes, while for Europe it equals to 45 minutes. The result is a typology including five categories: Predominantly Urban (PU), Intermediate Close to a City (INC), Intermediate Remote (INR), Predominantly Rural Close to a City (PRC), and Predominantly Rural Remote (PRR) (Dijkstra and Ruiz 2010: 2).

An alternative methodology of the rural space typology is represented by Dimitris Ballas, Thanasis Kalogeresis and Lois Labrianidis[2].

A certain generalisation, which emerges from the EDORA typologies, is opened on the project results "Dispelling Stylised Fallacies and Turning Diversity into Strength": Agrarian regions are mainly concentrated in an arc stretching around the Eastern and Southern edges of the EU 27; The rest of the European space is a patchwork of the consumption countryside, the diversified (secondary) regions and the diversified (private services) regions. The Agrarian Regions and the Diversified (secondary) Regions tend to be relatively low performers, (Depleting). The Consumption Countryside Regions and the Diversified (private services) group are both high performers, and are likely to continue to "accumulate" in the future[3].

To understand the Czech reality, the definition of the countryside in the Czech Republic is included in this sub-chapter. The definition of rural space and rural communes can be performed based on different viewpoints. Most of the present definitions and approaches issue from the number of inhabitants or the population density per 1 km^2.

In the Czech Republic, the still valid delimitation of rural communes is given by the number of permanent inhabitants of the given commune. As rural communes, there are regarded those of the number of permanent inhabitants up to 2000.

In 2006[4], i.e. in the time of the sociological empirical research the data of which were used for this analysis (in detail described in the following text), the number of inhabitants of the CR was 10 251 079. The total number of communes in the area of the CR was 6248, in that the number of rural communes represented more than 89.68% (in absolute numbers, they represented 5603 communes). The number of inhabitants living in them was 2 692 284, i.e. more than one quarter (26.3%) of the total population.

At present, regarding the statistical data in the CR 2010, the total number has increased by 2, i.e. up to 6250. Also the total number of inhabitants has increased during the relevant 4 years by more than 250 thousand persons, i.e. up to 10 506 813 inhabitants[5]. This total increase resulted, however, in the decrease of the number of rural communes down to 5581[6]. Therefore, the population of Czech countryside

[2]They use the data for the European NUTS3 regions to build a typology for rural areas in Europe, on the basis of their peripherality and rurality. An aggregate approach to building typologies is adopted, under which the well-established statistical techniques of principal components analysis and cluster analysis are employed. Then they highlight the disadvantages of this approach and present an alternative disaggregated approach to the construction of rural areas typology in Europe. Available at http://ideas.repec.org/p/wiw/wiwrsa/ersa03p515.html

[3]EDORA typology (Copus 2009; Copus et al. 2010)

[4]Data by January 1, 2006, Czech Statistical Office, own calculations.

[5]Data by January 1, 2010, Czech Statistical Office, own calculations.

[6]These communes represent 89.3% of all communes and administer almost three quarters of the total area of the state.

amounted to 2 776 345 inhabitants by January 1, 2010, i.e. 26.4% of the total population of the CR.

The problematics of the delimitation of the rural areas is covered in the Czech Republic by several specialists (e.g. Perlín, Maříková[7]) and different institutions (e.g. the Czech Statistical Office – www.czso.cz, the Institute of Regional Development – www.uur.cz). The CSO has elaborated a publication to the topic named "Variants of the Rural Areas Delimitation and Their Reflection in the Statistical Indicators in the Years 2000–2006", which was presented in 2008[8]. A similar topic was also studied by Hudečková and Lošťák (2008).

Main characteristics of workers in agriculture

During the historical development, the term "worker in agriculture" has changed above all in the connection with the ownership of production factors and the size of farm. The Czechoslovak professional terminology used, until the collectivisation in the 50s (20th century), the terms "rustic", "farmhand", "peasant", "landholder" and other. The term "farmer" in the sense of a private peasant was not common. During the collectivisation, these language specifics disappeared and the general term "worker in agriculture" or "member of the Unified Agricultural Cooperative" (UAC) prevailed. All these terms are used in the Czech language not only in the masculine but also in the feminine form.

At present, farmers again form several different groups of persons – it regards the individual farmers (private farmers) and their family members, but also the employees of different types of agricultural companies or the agricultural cooperative members. However, our aim was to find and accost the group of all people making their living in agriculture, so in our research, the representation of agricultural workers in the set of respondents was indicated by the positive answer to the question "Is agriculture, event. forestry or fishery, your main resource of livelihood?" There were given 360 such answers, what represents 16.8% of the persons in the sample. The real share of agricultural workers in the total economically active inhabitants of rural areas was 11.07% in 2001; however, it can be estimated at less than 10% at present.

Nevertheless, the comparison with the statistical data is complicated by several methodological problems. First, it is the definition of the group of agricultural workers – in the statistics; they are registered as the total of the following groups: employees, working members of agricultural co-operatives, entrepreneurs without employees and with employees, and helping family members. Similarly, also the Agrocensus (and in agreement with it also the Structural Statistical Research in Agriculture) includes into the total number of workers in agriculture, regarding physical bodies, the farmer, his/her wife/spouse (husband/spouse) working at the farm, the helping family members without regard to the fact whether they work there regularly or not, and the permanent employees. Regarding legal bodies, there are registered the farm managers, regularly working employees and working owners.

However, that research includes only the "registered units fulfilling the threshold values of the research"[9]. In contradiction to that, our research worked with the subjective self-classification of the respondents according to the above mentioned question regarding the main source of livelihood. Therefore, it could include not only the persons working in agriculture, individual farmers and their family members, but also the persons who are employed or have their own business in other sectors, but agriculture brings them (be it in the form of the own products sale or the income of land lease) a higher financial welfare. Moreover, this group can include also the economically inactive persons (students, pensioners, persons staying at home).

Another problem is whether to compare the results with the total or the recalculated (into full labour units) number of workers, and for which period (as the CSO registers the Structural Statistical Research in Agriculture for the 2-years periods). The last difference between the statistical set and our selected sample is regional – our researches are aimed at the rural communes' inhabitants only.

However, it can be presupposed that the overlapping of the thus defined groups will be sufficient, what will be showed by the following detailed presentation of the selected sample basic characteristics. In the cases when the statistical data are available in the identical structuring, a comparison is made. However, we keep a certain restraint in the results interpretation, as it is impossible to guarantee, for the above mentioned reasons, completely precise results. Nevertheless, it is possible to include the presented empirical research results among the reliable information resources, namely because the methodological limitations are

[7]This problematic is actually covered by Maříková in the chapter Countryside – the delimitation of the basic phenomena In: Majerová V. et al. (2009): 13–34 or Maříková (2007) and Perlín et al. (2010).

[8]The whole version is available at http://www.czso.cz/csu/2008edicniplan.nsf/p/1380-08.

[9]Further see the Metodické vysvětlivky ke Strukturálním výsledkům za zemědělství, CSO.

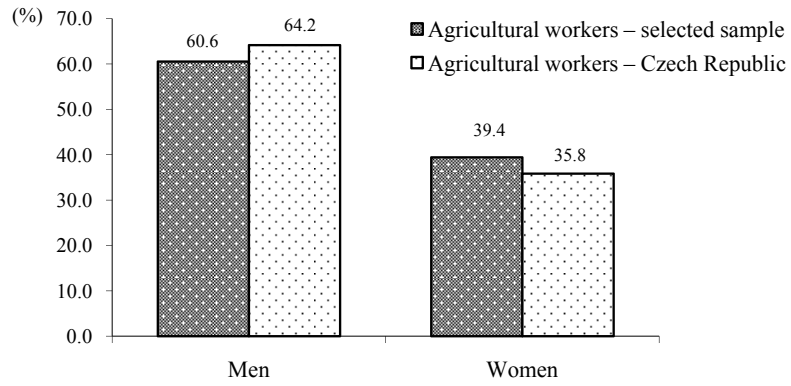

Figure 1. Comparison of the gender structure of workers in agriculture

Source: Research "Life Strategies of People in Rural Areas" and the Structural Results for Agriculture in 2007, CSO

stated and they have been regarded in the maximum measure possible in the data interpretation.

Gender structure

Farming is one of the national economy branches, where men have had the majority in the long term. There were more than 60% of men in our research sample. This fully corresponds with the data on workers in farming referred by the CSO (Czech Statistical Office) and involving the period October 2006 till September 2007. It is stated there that the total number of workers in agriculture in the mentioned period was 191,939, in that 123 131 men and 68 808 women (CSO 2007). The representation of women in the selected sample is 39.4% (Figure 1).

Therefore, from the gender viewpoint, agriculture belongs among the sectors where most work activities are performed by men. A similar rate of men and women can be seen e.g. also in the processing industry. This state issues on one hand from the historical perceiving of certain types of activities as more suitable for men or women (e.g. the mechanised professions are perceived as male and the non-mechanised ones as female ones, the managing positions as male and the subordinate positions as female, the administration activities as female and the jobs like control, supervision, security as male etc.), and on the other hand, also from the fact that even at present, a great part of work in agriculture is physically demanding and therefore unsuitable for women. However, it cannot be concluded that agriculture does not offer equal opportunities. The non-balanced structure can be also caused by a lower interest of women for certain jobs , their physical and health limits for their fulfilling, eventually by a lower offer of the jobs suitable for women.[10]

Dug the last eight years, the total number of workers in agriculture declines, but also the share of men and women changes (even if only slightly). The development of the number of workers in the sector of agriculture according to gender during the period

Table 1. Development of the number of workers in the agrarian sector according to gender

Year	Number of		Share of women (%)
	men	women	
2001	121 000	60 500	33.3
2002	123 300	63 100	33.9
2003	113 100	56 900	33.5
2004	110 800	57 200	34.0
2005	102 500	53 900	34.5
2006*	120 700	61 600	33.8
2007	121 600	55 900	31.5
2008	110 400	51 600	31.9

*From 2006, the source merges the data for agriculture, forestry and fishery

Source: Employment and Unemployment in the CR according to the Selected Research of Labour Force, 2nd Q 2001–2008, CSO 2001–2008

[10]The above mentioned stating are also supported by Spěšná et al. (2008) in the report The Situation in the Agrarian Labour Market (in Czech), where they state, among other, that "among the long-term characteristics of the sector, there belongs also a higher employment of men over women. In the 2nd Q 2008, the share of men in the agricultural labour force was 68.1% (in 2007, the share was 68.5%)".

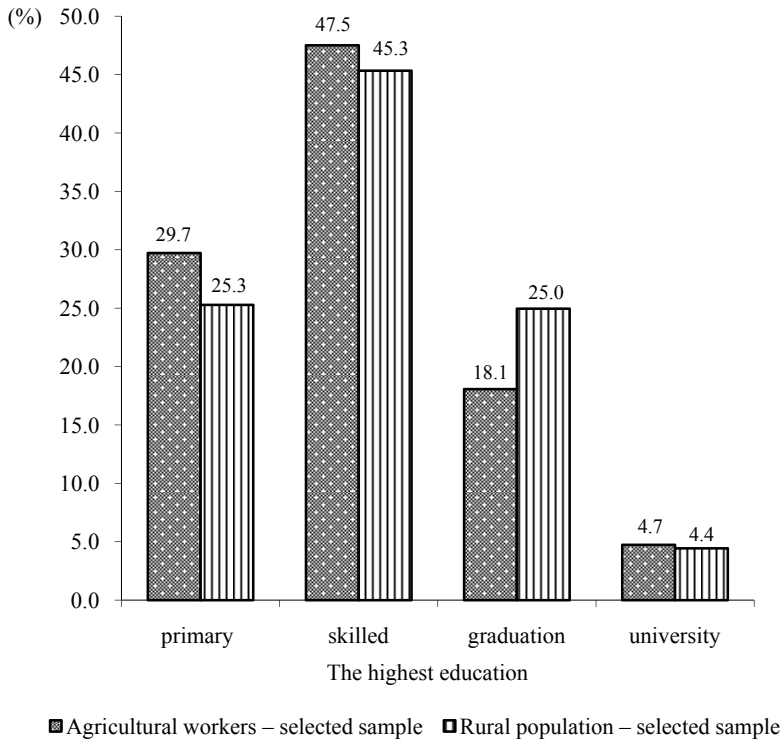

Figure 2. Education structure of agricultural workers – comparison with the inhabitants of rural areas

Source: Research "Life Strategies of People in Rural Areas"

2001–2008 is shown by the following table (Table 1). The shares remain balanced, even if the category of men recorded a higher relative decrease. In total, the number of the employed agricultural women decreases more rapidly since 2001 (14.7% compared to 8.8% of men) (Spěšná et al. 2008).

Structure according to the highest finished education

With regard to the inaccessibility of the actual comparable data on the agricultural workers education structure on the CR level (in the frame of the Structural Research in Agriculture, only the education of the owner/owners, but not of the individual employees is registered), the selected sample is compared with other inhabitants of rural areas. The differences are negligible, as it is shown in the Figure 2.

The analysis of the received answers from the inhabitants of rural areas has shown that in agriculture; mainly people with a lower education level are working – that is people with primary education (29.7%) and lower professional education (47.5%). On the contrary, the least numerous in this sector are university graduates. The educational structure of the respondents fully corresponds, with regard to their profession, to the education structure of the workers in agriculture in the CR as a whole, where also the most numerous groups are at present the workers with the lower professional education, followed by workers with primary education. Even if the education structure of agricultural workers is gradually improving, still the highest education levels are not sufficiently represented here.[11] This situation complicates the perspective development of rural areas. The worse education structure does not regard farmers only, but the rural areas inhabitants in general, what is also documented by the CSO data (Education Level of the Population ... 2003; The Variants of the Rural Areas ... 2008) To the educated strata of population, there are more strongly tied business activities in the area, the quality and successfulness of the representative bodies, the possibility to draw from the EU structural funds, the way of the local and regional co-operation and other. In connection with the work in agriculture, it regards namely the ability to transform the economic activities towards other roles fulfilled by agriculture besides food production: environmentally friendly ways of farming, countryside care and protection etc.

[11]This fact is also fully supported by Spěšná, who states: "...since 1989, a gradual improvement of the education structure of workers occurred. ... Even if in the 90s, with regard to the process of the decreasing employment in agriculture, positive structural changes of education emerged, still the education level of workers in agriculture stays considerably lower than that in the NE as a whole" (Spěšná et al. 2008).

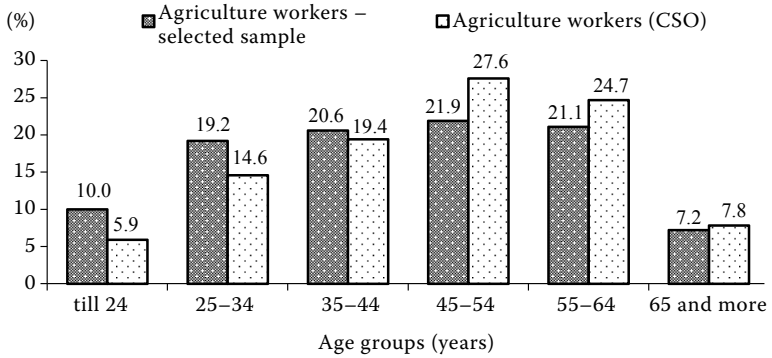

Figure 3. Comparison of the structure of workers in agriculture according to age groups

Source: Research "Life Strategies of People in Rural Areas" and the CSO data – Workers in agriculture in the period October 2006–September 2007 according to age groups

Age structure

In the sample of agricultural workers, all age categories are relatively equally represented, as corresponds with the structure of the general rural population. In the Figure 3, they are compared with the age structure of agricultural workers in the CR as a whole.

In the sample, all age categories are represented, only there are less people 60+, as these people are in the retirement age and either they do not work in agriculture any more, or it is not their main source of income. The age structure of the selected sample respondents, i.e. rural inhabitants whose main source of livelihood was agriculture, differs from the age categories distribution of the workers in agriculture in the CR as a whole in two aspects, which can be, however, explained by the same fact: the different age structure of workers in agriculture (with a higher share of older workers) compared to the rural population, which was binding for the selection of the sample. The present situation is documented by the Table 2.

In 2005, the major part of workers in agriculture, almost one third (30.2%), was in the age category 45–54 years. Little less than one quarter (23.3%) was in the following age group. In the given year, 7.2% of workers over 65 years worked in agriculture, what was by 3.9% more compared to the year 2003. In absolute numbers, it means that the number of workers in the highest age group doubled up to 13 131 persons. On the other hand, only 5.1% of people younger than 24 years worked in agriculture. It is evident that young people are searching for jobs outside the agricultural sector, being aware of the fact that work in agriculture is often demanding and its result is financially less attractive compared to other sectors (Czech Statistical Office 2005). Ageing of the population of agricultural workers therefore still continued. In the following period (October 2006–September 2007), the majority of agricultural workers was also in the above mentioned two age groups, i.e. 27.6% in the age category 45–54 years and 24.7% in the second oldest age category, i.e. 55–64 years. Compared to the previous year, the number of the oldest workers increased by 0.6%, but also a slight increase of the share of young workers was registered (by 0.8%).

Table 2. Basic characteristics of workers in agriculture – comparison of age structure

Age categories (years)	Age structure in %		
	selected sample of workers in agriculture	workers in agriculture in 2005*	workers in agriculture in the period October 06–September 07*
Up to 24	10.0	5.1	5.9
25–34	19.2	14.6	14.6
35–44	20.6	19.6	19.4
45–54	21.9	30.2	27.6
55–64	21.1	23.3	24.7
65+	7.2	7.2	7.8
Total	100	100	100

*data of the CSO – Structural Results for Agriculture 2005, Structural Results for Agriculture October 06–September 07

Table 3. Structure of workers in the agrarian sector according to age and gender

Age categories (years)	Number of workers in ths			Share in %		
	total	men	women	total	men	women
15–24	6.7	4.9	1.8	4.0	4.2	3.6
25–29	13.9	10.4	3.5	8.3	9.0	6.9
30–44	54.5	37.9	16.5	32.7	32.8	32.7
45–59	79.1	52.2	26.5	47.4	45.2	52.5
60+	12.2	9.9	2.2	7.3	8.6	4.4
CR total	166.8	115.5	50.5	100	100	100

Source: Employment and Unemployment in the CR According to the Selected Research of Labour Force, 2. Q 2008, CSO 2008, own computations

To complement the development in the area, we also included the real structure of workers in agriculture according to age and gender, as it was registered by the Czech Statistical Office in the 3rd Q of the year 2008 (Table 3). The data are summarised for the sector Agriculture, Forestry and Hunting and Fishery.

Farming of land, as well as keeping farm animals, represents traditional activities closely connected with the life of people in rural areas since the ancient times. Thus, agriculture in different forms will always be connected with the rural countryside. Its importance as the means and source of the rural inhabitants' livelihood was very high in the past; however, it decreases gradually in consequence of the economic development. It is not true any more for a long time, that agriculture represents the main source of income of the majority of rural population. Employment in agriculture decreased already in past, and the trend is still continuing at present.

The relationship of agricultural workers to their work

Although the transformation of agriculture after 1989 represented important structural changes, more than 100 thousand workers have stayed in agriculture (in different forms of work activities in all present types of agricultural enterprises). For some of them, it means continuing in the family tradition, others have chosen it for themselves, for others, it was a necessary choice and they would work elsewhere if they had the choice.

Based on the analysis of factors impacting the workers relations to this sector, we can answer the following questions: "Who works in agriculture?" and "What are the reasons for working there?" The relevant shares of respondents are indicating that an unconditional relation to the work in the farming is valid only for less than one third of them (30.3%). They would not change their job, because it is a pleasure for them to work in the farming sector. The attitudes towards working in the agriculture of the rest of the respondents are oscillating between a moderate resignation regarding agricultural work and the wish to change the job. We can designate their attitude as a "moderate resignation" in the case, when people would prefer working in farming as long as there is this possibility. In the case of other job opportunity, about one tenth of them (9.9%) do not conceal their intention to leave working in the agricultural branch. The attitude of this group towards farming is very poor and there is a risk, that they will get a new chance in another branch (however, because of their low expertise, it does not seem realistic for most of them).

Neither have the remaining 22.7% of workers in agriculture very strong ties to it, because they have chosen the answer "I do not insist on working in agriculture and have nothing against working outside it". Also these people could decide for a change in the case of an interesting job offer outside the sector (Figure 4).

The analysis of the socio-demographic qualities in various groups shows a detailed structure of their attitudes towards the work in farming. The strongest relationship to work in the sector is that of older men. In absolute numbers, they are the most numerous in the age group 50–64 years, relatively also in the oldest group – over 65 years (it means that most of the respondents chose this answer in both age categories). It regards prevalently persons with a lower professional or primary education; however, compared to other types of answers, there is the highest share of university graduates.

Supposedly it concerns the experienced practicians (and a smaller group of educated people with a long-time practical experience). A change of the branch would mean for them a change for the worse. They

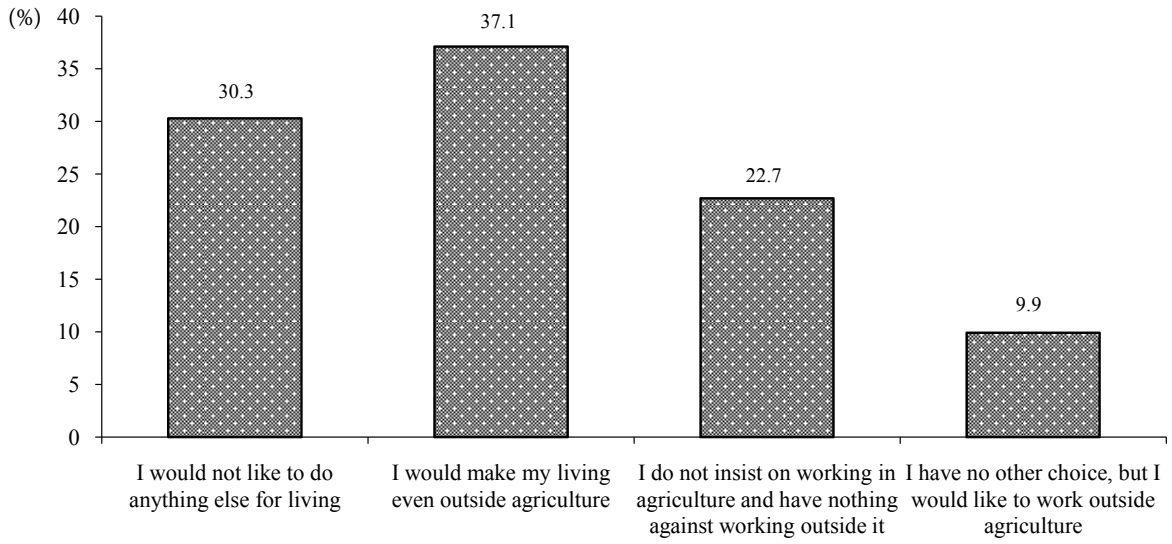

Figure 4. Relationship to work in agriculture

Source: Research "Life Strategies of People in Rural Areas"

have gained a lot of unique experience during their professional career, which is only partially usable (or not at all) in other branches. They are also too old for fundamental changes in their professional life and an attempt of re-qualifying them may not be successful and it may not bring positive effects. They are dependent on their actual way of the work and lifestyle and on the existing social communities. Integration into another work and social communities cannot be provided without compromises, which are not liked by the people in question and in many cases, also not possible for them. Farming brings them certainty, which they do not want to give up.

The second group (those who would chose another work only in the case of necessity) was also formed mainly by men, their share compared to that of women is, however, relatively balanced (this answer was chosen by 37% of respondents of both sexes). These were people of all age categories, only the oldest ones (without regard to the education level) were least represented.

We can suppose that their attitudes are partly overlapping with the aforementioned group of "essential" farmers. However, the reasons, why they stay in agriculture, are of a wider range. They can oscillate from self-indulgence (aversion to changes of their work and lifestyle associated with the work in farming) through uncertainty (how and under what conditions to assert oneself) to the yet not fully existing interest in trying to do something different (only on the condition that the circumstances will be acceptable). The minimum of the participants of the oldest age group indicates why these considerations are not so strong here.

In the group of respondents who do not insist on working in agriculture and have nothing against working outside it, there prevail persons with secondary education, however, in fact there are represented all groups of education with the exception of university graduates.

The missing figures of university graduates can be explained on the grounds that if they had the possibility to find job out of the farming, they would have already done it. The qualities of this social community show their flexibility – when acceptable conditions appear, they are consequently reflected in the real fluctuation.

In the group of persons, who would prefer a job outside agriculture, the young women with a lower education prevail. It is a question to what extent in this social community the unrealistic ambitions of the employment change prevail over the existing real possibilities. If a part of these women is not successful in finding a new job out of the farming, they will solve their situation by taking care of the family and household. Eventually, they will work part time or occasionally out of agriculture.

Conditions necessary for the change of job, leaving agriculture

To perform a change of job or even to change the working branch is very difficult, for some of the agricultural professions even almost impossible. Usually it regards such an important life step, which only a minimum of workers undergoes voluntarily and of their own volition. They always have to be sufficiently

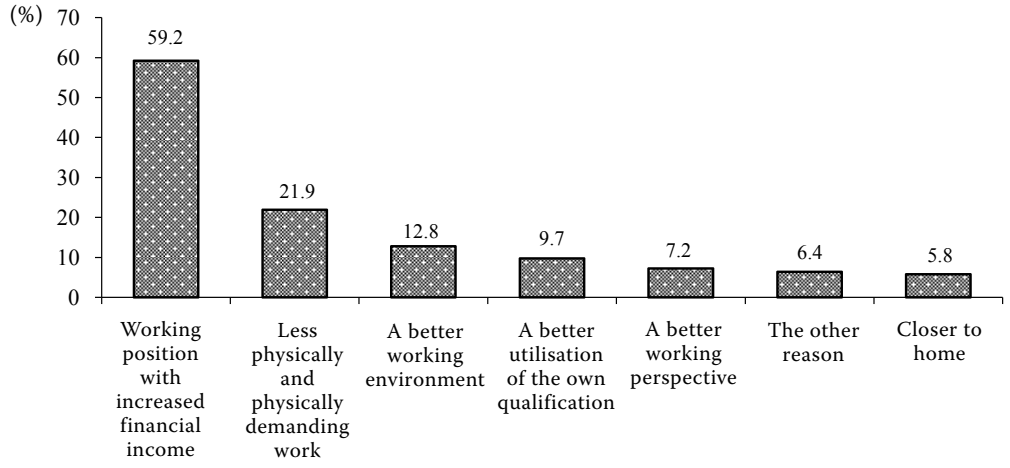

Figure 5. Reasons for the eventual change of work

Source: Research "Life Strategies of People in Rural Areas"

motivated to take such a step, e.g. by the increase of income, the increase of professional qualification and thus getting a better job etc. Another impulse, although a negative one, which could evoke such a step, can be the threat of organisational changes in the enterprises and firms, the danger of losing the job, unemployment, lack of job offers in the present branch etc.

Although it issues from the above text that only a minor part (approx. one third) of workers in agriculture is willing to change jobs, practically all of them think of a possible change on the explicit conditions. The answers indicate the dissatisfaction of the employees with their actual job and show what they want to change (Figure 5).

It is obvious from the evaluation that, similar as other people, also the accosted workers in agriculture would most often decide for a change if they acquired such a working position which would ensure an increased financial income (this possibility was chosen by 59.2% of the respondents). Even if this answer was chosen by the majority of persons in all groups, young women with the lower professional education chose it relatively the most often. However, this does not mean that these people really want to leave. On the contrary, this interpretation can be turned around and we can state that 40% of workers in agriculture are that much satisfied with their remuneration or job (or their position in the case of businessmen) that they would not change even for a better paid job in another sector.

However, a part of them does not consider changing the branch at all (e.g. because of their qualification or experience and practice), therefore, they could not be "lured" even by better income conditions.

With regard to the character of work in agriculture, which is often time and physical strength demanding, 21.9% of respondents would consider changing their job. Less physically and psychically demanding work would be most often chosen by older men with a lower education level. On the contrary, the possibility of better job perspective, eventually of a further career, is important for 17.2% of workers in agriculture, namely for younger men with the higher education. Equally important as the other aspects are also the fact, what are the working conditions and whether the health of the worker is not endangered. The possibility to reach a better working environment is regarded as important by 12.8% of the respondents (relatively more often by middle-aged women with a lower professional education). The possibilities of a better utilisation of own qualification is important for 9.7% of workers in agriculture. Most often, it regards younger women, however, with the higher qualification level. The least important reason for undergoing such an important step is the proximity of the place of living and work – only 5.8% of the respondents gave a positive answer. Therefore, it seems that commuting to work is not a problem of the sector, as agricultural production is performed almost in the proximity of all communes, so that the interested people can get job in the proximity of their abode.

With regard to the already presented stability and general distaste to changes, only a small interest in the change of employment could be expected (if the possibility of working in the farming was finished for some reason).

Only 16% of the present workers in agriculture had a clear idea how they would solve such a situation. These were above all the respondents (mainly young educated men) whose hitherto working activities were of a "universal character" and they were not closely connected to agriculture. They would therefore chose professions similar to their present practice, e.g. a mo-

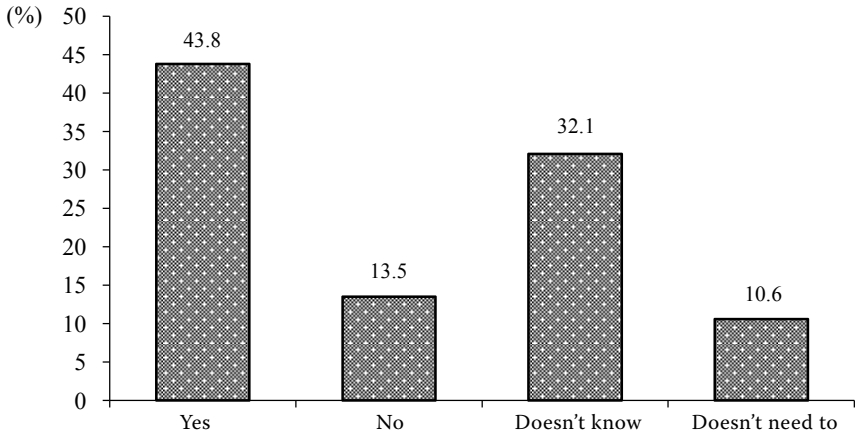

Figure 6. Willingness of agricultural workers to re-qualify at the change of the branch

Source: Research "Life Strategies of People in Rural Areas"

tor vehicles driver, machine repairs and maintenance, a carpenter or an administration worker.

The present technical and technological development in all sectors brings about the continual changes and innovations with the aim to make the production most efficient and to precise, accelerate and automate the individual processes. Therefore, every profession is connected with certain qualification demands and a specialised practice. With regard to this situation, it is necessary to continually follow these trends and to reflect them into the demands on the workers and new job applicants. The employer can demand that the workers themselves show an active interest in the development of their branch and that they continually increase their qualification.

The willingness of the respondents to utilise re-qualification courses in which they would improve their knowledge, eventually learn something new in the case they would have to leave their jobs, is demonstrated by the Figure 6.

From the distribution of the respondents' answers, it is obvious that a great part of them (44%) regards increasing of their qualification as very important. Those are mainly young people, what is understandable, however, interesting is the finding that a high share of positive answers was recorded in all education categories. Further, almost one third of the respondents (32%) do not yet know what attitude to take, they are not decided. Negative answers to the questions were given by 13.5% of the respondents, mainly older agricultural workers, and the remaining 10.6% think that they are working in such a profession where any re-qualification is not necessary with the change of the branch (these are mainly university graduates).

Another possibility in the case of the necessary change is "starting off" one's own business. The will-

Figure 7. Willingness to start private business

Source: Research "Life Strategies of People in Rural Areas"

ingness to undergo such a relatively risky step is, however, generally low in the population.

For comparison, the Figure 7 includes not only the answers of agricultural workers, but also of the general rural population. The results show that the attitudes of agricultural workers do not differ considerably. 14.2% of rural population (from those who are not yet doing so) would like to start a private business and further 31% would consider it in the marginal case (if there was no other possibility of job). This willingness is lower among agricultural workers, however, not very considerably.

Twice as many men than women would be willing to start private business (18.7 compared to 9.8%). Understandably, the willingness to take such a step decreased with the increasing age – more than 20% of respondents chose the positive answer among people up to 34 years, while it was only 6% among the seniors 65+ – and it increased with the increasing education level – the positive answer was given by 11% of persons with the primary education, but by 22% of university graduates.

CONCLUSION

Agriculture, losing in the past its importance as a source of livelihood for a big part of rural population, has the tendency to become perspective only in some chosen areas. It has not lost its significance as an additional source of livelihood. We can see in its form of a complementary and subsistence economic activity a specific kind of insurance against the impacts of the economic crisis. The work in farming and activities related to farming concern not only the people for whom agriculture is the bringing the main income, but also a wider range of other people. Their relation to work in farming is different according to the socio-demographically qualities of rural population.

The basic result of the research was ascertaining the gender unbalance of the professional groups of agricultural workers which issues on one hand from the traditional and stereotype division of roles in job, on the other hand, from the persisting prevalence of the physically demanding work unsuitable for women. On the contrary, the impact of income segregation does not function, although agriculture belongs among the less paid sectors. It is not possible, however, to derive from the mentioned results the conclusion of the existence or non-existence of gender discrimination. The Czech Republic belongs to the countries where the differences in the attitudes towards male and female work still persist from various viewpoints (wages, career and managerial development etc.). This exists permanently and it is not possible to see any tendencies of change even in the longer run.

Education structure of workers in agriculture is not regularly statistically followed. However, it can be presupposed that it is similar as for the other rural inhabitants, what was also proved by the Figure 2. It has to be mentioned, however, that this structure is worse (with a higher share of lower education levels and vice versa) compared to the national economy as a whole, the same as it is regarding the comparison of the highest reached education level between the urban and rural population.

According to the statistical data, the persons of middle to near-retirement age, e.g. the age category 45–54 and 55–64 years represent the biggest share of workers in agriculture. It was the same also in our selected sample, even if less pronounced. Its structure has copied more precisely the age structure of the economically active rural population, at which the research was aimed. The unfavourable age structure of workers in agriculture compared to other sectors of national economy and its negative development (ageing) are proved by the statistical data of the Czech Statistical Office (CSO).

In every country, the economically active part of the population exerts a decisive influence on the national economy as a whole. By its participation in the working process, it creates the values reflected in the individual macro-economic indicators (e.g. the GDP, the aggregate labour productivity etc.). These are serving, together with other followed macro-economic indicators, to the evaluation of the state and development of the given economy.

Human life is, from the history, connected with labour. At the beginning, it served just for ensuring the simple livelihood of an individual and his/her family. It regarded mainly the manual activity, which often lasted very long (the whole day or week) and was very physically demanding. Later on, with the intellectual development of the society and new learning in the sphere of science and technology, a great part of work activities was made more efficient and accelerated by the implementation of machine equipment. The undoubted positive feature of this gradual process of mechanisation and automation was the simplification and easing of work, saving time and financial means, but also the decrease of the number of workers hitherto necessary to perform the given work task. This led to an accelerated increase of workless people and a new phenomenon – unemployment – had emerged.

Even at present, when a still higher stress is put on the efficiency of all operations, work represents a very basic part of the daily life. It is an important item with a high priority for the individuals as well as the whole society

value ladder.[12] The performed sociological researches have shown that also the interviewed inhabitants of rural communes put a high importance to their work activity, they are happy to have a job, a certain working life and namely the income certainty.

As already mentioned, the offer of jobs in the countryside is limited – the demand for jobs generally surpasses the supply. This situation will not be possible to change radically in the near future, even if concrete steps are already taken both from the side of the CR as well as the EU (e.g. the programs for supporting small and medium businesses, the possibility of subsidies from the Program of the Countryside Renovation, from the EAFRD etc.).[13] Therefore, for many rural inhabitants work always has been and will be also in future connected with commuting to the nearby towns and communes.

For the working rural inhabitants, the workplace is not that important as their satisfaction with their job – its remuneration, interesting work, a good collective. The present work is satisfactory for the majority of them and they would not change it. The only and a very strong, motivating factor for the willingness to change the present job is the possible offer of a job with a higher wage than the present one.

The further support of the private business sector, namely in rural areas, will enable creating new job opportunities for its inhabitants, it will bring about the rural revival and it will influence the given region development. However, higher and targeted information on the individual subsidy programs and the prepared novelties and changes in this sphere from the side of the relevant institutions toward the general public is necessary. Business, namely small business, is undoubtedly the only possibility for many rural inhabitants to find a job either in the place of their abode or in its vicinity, with regard to the development of unemployment and the number of offered jobs in the given region.

The analysis of the acquired opinions and attitudes of the respondents, regarding just the possibility to start a private business, has, however, proved the persisting unwillingness to leave the existing certainty of their employment for the majority of them. Not even the possibilities offered by private business – to get more financial means, to do an interesting work, to be his/her own master – present a sufficient motivating factor to make such an important step in life.

Already for a long period, both the European Union and the Czech Republic put stress on the complex solution of all problems the countryside is coping with. There have been set the priorities and steps, how to proceed with removing of these problems. On the European as well as the Czech level, a whole set of measures has been proposed. These are at present mainly part of the strategic documents for the programming period 2007–2013 (e.g. the Program of the Countryside Development of the CR for the period 2007–2013, the National Strategic Plan of Rural Development of the CR for the period 2007–2013, the Strategy of the Regional Development of the CR for the years 2007–2013, etc.).

At the same time, we can expect that the Czech Republic will copy certain European trends of social development, which appear here with a certain delay. Life style changes of rural population are apparent even now; similarly like in the whole Czech society, also in rural areas the ageing of population occurs. However, the people, who retire at present, lived a certain part of their active life after the economic and political changes of 1989. They are, as a rule, more educated than the previous generation of pensioners, they have other priorities and life values. If rural space is able to offer them the proper living conditions, social services and public exercise, the rural population ageing may not be the menace, but it will support – in a natural way – the coexistence and co-operation of various age groups. Agriculture will always belong to rural space as one of its essential parts, however, not as a sole source of living or as the main shaping element of work and life careers.

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[12]This fact is supported by the researches regularly made by the Public Opinion Research Centre of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Science of the Czech Republic. The research performed in 2004, which was aimed at the problems of harmonisation of the family and professional life, has shown that 90 % Czech citizens ascribe an important role to work (the sample of 546 economically active respondents of the age 15+ mentioned work successes at the 3rd position in the value ladder, after the permanent partner relationship and having children).

[13]MPO – Ministry of Industry and Trade (Ministerstvo průmyslu a obchodu); National Program of Support of Small and Medium Business 2007. Support of the Countryside Renovation (POV – Podpora obnovy venkova). EAFRD – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (Evropský zemědělský fond pro rozvoj venkova).

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Contact address:

Věra Majerová, Gabriela Pavlíková, Pavlína Maříková, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Kamýcká 129, 165 21 Praha 6-Suchdol, Czech Republic
e-mail: majerova@pef.czu.cz, pavlikova**g@pef.czu.cz, marikova@pef.czu.cz**