

## CHANGES IN AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICES IN POLAND AFTER ACCESSION TO THE EU

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### ABSTRACT

The main objective of this article is to analyze and evaluate the state and development of agricultural advisory services in Poland after accession to the European Union. The most important change, based on the Act from 22 October 2004, was to obtain legal personality by the Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów (CDR) and 16 provincial agricultural advisory centers (ODRs), and the possibility of charging fees for selected services. This Act was changed three times during the research period. The changes concerned mainly the subordination of ODRs; from the Governors to the provincial self-governments (2009), then to the Boards of provinces (2012), and most recently to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (2016), and how they are financed. At present, two main public organizational units exist within the agricultural advisory structure; there are the CDR responsible for training of advisers and the 16 ODRs responsible for farm advisory services and rural development.

**Key words:** FAS in Poland, Farm Advisory System, agricultural advisory services, CDR, ODRs

### INTRODUCTION

Public sector of agricultural advisory services (agricultural extension) means that advisory is provided and funded by governmental organizations [Swanson et al. 1990, Rivera 1991]. Institutions of this type played a key role in the modernization of the agricultural sector and in changes of the rural environment in the countries of Western Europe and the USA. The experience of those countries provides firm arguments that agricultural advisory was the primary instrument for the implementation of the broadly understood agricultural policy and the driving force carried transformations in agriculture [Kania and Drygas 1995]. It is thus impossible to imagine adaptation processes related to sustainable development of the rural areas and agriculture in Poland without the participation of state-owned (public) agricultural advisory. From the middle of the 1980s public sector of agricultural advisory has been criticized for irrelevance for the needs of farmers, the results and effectiveness of advisory work as well as the costs and the manner of financing [Koutsouris 1997, Chapman and Tripp 2003]. Responding to these changes, some countries, including Poland, undertook restructuring, commercialization and privatization actions, as well as actions using non-governmental organizations to support public sector advisory, especially regarding educational functions [Blum 1995, Nagel 1997, Hoffmann et al. 2000, Kania 2007].

The accession of Poland to the European Union put new challenges for agricultural advisory system in Poland. They relate to, among others, the implementation of new production methods in agricultural farms,

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especially integrated and ecological production, the principles of good agricultural practices and animal welfare, food safety, public health of people, animal health and plant health. It is also about undertaking various actions related to agricultural and non-agricultural entrepreneurship requiring extensive economic and marketing knowledge in the conditions of market economy as well as acquiring skills regarding the preparation of applications for EU assistance resources as part of instruments of the Common Agricultural Policy, as well as the ability to prepare drafts of projects taking into account analyses as well as marketing and financial projections.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The main objective of this article is to analyze and evaluate the changes in agricultural advisory services in Poland, after accession to the European Union<sup>1</sup>. Research questions which I would like to address are: What are the statutory solutions in agricultural advisory services; What changes were caused by the decentralization and commercialization of public advisory services and when; When and how did the government resolve the problem of statutory state agricultural advisory units; How many households does a an advisor help.

The study used a descriptive and tabular method. The basic data was obtained from author's research carried out within the PRO AKIS project [AKIS in the EU... 2014]. The source of the presented indicators concerning the number of farms and advisers as well as the average farm of utilized agricultural area was the statistical data and data obtained from managers of the CDR and 16 ODRs. The remaining indicators concerning the work of advisers were calculated on the basis of the data originating from a questionnaire survey carried out among 5% randomly selected field advisers employed in all the 16 ODRs. 103 surveys completed were obtained, i.e. 4.5% of the respondents.

### **Agricultural Advisory Services after Poland's integration with the European Union (from 1 May 2004)**

As of 1 January 2005, the CDR and the ODRs obtained a legal status<sup>2</sup>, the possibility of charging for some services and have been subordinated respectively to the Minister of Agriculture and to province governors who are representatives of the government. Budget cuts in and charging for advisory services meant that the state advisory system was transformed from state-owned into a semi-state owned system. As of 1 August 2009<sup>3</sup>, the ODRs were subordinated to the provincial self-governments and together with this reform, the agricultural advisory system in Poland became a semi-autonomous system. It should be noted, however, that the term 'public advisory' is still used in statutory nomenclature. Since 31 December 2012<sup>4</sup>, the second change of the Act introduced the subordination of ODRs to the boards of provinces. New rules have allowed the boards to the additional small financing the annual operational programs of ODRs. Since 20 August 2016, under the new Act of 22 June 2016<sup>5</sup> amending the Act on agricultural advisory units from 22 October 2004, ODRs became again are semi-state organizational units with legal personality, partially funded by the Minister of Agriculture and rural development, and they are subject to him.

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<sup>1</sup> The history of agricultural advisory services in Poland was presented in another article [Kania 2017].

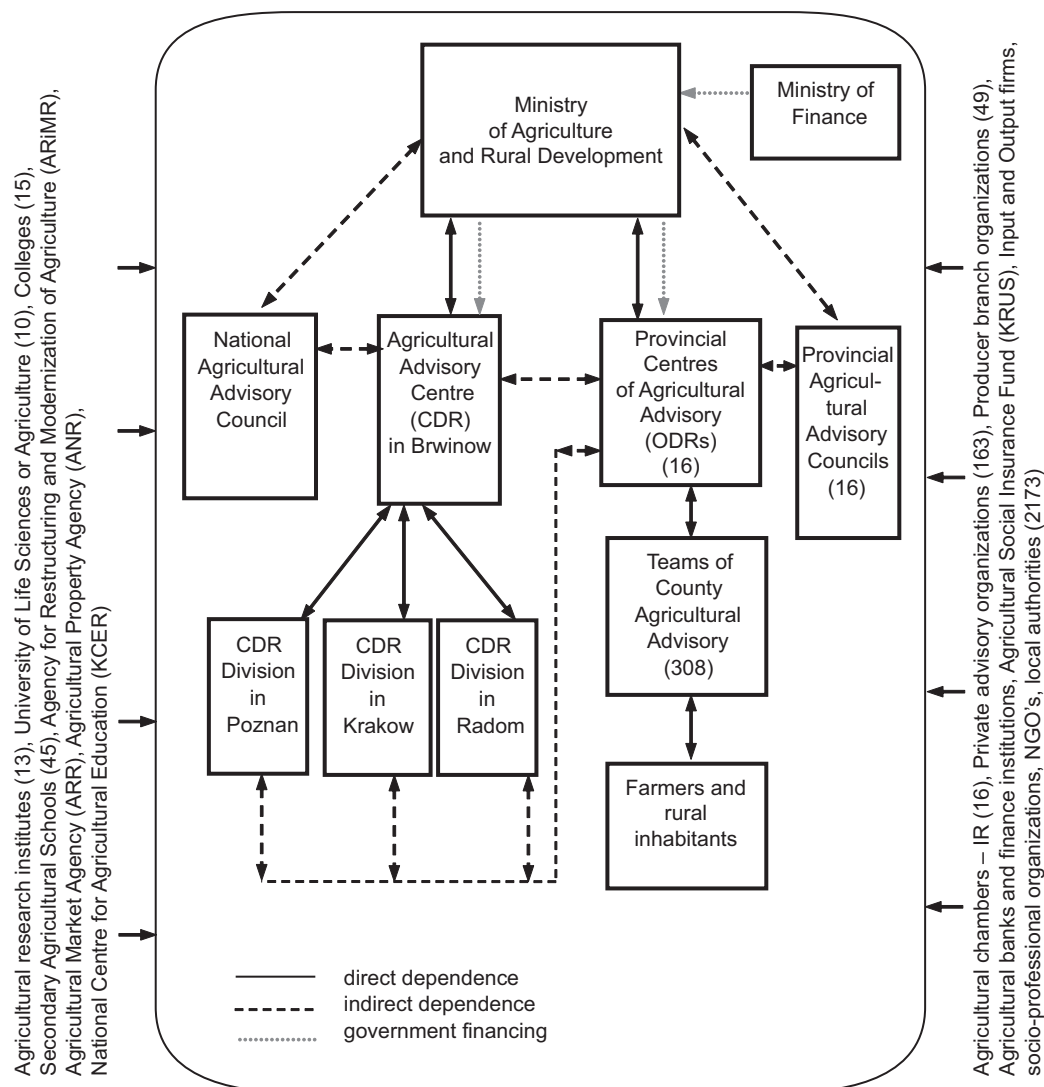
<sup>2</sup> Act on Agricultural Advisory Bodies of 22 October 2004 (Journal of Laws 2004 no 251, item 2507).

<sup>3</sup> Act from 16 June 2009 amending the Act from October 2004 (Journal of Laws 2004 no 92, item 753), and Act from 23 January 2009 amending selected acts due to changes in organization and competences of public administration (Journal of Laws from 2009 no 31, item 206).

<sup>4</sup> Act from 16 November 2012 amending the Act of Agricultural Advisory Services with later changes (Journal of Laws from 2012, item 1414).

<sup>5</sup> Journal of Laws from 2016, item 1176.

The organization framework of agricultural advisory in Poland is depicted in Figure 1. The Agricultural Advisory Center<sup>6</sup> (Polish – Centrum Doradztwa Rolniczego, CDR) in Brwinów is a governmental institution responsible for the professional development of agricultural advisors. The improvement in advisors' knowledge and skills is achieved through seminars, trainings, courses, practical trainings, workshops, shows, demonstrations, national and foreign study visits, as well as postgraduate courses in cooperation with universities. The CDR has operated in its present organizational form since 1 January 2005 and is supervised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The CDR has three branches or divisions in Krakow, Poznan and Radom.



**Fig. 1.** Organization of Agricultural Advisory Services in Poland and other stakeholders of AKIS (state since 20 August 2016)

Source: Authors' work.

<sup>6</sup> The center's name is confusing for foreigners and is not adequate to its role. In my opinion this is only a training center for agricultural advisers which are not subordinated ODRs.

It is a governmental unit and reports directly to the Minister and its scope covers the entire country. The CDR is managed by a director, appointed by the Minister. The tasks of the CDR are specified by the Act on Agricultural Advisory Bodies of 22 October 2004 [Kania 2011].

The so-called Social Council for Agricultural Advisory, an outcome of the Polish and American Extension Program, is appointed by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development [Kania 2016]. This Council since 2016, has 11 members, and they include: 2 representatives of the Minister, 2 representatives of the National Board of Agricultural Chambers, 4 representatives of farmers' trade unions and 1 representative for each of the following institutions: universities, R&D units and the Convent of Marshals.

The CDR cooperates closely with the provincial ODRs, as well as with agricultural research institutes, government and local government administration bodies, farmers' organizations, universities of agriculture and life-sciences, regional and local agencies, as well as agricultural chambers. Occasionally, it also establishes cooperation with the unions of farmers, farmer associations and organizations and other universities. The main source of funding for the operation of the CDR are subsidies from the state budget (about 50% of the total budget). The provincial agricultural advisory Centers (ODRs) were self-governed organizational legal entities operated on the basis of the Act on Agricultural Advisory Bodies of 22 October 2004. This Act went into effect on 1 January 2005, resulting in charges for selected services provided by the agricultural advisory centers. According to the Competence Act prepared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Poland, 16 provincial ODRs reporting to the province governor were transferred to the Provincial Parliaments on 1 August 2009. The Act specifies the goals and tasks of the centers, their structure, as well as their method of administrative and financial management. There is one provincial ODR in each of the 16 provinces in Poland. Its name contains the name of the province e.g., Mazowiecki ODR or Małopolski ODR. Provincial ODRs are part of the public sector. Pursuant to the Act from 2009, they receive purpose subsidies from the state budget to carry out non-commercial tasks specified in Article 4 item 2 of the Act from 2004, on Agricultural Advisory Bodies and specific subsidies for the remuneration of employees and maintenance of the centers (approx. 50% of the budget). This new management structure of agricultural advisory services which was introducing in 2009, with mentioned earlier small change in 2012, was criticized. The provincial advisory centers, in practice 16 independent organizations, they were under supervision and control of provincial self-governments first and then the boards, but they were funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, not by the self-governments. Easy to see the weakness of the management structure because someone else has supervised the ODR, and someone else has financed statutory activities. Another disadvantage of the advisory organization in Poland in that time, was the lack of a coordinating body for the sixteen independent advisory organizations. The Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów does not perform this function, as its main task is only professional improvement of ODR advisors, partially implemented against remuneration. Moreover, the Center reports directly to the Minister of Agriculture, and the activity of the 16 advisory centers was supervised by provincial boards. Additional weakness of advisory structure is that since 2004, Poland has implemented the Rural Development Plans in agriculture (RDPs 2004–2006, 2007–2013 and 2014–2020) which are centrally managed and implemented (both centrally and at the level of provinces) by Paying Agency (Polish – ARiMR), supervised by the Minister of Agriculture and supported by strong financial resources under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. It was very difficult in that case of efficient management of the national agricultural policy and RDP.

In my opinion, the decentralized ODRs needed consolidation of top management and financing which took place under the new Act of 22 June 2016. Since 20 August 2016, the Minister gives, by means of an order, the statute of the ODRs. The authority of ODR is the director appointed and dismissed by the Minister of Agriculture. Minister monitors and evaluates the activities of ODRs and the work of its directors and Social Councils. The agricultural advisory units act on the basis of annual program of operations, annual financial plans and price-list of services. Each ODR is associated with its own Social Council for Agricultural Advisory, which is a consultative-advisory body to the director of the ODR and is made up of 12 people. It

includes the representatives of: the Minister of Agriculture, the Marshal Office, Provincial Self-Government, the Agricultural Chamber (2), members of farmers' trade unions (4), universities and research units (2), and vocational agricultural schools.

They focus on the execution of objectives that can be classified into four types [Wiatrak 2006, Kujawiński 2009, Kania et al. 2014]: extension tasks, which consist in helping farmers in decision-making, information tasks, i.e., delivering information on new technologies and innovations to agricultural manufacturers without their assessment, educational tasks consisting in conveying knowledge and teaching adults (farmers and members of their families), popularizing tasks consisting in the dissemination of new technical and technological solutions in rural areas.

The priority for the ODRs is to assist farmers and their families in making decisions that will help them achieve their goals. This is achieved by: engaging in actions aimed at improving the level of qualifications of farmers and rural inhabitants, implementing the instruments of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy, promoting the multifunctional development of rural areas, promoting environmentally-friendly management methods and environmental protection, providing assistance in implementing new requirements relating to agricultural production, the so-called mutual conformity principle (cross-compliance), implementing new production technologies, protecting and cultivating cultural heritage at the village level and providing assistance in the creation of production groups.

Based on European Council Regulation No 1782 of 29 September 2003, the Farm Advisory System (FAS) was introduced in 2009. The FAS system in Poland consists of: provincial agricultural advisory centers – 16, provincial agricultural chambers – 16, private providers of services for farmers accredited by Ministry of Agriculture – 185, and public and private providers for forest holders – 271 (Fig. 1). Institutions supporting FAS in Poland are: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (as the institution for the FAS implementation), the Agricultural Advisory Center (as the coordinator), the Agency of Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture (as the payment agency and controlling farms on good agricultural and environmental conditions, food safety and plant health), and veterinary inspection (controlling animal welfare and animal health). Farmers can benefit from the advice on a voluntary basis and receive support to adapt their farms to the cross-compliance requirements.

### Selected characteristics of agricultural advisory services in Poland

The most important factor for the advisory system to be efficient is the advisory staff – competent professionals, with extensive and in-depth professional knowledge and good communication skills, familiar with farmers' needs, being market-orientated and capable of working with all stakeholders. In the period from 2006–2015 the number of advisory staff at provincial ODRs was successively decreased (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Employment of Agricultural Extension Advisors in ODRs in 2006 and 2015

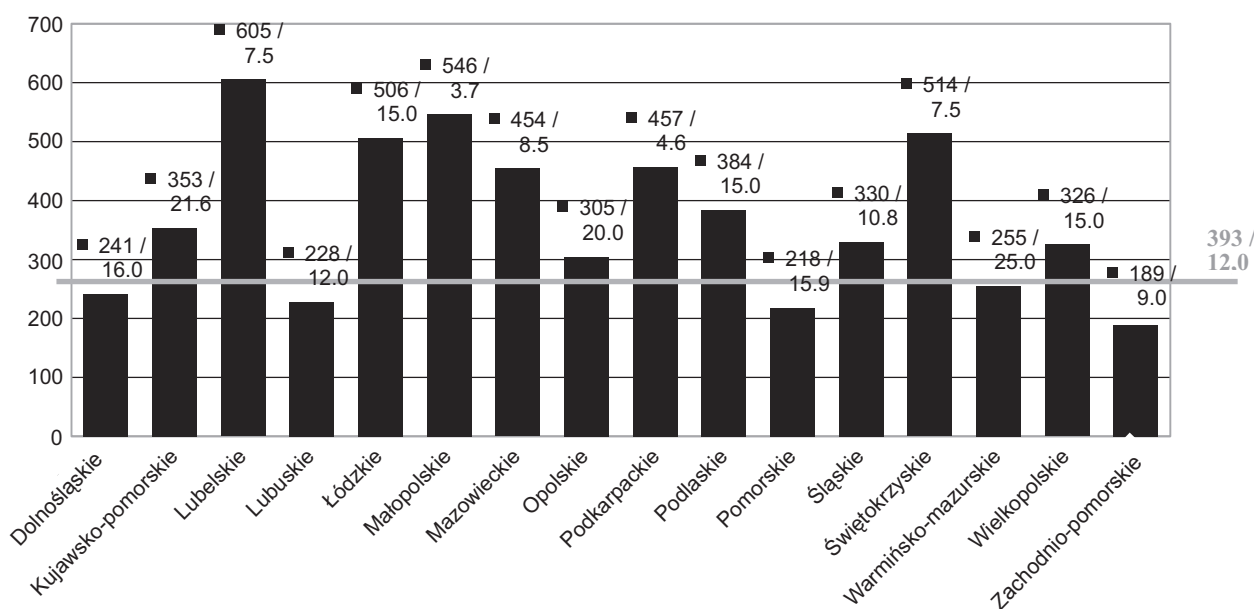
Year (on 1 January)	Years 2006 and 2015					total
	total	of which			administrative and technical assistance	
	advisors	management staff	subject matter specialists	field advisors		
2006	4 212	500.0	1 045.0	2 667.0	1 135.0	5 347.0
2015	3 549	565.0	753.0	2 231.0	653.0	4 202.0
%	100.0	15.9	21.2	62.9	–	–

Source: Own research based on data received from 16 ODRs.

At present, the number of advisors employed in the ODRs is 3,549, of which 31.9% are women. Since 2006, the number of full-time positions in provincial ODRs has declined (reduction by 15.8%). The reason for the declining number of advisors can be due to a very tight budget, year by year limited by the government, but also due to the fact that many advisors decided to open their own advisory practices.

The largest number of advisors are employed in Mazowieckie (455) and Wielkopolska (372), Lubelskie (293) and Podkarpackie (255) provinces. The smallest number was in Lubuskie (87), Opolskie (91), Śląskie (144) and Zachodnio-pomorskie (150) provinces. Each county's agricultural advisory team averages from 7 to 17 advisors by province. Since 2006, the number of full-time positions in provincial ODRs has declined (reduction by 18%). The reason of the declining number of advisors can be due to a very tight budget, year by year limited by the government, but also due to the fact that many advisors decided to open their own advisory practices. The advisory service as a profession is recognized by farmers and other stakeholders as a very important, trustworthy, and responsible one.

Statistically, the number of farms (over 1 ha) per advisor is generally very high in Poland (approx. 393), and there is a certain variation between provincial ODRs in the number of advisors per farm (from 189 in Zachodnio-pomorskie up to 605 in Lubelskie) – Figure 2.



**Fig. 2.** Number of agricultural holdings with area (UAA) over 1 ha per adviser and its average size (ha) in 2012 by provincial ODR

Source: Kania et al. [2014].

These holdings are also quite diverse in terms of average size of area e.g. 3.7 ha in Małopolskie or 4.6 ha in Podkarpackie and 25.0 ha in Warmińsko-mazurskie, 21.6 ha in Kujawsko-pomorskie and 20.0 ha in Opolskie wherein the average size for Poland is 12.0 ha.

From the responses of 103 advisors representing all the provinces, it follows that they work at an average of 201 holdings a year, which means that only one third of the farms use different types of advisory support [Kania et al. 2014a]. The number of clients differs widely between provinces from 60 holdings in the Podlaskie

province and 80 holdings in the Opolskie province, and up to 400 in the Świętokrzyskie or 280 in the Lubelskie provinces.

The most important group of customers for Polish advisors are small and medium farms. This is related to specific characteristics of Polish agriculture (fragmentation of farms, agrarian overpopulation, weak soil, poor use of production means). Nonetheless, advisors still ranked “helping large market oriented farms” fourth, before assistance to the so-called young farmers, i.e., persons below the age of 40, and rural women.

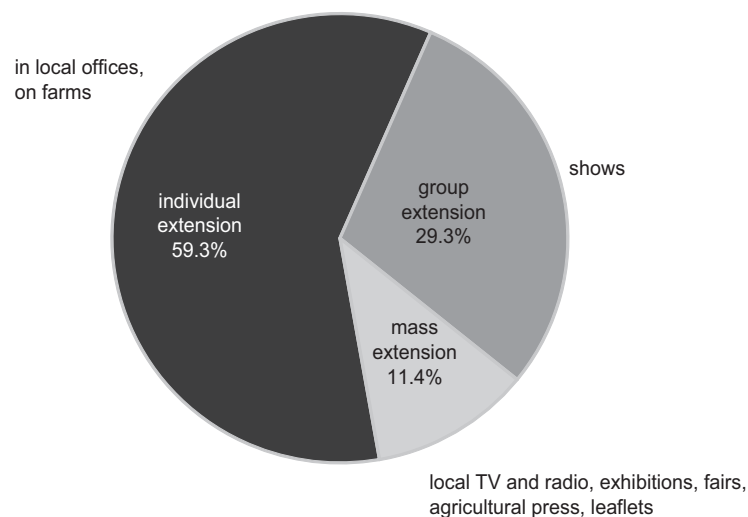
Looking at the main topics of advisory services, we can notice that there is no big difference between the groups of clients. The main topics of advisory for medium commercial farms are: plant production, animal production, accounting, taxes, cross-compliance and environment protection. Similar topics for small commercial farms, excluding environment protection, but including rural development, are covered. The four first topics and renewable energy hold true for young farmers.

The main methods used in advisory services are individual (56.2%). These relate to the preparation of business plans and the application forms for subsidies coming from different instruments of CAP under the Rural Development Plan 2007–2013. Group methods are used in advisory work in 26.0% and mass communication in 17.8%.

Most of the advisors (86.1%) have a university degree. Advisors with only a secondary education are older employees with very good experience and many certificates. The largest percentage of advisors specialize in plant production (cereals, root crops, high protein and oil plants), as well as in ecological agriculture. More than 10% of the advisors deal with the issues of agricultural farm management (farm economics and organization, marketing of agricultural products) and issues related to the implementation of instruments of the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy and policy-related principles (cross-compliance, financial support from the EU).

Additionally, more than 40% of the agricultural advisors filled applications for direct payments for farmers. Applications for other funds within the Rural Development Plan are prepared by nearly 24% of the employed advisors.

As shown in Figure 3, individual extension is the most common form applied (this form occupies 59.3% of agricultural extension advisors’ working time).



**Fig. 3.** The use of forms and methods of extension by field advisors

Source: Kania et al. [2014].

Most often, this form is implemented by direct contact with the agricultural producer, i.e., by meetings with farmers in advisory centers (district or county office) or on the farm.

Group extension services, most often implemented in form of shows, seminars, demonstrations, workshops, etc. constitutes one third of the working time (29.3%).

With respect to mass extension services (11.4%), the most commonly applied extension method is mass media, i.e., TV and radio.

## CONCLUSIONS

As of 1 January 2005, it is a common trend to charge fees for most advisory services, and the financial burden is transferred to the producers. In Poland, we can observe, year after year, less financial support for agricultural advisory services from the state budget and the necessity to look for other sources of funds (i.e., commercial services with marketing approach, EU funds). It is expected that farmers in our country will pay for most services received from advisory staff. The problem is that owners of small farms, which dominate in Poland, might not be able to afford such services.

In the analyzed period, the basic Act on Agricultural Advisory Bodies of 22 October 2004 was changed three times, mainly in terms of organizational subordination and the method of financing advisory bodies, both for legal reasons and political.

At present, two main public organizational units exist within the agricultural advisory structure. There are the CDR responsible for training of advisers and the 16 ODRs responsible for farm advisory services. These organizations are supervised and partially funded (ca. 50%) from a state budget by the Ministry of Agriculture.

In the longer term, ODRs should be incorporated into structure of the CDR and perform a uniform structure of public (semi-public) agricultural advisory services in Poland or moved to agricultural chambers together with the budget and become a semi-autonomous organization (farmer based organization – FBO) supervised by farmers.

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## **ZMIANY W DORADZTWIE ROLNICZYM W POLSCE PO AKCESJI DO UNII EUROPEJSKIEJ**

### **STRESZCZENIE**

Głównym celem artykułu jest analiza i ocena zmian w doradztwie rolniczym w Polsce, po akcesji do Unii Europejskiej. Najważniejszą zmianą, spowodowaną ustawą o jednostkach doradztwa rolniczego z dnia 22.10.2004 r. było uzyskanie osobowości prawnej przez Centrum Doradztwa Rolniczego w Brwinowie (CDR) i 16 wojewódzkich ośrodków doradztwa rolniczego (ODR) oraz możliwość pobierania opłat przez doradców za wybrane usługi doradcze. Ta ustawa była zmieniana w badanym okresie trzykrotnie. Zmiany dotyczyły głównie podporządkowania ODR, najpierw od wojewodów do sejmików województw, potem do zarządów województw, a ostatnio do Ministra Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Wsi oraz sposobu finansowania ODR. Obecnie w strukturze doradztwa rolniczego w Polsce istnieją dwie główne jednostki organizacyjne, tj. CDR odpowiedzialny za szkolenie doradców i 16 ODR odpowiedzialnych za doradztwo na rzecz gospodarstw rolnych i rozwoju obszarów wiejskich.

**Słowa kluczowe:** FAS w Polsce, system doradztwa rolniczego, rolnicze usługi doradcze, CDR, ODR