

## **The Need of Change in Education of Agricultural Advisors in Hungary**

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**Abstract:** The structure of the “Agricultural Advisory Engineer” postgraduate training (4 semesters, MSc degree) of prospective agricultural advisors is out-of-date in Hungary. In a rapidly changing world, the advisory sector is faced with new challenges as well, and the current education of agricultural consultants does not meet the expectations of the modern age.

Our general aim is the elaboration and development of a new educational module system in consultancy, so as to reach again the level that meets the prospective agricultural advisors’ expectations in Hungary.

To reach our goals, it is necessary to refresh and transform the current subject structure of Agricultural Advisory Engineers’ postgraduate training course. It contains 24 different subjects, 15 of which contribute significantly to the attainment of the required competences. In case of 9 subjects, there should be a further reconsideration of their future role. Furthermore, there is a need to build new contents into the educational program. The significance of methodological training can’t be overemphasized, highlighting the practice-oriented education and non-formal educational tools, in order to strengthen the efficiency of knowledge transfer and improve the communication skills of the students.

Last but not least, it is important to improve the acceptance rates of the postgraduate training course and facilitate the way of becoming a registered agricultural advisor with this certificate.

**Key words:** training, advisory, Hungary, new educational module system

### **Problem Domain**

The structure of “Agricultural Advisory Engineer” postgraduate training (4 semesters, MSc degree) of prospective agricultural advisors is out-of-date in Hungary. In a rapidly changing world, the advisory sector faces with new challenges as well, and the current education of agricultural consultants does not meet the expectations of modern age.

### **Questions, Purpose**

To understand the current situation, firstly, we should examine the out-of-date structure of education in Hungary and answer some questions about its long-ago operability and the agricultural extension sector’s demands in the past. On the other hand, we should study its present dysfunction, actualities and explore all the existing circumstances and influencing factors, to reach the general aim successfully: the elaboration and development of a new educational module system in consultancy to a level that meets the prospective agricultural advisors’ expectations in Hungary again.

### **Development of the Argument**

#### ***Current Situation***

The curriculum of current “Agricultural Advisory Engineer” postgraduate training course and the development of its subjects and curricula were elaborated within a PHARE programme

during 1996-98. Because of the elapsed time, changing influencing factors, new challenges, circumstances and actuality, it would be necessary to create an up-to-date curriculum with a subject theme based on real demands. Meanwhile, other disciplines were involved and became mandatory, which helped the prospective advisors to fulfil their tasks in the field of agricultural sector and cooperate with the institutions of the European Union.

By the last modernisation of the curriculum, number of the subjects became 24 and the number of contact hours raised from 256 to 320 as well. The new subjects were: Regional economics, Rural development, Issues of the European Union, Methods for generating resources, Public administration in agricultural sector, Banking, Issues of stock exchange.

Table 1. The current curriculum of  
“Agricultural Advisory Engineer” postgraduate training course

No.	Subject	Credit points	Number of lessons (hours)				Total
			Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 3	Semester 4	
1	Public administration in agricultural sector	3	8				8
2	Regional economics	3	8				8
3	Structural policy	2	8				8
4	Taxing	3	8				8
5	Economic law	4	8	6			14
6	Business economics	4	8	8			16
7	IT	6	10	10			20
8	Foreign language (spec.) (English, German)	4	6	6	6	6	24
9	Methodology of advisory	22	8+8	8+8	4+8	6+8	58
10	Accounting and financial management	12		8	8+10	8+6	40
11	Business informatics	2		6			6
12	Environmental management	2		6			6
13	Banking	2		6			6
14	Logistics	3		8			8
15	Entrepreneurial marketing	3			8		8
16	Quality assurance	3			8		8
17	Entrepreneurial controlling	2			8		8
18	Rural tourism	2			4		4
19	Rural development	4			8	8	16
20	Issues of the European Union	4			8	8	16
21	Foreign trade	3				8	8
22	Methods of communication	3				10	10
23	Methods for generating resources	2				6	6
24	Issues of stock exchange	2				6	6
Total hours			80	80	80	80	320
Total credit points		100	22	28	24	26	

Further credit points for the thesis: 20

The total duration of the training is 4 semesters, the total number of lessons: 980 hours containing the above mentioned 320 contact hours. Number of attainable credit points: 100. The prospective students should have a BSc, MSc or DVM degree in agricultural engineering, horticulture, forestry engineering, timber industry engineering, veterinary or agribusiness (Vér et al. 2007).

To reach our goals, it is necessary to revise the current subject structure of 'Agricultural Advisory Engineer' postgraduate training course.

## ***Future Plans***

### *Revision of Curriculum*

In order to refresh and transform the current subject structure, subjects focusing on personal development, communicational skills, management and marketing of advisory should have a more prominent role in the future than lately. On the other hand, it is obvious that the "classic" subjects providing professional basic knowledge are kept, e.g. statistics, IT, economics, law, methodology of advisory.

The above mentioned curriculum contains 24 different subjects. 15 of them contribute significantly to the acquisition of the required competences. In case of 9 subjects, it is not necessarily reasonable to build them in to the new curriculum, it should be a further reconsideration about their future role. These are the followings: Accounting and financial management, Foreign trade, Regional economics, Issues of the European Union, Banking, Structural policy, Logistics, Issues of stock exchange, Foreign language (spec.) (German, English). These subjects almost without exemption belong to the disciplines of corporate governance and finance.

It is advisable to convert or take out the following subjects:

Accounting and financial management: it should be converted. It is sufficient to teach only the subject of Accounting, which provides the familiarization with the basics of accounting and its subsystems.

Foreign trade: it should be taken out. The speciality of this field concerns only a small circle of advisors.

Regional economics: it should be taken out. Recently, the rural advisory has come into the view, instead of traditional agricultural advisory. The subject can be replaced by rural and regional development.

Issues of the European Union: it is recommended it be converted. The subject had relevance before 2004, when Hungary became a full member of the European Union. Currently, the knowledge of the EU's institutional system and its agricultural policy are considered of great importance.

Banking: it is recommended to be taken out. The speciality of this field concerns only a small circle of advisors.

Structural policy: it is recommended to be taken out. The subject delineates the Structural Funds of the European Union. The subject's theme is largely replaced by the Methods for generating resources

Logistics: it should be converted and renamed as Supply Chain management. In its content, the new subject could provide more relevant information than logistics.

Issues of stock exchange: it is recommended to take out. The topic of the subject is not related to the methodology of consultancy.

Foreign language (spec.) (German, English): it should be taken out. Presently, the intermediate language knowledge is a requirement for the completion of pre-studies.

On the other hand, there is a need to build new contents into the educational program.

With the revised curriculum, our aim was to reconcile the training course material with the present challenges in rural development, the changes of the Hungarian advisory system. Important aspect was the practice-oriented approach in the development of the training as well.

The advisor's activity requires a creative work, so it is essential that most of the subjects (64%) have an innovative nature to ensure the professional competences of the students. Further subjects are included to guarantee the acquirement of professional knowledge related to economic regulators and legal issues.

In the new curriculum proposal, we recommend the increase in the quantity of attainable credit points from 100 to 120. (Kozári 2015)

Table 2. The revised curriculum of  
"Agricultural Advisory Engineer" postgraduate training course

No.	Subject	Credit points	Number of lessons (hours)				Total
			Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 3	Semester 4	
1	Basics of consultancy	5	16				16
2	Communication and co-operation training	4	14				14
3	Economics	5	12				12
4	Regional and rural development I.	4	10				10
5	IT	3	10				10
6	Economic law	4	10				10
7	EU's institutional system and agricultural policy	3	8				8
8	Methodology of consultancy	6		16			16
9	Accounting	6		20			20
10	Farm management I.	4		14			14
11	Regional and rural development II	4		10			10
12	Organization of work processes in small farms	4		10			10
13	IT (spec. consultancy and rural development)	4		10			10
14	Advisory program development	5			16		16
15	Farm management II.	4			10		10
16	Issues of corporate finance and taxation	5			14		14
17	Statistics	4			10		10
18	Issues of cooperatives	3			10		10
19	Community development	4			10		10
20	Supply chain management (logistics)	3			10		10
21	Advisory management	6				16	16
22	Quality assurance	5				14	14

23	Controlling	5				14	14
24	Marketing	4				12	12
25	Organisational development	4				12	12
26	Environmental management	4				12	12
27	Thesis consultation	8					
Total hours			80	80	80	80	320
Total credit points		120	28	28	28	36	

The main educational fields of the changed training structure:

20 % basic knowledge:

- Statistics
- IT
- Economic law

50 % knowledge directly related to the course:

- Basics of consultancy
- Methodology of consultancy
- Advisory program development
- Advisory management
- Community development
- Communication and co-operation training
- IT (spec. consultancy and rural development)
- Regional and rural development I.
- Regional and rural development II.
- Organisational development
- Issues of cooperatives
- Environmental management
- EU's institutional system and agricultural policy
- Supply chain management (logistics)

30 % special knowledge related to the course:

- Economics
- Farm management I-II.
- Accounting
- Issues of corporate finance and taxation
- Controlling
- Marketing
- Quality assurance
- Organization of work processes in small farms

### *Development of Methodology*

It can't be overemphasized the significance of the methodological training, highlighting the practice-oriented education and non-formal educational tools, in order to strengthen the efficiency of knowledge transfer and improve the communication skills of the students.

The prospective introduction and adoption of CECRA (Certificate for European Consultants in Rural Areas) could be a very useful tool in reaching these goals. CECRA is a competence development program for advisors and consultants in rural areas of Europe. Under the umbrella of the International Academy of Rural Advisors (IALB) standards were compiled for a qualification and skills competence development program for advisors in rural areas, concluding with the CECRA Certificate.

The training program is geared to develop methodological, social and personal advisory skills. Within CECRA competencies are acquired in seminars and by examination of advisory systems in other countries or regions. In achieving the certificate advisors will have the opportunity to network with colleagues in other regions and countries. CECRA combines a seminar series consisting of various modules familiarized with rural advisory work in other regions and structures, and offers cross-border networking opportunities for the Certificate holder. The program is directed at all actors in the rural areas. In non-german speaking parts of Europe EUFRAS (European Forum for Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services) offers the CECRA competence development program. (CECRA 2017)

### *Changes to legislation*

We should note, that the postgraduate training course has lost its importance and acceptance because of former changes in the Hungarian legislation. Nowadays, it is not enough to graduate as an 'Agricultural Advisory Engineer' to be an officially registered agricultural advisor by the Hungarian Chamber of Agriculture. To fulfil all the requirements, the graduated students should pass further examinations according to the decree of Ministry of Agriculture in Hungary.

In the case of the prospective postgraduate training course, one of the most important aims is to reach its acceptance by Hungarian Chamber of Agriculture. On the one part, the educational system and training process would be more transparent by this required change in legislation. On the other hand, the course would be more seductive for the future students and it could help and ensure its general success, importance and acceptance.

### **Conclusion**

To meet the expectations of a rapidly changing world and improve the Hungarian agricultural extension sector and education of agricultural consultants, it would be necessary to create an up-to-date curriculum with a subject theme based on real demands for the 'Agricultural Advisory Engineer' postgraduate training course. Besides the above mentioned required changes in the structure of education, there is a high-priority need of alteration in methodology as well with more efficient methods of knowledge transfer and usage of new ways and tools during the communication process. Last but not least, it is important to improve the acceptance of the postgraduate training course and facilitate the way of becoming a registered agricultural advisor with this certificate.

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