

Chapter 94

Multifunctional Agriculture and the Green Economy

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ABSTRACT

Multifunctional agriculture represents a proactive approach of the role and effects of agriculture both on rural communities and traditions. The multifunctional agriculture passes beyond the classical functions of the agriculture bringing new gainful activities for the rural farmers. Understanding properly the multifunctional agriculture and farm diversity can offer all those involved new trends in valuing agricultural potential. This chapter presents a short but very comprehensive analysis regarding the multifunctional agricultural concept and farm diversity, in the context of the massive changes that have marked the actual evolution agrarian economy. It presents the evolution of multifunctional agriculture concept in the international approach and also analyzes the agriculture functions. In addition, it presents a short study case regarding the evolution of farm structure development in the Romanian agrarian sector.

THE CONCEPT OF MULTIFUNCTIONAL AGRICULTURE

In a general approach to the concept, multifunctional agriculture refers to all goods, products, and services resulting from agricultural activity. The transposition of the Rio Earth Summit documents (1992), in Agenda 21 of the EU has significantly contributed to the realization of this new concept,

so the multifunctional agriculture obtained an increasingly important role in the scientific and political debate regarding the future of agriculture and rural development (Renting et al, 2009).

The concept of multifunctional agriculture is widely debated in scientific research and still rises living controversy at international level, nurturing over time with new meanings. Multifunctional agriculture is in the current economic development a defining element in the development of sustainable agriculture in the production relations

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as a whole, encompassing both the economic, social and ecological functions but it especially is involved in reconciling different approaches to the role of agriculture in providing food security and the multivalent use of rural areas beyond its traditional functions. Referring to the term of multifunctionality, a group of Romanian authors (Luminița et al., 2003), claims that multifunctionality is the word that Europe uses to describe the fundamental link between sustainable agriculture, health security, natural balance, maintaining the quality of the landscape and of the environment, and all what is important for developing countries, particularly food security (Luminița et al., 2003).

The concept of multifunctional agriculture has recently appeared in literature, being defined for the first time in the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. The evolution of this concept has proved over time the adherence of agriculture to the changing demands imposed by practicing sustainable agriculture and to respect the multiple functions it is called to perform in terms of the role it plays in the national economy.

According to a British study (Marsden and Sonnino, 2008), the concept of multifunctional agriculture can be analyzed in terms of three approaches: as palliative to the productivist model and to reduce the price-cost ratio, as a form of regulation of consumption in rural areas and not least as part of the rural development process. (Marsden and Sonnino, 2008) The first approach reduces the term multifunctionality of agriculture to the notion of agricultural pluriactivity, as a survival strategy of farmers less competitive on the market and to reduce the harsh conditions imposed by the demands of a competitive market, being form as well as palliative against poverty in rural areas.

Multifunctional agriculture can be a form of regulation of consumption in rural areas, as a reflection of postproductivist paradigm, where the values are centered more on the character of diversification of land use. As outlined in the same study (Marsden and Sonnino, 2008), agriculture

begins to lose its centrality in society, and nature is designed particularly in terms of landscape capitalization as a commodity.

Understood as part of the development of rural areas, multifunctional agriculture showcase in integrative form, both the productivist character of agriculture, as a branch of material production, and the positive externalities it generates. To benefit from the multifunctional attribute, agriculture, according to Terry Marsden must meet the three key conditions (Marsden and Sonnino, 2008), respectively: firstly it must generate income and employment opportunities for the agricultural sector, secondly it must contribute to the construction and development of a new agricultural sector to correspond to the needs and expectations of the whole society, and finally, it must involve radical redefinition and reconfiguration of rural resources, to different degrees and levels, especially of industrial agriculture.

Multifunctional agriculture defines a concept of particular significance that places agriculture at the confluence of the requirements imposed by the food security of the population and the multiple functions, social, environmental and cultural that it must realize at the level of rural communities by reconciling the conventional agricultural practices with the need for environmental protection and conservation of rural landscapes, imposing a new approach regarding the relation agriculture-environment-rural area.

Analyzing the concept of multifunctional agriculture, the British Professor Geoff Wilson states that this explains the multidimensional coexistence of the productivist regime and therefore of the post-productivist one and thereby it comes to represent an accurate description of the multidimensional nature of the changes in rural environment and in agricultural ones (Wilson, 2001). In the evolution of the concept of multifunctional agriculture are worth noted three fundamental concepts promulgated by bodies such as FAO-WTO, OECD and the EU-27.

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