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Das Saratow AMC project

Development and support of model farms in Russia

The Saratow AMC project is the internal short-title for a project financed by the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) for supporting Russian citizens of German nationality (Russian-German) in the state of Saratow which partly belonged to the former autonomous Volga Republic. The aim of the project was the creation of specialist, production-technological and infrastructural requirements agriculture oriented on private economy. Also aimed for through the improvement of living and working conditions for private farmers is a last- ing settling or resettling of Russian-Germans in the region.

Project leadership lay with VDA, the society for German matters abroad which was already active in Russia at the time of the agreement for the project in 1992 and had a suitable infrastructure in the state of Saratow (VDA-office, Saratow). The specialist conducting of the project was handed-over by the VDA to the Institute for Agricultural Engineering in Bonn where the Agricultural-Management Centre was grounded for that reason, a working group for developing countries comprising several institutes within the Faculty of Agriculture in Bonn University. Inkopan in Essen was responsible for the building works within the project.

Incorporated as university partner on the spot was the Saratow State University for Agricultural Engineering (SSAU).

The planning phase began in 1992, its execution in 1993. Because of the changed political conditions the project was handed over to the GTZ at the end of 1996.

Selected as project concept was a combination of knowledge and technology exchange with material and financial support consisting of several project elements:

1. Exchange programme for lecturers and students
2. Development of an education, advisory and training centre with teaching farms
3. Support for private model farms
4. Integration of the experiences into an agricultural advisory service

Exchange programme for lecturers and students

This part of the project served mainly the transfer of knowledge and technology, particularly in the areas:

- environmentally-supportable farming
- management and development of farms according to the principles of private enterprise and
- free market economy
- creation of legal, economical and technical conditions for the development of private farms
- university training up to European standards of agricultural engineering science courses and
- their academic qualifications

From 1993 to 1995 many SSAU lecturers

and students were in Germany. The lecturers stayed for two to three months as guest scientists at the Institute for Agricultural Engineering. The students studied as practical students on-farm in North-Rhine-Westphalia and attended courses at Haus Riswick and the DEULA at Kempen.

In exchange, professors and members of the AMC scientific staff travelled to the SSAU and the two project locations gathering information and as guest lecturers.

Development of an educational, advisory and training centre with teaching farms

For the development of agriculture based on a private economy, committed and fully-trained farmers are especially needed, along with the right practical conditions. Because of the strong specialisation within state commune (Kolchosen) staffs, training for private farmers comparable with west European standards was not available. To help here a further AMC office was established in Saratow (in addition to the Bonn AMC office which was mainly responsible for the planning and coordination of the project) The Saratow office was responsible for training and helping private farmers in the state of Saratow with advice. The aim was to found two AMC teaching farms to help out with this. Lack of material on-location meant, however, that only one was able to be arranged. This arable farm specialising in seed production was grounded in 1993 in cooperation with SSAU on land where the latter had an experimental farm around 100 km north-west of Saratow. The teaching farm was made available to the AMC and the SSAU as training, demonstration and model farm.

Factor supply through the cooperation partner SSAU necessary for the development of the teaching farm included making available over the long-term of the land, water and steadings) as well as supplying inputs and energy and undertaking the removal of waste and other materials.

Planning was oriented on the available data [1] and the experiences of farmers re-establishing private farms in the former East Germany, with labour input of 0.6 to 1.0 working units/ 100 ha and a target size of 500 ha. In a region of 100% grain production the

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choice of seed production as special enterprise was made because the end product was marketable and had increasing earning possibilities whereas selling as food/feed grain was also possible. The production was to be environmentally-sustainable and also acceptable for the location.

The biggest organisational input was necessary for the creation of a suitable contract because grounding a company for private farming and the necessary statutory framework did not exist in Russia. Management of the farm was carried out by two equally responsible co-directors nominated by SSAU and Bonn University Institute of Agricultural Engineering.

Equipping the teaching farm with buildings and machinery was up to the German side whereas the Russians were responsible for building the farm manager's house.

The mechanisation was mainly west European because, along with private economy farm management, application of west European technology for integrated cropping methods was to be investigated and demonstrated. The machinery, acquired through tender, arrived mainly during the first management year of 1993 and was put to work on the total 470 ha farmland. In the same year, hall 1 was built to Russian design in steel with around 1000 m² floor area and facilities for grain drying, storage and preparation for around 900 t seed in 12 silos. Hall 2 was erected in steel to a German design in 1994 with 600 m² floor area for housing machinery and its year-round servicing along with training facilities in an insulated and heated area. While the building of a domestic house started punctually, considerable delays occurred during completion owing to

lack of finances on the part of the Russian cooperation partner. In 1995 the farmyard was surfaced with gravel and surrounded by fencing (fig. 1).

Despite many problems, operation of the teaching farm was able to be started as early as 1993. The experiences gained there were applied directly in further planning and indicated very clearly the effects on management and yield of the climate which was very different from that of western Europe. The management was also very difficult in the following year through poor availability of fertiliser and other inputs, extreme weather conditions and difficulties in the marketing of material produced, especially the seed.

Despite this it was possible to manage the farm comparatively successfully under the difficult climatic and economic conditions.

As from 1995 the teaching farm was free the requirements of the AMC and was used for demonstration and training of students and private farmers.

Support of private model farms

This part of the project concerned direct support measures for Russian-Germans in developing and managing farms. Planned were three model farms, i.e. farms with an exemplary mechanisation in specific production directions supplemented with an intensive agricultural advisory service. Requirement was the independent grounding and management of a farm with sufficient farmland and basic machinery and buildings as well as an agreement for continuous access of farm management data.

Within the project period only one farm, „Potschin“, a community of four Russian-

German families met these requirements. This farm was a purely arable enterprise with around 550 ha cropland and received as support in 1994 equipment including machinery and storage hall for production, storage, preparation and part-processing of grain.

A further measure – the importance of which only first became apparent during the project – was support during the development of a private agricultural engineering specialist company. Because of the dilapidation of the earlier central repair station, in the individual districts, private agricultural engineering companies for servicing, repair and marketing of farm machinery are becoming increasingly important. For this reason such a specialist firm was planned as a model and its grounding prepared with a suitable partner.

Integration of experiences within an agricultural advisory service

The main task of the Saratow AMC office was advising private farmers. This service was open not only to Russian-Germans but also for all private farmers in the region. For this, the AMC had available the teaching farm „Niwa-Hof“ as demonstration unit (machinery, buildings and management systems) and as data supplier. Additionally, the AMC was able to access data from the „Potschin“ model farm and, for comparison, also SSAU data from the region. Alongside the individual advising of single farmers, the AMC also held seminars for private farmers on current farm management and cropping themes with Russian and German speakers

Under the direction of AMC and with SSAU taking part, scientific seminars were held in Saratow on topical themes and on the results of the project [2]. In Bonn, the AMC conducted a so-called East European Seminar for the encouragement of science and technology transfer and the possible integration of activities in east Europe [3, 4].

Summary

The political and economic transformation process is well under way in Russia. Agriculture has a great importance in this development because a large proportion of the population are involved in the farming and nutrition sectors. Although the starting position regarding available farmland is positive, there remain great difficulties in the establishment of a farming sector based on private economy. The political and infrastructural framework is missing and to this can be added insufficient training and poor supply of farming inputs and capital, e.g., start help and reasonable credit terms for private farmers. Also to be borne in mind are the risks

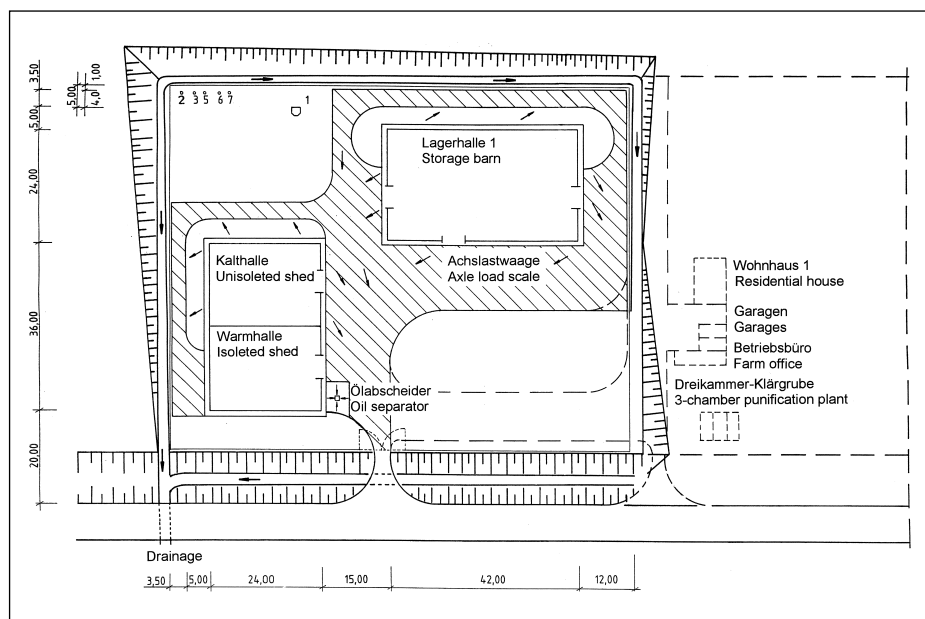


Fig. 1: The farm „Niwa-Hof“

of extreme weather conditions (summer drought and hard winter frosts), lack of marketing structures and the low purchasing power of the population through to lack of social services for private companies. All this hampers the development of private farming in a market-economy oriented system and with the collapsed former system in the background. This is why this action to encourage farming oriented on a private economy with consideration of political, social and psychological aspects is of great importance to the transformation process in Russia.

Literature

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