Role of EU funded projects to increase agricultural production and functionality of agricultural development cooperatives (Case of Turkey)

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate likely effects of the EU project on the management of agricultural development cooperatives and increasing agricultural production. Data were collected from the members of the Cayli Agricultural Development Cooperative, Tokat-Turkey using a questionnaire. Interim narrative and final technical reports of the project were used to evaluate the success of the project. Changes in crop pattern, decrease in production costs, and understanding the importance of working together were the positive outcomes of the project. The changes are attributed to project interventions that enhanced participatory training, furthered knowledge transfer, installed a more entrepreneurial spirit among cooperative members, and facilitated inter-organizational cooperation.

Key words: EU project, cooperative, fodder crop, animal husbandry, Turkey

Introduction

An easy way of getting credit from the Turkish government or grant from the EU is to organize under an umbrella of a non-governmental organization such as an agricultural development cooperative or Union for farmers while buying dairy cattle and construction of new barn. Therefore, new organizations engaged in agricultural production have been established throughout Turkey. For example, there are eighty-two agricultural development cooperatives in the Tokat province of Turkey but most of them have faced severe economic (i.e., bankruptcy) and institutional (i.e., bad management) problems. In 2005, only four cooperatives were successful in fulfilling their obligations. Although EU funded projects were an opportunity for them to overcome problems, most of the cooperatives have not benefited from the EU funds due to not knowing how to prepare a project.

In the context of call for proposals “Regional Development in Samsun, Kastamonu and Erzurum NUTS II Regions- Local development Initiatives Grant Scheme“, Cayli Town Agricultural Development Cooperative prepared a project “Development of Human Resources and Animal Husbandry in Cayli Town via New Agricultural Systems and Forage Crops” in 2005 and it was awarded by the Central Finance and Contracts Unit (CFCU) on behalf of the Republic of Turkey in 2006.

Grants were available for the following priority sectors: Economic development, rural development, improving the quality of human resources, and development of collective utility services (CFCU, 2005).

Although some agricultural cooperatives or producer unions have implemented EU funded project especially in central, eastern, and southeastern parts of Turkey within five years, there was no enough/exact information about the success of these projects in the literature. Therefore, the aim of this paper was to draw a picture of projects granted by the EU and Turkish Government and determine likely effects of them on agrarian change and rural development.
Material and methods

Cayli Agricultural Development Cooperative (Tokat province, Turkey) was chosen as sample project implementation unit. Primary and secondary data were used in the study. Fifty-two cooperative members were questioned (face to face interview) before and after project implementation. In addition, data obtained from the interim narrative and final technical reports of the EU project were used as source.

Results and discussion

Cayli Agricultural Development Cooperative is one of the four successful cooperatives in Tokat province of Turkey. It was established in 1995 and has 52 members. In 2004, managing board of the cooperative prepared a Project „Prime Stock Breeding under Collective Ownership (50 families * 4 cattle = 200 cattle)“. It was financed by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs. The fund was used for only establishment of cooperative building and buying cattle. In the short run, members of the cooperative have understood that their main problems were lack of knowledge on agricultural issues, inadequate machinery park, marketing problems, and weak contact with actors engaged in agriculture in the region.

EU funded projects were an opportunity for cooperatives in order to solve above problems. Therefore, they decided to prepare a new project in order to get grant from the EU sources. In 2005, Cayli Agricultural Development Cooperative decided to prepare an EU funded project under the supervisor of two project experts working at Agricultural Faculty of Gaziosmanpasa University, Turkey. Before preparing the project, the experts questioned the members of the cooperative in order to determine their needs. According to result of the questionnaire, members have had lack of knowledge in the following issues: agricultural supports (58.8%), pest management (56.9%), animal diseases (51.0%), marketing (47.6%), preparation of feedstuff (45.1%), new agricultural techniques (45.1%), use of modern agricultural machines (31.4%), entrepreneurship (25.5%), animal husbandry (23.5%), silage preparation (19.6%), environmental friendly agriculture (19.6%), cultivation of fodder crops (19.6%), use of pasture and grassland (15.7%), and fertilization (15.7%). In the context of this information, the cooperative prepared a project named “Development of Human Resources and Animal Husbandry via New Agricultural Systems and Forage Crops” and submitted it to the Central Finance and Contracts Unit. After strict evaluation of the project by independent assessors, it was found to be implemented.

Target group of the project were cooperative members (52 farmers). Its total budget was €96,000.00. Duration of the project was 12 months (June 2006-May 2007). Target group was trained theoretically and practically. Cooperative members were trained by 7 academic staff in 9 different subjects related to fodder crops, animal husbandry, machinery, crop protection, irrigation, animal waste, cooperation, agricultural policy, and farm management. Duration of the theoretical training was 220 hours. Seeds (silage maize, sainfoin, alfalfa, triticale, barley, Hungarian vetch, Sudan grass, common vetch) were distributed to farmers free of charge. A Machinery Park having 13 different agricultural machines was established in the context of the project. In order to show new agricultural techniques, cooperative members visited a modern animal breeding farm in Kayseri province of Turkey.

Although majority of farmers constituting target group are open to innovation, they had not grown fodder crops economically at enough levels due to lack of knowledge and not having machinery to cultivate fodder crops. Therefore, main aim of this project was to teach farmers how to produce rough and qualified feedstuff that farms engaged in animal husbandry.
One of the most important ways to improve agricultural production is to train farmers theoretically and practically in the issues that they lack of knowledge. Therefore, the EU funded projects are advantage for farmers willing to learn modern animal husbandry and fodder crops growing in the research area. In the following paragraphs the successful project carried out by agricultural development cooperative was analysed.

**Change in crop pattern**
Crop pattern was changed at importance level as parallel to implementation of the project. For example, while cooperative members did not cultivate sainfoin, triticale, vetch + barley mixture and vetch + triticale mixture in the past, as a result of training activity in the context of the project, target group understood the importance of the forage crops for animal husbandry and applying fodder crops in the crop rotation. With the project, there was 2.55 times increase in silage maize, 32 times in sainfoin, 0.42 times in vetch, 5 times in triticale, 5 times in sorghum, 124 times in vetch + barley mixture, 159 times in vetch + triticale mixture. Although 98.8 ha fodder crops were cultivated by the target group before the project, fodder crops cultivation increased to 140.4 ha after the training activity (Table 1). Nearly 42% increase was achieved in forage crops cultivation as a result of the training activity organised in the context of the project. The increase was higher than aimed at logical framework of the project.

**Table 1. Changes in cultivation of fodder crops before and after the project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crops</th>
<th>Fodder crop cultivation (ha)</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before the project</td>
<td>After the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silage Maize</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfalfa</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sainfoin</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vetch</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triticale</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorghum</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vetch &amp; Barley mixture</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vetch &amp; Triticale mixture</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>98.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>140.4</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Anonymous (2008)

**Active cooperation between farmers and other actors**
Before the EU funded project, Cayli Town Agriculture Development Cooperative had weak coordination with actors engaged in agriculture in the region. After implementation of the EU project successfully, some researchers from Agricultural Faculty of Gaziosmanpasa University started to work together members of the Cooperative and to implement another project „Comparison of Different Soil Tillage Systems to Extend the Required Thermal Time for Second Crop Silage Corn Production in the Transition Climate Belt“ financed by TUBITAK. Fields of two leader farmers and machineries of the cooperative bought in the context of the EU project were used in the TUBITAK project.

**Conclusions**
During the project implementation period, many government staff and representatives of the NGO (i.e. Rector of Gaziosmanpasa University, Provincial Directorate of Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Sub-governor of Turhal District, students of Agricultural Faculty, presidents of other cooperatives, local media, leader farmers, etc.) visited the cooperative. Obtaining grant from the EU Funds by Cayli Agricultural Development
Cooperative leaded to increase prestige of the Cooperative in the region. Cooperative members understood importance of timing, planned work, obligation to reach project aims and investment in human resource during the implementation of the project.

Although all members engaged in dairy cattle, they have lack of knowledge how to prepare feed ration. During the training, farmers were taught by academicians on feedstuff ration preparation, milking, growing fodder crops, and dairy cattle husbandry. As a result, animal breeders decreased feed cost and increased income in milk production.

Before the project, members of the cooperative were only contacted with agricultural engineers. Throughout the project they learnt advantage of being close cooperation with different actors (Farmers - Agricultural Faculty - Ministry of Agriculture - Agro based Industry - Local administrations).

Acknowledgement
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References