International Centers Week 1996  
October 28 - November 2  
Washington, D.C.

Toward Global Partnership in Agricultural Research

The Needs and Opportunities for Agricultural Research From the Perspective of Central and Eastern Europe

The attached paper is circulated as an input into the discussions leading to the Declaration and Action Plan for Global Partnerships in Agricultural Research.
The Central and Eastern Europe region encompasses nineteen states with different social and economic conditions for agriculture and agro-industry advancement.

On the one hand, countries such as Ukraine, Romania, and the Russian Federation cover vast areas and have enormous potential for agricultural growth. On the other hand, there are smaller nations that have more limited agricultural potential and economic strength, such as Albania and the states which emerged from Yugoslavia’s disintegration.

Climatic conditions in the region differ very much, beginning with the production regions with an almost subtropical climate (e.g. Bulgaria, Albania, and southern parts of Russia), to the low-temperature regions such as the Baltic States and northern parts of Russia. While some countries have high quality soils (Hungary, Romania, Ukraine), vast regions are covered by light soils with low nutrient and organic content (Poland and Baltic States).

Agricultural production in parts of the region is concentrated in small family farms (e.g. Poland), and in other areas in large units of several thousand hectares of land with diversified production (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Russian Federation). Centralized (state) production management has been typical for the agriculture of the majority of the states in this region until the end of the 1980’s.

These factors all influence the future of agricultural research, which was previously subordinated to the state planning system and the requirements of centralized government policy.
Agricultural Research

Strong agricultural research, linked to extension services has been established in all states of Central and Eastern Europe, but as a circumstance of economic and political pressure, regional agriculture has changed substantially in the past six years.

- agriculture appropriations and subsidies for food products were abolished;
- changes in agricultural enterprise structure occurred;
- management of agricultural production was taken out of state control;
- agricultural sector income reduced dramatically.

The above resulted from the following:

1. a marked decline in interest/uptake of agriculture research results, as farmers are preoccupied with the very existence and maintenance of their own farm operations;

2. many farmers began private agricultural activity, but without adequate technical information, either because it was not available or because they did not realize the significance of what was available;

3. agricultural technology innovation largely ceased as a result of lack of funding to purchase such innovations;

4. state expenditure has been reduced, including for research and extension, with consequent impacts on personnel and material endowment of state institutions;

5. young agricultural research workers are leaving their post to find better paying work in the private sector;

6. economic problems in state institutions limit potential international cooperation and access to information;

7. research management systems respond very slowly to the growing pressure of the external market, and research workers often do not realize or are not able to appreciate the value of research results as goods to be promoted and used in practice;

8. research workers are mostly oriented to work focussed on production, but their economic evaluation skills are weak. Farmers are mainly interested in the economic returns to their business.

9. some newly established states are forced to alter their research to meet (different) needs of their agriculture systems or to establish new research institutions;

10. the private sector is able to supply information inputs directly to the extension service without an objective evaluation of its approach by an independent body.
Future Needs and Priorities for Agriculture Research from the Perspective of Countries of Central and Eastern Europe

As already mentioned above, strong agricultural research came into existence in the different countries of the region after a lapse of fifty years. Political and economic changes had and still have a pronounced influence on the structure, functioning, and advancement of this sphere of the agrarian sector.

The following needs for support and cooperation with the CGIAR can be defined for Central and Eastern Europe:

- human resource development;
- development of a system of transfer of technological know-how to the agricultural sector;
- genetic resources preservation;
- soil and water preservation;
- better access to information.
The Czech Republic’s Role in Promoting Better Utilization of Research in Central and Eastern Europe

Government and non-governmental organizations of the Czech Republic are strongly interested in the progress of democracy and improvement of the economy in the region, and in approaching a stable political climate for the full integration of the Czech Republic into the European and global structures.

To reach these aims, the following practical steps were taken and are to be taken by the Czech Republic in close cooperation with the CGIAR or FAO:

1. a CGIAR/NARS consultation on the problems of research in Central and Eastern Europe was held in May 1996. Representatives of seventeen countries took part in the meeting.

2. the Government of the Czech Republic released funds for a stay of forty professionals from research and extension to cover expenses of a ten day training in the Czech Republic. This training course will take place before the end of 1996. Further specialization courses for these professionals are to be held in 1997, with the objective to improve research results utilization.

3. the Government of the Czech Republic covered the cost of a one week stay for agricultural professionals from Ukraine (in the Czech Republic). They dealt with the process of knowledge exploitation in agriculture (education-research-extension-production).

4. research institutions from Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, under the coordination of a Czech research institute prepared three research projects, oriented on soil and water management and protection in the Central European region, and for which financing is required:
   - emissions (pollutants) and their load limits in soil
   - quantitative and qualitative soil protection considering antierosion prevention
   - revitalizing river basins and small streams’ hydrosphere preservation

5. for immediate cooperation between the CGIAR (ISNAR) and the region, we offer the services of the Crop Research Institute in Prague. This institute has had cooperation with the CGIAR, especially in the field of genetic resources, and its research workers took active part in the Prague Meeting in May 1996, and have participated in other events of common interest.

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Prague, October 1996