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# **Socialist Agricultural Policy and the Agricultural Extension Service in Slovenia since the Early 1970s**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This article aims to briefly highlight the key characteristics of the agricultural policy of the revolutionary communist regime in socialist Slovenia, particularly in the context of frequently shifting political and economic directions.\* It focuses on the period both before and after the establishment of a new concept of agricultural policy between 1968 and 1971. Furthermore, the article seeks to shed light on the vision of the new agricultural policy concept and the development of agriculture and the food industry after 1970. It also aims to present an integral part of the new agricultural policy – the agenda and organization of the revitalized agricultural extension services following the revival of socialist cooperatives.

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In examining the study and historiography of Slovenian agricultural development, it becomes evident that this area has remained relatively marginalized in comparison to the more extensively researched field of political history. Nonetheless, among Slovenian historians, particular attention should be given to the work of Žarko Lazarević and Zdenko Čepič. Lazarević's research, among other subjects, addresses the development of agriculture and the socio-economic position of agriculture and the rural population within both capitalist and socialist economic systems. For the period preceding the Second World War, his focus primarily lies on the issue of peasant indebtedness and the mechanisms for debt resolution. In contrast, for the socialist period, he provides a general analysis of the transformation of agricultural policy from a capitalist to a socialist framework.

Čepič, by contrast, concentrates on the first fifteen years of socialist agriculture, with particular emphasis on the implementation of agrarian reform, colonization, and collectivization. Concerning the socialist period, it is also essential to highlight the contributions of Edvard Kardelj, a Slovene and the principal architect of Yugoslav socialist agricultural policy, as well as of Croatian statesman, politician, and Marxist theorist, Vladimir Bakarić. Both Kardelj and Bakarić engaged with fundamental questions concerning the construction and organization of a socialist state and society, including the position and role of the rural population within that framework.

In the context of regulating the position of peasants and the rural population, it is essential to mention the legal scholar Emil Čeferin, who formulated the legal foundations for addressing the socio-economic status of peasants. Among scholars from the former Yugoslavia, notable contributions include those of Croatian economist Vladimir Stipetić, who focused on the development and structural position of agriculture; Ivan Lončarević, who studied agricultural pricing policy in socialist Yugoslavia; and Dragan Veselinov, along with sociologist and legal theorist Stipe Šuvar, both of whom addressed the so-called »peasant question«. Svetolik Popović also merits mention for his analysis of agricultural policy up to the 1960s.

Yugoslav agricultural policy also attracted the interest of several foreign scholars. Notably, Arthur W. Wright and Lloyd S. Etheredge wrote about the transfer of Soviet economic and agricultural policies to communist Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. At the same time, Robert F. Miller examined the development of Yugoslav agricultural policy and the evolving relationship between the dominant private sector and the officially favored public/social<sup>1</sup> sector.

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1 The shift from the term »state« to »social« began in 1953, when the Yugoslav Federal Constitutional Law established self-management as the foundation of the new social order, thereby replacing state

The agricultural extension service in socialist Slovenia has not yet been the subject of a comprehensive study, and individual authors – such as rural sociologist Ana Barbič – refer to it only in the context of educating the rural population.

## BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE: AGRICULTURAL POLICY IN SOCIALIST SLOVENIA

Socialist agricultural policy and farming under communist leadership in Slovenia, within the framework of Yugoslavia, were characterized by the alignment of economic objectives with political and ideological goals amidst modernization and accelerated industrialization. The primary function of agriculture at the time, as it remains today, was to ensure the population's food supply. The economic challenge of providing sufficient quantities of food was to be addressed within the establishment of a new social, political, and economic order – socialism. This was achieved through the creation of a state and cooperative agricultural sector, sourced from nationalized land acquired through agrarian reform (1945–1948), and a multitude of small farms that, due to economic pressures, were compelled to integrate into the state agricultural sector via the newly established socialist cooperative system.<sup>2</sup> The agrarian reform, through the administrative redistribution of confiscated and expropriated land, led to further fragmentation of the land ownership structure. This resulted in a decrease in the number of larger agricultural estates and an increase in the number of small and medium-sized farms.<sup>3</sup> For the most part, agricultural holdings were established that were neither capable of generating surpluses for sale nor of sustaining families without seeking income sources outside agricultural activities.<sup>4</sup> This was also a goal of communist ideology, as one of its primary concerns, at least until the second half of the 1960s, was the »peasant question,« rooted in a fear of the farming class, particularly wealthy farmers. Communist ideology assumed that private land ownership, regardless of its size, perpetually carried the potential for the emergence of capitalism in rural areas. The private farmer, especially a wealthy one, was perceived as a threat to socialism. As a result, they were confined within narrow productive limits and subjected to economic, political, and social restrictions. The new revolutionary communist regime viewed agriculture

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and cooperative ownership with a concept of social ownership – defined as ownership by everyone and by no one.

2 Čepič, *Kmetijska politika*, 891. Lazarevič, *Delo*, 100.

3 Lazarevič, *Delo*, 100.

4 Čepič, *Kmetijska politika*, 890.

primarily through a political lens rather than as an economic issue tied to land ownership structure and agricultural production methods.<sup>5</sup>

The implemented agrarian reform essentially laid the foundation for the envisioned agricultural policy. Through the agrarian reform, the state and cooperative agricultural sectors were established, while the small-scale private agricultural sector was preserved.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it was the framework upon which the implementation of socialist agricultural policy was based. Agricultural policy in Slovenia, within the context of Yugoslavia, essentially followed the interpretation of classical Marxism, which argued that peasants, due to the developmental trends of agriculture towards land ownership concentration and the monopolization of production in the form of large agricultural operations using mechanization, could not survive in the long term as small producers. The only difference in following the Soviet socialist strategy lay in the tactics.<sup>7</sup> Similar to other socialist countries, Yugoslavia followed the Marxist strategy concerning the peasant question and agricultural policy. This strategy aimed to build socialism as an economically efficient and socially just system by eliminating the peasantry as a social class and transforming them into workers within the framework of large, industrial, collective, socialist agricultural production.<sup>8</sup> Although Yugoslavia deviated from the Soviet socialist model of agricultural policy<sup>9</sup> – being the only European socialist country to abandon the collective farming model in 1953 – the effects of the Yugoslav model of agrarian policy were similar to the Soviet one. After the abandonment of collectivization, private peasants were confined to even narrower productive limits, yet, through the new cooperative system, they were tolerated or allowed to coexist with the system.<sup>10</sup> However, in a comparative context, Yugoslavia – especially Slovenia – achieved a record speed of deagrarianization. Partial deagrarianization also emerged on a large scale. The tactic towards private farming in the first twenty years after the Second World War can, except for the harsh collectivization period from 1949 to 1953, be compared to Lenin's view on small private producers. His stance was that peasants as a class should be eliminated, but not overnight and through violent expropriation; rather, it should be done through a careful and deliberate organization of labor relations. He envisioned this within a new form of cooperativism.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, the leading architect of Yugoslav agricultural policy, the Slovenian Edvard Kardelj, viewed the new socialist cooperativism both as an organizational

5 Čepič, Kaj, kako, zakaj?, 575–91. Partlič, »Znanost«, 428.

6 Čepič, Kaj, kako, zakaj?, 580.

7 Partlič, »Znanost«, 430–32. Lazarević. Uvod, 12.

8 Partlič, »Znanost«, 430–32.

9 Merl, Sovietization.

10 Partlič, »Znanost«, 430–32.

11 Ibidem, 430–32.

tool for the reconstruction of agriculture and as a political means to »destroy the remnants of capitalist exploitation«. <sup>12</sup> The socialist cooperative agricultural sector was intended to complement the agrarian reform from both economic and political perspectives. Politically, it was meant to serve as an intermediary between the state/socially-owned agricultural sector and the private agricultural sector, functioning as a means of control, direction, and integration of the prevailing private agricultural sector into the state/socially-owned agricultural sector. <sup>13</sup> In this way, it was also intended to meet economic goals. The socialist cooperative sector was to be »supporting the state in implementing the national economic plan,« as the aim was the socialization of private agricultural production. <sup>14</sup> In its objectives, socialist cooperativism thus differed from the goals of classical cooperativism. Classical cooperativism, from its emergence in the mid-19th century until the Second World War, aimed to promote economic benefits and develop the economic or social activities of its members from the small-scale economic sector (merchants, craftsmen, peasants, workers) through a shared business operation (cooperatives) in an environment dominated by the power of capital. <sup>15</sup>

Socialist Yugoslavia and Slovenia, as its integral part, like other communist countries under Soviet influence, designed the country's accelerated and forced industrialization at the neglect of agriculture and the economic, political, and social discrimination of the rural population. With agricultural product prices that were disproportionate to those of industrial goods, agriculture was positioned as a source of accumulation for the development of the industrial sector. At the same time, disproportionate prices for agricultural products were used to regulate the macroeconomic level of agricultural food production. A system of taxation on private peasants further complemented the intervention in relative prices. <sup>16</sup>

Frequent changes in economic orientation characterized Socialist Yugoslavia and Slovenia. In the second half of the 1950s, the authorities decided to pursue a more balanced development of economic sectors. Among these sectors, greater attention was to be given to agriculture, which consistently lagged behind industry in terms of accumulation, investments, and economic outcomes. By the late 1950s, there was also a growing recognition that the development of private agriculture and agricultural cooperatives had reached a point where, according to agricultural policy makers, the focus of agricultural development needed to shift

12 See: Čepič, *Kmetje*, 325–36.

13 Lazarević, Rendla, and Sedlaček, *Zgodovina*, 150, 153. Between the two main forms of agricultural holdings, private and social, private farms dominated in terms of both number and land area. By the end of the socialist era, social agricultural holdings managed only about 15% of agricultural land in social ownership – Kovačič, *Kmetijstvo*, 166.

14 Lazarević, Rendla, and Sedlaček, *Zgodovina*, 150.

15 *Ibid*, 150, 151. Kovačič, *Kmetijstvo*, 174.

16 Lazarević, *Delo*, 105.

unilaterally to the socially-owned agricultural sector. This sector, along with the most advanced part of the cooperative sector, was expected to meet the demands for food security.<sup>17</sup>

In the context of economic reforms during the 1960s, agriculture underwent a reorganization driven by the desire to establish a significant and robust agricultural establishment and enterprises, thereby creating a socially-owned agricultural sector.<sup>18</sup> In practice, this meant merging cooperatives into larger cooperatives and affiliating agricultural cooperatives with socially-owned agricultural enterprises – agricultural conglomerates (agrokombinats). Although both agricultural ownership sectors consistently lagged behind the industry sector due to the prioritization of industrialization, the profitability and productivity of the private agricultural sector in Slovenia (as well as elsewhere in Yugoslavia) consistently fell behind those of the state agricultural sector. This was due to price policies and administrative restrictions on investments in private farms. From the 1960s onward, the disparity in relative production growth and profitability continued to widen, deepening over the long term to the detriment of private agriculture.<sup>19</sup> For example, the income of the rural population between 1967 and 1970 amounted to only 37% to 53% of the income of the non-rural population. Private agriculture was primarily self-sufficient in its production structure, characterized by fragmented land ownership, poor equipment, insufficient integration of peasants with agricultural organizations, and a low level of education.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1960s, the dynamic development of agricultural cooperatives through socialist cooperation, based on contract-based purchasing introduced after the abolition of strict collectivization in 1953, was interrupted. The peasant's interest representative organization, the Main Cooperative Union of Slovenia, was also dissolved.<sup>21</sup> The strong focus on so-called agrokombinats resulted in the neglect of the potential of private agriculture. On the one hand, it led to the strengthening of the socially-owned agricultural sector, while on the other, it devalued and underestimated the role of the private peasants.<sup>22</sup> Cooperatives, by limiting peasants' self-management, distanced themselves from the needs of their peasant members. In the context of cooperatives operating under principles similar to those of enterprises and prioritizing workers in their management, peasants became mere contractors in cooperation arrangements, with little influence on the functioning of cooperatives and cooperative enterprises. This resulted in the

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17 *Kmetijsko združništvo*, 22.

18 *Razvoj*, 8, 13, 17.

19 Lazarević, *Uvod*, 15.

20 *Razvoj*, 5, 11.

21 Avsec, *Kmetijsko združništvo*, 4.

22 *Razvoj*, 8, 13, 17.

dominance of collective interests over those of the peasants. Cooperative efforts focused on maximizing income, which was effectively generated for the cooperative rather than for its members. This focus also hindered cooperatives from taking on additional roles, such as providing education or distributing income. Cooperatives failed to adequately perform their fundamental tasks, such as supplying peasants with necessary agricultural materials and purchasing their produce. Often, cooperatives were unable to offer the required goods or lacked stock at the appropriate time. Additionally, they frequently purchased only agricultural products with guaranteed markets. As a result, peasants/cooperative members had to seek their own markets to avoid wasting their produce. The cooperative machinery pool, intended for working on peasants' land, was also significantly diminished. In many cases, cooperative machinery was converted into enterprises for transporting goods. Some agrokombinats organizing cooperative production, such as chicken farming, engaged with cooperative members only through production contracts. Under such agreements, contractors were left with no rights to the fruits of their labor after they had handed over their produce to the cooperative partner. Furthermore, cooperatives suffered from a lack of expertise, partly due to lower wages in agriculture compared to other sectors. This led to organizational decline, with cooperatives gradually losing their operational capacity.<sup>23</sup>

Given such a course of events, after 1960, both the number of cooperatives and their membership declined sharply. In 1955, there were 714 agricultural cooperatives; by 1960, this number had dropped to 421, and by 1964, to just 88. By 1969, the number of agricultural cooperatives had fallen further to 62. Similarly, the membership of agricultural cooperatives also experienced a steep decline: in 1958, cooperatives had 126,000 members; by 1961, the number had dropped to around 115,000; by 1964, it was approximately 68,000; and by 1966, only about 46,000 peasants remained as members of agricultural cooperatives.<sup>24</sup>

In the context of an unfavorable agricultural policy, particularly during the first 25 years after the war, marked by various restrictive measures targeting private farming while exclusively promoting the socially-owned agricultural sector, and due to virtually unlimited employment opportunities in industry that came with associated rights and social benefits, the rural population was forced to seek employment outside agriculture.

The post-war period's extensive industrialization, which required a large workforce, attracted primarily rural laborers in a predominantly agrarian country with a limited industrial workforce. Agricultural policy suppressed the development of private farming's economic potential through unfavorable measures,

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23 *Kmetijsko združništvo*, 22, 23, 25–27. Avsec, *Kmetijsko združništvo*, 4, 5. *Razvoj*, 17, 18.

24 *Razvoj*, 17.

including the establishment of a land ownership limit in 1953 – lowered for the second time since the war to just 10 ha of arable land—and the prohibition of modernization, such as the acquisition of farm machinery and tractors, until 1967.

These restrictions made it difficult for many peasants to develop their family farms—averaging 5.5 ha in size, with only 2.5 ha of arable land – and generate sufficient income for survival.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, a significant portion of the rural population sought employment outside of agriculture. Agrarian poverty and overpopulation – on the one hand – and industrial sector employment opportunities, on the other hand, drove the rural labor force away from agriculture to non-agrarian sectors. Deagrarianization and partial deagrarianization were driven by the undervaluation of agricultural labor, the high demand for labor in industry, and the fact that regular employment provided a higher and more reliable income, along with social rights and benefits derived from work. Mixed farms, where one or more family members were employed in the non-agricultural sector, combined income from farming with income from non-agricultural employment. In some cases, employment in the non-agricultural sector became the dominant source of income, while farming became a supplementary activity. The process of deagrarianization led to the abandonment of farming altogether. In contrast, partial deagrarianization resulted in the emergence of mixed households or semi-farms, where families combined agricultural work with industrial or other non-agricultural employment.<sup>26</sup> This led to the socio-economic stratification of farms in rural areas.<sup>27</sup> The effect of this process was also a decline in the prestige of farming as a profession. By creating a layer of the population with minimal chances for survival, the government effectively provided a source of labor for the planned industrialization.<sup>28</sup>

The motivation for dual employment of individuals, particularly male members of mixed farms, was not a peculiar feature of Yugoslav society, but rather a global phenomenon, viewed as a transitional phase that helped farms navigate critical stages. It was based on economic necessity, the desire to improve living standards, or the need to fulfill other personal interests and needs.<sup>29</sup>

By the early 1970s, mixed farms became dominant in Slovenia. In 1971, they accounted for 57% of all farms.<sup>30</sup> According to agricultural sociologist Ana Barbič, who classified farms into pure and mixed types based on income generation, the

25 Rus and Rupena–Osolnik, Vloga, 155.

26 Barbič, *Kmetov vsakdan*, 244–51.

27 Kovačič, *Kmetijstvo*, 167.

28 Lazarevič, *Delo*, 105. Čepič, *Kmetijska politika*, 891. Barbič, *Kmetov vsakdan*, 244. Makarovič, *Družine*, 135.

29 Barbič, *Kmetov vsakdan*, 256, 266.

30 Rus and Rupena–Osolnik, Vloga, 155.

share of mixed farms increased to 72% by 1981.<sup>31</sup> With the emergence of mixed farms, private agriculture became significantly feminized, as the employment of predominantly male family members in the non-agricultural sector led to women taking a more central role in agricultural production.

## THE CONCEPT OF AGRICULTURAL POLICY IN THE LAST TWO DECADES OF YUGOSLAV SOCIALISM

The lagging behind of agriculture compared to other economic sectors, as well as developed industrial countries, which simultaneously accelerated their agricultural development through technical and technological revolutions alongside industrial development and deagrarianization, influenced the communist government to opt for faster agricultural development and more balanced economic development for Slovenia. To this end, between 1968 and 1971, a new concept for the development of agriculture, known as the *Concept for the Long-Term Development of Agriculture and the Food Industry for the Period 1968–1990*, was formulated. Key elements of the long-term agricultural policy were focused on strengthening the socio-economic position of peasants and agricultural workers, implementing self-management, reinforcing cooperatives, and rationally utilizing natural resources. The primary emphasis was to accelerate the development of livestock production, improve peasants' knowledge, introduce and apply science and cutting-edge technologies in practice, and work towards a more efficient and socially organized market food production system.<sup>32</sup> Agricultural policy, in contrast to past practices, which underestimated, suppressed, and hindered the development and survival of private farms, sought to integrate them into socially organized agricultural production in the long-term development of agriculture and the food industry. Unlike the 1960s, when the economic potential of private agriculture was undermined, the policy now aimed to incorporate these potentials through measures designed to increase production. The private agricultural sector, which cultivated 82% of all agricultural land and 88% of arable land, was increasingly recognized in connection with socialist cooperatives as an important factor in ensuring food security.<sup>33</sup>

Agricultural development programs, both long-term and medium-term, aimed to achieve continuous and stable food production, aligned with the demand for agricultural products in domestic and foreign markets, as well as to

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31 Barbič, *Kmetov vsakdan*, 290.

32 *XV. redni občni zbor*, 1.

33 *Razvoj*, 8. Poročilo, 20.

improve the reproductive capacity of agriculture and reduce income disparities. The additional development goal was to increase productivity and close the price gap. Among the development tasks, they also envisioned more efficient use of agricultural capacities and more controlled deagrarianization. The outmigration from agriculture was deliberately intended to proceed at a relatively slow pace, to prevent worsening food supply issues. A key lever for the renewal of private agriculture – alongside the establishment and implementation of a law on partial interest compensation and the republic-level participation in agricultural and primary processing loans – was the work of the agricultural extension service.<sup>34</sup>

The strategy for the development of agriculture and the food industry positioned the agricultural extension service, with its objectives, as an integral part of the measures to achieve the agricultural development tasks. According to the so-called Green plan, introduced in the early 1970s, which encompassed strategies for achieving the highest possible level of food self-sufficiency, agriculture was to increase the level of food self-sufficiency to 85–88%. The most significant shares of market production were to be focused on products for which Slovenia had favorable natural and economic conditions (milk, beef, potatoes, hops, wine, some types of fruits and vegetables). Higher productivity was to be achieved through the introduction of modern technologies and scientific discoveries in agriculture. Since this also meant an excess of labor force, the reduction of the rural population was expected to continue. Aware of the problem of depopulation and the unfavorable age structure of the population in certain regions, more regulated deagrarianization was planned. At the same time, the modernization and better equipping of the remaining farms were intended to enhance their financial stability.<sup>35</sup>

Private agriculture was to be revitalized with the program of so-called farm restructuring. This meant the restructuring of farms based on natural conditions, shifting from diverse, self-sufficiency-oriented production to simplified, specialized market-oriented production. Market-oriented farming was intended to generate income, which would depend on the farm's labor productivity, cost-price relations, and employment, meaning the relationship between the amount of required labor and the available workforce.<sup>36</sup> Farms were to specialize in specific agricultural sectors, such as cattle breeding, piglet breeding or fattening pigs to slaughter weight, sheep farming, and vegetable production, among others.<sup>37</sup> Market-oriented farms, along with socially-owned agricultural enterprises, were to become the central pillars of agricultural production, hubs for modern

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<sup>34</sup> *Razvoj*, 13. *Ustanovni občni zbor*, 36.

<sup>35</sup> *Razvoj*, 14, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Kovačič, *Kmetijstvo*, 172.

<sup>37</sup> *Izredni občni zbor*, 15, 16.

technology, and leading market producers. As part of the restructuring of private farming, an important decision was made that mixed farms (or semi-farms), which became dominant from the 1970s onward, should also receive equal attention. Numerous semi-farms were significant not only for agricultural market production but also for preserving agricultural land. Many semi-farms continued to cultivate land primarily because non-agricultural income was reinvested in farming activities.<sup>38</sup>

The concept of long-term development for agriculture and the food industry anticipated the intensification of agricultural production in all sectors of crop and livestock production, also based on new forms of peasant cooperation brought about by cooperative legislation, particularly through the Peasants' Association Act (*Zakon o združevanju kmetov*, 1972, 1979).<sup>39</sup> The four basic forms of peasant cooperation (agricultural cooperatives with territorially organized cooperative units and special workers organizations, cooperation facilities in agricultural enterprises (agrokombinats), agricultural production communities, and various contract-based associations) were intended, unlike in the 1960s, to ensure peasants' influence on programmatic and production orientations. In agricultural production communities (machinery, perennial crop restoration, reclamation, dairy, pasture, and joint barn construction communities), specialized farms in specific agricultural sectors would be encouraged to join. These communities were expected to lower production and breeding costs through collective purchasing of materials necessary for specialized agriculture, joint selling of goods, and collaboration with specialized expert services. Agricultural policy also advocated for leaving the search for new forms of cooperation, as well as determining the most suitable form, to the affected peasants themselves. A regulated market for agricultural products, which was expected to lead to better prices, was to motivate peasants towards higher and better-quality production.<sup>40</sup>

The various forms of peasant cooperation were intended to facilitate the inclusion of peasants and their production into the socially-owned agricultural sector, thereby contributing to the faster development of socially organized agricultural production.<sup>41</sup> The restructuring of agricultural production, breeding, and farming was to be achieved through changes in the crop structure and the concentration of livestock farming. The development of livestock farming, particularly cattle breeding, was encouraged. To this end, better utilization of grasslands was planned, with a focus on more intensive production of grain feed (maize). The goal was for maize to eventually become the most important crop in

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38 *Razvoj*, 16.

39 *Izredni občni zbor*, 5. *Zakon o združevanju kmetov*, 49–63.

40 *Razvoj*, 21, 22, 23.

41 *Izredni občni zbor*, 6.

Slovenia. It was intended to expand at the expense of potatoes, although the total potato yield, due to higher yields per hectare, would not decrease significantly. The production of high-quality meat was to be increased, and efforts were to be made to revive shepherding, sheep farming, fruit orchards, and hop cultivation. Vine growing was also to continue developing.<sup>42</sup> The development of rural tourism and other supplementary industries was to be encouraged, allowing for an increase in income. In crop production, better results were expected through the accelerated introduction of biological and technical innovations, as well as the implementation of modern forms of technological cooperation among peasants, including the introduction of agricultural machinery. Since the introduction of such innovations was more feasible on larger, consolidated land areas, the continuous development of a sense of cooperation among neighbors was emphasized. Within land policy, efforts were to be made to ensure greater flexibility in land consolidation.<sup>43</sup>

During the modernization process, which involves the use of modern machinery and technologies, there were also opportunities to compensate for the decline in the agricultural labor force and to achieve higher productivity. Restrictions on the acquisition of agricultural machinery were lifted for peasants in 1967. Agricultural policy, in the context of insufficient connections between peasants and agricultural organizations that would enable well-organized cooperation among them, and amid increasing demand for food, advocated for the revival of the private agricultural sector through various forms of peasant cooperation, as the entire agricultural sector is crucial for ensuring food security.

## **AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE AND ITS AGENDA AFTER 1970**

The Agricultural Extension Service was organized based on the decision to revive socialist cooperatives, following the long-term development concept of agriculture and the food industry adopted in 1968. This concept served as an integral part of the activities of agricultural organizations in achieving long-term and annual production goals at the beginning of the 1970s, structured at three levels – local, regional, and republic.<sup>44</sup>

The nine areas of operation of The Agricultural Extension Service, in its efforts, followed the concept of agricultural policy and its strategic directions developed between 1968 and 1971. The strategic direction of agriculture was to

42 *Razvoj*, 16. VI. Redni občni zbor, 6, 7.

43 *Izredni občni zbor*, 12, 13. *Razvoj*, 16.

44 *X. redni občni zbor*, 50. *Kmetijsko združništvo*, 51, 52.

increase agricultural production to the level of self-sufficiency in food between 85% and 88%.<sup>45</sup> The so-called Green Plan was to be achieved through the implementation of agricultural development and investment programs for both areas of agricultural ownership.<sup>46</sup> The strategist of agricultural development, the Slovenian Edvard Kardelj, stated at an expanded session of the Economic Council at the beginning of 1974: »We must focus on large-scale socialist agricultural production and cooperation with private peasants. Everything we do must be done in a way that includes and economically connects the peasant into a unified process of collective work«. <sup>47</sup>

With the partial depoliticization of agriculture at the end of the 1960s – when fears of wealthy farmers gradually faded amid a declining rural population, which had dropped to 20% – the communist authorities began to reassess their approach to the sector. They recognized that the persistent post-war lag in agriculture, both in the socially-owned and private sectors, in terms of income and capital accumulation compared to other parts of the economy, could only be addressed through increased investment. This applied not only to the socially-owned agricultural sector but also to the private agricultural sector. Agricultural policy realized the importance of food production for domestic needs and export, as well as the fact that high and higher-quality yields could primarily be ensured by adhering to the findings of agricultural sciences, which could only be monitored and applied by trained peasants. The priority task of the Agricultural Extension Service was therefore to assist the previously neglected or excluded private agricultural sector in gaining access to modern agricultural technological knowledge and modernization through advice and education on new farming techniques, thereby helping to increase agricultural production. The Agricultural Extension Service was defined as the most important element of the basic units of agricultural organizations, tasked with organizing and promoting (ordered) market cooperative production through the introduction of new technologies into agricultural production.<sup>48</sup>

The Agricultural Extension Service was supposed to ensure the transfer of new knowledge and technological findings into practice, as well as to facilitate the connection and cooperation among private peasants, and between peasants and agricultural organizations or the parent cooperative organization. This would help develop more modern production methods, increase marketable output, achieve greater productivity, and generate higher income.<sup>49</sup>

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45 *Razvoj*, 14, 23.

46 *Kmečki glas*, January 30, 1974, No. 4, 6, Zeleni načrt je stvar celotne družbe 1.

47 *Kmečki glas*, March 27, 1974, No. 12, 1, Edvard Kardelj o osnovnih vprašanih kmetijstva. Oboje je pomembno: kmet in družbena proizvodnja.

48 Barbič, *Kmetov vsakdan*, 223.

49 *Poročilo Zadružne zveze SR Slovenije 1972–1976*, 20.

The Agricultural Extension Service had already been operating before this, as a result of the unification of agricultural cooperatives in 1952. The predecessor of today's Cooperative Union of Slovenia (Zadružna zveza Slovenije (ZZS)), the Main Cooperative Union of Slovenia (Glavna zadružna zveza Slovenije (GZZS)), established in the summer of 1952, paid attention to the agricultural extension service and the establishment of specialized extension committees for individual agricultural sectors (such as livestock, fruit growing, viticulture, and crop farming committees, as well as committees for mechanization, plant protection, forestry, trade, import, and export, etc.) from its founding onward. The committees for the extension of individual agricultural sectors remained under the auspices of the GZZS until the end of 1957, when they, as professional committees, were transferred to the Cooperative Business Union of Slovenia (Zadružna poslovna zveza Slovenije). In the spring of 1960, they were moved to the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of the People's Republic of Slovenia (Zbornica za kmetijstvo in gozdarstvo Ljudske republike Slovenije (LRS)).<sup>50</sup>

During the period of neglect of agricultural cooperatives in the 1960s, the effectiveness of the Agricultural Extension Service in transferring scientific discoveries and knowledge to the broader agricultural practice was minimal. The application of agricultural science findings, due to the belief that the socially-owned agricultural sector would ensure food security, was only accessible to the socially-owned agricultural sector. In contrast, the use of scientific achievements in agricultural sciences for individual farms, i.e., the private agricultural sector, was not encouraged unless it was directly linked to the intermediary role of cooperatives or the socially-owned agricultural sector. The Agricultural Extension Service, which was intended to disseminate scientific innovations and modern agricultural practices, was effectively paralyzed.<sup>51</sup>

By the early 1970s, the revitalized and modernized Agricultural Extension Service had developed extensive professional and educational activities over the previous two decades of the socialist period. The service focused its efforts on introducing technical and biological innovations into widespread practice, providing guidance and professional assistance to market-oriented farms, and connecting peasants to various farming communities.<sup>52</sup> In its efforts, it connected with other activities of cooperative organizations, internal production and administrative organization, the organization and operation of credit and savings services, as well as processing and trading companies.<sup>53</sup>

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50 Čeferin, *Organizacija*, 33, 34.

51 Mlinar, *Sociologija*, 903, 904.

52 *XIII. redni občni zbor*, 25.

53 *Organizacije združenih kmetov*, 11.

The agenda of the Agricultural Extension Service encompassed three types of tasks. The first group of tasks focused on intensifying the production of each peasant. Plant production was to be increased through the greater use of fertilizers, high-quality seeds of productive varieties, herbicides, crop protection agents, and improvements in individual production technologies such as sowing dates, crop rotations, and supplementary fertilization. In livestock farming, measures included the expansion of artificial insemination, increased control of dairy cow productivity, faster renewal of the breeding herd, breeding of pedigree heifers, the introduction of new feeding technologies, grazing-harvesting systems, multiple mowings of meadows, the inclusion of forage plants in crop rotations, intensifying crop production with additional and winter crops, and feeding livestock based on nutritional needs and production capacity. The Agricultural Extension Service was to include peasants in organized market production by organizing milk collection points, grain and other crop receiving stations, and ensuring the timely supply of quality agricultural materials necessary for farming. The second group of tasks involved rationalizing investments in private agricultural production. The Agricultural Extension Service, within this group of tasks, focused on advising peasants on acquiring machinery, preferably through machinery communities, and on advising regarding the renewal of plantations using unified technologies such as collective protection and fertilization, etc. It also focused on advising on the organization of communal pastures and milk collection points, as well as guiding the organization of land improvement and other cooperative projects. The third group of tasks referred to intensifying and specializing in production on both pure and mixed farms with potential for a shift towards »rational market production«. In some areas, entire villages specialized (e.g., milk production or vegetable farming).<sup>54</sup>

The restructuring of farms into specialized production or breeding was also emphasized in less favorable areas for agricultural development, such as hilly and mountainous regions, as it was believed that this approach would help retain young people in agricultural and forestry activities. With proper equipment and productivity, specialized farms in these areas were seen as having the potential to compensate for the production decline caused by the aging rural population and its extensive farming methods.<sup>55</sup> On specialized farms, private initiative was also expected to play a role in generating market surpluses in connection with the socially-owned agricultural sector.<sup>56</sup>

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54 Organizacije združenih kmetov, 11.

55 Poročilo Zadružne zveze SR Slovenije 1972–1976, 29.

56 Ustanovni občni zbor, 5, 37, 38.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

At the organizational level, the local branches of the Agricultural Extension Service operated within cooperative organizations, representing their basic structural units. At the regional level, the service operated in seven regional agricultural or livestock veterinary institutes in Nova Gorica, Ljubljana, Kranj, Celje, Maribor, Ptuj, and Murska Sobota, as well as at the Hop Research Institute in Žalec (Inštitut za hmeljarstvo Žalec). At the republic level, it was represented by the Republic Center for Agricultural Extension (Republiški center za pospeševanje kmetijstva), established in 1975, within the Cooperative Union of Slovenia.<sup>57</sup>

The basic network of the Agricultural Extension Service within cooperative organizations gradually improved, both in terms of staff numbers and professional expertise. This development was enabled mainly by co-financing from the republic's intervention fund and municipal funds for agricultural interventions. By the early 1980s, the service had begun to take on the characteristics of a technological support structure for cooperative production. Extension workers increasingly took on the role of technological advisors, particularly within peasant production communities.<sup>58</sup> By 1982, after twelve years of operation and at the peak of its staffing capacity, the Agricultural Extension Service began incorporating the technological services of socially-owned farms into its unified extension program, thereby expanding beyond its earlier focus on private peasants.<sup>59</sup> In response to the growing need for specialist involvement – driven by the increasing number of market-oriented farms and peasant production communities – the Agricultural Extension Service operated at multiple organizational levels. At the level of cooperatives, agronomists served as specialized advisors. At the lower level of cooperative units – smaller organizational units within individual cooperatives – and in broader production areas, the service relied on more broadly trained agricultural experts or veterinarians. The number of specialists, including engineers, agronomists, veterinarians, and technicians, increased from 252 in 1980 to 553 in 1986.<sup>60</sup> Extension workers were responsible for organizing cooperative production. At the same time, more demanding technical issues were addressed either through the cooperative's own team of specialized advisors or by engaging specialists from regional agricultural institutes.<sup>61</sup> Within agricultural cooperatives, extension workers organized training courses and led discussion groups for peasants. They also conducted production-oriented demonstration

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57 XIII. redni občni zbor, 29, 50.

58 Kmetijsko združništvo, 52.

59 XIII. redni občni zbor, 25.

60 XV. redni občni zbor, 29.

61 Kmetijsko združništvo, 52.

trials – such as on field crops and grasslands – facilitated visits to demonstrations of modern technologies, new facilities, land improvements, and similar innovations, organized professional excursions, and guided the work of production communities.<sup>62</sup>

The core network of the Agricultural Extension Service within cooperative organizations, along with the technological services on socially-owned farms, was complemented by professional departments in the form of development and extension units operating within regional agricultural institutes.<sup>63</sup> Specialist experts from the seven regional institutes and the Hop Research Institute collaborated with extension workers in agricultural cooperatives and with technologists at socially-owned estates. These professional services represented interlinked specialized activities: selection services, introduction plantations, nurseries, design offices, breeding centers for male seed animals, artificial insemination, veterinary services, hail defense, veterinary diagnostic laboratories, as well as pedological and enological laboratories (Maribor, Žalec, Nova Gorica, Murska Sobota), educational centers (Agricultural School in Nova Gorica/Kmetijska šola Nova Gorica), and extension departments.<sup>64</sup>

Some activities in regional institutes had a distinctly service-oriented character and operated entirely on commercial principles (nurseries, laboratories, design offices). Other activities, such as the selection service, veterinary service, and extension service, were fully aligned with the goals and tasks of agricultural organizations in their respective areas, which the basic network of the Agricultural Extension Service within cooperative organizations was unable to achieve.<sup>65</sup> The regional institutes also carried out demonstration production and other field-based professional interventions.

By the mid-1980s, when the extension program employed five crop production specialists, ten livestock specialists, seven home economics extension advisors, four fruit-growing specialists, and two viticulture specialists,<sup>66</sup> it was assessed that the regional specialist service was too weak. Although the Agricultural Extension Service was increasingly staffed with agricultural experts at all levels over time, fewer extension workers worked exclusively and full-time on extension tasks than the total number formally employed within the service. In 1977, nearly 76% of extension workers were employed on extension tasks for half the time. By the end of 1982, 61% of those employed in the Agricultural Extension Service were exclusively focused on agricultural extension tasks. Employees in

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62 XVII. redni občni zbor, 36.

63 XIII. redni občni zbor, 25. Kmetijsko združništvo, 53.

64 Poročilo upravnega odbora za X. redni občni zbor, 53.

65 Kmetijsko združništvo, 53.

66 Organizacije združenih kmetov, 14.

the Agricultural Extension Service were also heads of basic cooperative organizations or cooperative units. They also performed bookkeeping tasks, managed statistics, and conducted milking controls.<sup>67</sup> The work of extension workers was not limited to field visits; although direct contact with peasants and individual counseling were among the most effective forms of extension work. They also purchased livestock and agricultural products, collected orders from peasants for the necessary farming materials, and ensured that the ordered goods were delivered to the peasants. Agricultural extension workers also equipped and maintained milk collection centers, kept records of market produce from cooperators, issued order forms, assessed damage caused by various natural disasters, and damage caused by wildlife, etc.<sup>68</sup>

Co-financing from republican funds enabled the strengthening of the regional specialist agricultural extension service during the 1980s by employing narrowly focused experts and expanding its activities to include plant protection, feed consulting, barn design, pig farming, and milk hygiene. The aim was to establish closer integration with services for selection, reproduction, and veterinary prevention, as well as to improve the training of specialist staff.

Efforts were also to be made to equip regional institutes with appropriate technical resources, including audiovisual aids, computers, and laboratory equipment.<sup>69</sup>

In the specialized services, experts with different profiles worked as a team to resolve specific technical issues in narrower areas. One of the most essential tasks of the institute's specialized service was mentoring trainees for extension workers in agricultural cooperatives and technologists at social agricultural enterprises.<sup>70</sup>

Specialist experts also advised farms, taught extension workers from agricultural cooperatives and technologists, and lectured adult education students. They also conducted field lectures for peasants and organized production demonstration trials, excursions, and lectures for both professionals and peasants, as well as visits to demonstration production and breeding sites. Additionally, they published professional articles and guidelines. They participated in the work of peasant women's initiatives within cooperative organizations and youth groups of cooperators. They also took care of their own further education.<sup>71</sup>

At the top of the Agricultural Extension Service structure stood the Republic Center for Agricultural Extension at the Cooperative Union of Slovenia. It coordinated and collected initiatives for the development of extension programs

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67 Barbič, *Kmetov vsakdan*, 224.

68 *Ibid.*, 226.

69 *XIII. redni občni zbor*, 29, 30, 50. *Organizacije združenih kmetov*, 14, 15.

70 *XV. redni občni zbor*, 30, 31.

71 *XVII. redni občni zbor*, 36, 37.

for cooperative organizations and regional institutes, and – working with expert groups from research and educational institutions – it also developed the national extension program. When designing the national agricultural extension program, priorities had to be given to professional tasks, appropriate methods for transferring knowledge and experience into wide practice, involving collaborators from regional institutes and specialists in production, as well as organizing demonstration fields with optimal agro-technical practices. The expert groups defined the specific responsible parties and implementation deadlines within the national agricultural extension program. Research and educational institutions were expected to provide advisory, mentoring, and instructional support to the basic agricultural extension network within cooperative organizations. Thus, the Republic Center for Agricultural Extension coordinated the professional and developmental work of agricultural extension services at all levels of agricultural organizations and occasionally involved experts from the Agricultural Institute of Slovenia (Kmetijski inštitut Slovenije), the Biotechnical Faculty (Biotehniška fakulteta), and the Higher Agricultural School in Maribor (Višja agronomska šola Maribor). Collaborators from research and educational institutions were only occasionally involved in the implementation of the agricultural extension program as part of industry-specific expert groups. In carrying out the agricultural extension program, they worked with practical education in the form of direct work in cooperative organizations, agricultural extension workshops, regional demonstration plots, professional meetings and seminars, training sessions, and excursions. They also prepared expert content for journals, radio, and television, and provided consultations on farms and socially-owned estates. The Republic Center for Agricultural Extension was the organizer of all forms of knowledge and experience transfer in agreement with the expert groups.<sup>72</sup> It also organized various consultations, courses, seminars, and demonstrations.

The extension workers, that is, the experts of the agricultural extension service, were organizationally, programmatically, and operationally connected through a unified extension program.<sup>73</sup> Throughout its existence, the Agricultural Extension Service was also characterized by a high turnover of highly educated experts, meaning that newly hired specialists had difficulty replacing the departing extension specialists.<sup>74</sup>

At the beginning of the transition in 1990, the Agricultural Extension Service was transferred from cooperative organizations to the Secretariat for Agriculture, which is now part of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Food. This meant

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72 XIII. redni občni zbor, 30, 50. Organizacije združenih kmetov, 16.

73 Kmetijsko združništvo, 52.

74 XIII. redni občni zbor, 27.

the establishment of a public agricultural advisory service for the Republic of Slovenia.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, due to the demands for higher education, the number of specialists in the Agricultural Advisory Service decreased. From 457 specialists employed in the Agricultural Extension Service in 1989, their number dropped to 357 in 1990.<sup>76</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The shift in agricultural policy in the early 1970s, focusing on the development of both agricultural ownership sectors, the revival of socialist agricultural cooperatives, and the revitalization, modernization, and organization of the Agricultural Extension Service with its direct involvement in agricultural production, was a key factor in the economic growth of agricultural production.<sup>77</sup> By the end of the socialist era, the results of agriculture, achieved based on the long-term development concept of agriculture and the food-processing industry established in the early 1970s, had managed to approach the ambitious Green Plan, with a food self-sufficiency rate of 85% to 88%. By 1990, domestic agriculture met approximately 82% of Slovenia's food needs. However, self-sufficiency was not fully aligned with demand. On one hand, Slovenia produced too little grain, oil, and sugar, while on the other hand, it produced too much milk, beef, and poultry. In terms of wheat production, Slovenia achieved yields 15% lower per hectare compared to Austria, and 30% lower for maize. In milk production per cow, Slovenia was around 45% below the European average, although milk yields improved by 40% after 1975. The profitability of agricultural production in 1988, for example, reached only about 60% of the average profitability of the Slovenian economy. The price ratios between agricultural products and production inputs were less favorable than the average in the European Economic Community at the time.<sup>78</sup>

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75 Kovačič, *Kmetijstvo*, 163, 164.

76 *XIX. redni občni zbor*, 4, 14.

77 *XV. redni občni zbor*, 28.

78 Kovačič, *Kmetijstvo*, 163, 164.

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