

# COUNTRY REPORT

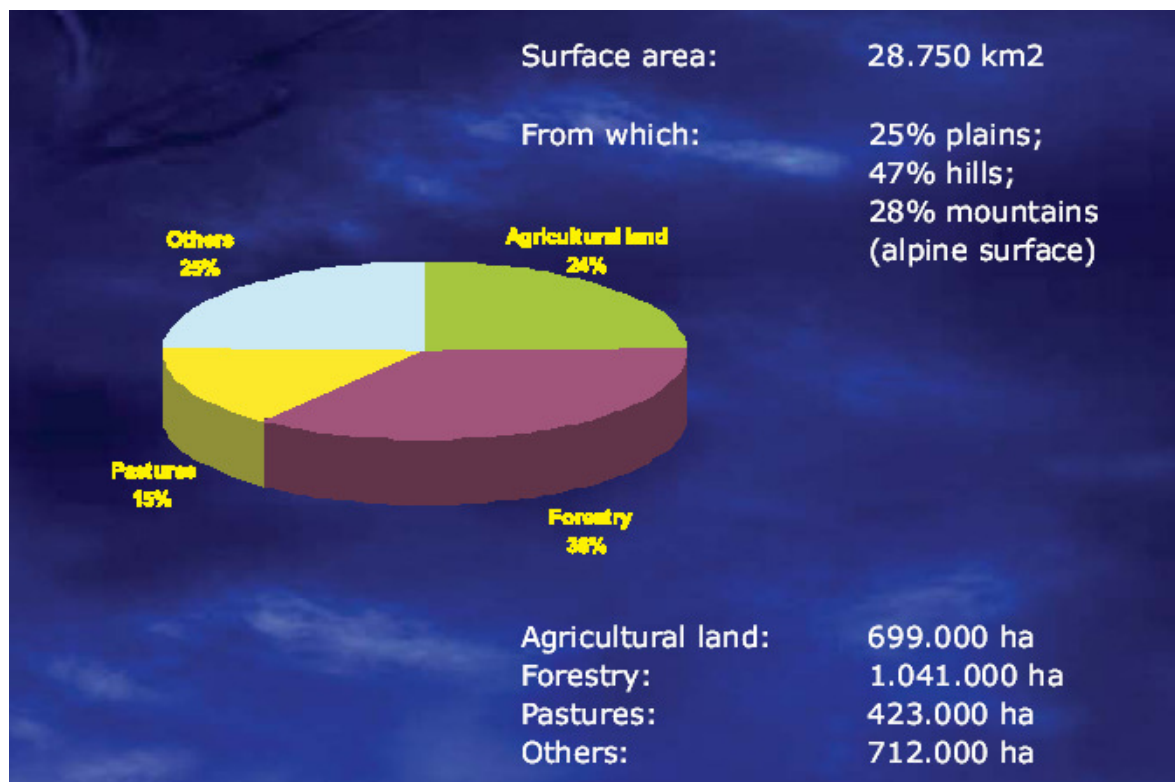
## ALBANIA

### The National Agricultural Research and Extension Service

#### Background

Albania is a small, very mountainous country covering an area of 28.750 square kilometers, with a population of about 3.4 million people.

24% of the total area is classified as agricultural land, 36% as forest and 15% as pasture. The average agricultural land per capita is very small at 0.2 ha, the smallest in Europe.



The agriculture sector continues to play an important role in the Albanian Economy, contributing about 23 percent of the GDP and employing more than half of the active labor force in the country. Actually, the agriculture sector is the most important income source for the majority of rural households.

The agriculture sector has, generally, experienced high growth rates during these last years. The rapid growth and recovery during these years resulted mostly from the ability of farmers to quickly adapt to the changes brought about through the privatization by modifying their production structures.

However, producers still continue to face many obstacles that are beyond their control: small and fragmented land holding, limited access to markets and poorly developed business relations with agribusinesses at the commercial end of the agricultural supply chains, limited access to rural finance, poor rural infrastructure, etc.

In spite of this, farmers' interests and investments have significantly increased during these last years, especially in vegetables, vineyards, fruit trees, olive, livestock, processing and some niche products, leading to higher annual growth in these sub-sectors. Exports of agriculture goods represent about 8% of total exports, while imports of agricultural products still remain very important. The main agriculture trade partners are Italy, Greece, Germany and countries of the region, mainly Bulgaria, Rumania, Macedonia, Kosovo, etc.

In this context, the increase of the productivity and competitiveness of the sector and integration of the Albanian agricultural market into the EU and regional markets constitute the medium-term goals of the government policies in this sector. In order to achieve this goal, the main measures being taken by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection include: (i) increasing public investments for market infrastructure and market information systems; (ii) introduction of support schemes for farm competitiveness; (iii) improvement of standards and food safety; (iv) the development of rural areas; (v) foster cooperation and business linkages; etc.

Albania has some advantages for the development of its agriculture. Among these are (a) a favorable geographic location relative to the European Union, (b) comparably low wage levels, (c) a relatively educated rural population, many of whom have worked in other European countries for some period of time, (d) creativeness among Albanian farmers in adapting rapidly to changing circumstances, and (e) fertile soils and favorable climate in some regions. Based on these advantages, the major opportunities for growth in the agriculture sector are in the production of higher value crops, livestock, processing, and some agricultural niche markets.

There are still different constraints affecting the agricultural development. The most important are considered:

- uncertainties regarding land ownership;
- existence of very small farms with very fragmented and small pieces of land;
- incomplete rehabilitation of the irrigation system;
- high prices of inputs and disorganized and inefficient systems of production and delivery;
- low level of crediting activities in the agricultural and food sector;
- many small producers, not supported and not able to compete in the local and regional markets;
- poor transport infrastructure;

- shortages for agriculture machinery and its high cost;
- electricity and the other uncertain energy sources;
- underdeveloped marketing and market information;
- underdeveloped agro processing industry;
- Research, extension and information services not very responsive to the farmers' needs, etc.

❖ **Overview of the National Agricultural Research and Extension System**

❖ **Information and communication strategy to support agricultural development**

### **Agricultural Research**

At the beginning of the '90s, Albania had 18 Agricultural Research Institutes. The total staff number was 4650 and 342 of them were researchers. Also those institutes possessed a rich genetics material (seeds, seedlings, semen, etc) and many other assets like land properties, buildings, laboratories, agricultural machineries etc.

Restructuring processes and reorganization of Agricultural Research initiated after this period have been too slow, often without precise objectives and priorities compared with the development stage. Among the directly affected factors in this process, one can pick out the objective difficulties of the transition period, complex socio-economic realities, the lack of politic willingness, insufficient budget, etc. Without denying the progress made, in general, it can be said that orientation and adaptation to the market economy conditions has been difficult and it is still an obstacle.

However, during this period the number of Agricultural Research Institutes has been reduced by 50%, and under continuous donor support there are important investments accomplished, mainly for lab equipment, which are necessary for diagnostic and input analyses, monitoring and other different services.

Until the middle of 2006, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection (MAF&CP) have had under its umbrella 9 Agricultural Research Institutes with 700 employees (5 of which were based in the capital city of Tirana and 4 others in different regions of Albania).

A considerable part of staff (about 90 persons) have scientific titles and grades and most of them have been qualified and trained outside of the country.

The scheme of these institutes, in accordance with their tasks and duties, had included research departments, sectors, economic and administrative units, labs, experimental stations, production units, techno-scientific archives etc.

In the framework of the scientific research restructuring on country scale, after an intensive discussions and consultations process with different interested groups, MAF&CP developed a new reorganization scheme of research institutes under its administration.

By the Governmental Decision no. 515, date 19.07.2006 “For restructuring of scientific research institutes under MAF&CP”, based on 8 existing scientific research institutes are established 5 Agriculture Technology Transfer Centres (ATTC-s) and one Institute, named “Food Safety and Vet Institute, Tiranë” (FSVI), focused mainly in service providing. Those centres are located at five main agriculture zones of the country as follows:

- ATTC of Fushë Kruja – situated at central part of Albania
- ATTC of Shkodra – situated at the northern part of Albania;
- ATTC of Lushnja – situated at low coast of the country;
- ATTC of Korça – situated at south-east of the country
- ATTC of Vlora – situated at south – west of Albania.

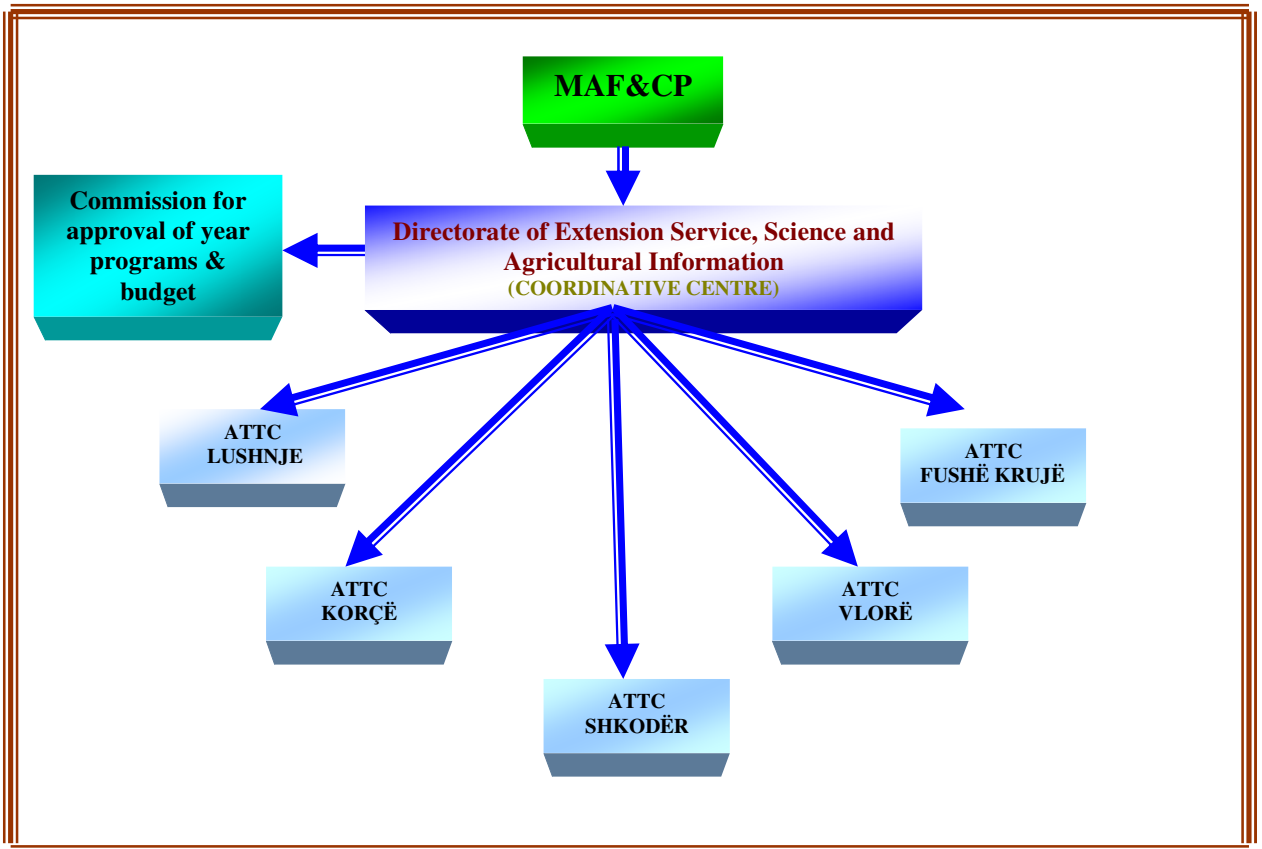
### **Agriculture Technology Transfer Centres**

#### ***The main duties of ATTC-s:***

- Identification, testing, adaptation and using of new methods and materials (inputs) in agricultural practices;
- Provision of technology packages for main agricultural crops and animal breeding;
- Carry out on farm research on problems (topics) that originate from farmers of relevant regions.
- Provision of basic planting certified materials for some kinds of seeds and seedlings;
- Training events provided for agricultural specialists, farmers, students of agricultural sciences and other interested persons;
- Provision of technical expertise for extension workers and farmers;
- Integrated farm management;
- Demonstration of new cultivation technologies of agricultural crops and animal breeding;
- Provision and publication of elaborated quality materials for agricultural specialists and farmers;
- Supporting of policy makers at Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Consumer Protection with needed information on fields of agriculture, food, consumer protection & rural development.
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*Next to the national responsibilities, other tasks of each ATTC are:*

- Needs and other priorities of the region;
- The agro-zones trials asked by the other Centers;
- Initiation/preparation of the projects that address the specific problems of the region
- Practices for students of Agriculture University of Tirana and “Fan Noli” in Korca.

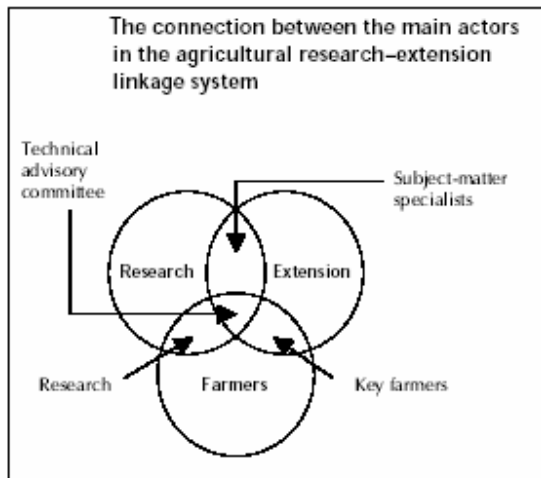


The total staff number paid by state budget is 200 persons (included here and FSVI) and compared with 371 persons at the beginning of the year 2006 is about 40% less.

Staff number reduction is made mainly at the administrative & support part, meanwhile the qualified research staff has been kept at the same level.

The new scheme, compared with previous one has the following advantages:

1. Original research goes to the Agricultural Universities, so, MAF&CP is focused mainly at the service offering and technology transfer;
2. Reduction of the staff number and funds provided by the state budget. Reduction of the administrative & support staff number, but the qualified research staff has been kept at the same level;
3. The regulator and monitoring functions are more clearly separated from technology transfer duties;
4. The activity of ATTC-s is better oriented and driven by market demand and regional priorities;
5. A better relationship between the ATTC-s, extension structures and interested farmers;
6. The work continuity, achieved results and existing investments are better protected and maintained;
7. Some of the buildings and other assets can be used for other needed public purposes.



## Extension Service

### Agricultural Extension Services

Agricultural Extension is a new phenomenon in Albania. It did not exist before 1990 as in the centrally planned agricultural system, agricultural specialist simply ordered working brigades the implementation of specified technical activities developed by research institutes.

After this period one can notice that rapid and huge changes have taken place in the agricultural sector. There have been a number of programs supporting the development of public extension services over the years.

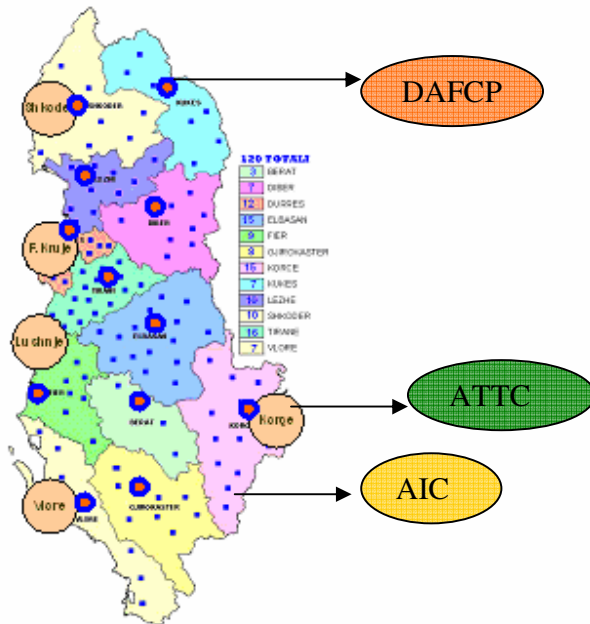
Public Extension Service now widespread in all the country is supported for 10 years with projects financed from European Union and Dutch Government.

In the structure of the public extension service, actually we have about 250 extensions which provide free of cost services offer for farmers.

Many activities are organized purposing technology transfer as: demonstrations, field days, individual and groups consultations, short training of farmers, preparation and distribution of leaflets etc.

As number of agricultural specialists is very small compare with farmer's necessary, is working for setting - up of Agricultural Information Centre. Up to now in level country are opened about 120 centers, half of which are equipped with necessary tools. Experiences have shown that these structures were very purposive in dissemination of agricultural information and knowledge's.

### Agricultural Information Centres in Albania (AIC)



Experience shows that Technology Transfer actually is affected by limited factors as:

- Typical farms with small surfaces and mainly mix.
- Low scale of farmers' organization
- Capital in farm level in general very low and possibilities of credits are limited.
- Water capability not sufficient, while investment from donors and state budget.
- Marketing of products with respective infrastructures.

Making a realistic evaluation of the actual situation, we think that one of the directions where we must stress promoting technologic development is the greater support for the agricultural consultation system.

In other countries with the same conditions it is recommended using at least 1% of gross internal production which comes from agriculture for extension services, while we financed actually sometimes little more than this level.

One important instrument that should be utilized better than now is technological information, including private and public mass-media. There is not enough space for research and extension structures to communicate with farmers, to image more information and to do consultations for farmers.

Notwithstanding that transfer of technology remains the important duty of agricultural extension, it is time in our country to spread the agenda of this service. This service must offer information for a lot of issues such as: developing of local organizations, small enterprises, environment issues, rural infrastructure, social programs and other nonagricultural aspects.

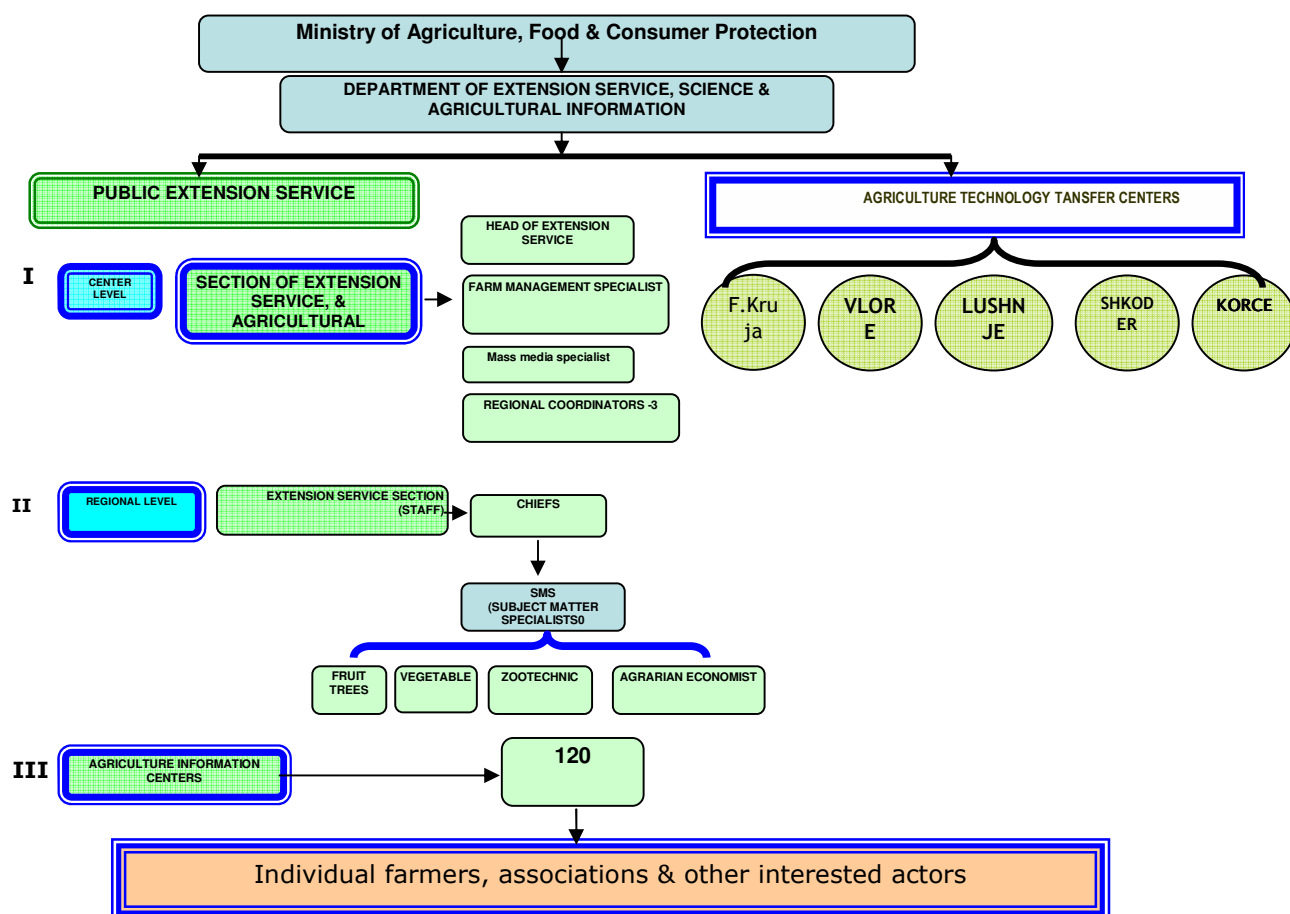
Protection of the environment and consistent managing of natural resources are objectives ever more important for agricultural extension. This service must secure environmentally safe practices to be part of programmers and to educate the farmers to adapt these agricultural practices. Several environmental main issues involving:

- Preservation of natural resources (land, water, forests)
- Preservation of bio-diversity and improvement of managing of the protected area.
- Security from pesticides and reducing of the remains.
- Preservation of water quality and protection of the basins.

### **Public Extension Structure**

Since 1996 the Extension Service is under Ministry's Science Directorate, changed into Extension and Science Directorate, and since then the Extension Section is responsible for the strategy, the management and the organization of this service at the country scale. The section presently has one Head of Extension and two Subject Matter Specialists (SMSs) covering the fields of farm economics/marketing and mass media. In addition there are three Regional Extension Coordinators who are part of Ministry's Extension Section structure. The Regional Coordinators are responsible for coordinating and monitoring the district level extension plans, training programs and On Farm Research activities within their regions.





Each of the 12 Regional Departments of Agriculture, Food & Consumer Protection (DAFCP) has Extension Section, which consist of Chief of Section, who reports administratively to the DAF Director, and four SMS (vegetable, fruit trees and livestock specialists and a farm economics). Other extension officers are located at the district and commune (field) level.

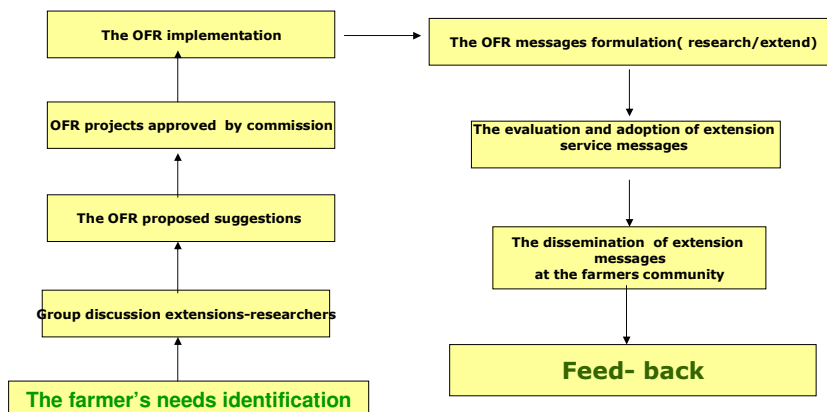
Staff fluctuations have happened over the years. There is now a total number of 260 extension workers at regional and field level. 120 of them are based in Information Centers, scattered in more potential agricultural areas.

### Main extension activities

- Extension staff training (training-of-trainers' approach). A big number of training activities have been organized and implemented mainly at national, regional and district level including extension methodology, extension skills but also many economical and technical topics)
- Farmer training
- Group and individual meetings
- Demonstrations
- Field days
- On farm trials

- Leaflets
- Exhibitions
- Radio and TV programs

### The experience of the implementation on farm research ( OFR)



Following participatory planning approach, which means involvement of farmers and other stakeholders, the regions develop the year extension plans. These plans include objectives aimed at addressing specific problems identified by farmers, results and the respective activities for each of them. The activities are drawn up on a monthly schedule. The plans are reviewed by Regional Extension Coordinators.

Experiences of these years avert as an effective instrument - research and testing on farm level, follow by many demonstrations.

More than 30 On-farm research project are implemented every year. Following a clear procedure a Research Extension Committee attached to the Ministry is responsible for the assessment and approval of proposals done by ATTC and other different applicants. Implementation of these projects at farm level is done by a very close cooperation of researchers, extension workers and farmers. Results of these projects are distributed to other farms by organizing many demonstrations, field days, distribution of leaflets etc.

In the policy of agricultural extension, researching on the farm is one of the main objectives and is foreseen that the funds should be increased. It is the aim that the subject of on farm research to come from the farmers or, in the future as usual more from the Organization of the Private Farmers, with the aim to be directed by request. On farm research will be focused more on the agricultural

systems than special cultures, and economic aspect of proposed innovation will be consider to convinced the farmers for viability of proposed notations.

As well as for dissemination of results, the researching must be followed with informative materials for farmers, programs in radio, TV and training.

In the future is necessary to do improvement on:

- Increase of financial participation of the stakeholders (Farmers, agro traders, etc)
- Involving more of the farmer's associations.
- Social- economic evaluation, collecting and considering of farmer's opinion.
- The role of researchers in consultation of extensions for setting - up of demonstration, etc.

A considerable part of information and findings of research work is transmitted to the extension workers through technical and economic training. Their professional level in generally has improved making them more competent and capable to help the farmers to solve the problems. The development of the specific action plans by extension workers after having participated in training sessions, the preparation of leaflets and implementation of farmers' training, are all clearly showing the value and effectiveness of the training.

Very often, the training courses for specialists are conducted at national level followed by the delivery at regional level and multiplied for small farmers groups later on. For every training activity, the regional coordinators present to the Ministry's Extension Section technical reports, which include the training objective, program, participants, results, evaluation, budget spent, remarks and proposal etc.

During the last years, the number of the training days per year is about 130 for agricultural specialists and 600 for farmers.

Speaking generally the extension service is operation nationwide with reasonable success

In order to ensure a flow of new extension workers in the field of agriculture with the required technical and communication skills, MAFCP aims to further strengthen the collaboration with the agricultural universities.

Prepared by:

**Prof.Dr.Tatjana Dishnica**

**Director**

Department of Extension Service, Research and Agricultural Information

MAF&CP (Ministry of Agriculture, Food&Consumer Protection

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