

Contemporary Changes in Agricultural Land Use in Central and Eastern Europe: Direction and Conditions

Authors : Jerzy Bański

Abstract : Central and Eastern European agriculture is characterized by large spatial variations in the structure of agricultural land and the structure of crops on arable land. In general, field crops predominate among the land used for agriculture. In the southern part of the study area, permanent crops have a relatively large share, which is due to favorable climatic conditions. Clear differences between the north and south of the region concern the structure of crop cultivation. In the north, the cultivation of cereals, mainly wheat, definitely prevails. In the south of the region, on the other hand, the structure of crops is more diverse, as more industrial crops are grown in addition to cereals. The primary cognitive objective of the study is to diagnose and identify the directions of changes in the structure of agricultural land use in the CEE region. Particular attention was paid to the spatial differentiation of this structure and its importance in its formation of various conditions. The analysis included the basic elements of the structure of agricultural land use and the structure of crops on arable land. The decrease in the area of arable land is characteristic of the entire region and is the result of the territorial growth of cities, the development of communications infrastructure (rail and road), and the increase in the rationality of crop production involving, among other things, the exclusion from the cultivation of land with the lowest agro-ecological values and their afforestation. It can be summarized that the directions of changes in the basic categories of agricultural land are related to agro-ecological conditions, which indicates an increase in the rationality of crop production. In countries with lower-quality of agricultural production space, the share of grassland generally increased, while in countries with favorable conditions - mainly soil- the share of arable land increased. As for the structure of field crops, the direction of its changes seems to be mainly due to economic and social reasons. Ownership changes shaping an unfavorable agrarian structure (fragmentation and fragmentation of arable fields) and the process of aging of the rural population resulted in the abandonment of resource- and labor-intensive crops. As a result, the importance of growing fruits and vegetables, and potatoes has declined. The structure of vegetable crops has been greatly influenced by the accession of Central and Eastern European countries to the European Union. This is primarily the increase in the importance of oil crops (rapeseed and sunflower) related to biofuel production. In the case of cereal crops, the main direction of change was the increase in the share of wheat at the expense of other cereal species.

Keywords : agriculture, land use, Central and Eastern Europe, crops, arable land

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