

The role and the duties of the Agricultural Extension Service in Switzerland

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Advisory services of the cantons and of farming organizations

Advice and further training in agriculture and home economics is a special incentive measure to promote these areas as part of the structural policy and basic improvements of the Confederation and cantons.

The responsible institutions for vocational training and advisory services in agriculture are the cantons. In some cases the responsibility is delegated to agricultural organizations. The tasks of the extension services includes drawing up decision-making aids, promoting further training after basic education, encouraging solidarity in agriculture and active participation by rural communities and collecting, processing and distributing information.

Most of the expenditure of the advisory services are beared by cantons with a federal co-funding. Co-funding of the advisory services by farming families is generally clearly increasing but differs widely from one canton to another and varies from a few percent to as much as half of the total costs.

Currently, the Federal Office for Agriculture and the cantons draw up new guidelines for output-oriented financial support of the cantonal advisory services. Federal public spending will be limited to services which are in the public interest of the Confederation. (annex)

In the agricultural knowledge system, the advisory services may give a link from research to the practical application and back to the research institutes.

The big farming cooperatives for selling production means and buying back the products maintain their own (sales) advisory services as well as private companies. There are some specialised farming organisations for production (e.g. sugar beats, sheep, porcs) which offer a advisory service focused to the respective problems of production.

Two advisory and training centers

In 1958 the cantons and 50 agricultural organizations built up the Swiss association for advisory in agriculture as a support unit for cantonal advisory services. This organisation has two centers (one in the german and one in the roman speaking part of the country) with the following tasks:

- develop methods, provide basic data
- offer basic courses and continuing training for advisory staff (for about 600 people which work to ¼ in the basic vocational education, to ½ in the advisory system and to ¼ in other functions; 20% are women) (about 180 courses of 1 - 5 days; and about 8000 "participation days")
- information, documentation, software and IT
- support of cantonal extension services, regions (extension, education, team development, organisational development, innovative projects)
- platform for co-ordination (initiate, manage, contribute)

There is a mixed funding of the two training centres: Confederation 56%, members (cantons and organisations) fees 11%, members paying for services 21%, projects 12%.

Service mandate in preparation between federal government and cantons (the figures within the fields show the public interest in percent)

Fields of activity Products/service category	and animal husbandry and welfare	and conservation of natural resources	c) Orientation to market	d) Accompanying structural change	e) Farm an home economics, machinery and construction	f) Professional and personal development, entrepreneurial training
1. Development of concepts and collection of data	100	100	100	100	100	100
Documentation	100	100	100	100	100	100
3. Training and knowledge transfer <i>Events with wished broad impact</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Events with educational character</i>	75	75	75	75	75	75
4. Individual advice	25	75	25	75	25	25
5. Support for implementing of innovative projects	75	75	75	75	75	75

Services outside mandate (not relevant for federal funding) **0**

The public interest for one or the other activity may be higher or less important in the cantons, regions or municipality. It may be substantially larger.