



Study "Development of New Job Outlines in Rural Areas"
- Short version -

Development of New Job Outlines in Rural Areas

Study within the framework of the Project REKULA of IBA Fürst-Pückler-Land

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REKULA
Restructuring Cultural Landscapes





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Introduction

Today, it occurs quite often that agriculture does not offer sufficient and future-compliant prospects for making a living to the farmers. This is reflected, among others, by reducing numbers of agricultural (in particular small-sized) farms. Based on details given by the Federal Statistical Office (Statistisches Bundesamt), the following development becomes apparent: "The structural change in agriculture goes on unabated. Since 1999, the number of agricultural farms has gone down by almost 11% from 472,000 to 421,400. In this connection, the average farm size has been increased from 36.3 to 40.5 hectares of agriculturally productive land although, at the same time, the total area available for agricultural use was reduced by 95,500 hectares (- 0.6%) to about 17 million hectares. The productive livestock husbandry in agriculture continues to be declining. Thus, the number of husbandry farms went down by 15%; this means a higher rate than with the total of all farms (-11%). Farms with a small dairy herd as well as low pig and poultry stocks mostly give up agricultural production."¹ Though these statements refer to the overall development in Germany, it can be assumed that the situation for medium-sized and small enterprises in the New Länder (former East Germany) will be similar.

Innovative ideas and concepts for additional branches of income are in demand. One of these concepts considers the agricultural farmer as an energy farmer as well. This means that renewable sources of energy are generated in agriculture and the occurring biomass is used for the generation of electricity and heat. For example, it is possible to operate unit-type district heating power stations with vegetable oil or biogas produced from liquid manure.

It is to be pointed out that it may be true that the term "energy farmer" is common for various depths of production or scopes of energy-economic work in agriculture, but should be better used as a designation of a process. We have to start out from the idea that, due to natural reasons, a complete orientation towards energy cannot occur so that there will be also no energy farmer par excellence either. For this purpose, we suggest a change of the term. What is actually concerned is an "**energy agriculturist**". This will contribute to avoiding some irritations among the farmers. Apart from the naturally inevitable and economic restrictions, there are also mental reservations among the farmers to rename their official job title and become an energy farmer. This is because they have identified themselves with their previous, traditional field of activity, namely the production of plants and animals.

The Renewable Energy Sources Act (EEG – Priority of Renewable Energy Sources Act dated 29 March 2000 (BGBl [Official Federal Law Gazette] I 2000, 305), last change by EEG [Renewable Energy Sources] 2004 dated 21 July 2004²) guarantees a fixed price per generated kilowatt-hour for the farmer and thus gives him the chance to make permanent profits. This is because there is a growing demand for al-

¹ "Further Concentration in German Agriculture". Federal Statistical Office, Press Release dated 21 January 2004

² Source BGBl (Official Federal Law Gazette) I 2004, 1918

ternative sources of energy. For power generation, biomass has the advantage that it is not subject to short-term fluctuations in weather conditions, which often occur, as compared with wind or solar power.

Qualification requirements

Summary: What does the farmer say?

In larger agricultural farms, there is a division of labour so that specific knowledge can be passed on to the people concerned. The cooperation with other agricultural enterprises, at least on the level of management, is part of everyday life and can be used for improving knowledge. Contacts to authorities, institutions and politics are essential to a successful change to an energy farmer. This facilitates the possibilities to take advantage of subsidies. In addition to this, it might also contribute to image building of the agricultural enterprise.

If it is handled professionally, the farmers' prospects of building up an additional field of work with renewable energies will be promising.

Summary: What does the forester say?

In the field of forestry, woodland management-related knowledge and qualifications are required. In this respect, further processing of energy wood is the interface for complementary knowledge. Knowledge with regard to the requirements of energy plant technology as well as marketing possibilities of energy wood will be advisable.

Summary: What does the representative of the farmers' association say?

The energy farmer is a future-compliant variant of the farmer. First and foremost, the concept will probably be taken up by larger agrarian enterprises where specialised and skilled personnel staff, e.g. for the maintenance of the technical equipment, is available. All in all, the knowledge of the role and possibilities of an energy farmer are still very limited. Practical examples are extremely rare so that multipliers with presentation possibilities are urgently required. It is important to integrate the concept into the agricultural training and advisory system.

Summary: What does the plant manufacturer say?

Farmers have sufficient basic knowledge that is to be supplemented in certain fields only. They have to be able to assess in which way they can make use of the different possibilities of energy generation in the agricultural enterprise. Depending on depth of production, special knowledge is required for which, however, a specialised and, if possible, independent consulting service is sufficient.

Summary:

Farmers and forest labourers have a good basis for getting into the function of the energy farmer. However, they need motivating impulses and knowledge in order to start promising activities.

Acquisition of knowledge and its implementation in practice will be no problem if there are motivation, prospects and a promising future.

Cooperation and exchange of experience among and with the energy farmers are significant. Moreover, contacts to authorities, professional representations and political institutions are important. Multipliers linked with possibilities of presentation are just as necessary as qualified and trustworthy advisors.

The energy farmer needs sufficient basic knowledge, which can be supplemented by further qualification using knowledge databases or "winter training courses".

Recommendations on the Lusatian energy region

The following measures will become necessary in order to disseminate and consolidate the concept of an "energy farmer":

Information events

Beyond their respective activities, the competent district administrations (together with their offices for economic development and agriculture), the district association of farmers and the banks active in the agrarian sector should invite to information events where the current situation is discussed with the farmers and chances of going into the concept presented. Practical examples should be introduced by specialists who demonstrate the concept of use and benefit.

Construction of demonstration plants

In each rural district, an invitation to tender for the construction of a demonstration plant should be organised. The state promotion connected with it will be granted to an applicant who will reimburse a large amount of these funds after successful operation and is prepared to act as a multiplier.

Establishment of an information and knowledge database

An information and knowledge database offers the possibility to call everything that is worth knowing and interesting as far as various fields of activity and aspects of the energy farmer are concerned. It is intended that the farmers can form their own opinion about the possibilities of the concept. The database shall make it possible to interactively ask questions and exchange experience.

Moreover, the database shall also serve as a supplementing instrument for further and advanced training of the "energy farmers" and can establish identity between them. The database can be offered and used in different ways:

1. As compactly prepared knowledge in the form of an introduction course which gives a first overview and introduction into the topic without previous experience being necessary, without taking a long time when looking for information, or being fraught with information
2. As specially prepared, modular course units about clearly defined partial fields from which the interested parties can compile a tailored course programme based on their demands.
3. As a reference work with expert knowledge which makes the well-directed research according to individual problems and questions possible.

Promotion of agricultural consultants

The agricultural consultants active in the region have the possibility to participate in a further and advanced training in the field of agricultural energy generation. In this connection, a database may be used. Consultants themselves can also take part in the establishment of a database. The consultants are especially propagated by the farmers.

Cooperation with energy suppliers

Agreements with regional energy suppliers and, in case of rejection, with other national energy suppliers should be reached in order to offer assistance and consulting services to the farmers. This shall serve the breaking down of restrictions imposed by the power supply companies to decentralised energy generation. The basis for this are valid regulations in terms of direct power transmission and the Renewable Energy Sources Act.

Conclusion

The results of the investigation have revealed that, if respective programmes are available, the existing educational opportunities can be used and new offers developed. Just in Lusatia where only a few promising ways of development become presently apparent, this concept can be evaluated as promising for energy farmers.

In this connection, it is a prerequisite that the underlying conditions stipulated by the Renewable Energy Sources Act do either not change at all or only insignificantly. Another factor for a promising future is also the presumably dramatically changing energy market with rising prices.

Because of climate problems and rising lack of resources, the necessity of a re-orientation to renewable energy raw materials is inevitable so that the role of the energy farmer will become increasingly significant. It can be assumed that the energy farmer may develop to become a successful model for an economic upswing in agriculture.