

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN EXTENSION EDUCATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN FINLAND

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Abstract

This paper is to find a larger meaning of Extension whose aim is to disseminate the advisory work to usual consumers. Food security is not anymore the task of agriculture alone. The small farmers and the part time farmers are more responsible of food security. Moreover, the industrialized farming has changed the role of extension.

The small farming needs the local advisory work. The women are not mainly responsible of the agriculture and the farming in Finland. Food security and food safety is generally organized by women associations. In Finland the voluntary based women organizations take care of disseminating the information of food security to the consumer level. There are not very small family farms in Finland. The food is produced by the bigger farms. There are less and less farms in Finland; at the moment about 59 000.

The role of women has risen almost dramatically in the food chain. The voluntary based women's organizations have become more important in education about food safety. The obesity is not that severe problem but to disseminate innovations of the healthy food is on the program of extension education.

The ProAgria is called the Finnish national advisory work organization. The Country Women association, Maa-ja kotitalousnaiset (45 000 members) is part of ProAgria. The other important voluntary based groups of women for the extension education are the Martta's (60 000 members) and Swedish speaking Martha's (20 000 members). The Extension as such is not educated or researched at the university in Finland. The women as students in the colleges have become more key persons in food security.

Keywords: extension, gender, women, advisory services.

Introduction

The Extension education is a term for advisory work. The Extension started at the universities in USA after the Second World War (Alford, 1968). The need of information of the modern agriculture was important. In Europe the war has destroyed the agricultural professional knowledge. The famine was every day; the fields had been used poorly for food production during the war.

The Universities in USA had continued the agricultural research. The students from Europe visited and studied to learn the modern agriculture and the new tools to produce food. That is the reason for using the American word "Extension" globally.

Extension is used for general dissemination processes for policy and research information which is considered by its producers to be relevant and useful for farmers. The other words which are used to Extension are advice and consultancy.

"Advice will mean the definition and clarification of problems and the options for their solution, arrived at through a personal relationship between an advisor and consumer. Consultancy takes advice further to arrive at the choice of specific proposed course of action with the justifying arguments and evidence." (Rolls, 2000).

The role of universities is assumed to include that of proposing general explanations of the main process of information transfer in agriculture. This information is based on research, innovations and analysis, as well as assisting the development of extension systems contributing to them.

In this paper Home Economics (HE) will be used according to the IFHE Position Statement in the 21st Century (IFHE, 2008) as “*an arena for everyday living in households, families and communities for developing human growth potential and human necessities or basic needs to be met*”. The global and local contexts will be taken together into consideration in this paper.

Meaning of Extension within Home Economics

Traditionally extension has been a task of agriculture and farmers. This paper has larger meaning to the consumers than to producers of food. Food security is important and not only about agriculture. The small farmers and the part time farmers are more and more responsible of food security beside the big farms. The industrialized farming has changed the role of extension.

The small farming needs the local advisory work. The women are more responsible of small farming. It means that food security and specially food safety belong to the women.

There are not very small farms in Finland. The average size of farms has grown during last 20 years 70% from 22.8 ha of arable land to 38.6 ha. The reason is that the total number of farms (over 1 ha) has fallen to 58,900. This was 2,300 farms (3,7%) less during one year 2011-2012. During seventeen years in the EU the number of farms in Finland has fallen 38% from the 95,500 farms to about 36,664 farms. While the number of farms has fallen the average size of farms has been growing. Finnish agriculture is almost exclusively based on family farms. 87.9 % of farms were privately owned in 2012, and the 10.7% were owned by heirs and family companies and corporations. Some percentage (2%) were owned by cooperatives, limited partnerships and the State, municipalities, schools and parishes.

The average age of farmers on farms receiving agricultural support was 51.7 years. Since 1995 the average age of farmers has risen by about three years. As the farm population is ageing, the share of young farmers is falling and that of the older ones is growing. In 2001 the share of the farmers over 55 years of age was 26%, but in 2012 their share was as high as 39%. During the same time the share of the under 44-year-old farmers fell from 38% to 28% (MTT, 2013).

Production structure of farms in Finland

Measured by the number of farms the production structure of Finnish agriculture has changed considerably in recent years. The utilized agricultural area in Finland is about 2.3 million ha, which is 6.8% of the total surface area and 7.5% of the land area. Compared to the average in European Union, the share of agricultural area is very small in Finland.

The share of livestock farms has fallen while the share of crop farms has increased clearly. In 2012, 27% of the farms which applied for support were livestock farms and 67% were crop farms while in 1995 the share of livestock farms was 52% and that of cereal crop farms was 39%. In 2012 cereals were cultivated on about 1,036,000 ha in Finland. The total cereal crop was about 3,668 million kg.

The forest is an integral part of Finnish farms. In 2012 the average forest area of farms was 50.7 ha. Regional variation is considerable. In Southwest Finland the average forest area of farms is 31 ha while in Lapland it is 108 ha.

The food market

The domestic food market depends on import (MTT, 2013). The foodstuffs that would be fully domestic existed only in the past. Today's agriculture and food production cannot be successful without imported inputs. In reality purely domestic agriculture may be considered to have ended when tractors substituted for the work done by horses. A lot of the human labor in the various tasks of the production chain has also been replaced by machinery and devices which depend on energy from foreign sources.

The consumer prices

In 2012 the food prices in Finland rose by 5.2% from the year before (MTT, 2013). The annual consumer price index was 2.8% which means that the rise in food prices was more rapid than the general inflation trend.

The meaning of Extension with Home economics

This paper is to find a larger meaning of extension. Food security is not only the concern of agriculture any more. The small farmers and the part time farmers have become more responsible of food security. In addition, the industrialized farming has changed the role of extension. The whole picture of food production has changed

The small farming needs the local advisory work. The women are not traditionally responsible of the gardening. The food security belongs to the women in general. Home economists study nutrition. Nutrition deals with foodstuffs that come from the fields and gardens to the table. Home economics (HE) is taught at universities and colleges in Finland. The extension education as such is not taught at the university level in Finland. That is why the role of home economics has become more important to the extension and advisory services research.

History of home economics teaching in Finland

Education to girls was allowed in early 1800 in Finland. The home economics teaching started in 1870 in order to teach the poor girls to prepare good food and clean houses to the 'better' people (Laine 1931, Levanto 2013). The specified teaching of home economics was not common of long period. In 1980' it was normal to have home economics and house hold economics education in the schools, since 1963 to boys as well.

The school reform in 1970's finished almost all home economics teaching in schools.

In 2012 there is again a fighting for a new structure of curricula to get more practical issues to school programs. The home economics teachers, women organizations, parliament members, individual people have signed petitions to get in the school curriculum more lessons a week and during school time altogether dedicated to the home economics, handicraft, gardening, nutrition, consumer sciences.

The voluntary based home economics organizations

Late 1800 started a very active movement for civilization of women in Finland.

The politically oriented and educated women opened the discussion about the rights of women to take care of their life and the family life (Laine 194; Heinonen 1998). Worldwide there was the same emancipation movement.

The Martta organization was established in 1892 to teach "Civilization to women". It was taken a short name according to the bible, Martta and Martha's. The Country women organization was first a part of men's extension organization. In 1920-1930 it found a way to be independent part of Country Women. Now it is called Country and Home Economics Women.

Country women have always been more land use professional orientated than Martta's or Martha's. The Country Women have been farmers' wives, small or big farms but having land

to cultivate, and animals to produce milk, wool, meat. That way it was possible to develop many important products for human life in society.

All main women's organizations have had international contacts. Country women are members in ACWW (Association of Country Women in the World).

Martta's are very active internationally during time of extension and home educationist, MSc Maija Riihijärvi-Samuel, started the extension education at the University of Helsinki in 1970. Later she was a managing director in Martta organization.

Martta continues as a member of IFHE, the International Federation of Home Economics.

The statement of 2008 gives the structure for the IFHE program and meaning of Home Economics.

Specially Country women had very active 'surviving courses' during second world war.

The Martta's has more difficult task without land ownership.

The education of Home Economics and Extension at the University

The model and the example of the American universities prepared the atmosphere so that in the 1946 the Department of Household Economics was founded at Helsinki University situating in Agro-Forest Faculty. In that decade there were several schools of home economics, cookery and gardening training schools, and home economics advisory organisations as well as two agricultural home economics polytechnics and colleges.

The education of food production belongs to the home economics department and faculty of education at the universities, now. The household economics is in program at the University of Helsinki. As there is no research or education of extension at the university in Finland, voluntary based advisory organizations have important role of rural development. The ProAgria is a private extension education information and advisory work organization. The Country Women, 'Maa-ja kotitalousnaiset' is a female part of ProAgria with its 60 000 members. The other voluntary women's advisory groups are Martta, 45 000 members, and the Swedish speaking Martha, 20 000 members.

Research organizations

Työtehoseura Work Efficiency Institute (TTS), has been since 1946 very active research organization in agriculture, forestry and home economics. TTS organized the big exhibitions and participated in all the exhibitions concerning agriculture, forest and home tools new innovations until recent times.

Agro-nutritional Research Center (MTT) is disseminating innovations via publications and books. A lot of seminars have been organized to introduce new innovations as well as seminars for rural development.

Historical transformations of Rural Finland

The area that nowadays represents Finland has been populated for very long time, several thousands of years. In effect, at the beginning of our chronology there was a growing stream of immigration over the Gulf of Finland, encouraged by the good prospects for hunting and trapping fur animals in the immeasurable Finnish woodlands. That export of furs united Finland economically with Europe for the first time during the first centuries of our calendar (Katajamaki 1999, p 11). We can imagine that the same kind of economic immigration continues now i.e. employees immigration from Estonia to Finland. The Finnish firms give work in Estonian companies and Estonians people come to work in Finland. The same kind of exchange was 40 years ago from Finland to Sweden, and one hundred years ago to USA.

Due to abrupt changes in the countryside, farmers founded an occupational organization, the Central Union of Agricultural Producers (MTK) in the beginning last century.

The rural Finland is working hard for agriculture and food security now. Agriculture is not fashionable as profession. The environmental issues and climate change are on social media. The local food is important, the home and city gardening are necessary. The education of small scale food production has found a way to teach the immigrants their food and further on their families fire wood and constructing trees logs. The farmers in their real own farms work too much. The farmer family must work outside farm to survive. The government makes the constructing in rural areas almost impossible. The new buildings are refused in the rural areas. The saving in community level is ridiculous. The farmers find it difficult to renovate the farm buildings. There are new people coming to the rural areas but the new constructing is refused (Sarvijarvi, 2013).

Conclusion

Extension education is presented as an important part of home economics education. Home economics is in close contact to the agriculture and that way to food security. Home economics have taken the task of disseminating the new innovations of everyday life. Voluntary based organizations have got more important role to make the extension of innovations to usual consumers. The ProAgria organization is active in agricultural innovations and disseminates all novelties to rural professionals. The Forest Center Metsäkeskus and Forest Company Metsänhoitoyhdistys are active in forestry extension work. The extension research at university level as such is looking for a better future. The voluntary based and hardworking ‘extentionists’ need national research. International education is well known but the local and national studies at university level cannot be substituted.

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