Eastern European Countryside
DOI: 10.2478/eec-2013-0010
19' 2013

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Is Small Beautiful? The Debate on the Future of Small Individual Farms in Poland

Abstract

The main concern of this article is to collect and discuss cases that are advanced for and against small agricultural farms at the international level in the EU and the national level in Poland and to make an assessment of these cases in the context of sustainable rural development. Cases concerning small farms and put forward by different actors reflect their visions of agriculture and rural development. Taking a closer look at those cases is interesting in the context of sustainability considerations, as there is a widespread programmatic demand for sustainable rural development, but at the same time visions for rural development may differ widely, and the question what exactly is meant to be sustainable often remains unanswered. Before the various arguments raised for and against small farms are discussed, some evidence from two Polish rural regions is presented. The empirical research was conducted in April and May 2012 in Eastern and Southern Poland in the context of my PhD-thesis. After presenting statements made by Polish smallholders, an assessment of the initially collected cases is made in the context of sustainable rural development. A comparison of cases made for and against small farms and findings from empirical research shows that small farms do in fact have the potential to contribute to sustainable rural development.

Keywords: Poland, semi-subsistence farming, small farms, rural development, sustainability.

Introduction

When in 2004 and 2007 a total of twelve, mainly Eastern European Countries (EEC) joined the European Union (EU), not only did the EU´s territorial extent and the number of its people grow enormously, but so also did the number of its agricultural holdings. And it was not only the number of agricultural holdings that rose considerably, the diversity of rural areas, cultures and the agrarian structure also increased substantially.

However, the New Member States (NMS) today display a wide variety of agrarian structure, which also varies within the states themselves. While e.g. there is a rather large-scale agrarian structure in terms of utilized agricultural area (UAA) in the Czech Republic, we find a very small-scale structure in Bulgaria and Romania. At the same time, some countries show pronounced differences in the agrarian structure within the country itself – e.g. in Poland we find rather big farms in the north and west of the country and rather small ones in the south and east. These differences are related to a large extent to the agricultural policy applied in the respective EECs during their socialist regimes and to the restructuring policy in the agrarian sector after the regime changes introducing – among other things – the capitalist system, the free market economy and private property rights. But they are also a legacy of historical developments dating back a long way.

Regardless of the structural differences among and within the NMSs, the last two eastward enlargements of the EU in 2004 and 2007 brought an addition of millions of small farms into the EU – by 2007, the number of farms of a size of up to 5 ha had grown by 313 % to more than 3 million[1]. Although the main centre of small farms is in Eastern and Southern Europe, farms of this size are in fact found in great numbers throughout the EU, and thus there is an intense political and academic debate on their future in the EU and its individual member states (cf. inter alios Davidova, Fredriksson and Bailey 2009: 2).

Small agricultural farms are of interest for several reasons and there are sound arguments which can be made for and against them. From an economic point of view, small farms are considered to be inefficient,

[1] Source: own calculations based on EUROSTAT agricultural statistics, see http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/agriculture/data/database

non-competitive and unprofitable. Their productivity, land and labour efficiency and integration with markets are low and they hardly ever provide a sufficient household income (ENRD 2010: 7). They are also thought to impede agri-structural change and thus economic growth in rural areas (cf. inter alios Rosner and Stanny 2007). For these reasons their raison d'être has been questioned and it has been argued that they represent only an intermediate stage of agrarian structure which has to be overcome as soon as possible. On the other hand, it has also been argued that small farms are not as inefficient as they are often claimed to be and that they provide important social, cultural and environmental services and benefits such as a buffer against poverty, the creation and protection of the cultural and natural heritage and the maintenance of the liveliness of rural areas, for all of which reasons, it has been argued, they have to be saved from disappearing.

In Poland, small agricultural farms can claim interest for similar reasons as the ones just mentioned. As there is a great number of them and they predominate in the agrarian structure in some parts of the country, their success or failure affects millions of people and a large proportion of rural areas. What makes them interesting besides is that they are not an outcome of the agricultural reforms that took place after 1989, as was the case in many post-socialist countries, but can look back on a centuries-old tradition, having developed as they did in the 18th century at the latest and never disappeared during socialism.

In this contribution, I first want to collect and discuss the various arguments for and against small farms, before making an assessment of these arguments in the context of sustainable rural development. Arguments concerning small farms and put forward by different actors reflect their visions of agriculture and rural development. Taking a closer look at those arguments is interesting in the context of sustainability considerations, as there is a widespread programmatic demand for sustainable rural development, but at the same time visions for rural development may differ widely, and the question what exactly is meant to be sustainable often remains unanswered.

This contribution will be structured as follows: First, I will point out the difficulties of defining the terms *subsistence farm*, *semi-subsistence farm* and *small farm*. After clarifying these terms I will give a brief survey of the history of the origin of small farms in Poland and show their distribution

in Poland and in the EU. The main concern of this paper is to give an overview of arguments that are advanced for and against small agricultural farms on the international level in the EU and the national level in Poland. Subsequently, I will present the first results from empirical work conducted in April and May 2012 in Eastern and South-Eastern Poland in the context of my PhD-thesis[2]. Finally, I will draw some conclusions from statements made by Polish smallholders with regard to its theoretical background and the debate on sustainability.

Clarifying the Terms: Subsistence Farm, Semi-subsistence Farm and Small Farm

The terms subsistence farm (SF), semi-subsistence farm (SSF) and small farm are closely related, but nonetheless differ in their meanings and must not be used interchangeably. According to Wharton (1970), the term *subsistence* has become ambiguous on account of its imprecise use, and the various notions of *subsistence* would be the most frequent conceptual difficulty in conducting research on it (cf. also Heidhues and Brüntrup 2003: 2). Such various notions become evident in the way the term *subsistence* is employed as a synonym of quite unlike concepts like 'traditional, small scale, peasant, low income, resource poor, low-input or low technology farming' (Heidhues and Brüntrup 2003: 1; cf. also Majewski 2009)[3]. Difficulties in defining *subsistence* stem from the fact that it can be regarded not just as a concept of measuring the standard of

[2] Original working title: „Der Beitrag von Semi-Subsistenzwirtschaft zur nachhaltigen Entwicklung ländlicher Räume. Eine Untersuchung in ausgewählten Regionen Polens." ("The contribution of semi-subsistence farming to sustainable rural development. A study in selected Polish regions.") The thesis is being written in the framework of the "PoNa – Politiken der Naturgestaltung" ("Shaping nature: policy, politics and polity") research project. The PoNa-project is funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Science in the Socio-Ecological Research Programme and affiliated to the "Institut für Nachhaltigkeitssteuerung" ("Institute for Sustainability Governance") at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany.

[3] In fact, examples demonstrating the synonymous use of SF, SSF, small farm and other terms can easily be found, e.g.: "In Europe, there is a broad consensus that SSFs or small farms are those that operate on an agricultural area of 5 ha or less" (ENRD 2010: 8). In their article "Development perspectives of subsistence farms in southeastern Poland: social buffer stock or commercial agriculture?" Petrick and Tyran (2003: 108ff), in contrast

living, but also as a measure of market-integration or a certain relation of own production and consumption. It can also be looked at from both a consumption and a production point of view, and fixing thresholds for subsistence farming to some degree is always arbitrary (cf. Heidhues and Brüntrup 2003: 6; von Braun and Lohlein 2003: 51; Wharton 1970: 13). Problems with defining *small* however stem from the fact that it can be attached to different characteristics of agricultural holdings, making it difficult to grade farms as *small* (Wołek 2009: 10). Besides that, there is no consistent definition of SFs, SSFs and small farms in agricultural statistics. Following a document prepared for the seminar "Semi-subsistence farming in the EU: Current situation and future prospects" (ENRD 2010) there is indeed no 'universally agreed definition' of SFs, SSFs and small farms (ENRD 2010: 8; cf. also Mathijs and Noev 2004; Davidova, Fredriksson and Bailey 2009: 3; Petrick and Tyran 2003: 111; Davidova 2011; Abele and Frohberg 2003: II).

In this chapter I want to list and explicate different ways of defining SFs, SSFs and small farms, present the Polish definition of farms in general and SSFs in particular and introduce what is meant by *small farms* in this paper.

Criteria for Defining SFs, SSFs and Small Farms: Physical Measures, Economic Size and Market Participation

There are three basic criteria, at least one of which is normally used to define SFs, SSFs or small farms: physical measures, economic size and market participation (ENRD 2010: 8). There are advantages and disadvantages to all of them.

Firstly, the *physical measure criterion* throughout the EU is 'used to set thresholds for i) what is considered a farm, ii) eligibility for Pillar 1 support and iii) eligibility for some rural development measures'[4] (ENRD 2010: 8). It seems to be quite manageable as it refers to data comparatively easy to

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to their title, are talking of *peasant farms* most of the time. Majewski (2009: 122f) is talking of *semi-subsistence farms* as a specific kind of *small farms*.

[4] According to the Council regulation (EC) No 73/2009, art. 28 (1), one hectare of agricultural land can be set as minimum requirement for receiving direct payments from Pillar 1 of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

collect, like the amount of agricultural land or the number of livestock. It becomes more difficult when, as an alternative physical measure, labour input is considered and farms are classified as part- or full-time farms, as is the case in the United Kingdom (ENRD 2010: 9). The major weakness in using data on agricultural land to define SFs, SSFs or small farms is that 'there are differences in terms of fertility of land and the type of land use' (ENRD 2010: 8). Highly specialized farms or farms operating on fertile soil can be 'relatively large economic enterprises despite the limited size of land area used' (ENRD 2010: 13). In addition, the importance of land constantly diminishes 'in favour of innovative solutions applied in production' (Wołek 2009: 20). Thus, 'the 'physical criterion' [is] being perceived as a less accurate measure for SSFs or even small farms' (ENRD 2010: 13, emphasis in original; cf. also Abele and Frohberg 2003: II).

Secondly, in the EU a farm´s *economic size* is expressed in European Size Units (ESU)[5]. This measure is 'applied widely for statistical and policy purposes' (ENRD 2010: 9), although there is no clear definition of SFs, SSFs or small farms in terms of economic size in EUROSTAT-statistics[6]. However, the economic size of holdings is used by the European Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN) to classify farms as commercial. According to FADN, a farm is classified as commercial when it exceeds a minimum economic size. The thresholds vary between the countries and range from 1 to 16 ESU (FADN 2010: 6). Adopting the economic size-criterion to define commercial and semi-subsistence farms, a contradiction becomes obvious, as at least in Poland farms can be classified as commercial and semi-subsistent at the same time: According to FADN, 'a commercial farm is defined as a farm which is large enough to account for the main activity of the farmer and supplies a level of income sufficient to support

[5] European Size Units express the Standard Gross Margin generated on a farm, which is defined as 'the value of output from one hectare or from one animal less the cost of variable inputs required to produce that output'. One ESU currently has the equivalent of 1200 € (FADN 2010: 5).

[6] According to "Agricultural statistics. Main results 2008–09." (EUROSTAT 2010), published by the EU´s statistics office EUROSTAT, *very small farms* are those at an economic size smaller than 1 ESU, while *small farms* are those at a size of 1–16 ESU (EUROSTAT 2010: 149). However, the same publication dedicates a chapter to *small farms* addressing farms smaller than 1 ESU (EUROSTAT 2010: 40). Finally, farms smaller than 1 ESU are also termed *subsistence farms* (EUROSTAT 2010: 51).

his or her family' (FADN 2010: 4). In Poland a farm is considered to be commercial at an economic size of 2 ESU. But, according to the Polish Rural Development Plan 2004–2006 (RDP) (MRiRW 2004), a farm of 2–4 ESU is by definition a semi-subsistence farm and thus eligible for the Pillar 2-measure "Support of semi-subsistence farms undergoing restructuring" (MRiRW 2004: 112). Another difficulty about the economic size criterion is that there is a debate 'whether holdings of less than 1 ESU should be considered a 'farm' at all' (ENRD 2010: 35, emphasis in original). But, if they are left out of statistics, hundreds of thousands of holdings will drift out of the focus of policy targets and measures. For Poland this is also claimed by Wołek (2009: 11) who argues that 'in order to encompass the whole spectrum of features related to small-scale farms, it is reasonable to expand this definition by adding holdings generating 0–2 ESU'. In Poland, this type is represented by more than 1.6 million farms. Regardless of these restrictions, the ENRD (2010: 10) considers the economic size criterion 'to be the best proxy measure to indicate the extent of SF and SSF activity' (cf. also Wołek 2009: 12).

Thirdly, the *market participation criterion* refers to the share of agricultural products respectively sold on the market or used to meet own food needs. Wharton (1970: 13) argues that farm households may sell between 0 % and 100 % of their agricultural output, and for farms to classify as SSFs he fixes a threshold of less than 50 % of the total amount of products sold. The market participation criterion is also applied in the definition of SSFs in the Regulation on the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) (Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005), which defines SSFs as 'agricultural holdings which produce primarily for their own consumption and also market a proportion of their output' (Council Regulation EC No 1698/2005, art. 34 (1)). However, in this definition no thresholds for the share of products sold are set 'in order to allow individual Member States to adopt their own eligibility criteria in the Rural Development Programmes for support of semi-subsistence farms undergoing restructuring' (ENRD 2010: 10). Although the market participation criterion is often applied in considerations of subsistence (cf. Abele and Frohberg 2003: II; Heidhues and Brüntrup 2003: 6; Petrick and Tyran 2003: 107, 111), and seems to be the most appropriate one to the meaning of *subsistence* in the sense of *food self-supply*, the main difficulty about it is that the share of agricultural products sold or consumed to meet

own food-demands 'can only be assessed through detailed surveys and is impractical with a very large population' (ENRD 2010: 10). In addition, the market participation criterion requires a decision whether subsistence is looked at from the production or the consumption point of view. Davidova et al. (2009: 3) argue for the production point of view, as 'any commercial operation, fully integrated in input and output markets, may still cover a great deal of food consumption of a household'.

Definition of Farms and SSFs in Poland

Of the three defining criteria described above – physical measure, economic size and market participation – in Poland two are used to define respectively a farm or a SSF. The *physical measure*, as throughout the EU, sets thresholds for what is considered a farm: According to the Polish Central Statistical Office (CSO), in Poland an individual farm is an agricultural holding having 0,1 ha of agricultural land or, if having less than 0,1 ha of agricultural land, keeping a certain number of livestock (GUS 2011a)[7]. According to the Polish Official Journal, the *physical measure* also sets limits for the eligibility for direct payments according to the Single Area Payment Scheme, where agricultural holdings must have at least 1 ha of land (Dz. U. 2008 nr. 170 poz. 1051; cf. also Commission Regulation (EC) No 1121/2009, annex VII). The *economic size* criterion again is applied to delineate holdings eligible for the Pillar 2-measure "Support of semi-subsistence farms undergoing restructuring"[8]. In contrast to the definition of SSFs in the EAFRD-regulation, here the *market participation* criterion has not been taken into account: In Poland farms of an economic size of 2–4 ESU are considered to be SSFs (MRiRW 2004: 112). Nonetheless, data concerning the extent of food self-supply is recorded by the CSO, dividing farms into

[7] 'Private farms are understood as an agricultural holding from 0,1 ha of agricultural land […], as well as an agricultural holding of a person having no agricultural land or with agricultural land less than 0,1 ha who has at least: 1 head of cattle or (and) 5 heads of pigs or 1 sow or (and) 3 heads of sheep or goats or (and) 1 horse or (and) 30 heads of poultry or (and) 1 ostrich or (and) 5 females rabbits or (and) 5 females other [sic!] of fur animals or (and) 3 heads of other animals kept for slaughter or (and) 1 beehive' (GUS 2011a: 58).

[8] In Poland this measure was only available in the planning period 2004–2006. It was not taken up again for the planning period 2007–2013.

four categories corresponding to the share of agricultural products used to satisfy the household´s own demands (Majewski 2009: 122f).

Summary Overview of Definitions and Usage of Terms in this Paper

As shown in the previous sections, it seems hardly possible to give a clear definition of SFs, SSFs and small farms and to attach unique features to each of them. Besides the difficulties of using physical or economic measures and market participation as defining criteria, it also seems to be inappropriate to talk about SFs, SSFs or small farms as if they were a homogeneous group of agricultural holdings: 'In reality, farm households are heterogeneous. While some SSFs are already well integrated into markets, others are not, and while many of these still farm out of necessity, others appear simply to enjoy the lifestyle' (ENRD 2010: 15; cf. also Swain 1999). Misleading vocabulary is used in the context of the measure "Semi-subsistence farms undergoing restructuring", where the market participation criterion is applied in the EAFRD, whereas the economic size criterion is applied in the Polish RDP 2004–2006. In summary, the term *subsistence* neither necessarily indicates food self-supply nor smallness in terms of physical or economic measures, and vice versa – *smallness* neither necessarily indicates food self-supply, nor are farms that are small in physical terms small in economic terms, nor farms small in economic terms small in physical terms. Referring again to the three defining criteria and their limited significance, 'farm characteristics, site-specific characteristics […] and a farmer´s personal inclination often overshadow the effect of other farm characteristics' (ENRD 2010: 21).

In the following I will use the term *small farm* as a collective for all three terms – SFs, SSFs and small farms – in the knowledge that there is no precise definition of *small*, and that *small* does not meet the different characteristics of these three terms. The decision to do so was made since a considerable part of the Polish (but also international) agro-economic debate refers to Poland´s small-scale agrarian structure and aims at enlarging a single farm´s size as well as a single field´s size (cf. Lerman 2002; MRiRW 2009; Wołek 2009). As physical smallness is not necessarily accompanied by the aspect of food self-supply, the usage of the term *SF* or *SSF* seems to be less appropriate here. Physically small farms also underlie the selection of the

study areas for my PhD-thesis, which focuses on a certain type of farming which often coincides with physical smallness rather than with food self-supply, although food self-supply may nevertheless be the case with the selected farms. Finally, when I speak of small *individual* farms in the title of this contribution, it is in order to distinguish them from collectivized or state farms that existed formerly in the NMS.

Distribution and Origin of Small Farms in Poland

There is a large number of small farms in Poland at present: In 2010, there were almost 900,000 individual farms of a size of 1–5 ha, representing 55% of the total number of individual farms[9] (GUS 2011a: 97). However, despite the generally high share of small farms, Poland´s agricultural structure shows pronounced differences within the country: Big farms predominate in the north and the west while small farms do so in the south and the east of the country. In 2011 the average farm size ranged from 3.86 ha in the southern voivodeship[10] of Małopolskie to 30.70 ha in the north-western voivodeship of Zachodniopomorskie[11]. Yet the number of small farms and their share in the total number of agricultural holdings may differ depending on the defining criterion applied (tab. 1).

While their significance is high in terms of absolute number and the share of the agrarian structure, small farms become less important when taking into account the share of agricultural area farmed by them (tab. 2).

The great number and share of small farms and the differences within Poland´s agrarian structure are mainly a result of Poland´s history. In 1795 Poland stopped existing by international law. It was partitioned between Prussia, Russia and Austria (Müller 2009: 30; cf. also Davies 2005). In these three conquered parts of former Poland, agriculture developed

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[9] The number of farms of a size up to 5 ha is nearly 1.58 million, representing almost 70 % of the total number of farms. This figure also takes into account farms smaller than 1 ha (GUS 2011a: 97).

[10] In Poland voivodeships are administrative units at NUTS II-level, widely used for political and statistical purposes.

[11] Source: http://www.arimr.gov.pl/dla-beneficjenta/srednia-powierzchnia-gospodarstwa.html

Table 1. Shares of small holdings in the EU-27, EU-12 and in Poland

	holdings <5 ha %[1]	**holdings <1 ESU %**	**holdings <8 ESU %**	**holdings using >50 % of production for own consumption %**	**holdings using >50 % of production for own consumption among holdings <5 ha %**
EU-27 (all MS)	68.6	46.6	81.0	data not available	data not available
EU-12 (NMS)	79.5	68.5	95.5	66.0[2]	74.0[3]
Poland	68.0	52.8	89.7	38.0	49.3

[1] Including farms of a size 0–1 ha
[2] Excluding Malta due to lack of data
[3] Excluding Malta due to lack of data

Source: own calculation based on FSS 2007-data[12].

Table 2. Share of UAA farmed by small farms

	share of UAA farmed by holdings <5 ha %[4]	**share of UAA farmed by holdings <1 ESU %**	**share of UAA farmed by holdings <8 ESU %**	**share of UAA farmed by holdings using >50 % of production for own consumption %**
EU-27 (all MS)	8.4	6.8	22.5	data not available
EU-12 (NMS)	18.6	15.2	42.9[5]	11.1[6]
Poland	17.6	10.5	48.4	5.9

[4] Including farms of a size 0–1 ha
[5] Excluding Malta due to lack of data
[6] Excluding Malta due to lack of data

Source: own calculation based on FSS 2007-data.

[12] Farm Structure Survey (FSS) statistics provide harmonised data on agricultural holdings in the EU. Full-scope surveys are carried out every ten years in the form of

under different political and legal conditions. Add to this different laws of inheritance, and it is no surprise that a highly diverse agrarian structure evolved. Especially in the Austrian and Russian territories in the south and east, a great number of small farms arose from the implementation of the right of primogeniture (cf. inter alios Buchhofer 1998; Jaworski, Lübke and Müller 2000).

After Poland regained its national sovereignty in 1918 and a socialist regime was established after 1945, the attempt at collectivizing agriculture failed in most parts of the country. When the market principles were introduced in late 1989, the agrarian structure had hardly changed in comparison with that of 1945. Unlike other socialist states such as the Soviet Union or the German Democratic Republic, Polish agriculture, despite decades of efforts at collectivisation and nationalisation, remained dominated by individual farms and a small-scale structure. At the same time, the pronounced differences within the country persisted under socialism. In contrast to other formerly socialist states, the prevalence of small farms in Poland after 1989 was not an outcome of the privatisation processes of collective or state farms and refunding activities, but the effect of abandoned collectivisation and nationalization (cf. inter alios int. al. Buchhofer 1998; Petrick and Tyran 2003; Pieniadz et al. 2010; Swain 1999; Ziemer 1987).

Today, small farms and the small-scale agrarian structure still prevail especially in the eastern and southern parts of the country, although Polish agriculture has been developing under the principles of the free market economy since 1989 and under the rules of EU´s CAP since 2004. The main reasons for preserving these structures are poor off-farm employment opportunities, which are keeping people in agriculture, and a lack of available farmland to increase farm size, which at the beginning of the 1990s was primarily available where former state farms were privatised. Other reasons which make farmers keep their land are a strong attachment to land and financial incentives due to direct payments from the CAP.

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an agricultural census. Between the censuses sample surveys are carried out every 2 or 3 years. The last sample survey was carried out in 2007 (http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/farm_structure_survey/introduction). First results from the agricultural census 2010 are already available, however not yet for each EU-member state, thus here data from the 2007-survey is used.

The Pros and Cons of Small Farms

There are several arguments advanced for and against small farms which can be assigned to the economic, social and environmental aspects of agriculture. These divergent opinions show that the assessment of small farms is highly dependent on the scholars' school of thought. This chapter gives a survey of the various arguments, arranged in three sections that deal with the economy, social concerns and the environment, preceded by some general aspects. Readers are warned that although the term *small farm* will be used in the following the arguments presented here can refer to quite different notions of *small* and *subsistence*.

Arguments Made Against Small Farms

General Aspects

There are those for whom the prevalence of small farms in Central and Eastern Europe – among others in Poland – is a general problem and a phenomenon to overcome. Abele and Frohberg (2003: V) argue that 'subsistence farmers are overall disadvantaged, and that subsistence agriculture really *is* a problem' (emphasis in original). They clearly take a negative view of small farms and associate them with poverty and the need for assistance by scientists and politicians (Abele and Frohberg 2003: VI). According to Davidova et al. (2009: 2), opponents of small farms treat them 'as an unwanted phenomenon and an impediment to rural growth.' Petrick and Tyran (2003: 107f) regard small farms as an intermediate stage of a structural transformation process in agriculture, whose 'principal direction is toward *specialisation* and *market participation at the producer level* (Tomich et al. 1995, p. 36)' (emphasis in original), and which is 'accompanied by a decline of the relative importance of this sector and a gradual dissolution of subsistence', in other words, they expect small farms to give way in the long run to larger, commercial farms. The Polish Rural Development Strategy Plan 2007–2013 (RDSP) (MRiRW 2009) also criticizes the country's unfavourable small-scale agrarian structure (MRiRW 2009: 6f, 88).

Economic Aspects

The bulk of the arguments made against small farms uses economic aspects of farming, portraying small farms as an economically unwanted phenomenon: 'Whatever the terms to describe subsistence agriculture, the attributes ascribed to it are predominantly negative, at least in the agricultural economics literature (Rogers 1970; Seavoy 2000)' (Heidhues and Brüntrup 2003: 1f).

According to Heidhues and Brüntrup (2003: 1), 'farming oriented towards subsistence is usually seen as synonymous with backwardness and inefficiency, holding down economic growth and economic performance' (cf. also Abele and Frohberg, 2003; Pieniadz et al. 2010; von Braun and Lohlein 2003). Resources, especially of land and labour, are significantly misallocated on small farms and could be allocated to more efficient use (von Braun and Lohlein 2003: 47; cf. also Kostov and Lingard 2004; Petrick and Tyran 2003). Inefficiency is also reinforced, it is claimed, by foregoing 'the benefits of comparative advantage, specialisation and division of labour' (Heidhues and Brüntrup 2003: 1). Pieniadz et al. (2010: 137ff) ascribe the low productivity of agriculture in some EECs to small farms, taking the example of wheat- and milk-yields in these countries and in Germany, showing that yields are much lower in the EECs examined, and demonstrating that where many comparatively small and inefficient milk producers quit the market due to CAP-requirements, milk yields and quality are enhanced. The authors argue that the small-scale structure and high labour intensity in some EECs would complicate the adoption of yield-increasing techniques and that there would be a high backlog in substituting the labour force by capital. Although more of proponents of small farms, the authors of ENRD (2010: 18) also state that 'even though [semi-subsistence agriculture] can act as a buffer against rural poverty, [it] can nonetheless be inefficient and/ or even impede structural change.'

Besides improving efficiency and competitiveness of the agrarian sector in general, the economic performance of small farms should be enhanced, it is suggested, in order to improve farmers´ income situation. Farmers little integrated into markets would generate only a small pecuniary income from agriculture and would be 'prone to production risks that cannot be buffered by functioning markets' (Abele and Frohberg 2003:

IV; cf. also Petrick and Tyran 2003; Pieniadz et al. 2010). Besides that, low levels of production and market integration could not 'be relied upon to provide a continuous food supply to urban populations' and would 'trigger high price instability on food markets' (Heidhues and Brüntrup 2003: 1f; cf. also von Braun and Lohlein 2003: 48). The persistence of small farms would also be an impediment to the further development of larger, commercially oriented farms and to economic growth in general by withholding land and labour (cf. Petrick and Tyran 2003: 122; Rosner and Stanny 2007). Again, small farms would not only hinder the extension of larger farms, diversification opportunities for small farms would be hindered by smallholders themselves as well as by certain characteristics of their environments: 'The creation of […] enterprises often requires managerial and marketing skills and financial capital, which semi-subsistence producers lack. It may also depend on infrastructure which is absent from the most remote rural regions' (ENRD 2010: 19). There would thus often be 'a mismatch between those most in need of diversification (small, remote farms) and those with the human and financial capital required to pursue successful diversification (Chaplin et al. 2007)' (ENRD 2010: 21).

As far as the economic aspects of agriculture are concerned, the small-scale agrarian structure is complained about for Poland in general by political as well as scientific authors. The Polish RDSP 2007–2013 is clearly in favour of accelerating structural change in Polish agriculture which would 'make only slow progress due to a strong attachment to the land' (MRiRW 2009: 6; my translation). It stresses the low efficiency and competitiveness of Polish agriculture and ascribes its low labour productivity to the 'small-scale agrarian structure, farmers´ poor financial assets, overemployment in agriculture, a low educational level of the rural population and insufficient provision of modern equipment on farms' (MRiRW 2009: 7; cf. also Lerman 2002). Thus, the agrarian structure should be changed for the benefit of larger, economically oriented and more productive farms as well as off-farm employment (Lerman 2002: 42f). Wołek (2009: 4f) also deems it necessary to improve Poland´s agrarian structure: 'During the debates over what is the most desirable structural change in Polish agriculture, the answer is generally accepted, and states that concentration is one of the main processes leading to an improvement in the structure of "peasant farming". However, concentration and structural

improvement could be achieved not only by land consolidation, as claims a frequent view, but also by the intensification of production and the introduction of formal and informal cooperation among producers as well as between producers and suppliers of inputs (Wołek 2009). Developing Poland´s agrarian structure towards a 'high share of large, highly market-oriented farms' and significantly decreasing employment in agriculture is also favoured by Rosner and Stanny (2007: 32f; my translation).

Social Aspects

The main argument raised against small farms from the social point of view is that although they may provide food and income at least at a basic level, they hardly ever provide a household income that can be called sufficient. Thus, if additional income is not available, smallholders and their household members are potentially threatened by poverty: 'Despite its effect in terms of decreasing the incidence of poverty, subsistence farming cannot eradicate it altogether' (ENRD 2010: 18; cf. also Heidhues and Brüntrup 2003: 1). According to the Rural Poland Report 2008 (Wilkin and Nurzyńska 2008), in Poland income per capita on farms of an economic size of 2–4 resp. 4–8 ESU was only 40 % or 60 % respectively of the national average net income (Wilkin and Nurzyńska 2008: 33), and in 2007 56 % of farmers said that income generated from farming could not assure sufficient household livelihood. Although rural poverty has decreased considerably, poverty in Poland would still have a 'rural face' (Wilkin and Nurzyńska 2010: 71, 73; my translation). Given the opportunity to take up off-farm employment, more than 50 % of smallholders said they would give up farming, which may indicate that in case non-agricultural sources of income are not available 'farming still is rather a necessity than a choice' (Wilkin and Nurzyńska 2010: 72; my translation). Besides being a poverty risk, small farmers, defined here as farmers producing mainly to satisfy their own needs, fail also in other respects: according to findings from the Social Diagnosis 2011 (Czapiński and Panek 2011), they come bottom of the league among 39 professional groups investigated in terms of social, material, physical and psychological wellbeing (Czapiński and Panek 2011: 458ff). They are least satisfied with what they have achieved and with their work, most frequently suffer from disease, have thoughts of suicide and are most pessimistic. They also least trust other people and have the lowest

affection for democracy (Czapiński and Panek 2011: 265ff). Small-scale farming has also been associated with social discrimination by Abele and Frohberg (2003: I), stating that no one would like 'to have a poor house right next to him in his neighbourhood'.

Environmental Aspects

According to the FSS in 2007, the share of small farms in the total of agricultural holdings in the EU-27 and especially in the NMS is high, but only a comparatively low share of agricultural land is farmed by these farms. Thus, as far as the provision of environmental benefits is concerned, only little space can benefit from this kind of farming. Besides that, even if *Small is beautiful* is a well-known slogan in several fields of the economy and also in agriculture (Schumacher 2001: 108ff), small farms do not necessarily farm in an environmentally friendly way, because they can just as easily be intensely operating enterprises. Furthermore, small farms are not always offered the chance to be rewarded or to receive support for the provision of environmental benefits: For one thing they may be too small to be eligible for Pillar 1 or Pillar 2-measures (ENRD 2010: 22), and for the other thing although there are claims to spend 'public money for public goods' (EC DG AGRI 2009: 2) in order to support small farms in providing environmental benefits, there are also claims to spend public money rather on producers who supply agricultural products to markets to a high extent, which is not necessarily the case with small farms due to their low market integration.

Arguments Made for Small Farms

General Aspects

Although small-scale farming is often associated with precarious living standards, Davidova et al. (2009: 2) underline that the decision to maintain small-scale farming would not inevitably grow out of economic necessities but 'might be a strategy selected by choice […] by households with non-farm income or by retired households in order to satisfy their lifestyle and consumption preferences'. And although small farms are not infrequently viewed as an economically unwanted phenomenon whose disappearance

is eagerly anticipated, Heidhues and Brüntrup (2003: 16) state that they fulfil 'important functions which should not be neglected.'

Economic Aspects

Although many voices are being raised against the inefficiency of small farms, Heidhues and Brüntrup (2003: 16) argue that 'despite its low efficiency [subsistence agriculture] may be the most rational answer to an adverse environment' and that a 'special "non-economic" mentality often associated with subsistence production should not be presumed' (emphasis in original), arguing with Ruttan (1988) that 'one should try to understand economic phenomena before making judgements about them.' Economic conditions which may make small-scale farming a rational choice are e.g. high transaction costs relating to the purchase of inputs, the sale of outputs, the employment of a labour force, risks of market failures and uncertainty in the context of past and future policy interventions. Other factors that may also make small-scale farming an economic decision are high costs for purchased food, poor off-farm employment opportunities and low wages (Ruttan 1988). Although von Braun and Lohlein (2003: 47) are talking of factor-misallocations in small farms 'in comparison to a well-functioning market economy', they admit that indeed 'such a "well-functioning market economy" is not yet a reality in many parts of the food and agriculture sector' (emphasis in original). Petrick and Tyran (2003: 113) refer to economic advantages of farming based on own factors, as 'owned land, family workforce, or farmers´ equity do not require permanent payment' and thus farmers do not 'need to generate sufficient profits to pay these factors'. Small farms´ equipment in buildings and machinery also enables farmers to continue agricultural production, although further farm investment would be unprofitable, as investments once made count 'as sunk costs and must not be regarded in decisions on the continuation of production' (Petrick and Tyran 2003: 113). As far as market participation is concerned, Davidova et al. (2009: 13) contradict the statement that a small-scale agrarian structure would impede commercialisation of farms. Moreover, they do not find any evidence for land fragmentation acting as a barrier to commercialisation, which may suggest 'that policies for land consolidation, itself a very expensive and slow process, may not provide such a strong boost towards market integration, at least for the small farm

sector itself, as had been hoped'. Similarly, van Zyl et al. (2000: 368) refute the 'myth of large farm superiority' and do not find any proof that there are 'efficiency gains from policies to promote larger, more mechanized farms over smaller units'. Wołek (2009: 10) takes up the argument that criticism of Poland´s 'unfavourable agrarian structure' must not be attached to physically small farms, as it would be 'questionable if low productivity and efficiency can be attributed mostly to small, in terms [sic!] of acreage, farms'. In the context of rural economy, it is argued, the farming method used by small farms creates assets needed for farm diversification and the diversification of the rural economy, among which are scenic landscapes, unique animal and plant species, high quality, organic or traditional food, all preconditions for successfully establishing agro-tourism, creating higher value-added products and developing other non-farm activities (cf. Cooper, Hart and Baldock 2009: 111ff; van Huylenbroeck et al. 2007: 29f). Finally, Larsen (2009) expresses the view that 'rather than perceiving semi-subsistence farming as an economic problem, […] it should be embraced as a resource for rural development' (ENRD 2010: 19).

Social Aspects

The bulk of arguments made in favour of small farms refer to social aspects, especially to their capacity as a buffer against poverty and a survival strategy. Heidhues and Brüntrup (2003: 16) argue that 'subsistence agriculture constitutes a low-level but secure survival strategy', as it would often be 'the only way for rural people to survive under extremely difficult and risky conditions.' Provision of food and income at least at a basic level would be 'most valuable in environments of weak or absent social safety nets, high urban unemployment, weak non-farm rural economies and tumultuous economic change, as witnessed in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s' (ENRD 2010: 17; cf. also Józwiak 2006; Majewski 2009; Pieniadz et al. 2010: 141; Wilkin and Nurzyńska 2012: 104; Wołek 2009: 3). Majewski (2009: 128) warns of eliminating the agrarian component of small farms´ highly diverse yet fragile income structure, which would probably cause a considerable worsening of the overall income situation. The importance of food self-supply for the survival of notably poor rural households is emphasized by Davidova et al. (2010: 12): 'The value of income-in-kind is crucial for the rural poor […]. Policies strongly in

favour of commercialisation might undermine the safety net provided by subsistence production (…).' For these reasons small farms could play an important role in stabilising fragile economies, which should be taken into account by policies 'instead of neglecting or even fighting subsistence agriculture' (Heidhues and Brüntrup 2003: 2). Policy should also 'address the underlying reasons for the drift into subsistence and open viable ways for farmers' when aiming at small-scale farmers to increasingly join markets (Heidhues and Brüntrup 2003). For Poland the importance of rural areas as a living space for poor people is stressed, who 'in view of the crisis and growing unemployment prefer to stay in rural areas, choosing a sort of poverty which is the same as in urban centres, but less degrading' (Wilkin and Nurzyńska 2012: 104; my translation). Several authors show an understanding for policy support for small farms in the Polish context: According to Petrick and Tyran (2003: 122) 'keeping in mind the prospect of the currently hidden unemployed protesting on the streets against their situation even makes the government support policy of subsidising credit and pensions understandable.' The fact that small farms 'engage much more workforce in relation to the acreage of utilized land' than larger farms may be a hint at small farms actually offsetting unemployment (Wołek 2009: 17). The argument of a weak rural economy keeping people in agriculture and hindering the repeatedly requested agri-structural change is again contrasted by the argument that in case off-farm employment opportunities are available, they still do not make farmers give up farming, as off-farm incomes seem either not to be sufficient, reliable or to be regarded as only one source of income among others. In fact, 'non-farm employment did not bring about significant structural change' (Wołek 2009: 14; cf. also von Braun and Lohlein 2003). Besides providing social benefits at an individual or household level, small farms also play an important role in maintaining rural vitality, as they would 'populate rural areas, often the most fragile and disadvantaged regions' (ENRD 2010: 7; cf. Cooper et al. 2009: 15ff).

Environmental Aspects

A series of papers underline that the farming activities of small farms go 'far beyond the traditional contribution to production of food and fibre' (ENRD 2010: 22). By their way of farming small farms are considered to provide public goods like quality, functionality and availability of

water, soil and air, biodiversity, unique animal and plant species, rural landscapes, a mitigating impact on climate and resilience to flooding and fire. Other public goods ascribed to small farms are indirectly related to the environmental impact of agriculture among which are food security and farm animal welfare and health (Cooper et al. 2009: 15ff; cf. also Farmer et al. 2008; Keenleyside et al. 2006; Beaufoy et al. 2008: 36ff; Zámečník 2008). For this reason the EC´s Directorate-General Agriculture and Rural Development (EC DG AGRI) argues that small farms have to be kept because 'public goods cannot be delivered without the necessary farming capacity being in place – "public money for public goods" can only be delivered where there is an agricultural presence to which this condition can be attached' (EC DG AGRI 2009: 2, emphasis in original; cf. also Pautasso 2010). Environmental benefits accruing from small-scale farming are also taken up in the two main political documents for rural development in Poland, the RDSP 2007–2013 and the Rural Development Programme 2007–2013 (MRiRW 2010). Both documents underline the beneficent role of small farms and traditional farming practices as well as threats to habitats and species posed by abandoning agriculture: 'The existence of some environmentally valuable habitats is not possible when traditional farming will not be continued' (MRiRW 2009: 25, my translation; cf. also MRiRW 2010: 80). Upholding traditions in agriculture and rural ways of life are also supported, as traditional agriculture as well as traditional architecture and settlement structures would 'create the identity of rural areas, their specific aspects und their inimitable character, which have to be saved' (MRiRW 2010: 118f; my translation).

Empirical Evidence: What do Polish smallholders Think?

In April and May 2012 empirical research was conducted in order to collect data for my PhD-thesis. The aim was to learn something about the everyday world of small-scale farmers, their views of their general life situation, the past and present situation of their farms and their future options as well as their views on nature. The data was collected by conducting fifteen semi-structured qualitative interviews mainly with small-scale farmers, but also with representatives of the local administration and agricultural consultants. The study areas were situated in the voivodeship Lubelskie,

district of Lubartów, and the voivodeship Podkarpackie, district of Krosno in the East and South-East of Poland. Both regions show a very small-scale agrarian structure, high dependency on agriculture, comparatively high unemployment rates and incomes clearly below the national average[13]. In this chapter I will present the first results from an initial analysis of the interviews.

Statements made by the interviewed farmers confirm that many of the arguments made for small farms prove right in the regions examined. However, at the same time they show that some of the arguments raised against them are also true. Arguments advanced for small farms especially prove right where it was a question of claims for increasing market integration, efficiency, productivity, specialisation and quality of products or releasing land to enable the growth of commercially oriented farms.

Many farmers are sceptical about whether market integration – which is supposed to counterbalance production risks – is in fact as beneficial as it is said to be. It follows from several statements that farmers do not trust in markets and price trends, which they believe to be unforeseeable and thus make it difficult to specialise. Furthermore, as farmers nowadays have to take care of distribution channels for their products themselves, what is decisive for successful market participation are farmers´ negotiating and trading skills with retailers and not the mere fact of market participation as such. In general, the argument of profitable, functioning markets is not true for many small-scale farmers. Besides that, CAP-regulations imposed on agricultural products now keep farmers from markets where they have participated before: Many farmers cannot meet EU requirements, especially in the field of milk production and dairy products, where the requirements imposed are especially demanding. In this respect many farmers show a lack of understanding for newly required product quality standards and do not see what is wrong with their products now. Despite some displeasure at joining markets, a non-economic mentality cannot be assumed for small-scale farmers, as they show sober consideration of what may and may not be

[13] For the voivodeships Lubelskie and Podkarpackie the respective figures are 7.46 ha and 4.54 ha for average farm size (http://www.arimr.gov.pl/dla-beneficjenta/srednia-powierzchnia-gospodarstwa.html), 38.8% and 33.2% for the share of employment in agriculture, 13.1% and 15.4% for the registered unemployment rate and 80.3% and 75.9% for the disposable income per capita (GUS 2011b: 45, 73, 93).

profitable. In case meeting CAP requirements and marketing pre-requisites seems to require unreasonably high financial outlays compared to rather low incomes expected from selling, farmers prefer to forego (re-)entering markets, which seems to be an economically rational choice. However, some farmers called other farmers 'lazy' with regard to their reluctance at joining markets.

As far as farm specialisation is concerned, a low level of specialisation is in fact the case on many farms. On the other hand, the decision not to specialise can often be considered an economically rational choice which has been taken willingly: Besides arguing that changing markets make it difficult to specialise, many farmers maintain a diverse agricultural production in order both to reduce their pecuniary needs for purchased input like fertilizer, and to provide good quality food for their families, arguing that they do not trust the food security of products sold in supermarkets, which they think is contaminated and of low quality. Farm specialisation also seems to be inconsistent with the farmers´ self-conception, with some farmers regarding farms specialising either in crop or livestock production not as 'real' farms.

The truth of the claim that small farms withhold land and hinder the growth of commercially-oriented farms has to be admitted on the one hand as hardly anybody wants to get rid of his or her land mainly for financial reasons. In the district of Krosno, however, it is not smallholders who hinder other farmers from expanding, but 'non-agrarian' owners of huge amounts of agricultural land which was available at low cost – but still too expensive for most farmers – in the early 1990s and is now bringing in a lot of money due to direct payments, payments for less favoured areas and agri-environmental measures, thus making land-ownership very attractive. While farming on this land is reduced to the essentials, it withholds land from farmers willing to expand.

Arguments advanced for small farms as regards social aspects are clearly confirmed. Some farmers stated that in general they do not feel disadvantaged and that, compared to urban areas, rural areas would be more resilient to economic shocks like unemployment, poverty and homelessness, and would offer a high quality of life with respect to their surroundings. In both regions, many farmers pointed out that off-farm employment opportunities would be very limited, especially for people with little formal education who have spent all their life in agriculture.

Besides that, the few off-farm jobs on offer would usually be low-paid but would nevertheless require long working hours and absence from home. Compared with the self-determined and diverse work on the farms, they were considered rather unattractive. Nonetheless almost all farmers expressed their need to improve their income situation and their wish to be better paid for farming. In fact, where additional off-farm income is not available, households suffer from a precarious income situation. Thus, significant financial difficulties are the main argument which was mentioned that speaks against small farms. Furthermore, as small-scale farming is of low profitability, especially young people see no future in agriculture, and so are not keen to make it their career.

Beneficial environmental effects ascribed to traditional, extensive farming are also confirmed as almost all farmers emphasised the environmental and cultural damage caused by intense farming and contrasted them with the high values created by their own type of extensive, low-input farming. However, creating environmental benefits in fact cannot be exclusively attributed to farms small in acreage: Most of the interviewed farmers did indeed operate on small areas, but there were also some farms of over 10 ha or even 25 ha, using extensive farming methods. Negative environmental and social effects of CAP-efforts to intensify and concentrate agriculture become apparent in an increase of fallow meadows and pastures in the region of Lubartów and grassland under environmental protection in the region of Krosno, the reason in both regions being that it was the CAP-regulations that made many milk-producers quit production. Even if ecologists' opinions on fallow land may differ, fallow land is obviously harmful to the self-conception of farmers: Many owners of practically unfarmed land, though under environmental protection, nevertheless regarded this situation as a symbol of the decline of farming culture or did not consider themselves as 'real' farmers.

Conclusion – Small-scale Farming and Sustainability

The concept of sustainability denotes a normative orientation-framework, which is characterised by the ambition to link economic, social and environmental concerns, thereby pointing out the linkages between economic, social and environmental crises. The report "Our Common

future", published in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) and called after its chair Gro Harlem Brundtland, the Norwegian prime minister at that time, "Brundtland Report" (WCED 1987), is deemed to be the pioneer in the debate on sustainability, and illustrates these linkages as follows: 'Until recently, the planet was a large world in which human activities and their effects were neatly compartmentalized within nations, within sectors (energy, agriculture, trade), and within broad areas of concern (environment, economics, social). These compartments have begun to dissolve. This applies in particular to the various global 'crises' that have seized public concern, particularly over the past decade. These are not separate crises: an environmental crisis, a development crisis, an energy crisis. They are all one' (WCED 1987: 20). It defines sustainability as a development that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED 1987: 24).

The claim for sustainable development is taken up on various political levels: Within the EU it was taken up in the Lisbon and the Gothenburg-strategy (European Council (Lisbon), 23 and 24 March 2000; European Council (Gothenburg) 15 and 16 June 2001), which are both referred to in the EAFRD, thus implementing sustainability in rural development (cf. Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 (1)). The Polish RDSP also aims programmatically at sustainable rural development, again with reference to both European strategies (MRiRW 2009: 41). However, what exactly is meant to be sustainable often remains unclear, and criticism of the concept of sustainability mainly refers to its vague content, to an imbalance of power in specifying it and to political and social limits of its implementation (cf. Mölders, Burandt and Szumelda 2012: 96).

As far as small-scale farming and rural development is concerned, in the context of the theoretical background of my PhD-thesis in fact it seems that small-scale farming can contribute to sustainable rural development. The PhD-thesis is based on the concepts of Social Ecology (cf. inter alios Becker and Jahn 2006) and Social Relations to Nature (cf. inter alios Görg 1999), both stressing the close relationship between human acting and nature, and the debate on Degrowth (cf. inter alios Jackson 2011; Seidl and Zahrnt 2010), which, among other things, stresses the limits of natural and human resources and is a criticism of an economy solely oriented towards efficiency and disregarding social and ecological aspects. With

this theoretical background, as far as the Polish RDSP and its claim for sustainable development is concerned, it leaves the reader feeling that there is a bias towards economic aspects, while environmental and social aspects remain underrepresented. Although beneficial environmental and cultural effects of traditional farming are recognised and the 'strategic vision to keep the liveliness of rural areas' (MRiRW 2009: 44; my translation) is expressed, yet the strategy primarily aims at structural change and an increase in the efficiency, productivity and thus competitiveness of agriculture. At the same time, evidence from empirical research shows that small-scale farming does have the potential to contribute to a sustainable rural development by integrating economic, social and environmental aspects: It pursues a sort of economic action which at the same time provides essential social and cultural benefits, makes cautious use of natural resources and takes care of the wellbeing of living creatures. It also contributes significantly to the realization of the vision of vivid rural areas as it counters depopulation. However, the low profitability and poor economic performance of small farms, which – at least potentially – threatens its owners and their families by poverty, in many cases must be admitted. Yet the negative assessment of small farms´ economic performance, which is thought to be in urgent need of improvement in the RDSP and several other publications, primarily comes about because in the context of market-driven and globalized economies of scale and CAP-regulations it was decided not to pay farmers for what they produce beyond food and fibre but only for a certain quality standard (and amount) of products which small-scale farmers usually lack. It is also often based on comparisons of yields respectively produced in Poland and the NMS to those produced in the old EU-member states, which only take into account the amount of produce, but do not consider natural conditions, which may vary widely among the regions, and also do not ask whether it is worth striving for higher yields at all, as the price paid for this effort in the currency of environmental and social damage and farm animal mistreatment might be high. If the integration of economic, social and environmental concerns, as called for in the Brundtland Report in order to achieve sustainable (rural) development, were taken seriously, some currently unwanted aspects of small-scale farming would be classified as sustainable, while the sole concentration on economic performance would appear to be less favourable.

While it remains a tough process to specify and implement sustainability and no consensus has yet been reached, in the case of small-scale farming events like the seminar "Semi-subsistence farming in the EU: Current situation and future prospects" held in Sibiu/Romania in April 2010 and the international conference on "Current situation and future options of small farms in the European Union"[14] held in Cracow/Poland in July 2011 show that the issue of small farms has reached not only the scientific, but also the political agenda. However, it is difficult to say how far the outcomes of such events can influence political decisions scientific findings and arguments can support both a favourable and an unfavourable view, and there is also a big question mark against a meeting of the two sides, the proponents and opponents of the usefulness of small farms in both the EU and Poland.

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