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## THE IMPROVEMENT OF PEASANT AGRONOMIC CULTURE: DIRECTIONS AND FORMS OF WORK OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATION IN THE NEP YEARS

**Abstract. Purpose.** The author of the article aims to outline the directions and forms of agricultural cooperation functioning in the NEP years to increase the level of peasant agriculture, assess the various cooperative agricultural measures for gaining the marketability and profitability of farms.

**Scientific novelty.** On the basis of the involved sources and the application of current methodological approaches, the directions and forms of work of agricultural cooperation in the years of the NEP to increase the level of peasant agriculture have been highlighted, an attempt has been made to evaluate various cooperative agricultural measures to increase the marketability and profitability of peasant households. It is proved that cooperative agricultural work was an important factor influencing the growth of peasants' interest in obtaining agricultural knowledge.

**Conclusion.** It is noted that during the NEP years agricultural cooperation as a form of mutually beneficial collaboration of peasant farms became the centre of economic life of the Ukrainian countryside, contributed to its revival and met economic interests of multimillion agricultural producers. In this area the cooperative network took a number of decisive and progressive steps related to the organizational, financial and economic-productional components of the agricultural revival process and its further development.

It is emphasized that the agricultural cooperation developed an effective mechanism for an active introduction of agronomic culture in peasant life, which was gradually taking large-scale, rationally organized forms and directions. The cooperation launched mass work not only among the cooperative peasantry, but also actively involved non-cooperative farmers in the improvement of the agronomic culture, thus involving them in cooperative ranks and caring for the expansion of agricultural knowledge among the population.

It has been proved that cooperative agricultural work was an important factor influencing the growth of peasants' interests in obtaining agricultural knowledge.

Agricultural cooperative measures concerning the improvement of agronomic culture of peasant farms during the NEP years were characterized by a wide range of organizational and substantive diversity. In general, the constructive agricultural efforts of cooperation, along with powerful productional and economic processes, were aimed at achieving maximum economic effect, stimulated the marketability and profitability of peasant farms.

**Key words:** new economic policy, agricultural cooperation, "Farmer", peasant farm, agronomic culture, agricultural measures.

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## ПІДВИЩЕННЯ СЕЛЯНСЬКОЇ АГРОНОМІЧНОЇ КУЛЬТУРИ: НАПРЯМИ І ФОРМИ РОБОТИ СІЛЬСЬКОГОСПОДАРСЬКОЇ КООПЕРАЦІЇ В РОКИ НЕПУ

**Бібліографічний опис для цитування:** Дабіжа А. Підвищення селянської агрономічної культури: напрями і форми роботи сільськогосподарської кооперації в роки НЕПУ. *Український селянин*. 2022. Вип. 27. С. 19-24. doi: 10.31651/2413-8142-2022-27-Dabizha

**Анотація. Мета:** висвітлити напрями і форми роботи сільськогосподарської кооперації в роки НЕПу задля зростання рівня селянської агрокультури, дати оцінку різноплановим кооперативним агрокультурним заходам для підвищення товарності і прибутковості селянських господарств.

**Наукова новизна.** На основі залучених джерел і застосування актуальних методологічних підходів висвітлено напрями і форми роботи сільськогосподарської кооперації в роки НЕПу задля зростання рівня селянської агрокультури, зроблено спробу дати оцінку різноплановим кооперативним агрокультурним заходам для підвищення товарності і прибутковості селянських господарств. Доведено, що кооперативна агрокультурна робота була важливим чинником, що впливав на зростання зацікавленості селян до отримання сільськогосподарських знань.

**Висновки.** У роки НЕПу саме сільськогосподарська кооперація як форма взаємовигідної співпраці селянських господарств стала центром господарського життя українського села, сприяла його поживленню і задоволенню насамперед економічних інтересів багатомільйонних виробників сільськогосподарської продукції. У цій царині

кооперативна мережа робила ряд рішучих і прогресивних кроків, пов'язаних із організаційною, фінансовою та господарсько-виробничою складовими процесу відновлення сільського господарства і його подальшого розвитку.

Сільськогосподарською кооперацією було розроблено дієвий механізм впровадження в селянське життя агрономічної культури, який поступово набирив масштабних, раціонально-організованих форм і напрямів. Кооперація розгорнула масову роботу не лише серед кооперованого селянства, а й активно залучала до підвищення агрономічної культури некооперованих господарів, втягуючи їх таким чином як до кооперативних лав, так і дбаючи про розширення агрокультурних знань серед населення.

Кооперативна агрокультурна робота була важливим чинником, що впливав на зростання зацікавленості селян до отримання сільськогосподарських знань.

Заходи сільськогосподарської кооперації в роки НЕПу щодо підвищення агрономічної культури селянських господарств характеризувались широким організаційним і змістовним різноманіттям. Загалом конструктивні агрокультурні зусилля кооперації, поряд із потужними виробничо-господарськими процесами, були спрямовані на досягнення максимального економічного ефекту, сприяли підвищенню товарності й прибутковості селянських господарств.

**Ключові слова:** нова економічна політика, сільськогосподарська кооперація, «Сільський господар», селянське господарство, агрономічна культура, агрокультурні заходи.

**Problem statement.** The study of the period of functioning of the agricultural cooperative in the years of the NEP, albeit short in time, but effective in its essence, which brought constructive results to agriculture, attracts the attention of researchers again and again. In particular, an important direction of cooperative work has become the improvement of the agronomic culture of the Ukrainian peasantry as a necessary component of increasing the profitability of peasant households and the economic well-being of their owners.

**Research analysis.** Investigations of the direct participants of cooperative life during the NEP years, in particular agricultural scientists, leading figures of agricultural cooperatives, in the columns of the leading national journals of that time are in the focus of research interest. The scientific-practical studies of A. Didusenko<sup>1</sup> and O. Shchadylov<sup>2</sup> focused on issues of agronomic assistance to the peasantry are also worthy of attention. The modern scientific historical space is enriched by a number of thorough fundamental studies, among which the monographs of A. Morozov<sup>3</sup> and V. Marochko<sup>4</sup> are devoted to the disclosure of a significant range of issues of domestic cooperative life in the outlined period. O. Dulgerova<sup>5</sup> and Yu. Trenkin<sup>6</sup> touched upon important aspects of agricultural work in their studies. Despite the depth of the analysis of the processes that took place in the Ukrainian countryside in the 20s of the 20th century, the work of the agricultural cooperative was so multifaceted

that certain subjects of its activity remain understudied and require additional study.

**The purpose of the article:** to highlight the directions and forms of work of agricultural cooperation in the years of the NEP to increase the level of peasant agro-culture, to give an assessment of various cooperative agricultural measures to increase the marketability and profitability of peasant households.

**The statement of the basic material.** In the NEP years, agricultural cooperation as a form of mutually beneficial cooperation of peasant households became the centre of the economic life of the Ukrainian countryside, contributed to its revitalization and primarily to the satisfaction of the economic interests of multimillion producers of agricultural products. In this area, the cooperative network took a number of decisive and progressive steps related to the organizational, financial, and economic and production components of the process of restoring agriculture and its further development.

In addition, the specialists of the cooperation perfectly understood that both the intensification of agricultural production in general and the growth of the economic well-being of peasant households in particular will not be effective without solving such a pressing issue as improving the agronomic culture of peasant households. Therefore, the process of establishing cooperation with peasant households in the agro-cultural field has been widely developed.

1 Дедусенко А. Агрономическая помощь населению Украины. Харьков: Всеукраїнське агрономічне товариство. 1923. 137 с.

2 Щадилів О. Як агрономія допомагає селянам. Харьков: Державне видавництво України. 1925. 55 с.

3 Морозов А. Гроші для господаря (виробничі кошти села в доколгоспний період 1921–1929). Черкаси. 2016. 418 с.; Морозов А. *Село і гроші. Українська кредитна кооперація в добу непу*. Черкаси: НДІТЕХІМ. 1993. 275 с.

4 Марочко В. *Українська селянська кооперація: історико-теоретичний аспект (1861–1929 рр.)*. Київ: Ін-т історії України НАН України. 1995. 217 с.

5 Дулгерова О., Морозов А. Культурно-освітня робота сільськогосподарської кооперації в період НЕПу. *Наукові праці Чорноморського державного університету імені Петра Могили. Сер.: Історія*. 2010. Т. 129. Вип. 116. С. 27–31.; Дулгерова О. Роль культурно-освітньої роботи кооперації у піднесенні агрономічних знань селянства в період непу. *Вісник Черкаського університету. Серія: Історичні науки*. 2006. Вип. 80. С. 94–99.

6 Тренкін Ю. Організаційно-фінансове забезпечення агрокультурних заходів сільськогосподарської кооперації в добу непу. *Гілея*. 2018. Вип. 136. С. 48–51.

Cooperative specialists had to determine the appropriate ways of implementing agro-cultural innovations not only from an organizational, economic and financial perspective, but also to clearly understand some mental obstacles. It is primarily about the fact that the majority of the Ukrainian peasantry at the beginning of the 20th century remained conservative, wary, and even fearful of any innovations. However, as the experts of the agricultural cooperation reasonably argued, «agronomic darkness» did not allow the Ukrainian peasant to fully utilize all available treasures of nature. In the work «How Agronomy Helps Peasants», O. Shchadylov argued this quite convincingly and notes that conservative peasants «because of their darkness do not believe the word of reason». The researcher stated that as a result of such «darkness» the vast majority of peasant households did not have even a third of the profit that they could have with the constant use of agro-innovations<sup>7</sup>. The same opinions are expressed by modern researchers, pointing out that the introduction of progressive methods of farming, improvement of agronomic culture encountered certain obstacles, which were based not only on financial difficulties, but also on the behaviour of the peasantry, which, unfortunately, perceived new trends not always with enthusiasm<sup>8</sup>.

The researchers noted that mistrust was the dominant factor in the peasant mentality: «But our peasants have such luck – until they see it with their own eyes and feel it with their own hands – they will not believe it»<sup>9</sup>. Specialists of the cooperative system understood that not only the professionalism and education of agricultural specialists, their ability to apply agronomic knowledge in practice is a necessary prerequisite for the perception of innovations by the average peasantry, but also the ability to convey his knowledge «in a living word, understandable to every peasant, and to show in practice that his word is true in order to reassure the peasant»<sup>10</sup>.

In order to solve such a rather difficult task, the agricultural cooperative developed an effective mechanism for the active introduction of agronomic culture into peasant life, which gradually gained large-scale, rationally organized forms and directions. The cooperative launched mass work not only among the cooperative peasantry, but also actively involved non-cooperative owners in im-

proving agronomic culture, thus involving them both in the cooperative ranks and taking care of the expansion of agricultural knowledge among the population.

Since March 1922, the All-Ukrainian Union of Agricultural Cooperatives «Silsky Hospodar» became the centre that united Ukrainian agricultural cooperative life, which already in the 1922/1923 economic year clearly understood and defined the key aspects of cooperative work, actively participating in the sowing campaign and in general in work on the reconstruction of the agricultural economy of Ukraine. In terms of both economic and production and agro-cultural work, the supply of agriculture with urgently needed agricultural tools of various types was actively carried out, effective work was carried out on the sale of agricultural products, the organization of agricultural institutions (connecting points, nurseries, etc.) at agricultural societies was effective, the organization of seed production was carried out in cooperative farms<sup>11</sup>.

Agricultural propaganda was carried out most intensively in 1922/1923. In some provinces, in terms of the number of lectures and the coverage of the population, it reached pre-revolutionary indicators. So, for example, up to 100,000 attendees attended courses and lectures in the Poltava province<sup>12</sup>.

The work on agricultural propaganda was coordinated by the NKVD of the Ukrainian SSR, which sent out circulars on recommendations for agricultural work. Already during 1923/1924, more than 1,000,000 peasants attended courses, lectures, agricultural exhibitions, agronomic conferences, etc<sup>13</sup>.

Gradually, the agro-cultural work of the agricultural cooperative was increasingly characterized by the expediency of forms and directions, organization and scale. At the central board of the All-Ukrainian Union of Agricultural Cooperation, a cultural and educational sub-department began its work, which coordinated the agro-cultural work of agricultural cooperation both at the All-Ukrainian level and locally, summarizing and recommending its effective forms. In district agricultural unions, a special position of instructor-cultivator was added to the staff list<sup>14</sup>. An indispensable condition for the entire work of the agricultural cooperative was the

7 Щадилів О. Як агрономія допомагає селянам. Харків: Державне видавництво України. 1925. С. 4.

8 Тренкін Ю. (2018). Організаційно-фінансове забезпечення агрокультурних заходів сільськогосподарської кооперації в добу непу. *Гілея*. 2018. Вип. 136. С. 48.

9 Щадилів О. Як агрономія допомагає селянам. Харків: Державне видавництво України. 1925. С. 8.

10 Ibid.

11 Дедушенко А. Агрономическая помощь населению Украины. Харків: Всеукраїнське агрономічне товариство. 1923. С. 125.

12 Ibid. С. 122.

13 Про план агропропаганди Наркомзема. *Радянський селянин*. 1925. № 18-19. С. 7.

14 Дулгерова О., Морозов А. Культурно-освітня робота сільськогосподарської кооперації в період НЕПу. *Наукові праці Чорноморського державного університету імені Петра Могили. Сер.: Історія*. 2010. Т. 129. Вип. 116. С. 28.

introduction of a whole system of agro-production and agro-cultural measures into agriculture, which were mainly aimed at increasing the productivity of certain branches of agriculture and the quality of agricultural products<sup>15</sup>.

Agricultural exhibitions and competitions, the organization of demonstration farms, demonstration fields, plots, etc., became bright and quite effective forms of agricultural work of agricultural cooperation specialists. Agricultural excursions, professional and thematic lectures, multi-disciplinary professional development courses, organization of agricultural offices, winter peasant agricultural schools and agricultural circles, cooperative literacy schools, cooperative corners, reading houses, book collections, distribution of cooperative literature, etc., were very effective<sup>16</sup>.

Coordinators of agro-cultural work pointed out that it is better to carry out agro-cultural measures of a demonstration nature under favourable conditions directly in peasant households, as well as at agricultural societies, since the demonstration plots should demonstrate the visibility of the impact of this or that agro-cultural measure. It was recommended that, for the most complete coverage and further popularization, the conclusions regarding the work of demonstration territories should be announced not only through local, but also through all-Ukrainian journals, at agronomic congresses, cooperative and village meetings.

It was also pointed out that it is quite effective to combine demonstration work with agricultural exhibitions and excursions, as the latter provide additional opportunities to acquaint the peasantry with the reorganization of the economy at demonstration sites, experimental stations, and advanced peasant households. The statement regarding the fact that in order to encourage peasant planters to increase the efficiency of their own farming, it is necessary to hold agricultural competitions on a large scale, the results of which are extremely important to systematize and spread in the peasant society<sup>17</sup>.

Studying the materials of the press of that time, in particular «Ukrainian Agronomist», «Soviet Peasant», «Ukrainian Cattle Breeding» journals, the official newspaper of the All-Ukrainian Union of Agricultural Cooperation «Cooperative Village», we come across a number of examples

of the effectiveness and expediency of introducing agro-culture component into the practice of peasant farming. Lectures, conversations, agricultural courses, etc., have become quite effective means of agronomic propaganda, because «a peasant who has listened to a lecture or spent a month at a course tries to implement the advice he heard from an agronomist in his household, and sees for himself the benefits of new methods of farming»<sup>18</sup>.

The expediency of using agricultural exhibitions and competitions also had its confirmation. For example, contributors from the Kharkiv region told in a letter to the journal «Soviet Peasant» that in the summer of 1927, their cooperative group took part in the district agricultural exhibition, which the Valky district arranged in Mynkivtsi village. Members of the Melnyky circle received the first monetary award for management and exhibited exhibits. For this award, the group bought a steam cleaner and a one-horse beet planter<sup>19</sup>.

Informative from the point of view of confirming the spread of various agricultural activities and their popularity among the population is also the post of the villagers of Mohyliv region regarding the organization of the district agricultural exhibition in November 1927, for which the organizers allocated 630 rubles and which was visited by more than 3,000 villagers. The awards received by the winners were not only moral (certificates), but also material in nature: 1 four-ploughshare, corn thresher, manual chopper, 3 cultivators, 4 two-link harrows, 1 three-link harrow, pure grain, superphosphate, etc<sup>20</sup>. In their letter, the contributors also mentioned the beet sowing competition, which took place simultaneously with the exhibition and whose task was to sharpen the attention of peasants-planters of sugar beet on issues of organization and strengthening of the raw material base of the sugar industry. The competition was also accompanied by a material reward, as the management of the Sugar Trust allocated 450 rubles for rewarding planters<sup>21</sup>. Such incentives, of course, stimulated the interest of peasant households in the results of their laborious work.

In the columns of cooperative journals, we also find enough information about the effectiveness of winter agricultural schools, which not only solved a number of economic and production issues, but were also agro-cultural centres. The importance of

15 Колодязна О. Шляхи й темпи розвитку сільськогосподарської кооперації України на 1929–30 р. *Український агроном*. 1929. № 12. С. 58.

16 Відчит Всеукраїнського союзу сільськогосподарської кооперації «Сільський господар» за 1926–27 операційний рік (1 жовтня 1926 р. – 1 жовтня 1927 р.). Харків: Сільський господар, 1928. С. 17.

17 Мельник П. Кооперативна цукро-бурякова агрономія (програма й методи її роботи). *Український агроном*. 1925. Ч. 1. С. 31.

18 Щадилів О. Як агрономія допомагає селянам. Харків: Державне видавництво України. 1925. С. 8.

19 Що робив Мельниківський с-г гурток в 1927 р. *Радянський селянин*. 1928. № 2. С. 34.

20 Пирогов М. Районова с-г виставка та конкурс плантаторів цукрового буряку в Джурині (Могилівщина). *Радянський селянин*. 1928. № 3. С. 24.

21 Ibid. С. 25.

the functioning of such centres is confirmed by a number of posts from villagers who are members of winter agricultural schools. «The Husaky school in the Uman region established a dairy artel, and a beekeeping society was organized on the initiative of the school. The school contributes to the improvement of cattle breeding (purchased purebred pigs), poultry farming (discharged purebred chickens). At the district agricultural exhibition, 75% of the prizes were awarded to students of the school. In addition, the school has a library of 400 books»<sup>22</sup>.

«25% of the students of Makharynets school in Berdychiv region are members of agricultural cooperatives. They conduct collective experiments at the research station, set up exemplary raspberry farms, improve livestock care (they built warm barns with windows with their own efforts, staffed them with Danish nurseries). The listeners founded a livestock and dairy society, which covered the peasant households of 9 surrounding villages with its activities, bought 5 separators, breeding piglets, and organizes various agricultural exhibitions»<sup>23</sup>. «The peasant school in the Cherkasy region founded a poultry society, a dairy society, a horticultural society and the AJCL»<sup>24</sup>.

The effectiveness of the work was also characterized by the organization of hut-reading houses at the agricultural societies: for example, in the post of a poor man from Luchka village, Lyi-Dolyna district, Romen district, it was noted that «in the beginning of 1925, a reading house was opened, the work of which produced significant results. After all, when in 1924 up to 5 dessiatins of vegetables were planted in the field, in 1925 up to 20 dessiatins of melon were planted, up to 5 dessiatins of corn, not less than 30 dessiatins of sugar beet»<sup>25</sup>.

We can also illustrate the interest of the Ukrainian peasantry in cooperative forms of agro-cultural work based on the results of statistical summaries. Digital data show the following: if in 1924/1925 a total of 1,299 agricultural courses of various formats were held, then already in 1926/1927, 2,743 such forms of work were organized and conducted, and the following year, 1927/1928, their number increased even more significantly – 4555 events<sup>26</sup>. The number of excursions of agricultural sig-

nificance also increased steadily: from 454 in the 1924/1925 economic year to 1150 in 1927/1928<sup>27</sup>. As for the organization of the activity of agricultural circles, there were significant successes in this area as well: if in 1924/1925 they covered 65 thousand peasants, then in 1927/1928 economic year the number increased to 78,937 people<sup>28</sup>.

The lecture activity also spread at a good pace. Thus, during 1925-1927, not only the number of agricultural societies that held lectures increased, but also the number of lectures on average per 1 society (from 5 to 8.2). The number of lectures organized by agricultural unions also increased during the above-mentioned period: from 168 to 294. Only during the 1926/1927 economic year, agricultural cooperative societies and unions organized 9,677 lectures<sup>29</sup>. Also, by 1927, 149 winter agricultural schools were actively and viable functioning<sup>30</sup>. Regarding the organization and holding of agricultural competitions, there were positive results in this area as well. Thus, during the 1927/1928 economic year, 220 agricultural competitions of various scales and specialties were held, among which 36.8% were related to agriculture, 23.2% were related to cattle breeding, and 36.8% were related to other agricultural fields<sup>31</sup>.

As a result of the financial and economic strengthening of agricultural cooperation, the variegated palette of directions and forms of cooperative agricultural work was gradually enriched. From the second half of the 1920s, radio and film propaganda became technologically new components of agricultural work. By the end of 1928, 13 radio stations were created, 3,389 tube receivers, 1,072 loudspeakers were purchased at the expense of cooperative funds, and 950 stationary and mobile cinema installations were functioning<sup>32</sup>.

**The conclusions.** Thus, the measures of agricultural cooperation in the years of the NEP to improve the agronomic culture of peasant households were characterized by a wide organizational and substantive diversity. In general, constructive agro-cultural efforts of the cooperative, along with powerful production and economic processes, were aimed at achieving the maximum economic effect, contributed to increasing the marketability and profitability of peasant households.

22 Зарудний С. Вшановуємо Жовтень відкриттям зимових шкіл. *Кооперане село*. 1927. № 20. С. 86.

23 Ibid. С. 86-87.

24 Ibid. С. 87.

25 Розсадник культури на селі. *Радянський селянин*. 1925. № 13-14. С. 51.

26 Інгульський І. Масова агрономізація населення та її перспективи. *Український агроном*. 1929. № 11. С. 55.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Відчит Всеукраїнського союзу сільськогосподарської кооперації «Сільський господар» за 1926-27 операційний рік (1 жовтня 1926 р. – 1 жовтня 1927 р.). Харків: Сільський господар, 1928. С. 17.

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