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The Economic Potential of Agriculture in Eastern Galicia in the Interwar Period

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Abstract

The article deals with the economic potential of the agrarian sphere of Eastern Galicia in the interwar period of 1918–1939, the territory of which in certain periods was under the influence of different states. This has also left an imprint on agriculture. Agrarian reforms in the interwar period were accompanied not only by the intensification of the economic activities of property owners and farms, but also by the introduction of advanced agricultural machinery. The article investigates the impact of the economic crisis of the early 1930s on the reduction of agricultural machinery and the decline in purchasing power of the population. The development of market relations in Eastern Galicia during the interwar period was accompanied by the concentration of agricultural machinery mainly at large property owners and farmers, and the lack of it in small peasant farms, where primitive tools of labor were still widely used. The state economic policy contributed little to the industrial development.

Keywords: agriculture, Eastern Galicia, land reforms, private property.

Экономический потенциал сельского хозяйства Восточной Галиции в межвоенный период

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Авторское резюме

Исследуется экономический потенциал сельского хозяйства Восточной Галиции в межвоенный период 1918–1939 гг., территория которой в определенные периоды была под влиянием разных государств. Это отразилось и на ведении сельского хозяйства. Аграрные реформы в межвоенный период сопровождались не только активизацией хозяйственной деятельности помещичьих и фермерских хозяйств, но и внедрением усовершенствованной в то время сельскохозяйственной техники. Проведен ретроспективный анализ определенных исторических и территориальных особенностей развития сельского хозяйства. Исследовано влияние экономического кризиса начала 30-х гг. XX в. на сокращение сельскохозяйственного машиностроения, снижение покупательной способности населения. Развитие рыночных отношений на территории Восточной Галиции в межвоенный период сопровождалось концентрацией сельскохозяйственной техники преимущественно в хозяйствах крупных землевладельцев и фермеров и отсутствием ее в мелких крестьянских хозяйствах, где еще широко использовались примитивные орудия труда, а государственная экономическая политика мало способствовала развитию местной промышленности.

Ключевые слова: сельское хозяйство, Восточная Галиция, земельные реформы, частная собственность.

Introduction. Considering the economic potential of the agricultural sphere of Eastern Galicia in the interwar period from 1918 to 1939, we can see certain historical and territorial features of agricultural development. In the interwar period, Eastern Galicia remained an agrarian region. More than 80% of the population was engaged in agriculture. Most peasant farms had a three-way system of growing crops. In addition, allotments were rarely concentrated in a single array. There were considerable difficulties in the cultivation of the land through the land, which often in the absence of public roads had to be reached through the landed estates.

These issues are also relevant from the standpoint of studying the history of the organization of agricultural production, trade in agricultural products, reforming property relations in the context of socio-historical transformations.

As agrarian reforms in the interwar period were accompanied not only by the intensification of the economic activity of landlords and farms, but also by the introduction of advanced agricultural machinery at that time, the study is conditioned not only by the cognitive necessity but also by the applied aspects of the study of historical experience, which may have practical experience.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Despite the fact that there is controversy among scientists about the reform of agriculture in the interwar period, they did not remain a part of the study of regional problems. The most significant contribution to the development of regional aspects of the study of the economic potential of the agricultural sector was provided by the scientific works of O. Lutsky [1], K. Chernievsky [2], L. Korniyuchuk [3], I. Vasyuta [4], Z. Landau and J. Tomaszewski [5], S. Zlupko [6]. Recognizing the indisputable scientific and practical importance of the conducted research, we believe that the historical aspects of assessing the economic potential of the agricultural sphere of Eastern Galicia remain underdeveloped at both theoretical and methodological levels. Given the urgency of the problem and its lack of scientific disclosure, the purpose of our study is to develop conceptual approaches aimed at unlocking the economic potential of the agricultural sector of Eastern Galicia in the interwar period, knowledge of the historical experience of reforming and organization of agriculture.

Results and discussion. Eastern Galicia has a significant potential for traditional mountainous agriculture, forestry and other organizational forms of production and agriculture activity. The formation of the agricultural sector of Eastern Galicia in the interwar period was accompanied by certain features. After all, the territory of Eastern Galicia was influenced by Austria, Poland, Hungary, the Grand Duchy of

Lithuania, and Russia at certain times. This has also had an impact on the agriculture. In this regard, let us consider the retrospective aspects of agrarian reforms and analyse their importance in the context of developing the economic potential of agriculture (N. Sytnyk, V. Humeniuk, O. Sych, I. Yasinovska) [7: 36].

Agrarian reforms and their economic importance. The agrarian reform of Austria was ensured by the agricultural reform of Eastern Galicia before the beginning of the interwar period. These changes began in 1772-1789 by Archduchess Maria Theresa of Austria. The need for reforms in the countryside was conditioned by the difficult, deplorable condition of agriculture and rural residents during the stay of Ukrainian lands under Polish rule (before the transfer of land to Austrian rule). The ruling emperor of Austria, Joseph II, believed that the peasant of the time was an unhappy creature that existed physically, with nothing but an image of a person anymore (M. Herasymenko) [8: 18].

In order to overcome the economic backwardness of the peasantry, the main directions for improving the situation in the countryside in accordance with the policy of the Austrian authorities were the restriction of the authority of the nobility with regard to serfdom and land relations with serfs, the protection of peasants from arbitrary mockery of the nobility, the reduction and normalization of serfdom, strengthening the duties and levies of the peasants and the announcement that a part of the land would forever belong to peasants (M. Zubets, V. Vergunov, V. Vlasov) [9: 64–67].

On December 17, 1920, the Polish Seimas adopted a law on siege, and from that date the military colonization of the “Eastern Borderlands” began. Predictors were expected to receive 400,000 ha of land, however, by the beginning of 1923 about 57,000 ha had been made available to settlers. In the early 1920s, the reform progressed too slowly. On August 20, 1925, the Seimas approved a new law on agrarian reform, which came into force on December 28, 1925 and was called “On the implementation of agrarian reform” (W. Medrzecki) [10: 12].

The agricultural system of Poland was to rely on strong, highly productive farms of different types and sizes, based on private property. The main components of the reform were: redistribution of land ownership by limiting large tenure (thus, the maximum rate for suburban and industrial areas was set at 60 ha, for agricultural land – 300 ha, and the surplus land was subject to redemption with subsequent division into separate parcels of land, which were used to provide land to the landless and supplement smallholder farms; a part of these lands also formed a state reserve, from which land was allocated to Polish settler colonists); reorganization of land use, the main component of which was

the unification of disparate plots of one owner into one land allotment (land consolidation), which had to create considerable convenience for the owner: to provide an opportunity to rationally plan crops and crop rotations, to save time and physical labor for cultivation, use agrology, etc. The reform also provided for the elimination of easements – the rights of peasants to share with landowners the use of pastures, hay-fields, forests (Y. Slyvka) [11: 147].

An important component of the reform was the rationalization of land use through land consolidation – in fact, the elimination of cross-country and narrow-country. In many cases, the land properties of a single owner were in several, and sometimes in a few, plots located at a considerable distance from the apartment and from each other. Often, having a width of 1-2 meters, these stretches extended for miles and sometimes longer. Of the 226,060 farms up to 50 ha, 133,928 farms had soils in developed areas, of which 11,975 (8.9%) farms consisted of two, 23,367 farms (17.5%), and 16,725 farms (4.5%). Most farms consisted of 6-10 sites – 43,443 (32.4%) (A. Giza) [12: 108].

In addition, land management was facilitated by the elimination of easements. Shared soils and grounds were generally neglected because they did not have a specific owner who would treat them carefully. In addition, easements were a disruption to works related to soil division and allotment. Most of the settlers received the land for free, and the state promised to help them with the farm. Such conditions attracted people who were often unprepared for land work, as 5557 farms were permanently abandoned, the rest abandoned or given away to the state. Those settlers who overwintered on their farms belonged to an active economic element. They took an active part in the social and political life of the region, fulfilled the functions of healers and directors of enterprises (B. Garmatni) [13: 145].

The land fund from which the landowners were granted land consisted of state-owned lands of the Orthodox clergy, mainly confiscated by the tsarist government after the uprising of landlords (mostly landowners of non-Polish nationality who did not return to their estates) until April 1, 1921. According to the law of December 17, 1920 the Polish government provided per colonist: one pair of horses with a harness and a cart (after the demobilization of the sedentary); 80 mi trees and other necessary materials for economic development; credit for 50,000 marks (1921) for equipment (A. Chojnowski) [14: 45–46].

Assessment of the economic potential of the agricultural sector.

According to the 1921 census, only a small portion of the estates had no agricultural machinery, these were mostly destroyed during the farm war. Such farms affected by hostilities accounted for 4,8% in

the Stanisławow Voivodeship, 2,5% in Lwow and 7,1% in the whole of Poland (Polish statistics) [15: 17]. The post-war revival of farms was carried out on the working-out system, using the remedies of the peasants. Large-scale farms saw an increase in the use of advanced tools and machines.

Thus, statistics on farms with an area of 100 ha to 500 ha accounted for much more use of machinery and advanced tools than in large latifundia covering an area of more than 1000 ha of land. The only exceptions were steam plows and threshers because their prices were high and, consequently, they were profitable in larger farms (Polish statistics) [16: 1–2]. So, it can be concluded that the rational use of machines, and therefore the productivity of farms in medium and small farms was higher than in large latifundia. Many efforts were made by landowners and farmers to rationalize the production of their farms using mineral and natural fertilizers.

It should be noted that the development of agricultural production depended on the use of advanced tools and machines, fertilizers, varietal seeds, agricultural machinery and new technologies of tillage. These processes took place in landlords' and peasants' farms in the mid and second half of the 1920s. During this period, the movement for the introduction of new machinery in agriculture increased. One of the reports of the Agricultural Society of East Małopolska for 1927 stated: "The spring season was marked by a rather intense demand of more progressive breeding farms for the implements of cultivation of the land of the Burmistra system, and in particular of the plows of the Union production and of wide-spreaders" (The State Archives of Ivano-Frankivsk Region, case 4) [17].

New equipment was expensive, so individual owners could not buy it. That is why, since the late 1920s, the Agricultural Society had started a campaign to purchase new machinery. In order to interest the peasants in the new technique, there was widespread propaganda on the pages of economic and cooperative publications, separately printed large brightly colored posters and addresses were provided in Lviv, where it could be purchased (Z. Struk) [18: 24].

The efficiency of the use of new machinery on farms was exemplified by the use of a planter, which is a true friend of the farmer, as it saves him 30–50% of the seeds when compared to the old method of manual sowing. A good seeder will not damage the grain, the grain sown by it is divided evenly, all the grain is stacked under the top, so neither birds nor the frost could damage it. In August 1926, the Farmers Society announced a competition to encourage peasants to buy new equipment. Whoever was the first to purchase equipment through a county

cooperative union or through the Central Union in Lviv would receive 100 zł. (Silskyi hospodar, 1931) [19: 4].

At the initiative of the Rural Owner, it was suggested how new equipment could be purchased. In particular, at the end of the year, the cooperatives paid out to their members bonuses that could be used to divert them to the Village Farm for the purchase of shared machines needed in the village. Thus, in the account of the Society of Agriculture, there was the following machinery in 1927 (Silskyi hospodar, 1928) [19: 27] (Table 1):

Table 1

Agricultural machinery of the Agricultural Company

Machine name	Regions			
	Lwów	Stanisławów	Ternopil	Together
Chain harrows	11	3	3	17
Seeders	3	5	24	32
Threshers	10	13	17	40
Plows	1	1	–	2
Plows for potatoes	3	4	21	28
Together these and other aggregates	80	53	232	365

Source: Our cooperation in 1927. Silskyi hospodar, 1928.

However, on small farms of poor peasants, the use of expensive machines was not rational or affordable. Whereas, wealthy peasants had steam plows, seeders, reapers, threshers and other agricultural implements for the mechanical cultivation of the land.

The Polish government was interested in the fact that the village did not buy foreign machines, but Polish ones, so decided to cooperate with “Rural owner”: reduce the prices of machinery, especially for wholesale purchases, and provide a loan for two years when paid a quarter of the cost of the machine (Silskyi hospodar, 1928) [19: 3]. Such governmental policies and activities of the Farmers Society made it possible to create “machine departments” or, as they were called, “machine and technical parks” at cooperatives or clubs “Farmer”. In 1928, a number of machine-technical parks were already formed in some counties, and in 1932 Ukrainian cooperatives already had 945 such parks (I. Vitanovich) [20: 29].

The organization of machine and technical parks at the company “Village Owner” had not gained widespread distribution, in addition, the machinery was dominated by low power. This can be explained by the

aggravation of the economic crisis in Eastern Galicia and the reluctance under these conditions to provide loans to companies or cooperatives due to the rapid depreciation of funds: if, for example, in 1928 a plow could be bought for 100 kg of rye or 20,8 kg live weight of pork, then in 1935 – 2,7 hundred kg of rye or 41,5 kg of pork had to be paid for the same plow, and the price for a threshers, for comparison, increased from three wagons of rye to 8–9 in three years (L. Grossfeld) [21: 19].

Many smallholder farms replaced the plow with wooden instruments. As a consequence, there was a tendency for technical recession, which led to a sharp decline in agricultural machinery. According to official statistics, the production of threshers in Poland in 1933 decreased 13 times by 1929, equestrian plows – 13,3 times, harrows – 173,6 times (L. Grossfeld) [21: 251].

In the post-war decade, landowners and farmers made a great deal of effort, especially in the last years before the crisis, to promote rational production and improve the technical support of agriculture. But as a result of the crisis, the demand for agricultural machinery had fallen sharply, and it was only since 1935 that the investment of entrepreneurs in the development of agricultural machinery and tools had slowly begun to increase. If the index of investment in agricultural production of machinery and tools was taken 100% in 1928, in 1929 it was 76,2%, in 1930 – 43,9%, in 1932 – 8,8%; in 1933 – 10,3%; in 1936 – 20,6%, in 1937 – 31,2%. Both domestic production and imports of agricultural machinery were reduced to a minimum. If we compare the volume of products of domestic agricultural machinery before the crisis, only the enterprises of Eastern Galicia produced much more. Thus, in 1929, 11 factories produced 29,000 tonnes of machinery and tools for the cultivation of land and the processing of hay and straw. In Poland in 1932, production decreased to 5,000 and in 1937 it increased to 21,000 (K. Chernievsky) [2: 65–77].

The introduction of machines into production required a large financial investment. A significant contribution to accelerating this was made by the State Agricultural Bank, which simultaneously financed agrarian reform and loaned farms to improve the technical equipment of rural entrepreneurs, farmers, and landowners. This issue is still relevant today. Own funds are the main sources of investment resources for most agricultural enterprises (O. Levandivskyi, V. Humeniuk, N. Kaziuka) [22: 543]. From 1925 to early 1932, it issued a long-term loan worth 16,969 thousand zł for mortgage on agricultural investments and debt repayment (The State Archives of Ivano-Frankivsk Region, case 6) [16]. Most of the credit came from Polish landowners and settlers who owned between 20 and 50 ha of land for the purchase of supplies, machinery,

artificial fertilizers and debt payments. Through various cooperatives, unions, and joint-stock banks, loans to predatory farmers, part of which went to purchase agricultural machinery and tools, were granted to the majority 29% and for cash 37% (The State Archives of Ivano-Frankivsk Region, case 1) [16]. These could benefit mainly wealthy market farmers.

Thus, the main occupation of the population of Eastern Galicia was agriculture. In 1921, 70,9% of the population of Lviv Voivodeship, 76,6% of Stanislaviv Voivodeship and 81,2% of Ternopil Voivodeship were engaged in that sector of the national economy. If only ethnic Ukrainians are taken into account, the percentage of the employed in agriculture was almost 95%. The socio-economic relations in the village were characterised by the preservation of the magnate and small peasantry's land ownership. Most of the peasant farms were dwarfed and had an area of less than 2 ha. Large landowners were predominantly Polish (1921): 92,8% in Ternopil, 88,1% in Lviv and 73,1% in Stanislaviv voivodeships. For every 100 ha of land owned by the Ukrainian owners there were 98 ha in smallholdings, and 2 ha in largeholdings. Thus, in 1921 there were 143 large Polish estates in the Ternopil voivodship with the size exceeding 1,000 ha; 18 estates belonging to Ukrainian landowners had on the average 245 ha of land, and 55,2% of all farms owned less than two hectares of land. In 1927, farms with 1 to 5 ha paid 2,38 PLN, with 5 to 15 ha – 2,15 PLN tax, 100-500 ha – 2,09 PLN, 500-2000 ha – 2,03 PLN. According to the Tax Code from 1937, the land tax rates in the Eastern Galicia voivodships averaged 40% of the net cadastral income, and in the native Polish voivodships they were between 7% and 13%. Tax payments in the total amount of all peasant households were on the rise. Thus, in 1927-1928, they amounted to 9,4%, and in 1932-1933, they amounted to 25,7%. In 1932-1933 it was 25,7%. Since the amount of all other taxes was fixed in proportion to the land tax rate, the farms of small peasants were much more heavily taxed than the landed estates [24]. From the results of this study it can be concluded that the potential of the landed estates in Eastern Galicia was quite considerable in the interwar period

Economic problems of agrarian sphere development. One of the reasons limiting the use of technical means in agriculture was the agrarian overpopulation, which created a great amount of labor in the labor market.

Thus, in the report of the Economic Society of East Malopolska it was noted, "The cheap labor of the workers and its excess contribute to conservatism in the economy, do not encourage the heads of farms to raise practical efforts to improve the organization of human labor" (The State Archives of Ivano-Frankivsk Region, case 3) [16].

The farms of large landowners used cheap labor of workers, which inhibited the use of expensive machines. According to the calculations of the mentioned society, manual harvesting of daylilies in the area of 80 morgens cost 1000 zł. And the same amount had to be paid annually for 5 years only for the depreciation of a horse-drawn harvester purchased under a 15% loan. Steam thresher cost – 20-40 thousand zł. Thus, “at such prices for cars and at an average percentage rate, every thrifty owner will seek, buy old threshers and locomobiles, and consider the purchase of new machinery a luxury” (The State Archives of Ivano-Frankivsk Region, case 2) [16]. This tendency manifested itself in the period of economic crisis, when landowners and farmers actively used semi-free labor and worked on the old technical base. From 1923, the Ministry of Agrarian Reform (at the local level, district and county land administrations and commissions) was responsible for the overall management and control of land policy [25: 49].

From 1923, the Polish government made partial concessions to the Ukrainian agrarians of Eastern Galicia. Thus, on 24 March 1923, the Polish Sejm passed a provisional decree stopping the military siege, and on 20 June 1924 a law which gave the right to buy land on the “kresy” not only to Poles, but also to persons of other nationalities, provided they were not punished for crimes against the Polish state [26: 74].

According to the Agricultural Institute, which in 1935 surveyed the state of livelihood of peasant farms in 11 villages of Eastern Galicia and in 42 villages of other regions, the difference in equipping these farms with carts, plows and logging was small. The advantage of the western voivodeships in equipping the farms of rich Polish peasants with threshers, horse-drawn carts, fans and grain-cleaning machines was tenfold. An even greater advantage was the use of harvesters, cultivators and seeders (K. Chernievsky) [2: 55].

Particular attention should be paid to ordinary peasant stock. The low level of economic development of small and parcelled farms is impressive. On farms that had an area of 0,5 to 2 ha, there were only 12% of yards that had one horse, plow and harrow, and 14,6% had one cart each. The farms that had the simplest maintenance could not exist on their own because keeping a horse even up to 2 hectares was unprofitable. Depending on the arable land, there was a simple stock (at least two carts and plows, two or more horses) on all farms (from 5-10 ha).

The use of improved agricultural implements and machines in different groups of farms is evidenced by the questionnaire data of the Institute of Public Economy (Table 2).

The table shows that the southern voivodeships had significantly more advanced farm implements and machines in the same groups than

the eastern voivodeships. The use of labor tools and machines in both groups increases with the size of farms, except for land that is unfit for cultivation. Technical progress in agriculture affected more and more wealthy peasant groups.

Table 2

Use of improved agricultural implements and machines in different groups of farms (1938)

Farm groups, ha	Improved tools and agricultural machinery, on 100 farms surveyed	
	In the southern provinces	In the eastern provinces
Less than 2	41,1	10,9
2-5	95,9	9,4
5-10	168,9	77,7
10-20	219,7	118,8
20-50	318,7	75,7

Source: Czerniewski K. Maszyny i narzędzia rolnicze w gospodarstwach mniejszej własności. Warszawa, 1938.

On small-scale but relatively large in production farms, such as live-stock breeding, root-growing, the most widely used were hatcheries and plows for potato rolling. They did not use expensive tools – threshers, horse-drawn vehicles, grain-cleaning machines, seeders, reapers and other tools. Based on statistics in Western Ukraine, there were 16,7% of wealthy peasant households that owned one of these tools. For example, 4,2% of farms owned horse-drawn threshers. Moreover, 54,7% of farms did not even have conventional plows, all the while renting them. According to the General Statistical Office of Poland, in 1935, 9% of farms used seeders in the Lwów and Stanisławow Voivodeship, 14% in Ternopil (Agricultural statistics) [23: 120]. The intensity of agricultural production of the bulk of peasant farms in the interwar period remained at the same level as before the First World War.

Conclusion. The disproportionate development of the agricultural sphere in Eastern Galicia was observed in the use of agricultural implements and machines. On the one hand, the development of capitalist production in agriculture was accompanied by the concentration of agricultural machinery at landowners and farmers, and on the other, the lack of machinery at small farmers who were forced to use primitive tools.

During the economic downturn, agricultural machinery fell into disrepair, holding back the development of capitalist production in the countryside. Low prices for agricultural products and high prices for manufactured goods had a negative impact on the purchasing power of peasant farms. This difference was especially noticeable during the

global economic crisis. Landowners used the old methods of management, which used more cheap labor for hired workers than investing in rationalization of production to reduce its costs. The crisis in agriculture contributed to the growth of the waste system, which revived the remnants of the countryside, inhibiting the development of productive forces more than in industry.

In times of economic crisis, the technical base of agriculture declined as a result of reduced demand for agricultural implements and machines. The minimum amount of equipment in the landlords was ineffective, as a large number of landowners were returning to the old system due to the emergence of cheap labor. Even the farms of wealthy peasants abandoned seeders and cultivators. As for the general majority of peasants, during this period, they went to shallow plowing and refused inter-row cultivation.

The use of sophisticated agricultural machinery was only profitable on large farms of landowners and farmers, at the same time displacing small producers. It should also be noted that in addition to the use of agricultural machinery, permanent fixed-term workers were not hired.

Despite state support, the use of machinery in agriculture created tension in society. On the one hand, on farms that used hired labor, machines displaced agricultural workers, on the other – cheap labor, price differences between agricultural products and machines, in favor of the latter, hampered the mass introduction of agricultural machinery.

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