

TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL POPULATION VITAL STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Transformation of rural population vital strategies and current period peculiarity of its adaptation to economic reforms in agribusiness are analyzed in this paper. Special attention is dedicated to the problems of readiness of different social groups to new professional knowledge acquisition, their commitment in it, and to analysis of modern life strategies and employment preferences of rural youth.

The paper is based on sources of sociological researches conducted by the Institute of Agrarian Problems of the Russian Academy of Sciences with personal involvement of the author in one of the Russian regions (Saratov's oblast) in 1993-2007, dedicated to the problems of rural community adaptation to changing socio-economic conditions. The research included polls, budget studies, and "deep" interviews with the budget study respondents.

Key words: rural population, agrarian sector, adaptation, vital strategies, innovations, professional training, raising the level of one's skill

During last fifteen years a sizeable amount of rural economists and sociologists' research was dedicated to the problems of adaptation of rural community to new economic conditions. At that the authors noted that successful socio-economic adaptation, i.e. working-out by large enough amount of people productive models of socio-economic conduct goes as necessary condition for the transit of rural economy on real trajectory of sustainable development [1, p.5].

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For the eight straight year in a row there in Russian agriculture the economic growth is observed. Positive changes take place in social sphere. For the years 2002-2007 the wages in agricultural enterprises increased more than three time [5, p.110], the overdue volume of salaries decreased twenty time [5, p.1143, p.446]

In the country are maintained high rates of growth of summarizing indicator of material wealth – the available resources per household member (in 2007 by 30.6 per cent in comparison with the previous year, in 2006 by 24,76%, in 2005 by 26,4%) [5, p. 237].

As it can be seen from data of sociological research conducted by the Institute of Agrarian Problems of the Russian Academy of Sciences (laboratory of rural social structure and socio dynamics) in 1993, 2002, 2007, and together with Saratov Inter-regional Institute of Social Sciences at Saratov State University in 2005 in one of the Russian regions (Saratov’s oblast) for relevant sample², a sizeable part of rural population succeeded to adapt to new economic conditions thanks to working-out a productive strategy of adaptation, which made it possible to conserve or increase the living standards. Now new positive tendencies are not only fixed by statistics, but are as well embodied in results of polls.

In 2007 for the first time for the last fifteen years of our polls among those respondents who answered on the question ‘How had changed the financial position of your family during last 2-3 years’ quantity of those who marked the improvement exceeded the quantity of those who marked worsening. (Table 1)

Table 1 How had changed the financial position of your family for the last 2-3 years?
(%to the number of those who answered on this question)

	1993.	2002.	2007.
Without change	32,0	37,4	33,7
Improved	13,1	12,3	30,5
Worsened	42,7	41,3	20,2
Difficult to say	12,2	9,0	16,1

It became visible the growth of satisfaction with some aspects of life – dwelling, provisions with foodstuff and manufacture, incomes, first of all it is peculiar to the group of respondents who consider themselves “living worse than many others”. These are able at present moment to improve essentially the financial position of rural family (according to the respondents opinion): the enlargement of fore-household farming (in 2007 this

² 1993- 486 respondents, 2002 - 457 respondents, 2005- 287 respondents, 2007 - 197 respondents

alternative was chosen by 30,6% polled, in 2002 – 26,0%, 1993 – 17,0%), attempts to earn more on major job (20,7%), employment opportunities in the city or migration to the city (2007 – 15,0%, 2002 – 10,5%, 1993 – 1,9%). The claim to the state for just pay has lost its former popularity (44,4% - 1993, 32,2% - 2002, 11,9% - 2007). Though family farming is understood today by rural population as the main source of reliability for existing only 11,4% of respondents want it to be their main sphere of occupation.

In spite of all the changes relatively stable for already fifteen years stays a fraction of willing to conduct individual farming (20,0% - 2007 and 2002, 18,8% - in 1993), while the amount of those who want to start own business increased substantially (21,0% in 1993 and 2002 vs. 37% in 2007). With this there arrived more respondents willing their children to start own business (20% in 2002 up to 31,4% in 2007). Per cent of those who want to see their children and grandchildren as farmers also increased and reached 5,2% after declining more than threefold from 2002 till 1993 from 7,6% to 2,4%. It is evident that there in the country the social base for the development of small and medium entrepreneurship is forming.

In the process of adaptation to new economic realities among rural population there have been accepted a broad range of new vital strategies often based on more intense usage of inter-family social support networks. The role of such a traditional form for vitality support as mutual aid among relatives and familiars increased sharply. Nowadays when labor potential of one separate rural family is practically exhausted the increase in output in households is possible perhaps first of all due to usage of family network resources, emerging of different forms of inter-family cooperation.

One of the main problems of the country is still the situation in the sphere of employment and first of all very low popularity of agricultural jobs. The main reasons are low level of salaries and hard labor conditions. In spite of the outrunning increase in wages in the country (plus 10% points to national average) wages themselves in agriculture remain extremely low and were only 45,2% from national average in 2007. That same year as well as in 2002 only 3,6% of parents wanted their children to work in agriculture (27,4% in 1993). Just as in 2002 30 per cent of respondents were satisfied with their work and only one of ten was happy with the conditions of work. Today the majority of agricultural enterprises have no inner resources to successfully compete with urban counterparts for attracting and attaching of qualified personnel. At the same time today peasants are more often afraid of unemployment. 50,6% of respondents confirmed this issue which is respectively 9 and 15% increase in comparison with 2002 and 1993. More often than others think that they can find themselves without job not only respondents of pre-retire age but also youth of pre-30 years as well.

A sustainable mood to migrate preserves in rural community. Today rural habitants are much more often ready to seek for a job or move to the nearest urban dwelling if the job lost than in previous five or fifteen years ago (1993 – 4%, 2002

– 5%, 2007 – 21%). Every sixth poll participant considers such a move as a necessary condition to improve the financial welfare of his family. In 2002 this opinion maintained every tenth and in 1993 only one on a hundred. The highest per cent of potential migrants is among young people younger than 30. Every third respondent dreams his children to leave for the city to live and work.

Having evident positive changes in agro-sector development, the state's attitude to social problems of the country great influence on rural inhabitants' preferences, their plans on own future and the future of their children press' the unfair lagging of the country from the city according to consumer standard, the process of increasing of the "scissors" in incomes of town-dwellers and their rural counterparts, which takes place continuously during all 'after-reform' period, the absence of the necessary amount of jobs with the level of pay and labor conditions relevant to modern requirements. Under these conditions the transition of the agribusiness on the way of innovations comes not only the main factor of the agro-sector's economic effectiveness, but the most important condition for the further growth of the level of life of rural households, perfecting of the rural socio-labor sphere. At the same time the process of technical and technological re-equipment, modernizing the productive relations on the enterprises of the branch inevitably implies the change in vital and labor strategies of important part of rural population and probably would be followed by deepening of socio-economic differentiation in country's community. In its turn the rural community potential, its traditions, values and interests of peasants predetermine a lot in velocity and results of planned transformation.

The increase of a skill level of workers of the agricultural enterprises goes as one of the basic preconditions of transition of agriculture on an innovative way of development, and as well as a consequence of this transition. However, today workers themselves differently estimate the personal potential, the opportunities and interest in obtaining new professional knowledge. In these conditions allocation of groups of workers of the agricultural enterprises with different level of orientation on increasing of qualifications and improvement of professional skills, the analysis of numbers of the given groups, their social characteristics and features of vital and labour strategy is a necessary condition of development of effective personnel selection and measures on prevention of growth of social tensions during technical and technological re-equipment and perfection of relations of production at the enterprises. Most part of the respondents employed on agricultural enterprises (58,5%) do not see any possibilities to increase their qualification. Only 13,0% of poll participants consider it real. Its evident that answering this question respondent took into account not only the fact of external presence of conditions for qualification increase but also his internal factors and first of all such as age and health.

Thus, among the respondents, the age of whom do not exceed 40 years, every fourth believes that is possible to raise his or her proficiency, while in the age groups

from 41 to 50 years and from 51 to 60 years, this alternative have been chosen respectively by 11.5% and 6.0% of respondents. If we analyze the situation with respect to separated socio-professional groups, we can see that the absence of qualification improvement prospects have been noted by ordinary personnel of large-scale agricultural enterprises more frequently than others. More optimistically (more than 40% of interrogated in this group) estimate their possibilities in getting professional knowledge the employees who consider themselves as high- skill workers and having such a profession with which they have an opportunity to get the job at the enterprises of other sectors (electricians, motor mechanics, drivers, etc). It is significant that just only among the given group of respondents a readiness to qualification improvement is not affected by the age.

Readiness of a person to get a new professional knowledge is undoubtedly depends on his or her basic professional background, experience of qualification improvement or new profession obtaining. 42.4% of inquiry participant's work by a profession obtained during training, 64.5% of respondents do not have an experience of any additional training, 21% passed the courses on getting a new profession and only 13% were trained on raising their qualification. 63% of inquiry participants noted that qualification they got complies with their job's requirements they do at present, 20.4% consider their qualification much higher than the required, and 16.6% – lower. (Is interesting the fact that the third alternative was selected by no one specialist or manager of large-scale collective farms. More frequently it was chosen by farmers and young people at age from 20 to 29 years employed at working positions at large-scale collective farms) Meanwhile, in general en masse, only 39.6% of interrogated believe that their work requires new knowledge acquisition and qualification improvement. Nevertheless, frequency of this alternative selection by separated socio-professional groups is strongly differentiated. To this opinion are adhered 84.6% of farmers, 63.2% of general speciality workers and 17.0% of ordinary employees working at large-scale collective agricultural enterprises.

It is impossible not to note that erudition factor for countrymen occupy the increasingly major weight in the system of their values. As one of the main reasons of significant part of population's low standard of life, 43.6% of interrogated consider the unwillingness to work, unwillingness to raise their qualification and 73.8% note that the opportunity to get a good education is an important factor of wealthiness growth. Meanwhile, the qualification improvement opportunity closely links not only with the need for salary increase, but also with a requirement for professional and career growth. The higher the respondent estimates his opportunities to obtain additional professional skills and knowledge, the more often he is assured that he has real chances both for increase of a post, and for career growth.

Along with a part of highly skilled workers (mainly in the age of 30-45 years), the young workers focused on continuation of education and career growth are also interested

in receiving a new professional knowledge, while the general body of agricultural workers feel very concerned to any innovations. In this way, today, it is possible to distinguish a significant group of agricultural workers with a low orientation to labour mobility and professional skills improvement. First of all, these are the ordinary employees, both workers, and specialists, who are mainly senior than 45 years and have a great working experience at the given enterprise. They, more often than others, are satisfied in general by their work and are afraid to lose it. In case of job loss, the representatives of the given group consider themselves being forced to become occupied with a work on a personal farmstead and do not see other prospects of employment for themselves.

Peculiar attention during research was paid to modern life strategies and labour preferences of rural youth. For the last 15 years, it was grown a whole generation of young people, the socialization process of which having been passed in new socio-economical conditions and who, by themselves, tested many pluses and minuses of market economy. In the village, the objective processes of generations, age groups and professional groups' changes are taken place. Economical behaviour of the youth, their readiness to carry out, along with traditional ways of activity and behaviour, the innovative ones connected with progressive changes in the society, will determine to a large extent the prospects of agricultural sector development.

The youth is still one of the most vulnerable social groups in the agricultural job market. During 2004-2007 years it can be traced a tendency to a growth of employment rate of rural population younger than 30 years, and in November, 2007 it came to 45.1%. However, the general unemployment rate in November, 2007 amounted 23.3% in respect to young people younger than 20 years and 13.8% in respect to people in the age from 20 to 29 years, that is respectively 2.5 times and 1.4 times higher than the correspondent indicator in respect to the rural able-bodied population [4, p.164]

According to the data of sociological researches provided by the experts of the Institute of Agrarian Problems in 1993 and 2007, in the year 2007, the same as fifteen years ago, every second respondent younger than 30 years was afraid to lose his job. But the intentions of the young people in case of job loss have been undertaken the definite changes. The popularity of answers linked with job seeking in the town has been grown dramatically. Such alternative as "I will transfer to live and work in the town" was selected by 2.2% in 1993 and in 2007 – by 30.1%, and "I will find a job in the nearest town" – by 2.7% and 7.5% respectively. The readiness to stay in the village and become occupied with a work at a farm was expressed by every third young man, the same as fifteen years ago. Though modern youth is much more better aware, than their peers of the beginning of nineties, of all difficulties and risks linked with carrying out business, the portion of the youth who want to create in case of job loss their own farm, all these years have been remained at the same level (i.e. 5% of interrogated young people younger than 30 years and in general en masse), and the number of people willing to open the private non-agricultural business even grew (from 4.0% in 1993 to 7.9% in 2002).

The willingness to change a job was expressed by 60.9% of poll's participants not senior than 30 years, that proves a high level of potential labour mobility. 14.6% of young people are going to quit in a year that is 1.5 times higher the correspondent indicator in general en masse. The fact that more than half of the young people who participated in inquiry are sure that getting a job based on the obtained qualification is easy, while only every tenth consider the opportunity to change a job to a higher position, qualification, tells about the lack of vertically labour mobility opportunity and domination of horizontal one.

Though many respondents estimate their career development chances as bad, major part of the youth (65% against 43% in general en masse), nevertheless, strive for it, and 79% believe that they are able to realize all their life's perspectives. In the meanwhile, the growing number of young people, in order to achieve this, is ready to change not only a place of work, but also a place of living.

Modern rural youth, in their desire to improve the material well-being, first of all, rely on expansion of fore-household farming and transfer to the town. At the same time, working at a personal plot is more frequently considered as the only available way of accumulating means, needed to get an education and move to the town. Recognizing the necessity of fore-household farming expansion for rural families' wealthiness improvement, the real opportunity to achieve stable wealthiness, as estimated more frequently by the young people, is linked with transferring to the town or more wealthy villages, where are available working places with acceptable conditions and level of salaries. In spite of all the negative consequences of agrarian reforms at the beginning of nineties, the Russian village, today, maintain a social potential for the agricultural technological upgrading that is proved by the results of the last researches. More than 40% of rural population at able-bodied age today are not senior than 30 years.

At the same time, the rural youth is not only aware about the necessity of getting professional training, but also considers it as necessary condition to achieve a high material well-being. It is great an interest of rural population not only in expansion in the village of non-agricultural employment spheres, but also in own enterprises creation, for example, in services sector.

It is especially important, in our opinion, to provide a comprehensive approach, a one-time creation of conditions not only for technical and technological transformation in the agricultural sector, but also for diversification of rural economy, road transport infrastructure development, increase of accessibility to high-quality professional training for the rural population. Under these conditions it is essential not only to create conditions for attraction and fastenings of specialists in the village, but also to transform forms of training and improvement of professional skills, keeping in mind opportunities and requirements of various social groups of agricultural population, specificity of a rural way of life.

Literature

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