

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES OF LAND USE AND WATER MANAGEMENT FOR AGRICULTURE IN BULGARIA

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Abstract

Protection of the agricultural land is a consistent goal of the Common Agricultural Policy. Regulated criteria for sustainable land use are a precondition for reconciliation of property interests with ecological issues. Bulgarian legacy from the inherent to socialism intensive agricultural production includes soil degradation processes, and from the recent Agrarian Reform – fragmented, small-sized and scattered land tenure that puts obstacles to modern and efficient agriculture. In this paper, an overview and structural analysis of the recent agricultural land use is made. The reasons for the inefficient irrigation and drainage management in relation to the existing legislation and ensuing land management processes are discussed. Data from recent national census and property counting have been processed. The analyses show unsustainable land management (around 9% of the agricultural land is unutilized and the total number of holdings has recently decreased with around 45%). There is great polarity in the agricultural ownership and land use (67% of the holdings – 0-1 ha sized - manage 10% of the utilized agricultural area (UAA) while only 2% of holdings - >50 ha sized - 84% of UAA). Location of land tenure and land arrays is inadequate to the technological parameters of the existing irrigation and drainage systems and this makes their functioning difficult. This, in combination with other exploitation problems contributes for only 20% efficiency of these systems. Physical, operational, organizational and pricing problems lead to low interest to irrigation. Actually, only 3.6% of UAA is under irrigation, although 15% of UAA is potentially irrigable. Further, around 82% of the agricultural land is subjected to water erosion. The yearly erosion varies with the type of land use and 51% of it originates from the fields. Considering the fertility of Bulgarian soils and the favorable for agriculture relief and climate conditions, improving land management is the key approach to create conditions not only for obtaining high agricultural production, but for complex solution of land use problems. First of all, an adequate legislation for establishment of middle size property and land consolidation, differentiated according to site topography, is needed. If so, proper mechanization and efficient irrigation will be applied, soil protection and landscape preservation activities will be allowed, and market and social benefits will be established.

Key words: land use, irrigation&drainage, legislation, management, Bulgaria