GREEN ECONOMY BELARUS

Sustainable Agriculture

Belarus has developed an inefficient system of agricultural management. The state owns the land, establishes so-called "raw material zones" for the procurement of raw materials for the food industry, and sets procurement prices for products, leading to a lack of market competition and a growing number of unprofitable farms.

In animal husbandry, large export-oriented commodity complexes prevail, using antibiotics and hormones, and acting as significant sources of environmental pollution.

Intensive agriculture relies heavily on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, resulting in contamination of surface and groundwater.

- Land reclamation has disrupted natural ecosystems, leading to a decline in groundwater levels, rivers, and lakes.

- Arable farming on former peatlands contributes to soil degradation and desertification.

Photo: Anthropogenic desert in Rechitsa district.

Reasons for reforming Belarusian agriculture:

1. **Agriculture is responsible for 20% of all CO2 emissions** and even more dangerous methane emissions, causing climate change and its consequences - droughts, hurricanes, floods, and pest invasions. Around 1.5 million hectares, or 18% of all agricultural land, in Belarus is threatened by wind and water erosion.
2. **The state supports the existing agricultural model through budget subsidies**, which means that Belarusians are forced to pay for nitrates in vegetables, antibiotics in milk and meat, and pollution of water bodies, soil, and air through taxes. However, the majority of agricultural enterprises remain unprofitable due to inefficient management, outdated machinery, irrational resource usage, and salaries that are less than 69% of the national average.
3. **Stagnation of organic farming and private agriculture**. As of 2023, Belarus has only 26 organic farms, using 1600 hectares of land. Farmers face challenges such as **land scarcity**, the risk of confiscation, difficulties in selling products, expensive certification, and a transition period to clean the land from heavy metals, pesticides, and mineral fertilizers.

*- **Organic farming** has a positive impact on nature conservation: it preserves biodiversity, maintains soil quality, ensures the quality of underground and surface waters, and the produce does not contain components harmful to human health.*

*- **Organic animal husbandry** considers physiological and behavioral animal needs: it excludes GMOs, antibiotics, hormonal preparations, forced feeding, and encourages free grazing and local feed.*

Agriculture directly depends on the environment and climate, while causing them the most harm. The green economy focuses on efficient resource development and environmentally friendly production that does not harm the environment.

Benefits for Belarusians

Primarily, this means delicious and safe products for us and our children, a healthy environment. It creates new jobs in rural areas, promotes waste processing, rural construction, and green energy.

Private initiatives can boost agritourism, providing additional income for rural residents and enhancing the attractiveness of Belarusian villages. Creating new jobs and developing rural economies can halt the rural exodus, improve social and transport infrastructure.

How to Make Agriculture in Belarus More Sustainable?

Considering the damage caused by traditional agriculture and the increasing demand for organic products, Belarus needs to develop farming and small household farms that are more environmentally friendly compared to the existing large-scale farms.

Necessary conditions for the development of farming include **private land ownership**, which will enable investment in production, machinery, new farming methods, and equal access to financing and markets.

Objective	Practical Implementation
1. Support Organic Farming and Animal Husbandry	
Develop organic farming, which has already proven its efficiency in Belarus and its products are in demand in Belarus and EU markets	- Allow private land ownership - Align legislation with EU standards and establish a certification system - Implement green public procurement - Create conditions for export development - Support associations of organic farmers - Develop agricultural education and research
2. Ecologize Agriculture	
Make all agricultural practices more environmentally friendly and biodynamic, as organic farming alone cannot meet all of Belarus's needs due to its climate peculiarities.	- Optimize the use of fertilizers and pesticides - Restore degraded lands, limit arable farming on peatlands - Balance the structure of animal husbandry - Develop fish farming, and gather mushrooms, berries, and medicinal herbs.
3. Produce Biogas and Fertilizers from Organic Waste	
Transform agricultural and livestock waste from soil and water pollutants into resources for biogas energy and a way to **increase farm profitability**.	- Convert manure into biogas and environmentally friendly fertilizers to reduce methane and CO2 emissions - Produce heat and electricity from organic waste for farm needs and sale - Introduce biogas-powered agricultural machinery to reduce fuel and petroleum costs

- Annually, Belarus generates 89 million tons of organic waste, only 2% of which is utilized.

- From 1 ton of manure, 30-65 cubic meters of biogas and 200 kg of fertilizer can be produced.

- According to ALC Eneka, Belarus could construct 982 biogas complexes with a total capacity of 670 MW.

Sources of Reforms Financing

Even under current conditions, farming in Belarus is a profitable business. Projects related to waste recycling, biogas production, green energy, investments in modern machinery, and new technologies are typically repaid within 5-12 years and significantly increase productivity.

The government should move away from directly subsidizing loss-making farms and instead create incentives in the form of tax benefits, promote green financing, and engage in green public procurement.

After the restoration of democracy and the rule of law in the country, Belarus will gain access to funds from the EU Economic Assistance Plan, loans and grants from EIB, EBRD, IMF, technical and material assistance programs, foreign and domestic investments.

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