

Farmers' use of Brandenburg's privatised extension

Sonja Dimter^a, Andrea Knierim^b, Uwe Jens Nage^a

^aHumboldt-Universität Berlin, Faculty of Agriculture and Horticulture, Extension and Communication Group, Germany; ^bLeibniz-Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research, Müncheberg, Germany - aknierim@zalf.de

Abstract: *In the federal state of Brandenburg, Germany, provision of agricultural extension has been privatised in the early nineties. Since then, public financial support was reduced continuously until full deletion in 2001. From the change management theory it can be assumed that this organisational transformation has demanded considerable adaptation efforts of the farmers. In 1996, a first empirical evaluation of Brandenburg's extension system had been undertaken revealing farmers' interests and satisfaction with extension's contents and methods (Bokelmann et al., 1996) at that time. In 2006, another empirical study was carried out, focussing on farmers' actual appraisal of the system. In this frame, 69 managers of all types of agricultural holdings in Brandenburg were personally interviewed, combining quantitative and qualitative survey methods. The paper presents selected results of the latter study from the information seeking and processing activities of these farmers. Compared to the findings in 1996, a clear shift from modernisation and restructuring issues towards more general financial and production related subjects can be observed. The perceived need of general extension advice largely exceeds the support actually requested. This is mainly due to financial restrictions. Hence, priority is given to obtaining support when applying for public subsidies. While some farmers appreciate the increased user orientation of extensionists in the privatised system, most farmers tend to diversify their information sources including those of commercial enterprises. Accordingly, an appropriate on-farm knowledge management is a big challenge many farmers have to meet. A broad dissatisfaction is expressed with regard to the information dissemination of the public authorities. Although many respondents complained about these negative effects of the privatisation of Brandenburg's extension system, young farm managers in particular expressed the wish to accept the challenges and exploit all promising options in the future.*

Keywords: *Extension, knowledge management, farmer – advisor linkages, Germany*

Privatisation in agricultural extension

Introduction

Privatisation of public services has been a worldwide phenomenon since the 1980s. With regard to agricultural extension in particular, three practical reasons are frequently put forward: (i) a broad discontent with the quality of governmental services, (ii) the decrease of public financial means and (iii) an increase of private enterprise involvement and interest in knowledge dissemination (Qamar, 2000). In the meantime, the reform of agricultural extension systems has led to the emergence of pluralistic agricultural knowledge systems in many countries, where private and public bodies cooperate in multiple ways to provide information to farmers. A World Bank workshop, held in 2002, provided a sample of 44 case studies which highlighted the most obvious tendencies of the structural change processes, including decentralisation, privatisation and demand driven approaches (Rivera et al., 2004). Of these, twelve cases deal with extension privatisation and they show that the phenomenon is visible in all parts of the world, industrialised nations as well as developing countries, that the diversity of organisational change processes can not yet be seized with one conceptual model but remains highly case specific and that the reform process is usually a long-term endeavour over 5 to 10 years (Connolly, 2004).

The focus of all studies undertaken in this context lies on the organisational and functional aspects of the agricultural extension system, sometimes with a broader view, encompassing knowledge and information systems as a whole. Emphasis is laid on the observation that privatisation does not necessarily imply a complete withdrawal of governmental intervention. Even if the provision and the funding of extension services are fully left to private actors there is still an important task of monitoring and controlling the rules and upcoming norms of interaction. The new extension systems in the revised case studies for example broadly correspond to the slogan *Caveat emptor (the buyer has to*

take care) – indicating that the quality management remains underdeveloped for many reasons. Hence, “the private sector can play an increasingly important role in rural knowledge systems, but total privatization is not feasible, even for commercial agriculture” (Rivera et al., 2004: 27). The authors recommend learning about the right mixture of private and public intervention and responsibility distribution through pilot studies, in order to remain realistic about the possibilities and pitfalls of privatisation. Especially, it is urged that the public sector needs to develop a clear vision of the intended knowledge system and pro-actively sets the appropriate frame structure through political and fiscal instruments.

Privatisation in Germany

In Germany, the overall trend of privatising public services coincided with the German unification in 1990 which in turn led to a restructuring of public bodies in the new federal states. In several of these states, the attempt was made to hand over the delivery of agricultural extension to private bodies. Only little generic literature on the appraisal of these new systems is available: Currie and Schütz (2000) present a brief history of the organisation and financial scheme of the extension system in Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt, systems which differ with regard to the way extension is subsidised. While in Thuringia, certified advisors can apply for a personnel cost subsidy, in Saxony-Anhalt it is the farmer who can obtain a reimbursement of a part of their costs. As both reform processes were just under way in the late nineties, the authors abstain from summative evaluation and rather judge on structural observations. In their conclusions they observe that in both cases small farmers seem to completely withdraw from payable extension services and hence privatised extension is predominantly used by large farm managers. Such a trend could lead to a fortification of the existing cleavage between large scale agricultural enterprises and smaller family based entities. However, the study has an organisational focus and does not include empirical data from farmers themselves. In contrast, some empirical studies are available from the state of Brandenburg, one of the new member states which started to introduce a privatised system as early as 1992.

While during the times of the GDR, i.e. until 1989, farm managers in Brandenburg were serviced with excellent extension services free of charge, a harsh change occurred in the early nineties when the state ministry of agriculture decided to follow the “Brandenburg Path”, which was intended as a bottom-up approach where farmers should take the decisions and governmental involvement should be as restricted as possible (Nagel et al., 2002). From the beginning, the long term objective was the privatization of the extension system. In order to receive financial public support, farmers could either form a group on their own initiative (“extension circle”) or an extension worker would establish an “extension association” and offer his/her service to the farmers (Bokelmann et al., 1996). An early empirical appraisal of this extension system in 1996 revealed promising results with regard to farmers’ satisfaction with the information and services they obtained (*ibid*: 55). However, as the subsidies decreased faster than expected, the formerly rather optimistic farmers had to struggle after 1996 in order to continue the established extension relations (Nagel et al., 2002). In 2002, financing of the extension system was fully commercialised due to a total reduction of public subsidies. The utilisation of advice and informational support is now completely dependent on the farmers’ own demand.

From a neo-classical governance perspective, the organising forces of the market are not only the motor but also the regulatory mechanism of extension. Consultancy enterprises will develop and offer knowledge products appropriately adjusted to the needs of the customers – in our case the farm managers. With this understanding, farmers are no longer beneficiaries but become active actors as clients or stakeholders in the agricultural knowledge markets (Klerkx et al., 2006). In this line of thought, ‘active client’ implies that a farmer’s use of extension services is based on a proper problem and needs analysis, a system of priorities with regard to his/her management objectives, and a fair judgement on the performance of the advisory activities. A demand-driven agricultural knowledge system that actually reveals the advantages of privatisation will thus be dependent on the steering task formulation of such informed, deliberately acting clients.

Scope and Objectives of the study

With this background, it seems of striking urgency to empirically study the results and impacts of the reform processes and, especially, to reveal judgments and impressions of clients, i.e., the farmers themselves. As already stated, hardly any empirical studies have been undertaken so far excepting research in the federal state Mecklenburg-Pomerania (Rüther, 2007) and in Brandenburg. In this paper, we report on the latter research to be published soon. We focus our presentation on the items of (i) farmers’ information management, (ii) the role and perceived agency of farmers within the

agricultural knowledge system and (iii) the appraisal of the (changed) relationship between farmers and extensionists in a privatised extension system.

Design of the study

The study was conducted as an empirical research with extensive field work. Questionnaire-based interviews were held with 69 farm managers (54 male, 12 female) of farms who actually use advisory services from a leading extensionist and/or consultant of an agro-commercial firm. The interview partners of 1996 survey were contacted as potential respondents. Very soon it became clear that there are fewer farms contracting with an extensionist than in 1996 or before privatisation: Of the 69 respondents in 2006, only 47 % were willing to pay a certain amount, monthly or annually, to be able to fall back on an extensionist's service or opinion. To do this, they sign a contract with one leading extensionist who may accompany the farm manager over long periods of time (up to 12 years and more) and supports his/her decision-making. This percentage is roughly equivalent to the figures presented by Platen (in Wolters, 2005), who estimated that in average 50% of Brandenburg's farm managers have signed contracts with an extension agent.

In the present study, the sample of farms (66) corresponds exactly to 1 % of all farms in Brandenburg. They cultivate 1031 ha in average and employ 13.8 labourers in average with a range from one to 64 labourers. Most farms (46 or 64 %) are mixed holdings with both plant and animal production, pure market crop production is done on 12 holdings; horticulture is the specialization of eight. Close to 10 % are organic farms. All farm managers consult extensionist since the foundation of their enterprise, in most of the cases since 1992.

Table 1. Types of enterprises of the interviewed farm managers

Types of enterprises					Total Sample
Number of...	Individual enterprise	Agricultural cooperative society	Civil law association	Limited liability company	
Holdings (in total)	26	11	18	11	66
With livestock	10	11	14	11	46
Market crops	8	-	4	-	12
Horticulture	8	-	-	-	8
Average size of holding (labours/holding)	2.96	26.49	5.9	19.9	13.8
ha/holding	250.5	1667.27	821.5	1384.45	1030.9
Size of holding in labours per holding					
Until 2 labours	3-5 labours	6-10 labours	11-20 labours	21-64 labours	total
17	17	11	8	13	66

Various organisations offer general extension services in Brandenburg and some are especially important to animal keeping farms. The Landesbauernverband (LBV), the main farmers association of Brandenburg, offers a wide range of information, including legal advice and was mentioned most frequently by respondents. Nearly 50 % of the interviewed farmers are members of the LBV, a figure which corresponds with the overall Brandenburg situation. Compared to the national level (90%), this figure is quite low. The other repeatedly mentioned organisations work in specified fields, e.g. in pomiculture, swine keeping, cattle breeding, and dairy production respectively. Of the 41 cattle keeping farms, which were part of the sample, 25 are a member of the association of cattle breeders. Their information needs are breed specific and they are therefore collaborating with the respective specialist organisation.

Selected results

Farmers' information needs and extension objectives

One of the primary research questions was to find out which issues are of topical interests to farmers so that they actively use external informational sources. Not surprisingly, fiscal extension is still of highest importance and in this case importance attached equals the frequency of use (Fig. 1). Plant protection issues are placed second, still a crucial issue in the field of practical production. Compared to the results of the 1996 study a significant increase in demand for extension in the field of plant protection becomes apparent. Financial matters, both general as well as regarding public subsidies and implying a high level of administrative burden, come on third place mentioned by 40 and 45 interviewees.

The analysis of the respective qualitative statements confirmed the high importance of extension with regard to the application for public financial support. The reasons for this are twofold: (i) the formal requirements of the application procedure are perceived as too complicated, increasing farmers' need for support and this "support is defective, especially from the administrative bodies. They just work too slowly". Another disturbing factor is the date of deadline (15th of May) for the submission of the application. "It is catastrophic to have to be confronted with bureaucracy in times of work peaks", one farmer said. In this case, the main service farmers ask from extensionists is the completion of application forms. And this service has the highest importance in the farmers' eyes as confirmed by the ranking of extension topics (cf. Table 3).

Furthermore, the respondents had a lot to say about the subject of subsidies in general. They questioned the system of public financial support as such and - asked why it seems to be impossible to plan the direct payment either in short-, middle-, or long-term - one farmer said: "We never know, what will come up to us." Already ten years ago, this issue was of high importance to the farm managers (Bokelmann et al., 1996: 30 ff)

The expressed need of extension in the field of farm economics (with an emphasis on the issues of farm planning, investment planning, financing) does not correspond with the frequency of use of extension in this field. Even though roughly half of the respondents assigned high importance to this field – this is 30 % less than in 1996– only 10 % to 15 % of the interviewed farm managers use these extension services regularly nowadays (Table 2).

Information requests and advisory services regarding marketing and environmental management are still of little importance. This finding is surprising in the case of agro-environmental issues in the context of the cross compliance requirements, which are basically a matter of environmental management at farm level and currently a hot topic. A considerable number of qualitative statements underline that the cross compliance requirements are by far the most important topical (extension) issue to the respondents. Farmers claim the system of controlling and sanctioning as totally intransparent. They therefore propose that one concrete task of active extension agents should be the design of individual checklists for the farms.

Farm managers criticized strongly the role of the administrative bodies of Brandenburg. They are concerned about administrators who are often badly informed and useless as information sources, both for farmers as well as extension agents even though it is their particular responsibility to provide advice on cross-compliance issues-.

Table 2. The demand of extension in the sector of managerial-economics in 1996 and 2006

year	Extension issues of high importance (as expressed by x % of the sample)			Extension services of regular use (as expressed by x % of the sample)	
	Planning of farm's design and development	Investment	Financing	Investment Consultant	Bancs
1996	86 %	81 %	77 %	26 %	12 %
2006	34 %	30 %	40 %	10 %	15 %

Source: Bokelmann et al., 1996:29 and 31; own survey

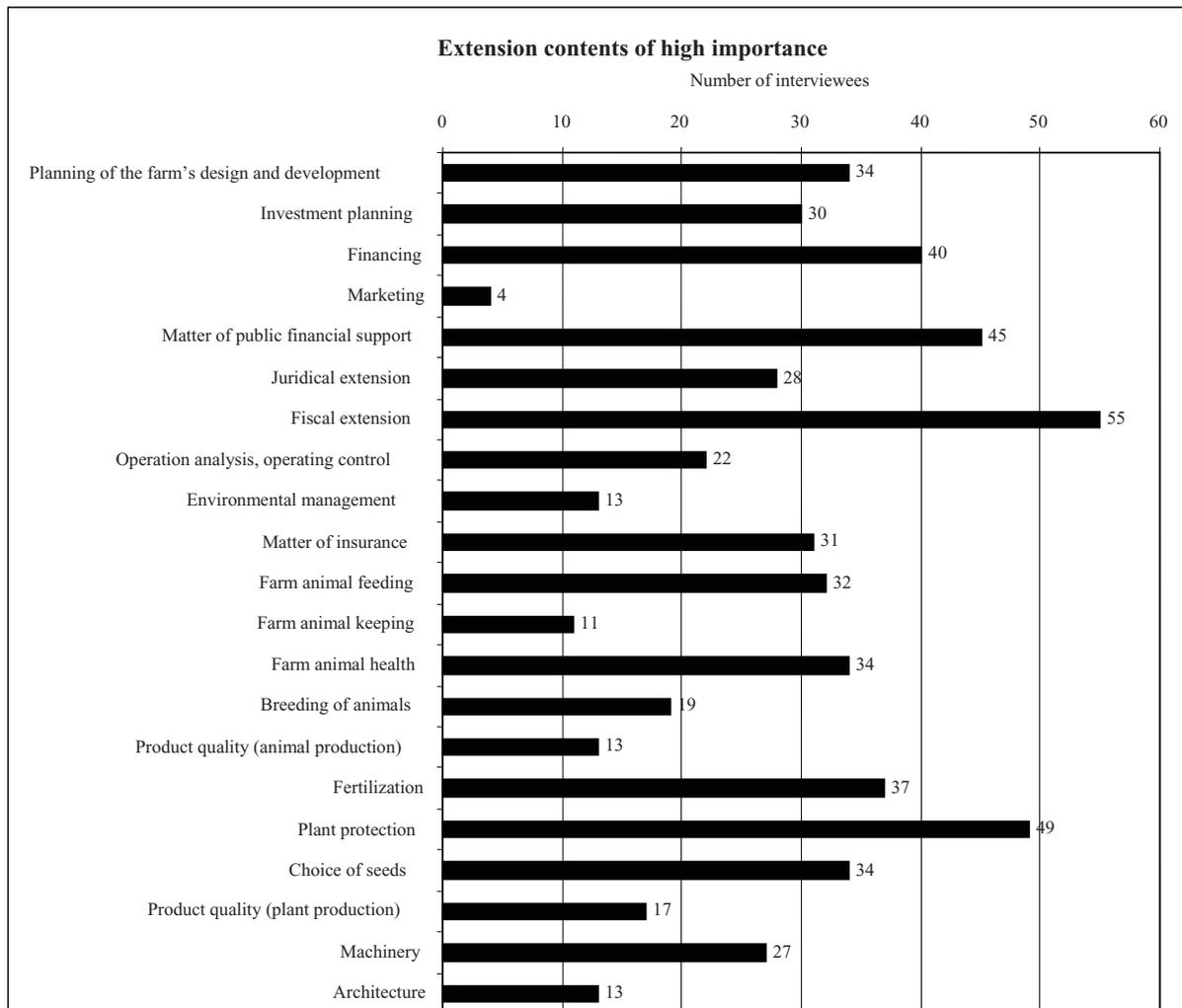


Figure 1. Extension contents of high importance

Further issues of high importance for the interviewed farm managers were - in a nutshell - “energy”, “GMOs” and “rural development”. The issue “energy” is a concern of the farmer as a producer: either directly by operating a biogas plant or indirectly via the production of bio fuel and other renewable primary products. In cases where farmers were already in the “energy business” or want to enter it, both technical as well as economic questions, referring, e.g., to the long-term rentability of the project were central. Farm managers who are not involved in the energy production said that many extension agents were promoting or even pushing this kind of change in production. Relating to the problem of GMOs, the respondents fear increasing conflicts within the farming community in Brandenburg and would like to consult with their extension worker not only about technical questions. With regard to rural development perspectives in Brandenburg, one farmer said: *“There is a growing demand for extension, pertaining to the details of the issue “rural development”. What can be done on farm level? - For that we would need a coordinated consultation. The offices of agriculture should transform into offices of rural areas. Actions fitting to the region could then be possible. It’s about multifunctional development of the sector, that means not only a sponsorship of agriculture, but an aid for the most important factors of the sector, which are not only those referring to production. And what the single holding can do that for we should be more consulted.”* In general the farm managers estimated their need as enormous, as they see themselves *“confronted with more and more new possibilities and challenges”*.

When looking at the survey undertaken in 1996, a shift of important extension subjects within the last decade can be observed. As shown in Table 3, the most important change is that the subjects of farm (re-) establishment and modernisation have most obviously lost topicality while nowadays the focus is on the application for subsidies and the procedural requirements caused by the common agricultural policy (CAP) as, e.g., the cross compliance requirements.

Table 3. Major subjects of extension, 1996 compared to 2006 (number of quotations in brackets)

Major subjects of extension in 1996	Major subjects of extension in 2006
Investment proposals and credits (14)	Application for subsidies (17)
Farm re-establishment / change of corporate form (12)	Finance and investment questions (15)
Modernisation (8)	Cross Compliance Requirements or other guidelines of the European Union (11)
Production program and operational concept (7)	Special extension e.g. to the subject of "biogas" (7)
Juridical questions (Zusammenführung von Boden und Eigentum, Establishment of a company) (4)	Planning of the farm's design and development (7)
Computer assisted workstations (1)	Extensionist needed for dealing with bancs (2)

Farmers were asked about the objectives they want to attain with the help of extension services. The analysis clearly shows that farmers see their essential need in the field of topical information. The most important objective of extension work is to provide up-to-date information concerning political, technical or organisational questions and news. The objective "mutual formulation of a solution" was ranked on second place and almost taken for granted. The extension objective "take-over of complete subtasks for the client" was ranked on third place. The most prominent example for this is the application procedure for the agricultural subsidies. Obviously farmers focus on the service-provision part of extension throughout these objectives and this impression is also confirmed by the fact that the objective "extension should enable the farmer to solve his problems on his own" was ranked very low. Grygo (2004) had already discussed this paradigmatic change some years ago: "Extension isn't "help for self-help" anymore. Under the term "extension", an increasingly wide spectrum of different services will be demanded and offered. The objective, "the assistance to implement recommendations", was ranked lowest and refuted by many farm managers with the words: *"The implementation is our sphere of competence, we know the practical stuff, of that the extensionist has no idea and there we won't let in an outsider."*

Changing role and perceived agency of farmers within the extension system

One objective of the survey was to detect whether farmers have intentionally changed their ways of behaviour towards professional advisors and thus their role as actors within the agricultural knowledge system. Here, questions were asked in relation to the quantity and quality of extension, to the way the extension agent is chosen and the transparency of the markets.

In the course of Brandenburg's privatisation process, farmers became aware of the high responsibility for their actions. Many perceive themselves as decision-makers in the extension process because it is they who finally have to deal with the results of any decision, as they say. One determination factor of farmers' active intervention in the extension process is the costs. Half of the farm managers interviewed considers the increased financial burden as the most important change induced by the privatisation. For this reason 26 out of 66 farmers reduced the amount of extension services they demand. Actually, many of them would prefer more consultation *"if it wouldn't be that expensive"*. Others have given up the expectation of further public support and developed a realistic view, summarised as *"who needs advisory services, just has to spend some Euros more. Who doesn't have the money, has to do it by himself"*.

One reason forwarded why the costs for extension are so high is seen in the low density of extension in the state of Brandenburg. This leads to high travel costs which the farmers have to bear in the end. Hence, as a reaction to the rising extension costs after privatisation, farmers try to reduce the extension services as much as possible and rely on their own judgement and information. They do this although many realise that this strategy is very time intensive and the quality of the output sometimes questionable. A second emerging strategy is a shift at the methodological level: an increased importance of seminars and workshops was mentioned by many respondents. Compared to the statements in the 1996 survey, the importance accorded to workshops as instrument of extension has doubled. Nevertheless, the one-to-one advisory situation is still top-ranked and farmers who are ready to invest in extension services say, that *"problems are solved best in a one-to-one interview"*.

Farmers' revealed that now, having to pay for every service they demand, they are also aware of being able to control the quality of the extension service rendered and/or the result to a certain point.

“Well, now [compared to the time before the privatisation] it is definitely so, that if any extension service has been suggested, it is linked to a concept of success. In this case one is now more secured. I had once an extensionist, who introduced himself and said if the result of his work improves my farm’s account by a certain percentage, than he [the extensionist] will have a certain share in the profit. Especially the private extensionists do so. I think, that is also legitimate, if for me [the farm manager] his activity is profitable, than I can hand something over, this is okay.”

Even though a performance-based payment of extensionists is preferred by several farm managers, to this is still a controversial issue. In the Mecklenburg-Pomerania study, 60 % of the interviewed extensionists refused a remuneration that depends on a projects’ success. The respondents explained that for this form of fee, “objective measurable criteria are not yet bindingly verbalised” (Maier, 2000: 45). Indeed it is difficult to exactly measure the extensionists’ success. Hypothesising that the success of extension is the product of extension advice and clients co-operation, it is essential to bear in mind that the farm manager is the one who has the final decision. Consequently, agents argue that the best recommendation can be given which may not necessarily lead to good results because they are not, on a limited scale, or wrongly put into practice (Maier, 2000).

While on the one hand farmers seem to realise their increased agency towards the extension worker, many would prefer a pure service provision as outlined above with regard to the application for agricultural subsidies. Furthermore, the results of the present survey show that farmers stay in close contact to their tax counsellor, whom they call their “*most important consultant*”, and whose support can be considered rather as service provision than as supporting farmers’ own problem solution.

Good decisions can only be made if well informed. Knowing that farm managers feel highly dependent on up-to-date and well-filtered information. But, as they say, they can not be certain that one particular extension agent will permanently fulfil their expectations. Some of the respondents specifically complained about receiving ideas which were not adapted to their respective farm, or getting biased information if the extensionist is a salesman. Since 1992, 28 farm managers have changed their extensionists, mostly because of “*a lack of specialized knowledge*”.

Altogether, farmers still tend to remain in a rather passive wait-and-see attitude. While being confronted with multiple requirements, many farm managers in Brandenburg feel left alone by the official authorities, as there is no central coordination or control in the extension system of this German state. They also perceive themselves as the last link in an information transmission chain and the extensionist is seen as the connecting link to the agro-political sphere and the agricultural administration. Nevertheless, they see the challenges of privatisation. Many felt that the competition within a privatised extension market in Brandenburg has somehow cleared the field. Before, “*there was a proliferation of supply. Always if there is public financial support, there is uncontrolled growth. Undisputed! There was a bulk of extension rings, in which only a few persons for little effort pocketed a lot of money from the financial aids. [...] There has happened a rethinking and the chaff was separated from the wheat*”. In addition, the remaining extensionists have become more active, as some farm managers stated.

A new relationship between farmers and extensionists in a privatised system?

The interviewed farmers are very much aware of the personal factor within the client-advisor relationship. As they say, one precondition for starting and continuing a successful cooperation is still “*good chemistry*” between the farm manager and the extensionist. In some cases a “*good relationship was developed over many years*” and is the reason for the farmer to keep the agent even if the cost has increased.

However, a radical change in the relationship is also observed by some farmers which they attribute to privatisation and the extensionists’ profit orientation: One respondent explained it with the following words: “*From our experience it is so that since an extensionist must be paid, he echoes the farmer’s opinion. If the criticism gets too severe than he fears that the farmer would not utilise his services anymore. Some extensionists became very reserved with critique but also with proposals. That means that there is no good, critical extension anymore. The mutual trust is burdened by the extensionist’s financial dependence on the farmer.*”

None of the interviewed farm managers meets his/her needs with only one extension worker. Even in cases where they signed a contract with an advisor, extension services from farmers’ associations, crop protection producers or breeding associations are considered “*indispensable*”. The reason is that more and more specialized extension is demanded, which is confirmed by the results of the study. Fiesel (2007) feels that the future belongs to teams of extensionists, “*in which well cross-linked*

extension workers with different profiles are serving one agricultural holding". At the moment, the extensionists do not seem to work together much; instead, everyone is *"doing one's one thing"*. Though it might be difficult to cooperate with other extension workers under the pressure of a privatised system, this could be one way to improve the quality of the service they offer. According to some farmers the quality of the extension services became better after the privatisation. Several interviewees pointed out that the value of the advice they get is good, because proposals can be put into practice and the extensionist takes into account results from discussions with the farmer, etc. Farmers define a highly qualified extension worker as one who has good professional skills, who knows the region and the problems of agriculture in practice and who is willing to stay in regular contact with the farm manager (personal skills).

To foster good exchange of knowledge and information, both extensionists and farm managers have to work on the process of extension. A fundamental basis would be in any case the capability to mutual give and receive feedback about one's satisfaction with the advisory process and its results. Hence, it is necessary that the extensionist can accept the farmer's critique as suggestion for further improvement and to react with flexibility to expressed demands and needs. Frequently, the task and competences to maintain and nurture the relationship between the farm manager and the extensionist is primarily attributed to the extensionist (Fiesel, 2007). However, as the farmers admit themselves, one indispensable prerequisite for successful extension is to take enough time for the extension process. As one of them said: *"because of the farmer's personal lack of time, an intensive discussion with the extensionist is impeded and the quality of extension is not as good as it could be"*.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings presented in this article paint a differentiated picture of how Brandenburg's farmers cope with the privatised extension system. The general impression is that farmers still rather adjust to than actively deal with the new system. They tend to see the threats rather than the opportunities. Most farmers admit that they increasingly need information and support in processing information in particular. In line with this perceived need, information transfer has become the most important objective that the respondents pursue through extension services and this is a clear shift compared to the findings ten years ago when joint problem solving was on first rank. And yet, they hesitate to spend extra money. The demand for chargeable information is either stagnating or decreasing although at the same time an increased need is voiced. Some farmers clearly see that this new situation requires pro-active behaviour of farmers towards the advisor through a good preparation of the meeting, clear goal-setting and the formulation of revisable outcomes. However, most farmers prefer to see the extensionist as a service-provider who supports the acquisition of subsidies and assures the execution of annoying formalities. Consequently, the findings show that the extension objective of service provision has shifted from rank 5 in 1996 to rank 3 in 2006.

Summarizing, the expectations concerning the advisor go into two directions: s/he should have a broad informational horizon covering political and administrative as well as economic and technical issues in his fields and hence an experienced "processor" of knowledge and information. On the other hand, s/he has to be a service provider, ready to assume administrative tasks and take over judicial formalities, etc. However, during the study it also became clear that most farmers are not yet ready to actively manage and govern the extension process. They are not willing (or able) to take enough time for the preparation and negotiation of an extension contract. Farmers rather tend to wait and reduce expectation or to be content with a self-made solution. Hereby, the cost argument has been broadly used. This issue has not yet been extensively elaborated and the figures in the present study do not allow drawing conclusions on the relationship between farm income, expenses for extension and satisfaction with extension services. Further research comparing farmers' experiences with private extension in several federal states in Germany would fill in an interesting research gap.

One strategy of farmers who actively seek new pathways of cost-reduction is to participate in group events such as workshops, seminars and field demonstrations. Other propositions go back to the organizational model of 'extension circles' which had been introduced during a short period of time in Brandenburg in the nineties but given up because they weren't broadly accepted at that time. These ideas show that some farmers realize that effective extension demands efforts and engagement not only from the advisor but from the client too. Although many interviewees complained about the negative effects of the privatisation of Brandenburg's extension system, young farm managers in particular are aware of the potential impact of their actions and behaviour on the extension process. They strongly expressed the wish to accept the challenges and exploit all promising options in the future.

Summarising the findings of this empirical study in Brandenburg, they demonstrate that by completely privatizing the extension system with no visible intervention of public authorities farmers are faced with serious problems of adjustment and learning. Especially the *caveat emptor* slogan is not easy to realize in a situation where farmers feel in need of a broad array of information and knowledge while extension services are provided by a number of heterogeneous bodies and agencies. The claim by Rivera et al. (2004) that governments have to remain an active partner within a privatized extension system in order to monitor and control its quality and performance can be substantiated by this case study. On the other hand, the assumption that farmers behave as active clients in the agricultural knowledge system and self-confidently govern its performance through their goal-oriented and strategic demands for extension services can not be confirmed. The time span of roughly ten years which has elapsed between the two Brandenburg studies is, in our view, sufficient to render plausibility to these statements.

References

- Bokelmann, W., Hirschauer, N., Nagel, U.J., Odening, M., 1996. Landwirtschaftliche Beratung im Land Brandenburg. Kommunikation und Beratung 9. Weikersheim Margraf Verlag.
- Connolly, M., 2004. Private Extension and Public-Private Partnerships: Privatized, Contracted, and Commercialized Approaches. Extension Reform for Rural Development. Agriculture and Rural Development Discussion Paper N° 9. Privatisation of Extension Systems, Washington US, The World Bank, 1–5.
- Currle, J., Schütz, P., 2000. Privatizing agricultural extension services in two new German federal states: necessary conditions emerging from experience, in *Human resources in agricultural and rural development. FAO Rome*, 131–158.
- Fiesel, T., 2007. Immer gut beraten, *Joule 2/2007*, 20.
- Grygo, H., 2004. Entwicklungen und Bedarf in der Beratung landwirtschaftlicher Unternehmen, *Bildung & Beratung 2*, 54–56.
- Klerkxs, L., Grip, de K., Cees, L. 2006. Hands off but strings attached: The contradictions of policy-induced demand-driven agricultural extension, *Agriculture and Human Values 23*, 189–204.
- Maier, P., 2000. Empirische Untersuchungen zum Stand der Agrarberatung. Ergebnisse einer Befragung von Agrarunternehmen in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern sowie Beratern in den neuen Bundesländern. Universität Rostock. Rostock.
- Nagel, U. J., Heiden, K. v. d., Siebert, R., 2002. *Public Goods and privatized Extension – the rocky road towards Agro-Environmental Extension*. ARD.
- Qamar, M.K., 2000. Agricultural extension at the turn of the millennium: trends and challenges, in *Human resources in agricultural and rural development, FAO Rome*, 159–170.
- Rivera, W., Alex, G. 2004. Extension System Reform and the Challenges Ahead, *The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*, 10, 1, 23–36.
- Rüther, C., 2006. Untersuchungen zur Qualitätsbestimmung landwirtschaftlicher Fachberatung aus Kundenperspektive, Tönning, Lübeck, Marburg, Der andere Verlag.
- Wolters, W., 2005. Privatberater: Freiheit und Zwang, sich ständig zu bewähren – Interview mit Dr. M. Platen, *Beratung & Bildung Agrar 3*, 106.