

ARE MACEDONIAN FARMERS WILLING TO JOIN EU? – ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS

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Abstract

Macedonia is a candidate-country for EU membership since 2005. There are many discussions and research projects about the impact that the EU integrative process will have on the Macedonian economy and particularly on the agricultural sector, which is one of the most significant sectors in terms of GDP contribution and as a workforce employer. Usually, the focus is on the process of adaptation to the European legislation and the future development of agricultural markets. There are not many research projects about the knowledge and expectations of Macedonian farmers with regard to the impact of EU accession. Are they aware of the real needs and obligations? Are they ready to put in energy, time and money in order to gain the benefit from the EU accession they are being told? In this respect, the objective of the research is to provide an understanding and description of the Macedonian farmers' attitudes and behavioural intentions in the context of the EU accession.

Farmers' behaviour is often shaped by farmers' personal beliefs and experiences, their traditional heritage and specific socio-economic environment in which they are operating with their limited educational level and resources; or in other words, the characteristics of the farmer, the farm and the operating environment. Grouping farmers according to some relevant characteristics is elemental for modelling their behaviour. Thus, the paper uses few theories as theoretical basis: Theory of Planned Behaviour, Resource-Learning Theory, Farm Management Theory and Decision Making Theory.

The data collection was carried out with face-to-face interviews of 489 farmers in the Republic of Macedonia in the period March-April 2012. The research uses hierarchical cluster analysis, using Ward's method with squared Euclidean distance and within-case standardization (in SPSS 17). Prior to the cluster analysis, factor analysis was made at the attitudinal statements used as cluster variates. Statistics tests were used to assess the homogeneity between groups for a given variable (Kruskal-Wallis H test) and to verify which variables determine the difference between clusters (Mann-Whitney test). The farmers' profiles with similar attitudes were portrayed by descriptive statistics. Friedman's ANOVA was used on variables with several distinct forms, to compare them among separate clusters.

The cluster analysis suggests four distinctive groups of farmers according to the farmers' attitudes and expectations from the EU accession which can provisionally be labelled as "optimist/willing", "moderate", "restrained" and "sceptic". The analysis shows that the clusters differ not only in terms of farmers' attitudes towards EU accession, but also in terms of their personal and farm management characteristics. The most significant differences between the clusters are the variables explaining farm legal structure, education, some farm management activities including investments by type, personal and farm objectives, farmers' sources of information and knowledge on CAP and the pre-accession funds.

Keywords: cluster analysis, EU accession, farmers' attitude