



WORKING WITH SMALL FARMERS: TAIWAN EXPERIENCE

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1. Introduction

The major players in agriculture in Taiwan are small family farmers. Farmers Associations, Fishermen's Association, Irrigation Associations are major farming related social community for the farmers. For the rice economy, the irrigation associations play the most important role on maintenance and operation of the irrigation and drainage system and allocation and distribution of the irrigated water system. On the other hand, the first two types of the associations are closely linked to local politics as its boundary of membership in most cases corresponds with the government administrative boundaries. The membership in these two associations is limited to one person per registered farm household, since there are diverse benefits available to the membership.

2. Agricultural extension system and the farmers' organization

The most notable experience of working with small farmers in Taiwan is through the agricultural extension system that collaborates among government, farmers' own organization (farmers' associations) and the academia. The structural chart is depicted in Figure 1. A similar scenario is applicable to the fishermen's organizations.

The farmers' associations at the local level provide comprehensive services from farm inputs, credit and finance, animal insurance, cooperative marketing of products, farmers' insurance, farmers training as well as programs for farm women and the youth. It provided comprehensive services, or more appropriately, through the platform of the farmer organization. The collaborators of the services rendered include those financed by government's projects as well as government research institute and academia. The farmers association is self sustaining though the operation of financial institution (credit department), supermarket and input supply store (supply and marketing department). The law governing the farmers association has an explicit requirement stating that



62% of the profit from the operation of the units has to be devoted to the extension related services. However, even when the association is not making profit, it is still eligible to apply for government project to conduct the agricultural extension services.

Since it has a broad based membership, accessibility to the membership is not an issue, hence it is a well established channel for the government to reach out to the farmers as well as for the farmers to receive the services, as long as the farmers association is run appropriately. In order to make sure that the organization is run properly, the performance of the executive manager of the farmers association will not oversea by the board and the general assemble of the farmers association, it will also be reviewed by the responsible authority in the government.

3. Cases of successful operation

For many small farmers in the region, accessibility to technology, credit, and the market are the biggest concern. With the current extension services, these are taken care right at the local farmer's association. Taken the market access for example, it is the mandate of the government that at each of the local area should have a township level of wholesale market for the products. The wholesale market in the township nowadays is either operated by the township government or the local farmers associations or sometimes the joint ownership of the government and non-government entity as a not-for-profit public entity. In addition, to reach to the major consumer market more efficiently, the products run on cooperative (joint) marketing through the farmer associations or other farmers' organization are eligible to get preferential status while arranged for auctioning. Over the years, the farmers groups also gain recognition from the buyers that whether there be preferential status is not the major factor anymore, because the buyers would recognize the products from the best performing farmers groups thus getting better price.

4. An example of the Production and Marketing Team for Cauliflower

The Production and Marketing Team for Cauliflower in Kaohsiung City is comprised of around 12 members of small farmers. The members jokingly mention that we could pick any three members from the team, and by adding their age together could easily



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over 200. The newly appointed team leader aged 62 was the youngest of all. The previous team leader Mr. Chen was the winner of the 2004 “Shin-Non” (god of agriculture) award. The team specializes in producing cauliflowers. Their products are certified with GAP (good agricultural practice), and their product mainly ships to the Taipei Wholesale Market. Their product almost always gets the highest bid of the day whenever they make the shipment. Through the help of the extension expert at the farmers association, the team has a record of the weekly transaction chart of their product during the production seasons.

According to the team leader, the secret of the team is that they recognize the need of the Taipei consumer to provide a small flower because their family size is smaller. Therefore, their team members all adapted to the new production technique by narrowing the rows and columns of the plant.

Even though the team is formed by very senior farmers, they also benefited from the modern internet based communication technology. They usually ship out their products the evening before the auction (usually starts at 3:00am), by 8:00am they will be able to link to the website to make inquiry on the price they got for the shipment. Mr. Chen and his colleague learnt to use the system for more than 8 years ago when they attended the computer training workshop in NPUST.

For more information

Agriculture and Food Administration (AFA), Council of Agriculture. www.afa.gov.tw

Huang, Wen-Chi. 2007. An Investigative Report on Successful Cases of Innovative Projects for Enhancing Woman Farmers' Role in the Development of Rural Taiwan, paper presented at 2007 FFTC-RDA International Seminar on Enhancement of Women Farmers' Role in the Development of Rural Asia, Suwon, Korea, 15-19 October 2007

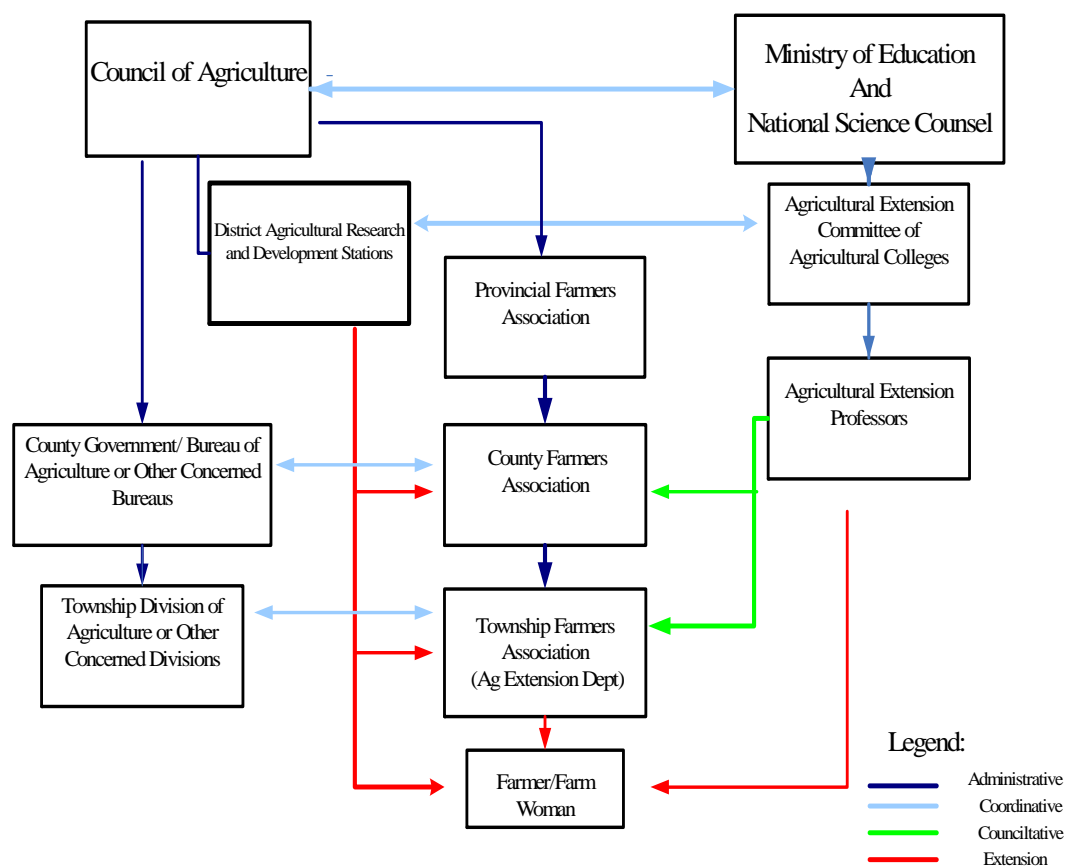


Figure 1. Agricultural Extension System in Taiwan

Source: Huang, 2007