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THE NEEDS, SOURCES, AND CONDITIONS FOR THE
STUDY OF THE EASTERN COMMUNES OF BIALYSTOK
VOIVODSHIP ^{1/}

1. Introduction

Polish scientific literature offers quite a variety of studies devoted to broadly conceived regional problems; see, e.g., Horodenski /1983/ for a bibliography on the subject. In many works devoted to this domain, there appears a characteristic current, enabling knowledge of the country in its territorial aspect to be gained along with one means of interpreting regional policies. Employment of such an approach to regional policy is characteristic of the centralized management system, although it does not entail proper consequences for the links with branch-and-sectoral setting, usually considered superordinate in this system of development control.

Another essential approach to regional policy finds its expression in the holistic cognition of concrete areas /voivodships, communes, towns/ against the background of the country and other areas. This cognitive current makes it possible to unearth all the local assets and reserves and to suggest individual, specific directions of development and thereby to enhance measurable and non-measurable values. Such an approach is most often applied in the very regions, usually by non-profes-

^{1/} Poland is divided administratively into 49 voivodships, which are further subdivided into communes /transe/.

sional scholars. The lack of accord that occurs between the order-and-allocate management system and the grassroots initiatives has been, until now, confining this current of regional policy and analysis only to vegetation. Absence of systemic conditions for recognizing local assets and reserves and for the inclusion into the scope of socio-economic development factors means that these assets and reserves are not paid sufficient attention by the decision-makers of various management levels.

2. Studies performed

There is a relatively significant body of knowledge resulting from studies of the socio-economic development of Białystok voivodship, quite often carried out in connection with the territories of Lomza, Suwalki, and Ostrołęka voivodships. The most important studies, worth noticing here, are: Pukniel /1974/, Sikorski /1979/, Niemiec /1974/, Pawluczuk /1981/, Walicki /1985/, Sadowski /1981/, Horodenski /1974/, and Kupiec /1975/. These studies form a framework for knowledge on social and technical infrastructure, education, culture, apartment availability, living conditions of residents, and industries. A multifaceted analysis of the demographic, settlement, and economic problems of the area is contained in the work edited and directed by J. Kostrowicki /1967/.

Studies and publications devoted to agricultural and rural problems of Białystok voivodship will be commented upon separately. This separate treatment is justified by the significance of agriculture and countryside in the problematic

development of this area.

From among the numerous studies devoted to rural and agricultural questions, those performed at the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development /IRWiR/ and at the Scientific Research Center in Białystok should be given special attention. These two institutions dug into a number of aspects of the current situation in agriculture and in rural areas. The most important studies were reported, e.g., in Michna /1979/, Horodenski /1983/, and Serwin /1985/.

Most often the studies on the development of Białystok voivodship were undertaken and carried out at the initiative of scholars or their home scientific institutions. It should be emphasized, though, that the majority of these studies were backed by political and administrative voivodship authorities. Scientific findings presented in publications do not follow the conventions used in practice because of the reference to a broader documentary basis. Practice-oriented institutions basically refer to official statistics. In the case, however, of carrying out studies on the development of many domains of regional life, statistics are but one of the sources. Thus, it perhaps must be emphasized that in many studies parallel to statistical data such other sources were made use of as interviews, questionnaires, and source documentation.

In the research conducted to date, especially those devoted to economics, it is characteristic that a tendency toward globalization, i. e., to treatment of processes and phenomena on the voivodship scale, prevails. Such treatment was generally approved by the voivodship authorities, since voi-

voivodship-wide indicators suited them best and were well in line with the presumptions of the scientific-allocative managerial schemes. These indicators were also easier to obtain in view of availability of appropriate data sources.

3. The study of the Eastern communes of Białystok voivodship

Against this background, the study of the Eastern communes of Białystok voivodship undertaken in 1984 by the Scientific Research Center in Białystok displays favourable characteristics. Voivodship authorities have concluded that a need exists for deeper studies of the situation in the Eastern communes of Białystok voivodship, this conclusion being motivated by the recognition of a worsening socioeconomic position of the population in these communes. The need for performing such studies was also corroborated by the Inter-voivodship Commission of the North-Eastern Macro-regional Planning Area /see conclusions of this Commission of April 16th, 1986/.

On August 15th, 1984 an agreement was concluded between the Voivodship Planning Commission in Białystok and the Scientific Research Center in Białystok concerning the study of "Problems of economic and social activization in the communes located in the Eastern part of Białystok voivodship". This agreement contains a provision specifying the substantial framework for this study. Namely, three stages of work are envisaged, of which two are:

* stage I, analytic-diagnostic, to be carried out before June 30, 1985;

* II, research and forecasting, to be carried out until the end of 1987.

Stage I has been completed and its main results published in 22 detailed reports /see Appendix/. These reports present a comparative analysis of the area in question against the background of the rest of Białystok voivodship and the country, an overview of the basic conditions of this area's functioning, and indications as to the most essential needs of the population living in and the economy of the Eastern part of the voivodship.

Within the Scientific Research Center in Białystok /CBN/, in the course of internal planning, it was established that until June and December of 1987 the research and forecasting tasks related to the following domains, deemed necessary for termination of the overall work, shall be completed:

- demographic and socio-professional situation of the population,
- land economy,
- agricultural production in private farms without livestock.^{1/}

Furthermore, in an effort aimed at securing the proper multidimensional nature of the studies undertaken, several additional enquires were to be carried out, mainly via expert-based assessment, on such subjects related to the Eastern communes of Białystok voivodship as:

1/ The question is important as private farming represents a low specialization profile, with a virtual absence of no-livestock farms even if livestock is kept only for self consumption purposes /transl./.

- the role of geographic-natural environment in shaping the course of economic and social development;
- forestry and its influence on the economy and living standards of the population;
- settlement system development perspectives;
- housing conditions of the population and housing construction situation;
- role of industry in economic development and in shaping the population's living conditions;
- role of tourism in the development of the Eastern communes;
- population living in the most difficult conditions;
- water economy perspectives;
- competence and effectiveness of local authority activities;
- economic and social policies seen from the standpoint of social and economic development needs of the neglected areas.

Detailed studies performed during stage I encompassed all of the Eastern communes of Białystok voivodship /24 communes or other basic administrative units/. Detailed studies of stage II will be performed on a mixed geographical basis. Some problems shall be looked at within the whole population of the Eastern communes /i.e., all 25/, while other problems will be analysed on the basis of just 6 communes, purposefully chosen /Sokolka, Szudzialowo, Krynki, Gródek, Michalowo, and Narewka/. It has been assumed that proper in-depth studies can only be conducted on a narrower, representative sample,

especially in view of resources and capacities of CBN. The research program is founded on the assumption that conclusions reached for the smaller group of communities will also be valid for the whole area in question and will make wider ranging generalizations possible, which will be used for further purposes.

In view of the need to go down to the level of a village, a farm, or a small population group, it will be necessary to complement or create from scratch a portion of the documentary basis. To this end, polling and questionnaires, direct observation among inhabitants, and other non-statistical sources will be used, with the aim of obtaining an objective assessment of the phenomena and situations observed. This method of gathering documentation shall require special, separate organizational preparations, especially in the area considered.

Obviously, maps, or cartograms, also present highly useful sources for the identification and interpretation of social and economic situations. In the majority of cases, they will be prepared and presented according to communal breakdown, which is considered fundamental for spatial representation in this study.

4. Findings of the study

Based upon these detailed studies of the development of the Eastern communes of Białystok voivodship, which have been completed to date, two findings can be forwarded. The first concerns the general development level of this area, while the other concerns problems of the func-

tioning of agriculture. Besides these, some problems related to the development of the area in question are illustrated with maps presenting: population /figure 1/; migration /figure 2/; agricultural production space quality /figure 3/; and value of agricultural production sales through the state market ^{1/} /figure 4/.

Research performed during stage I confirmed the opinion existing with regard to the Eastern region; namely, that its social and economic development level is lower than in the Western part and in the whole of Białystok voivodship. Besides that, significant differentiation of many elements of the economy and living conditions among the communes in question was observed, as well as divergence between the spheres of economy and social life. Both in the authors' conclusions and in the opinions of reviewers and of the Scientific Council of OBN, the need for conducting further studies of the still open or insufficiently analysed problems was indicated.

The Eastern part of the voivodship is dominated by agriculture. Statistical data indicate that approximately 60 % of the rural population and 13 % of the urban population in the 24 Eastern communes live on agriculture-related jobs. These two indicators do display a certain decreasing tendency, though, for in 1950 they were, respectively, 90 % and 22 %; but agriculture is still the main source of income for the majority of population living in the Eastern rural areas.

^{1/} This part of agricultural produce that is sold through private market is usually not evaluated because of lack of adequate data /transl./.



Towns -
 - population number
 increase with 1946 level=100%

- 120 - 162 %
- ◐ 163 - 260 %
- ◑ 261 - 360 %
- 361 - 408 %
- 1756 /Mońki/

decrease to the level of

- 96,3 % /Suraż/

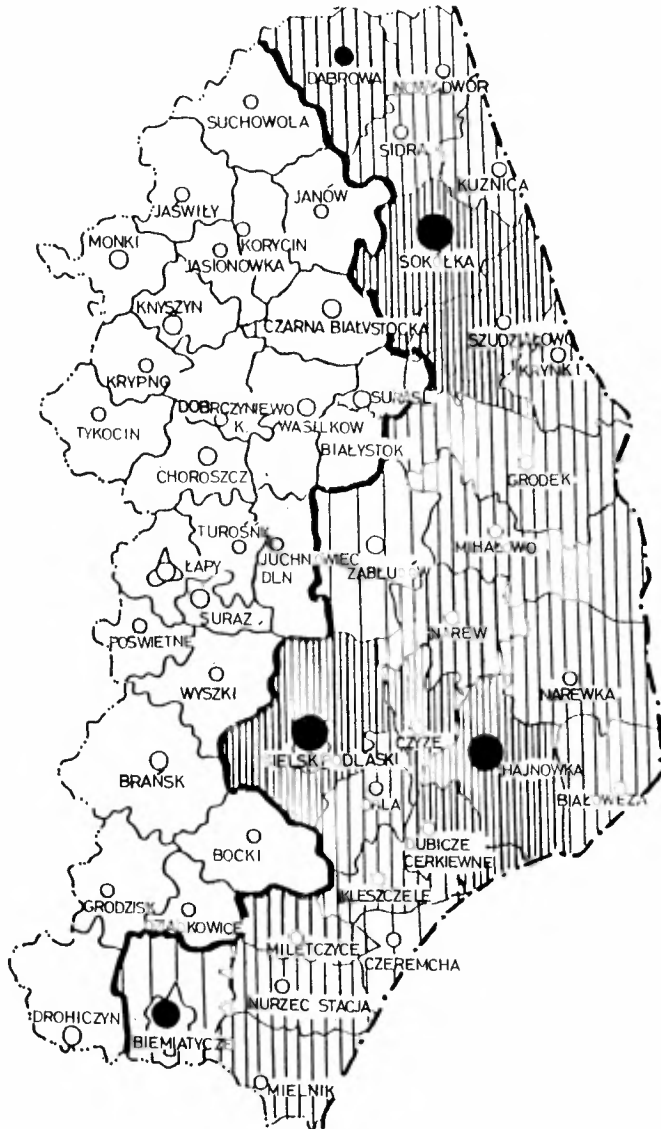
Communes -
 - population number
 increase with 1946
 level=100 %

- ||| 101 - 107,6 %
- ||| 143,9 % /Supraśl/
 - decrease to the level
 of
- == 53 - 75 %
- === 75,1 -100 %

— boundary of the
 Eastern area

Scale: 1:600 000

FIGURE 1 Białystok voivodship. Town and commune population changes over the period 1946-1983



1. Immigration centres
 Annual average immigration /number
 of persons/:



365-455 181 87

2. Outmigration areas
 Annual average outmigration per
 1000 inhabitants



Scale: 1:600 000

FIGURE 2 Białystok voivodship. Net migrations
 in the period 1975-1983

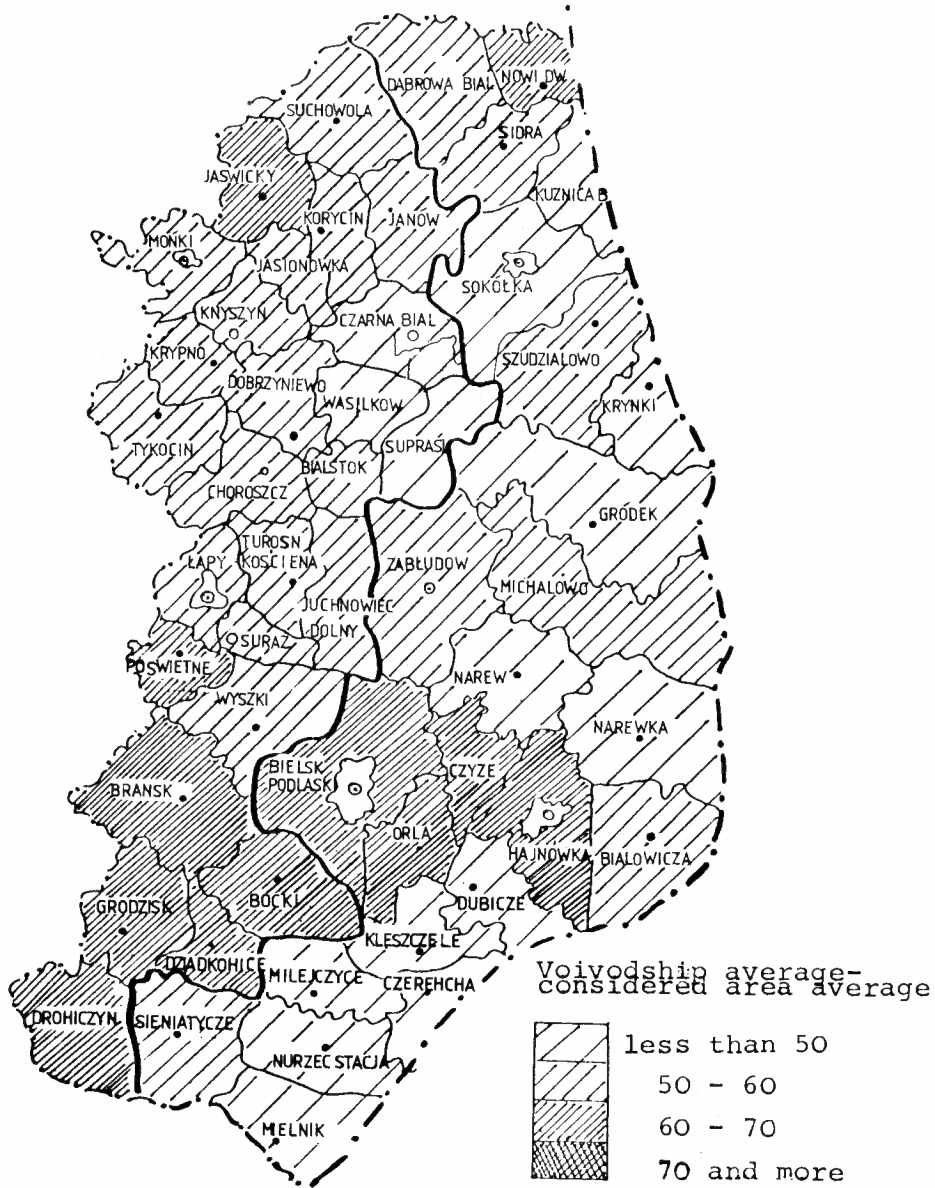


FIGURE 3 Białystok voivodship. General index of quality and utility of the agricultural production space

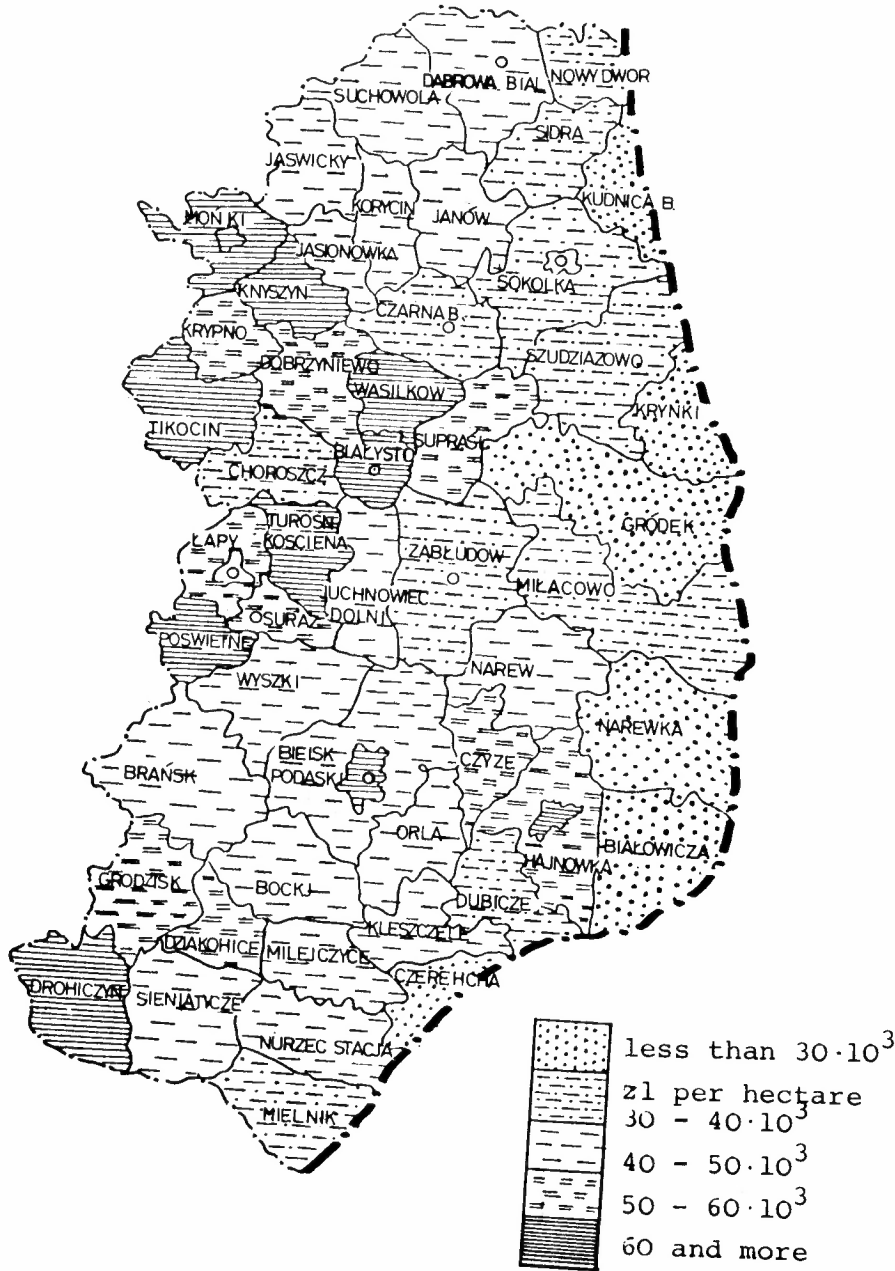


FIGURE 4 Białystok voivodship. Monetary value of produce sold by private farmers to the state market in 1984 in zlotys per hectare of agricultural land

Source: Food economy bank in Białystok

Certain conclusions of the study in its part concerning agriculture will be highlighted in this paper. First of all, the study enabled identification of component elements forming conditions of the agricultural economy of the area, as well as identification of basic factors influencing the level of agricultural production. Having performed this identification, the study team went on to assess the production effects attained, i.e., crop yields and livestock numbers, and also agricultural produce sales and their values as registered by Cooperative Banks. The scope of recognition of these data was taken with diagnostic, but also practical, needs in mind.

Thus, this part of the research work encompassed the following domains pertaining to agriculture:

1. Population and agricultural labour force resources.
2. Natural conditions of agricultural production.
3. Availability of the most important capital assets /farm buildings, more important machinery items/.
4. Agricultural service: production, sales- and utilization-oriented.
5. Supply of the more important production means and materials for agriculture.
6. Sales through the state market, in physical and monetary units.
7. Basic elements of agricultural land economy.

8. Main components of financial income and expenditure on private farms.

Studies conducted within these domains allowed first of all to ascertain that undertaking the work was justified and that the comparative methods used were proper. This stage of research has provided data making it possible to state that economic activation of agriculture, mainly through the fuller use of so far underused factors, will evidently require an input of means and resources from outside. It is also at this stage of research that it became possible to determine the capacities of operationalization of economic and productive /i.e., technical/ reserves, on the basis of internal factors. To this end, research concentrated on determination of locally appearing reserves and on the search for appropriate economic and social factors together with conditions for their activation and use. While in the first stage of the study communes constituted the main object of research interest, in the second stage, still pursuing the similar problem area, work concentrated on villages and farms from the six chosen communes.

Results obtained during the first stage of work made it possible to establish that the main elements influencing the conditions of agricultural production and economy within the area of the Eastern communes can be classified as follows:

* Natural conditions of production. These conditions are generally worse in the area considered than in the Western part of Białystok voivodship, but concrete qualities over particular communes differ significantly. It has also been shown that the activities aiming at improvement

of these conditions /fertilizer application, land improvement techniques/ has on this area much smaller scope and magnitude.

* Smaller quantity and weaker quality of labour force resources in agriculture. Rapid diversion of labour force from agriculture was not compensated, neither in proper quantity nor with proper timing, by substitutive equipment. Similarly, the degree of development of the agricultural servicing network, and especially the very functioning of service units, did not satisfy the needs expressed by farmers.

* Monetary net incomes obtained by farmers from produce sales were here much lower than in the Eastern communes. There exists substantial evidence indicating that expenses in farms are dominated by fiscal dues, compensations for family members giving up agriculture and their farms share and moving into town, and by capital investment expenses. Only a narrow margin is left for current production input purchases, so that attaining higher yields, conditioned by higher inputs, is out of the question.

Problems of agricultural development delay in the Eastern communes should be looked at from two angles. First, it is feasible to look at the justifications presented in the analyses of the geographical allocation of the food economy in the country, with special reference made to agriculture as the primary, raw-material-producing, link of the food economy chain. Thus, problems considered would be placed in the perspective of geographical location and means allocation theories. The present state of empirical knowledge indicates that actual allocation of production means necessitates ration-

alization, while existing general scientific prerequisites are not sufficient for proposing single proper solutions to be attained. The latter statement is clearly corroborated by the specialists from this domain. It would, in particular, be very difficult at present to formulate "objective" criteria of optimum allocation of agriculture and food economy throughout the country. Within the set of hypothetical partial criteria, economic effectiveness^{1/} is certainly an important element, but it cannot become the decisive instrument for shaping the spatial distribution of agriculture. It should at this point be recalled that application of just this one criterion has significantly contributed to the present spatial differentiation of agriculture in the country. Thus, other criteria should also be taken into account, derived from social conditions and related to work and living standards of population living in other areas of the country. The question of elaborating the proper criteria for the optimal /optimizing/ model of agriculture allocation is, however, yet to be undertaken; detailed studies must precede the attempted solution.

On the other hand, though, there exists current evidence of the pressing need of finding ad hoc solutions that would aim at defining methods and means for decelerating the process of further spatial differentiation in agriculture. The importance of this problem results directly from the goals of the present agricultural policy, i.e., attainment of food self-sufficiency of the country, in part through "profitability of production achieved by good farmers". It is justified to suspect

1/ To be well distinguished from economic efficiency /transl./.

that in the regions of lagging agricultural development there will not be many such "good farmers" being able to achieve adequate levels of profitability in their local conditions, and certainly their number will be much lower than on the better developed, preferred areas. It can also be anticipated that farms from the socialized agricultural sector, i.e., state or cooperative farms, especially those newly organized on the land given over to the state by the abandoning or retiring private farmers, will have difficulties qualifying as "good farmers" from that point of view.

What kinds of ad hoc solutions can be considered for the areas of lagging agricultural development? When contemplating such solutions, that is, the ones that can be implemented in 5-10 years, one should take into account the following types of activities:

1. Those that aim at elimination of the most flagrant negligences impacting the conditions of agricultural economy and production. First of all, this concerns the spatial land economy within farms /liquidation of in-farm land scatter, securing of contiguity, etc./, water economy, both in terms of general water resources and water supply, improvement of electricity supply, local road network, and bettering of the service and supply system.

2. Those that aim at more direct improvement of the financial situation of farmers and in the actual supply of production means and capital investment goods as well as consumption goods.

Improvement of the financial situation of farms and thereby also of the labour force conditions over relatively small areas, being an integral part of the country's economic organism, is

a very difficult undertaking. Two directions of possible actions can be taken into account:

a. policies aiming at increasing monetary incomes of agriculture, taking on at least two following forms: first, as budget disbursements; and second, as adequate agricultural produce prices, and also low- or no-interest credits with possibility of remission;

b. policies aiming at decreasing farm expenses; as in a. above, also in this case two forms of policies are feasible: one, concentrating on prices of production means bought by farmers; and the other, referring to lowering or even remission of fiscal charges /mainly land tax/.

Mixed policies, aiming at the simultaneous increase of incomes and decrease of expenses for productive purposes, of course also can be contemplated.

As can easily be seen, implementation of most of these policies would require an intervention of national state authorities. Regional authorities would have to monitor proper implementation through influencing local decisions, where applicable.

The other variant of undertakings leading to activation of the Eastern areas will first of all address not so much practical solutions as research work. As has already been mentioned, the current state of knowledge does not give sufficient foundations for proposing "model" /i.e., to be followed or just implemented/ solutions for the spatial allocation of agriculture and the food economy sector throughout the country. In this situation such research directions should be considered necessary, which would bring possibly complete recognition of

this portion of economic and social reality of levers and mechanisms forming it, and only thereupon formulation of "model" solutions. Such studies could be organized and conducted on the scale of the whole country, by the adequately strong institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

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/all in Polish/

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