



**BERAS**

Baltic Ecological Recycling Agriculture and Society

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## **Agriculture in Poland – Report on a journey, 5–13 June 2005**

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Within the BERAS project, it has been my task to map out around 35 farms in Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. On these farms I have drawn up plant nutrient balances over three years. These balances are calculations of how the farms in question use and manage the three most important plant nutrients: nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. All inputs in production, such as fodder, seed and manure, and all outputs from the farm are taken into account. The balance then forms the basis for further studies within the project. Nitrogen fixation by legumes is also calculated as a nutrient input. To be able to make an estimation, I take cutting samples from a ley, for instance, shortly before it is harvested, and calculate the total yield and amount of clover as part of the calculation.

During the three years I have visited each of the farms one to four times, often together with a partner with a knowledge of both agriculture and the language of the country in question. My last trip in June was to Poland, where together with Jozéf Tyburski I visited seven farms within the project, spread over the whole country. Every landscape has its own specific conditions, but common to all the farms is that they are organically managed, are highly self-sufficient in fodder and manure, and are located within the drainage basin of the Baltic Sea.

As described in an earlier letter, Poland's agricultural structure holds an exceptional position in Europe. As much as 20% of its population still works in agriculture (in Sweden, the figure is 1–2%). Poland retained its agricultural structure during the Soviet era, and it was not destroyed and replaced with large state-run agricultural entities to the same extent as in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, for instance. The average size of a Polish farm is 9 ha. The south of Poland especially is characterised by very small farms. In the southernmost part of the drainage basin, south of Kraków, Jozéf Czarnota's holding is located halfway to the Slovakian border, and is a model farm for the area.

I am now in a mountain landscape (about 500 m above sea level), a landscape of small villages and farms whose land forms a patchwork of very small pastures and arable fields along the mountain slopes. Jozéf runs his 7.5 ha farm, divided into 49 individual fields and pastures (!), together with his family of three generations. His livestock consists of two dairy cows, one heifer, one calf, six pigs, 35 chickens, eight turkeys and a working horse.



*Fig.1 and 2. Jozéf Carnota (right) and Jozéf Tyburski in a field*

All the animals are housed in one part of the barn. Farm products are sold in the area and to ecotourists who visit the farm. For those who find the farm, it is an oasis, offering a farming experience and, not least, an opportunity to taste all the farm's own dairy produce, meat and bread. The input of labour required for all the different crops grown is enormous and demands the involvement of the whole family. When I ask the farmer why he is even growing rye on this fertile soil, he replies: We need rye for the sourdough bread!

Nowadays Poland is part of the EU, and the survival of this kind of farm is in danger. This particular farm is for example entitled to EU payments for only half of its area, as the fields are too small. The family has decided to concentrate on ecotourism and offer accommodation, services and products.



*Fig. 3. Here the two cows are tended*

I would like to describe another farm, located in the south-east of Poland, south of Lublin. The landscape is dominated by agriculture and the soil is loose and fertile. We are now



*Fig.4. Ryszard Karamon and family*

visiting Ryszard Karamon and his wife and three children. The two sets of grandparents also live on the farm. This farm consists of 10 ha and is positioned at right angles to the main street of the village. The farmhouse is nearest to the road, with the farm buildings behind, and behind them very narrow (22.5 m wide) and long (2 km) strips of land. This is an organic farm, the only one in the area. It concentrates on soft fruits: strawberries, raspberries and currants.

The livestock of the farm consists of three dairy cows, five geese, 30 turkeys, 300 pigeons, 20 rabbits, 30 chickens, one sow with growing-fattening pigs and one horse. We go on a tour of the farm and are confronted with the damage to Ryszard's crop caused by pesticides that have blown in from his neighbour's land. This is a problem Ryszard wants to have resolved in court. In the middle of one of the fine fields there is a large hollow and I wonder what it is used for: the farmer had dug down to a deeper level here to get the sand he recently used to build his house. Here they really make good use of their own resources!



We pass a well-thinned group of hazel bushes: the combustible material has been collected and

*Fig.5. Cow and child  
Fig.6. Hazel bushes*

carefully sorted into different piles.

Every member of the family has his/her specific chores. The little girl helps her granny to milk the cows.

After finishing our work on the farm's data, I have an opportunity to acquaint myself with the farmer's hobby. In one of the farm buildings we climb up a narrow ladder and between the roof trusses we move from cage to cage of the most beautiful purebred pigeons (25 different breeds!). There are some 300 pigeons living here, filling every corner under the roof. Each breed has its own exit and is allowed to fly at a certain time, to avoid crossbreeding. When I have seen this, the farmer shows me the best room in the house, whose walls are decorated with diplomas and awards, testifying to his enthusiasm for pigeon breeding.

On the ferry home across the Baltic Sea I look back on my journey from an agricultural point of view and wonder how Poland will get on as an EU member. Will this country, too, with its great diversity of well-functioning agriculture, have to reorganise and change to a mix of abandoned land in "fallow" and intensive agriculture with farm-alien inputs of fertilisers, a prospect which evidently confronts us more and more?

