

**The Fifth Annual Common Property Conference  
of IASCP****Bodo, Norway, 1995****Attitudes to privatization of land  
among Ukrainian peasantry****Irina Pribytkova-Ukraine***Introduction.*

All agricultural reforms in Russia were inspired "from the top" and started at a moment when the powers that be began to realize through stress of circumstances that it is impossible "to live like that any longer". All agricultural reforms in Russia came to an end in counter-reforms as a rule. In a peasant country land question infringed upon the interests of a vast majority of people. In dramatic withstanding the winners were those who held power. Every land reform always is a conflict of interests of different social groups in the village. And the main ones are peasantry and authorities at all levels. Their interests, expectations, resources, level of unity, notion about property rights and its firmness have a great influence on the process of agricultural reform.

To understand all collisions of the current moment and to forecast the most probable way of the changes in land ownership system it is necessary to find answers to the following questions:

- ⇒ What are the attitudes towards land privatization and the different forms of rural economies among diverse social groups of Ukrainian villagers today?
- ⇒ What is the present understanding of property rights and their protection by the peasantry?
- ⇒ Does land privatization conducted in Ukraine "from the top" correspond to the interests of the peasantry?
- ⇒ Does the design of land privatization answer to its realization?
- ⇒ What is the level of peasant's trust in the authorities intention to change property rights?

The Author makes an attempt to answer these questions using the results of sociological polls of Ukrainian peasants and the analysis of the statistical data obtained.

**I. Land Reform and Farm Restructuring in Ukraine**

The forced collectivization of peasant's farms in the 30-ies in the USSR generated in the village a marginal class with double psychology neither peasants, nor workers; on the one hand- the owners of microfarms, and hired workers of state agricultural enterprises- on the other hand. Forming of peasantry, its psychology, motivation for labour, morals was going on during several generations in the context of "depeasantization" of the village. Alienation from property and produced output turned peasantry into hired workers-farm-hands. Being a producer, a peasant has lost a lawful right to have a free hand in handling the output of his activity. It was usurped by the state-monopolist, independent both of its producers and its consumers.

Many collective farms, set up on the basis of bringing together the farmer peasant farms, were later transformed into state agricultural farms. The majority of these were losers and existed only due to yearly state subsidies.

The same situation was happening in the collective farm sector. Nonefficiency of the organization forms of agricultural production, existing from the thirties, was more and more obvious, and the necessity of reforming the property relations in the agricultural sector became more urgent. This need was recognized by all public groups of the country - peasants, intelligentsia and the ruling elite.

But the choice of the model of reforming which would correspond to the interests of all the public groups and peasantry, first of all, is not provided till now. The interests of different social groups are not concorded and the subjects of these interests can't formulate them exactly and in the most unambiguous manner.

The process of land reform and farm restructuring in Ukraine, as in many other former command economies, has proven more complex than originally anticipated, and results to date are more modest than initially expected.

The administrative command system has left the heavy legacy in the agricultural sector in Ukraine. Dependence of producers on centrally allocated and supplied inputs; lack of procedures for the interface between producers and consumers; subversion of financing systems and credit policies; loss of an allocative role of prices and their transformation into accounting conveniences; shortage of storage capacity in rural areas and their concentration in cities; suppression of individual initiative and personal interests of peasants in highefficient labour - this is far from being a complete set of starting conditions for land reform and farm restructuring in Ukraine.

These difficulties are not overcome till now. New problems, such as macroeconomic instability, continuing high inflation, political and legal uncertainty, sexennial moratorium for sales of privately owned land and as result - lack of land markets and many others, added to old problems. In 1994 Ukrainian land reform and farm restructuring find their realization in the creation of shareholding farms but not beyond it. Very little restructuring of farms has taken place. The transfer of ownership has so far resulted in a new but essentially unchanged collective sector, comprising the former collective and state farms. It looks like the traditional soviet agricultural model.

The results of sociological polls indicate that participants in the land reform and farm restructuring (managers, employees, specialists, private farmers) do not have a clear view of the situation that will carry the process of land reform in Ukraine naturally beyond the creation of shareholding farms. At present many members and employees, having rights to land and asset shares, have received them "on paper". There is no clear mechanism for creation of new production units other than shareholding large farms or the individual family farms. Besides that not many employees decide to leave the collectives and create new business units. Much of the rural population at present is poorly informed about their rights and options, and farm managers also report a need for more information.

There is an opinion that it would be undesirable to have land presently in collective ownership reregistered in corporate ownership within existing farms. This would be equivalent to expropriating the land rights of employees and members, and would not solve the problem.

## **II. The problems of land privatization and change of ownership forms in peasantry's interpretation**

The present paper is based on results of two extensive sociological surveys carried out in Ukraine in 1994 under conducting of the Author. The objective of study has been to investigate

the peasants opinion of land privatization, their attitudes to different forms of property, including private plots, public sentiments and expectations, readiness for changes, life plans of peasants.

The first survey was undertaken in the framework of Norwegian-Ukrainian project "Agricultural development and Social changes in Ukraine". 190 workers of the state farm "Voikowsky" were interrogated by questionnaires "You and your interests". There was the pilot research sociological poll conducted by the method of random selection, participating in this procedure was every third working in the state farm.

The share of young people was relatively not large: to 20 years old there were 8.6% and 20-29 years old-22.5%. So only every third respondent will be able to work before retiring on a pension for 35-40 years. Meanwhile just this contingent will determine to a considerable extent success or failure of agricultural reform in the near 20-30 years. Therefore in the course of another sociological poll conducted in three provinces of Central Ukraine (Cherkassy, Vinnitsa, Kirovograd) 640 young villagers 20-30 years old were interrogated by means of special questionnaire. Their opinions, judgements and appraisals were used as the basis for conclusions presented in this paper.

### **II.1. The Attitudes of peasants to different forms of rural economy**

The attitudes more than two thirds of respondents (69.8%) are positive to collective farms. The most devoted them are farm managers (84%) and agricultural specialists (74.5%). Farm employees regards to them are more restrained: only 67.9% of their number supported collective forms of rural economy. The main its opponents are naturally private farmers. They have taken their choice already and only reaffirmed their adherence to individual family farm. As a whole only 12.2% of respondents, or every eighth participant of the poll, were against collective farms and every fifth could not define his position.

Private farming has many advocates in a country-side. Only every fifth respondent has a negative attitude towards individual sector of agriculture, and every fourth did not answer to this question. Thus more than a half of respondents (59.2%) keep up the farming.

But only one fourth of respondents answered in the affirmative to question about their personal intention to become a farmer and the others three quarters (73.2%) have rejected such perspective.

A low level of providing with such inputs as fertilizers, herbicides, fuel, machinery and spare parts, and financial difficulties are in opinion of 44.9% of respondents in the lead among obstacles limiting the individual farming. The next in order reason of modest accomplishments in the operation of new privatized agriculture is unwillingness of authorities to help farmers (it was pointed out by 17.7% of respondents).

Such impediments as an uncertainty in future of individual family farms or lack of self-motivation were called by 16.7% and 10.8% of respondents correspondingly. Extremely negligible part of respondents (4.4%) has defined as a hindrance, standing in the way of successful operation of new privatized agricultural, incapacity of the very peasants for self-dependent farming.

Only 3.4% respondents believe that the negative appraisal of individual farming by public opinion is the main obstacle for broadening of this form of agriculture.

## **II.2. The peasants' opinions about privatization of land used by collective and state farms**

Every fourth participant of a sociological poll in Central Ukraine is radically oriented concerning the land privatization: 23.2% of respondents think it is necessary to privatize all land which is used by collective and state farms. Approximately the same number (26.0%) consider that only partial land privatization will be expedient. The largest part of respondents (33.6%) look with favour on privatization lands only of nonprofitable farms. And at last every sixth (17.1%) is sure that it is necessary to preserve "status quo" and to leave the former order of land use. So according to their attitudes the peasants may be divided into radical (23.2%), moderate (59.6%) and conservative (17.1%).

Let us look how the Ukrainian peasants act when they decide the land question for themselves personally?

## **II.3. The Intentions of peasants for land privatization**

So to be or not to be a landowner? That is the question!

Every second respondent (42.1%) volunteered a firm wish to realize his landowner rights. Every third had not such intention, every fourth did not decide this question.

But when asking about quantity of land, they are ready to take as private property, 91.7% of respondents have given answers: 37.4% (every third) expressed their wish to privatize up to 0.5 ha; 23.8% (every fourth)-up to 1.0 ha; 11.6% (every tenth)-up to 5.0 ha; and 10.6% (also every tenth) would like to take more than 10 ha. And only 8.3% over-modest respondents have kept silence.

Apparently final lucidity of peasant's mind about land privatization is not reached for the present. In spite of the abundance of potential owners, more than a half of them (55.9%) did not privatize the land used in their subsidiary household plots. The part of those, who has realized this operation (42.9%), corresponds the share of respondents answered in the affirmative concerning their intentions of being land-owners.

We must state as a whole that the forming of the attitudes to land privatization among young countryfolk is not yet completed at present. That is why the realization of their attitudes is the cause of to-morrow but not to-day.

## **II.4. The peasants and the individual household plots**

Practically every Ukrainian peasant has got an individual household plot. It is that small field allowing him to preserve the feeling of master and on which he could notwithstanding remain an owner. Probably this is the reason of a very small number of those respondents who had low opinion of household plots-only 5.2%.

The land in individual household plots is held primarily in a mixture of two traditional forms of tenure: usership and lifetime inheritable possession, and also as privately owned land, which in itself is a considerable step forward from total state ownership of land only three years ago. The proportion of leased land in household plots is negligible.

The most part of respondents consider individual household plots as a basis of private farms if fertilizers, herbicides, fuel, machinery, spare parts are available at a low or moderate prices. This point of view was expressed by 41.6% of respondents; 16.3% of them think that

transformation of individual household plots to private farms is possible only under condition of strenuous and honest labour; and 14.6% of respondents are sure that such transformation is absolutely impossible. Every fourth participant of the poll had evaded this question.

Employment at individual household plots was and remains now the important component of way of life of Ukrainian peasantry. And in contrast to a private farming as a form of agriculture, employment at individual household plots is not an object of choice. Probably this circumstance is a reason of perception private farming by some respondents as a certain undesirable alternative to traditional and sanctioned by public opinion rural way of life. At any case only 7% of respondents look at a farmer lot as a life perspective for their children. And as it is generally known all of us wish nothing better than bright future for own children.

### II.5. The peasants' notions about the right of property

The rights and obligations of owner are written down in legislative laws of Ukraine—the Law “On types of ownership on land”, the Law “On payment for land”, the Law “On private farms”, the Law “On priorities of social development of village and agricultural industrial complex in national economy of Ukraine” and a number of others regulating the implementation of agricultural reform as a whole, and land reform in particular.

When questioning the peasants it was found out, that every third (34.9%) is acquainted with some of them. And only 30% of respondents have confirmed without any reserves their knowledge of laws. But profundity of this knowledge leaves much to be desired: only 15.3% of respondents have read the text of Laws. The great bulk of them (41.2%) heard about adopting law on radio or TV; 12.4% of respondents heard on the radio when the Law was adopted by Supreme Soviet of Ukraine; 10.0% know about them from the members of their family or neighbours; another 10.0% watched Supreme Soviet meeting on TV; 8.5% of respondents have learned about the content of law from administration of their collective farms; 6.6% of them heard about these laws from the representatives of administration. A quarter of respondents did not answer the question about sources of information.

It is supposed that the content of law, regulating current and future relations of property, remained outside the attention every fourth respondent.

So only as for 15.3% of respondents we may be pretty sure that they personally got acquainted with the legal basis of reform. And then we come to the conclusion that the peasants do not know the rights and obligations of the owner very well, and their judgement about privatization are based mainly on common sense and not the knowledge of current laws.

This conclusion is especially true in relative to ordinary farm employees: only 25.7% of their number are acquainted with a content of laws and only 12.5% read their texts. More versed in land legislation are the farm managers at all levels: 65% of them know the content of laws and 54.5% read their texts. Apparently this is one of the reason explaining the most high part those who had privatized their individual subsidiary plot among managers (65.0%) while only 42.9% ordinary farm employees took this decisive step, realizing their right of landowner.

What are the notions of village youth about institution of ownership, its potentialities and restrictions?

So two thirds of potential landowners (65.4%) suppose that the land privatization provides the right to work on their land by themselves and unconditionally to have a free hand in ordering produced output. Every third (29.7%) thinks that he can transfer land to the possession of his children or another relatives as inheritance. Every seventh (14.3%) is convinced in his right to

lease land. Every twelfth (8.0%) intends to exercise his right of landowner by creating of agricultural production cooperative with another owners. Only 5.0% of respondents assume that they could sell their land.

These are the ideas of the peasants about the rights of landowners which they acquired automatically if they privatize land. To a certain extent they illustrate superficial knowledge of content of laws regulating the land reforms in Ukraine. The results of sociological polls show that not all peasants know, apparently, about the moratorium of six years on sale land or lack of mechanisms for restructuring at the farm level, exiting collectives with land and asset shares and creating of a new production units.

## II.6. The level of peasants trust to authorities

The success of land reform in Ukraine depends on many circumstances and one of special interest is the extent of peasants faith in "purity of designs" of reformers starting the restructuring of Ukrainian agriculture "from the top". The historical experience acquired by the peasants in the sphere of interaction with powers may be rather an obstacle than the source of enthusiasm in the process of transition from collective to private land ownership.

Who is able to deprive the peasants of ownership rights? Who is able to prevent them to possess and to use the privately owned land? The peasants answers are a very telltale. A half of respondents (52.1%) suppose that ownership rights are immovable and nobody can take them away. But expectations of another half of them are not so optimistic: 16.6% of respondents consider the state to be the main expropriator; 11.6% of them see the local authorities in this role; 6.4% of respondents do not trust to labour collective; 5.3% of their number regard that farm administration can take their ownership rights from them.

All social groups of contemporary village youth, and the managers-in the first place, think the state is not to be trusted.

So 17.3% of ordinary farm employees, 18.1% of specialists and 20.0% of managers give the state a role of the principal expropriator. But the harmony of their opinions comes to an end, and gives up the place to mutual distrust when the conversation turns on the "enemy number two". 12.9% of ordinary farm employees and 12.3% of specialists discover the threat to their ownership rights in a position of local authorities, and 10.0% of managers think that the general meeting of labour collective is able to deprive them of ownership rights. However, 10.3% of specialists are prone to distrust to this collective body though the ordinary farm employees have given it a vote of confidence. The conflict of interests is available.

Where the peasants are going to find protection in case of the violation their private property rights?

The level of right-consciousness among young villagers is not high. Every third (33.3%) respondent announced that he will not apply to any instance and go round the departments, he will protect his property on his own at any price. We can only guess what possible means he is going to use. Another every third respondent (32.9%) will take his cause into court; 7.5% of respondents expect to receive help of militia; 5.6% of peasants will seek for intercession in the village council; 3.1% are going find protection at the local authorities; 2.7% will apply to collective farms managers. Every seventh respondent do not answer this question.

The most high level of right-consciousness is demonstrated by managers: every second of them intends to seek protection of their property rights in the court. It is quite explicable since just managers know the laws better than others. As for specialists they prefer to resort to the

help of militia, every tenth of them believes in efficiency its efforts. Fighters from "people's volunteer corps", who are going to assert the property rights on their own, are present in equal parts at all three social groups of rural youth (39.0% of every of them).

### III. Public sentiments of rural youth

Economic difficulties of transition period exerted influence upon frame of mind and emotional attitudes of peasants, their evaluation of prospects and expectations. The half of respondents either could not or did not want to assess the quality of life in the near future. Only a quarter of them expressed the optimistic belief that the life will become "a little easier". And 8.8% of respondents are firmly convinced of essential improvement of life standart. But pessimists who are not sure of future were not so numerous: only 3.3% of respondents have assumed that life in the nearest five years will considerably be worst. The rest 12.7% think that nothing will change neither for the better nor for the worse.

Nevertheless vague perspectives do not prevent 42.6% of respondents to keep their presence of mind and belief in successful overcoming of economic crisis. Only 22.7% of their number express their anxiety and uncertainty in future, a dread to lose a job, waiting another famine. Every third respondent live with today, showing patience and soberness of mind, not giving way to despair but also not making plans which can be not implemented.

Optimists are more often met among managers, and living with today - among ordinary farm employees. The specialists are more often prone to pessimistic perception of future. Estimating the personal perspectives in a nearest future, representatives of all social groups: managers, specialists and employees, have showed restraint and embodied healthy conservatism: 45.2% of ordinary employees and 38.5% of specialists are not planning any changes in the near 2-3 years. And 40.0% of managers are not going to change anything in their life at all. The most of them link the future of their children with the village but they would like them to work in social services such as medicine, education, trade, public utilities and so on. Managers and specialists prefer their children to work abroad, and employees think that it will be good for their children equally to work in the city or to go abroad.

It is necessary note that in decision of vital questions the most of rural youth manage without any assistance. More than a half of respondents (53.0%) announced that they cope with life problems on their own. Every third rely on parents and every tenth - on relatives and friends. Rural youth do not cherish the illusions concerning the state and society, only 2.2% of respondents expect to receive their maintenance.

It is to be supposed that a very low level of confidence in the state institutions and public organization is a definite result of the historic experience of our peasantry. Being the main producer the peasantry has no rights (only obligations), has no access to taking decisions, has no a free hand in ordering the farm produce and at last is a small bolt in the gigantic administrative command mechanism controled by beauracrat machine up to now. It is doubtful whether this state machinery will help its obedient and dutiful citizens.

#### *IV. Conclusion*

1. The design of land reform and farm restructuring in Ukraine consisted in transfer of agricultural land and assets to private ownership and the creation of more productive strongly market-oriented private commercial farms. But the process of reform in Ukraine does not reflect a clear commitment to private ownership of land and assets, initial accomplishments in the reform have been modest.

The total result of land reform today is the creation of shareholding farms. They are a minimally reorganized new collective agriculture, the procedures for further restructuring at the farm level are inadequately developed. Frequent changes of legislation have created a sense of uncertainty about the future course of reform.

2. The most peasants keep the adherence to collective farming. But private farming has many advocates in a country-side as well: more than a half respondents keep up this new form of agriculture. Nevertheless only every fourth of them answered in the affirmative to question about his personal intention to become a farmer.

3. The attitudes of the peasantry to the privatisation of land, used by collective and state farms, show a certain restraint. According to their attitudes the peasants may be divided into radical (23.2%), moderate (59.6%) and conservative (17.1%). But when discussing this problem in relation to their own enterprise, almost every second respondent volunteered a firm wish to realize his landowner rights. It must be stated that as a whole the forming of the attitudes to land privatization among young countryfolk is not yet completed at present. That is why the realization of their attitudes is the cause of to-morrow but not to-day.

4. In spite of all vicissitudes of life the Ukrainian peasants nevertheless are the owners, realizing their master's rights at the individual household plots. Employment at subsidiary household plots was and remains to-day the important component of way of life of Ukrainian peasantry and is not an object of choice in contrast to private farming. The vital interests of Ukrainian peasants are bound up with their household plots which demonstrate stability and efficiency during their whole history.

5. The level of right-consciousness of rural youth is not high. The respondent's answers illustrate a superficial knowledge of the laws, regulating the land reform in Ukraine. The peasants do not know the rights and obligations of the owner very well and their judgement about privatization are based rather on common sense than the knowledge of current laws.

6. Two thirds of potential owners suppose that the land privatization provides the right to work on their land by themselves and unconditionally to have a free hand in ordering produced output. And only a few of them intend to exercise their right of landowner by creating of agricultural production cooperative with another owners.

7. Only a half of respondents suppose that ownership rights are immovable and nobody can take them away. But expectations of another half of respondents are not so optimistic: they think that it is easy to be deprived of property rights by the state, local authorities, farm administration or a general meeting of labour collective. In case of the violation of their property rights only every third will apply to a court, and every tenth to militia. Every third announced he will protect his property on his own.

8. The main mass of peasants coming across everyday difficulties and necessity to overcome them lives with the interests of today not making any radical plans for future. Four out from ten respondents are sure in successful going out of crisis; every fifth is looking in future with

apprehension of unemployment, famine or another disasters; every third lives with today. Optimists are more often met among managers, and living with the interests of today- among ordinary employees. The specialists are more often are prone to pessimism.

9 Under conditions of vague perspectives young peasants do not plan any radical changes in their life but when it is going about the future of children, the scope of possible life prospects has quite a variety. This information shows dissatisfaction of peasants with their status and way of life on the one hand and reflects substantial potential of their social mobility- on the other.

10. In decision of vital questions the most of rural youth manage without any assistance. More than a half of them announced that they cope with the problems on their own.