

CZECH AGRICULTURE IN THE INTEGRATING EUROPE

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Abstract: The contribution deals with the development of Czech agriculture in the period of transition and in the period of integration of Czechia into the European Union. The processes of transformation of Czech agriculture and the processes of integration of Czechia into EU are part of structural changes of economy and society and they present some extent part of internationalising and globalisation tendencies taking place in Europe and in the world. The attention is paid to the perspectives of the Czech agriculture and rural areas after accession of Czechia to the EU especially.

Key words: economic and social transformation, rural areas, agriculture, Czechia, EU

1. INTRODUCTION

Economic and social transformation in Czechia, as well as in other post-totalitarian countries, is a unique process. Transformation process in Czechia began after the change of political system in 1989 and recently it has been deepened by the European integration processes connected with the accession of Czechia to the European Union. There is also a certain impact of globalization processes.

The mentioned processes have significantly influenced the Czech agriculture and the Czech rural landscape. Agricultural land has been restituted, agricultural cooperatives transformed, state farms privatized, the high intensity of farming in certain regions has decreased similarly as have the exportations of agricultural products into successor states of the former Soviet Union. Subsidies into agricultural sector, which used to enable a generally higher intensity of farming and to even out both volume and structure of farming in different regions of Czechia, have been reduced. International competition pressures have caused a general reduction of farming and of the efficiency and productivity growth in agriculture, as well as a restructuring of production. In connection with the accession of Czechia to the EU, significance of ecological principles in farming and forestry has increased. A whole series of programmes, supports and

subsidies have been introduced to back these principles, to enlarge the EU common market and to strengthen new functions of rural areas.

Transformation of the Czech economy and society and recently mainly impacts of accession of Czechia to the EU on the agricultural sector and Czech rural areas are now in the centre of attention of various social sciences. These processes are being analysed by economists, sociologists and, last but not least, by Czech geographers. Research into these changes and their regional impacts is carried on by geographers studying more general and complex issues of economic transformation (see Hampl et al., 1996, Hampl, 2005); a similar attention is paid to analysing the impacts of transformation not only on the agriculture itself, but also on rural areas and landscape (see Bičík, Jančák, 2002, 2005; Jeleček, 1998, 2002; Kupková, 2002; Bičík, Chromý, Jančák, Janů, 2002; Turnock, 2001; Spišiak, 2004, 2005 and others). Development of the society influences individual components of the social-geographical sphere and their impact on the landscape, including land use changes (see Himiyama, 2002; Himiyama, Mather, Bičík, Milanova, eds., 2001; Turner II, 1997; Bičík, Chromý, Jeleček, Kupková, Šefrna, 2002; Chromý, Jeleček, 2005; Jeleček, Burda, Chromý, 1999). For those reasons, studies aimed at analysis of these individual components in turning points, as the change of political system in Czechia after 1989 or the accession of Czechia to the EU, are very important. On the one hand they depict the unique phenomenon in time and space, i.e. the process of transformation of a given branch from the former for to a new structure, on the other hand they should enable to evaluate more generally this process of the change of structures by comparison with other countries or periods. For those reasons, studying of these processes and phenomena is an important research task. Conclusions of these studies can be eventually applied on specific conditions of another country to help it to use the Czech experience.

The aim of this article is to characterize principal changes and development trends and consequently to explain the driving forces of these changes in the agricultural sector of Czechia after 1990. It is however clear that transformation has been an impulsion to new phenomena and processes not only in the agriculture itself, but in the whole agrosystem, the structure and feedbacks of which have been changing, and that at least by the moment, when the agricultural land market is opened in Czechia (sometime about 2012). The second part deals with the prospects of the Czech agricultural and the Czech rural areas after the accession of Czechia to the EU.

2. CZECH AGRICULTURE DURING THE TRANSFORMATION PERIOD

Agricultural production has its specific position among other economic sectors. Although it represents only about 3 % of the total employment, which is already comparable with the West-European EU members (in 1990 about 6 % of economically active inhabitants worked in agriculture), at the same time farmers manage more than half of the area of the whole Czechia. They thus contribute in a very significant way to the character of the landscape. For that reason, agriculture has an important and irreplaceable landscape-forming function. Nowadays, in the period of high surpluses of agricultural products in Europe, the significance of productive function of agricultural

production is decreasing and at the same time the significance of other (non-productive) functions of agricultural farms is growing. Also the structure of functions, asked for by society in the concrete place in the landscape, is changing. Therefore the impacts of transformation of the Czech economy and society were very important for the agricultural sector. From the viewpoint of impacts of the transformation on landscape and on intensity, ways and regional differentiation of landscape use, these are the key processes of present landscape changes. It is clear that as regards the structure of areas, a very strong process of grassing over has been going on since 1990. This process is dominating in one third of all cadastral territories of Czechia. The Czech and the Czechoslovak agriculture at the end of the 1980s were characterized by a high intensity of production, both crop production and animal breeding. A high level of the volume of agricultural production was then obtained by an agrarian policy aimed at the maximal self-sufficiency of the former Czechoslovakia, or at the predominance of exportations of agricultural commodities over imported products. Because of a relatively low level of agricultural land per habitant, these volumes were obtained thanks to a high intensity of production per hectare of agricultural land and by a high proportion of arable land on the total area of agricultural soil resources. Typical was also a relatively important and steadily growing volume of non-agricultural activities (constructions, production of fodder and raw products, assembling and reparation of machines, etc.) in agricultural enterprises and their relatively high part on the gross agricultural production. After a change of this agrarian policy based on high subsidies and aimed at the maximal self-sufficiency in agricultural products within Czechoslovakia, an extraordinary reduction of labour force in the primary occurred in the period 1991 – 1992 (Fig. 1), which however did not bring more significant problems in food supply in the home market. It was due not only to a reduction of consumption, but also to the pressure of import possibilities and also to the fact that the majority of those who left the branch had been employed before in non-agricultural activities of the former agricultural enterprises.

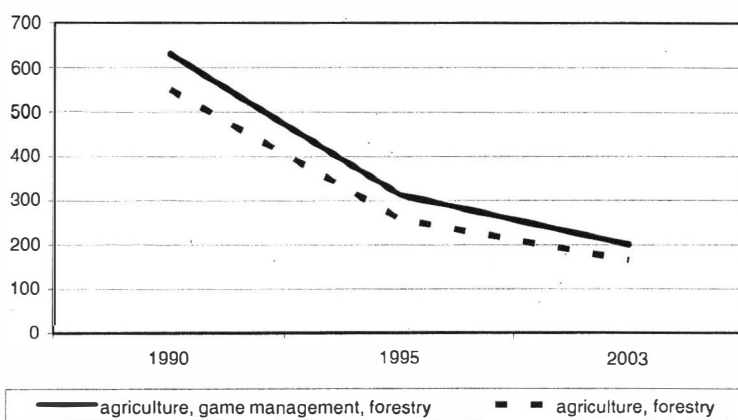


Figure 1 Number of economically active workers in agriculture after 1990. Axis x – years, axis y – number of economically active workers). Source: Statistická ročenka ČR (Statistical Yearbook of the Czech Republic)

In the end of the totalitarian period, agricultural co-operatives farming over 60 % of total area of agricultural land positively predominated in the structure of agricultural

enterprises in Czechia. State enterprises farmed about one third of agricultural land particularly in the borderland along the former “Iron Curtain“. Main reasons of that situation were political; they enabled the state to keep a certain control over the territory. Private farmers worked only small areas (about 4 % of agricultural and only about one percent of arable land) before 1989 and their share in produced agricultural commodities was in fact insignificant (see Fig. 2).

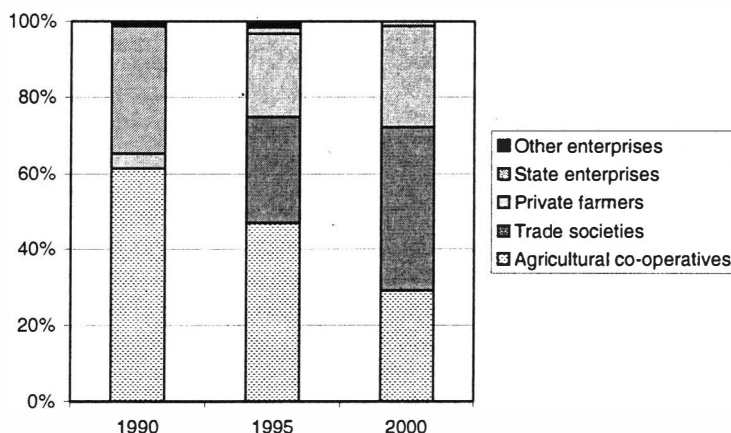


Figure 2 Transformation of property rights in the agricultural sector of Czechia.
Source: Agrocensus 1995, 2000

During the transformation period, significant changes occurred in Czechia in the structure of legal forms of subjects farming on agricultural land. The number of individual farmers significantly increased – today they farm one quarter of agricultural land in Czechia. From the regional point of view, individual farmers are concentrated mainly in regions, where before 1990 state farms prevailed (north-western Bohemia). Individual farmers are concentrated also in fertile regions of Central Bohemia (surroundings of Prague, Kladno and along the Ohře River). The way of privatization of former state farms enabled to begin individual farming mostly on leased land. Microregional analyses done in selected model territories show that the most important factors were the way of transformation of former agricultural enterprises and above all the quality of human capital (good management, etc.). Individual farmers are less numerous in regions, where new landowners came to an agreement with an agricultural enterprise and leased it the land. On the contrary in regions, where individual farmers are now the most numerous, transformation was accompanied by certain complications, i.e. good management lacked there. Microregional analyses show that the ability of managers to present a good project is more important than farming tradition (the long period of socialist economy mostly severed the ties with the land).

In the second half of the 1990s a significant shift from the cooperative form of ownership to trade companies is visible. The change is mostly only formal, in fact the farming subject has not changed, but the cooperative ownership is de iure transformed to joint-stock company or limited company. The reason is, that the form of trade company makes the enterprise management easier.

3. PERSPECTIVES OF THE CZECH AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AREAS AFTER ACCESSION OF CZECHIA TO THE EU

Czech farmers will be certainly influenced by subsidies they will receive from the EU, although their volume will be lower in comparison with those received by their colleagues in the old EU countries (at the beginning, they will obtain only 25 % of the sum given to the EU farmers but this will progressively change to equalize in 2013). But in comparison with the EU farmers, the Czech farmers have lower costs. In 2001, the prices for buying or leasing land represented only 5 % of the average prices in the old EU countries. Financial means obtained through subsidies will be for many Czech farmers an interesting impulsion to farming. Many farms will certainly disappear, but capable farmers will survive if they succeed to adapt themselves to new conditions, to find interesting production programmes and to obtain subsidies. It is certain that if Czech farmers had similar conditions as their EU colleagues, it would necessarily lead to a high overproduction and problems with processing, storing and selling the surpluses. We are thus convinced that solution does not lie in increasing subsidies into agriculture, i.e. into rural landscape, but on the contrary in reduction of the EU subsidies to roughly 30 % of the value of the EU agricultural production (as against 50 % nowadays). This solution is nevertheless politically quite unacceptable for the agricultural lobby in the EU. In spite of that we are convinced that subsidies will decrease or stagnate and that they will have to be restructuralized.

As to the competitiveness of Czech farmers at the European market, they can rely mostly on cheap labour force in Czechia in comparison with the EU and on a suitable size structure of agricultural enterprises. On the contrary, the competitiveness of Czech farmers may be often reduced by a relatively high chemical load of soils (due to former high application of synthetic fertilizers) and thus by a long time needed to soil convalescence. At many places this fact complicates or even prevents to produce ecologically pure aliments (with the ecological agriculture certificate).

As to structural changes, probably the most important will be those of agricultural land resources. A further reduction of agricultural and arable lands area is expected, sometimes by a fourth to a third of the areas which will have to be abandoned and not farmed anymore (see Doucha, 2002). The part of agricultural land resources in our country and especially the part of arable land is substantially higher than in countries with similar natural conditions (impact of subsidies from the totalitarian period still survives). In 2004, about 10 % of arable land were not farmed. Regional differentiation in decrease of agricultural land resources and mainly of arable land will still deepen (a higher decrease in regions with less productive soils). It will be connected with a further increase of the area of permanent grasslands and with an increase of ecologically pure production (bioproduction), agrotourism and mainly of landscape cultivation. Although these new forms of agriculture will not be massive, they might be interesting for some farmers, especially under specific regional conditions. They might represent an important part of the total income of the farm. The precondition is that society will in a larger extent not only call for such landscape cultivation, but also pay for it. As to the structure of land resources, the part of forested areas will probably increase (as it is in other advanced European countries), mainly in regions where soil cultivation is more complicated, on slopes and in places with poor soil quality.

During the last fifteen years, many changes have occurred under new political conditions. It is probable that these changes are not yet complete and that they will go on. Agricultural complex as a system built in the totalitarian period has undergone substantial changes not only during these last years, but it will certainly develop also in the future. It corresponds not only to similar experience in neighbouring countries which have accessed to the EU earlier (especially the former German Democratic Republic, see Bičík, Götz, 1998; Turnock, 2001), but also to the ongoing globalization process affecting more and more even those branches which used to be relatively closed in the past. In addition, there will appear new vertical and horizontal links between agricultural primary producers, processors and commercial chains. The annual increase of the EU subsidies into agriculture by 8 % from 2005 might be an interesting contribution for the majority of producers. These expectations have also significantly influenced the relatively small movement on the agricultural land market and other activities connected with agricultural production. It is probable that exactly the accession to the EU was a mechanism, which will initiate some movements on the market with agricultural immovable property. After accession of Czechia to the EU we can expect also a more pronounced imposition of production quotas for individual plots or producers. Czech primary producers (farmers) expect a more equitable repartition of profits between individual rings of the chain (higher outputs for primary producers on the detriment of processors and trader. Sometime around 2012 the agricultural land market should be liberated and also foreign natural persons will be allowed to deal in agricultural land in Czechia.

As to the distribution of property, we can presuppose that leasing land will be much more expensive in future. We must take into consideration that the restitution process was very extensive, so that there are some 3.5 million of landowners in Czechia now. It will be probably more advantageous for them to lease their agricultural land to economic entities from the EU states. And for these agricultural businessmen from EU states it will be probably much cheaper to farm agricultural land in Czechia, because of reduced costs for its leasing.

On the one hand the size structure of agricultural enterprises in Czechia is relatively advantageous when compared to the average size of family farms in the EU states, but on the other hand we must remember that the EU agricultural policy is conceived to fit exactly these family farms and not enterprises with several dozens of employees farming not only their own land but also other land leased from the state, from a private subject, or from both. In future it might cause certain problems with application of the EU agricultural policy under Czech conditions. According to us, the idea of an increase of the part of family farms is not realistic because of political, historical or social reasons. An employee in agriculture in Czechia lives in most cases better than if he had his private farm. In addition, the majority of economically active people lack now the necessary capital, formation, endeavour and will to experiments and risks with running their own farm.

Czech agriculture has nevertheless undergone the deepest changes in the productivity of labour. Calculations of gross agricultural production per worker, i.e. evaluation by the volume of basic products per worker, document that the productivity has at least doubled in comparison with the year 1990 and the increase has been still higher when compared with the year 1980, especially in crop production.

But at the same time we must keep in mind that the European market with agricultural commodities is full. We cannot thus expect that Czech farmers might

substantially penetrate to it in the full spectrum of produced commodities. The EU member states will certainly protect the market with agricultural commodities. Czech agriculture should thus produce such quantity of crops and animal products to cover the consumption of Czech population. A higher production and thus exportations can be expected only in some traditional Czech agricultural commodities, as brewing barley. But production of these commodities is, much more as of other crops, very unstable and depending on weather conditions during the year.

Already during the 1990s the structure of produced agricultural commodities changed in Czechia for the benefit of crop products covering now some 49 % of the gross agricultural production. It was due not only to a decrease in dairy cattle husbandry and in milk production, but also to changes in the internal structure of grown crops. An important increase was registered mainly in rape (both larger areas under crop and higher yields). Thanks to subsidies and relatively small requirements on agroclimatical conditions, rape can be grown also on arable land destined for reduction of farming (worse natural conditions). Changes in the volume of production of basic agricultural commodities after 1990 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Changes in the volume of production of basic agricultural commodities in the period 1990 – 2004

Agricultural commodity	Average of the years 1988 – 1992 (in thousands of tons)	Average of the years 1999 – 2003 (in thousands of tons)	Index of production 1988 – 1992 to 1999 – 2003
Wheat	4,063	3,819	94.0
Barley	2,729	1,919	70.3
Potatoes	2,191	1,119	51.1
Rape	313	769	245.7
Arable fodder crops (total – hay)	7,433	2,522	33.9
Sugar beet	4,031	3,171	78.7
	Number of farm animals (1990, in thousands of heads)	Number of farm animals (2004, in thousands of heads)	Index of numbers (1990 – 2004)
Cattle	3,360	1,428	42.5
Pigs	4,569	3,127	68.4
Poultry	33,278	25,494	76.6
	Production (1990, in thousands of tons of live weight)	Production (2003, in thousands of tons of live weight)	Index of production (1990 – 2004)
Beef	509.1	197.7	38.3
Pork	739.7	576.3	77.9
Poultry	210.5	304	144.4
Fish	17.7	19.7	111.3
Milk	4.8	2.6	54.2

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Czech Republic, 1993, 2004

From the viewpoint of regional differentiation of agricultural production, we can expect concentration of agricultural commodities production into regions with good to above average conditions for farming, into regions with a cost-effective agricultural production, i.e. into fertile lowlands regions with the highest average price of agricultural land. It would be effective to maintain agriculture production in these regions on its

present level, or, according to local conditions (above-average soil quality, sufficient labour force), even to increase it.

On the contrary in regions with unprofitable agricultural production it would be desirable to continue with reduction of agricultural production, mainly of its intensity. In these regions it would be suitable to consider, beside the extensive way of farming (livestock breeding on pastures, etc.), also other complementary possibilities and new forms of farming (agrotourism, ecological farming), or non-agricultural activities of rural population.

Microregional and local influences are an important factor with impact on regional differentiation on the district level. They are conceived as a consequence of restitution and privatization processes that were going on in different places with a different degree of destruction or safeguard of existing production structures, which have influenced also relations of new agricultural cooperatives and restitutes or new landowners. Equally a very different level of new owners and managers both in agricultural production itself and in orientation in new economic conditions sometimes goes against the expected regional differentiation of the state and development of agriculture of Czechia. Where new management of transformed cooperatives or new owners of the property of former state farms and restitutes have chosen a suitable programme of their activities, they have more chance to survive and to make profit. Field inquiry done during these last years in different regions of Czechia shows very differentiated results of individual agricultural enterprises, even neighbouring or farming under the same conditions. It appears that individual, local and microregional impacts play an important part in the regional differentiation of Czech agriculture in the transformation period. These subjective factors, i.e. the ability of individual managers, are undoubtedly one of the decisive factors of regional differentiation of Czech agriculture after the accession of Czechia to the EU. It is thus certain that the ability to profit of the offered possibilities (the EU and national subsidies for agriculture) will be different in individual agricultural enterprises.

The degree of impacts on the Czech rural areas will be regionally differentiated and in general directly proportional to the different role of agriculture in individual regions of Czechia. In fertile regions, if agricultural production is strengthened here, these impacts should be positive (maintenance or increase of employment, positive impacts on the landscape – management of agricultural land, no fallow land, no increase of the area of weed infested wildlands, perspective agricultural enterprises as pillars of successful development of Czech rural areas). It is interesting that ageing of rural population on traditionally small farms in neighbouring Poland was characteristic of the processes of abandoning agricultural and arable land in many regions already in the 1980s. Substantial subsidies into Czech agriculture and restitution have delayed this process by roughly twenty years. In regions with reduced agricultural production, i.e. with passage to extensive farming, agriculture should play a positive role as a landscape enhancement factor. As to the social impact on the population, the decisive factor is again a sound agricultural subject able to use suitable forms of farming (including the new ones, see above). These issues are to a certain degree connected with the size of the farm and with its specialization. The degree of specialization in agriculture and looking for non-agricultural income possibilities by individual farms will influence individual rural areas in a differentiated way.

4. CONCLUSION

The change of the political system in 1990 had a significant impact on the Czech agriculture and rural landscape. In Czechia, the ownership structure of agricultural subjects has been transformed, the process of restitution has been carried out, agrarian policy has been changed. These changes of farming are visible also in the Czech landscape (fallen land, enlargement of permanent grasslands). More important are non-productive (non agricultural) functions of landscape, at the beginning of the 1990s limited or practically unknown (ecological, recreational).

As to the post-totalitarian countries, they were led in the past period by the effort to ensure a high intensity of farming and the maximal self-sufficiency in food production. This had not only a harmful impact on the quality of environment, but after the change of political conditions it led to rapid changes in volume, structure and intensity of farming and to substantial and relatively rapid changes in land resources structure and to a deepening of the process of landscape degradation.

Characteristic is a rapid decrease of the part of agriculture in fertile but urbanized regions due to "non agricultural" development dynamism.

Globalization will advance hand in hand with an irregular space development. If we keep in mind these characteristics of globalization processes, it is clear that the development of land use and the whole agricultural sector can be largely dependent on these processes. The reason is that in economically developed countries the rural areas are conceived space dimension of collective consumption.

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České zemědělství v integrující se Evropě

Resume

Transformační proces v Česku byl nastartován změnou politického systému v roce 1989 a v posledních letech je zesilován integračními evropskými procesy v souvislosti se vstupem Česka do Evropské unie. Svou roli sehrává i vliv globalizačních procesů. Uvedené procesy zásadně ovlivnily české zemědělství a českou venkovskou krajinu. Proběhla restituce zemědělské půdy, transformace zemědělských družstev a privatizace státních statků, snížila se vysoká intenzita zemědělského hospodaření v některých regionech, poklesl objem vývozu zemědělských produktů zejména do nástupnických států

bývalého Sovětského svazu, byly odbourány dotace do zemědělského sektoru, které udržovaly celkově vyšší intenzitu zemědělského hospodaření a nivelizovaly objem i strukturu zemědělského hospodaření v jednotlivých regionech Česka. V důsledku mezinárodních konkurenčních tlaků, došlo k celkovému útlumu hospodaření, růstu efektivity a produktivity v zemědělství, restrukturalizaci produkce. V souvislosti se vstupem Česka do EU vzrostl i význam ekologických principů zemědělského hospodaření i lesnictví. Byla zavedena celá řada programů, podpor a dotačních titulů pro prosazení těchto principů a pro rozšíření společného trhu EU a posílení řady nových funkcí venkova.

Zemědělská výroba má své specifické postavení mezi ostatními sektory ekonomiky. Na celkové zaměstnanosti se sice podílí jen zhruba 3 %, což je dnes již srovnatelné se západoevropskými členy EU (v roce 1990 bylo u nás zhruba 6 % ekonomicky aktivních zaměstnaných v zemědělství), na druhé straně však zemědělci obhospodařují více než polovinu rozlohy našeho státu. Velmi významným způsobem tak spoluutvářejí ráz a charakter krajiny. Proto má zemědělství velmi významnou a nezastupitelnou krajino-tvornou funkci.

Pozitivní předpoklady pro konkurenceschopnost českých zemědělců na evropském trhu jsou zejména levná pracovní síla v Česku ve srovnání se státy EU a vhodná velikostní struktura zemědělských podniků. Na druhé straně je si potřeba uvědomit, že zemědělská politika EU je koncipována právě na rodinné farmy, jakožto cílové subjekty, a nikoli na firmy o desítkách zaměstnanců, které hospodaří nejen na své, ale mnohdy i na pronajaté půdě. To může být v budoucnu zdrojem určitých problémů při aplikaci jednotné agrární politiky EU na české poměry. Konkurenceschopnost českých zemědělců bude dále snižovat mnohde poměrně vysoké zatížení půdy chemikáliemi (dříve byla vysoká míra aplikace průmyslových hnojiv) a s tím související dlouhá doba „rekonvalescence“ půdy. Dnes tato skutečnost mnohde komplikuje nebo přímo znemožňuje produkovat ekologicky čisté potraviny (s atestem ekologického zemědělství).

Z hlediska regionální diferenciací zemědělské produkce lze očekávat soustředění produkce zemědělských komodit do oblastí s dobrými až nadprůměrnými podmínkami pro zemědělské hospodaření, do oblastí rentabilní zemědělské produkce, tedy do oblastí úrodných nížin (oblasti s nejvyšší průměrnou cenou zemědělské půdy). Bylo by efektivní, aby v těchto oblastech byla zemědělská výroba udržena na stávající úrovni, příp. podle lokálních možností (nadprůměrná bonita půdy, dostatek ekonomicky aktivních) dále prohloubena. Naproti tomu v oblastech nerentabilní zemědělské výroby by bylo žádoucí pokračovat v trendu útlumu zemědělské produkce, resp. zejména její intenzity. V těchto oblastech by bylo vhodné se kromě extenzivního způsobu zemědělského hospodaření (pástevecký chov skotu apod.) zaměřit na další doplňkové možnosti a nové formy zemědělského hospodaření (agroturistika, ekologické zemědělství), resp. nezemědělské aktivity venkovského obyvatelstva.

V případě posttotalitních zemí byla v minulém období patrná snaha o vysokou intenzitu hospodaření a maximalizaci samozásobení na úrovni státu. Ta vedla nejen k nežádoucím dopadům na kvalitu životního prostředí, ale po změně politických poměrů i k rychlým změnám v objemu, struktuře a intenzitě hospodaření a k podstatným a poměrně rychlým změnám ve struktuře půdního fondu, jakož i prohloubení procesu degradace krajiny. Charakteristický je rychlý pokles podílu zemědělství v úrodných, ale urbanizovaných oblastech díky „nezemědělské“ rozvojové dynamice.

Globalizace bude postupovat ruku v ruce s nerovnoměrným prostorovým vývojem. Uvědomíme-li si tyto charakteristiky globalizačních procesů, je zřejmé, že vývoj využití země a celého zemědělského sektoru může na těchto procesech podstatným způsobem záviset. Především proto, že v zemích hospodářsky vyspělejších je venkov vnímán jako prostorová dimenze kolektivní spotřeby.