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## Consulting for sustainable development, information technologies adoption, marketing and entrepreneurship issues in livestock farms

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### Abstract

Consulting agricultural services constitute a major key for implementing successfully sustainable development EU goals in rural areas. Today, in the context of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, there are initiatives for funding crop and livestock farms and entrepreneurship. Presently, there are bureaus offering consulting services and reliable information to the Greek farmers regarding Information Technologies adoption and innovative e-tools, marketing and processing of agricultural products, certificated agro-products (ISO), modernization of agricultural holdings, etc. Farmers have the opportunity to participate in EU funded measures that support the development of new activities, such as innovative actions, marketing services, new information technologies software and web tools and promote production innovations through specific investments. This paper aims to study and evaluate the adoption of consulting from livestock farms and discuss future opportunities. The study is based on primary data collected from the prefecture of Rodopi, in Thrace/Northeastern Greece, through a farm management survey which was carried out during September and December 2011. A sample of 120 livestock farmers between the ages of 20 and 70 was surveyed for the empirical application of this study using a well-structured questionnaire. The survey took place in private consulting bureaus and locally at farms. The collected data were coded and statistically analyzed using SPSS. Data was classified with cluster analysis in order to identify and describe groups with common attitudes among farmers. Findings show that 54% of the farmers in the sample are interested in consulting and adopt information technology solutions, marketing and entrepreneurship issues, aiming to sustainability in the context of EU goals. The results also indicate that 63% of the farmers have already participated in a program, while 37% have participated in the schemes promoting the establishment of young farmers. Moreover, 55% of them would prefer to be consulted by private consulting bureaus rather than government consulting divisions. Private consulting bureaus satisfy farmers who consider them as a significant support in their attempt to achieve the

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contemporary EU goals for sustainable development through the adoption of information technologies tools and innovative trade and marketing techniques. Farmers can be further classified in two groups that share similar either innovative or traditional aspects about Greek agriculture trends, in relation to their social characteristics.

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## 1. Introduction

Sustainable development, as it was initially presented in Broadlands Report (WCED, 1987; IISD, 2012) is defined as the development that meets the needs of the present without depriving the right of future generations to meet their own needs. According to European Commission (EC, 2012) sustainable development ensures the needs of present generations without jeopardizing the ability of futures generations to meet their own needs – that is, better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. It offers a vision of progress that integrates immediate and longer-term objectives, local and global action, and considers social, economic and environmental issues as inseparable and interdependent components of human progress. Sustainable development constitutes the main objective in contemporary research, especially during global economic crisis, aiming to deal with green development challenge.

The European policies focus on the efficient use of resources utilized in agriculture, a sector which remains vital for national economies. Agriculture constitutes the main force for rural economic development, while entrepreneurship and innovation are fundamental for contemporary economies' success. In particular, in the context of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, there are initiatives for funding livestock and crop farms and entrepreneurship. The development in agriculture aims at the improvement of economic performance of the sector along with an increase in the quality of farmer's life, while it's important for agricultural entrepreneurship to incorporate innovation. In Greece, farmers have to be aligned to the EU initiatives regarding sustainable development, entrepreneurship, marketing and technological novelties, in order to benefit from European and national funds. In a continuously competitive market environment the production of quality products and the implementation of proper marketing strategies are considered salient features of a contemporary entrepreneur. Therefore, rural entrepreneurs have to adopt innovative management behavior and practices in order to attract and retain customers (Tsekouropoulos et al., 2012).

A major barrier for the production of high-quality and value added products, the adoption of innovative production systems, and the development of integrated food chain and new markets for agricultural products (ADE, 2009) is the lack of information and knowledge in the farming sector, limited research, as well as the lack of data on agronomic and economic aspects of agriculture (Vasilikiotis, 2012). The establishment of the Farm Advisory System in 2003 was an important element of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform. Council Regulation (EC) 1782/2003, which established common rules for direct support schemes, decoupling farming subsidies from production, introduced the establishment and the use of farm advisory services, in order to help farmers to assess their performance of their agricultural holding and identify necessary improvements. The setting up of farm management, farm relief and farm advisory services for farmers should help them to adapt, improve and facilitate management and improve the overall performance of their holdings by further enhancing the human potential operating in the agricultural sector (EC, 2005).

Within this context, Farm Advisory Services constitute a major key for implementing successfully sustainable development EU goals in rural areas. Presently, there are bureaus offering advisory services and reliable information to Greek farmers about Information Technologies adoption and innovative e-tools, marketing and processing of agricultural products, certificated agro-products (ISO), modernization of agricultural holdings, restructuring of livestock sector, etc. Farmers have the opportunity to participate in EU funded measures that support the development of new activities, such as innovative actions, marketing services, new Information Technologies software and web tools and promote production innovations through specific investments. The private consultants visit the agricultural holding, record the existing situation, conduct a market research and viability study, assess the

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