

Spreading Professional Agricultural Communication

World-wide—The Case in Point: Ukraine

ACE acts, as both organization and individuals, to bring the benefits of the agricultural communication profession to persons and agencies of other countries. Actions to form ACE affiliates in Russia, 2001, and Philippines, 2002, are cases in point.

Current developments in Ukraine—one of the premier agricultural environments of the northern hemisphere—offer another such opportunity. Informal contacts of ACE members with an innovative non-governmental organization have led to a Memorandum of Understanding for collaboration signed by **ACE** and **Agro-Soyuz** of Majskoye, Ukraine.

Is there a role you want to play?

First, know something of Agro-Soyuz.

At the time of independence of Ukraine, formerly a Soviet Socialist Republic, two innovative young Ukrainian citizens established a spare-parts business serving the agricultural sector. With the success of that enterprise, the men saw that their business would grow as the farming sector grew in both technology adoption and profitability.

Within the laws that allowed transformation of Soviet-style collective farms into joint ownership by individuals who were members of the collective

enterprise, Agro-Soyuz established a farm as a subdivision of the parent corporation, working out leases that paid annual fees to the owners and permitted the organization to take over operation of the farm. In the matter of a few years, adoption of improved technologies in crop production and handling, and in dairy and swine production on its nearly 20,000 acres of arable land, Agro-Soyuz was proving the potential for profitability. In their view, **Ukraine could again become the Breadbasket of the region with adoption of modern farm technologies.**

The fundamental business of Agro-Soyuz remains its equipment spare-parts business, with a new direction in manufacturing some wide harrows and seeders to allow conservation tillage practices. To grow their business, the leaders saw the need to stimulate farm production throughout Ukraine. That would bring modernized mechanization and increased cash flow, thus, a growing need for spare parts and more efficient equipment. At the same time that the agriculture of Ukraine prospers, Agro-Soyuz will prosper.

From the start of the farm operations, Agro-Soyuz employed specialists in the various enterprises of the farm and also set aside nearly 750 acres for crop trials and research. The company had early opened the farm gate to farmers who wanted to see the methods in use and the results.

The 82 sales outlets for Agro-Soyuz became points of contact between the company and farmers throughout Ukraine. In addition to buying spare parts, many in the outlying areas are becoming interested in results being achieved on the Agro-Soyuz farm.

Specialists of the farm subdivision gathered the best available information from European and North American sources, international expositions, and Ukrainian and foreign educational organizations. Working relations were set up early with various institutions: Ukraine National Academy of Agriculture, National University of Agriculture, Dnipropetrovsk State University of Agriculture, Kharkiv University of Zooveterinary Medicine, Novomoskovsk State College of Agriculture, and Poltava Institute of Pig Breeding.

The specialists began to share their results with any who were interested—notably, on reducing costs and increasing productivity. The open-gate policy led to many visitors who came to see the innovative technologies and achievements. But an open gate was not enough to satisfy the desire of many who wanted to study the technologies seriously.

The Agricultural Extension Center

In 1999 the corporation built an Agricultural Extension Center. In its first three years, the center attracted 15,570 clients. They came from 850 enterprises (the majority from restructured collective agricultural enterprises) in 25 regions of Ukraine and 165 enterprises from Russia. For the year 2001, visitors totaled 9,448. There is no fee for the training

The Agricultural Extension Center lists its functions:

- Collecting, analyzing, and systematizing information about innovative technology and management

- Disseminating knowledge about innovative technology in agricultural production, management, and teaching
- Organizing training for specialists of Ukrainian and foreign enterprises
- Organizing internships for agricultural college students
- Giving career guidance to school children
- Developing and using active forms for teaching the staff
- Issuing video films, booklets, and newspaper on technology
- Supporting programs for development of agriculture in Ukraine

Focus of Extension Activities

Agro-Soyuz foresees its need for strengthened extension and communication activities in:

- Crop production
- Livestock production
- Manure management
- Grain processing and storage
- Laboratory analysis
- Farm management
- Managerial accounting
- Value-added markets
- Anaerobic digesters
- Renewable fuels
- Diffusion of innovations

Agro-Soyuz Activities in Your Area

Agro-Soyuz may already have had a presence in your state. In the years between 1997 and 2002, the company spent millions of dollars to obtain equipment and supplies—from as little as \$473 for spare parts for a liquid fertilizer applicator to almost \$3.5 million for grain storage and drying equipment. This may be another area of potential mutual benefit, where ACE can help a domestic supplier and Agro-Soyuz at the same time. Here are the North American companies on the list:

Agri-tech

Agtron Enterprises

Ancom

Boumatic

Bourgoult

Den Equiplint

Farmers

Gates Manufacturing

Golden Harvest Leasing

Groening Industries, Ltd.

Highline Mfg.

Houm

Husky Form Equipment

Intertape Polymer

Iowa Export/Import

J. Houle Fils Inc.

Jay-Lor
MFS York Stormor
Morris Industries
Newfield Seeds
Poliywest Septiec Ltd.
Precision Metal
Ritchie Industries
Serbise Shelters
TAG
Trade Grossread Inc
Tricorp
Valmar Airflo Inc.
Viniler

The Need for Content and Process

The needs in extension and communication activities embrace both needs for content and needs for process. Agro-Soyuz specialists need places to turn to gather new technological information from sources beyond their own reach. And there are needs in the center for improved processes of communication with its various audiences and clients.

Professional studies in agricultural extension and agricultural communication are still largely unknown in Ukrainian universities. The skills, of course, exist in individuals who have developed them through their

own experience. There is no pool of professionals educated specifically to these roles, however.

Where ACE Fits In

The Memorandum of Understanding, signed between Agro-Soyuz and ACE in August 2002, identified this list of activities as areas of mutual interest: that is, needs of Agro-Soyuz that may be served by some members of ACE.

- Video and audio exchanges or joint production of materials as training tools for agricultural producers
- Aid in developing distance-learning systems and capability
- Develop internship programs for subject specialists who have completed their professional education
- Train Agricultural Extension Center specialists in communication technology
- Train trainers at oblast and rayon offices
- Conduct exchange programs for agricultural specialists
- Provide education programs at North American universities for Ukrainian agricultural specialists
- Design web pages for use by agricultural specialists and technicians
- Aid in developing a systematic information network that will enhance information development, sourcing, archiving, retrieving, and diffusion and knowledge use
- Support use of software for informational resources

Some of the needs call for specialist expertise held by some ACE members—such as video production, web-page design, distance-learning systems, information networking, and training specialists in information technology. Some needs call for ACE members as linkers: persons who can identify on their campuses or agencies best professional sources to meet a given need: developing internship programs; arranging university programs for agricultural specialists, for example.

Conditions for Collaboration

There is another element in this “equation” that the ACE member needs to know, related to on-site work in Ukraine. Agro-Soyuz is not itself a prospective employer for an ACE member.

Where Agro-Soyuz and ACE have jointly arranged a collaboration, Agro-Soyuz agrees to pay costs of the consultant after he/she lands on Ukrainian soil. That includes costs of housing, food, transport, and interpreter/translator. The cost of transportation from the ACE member’s home base—including pre-travel costs such as passport and visa—and the arrival site in Ukraine (Kyiv or Dnipropetrovsk) is the responsibility of ACE or the member.

ACE is seeking sponsors and collaborators among international donors for activities that develop under this relationship. Some ACE members may have access to professional funding that they might apply to their participation in this work. Some might be able to get backing from domestic

agribusiness suppliers to Agro-Soyuz. Others may be sufficiently interested to pay their own travel costs.

What Role for You?

The first question: Are you intrigued by this effort to extend the professionalism of ACE to a foreign land—specifically to Ukraine?

If you are, let us know:

- Look carefully at the lists of activities on pages (and) and identify any or all where you could make a contribution—as communication specialist or as a linker:
 - For activity In Ukraine
 - For activity in your own country
- Report that information to Ashley Wood (amwood@ufl.edu)

The second point: Help explain this effort among your colleagues, including on-campus “power structure persons” whom we want to understand that we are attuned to international aspects of our profession.