

FARMER ATTITUDE TOWARDS ADVISORY SERVICES IN SWEDEN

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At the very core of a transition towards farm sustainability is the individual decision-maker. An increased awareness, knowledge, participation and capacity among farmers are keys to sustainable development of agriculture. Clearly, it is the farmer that will take both strategic and operative decisions that bridge between theory and practice while balancing a desirable future with what is feasible. Advisory services have and will be a major contributor in the realisation of a sustainable development, both on farm and societal level. Being an intermediary in the knowledge system, advisors should not only provide scientific and relevant knowledge, but also tailor their activities to the farmers' needs. No doubt, advisory services are an important part of farm development. Given that farmers struggle with an increased and international price-pressure, a need to work with objectives on different system levels simultaneously (i.e., viability, animal welfare, environmental targets, social situation), and higher demands on competence and capacity (individual and organisational), we have over the last years seen an emergence of alternative models in agricultural extension. In this respect, advisory services are called upon in new roles. However, conventional advisors encounter difficulties in taking over new roles and becoming professional coaches and facilitators.

Today's development of advisory services (agricultural extension) is quite radical. New societal and market challenges forces advisors to rethink much of what has been taken for granted earlier. The technological development gives rise to both new opportunities and challenges. In this sense advisors need to work both transformative (transcend the farmers visions of what is possible) as well as integrative (adapt their advice to the unique situation in which farmers live and act).

To be able to address these issues from the right angle we decided to map the overall attitudes among farmers towards advisory services using a questionnaire as a point of departure in our project "Learning and communication in Swedish Agriculture – Advisors role in bridging between research and practice". We wanted to know how well the advisory services fulfil the farmers needs and requirements. The hope was to be able to identify areas, such as disciplines and/or type of production where the advisory services are sufficient and up-to-date and where there are gaps and a need for improvement. To do this we decided to do a survey among farmers from all over Sweden across production types. The questionnaire was sent out to 2000 farmers.

The results show that the farmers that use advisory services to a large extent also are the ones most content with the services. Larger farms use a bigger range of advisory services and have a clearer aim for profitability. We can also see that the services provided varies across the country.

A questionnaire gives us an overall picture of the situation at the moment. But it can't provide depth and detail, therefor this study will continue using other methods interviews and focus-groups towards farmers. We will also direct our attention towards the advisors in the quest for a best practice in advisory services – what work and why?