Support for Farmers' Cooperatives

Country Report Estonia

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European Commission

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Country Report **Estonia**

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November 2012

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Preface and acknowledgements

In order to foster the competitiveness of the food supply chain, the European Commission is committed to promote and facilitate the restructuring and consolidation of the agricultural sector by encouraging the creation of voluntary agricultural producer organisations. To support the policy making process DG Agriculture and Rural Development has launched a large study, "Support for Farmers' Cooperatives (SFC)", that will provide insights on successful cooperatives and producer organisations as well as on effective support measures for these organisations. These insights can be used by farmers themselves, in setting up and strengthening their collective organisation, and by the European Commission in its effort to encourage the creation of agricultural producer organisations in the EU.

Within the framework of the SFC project this country report on the evolution of agricultural cooperatives in Estonia has been written.

Data collection for this report has been done in the summer of 2011.

In addition to this report, the project has delivered 26 other country reports, 8 sector reports, 33 case studies, 6 EU synthesis reports, a report on cluster analysis, a study on the development of agricultural cooperatives in other OECD countries, and a final report.

The Country Report Estonia is one of the country reports that have been coordinated by Konrad Hagedorn and Renate Judis, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. The following figure shows the five regional coordinators of the "Support for Farmers' Cooperatives" project.

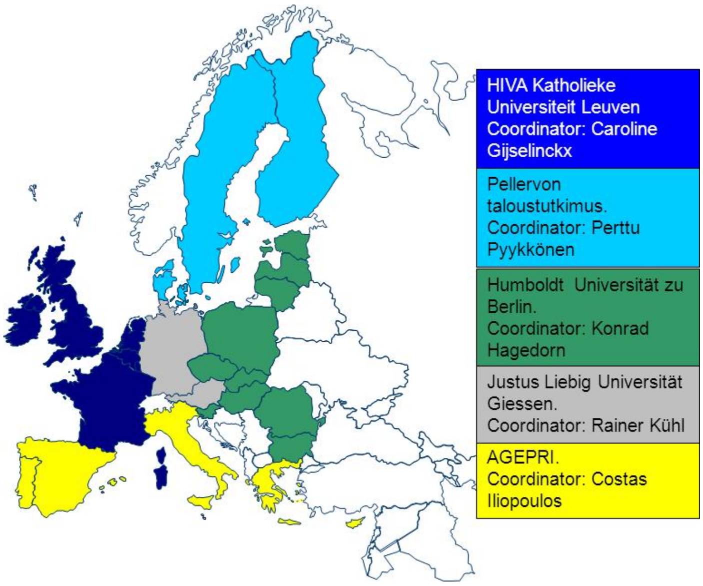

Table of contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Objective of the study

The imbalances in bargaining power between the contracting parties in the food supply chain have drawn much attention, also from policy makers. The European Commission is committed to facilitate the restructuring of the sector by encouraging the creation of voluntary agricultural producer organisations. DG Agriculture and Rural Development has launched a large study, "Support for Farmers' Cooperatives", that will provide the background knowledge that will help farmers organise themselves in cooperatives as a tool to consolidate their market orientation and so generate a solid market income. In the framework of this study, this report provides the relevant knowledge from Estonia.

In this context, the specific objectives of the project and this country report are the following:

First, to provide a comprehensive description of the current level of development of cooperatives and other forms of producer organisations in Estonia. The description presented in this report will pay special attention to the following drivers and constraints for the development of cooperatives:

- Economic and fiscal incentives or disincentives and other public support measures at regional and national levels;
- Legal aspects including those related to competition law and tax law;
- Historical, cultural and sociologically relevant aspects;
- The relationship between cooperatives/POs and the actors of the food chain;
- Internal governance of the cooperatives/POs.

Second, identify laws and regulations that enable or constrain cooperative development and third, to identify specific support measures and initiatives which have proved to be effective and efficient for promoting cooperatives and other forms of producer organisations in the agricultural sector in Estonia.

1.2 Analytical framework

There are at least three main factors that determine the success of cooperatives in current food chains. These factors relate to (a) position in the food supply chain, (b) internal governance, and (c) the institutional environment. The position of the cooperative in the food supply chain refers to the competitiveness of the cooperative vis-à-vis its customers, such as processors, wholesalers and retailers. The internal governance refers to its decision-making processes, the role of the different governing bodies, and the allocation of control rights to the management (and the agency problems that goes with delegation of decision rights). The institutional environment refers to the social, cultural, political and legal context in which the cooperative is operating, and which may have a supporting or constraining effect on the performance of the cooperative. Those three factors constitute the three building blocks of the analytical framework applied in this study (Figure 1).

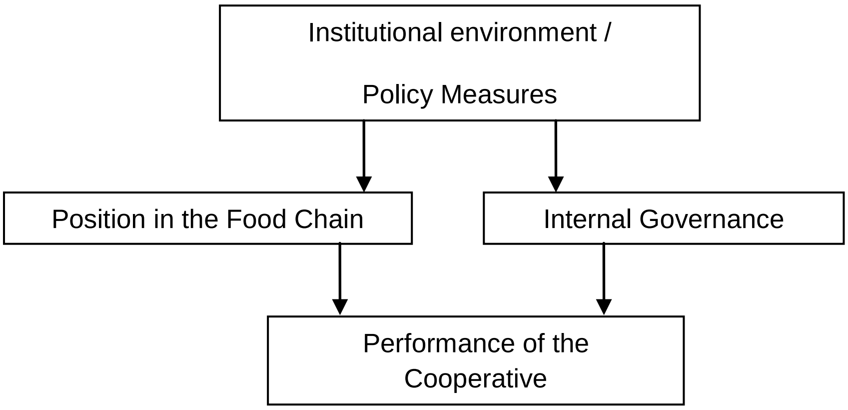

Figure 1. The core concepts of the study and their interrelatedness

1.3 Definition of the cooperative

In this study on cooperatives and policy measures we have used the following definition of cooperatives and Producer Organisations (POs). A cooperative/PO is an enterprise characterized by user-ownership, user-control and user-benefit:

- It is user-owned because the users of the services of the cooperative/PO also own the cooperative organisation; ownership means that the users are the main providers of the equity capital in the organisation;

- It is user-controlled because the users of the services of the cooperative/PO are also the ones that decide on the strategies and policies of the organisation;

- It is for user-benefit, because all the benefits of the cooperative are distributed to its users on the basis of their use; thus, individual benefit is in proportion to individual use.

This definition of cooperatives and POs (from now on shortened in the text as cooperatives) includes cooperatives of cooperatives and associations of producer organisation (often called federated or secondary cooperatives).

1.4 Method of data collection

Multiple sources of information have been used, such as databases, interviews, corporate documents, academic and trade journal articles. The databases used are Amadeus, FADN, Eurostat and a database from DG Agri on the producer organisations in the fruit and vegetable sector. Also data provided by Copa-Cogeca has been used. In addition, information on individual cooperatives has been collected by studying annual reports, other corporate publications and websites. Interviews have been conducted with representatives of national associations of cooperatives, managers and board members of individual cooperatives, and academic or professional experts on cooperatives.

1.5 Period under study

This report covers the period from 2000 to 2010 and presents the most up-to-date information. This refers to both the factual data that has been collected and the literature that has been reviewed.

2 Facts and figures on agriculture

2.1 Share of agriculture in the economy

A study of farmers' cooperatives can best start at the farmers' side, in agriculture. In 2007, the share of agriculture in the GDP in Estonia was 3% as compared to 5.2% in 1995 (Figure 2). The trend is logical due to similar developments at European and global scales. Nevertheless, the total capacity of Estonian agriculture at current prices has grown from 2.5 billion euro in 1995 to 13.8 billion euro in 2007.

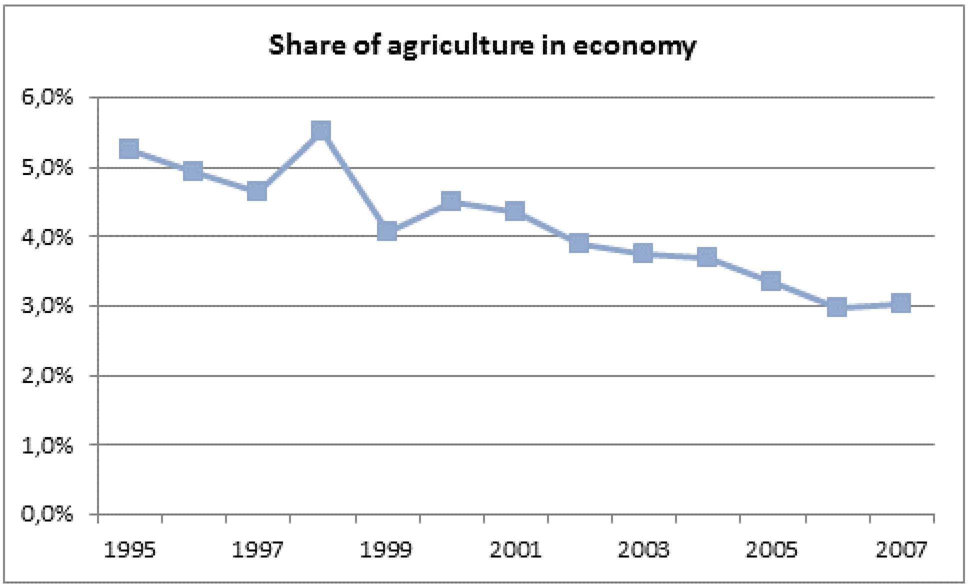

Figure 2. Share of agriculture in GDP. Source: Eurostat Nat. Accounts

2.2 Agricultural output per sector

Within agriculture several sectors exist. Figure 3 provides information on the main sectors in Estonia.

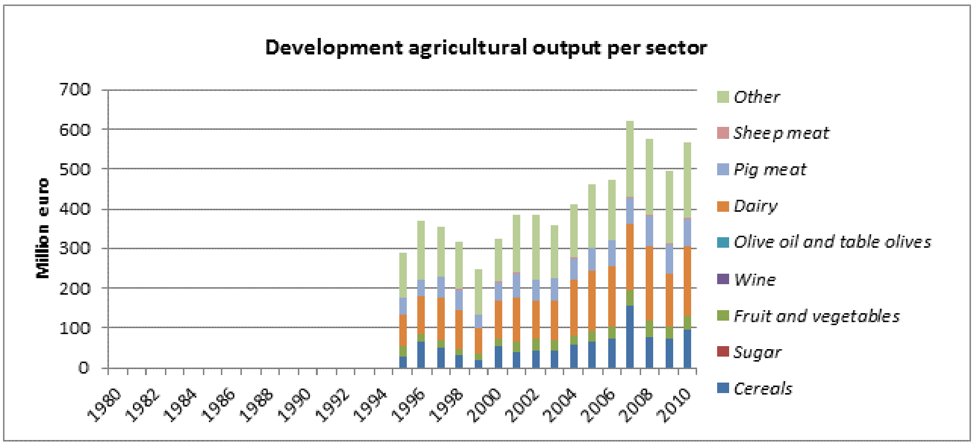

Figure 3. Development of the different sectors in agriculture, value of production at producer prices, in millions of Euro. Source: Agriculture Economic Accounts, Eurostat

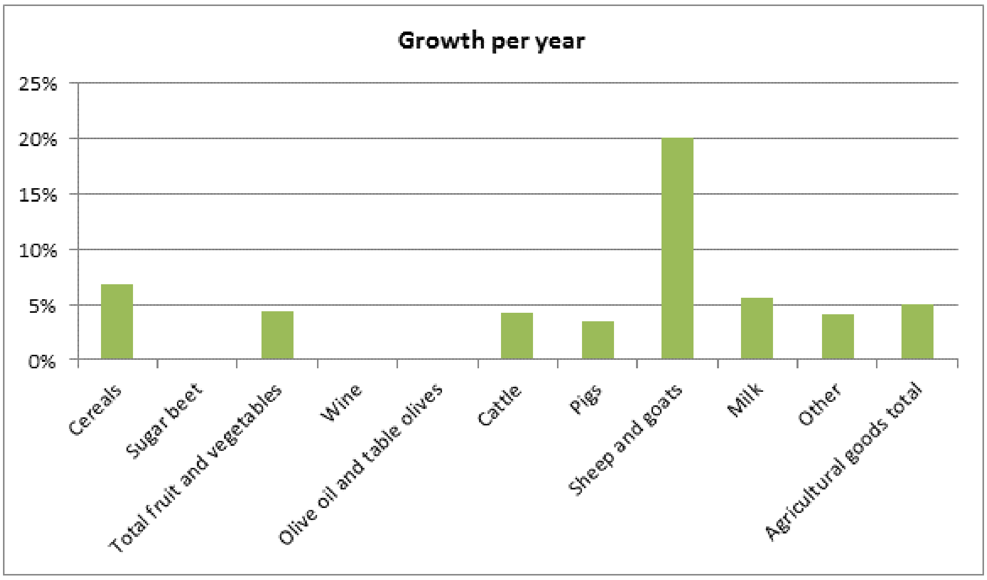

Figure 4. Trend in output per sector "2001" - "2009" Source: Economic Accounts of Agriculture, Eurostat.

2.3 Development in the number of farms

The number of farms in Estonia is given in Table 1 and Figure 5. Because there is no information available from 2000, 2003 is given as year of comparison.

Table 1. Number of farms

	2003	2007	% change per year (Average)
Cereals	1 680	1 990	IV.61
Sugar	3 130	2 210	-7,35
Pig meat	130	100	-5.77
Sheep meat	4 080	4 450	2.II
Total fruits and vegetables	640	650	0.39
horticulture	390	390	0.00
fruit and citrus fruit	250	260	1.00
Olive oil and table olives	0	0	0.00
Wine	0	0	0.00
Dairy	3 980	2 330	-10.36
Beef	160	140	-3.13

Source: Eurostat, Farm Structure Survey.

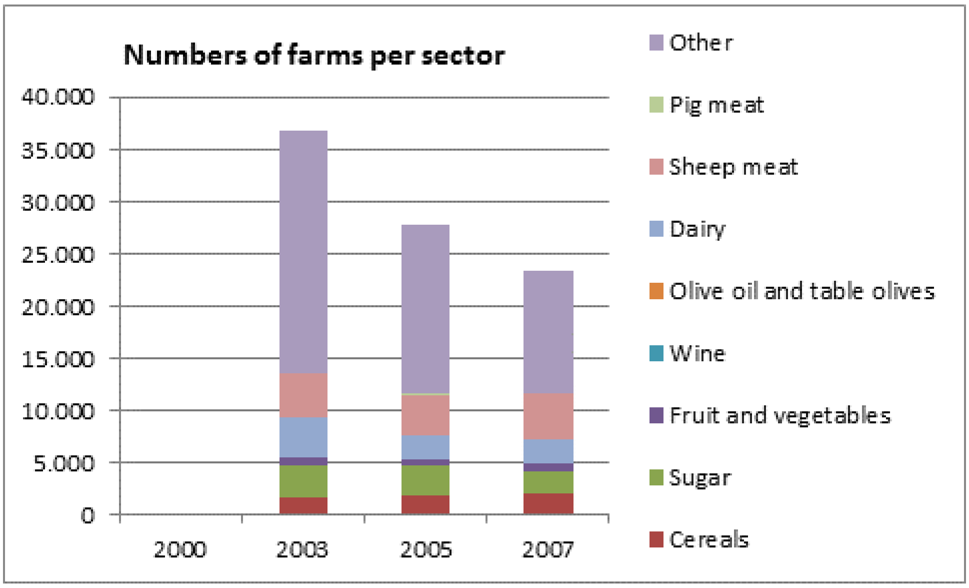

Figure 5. Number of farms 2000-2007 with data per specialist type of farming. Source: Eurostat, Farm Structure Survey.

2.4 Size of farms

Farms come in different sizes from small part-time farms to large-scale farms. Figure 6 shows the distribution of farms per size class, measured in European Size Units (ESU).

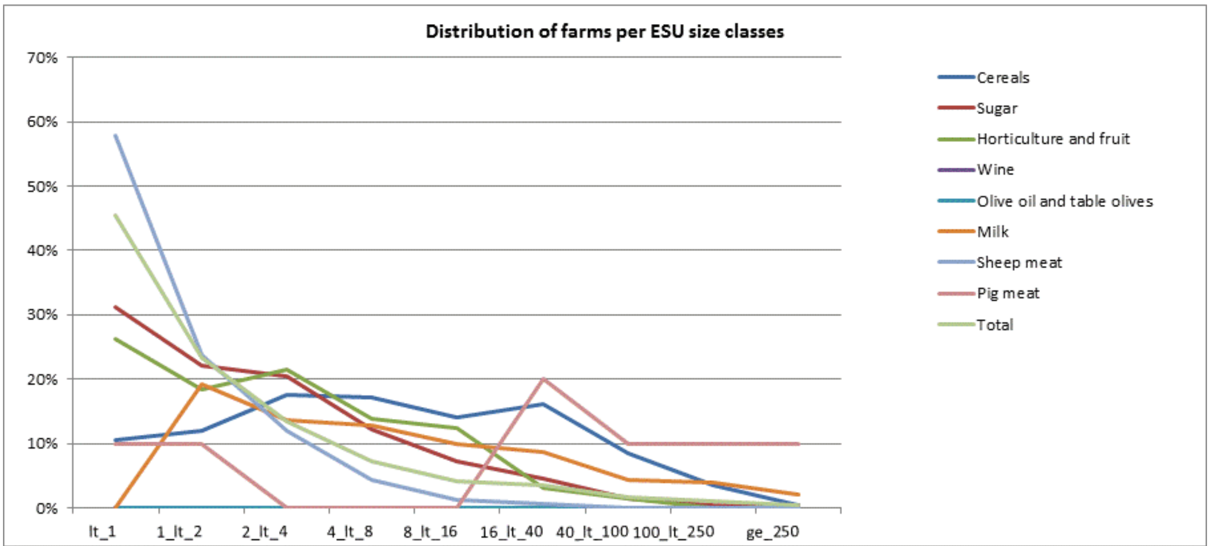

Figure 6. Number of farms per size class, measured in ESU, per specialist type of farming Source: Eurostat, Farm Structure Survey.

In Figure 6, the number of farms per size class and per specialist type of farming is given for the year 2007. Farms with size class Lt_1 are the smallest and farms with size class Ge_250 are the biggest ones. In many farm types there is a large number of very small farms, although also many larger farms exist. In pig farming there are relatively many larger operations.

2.5 Age of farmers: distribution of farms to age classes

The age of farmers differs. As seen in Figure 7, the age structure of Estonian farmers nearly corresponds to the avarage of the EU member states. A total of 25% of Estonian farmers are aged over 65 years, and 18 % are between 55 and 64 years. This might be problematic for the further development of the Estonian agriculture and could mean that the trend of declining numbers of farms continues. Hence, also the number of cooperatives and the members of cooperatives could continue to fall in the future.

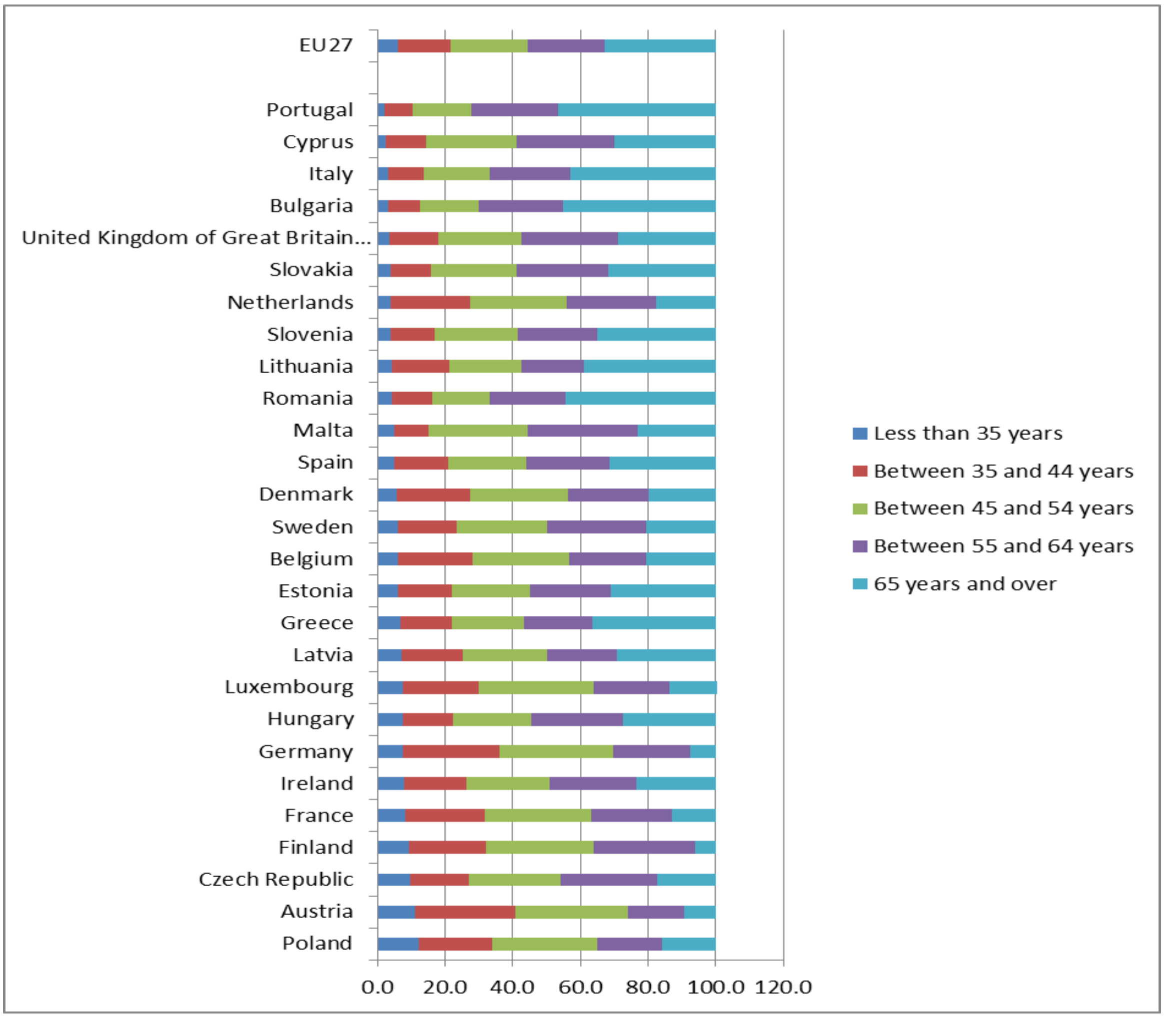

Figure 7. Percentage of farmers per age class, per EU27 Member State and EU27 in total, 2007 (ranked with countries with the lowest percentage of young farmers on top) Source: Eurostat, Farm Structure Survey.

2.6 Specialisation of farm production

Cooperatives might not only have member-farmers with different farm sizes or of different ages. Farms also have a different composition of their production and therefore their input. This is even true for specialist farms, where e.g. some so-called specialist dairy farmers also have beef or sheep or sell hay. In addition to that, a lot of mixed (non-specialized) farms exist. The heterogeneity of farming in terms of specialisation can be estimated by calculating the share that specialized farms have in the total production. This is what Figure 8 (split in 8A for plant production and 8B for animal production) shows.

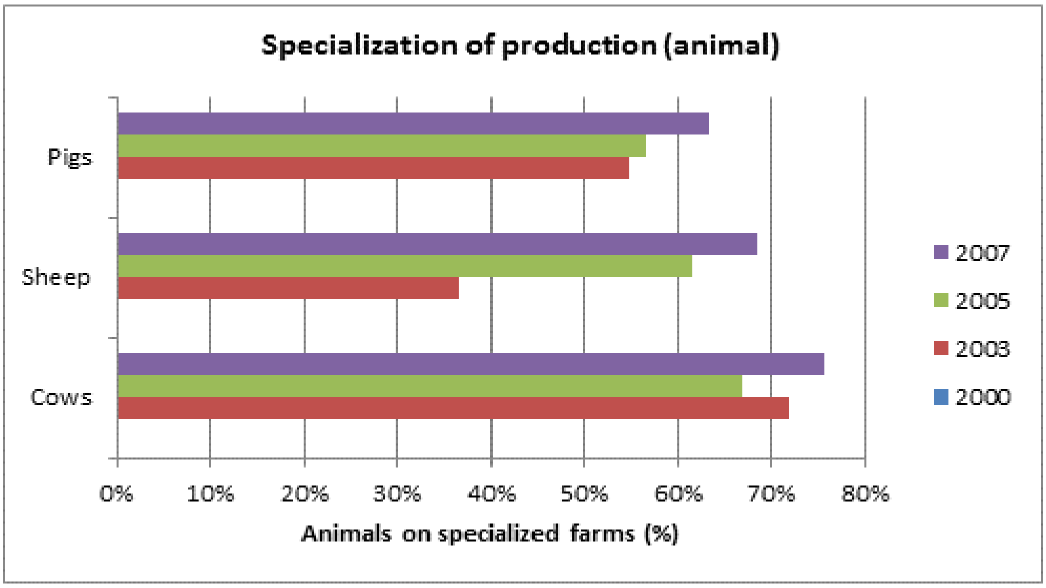

Figure 8 A & B. Heterogeneity in farm production: the share of specialist farm types in total production. Source: Economic Accounts of Agriculture, Eurostat.

As seen in Figures 8, the specialization of farms in Estonia is higher in animal production and lower in plant production. Nevertheless, over the years the specialization of farms has decreased both in animal and in plant production over all farm types.

2.7 Economic indicators of farms

The description of agriculture is concluded with some economic indicators (Table 2). These indicators focus on the net value added and income from farming for farmers as well as the level of their investment. Some of this investment might be in equity of the cooperatives but far the most will be in farm assets.

Table 2. Economic indicators for farms

Economic indicators average per farm (2006 - 2008)	Cereals	Sugar	Fruit and vegeta bles	Olive oil and table olive	Dairy	Wine	Pig meat	Sheep meat
Economic size-ESU	28.43	7.27	9.20	-	40.27	-	-	-
Total labour input-AWU	1.93	1.59	1.69	-	5.47	-	-	-
Total Utilised Agricult. Area-ha	194.89	54.06	10.69	-	188.88	-	-	-
Total output €	78 663	19 915	50 380	-	157 774	-	-	-
Farm Net Value Added €	35 195	9 445	15 104	-	60 908	-	-	-
Family Farm Income €	31 515	8 803	4 382	-	27 418	-	-	-
Total assets €	211 953	82 030	87 341	-	342 100	-	-	-
Net worth €	149 269	69 431	47 364	-	234 175	-	-	-
Gross Investment €	33 267	5 164	7 636	-	42 064	-	-	-
Net Investment €	20 054	1 832	3 842	-	24 497	-	-	-
Total subsidies-excl.investm. €	26 855	6 901	1 291	-	31 981	-	-	-
Farms represented	1 473	1 083	280	-	1 300	-	60	617
note: - less than 3 years available								

Source: DG Agri, FADN.

3 Evolution, position and performance of cooperatives

3.1. Types of cooperatives

Cooperatives as type of business are quite marginal phenomena in Estonia. However, this has not been so at all times. The modern cooperative movement is specific to a democratic capitalist society. For the first time in the world it had success as an uninterrupted and conscious mass movement in Great Britain in 1844, when Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers was founded. In Estonia, in 1802 the Private Credit Office was founded in Tallinn. On the one hand, it was a cooperative society of mortgage, but on the other hand, it was not quite a modern cooperative society; it was an exclusive association. And after all, there existed no democratic capitalist society at the beginning of the 19th century in Estonia; the economy was based on serfdom. It would be better to consider the year 1866 the beginning of the period of modern cooperation in Estonia. In 1866, first consumer cooperatives were set up by Baltic Germans in Tallinn, Tartu and Pärnu. The beginning of modern cooperation of native Estonians in Estonia was the year 1902, when Estonian Savings and Loan Cooperative was founded in Tartu. After the foundation of this first Estonian credit cooperative, different consumer cooperatives and production cooperatives were founded all over the country. The independence of the Republic of Estonia was declared on 24 February 1918. During the tsarist period of 1902-1917, farmer cooperatives developed fast. During the independence period of 1918-1940, the development of the cooperative sector was powerful: in 1939 the share of cooperative banking in the overall banking market was 51-52%, the share of cooperative insurance was 31-49%, the share of cooperative consuming 20-25%, the share of cooperative dairy 98%, the share of cooperative alcohol production 59-64%, the share of cooperative machine usage 25%, the share of cooperative seed production 75% of overall market of the specific sector. A total of 41% of Estonian agricultural export was performed through cooperatives. In 1939, cooperatives in Estonia had 283 768 members – this was 25% of total population.

Today, there are very few de facto acting cooperatives in Estonia. There are no insurance cooperatives and only 19 credit cooperatives with a market share of less than 1% of the overall banking market. There exist about 10 regional consumer cooperatives and one central consumer cooperative, which together have a share of one fifth in the Estonian retail market. There are 5-6 dairy cooperatives, 1 vegetable cooperative, 1 cereal cooperative, 1 pig meat cooperative and 1 animal breeding cooperative. There exist some farmer associations, but their activity is marginal as well as the market share of most cooperatives in Estonia.

In Estonia, all legal and private persons have the right to be members of different types of cooperatives (with few exceptions). A cooperative can also be a member of another cooperative. The diversity of functions and products are often close (single product cooperatives). The geographical scope of a cooperative is in many cases a national one due to the fact that in most sectors there exists only one single cooperative and other players in the sector are commercial organisations. All members have one vote irrespective of the amount of share capital invested into the cooperative in Estonia. All shareholders are members of a cooperative. The legal form of a cooperative is commercial association.

3.2. Market share of farmers‘ cooperatives in the food chain

Table 3. Market Share of Cooperatives

	2000		2010		Comments
Sector	Number of members	Market Share (%)	Number of members	Market Share (%)	
Cereals	70	7.7	146	10.0	In 2000 there existed several small cooperatives, in 2010 there is only one – Kevili.
Sugar	0	0	0	0	No cooperatives
Pig meat	138	17.7	12	0.8	In 2000 there existed several small cooperatives, in 2010 there is only one – Viru Lihaühistu
Sheep meat	0	0	0	0	No cooperatives
Fruit and vegetables	0	0	1	4.2	The only existing cooperative, Peipsiveere Köögiviljaühistu, has only 1 member.
Olive oil and table olives	0	0	0	0	No cooperatives
Dairy	3000	33.0	377	35.1	
Wine	0	0	0	0	No cooperatives
Animal breeding	900	100	1500	100	The only business in the field is the only cooperative – Eesti Tõuloomakasvatajate Ühistu

Sources: Annual reports 2000 and 2010 of Estonian farmers´ cooperatives; Database of Statistics Estonia.

3.3. List of top 50 largest farmers’ cooperatives

Table 4. The 9 largest farmers’ cooperatives in the food chain of Estonia

	Name of the Cooperative	Sector(s) involved in:
1	Piimandusühistu E-Piim (Dairy cooperative E-Piim)	Dairy
2	Kevili Põllumajandusühistu (Agricultural Cooperative Kevili)	Cereals
3	Eesti Tõuloomakasvatajate Ühistu (Estonian Animal Breeders´ Association)	Animal breeding
4	Rakvere Piimaühistu (Rakvere Dairy Cooperative)	Dairy
5	Tori-Selja Piimaühistu (Tori-Selja Dairy Cooperative)	Dairy
6	Tulundusühistu Mulgi Piim (Cooperative Mulgi Milk)	Dairy
7	Viru Lihaühistu (Viru Meat Cooperative)	Pig meat
8	Saaremaa Piimaühistu (Saarema Dairy Cooperative)	Dairy
9	Peipsiveere Köögiviljaühistu (Peipsiveere Vegetables´ Cooperative)	Fruit and vegetables

Source: Author’s own data.

There are only 9 acting farmers´ cooperatives in Estonia as seen in Table 4. Additionally, as brought out earlier in the study, there are about 20 credit cooperatives and about 10 000 housing cooperatives, but these are not subject of the research as they are not exclusively farmers' cooperatives.

3.4. List of top 5 largest farmers' cooperatives per sector

Table 5. Most important cooperatives in the sectors studied in this project

Sector		Name of Cooperative
Cereals	1	Kevili Põllumajandusühistu (Agricultural Cooperative Kevili)
Fruit and vegetables	1	Peipsiveere Köögiviljaühistu (Peipsiveere Vegetables´ Cooperative)
Dairy	1	Piimandusühistu E-Piim (Dairy cooperative E-Piim)
	2	Rakvere Piimaühistu (Rakvere Dairy Cooperative)
	3	Tori-Selja Piimaühistu (Tori-Selja Dairy Cooperative)
	4	Tulundusühistu Mulgi Piim (Cooperative Mulgi Milk)
	5	Saaremaa Piimaühistu (Saarema Dairy Cooperative)
Pig meat	1	Viru Lihaühistu (Viru Meat Cooperative)

Source: Author's own data.

There are only 5 acting dairy cooperatives, 1 cereal cooperative, 1 vegetable cooperative and 1 pig meat cooperative in Estonia, as seen in Table 5.

3.5. Transnational cooperatives

Many cooperatives are active internationally. In most cases, the foreign activities of cooperatives are limited to marketing, trade and sales. Usually, they neither buy agricultural products from farmers nor supply inputs to them. However, there is a growing group of cooperatives that do business with farmers in other EU Member States. These cooperatives are called international cooperatives. They can be marketing cooperatives that buy from farmers in different countries, or they could be supply cooperatives that sell inputs to farmers in different countries. One particular group of international cooperatives is the so-called transnational cooperatives. These cooperatives do not just contract with farmers to buy their products or to sell them inputs, they actually have a membership relationship with those supplying or purchasing farmers. To sum it up, a transnational cooperative has members in more than one country.

There are no transnational cooperatives acting in Estonia. There are some international cooperatives which do not accept Estonian farmers as their members. Interacting with Estonian farmers these international cooperatives operate as any other non-cooperative business entity which aim is to maximize their profits.

Table 6 below presents the foreign international cooperatives active in Estonia. These are cooperatives from other EU Member States that have come to Estonia to directly trade with farmers as contractual customers.

Table 6. The foreign international cooperatives that are trading with farmers in Estonia

Name of the Cooperative	Mother country	Sector(s) involved in:
Internationals		
Valio Oy (subcompany Valio Eesti AS)	FIN	Dairy
Atria Oy (subcompany Eesti AS)	FIN	Meat
Scandinavian Farmers	SWE/DAN	Cereals

Source: Author's own data.

Table 7. The international cooperatives from Estonia that are trading with farmers in other countries

Name of the Cooperative	Host countries	Sector(s) involved in:
Internationals		
Piimandusühistu E-Piim (Dairy cooperative E-Piim)	Russia	Dairy

Source: Author's own data.

Table 7 above presents the only international cooperative Piimandusühistu E-Piim that has its headquarters in Estonia. There are no transnational cooperatives that have their headquarters in Estonia. Piimandusühistu E-Piim has gone international by doing business with non-member farmers in Russia.

4 Description of the evolution and position of individual cooperatives.

4.1 Data gathering per cooperative

Multiple sources of information have been used, such as Estonian Statistics databases, interviews with farmers and representatives of cooperatives, annual reports and public webpages of cooperatives, academic and trade journal articles, to conduct the study. As there are only 9 acting farmers´ cooperatives in Estonia, the data gathered is highly representative and statisticaly relevant.

4.2 Position in the food chain

There has been only very little development in position of Estonian cooperatives in the food chain. The strongest and the most outstanding farmers´ cooperative in Estonia is Piimandusühistu E-Piim. Its activity in 2000 was relevant in providing market, collective bargaining, collecting farm products, primary processing, secondary processing, marketing commodities, marketing branded products as well as integration of supplying inputs and processing and marketing of farm products. Today, Piimandusühistu E-Piim is a considerable market participant and its activity in 2010 was most relevant in collective bargaining, collecting farm products, secondary processing, marketing commodities and marketing branded products. In providing market, primary processing and in integration of supplying inputs and processing and marketing of farm products, its activity in 2010 has maintained the same position as in 2000. Neither in 2000 nor in 2010, Piimandusühistu E-Piim did not have a relevant position in wholesaling or retailing.

Other farmers´cooperatives have had no relevant position in secondary processing, marketing commodities, marketing branded products, wholesaling, retailing, and in the integration of supplying inputs and processing and marketing of farm products during the period 2000-2010.

The other quite strong and outstanding farmers´ cooperative is Kevili Põllumajand-usühistu, the only cereal cooperative in Estonia. Kevili Põllumajandusühistu was established on 12 April 2005. Hence, the cooperative did not have any position in food chain in 2000, but it has achieved relevant position in providing market, collective bargaining, collecting farm products and primary processing for 2010.

Despite the fact that Viru Lihaühistu, the only pig meat cooperative in Estonia, had been established before year 2000 (10 July 1998), it did not gain any relevant position in any part of the food chain by 2000 or by 2010.

Peipsiveere Köögiviljaühistu, the only vegetables cooperative, was established on 19 October 2005, but it also did not gain any position in any part of the food chain by 2010.

Saaremaa Piimaühistu (Saaremaa Dairy Cooperative) had no position in any part of the food chain in 2000 or 2010. Other dairy cooperatives (Tori-Selja Piimaühistu and Tulundusühistu Mulgi Piim) have maintained their relevant position in providing market, collective bargaining and collecting farm products over the period 200-2010.

All farmers´ cooperatives in Estonia use cost leadership as their most relevant marketing strategy. Only Piimandusühistu E-Piim uses differentiation as its marketing stategy.

4.3 Institutional environment

The activity of the most outstanding farmers´ cooperative in Estonia, Piimandusühistu E-Piim, dates back to the year 1910 when its predecessor was established. Other dairy cooperatives are much younger. Saaremaa Piimaühistu was established in 1996, Rakevere Piimaühistu and Tori-

Selja Piimaühistu both in 1997 and Tulundusühistu Mulgi Piim in 2000. Viru Lihaühistu, the only pig meat cooperative in Estonia, was founded 1998. Kevili Põllumajandusühistu and Peipsiveere Köögiviljaühistu were both founded in 2005. There were much more farmers´ cooperatives operating during the period 2000-2010 and also earlier, but mostly they have not managed to remain in operation.

The number of members of Estonian farmers´ cooperatives has sharply decreased during the period of 2000-2010 as shown in Table 3. Table 8 shows the number of members of the observed farmers´ cooperatives in 2010.

Table 8. Number of members of farmers' cooperatives of Estonia in 2010

	Name of the Cooperative	Number of members
1	Piimandusühistu E-Piim (Dairy cooperative E-Piim)	260
2	Kevili Põllumajandusühistu (Agricultural Cooperative Kevili)	146
3	Rakvere Piimaühistu (Rakvere Dairy Cooperative)	20
4	Tori-Selja Piimaühistu (Tori-Selja Dairy Cooperative)	27
5	Tulundusühistu Mulgi Piim (Cooperative Mulgi Milk)	62
6	Viru Lihaühistu (Viru Meat Cooperative)	12
7	Saaremaa Piimaühistu (Saarema Dairy Cooperative)	8
8	Peipsiveere Köögiviljaühistu (Peipsiveere Vegetables´ Cooperative)	1

Source: Annual reports 2010 of Estonian farmers´ cooperatives; author's own data.

4.4 Internal Governance

All observed farmers´ cooperatives in Estonia are one legal person by its legal structures. Additionally, Piimandusühistu E-Piim owns several subsidiaries. Only Rakvere Piimaühistu, Tori-Selja Piimaühistu and Saaremaa Piimaühistu function as holding.

The Board of Directors (BoD) is the main decision-making body of the cooperative. In most of the observed cooperatives also non-members, so called professionals, can be members of the BoD. Only Saaremaa Piimaühistu and Tulundusühistu Mulgi Piim accept only cooperative members to become members of the BoD. The number of board members varies from 1 to 8 members which does not depend on the size of the cooperative but rather results from different agreements among members of different cooperatives. As traditions of different cooperatives are different, the structure of the board varies also. Here we can say that cooperatives which have relatively big number of members have also a Supervisory Committee additionally to the BoD. These cooperatives are Piimandusühistu E-Piim, Tori-Selja Piimaühistu, Saaremaa Piimaühistu and Kevili Põllumajandusühistu. In these cooperatives the BoD is elected by the Supervisory Committee. In cooperatives which do not have a Supervisory Committee, the BoD is elected by the General Meeting according to discretion of members attending on the General Meeting and personal expertise of candidates. There is no maximum number of years of BoD membership.

In all observed cooperatives, the BoD is in charge of operational management and if a cooperative has a Supervisory Committee, it only has the function to monitor the activity of the BoD.

In the General Meeting (General Assembly) every member has one vote. Two out of eight observed cooperatives traded also with non-member farmers: Piimandusühistu E-Piim (non-members trade 35%) and Tulundusühistu Mulgi Piim (15%). According to Estonian law, members do not have the legal obligation to deliver their products to the cooperative. The average specialization of member farmers is rather medium. In seven of the observed cooperatives, there is no formal grouping of members. The only exemption is Piimandusühistu E-Piim, which group its members on a regional basis.

In five out of eight cooperatives, members with large volumes of trade with the cooperative get a premium. All these cooperatives also apply a differentiated cost policy: In most cases the members with high volumes and long history of trade with the cooperative get better prices.

A survey among the studied cooperatives revealed that the problem on non-active members is marginal and they do not influence the decision-making process.

4.5 Performance of the cooperatives

The analysis of the performance of observed cooperatives showed that the turnover of 5 cooperatives had improved in 2010 as compared to 2000. The performance of 3 cooperatives had worsened during that period. When we study balance total of observed cooperatives in 2000 and 2010, the picture is about the same. The situation is shown in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9. Turnover of farmers' cooperatives in Estonia in 2000 and in 2010 (thousand Euros)

Name of the Cooperative (Sector)	Turnover 2000*	Turnover 2010
Piimandusühistu E-Piim (Dairy)	13 809	32 510
Kevili Põllumajandusühistu (Cereals)	3 076	13 260
Rakvere Piimaühistu (Dairy)	0	8 871
Tori-Selja Piimaühistu (Dairy)	2 275	3 446
Tulundusühistu Mulgi Piim (Dairy)	2 090	2 080
Viru Lihaühistu (Pig meat)	5 932	658
Saaremaa Piimaühistu (Dairy)	36 559	18 675
Peipsiveere Köögiviljaühistu (Fruit and vegetables)	502	9 996

*Kevili Põllumajandusühistu´s data from 2006, Peipsiveere Köögilivjaühistu´s data from 2005. Source: Annual reports 2000 and 2010 of Estonian farmers´ cooperatives; author's own data.

Table 10. Balance total of farmers' cooperatives in Estonia in 2000 and in 2010 (thousand Euros)

Name of the Cooperative (Sector)	Turnover 2000*	Turnover 2010
Piimandusühistu E-Piim (Dairy)	5 128	22 232
Kevili Põllumajandusühistu (Cereals)	159	3 848
Rakvere Piimaühistu (Dairy)	94	1 009
Tori-Selja Piimaühistu (Dairy)	681	1 118
Tulundusühistu Mulgi Piim (Dairy)	249	488
Viru Lihaühistu (Pig meat)	547	67
Saaremaa Piimaühistu (Dairy)	721	4 544
Peipsiveere Köögiviljaühistu (Fruit and vegetables)	3557	10 783

*Kevili Põllumajandusühistu´s data from 2006, Peipsiveere Köögilivjaühistu´s data from 2005.
Source: Annual reports 2000 and 2010 of Estonian farmers´ cooperatives; author's own data.

When we compare the leverage ratio (debt capital / equity capital) 2000 and 2010, it can be said that the cereal cooperative Kevili Põllumajandusühistu and two dairy cooperatives Rakvere Piimaühistu and Tori-Selja Piimaühistu have sharply increased debt capital proportion in their total balance. Two cooperatives, Saaremaa Piimaühistu and Peipsiveere Köögiviljaühistu, do not have any debt capital at all and 3 cooperatives, Piimandusühistu E-Piim, Tulundusühistu Mulgi Piim and Viru Lihaühistu have decreased their debt capital proportion. The situation is shown in Figure 9.

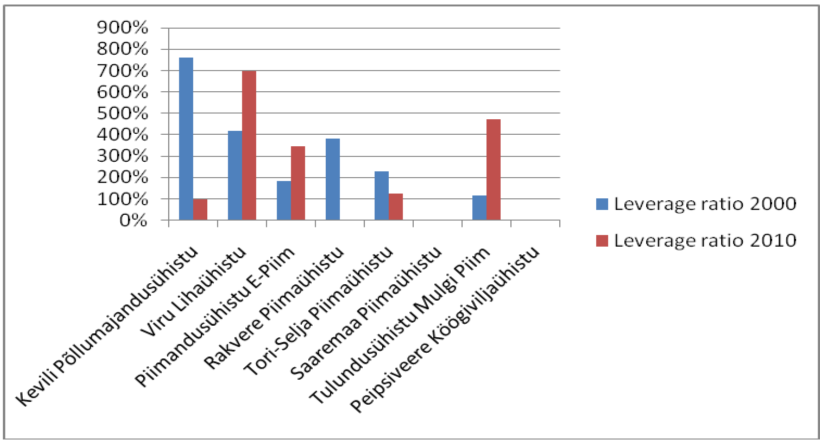

Figure 9. Leverage ratio of farmers´ cooperatives of Estonia in 2000* and 2010.
*Kevili Põllumajandusühistu´s data from 2006, Peipsiveere Köögilivjaühistu´s data from 2005.
Source: Annual reports 2000 and 2010 of Estonian farmers´ cooperatives; author's own data.

Some information can also be obtained from Figure 10, which shows the share of individualized equity capital in the total equity capital. In 7 cooperatives out of 8, individualized equity capital is below 40% of the total equity. This shows that these cooperatives have performed long time and raised equity capital at the expense of annual profits. Only one cooperative, Viru Lihaühistu, has individualized equity capital of 99% of the total equity. But as also shown in Tables 9 and 10, Viru Lihaühistu´s performance decreased sharply during the period 2000-2010.

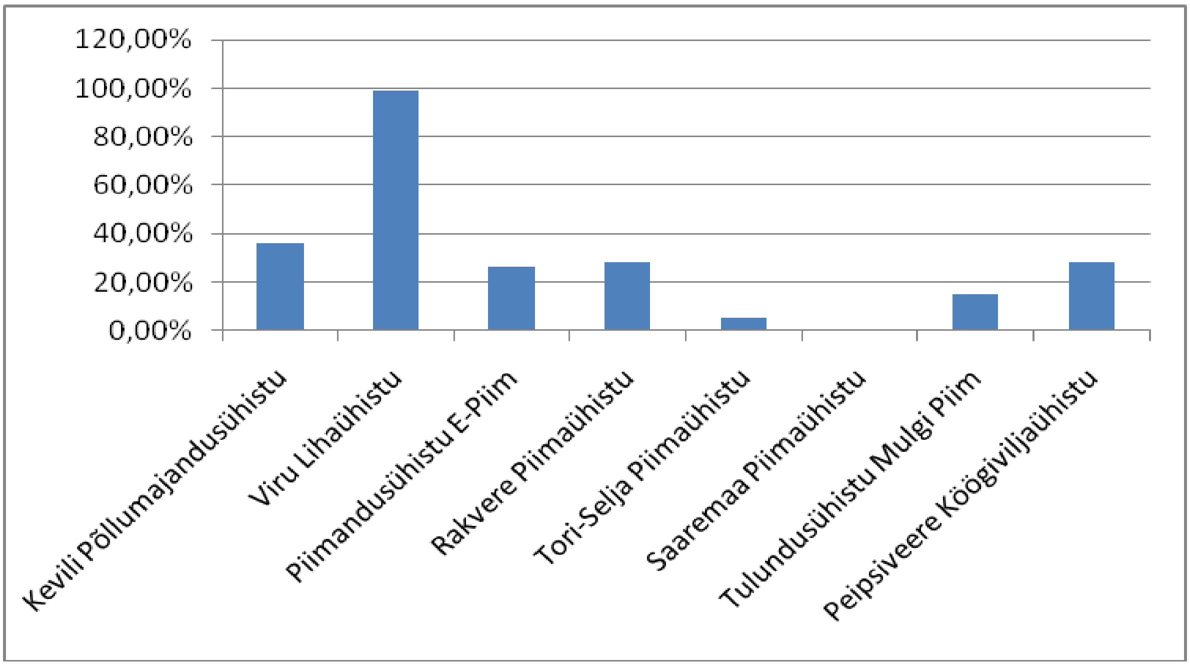

Figure 10 Individualized equity capital (% of total equity capital) 2010. Source: Annual reports 2010 of Estonian farmers´ cooperatives; author's own data.

5 Sector analysis

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter we discuss the developments in the eight sectors that are central in this study. We report on trends in the markets, important changes in (agricultural) policy and we try to link this to the strategies and performance of the investor-owned firms and cooperatives in the sector. The period of observation is 2000 – 2010.

5.2 Cereals

The cereal sector is the third important sector of agricultural production in Estonia. The structure of cereals and cereals processing industry has undergone restructuring during the period of 2000-2010. The share of cooperatives (there is only one serious cooperative – Kevili Põllumajandusühistu) is small and has decreased a little bit during the period 2000-2010. It was 7.7% in 2000 and 10.0% in 2010 of the total market share of the cereals industry. Nevertheless, unlike other agricultural cooperatives, the number of members has grown in the cooperative from 70 to 146. Table 11 gives an overview about production capacity and prices. In absolute numbers, the total cereal production increased from 696.6 thousand tons in 2000 to 883.5 thousand tons in 2010. The share of wheat has doubled while the production of barley remained almost constant. The production of other grain crops sharply decreased. Also the prices of raw cereals have not increased remarkably (about 6%), while inflation has been over 50% over the last decade. This has put cereal producers and their cooperative under great pressure.

Table 11. Production capacity (thousand tons) and price per ton in Estonia in 2000 and 2010.

	2000	2010	2000
Type of Grain	Capacity	Price	Capacity
Rye	60.8	85.55	40.7
Wheat	146.8	107.18	349.5
Barley	347.5	114.72	364.0
Oats	117.1	105.1	96.3
Other	24.40	-	33.0

Source: Teraviljaturu ülevaade 2000; Teraviljaturu ülevaade 2010; author's own data.

5.3 Fruit and vegetables

The fruit and vegetables sector is marginal in Estonia. There existed 18 companies in this field in 2010. One of these companies was the only Estonian fruit and vegetables cooperative Peipsiveere Köögiviljaühistu. In 2000, a total of 25 companies had been active in that business. The main activities of the companies of the sector are peeling, production of chips, potato flour or powder, fruit and vegetables´ jam, preparation and packaging of fresh and frozen products.

The economic crisis has diminished the capacity of the sector and also profits of the companies. The main factors of decrease have been insufficient demand both in the foreign and home markets, increasing unemployment and decreasing wages. The total production amounted to 46.89 million euro in 2008. In 2010, it had fallen to 31.53 million euro, which, however, was still 188% larger than in 2000 (16.27 million euro). The share of the capacity of the sector in the total capacity of the manufacturing industry was 0.7% of the GDP and decreased to 0.2% in 2010.

5.4 Dairy

The dairy sector is the most important sector of agricultural production in Estonia. The structure of the milk processing industry has undergone restructuring during the period of 2000-2010. Milk processing industry is also the only industry in Estonia, where agricultural cooperatives play a significant role. About 1/3 of dairy industry has been cooperative during 2000-2010 in Estonia.

Accession to the EU and the accompanying harmonization of legislation has influenced the development of the Estonian dairy sector. The limited supply of raw milk has created competition among the dairies, and during 2000-2010 numerous small dairies were liquidated or merged with bigger ones. There existed 41 dairies in 2000, but only 29 in 2010. Changes in consumer preferences have been driving processors to produce higher quality and value added products.

Estonian milk production totalled 646 000 tons in 2010. It was 4.5% (676 000 tons) lower than in 2009 and 5.4% (683 000 tons) lower than in 2000. The price of raw milk was 268.43 euro per ton in 2010. This was 44.8% higher than in 2000 (185.34 euro per ton). Still, real prices have dropped, as the total inflation rate of the period 2000-2010 was 50.6%.

5.5 Sheep meat

The sheep meat sector is microscopic in Estonia. There exist no serious cooperatives in this field in the country and also no slaughterhouse taking sheep meat from farmers for processing due to the fact that processable amounts are small. There are about 100 000 sheep in Estonia and meat is processed exclusively on the farms for private purposes.

In 2000, sheep meat production made up 0.5% of the Estonian total meat production– it was 300 tons. In 2010, the market share in total production was 0.4% with 200 tons produced. The price of raw sheep meat was 1830.43 euro per ton in 2000 and rose to 2300.82 euro per ton in 2010. Although nominal prices of raw meat increased by 25.70% during the observed period, the real prices dropped.

5.6 Pig meat

The pig meat sector is the second important sector of agricultural production after dairy production in Estonia. The structure of pig meat production industry has undergone restructuring during the period of 2000-2010. As shown in Table 3, during the period of 2000-2010 only one cooperative, Viru Lihaühistu, had been active in the pig meat sector. In 2000, Viru Lihaühistu had 138 members and market share of 17.7%. Up to 2010, the number of members decreased to currently 12 members and the market share of Viru Lihaühistu declined to 0.8%. There were tens of pig meat processors in Estonia in 2000, while by 2010, the market of pig meat production had undergone a great concentration process. This kind of trend arose after accession to the EU.

Pig meat production made 50% of Estonian total meat production in 2000 – it was 30 300 tons. Estonian pig meat production covered 70% of pig meat consumption in Estonia. In 2010, pig meat production was still the biggest meat production subsector and it made 59% of total production – 31 300 tons.

The price of raw pig meat was 1399.67 euro per ton in 2000 and 1633.36 euro per ton in 2010 – an increase by 16.70%. However, real prices have dropped sharply as the inflation rate of the period 2000-2010 has totalled 50.6%.

6 Overview of policy measures

6.1 Regulatory framework

The performance of cooperatives (including producer organisations) is influenced by the regulatory framework in a country. This framework is multi-level: EU regulations, national laws and – in some countries – even regional policies influence the way cooperatives can operate. In this chapter we look especially at the regulatory framework that influences the competitive position of the cooperative versus the investor-owned firm (IOF) or the competitive position of the cooperative versus other players in the food chain (e.g. the retail sector).

These competitive positions are influenced within the regulatory framework by much more than the law that establishes the rules for running a cooperative (business organisation law). Well known other examples include agricultural policy (e.g. the EU's common market organisation that deals with producer organisations in the fruit and vegetables sector), fiscal policies (at the level of the cooperative and the way returns on investments in cooperatives are taxed at farm level) and competition policies. There are different types of policy measures in the regulatory framework (McDonnell and Elmore (1987):

POLICY MEASURE TYPE	DEFINITION
Mandates	Rules governing the actions of individuals and agencies
Inducements	Transfer money to individuals in return for certain actions
Capacity Building	Spending of time and money for the purpose of investment in material, intellectual, or human resources (this includes research, speeches, extension, etc.)
System Changing	Transfer official authority (rather than money) among individuals and agencies in order to alter the system by which public goods and services are delivered

The objective of this project / report is to identify support measures that have proved to be useful to support farmers' cooperatives. In section 5.2 the relevant policy measures and their potential impact in Estonia are identified. In section 5.3 a number of other legal issues are addressed.

6.2 Policy measures

The table below identifies the policy measures that influence the competitive position of the cooperative versus the investor-owned firm (IOF) or the competitive position of the cooperative versus other players in the food chain (e.g. the retail sector). There are only 2 policy measures which are specially directed to farmers´ cooperatives in Estonia. These measures have very little impact as sums of support are small. Nevertheless, the measures with expert comment are outlined in Table 12.

Table 12. Policy Measure Description

Policy Measure Name	Policy Measure Type	Regulatory Objective	Policy target	Expert comment on effects on development of the cooperative
Farmers' support for joint information activities (applied through Rural Development Foundation of Estonia)	**Mandate** - Agricultural Market Act §64 and 66 - EC Regulation no 1857/2006 **Inducement** - Financial (100% per project, maximum 19 173 Euros per cooperative) **Capacity Building** - Consulting, training, knowledge	Spreading information about positive aspects of cooperation among current and potential members, partners and customers of a cooperative	Agricultural cooperatives, which have at least 5 members from 3 counties, with turnover over 256 000 Euros and has no tax liabilities	- The measure does not make cooperative´s position better in food chain, as it is relatively small. - The impact of the measure on internal governance of a cooperative is weak. - The measure does not have impact on institutional environment.
Support for starting and developing producer group	**Mandate** - Rural Development Plan of Estonia **Inducement** - Financial (maximum 309 999,93 Euros which will be allocated between cooperatives applied for support according to the decision of Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board) **Capacity Building** - Starting and developing producer groups	Promoting agricultural producers to start or develop a cooperative to induce joint marketing and improvement of product quality	Agricultural cooperative which is approved by Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board	- The measure improves beneficiary´s position in food chain a little bit, but the sum is too little for large scale changes. - The impact of the measure on internal governance of a cooperative is weak. - The measure does not have impact on institutional environment.

Source: Webpage of Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board; Webpage of Rural Development Foundation of Estonia.

6.3 Other legal issues

The Law of Commercial Association was enacted on Feb 1st, 2002. Before that, the legal field of cooperatives was regulated by the Commercial Code. Taking a general view on the Estonian organizational law aspects, it has to be said that, according to the Commercial Code, several legal business forms are available for farmers to organize themselves into producer organizations. These are: cooperative (commercial association), private limited company, public limited company, general partnership, limited partnership and non-profit association. The most frequently used legal form in Estonia is private limited company, but sometimes also non-profit association or commercial association. The law in Estonia does not stimulate the use of a specific legal business form for farmers to organize themselves. The Estonian law also allows cooperatives to own subsidiaries without any restrictions.

Initial costs of setting up the legal business form in Estonia is about 300 euro, it also includes the formation of a cooperative and this sum includes state duty, notary fee and consultation cost. After registering a cooperative, there will be no special costs of maintaining the legal business form. The minimum share capital incorporators of a cooperative have to pay is 2556 EUR in total. Entrance fees and the size of individual share are set by the bylaw of a cooperative. According to law, only members can raise equity. Each cooperative has to have at least 5 incorporators, they can be legal or private persons. If a cooperative is founded by other cooperatives, then the minimum number of incorporators is 3.

The Estonian Law of Commercial Association does not allow to depart from the principle „one man, one vote". It is also prohibited to give voting rights to non-members. The law allows to set specific requirements with the bylaw to be met on the admission of members. For instance, it is possible to enact the obligation to pay an extra entrance fee or extra share additionally to minimum requirements, also the circle of potential members can be set, etc. There are no legal restrictions with regard to the possibility to accept members from other EU Member States.

According to the law, the Board of Directors and General Meeting are mandatory corporate bodies in Estonian cooperatives. The overall corporate governance structure of cooperatives in Estonia is flexible enough. The legal tools for members to effectively influence the decision-making process in a cooperative are attending and voting on the General Meeting. The legal requirements for the composition of the BoD are flexible – the BoD can totally consist of non-members. The same is with the Supervisory Committee. The institution of Supervisory Committee is not mandatory, but if the institution exists, the members of the committee are elected in the General Meeting and members of the BoD by the Supervisory Committee. If not, then the BoD members are elected directly on General Meeting. The responsible institutions (e.g. General Meeting or Supervisory Committee) can dismiss and appoint new members to the BoD without any restrictions by their own will.

For raising equity of Estonian cooperatives the following legal methods are allowed: contribution to share capital through a bank transfer, contribution to share capital through handing over capital assets to the cooperative, reservation of net proceeds in general reserve (bonus issue). The most commonly used instrument here is bonus issue. Analyzing the rules on the distribution of profits, it has to be pointed out that members can get payments from profit according to the bylaw of the commercial association. Profit distribution will always be decided in the General Meeting of a cooperative. Hence, the rules set by law can be considered flexible. Still, Estonian law does not allow non-members participation in the equity capital – this fact can be restrictive in the case of the need to engage equity capital in the situation when members or potential members cannot participate in this.

The Law of Commercial Association allows restrictions on exit of members from a cooperative. Such restrictions can be established by the bylaw. Maximum time of restricting the exit of a member is 5 years. It is also possible to enact other restrictions, but the law stresses that these restrictions have to be reasonable. This kind of order is reasonable and fair, yet flexible enough. In reality, there have been no problems in connection to the order of exit.

The law also provides quite effective tools for cooperatives to reorganize. This can be done through legal mergers or by setting up a central cooperative (ordinary cooperative by legal business form, but its members are other cooperatives). It is not possible for a cooperative to reorganize itself to other business form (e.g. private limited company, public limited company etc). Reorganisation of cooperatives is not effected by rules on employee involvement or by rules of tax law.

In Estonia, the same laws apply to the legal business form of the cooperative like to other forms of business. There are no remarkable provisions and also no remarkable restrictions in the tax law fostering or promoting the activity of cooperatives. In the theoretical case of existence of members from other member states of a transnational cooperative, there are no problems with regard to taxation. The question of overall tax burden is complicated, but the burden of taxation in the case of cooperatives is of the same size as that in the case of other business forms. During the period of 2000-2010, there had been no relevant developments or remarkable changes in the tax law concerning cooperatives.

Cooperatives in Estonia are subject to competition law regulations on the same footing as investor-owned firms and there are no general exemptions especially formulated for cooperatives. Actually, there are no cooperatives with a dominant market share that would have legal relevance for the application of EU or national competition law in Estonia. There do not exist any rules or conditions in the competition law of Estonia which would deal with withdrawal of membership. There have also been no relevant developments in and changes of the regulation of cooperatives since January 1st, 2000 with regard to the competition law.

7 Assessment of developments and role of policy measures

This chapter provides a concluding assessment on the development of cooperatives in Estonia. In chapter 2 the basic statistics on agriculture and farmers' cooperatives were provided. In chapter 3 data on individual cooperatives were reported, especially concerning their internal governance, their position in the food chain and the institutional environment in which they operate.

This led to some first impressions in section 3.5 on the performance of cooperatives in Estonia in relation to their internal governance, institutional environment and position in the food chain.

In chapter 4 the data gathering and analysis was broadened by looking at the differences between the sectors and the influence of sectoral issues on the performance of the cooperatives. Chapter 5 looked into much more detail on the how the regulatory framework influences the competitive position of the cooperatives in the food chain and vis-à-vis the investor-owned firms.

This final chapter assesses the (performance) development of cooperatives and how they can be explained in terms of the building blocks (institutional environment, position in the food chain including sector specifics, and internal governance). Section 6.1 focuses on the explanation of the performance of cooperatives in terms of their internal governance, their position in the food chain (including sector specificities) and the institutional environment (including the regulatory framework). In section 6.2 an assessment is given on which policy measures in Estonia seem to benefit cooperatives and which ones have a constraining influence.

7.1 Explaining the performance of cooperatives

There were very few de facto acting cooperatives in 2010 in Estonia. There are 19 credit cooperatives with a market share below 1% in the overall banking market, and no insurance cooperatives. There exist about 10 regional consumer cooperatives and one central consumer cooperative, which together have a share of 1/5 in the Estonian retail market. There are 5-6 dairy cooperatives, 1 vegetable cooperative, 1 cereal cooperative, 1 pig meat cooperative and 1 animal breeding cooperative. There exist some farmers´ associations, but their activity is marginal as is the market share of most cooperatives in Estonia.

The number of members of Estonian farmers' cooperatives has sharply decreased during the period of 2000-2010 as shown in Table 3. Table 8 shows the number of members of the observed farmers´ cooperatives in 2010.

The Turnover of farmers´ cooperatives has improved in 5 cases out of 8 as shown in Table 9. The same conclusion can be made if we analyze the total balance of farmers' cooperatives in the period of 2000-2010 (Table 10). However, the picture is controversial as the number of cooperatives has declined also the market share has fallen over last decade (Table 3). The picture worsens if we also consider inflation rate of the period (50.6%). There are only one dairy cooperative (Piimandusühistu E-Piim), one (and the only) cereal cooperative (Kevili Põllumajandusühistu) and one (and the only) animal breeding cooperative (Eesti Tõuloomakasvatajate Ühistu) which have remarkable shares in their sectors, and show stable or growing membership and stable or growing performance. The other 6 existing cooperatives have lost market shares and members and it is possible that they will close down their business in coming years.

On the one hand, decreasing membership and financial performance of most farmers´ cooperatives come from incapable management. On the other hand, it is very much influenced by the macroeconomic situation of Estonian agricultural and socio-economic policy. The cooperative business type in Estonia is not very common due to political and historical but also social reasons. Due to the fact that Estonia has a liberal open economy system, private farms have to compete with other farms and farmers´ organizations globally.

7.2 Effects of policy measures on the competitive position of cooperatives

As noticed earlier in the study, the cooperative business type in Estonia is not very common due to political and historical as well as social reasons. Most of Estonian economy is built up according to principles of liberalism which bases mainly on commercial organisations owned by investors outside from Estonia. Hence, special attention has not been attended on the development issues of cooperation and cooperatives, as Estonian political system is also built up on principles of economic liberalism.

Before WWII, the situation and politics were the opposite – most of Estonian agriculture and economy was based on cooperatives and central cooperatives in almost every sector. During Soviet period, Estonian agriculture was based on collective farms system, which was compulsory. The period of this kind of collective farming lasted for 50 years, in other words over two generations and it badly affected the mentality of ownership and skill for voluntary cooperation among farmers. Hence, when re-privatisation of private farms started in 1989, industrial products of former collective farms were sold to single farmers. Instead of cooperating in joint usage of industrial products, joint purchases of raw materials, joint distribution of products etc, private farms started keen competition.

Table 12 identified the policy measures that influence the competitive position of the cooperative versus the investor-owned firm (IOF) or the competitive position of the cooperative versus other players in the food chain (e.g. the retail sector). There exist only two relatively small policy (support) measures especially for farmers' cooperatives in Estonia: Farmers´ support for joint information activities and Support for starting and developing a producer group. Both measures have very marginal impact of starting new cooperatives or developing existing ones. They do not contribute to improve the position of cooperatives in the food chain, they have very little impact on the internal governance of cooperatives and also on the institutional environment.

To sum up, it can be noted that the legislation about cooperatives is effective and adequately flexible in Estonia. The problem is rather problematical situation in agricultural policy which is aimed to contraction of traditional agricultural production and low awareness advantages and possibilities about cooperative business form among farmers and it comes directly from political image building and the lack of suitable policy measures in Estonia.

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