

IPP TECHNICAL EVALUATION

US Partner: Texas A&M University

NIS Partners: Russian Ministry of Agriculture and Provisions, Moscow Academy of Agribusiness and Management; Five Regional Agricultural Academies and Regional Retraining Institutes: St. Petersburg, Kazan, Krasnodar, Barnaul, and Irkutsk.

Location of Visits: Moscow Academy; Kazan Regional Agricultural Academy

Dates of Visits: Moscow Academy: 27 November 1996
Kazan Regional Agricultural Academy:
18-20 November 1996

Date Submitted to IREX: 15 December 1996

A) Discuss the strongest aspects of the technical and professional work being done by this partnership.

The strongest aspect of this partnership consists of the fact that there is an in-country project coordinator, Roy Chapin, and assistant project coordinator, Ivan Perov. Mr. Chapin and Mr. Perov are both conscientious men who are experienced and results oriented.

Another strong positive factor consists of the faculty of Texas A&M University, especially Professors Pena, Nichols, and Edwards, who have repeatedly traveled to Russia to teach seminars sponsored by this program.

Discuss the weakest aspects of the technical and professional work being done by this partnership.

Some of the more problematic aspects of this partnership can be related to the fact that there are five widely separate, independent participant institutes, all of which have their own independent rectors and are not parts of the same organization. This is offset somewhat by having an in-country project director in Moscow, but the logistics and travel time involved in coordinating and overseeing the activities of these institutes is truly a daunting task.

Another possible shortcoming may be that the schools have varying interests in the ultimate sustainability of the program. Kazan, for example, seems to be less aggressive in actively seeking out alternative methods of funding for the seminars, while the Moscow Academy has managed to obtain partial funding from the government. Of course that may

be explained by the Academy's proximity to the Ministry of Agriculture and Provision, but the situation is something which should be monitored.

Recommendations for improvement:

I recommend the Texas A&M partner continue its strong involvement and that Mr. Chapin and Mr. Perov continue to provide close oversight for the projects.

Additional prodding may be required by the American side to push the schools toward recognizing the need to more closely plan for the eventual sustainability of the project and toward actively seeking alternatives. Not all of the schools recognize that they themselves need to be more aggressive in actively seeking out alternative methods/sources of additional funding.

Although the US side of the partnership is already providing the schools with regular reminders of the need for additional planning beyond the life of the program, the schools must be made to understand the finite nature of the assistance provided under the partnership program. This would best be accomplished by repeating reminders of the program's closing date and demanding that any unfulfilled obligations be met.

Potential problems might exist with the rectors of the various institutes who may wish to play favorites and send one of their cronies to the United States instead of someone more qualified. The US partner should resist any attempt by the Russian partners to dictate the recipients of the US training. Only those who are seriously interested in learning and in changing the system should be sent. It does no good to send old believers on a vacation to the United States.

B) What do the Russian and Ukrainian partners see as the "criteria for success" for their partnership project activities? How close are they to attaining them?

As with all of the partnerships evaluated, the main criterion for success of the partnership's activities, as perceived by the Russian side, is a continuation of funding.

Naturally, given that there are five widely separate and independent partners on the Russian side, differences exist as to how close each is to actually achieving this goal. Of the two sites visited, the Moscow Academy is closer than the Kazan Academy, since the Moscow Academy is already receiving some government funds and has a more progressive leadership.

Recommendations for Improvement:

Continued reminders that the funding is not eternal and the schools themselves must take a very active role in ensuring the continuation of the activities begun by the partnership is

the foremost recommendation. The schools must open an aggressive dialogue with other possible sources of funding and assistance. They might contact such organizations as the Soros and Eurasia Foundations, the Western Enterprise Fund, TACIS, the Know How Fund, VOCA, Winrock, Citizens Network, and others, to request assistance with concrete and realistic proposals.

C) Describe the technical merit and appropriateness of the following program components:

1. Training

The training conducted during the visited seminar was of a very high quality. The curriculum was both relevant and useful to the participants. The presenters were experienced in presenting the material to a Russian audience and in making it appropriate to the Russian reality. As the rector of the Moscow Academy said, "The people from Texas treat us as colleagues, not as children."

Recommendations for Improvement:

The quality of the training sessions could be improved by making them longer in duration, depending of course upon the time constraints of the presenters. The additional monetary cost would be minimal, and the benefit to the trainees would be much greater. An increase in the duration of the training sessions would allow the presenters to give more in-depth coverage to the material and to reinforce the lessons imparted at the sessions.

Given that one of the main goals of the program is to "train trainers", it is necessary to ensure that the attendees at the sessions fully understand the material they receive. Since the material has to cross a language barrier and a cultural barrier, and must be assimilated by a person raised in a different political and economic system, who then must teach that material to others, it is imperative that this individual clearly understands the lessons the presenters are trying to impart. Any increase in the amount of time allotted to the task of training trainers under the aforementioned conditions can only have a positive impact.

The inclusion of a local banker among the presenters at the Kazan seminar was especially useful, as he gave an insider's view of the current credit situation in Russia. It would be good to include Russian tax officials and bankers in future seminars.

Additional benefits to the program may be obtained by increasing the use of advertising to increase the exposure of the available training.

The Moscow Academy wished to improve the training by stressing agribusiness management. They also would like to cover topics of pricing and environmental problems.

2. Products

The products which the partnership has developed- curricula, training materials, translations, etc.- are all useful in providing insights into a free market economy and in promoting understanding of what is required to function and prosper within one. Specifically, the Agribusiness Training Workshop is a useful tool in training individuals to better understand some of the components of a free market economy and how to operate in such an environment.

Recommendations for Improvement:

Continuous attention should be paid to the compilation of materials to ensure that they are kept up to date and that they include material covered in the seminars plus any supplemental material. The availability of these materials should be made known to previous seminar participants through newsletters.

Wider use of advertising should also be undertaken to inform area agribusiness professionals and farmers of the services which may be obtained at the participating regional agricultural academies.

It is recommended that the availability and usage of communications via e-mail be expanded to include seminar faculty and participants. Networking and information transfer technology should be expanded among the schools and made available to seminar participants and faculty to facilitate networking, professional consulting, and marketing contacts.

D) What additional technical assistance do you believe the Russian or Ukrainian side could use to improve their work in general?

Additional technical assistance in the form of computer hardware and software (communication and word processing), copiers, and overhead projectors would not be an unwelcome addition to the Russian side and would lead to an improvement of their work. Increasing the availability of business textbooks and technical journals would also be a plus.

E) What new directions do you see as a natural follow-on for this project? Are there others working in the sector that this group might contact and/or collaborate with?

A natural follow-on for this project would be to increase the availability of the seminars to the private farmer and other agribusiness professionals. Ultimately it is these people who will be the supporters of the seminars. True sustainability will come from these end users, who are earning the money to pay for the services of the Academies.

Another follow-on might be realized if the academies become distributors of other educational materials, such as textbooks, extension bulletins, research results, and computer programs. The distribution of texts and computer programs through the activities of the Center would provide financial income and increase interest in the seminars at the Center, especially if the Center can combine the sale of agricultural computer programs (record keeping, dairy/swine/poultry production, and ration formulation) with seminars on their utilization. The benefits of this would be an increase in the cash flow of the Center and a widening perception among the agricultural community that the Center is the place to go to find the best, latest information and advice about whatever agricultural problem they may be encountering.

Organizations which might be contacted to explore such possibilities are: land grant universities, computer software firms, and international agricultural companies. Other organizations who may be working in this area are the Soros and Eurasia Foundations, the World Bank, VOCA and Citizens Network.

F) How do you assess the partnership's sustainability plan? What is your sense of how close the partners will be to meeting these goals?

The sustainability of the project beyond the life of the grant is highly dependent upon each individual Academy. In comparing the Moscow and Kazan Academies, the Moscow Academy is much more concerned about sustainability, is taking steps in that direction, and is therefore closer to meeting the goal of sustainability. The Kazan Academy is more passive in this respect.

At the time of the site visits, the strategy for the second tier seminars was not yet complete. The tentative schedule plans to hold the seminars from the last half of February through April. The Academies had not yet decided how they wanted to schedule the seminars.

G) Other comments:

The Texas A&M University Institutional Partnership Program has certainly done a great deal to aid and assist their Russian partners. Despite many problems and the widespread locations of the partners, much has been accomplished. A great deal of the success of this program is the result of the in-country project coordinator and assistant project coordinator.

From the standpoint of the Russian private farmer, more should be done to make the services of the Academies available. The private farmers' associations should be contacted and be made aware of the availability of the seminars so that their membership has a greater opportunity

to attend the sessions. It is gratifying to see private farmers in the seminars receiving information directly from American experts without having that information diluted by filtering through other people. It is very important to keep the number of middlemen in the transfer of knowledge as low as possible to keep any distortion to a minimum.