

Agricultural cooperatives and active membership: two case studies from Greece

Stavriani Koutsou, International Hellenic University, skoutsou@ihu.gr

Martha Nikolaidou, International Hellenic University

Fotini Habeou, Hellenic Open University

According to the literature, active membership in cooperatives and especially in agricultural ones is an important factor for the overall performance of the organization and the achievement of its goals, both financial and social ones. Active membership contributes to the democratic governance of the cooperative and safeguards that decisions are adapted to the needs of the local community, trust is build towards the administration and cooperation between members is promoted. The research question put forth in this paper is whether active membership is influenced from the characteristics of the cooperative, like the size (in terms of members), the legal form, the activities.

In order to answer the above question, we have chosen two agricultural cooperatives in Greece with completely different characteristics: the first one is a relatively small cooperative in northern Greece, with a local scope, with a small number of employees, dealing exclusively with one product, it trades exclusively with its members, it hasn't processing units and its turnover is relatively low. The second one is a relatively large cooperative in southern Greece, with a regional scope, with a large number of employees, with diversified activities, which also trades with non-members, it has processing units and its turnover is relatively high. Their common feature is that today they present positive economic indicators, but this has not always been the case. A survey was conducted through a structured questionnaire on a random sample of 270 members (150 from the first one and 120 from the second cooperative).

According to the results of the research, in both cases there is a group of active members and it is impressive that they represent approximately the same percentage of members in both cooperatives: 42% in the first and 44% in the second. These active members have common characteristics: they participate in the assemblies, they are informed about the actions and the course of the cooperative, they trust the board, they have cooperative relationships with the other members, they feel proud to be members of the cooperative. The members who are skeptical of the cooperative are those who do not participate in the assemblies, do not trust the board, consider the other members as competitors and believe that the cooperative has a declining trend. So, according to this research, active membership is not influenced by the characteristics of the cooperative.

Key words: agricultural cooperatives, active membership, Greece