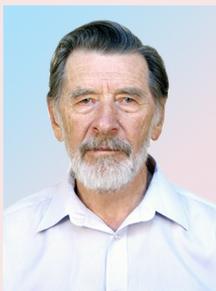


Actors of Rural Autonomous Household: Meanings and Results



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Abstract. The article examines the main areas of life of self-employed in agriculture from the position of the meanings of life, defined as the goals – principles of life activity. The self-employed include those heads of households who, having passed the initial adjustment and relying on their human potential, use the reserves of new household forms in the local environment, having partially or completely terminated their labor relations with an agricultural enterprise. They have no farm land, they do not have the status of farmers, nevertheless they live and operate according to similar technology. In terms of material wellbeing they surpass their fellow villagers, who are limited to work in an agricultural enterprise. In the context of free employment choice, these actors adhere to certain attitudes and guidelines, conforming (with varying degrees of completeness) to the norms and requirements of the institutions surrounding them. We have described the problems that arise in families whose lifestyle is determined by the objects of their household – plant and animal life. On the basis of our research we have defined the contours of the self-employment actors' creativity and the opportunity limitations of implementing the meanings

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of household, which is explained by the violation of conjugations in interaction with large agricultural entities, destruction of connections and relations in the production and sale of products. We have found that depending on the changes in a family life, with the transformation of such indicators as age, health, achievement of ultimate goals (for example, the completion of children's education in universities or, on the contrary, their return to the village), the head and family members constantly cross the formal and essential boundaries of the pre-established status, the scale of activity and, in general, the space mastered and not mastered by them. The study of the social experience of autonomous family household contributes to a deeper comprehensive understanding of the deployment of modernization in the village in the context of the conjunction of innovative and traditional trends.

Key words: village, farming, family household, self-employment, meanings, lifeworld, agricultural enterprises, prestige, status, socio-cultural practices, indicators of success.

Introduction

The village (rural "world") is traditionally endowed with significant functions of general and specific meanings in relation to society. Among the general functions, we should mention the reproduction of the population, not only the agrarian one, and the preservation of traditional culture elements. A specific function is the production of basic types of agricultural products at a level enough for the self-sufficiency of the country. They are the basis of the historical viability of Russian society. In this regard, we can agree with the opinion of our colleagues that the components of the viability of the modern domestic village are depleted, deformed, and they cease to play an essential role in the composition of the subjectivity of rural society as an independent organizing force of Russian society [1].

The reasons for the erosion of the meanings of the rural world's life are in several planes. It is impossible not to consider the fact that the world has entered a period of dynamics of accelerated changes in all areas of life: economy, politics, scientific and natural field, and culture. Its main feature is the uncertainty of the present and the future that appeared due to the globalization processes [2; 3], and it is accompanied by crisis phenomena in rural society in different countries.

Many western researchers no longer associate the prospects for the life of people in rural areas with mostly agricultural employment, and they make the preservation of human potential dependent on the placement of employment objects outside cities that are not related to agriculture [4; 5]. Discussing the combination of innovative and traditional meanings of agricultural production actors, several foreign authors believe that it is necessary to rely on internal human, cultural, and natural resources to optimize this process [6]. Other researchers insist on the expediency of combining endogenous and exogenous impacts: foreign trade and investment, government aid [7].

In Russia, recent transformations of agriculture, initiated by the state and based on the philosophy of liberalism, have dramatically changed socio-economic positions of rural residents of economically active age. It was accompanied by a transition to precarious forms of employment [8] and self-employment, implemented in various formats. This makes it difficult to determine the boundaries of various social groups in rural areas, and therefore we share the position of O.I. Shkaratan and G.P. Yastrebov who call for distinguishing social groups not on the basis of formal nominal characteristics but

based on real elements of the social structure that allows identifying the basis of “homogeneous social groups consisting of people with more or less similar characteristics” [9].

During the ongoing agricultural reforms, people, working in rural areas, have become either ordinary shareholders in an OOO, or employees who do not decide anything in the choice of technologies. distribution of income, or management. The main people, involved in the management, were the heads of agricultural holdings, large farmers, agribusiness, and not the working collective. In the Market order in the AIC (Agro-Industrial Complex), nearly all intangible resources of labor collective cohesion have been taken out of the framework. Due to the limitations of the conceptualization of the agrarian reform, various “traps” have arisen that have activated the reanimation of family farming (PSP – Personal Subsidiary Plot) as a self-adjusting survival mechanism. There was a group of rural families focused on the PSP, their own farmstead. Its share in different regions is 10% of the members of rural communities [10, p. 172–173].

At the same time, the hopes for farming becoming the main resource of agricultural production were not justified [11]. Moreover, a new stage of de-farming at the beginning of the 21st century, which took place according to neoliberal ideological patterns, led to a significant increase in the number of multi-land farms. According to the researchers, “it is related to the corrupt nature of the implementation of the “AIC Priority National Project”, for the implementation of which several hundred billion rubles were spent” [12, p. 32]. As a result, the private capitalization of certain groups happened – ones close to the authorities, bureaucrats, and intermediaries.

Under these conditions, the reaction to these processes of rural residents of economically active age appears in several areas. One of them is the

pendulum labor migration to enterprises in cities and suburbs; the other area is implemented in remote objects (capitals, the Far North, Eastern and Western Siberia), where rural men go for a long time. The third area is employment at your farmstead and, in case of a vacancy at a local enterprise, its combination with work in it and family household. We plan to analyze it in the article, the purpose of which is to consider the specifics of the organization of work and life of self-employed people in rural areas in the context of changing economic conditions.

The object of study in this case is the actors of self-employment, understood as individuals (families) who independently provide a fairly high income almost entirely due to the resources received, at least in comparison with an average wage worker of the AIC in corporate-equity structure organizations or with a large farmer. In other words, we exclude the official name “self-employed”, which is widely used in modern literature [13] and introduced for several urban workers for purely fiscal purposes.

To determine the image of the studied group in the socio-structural context, it is necessary to distinguish it from other groups that manage independently. Commodity-type family management actors are the most similar to small farmers, who perform almost the same list of works in their daily lives as the owners of the PSP, just on a larger scale. It is more difficult to separate them from the self-employed, whose status was manifested by the state in 2018. The adopted Federal Law on self-employment¹ raised many questions among the owners of rural farmsteads. The fact is that all the channels used by a rural family to generate income,

¹ On holding an experiment on the establishment of a special tax regime “Professional income tax” in the federal city of Moscow, in the Moscow and Kaluga oblasts, as well as in the Republic of Tatarstan (Tatarstan): Federal Law no. 422-FZ, dated November 27, 2018. Available at: <http://pravo.gov.ru/search/index.html> (accessed: November 11, 2018).

in addition to working in agricultural organizations, are unstable and unreliable. By beekeeping, collecting wild plants, or raising cattle of meat breeds for sale, no one can be sure that each reproductive cycle (of a year, season, or month) will be identical to the previous one. But the strongest argument against classifying actors of agricultural family management as self-employed is as follows: self-employed are individuals who perform work or provide services using their skills and abilities because of a direct contract with a customer.

Thus, the actors of independent economic management in rural areas act outside the contract with a customer. They are formally and literally different due to the independence and autonomy of their status from those whom the state has introduced into this status to fill the budget through taxation. Self-managing rural families are different from the urban self-employed people in terms of their close involvement in the social environment, collectives, and communities. Their independence is manifested in the processes of exchanging benefits with external counterparties. If in the collective farm reality, an owner of a private farm could buy (“write out”) the product he needed only in his collective farm, now he can choose it among many sellers.

Considering aforementioned things, we believe that autonomy is a concept that covers the semantic specifics of the actors of agrarian self-employment, and it should be present as a key term in the name of the group – these are the actors of the autonomous group of family economic management.

Research methods

During the study (2018–2020), depending on the tasks set, different methods were used, including interviewing, observation, questionnaire survey, as well as expert interview, the results of which were used to verify the reliability of information obtained using other methods, in order to clarify the bases of classification and typologies.

The identification of the meanings and results of activity as the key concepts of research determines the methodology for constructing a sample, obtaining, and using indicators. Although the group that successfully manages its household is small and must be approached as a target, it is located within rural communities, and only a comparison with the rest allows us to assess its real success. It leads to the first condition: the tools for obtaining information (at least at the initial stage) should be of the same type, standard for both groups. Another methodological task was to find a certain optimum in the ratio of the measurement of objective and subjective prerequisites for graduation within a group of successful actors. At the first (initial) stage of the study, the emphasis is placed on material prerequisites for success that were assessed by experts as decisive. At the same time, we were interested in the way of life and its meaning among similar groups according to independent family farming, which allows us to include in the sample a small-land (landless) farmer and a head of a good commodity family household.

A varying sign of the distribution of family households into successful and ordinary ones was the presence of more than three cows or 10 sheep/goats, four or more pigs or 20 rabbits, a land plot of more than 30 acres or more than 15 behind the village in a family farm.

In the future, it would be useful for analysis to have a map of the condensation or sparsity of a selected group of successful ones by region zones. However, in our study, such a task was not set: first it was necessary to identify the main signs that characterize the specifics of economic self-employment. To solve this problem, it is enough to survey the target group and its fellow villagers in the rural communities of specific villages. The territorial aspect is considered only in the proximity/remoteness of the survey sites from urban

settlements, which are widely used as one of the channels for earning vital resources.

Considering it, 97 villages in the Saratov Oblast and the Republic of Tatarstan were selected for the survey. The sample is quota-nesting, representative of the gender and age structure of residents (from 18 to 70 years old) of medium and large villages; taking into account the area of residence and distance from the regional center – the near, middle, and far periphery. The research group communicated with 367 respondents from the Saratov Oblast (190 heads of households from 52 villages located in 21 districts) and Tatarstan (112 households from 45 villages located in 9 districts).

To identify the role of the factor of territorial proximity of a village to a city, 42 people from 33 villages located in four districts of the Moscow region and 23 people in the Omsk Oblast were interviewed.

The first stage of the study, which ended with the processing of the entire array of respondents, showed significant differences between actors who successfully manage independently and those who are more focused on employment in organizations of formal AIC structures.

At the second stage, 20 heads of family households from each region were selected among the respondents for in-depth interviewing (Moscow, Omsk, and Saratov oblasts).

Transformation of the agricultural sector as a factor of labor precarization

Currently, about 5,075 thousand people work in the AIC system, which includes agriculture, forestry, and hunting². At the same time, there is a certain gap between the need for employment and the supply of places of employment.

In the process of post-Soviet transformations in the AIC system, the following groups of agricultural actors can be distinguished:

- farmers of different scales (large, medium, small), the most active part of the rural agrarian society;
- successful owners of rural households, who are not different from small farmers in terms of social status and scale of management;
- ordinary shareholders and employees of collective-equity structures, performers of technological processes, strictly limited in the manifestation of initiatives;
- unsettled groups that are outside of labor collectives and do not have a stable channel for obtaining survival resources;
- old-age pensioners who receive financial resources from the state in an amount close to the minimum wage, which is sufficient for a normal life by standards of rural communities;
- the group of the greatest deprivation is rural youth, whose integration into the rural environment (primarily production) today and in the future has no objective prerequisites.

With a high level of unemployment in rural areas, a significant share of residents are not inclined to look for work. The reason for this is not just the limited labor market in the agricultural sector, but also real practices that have developed in corporate organizations: primarily the absence of a relationship between the quantity and quality of labor and its payment [14].

According to a survey in 71 villages of all federal districts in 2015, ordinary workers of agricultural organizations received an average monthly income of 11,750 rubles per family member [15]. However, an increase in the profit of owners often does not affect salaries of ordinary workers, which, as a rule, are tied to the minimum wage. Such low incomes and the lack of prospects for fair wages are important factors in deciding to run an independent farm.

According to the agricultural censuses of 2006 and 2016, the number of private subsidiary farms has significantly decreased over 10 years. However,

² The average annual number of employees by type of economic activity in 2017. *Russian Statistical Yearbook. 2018: Stat. Coll.* Rosstat. Moscow, 2018. P. 113.

the reduction of their number was followed by the concentration of agricultural production in the largest PSPs³, which demonstrates an increase in the total number of livestock by more than 2.3 times. We can say that such developing large personal farms essentially become commodity mini farms, although they are different in institutionalization models.

In the early 2000s, integrated entities, agricultural holdings with creative and destructive potential, became popular in Russia. In favor of their positive role, there are more large-scale opportunities for spreading the achievements of scientific and technological progress in the agri-food system. At the same time, agricultural holdings, using imperfect land legislation, took possession of the best lands in agricultural regions (southern regions, the Volga region, the Urals, Western Siberia). In 2016, 62.3% of traditional farms (OOO, PSP, farmers) did not own land at all, while agricultural holdings and landowners owned 2.4 million hectares (13.6%) of farmland; they accounted for 25% of total revenue. Agricultural holdings, after pushing aside traditional farms, concentrated 68% of all grain production, 51% of cattle meat, 60% of pig meat, and 64.3% of poultry meat [16].

However, we should agree with our colleagues that the structural changes in the agricultural sector, which ensured the growth of production, had a number of negative consequences: reduction of agricultural employment, accelerated reduction of the rural population; deterioration of competition conditions for agricultural producers who are not part of agricultural holdings, etc. [17].

Successful family farms, in fact, being mini farmers, could form the social base of the layer of rural entrepreneurs, farmers. Although the process of transition to the group of farmers

is rather slow, it is impossible not to consider these trends [18, p. 15]. In this context, we overview successful family farms with experience in commodity production and effective sales of products as a small but real resource for reproducing existing patterns and economic practices in the agricultural sector.

Financial well-being as the meaning of the life of autonomous economic actors

The life of the villagers begins with the conditions in which they live and work, and it reflects the processes and results of interactions in the social community, their place of residence. The meaning is related to the desire of subjects to comprehend the world, relying on life-practical attitudes and orientations [19]. Understanding the meaning of life as a set of goals-principles that form the strategic core of attitudes and embody the core of people's consciousness and behavior [20, p. 19], we did not limit the methodology for studying the phenomenon of life meanings to identifying respondents' subjective assessments but included objective prerequisites in the analysis. Thus, the assessment of the subject environment of economic activity simultaneously serves as an indicator of the meaning and result of active life activity.

Indicators of the meanings and results of ensuring a good material level are the accumulated production potential, the purchase of household items, cultural goods, cars, deposits in banks, etc. Assessing their material capabilities, the respondents considered that due to autonomous management, they can build a house (29.2%), purchase a car (27.5%), a tractor and a truck (13.8 and 10%), they can put aside approximately 100–150 thousand rubles a year (38.5%). Apparently, such rather optimistic assessments of their well-being emerge from the respondents' practices. For various events involving financial expenses (weddings, sending off to the army, anniversaries, purchase of housing for children), half of the respondents used money

³ *Results of the All-Russian Agricultural Census of 2016: In 8 Vol.* Rosstat. Moscow: IITS "Statistika Rossii", 2018. Vol. 1. Book 1. Pp. 276–314; Vol. 1. Book. 2. Pp. 16–23.

received only from family economic management, which amounted to 50 to 80% of the total cost of the event. 60.8% of respondents use bank loans.

Based on the volume of the integrated production potential, we identified five groups of respondents: ones with low, below average, average, above average, and high production potential. The calculation of the integral production potential was carried out as follows. First, based on expert assessments, we compiled a list of types of grounds, land, deposits in banks, equipment, animals that ensure the transition of farms to the status of successful ones; the number of species of equal income from them was determined. For instance, 3 cows are equal to 70 rabbits or 5 pigs. By having one type of animal, but not less, the actor falls into the group of successful ones, if it met the following criterion: to have 43 types of household resources necessary for successful economic management (5 types of household buildings, 15 types of mechanical and electrical units, 9 types of sales of grown agricultural products). Based on the answers in the questionnaire, a respondent got into a group through the procedure of assigning points. The relationship between the indicators in the nominal scale was checked on the basis of the X² criteria (the Pearson coefficient indicated the strength of the relationship between them at a 0.05significance level).

The success indicator in the toolkit assumed the respondents' answers regarding the use of the resources of local large agricultural producers, marketability, the fact of owning machinery and other production items, the presence of farm buildings, etc. The proposed list included 43 items. Based on expert assessments, the "successful" group included 131 farms out of 364 surveyed.

The possibility of accumulating funds is an important factor in achieving success and prospects for further development. 41.4% of respondents put aside money, and its amount varied from 10,000 to

300,000 rubles; half of rural families saved up to 60,000 rubles a year.

These funds were used to increase the production potential of the economy and home improvement items: a mobile phone (48.3%), from a fifth to a half of rural families bought books and textbooks (29.9%), building materials (28.7%), household appliances (26.4%), household furnishings (23%), cultural goods (21.8%).

An important indicator of success is the dynamics of the level of financial situation: successful owners, as a rule, plan to expand farms, while 41.4% of respondents indicated that their financial situation has improved over the past three years, the third part remained unchanged, 21.8% of rural families felt a decrease in material prosperity.

It is predictable that the production potential of PSP of successful farms is significantly higher (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Distribution of successful and other households according to the values of the integral production potential of the economy, %

Integral indicator of the production potential of the PSP	Successful	Other
Low	13.0	39.1
Below average	20.6	3.2
Average	28.2	19.5
Above average	22.9	9.5
High	15.3	1.7

Interaction with local agricultural organizations plays an important role in ensuring the material level. Of course, in the post-reform period, relations have become more alienated in comparison with the collective farm reality, or rather, they are implemented according to strict norms of market relations.

Currently, the relationship of autonomous economic actors with corporate-equity organizations (OOO) is carried out at the level of market exchange of resources, or one of the family members works at an enterprise (Tab. 2).

Table 2. Resources for ensuring the financial level of families

Resources Household group	Plot near the house, acres	Plot behind the village, acres	Fruit trees, un.	Cows, heads	Calves, heads	Sheep, goats, heads	Pigs, heads	Piglets, heads	Rabbits, heads
Percentage of households of the specified group that have the corresponding resource									
All adults work in OOO	78.6	11.9	78.0	37.7	36.5	23.9	22.0	10.7	11.3
One adult working in a family household	94.7	26.3	90.5	67.4	60.0	46.3	38.9	27.4	13.7
Two adults working in a family household	82.6	19.6	82.6	58.7	56.5	39.1	26.1	21.7	8.7
With retired parents	89.8	14.3	83.7	51.0	49.0	44.9	30.6	14.3	16.3
Without retired parents	83.3	18.3	82.5	50.2	46.6	31.1	27.5	18.3	10.8
With student children	82.1	22.4	80.6	50.7	50.7	34.3	31.3	13.4	9.0
Without student children	85.0	16.3	83.3	50.2	45.9	33.0	27.0	18.9	12.4

The data in table 2 indicate that households with two adult children (one in five of the surveyed) are larger. In every fourth of the surveyed households, one or two family members are employed in local agricultural enterprises, which facilitates their access to the resources necessary for the management of private farms. However, employment at local agricultural enterprises practically does not correlate with success, since in this case there are fewer livestock on the farmstead.

The presence of student children is also a factor in the growth of family farms since it encourages a family to receive additional income to support children.

The family economy can compete with employment in other areas to ensure well-being if the selling of manufactured products is established. Unfortunately, long distances to marketplaces, the lack of personal cars, and poor roads limit the sale of products. Nevertheless, almost half of the families deliver food to the places of trade. The farmsteads of successful owners, as a rule, are commodity-oriented, focused on increasing quantitative indicators and on sales.

The social composition of family members and their education also play an important role in the

success of economic management. Education in this case correlates with the presence of equipment (tractors and trucks) and animals on the farmstead. It is the farms where a head or family members have a higher education (34.4% in the sample) that are more likely to become marketable. Let us remind that it was in the initial years of the agrarian reform that specialists with higher and secondary specialized education made a choice in favor of independent economic management, which corresponded to the values of independence and rootedness in rural life. People with higher and secondary specialized education predominate in the groups of successful private entrepreneurs with above-average potential (*Tab. 3*).

Respondents from different groups also evaluate the factors of successful household management in different ways (*Tab. 4*).

A significant gap is revealed in the indicators “friendship with the right people”, “good technical means”, and “territorial availability of sales places”, which confirms the fact that successful households are oriented toward sales and commodity relations.

Let us pay attention to the higher level of social optimism among successful owners: they, as a rule, have a higher level of life satisfaction. According to

Table 3. Distribution of PSP groups with different potential depending on the education of family members, %

PSP potential	Groups by level of education		
	general, below secondary	secondary vocational	higher
High	15.0	40.0	45.0
Above average	16.7	36.7	46.7
Average	21.6	37.8	40.5
Below average	22.2	63.0	14.8
Lowest	23.5	58.8	17.6

Table 4. Respondents' assessment of the household success factor on a 10-point scale

Success factor	Successful	Other
Fruitful year	4.31	3.66
Availability of assistants	3.89	3.25
Availability of a car	3.82	3.26
Good technical means	3.47	2.72
Territorial availability of places of sale	3.18	2.46
Friendship with the right people	2.83	1.92
Compliance with agricultural technologies	2.74	2.30
Available loans	1.90	1.37
Interaction with consumer cooperatives	1.82	1.34

the results of the analysis, a statistically significant difference in the average life satisfaction scores between successful rural families and other groups was recorded.

Rural families' plans for PSPs are closely correlated with their success⁴ (Tab. 5). Most successful owners of rural farmsteads preferred to expand their PSP" (73.9%), "less successful" and "unsuccessful" (the rest) preferred to leave their private households as they were before (48.3 and 66.7%, respectively). "Unsuccessful" rural families were more likely than other categories to plan to

abandon the management of their PSP altogether (25% vs. 1.7 and 0). "Less successful" rural families were more likely to think about the reduction (13.3% vs. 4.3 and 8.3).

Thus, the following key factors and resources for the success of rural households can be recognized: a high level of professionalism and knowledge in various fields (household, economic), the presence of an above-average production potential, the presence of socio-psychological attitudes to success, education and cultivation of traditional family values, a tendency to innovation and risky behavior.

Table 5. Differentiation of rural families according to the criterion of achieving the expected success of managing the PSP, % in groups

Possible answers to the question: "To what extent have your expectations of PSP success come true?"	Successful	Less successful	Other
100% and more	4.3	5.0	8.3
80%	34.8	21.7	16.7
60–70%	34.8	15.0	33.3
Half	21.7	23.3	0
Less than half	4.3	21.7	0
Did not come true	0	13.3	41.7

⁴ These indicators have a correlation relationship with each other at the level of significance 0.01 (sig=0,00).

Meanings of interaction with the social environment

The reproduction of traditional peasant culture is largely caused by the fact that the social circle of villagers is still located within the boundaries of neighbors, relatives, heads of agricultural organizations, employees of a rural municipality, teachers, and medical workers. As a rule, the same people are called as reliable assistants when emergency care is required. Thus, 63.4% of respondents count on the help of relatives, on help of neighbors and friends – 45 and 42% of respondents respectively.

Support networks that include the “right” people have become very valuable in rural areas: the presence of relatives/friends in government bodies, businesses, and public organizations is an important component of success, and actors, who manage autonomously, contribute to this. They have twice as many such people as other members of rural communities. Gifting of a villager, adopted in the past Soviet years, at the expense of scarce resources withdrawn from the company’s funds (often illegally), was replaced by the “barter” exchange of items in monetary equivalent. Guided by this approach, a less profitable partner began to be replaced by a more profitable one, which even applies to charitable acts. Thus, autonomous economic actors, in comparison with those employed in corporate-equity organizations, are more likely to choose the alternative “I help only those who helped me earlier”.

At the same time, the self-employed, regardless of the conditional success of the farms, demonstrate greater involvement in social life of a settlement. More than a third of the respondents testified about their participation in rural assets, local self-government bodies, which, in our opinion, is a positive trend, reflecting the expansion of the responsibility area of independent economic entities from personal economy to local society at the level of a rural settlement, municipality.

Independent economic management and achievement of a certain level of well-being through it, which is defined by the phrase “the family lives well” in the rural community, are fraught with several points of interest for agricultural sociology.

How to assess total workload of personal time with work? For an outsider, it seems completely unacceptable when an individual does not have time for leisure in its socially organized forms: visiting cultural institutions, sports shows, restaurants, rest in a sanatorium, etc. However, this situation is not perceived dramatically by rural residents: “If you are tired, sit down, rest, no one is chasing you. You manage your own time”, the respondents say.

Second, employment in socially organized production and in the household are two components of the rural way of life. Animals, a garden, a vegetable garden have firmly entered the life of a rural family. It is generally accepted that human behavior is determined by necessity and need. The grassroots layer of independent farming – small and medium-sized farmers, successful owners of rural households who have reached a fairly high level of well-being. They are usually guided by this principle, but not constantly. Everyday preoccupation with the issues of a household is connected not only with the meanings of ensuring material well-being, but also with its existentialist dimension, i.e., with the non-objectivity of one’s behavior: everyday preoccupation with affairs puts family members, especially a head of a household, into a rigid framework.

Even the public channels of consumption of spiritual goods and values are used extremely unevenly. The self-assessment of the actor’s participation in cultural events, common for rural areas, showed that watching television programs dominates (82.7% of respondents “regularly sat at the TV”). The indicators of intra-village communication with neighbors and visiting guests remained almost unchanged; a quarter of

the respondents read fiction and special literature on agricultural topics; a third of them rested “doing nothing”. Other leisure activities that were previously common in rural areas, which are amateur art, interior decoration, sports competitions, playing checkers, chess, have almost disappeared. This corresponds to the general trend of rural residents’ detachment from the cultural situation created by the poor rural socio-cultural infrastructure. The situation is also determined by an extremely small proportion of young people in the village. The noted shifts in the socio-cultural life of independent farmers and the entire rural community, being illogical and contradictory, are also the result of life activity in the new market situation.

Everyday preoccupation with household chores limits spatial mobility. Only in the winter months, according to 38–40% of respondents, it is possible to leave the household for up to 7 days, and in May – June, August – October it is impossible even for a day. Despite such a busy schedule, 71% of respondents note that autonomous employment is equivalent to corporate-equity employment (in OOO, PSP) in terms of its impact on preserving health. Vacation according to the model adopted in a formal organization is almost impossible for self-employed actors: only 6.6% rested in holiday homes, 5% – in cities with relatives and friends, 5.8% went outside a village on a tourist trip.

By the present (post-reform) time, many positions of employment, habitat arrangement, and health saving have mostly acquired stability, but family management has retained a high meaningful value, remaining an institution of insurance against economic, natural and climatic challenges, risks of unforeseen events associated with epidemics and epizootics [21].

Limitations and challenges in the space of rural self-employment

The Institute of farming entered the practices of the post-reform period inorganically, which

was caused by organizational, legal, and mental prerequisites.

Arable land passed into the hands of large business structures, while ordinary residents received only shares, which turned out to be very difficult to privatize. Household (PSP) remained more accessible, and its expansion at the initial stage of the agrarian reform was not limited to the state. The way of life of such actors of life turned out to be close to those who only expanded the volume of land, equipment, and their responsibility, i.e., small and medium-sized farmers.

PSPs are comparable to small and medium-sized farms in terms of everyday concerns and are not against the transition to the formal farming sector.

According to the study, 47.3% of successful households prefer to expand their private farms, which may be hindered by restrictions in expanding the land area outside the household plot. There is a reverse movement: the transition from the status of a farmer to the legal position of a head of a family household (PSP).

Any economic actor in a market environment faces restrictions and challenges, which are successfully presented in the M. Porter model in the form of five threats [22] that affect the competitiveness of a firm. Considering the specifics of the rural place of activity of household owners and farmers, we have added two more threats: unfavorable initial conditions and the emergence of new norms, according to which it is necessary to change the usual practices of selling products. The owners of rural households distributed threats according to their significance (from 0 to 100 points): 30 points were given to the weather and power, 20 points – to the behavior of buyers (they stop buying for unknown reasons), 10 – to competitors from retail chains offering the same type of products. The remaining threats – the power of resource owners who raise prices for gasoline, electricity, gas, etc., and the possibility of

competitors entering the market from their village – received 5 points each.

Farmers' threat assessments show similarities with the opinions of household owners, but there are also differences. Farmers rated the threat of an increase in the cost of resources, which cannot be dispensed with during field work (gasoline, lubricants, spare parts), and the influence of competitors five times higher. They proposed to divide the latter into two subgroups: firms engaged in retail trade (5 points) and wholesale purchases (75 points). The shift in the weight of estimates to the marked areas of interaction with market forces, which firms cannot influence, is associated with the scale of management: the larger the production capacity, the larger the volume of consumables is.

A comparison of the restrictions of cattle farmers and owners of households containing a lot of cattle shows almost complete similarity of their situation: both are in the hands of manipulators-dealers, whose power is not limited in any way.

Since large family farms and households operate using similar technologies, it is possible to compare their perception of common threats and challenges. For livestock farmers, the time factor plays a limiting role, in addition to the challenges common with field breeders: marketable products must reach the markets in a short time. It is easier to cope with this task for owners of small farms, such as private farms, offering dairy and meat products at half-stops, near highways or in the courtyards of apartment buildings in the city. When you need to sell a dozen pigs, meat breeds of cattle, sheep, the most convenient and profitable option is to deliver them to the meat processing plant in live weight, which is usually not available to farmers. Meat processing plants allocate quotas for the reception of livestock for processing, which fall to resellers of animals, who will take them out of villages, buying them at an imposed low price.

Individuals who fundamentally change their way of life, when they take up a new decisive task, stay for a certain time on the border of the mastered and undeveloped space. Employment in farming technologies is complicated by the fact that its success depends not only on the social qualities of the actors applying for this role, but also on the lack of coherence of institutional norms.

It is enough to give only some facts. Heads of small farms often operate on land that is not their property, which deprives them of the opportunity to use it as collateral for obtaining bank loans, to make long-term investments in increasing fertility, etc. People focused on family farming have found themselves in a dead-end situation due to conflicting regulations. For example, grants and subsidies to novice farmers are allocated for peasant farming, and according to the regulations of the Federal Tax Service, only registered sole IE (individual entrepreneurs) are allowed, for which state support is not provided. If a novice farmer, without taking advantage of state support, still starts working and building a house on his land (which is allowed by the federal law), then he will have to pay a fine for inappropriate use of the land. When registering a family farm, a head of a farm must hire a certain number of fellow villagers, otherwise he will not get the necessary score in points and will lose something.

In addition to this absurd situation, the applicant for the transition to a new status will have to go to large transaction costs for processing the relevant documents and numerous approvals in various instances. All of this often becomes a serious obstacle to entering a new socio-economic "territory", which hinders the modernization of the agricultural sector.

Conclusion

The representation of the social experience of the actors of independent economic management in this article can serve to form a deeper,

comprehensive view on the spread of innovations, strato-formation in the village and play a positive role in clarifying the theoretical and methodological principles of explaining social development.

Despite the limitations and challenges, a form of family management has developed in the living space of the modern village at a level exceeding the PSP traditionally inherent in rural families. The appearance of a group of successful economic entities in rural areas, practically not motivated by external actors, like the state, has a huge socio-economic significance and indicates the presence of a serious potential of peasant tradition. To date, many positions of employment, habitat improvement, health saving have mostly acquired stability, and family management has retained a high semantic value, remaining an institution of insurance in the face of the challenges of uncertainty.

The independent and autonomous management of rural actors entails a change in the structure of their roles: economic (owner, participant in the exchange of resources); professional (combining traditionally peasant and innovative qualities); social (framework has expanded and procedure for access to socially significant functions in the rural community and municipal district has been simplified); the emphasis on the prestige of successful villagers has shifted.

Successful owners, defined by us as self-employed actors, are in no hurry to become farmers, not considering it appropriate to change their status. The main reason for this is in regulatory mechanisms and barriers that do not stimulate but impose a significant number of responsibilities on a farmer and do not help to cope with the problems of production and selling of products.

The most important factor limiting the further development of the PSP in the area of farming is the lack of normal consumer cooperation, which forces

“unofficial farmers” to sell products on roads, railway stations, in the courtyards of apartment buildings in nearby cities.

The autonomous management of a rural family can also be viewed as a force for overcoming contradictions in the self-reproduction of heads of official farms. This is evidenced by the dynamics of the ratio between small, medium, and large farms: in 2006, there were 47% of the former, in 2016 they became 30.6%, while the land area of the average ones decreased by half (from 18.3 to 9.3%). The land area of small farmers decreased even more – from 2.9% to 0.8%. But large farms have dramatically increased in number and in size of the land belonging to them. In 2006, there were 8.4% of them, in 2016 – 20.5%, the land area per household increased from 962 to 1095 hectares⁵.

It can be assumed that in the longer term, land areas are highly likely to be transferred to the disposal of large and largest farmers. Although all this is happening legitimately, negative social consequences are obvious: a decrease in the share of rural families who independently realize their potential in solving national agri-food problems.

The authors defend the idea that the “grass-roots” composition of farmers and farmer-like groups represented by successful farms of family households is the last estate that has the qualities of a poly-professional, or a universal peasant, since the vast majority of hired workers in the agro-industrial complex, due to modern technologies, turn into a “partially working” industrial production.

The agriculture and daily life of villagers, including those working in a personal household, includes technical innovations, electronic innovations, the ability to use the Internet for receiving services and for self-education. It is too

⁵ *Results of the All-Russian Agricultural Census of 2016: Vol. 1.* Rosstat. Moscow: IITS “Statistika Rossii”, 2018; *Results of the All-Russian Agricultural Census of 2006: Vol. 1.* Rosstat. Moscow: IITS “Statistika Rossii”, 2008. Pp. 320–323.

early to say whether this will lead to an expansion of the practices of autonomous functioning of individual farms and an increase in production, especially since a reduction in the number of rural residents in general and the number of rural families employed in private farms and in formal agricultural organizations is inevitable [23]. The state should already contribute to the formation of new, more effective cooperative relations in order to ease the situation of a rural family with a commodity family household, to increase its importance in preserving the stability of territories.

It is worth looking at independent family economic management from a broader perspective. The fact of the loss of two small villages per day and the gradual transition of medium-sized villages to this perspective is very disturbing. The thought that peasant wisdom does not allow a unique phenomenon, the Russian village, to disappear can be supported by the facts of the resilience of families who have chosen self-organization of employment through an autonomous model. This gives hope for the preservation and self-reproduction of the core of the village world.

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