

Review

Monitoring and Evaluation as a Mechanism for Agricultural Policy Management

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Abstract: Agricultural policy encompasses a collection of measures and mechanisms designed to direct the operation and advancement of agriculture within a country. In order for agricultural measures to yield fruitful outcomes, continuous enhancements and adjustments to address contemporary requirements become imperative. As a part of this initiative, the careful selection of monitoring and evaluation models, serving as guiding mechanisms for agricultural policies, assumes considerable significance. This paper offers a comprehensive survey of diverse modeling approaches employed for monitoring and evaluating agricultural policy initiatives. Furthermore, it sheds light on the execution of these undertakings both within the European Union and within the Republic of Serbia.

Keywords: monitoring; evaluation; public policy; agricultural policy; indicators.

1. Introduction

While a universally accepted and singular definition of public policy remains elusive, it can be characterized as the tools and strategies employed by governmental institutions to address a multitude of societal concerns. Among these domains, agriculture stands out as a pivotal sector, representing an economically strategic endeavor for every nation. The management of all public policy actions, including agricultural policy, hinges on a variety of monitoring and analytical approaches.

In the lifecycle of public policies, following the formulation or inception of measures, comes the phase of implementation, succeeded by assessment of evaluation. During the execution of public policy, such as agricultural policy in this context, a diverse array of approaches and models are employed to oversee and track the implementation of defined and adopted measures. Drawing from information gathered through monitoring, reports are generated as integral components of the evaluation process. The overarching purpose of these reports lies in identifying potential deficiencies within existing agricultural support solutions, with the ultimate goal of rectifying them in subsequent periods, thereby enhancing the efficacy of agricultural planning.

This research paper centers on monitoring and evaluation models relevant to agricultural policy. Its primary aim is to dissect various models employed to monitor and evaluate agriculture measures, while also delving into the experiences of both European Union member states and Serbia in the realm of public policy management. The paper delineates the indicators utilized within the EU to monitor and evaluate agricultural policy, while introducing a novel evaluation model slated for implementation between 2023 and 2027. Furthermore, it encompasses a dedicated chapter elucidating the evaluation of Serbian agricultural policy.

The term „public policy“ holds a narrower scope compared to the broader notion of „policy“, and it pertains to a set of initiatives that address matters of general societal importance under the governance of state institutions [1]. Despite the extensive research and studies on public policies, a singular definition remains elusive. Demakis [2] characterizes public policy as “action, regulatory measures, laws, and funding priorities pertaining to a specific issue, declared by the government and its representatives” [2]. Another interpretation equates public policy with “constitution, legislative acts, and judicial decisions” [3]. From these perspectives, it is evident that, in the broadest context, public policy serves as a mechanism for tackling societal concerns across various domains. In this endeavor, the success of public policy hinges on its ability to [4]:

- Effectively address problems;
- Operate in alignment with the principles of state institutions, and
- Foster active citizenship.

For the realization of these objectives, efficient management of public policies is paramount. The foundational principle of public policy management is rooted in the policy cycle. Within this cycle, the subsequent stages of strategic planning come to the fore:

- Policy formulation;
- Implementation, and
- Monitoring and Evaluation.

The initial phase of strategic planning involves a thorough analysis of the present situation, establishment of development goals, and anticipation of outcomes. During this stage, a financial framework is projected, and a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis is undertaken to gauge the expenses and advantages linked to policy implementation.

Transitioning to the implementation phase, the second stage entails the execution of activities outlined in the first stage, all directed toward the achievement of established objectives. The execution of policy is entrusted to governmental bodies, including the Cabinet and all relevant state institutions. The effectiveness of implementation pivots on robust horizontal and vertical coordination among entities accountable for policy execution. Moreover, the attainment of stable and transparent funding sources assumes a pivotal role in influencing the triumphant execution of policy.

The third phase within the policy cycle is marked by control and evaluation. Policy evaluation entails the examination of outcomes and impacts resulting from the executed measures. This evaluative process holds considerable significance within the domain of public policy management, as it furnishes insights the foster the refinement of guidelines quality in subsequent iteration. When challenges arise during policy execution, this phase offers a platform for devising corrective measures.

Among the array of public policies, agricultural strategy, often denoted as economic policy within the agriculture sphere, takes prominence. Agricultural policy entails an assemblage of measures and instruments steering the operation and advancement of agriculture within a nation [5]. The gravity of agricultural policy’s role is manifest in the fact that agriculture constitutes a pivotal economic pursuit in every country, irrespective of its economic development level. Within this context, the state, through its pertinent institutions, conceives and operationalizes public strategies in the agricultural arena to redress structural concerns within this critical economic domain.

In order for agricultural measure to be efficacious and yield gratifying outcomes, a pivotal stride in its formulation and execution is encapsulated in the process of monitoring and evaluation. The outputs derived from monitoring and evaluation offer an array of invaluable insights that should contribute to heightening the effectiveness of agricultural program in successive phases. The main advantages encompass [6]:

- Establishing a robust analytical foundation for shaping forthcoming agricultural policy endeavors;
- Facilitating the delineation of agricultural policy objectives and longitudinal assessment of their realization, and

- Nurturing accountability in public expenditures, mindful of taxpayer's interests concerning the funding of agricultural policy.

Constructing agricultural development strategies as long-term developmental documents would lack potency if suitable periodic evaluations of attained objectives are omitted. Through the prism of monitoring and evaluating agricultural policy, the constraints recognized as „bottlenecks“ within strategic development documents are brought to light. This revelation serves as a momentous input for sculpting agricultural policy in subsequent temporal stretches. The removal of inhibitive factors stands as a foundational prerequisite for harmonizing agricultural policy with the authentic requisites of agriculture and rural landscapes, thereby amplifying the potential to address extant issues.

2. Selecting an Agricultural Policy Evaluation Model

Monitoring and evaluation serve as indispensable tools that uphold the principles of democratic governance within the realm of public policies [7]. Evaluation represents a systematic process aimed at refining public regulations in forthcoming periods. To yield pertinent outcomes, evaluation must be underpinned by fitting methodologies. The task of choosing a suitable evaluation methodology assumes paramount importance across all public policies, encompassing agricultural program. The selection of a methodological approach presents a perennial challenge for entities engaged in the evaluation process, with its complexity particularly heightened in novel spheres of public policy that necessitate the assessment of realized outcomes. Within the domain of agricultural policy, this acquires relevance in context of agro-ecological dimensions [8].

Diverse evaluation models come into play based on the specific objectives in focus. In this regard, they are categorized as following [9]:

- An evaluation model geared towards fostering learning;
- An evaluation model centered on quantifying the performance of agriculture policy;
- An evaluation model focused on unraveling the mechanisms inherent to agricultural policy, which can potentially lead to enhancements or unintended consequences.

The efficacy of the evaluation process, as well as the augmentation of public regulations, hinge crucially on the alignment of the chosen evaluation methodology with these very objectives. Optimal outcomes, characterized by reliability and underpinned by pertinent empirical data of facts, are achieved through judicious of the appropriate evaluation approach.

The learning-oriented evaluation model is rooted in overarching principles. Its central objective lies in fostering a culture of learning by fostering collaboration among stakeholders. Core tenets of this model encompass the cultivation of awareness regarding the important of evaluation and the cultivation of novel initiatives. Participatory evaluation techniques serve as cornerstones within this paradigm, uniting all entities vested in the enhancement of the sector policy under scrutiny. Effectual execution of this model hinges on an intricate and meticulous dissection of the intricate web of relationship between entities eager to partake in the evaluation process. Once a structured sociogram is established, the evaluator undertakes comprehensive interviews with stakeholders to assimilate their viewpoints and recommendations geared towards elevating the sector policy.

The role of the evaluator extends to orchestrating deliberations to extract relevant insights. The participatory approach assumes various forms and can address subjects ranging from the management of water resources to land utilization, planning, and other facets relevant to rural communities.

The performance measurement-oriented evaluation model rests upon the application of quantitative methodologies and statistical data. Within this framework, the impact of agricultural policy finds quantification through multiple lenses [10]:

- Economic metrics (income, investments, etc.);
- Technical indicators (achieved yield levels), and
- Environmental gauges (biodiversity measurement, pollution levels assessment).

In essence, the evaluation process is tailored to gauge the repercussions of specific agricultural policy measures. Every public strategy, including agricultural framework, involves a multitude of

stakeholders. In the context of agricultural policy, this encompasses all participants within the food supply chain, alongside pertinent institutions. Consequently, the evaluation process does not encompass an analysis of stakeholder relationships during the execution of a designated development program; its focus solely rests on the realized outcomes.

The evaluation model striving to apprehend the underlying mechanisms of public policy finds its roots in a theoretical lens of evaluation [11;12]. This evaluation paradigm posits that grasping the roles of specific entities or gauging the achieved outcomes falls short of comprehending the reasons behind the efficacy or inefficacy of a given policy. Evaluation, in this context, hinges on an understanding of:

- The public policy under examination;
- The mechanisms at play, encompassing undertaken actions, and
- The context within which the policy or developmental program unfolds.

By comprehending these three dimensions, insights emerge regarding the circumstances and factors that influence how agricultural policy operates, whether as intended, unexpected, or unintended outcomes. The evaluation methodology within this paradigm requires customization to the specific situation and the distinctive contours of the development program under examination.

The first step in the evaluation process involves understanding the underlying causal mechanisms that shaped agricultural policy creation [13]. The evaluator's role encompasses the formation of hypotheses pertaining to causal patterns interlinking agricultural plan with its potential effects. To this end, a causal diagram is fashioned, delineating the program theory. This diagram serves as a navigational framework, anchoring the evaluation approach. Subsequently, the process advances to the selection of indicators to quantify impacts.

Each evaluation model harbors distinct aims – comprehending the mechanics of public policies, quantifying their specific ramifications, or bolstering collective learning and effective coordination among stakeholders. Nonetheless, a shared characteristic across all paradigms is their circumscribed applicability within specific research domains. As a result, it's important to interpret the findings if these analyses with caution to avoid any wrong interpretations.

From the vantage point of result reliability, an optimal course would entail the amalgamation of all three model approaches for evaluating agricultural policy. However, practical considerations often render such fusion unviable, due to costs and methodological constraints. Thus, the choice of an evaluation approach should be contingent on situational factor and objectives, as aligned with the given circumstances [9].

3. Monitoring and Evaluation of Agricultural Policy – European Union Example

To oversee the ramifications of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) during the span from 2014 to 2020, the European Commission instituted the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF). Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Union opted to extend the implementation of all CAP measures from the 2014 – 2020 programming period up until 2022.

Facilitating effective monitoring and evaluation requires a seamless alignment of agricultural policy measures with their respective objectives. The CAP's objectives encompass a triad of facets [14]:

- Sustainable food production, underscored by stable farmer income, consistent agri-food product prices, and the augmentation of productivity
- Sustainable stewardship of natural resources and the mitigation of climate change, with focal points on curtailing greenhouse gas emission, preserving biodiversity, and prudently managing land and water resources
- Equitable territorial development, accentuating rural employment, economic advancement, and the reduction of poverty.

Monitoring proffers substantive insights into the implementation of agricultural policy [15]. This surveillance effort spans three pivotal areas: the condition and trajectory of the agri-food market, the trajectory of rural development, and the judicious utilization of funds earmarked for the Common Agricultural Policy.

Evaluation of the ramifications of CAP transpires through pertinent indicators. These indicators are compartmentalized into several groupings, predicated upon the thematic domains they address. Within each thematic realm, a discrete array of indicators is defined, their computation hinging on statistical data. These indicators assume the following categorizations:

- Indicators delineating facets of agricultural policy;
- Indicators tethered to income and market dynamics;
- Indicators appertaining to rural development;
- Indicators intertwined with direct income support for agricultural holdings;
- Indicators encapsulating environmental and land preservations dimensions;
- Target-oriented indicators; and
- Long-term impact indicators germane to the efficacy of CAP.

Table 1. Indicators for monitoring the agricultural policy of the European Union.

Topic	Description	Indicators
Contact indicators	Provide general information relevant to agricultural policy	Area of available agricultural land
		Average age of farm holders
Income Support and Market Measures	Provide information about types and extent of farmer income support and measures related to agricultural product market	Number of subsidy beneficiaries
		Amount of costs for specific types of subsidies (support)
		Volume of exports of specific products with market support measures
Output indicators in the Field of Rural Development	Provide information about outcomes of measures in the second pillar of CAP	Number of advisory workers
		Area of agricultural land undergoing conversation to organic production
		Area of newly established perennial plantations
Outcome indicators in the Income Support Area	Provide information about effects of direct and indirect farmer income support	Percentage of farmers income derived from subsidies
		Changes in income levels categorized by types of farms
		Changes in income levels categorized by economic size of farm

The evaluation of measures geared towards bolstering farmer’s income, propagating sustainable agricultural practices, and nurturing market support is undertaken by independent external entities. This encompasses institutions, universities, and consulting firms operating under the authority of the European Commission. Contracts to execute evaluation tasks are bestowed

through open competitive bids. For each evaluation undertaking, the objectives, method of implementation, and deadlines are distinctly defined. Within this process, the insights gathered from farmers hold paramount significance. Subsequent to the conclusion of the evaluation, comprehensive reports are compiled and submitted to the Commission. The ambit of evaluation encompasses a spectrum of domains [16]:

- Agricultural populace and agricultural production;
- Ecological sustainability and climate change;
- Rural development;
- Research and development, innovation, and technology;
- Agricultural and food product markets, and
- Regulations and the streamlining of CAP measures.

The maiden monitoring and evaluation report for the CP interval spanning 2014-2020 was proffered to the European Parliament and the Council in 2018, subsequently complemented by a supplementary report in December 2021 [17].

For the ongoing programming period, extending from 2023 to 2027, the European Parliament and the Council adopted a fresh framework on December 6, 2022, for overseeing and assessing the CAP (PMEF – Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework). The emerging evaluation model centers on assessing the performance and actualized outcomes of the preceding CAP period. Consonantly, evaluation rests on a triad of indicator categories [18]:

- Output indicators – deployed to surveil the execution of CAP measures;
- Result indicators – utilized to gauge the advancement of EU member states towards stipulated objectives; and
- Impact indicators – employed to evaluate the overarching ramifications of agricultural policy in relation to its defined aims.

The novel framework governing the oversight and appraisal of the EU's agricultural policy carries an assemblage of challenges, yet its primary advantage lies in the active engagement and contributions of independent evaluators before implementation. Within this process, an array of non-binding queries guides the assessment of impacts within the Strategic CAP Plan across various phases. Starting from 2023, this model is set to chart the trajectory of goal attainment, appraise the efficiency, efficacy, and relevance of CAP measures, and furnish insights for a learning-oriented trajectory concerning monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, every EU member state retains the prerogative to tailor the monitoring and evaluation system to the distinct nuances of its agricultural sector. Additionally, avenues for innovation and enhancement within the monitoring and evaluation paradigm for agricultural policy are inherent as the implementation unfolds.

The regulatory framework governing the realm of monitoring and evaluation of the Common Agricultural Policy within the European Union is underpinned by the following regulations: 1306/2013, 834/2014, 1303/2013, 808/2014, 2021/2115, 2021/2290 and 2022/1475.

4. Evaluating Agricultural Policy in the Republic of Serbia – General Objectives and Indicators

The appraisal of advancements in realizing stipulated strategic goals and priorities stands as a fundamental prerequisite for the triumph of agricultural policy. Within this realm, the outcomes of the monitoring and evaluation processes hold paramount significance. A salient distinction lies between these two processes, wherein monitoring furnishes insights into the utilization of tangible, human, and financial resources, while evaluation gauges the attained outcomes within the realm of agricultural policy. Evaluation serves as a multifaceted tool [19]:

1. Assessing the trajectory of envisaged undertakings;
2. Assessing relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency;
3. Furnishing input for course corrections where deemed necessary to ensure goal realization;
4. Analyzing disparities between anticipated and eventual outcomes;
5. Disseminating accomplished outcomes to a broader audience.

By means of evaluation process and the calculation of indicators, the relevance, efficiency, effects, impact, and sustainability of agricultural policy come under examination. The relevance of agricultural regulation is assessed concerning the congruence of its objectives and measures with the extant predicaments within the agricultural sector. It's imperative to acknowledge that agricultural framework, like other sector policies, remains subject to change and warrants adaptation to socio-economic dynamic.

Efficiency in evaluation refers to assessing the value achieved in relation to the efforts invested, examining the outcomes (outputs) against the inputs provided. In essence, it encapsulates a cost-benefit analysis that can potentially signal the necessity to reevaluate and potentially redefine specific solutions and approaches within agricultural policy. Another vital aspect of evaluation centers on assessing the achieved effects and impacts of agricultural measures. This trajectory encompasses the evaluation of the ramifications and influences stemming from all measures and undertakings, spanning all forms of interventions impacting social, economic, environmental, and other developmental benchmarks. In addition, the process assesses the long-term viability of an agrarian regulation. For agricultural progress, policies must be designed to allow for sustained implementation over time. Considering the strategic importance of agriculture in every nation, with its unique characteristics, this is of paramount importance. Evaluation examines the sustainability of set goals, solutions, and initiatives, including any potential risks.

Opting for indicators for evaluation stands as one of the most intricate tasks within the realm of public policy management. While comprehensive catalogs of standardized indicators for monitoring interventions within the domain of agricultural and rural development policy exist within international framework, each nation, owing to its development nuances, opts for indicators germane to its contextual milieu. The official development document of the Republic of Serbia, the „Strategy of Agriculture and Rural Development“ spanning the interval from 2014 to 2024, delineates a suite of indicators tailored to monitor the execution of strategic objectives.

Indicators for monitoring the achievement of strategic goals in agriculture and rural development of the Republic of Serbia in the period from 2014 to 2024 are [19]:

- Number of beneficiaries of insurance premium subsidies;
- Share of loans disbursed to agriculture in total loans to the economy;
- Establishment of the LPIS (Land Parcel Identification System) record system;
- Establishment of the GIS (Geographical Information System) record system;
- Number of livestock under productivity control;
- Area under newly planted orchards and vineyards based on the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management measures;
- Percentage of registered agricultural producers covered by advisory services in agriculture;
- Area of irrigated and drained agricultural land;
- Area under hail protection nets, shading nets, and anti-frost systems;
- Increase in surplus participation in the trade of food products in the total value of agricultural and food product exports;
- Volume of agricultural and food products exports per hectare of utilized agricultural land;
- Import coverage ratio by exports;
- Agricultural area under organic production;
- Identification of nitrate-sensitive areas from agriculture;
- Number of plant genetic resources in the national collection;
- Environmental protection investments;
- Increase in the number of agricultural households engaged in other profitable activities;
- Percentage of agricultural holdings managed by individuals under 35 years of age in total number of agricultural holdings;
- Approval of the IPARD program;
- Percentage of facilities for animal slaughter and meat and milk processing meeting EU structural and hygienic conditions;

- Introduction of meat processing classification, and
- Introduction of an independent milk quality assessment system.

Within the purview of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management of the Republic of Serbia, a dedicated department for analytics and statistics assumes various responsibilities, including the analysis of the repercussions of agricultural policy measures. From 2013 onward, an Annual Report on the State of Agriculture in the Republic of Serbia has been published – an analytical compendium known colloquially as the „Green Book“. Over the course of time, this analytical artifact has undergone evolution, embracing contemporary subjects such as the scrutiny FADN indicators, the influence of climate shifts on agriculture, and the ramifications of the European Green Deal on Serbian agriculture, as the country aspires to European Union membership.

In June 2023, the „Green Book“ – the Report on the State of Agriculture in the Republic of Serbia for the year 2022 was unveiled. Chapter 4 of the Report is dedicated to the agricultural policy within the nation. As outlined in the 2022 Regulation concerning the allocation of incentive funds for agriculture and rural development, the „Green Book“ provides insights into the structure of agricultural policy measures, the percentage distribution of incentives among different objectives, and the amount of subsidy increase compared to the previous year [20]. Additionally, this chapter conducts an analysis of the structure of the agrarian budget, supported by a comparative assessment of its quantum and architecture in 2021. Given that agricultural producers secure subsidies not solely from the national agrarian budget but also from the budgets of the Vojvodina province and every local self-governance entity, this annual report undertakes the appraisal and analysis of the magnitude and composition of support for agriculture and rural development at these respective echelons. The Report includes a presentation of the realized amounts stemming from agricultural policy measures during 2022, alongside the legislative and regulatory framework that governs the expanse of agriculture and rural development within the Republic of Serbia.

The implementation of this annual document can be deemed a momentous stride in the context of monitoring and evaluating agricultural policy within the Republic of Serbia. Of notable significance is the examination and comparison of subsidy levels for various objectives on an annual basis. Through this mechanism, the architects of agricultural policy amass insights into the sectors of agriculture that garner substantial funding and the sectors that stand to benefit from amplified financial backing.

5. Conclusions

The triumph of public policies is contingent upon a multifaceted interplay of factors, of which the selection of an apt monitoring and evaluation model emerges as crucial. Monitoring and evaluation form a suite of mechanisms that serve as the litmus test for the realized impact of implemented public policy measures. These processes yield insights that prove invaluable for sculpting decisions in subsequent time horizons, thereby fostering a trajectory aimed at bolstering the efficacy of public policy and harmonizing it with genuine development requisites. In this regard, the evolution process accentuates transparency, subsequently ushering in accountability in the realm of policy implementation.

In the context of evaluating agricultural policy, as an archetype of public policies, three distinct models emerge, each geared towards specific objectives. These models encompass the learning-oriented paradigm, the model centered on quantifying the influence of public policy, and the model entrenched in comprehending the applied mechanisms to optimize the effects while mitigating a gap within agricultural policy.

In the ongoing programming interval, spanning from 2023 to 2027, the European Union harnesses a model for overseeing and evaluating agricultural policy anchored in three clusters of indicators: outputs, outcomes, and impact. In essence, this involves the monitoring of Common Agricultural Policy implementation, the benchmarking of progress against pre-set objectives, and the comprehensive assessment of the overarching ramifications of agricultural policy.

Within the Republic of Serbia, the blueprint for monitoring the attainment of strategic goals is codified within the developmental blueprint “Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development”

spanning from 2014 to 2024. By assessing these indicators, preliminary insights into the efficiency of agricultural policy crystallize, concurrently unveiling areas that necessitate amelioration in ensuing intervals. Furthermore, an Annual Report elucidating the state of agriculture is released annually, serving as the bedrock for the evaluation trajectory of agricultural policy. The pursuit of monitoring and evaluation agricultural policy mandated a holistic and conscientious approach, given that this stage in the lifecycle of public policies exerts a profound sway on their future success.

Given the vantage point and significance of agriculture within the economic fabric of the Republic of Serbia, the adoption and enactment of one of the extant models for monitoring and evaluating agricultural policy emerges as an imperative. This determination carries considerable weight, as the prosperity of agriculture, poised as a pivotal economic endeavor, hinges significantly upon it.

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