COMPETITIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF LAND USE:
BOOK REVIEW¹

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This work presents a review of the actual monograph “Financial support for the formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises” prepared by Professor, DrS, PhD Anatolii Kucher. The main provisions of the fundamental monograph and its contribution to the development of the modern system of scientific knowledge on the theory, methodology and practice of financial support for the sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises are presented.

Key words: sustainable competitiveness, sustainable soil management, sustainable land use, sustainable finance, agricultural enterprises.

Sustainable development has become the main topic not only for economic science, but also for the development of economic policy. There is a large amount of literature devoted to the analysis of various aspects of sustainability – economic, social and/or ecological. Agriculture is recognized as one of the spheres of the economy, which has a multidimensional impact not only on the incomes and well-being of the employed, but also on the rural population as a whole and the environment [1]. However, the study of agrarian sustainability and its governance is still at an initial stage due to the “novelty” of the problem, new emerging challenges, fundamental modernization in recent years, the “lack” of long-term experience and relevant data, the application of narrow (certain form or level of management); one-dimensional, one-industry, regulatory, without transaction costs, etc. approaches [2]. On the other hand, agriculture should strive to achieve competitiveness and increase the added value in agriculture through innovation and technological improvement to ensure quality and healthy nutrition and pay attention to the social and environmental aspects of agriculture. Until economic competitiveness is achieved, agricultural viability and environmental sustainability may not be achieved [3, p. 1].

The concept of sustainable competitiveness has recently been introduced into


scientific circulation, with the concept being used in managing and assessing of sustainability levels. Despite some progress in this new emerging field, there is still no consensus on how to assess the sustainable competitiveness of agroecosystems, in particular land uses, due to the diversity of views, approaches, methods, data used, etc. Until recently, there were no comprehensive studies on integral (economic, social and ecological) assessments of the sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises. The reviewed monograph “Financial support for the formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises” [4], prepared by Professor, DrS, PhD Anatolii Kucher, makes the first attempt to assess the sustainable competitiveness of land use using the example of agricultural enterprises in Ukraine. This monograph attempts to fill the gap and present a holistic framework for understanding and assessing the sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises, its formation and improvement based on sustainable soil management in Ukrainian agriculture.

The reviewed monograph, 884 pages long, consists of an introduction, five chapters (including 26 paragraphs), conclusions, appendices and a list of references. All chapters (parts) of the monograph are arranged expediently and logically, which is determined by the content of the study. The main text contains 197 tables and 110 figures, which makes it easier for the reader to perceive the material and demonstrates the solid empirical basis of the study.
The first chapter “Theoretical basis of financial support for the formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises” describes (1.1) Theoretical concept of financial support for the formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises; (1.2) Methodological approaches to study of financial support for the formation of sustainable competitiveness of agricultural enterprises based on sustainable soil management; (1.3) Conception of sustainable soil management in Ukrainian agriculture as a prerequisite for program-targeted financing; and (1.4) International financial benchmarking of sustainable competitiveness of agriculture in the context of European integration of Ukraine [4, pp. 18–120].

The second chapter “Methodological basis of financial support for the formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises” describes (2.1) Methodological concept of financial regulation of the formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises; (2.2) Methodology for assessing sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises; (2.3) Methodology for monetary estimation of losses due to soil degradation at agricultural enterprises; (2.4) Methodology for evaluation of investment attractiveness of agricultural land use; and (2.5) Methodology for evaluating the efficiency of financing of improvement soil quality and land reclamation projects – for sustainable competitiveness [4, pp. 121–224].

The third chapter “Financial problems of the formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises” describes (3.1) Current state and problems of formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises in conditions of scarcity of financial resources; (3.2) Zonal features of formation and reserves of increasing the sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises; (3.3) Trends and opportunities of financial support for the formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises; (3.4) Monetary estimation of losses due to soil degradation at agricultural enterprises; (3.5) Econometric modeling the impact of soil erosion on the financial results of agricultural enterprises; and (3.6) Sustainable management of soil in danger of wind erosion: stakeholder engagement to search for project financing [4, pp. 225–370].

The fourth chapter “Strategic priorities of financial support for the formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises” describes (4.1) Formation of sustainable competitiveness of agricultural enterprises on lands of different quality under the conditions of various financial support of their activities; (4.2) Fiscal regulation of formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises and rural development; (4.3) Formation of strategic priorities of financial support for sustainable soil management; (4.4) Conceptualization of sustainable management of soil organic carbon as a strategic (global) priority of financial support; (4.5) Financial cost-benefit analysis of use of liquid organic fertilizers, bio humus and mineral fertilizers; and (4.6) Potential sources of measures financing for sustainable soil management [4, pp. 371–517].
The fifth chapter “Efficiency of financial support for the formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use at different levels” describes (5.1) Forecast of financial support for sustainable intensification of land use based on the transfer of soil protection innovations in agricultural enterprises; (5.2) Impact of the land concentration on the forming of financial results of agricultural enterprises; (5.3) Investment attractiveness of agricultural land use and its improvement in the context of the introduction of the land market; (5.4) Predictive economic efficiency of financing of innovation-and-investment projects for sustainable soil management; and (5.5) Efficiency of financing of practices of sustainable soil management at the micro, meso and macro level [4, pp. 518–646].

It should be noted that each of these chapters has scientific novelty, theoretical and practical value. For example, in the third chapter, the author for the first time proposed a holistic methodology for monetary estimation of losses due to soil degradation at agricultural enterprises based on the ecosystem approach. It is based on official statistical and other information, as well as on expert assessments [4, pp. 169–190]. The ecosystem approach has great prospects for widespread use in agricultural management. In one of our articles, a first attempt was made to assess sustainability of agroecosystems in Bulgaria, which led to some important conclusions regarding the state of their sustainability and recommendations for improving management and assessment practices [5]. Interesting and useful, including for Bulgaria, is the holistic methodology proposed by the author for the first time for assessing investment attractiveness of agricultural land use [4, pp. 191–207]. The new system for evaluation the investment attractiveness of agricultural land use consisting of 15 principles, 8 criteria and 58 indicators is applied in a large-scale study to assess investment attractiveness of agricultural land use at the regional level [4, pp. 588–595].

In general, the information, analysis, and conclusions presented in all five chapters of the reviewed monograph, based on thorough empirical and statistical material, referring to current legal acts, allows for properly substantiated generalizations and conclusions. The main goal and specific tasks have been fulfilled. The work has cognitive, methodological and practical significance. The list of used sources is very long (the bibliography consists of 877 titles) and includes publications in different languages. The book “Financial support for the formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises” is the first attempt to comprehensively assess macro-, meso- and microeconomic trends and changes in financial support for the formation of sustainable competitiveness of land use in agricultural enterprises with the help of various approved scientific tools, which is an approach for obtaining substantiated results and conclusions.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the evaluated monograph as a whole has a very high cognitive and scientific value. In terms of the knowledge provided and its interpretation, this is a valuable study, which is based on many different sources of empirical material and a wide review of the literature, as well as on the extensive experience of the author. The publication of this monograph enriched the agrarian
economic literature devoted to the challenges of sustainable development of agriculture and rural areas in the conditions of globalization, financialization, and integration.

To summarize, it can be noted that the research results presented in the monograph are a significant contribution to the formation of a system of knowledge about the financial support of sustainable competitiveness of land use of agricultural enterprises not only in the agrarian economy of Ukraine and Bulgaria, but also in European agrarian economic science.

The results reflected in the reviewed monograph may be of interest to a wide audience. First of all, the book will be useful to the following stakeholders: scientists and university lecturers; managers of agricultural enterprises and specialists in agriculture; consultants, advisors and decision-makers; specialists of state, regional and local public authorities.

As we know, economics is not an exact science, where most famous people analyze the economic problems of the world and come to completely different conclusions [3, p. 1]. Economics provides an opportunity to draw conclusions and provide space for different opinions and positions, so the statements and conclusions in the reviewed book should be viewed critically, debatable points should be discussed. As in the case of most scientific works, the reviewed book also contains some provisions that are debatable and do not detract from the value of the reviewed work. Theoretical discourses should inspire new economic evaluations and research to encourage scientific discussion that would contribute to the analysis of economic ideas by proving them through economic theories. The reviewed monograph encourages discussions and the acquisition of new knowledge, as well as conducting similar research.

References