

THE ROLE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT IN THE GROWTH OF AGRIBUSINESS: THE CASE OF AGRIFOOD COMPANIES IN WIELKOPOLSKIE VOIVODESHIP

Sochima Thomas Ozougwu 

sochima.ozougwu@yahoo.com

Olga Maria Grabowska-Chenczke 

Poznań University of Life Sciences, Poland

Abstract. This research aims to identify growth-driving talent management practices in agri-food companies in Wielkopolskie, Poland using primary data collected between October 2021 and April 2022 via online questionnaires. Based on conclusions drawn from both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, it appears that many agri-food companies lack effective talent management practices, which may hinder the overall development, efficiency, and competitiveness of the Polish agri-food sector, as well as its attractiveness to potential employees. Although we observed that agri-food companies in Wielkopolskie are learning organizations regardless of size, they still pay little attention to team-building activities, and there is no clear communication of a common business goal and vision by company leadership. This study recommends creating a collective talent management system for agri-food clusters, adopting a more deliberate approach to employer branding and leadership skills management, and positioning agri-food companies as desirable workplaces to ensure the attraction and retention of skilled labour and to drive and sustain the necessary growth.

Keywords: talent management; agri-food economics; agribusiness; labor market; employee development

INTRODUCTION

As Praburaj (2018) puts it, the agriculture sector is the backbone of the economy, providing both essential

resources for mankind and the raw materials for industrialization. Agriculture has increasingly benefited from growth and development in other sectors of the economy through backward linkages. Agri-food companies, which are usually categorized based on their size (small, medium, or large-scale), produce a significant share of certain food products consumed in Poland and other European Union (EU) countries, and their collective practices play a key role in shaping the development of the agri-food sector in Poland.

For centuries, people have been the primary drivers of economic activity through their productive work. Even as technology has advanced, human input has remained central, not only in production but also as the source of innovation, technological development, and overall process development, alignment, and implementation, which leads to improved efficiency and drives growth. To harness this potential, talent management (TM) is essential, and its application to agri-food companies is especially important, given that this growth-driving approach has already been widely adopted in other sectors, where companies deliberately use talent management to enhance performance. In contrast, awareness of talent management in the agri-food sector lags far behind.

In the words of Gardner (2002), talent management should focus on finding the right employees, as traditional sources of competitive advantage – land, capital

Accepted: 3.06.2025

Published: 30.06.2025

Cite as: Ozougwu, S.T., Grabowska-Chenczke, O.M. (2025). The role of talent management in the growth of agribusiness: The case of agri-food companies in Wielkopolskie voivodeship. *J. Agribus. Rural Dev.*, 2(76), 207–214. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17306/J.JARD.2025.00010R1>



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Licensee Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczego w Poznaniu. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

and fixed assets – are no longer sufficient in the modern economy. Human capital has become the driving force behind the other factors. As an innovation- and growth-driving asset, talent management is central to building winning teams through a chain of talent management activities (Davis et al., 2007), supercharging organizations for efficiency and growth.

As the food sector grows, and as certain advances and new practices are implemented, companies in the agri-food sector respond by seeking the services of skilled, well-trained employees. In Europe, the growth of the agri-food sector has created a need for proper testing and traceability in order to ensure that agri-food products can be traced across the entire supply chain, thereby making it easier to recall unsafe food. As further argued by Rembisz and Kowalski (2007), a key driver in today's agri-food business is knowledge; hence, the ability of companies to access, utilize and internalize knowledge through talent management serves as a means not only of gaining competitive advantage but also of creating an efficient and thriving agri-food system.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our research objective was to examine the role of talent management in the growth of agri-food companies in Wielkopolskie, Poland. This focus arose from the observation of a lack of coherence and direction in organizations, which has been closely linked to poor talent management practices and is known to hinder growth potential.

We obtained data from six (6) agri-food companies in Wielkopolskie, Poland through an online questionnaire (via Google Forms) between October 2021 and April 2022. The aim was to determine whether the talent management practices of these companies, and their perceived impact on growth, are related to company size or other factors. The questionnaire enabled qualitative comparisons among the companies and, by identifying trends and areas of similarity, generated insights into their talent management practices. The six (6) agri-food companies were divided into two small, two medium, and two large-scale enterprises. This allowed us to gain insight into the talent management practices in companies of various sizes, to generalize the findings, and to formulate recommendations based on company size. We contacted agri-food companies using publicly available online databases, and participation in the survey was voluntary.

The classification of enterprises was based on their number of employees and annual revenue. Businesses with fewer than 50 employees were classified as small, those with 50–249 employees as medium-sized, and those with 250 or more employees as large. Revenue was also considered in determining company size. Among the six (6) companies, two were large (companies A and B), two were medium-sized (companies C and D), and two were small (companies E and F). Within this grouping, three companies (one from each size category) were agricultural businesses, while the other three were focused on food processing. The questionnaire distributed to the agri-food companies took no more than 30 minutes to complete. Due to the nature of the information provided, and at their request, the identities of the companies were kept confidential.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Agri-Food Sector in Poland

The Polish agri-food sector has a long history that has led to a certain competitive advantage for Poland and has created a strong foundation of internalized knowledge within a professional education system that cooperates closely with the agri-food industry. In 2016, Polish agriculture demonstrated high production potential, as evidenced by the availability of factors of production. However, as Baer-Nawrocka and Poczta (2016) argue, having these factors alone does not determine productivity; rather, their effectiveness depends on how well they combined. This includes not only the scale of production, but also the type of agriculture practiced and its integration with industry and trade.

During the period under review, Poland had the highest labor input in the EU, accounting for approximately 18.1% of the bloc's total annual work units (AWUs) (Pawlak and Poczta, 2020). Poland also represented about 8.3% of Europe's utilized agricultural area (UAA), ranking fifth in the EU, with production resources spread across a large number of farms. Despite this high level of factor ownership, the efficient combination of factors is a significant concern. Poland has one of the lowest ratios of UAA per AWU – just 8.7ha, which is well below the EU average of 19.2ha and far behind countries such as Germany (34.1ha) and Denmark (52.8ha). This reflects a poor relationship between land and labor resources in Polish agriculture and highlights its limited competitive potential.

Between 1980 and 2018, Polish agri-food exports showed consistent growth, both in absolute terms and as a share of EU and global exports (Pawlak and Poczta, 2020). According to the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2021), this growth in agri-food exports was driven by several factors, including the production of high-quality products adapted to EU standards following Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, as well as lower input prices. These advantages enabled the Polish agri-food sector to produce goods that were not only of high quality but also cheaper than the EU average.

Data from Statistics Poland indicate a positive trade balance in agri-food products after 2015. From 2018 to 2020, the value of both exports and imports increased, with the export–import balance reaching 47,154 PLN at current prices (GUS, 2021).

Despite this sector's importance for national development and daily life, and despite the well-developed agricultural curriculum at various levels of education, few people appear interested in working in the agri-food sector (Uglis and Kozera-Kowalska, 2019). This is largely due to a persistent stereotype of the sector as demanding and poorly paid (Unay-Gailhard et al., 2019). Its perceived unattractiveness may also stem from the fact that agricultural and food processing companies are mostly located in rural areas, which many young graduates from agriculture-related courses do not consider ideal places to live and work (Uglis and Kozera-Kowalska, 2019).

After more than twenty years of EU membership, Poland's agri-food sector still requires support and innovation. Despite the stable growth trend in agricultural production, future policy measures are needed to maintain a sustainable agri-food market capable of competing in global markets. Moreover, the sector must make better use of human and technological capital in order to maintain high resilience and the capacity to withstand unexpected external shocks, such as natural disasters, climate change, or wars in the region (Pawlak and Poczta, 2025).

The Role of Talent Management

The concept of talent management has passed through various stages of development, and its origins can be traced back to 1997, when some McKinsey consultants were engaged in discussions on the war for talent, which plagued many industries at that time. In particular, McKinsey expressed serious concerns about the supply

of human talent, which organizations need to survive and grow in a competitive world (Chambers et al., 1998).

Many attempts have been made to define talent management, and although they all acknowledge the importance of talent management in driving organizational growth and success, there is still no unified or clear definition of the term. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2006) has recognized that talent management has moved away from being an administrative process and developed into a continual organizational practice with a strategic focus that drives organizational outcomes. Goffee and Jones (2007) defined talent as employees whose ideas, knowledge, and skills give them the potential to produce disproportionate value from the resources they have available to them. Similarly, Tansley et al. (2006) defined talent as a complex amalgamation of employees' skills, knowledge, cognitive ability, and potential. SHRM (2006) defined talent management as the implementation of integrated strategies or systems designed to increase workplace productivity by developing improved processes for attracting, developing, and retaining people with the skills and aptitude required to meet current and future business needs. This broad definition captures all the known elements of talent management, and it recognizes the positive relationship between efficient talent management and business outcomes, which is the reason organizations spend a lot of their resources on recruiting, developing, and



Fig. 1. Ozougwu's Talent Management Ring
Source: own study (2025).

retaining certain individuals they consider competent enough to achieve their goals.

Based on these considerations, our research divides talent management into six (6) components that form the Talent Management Ring: Workforce Planning, Talent Acquisition, Performance Management, Learning and Career Development, Talent Retention, and Succession Planning (see Fig. 1).

RESULTS

Talent Management Practices in the Agri-Food Sector in Wielkopolskie

Companies' talent management practices were reviewed based on the responses received, and the results are presented here. One key factor that influences employees' decisions to join and remain with a company is the career path they see for themselves within it. Unlike medium-sized and larger companies, smaller agri-food companies have a shorter career progression ladder and are mostly unstructured, which limits their ability to offer succession planning and internal mobility.

Our findings reveal that agri-food companies have little or no succession planning strategy, regardless of size. The only exceptions are large enterprises with a practice of selective succession focused exclusively on leadership positions.

All the surveyed agri-food companies in Wielkopolskie fill approximately 75% of their vacant positions with external candidates, a practice that often reduces motivation among current employees. Similarly, these companies did not regularly promote high-performing employees, as fewer than 20% of employees were promoted every 1–3 years. As these companies rely on external candidates to fill many open positions, employees may doubt their capacity to support their career goals.

On a scale of 1–10 (equivalent to 10–100% on the graph), companies were asked to rate how their job analysis aligned with their business goals (see Fig. 2), and the results show that although these companies generally understand the need for alignment, they often do not pay close attention to changing business needs and the need to modify job analyses on an ongoing basis.

It was also observed that agri-food companies in Wielkopolskie are learning organizations, regardless of size. The companies declared that they pay close attention to the development of employees, as monitored through regular competency evaluations to ascertain the

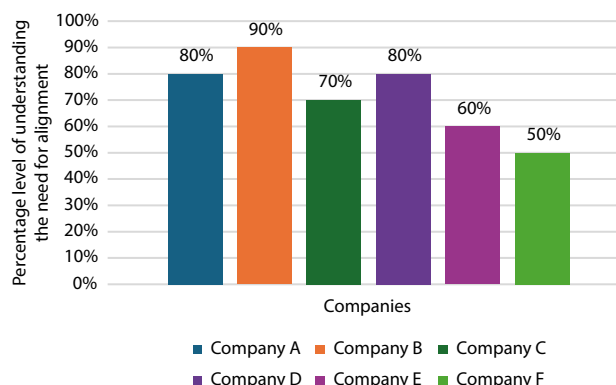


Fig. 2. Alignment of Job Analysis with Business Goals Among Agri-Food Companies in Wielkopolskie
Source: own study (2022).

value employees have added to the organization. Our findings show that agri-food companies do not prioritize identifying key positions for which successors should be groomed, and as a result, they tend to view succession planning as a time-consuming and expensive activity. Therefore, they implement selective succession planning for leadership positions.

Many companies do not pay close attention to employee engagement. They pay little attention to team-building activities, and there is no clear communication of a shared business goal or vision by the company's leadership. This was mostly observed in large- and medium-scale companies, where the communication of business goals seemed narrow, whereas in smaller companies with smaller teams, business goals were often communicated to all employees during team meetings.

Each organization had different onboarding practices, and levels of new-hire engagement varied accordingly. It was observed that about 60% of the agri-food companies have dedicated onboarding teams (see Fig. 3), which drives new hire onboarding and engagement. This effect was more evident in large and medium-sized companies.

The importance of different elements in the recruitment process was assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing “not important”, 2 “slightly important”, 3 “moderately important”, 4 “important”, and 5 “very important”. The results reveal that many agri-food companies pay less attention to the attitude and behavior of candidates and more to their skills, knowledge, and experience (see Fig. 4). Some medium-sized

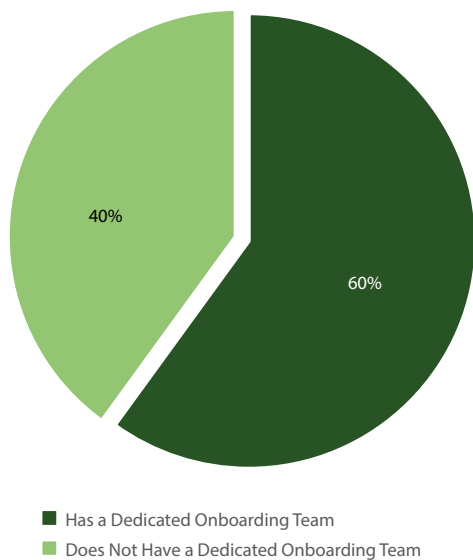


Fig. 3. Separation of Onboarding Function in Agri-Food Companies in Wielkopolskie
Source: own study (2022).

and small companies place the greatest importance on the versatility of the candidate, because they are seeking candidates who can provide support in various roles if

needed. This can also be attributed to the smaller workforce and the need to accomplish a wide range of tasks with fewer people.

The quality of talent in a company is often a key driver of its development, and this is largely evident in the way in which an organization acquires and retains its talent. Table 1 below shows a breakdown of revenue, and Fig. 5 shows that many of the companies in this study experienced significant revenue decline during the 2020 financial year, which can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ability of these companies to regain their position in the market and achieve higher revenues was dependent on the ingenuity of their employees in navigating a turbulent period marked by significant social, economic, and trade restrictions.

Companies D, E, and F experienced greater revenue decline during the pandemic and a slow recovery in 2021 – unlike companies A, B, and C, which recovered more quickly in 2021 by leveraging the ingenuity and innovation of their employees, offering learning opportunities and the freedom to explore opportunities for business expansion.

It was observed that companies with better talent management practices, specifically companies A and B, recorded higher levels of growth and competitiveness,

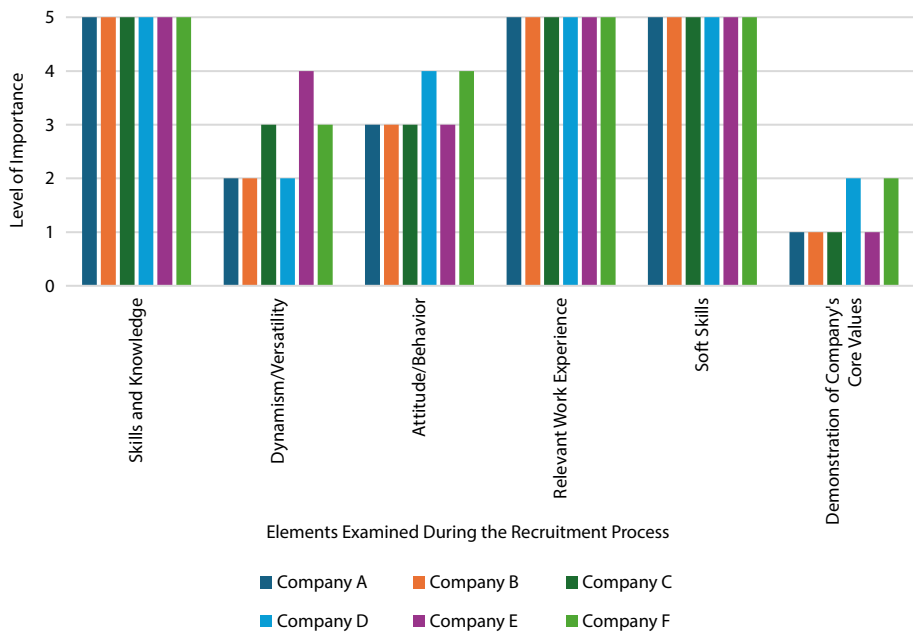


Fig. 4. Importance of These Elements in the Recruitment Process
Source: own study (2022).

Table 1. Percentage Change and Annual Revenue (PLN) of Selected Agri-Food Companies 2019–2021

Company.....	Annual revenue		Change 2019/2020 (%)	Annual revenue 2021	Change 2020/2021 (%)
	2019	2020			
A	240,172,936.10	180,865,249.70	–25	227,603,981.00	26
B	155,083,100.50	112,503,822.06	–27	146,371,998.33	30
C	81,986,176.90	65,731,250.16	–20	74,612,835.26	14
D	65,588,435.85	36,682,891.00	–44	40,269,417.46	10
E	5,856,294.20	3,200,547.39	–45	3,383,526.61	6
F	2,155,072.50	1,248,793.18	–42	1,308,395.42	5

Source: own study (2022).

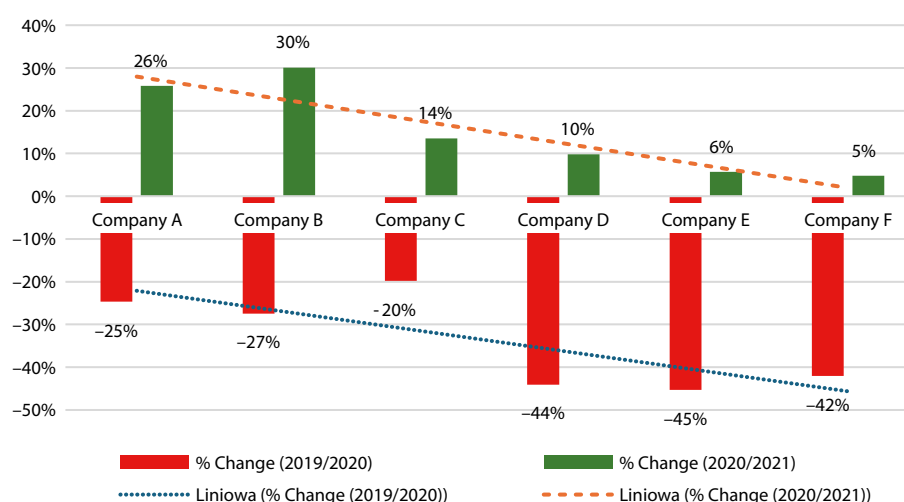


Fig. 5. Recovery Rate of Agri-Food Companies in Poland Based on Turnover (2019–2021)
Source: own study (2022).

demonstrating a clear link between talent management practices and performance.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of our study was to investigate the role of talent management in the growth of agri-food companies in Wielkopolskie, Poland. Although some companies regarded the impact of talent management on their growth and competitiveness as unproven, the results suggest that there is an association between the quality of talent

management practices and employee motivation and talent retention; hence, talent management has an impact on innovation and productivity. Still, the association needs further study and formal testing, using larger and more representative samples.

This study is limited by the lack of relevant literature describing a clear relationship between agri-food companies and talent management, and how talent management influences these companies. Similarly, it is limited by the sample size. Despite these limitations, it has sought to draw relevant conclusions based on the data obtained,

which primarily compares the talent management practices in various companies while also looking at similarities and potential areas of improvement.

Since one of the most significant concerns in Polish agriculture is the combination of factors of production – more specifically, the more efficient combination of land and labor resources – key investments need to be made in learning and skills development within this sector. Referring back to Tansley et al. (2006), who defined talent as a complex amalgamation of employees' potential, there is an urgent need to supply talented staff to drive innovation and further growth in the agri-food sector in Poland. However, the goal of talent management is not only to recruit talent but also to develop, motivate, and empower employees in a way that will enable them to contribute meaningfully to the growth of the organization. As Chambers et al. (1998) claimed, many organizations do not acknowledge the existence of the talent retention problem and do not recognize that high-performing employees constitute the majority of those who leave the organization. Laddha et al. (2012) viewed talent retention as a process of linked activities and tasks that help employers retain employees. The core of the problem is that many organizations do not know how to implement the right initiatives to increase their chances of retaining talented staff. Furthermore, many who possess this knowledge lack the will or means to consistently sustain talent retention efforts, particularly because they do not recognize that retaining talent constitutes the primary source of an organization's competitiveness. To solve these problems, this study proposes the following measures:

1. Modernize the curriculum of vocational learning institutions related to agri-food and create opportunities for individuals who are interested in working in the agri-food sector. The learning process should involve pre-industrial, industrial, and post-industrial training i.e., structured learning within an organization during a well-designed internship in an agri-food company that could absorb the most promising trainees.
2. Make the agri-food sector as appealing as companies in other sectors by supporting employees in achieving their career goals, offering a competitive salary and a friendly work environment with a positive growth-oriented work culture and stable employment.
3. Provide employees with learning opportunities that will improve their competence. This includes job-specific knowledge, business knowledge, knowledge

of IT systems and tools, and an understanding of processes and procedures.

Supervisors and team members should be trained in how to manage employees in a way that advances their career satisfaction and professional development. Agri-food companies in Poland should adopt a hire-to-grow model supported by robust succession planning, such that most senior vacant positions are consistently filled internally, while more junior vacant positions are filled externally.

Researchers have previously suggested that there is a link between talent management and business growth; however, this study has attempted to make a specific connection between talent management and the growth of agri-food companies in Wielkopolskie, Poland by demonstrating how talent management can enhance individual and team efficiency, dedication, and motivation. This translates into a collective commitment by a group of highly motivated employees to utilize their talent to drive various forms of innovation, which in turn supports business growth. To achieve such a commitment, agri-food companies must attract the most talented employees, hone their skills, and motivate and retain them with business growth and continuity in mind.

REFERENCES

- Baer-Nawrocka, A., Poczta, W. (2016). Polskie rolnictwo na tle rolnictwa UE. In: J. Wilkin, I. Nurzyńska (Eds.), *Polska Wieś – Raport o stanie wsi*. Warszawa: FDPA.
- Chambers, E., Foulon, M., Handfield-Jones, H., Hankin, S., Michaels, E. (1998). The war for talent. *McKinsey Quart.*, 3(3), 44–57.
- Davis, T., Cutt, M., Flynn, N., Mowl, P., Orme, S. (2007). Talent assessment: A new strategy for talent management. Gower.
- EC (2022). Monitoring EU agri-food trade. European Commission, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, Brussels.
- Gardner, T. (2002). In the trenches at the talent wars: Competitive interaction for scarce human resources. *Hum. Res. Manag. J.*, 41(2), 225–237. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.10033>
- Goffee, R., Jones, G. (2007). Leading clever people. *Harv. Bus. Rev.*, 85(3).
- GUS (2021). Dział II. Gospodarka żywnościowa. Handel zagraniczny. *Rocz. Statyst. Roln.*, 231–347. Retrieved from: <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/rocznik-statystyczny-rolnictwa-2021,6,15.html>

- Guthridge, M., Komm, A., Lawson, E. (2008). Making talent a strategic priority. *McKinsey Quart.*, 1(1), 49–59.
- Laddha, A., Singh, R., Gabbad, H., Gidwani, G. (2012). Employee retention: An art to reduce turnover. *Int. J. Manag. Res. Rev.*, 2(3), 453–458.
- Pawlak, K., Poczta, W. (2020). Competitiveness of Polish agriculture in the context of globalization and economic integration – Competitive potential and position. *Probl. Agric. Econ.*, 4(365), 86–107. <https://doi.org/10.30858/zer/130541>
- Pawlak, K., Poczta, W. (2025). Twenty years of Poland's EU membership: What is progress in the agri-food sector? *Agriculture*, 15 (49). <https://doi.org/10.3390/agriculture15010049>
- Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2021). Polish export offer in agri-food products. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.pl/web/agriculture/polish-export-offer-in-agri-food-products>
- Praburaj, L. (2018). Role of agriculture in the economic development of a country. *Shanlax Int. J. Commer.*, 6(3), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1323056>
- Rembisz, W., Kowalski, A. (2007) Rynek rolny w ujęciu funkcjonalnym. Warszawa: Wyższa Szkoła Finansów i Zarządzania.
- SHRM (2006). Talent management: a key component of HR. Retrieved from: <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/talent-management-key-component-hr>
- Tansley, C., Harris, L., Stewart, J., Turner, P., Foster, C., Williams, H. (2006). Talent management: Understanding the dimensions change agenda. London: CIPD.
- Uglis, J., Kozera-Kowalska, M. (2019). Students' perception of ideal work – An agribusiness sector case study. <https://doi.org/10.36689/uhk/hed/2019-02-049>
- Unay-Gailhard, I., Bavorová, M., Bednaríková, Z., Ponkina, E.V. (2019). I Don't Want to Work in Agriculture! The Transition from Agricultural Education to the Labor Market in Rural Russia. *Rural Sociology*, 84(2), 315–349. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12245>