

# Analysis on political participation of farmers' professional cooperatives--a survey from M town

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**Abstract:** *Rural development has always been an important issue of concern to the party and the state. Since 2006, farmers' professional cooperatives have become an important carrier of rural development in China, and have made very outstanding achievements in the economy. In addition, the political participation of cooperative members has also exerted a subtle influence on grassroots autonomy in the political aspect. Based on organization management theory and political participation theory, this paper tries to find out the political participation behaviours of farmers' professional cooperatives through literature research and questionnaire survey, and puts forward some suggestions to improve the rural grassroots autonomy.*

**Keywords:** *farmers' professional cooperatives; political participation; rural grassroots self-government*

## 1. Introduction

The issue of agriculture, rural areas and farmers has always been widely concerned by the society and highly valued by the state. In the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017, it was proposed to actively cultivate new agricultural management entities to help the development of agricultural modernization. In 2019, the No.1 Central Document put forward the general policy of adhering to the priority development of rural agriculture. In the same year, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee proposed to continuously deepen the reform of the rural collective property rights system, develop the rural collective economy and improve the basic rural management system. The No.1 Central Document of 2020 and the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee pointed out that the whole Party must have a profound understanding of the importance of doing a good job in the work concerning agriculture, rural areas and farmers in 2020, give priority to the development of agriculture and rural areas, and comprehensively promote rural revitalization. This shows that the 'three rural' issues related to the national economy and people's livelihood, in the healthy development of China's economy and complex international forces collision environment plays a vital role. The rural grassroots autonomy is an important gathering point of the 'three rural' issues. For more than ten years, farmers' professional cooperatives have become an important carrier of rural economic development. At the end of 2006, the state officially promulgated and implemented the law of farmers' professional cooperatives. Over the past ten years, farmers' professional cooperatives have developed rapidly and achieved outstanding results.

As of July 2019, according to the data of the State Administration for Industry and Commerce of China, the number of farmers' professional cooperatives registered for industry and commerce nationwide reached more than 2.2 million, radiating and driving nearly half of the country's farmers. The industrial types of farmers' professional cooperatives in China are diversified, the cooperation content is more perfect, and the service ability is constantly enhanced. There is no doubt that farmers' professional cooperatives have become a powerful driving force to promote the development of China's modern agricultural economy. With the continuous advancement of the rural revitalization strategy, the role of farmers' professional cooperatives is not limited to the economic field. As a strong economic organization, it will also have some impact on rural grassroots democratic autonomy. Farmers' professional cooperatives in M town have developed steadily and continuously for more than ten years. This paper analyzes the current situation of political participation of farmers' professional cooperatives in M town and puts forward some suggestions for improving rural grassroots autonomy.

## 2. Analysis on political participation of farmers' professional cooperatives

### 2.1. Overview of questionnaire design

In this paper, the questionnaire is based on organizational management theory and political participation theory, and learn from a number of papers on the political participation of farmers' professional cooperatives in the questionnaire design part,<sup>table1</sup> according to the actual development of farmers' professional cooperatives in M town and the basic situation of the adjustment. There are 11 questions in the questionnaire, which are divided into four parts: political cognition, political attitude, political participation motivation and political participation mode.

### 2.2. Present situation of political participation of farmers' professional cooperatives in M town

The political participation of farmers' professional cooperatives in M town is mainly carried out through questionnaire survey from four dimensions: political cognition, attitude, participation motivation and participation mode.

#### 1) Political cognition

Political cognition is in the most basic position in the political concept system. It is the basic understanding of farmers' political system, political function, political norms and political power in daily political practice.<sup>[2]</sup> Regarding the cognition of the nature of the village committee, about 71% of the members can clarify the basic nature of the village committee, that is, the rural grass-roots mass self-government organization, but 33% of the members believe that the village committee belongs to the township agency or even the state power organization. In the understanding of 'farmers' professional cooperatives law', the survey results show that 80% of the members can accurately say that the competent department of cooperatives is the agricultural department.

#### 2) Political attitude

Behaviorism politics believes that political attitudes can be divided into four types: political efficacy, civic responsibility, political trust and political alienation.

Table 1: Survey results of members' political participation

Question	Answer	Number
Participation in village committees, localities	Not once	3
	Occasionally	7
	Often	43
	Every	22
Willingness to serve as a local village cadre	Unwilling	22
	Indifferent	33
	willing (or be)	10

This paper adopts the above viewpoint of behaviorism politics and applies the behavior of participating in the election of village committee and local people's congress to investigate the political responsibility of members. That is to say, the higher the positive participation of members in the election of village committees and local people's congresses, the stronger the political responsibility of members. According to statistics from relevant departments, the local participation rate in the latest village committee election reached 73%. As shown in Table 1, the proportion of 'often' and 'every' in this survey reached 84.6%, indicating that cooperative members have a high enthusiasm for voting in elections.

In the topic setting, whether there is a willingness to serve as a village cadre reflects to a certain extent the subjective willingness of members to assume greater responsibility. This paper believes that this reflects a higher level of political needs. About 33.8% of the respondents said they were unwilling to be village cadres: nearly half of the members think it doesn't matter, overall, as a village cadre attitude is not positive.

The sense of political efficacy in this paper refers to the subjective feeling that members think that their actions can have various effects on the political process of cooperative operation. The questionnaire measures the political efficacy of members by investigating the attitude of the cooperative in the process of democratic management voting. Members of the voting process for the choice of 'my vote is important' 24.6% of 35.4% of members chose 'my vote is useless', which is consistent with the cooperative decision-making approach, and 40% of members can realize that voting is their right. According to the trust performance of cooperative cadres and village cadres, the political trust of members can be reflected

to a certain extent. Cooperative leaders and business backbones are the soul of cooperatives. They largely determine the development of cooperatives. Members usually have a strong dependence on them. According to the survey results in Table 2, only a very small number of members do not support the village cadres by the cooperative backbone. And about 71% of the members of the cooperative cadres to participate in the election of village cadres is a supportive position. It can thus be seen that these backbone members of cooperatives have a good mass base and that their participation in elections is more competitive than that of ordinary candidates, thus allowing them to enter the 'political' sphere directly. On the other hand, the successful election of the backbone of cooperatives may also bring more development opportunities to cooperatives.

*Table 2: Survey results of members' views on cooperative voting*

Question	Answer	Number
Views on cooperative voting	My vote is useless	23
	Voting is my right	26
	My vote is important	16

The questionnaire also has members 'views on village cadres' part-time cooperatives. According to Table 3, it can be directly seen that the village cadre part-time cooperative has a higher support rate than the key cooperative members participating in the village committee election, which shows that some members do not trust the village cadres. In general, members hold a positive attitude towards the positive role played by village cadres in cooperatives.

*Table 3: Survey results of members' views on the composition of cooperative cadres*

Question	Answer	Number
Do you support key cooperative members in village cadre election	Not support	4
	I don't know	15
	Support	46
View of village cadres to cooperatives part-time	Should not hold a position in the cooperative	18
	Positive effect on the establishment of cooperatives.	11
	Positive effect on the development of cooperatives	36

### 3) Political participation motivation

*Table 4: Survey results of members' political participation motivation*

Question	Answer	Number
Main reasons for voting	It is my right and duty	38
	Acquaintance canvassing, sorry	15
	Particularly wish someone to be elected	8
	Participation in the election is good for me	4
	Did not participate	11
The role of cooperative in the village	Has no direct relationship	8
	Don't participate in the village things	6
	Contribute to village development	51

In order to explore the motivation of members' political participation, we must first clarify the form of their political participation. At present, farmers' political participation in China is mainly in the form of means of political participation, rather than objective political participation. Targeted political participation regards political participation as a goal pursuit: the instrumental political participation is in the political environment, political participation as a means to achieve other goals, such as to achieve a certain economic goal. Through the questionnaire to understand the purpose of members to participate in the election can intuitively understand their political participation motivation. In the cognition of participation in village committee elections, the purpose of members' participation in elections is that participation in elections is their own rights and obligations, which can be identified as targeted participation. From the survey results in Table 4, the proportion of targeted participation is 58.5%, which is relatively high. This shows that the cooperative members have a strong sense of political participation.

Another basic indicator to measure the political orientation of citizens is the sense of contribution to community welfare. Here, the sense of contribution to rural areas is used to reflect the political orientation of farmers. The questions shown above are used to measure the sense of contribution of cooperative members to rural welfare. 78.5% of the members believe that the development of cooperatives should contribute to rural development, less than 13% of the members believe that the development of cooperatives should not be too much involved in the affairs of the village and the development of cooperatives has no direct relationship with the development of the village, which shows that the

members have a positive political orientation, have a good vision for the development of cooperatives, that cooperatives need to have the courage to assume responsibility, with a positive attitude to contribute to the local grass-roots governance and development. According to the above statistics, the motivation of political participation of cooperative members in M town is rational, and it is more inclined to target political participation than traditional means of political participation.

#### 4) Political participation

According to literature review, political participation can be divided into two main ways, namely institutionalized political participation and non-institutionalized political participation. Scholars also found that the phenomenon of non-institutionalized political participation of farmers is increasing, and has an important impact on the social and political environment and grassroots governance.

*Table 5: Survey results of members' political participation modes*

Question	Answer	Number
How to respond to the higher-level government agencies when they are harmful to farmers' interests	News media	15
	Collective petition	10
	People's representative	12
	Own organizations (such as cooperatives)	28
How do members reflect the problems in villager autonomy	Village meeting	25
	County, township people's congress or higher authorities	23
	Common consultation	11
	Not to reflect	6

In Table 5, the members of professional cooperatives will be asked how to respond to the higher-level government agencies when they are harmful to farmers' interests. Only 15.4% of the members choose the non-institutionalized way of 'collective petition', and most of the members choose to reflect the problems through the institutionalized participation forms such as the news media and the people's congress representatives. Of these, 43.1% chose to solve problems through their own organization. It can be seen that cooperatives have become a platform for farmers to express their interests and safeguard their rights and interests. Reflecting problems through cooperatives has positive practical significance for reducing farmers' non-institutionalized political participation, easing grassroots contradictions and alleviating social conflicts.

In terms of how to reflect the problem of villagers' autonomy, less than 20% of the members choose to cooperate with other farmers to solve the problem by means of joint consultation, while about 75% of the members choose to participate in the villagers' meeting to express their opinions and reflect the situation to the deputies to the people's congress or the higher authorities, which shows that the form of political participation of the members is generally rational, and most of them participate in political participation in an institutionalized way.

### 3. Conclusions

Based on the above questionnaire, we can know that the political literacy of members of farmers' professional cooperatives is generally higher than that of ordinary farmers outside cooperatives. From the four dimensions of political cognition, political attitude, political participation motivation and political participation mode, the democratic consciousness, cooperation consciousness and participation consciousness of the members of farmers' specialized cooperatives have reached a high level. Thus, farmers' professional cooperatives become the main place to cultivate farmers' political literacy. This is a very gratifying thing for rural development. At present, a prominent problem faced by rural grassroots mass self-government in China is that farmers' political participation is generally low. The organization of farmers' professional cooperatives can effectively cultivate farmers' awareness and ability of political participation, which will be an effective carrier to improve the autonomy of rural grassroots people. For example, we can learn from the daily management norms of cooperatives and the positive practices of local representative typical cooperatives to lead all villagers to learn together, set up support groups, and effectively implement the political participation ability and consciousness of local farmers in the form of one-to-one and one-to-many.

Through the above analysis of the status quo of the political participation of farmers' professional cooperatives, the questionnaire sets up two questions on the attitude of members to the key cooperative members as village cadres and village cadres as part-time cooperative cadres in the dimension of political trust. The survey results show that 70.8% of the members strongly support the key cooperative members

to run for village cadres, and for village cadres as cooperative cadres, members are obviously unwilling to accept. Based on the above data and phenomena, it can be concluded that cooperative cadres have a broad mass base within the cooperative, and cooperative members can also rationally realize that cooperative cadres can play an active role in the overall development of the cooperative after taking office as village cadres. Most cooperative members also believe that the development of cooperatives should also contribute to the development of the whole village. It can be concluded that in the selection of village cadres, these factors and voices can be properly considered, for example, can explore the 'village cadres + key cooperative members' co-serving situation, through foster strengths and circumvent weaknesses, to jointly enhance the level of local grassroots rural autonomy.

### References

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