

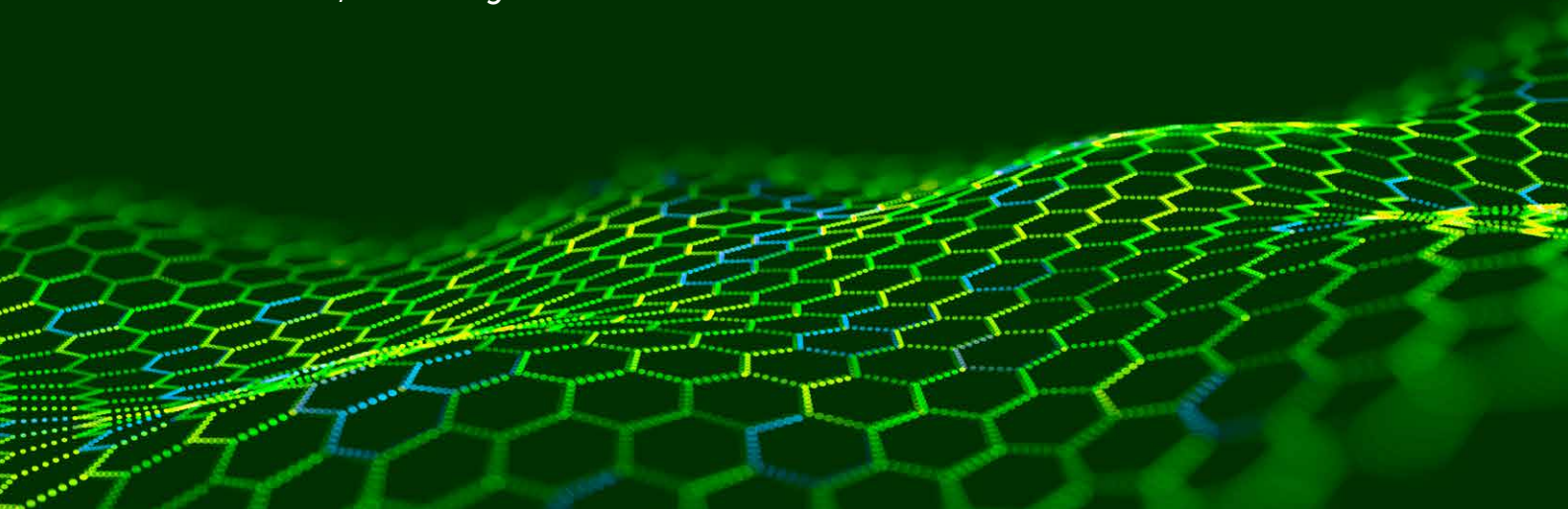


Scientific Conference

KRUS – Between Stability and Change

The Future of the Farmers' Social
Insurance System

Warsaw, 12 May 2026



Conference organiser:



KASA ROLNICZEGO
UBEZPIECZENIA SPOŁECZNEGO

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The conference record was prepared by Ewelina Alwasiak, MBA,
PhD, Director of the Communications Office at KRUS Headquarters

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PROGRAMME

WARSAW, 12 MAY 2026

09.00–09.30 Participant registration

09.30–09.50 Opening of the conference

09.50–11.10 **PANEL I: *Where we came from – the origin and purpose of establishing KRUS***

Moderator: Krzysztof Księżopolski, PhD

Panellists: Andrzej Kosiniak-Kamysz, MD
Adam Niewiadomski, PhD, Professor at the University of Warsaw
Agnieszka Chłóń-Domińczak, PhD, DSc, Professor at the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH)
Marek Wigier, PhD, DSc, Assoc. Prof. at the Institute of Agriculture and Food Economics -National Research Institute (IERiGŻ – PIB)
Prof. Gertruda Uścińska, PhD

11.10–11.30 Coffee break

11.30–12.50 **PANEL II: *Where we are – current challenges of the KRUS system***

Moderator: Prof. Marian Podstawka

Panellists: Monika A. Król, PhD, Professor at the University of Łódź
Prof. Irena Jędrzejczyk, PhD
Prof. Marek Kos, MD, PhD
Anetta Zielińska, PhD

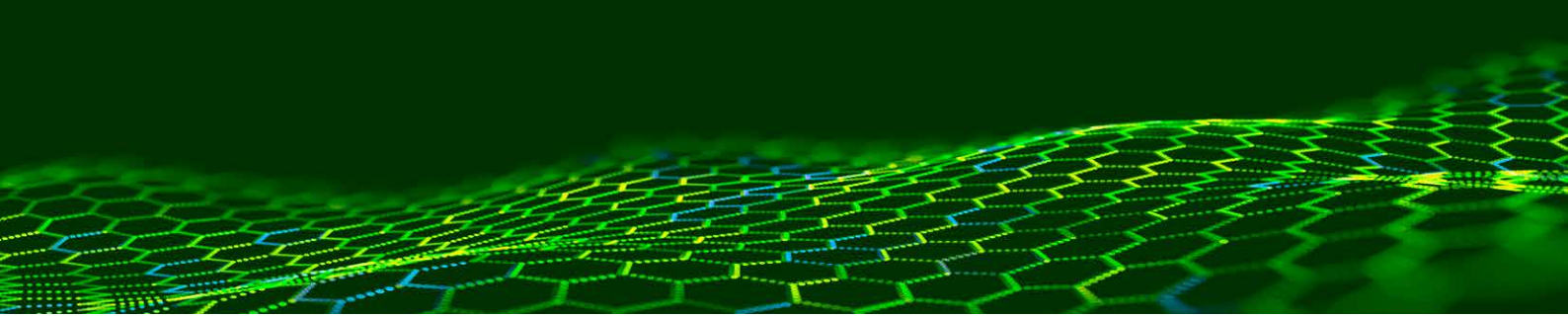
12.50–13.20 Lunch break

13.20–14.50 **PANEL III: *Where we are headed – the future of KRUS***

Moderator: Tomasz Jędrzejczak

Panellists: Monika Stanny, PhD, Professor at the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IRWiR PAN)
Prof. Marian Podstawka, PhD
Janina Petelczyc, PhD
Damian Walczak, PhD
Helena Rudzis-Gruchała, Professor at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (NCU)

14.50–15.00 Conference summary



DEAR GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, FRIENDS OF KRUS,

it is a great honour for me to welcome you to this scientific conference devoted to the future of the farmers' social insurance system. We are meeting at a special moment – in the year in which KRUS celebrates its 35th anniversary. This is an excellent opportunity not only to celebrate, but above all to discuss the future in a spirit of dialogue between practice and academia.

I am particularly pleased that we are doing so here – within the walls of Warsaw School of Economics (SGH), one of the leading economic universities in Poland. This is a place where thinking on public policy, finance and the economy has been shaped for many years. Today, we are joining this discussion as an institution that has stood alongside rural Poland for three and a half decades.

Today, I see before me people who help build the security of farmers: representatives of central and local government, agricultural organisations, rural-sector institutions, experts in social policy, economics, public health and rural studies. I warmly welcome all practitioners, activists and researchers who have accepted our invitation.

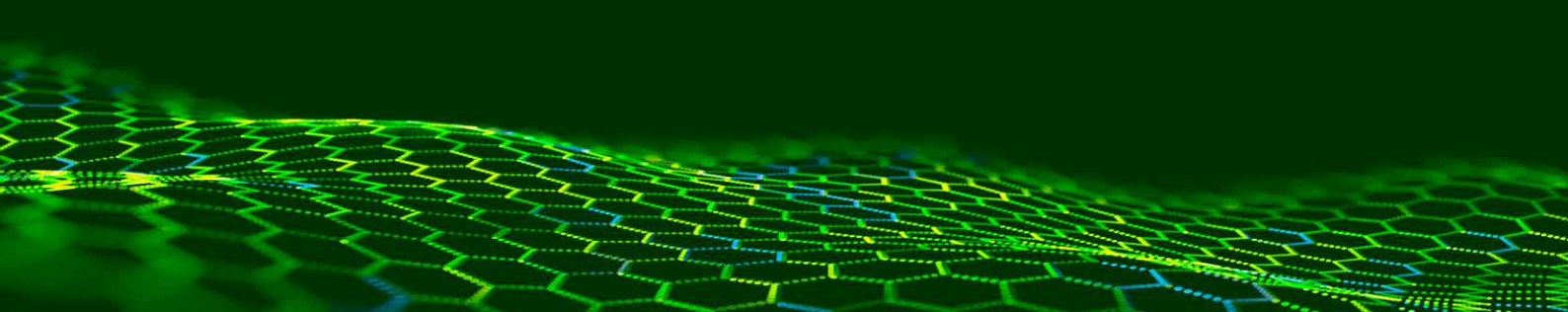
Today's conference forms part of a broader debate on social security in Poland. Your presence demonstrates one thing: this conversation is necessary – and fortunately we are not conducting it alone.

KRUS was established more than three decades ago because farmers needed an institution that would provide stability in later life, while also offering support in everyday risks: short-term benefits, prevention and rehabilitation. An institution that understands their work, their rhythm of life and their burdens. And we have proudly stood by their side for 35 years.

Today, KRUS provides protection to nearly two million people – pensioners, disability pension recipients, widows and widowers, as well as those who work on Polish land every day. This is a vast community whose social security we help to build. The system we have developed provides real support to people who have spent decades building rural Poland and its strength. This scale brings responsibility – and motivates us to continue our efforts.

Today, together with you, we wish to consider how best to use this experience and how to adapt the system effectively to the changing realities of rural areas and agriculture. Because the world is changing. Rural areas are changing. Needs and expectations are changing. And we – as an institution – must be prepared to respond to these changes.

That is why we have structured today's conference around three fundamental questions:



1. Where do we come from – because one must know one's foundations in order to build the future.
2. Where are we – because one must honestly recognise the challenges of the present.
3. Where are we headed – because the future requires wise decisions.

On its 35th anniversary, KRUS wishes to participate actively in public debate. We are an institution open to dialogue and to new ideas and concepts that serve more than two million Poles. Every year, we pay benefits on time, safeguarding the financial stability of farming families. We are also expanding cooperation with academia – including through our scientific

journal, which has become a platform for the exchange of knowledge and analysis.

Thank you for your presence, your willingness to engage in discussion, and for being here with us – not as observers, but as co-creators of the future of KRUS. Together, we want to seek the best solutions that will continue the excellent 35-year history of the Fund.

And now – with great pleasure – I declare the conference open and invite you to the first panel.

Thank you

Tomasz Ślusarczyk
President of KRUS



Moderator:

Krzysztof Księżopolski, PhD

Adviser to the President of KRUS

Department of Public Policy

College of Socio-Economics

Warsaw School of Economics (SGH)

Panellists:

Andrzej Kosiniak-Kamysz, MD

Plenipotentiary of the Director for Medical Services

at the Józef Dietl Specialist Hospital in Kraków

Minister of Health and Social Welfare in 1989–1991

Deputy Minister of Health in 2002–2003

Adam Niewiadomski, PhD, Professor at the University of Warsaw

Vice-Rector of the University of Warsaw for Doctoral and Legal Affairs

Head of the Department of Agricultural Law and Food Protection

System Faculty of Law and Administration

University of Warsaw

Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak, PhD, DSc, Professor at Warsaw School of Economics (SGH)

Vice-Rector for Research

Director of the Institute of Statistics and Demography

Warsaw School of Economics (SGH)

Marek Wigier, PhD, DSc, Assoc. Prof. at the Institute of Agriculture and Food Economics – National Research Institute (IERiGŻ – PIB)

Director of the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics – National

Research Institute

Prof. Gertruda Uścińska, PhD

Deputy Chair of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Labour and Social Affairs

Research and teaching staff member at the Faculty of Political Science and

International Studies, University of Warsaw

Head of the Centre for Social Security Research (at the above Faculty)

Since 2020, Chair of the Committee on Labour and Social Policy Sciences

of the Polish Academy of Sciences

President of the Social Insurance Institution from 2016 to 2024

PANEL I

Where we came from – the origin and purpose of establishing KRUS



In the photograph, from left: Krzysztof Księżopolski, PhD
Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak, PhD, Prof. Gertruda Uścińska, PhD
Dr Andrzej Kosiniak-Kamysz, Adam Niewiadomski, PhD, Marek Wigier, PhD

WHERE WE CAME FROM – THE ORIGIN AND PURPOSE OF ESTABLISHING KRUS

The first panel of the conference ‘KRUS – Between Stability and Change. The Future of the Farmers’ Social Insurance System’, entitled ‘Where we came from – the origin and purpose of establishing KRUS’, was devoted to reflection on the historical foundations of the system, the continued relevance of its original assumptions, and the place of KRUS within European social policies. The discussion was moderated by Krzysztof Księżopolski, PhD, and the panel participants included: Andrzej Kosiniak-Kamysz, MD, PhD, Professor Adam Niewiadomski, Professor Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak, Professor Marek Wigier, and Professor Gertruda Uścińska.

The panellists returned to the origins of the institution, analysing the political and economic realities that led to the establishment of KRUS in 1991. They emphasised that the system was a response to the unique structure of Polish agriculture and the need to provide social protection for rural communities during the period of transformation. At the same time, they pointed out that over the past 35 years the environment in which KRUS operates has changed radically – demographic trends, the agrarian structure, the labour market and EU regulations now pose new challenges for the system.

The discussion focused on how to maintain a balance between stability and the need for change: how to modernise the system without losing sight of its mission and the values on which it was founded. The panel provided a solid foundation for the subsequent conference discussions, demonstrating that understanding the origins of KRUS is key to answering the question of where the system should be heading.

Dr Andrzej Kosiniak-Kamysz, Minister of Health and Social Welfare in the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, emphasised that KRUS was one of the most successful projects of the transformation period, providing social security to rural Poland during a time of profound systemic change. He noted, however, that although effective, the system is still based on solutions developed 35 years ago and should evolve – without revolution, while respecting the specific nature of agricultural work and the uncertainty that accompanies it.

Recalling the beginnings of the transformation period, Dr Andrzej Kosiniak-Kamysz referred to a visit by Bernard Kouchner, the French Minister for Humanitarian Action and Health, who brought medical supplies to Poland and proposed cooperation in organising farmers’ insurance. The French made available to Poland the organisational structure of their farmers’ insurance system, which was similar to the Polish agrarian structure. This cooperation was continued by Minister Artur Balazs, with the full support of the agrarian movement within the

Mazowiecki government, ultimately leading to the establishment of KRUS.

After leaving government service, Dr Kosiniak-Kamysz became involved in developing the KRUS prevention and rehabilitation system. An expert triangle was established in Kraków: the Józef Dietl Specialist Hospital with its Department of Rural Medicine, KRUS Headquarters, and the Witold Chodźko Institute of Rural Health in Lublin. This team laid the foundations for modern prevention activities: physician training, publications, field programmes and the development of a network of rehabilitation centres, including in Horyniec-Zdrój, Szklarska Poręba, Iwonicz-Zdrój and on the Baltic coast. As a result, KRUS became an institution that not only pays benefits but also actively cares for the health of farmers.

Dr Kosiniak-Kamysz emphasised that KRUS empowered generations of Polish farmers who previously had no genuine health or social protection. Agricultural disability pensions and old-age pensions provided a sense of security during a period of enormous uncertainty. 'Those who do not respect the past cannot build the future,' he noted, stressing that the origins of KRUS should serve as a point of reference for its future development.

In conclusion, he stated that KRUS should be maintained and that its role could be expanded – for example, to include social assistance tasks or additional insurance schemes. The distinct nature of the farming community is a fact, and the institution's achievements are valuable and enduring. The system of CRRs [Farmers' Rehabilitation Centres], prevention activities,

rehabilitation services and organisational experience mean that KRUS has the potential to take on new functions while remaining a cornerstone of social security in rural Poland.

Professor Adam Niewiadomski emphasised that a separate farmers' social insurance system remains justified both historically and from the perspective of agricultural law. Its foundation lies in Andrzej Stelmachowski's concept of 'agricultural ownership', which assumes a particular responsibility of the state towards farmers as a group ensuring the country's food security. This is not a matter of privileges, but of the state's obligations towards those who perform work of strategic importance to the functioning of the state.

The second historical pillar of the system is the tradition of civil-law protection of farmers in old age, including through life annuity agreements. KRUS represents a modern continuation of this approach, guaranteeing farmers social security after many years of physically demanding work performed seven days a week.

The professor identified the compulsory nature of insurance for specific groups of farmers as the most enduring element of the KRUS framework, ensuring the coherence and comprehensiveness of the system. Equally important is the guarantee of old-age security, which constitutes a key value of the system and one of the main arguments for its retention. The professor noted that although the system had been abused in the past – including by individuals attempting to artificially meet the conditions for insurance coverage – current regulations have significantly limited such practices.

KRUS remains a system that genuinely serves both older and younger farmers, as confirmed by practical experience. In Prof. Niewiadomski's view, the advantages of maintaining a separate system outweigh its shortcomings, and KRUS – despite the need for further reforms – is a well-conceived framework that reflects the specific nature of agricultural work and its importance to the state. The system's greatest value remains its durability, its guarantee-based character, and its ability to provide farmers with stable security after the end of their professional activity.

Professor Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak pointed out that the rationale for maintaining a separate farmers' social insurance system should be considered in the context of both historical factors and contemporary challenges. When KRUS was established, there were strong reasons for creating a separate system: difficulties in determining farmers' income, a fragmented agrarian structure, higher levels of rural poverty, and the need to ensure access to social and healthcare benefits. The flat-rate contribution structure and the institutional adaptation of KRUS to the realities of Polish agriculture were responses to these challenges and remain important elements of the system.

However, the environment in which KRUS operates has changed profoundly. Agriculture's share of GDP has fallen from approximately 6% to 2.6%, the share of farmers in the labour market has decreased from 25% to 7.6%, and the number of insured persons and beneficiaries has fallen from 1.7 million to approximately 1 million. KRUS continues to perform its tasks effectively, but the structure of the economy, the labour market and the nature of rural Poland

have changed. The greatest challenges are the ageing of rural areas and depopulation, which particularly affect small family farms that, without KRUS, would be deprived of meaningful social and healthcare protection.

In the coming years, the stability of the system will be determined by three demographic processes. First, declining fertility, which has led to convergence between rural and urban fertility patterns and reduced the fertility rate to 1.1. Second, increasing life expectancy, which means that benefits must be paid over increasingly long periods. Third, migration of young people to large cities, particularly from areas dominated by small farms, leading to depopulation, the ageing of the farming population and a decline in the number of insured persons.

These changes are reflected in the system's finances: the State Budget subsidy to KRUS increased from PLN 18.4 billion in 2020 to PLN 24.8 billion in 2024, accounting for almost 90% of transfers to the population within this system. Although this is socially justified, it requires consideration of the future operating model of KRUS.

In the researcher's view, KRUS remains an institution of key importance to rural Poland, especially for small family farms. However, demographic, migration and structural changes make it necessary to redefine more precisely the role of the system and the direction of its reform so that it reflects both the specific nature of Polish agriculture and inexorable demographic trends.

Professor Marek Wigier noted that the rationale for maintaining KRUS should today be assessed in the context of profound structural and

demographic changes in rural Poland. When the system was established in 1991, its introduction was fully justified – KRUS stabilised the social situation during the transformation period, while agriculture served as a buffer against change, providing basic social security.

Thirty-five years later, however, rural Poland looks entirely different. Depopulation, population ageing and the growing imbalance between the number of insured persons and beneficiaries are all intensifying. The structure of agriculture has become highly polarised: alongside approximately 200,000–250,000 active commercial farms, there is a large group of small farms that gain access to basic benefits through KRUS. According to the professor, these changes require reflection on whether the system should provide stronger incentives for capital accumulation and introduce differentiated contributions, as KRUS is currently one of the few systems in which the level of contributions is not linked to the level of future pensions.

From an economic perspective, the system is advantageous for the smallest farms because KRUS contributions are several times lower than Social Insurance Institution contributions. However, in the longer term, changes are required, particularly given that an increasing number of rural residents no longer engage in agricultural activity while continuing to benefit from the system. The professor suggested considering tighter eligibility criteria for KRUS so that it primarily covers genuinely active farmers.

The functions of rural areas are also changing – they now extend beyond food production to include the protection of natural resources,

the development of non-agricultural activities, and the use of Common Agricultural Policy instruments, including direct payments that help sustain farm viability. All these processes require a new approach to farmers' social insurance, although they do not undermine its rationale.

In response to a question concerning the relationship between KRUS and the Common Agricultural Policy, Prof. Wigier emphasised that changes to the system should be aligned with it. The CAP has been evolving for years in response to new challenges, and similarly KRUS should respond to its changing environment. At present, the system supports farm competitiveness mainly through cost and social-security mechanisms, but its impact on the long-term efficiency and modernisation of agriculture is limited and sometimes even constraining.

The professor concluded by emphasising that the natural evolution of the system is necessary, while also acknowledging that for 35 years KRUS has provided stability and continuity of social security in rural areas.

Professor Gertruda Uścińska outlined the broad historical and institutional context without which neither the origins of KRUS nor its current position within the European social security system can be properly understood. She stressed that the roots of the contemporary system date back to the 1970s and 1980s, when Polish agriculture operated under unique political and economic conditions. Unlike other countries of the Eastern Bloc, Poland was dominated by individual farms – approximately 3.2 million holdings accounting for 75% of agricultural land. This structural phenomenon

made it necessary to create separate legal arrangements for farmers.

The 1977 Act on farmers' old-age pension provision was the first step towards recognising farmers as independent social actors: for the first time, they obtained universal entitlement to social benefits and access to healthcare. At the same time, the system continued to pursue the political objectives of the Polish People's Republic, including the obligation to sell agricultural products to the state. A subsequent Act adopted in 1982 extended insurance coverage to household members and introduced new contribution rules, easing social tensions in rural areas.

The real breakthrough, however, came only in the years 1989–1991. The liquidation of State Agricultural Farms (PGRs) and the sharp rise in structural unemployment created the need to establish a protective framework for rural areas under conditions of economic transformation. The 1990 Act on farmers' social insurance and the establishment of KRUS were responses to the shock of transformation, instruments of social stabilisation and elements of building political support during the reform period. As the professor emphasised, the system was intended to protect farmers from being 'hit twice as hard by the free market'.

Professor Uścińska noted that the establishment of KRUS was also an expression of institutional sovereignty in the field of social security and a manifestation of European aspirations – drawing on French and German solutions. Academic literature identifies three stages in the development of the system: the

provision stage (1977–1982), the insurance stage (1982–1990), and the autonomous stage (from 1991 onwards), in which KRUS has operated as a separate institution.

In response to a question regarding the place of KRUS within the European social security system, the professor emphasised that EU Member States retain autonomy in organising and financing their insurance systems, but that the importance of EU coordination and the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union is increasing and influences the shape of national legislation. Poland should actively participate in these processes, particularly in the area of regulations concerning farmers engaged in cross-border work.

Professor Uścińska also highlighted the need for comparative studies of agricultural insurance systems across the EU in order to better understand directions of change and dispel misconceptions that continue to circulate in Poland. She noted that many European countries face similar challenges: the ageing of the agricultural sector, changes in production structures, an increasing number of regulations, and the need for long-term planning extending to 2050–2060.

Compared with other European systems, KRUS stands out for its stable eligibility conditions for old-age pensions – a retirement age of 60/65 and a requirement of 25 years of work. The professor stressed that this is a solution 'to be envied', particularly in the context of the growing problem of micro-pensions in the general system, where entitlement to a benefit may arise after only a few days of contributions.

In conclusion, Prof. Uścińska emphasised that understanding the historical context – from the 1977 Act, through the changes of the 1980s, to the transformation period of 1989–1991 – is essential for assessing the current shape of KRUS and its future directions of development. The

system was created in response to exceptional political, social and economic challenges, and its distinct character is deeply rooted both in history and in the specific nature of Polish agriculture.

Discussion from the floor – key points

During the discussion session, representatives of the academic and expert communities took the floor, expanding on issues raised by the panellists. **Professor Marian Podstawka** drew attention to two key issues: first, that in practice contributions based on agricultural income have never existed, because agricultural income is difficult to determine precisely; second, that the real issue is not the level of contributions but the relationship between contributions paid and the amount of future benefits. As he pointed out, a PLN 1,000 contribution in the Social Insurance Institution system translates into approximately PLN 5 of pension entitlement, whereas in KRUS it translates into approximately PLN 35, illustrating the fundamental structural difference between the two systems.

Gertruda Uścińska responded by recalling that the 1977 Act included elements linking contributions to the value of market sales, which in practice proved burdensome, particularly for the smallest farms

President Helena Rudzis-Gruchała in turn, emphasised that the importance of agriculture to the economy cannot be measured solely by its share of GDP or employment. Agricultural

production provides the foundation for many sectors of industry – including the agri-food, chemical and processing industries – which strengthens the argument for maintaining a robust social security system for farmers.

Professor Marek Wigier clarified which of the original premises underlying KRUS remain valid and which have become outdated. He indicated that the fragmented agrarian structure, the absence of comprehensive income accounting, and the lack of a realistic alternative system remain relevant factors. At the same time, he noted that the income of many farms has increased significantly and that rural areas are now far more modernised than they were in the 1990s, which requires a fresh perspective on the system.

In the final part of the discussion, **Professor Adam Niewiadomski** drew attention to ambiguities in the legal structure of KRUS, including the status of the Contribution Fund. He stressed that the Act does not clearly define what KRUS is as an institution, which creates interpretative difficulties even among legal professionals. He suggested that this issue should be the subject of further work, particularly in the context of future reforms.

Moderator:

Prof. Marian Podstawka, PhD

Institute of Management and Quality Sciences

Social Sciences Faculty

University of Siedlce

Panellists:

Monika A. Król, PhD, Professor at the University of Łódź

Institute of Legal Comparative and Interdisciplinary Research

Faculty of Law and Administration

University of Łódź

Prof. Irena Jędrzejczyk, PhD

Department of Management

University of Bielsko-Biala

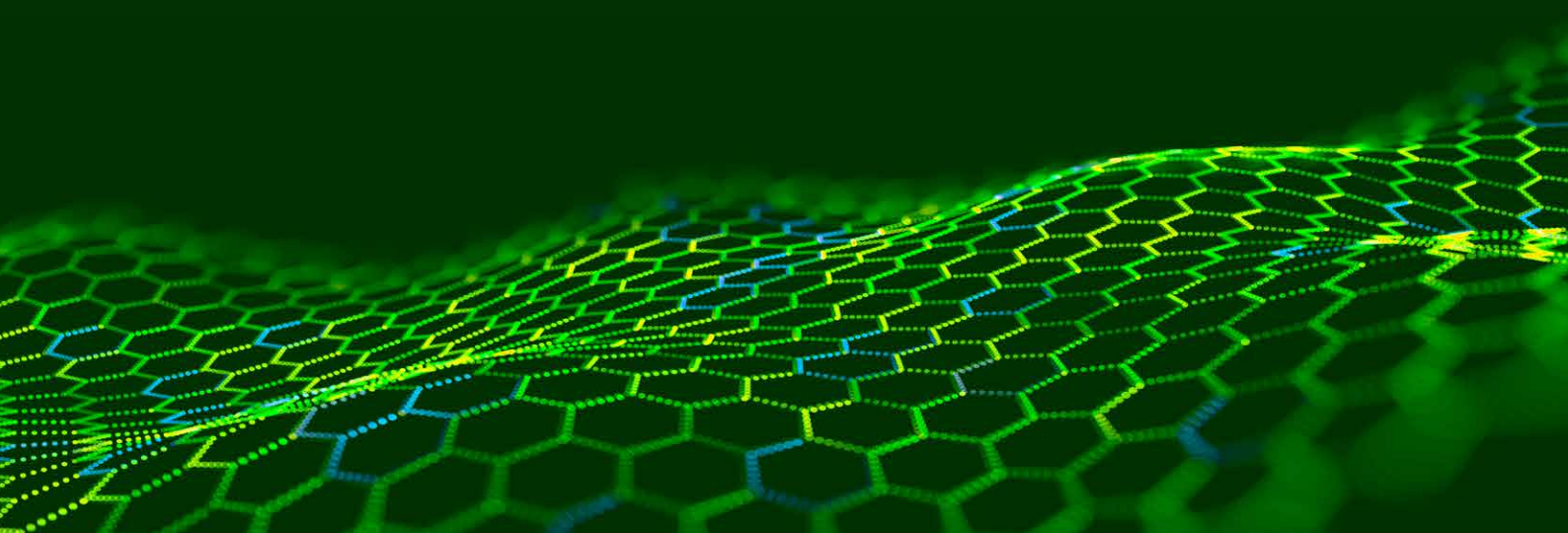
Prof. Marek Kos, MD, PhD

Chief Medical Examiner of the Fund

Anetta Zielińska, PhD

Dean of the Social Sciences Faculty

Piotrków Academy in Piotrków Trybunalski



PANEL II

Where we are – current challenges of the KRUS system



In the photograph, from left: Prof. Marian Podstawka, PhD, Monika A. Król, PhD
Prof. Irena Jędrzejczyk, PhD, Marek Kos, MD, PhD, Anetta Zielińska, PhD

WHERE WE ARE – CURRENT CHALLENGES OF THE KRUS SYSTEM

The second panel of the conference ‘KRUS – Between Stability and Change. The Future of the Farmers’ Social Insurance System’, entitled ‘Where we are – current challenges of the KRUS system’, focused on diagnosing the contemporary challenges facing the farmers’ social insurance system. The discussion was moderated by Professor Marian Podstawka, and the panellists included Professor Monika A. Król, Professor Irena Jędrzejczyk, Professor Marek Kos and Dr Anetta Zielińska.

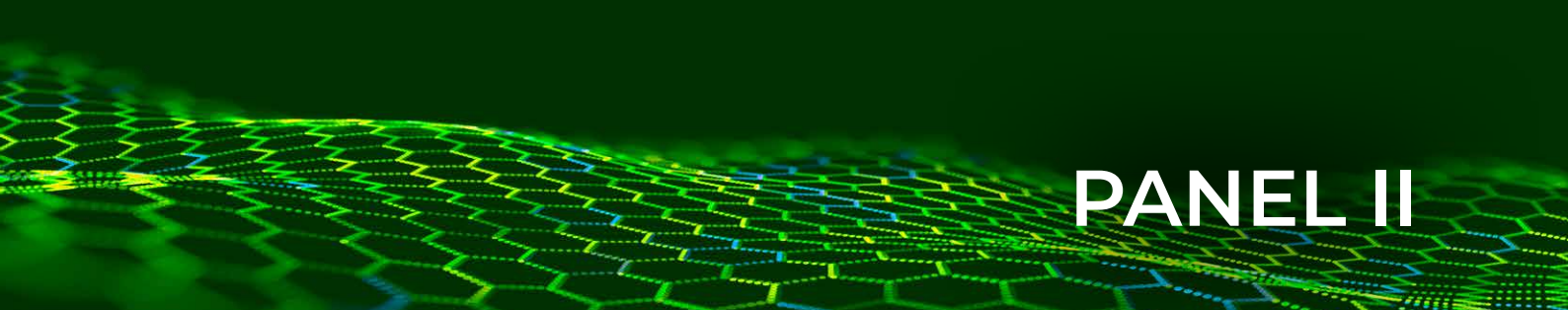
The panellists analysed the most important challenges currently facing KRUS, arising from profound demographic, structural and health-related changes taking place in rural Poland. The discussion centred on issues such as the ageing of the farming population, the declining number of insured persons, the growing number of beneficiaries, the changing nature of agricultural work, and emerging health and occupational risks. The participants also discussed how the system should modernise its legal, financial and preventive instruments in order to respond effectively to these developments.

The second panel therefore attempted to answer the question of how KRUS is functioning today and what actions are needed to keep it stable and adequate in the next decades. The panellists’ contributions demonstrated that the system faces challenges extending beyond insurance matters alone to encompass social, health and economic issues, and that addressing them requires both the modernisation of regulations and a stronger role for KRUS as an institution supporting the safety and well-being of rural residents.

Professor Monika Król emphasised that the most urgent legislative changes concern succession and generational renewal in agriculture, as these issues will largely determine the future stability of the KRUS system. Referring to the work of Professor Andrzej Stelmachowski, she recalled that the farmers’ social security system was originally intended to serve two equally important functions: providing social security for older people and enabling the smooth transfer of farms to the younger generation.

The professor noted that successive legal solutions – from the mandatory transfer of farms to the state, through successor agreements, to Common Agricultural Policy instruments – have failed to achieve the expected effectiveness. Although extensively discussed in legal doctrine, the successor agreement proved in practice to be a dormant instrument. Likewise, EU support instruments for young farmers have not brought about a genuine breakthrough.

In Professor Król’s view, generational renewal is now the key challenge, as the average age of farmers in the EU is 57, while in Poland it is 52.



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Over the next 10–20 years, the KRUS system will have to cope with a declining number of insured persons and a growing number of beneficiaries, which requires carefully considered legislative modernisation.

The professor stressed that only young farmers are capable of meeting the growing requirements of food security and global demographic challenges. The world's population is increasing – by 300 million people over the last two and a half years – which means that agriculture must be capable of increasing production, and this requires efficient, secure and predictable farm succession.

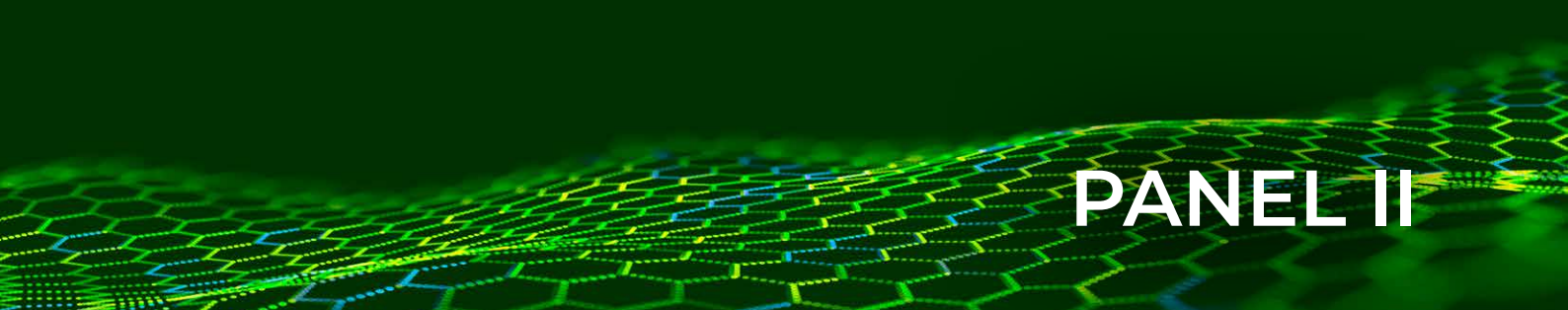
She pointed out that there is currently a conglomerate of incoherent legal instruments: civil-law mechanisms (land transactions, leases, inter vivos and mortis causa agreements), administrative instruments, financial measures and EU instruments. There is a lack of coordination between them, making effective planning of generational change difficult. Therefore, as she emphasised, modernisation – and perhaps reform – of the system is necessary, taking into account both demographic developments and the future structure of insured persons and beneficiaries.

In the second part of the panel, Professor Król drew attention to the insufficient protection of children on farms. She stressed that although the law assumes that children do not work on farms, in practice they perform simple auxiliary tasks, particularly during periods of intensive fieldwork. This 'legal fiction', as she described it, hinders effective accident prevention.

The professor recalled tragic incidents she had analysed during her work at KRUS, including fatal accidents involving entire families. She pointed out that the difference between a farm and a workplace lies in the absence of immediate occupational health and safety procedures and inspection services. She therefore called for stronger protection of children and enhanced accident prevention as one of the priorities for future legislative changes.

Professor Irena Jędrzejczyk strongly emphasised that the debate on the future of KRUS should not be conducted solely from the perspective of agriculture or rural demographics. In her view, it is essential to regard KRUS as an institution that stabilises the entire national economy, rather than merely a farmers' social insurance system. In a market economy, which develops cyclically and is vulnerable to supply shocks, demand shocks and other disruptions, KRUS serves as a stabilising mechanism, protecting the weakest elements of the system from the consequences of crises.

The professor pointed out that rural areas have the lowest capacity to adapt to economic shocks. Farmers do not have access to the financial instruments available to businesses – they cannot issue bonds or shares, nor can they use advanced hedging instruments. For this reason, she stressed, merging KRUS with the Social Insurance Institution system would be a mistake, as the two systems are based on entirely different risk communities. The risks faced by farmers and office workers are not comparable, and any attempt to combine them would undermine the insurance logic of both systems.



PANEL II

In her view, KRUS is an institution of macroeconomic importance: it provides financial stability to farming families, prevents severe social tensions and reduces the risk of economic destabilisation. As she observed, it is thanks to KRUS that ‘tyres are not burning outside ministries’, because farmers have a minimum but reliable level of protection that shields them from the most severe consequences of crises.

Referring to demographic trends, Professor Jędrzejczyk noted that the ageing of the farming population will generate increasing demand for long-term care services. She pointed out that it would be worthwhile drawing inspiration from German solutions, where the long-term care system is far more developed. In her view, this area should become one of the directions of future KRUS reforms.

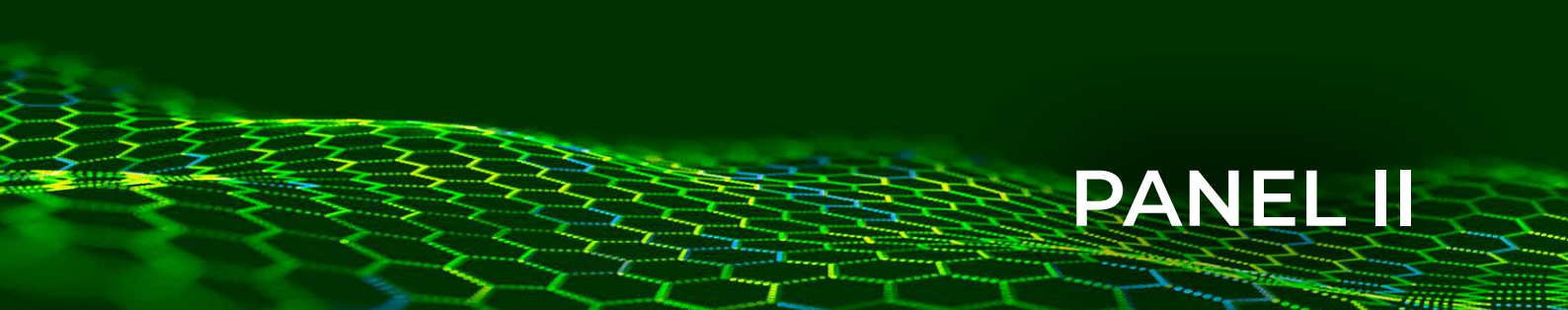
The professor also emphasised that the protection of private property is a cornerstone of the market economy. Therefore, farmers should not be compelled to transfer their farms – succession must be based on voluntary decisions and appropriate support instruments rather than coercion. She cited France as an example, where several separate agricultural insurance systems operate, tailored to different occupational groups within agriculture.

In conclusion, Professor Jędrzejczyk stated unequivocally that KRUS must remain a separate institution, as its role extends far beyond traditional social insurance. It is an element of the state’s economic security, a buffer against cyclical shocks, and a guarantor of the stability of rural areas. Future reforms should therefore strengthen these functions rather than weaken them.

Professor Marek Kos argued that one of the most pressing challenges facing KRUS is the establishment of a genuine health prevention system for farmers who, unlike employees working under employment contracts, are not subject to mandatory pre-employment, periodic or follow-up medical examinations. The lack of systematic health assessments means that occupational and chronic diseases are detected too late, and farmers enter rehabilitation only when their condition has already deteriorated significantly. For this reason, KRUS should prioritise educational activities, screening programmes and cooperation with the National Health Fund (NFZ), ensuring that farmers undergo regular examinations and are aware of the health risks associated with their work.

The professor noted that KRUS preventive measures have delivered tangible results – the number of agricultural accidents has fallen in recent years from more than 12,000 to fewer than 10,000 annually. This demonstrates that education, the ‘Safe Farm’ competition and the promotion of safe working practices genuinely improve safety in rural areas. At the same time, KRUS – as an institution close to farmers – should actively support preventive programmes such as ‘My Health’, which offers a comprehensive package of medical examinations for individuals over the age of 20.

In the second part of his speech, Prof. Kos identified specific organisational changes that could reduce waiting times for rehabilitation services. The most important of these is the revision of outdated tables for assessing percentage impairment of health, which, as he noted, no longer reflect contemporary medical knowledge



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and lead to absurdities in disability assessment decisions. Modern, precise assessment schedules used by other insurers should serve as a model for KRUS.

The professor also emphasised that KRUS already performs tasks extending beyond traditional social insurance – it operates six Farmers' Rehabilitation Centres, finances rehabilitation stays and implements preventive programmes that formally fall within the remit of the National Health Fund. Farmers rate rehabilitation services provided by KRUS centres very highly; therefore, the system should develop new areas of rehabilitation, including obesity, diabetes and metabolic diseases, which are becoming increasingly serious problems in rural communities.

In conclusion, Professor Kos stressed that for farmers KRUS is not merely an insurer but also an institution that accompanies them throughout their lives, safeguarding their health, safety and well-being. To fulfil this role effectively, the system must strengthen prevention, modernise disability assessment procedures, expand rehabilitation services and consistently educate farmers – because these measures will genuinely improve the health of rural residents and reduce waiting times for benefits.

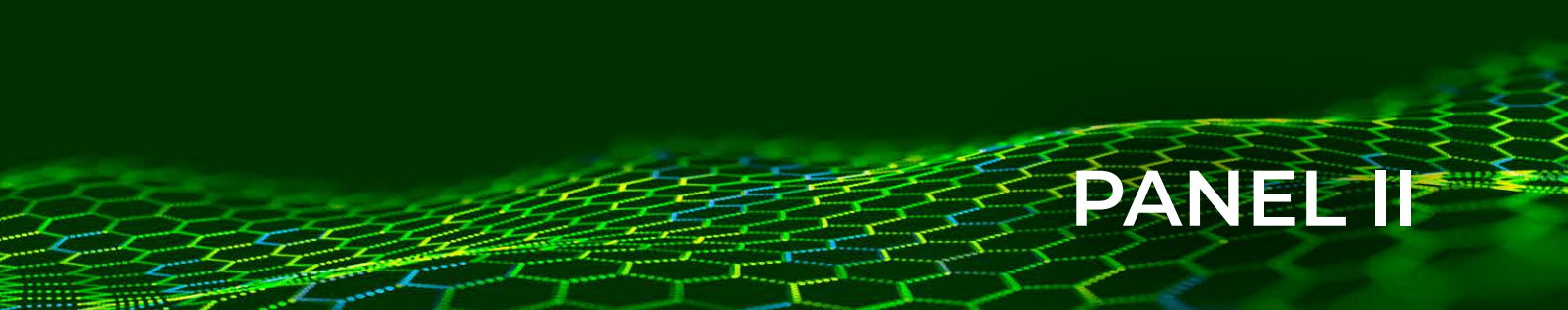
Dr Anetta Zielińska pointed out that occupational risks in agriculture are changing alongside the modernisation of the sector and that although the number of accidents is declining, their severity and health consequences are increasing. Farmers are increasingly suffering serious injuries, resulting in greater impairment of health and more substantial losses for farms.

This is primarily due to the operation of modern machinery, for which farmers receive insufficient preparation – unlike industrial workers, they are often left 'alone' in their interactions with technology, without systematic training support.

In her view, KRUS preventive activities require modernisation, and the key priority should be investment in farmers' health, as farmers are 'the most valuable asset of the farm'. Dr Zielińska emphasised that training programmes must be shorter, more practical and tailored to the production profile and age of farm operators, as farmers do not have the opportunity to participate in lengthy courses. Effective prevention should focus on groups most exposed to accidents, and KRUS activities – although already highly valuable – require further strengthening.

In the second part of her contribution, Dr Zielińska highlighted growing mental health risks in agriculture, including depression, occupational burnout, addiction and economic stress. In small communities these problems are more visible but discussed less frequently, which increases the risk of escalation. In addition, farmers work continuously, often seven days a week, intensifying psychological and physical strain.

She also pointed to the lack of any link between accident insurance contributions and risk levels, which is standard practice in the business sector. In agriculture, even farms with no accidents receive no support for preventive measures or the purchase of protective equipment. Yet an accident on a farm is not merely a cost for KRUS; it is often a tragedy for the entire family, which



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loses the 'farm manager' – the individual crucial to the operation and future of the farm.

In conclusion, Dr Zielińska stressed that KRUS plays a fundamental role in building a culture of safety in rural areas, and that its campaigns and preventive activities are among the institution's

greatest achievements. To respond more effectively to contemporary risks, however, the system should further develop prevention focused on practical measures, mental health and the real needs of farmers who, despite an enormous workload, are responsible for the food security of the entire country.

Discussion from the floor – key points

Several important themes emerged during the discussion concluding the second panel, significantly broadening the perspective on contemporary challenges facing the KRUS system.

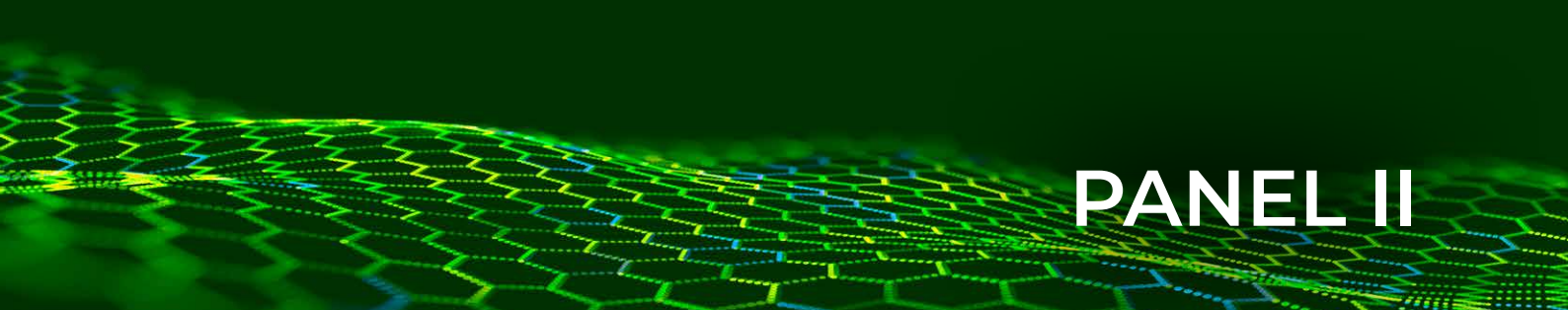
Professor Monika Stanny (IRWiR PAN) drew attention to the growing role of women in agriculture, emphasising that although they account for 47% of insured persons, their participation in decision-making and institutions remains much lower. Research conducted by IRWiR PAS shows that women farmers are overburdened with work, often struggle with chronic illnesses and sleep deprivation, and at the same time remain strongly committed to their farms and wish to continue living and working there. She noted that women represent the 'future potential' of rural Poland but require systematic health and social support.

Professor Monika Król emphasised that the debate on KRUS cannot ignore the protection of pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and carers of older people, nor the lack of opportunities for farmers to build funded retirement savings. She pointed out that the specific

nature of agricultural work requires legislation adapted to the realities of rural life.

Professor Sylwia Michalska (IRWiR PAN) raised the issue of unequal access to primary healthcare in rural areas, noting that the number of healthcare facilities in rural communities is half that available in urban areas. She asked whether KRUS could become a partner in discussions with the National Health Fund and the Ministry of Health to improve access to general practitioners in rural areas.

In response, **Professor Marek Kos** confirmed that the staffing situation in rural primary healthcare is critical – many doctors are over 70 years old, while younger physicians are reluctant to work in small towns and villages. He indicated that improvement requires increased financial support for family medicine residencies and a shift in the healthcare system's focus from hospital treatment to outpatient care, which would increase demand for general medical practitioners and could improve their availability in rural areas.



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Professor Marek Wigier asked about the reasons for the decline in the number of agricultural accidents. **Dr Anetta Zielińska** explained that this is primarily due to the reduction in the number of persons insured by KRUS (by approximately 33%), as well as intensive preventive activities undertaken by KRUS and other agricultural institutions, which have genuinely improved workplace safety.

In closing, **Professor Irena Jędrzejczyk** addressed critical opinions concerning the Social Insurance Institution, emphasising that its perceived 'oppressiveness' stems not from the institution itself but from legislative decisions that imposed successive obligations on it, often without providing adequate tools. She also referred to the achievements of the late Minister Jolanta Fedak, who reduced the fees charged by Open Pension Funds (OFE), thereby protecting the interests of insured persons.

Moderator:

Tomasz Jędrzejczak,

Adviser to the President of KRUS

Panellists:

**Monika Stanny, PhD, Professor at the Institute of Rural and
Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences
(IRWiR PAN)**

Department of Rural Economics

Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences

Head of the 'Monitoring Rural Development' Programme

Prof. Marian Podstawka, PhD

Institute of Management and Quality Sciences

Social Sciences Faculty

University of Siedlce

Janina Petelczyc, PhD

Department of Social Insurance

Institute of Social Economy

College of Socio-Economics

Warsaw School of Economics (SGH)

Prof. Damian Walczak, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

Vice-Dean for Student Affairs and Education

Department of Financial Management

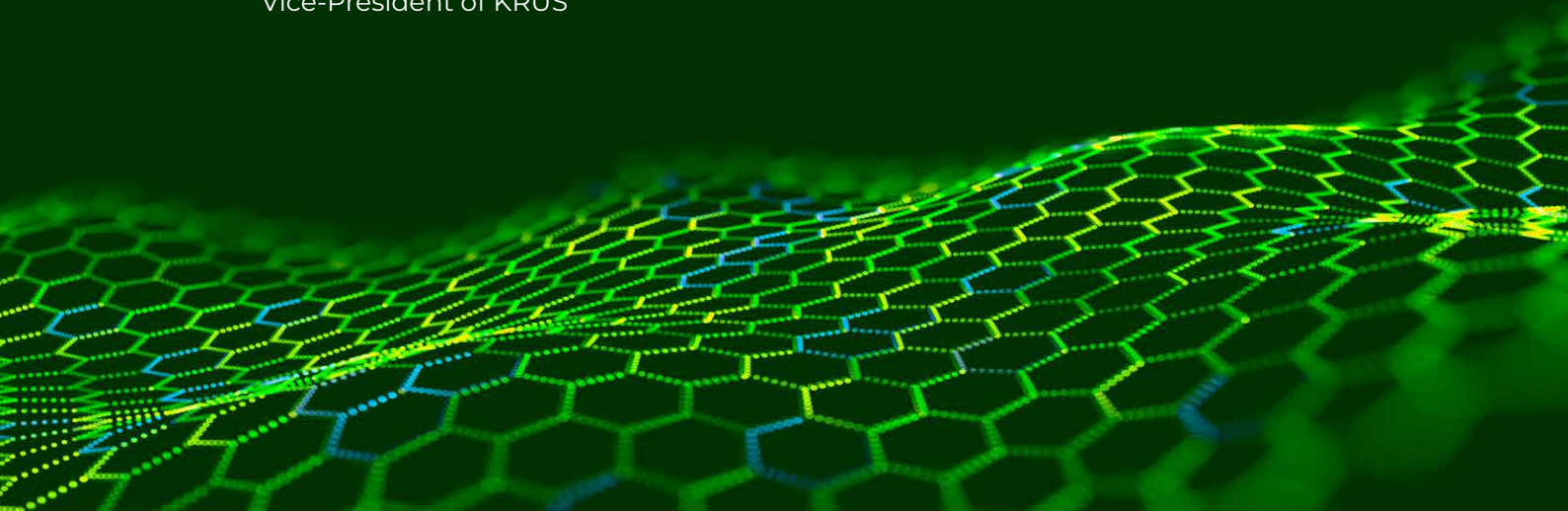
Institute of Economics and Finance

Faculty of Economic Sciences and Management,

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

Helena Rudzis-Gruchała

Vice-President of KRUS



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Where we are headed – the future of KRUS



In the photograph, from left: Tomasz Jędrzejczak, Damian Walczak, PhD, Prof. Marian Podstawka, PhD, Monika Stanny, PhD, Helena Rudzis-Gruchała, Janina Petelczyc, PhD

WHERE WE ARE HEADED – THE FUTURE OF KRUS

The third panel of the conference – ‘Where we are headed? the future of KRUS’ – was devoted to the most challenging, but also the most anticipated topic: the future directions of development of the farmers’ social insurance system in the decades ahead. It was here that the discussion moved beyond analysing the past and diagnosing the present to consider scenarios for change, possible reforms and the challenges that are already shaping the future of KRUS.

The panel, moderated by **Tomasz Jędrzejczak**, Adviser to the President of KRUS, brought together experts representing different academic and institutional perspectives: **Professor Monika Stanny, Professor Marian Podstawka, Dr Janina Petelczyc, Professor Damian Walczak and Vice-President of KRUS Helena Rudzis-Gruchała**. Their contributions created a multidimensional picture of a system currently positioned at the intersection of stability and necessary modernisation.

The discussion focused on issues crucial to the future of KRUS: differentiated contributions, the integration or coordination of social insurance systems, the future of financing, and the role of KRUS in modern social and agricultural policy. The panellists also analysed the impact of demographic trends, public health, structural changes in agriculture and the transformation of public services on the shape of the future system.

The third panel therefore sought to answer the questions of what KRUS should look like in Poland in 2035, 2040 and beyond, and what decisions must be taken today to ensure that

the system remains stable, fair and suited to the challenges facing contemporary rural areas. It was in this session that the greatest number of reform proposals emerged, but also the strongest calls for changes to be evolutionary, responsible and based on broad social consensus.

In her remarks, Professor Monika Stanny emphasised that the future of KRUS must be analysed in the context of the profound demographic, social and economic transformation of rural Poland, which over the next decade will become a ‘game changer’ for the entire farmers’ social insurance system. In her view, the current KRUS model, although it performs an important stabilising function, perpetuates the traditional agrarian structure instead of supporting modernisation processes and strengthening the social capital of local communities.

The professor pointed out that KRUS operates within a broader system of preferences – direct payments, agricultural tax arrangements, the absence of mandatory accounting requirements and preferential insurance rules – which together create a strong incentive to maintain

even very small and often inactive farms. As a result, the system does not differentiate between farmers according to their actual activity or income levels, which limits the competitiveness of the sector and hinders rural development.

When asked about directions for change that could strengthen social capital and local development, Professor Stanny identified five key areas:

1. Gradual differentiation of the KRUS system according to actual agricultural activity and farm income. Without accounting and reliable income data, it is impossible to pursue responsible social policy or build a fair insurance system.
2. Linking KRUS reform with non-agricultural development, including entrepreneurship, services and local labour markets. A multifunctional rural area – with access to doctors, schools and public services – is essential for retaining residents and building strong communities.
3. Creating transitional mechanisms that would allow for the gradual transformation of the system without social disruption, taking account of generational change in agriculture.
4. Recognising the enormous spatial diversity of rural areas – from regions where the number of KRUS-insured persons is declining rapidly to areas where the system continues to serve as a key social buffer.
5. Changing the perception of rural areas as a whole, because contemporary rural Poland is no longer solely a space for agricultural production. It is a complex system in which occupational mobility, services, entrepreneurship and quality of life are becoming increasingly important.

The professor also stressed that women in rural areas are becoming an increasingly important development resource, yet the system fails to recognise their growing role. Research shows that they are overburdened with work, rarely participate in agricultural organisations and have limited influence over decision-making, despite increasingly managing farms themselves. Strengthening their social, economic and institutional position should be one of the priorities of future reforms.

In conclusion, Professor Stanny stated that KRUS remains necessary, particularly for small farms and peripheral areas, but that its current model no longer reflects the structure of contemporary rural Poland. The key question is not *whether KRUS should be abolished*, but how it can be transformed into an instrument supporting the safe and desirable transformation of rural areas, strengthening social capital, supporting active farmers and responding to the demographic challenges of the coming years.

Professor **Marian Podstawka** argued that the financial stability of KRUS requires the modernisation of key elements of the 1990 Act, which has failed to keep pace with changes in agriculture. The professor pointed out that successive amendments removed instruments that had enabled influence over the agrarian structure, such as the requirement to cease agricultural activity when claiming the supplementary pension. In his view, the system should return to solutions that encourage the transfer of farms to active farmers, for example through pension supplements linked to farm enlargement.

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He also highlighted the need to update the definition of an agricultural occupational accident, which does not cover contemporary forms of activity such as agritourism or direct sales. He stressed that the criterion of one conversion hectare as a condition for joining KRUS is outdated and does not reflect the actual capacity to earn a living from agriculture. An income-based criterion would make it possible to distinguish genuinely active farms from those that exist only formally.

The professor also pointed to inconsistencies in the rules governing special branches of agricultural production, where genuinely profitable activities coexist with activities that do not provide a viable livelihood. An income criterion could help organise this area without the need to create new classifications.

With regard to benefits, Professor Podstawka emphasised that the KRUS system still rests on insurance egalitarianism, under which length of contribution history and contribution levels have only a minimal impact on pension amounts. In 2022, the difference between 25 and 35 years of insurance amounted to only PLN 5.17, which he described as illogical and demotivating. Consequently, differentiated contributions should be accompanied by differentiated benefits so that the system becomes both fair and incentive-based.

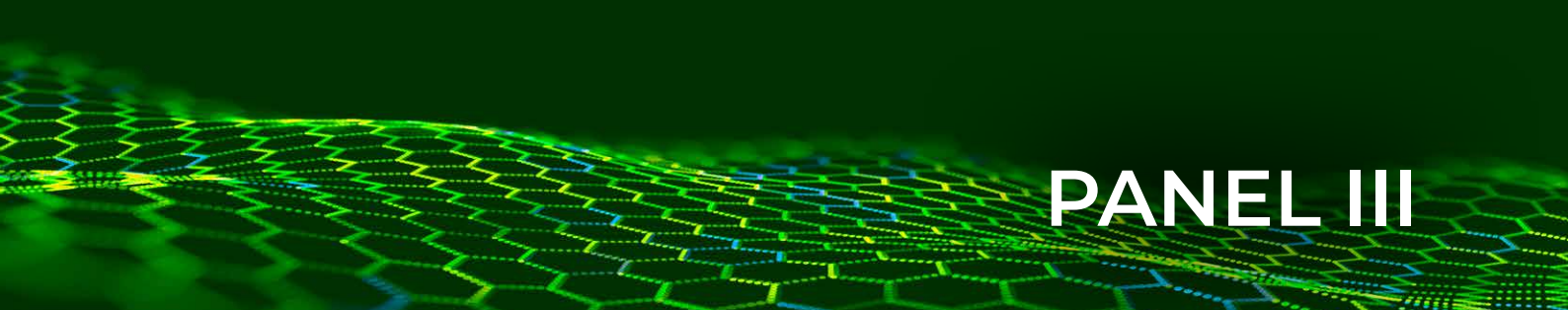
The professor also proposed introducing a funded pension supplement for farmers paying higher contributions (for example, farms exceeding 50 hectares or those combining agricultural and business activities), analogous

to mechanisms operating within the Social Insurance Institution system.

In conclusion, he argued that KRUS does not require abolition but rather thoughtful modernisation, including linking the system to actual farm activity and income, rationalising the rules governing special branches of agricultural production, restoring instruments that support structural change, moving away from benefit egalitarianism, and establishing clear rules for managing the Contribution Fund. Only such changes, he argued, would make it possible to combine financial efficiency with the social function that remains the foundation of KRUS.

Dr Janina Petelczyc pointed out that demographic change need not pose a threat to social security systems, provided that institutions are properly designed and adapted to foreseeable trends. In her view, public debate too often presents demography in terms of crisis, whereas the key issue is not the pace of population ageing but the state's ability to distribute the GDP it generates appropriately. As she emphasised, following the approach of scholars such as Nicholas Barr and Peter Diamond, the stability of pension systems depends primarily on economic productivity, the taxation of capital and adaptation to technological change rather than on the number of people of working age alone.

In this context, Dr Petelczyc noted that KRUS performs an important function within the social security system, although it is difficult to describe it as a classic insurance system – the relationship between contributions and benefits is weak, and a substantial proportion of funding comes from the State Budget. This is not,



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however, a flaw but a characteristic resulting from the specific nature of agricultural work, which is based on different production factors than those prevailing in urban sectors. For this reason, she stressed, a separate system for farmers is justified, and setting KRUS and the Social Insurance Institution system against each other is not only unnecessary but also misguided.

At the same time, Dr Petelczyc highlighted the need to eliminate false participation in KRUS, namely situations in which individuals with no connection to agriculture use the system as a cheaper alternative to the Social Insurance Institution. In her view, this issue most seriously undermines the credibility of the system and should therefore be a reform priority.

As examples from Europe, she pointed out that separate agricultural insurance systems operate in many countries, including Austria, Germany and France, demonstrating that the model is not an exception but part of a broader institutional tradition. In her opinion, KRUS could gain greater social acceptance if public debate more often emphasised this normality and these European parallels.

Dr Petelczyc also stressed the importance of preventive healthcare, particularly in the context of the shorter life expectancy of men living in rural areas. The ageing of the rural population is a fact, but the real problem is not demography itself; rather, it is unequal access to healthcare and services, which deepens disparities between urban and rural areas.

In conclusion, she referred to the findings of Oskar Urban's master's thesis, which

demonstrated that the existence of KRUS significantly reduces extreme poverty in rural areas. As she emphasised, this provides evidence that the system performs an important social function that cannot be ignored in discussions about its future.

In **Professor Damian Walczak's** view, Polish agriculture and the KRUS system are characterised by a 'long-duration strategy' – agrarian structures change very slowly, regardless of political systems or demographic pressures. In his opinion, even when the number of farmers declines, land ownership remains largely unchanged, while many phenomena – such as children working on farms – are cultural in nature and difficult to eliminate through regulation alone.

According to the professor, the direction of change in KRUS is clear, and there is broad consensus among experts regarding the need for reform. The differences concern only the method of implementation. From the perspective of public finances, subsidies to KRUS are not as significant a problem as is commonly assumed – subsidies to the Social Insurance Fund are more than twice as high. At the same time, farmers expect changes, particularly regarding low and insufficiently differentiated pensions, which generate both vertical inequity (different incomes – the same contributions) and horizontal inequity (the same incomes – different burdens).

The professor emphasised that agricultural accounting is difficult to introduce, but other realistic reform scenarios are possible. He identified, among other things, the need to:

- define the legal status of KRUS, since in court proceedings it is currently the President of

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KRUS, rather than the institution itself, who is named as the defendant;

- ▶ digitise the system, which would make it possible to determine automatically who should be covered by insurance
- ▶ verify the status of the smallest farms, which often do not conduct genuine agricultural activity;
- ▶ treat the largest farms and agricultural enterprises separately, as the scale of their operations is incompatible with a uniform contribution system.

In the second part of his remarks, Professor Walczak addressed the issue of differentiated contributions. In his view, such a solution would increase both the financial stability of the system and social fairness. He pointed out that the current health insurance contribution model is inconsistent: the state pays contributions for farms of up to 6 hectares, above that threshold farmers pay a symbolic PLN1 per hectare, while many individuals – despite owning large areas of land – pay nothing because the system fails to identify their status. Digitisation and linking data with land and mortgage registers could resolve this problem.

With regard to social insurance contributions, the professor proposed an evolutionary approach: changes should apply to new entrants to the system, while those already insured should retain the existing rules. He noted that tools already exist which could form the basis for differentiation – for example, data on VAT-registered farmers, which make it possible to estimate their revenue.

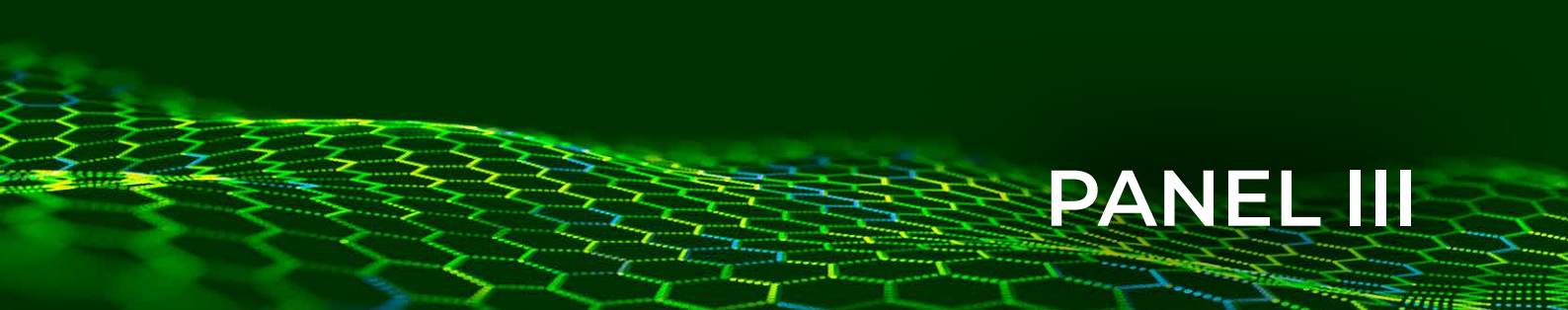
The professor also stressed that current regulations allow virtually anyone to obtain KRUS

coverage, even with minimal production activity (for example, breeding 50 rabbits). In his view, this illustrates the scale of the necessary changes and the need to rationalise the criteria for entry into the system.

In conclusion, Professor Walczak stated that he supports maintaining KRUS, but with reforms that increase the transparency, fairness and efficiency of the system. He also suggested that, in the longer term, it may be worth consolidating pension regulations into a single Act, which would simplify settlements between the Social Insurance Institution and KRUS and facilitate the operation of the system as a whole.

In her contribution, **Helena Rudzis-Gruchała** emphasised that women today constitute one of the most important pillars of Polish agriculture and that their role within the KRUS system is steadily increasing. Institutional data show that in the key age groups of 49–54 and 43–48 years, women account for more than 104,000 and 86,000 insured persons respectively, making them not a marginal but a fundamental part of the system. Particularly important is the group of 25,000 women caring for children whose contributions are financed from the State Budget. As she noted, this is not a cost but an investment in the durability of the family, the farm and the rural community.

The Vice-President pointed out that women in rural areas – both younger and older – perform crucial social functions: they are leaders of local communities, guardians of tradition and active participants in community life. Their presence is particularly visible in rural housewives' associations and in their high participation in KRUS



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rehabilitation programmes – in 2025, more than half of all places on rehabilitation stays were used by women. This demonstrates that the system responds to genuine needs and that women make full use of the support available.

In the second part of her remarks, Helena Rudzis-Gruchała argued that the future of KRUS should be built in the spirit of the silver economy, that is, an approach that takes account of the dynamic ageing of society and the growing role of older people. In her view, KRUS cannot remain solely a benefit-paying institution – it must become an institution that supports farmers' well-being and responds to their health, social and safety needs. One of KRUS's greatest strengths is its extensive network of local offices and its highly competent staff, who already serve as the first point of contact for rural residents.

The Vice-President emphasised that reform of KRUS is necessary, but should be carried out

responsibly and in stages. In the short term, it is possible to introduce changes that do not require difficult negotiations with the Ministry of Finance but would significantly improve both the functioning of the system and the situation of insured persons. In the longer term, a comprehensive modernisation of the Act is required, ideally prepared by an interdisciplinary team of experts whose establishment KRUS intends to initiate.

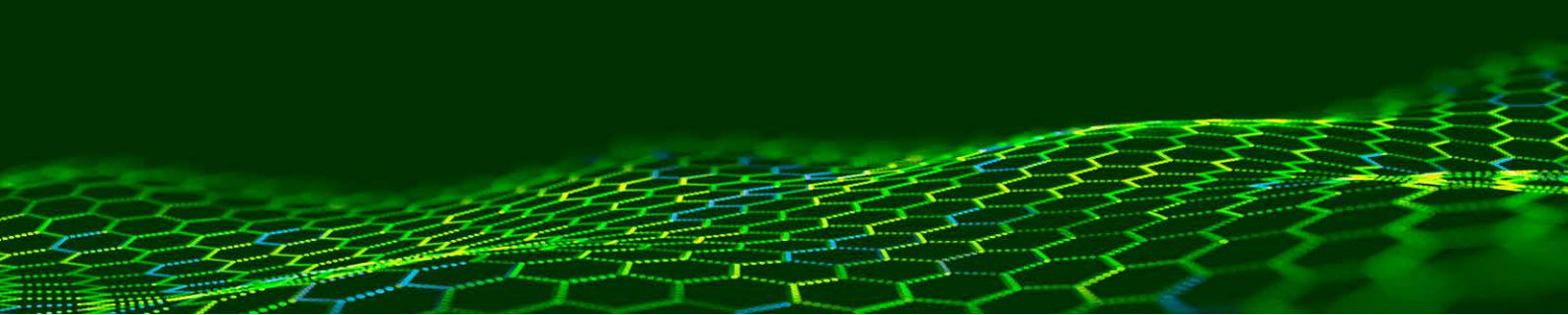
In conclusion, Helena Rudzis-Gruchała stressed that there is complete agreement on one point – KRUS is an absolutely indispensable institution in rural areas. Its future should be based on strengthening the role of women, developing health and social services, and making full use of the potential offered by its local network and the experience of its staff. In this way, KRUS can become a modern institution capable of responding to the demographic and social challenges of the coming decades.

Discussion from the floor – key points

The discussion during the third panel demonstrated that the future of KRUS requires a combination of stability and carefully designed change, and that reforms must take account of both economic realities and the social conditions of rural Poland. **Minister Czesław Siekierski** emphasised that KRUS is one of the most important achievements of the transformation period and has for decades served as a social safety net for the poorest segments of rural society. Changes are necessary, but they must be introduced prudently, with respect for

the specific nature of agriculture and an awareness that excessively rapid reforms could do more harm than good.

Professor Monika Stanny noted that KRUS was created as part of a former 'social contract', and that today a new contract for rural areas is needed – based on evolution rather than revolution. In her view, changes should primarily affect new generations entering the system, while preserving stability for current insured persons and pensioners.



The discussion also addressed the risks associated with global corporations, raised by Dr Janina Petelczyc. She pointed out that in many countries the acquisition of land by large corporate entities leads to the marginalisation of local communities and the erosion of labour rights. In Poland, this problem remains limited due to the fragmented agrarian structure, but it requires vigilance and a conscious public policy response.

Minister Siekierski also recalled the origins of KRUS and the role of its 'founding fathers', stressing that the system was the least costly and most effective means of improving the

social situation in rural areas. At the same time, he pointed to the need to tighten the system and move away from solutions that no longer reflect contemporary realities.

In the final part of the discussion, **Professor Marian Podstawka** highlighted the need to clarify both the nomenclature and legal form of KRUS, as well as to define more precisely the institution's role within the social security system. He stressed that changes should be 'gentle but consistent', so as not to undermine the foundations of a system that has served for 35 years as a stabilising force in rural Poland.

CLOSING OF THE CONFERENCE – ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF KRUS

Tomasz Ślusarczyk, President of KRUS, thanked all panellists, moderators and participants for their exceptionally substantive and inspiring contributions. He expressed his gratitude to Minister Czesław Siekierski for his presence and for his important contribution to the discussion on the future of the system, while also acknowledging the participation of representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, who took an active part in the proceedings. He noted that the conference had brought together representatives of numerous institutions, academic communities and individuals particularly committed to the well-being of rural Poland. He pointed out that changes taking place in agriculture and demographics are dynamic and far-reaching, and that KRUS must

therefore listen carefully to the needs of farmers. All opinions and proposals presented during the panels will be analysed and taken into account in the institution's future development work. The President emphasised that the common objective of all conference participants is to ensure farmers' social security and the stability of the system for the decades ahead. He stressed that KRUS remains an institution close to people, while also being ready for responsible change. He thanked the organisers and KRUS staff for preparing the event. He expressed the hope that the next meeting would take place as early as October, in an even more refined format. He concluded by stressing the importance of cooperation and the joint shaping of the future of the farmers' social insurance system.



KASA ROLNICZEGO
UBEZPIECZENIA SPOŁECZNEGO