STUDY ON ROMANIAN FARM EVOLUTION COMPARED TO OTHER EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES

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Abstract: The current state of Romanian agriculture, including its level of development and rural space, are largely determined by Romania's agrarian structure. The paper analyzes the agrarian structure of Romania by size classes (area) of agricultural holdings, as well as its evolution in recent years as compared to some of the EU countries (neighboring countries and countries considered standard in rural development). An analysis is also made of the share of agricultural holdings whose products are mostly used for self-consumption.

Key words: farm number, agricultural holdings area, agrarian structure

INTRODUCTION

One third (32.7 %) of the EU’s agricultural holdings (farms) were located in Romania in 2016, much more than any other Member State; this was about the same as all the farms in Poland (13.5 % of the EU-28 total), Italy (10.9 %) and Spain (9.0 %) combined, the three Member States with the next highest number of farms[10].

A majority (55.1 %) of the standard output generated by agriculture across the EU was from farms in France, Italy, Germany, and Spain in 2016. Although Romania accounted for about one third of the EU’s farms, it accounted for only 3.3 % of the EU’s standard output (figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of farms and standard output, 2016
(own processing after [7], [8], [10],[16])
Almost three quarters (71.5%) of the utilized agricultural area of the EU was based in just seven Member States; France used 27.8 million ha for agricultural purposes in 2016, Spain 23.2 million ha, the United Kingdom and Germany both 16.7 million ha, Poland used 14.4 million ha, Italy a further 12.6 million ha and Romania 12.5 million ha [2, 4].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper analyzes the current agrarian structure of Romania by size classes (dimension) of agricultural holdings, as well as its evolution in the 2005-2016 period. The situation in the last surveyed year is compared to the same type of data from 8 other EU countries, considered to be developed from the point of view of the level of agricultural development, or neighbors, namely France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria. The data were taken from various statistical data bases, Romanian respectively EU publications, after which they were sorted, aggregated and analyzed in order to carry out the study.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The total surface area of Romania is about 23,838 million ha (238,397 km²), comprising 62% of agricultural land (about 14.8 million hectares, of which about 67.5% of arable land). Of the total area of the country, about 92% is represented by the rural area consisting of the agricultural and forest land, the land of the localities and the rural communities. Since 1991, in a first legislative phase, it has been regulated the re-establishment of the ownership of agricultural land for former owners or their heirs, where a large number of people have recovered their confiscated land [3].

Census data from year 2010[13, 14] presents a picture of Romanian agriculture undergoing a very slow restructuring process, the average area of an agricultural holding increasing from 3.1 ha in 2002 to 3.45 ha in 2010. Analyzing the data from the two agricultural censuses (2002 and 2010), an incipient restructuring process is observed, by the reducing of the number of holdings under 10 hectares (by 600,000) and the areas owned by them by more than 1.2 million hectares [12, 14, 15]. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of farms with an area of more than 10 ha, and the areas they hold with about 600000 ha.

Under these conditions, our country is characterized by a highly polarized agricultural structure, where most of the agricultural holdings are small (less than 2 hectares), their share being over 70% in number of holdings and 13.0% as the area owned [1, 5]. If we refer to farms up to 10 hectares, they represent more than 97% of the number of farms and hold only 38% of the utilized agricultural area. Average farms, ranging from 10 to 100 hectares, predominantly in European agriculture, represent in Romania fewer than 2% in number and almost 13% in area. Finally, large farms over 100 ha, although representing a very small percentage of only 0.3% of the total number of farms, exploit almost half of the total agricultural area. All these data confirm the predominant subsistence character and the very large fragmentation of most Romanian agricultural holdings. Also, if we refer to the territorial distribution of large agricultural holdings, it can be noticed that between the high weight of large farms and the severe rural poverty map (Figure 2) is a perfect correlation. In areas where there are high weights of large agricultural holdings, there are also the first four largest, most extensive, rural poverty sections (1. Moldova: Vaslui (44.4%), Iasi-South (10.5%) Galati-North (10%) 2. South-East Muntenia: Brăila (22.2%), Ialomiţa (20%), Călăraşi (30.4%), MunteniaCentru-Sud: TeleormanOlt (12%), Giurgiu (10.7%), Oltenia-Sud: Dolj (10%) [4].
Compared to Romania, in France and Germany, is an almost equal distribution of each category [2]. For example, farms of over 20 ha own over 50% of the total, while those over 100 ha own more than 10%, even 20% in France.

Using a comparison between the utilized agricultural area and the number of farms in several EU countries, it can be observed (Figure 3) that among the studied countries, Romania ranks somewhere in the middle of the interval in terms of the number of hectares (UAA) but has the largest number of farms.

This relationship is most clearly seen when we refer to the used agricultural area divided to the number of farms (Figure 4). In this case, Romania ranks last among the countries considered, with a value of approximately 3.7 ha/farm, almost 3 times smaller.
than the following countries (Poland and Hungary with 10.2 and 10.9 ha/farm) and far behind France and Germany (60.9 and 60.5 ha/farms respectively).

Taking into account that large farms, over 100 ha, exploit almost half of the total agricultural area and have an extremely low share of the total number of farms, the more so, the vast majority have areas much lower than the resulting value, of 3.7 ha/farm. However, the results are partially distorted of what represents the term of agricultural exploitation in Romania. This category also includes land and gardens belonging to the houses, which are obviously very small in size, but added to the total number of holdings. Basically, if only registered with APIA holdings are taken into account, the ratio between the UAA and the number of farms is closer to that of Poland and Hungary.

Based on the official data, between 2005 and 2016, there was a slight decrease, both in the UAA and in the number of farms (Figure 5). Even though both fell, due to the large differences in value, the ratio between the two did not show any significant increases, the difference being only about half a hectare (Figure 6).
In addition to the above, it must be taken into account the age and the level of training of farm managers. Mainly, elderly farm managers tend to work on the smallest farms (measured in economic terms) which are characterized by subsistence households and low levels of agricultural income. Also, regarding the level of training, in Romania 4% of farm managers had full agricultural training, the overwhelming majority (about 96%) having only practical experience.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering the degree of utilization of the ecological potential of the arable land for cereals in Romania of only 39%, we have a clear situation of the compatibility deficit of the Romanian agriculture with the EU countries. Among the main factors of incompatibility are: the existing technological gap, poor access (in most cases) of European funds, the highly qualified intellectual capital deficit, the differences in institutional functionality, etc.

Analyzing the performances of agriculture, it can be concluded that the current real stage of Romanian agriculture is at the level of the 1960-1965 agriculture of the EU-6 countries. As the main weaknesses of agriculture in Romania, we have the value of primary production per hectare (2-2.5 times lower than other EU countries), food self-consumption in subsistence farms (representing 90-92% of their production), very small agricultural yields, insufficient equipment of the vast majority of farmers, a functional irrigation systems (in fact only 9-10% of the area planted), the aging of the rural population, etc.

Referring to small farms, Romania has now about 3.5 million farms under 5 ha, representing 93% of the total number of holdings, or almost 30% of the agricultural area used. Although their contribution is generally excluded by national and European agricultural policies, they still play a rather important role in providing some social protection for rural residents, whose pensions are insufficient for a decent living, providing them with most of their own consumption. However, it cannot be denied that these farms do not increase the welfare of farmers and their families, most of them being dependent on various services of those who own agricultural machinery.

It follows that the agrarian policies that should be adopted in the future to bring Romania's agriculture to European performance must include for each type of agricultural holding: profitability by finding adequate financial support paths, finding a place in the agricultural structure (commercial, technical, scientific) to each one, finding the best managerial system and, last but not least, reaching an economically and socially optimal size.

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