

IDENTIFICATION OF STRATEGIES FOR THE RE-LAUNCH OF AGRICULTURE IN VASLUI COUNTY

DINCU ANA-MARIANA¹, DRĂGOI VIOLETA ELENA^{2*}, ORBOI MANUELA DORA¹,
PREDA LARISA ELENA², SICOE-MURG OANA MARIA¹

¹University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I" from Timisoara,
Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, Timișoara, Romania
²Valahia university of Târgoviște, Faculty of Economics, Romania

*Corresponding author's e-mail: violeta_dragoi@yahoo.com

Abstract: Agriculture has an important role in the economy of Vaslui County, due to the owned land which represents the main source of natural resources, therefore agriculture remains the most efficient branch of production. The application of the land fund law no. 18/1991, changed the property structure in Vaslui county, thus giving birth to the private sector, however, the development of agriculture is quite slow, and labor productivity is reduced. Therefore, this article is an attempt to provide a more complete picture of the problems facing the agriculture of Vaslui county and to highlight that the development of agriculture can be a way of economic relaunch of the area.

Key words: agriculture, agricultural production, Vaslui County, farmers

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture plays an important role in Romania, relative to the size of the rural population and the degree of employment. Approximately 45.7% of the population in Romania lives in rural areas, compared to approximately 23.6% in the EU member states. About 30% of the population is employed in agriculture, compared to about 2% in the old member states (EU15) and 3-14% in the new member states (EU-8). There are major differences between rural and urban areas, the former being marked by a significantly higher level of poverty and a correspondingly lower standard of living [7].

According to the opinions of several authors, it can be confirmed that agriculture is an activity that differs from other economic activities because, on the one hand, agricultural activity is conditioned by the biological evolution of plants and animals, and on the other hand, it ensures the food security of the population [1,2,3,4].

Therefore, it can be stated with certainty that agriculture in the economy of Vaslui County holds the main role due to the fact that the land is the main source of natural wealth, in recent years agriculture has been the main productive branch. However, the rate of development of agriculture is still low, and labor productivity is low [5].

This article represents the clearest possible picture of the problems facing the agriculture of Vaslui county and to highlight the fact that the development of agriculture is a way of economic relaunch of the area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To create this article, the authors analyzed, compared and interpreted the data provided by different sources published in the field, as well as by the National Institute of Statistics. The methods used were: observation, analysis and comparison.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Vaslui County is located in the eastern part of the country, in the historical region of Moldova. It is the main eastern gate of Romania. The county is part of the Siret-Prut-Dniester Euroregion since 2002 and the North-East Development Region. The county seat is the municipality of Vaslui [14].



Figure 1. Map of Vaslui County [11]

Source: <http://www.hartaromanieionline.ro/harta-judet-Vaslui/>

It has as neighbors, to the east, the Republic of Moldova, the border being the Prut river, to the west, the counties of Neamț, Bacău, Vrancea, to the south, the county of Galati and to the north, the county of Iasi. Vaslui County represents 2.2% of Romania's surface and covers 5318 Km². From the point of view of administrative-territorial organization, Vaslui county has 3 municipalities (Vaslui, Bîrlad and Huși), two cities (Negrești and Murgeni) and 81 communes with 449 villages.

The economy of Vaslui county has a predominantly agrarian character, due, first of all, to the large area of agricultural land and the high number of people who live in the countryside and deal with agriculture.

In the rural environment, the economic activities carried out are not very diversified, but for the most part, the activity that dominates is the agricultural one. Therefore, it can be stated that, in rural areas, industry is less developed and then the only alternative for obtaining income can be, in addition to agriculture, the practice of agritourism or rural tourism.

In the following we present the structure of the land fund by categories of use, as can be seen in figure 1.

The total area of Vaslui county is 531,840 ha, and the agricultural area was 400,721 ha, at the end of 2020, of which:

- ✓ 291,759 ha of arable land,
- ✓ 87,282 ha of pastures,
- ✓ 7,918 ha of hayfields,
- ✓ 11,401 ha of wine plantations,
- ✓ 2,361 ha of fruit plantations

From the figure 2, it can be seen that the largest share is held by arable land, in proportion to 73%, followed by pastures that have a significant share of 22% of the agricultural total, and at the opposite pole are vineyards, pastures and orchards.

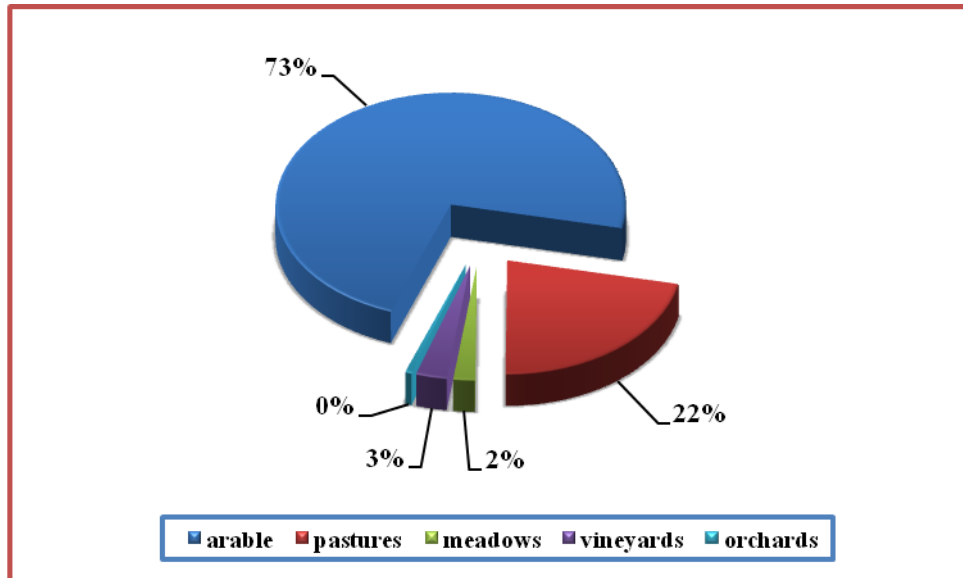


Figure 2. The structure of the land fund by categories of use at the end of 2020

At regional level, the largest agricultural areas are registered in the counties of Vaslui, Botoșani and Iași, and in terms of the vineyard area, the most important areas are owned by the counties of Vaslui and Iași.

Viticulture has a long tradition in Vaslui County and represents a sector with great potential for attracting investors. The Vaslui vineyards have been and are appreciated by connoisseurs in this field for several hundred years. At the moment, like other sectors of the economy, viticulture needs a financial infusion in order to recover successfully [12].

Agricultural production, varies from one season to another and requires current decisions in a constant effort to maximize the benefits and minimize the efforts and resources we use.

In the figure below shows the evolution of agricultural production, in the period 2015-2020, from which it can be seen that the plant production sector is predominant, followed by the animal production sector, with agricultural services in last place.

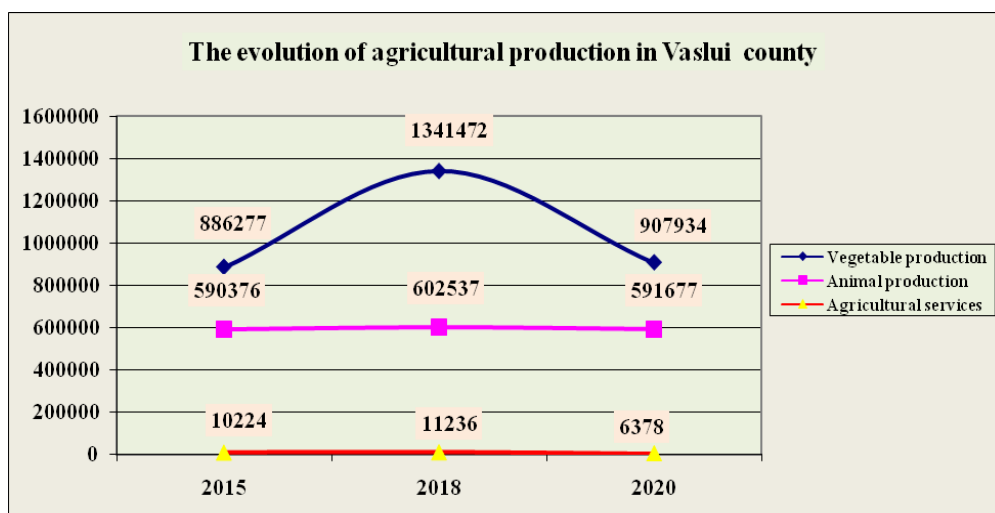


Figure 3. The evolution of agricultural production in Vaslui county, in the period 2015-2020 [6,13,15]

Analyzing the evolution of agricultural production, in the period 2015-2020, it can be seen that it increased significantly until 2018, and from 2019 it started to decrease slightly. The same upward trend can be observed in vegetable agricultural production, it increases from 886,277 thousand lei in 2015 to 1,341,472 thousand lei in 2018, reaching 907,934 thousand lei in 2020. As for agricultural animal production, it increased slightly until 2017, in 2018 it decreased significantly, in 2019 it increased again, and in 2020 it decreased, reaching 591,677 thousand lei.

Analyzing the category of agricultural services, in the period 2015-2020, their evolution fluctuates from one year to another, in 2015, they represented 10,224 thousand lei, and in 2020 they reached 6,378 thousand lei.

Normally, in a healthy agrarian economy, the structure of agricultural production should normally hold the values:

- vegetable agricultural production - 48-55%;
- animal agricultural production - 45-52%.

In the studied area, the situation is different from how it would normally be, therefore, at the level of 2020, vegetable production has a percentage of 60%, animal production 39%, and agricultural services have a very small percentage of 1%.

Vaslui County ranks first in poultry flocks at the regional level, after Buzău, and at the national level it ranks second, given that about 30% of them are found in industrial type farms.

Recently, more and more people have taken up beekeeping, this being a very profitable concern. Vaslui county has long been known as the heaven of natural honey, there is also a cooperative called "Miarea din Vaslui".

Animal breeders in Vaslui County are sounding the alarm because they state that the livestock sector is close to collapse. Even though animal breeding should represent one of the engines of the local economy, the number of animal herds is drastically decreasing, and farmers have nowhere to use their products. Vaslui livestock, in recent years, lost 21,461 pigs and 20,749 cattle.

The problems are quite serious here, because in small households animal husbandry is on the verge of extinction, but livestock farms are no better from this point of view. In conclusion, the livestock sector in Vaslui county is approaching collapse. This situation has been reached due to the drastic reduction of subsidies, the excessive drought, the lack of irrigation systems, but also the non-existence of medium and long-term agricultural strategies that have led farmers to bankruptcy. Therefore, soon many farmers will liquidate their businesses and give up their animals as well, due to the lack of profit obtained in the agricultural holdings [10].

Following the studies undertaken, it can be stated with certainty that the agricultural sector, in recent years, has been quite badly affected by extreme weather phenomena. Torrential rains, hail, floods and drought, caused by climate change, led to the decrease of agricultural production in Vaslui county and not only [9].

Despite the considerable potential, yields in Vaslui agriculture are modest, indicating a use of production factors far below optimal values. Properly exploited, the existing potential allows the employment of agricultural labor in a much more productive way, thus contributing to the registration of real progress on the path of reducing rural poverty and eliminating income differences compared to those in urban areas.

Following the studies carried out, several problems faced by Vaslui agriculture, among which: [8]

- Fragmentation of agricultural land
- Lack of irrigation facilities
- Aging population

- Lack of investment in technology and improving soil quality
- Low level of subsidies needed for agriculture
- Poor condition of road infrastructure
- Lack of modern machinery and technologies for agriculture

If the main problems of Vaslui agriculture were presented above, then several strategies were proposed for its relaunch, namely:

- ✚ the development of agriculture by modernizing the techniques and technologies used
- ✚ diversification of agricultural and economic activities, which can create new jobs and attract young labor to the villages
- ✚ the establishment of centers for the collection of agricultural products
- ✚ supporting agricultural associations
- ✚ access to non-refundable funds
- ✚ the establishment of irrigation systems

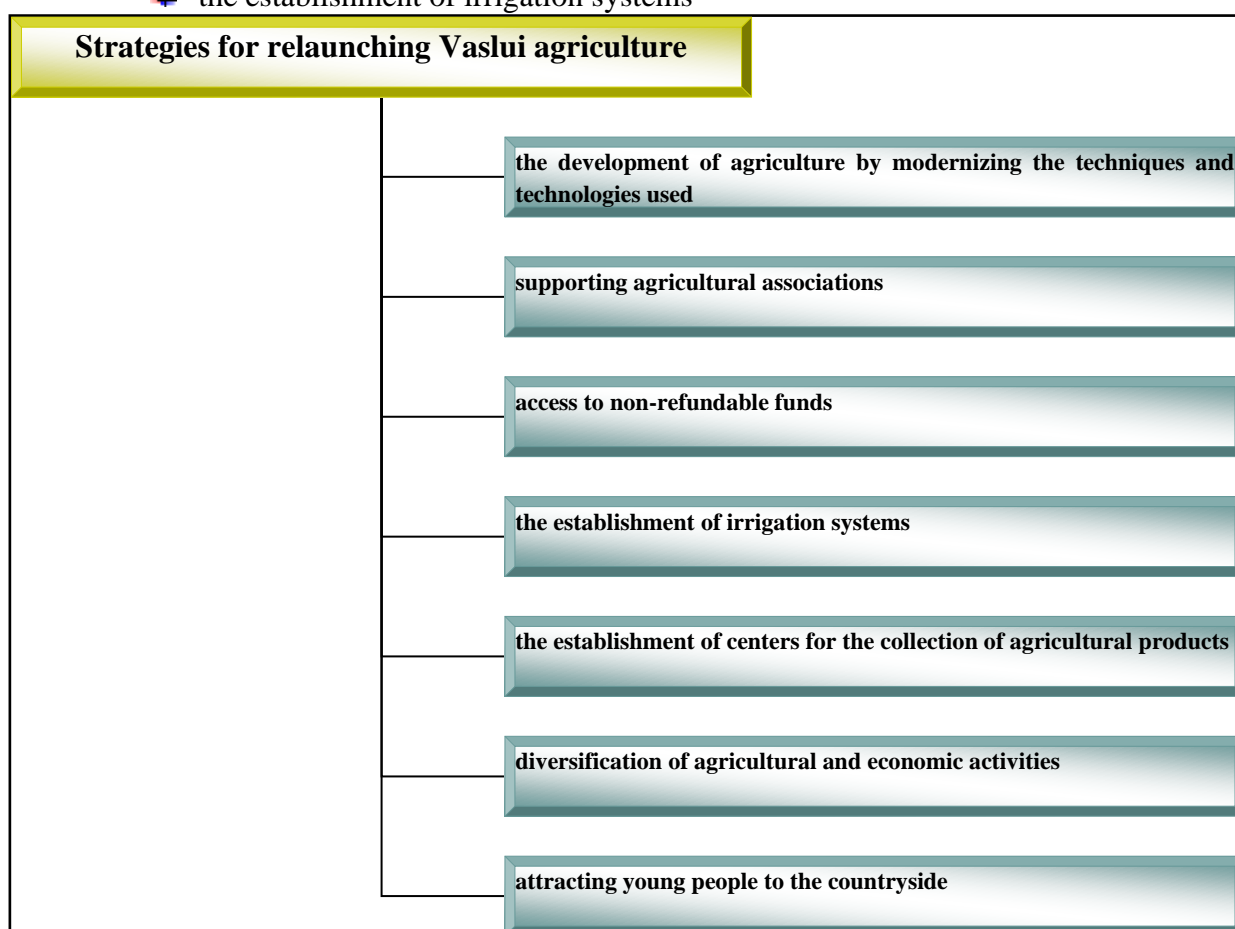


Figure 3. Strategies for relaunching Vaslui agriculture

For the relaunch of agriculture in the studied area, it is very important to involve the local authorities who could facilitate the professionalization of farmers through better access to knowledge, education and consultancy to ensure insertion on the labor market and encourage land consolidation and stimulate the association of farmers.

CONCLUSIONS

Following the research carried out, some conclusions emerge, such as:

Vaslui County has a huge potential for the development of agriculture, because it benefits from fertile soils.

The villages, in the studied area, have fewer and fewer animals. Although livestock farmers are old and can no longer work, young people do not want to work in agriculture.

The county's agricultural production was and remains dependent on weather conditions, the biggest problems being related to drought, which is an increasingly frequent global warming.

A solution for agricultural producers in the area would be to form associations, which open up new opportunities for development by attracting certain local advantages, with the objective of increasing the prosperity of the members and the community of which they are a part.

By setting up agricultural cooperatives or by associating farmers, the number of intermediaries in the distribution chain is reduced, it also reduces the risk of not having a market for the products obtained by farmers, ensures and supplies the raw materials on time and at a reasonable price.

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