

ROMANIA'S AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN THE EU CONTEXT

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Abstract: Romania faced repeated political instability after 1990, which has affected the continuity and viability of the national agricultural system. Thus, these transformations have prevented the development of a stable, competitive agricultural sector, negatively influencing the evolution of rural areas in recent decades. These developments have, often, been accentuated by the adaptation to the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union with the country's accession to the EU in 2007. This paper presents an analysis of agricultural production: statistical data show that, although Romania has the potential to meet domestic demand for agri- food products, our country currently imports significant quantities of food, which has caused the trade balance in this sector to be negative for three decades.

Key words: *agricultural production, import, agri-food products, trade balance*

INTRODUCTION

The Romanian rural economy is currently largely represented by agriculture. It enjoys favorable geographical conditions, such as relief, climate and high percentage of fertile soils, as well as the attachment of the rural population to the land and animals. These aspects can make Romanian agriculture a profitable and attractive branch for investors, contributing significantly to the growth of the national economy. In developed countries, agriculture is perceived as a modern industry, which includes not only the production activity, but also parts of the distribution of agricultural goods and products. Some economists consider it not only a "strategic sector", but also a "vital" one, because it ensures basic food for the population, supplies raw materials for processing industries and plays an important role in maintaining ecological balance and social stability [3,7,8,9].

The dominant ownership of land, its extension in upstream and downstream sectors, market liberalization, as well as the technological modernization of production and distribution channels allow the modern development of rural communities.

Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007 was a crucial moment for Romanian agriculture, marking the beginning of a new era characterized by both opportunities and challenges. Agriculture not only provides agri-food products essential for domestic consumption, thus ensuring population nutrition, but it is also an important supplier of raw materials for the processing industry [1,2,4,5].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research methods and scientific instruments used in this paper are diverse and appropriate to the proposed objectives. The main method applied is content analysis, which allows the interpretation of information from sources. The paper includes a study carried out through scientific documentation, following several essential stages: information on sources, data collection, study of sources, processing and grouping information, as well as their in-depth evaluation and analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The analysis of Romania's agricultural situation highlights significant potential, but also numerous challenges that need to be addressed to ensure food security and capitalize on national resources. Specialists emphasize that, due to favorable soil and climatic conditions, our country has the capacity to cultivate a diverse range of crops and raise animal species to meet the needs of the population. However, statistical studies show that, in the last three decades, Romania has become dependent on imports of basic products such as meat, fruit and vegetables, due to the inefficiency of the domestic agri-food sector and the difficulties in the functioning of supply chains in the context of a market economy. [3,9,10]. This situation indicates a lack of competitiveness of Romanian producers on the domestic and international markets, as well as an insufficient and structurally unhealthy agri-food supply.

According to the data from RGA-2020 (Figure 1), the use of agricultural land in Romania is as follows: arable land occupies the largest area – 8,565 thousand ha, which represents 67.10% of the utilized agricultural area of 12,763 thousand ha; pastures and hayfields hold 29.20% of the utilized area, permanent crops occupy 2.70%, family gardens represent 0.97%, and greenhouses and solaria cover 0.13% [12,15].

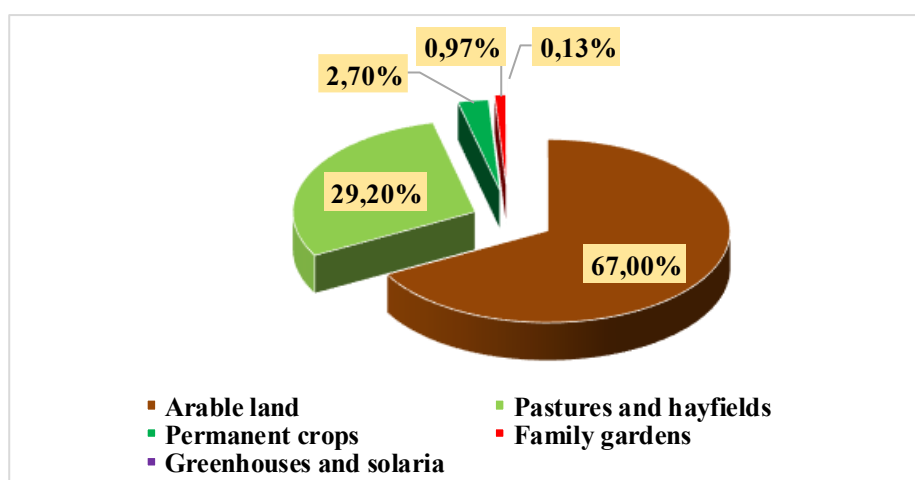


Figure 1. Structure of agricultural land in Romania

Source: General Agricultural Census (RGA), 2020, [12]

These data highlight the fact that arable land predominates the structure of agricultural land use in Romania, being the most important component of the agricultural area.

Romania has a high production potential for most crops, as pointed out by the data in Table 1. Romania ranks fourth in cereal production among the 27 EU member states, after France, Germany and Poland [14].

Table 1.

Production for grains (including seeds), 2023
[thousand tons]

Country	Production
UE-27	2,708,481
France	63,801
Germany	42,508
Poland	35,184
Romania	20,571
Hungary	15,082
Italy	14,338
Spain	12,459
Bulgaria	9,791
Czechia	7,996
Denmark	7,055
Lithuania	5,581
Austria	5,235
Slovakia	4,283
Sweden	4,239
Latvia	3,244
Croatia	3,182
Finland	2,974
Belgium	2,796
Greece	2,310
Ireland	1,909
Netherlands	1,494
Estonia	1,201
Portugal	1,022
Slovenia	667
Luxemburg	148
Cyprus	46

Source: Eurostat, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>, 2023[13]

The sustainable development of the agricultural sector plays an essential role in the economic stability and overall growth of a country. A high-performance agriculture ensures the domestic food needs, reducing dependence on imports and, at the same time, contributing significantly to the trade balance through the export of agri-food products.

This balance between domestic consumption and value-added exports in the agri-food sector stimulates economic growth, creates jobs, and promotes innovation and technology in agriculture. Thus, a country with a strong and competitive agriculture is more resilient to fluctuations on the international market and can ensure a higher standard of living for the population.

The analysis of the situation of agriculture through the prism of import and export indicators in comparison with several countries (France and Germany, highly developed founding EU states, and Poland and Hungary, new EU member states, with conditions approximately similar to Romania's) of the EU highlights Romania's lagging position from this point of view.

The analysis of statistical data highlights significant differences between EU countries in terms of agri-food exports, trade balance and national agricultural policies.

Table 2.
Share of import and export of agri-food products in some EU countries [%]

State	Export	Import	Agricultural trade balance
Germany	55.5	62.8	-7.3
France	36.5	30.4	+6.1
Poland	45.3	29.8	+15.5
Hungary	41.2	27.9	+13.3
Romania	12.5	16.4	-3.9

Source: Eurostat, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat> 2023[13]

Poland has significant agricultural resources and it has adopted an agricultural policy oriented towards increasing exports. The rapid growth of Polish exports above 60% in 2020-2021 shows supportive policies and increased competitiveness. The key to Polish success seems to be a combination of natural resources, an export-oriented agricultural policy, and investments in the efficiency of the agricultural sector.

In terms of trade balance, France, Poland and Hungary record positive agri-food trade balances, with significant surpluses, especially in the case of Poland and Hungary. Germany and Romania have negative balances, but the reason is different.

In Germany, the overall economic strength and the efficiency of the agricultural sector show that the deficit is not a major problem. In the case of Romania, the negative balance may signal problems in competitiveness, infrastructure, or other aspects of agricultural policy.

The comparative analysis of import/export imbalances highlights the fact that they are generated by the unbalanced structure of agri-food production by product groups intended for export and import. While Romania exports, with predilection, raw materials with low added value (cereals, oilseeds) because of their completely insufficient internal processing (in the country), the import necessary to cover domestic food consumption includes, with predilection, highly processed products with high value [11].

Table 3.
Structure of import and export of agri-food products in Romania before and after accession to the EU

Grupe de produse	IMPORT		EXPORT	
	mean			
	1991-2006	2007-2020	1991-2006	2007-2020
Vegetal produce	28.5	31.5	38.0	53.0
Live animals and animal produce	20.1	21.5	33.4	13.9
Food produce, beverages, and tobacco	47.9	43.5	18.9	29.2
Fats and animal or vegetal oils	3.5	3.5	9.7	3.9
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Calculations based on Tempo online data, INS, 2022 [15]

The data in Table 3 show that, after Romania's accession to the EU, exports of vegetal produce increased from 38.0% (1991-2006) to 53.0% in the period 2007-2020 and exports of food, beverages and tobacco, from 18.9% to 29.2%, while those of live animals and animal produce and animal or vegetable fats and oils decreased from 33.4% to 13.9% and from 9.7% to 3.9%, respectively.

As for imports, according to statistical data, they increased for vegetal produce and live animals and animal produce and decreased for the group food, beverages and tobacco from 47.9% to 43.5% (Table 3).

To improve the position of the agri-food sector, Romania can learn from Poland and act in the following directions: increasing investments in infrastructure and agricultural technologies, developing policies oriented towards increasing exports, capitalizing on existing agricultural resources and diversifying products, and improving the competitiveness and quality of products to access foreign markets

CONCLUSIONS

Romania stands out for its varied and favorable soil and climatic conditions for obtaining diversified agricultural production, of quality and in sufficient quantities to cover domestic consumption with agri-food products but also for export.

Although Romania has considerable potential for agriculture, the yields obtained from Romanian agriculture are still quite modest compared to developed EU countries, which indicates a use of production factors in agriculture below the optimal values necessary to obtain high production. The average production per hectare achieved in cereals in Romania is under 30% below the average level recorded in EU countries.

In Romania, although animal husbandry is a traditional field, animal herds have. The agri-food sector of a country develops in a balanced, profitable way only if it ensures the internal food consumption of the population and a surplus for export. Following the food consumption, as well as the export, import, and agri-food balance of Romania, there is only one conclusion one can draw: Romania does not fall, in this long period (the last three decades) into the category of EU countries with a balanced, performing agriculture.

The structural imbalances of agri-food production are also reflected in the strongly “decompensated” structure of foreign trade and of the import and export of agri-food products, respectively.

To turn the agri-food sector into an engine of growth and export, Romania should adopt a coherent national policy, which stimulates efficiency, innovation, and orientation towards foreign markets, drawing inspiration from the experience of the Polish success which became the sixth economy of the EU in 2025.

Developing a competitive, export-oriented agri-food sector can bring significant benefits to both trade balance and overall economic growth.

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