

THE EVOLUTION OF ASSOCIATIVE FORMS IN AGRICULTURE/FRUIT GROWING CULTURE IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

In Romania, there is a significant diversity of forms of association that operate in various fields, both based on the activities carried out and on the specifics of the economic branches, at county, regional and national level. This diversity includes, but is not limited to, producer associations, producer groups, cooperatives, branch unions, etc. Over time, the activity of these associative entities has been subject to a legislative framework that has evolved to respond to the specific needs and challenges faced by these organizations. The present study aims to provide a detailed analysis of the evolution of the forms of association in Romania, focusing on identifying the essential similarities and differences between cooperatives and producer groups. This analysis will include an in-depth examination of the organizational structure of cooperatives and producer groups, based on the latest available data on this sector of the economy. In assessing the current state of fruit farms in Romania, a detailed analysis of data from 2005 – 2020 was carried out, considered the most recent source of information at farm level. This assessment was carried out using an approach that considered the legal form of the farms, their physical and economic size, and the development regions in which they are located. Thus, the study will not only bring to the fore relevant information about the fruit sector, but will also contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics and diversity of the forms of association in Romania, providing a solid basis for future research and development in this field. In addition, the analysis will also include aspects related to the impact of climate change on production, as well as consumption trends influencing the fruit market. These elements are essential to outline an overview of the challenges faced by farmers and to identify opportunities for growth and adaptation in the face of global change. We will also examine the role of agricultural policies and subsidies in supporting the sector, highlighting how they can stimulate innovation and sustainability, but also the vocational training of farmers, which has contributed to increasing the number of plantations, the

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quality of products and their diversification. The importance of European grants thus becomes obvious, as they have not only stimulated the increase in the number of fruit farms, but have also contributed to the development of a more competitive and innovative agricultural economy in Romania.

Keywords: Rural Development, sustainability, association in agriculture, fruit-growing farms.

JEL: Q13, Q19

1. Introduction

In Romania, there are numerous forms of associations, both in terms of activities and specific sectors, at the county, regional, and national levels. From producers' associations to producers' groups, cooperatives, branch unions, etc., the activity of these forms of associations has been regulated over time, and existing legislation has been adapted to respond to the evolution of these associative forms.

The role of associative forms in the overall development of agriculture is undeniable. These associative forms can better capitalize on the socio-economic development opportunities of the agricultural sector by using the collective strength of their members to implement support measures adapted to the local level. When the main objectives cannot be achieved individually, association can represent the only way to achieve these objectives, taking the agricultural exploitation to the next level, that of producing for the market, not just for self-consumption.

Beyond the advantages offered by belonging to an associative form, in Romania, it is necessary to overcome certain barriers that hinder the development of associative forms. These barriers are related to the existence, within cooperatives, of members with their own behavioral traits, who have a certain level of education and professional training and who are reluctant to give up their individual beliefs in order to think collectively and in the interest of all members. Additionally, Romania's recent history, when after 1945 people lost their land and means of production as a result of the collectivization process initiated by the Communist Party, leads to a certain reluctance among agricultural producers to associate.

Beyond these functional and social barriers, association and cooperation are modern forms of organizing means of production and commercialization, which can bring Romanian agriculture to the same level as European agriculture, and can help agricultural producers meet the competitive demands of the market. Members of an associative form must have common goals and attitudes oriented towards tolerance, entrepreneurial spirit, generosity, the desire to learn as much as possible, and to be open to technology and the implementation of new, modern techniques for obtaining agricultural products.

Association is extremely important in all fields, but especially in those in decline. One such sector is the fruit-growing sector, where the measures and agricultural policies that have been implemented over time have not resolved the problems faced by this sector.

2. The Stage of Knowing the Problem

Association is a concept that has been studied over time by researchers both at the international level and in the national context. There are numerous studies that have examined the impact of association on rural businesses and the extent to which association contributes to the development of rural businesses. The contribution of well-constructed agricultural policies to stimulate certain sectors was studied in the work "Fruits and Vegetables are Essential for the Wealth of Agriculture" by author Ganry, J. (2012). According to him, the role of governments, through a series of commitments, should be one of the key components of the virtuous circle linking fruit and vegetable production to nutrition and better health. In the author's opinion, authorities need to encourage private initiatives in the production, packaging, processing, and marketing of fruits and vegetables as part of public-private partnerships. It is important for many countries to adopt such a stance and to consider fruit and vegetable production as central to the wealth of agriculture.

The unique characteristics that cooperatives acquire over time can lead to the application of different techniques and methods for achieving performance. In the work "Performance of Small Agricultural Cooperatives: What is in the Mind of Management," authors Ishak, S., Omar, A. R. C. and collaborators analyzed, through individual interviews, the managerial behaviors of the cooperative leaders included in the study. According to the study, the performance of small cooperatives can be defined as the ability to conduct basic management tasks in an effective and efficient manner, in line with the expectations of its members. The study offers new perspectives derived from a practical standpoint, considering the nature of the cooperatives presented in the study.

The existence of strong cooperatives can lead to the mitigation of phenomena related to poverty and lack of employment in rural areas. In the work "Cooperatives and the Alternative Food Network in Italy: The Long Road to a Social Economy in Agriculture," authors Fronte, M., Cucco, I. (2017) studied the phenomenon of cooperatives in Italy specialized in the agricultural sector. The study's results reflect a paradigm shift for cooperatives, moving from working exclusively for the benefit of their members to identifying better ways to support the communities where they operate. The study's conclusions show that the vast majority of cooperatives that have demonstrated economic efficiency must also demonstrate their social aspect, implementing a cooperation model closely linked to the community, thinking, and implementing initiatives oriented towards solidarity.

At the national level, association and associative forms have been extensively studied. Author Apetroie, C. (2008), in the work "Current Practical Approaches in the Association of Agricultural Producers," studied the extent to which the forms of association found in Iași County have developed and their stage of development. According to the study, as of 2008, most agricultural producers in Iași County were

considering belonging to an associative form. Additionally, the study indicated that authorities play an important role in stimulating association at the national level. The role of cooperatives in the development of agriculture in Romania was studied by authors Gherman, R., Iancu, T., Dincu, A. M. and Brad, I. (2016), in the work titled “Professional Associations and Agricultural Cooperatives in Romania and the EU – Key Factors in Agricultural Development.” The study's results showed that the establishment of associative forms opens up more economic development opportunities by attracting local/regional advantages, using collective power to enhance the prosperity of members and the communities they belong to. The practice of association for better representation in front of authorities has been present in Romanian agriculture since 1990.

3. Research methodology

In order to establish the methodology for this study case, classic tools of observation and examination were used. Procedures based on factual analyses were employed, along with intensive research in the existing literature within this new field. The methodology of the study involves direct tools such as gathering information from specialized literature and from current practices in public institutions in our country, namely MADR (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development), AFIR (Rural Investment Financing Agency), as well as information from major platforms such as Eurostat, FAO, Agridata, INS (National Institute of Statistics), TEMPONLINE.

4. Analysis and results

4.1 Analysis of the situation of fruit-growing farms in Romania

Regarding the distribution of fruit-growing farms across Romania's 8 development regions, it can be observed that as of the year 2020, the majority of farms were located in the South-Muntenia region, where 34,040 fruit-growing farms were recorded. This represents a 91.1% increase compared to the number of farms in this region in 2005 (17,720 fruit-growing farms). For this region, during the analyzed period, an average of 25,182 fruit-growing farms was determined, with a positive growth rate of 13.9% and a coefficient of variation of 28.48%, indicating a relatively heterogeneous degree of analyzed data (Table 1)."

Comparatively analyzing the data recorded in 2005 with those from 2020, the most significant increase in the number of fruit-growing farms is observed in the development regions: North-East (312.1%) and West (205.8%). Conversely, the region where the number of fruit-growing farms decreased in 2020 compared to 2005 is Bucharest-Ilfov, where there was a decrease of 68.9% in the number of fruit-growing farms (Table 1).

Table 1. Examination of the number of fruit farms categorized by development region, during the period 2005 – 2020

Specification	2005	2007	2010	2013	2016	2020	2020/ 2005	Medie	Ritm (%)	C.V. (%)
Total	39.770	37.420	63.500	63.540	66.920	85.580	115,2	59455,0	16,6	30,50
Northwest	7.930	9.530	14.470	13.200	16.510	22.040	177,9	13946,7	22,7	36,37
Center	2.200	1.700	2.290	2.300	2.520	3.590	63,2	2433,3	10,3	25,83
NORTH EAST	1.570	2.460	4.010	3.220	3.570	6.470	312,1	3550,0	32,7	47,06
South East	1.370	1.640	3.350	2.870	2.500	4.120	200,7	2641,7	24,6	39,27
South – Muntenia	17.720	15.320	27.030	29.010	27.970	34.040	92,1	25181,7	13,9	28,48
Bucharest – Ilfov	1.320	370	330	360	260	410	-68,9	508,3	-20,9	78,84
South-West Oltenia	6.110	4.510	9.240	9.320	8.970	10.180	66,6	8055,0	10,7	27,60
West	1.550	1.880	2.780	3.260	4.630	4.740	205,8	3140,0	25,1	42,82

Source: Eurostat data processing, accessed 12.04.2024

One development region where the fruit-growing sector is very well represented is the North-West region, where in 2020 there were 22,040 fruit-growing farms, which is 177.9% more than those recorded in 2005 (7,930 fruit-growing farms). For this region, during the analyzed period, an average of 19,947 fruit-growing farms was determined, with a positive growth rate of 22.7% and a coefficient of variation of 36.37%, indicating a relatively heterogeneous degree of analyzed data (Table 1).

4.2 Evolution of fruit-growing farms, classified by physical size

The number of fruit-growing farms has shown a significant upward trend, with the exception of the year 2007. As of the year 2020, Romania recorded a total of 85,580 fruit-growing farms, an increase of 115.2% compared to 2005, when there was a total of 39,770 fruit-growing farms. During the analyzed period, an average value of 50,977.9 fruit-growing farms was determined, with a positive growth rate of 16.6% and a coefficient of variation of 35.57%, indicating a relatively heterogeneous degree of analyzed data (Table 2)."

Regarding the physical size of fruit-growing farms, the most numerous were farms with a physical size of less than 2 hectares. In 2020, there were 66,730 such fruit-growing farms, which is 124.5% more than those existing in 2005 (29,720 fruit-growing farms). For the analyzed interval, an average value of fruit-growing farms smaller than 2 hectares was determined to be 38,484 fruit-growing farms, with a

positive growth rate of 17.6% and a coefficient of variation of 41.53%, indicating a heterogeneous degree of analyzed data (Table 2).

Table 2. Examination of the number of fruit farms, classified by physical size, during the period 2005 – 2020

Specification	2005	2007	2010	2013	2016	2020	2020/ 2005	Medie	Ritm (%)	C.V. (%)
Total	39.770	37.420	63.500	63.540	66.920	85.580	115,2	50977,9	16,6	35,57
< 2 ha	29.720	22.860	49.220	48.650	52.080	66.730	124,5	38483,5	17,6	41,53
2 – 4,9 ha	6.900	9.600	10.330	10.660	11.580	14.460	109,6	9091,4	15,9	27,22
5 – 9,9 ha	2.080	2.850	2.720	3.060	2.680	3.030	45,7	2352,2	7,8	15,19
10-19,9 ha	640	1.600	720	830	450	810	26,6	725,2	4,8	54,64
20-29,9 ha	150	160	140	100	80	210	40,0	125,7	7,0	36,63
30 – 49,9 ha	100	190	150	80	40	160	60,0	111,4	9,9	50,45
50 – 99,9 ha	80	80	80	70	20	110	37,5	68,2	6,6	43,16
> 100 ha	100	90	150	90	70	70	–30,0	77,1	–6,9	38,24

Source: Eurostat data processing, accessed 12.04.2024

In the year 2020, Romania had 14,460 fruit-growing farms with a physical size ranging from 2 hectares to 4.9 hectares, which is 109.6% more than the values recorded in 2005 (6,900 fruit-growing farms). During the analyzed period, an average value of fruit-growing farms with a physical size ranging from 2 hectares to 4.9 hectares was determined to be 9,091, with a positive growth rate of 15.9% and a coefficient of variation of 27.22%, indicating a relatively homogeneous degree of analyzed data (Table 2).

The number of fruit-growing farms experiencing the most significant decrease are those with a physical size greater than 100 hectares. If in 2005 there were 100 fruit-growing farms with an area larger than 100 hectares, by 2020 this number had decreased by 30% to 70 farms. For the analyzed interval, an average value of fruit-growing farms larger than 100 hectares was determined to be 77 fruit-growing farms, with a negative growth rate of 6.9% and a coefficient of variation of 38.2%, indicating a heterogeneous degree of analyzed data (Table 2).

4.3 Evolution of fruit-growing farms, classified by economic size

At the national level in Romania, in 2020, there were no fruit-growing farms that reported zero income from their activities (S.O. of 0 euros) (Table 3).

Nationwide, in 2020, there were 56,110 fruit-growing farms with an S.O. (economic size indicator) lower than 2,000 euros. The majority of such farms are located in the South-Muntenia development region (23,450 fruit-growing farms with an economic

size lower than 2,000 euros). In 2020, compared to 2005, the number of fruit-growing farms in the South-Muntenia region with an economic size lower than 2,000 euros increased by 73.7%. The average for the analyzed period was 17,745 farms, with a positive growth rate of 11.7% and a coefficient of variation of 28.1%, indicating a heterogeneous degree of analyzed data (Table 3).

Table 3. Examination of the number of fruit farms with an economic size below 2,000 euros, according to the development region, in the period 2005 – 2020

Specification	2005	2007	2010	2013	2016	2020	2020/ 2005	Medie	Ritm (%)	C.V. (%)
Total	29.490	21.960	48.960	42.110	42.310	56.110	90,3	40156,7	13,7	31,21
Northwest	5.460	5.550	11.280	8.580	9.280	13.720	151,3	8978,3	20,2	27,95
Center	1.670	1.130	1.730	1.740	1.820	2.390	43,1	1746,7	7,4	15,91
NORTH EAST	1.160	1.320	3.120	2.140	2.380	4.600	296,6	2453,3	31,7	32,76
South East	880	550	2.470	1.910	1.700	2.890	228,4	1733,3	26,8	45,02
South – Muntenia	13.500	9.420	21.310	19.980	18.810	23.450	73,7	17745,0	11,7	28,13
Bucharest – Ilfov	1.300	280	320	350	250	380	-70,8	480,0	-21,8	93,51
South-West Oltenia	4.720	3.010	7.200	6.130	5.360	6.510	37,9	5488,3	6,6	28,64
West	800	700	1.540	1.280	2.710	2.190	173,8	1536,7	22,3	52,47

Source: Eurostat data processing, accessed 12.04.2024

A significant percentage of the total fruit-growing farms with an economic size indicator (S.O.) lower than 2,000 euros are also found in the North-West development region (13,720 farms in 2020). Compared to 2005, the number of these farms increased by 151.3%, resulting in an average of 8,978 farms for the analyzed period, with a positive growth rate of 20.2% and a coefficient of variation of 28%, indicating a relatively heterogeneous degree of analyzed data (Table 3).

Similarly, in the North-East development region, the number of fruit-growing farms with an economic size indicator lower than 2,000 euros showed significant growth in 2020 compared to the data recorded in 2005. In 2020, there were 4,600 such fruit-growing farms, which is 296.6% more than in 2005. For the analyzed period, an average of 2,453 farms was determined, with a positive growth rate of 31.7% and a coefficient of variation of 32.8%, indicating a heterogeneous degree of analyzed data (Table 3).

A smaller percentage of the total fruit-growing farms with an economic size indicator lower than 2,000 euros are located in the South-East development region

(1,700 farms in 2020). Compared to 2005, the number of these farms increased by 228.4%, resulting in an average of 1,733 farms for the analyzed period, with a positive growth rate of 26.8% and a coefficient of variation of 45%, indicating a heterogeneous degree of analyzed data (Table 3).

5. The evolution of the forms of association in agriculture in Romania

The diversity of connections between the agricultural sector and other branches of the national economy, as well as the internal relationships within agriculture (such as those between producers and entities involved in storage, processing, and sales of products), influences the types of partnerships and collaborations that form.

5.1 The Situation of Agricultural Cooperatives in Romania

Analyzing the trend of the number of cooperatives at the national level in Romania, it shows an upward trend, reaching its peak during the analyzed period in 2018, when 280 cooperatives were established. However, in 2020, only 112 cooperatives were established, marking a decrease of 48.6% compared to the previous year, when 218 cooperatives were registered (Figure 1).

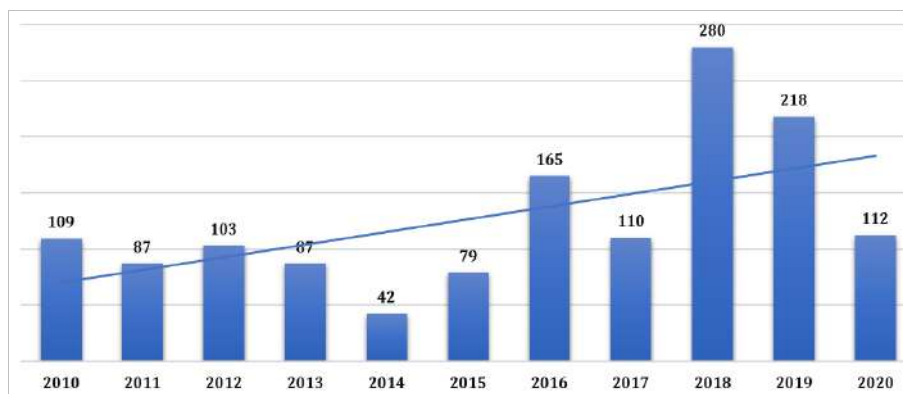


Figure 1. The evolution of the number of agricultural cooperatives established in Romania, in the period 2010 – 2020

Source: ONRC processing, accessed 16.04.2024

This increase in the establishment of cooperatives starting from 2016 can be attributed to the tax incentives introduced with the adoption of Law No. 164/2016, as well as the initiation of accessing and implementing measures for establishing cooperatives through the Local Action Groups (GALs) (Figure 1).

Out of a total of 1,696 cooperatives registered as of the year 2020, 88% of these are still operational, while 12% are no longer functional (Figure 2).

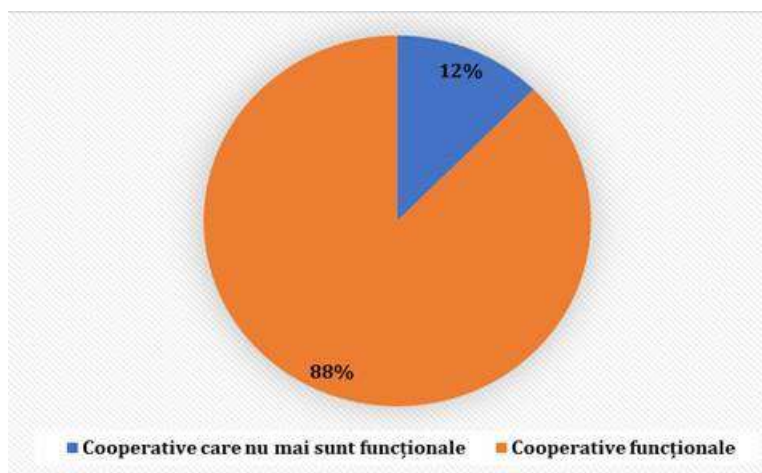


Figure 2. Percentage distribution of agricultural cooperatives according to functionality, in Romania, at the level of 2020

Source: ONRC processing, accessed 16.04.2024

Out of the total of 1,485 operational cooperatives as of the year 2020, 37% are classified as Grade I (solely individuals), while 63% are classified as Grade II (both individuals and legal entities) (Figure 3).

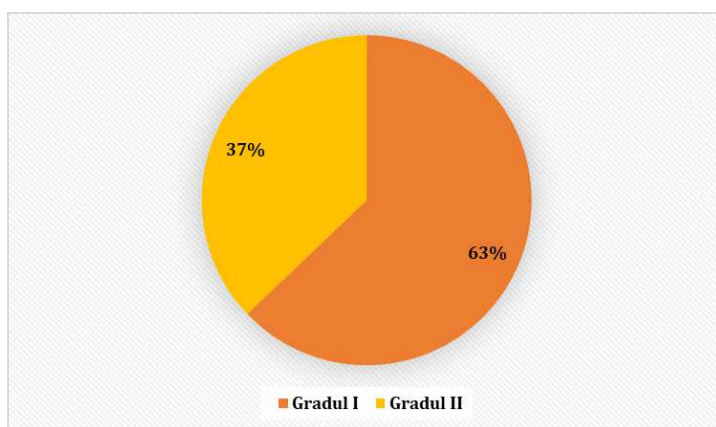


Figure 3. Percentage distribution of agricultural cooperatives according to their type, in Romania, at the level of 2020

Source: ONRC processing, accessed 16.04.2024

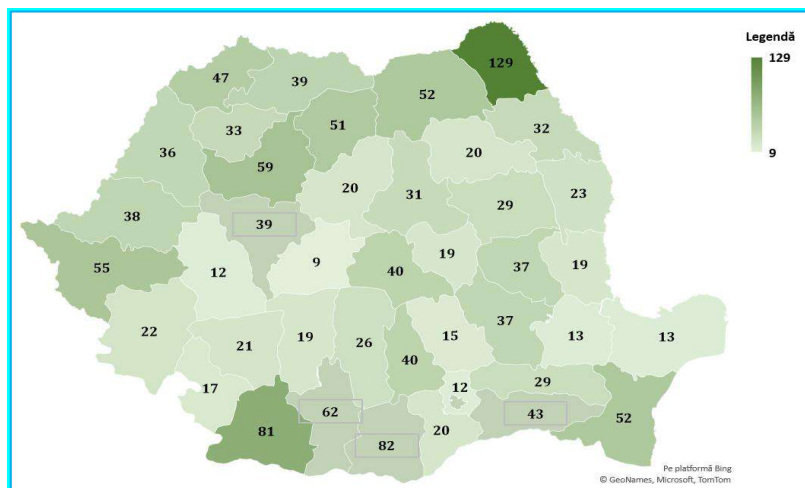


Figure 4. Distribution of agricultural cooperatives by county, at the level of 2020

Source: ONRC processing, accessed 16.04.2024

Analyzing the situation of functional agricultural cooperatives at the level of the year 2020, classified by county, we can state that the majority of agricultural cooperatives are located in Botoșani County with 129 entities, followed by Teleorman and Dolj counties with 82 and 81 agricultural cooperatives, respectively. On the other hand, at the opposite end are Sibiu County with 9 entities, and Ilfov and Hunedoara counties each with 12 agricultural cooperatives (Figure 4).

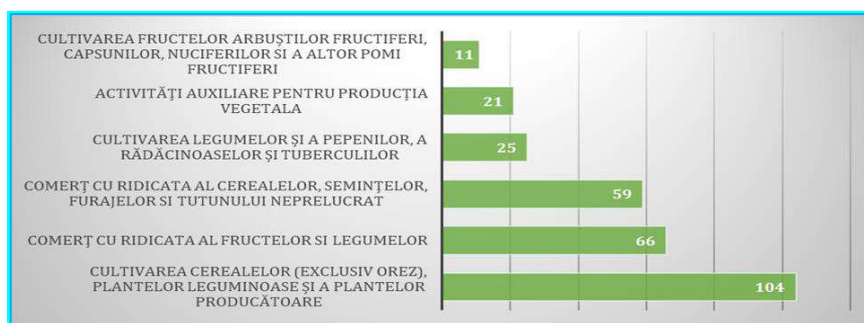


Figure 5. Classification of cooperatives operating in the plant sector, according to the CANE code, which submitted a balance sheet in 2019

Source: ONRC processing, accessed 16.04.2024

Out of the total number of agricultural cooperatives specializing in plant production that filed their financial statements in 2019, 104 of them were classified under the NACE code 'Growing of cereals (except rice), leguminous crops and oil seeds',

while 66 cooperatives were specialized in wholesale trade of fruits and vegetables. Additionally, only 11 cooperatives were specialized in fruit cultivation.

5.2 The Situation of Producer Groups in Romania

Out of a total of 247 producer groups existing as of April 1, 2024, in Romania, the majority were located in Bihor and Suceava counties with 23 and 19 producer groups, respectively (Figure 6).

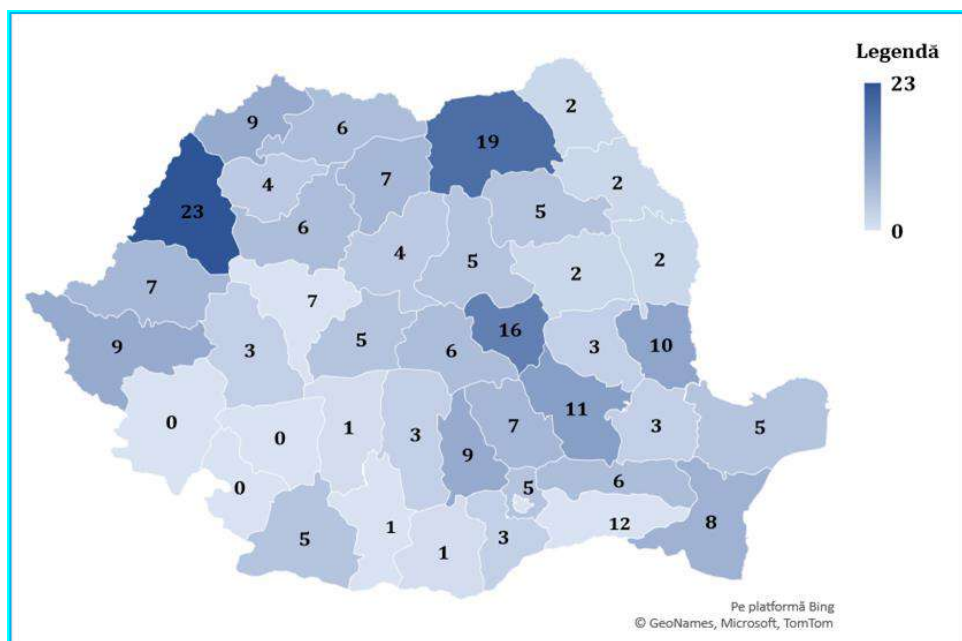


Figure 6. Distribution at country level of the total number of agricultural producers, registered in Romania

Source: MADR data processing regarding the number of available manufacturers until 01.04.2024

Also, a significant number of producer groups are also registered in Covasna and Călărași counties with 16 and 12 producer groups, respectively. At the opposite pole, there are counties such as: Caraș Severin, Gorj and Mehedinți that do not have any group of agricultural producers (Figure 6).

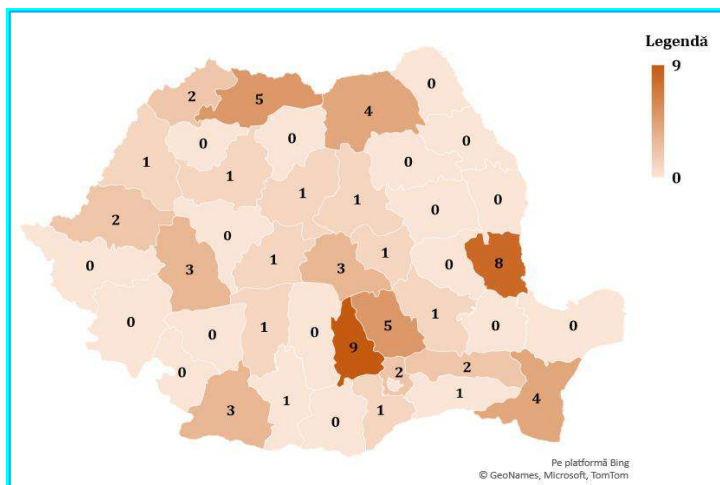


Figure 7. The county-level distribution of agricultural producers in the fruits and vegetables sector registered in Romania.

Source: MADR data processing regarding the number of available manufacturers until 01.04.2024

In terms of county-level distribution, regarding agricultural producer groups active in the fruits and vegetables sector, the highest number of producer groups were recorded in Dâmbovița County (known for its favorable conditions for fruit tree cultivation) and Galați County (recognized for its vegetable production basins at the county level), with 9 and 8 agricultural producer groups, respectively (Figure 7).

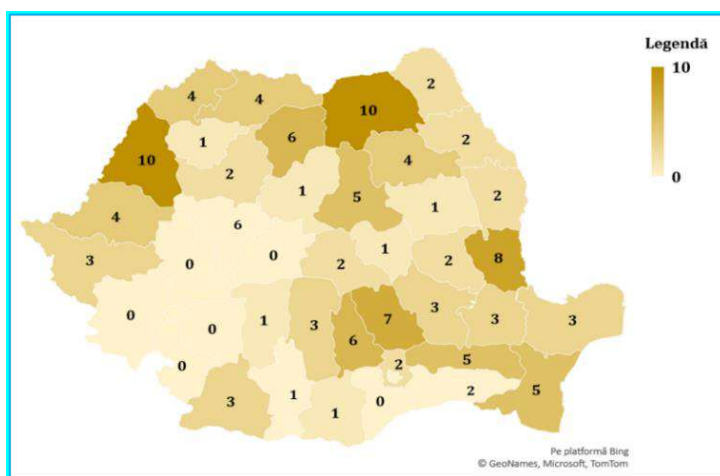


Figure 8. The county-level distribution of the number of agricultural producers who have retired, registered in Romania

Source: MADR data processing regarding the number of available manufacturers until 01.04.2024

Compliance with EU standards in environmental, climate, and food safety matters; Those who have been able to benefit from this support include producer groups (in the pomology sector) classified as SMEs and recognized (after January 1, 2014). Regarding the non-repayable support granted to eligible applicants, it is up to 100%, but it cannot exceed 10% of the value of the sold production and 100,000 euros per year. This is provided in the form of a degressive lump-sum aid, in annual installments that cannot exceed 5 years from the date the group was recognized.

Table 4. Principles and selection criteria for applicants for sub-measure 9.1.a

Nr.	Principles and Selection Criteria	Score
1	Principle of cooperation	Max. 10 p.
	Scoring varies	4 – 10 p.
2	Principle of group representativeness (number of members)	Max 30 p.
	Scoring varies	20 – 30 p.
3	Principle of product quality	Max 35 p.
	Scoring varies	5 – 35 p.
4	Principle of association of small-scale farms	Max 20 p.
	Scoring varies	15 – 25 p.

Source: data processing Applicant Guide related to submeasure 9.1a, accessed 01.04.2024 – Rural Investment Financing Agency

Through this measure, producer groups that apply and are part of a partnership aimed at establishing an operational group have been encouraged. Additionally, producer groups with a higher number of members (over 15 members – 30 points) and targeting certified activities in organic agriculture (20 points) or certified activities under a quality scheme (up to 15 points) have also been encouraged.

According to the data found on AFIR (Agency for Financing Rural Investment), there were two open sessions for this measure targeting producer groups in the pomology sector. For the first session, a budget of 5.3 million euros was allocated, and for the second session, a budget of 1.99 million euros was allocated.

During the first session, a budget of 5.3 million euros was allocated, out of which the public value of the 3 winning projects was 1.22 million euros. Among these projects, 2 out of 3 cooperatives have between 6 and 9 members. All three cooperatives plan to invest in an organic certification system, and they all include farms with an economic size ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 euros.



Figure 9. Criteria met by applicants declared winners in the first open session, under sub-measure 9.1a

Source: AFIR data processing, accessed 04.04.2024

The 3 cooperatives declared winners are located in Dâmbovița, Bucharest and Suceava counties.

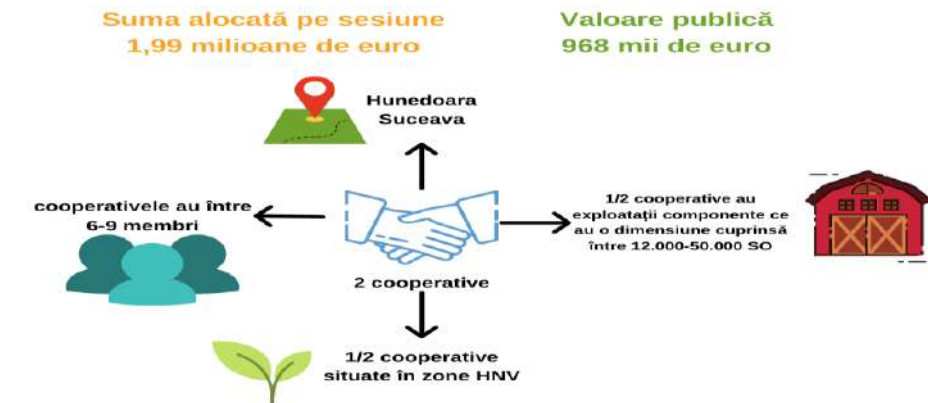


Figure 10. Criteria met by applicants declared winners in the second open session under sub-measure 9.1a

Source: AFIR data processing, accessed 04.04.2024

The second open session, targeting producer groups in the pomology sector, had a budget allocation of 1.99 million euros, out of which the public value of the winning projects was 968 thousand euros.

The winning cooperatives had between 6 and 9 members and were located in Hunedoara and Suceava counties.

6. Conclusion

Regarding the distribution of fruit-growing farms across Romania, broken down by the country's 8 development regions, it is notable that as of 2020, the majority were located in the South-Muntenia region, with 34,040 fruit-growing farms recorded. This figure represents a 91.1% increase compared to the number in this region in 2005, which was 17,720 fruit-growing farms.

Nationally, the number of legally recognized fruit-growing farms in 2020 was 1,290, which is three times higher than the number recorded in 2005. The highest numbers of legally recognized fruit-growing farms in 2020 were found in the development regions of North-West (300 farms), South-Muntenia (240 farms), and North-East (180 farms). In contrast, the Bucharest-Ilfov region had no legally recognized fruit-growing farms, while the South-East region had 110 such farms. The same number of legally recognized fruit-growing farms was also recorded in the South-West Oltenia region.

In Romania, the number of fruit-growing farms has shown a significant increase over the analyzed period, with the exception of 2007. By the year 2020, there were a total of 85,580 fruit-growing farms in the country, marking a 115.2% increase compared to 2005, when there were 39,770 such farms in total.

The average number of fruit-growing farms during this period was approximately 50,977.9, with a positive growth rate of 16.6%. The coefficient of variation stood at 35.57%, indicating a relatively heterogeneous distribution of the analyzed data.

At the national level in 2020, there were 56,110 fruit-growing farms with an economic size of less than 2,000 euros. The majority of such farms were located in the South-Muntenia development region (23,450 fruit-growing farms with an economic size of less than 2,000 euros). Compared to 2005, the number of fruit-growing farms in the South-Muntenia region with an economic size of less than 2,000 euros increased by 73.7% in 2020. The average for the analyzed period was 17,745 farms, showing a positive growth rate of 11.7% and a coefficient of variation of 28.1%, indicating heterogeneous data distribution. This category continues to represent the highest proportion of total fruit-growing farms.

From a total of 247 producer groups existing as of April 1, 2024, in Romania, the majority were located in Bihor and Suceava counties with 23 and 19 producer groups, respectively. Regarding the distribution at the county level of agricultural producer groups active in the fruit and vegetable sector, the highest numbers were recorded in Dâmbovița (known for its opportunities in fruit tree cultivation) and Galați (recognized for vegetable basins at the county level) with 9 and 8 agricultural producer groups, respectively.

It is noteworthy that Measure 9.1a did not attract significant interest from agricultural producers in the fruit-growing sector, as evidenced by the low number of applicants in the two project submission sessions. Farmers continue to be reluctant to

associate themselves in producer groups or cooperatives, highlighting the need to identify new approaches to persuade Romanian farmers to collaborate.

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