SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF AGRICULTURE AND THE ROLE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA AND ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT

The authors of the paper performed a comparative analysis of socio-economic characteristics of agriculture and the role in economic development of the Republic of Serbia and Romania. The primary goal of this article was to conduct a survey in two countries during 2023, analyzing the social and economic value, using a database of 150 farms (small farms). The statistical analysis gave an insight into the basic aspects of working population in agriculture, age, level of education and management experience on the farm, value of farm production, their income structure and etc. Based on the research and comparison of certain differences in the categories of agricultural development between the Republic of Serbia and Romania, we will analyze the socio-economics characteristics of smallholders who constitute a large share of farmers in those countries and have a big influence on sustainable development and improvement of economic development.

Keywords: economic development, socio-economic characteristics, agriculture

INTRODUCTION

With the development of technology, digitization and innovation, in a large number of developed countries, agriculture ceased to be considered the main economic sector and its role was neglected, often without strategic investments and development by the state. Even countries that traditionally deal with and depend on the agricultural sector have reorganized their growth policies in favor of other sectors following global economic trends. However, after the world economic crisis, and especially after the pandemic crisis, there are new assessments and the definition of development priorities, which directly affects the development and improvement of the agricultural sector, as one of the priority sectors for sustainable development and improvement of the overall economic development.

Agricultural trade performance is connected to national competitiveness, which presumes the existence of the comparative advantage [1]. It is very important to consider what determines economic development and how agriculture features in this and whether economic growth - through agricultural development [2], contributes to poverty reduction and the role in economic development in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, especially in the Republic of Serbia and Romania.

When we analyze the role of agriculture in economic development, we could specify a few important things, such as influence and contribution to employment, contribution to export, source of food supply, improving rural welfare, creating effective demand, etc. It is important to identify the effects of agricultural growth on farm economy, rural economy and national economy and how to achieve these goals.

Serbia has a great potential for the development of agriculture and it is significant for the national economy in terms of economic, social and sustainable value [3]. Although the trend of decreasing population in rural areas is permanent, the potentials for development of agriculture and rural development in Serbia remain at high level [4]. Also, a lot of research should focus on small and mid-sized farms, which are the basis for agricultural development, both in Serbia and in EU countries [5]. Analyzing the situation by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2023) observed by activities, in the third quarter of 2023, a significant real growth of gross added value was recorded in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector, 9.5%. The first results of the Agriculture Census show that in the Republic of Serbia, in 2023 [6,7]: 1) there were 508,365 farms, of which 99.6% were family farms engaged in agricultural production, 2) the average agricultural holding cultivates 6.4 hectares, 3) compared to data from 2018, the number of farms decreased by 10%, 4) the census showed that the average age of the head of a family farm is 60 years, while only one in eleven heads of the farm is younger than 40 years old (https://www.srbija.gov.rs/tekst/en/130157/agriculture.php). According to the Jurkević et al. (2023) the goal of the agricultural policy of Serbia in the future should be to increase the share of funds for rural development, which should have a dominant share of the agricultural budget after EU accession [7]. Some progress was made, with improving the efficiency of processing IPARD applications [8], but it is still not enough.

When we analyze the situation in Romania, we could say that agriculture plays a significant socio-economic role in that county and its transformation to an advanced, dynamic, and market-oriented sector is central in fighting against poverty, promoting social inclusion, and reducing the urban/rural development disparities. In Romania, more than half of the total land area was used as agricultural land. According to European Commission data, in 2020, there were 9.1 million agricultural holdings in the EU, of which 2.9 million holdings (the equivalent of 31.8 %) were located in Romania [9]. There were more than twice the number of farms in Romania as the next Member State; there were 1.3 million farms in Poland (the equivalent of 14.4 % of the EU total), with 1.1 million farms in Italy (12.5 %) and 0.9 million in Spain (10.1 %) [10]. In Romania, the Member State with the highest number of farms, nine in every ten farms (90.3 % or 2.6 million farms) were smaller than 5 ha, but the 0.9 % of farms of 50 ha or more in size farmed a little over one half (54.0 %) of all the UAA in the country. Although Romania accounted for about one third of the EU's farms, it accounted for only 3.3 % of the EU's standard output [11].

Because of the importance of everything previously mentioned, in this paper we will present the data from the survey from 2023 from the Republic of Serbia and Romania, defined during the implementation of the project "Eco-efficiency and sustainability of small-scale farming: exploring slacks for undesirable outputs and public goods". From this Survey we will select data specifically of interest for this topic, analyzing the socio-economics characteristics in those two countries. We will analyze the socio-economics characteristics of smallholders who constitute a large share of farmers in analyzing countries and have a big influence on sustainable development and improvement of the economic development.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF AGRICULTURE - REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

The activities under the project "Eco-efficiency and sustainability of small-scale farming: exploring slacks for undesirable outputs and public goods" started on January 2022.

Based on the agreement, on 27th March 2023, a one-day Focus Group was organized in Belgrade, Serbia by the representatives of Faculty of Business Economics and Entrepreneurship as a partner. As part of the first project activity, two focus groups were conducted, which were successfully implemented in the premises of the Faculty of Business Economics and Entrepreneurship. The first focus group was conducted with representatives of agricultural farms in Serbia, and the second with experts in this field from the Institute of Crop and Vegetable Agriculture from Novi Sad, Faculty of Biofarming from Bačka Topola and from the Institute for Agricultural Economics in Belgrade.

From May to October 2023, 150 DCE interviews were organized in different locations from Serbia, but in the same part of the region - Vojvodina. The interview was conducted with producers from the territory of South Banat, the city of Pančevo, the municipalities of Opovo, Kovačica and Alibunar. Farm sizes ranged from 1 to 20 ha in most cases. Average production value from 1,000 EUR to 12,000 EUR. The farmers interviewed were selected accordant with some prerequisite criteria.

Regarding the farmer's profile, Table number 1 shows that the average age of the farmer is about 52 years (i.e., minimum 26 years and maximum 80 years), is male and has an average experience of about 18 years (i.e., minimum 1 years and maximum 50 years). On the level of education, it is noted that the farmer has graduated high school level and is without agricultural education. The average total farm area is approximately 9,4 ha (i.e., maximum 39 ha), of which leased land with an average area of 1,9 ha and insured area with an average area of 0,68 ha.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Age of farmer	150	51,9133	12,82338316	26	80
Farm management	150	17,6	12,00333287	1	50
Gender1male~e	150	0,7666	0,422952585	0	1
Education1~7	150	3,64	1,420234722	1	7
member_org~0	150	0,2466	0,564938541	0	5
ag_educati~r	150	0,2266	0,418675159	0	1
ag_eduyears	150	2,6566	7,778418148	0	55
Noofhouseh~r	150	2,306	1,821891569	0	9
Children_nu~r	150	0,34	0,815107355	0	4
Totalfarm_area~n	150	9,4238	7,906582293	0	39
leaseland_n	150	1,9233	4,801213967	0	34
area_insur~n	150	0,6866	2,761368421	0	20

Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey

Concerning the *Type of crops*, it is noted that predominates maize with an average area of 4,75 ha (i.e., minimum 0 ha and maximum 22 ha), followed by cereals with an average area of 3,06 ha (i.e., minimum 0 ha and maximum 12 ha), then oils and seeds with an average area of 1,46 ha (i.e., minimum 0 ha and maximum 17 ha), then root crops with an average area of 0,24 ha (i.e., minimum 0 ha and maximum 5 ha).

Table 2. Type of crops

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Cereals	150	3,0651	2,885925094	0	12
Maize	150	4,7507	4,254479223	0	22
Root crops	150	0,2366	0,809651637	0	5
Pulses	150	0,1913	0,889939074	0	8
Oils and seeds	150	1,4647	3,24006454	0	17
Field vegetables	150	0,0392	0,22018029	0	2
Veg_in greenhouse	150	0,0133	0,162754075	0	2
Orchards	150	0,0233	0,181716813	0	2
Fruit bushes, berries	150	0,0067	0,081377037	0	1
Vineyards	150	0,0015	0,017902948	0	0,22
Permanent grassland	150	0,0567	0,260106816	0	2

Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey

Related to the *Total value of farm production in EUR* (Table 3) *and Total value of plant production in EUR* (Table 4), you can notice that the highest score and average percentages are in the interval of EUR 0-3000 and EUR 3.001-6.000.

Table 3. Total value of farm production in EUR

Variable	Obs.	Average
0-3000	150	0,4067
3001-6000	150	0,28
6001-9000	150	0,14
9001-12000	150	0,08
12001-15000	150	0,087
>15000	150	0,0067

Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey

Table 4. Total value of plant production in EUR

Variable	Obs.	Average
0-3000	150	0,3867
3001-6000	150	0,32
6001-9000	150	0,1467
9001-12000	150	0,0733
12001-15000	150	0,08
>15000	150	0

Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey

Concerning Approximate data variables (Table 5), it is noticed that: the average Agri-land area is 9,56 ha (i.e., min 0 ha and maximum 39 ha), the average arable land area is approximately 9,77 ha (i.e., minimum 0 ha and maximum 39 ha); Permanent grass average area is 0,1 ha (i.e., minimum 0 ha and maximum 10 ha); Intercrops average area is 4,67 ha. Other approximate data variables highlight that: at the farm level, energy expenditure averages €110; mineral fertilizer costs €50 on average, organic fertilizer costs €37 on average; plant protection costs €844 on average; average fuel costs at farm level is €1220; and total work per week averages 43 hours.

Table 5. Approximate data

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Agri land	150	9,5638	8,100356755	0	39
Arable land	150	9,7743	8,074695158	0	39
Permanent grass	150	0,102	0,841939824	0	10
Intercrops	150	4,667	56,96392621	0	700
Electricity	150	110,47	255,4273195	0	1500
Fertiliser	150	2742,67	2531,182706	0	15000
Mineral fertiliser	150	49,56	423,6537952	0	5000
Organic fertiliser	150	36,69	221,1437268	0	1700
Plant protection	150	844,52	1052,352024	0	7500
Fuel in EUR	150	1219,45	1193,601829	0	7500
Total work	150	43,067	34,88240563	0	250

Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey

Related to the *Yearly income per household in EUR* (Table 6), one can see that the highest score is in the interval of EUR 0-3000 and EUR 3001-6000.

Table 6. Yearly income per household in EUR

Variable	Obs.	Average
0-3000	150	0,4667
3001-6000	150	0,3133
6001-9000	150	0,14
9001-12000	150	0,0867
12001-15000	150	0,0533
>15000	150	0,0067

Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey

From Table 7. *Agriculture income per household in EUR*, most of the farms register values in the interval of EUR 0-3000 and EUR 3001-6000.

Table 7. Agriculture income per household in EUR

Variable	Obs.	Average
0-3000	150	0,48
3001-6000	150	0,3533
6001-9000	150	0,0733
9001-12000	150	0,0467
12001-15000	150	0,04
>15000	150	0,0067

Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey

Based on the results from this Survey from 2023., we can identify some of the important socio-economic factors of the agriculture sector and small farms in the Republic of Serbia. Based on the fact that small farms occupy most of the farmland in the Republic of Serbia [12], these data could be very useful and very important to economic and agricultural development.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF AGRICULTURE - ROMANIA

Between June 2023 and November 2023, 150 DCE interviews were organized in different locations from Alba region. The farmers interviewed were selected accordant with some prerequisite criteria. Interviewers were previously trained by the staff from "1st December 1918" University in Alba Iulia. The interviews took place on different locations: village hall (for Sântimbru, Galtiu, Coşlariu), farmers residence (Mihalţ, Cistei, Meteş, Baia de Arieş, Mogoş and other villages in Alba County) and at the Regional Agricultural Division establishment in Alba Iulia.

Regarding the farmer's profile, Table 8. shows that the average age of the farmer is about 50 years (i.e., minimum 24 years and maximum 90 years), is male and has an average experience of about 14 years (i.e., minimum 0 years and maximum 70 years). On the level of education, it is noted that the farmer has graduated high school level and is without agricultural education. It is also renowned that the farmer is not a member of any farmers' organization. In connection with the number of members in the household, it is noted that there are on average about three people, and the average number of minor children in the household is equal to 1. The average total farm area is approximately 12.6 ha (i.e., minimum 1 ha and maximum 165 ha), of which leased land with an average area of 8.5 ha and insured area with an average area of 1.44 ha.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Age of farmer	150	49.84667	13.80047	24	90
Farm management	150	13.86667	13.56796	0	70
Gender1male~e	150	.6466667	.4796065	0	1
Education1~7	150	4.666667	1.139096	1	7
member_org~0	150	.4533333	.4994852	0	1
ag_educati~r	150	.46	.5000671	0	1
ag_eduyears	150	5.58	8.92344	0	40
Noofhouseh~r	150	3.306667	1.225822	1	6
Children_nu~r	150	.6666667	.8873962	0	3
Totalfarm_area~n	150	12.57787	18.31777	1.49	165
leaseland_n	150	8.5332	17.40098	0	165
area_insur~n	150	1.443133	4.495553	0	33

Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey

Concerning the *Type of crops*, it is noted that predominates maize with an average area of 2.5 ha (i.e., minimum 0 ha and maximum 80 ha), followed by grass on the field with an average area of 1.27 ha (i.e., minimum 0 ha and maximum 10.92 ha), then cereals with an average area of 1.23 ha (i.e., minimum 0 ha and maximum 20 ha), then Orchards with an average area of 0.25 ha (i.e., minimum 0 ha and maximum 19.65 ha).

Table 9. Type of crops

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Cereals	150	1.228533	2.575587	0	20
cereals_po~n	150	.1428	.7014311	0	7.5
Maizee	150	2.5328	6.897122	0	80
Maize pot	150	.2326667	.5265816	0	3
Rootcrops_n	150	.2834	.990251	0	10
root_pot_c~n	150	.0852667	.3674065	0	3.24
Pulses_n	150	.1202667	.5237692	0	5
pulses_pot~v	150	.0554	.304575	0	2
Oilsandsee~n	150	.1937333	.5946016	0	4

oil_pot_co~n	150	.09	.4672855	0	4
Fieldveget~n	150	.1734	.7350787	0	7
veg_pot_co~n	150	.1164	.6411057	0	7
Veg_ingree~n	150	.012	.0657124	0	.6
greenhouse~n	150	.0048667	.0324758	0	.33
Orchards_n	150	.2457333	1.648566	0	19.65
orchards_p~n	150	.1043333	.5035877	0	5
Fruitbushe~n	150	.0466	.3745294	0	3.97
fruit_pot_~n	150	.0168	.1863291	0	2.27
Vineyards	150	.0101333	.0573344	0	.5
vineyard_p~v	150	.0057333	.0457355	0	.5
Grassonthe~n	150	1.270133	2.086489	0	10.92
grass_pot_~n	150	.7074	1.542788	0	9

Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey

Related to the *Total value of farm production in EUR*, one can notice that the highest frequency is in the interval of EUR 6.001-9.000 (i.e., 36 farms), followed by the interval of EUR 3.001-6.000 (i.e., 30 farms), the interval above EUR 15.000 (i.e., 28 farms) respectively.

Table 10. Total value of farm production in EUR

Variable	Obs.	Frequency
0-3000	150	6
3001-6000	150	30
6001-9000	150	36
9001-12000	150	23
12001-15000	150	27
>15000	150	28

Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey

From Table 11. *Total value of plant production in EUR*, most of the farms register values in the interval of EUR 3.001-6.000 (i.e., 55 farms), followed by those in the interval of EUR 0 -3.000 (i.e., 29 farms), and by those in the interval of EUR 6.001-9000 (i.e., 28 farms) respectively.

Table 11. Total value of plant production in EUR

Variable	Obs.	Frequency
0-3000	150	29
3001-6000	150	55
6001-9000	150	28
9001-12000	150	14
12001-15000	150	15
>15000	150	9

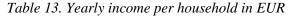*Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey*

Concerning *Approximate data* variables, it is noticed that: the average Agri-land area is 12,57 ha (i.e., min 1,5 ha and maximum 165 ha), the average arable land area is approximately 6 ha (i.e., minimum 0,07 ha and maximum 120 ha); Permanent grass average area is 6.55 ha (i.e., minimum 0 ha and maximum 72 ha); Intercrops average area is 0.05 ha (i.e., minimum 0 ha and maximum 5.7 ha). Other approximate data variables highlight that: at the farm level, energy expenditure averages €481; fertiliser costs €565 on average, mineral fertiliser costs €20 on average, organic fertiliser costs €125 on average; plant protection costs €238 on average; average fuel costs at farm level is €778; and total work per week averages 93 hours.

Table 12. Approximate data

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Agri land	150	12.57387	18.31892	1.49	165
Arable land	150	6.022467	11.05573	.07	120
Permanent grass	150	6.552067	11.24403	0	72
Intercrops	150	.0502	.4809868	0	5.7
Electricity	150	480.6667	503.2441	0	2000
Fertiliser	150	565.9287	568.3884	0	4300
Mineral fertiliser	150	20.262	88.51776	0	750
Organic fertiliser	150	124.7685	218.1404	0	1500
Plant protection	150	238.44	259.1189	0	1500
Fuel in EUR	150	778.2	1327.792	0	14000
Total work	150	93.04	50.82591	5	250

Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey

Related to the *Yearly income per household in EUR*, one can see that the highest frequency is in the interval of EUR 12.001-15.000 (i.e., 45 farms), followed by the interval above EUR 15.000 (i.e., 44 farms), the interval of EUR 6.001-9000 (i.e., 26 farms) and the interval of EUR 9.001-12.000 (i.e., 26 farms) respectively.

Table 13. Yearly income per household in EUR

Variable	Obs.	Frequency
0-3000	150	0
3001-6000	150	9
6001-9000	150	26
9001-12000	150	26
12001-15000	150	45
>15000	150	44

Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey

From Table 14. *Agriculture income per household in EUR*, most of the farms register values in the interval of EUR 3.001-6.000 (i.e., 39 farms), followed by those in the interval of EUR 12.001-15.000 (i.e., 38 farms), and by those in the interval of EUR 6.001-9000 (i.e., 36 farms) respectively.

Table 14. Agriculture income per household in EUR

Variable	Obs.	Frequency
0-3000	150	13
3001-6000	150	39
6001-9000	150	36
9001-12000	150	21
12001-15000	150	38
>15000	150	3

Source: Author's calculations based on the questionnaire survey

Analyzing the data from this Survey from 2023., we can identify some of the important socio-economic factors of the agriculture sector and small farms in the Romania. Regarding the farmer's profile, we could see that average age of the farmer is about 50 years, average experience is about 14 years, the level of education, it is not directly connected with agricultural education, where the average of total farm area is approximately 12.6 ha.

CONCLUSION

The paper focuses on socio-economic characteristics of agriculture and the role in economic development of the Republic of Serbia and Romania. Analyzing the farmer's profile in both countries we could see the similarity in to many things, starting with data about average age of the farmer (it is about 50 years in Romania and 52 in Serbia), then the statistics about level of education, where we could note that the farmer has graduated high school level but with a small percentages of agricultural education and farm managements experience. All these things indicate a problem of the older working structure in the agriculture sector with a less experience and education level to recognize the very important aspect of using new technology and digital services to improve their agriculture business.

Analyzing the situation about Total value of farm production in EUR (the highest frequency is in the interval of EUR 0-3.000 - about 61 farms in Republic of Serbia compared to Romania, the highest frequency is in the interval of EUR 6.001-9.000 - about 36 farms) we could see a differences between those two countries. Most of the farms in Romania register values in the interval of EUR 3.001-6.000 - 55 farms, compared to the Republic of Serbia where most of the farms register values in the interval of EUR 0-3000 - 57 farms. Also, we could see the differences in the aspect of Agriculture income per household in EUR, where most of the farms in the Republic of Serbia register values in the interval of EUR 0-3000 and EUR 3001-6000, compared to Romania where most of the farms register values in the interval of EUR 3.001-6.000 - 39 farms. Based on the results from surveys conducted in both of the countries in 2023. (using a database of 150 farms), we could identify some of the important socio-economic factors of the agriculture sector and small farms, which could be very important for making some decisions with a goal to improve economic and agricultural development in the Republic of Serbia and Romania.

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