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STUDY ON THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Agriculture has always been a strategic sector of the national economy, but also one of the most vulnerable, due to the fragmentation of land ownership, dependence on natural conditions, and low competitiveness. In this context, economic cooperation among farmers has become a modern solution for adapting to market demands and the challenges of globalization. The paper analyzes the importance of economic cooperation in agriculture, focusing on the role of agricultural cooperatives in the sustainable development of rural areas. In the context of a globalized economy and a fragmented Romanian agricultural sector, the agricultural cooperative represents a modern solution for increasing farmers' competitiveness, efficiency, and resilience

• Introduction

Agriculture has always been a strategic sector of the national economy, but also one of the most vulnerable, due to the fragmentation of property ownership, dependence on natural conditions, and low competitiveness. In this context, economic cooperation among farmers has become a modern solution for adapting to market requirements and the challenges of globalization. Agricultural cooperatives, as the organizational form of such cooperation, play a crucial role in strengthening the position of small and medium-sized producers, facilitating access to resources, technology, and markets, while also contributing to the economic and social development of rural areas. Historically, cooperation has been one of the fundamental forms of organization of human activity in rural environments. In Romania, the first forms of agricultural cooperation date back to the late 19th century, when popular banks, credit associations, and peasant consumer cooperatives emerged, designed to protect farmers from lack of capital and commercial exploitation.

An agricultural cooperative is an autonomous association of natural and/or legal persons, a private legal entity founded by the free consent of its members, with the aim of promoting their common interests, in accordance with cooperative principles, and of implementing agricultural policies that encourage association among producers.

• Material and method

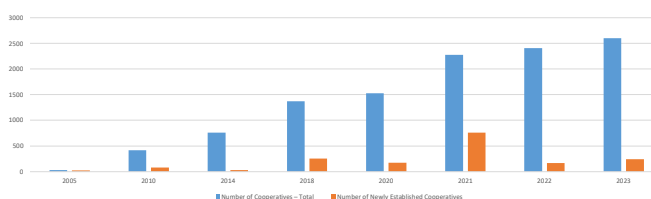
This study is based on a combination of documentary analysis, statistical research, and comparative interpretation, aimed at highlighting the role of agricultural cooperatives in the sustainable development of rural areas in Romania. The methodology was designed to achieve an integrated understanding of the cooperative phenomenon—not only as an economic form, but also as a social and institutional development mechanism.

Thus, the analysis focused on identifying the determinant factors of the success of agricultural cooperatives and the necessary conditions for their consolidation within the Romanian rural economy..

• Results and discussions

Forms of association and cooperation in agriculture are highly diverse, depending on the relationships established both between agriculture and other branches of the national economy, as well as within the agricultural sector itself — between producers, storage units, processing facilities, and distribution networks. Agricultural cooperatives represent a form of collective adaptation to the green transition, facilitating the shift from intensive to sustainable agriculture. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR, 2024): over 2,500 functional cooperatives exist in Romania, about 70% active in crop and livestock production.

Agricultural Cooperatives in Romania (2005–2023)



The number of newly established cooperatives varies considerably throughout the period, showing alternating phases of intensification and stagnation. After 2005, Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007 and the following years brought a wave of new cooperatives (80 in 2010), followed by moderate growth until 2014 (33 new cooperatives).

• Conclusions

The analysis reveals that Romanian agriculture is undergoing a complex process of transformation, and agricultural cooperatives have gradually established themselves as central actors in rural development. These structures provide an effective response to challenges such as land fragmentation, lack of capital, market volatility, and the competitive pressure generated by globalization. Cooperatives not only increase production efficiency, but also integrate farmers into agri-food value chains, facilitating collective bargaining, access to modern technologies, and reduced production costs.