

STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF DE MINIMIS AID ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND THE NUMBER OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS IN NORTH-WESTERN ROMANIA

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

The North-West Region of Romania represents one of the country's most important agricultural areas due to its favorable pedoclimatic conditions and diversified agricultural production. The aim of this study was to evaluate agricultural production patterns, the structure of agricultural producers, and the role of de minimis aid schemes in supporting agricultural development within the region.

The research was based on a quantitative analysis of statistical data collected from the National Institute of Statistics (INS), the Agency for Payments and Intervention in Agriculture (APIA), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR), and regional agricultural reports covering the period 2022–2024. The study examined cultivated areas, crop yields, farm structures, and the evolution of agricultural holdings across the six counties of the North-West Region.

The results indicate that maize and wheat are the dominant crops, occupying 303,000 ha and 236,000 ha respectively. Significant differences were identified among counties regarding cultivated areas, productivity levels, and farm structures. The analysis also highlights the positive contribution of de minimis aid schemes to the modernization of small and medium-sized farms through investments in agricultural inputs, machinery, and infrastructure.

The study concludes that de minimis aid schemes contribute to improving farm competitiveness and supporting the sustainable development of agriculture in the North-West Region. However, challenges related to land fragmentation, climate variability, and limited infrastructure continue to affect agricultural performance.

Keywords: de minimis aid, agricultural production, agricultural producers, North-West Region, Romania
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INTRODUCTION

The North-West Region of Romania has considerable agricultural importance due to its favorable natural conditions and productive potential. The region encompasses plains, plateaus, and mountainous areas, allowing for diversified agricultural practices and a wide variety of agricultural products, ranging from field crops and horticulture to livestock farming (INS, 2024).

This study aims to analyze two major dimensions of the agricultural sector in the North-West Region. The first concerns the production levels of the main agricultural crops and their evolution across counties. The second focuses on the number and structure of agricultural producers, with particular emphasis on farm size and organizational forms (MADR, 2024).

An important factor influencing agricultural development is represented by de

minimis aid schemes, which provide direct financial support to small and medium-sized farms. These programs facilitate investments in equipment, agricultural inputs, and other productive resources, contributing to income stability and maintaining agricultural activity in rural areas (APIA, 2024). Understanding who produces, how much is produced, and under what conditions agricultural activity is carried out is essential for designing agricultural policies, support programs, and business strategies. Therefore, this study contributes to a broader understanding of agriculture in the North-West Region and provides an analytical basis for regional development strategies.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The research methodology consisted of a quantitative analysis of statistical data collected from official national and regional sources. The study used annual agricultural data at county and regional levels, combined with literature review and qualitative interpretation.

The main data sources included:

- National Institute of Statistics (INS);
- Agency for Payments and Intervention in Agriculture (APIA);
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR);
- Cluj County Directorate for Agriculture;
- Regional development reports and publications.

The analyzed data mainly cover the period 2022–2024 and include information regarding cultivated areas, crop production, agricultural producers, and beneficiaries of agricultural support schemes (INS, 2024; APIA, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Geographical and Socio-Economic Context

The North-West Region consists of six counties: Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Maramureș, Satu Mare, and Sălaj. The geographical diversity includes fertile plains, hilly landscapes, and mountainous areas, creating favorable conditions for various agricultural activities.

The principal agricultural crops cultivated in the region include: wheat, maize, sunflower, rapeseed, potatoes, vegetables.

Agriculture in the region combines small family farms with larger commercial agricultural enterprises, especially in counties characterized by extensive fertile land.

Cultivated Areas and Main Crops

The region records significant cultivated areas for cereals and industrial crops. Bihor and Satu Mare counties have the largest areas dedicated to cereals and sunflower production, while Cluj County shows a more diversified agricultural structure. Maramureș and Bistrița-Năsăud are characterized by a greater importance of subsistence farming and livestock grazing.

Average crop yields recorded during 2022–2024 were approximately:

- Wheat: 3.5–4.5 t/ha;
- Maize: 3.0–6.0 t/ha;
- Sunflower: 1.5–2.5 t/ha;
- Potatoes: 8–18 t/ha.

Counties with more intensive agricultural systems generally achieve higher productivity levels than mountainous areas. These differences are closely related to land quality, mechanization levels, and access to agricultural support measures (MADR, 2024).

Structure of Agricultural Producers

Agricultural producers in the region can be grouped into four categories:

1. Small family farms (less than 5 ha);
2. Medium-sized farms (5–50 ha);
3. Large commercial farms (more than 50 ha);
4. Organic farms and agricultural cooperatives.

Land fragmentation remains a significant challenge in many areas and directly affects productivity and competitiveness.

Evolution of Agricultural Producers

Statistical data indicate a gradual decrease in the total number of agricultural holdings, accompanied by a process of consolidation and professionalization. Larger commercial farms are increasing their cultivated areas, while many small producers remain partially integrated into the agricultural market.

In this context, de minimis aid schemes play an important role by providing direct financial support for equipment acquisition, agricultural inputs, and small-scale investments. These programs contribute to maintaining agricultural activity and supporting the transition toward more competitive farming structures.

Factors Influencing Agricultural Productivity

The main factors affecting productivity include:

- Soil quality and fertility;
- Water availability and irrigation systems;
- Agricultural technology and mechanization;
- Access to financing and subsidies;
- Agricultural education and technical advisory services;
- Farm fragmentation.

Challenges and Constraints

Several obstacles continue to affect agricultural development:

- Land fragmentation;
- Climate variability and drought risks;
- Insufficient storage and processing infrastructure;
- Aging rural workforce;
- Limited financial resources available through support schemes;
- Unequal access to information and administrative support.

County-Level Strengths and Challenges Bihor County

Strengths include extensive fertile plains and strong cereal production. Challenges involve the need for improved irrigation infrastructure and value-chain development.

Cluj County

Strengths include production diversification and proximity to urban markets.

Challenges are mainly associated with fragmented land ownership in hilly areas.

Satu Mare County

The county has an important contribution to regional cereal production but requires investments in storage and processing infrastructure.

Table 1

Cultivated areas (ha) of major crops in the North-West Region of Romania

County	Wheat (ha)	Maize (ha)	Sunflower (ha)	Barley (ha)	Rapeseed (ha)	Potatoes (ha)	Vegetables (ha)
Bihor	65,000	78,000	32,000	7,000	11,000	3,500	2,800
Bistrița-Năsăud	24,000	33,000	12,000	3,500	2,800	5,000	1,200
Cluj	55,000	70,000	25,000	6,000	8,000	8,000	2,000
Maramureș	18,000	26,000	8,500	2,500	1,700	7,000	1,600
Satu Mare	52,000	67,000	29,000	5,800	9,500	2,800	2,100
Sălaj	22,000	29,000	10,500	3,200	4,000	3,600	1,150
Total N-W Region	236,000	303,000	117,000	28,000	37,000	29,900	10,850

Source: Author's processing based on INS, APIA and MADR data (2022–2024)

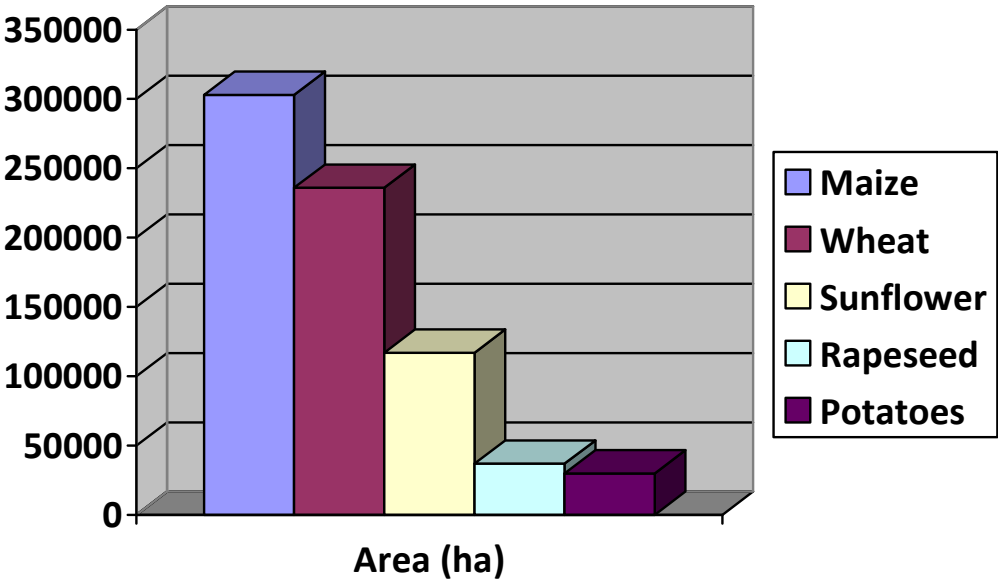


Figure 1. **Distribution of cultivated areas by major agricultural crops in the North-West Region of Romania**

CONCLUSIONS

The North-West Region possesses substantial agricultural potential supported by favorable natural conditions and a long agricultural tradition. Nevertheless, significant disparities exist among counties in terms of productivity, farm size, modernization level, and access to resources.

Recent developments indicate a reduction in the number of small agricultural holdings and a consolidation process around larger and more efficient farms. While this contributes to increased competitiveness, important challenges remain, particularly regarding irrigation infrastructure, access to financing, labor shortages, and climate change impacts.

De minimis aid schemes represent an important support instrument for small and medium-sized farms. They facilitate investments, improve economic resilience, and support the integration of producers into agricultural markets. Future regional policies should focus on farm consolidation, modernization, digitalization, technical advisory services, and local processing capacities.

A coherent and integrated development strategy, combined with effective support mechanisms, can significantly enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of agriculture in the North-West Region of Romania. The findings emphasize the importance of maintaining and improving support mechanisms for small and medium-sized agricultural producers. Future regional development policies should focus on increasing farm competitiveness through investments in irrigation systems, storage infrastructure, agricultural digitalization, and technical advisory services. Strengthening agricultural cooperatives and encouraging land consolidation may further enhance the sustainability and resilience of the agricultural sector in North-Western Romania.

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