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Sustainable Development Strategy for the Agri-food Sector and Rural Area – Horizon 2030

Păun Ion Otiman^{a*}, Filon Toderoiu^a, Cecilia Alexandri^a, Violeta Florian^a,
Camelia Gavrilesco^a, Iuliana Ionel^a, Elena Sima^a, Monica Mihaela Tudor^a

^a*Institute of Agricultural Economics, Romanian Academy, Calea 13 Septembrie no.13, 050711, Bucharest, Romania*

Abstract

Following the evolution of the Romanian agri-food sector and rural area after more than two decades from December 1989 and at seven years from Romania's accession to the EU, and investigating it in a large enough time period for the consolidation of Romania's agrarian structures, taking into consideration the too slow progress of the overall national agri-food system, the still large discrepancies and non-convergence between our country's agriculture and that of the other EU countries, the existence of large severe rural poverty areas, as well as the precarity of Romania's population's food security, in the present paper, the Institute of Agricultural Economics of the Romanian Academy proposes the agri-food and rural development strategy of Romania. The rural strategy establishes the guidelines for the agri-food sector and rural area sustainable development, as one of the basic components of resuming economic growth in Romania, as conditioned by: ensuring national food security and guaranteeing food safety for Romania's population; the natural, material and human resources of Romania's agriculture, and the ecological suitability of Romania's agricultural resources to supply high quality agri-food products on the domestic and foreign markets.

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +4021-318-24-11; fax: +4021-318-24-11.
E-mail address: otiman@acad.ro; iea@ines.ro.

1. Introduction

The **national strategic framework**, the programs and projects for Romania's agriculture have the **sustainable rural development** at their core, as **sustainable economic growth** factor, which presupposes a **strong rural economy**, based on **modern rural infrastructure**, an **adequate technical endowment of the rural territory**, of **rural localities and dwellings**, through the use of **renewable local natural resources (from the rural area) in the economic circuit**, **environment and landscape protection** and, as an effect of these, **reaching an acceptable rural living standard**, through **severe poverty attenuation and alleviation in the rural areas**.

Sustainable economic development can be achieved, first of all, only if **medium and long-term investments are made in the consolidation of agricultural holdings and agro-processing units**, in advanced technologies, in the adequate equipment of the agricultural territory through irrigation, desiccation, anti-erosion systems, forest shelter belts for field protection, anti-flooding systems, etc. The direct financial support from European and national funds should be targeted for reaching these sustainable rural development premises. At the same time, the legal, institutional and financial actions must be intensified in order to increase the competitiveness of national commercial agricultural circuits at international level, having in view the increased participation of the Romanian agricultural products on third markets, on the common European market in the first place, as well as the attenuation of risks and turbulences caused by the annual and multi-annual fluctuations of the natural production factors and of prices. A greater importance should be attached to the regional and local markets development.

Rural area development is based on the **sustainable rural development** concept, rural economy development and diversification presupposing the harmonious blending of the **agricultural (and forestry) component and of the rural agri-food and non-agricultural economic component**, based on the following principles:

- **Agriculture**, in the predominantly agricultural areas, and **forestry**, in the mountain rural areas, represent the **backbone of the rural area**. Although great changes have been recently produced in the role and functions of agriculture, this remains the main component of any rural development strategy. At the same time, in agriculture development, a shift of focus from **productivist** to **multifunctional agriculture** should be envisaged;
- Having in view that **soil** is Romania's most valuable renewable resource, the main decision-makers of the country have the political and economic obligation, as well as the moral obligation, towards the present generation and the next generations as well, to ensure, through adequate agricultural policies, the sustainable exploitation of the soil resource at the level of its productive potential. The increase of agri-food production and of forestry economy should not be considered as an objective "per se", but rather as an objective targeting **food security for the country's population** as well as a prospective objective for Romania, having in view the world demographic forecast estimated at about 9 billion people in the next two-three decades. The increase of agricultural yields at the level of soil natural (ecologic) potential must be obligatorily correlated with the absorption potential of domestic and foreign markets;
- The priority of agriculture and rural economy modernization according to the **National Strategic Framework**, in our vision, should be based on the vital economic and social functions of the agri-food system: **ensuring a balanced food supply for the population (food safety implicitly), the necessary raw products for the non-agricultural activities and an active and profitable export of agri-food products, increasing the landscape resources in the countryside, while ensuring a decent living standard** (comparable to the European average) **and environment protection**. At the same time, the **rural economy** in general, and **agriculture**, in particular, **represent a huge outlet for the upstream and downstream branches**, directly contributing to the development of certain non-agricultural branches, as well as of the sectors related to agriculture (and forestry).

The **priorities** of the **National Strategic Framework for the sustainable development of the agri-food sector and rural area in the period 2014-2020-2030** were formulated starting from the functions of Romania's rural area and economy, of agriculture inclusively, while taking into consideration the need for their fast development, the new partnership between Europe and farmers, according to the CAP Reform for the period 2014-2020, namely:

- Obtaining an agricultural and food production meant to ensure the national food security and to guarantee the food safety for the population through:
 - **doubling the agricultural yields in the next ten years**, compared to the 2000-2010 decade;
 - **doubling the value of crop and livestock production in the next decade**, compared to the production in the year 2010;
 - **doubling the processed agri-food production value**, compared to the year 2010;

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