

**The role of small scale family
farming in the sustainable
development of rural areas in the
opinion of agricultural producers.
Case study from Poland, Romania
and Lithuania**

on the basis of interviews with farmers

Aims of the study

- ▶ to determine the attitude of the farmers to the level and form of the financial support obtained from the instruments of the EU common agricultural policy.
- ▶ to compare opinions of small family farm owners in countries with fragmented agrarian structure (Poland, Romania, Lithuania) on the implementation of sustainable practices.

Material and methods

- ▶ In the first stage, the analysis was based on surveys conducted in Poland in 2018 and in 2019 in Lithuania and Romania. The samples accounted for 710 farms in Poland, 1000 in Lithuania and 900 in Romania.
- ▶ Data were collected in the form of direct interviews by agricultural advisors.
- ▶ In the second stage we ordered farms according to the synthetic sustainability measure. From each country we selected the 20 most sustainable farms (Top-20). The research focused on the individual perspective.
- ▶ Among these farms, there were direct in-depth interviews conducted on six parts: 1. general assessment of the farm, 2. economic situation, 3. market connections, 4. social aspects, 5. the role of the farm in the sustainable development, 6. new technology.
- ▶ SPSS Statistic.

Basic statistics for the 'Top-20' farms

Farm characteristics	Average value		
	Poland	Romania	Lithuania
Farm area (ha of UAA)	13,4	13,2	10,3
Standard output (EUR/year)	17,905	12,650	7,501
Household income (EUR/month)	1,917	1,219	1,230
-only from agriculture	1,076	751	533
Share of support in agricultural income	35%	57%	55%
Estimated farm value (thous. EUR)	209,6	25,7	51,5
Age of farm manager	49	46	48
Level of education of farm manager*	4,6	4,8	5,1

higher prices of land on the Polish market

Level of education in the range from 1 to 7, where 1 - no education, 7 - higher education

Economic dimension of sustainability

In the case of the economic dimension, the focus was on assessing the impact of financial support on the economic situation of the analysed farms.

Do you consider the obtained support (financial and non-financial) for the farm sufficient?

Country:	Yes	No	I don't know / I haven't opinion
Poland	55%	30%	15%
Lithuania	20%	50%	30%
Romania	45%	45%	10%
Total (N=60)	40%	41.7%	18.3%

Economic dimension of sustainability

If you could change the support, what would this change concern? (only farms dissatisfied with the level, direction or form of support)

Country:	level of support	forms of support	direction of support
Poland (N=8)	50.0%	12.5%	37.5%
Lithuania (N=9)	44.4%	11.1%	44.4%
Romania (N=12)	100.0%	0%	0%
Total (N=29)	69.0%	6.9%	24.1%

Economic dimension of sustainability

Poland:

- ▶ large farms receive much more.
- ▶ subsidies create social antagonism : "we would even prefer that there was no support, only an appropriate price, because subsidies give rise to urban-rural antagonisms", "subsidies only give rise to quarrels in society".
- ▶ subsidies lead to price increases, e.g. for fertilisers.

Lithuania:

- ▶ if prices were higher, support would not be needed.
- ▶ They also note that: "currently small farms need support, which should be paid in the form of direct payments, otherwise small farms will not survive". At the same time, "small farms should have priority in receiving higher financial support".

Romania:

- ▶ Romanian farmers point out that if the amount of financial support was higher, one could: "buy more land", "diversify agricultural production and open a restaurant" "diversify agricultural production and increase livestock".

Conclusions regarding economic sustainability

- ▶ Regardless of the country, higher support conditions the implementation of investments in small farms.
- ▶ Farmers, regardless of the country, also agree that the current system of income support for agriculture is unfair, because it favours large.
- ▶ Farmers of all surveyed countries complained about too much bureaucracy in applying for subsidies for measures under the second pillar of the CAP, which is a significant barrier in access to financial resources for their farms.

Environmental dimension of sustainability

Do you think that your farm is environmentally friendly?

Country:	Yes
Poland	100%
Lithuania	100%
Romania	100%
Total	100%

- Farmers use less mineral fertilisers and chemical plant protection products than in the case of larger farms. (the reason - often lack of money).
- Lower fertilisation results from taking care of their own and their family members' health, as it is they who consume mainly the products manufactured by them.

- On this basis, it can be concluded that the self-sustaining nature of smaller farms has a positive impact on their environmental sustainability.
- Also the experience and tradition passed down from generation to generation are of great positive importance for their management in environmentally sustainable way.

Conclusions regarding environmental dimension of sustainability

- ▶ Small farms have a positive impact on the natural environment.
- ▶ Farmers from the analysed countries in the vast majority do not feel the need to change their pro-environmental activities.
- ▶ Farmers only singularly indicate that more widespread financial support for pro-environmental agriculture would encourage actions aimed at obtaining the certificate of an organic farm

Social dimension of sustainability

How do you evaluate your and your family's social activity (participation in events, parties, participation in organizations, associations, etc.)

Country:	high level	average level	low level (lack of needs)
Poland	35.0%	10.0%	55.0%
Lithuania	20.0%	25.0%	55.0%
Romania	22.2%	38.9%	38.9%
Total	25.9%	24.1%	50.0%

Farmers from the analysed countries mostly rated their own and their family members' social activity as low.

Farms from Romania were the most socially engaged. As many as 11 farmers from this country indicated that they are members of different agricultural organisations, i.e. Sheep Growers Association, Beekeepers' Association and others.

Social dimension of sustainability - reasons of low social activity of farmers

Poland:

- ▶ do not feel social needs,
- ▶ they rest best at home, and the contact with nature is enough for them,
- ▶ do not feel like being socially involved and are home-makers,

Lithuania:

- ▶ lack of time,
- ▶ lack of money,

Romania:

- ▶ lack of time,
- ▶ lack of money.

Social dimension of sustainability

- ▶ Despite the fact that the majority of surveyed farms classified their social activity as low, there were also farmers involved in the organization of social life in rural areas.
- ▶ However, social involvement of farmers most often resulted from the functions performed, i.e. councillor, member of the village council.
- ▶ The following activities were mentioned: holiday festivals, harvest festivals, meetings and local events integrating rural community.

Social dimension of sustainability

- ▶ The farmers from Poland, Lithuania and Romania **aren't directly involved** in social initiatives, but have **indirect impact** on social life of village.

Poland:

- creating jobs for children and village inhabitants,
- cultivating and passing on rural traditions,
- small farms also provide good conditions for recreation (in nature), conditions for raising children (in accordance with respect for nature),
- have a positive impact on the integration of the local community through inter-neighbourly help and self-help.

Lithuania and Romania

- the most important advantage of small farms was to ensure the vitality of villages (the absence of small farms become completely depopulated and disappear of villages).

Conclusions

- ▶ The view found in the literature that small farms perform important environmental and social functions in rural areas applies also to countries with fragmented agricultural structure, such as Poland, Romania and Lithuania.
- ▶ This phenomenon results from the very essence of these farms, based on the cultivation of traditions and experiences passed down from generation to generation, and from the family character of these farms.
- ▶ Beneficial effect of these farms on the social balance of rural areas should be seen primarily in ensuring the vitality of rural areas. This is particularly visible in case of Romania and Lithuania.
- ▶ This underlines the need for financial support for these farms, which is in accordance with the European model of agriculture that exposes the dual function of agriculture in Europe - besides food production, it contributes to the broadly understood development of rural areas and provides public goods.

Thank you very much for your attention

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