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Bruma, Ioan Sebastian and Bohateret, Valentin - Mihai and
Tănasă, Lucian

Iași branch of Romanian Academy, ICES „Gh. Zane”, Iași branch of
Romanian Academy, ICES „Gh. Zane”, Iași branch of Romanian
Academy, ICES „Gh. Zane”

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PROFILES OF RURAL HOUSEHOLDS IN THE NORTH—EAST DEVELOPMENT REGION OF ROMANIA. CASE STUDIES

BRUMĂ IOAN SEBASTIAN¹,
BOHATEREȚ VALENTIN MIHAI²,
TANASĂ LUCIAN³

Abstract: *The rural household epitomizes the central socioeconomic unit of the vernacular village. The territorial resources, livestock and human capital shape the particular features of each place and zone. The present study relies upon field research, namely a questionnaire undertaken in 354 rural households across the counties from the North-east Development Region. The main conclusions highlight visible zonal differences among them, all with clear distinctive features that draw the traditional element of each zone.*

Keywords: *rural household, population, agricultural uses, type of land ownership, livestock*

JEL Classification: *Q 15, Q 24*

INTRODUCTION

From a historical point of view, the practice of agriculture in Romania has always contained a central component - ignored at times, annihilated on occasion, often left on its own - which has been holding and will hold as long as the traditional village exists. It is all about the rural household whose complex and multiple functions have enriched it across time and have also created the possibility of enlarging the family nuclei, thus stimulating the demographic course by providing the survival conditions, regardless of the hard times. It also meant a constant food supply, fodder, agro alimentary products for own consumption but mostly for supplying farmer markets and ensuring the raw materials in the food industry and light engineering. There is a stable tendency in minimizing the important role-played by this socioeconomic category, often misunderstood or belittled and also less adjusted.

First of all, the existence of roughly four million rural households as registered in the latest population censuses under the title of population households or in the agricultural censuses under the title of agricultural holdings without legal entity — with clear distinctions but also complementing the concept content through the inseparable triad: rural household, population household and agricultural holding without legal entity — call our attention upon its strategic importance, a guarantee of the Romanian state's existence and authority that recognizes the fact that over 90% of the country's area is actually rural area.

Secondly, approximately 85% of the country's agricultural area is private property which provides impressive agricultural lands by means of leasing, thus creating a private business environment in the Romanian agriculture, a pole that is currently developing and strengthening an agriculture of great productivity and growing profitability. Under the circumstances, about 55% of the country's agricultural area remains under the exclusive handling of the rural households.

Thirdly, the Romanian rural space secures the shelter and living conditions for roughly half country's population but, on the whole, there is no legal social protection guaranteed by the state for this social category. The population households have the mission of socioeconomic self-protection of all village inhabitants by providing the habitat and covering the basic vital needs of survival. Here are three strong arguments which entitle the actions of bringing into focus the role-played by the research, study and sustenance of the rural households which, commencing from tradition to modernism, can guarantee the maintenance, adaptation and involvement of the contemporary

¹ Brumă Ioan Sebastian, Senior Researcher, Iași branch of Romanian Academy, ICES „Gh. Zane”, sebastianbruma1978@gmail.com

² Bohateretș Valentin-Mihai, Chief Researcher, Iași branch of Romanian Academy, ICES „Gh. Zane”, bvmarfi@gmail.com

³ Tanasă Lucian, Senior Researcher, Iași branch of Romanian Academy, ICES „Gh. Zane”, lucian.tanasa@gmail.com

Romanian village and also develop novel poles of economic growth adjusted to the future across the Romanian rural space.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The current study counts on an ample field research which assessed based on a questionnaire the state of the private agricultural household in the counties from the North-East Development Region of Romania. The questionnaire attended 21 different issues detailed through 136 indicators. The respondents were chosen from the category of households having relevant agricultural activities in their vernacular villages and communication capabilities ruled out of any immediate interest. On the whole, 354 questionnaires were filled, more precisely, 342 questionnaires were filled in the rural space: 59 in Bacău county (10 communes investigated), 52 in Botoșani county (19 communes), 30 in Iași county (16 communes), 57 in Neamț county (11 communes), 46 in Vaslui county (11 communes) and 98 in Suceava county (33 communes). As a special note, a particular attention was given to Suceava county due to its unique features of the rural households: partly caused by the positive influences from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and, on the other side, generated by the non-cooperative character of the mountain and sub mountain regions under the communist regime.

Three types of relevant information have been selected in the study case of rural households, namely, the structure of the work force, the ownership model of the land used and the livestock, employing 24 analytical indicators. For the first time this study draws attention upon the special economic weight of the agricultural lands within the incorporated areas of the rural settings.

The data have been processed for presentations at commune or county level and also to provide a comparative analysis on the medium profile of the rural households under assessment. The aim was to overlap the particular features of the rural households under research in absolute sizes, in proportion to the households which provide content in the differences among the rural households within the counties.

OUTCOMES AND DISCUSSIONS

By selective processing and interpreting the data gathered in the field, based on the questionnaires applied regarding the state of 354 rural households from the six counties of the North-East Development Region, significant results have been obtained on four types of information (table no.1).

The first category introduces the family members' structure of the rural households studied. It was learnt that the number of the members from the families within the households studied varies between 2.93 persons (on average) in Iași county and 4.09 persons (on average) in Neamț county, with an average on the studied batch by 3.57 persons. This aspect reveals a more vigorous demographic structure on household in the region than the national average, to which only two other counties within the Region come closer (Neamț și Botoșani). In connection to this matter we have noticed a high active work force — on average 1.86 agricultural workers on household, with differences between Iași and Botoșani counties by 2.13 agricultural workers and also between Vaslui and Neamț counties by 1.59-1.68 agricultural workers, fact that outlines the existence of an active human potential to be more effectively involved in agriculture by proper measures and policies.

Contrary to some recent opinions often formulated, the rural households still have the human resources necessary for running the agricultural works.

The second aspect under study is represented by the type of agricultural land ownership. Noticeably, there is a general willingness for land tenancy with the express aim of self-farming. In view of the batch analyzed there is an average rented area of 14.31 hectares of agricultural land with large medium areas in the following counties: Vaslui (34.05 ha), close to the average from Bacău, Neamț and Botoșani counties and with lesser areas in (4.28 ha) and Suceava (3.05 ha) counties. There is also a higher average of the agricultural area owned (3.18 ha per household) at the studied batch level, larger areas being registered in rural households from Vaslui (5.85 ha), Botoșani (4.00 ha) and

Suceava (3.29 ha) counties. In contrast, Iași, Bacău and Neamț counties register values ranging from 1.68 to 2.41 ha agricultural area per household on average. There is another significant aspect that is worth mentioning: the availability to lease land is rather low as the medium on batch registered 0.49 ha: very low values, under 25 acres in Bacău, Suceava and Neamț counties and a little over one hectare in Iași and Botoșani counties.

Consequently, it is noticeable the general trend for strengthening the agricultural holding without legal entity by attracting 82.4% of the agricultural lands by means of leasing. Thus, it is taking shape the positive tendency without legal entity based on the structure of the rural households, open to commercial agriculture.

Table no.1 Medium profiles of the rural households in the counties of the North-East Development Region of Romania

| Indicator | County | | | | | | Average on batch |
|---|--------|----------|-------|-------|--------|---------|------------------|
| | Bacău | Botoșani | Iași | Neamț | Vaslui | Suceava | |
| 1. Structure of the labour force (no.) | | | | | | | |
| Family members, total | 3.68 | 3.12 | 3.93 | 2.93 | 4.09 | 3.59 | 3.57 |
| agricultural workers | 1.78 | 2.13 | 2.13 | 1.68 | 1.59 | 1.90 | 1.86 |
| 2. Ownership type of the agricultural land (ha.) | | | | | | | |
| - private property | 1.84 | 4.00 | 1.68 | 2.41 | 5.85 | 3.29 | 3.18 |
| - giving on lease | 0.01 | 1.14 | 1.09 | 0.25 | 0.42 | 0.03 | 0.49 |
| - taking on lease | 13.55 | 17.03 | 4.28 | 13.87 | 34.05 | 3.05 | 14.31 |
| 3. Used Land (ha.) | | | | | | | |
| - arable | 10.98 | 19.62 | 4.10 | 12.41 | 11.62 | 3.81 | 10.42 |
| built-up area* | 0.21 | 1.35 | 0.22 | 0.39 | 0.22 | 0.60 | 0.33 |
| irrigated | 0.02 | 0.07 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.18 | 0.05 | 0.05 |
| untilled** | 0.00 | 0.23 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| - pastures | 3.41 | 4.18 | 2.79 | 2.56 | 0.07 | 1.28 | 2.38 |
| - hay fields | 1.00 | 0.49 | 1.14 | 0.86 | 0.07 | 0.66 | 0.70 |
| - vineyards | 0.04 | 0.01 | 0.11 | 0.00 | 0.16 | 0.07 | 0.06 |
| - orchards | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.43 | 0.07 | 0.22 | 0.02 | 0.13 |
| - woods | 0.15 | 0.01 | 0.15 | 0.01 | 0.04 | 0.00 | 0.06 |
| - body of water | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 4. Livestock (per head) | | | | | | | |
| - cattle | 6.47 | 5.56 | 2.70 | 5.60 | 1.30 | 5.05 | 4.45 |
| milk cows | 3.32 | 3.40 | 2.40 | 3.53 | 1.15 | 2.82 | 2.77 |
| - sheep and goats | 15.03 | 55.29 | 12.97 | 14.40 | 36.52 | 5.61 | 23.30 |
| reproductive females | 11.37 | 31.38 | 2.00 | 7.77 | 28.43 | 4.81 | 14.29 |
| - swine | 4.22 | 2.98 | 2.60 | 1.54 | 2.46 | 1.91 | 2.62 |
| - poultry | 21.00 | 28.94 | 45.73 | 14.21 | 36.87 | 34.31 | 30.18 |
| - equines | 0.31 | 0.85 | 0.33 | 0.18 | 0.24 | 0.21 | 0.35 |
| - bee families (no.) | 5.56 | 7.12 | 9.50 | 1.63 | 13.85 | 11.34 | 8.17 |

* The average built-up agricultural area of a rural household in Botoșani county has not been taken into account because there were households with very large agricultural areas declared as built-up areas which presented cause of suspicion for false data.

** It has not been calculated the average on the Region because the indicator, as an exception, shows a single state for a county out of six.

The third data category refers to the agricultural uses as found in the farming works operated by the rural households. From a medium perspective of the batch studied it results that a single household uses 10.42 ha arable land, 2.38 ha pastures, 0.70 ha hay fields, 0.06 ha vineyards and 0.13 ha orchards. The study reveals the existence of 600 square metres of forest on average, while the bodies of water are barely existent. The differences regarding the average on counties are quite significant: Bacău, Neamț and Vaslui counties have — on average per household — 11-12 ha farming arable land as opposed to Suceava and Iași counties which register 3.81 and 4.10 ha, while Botoșani county holds the first position by 19.62 ha farming arable land. There are high availabilities towards pastures, on average, especially in Botoșani (4,18 ha), Bacău (3,41 ha), Iași (2,79 ha) and Neamț (2,56

ha), while Suceava (1.28 ha) and Vaslui (0.07 ha) register low values. The fodder resources are complemented by hay fields, with a higher average in Iași, Bacău and Neamț (1.14 ha, 1.0 ha and 0.86 ha), as opposed to the lower average from Suceava, Botoșani and Vaslui. The fruit-growing and wine-growing potential is higher in the households from Iași (54 acres) and Vaslui (38 acres), while in the rest of the counties from the Region registers rather low values. Other three key quality aspects can be detected: the average built-up agricultural area per household is, in this batch, 33 acres with difference among counties, ranging from 21 to 60 acres (Bacău and Suceava), while the average irrigated area is rather insignificant (under 5 acres). Practically, there are no untilled lands except for some small areas in Botoșani county.

Based on the field researches done, it is possible to foretell the existence of a number of households open to a commercial agriculture focused on field crops and fodder resources and a rather low wine-growing potential.

The last category of information investigated refers to the average livestock in the rural households studied. The analyzed batch includes households of a dominant zootechnical profile, fact that boosted the medium profile of the household at county and region level, namely: 4.45 cattle of which 2.77 milk cows; 23.30 sheep and goats, of which 14.29 reproductive females; 2.62 swine; 30.18 poultry; 0.35 horses and 8.17 bee families. A great importance is given to breeding bulls, heifers and milk cows, with some small differences among counties ranging from 2.40 and 3.53 heads per household in Iași and Neamț county to a merely 1.15 head per household in Vaslui. There is also a growing interest in breeding sheep and goats in Botoșani (55.29 head/ household) and Vaslui (36.52 head/ household), registering surprisingly low values in Suceava, namely, 5.61 head/ household on average.

A positive note proves to be the favorable structure of the basic species for home consumption, as it follows: swine varying from 1.54 head/ household in Neamț county to 4.22 head/ household in Bacău county and poultry ranging from 14.21 head/ household in Neamț county to 45.73 head/ household in Iași county.

The decreasing interest towards horses has not gone undetected, registering on average values between 0.18 head/ household and 0.85 head/ household in Neamț and Botoșani, while maintaining a high number of bee families in counties such as Vaslui, Suceava and Iași and a moderate level in Botoșani and Bacău counties and a very low level in Neamț.

A singular aspect of the analysis and interpretation of the results obtained from field research is the high economic potential of the built-up agricultural lands usually located around the dwellings and various annexes (stables, sheds, storage houses, vegetable garden, vineyard, orchard, green house, etc.) of each rural household. These lands are characterized by a high productive potential, are fit for intensive and highly intensive agricultural activities, allow an efficient domestic workflow and boost, by intelligent use, the habitational environment of the human settlements. These lands are fit for vegetable growing, green houses or garden solariums, for growing medicinal and aromatic plants, for horticulture purposes, intensive fruit and wine-growing (especially table grape varieties) and special arboretum arrangements. The built-up spaces allow the breeding of small-waist fur species, different birds and honeybees, taking into account the importance of an apicultural flora all year round: flowers, herbs, flowering trees and shrubs.

The results of the analysis are impressive (table no.2): the average area of the built-up agricultural land per rural household in the batch analyzed is 3,280 square metres, exceeding by far the limit of 1,500 square metres as assessed by the community statistics and assumed by the National Institute of Statistics for defining the family gardens.

What happens with the difference of extra 1,780 square metres of built-up agricultural area per individual household on average as long as, statistically speaking, this land falls within the classification of agricultural land which, essentially, fits into the great agricultural farming but it does not have the same farming status as the field?

Table no. 2 The state of agricultural lands from the built-up areas of the communes analyzed in the counties from the North-East Development Region of Romania

| County | Built-up agricultural area (% from total) | Average built-up agricultural area per household (square metres) | Built-up arable area from the built-up agricultural total (%) | Average built-up arable area per household (square metres) | Average built-up agricultural area per household from the batch (square metres) |
|----------------------------|---|--|---|--|---|
| Bacău | 8.38 | 1,977 | 60.02 | 1,187 | 2,100 |
| Botoșani | 15.10 | 5,908 | 59.64 | 3,524 | * |
| Iași | 12.43 | 3,166 | 67.31 | 2,131 | 2,200 |
| Neamț | 17.91 | 4,293 | 59.97 | 2,574 | 3,900 |
| Vaslui | 7.11 | 3,003 | 72.96 | 2,191 | 2,200 |
| Suceava | 25.28 | 5,973 | 51.27 | 3,062 | 6,000 |
| Average per analyzed batch | - | 4,053 | 60.30 | 2,444 | 3,280 |

Note: the agricultural and arable lands from the built-up areas have been deducted through specific methods from the topographical documents of the communes analyzed (our calculations).

*) from medium has been eliminated Botoșani county because two rural households have declared large built-up areas, fact that was regarded as improbable data.

Consequently, the results of research are enlightening: the built-up agricultural area ranges from 7.11% in Vaslui county to 25.28% in Suceava; the average size of the built-up agricultural area is 4,053 square metres with wide varieties, from 5,973 square metres in Suceava county to 1,977 square metres in Bacău; the proportion of the arable area from the total of the built-up agricultural area is 60.30%, registering medium value varying from 51.27% in Suceava to 72.96% in Vaslui, while the average area of the arable land from built-up area (per rural household) is 2,444 square metres with medium values ranging from 3,524 square metres in Botoșani to 1,187 square metres in Bacău.

The results, previously introduced, are advocating the intensive and highly intensive use of the arable lands from the built-up areas of the rural settlements with the potential of achieving an economic boom if special programs are to be developed and implemented for this type of business and last but not the least if there is a political view and willingness.

CONCLUSIONS

By corroborating the four analysis criteria regarding the state of the average type of rural household in the counties from the North-East Development Region, the following profiles stand out:

- the rural household — following a trend with a medium growth rhythm, oriented towards commercial agriculture (mostly vegetable), having sufficient resources of agro-alimentary products for own consumption and surplus of active work force, also having high possibilities of taking land on lease with high fodder resources, livestock (cattle and sheep) fit for commercial production characteristic of the batch analyzed in Botoșani county, represents the profile of a dynamic rural household from the North-East Development Region of Romanian tracing two main aspects: subsistence farming and sustainable commercial agriculture. This profile can be found in counties such as Bacău, Neamț and Vaslui as well;

- the rural household — following a conservative trend with a slower growth rhythm of contemplative nature, mainly oriented towards own consumption, having diminished livestock and land resources but still sufficient work force — characterizes ” the great expectations” attitude of Iași and Suceava counties. A possible explanation is to be found in the influence pole generated by the elevated cultural and educational level from the former capitals of Moldavia, rather prone to dynamic profitable low-risk businesses and also in the conservative inertia of the autonomous households characteristic of the Bukovina places where tradition governs as well as the property spirit, contemplative nature and the well-known pride of its inhabitants.

The two significant profiles of rural households as identified through field research undertaken in 90 communes from the counties of the North-East Development Region fall into two

different rural macro-zones: the first type of rural household characterized by a medium rhythm of development, a typical feature of the profound rural space and the second type of rural household characterized by a slower rhythm of development, based on the expectation attitude, a typical feature of the rural space with a strong urban vibe and major urban poles of attraction and influence.

These two type of rural households identified in the North-east region can co-exist and complement each other without hindering their growth pace, offering a fresh novel dimension to the businesses in agriculture. At the same time, the paradigm of the economic boom by drawing built-up arable land resources and implementing an intensive and hyper intensive agriculture can transform the Romanian villages into dynamic poles of socioeconomic development and metamorphosis of mentalities regarding the importance and purpose of the vernacular rural space.

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