

Food Security – Element of Romania's Common Agricultural Policy in the European Context

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Abstract. *The starting point of the research was the approach of a series of theoretical aspects related to the concept of food security, as developed over the last decades by specialized international bodies, especially FAO. Currently, food security has become a complex concept, the assessment of which takes into account both the availability of food, including the stability of the agricultural supply, and the (economic) access to food, which is conditioned by the purchasing power of different categories of the population. The concept of food security has gradually developed over the last decades, including more and more aspects that address the problems of human nutrition from a complex, quantitative and qualitative perspective, with references including to health security, environmental quality, the general socio-economic framework, the risk of armed conflicts. The numerous challenges present in most countries of the world transform the problem from a theoretical one into a practical one, with scientists, governments and other stakeholders seeking to discover the most useful measures to remove risks and provide food security to as many of the Earth's inhabitants as possible. The article below is very useful, because it defines the term food security, presenting the objectives and priorities of the phenomenon, as well as the factors that positively and negatively influence this area.*

Keywords: individual food security, food and nutritional insecurity, nutritional status, nutrition, population.

Introduction

At the level of Romanian society, in recent times, a certain weakening of the terms of food security of the population is increasingly perceived, especially in the context created by the energy price crisis and the effects of the aggression on Ukraine. However, in Romania there have been constant concerns regarding food security, including during the Covid-19 pandemic, due to concerns related to the increase in trade deficits in certain product categories, under the pressure of increased consumption of products with high nutritional value (animal products, vegetables, fruits, fish), against the backdrop of policies to increase the population's income (Gil et al., 2019).

The deterioration of the balance of international trade in agri-food products of Romania took place in parallel with certain structural changes in the agricultural sector, which began in the early years of transition, but accelerated after Romania's accession to the European Union. This is

about the gradual specialization of Romanian agriculture in the production (and export) of cereals and oilseeds, crops that began to represent the main products in the structure of agricultural production (Stanciu, 2015).

The issue of food security goes beyond the sphere of agriculture and agricultural policies, being also conditioned by income policies, social policies, policies to combat poverty and policies to adapt to and mitigate climate change. However, in a country with the resources of Romania, it can be considered that the role of agriculture is essential in ensuring food security, because domestic agricultural production represents the most direct form of ensuring food for the population of a country. In the event that it cannot ensure self-sufficiency, as a result of the inadequate use of agricultural resources, food can be imported, but resorting to massive food imports represents a vulnerability for any state, especially in the context of increased volatility of world agricultural prices (Marian et al., 2014).

On the other hand, food security is only partially conditioned by the existence of a sufficient agricultural supply, most often the problems and vulnerabilities manifesting themselves at the microeconomic level, where access to food is limited by reduced purchasing power, lack of income, and poverty in general. Thus, an essential determinant of food security for a country is its general level of development. In turn, the relationship between food security and self-sufficiency must be treated carefully, because self-sufficiency does not overlap with food security, even if the two notions interact in many aspects (Aday& Aday, 2020).

Literature review

Food safety has become a component of food product quality long before it was formulated, the concept emerging from the natural need to protect consumers (Radulescu, Bran et al., 2020). This means that in order to be marketed, products must be safe, a requirement that is found both at the community and national level in a series of general or specific regulations, by product groups. Initially, the notion of food safety appeared under the name of food safety. However, in the specialized literature the term food safety is often used with the meaning of food safety (Gavrilescu, 2022).

The complex issue determined by food safety has imposed a multiple approach in the specialized literature, being a subject with profound implications, whether it is analyzed at the macroeconomic or company level (Aldaco et al., 2020). However, the notion of food safety has presented multiple meanings, being often assimilated to the point of overlapping with that of food security (Hanning et al., 2012); Analyzing this notion, Mc Carthy et al., (2018) highlights the mutations of the concept's meaning over time. Food security actually represents ensuring adequate nutrition for the entire population of the Earth, in order to be able to lead an active and healthy life.

The notion of food security has evolved conceptually over time and space, acquiring different connotations, depending on the particularities of its elements (Pinstrup, 2009). Thus, for developed countries, the emphasis of food security falls on food quality, with reference to food safety, respectively to ensuring the long-term health of the population (Deac et al., 2023). For underdeveloped countries and some of the developing ones, food security mainly aims at the social protection of disadvantaged categories of people, through access to food for the entire population (Badran et al., 2017).

The concept of food security has evolved dynamically over time, expanding its meanings and connections, so that currently, in the broadest sense, it encompasses all aspects that allow the population optimal access to food (Beckman et al., 2020).

The theory in the field of food security continues to oscillate between two extremes: one pessimistic and one optimistic (Radulescu et al., 2023). The pessimists are the followers of Malthus, who argued that the population will exceed the potential of the globe to provide food and thus humanity will be doomed to live forever on the brink of starvation. Today, this pessimism - shared, for example, by the Worldwatch Institute - is accentuated by the fear of an ecological collapse. At the other extreme are the optimists, followers of the ideas of the French philosopher Condorcet, who, four years before Malthus, predicted that technology and increased productivity constitute the solution to the difficult problem of providing food for the population of our planet. This conception is currently shared to a large extent by international organizations such as the World Bank (WB) FAO, which, through their attitude and forecasts, look with confidence towards the future of the global food problem (Elleby et al., 2020).

Bengtsson et al., (2018) note that food security is a critical component in ensuring the sustainable development of contemporary economies, and any problem triggered in one state has a contagion effect, spreading to other states. The need to ensure food security standards is important for all products, whether they are of animal or vegetable origin or industrially processed, regardless of their production process, distribution chain or addressability (Cavallo, Sacchi & Carfora. 2020). Berkum and Ruben (2021) argues that without meeting the objectives of food security and safety, the objectives of sustainable development cannot be achieved.

Methodology

To measure Romania's progress in the field of food security in a global and European context, we used the Global Food Security Index (GFSI)-2023, a composite index that ranks countries based on: a) the dynamics of food systems in 100 countries; and b) the effects of global environmental change on them. The index is a dynamic quantitative model built on the basis of 28 indicators that measure the factors influencing food security in each country. Starting from 2017, the GFSI also measures the effects of the environment and estimates the exposure of countries to the impact of climate change, their susceptibility to risks related to natural resources and their adaptation to these risks.

The Global Food Security Index is presented in the form of an aggregate country score, which takes into account 3 dimensions: access to food, food availability and food quality and safety. Each dimension has its own country score calculated and indicates the place occupied by each country in the world hierarchy according to this criterion. Having as its main working tool the Global Food Security Index 2023, this paper is structured in 4 parts, which analyze: (a) the constituent elements of food security and risk factors for the European Union; (b) Romania's progress in ensuring food security and the influencing factors in 2023; (c) identifying Romania's strengths and weaknesses, comparative advantages and disadvantages in ensuring food security; and (d) the last part, which formulates the conclusions.

Results and discussions

Indicators for measuring food security are characteristics for a certain security perspective and a certain level of assessment (Burlacu, Crețu et al., 2022). At the macroeconomic level - global, regional or national - indicators focus mainly on identifying the availability and stability of agricultural and food supply, and the most widely used indicator is the availability of basic products and the level of self-sufficiency in the main food product groups (Gâf-Deac et al., 2022).

At the microeconomic level, indicators from family budget surveys prevail, mainly the level

of income, the structure of expenses, and the situation of nutrients consumed, especially calories and proteins (Rădulescu, Gâf-Deac et al., 2022).

Global Food Security Index (GFSI)

This index, developed by The Economist group, represents a score based on which a classification of countries is made in terms of the degree of ensuring food security. In the latest edition, the index takes into account four dimensions of food security: accessibility; availability; quality and safety; sustainability and adaptation. The fourth category was introduced in 2021 under the name "natural resources and resilience", being renamed in 2022. The introduction of this fourth dimension is the result of the increase in climate change, which has a major impact on natural resources and the finding of differences between countries in terms of how and how fast they can adapt to these changes. The weights of the four groups of indicators in calculating the final score are: accessibility 30.0%, availability 25.0%, quality and safety 22.5%, and sustainability and adaptation 22.5%.

The first dimension, accessibility, assesses consumers' ability to purchase food, their vulnerability to price changes, and government policies and programs that can protect them from excessive price fluctuations. The most important factor that determines people's access to food is food prices, especially in developing countries, where poverty makes people more vulnerable.

The indicators considered for quantifying the second dimension, availability, measure the sufficiency of domestic agricultural production, the risks of crisis situations in ensuring domestic supply, the capacity to distribute food at the national level, the state of agricultural infrastructure, and the contribution of agricultural research to improving farm productivity.

The indicators that quantify the third dimension, quality and safety, are largely focused on the nutritional and qualitative aspects of food security.

Table 1. GFSI Food Security Index values for Romania (out of 100 points)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Overall Score	67,7	68,7	70,9	69,2	70,5	71,7	69,3	68,8
1. Accessibility	87,8	88,5	88,4	85,8	84,5	84,0	83,7	85,1
2. Availability	53,0	55,7	53,6	53,4	58,0	63,4	62,1	60,6
3. Quality and Safety	77,3	77,8	84,1	83,2	82,7	82,4	76,9	77,9
4. Sustainability and Adaptation	47,6	47,6	53,7	50,5	53,7	53,7	50,4	47,1

Source: INSSE.

The highest score recorded by Romania in 2023 is in accessibility (85.1 points), registering position 36 in the overall score and position 20 among European countries.

This score has been increasing since 2019, and the indicators that have driven this dynamic have been in particular the low overall level of poverty (compared to the global level) and the functioning of food programs for disadvantaged categories (mainly European programs). Romania's score in this dimension receives the qualification "very good". In availability, Romania has recorded a decreasing score since 2020, having in 2023 a score of 60.6 points, which positions it in 50th place in the overall score and 26th place in Europe.

This score is rated as "moderate." The indicators that contributed most to this declining result are the volatility of agricultural production and political commitments on access (the absence of a formally assumed food security strategy and an agency to coordinate this area).

Table 2. GFSI Food Security Index 2023 scores for selected European countries (out of 100 points)

	Dimension scores				Overall score	Overall rating
	Accessibility	Availability	Quality and safety	Sustainability and adaptation		
France	91,3	69,0	87,7	70,3	80,2	Foarte bine
Poland	87,4	63,8	81,5	66,7	75,5	Bine
Romania	85,1	60,6	77,9	47,1	68,8	Moderat

Source: Global Food Security Index 2023.

Compared to Romania, France has always ranked higher, in 2023 it was ranked fourth overall, based on strengths such as disaster risk management, supply chain infrastructure and nutritional standards, with an overall rating of “very good”. Poland is also ranked higher than Romania, at 21st, with an overall score of “good”.

Access to food and its conditionalities

It is known that in the last three years, against the backdrop of the climate crisis, the health crisis and the war in Ukraine, agricultural prices and then consumer prices have experienced upward developments that were difficult to predict a few years before these crises. The global food price index, calculated by the FAO, recorded an increase of 10 percentage points (pp) between August 2022 and August 2023. By product group, these increases were 27.3 pp for milk, 14.8 pp for cereals, 9.3 pp for meat, 2.6 pp for vegetable oils and 10.1 pp for sugar.

The graph on the evolution of world food prices shows that medium-term changes also bring to attention other moments when prices escalated. Thus, there is the moment of 2007-2008, when, due to the prolonged drought in 2007, prices increased sharply in 2008 for cereals, vegetable oils and dairy products. Also, in 2011, when, also due to the difficult climatic conditions of the previous year, prices increased greatly, in all product groups and more sharply in those of vegetable origin (cereals, vegetable oils, sugar), but also dairy and meat.

The third tense moment in this 20-year period was in 2021, when food prices escalated again, amid the drought in 2020 and the pandemic, which disrupted global supply chains

The year 2022 brought an even sharper increase in food prices amid the pressures exerted by the war in Ukraine on the supply of cereals and more. Thus, in the spring of 2022, the cereal price index was 173.5%, and that of vegetable oils was 229.4% compared to the same month in 2021.

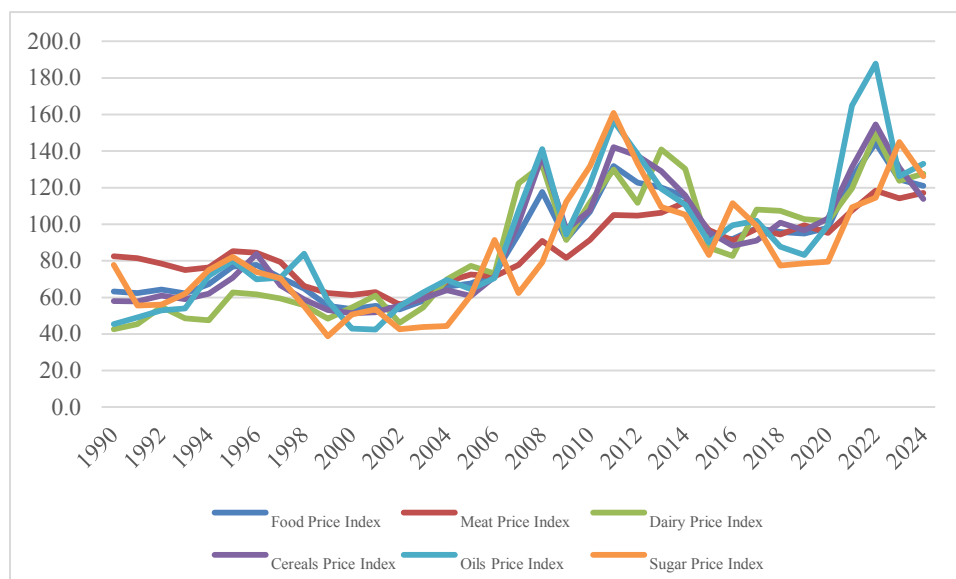


Figure 1. Evolution of food prices during the period 1990-2024 worldwide (%)

Source: World food situation/FAO Food Price Index.

Next, the question arises as to what level food prices in Romania are in the context of the countries of the European Union. This approach is justified, because information has often appeared in the public space, but also among experts in the field, based mainly on individual perceptions regarding the fact that food in Romania would be as expensive or even more expensive than those in other European countries, especially in the developed countries of the European Union, where the population's incomes are higher.

To provide information on this subject, the table below presents the comparable prices of the main food groups in France, Poland and Romania, this information being obtained within the framework of a selective research of prices at the European level, which compares the price levels in different countries, compared to the European Union average.

Table 3. Price index for four food categories, in selected countries, 2023 (EU average=100)

	Bread and cereals	Meat	Fish	Milk, cheese and eggs	Fruits, vegetables and potatoes
France	106,1	129,3	107,9	96,0	120,0
Poland	70,3	61,2	83,5	74,4	72,6
Romania	59,4	61,7	76,0	97,8	58,6

Sursa: Eurostat, 2023

Compared to France and Poland, Romania generally maintains the gaps recorded in the food category, with the exception of the milk, cheese, eggs category for which it records higher prices even than in France.

These estimates of the relative price level bring to attention the fact that food is still significantly cheaper in Romania compared to the level in the European Union, by about 31% on average, but the situation differs greatly by product group, some being below the European average, others at the European average level and others above this average.

Consumer prices for food increased in Romania by 14.7% in June 2023 compared to the same month in 2022. The largest increases were recorded for potatoes (42.2%) and edible oils (49.7%). Also, the price of bread recorded a consistent advance (22.6%), amid the problems in the cereal sector, generated by the drought and the war in Ukraine. In general, however, most food products recorded price increases of over 10%, less for fruit (seasonal effect) and alcoholic beverages, and this considerably affected the purchasing power of consumers.

Romania has a high agricultural potential, ranking first in the EU in terms of agricultural and arable area. Access to the Single Market and the development of the agricultural and food sector in the post-accession period have led to a significant expansion of trade in agri-food products. Thus, in the period 2010-2021, the value of exports tripled, and that of imports increased 2.6 times. However, there are major structural problems in this sector, and this has transformed Romania into a net importer of agri-food products.

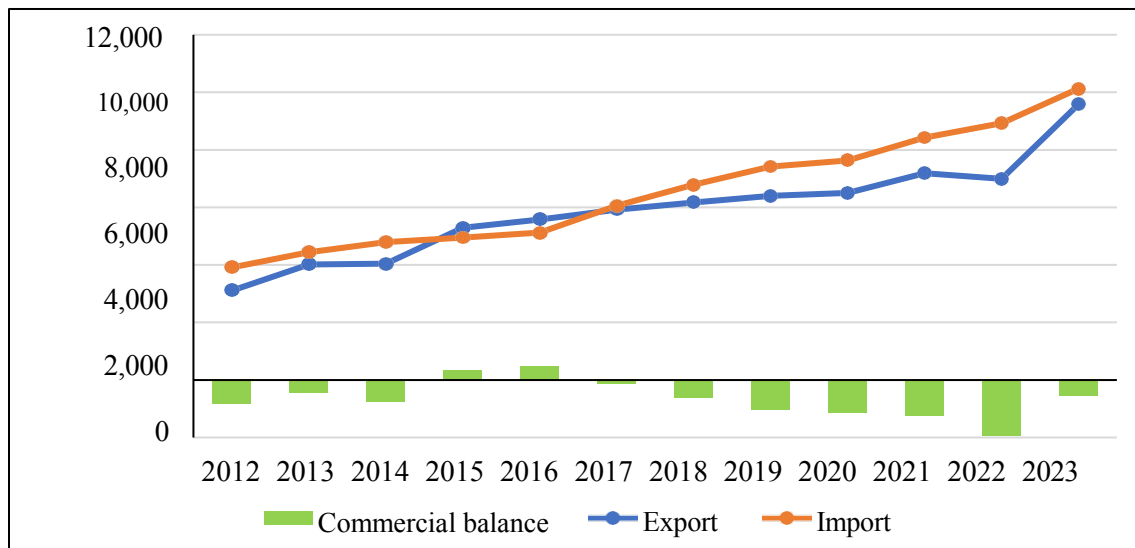


Figure 2. international trade in agri-food products of Romania, 2012-2023

Source: Eurostat.

The main determining factors are the lack of competitiveness of many agri-food products, the lack of concentration of supply and its variability due to strong dependence on climatic conditions. As a result, local agriculture and the food industry have difficulties in covering the growing demand for such products.

The development potential of food companies at the national level is eroded by imports, including for categories of raw materials available at the national level. There are notable differences between the structure of flows and trade balance between intra- and extra-community destinations.

Exports to the EU are predominant, but their share in total exports decreased in the period 2010-2021 from 74% to 57%, by reorienting towards third countries (especially cereals, oilseeds and live animals to countries in the Near and Middle East). The share of imports from the EU in total agri-food imports is higher and relatively constant (81-85%) under the application of the principle of community preference.

Financing needs of the agri-food sector for 2023-2027

The objectives proposed by the CAP reform for the national strategic plans are: fair incomes for farmers; increased competitiveness; rebalancing the food chain; combating climate change; sustainable management of resources; preserving landscapes and biodiversity; supporting generational renewal; developing rural areas; food safety and animal welfare. In addition to these nine common objectives of the CAP, a cross-cutting objective is added: promoting knowledge, innovation and digitalisation in agriculture.

Unlike previous rural development programming documents (such as the PNDR), the current CAP National Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (PNS) includes all interventions financed from European funds, i.e. direct payments (both decoupled and coupled) and sectoral interventions (e.g. fruit and vegetables), financed from the EAGF, but also rural development interventions (mainly investments), financed from the EAFRD, and where applicable even interventions financed from the national budget (e.g. transitional national aid).

According to the NBR report (2022) on foreign direct investment (FDI) in Romania, the net flow of foreign direct investment in 2021 was directed to a small extent in agriculture, forestry and fisheries (57 million euros), compared to industry (2572 million euros) or trade (1732 million euros).

For agriculture, forestry and fishing, a decreasing trend in the FDI balance has been observed since 2019, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

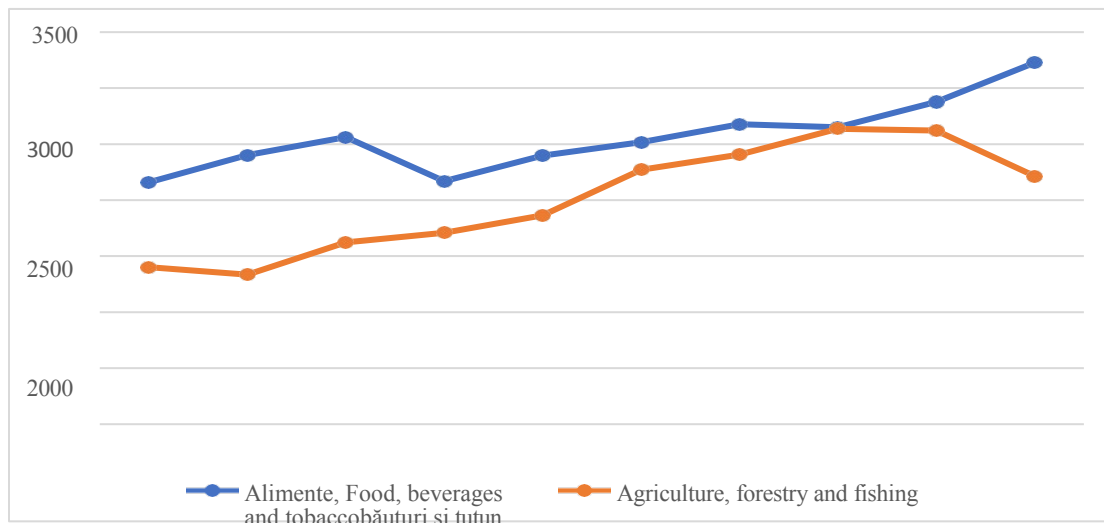


Figure 3. Evolution of the FDI balance for agriculture and the food industry in the period 2014-2023

Source: NBR - Foreign direct investments in Romania.

The NSP 2023-2027 establishes a performance, monitoring and evaluation framework, with the aim of assessing the impact, effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value of the CAP, setting milestones and targets for specific objectives, monitoring progress made, and supporting a common learning process. From this point of view, it is advisable for the Member States and the EU in general to use first of all the instruments and resources available and which have proven effective in the past.

Romania was one of the first countries in which a financial instrument financed by the PNDR 2014-2020 was created, which, according to the conditions of art. 38 of Regulation no. 1303/2013 with subsequent amendments and completions, is a financial instrument for risk-sharing

lending at portfolio level financed from the funds allocated by the PNDR.

Preferential lending is granted to beneficiaries of rural development projects provided that the maximum intensity provided for in the PNDR is respected, both at the level of the investment supported by the grant and at the aggregate level (of the investment supported by the grant and of the working capital loan). The 2023-2027 NSP will not implement new financial instruments, but will use national resources, including funds returned from financial instruments implemented through the NRDP.

Instead, a support instrument for farmers affected by losses in agricultural production will be established (coded as intervention DR-32 in the NSP), complementary to the support for the payment of insurance premiums (provided through intervention DR-31), which will provide farmers with compensation for agricultural production that falls under the eligibility conditions provided for in the intervention, by creating an integrated risk coverage system together with the agricultural insurance system, also aiming to relieve the state budget of the payment of damages caused by adverse weather phenomena with a major impact on the agricultural sector.

The introduction of this instrument implies the mandatory and automatic participation of farmers in the establishment of a risk management fund, by annually withholding a percentage of 3% of the direct payments to be paid to each farmer beneficiary of direct payments, to which will be added a public contribution from the EAFRD and co-financing from the state budget, to consolidate this fund.

Conclusion

The analysis through the indicators provided by FAO reflects a series of deficiencies regarding the food security of the population, the share of the population in severe and moderate insecurity being almost 14%, as an average for the period 2018-2023, almost double the average of the developed countries (North America and Europe) and almost three times higher than some European countries (France and Poland).

Thus, the problem of access to food represents an unresolved issue for certain categories of households in Romania, those belonging to low-income groups. The analysis of the domestic supply of food products indicates high volatility especially for products of plant origin, which are more vulnerable to extreme climatic phenomena, but also a high dependence on imports for a wide range of products, both of plant and animal origin. For example, import dependence was 26% for wheat and rye and products containing them and 48% for pork and pork products in the period 2018-2023. Many of the imported products are processed products, and this raises the issue of the efficiency of supply chains and processing in Romania.

The effects of climate change may lead to the impossibility of growing vegetables in areas previously considered favorable, and therefore a rigorous assessment of the current potential for growing vegetables for industrialization is necessary, given the increasingly high temperatures and decreasing precipitation in areas dedicated to growing vegetables.

Such an analysis should be carried out at the national level by involving processors in the field, with farmers being advised to set up pilot vegetable farms with modern technologies, which would limit as much as possible the dependence on seasonal labor.

The main determinants of the demand for financing in the agricultural sector are the need for investments to modernize production (through the purchase of agricultural machinery and equipment, but also irrigation equipment), investments in land assets (vineyards, orchards, greenhouses) and working capital (for the purchase of inputs, mainly).

In the food sector, the main determinants are the need to modernize enterprises (through investments in machinery and equipment, but also in sorting, calibrating and packaging facilities) and the development of new products (to attract new customers or enter new markets). Taking into account the unmet demand for financing, both for the agricultural sector and for the food industry, recommendations for improving financing are aimed at designing specific measures aimed at small farms (and in the food industry at small and microenterprises), but also at providing technical support to these beneficiaries, to strengthen their business planning capacity and understanding of financing rigors.

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