

ONE AND A HALF CENTURY OF AGRICULTURE IN DOBROGEA. THE COUNTRY BETWEEN THE DANUBE AND THE SEA

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Abstract

In 2018, the Romanians celebrate 100 years since THE GREAT UNION, but also 140 years since Dobrogea's union with Romania. This paper tries to review the main stages of Dobrogea's agriculture throughout this period. In 1878, after the Russian-Turkish war and Romania's independence war, the Berlin Congress of the European countries decided to unite Dobrogea with Romania. As a result, on November 14, 1878, the Romanian army, under the leadership of Prince Carol, entered Dobrogea, not as conquerors but as the rightful owners of a land granted by history. In order to capitalize the land, the Romanian administration began the colonization process. Order was made in the legal status of agricultural holdings through a series of reforms, culminating in the great agrarian reform of 1921. Throughout this period, agriculture had modernized and adapted to the requirements of the market economy. After World War II, the Communist dictatorship followed, which for 40 years took its citizens the right to private property on the land. After 1989, it reverted to market economy principles and, since 2007, the European Union's agricultural system has been practiced.

Key words: agriculture, centenary, Dobrogea, modernization, union

In the anniversary year 2018, when Romania celebrates the centennial of the Great Union, 140 years have passed since Dobrogea's union with Romania, in 1878. In this almost one and a half century, Dobrogea's agriculture has undergone through several stages that have marked its main components: the ownership system, exploitation structures, technologies and, last but not least, its economic, social and technological performances. Administratively, Dobrogea consists of two counties, i.e. Tulcea in the north and Constanta in the south. The region is situated in the southeastern extremity of the country, with the Danube River to the west, the Black Sea to the east, Ukraine to the north, and Bulgaria to the south.

With a great agricultural potential – almost 580 thousand ha of agricultural land in Constanta County and 335 thousand ha in Tulcea County – Dobrogea is also economically important in other terms. Most of Romania's industrial and agricultural products are exported through the Port of Constanța, one of the largest Black Sea ports. At the same time, Constanța is the endpoint of the trans-European waterway that connects the Black Sea with the North Sea, through the Danube-Black Sea Channel built in 1976-1983.

About half of the Tulcea County area is occupied by the Danube Delta, which, together with the fluvial-maritime lakes in the south, forms the UNESCO Heritage known as the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve. The area of the Delta stretches over 430 thousand hectares, one of the largest deltas – i.e. the 22nd in the world and the 3rd in Europe – and one of the largest wetlands (Lupa A., 2003), together with the Razelm-Sinoe lagoon complex.

As far as the evolution of Dobrogea's agriculture is concerned, the main chronological stages can be summarized as follows:

- The Dobrogea' union with Romania in 1878 triggered changes in the ownership system, the agrarian order, the ethnic structure, followed by colonization;

- The Great Agrarian Reform in 1918-1921, which (in terms of the country level) was the largest in Europe and one of the largest in the world;

- The establishment of the first communist government and the changes it brought: the 1945 agrarian reform, the nationalization of 1948, the socialist transformation of agriculture that started

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in 1949 and concluded in 1957 in Dobrogea and in 1962 in the entire country.

- The political decision to revert to the market economy in 1990, after the fall of the totalitarian regime in December 1989;

- Romania's accession to the European Union and the Common Agricultural Policy in 2007.

Next, we will briefly resume the importance of each stage as far as agriculture is concerned.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The material used is mostly bibliographic, taking into account its anniversary and historical nature. For the period 1949-1989, known and researched by the authors from this area, we presented technical and economic data characteristic of the respective period.

The research method is specific to economic research: material collection and selection, processing, synthesis and conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Dobrogea's union with Romania in 1878.

The European Congress held in Berlin in 1878 decided to unite Dobrogea with Romania. Thus, on November 14, 1878, the Romanian army entered Dobrogea at Braila. The proclamation of King Carol I to Dobrogea's inhabitants and to the army reveals the following:

"Under the Treaty of Berlin, the Great European Powers united your country with Romania. We do not enter your borders drawn by Europe as conquerors; as you also know it, much Romanian blood was shed for the freedom of the peoples living on the right of the Danube.

Inhabitants of any nationality and origin, Dobrogea, the old possession of Mircea the Elder and of Stephen the Great, is today part of Romania.

Now, you belong to a State, where not the arbitrary will, but only the law debated and approved by the nation decides and guides mankind's most sacred and most precious goods: life, honor and property are placed under the shield of a Constitution, which many foreign nations want."

Your religion, your family will be protected like the Christians' religion and family. The affairs of your religion and family will be entrusted for protection to the Mufti and to judges chosen by your people and under your law.

Christians and Muslims, Welcome with confidence the Romanian authorities, as they have the task of ending the painful hardships you have

faced, of curing the wounds of war, of defending your legitimate person and interests; finally, to develop your good moral and material status.

The Romanian army, which enters Dobrogea, has no other calling than to maintain the order and model of discipline, to protect your peaceful life.

"Salute with love the Romanian flag, which will be for you the flag of freedom, justice and peace" (Brătescu C., Georgescu I., 1928).

As a result of the above proclamation, one of the priorities of the Romanian administration was represented by the land ownership issue. It involved the transfer of the Ottoman system into the Romanian one, and the necessity of colonization, taking into account both the population scarcity and the fact that in 1878 the Turkish-Tartar population was still majoritarian (Axenciuc V., 1996). The first regulations on land ownership are found in the *"Law for the Organization of Dobrudja from 1878"*; however, because it required time, the law stipulated that until the final regulation, *the property and the real estate possession in Dobrogea is acquired, preserved, transmitted and lost according to the Ottoman laws in force until April 11, 1877*. At the same time, the Romanian administration replaced the Ottoman legal system with a series of legislative acts that mainly pursued the following objectives:

- consolidating property rights;
- transforming the *mirie* (fee, good of the Ottoman state) into an absolute property right by redemption (compensation) of the tithe;
- merging and performing the survey of the rural real estate property of the state and of the inhabitants;
- colonizing Dobrogea with Romanian elements.

In the run-up to the 1921 agrarian reform, there were enforced a series of regulations accompanied by many irregularities, some resolved later (Lup A., 2003).

The agrarian reform of 1921. In Dobrogea, the agrarian reform was carried out based on the Law on the Agrarian Reform in Oltenia, Muntenia, Moldova and Dobrogea in the Old Kingdom (Official Gazette no. 82/ July 17, 1921). As far as the land resource was concerned, the Land Fund situation on August 15, 1916 was taken into consideration; for the land sold under certain conditions, there was taken into consideration the Land Fund situation until February 1, 1921.

At the beginning, due to population scarcity and to higher land resources, the land lots granted exceeded 5 hectares; therefore, medium-sized farms were predominant (Axenciuc V., 1996).

However, land reserves have become insufficient in relation to the number of land ownership applications. Thus, in many communes, the lots were reduced to 4 ha and in Tulcea County, under the pretext of setting up state reserves or public interest reserves, the lots were reduced up to 0.5 ha. For example, in Constanta County, only 14,500 peasants out of 18,743 were granted land property rights. Of course, as always and everywhere, abuses were committed, most often with the help of the specialists charged with the implementation of the reform.

According to the data available at the Constanta State Archives, the agrarian reform of 1921 attributed to different categories of beneficiaries an area of 115,271 ha, of which 57,244 ha to the inhabitants in 200 villages in Constanta County and 58,027 ha to the inhabitants in 102 villages in Tulcea County (Ana Maria Diana, 1980).

The 1945 Agrarian Reform. Its legal basis was represented by Law no. 187 of March 22, 1945. This agrarian reform was characterized by the fact that the goods falling under the Law were not limited to the land but to the whole property capital: tools, animals, other goods, without any compensation. In fact, it was a confiscation.

According to V. Axenciuc, on January 8, 1947, the situation of expropriations and property apportionments was the following:

Expropriations:

Number of expropriated owners ... 143,219
Expropriated area (ha) 1,443,911

Property apportionments:

Number of entitled persons 1,114,888
Number of persons who
received land property 796,129
Apportioned area (ha) 1,057,672
State reserves (ha) 387,565

An important remark: besides the 1,468,000 ha expropriated in 1945, the areas of up to 50 ha of the great land property, amounting to 940,238 ha, were also nationalized in 1949; thus, the total seized land area amounted to 2,360,000 ha (Costin Murgescu: *Reforma agrară din 1945 (The Agrarian Reform in 1945)*, Bucharest, 1956, p.163) (Axenciuc V., 1996).

As confirmed by the results of the two agricultural censuses of 1941 and 1948, the 1945 agrarian reform did not significantly improve the structure of land ownership, as regards the size of agricultural holdings. This happened also because a large part of the expropriated land was not given to peasants but became state property, representing the main land source for future state agricultural enterprises.

Nationalization of the main production means. Under Law no. 119/1948, on June 11, 1948, the Grand National Assembly approved and voted the Law on the Nationalization of the Main Industrial, Mining, Banking, Insurance and Transport Enterprises, with the aim of creating the State Socialist Sector and the prerequisites for the transition to the planned administration of the national economy and the implementation of the subsequent forced industrialization policy.

Under the 1948 Law, there were expropriated five categories of enterprises of national (oil, textiles, wood, and railways) and regional (food and consumer goods) economic importance, metallurgical enterprises with more than 100 workers, enterprises with a capacity of over 10-50 hp, as well as all banks, commercial enterprises and insurance companies. By applying this law, 1,060 industrial and mining enterprises were affected, accounting for 90% of the country's production (until 1950). Nationalization was in fact a direct confiscation ordered by the political power, and obviously without any compensation (Lup A., 2003).

By the Nationalization Law of June 11, 1948, in Constanta County, the State entered into the possession of (among others):

- 11 systematic mills and 4 mechanical oil presses taken over by Constanța City Hall;
- 11 systematic mills and 5 mechanical oil presses taken over by the village cooperatives through the Federal Bank of Constanta.

Other 55 mills and 31 oil presses of various degrees of complexity and functionality.

In fact, for farmers, nationalization meant the confiscation of their land throughout the collectivization period and even after it ended.

In the following year, i.e. 1949, by Decree no. 83/1949, the state confiscated the remaining estate properties, under Law no. 187/1945 of the agrarian reform (up to 50 ha) of private model farms. At the same time, there were transferred to state ownership the living and dead inventory, constructions, products, receivables and any other values, except for personal use objects and food for personal consumption.

The socialist transformation of agriculture.

This was the most radical and the deepest agrarian reform that marked the history of the Romanian rural area. After 1949, the Communist leaders led by Gheorghiu-Dej reassured the people that the state recognized the private property and stated that the land property was recognized by the constitution. This happened in February; then, in April; then, in October, Ana Pauker declared that *the victory of socialism in Romania was not to be conceived without the accomplishment of*

collectivization. In December 1948, Dej himself declared that *the transfer of the peasantry to collective households was the only means whereby poor and middle class peasantry could escape from misery and backwardness* (Kligman G., 2015).

In Dobrogea, as in the entire country, collectivization began in the spring of 1949 (Hartia S., 1960) after the historical Plenary of the PMR CC, which was held on March 4-5, 1949. However, due to the zeal of the party activists headed by Vasile Vâlcu, son of Dobrogea, the collectivization process was concluded in autumn 1957, nearly five years before the end of the action at the country level, in 1962.

For this performance, Vasile Vâlcu was awarded *the RPR Star - 1st class*. On this occasion, Gheorghiu-Dej congratulated the inhabitants of Constanta, expressing the conviction that the advanced experience of the region in terms of socialist construction would also serve as example for other regions (Cojoc M., 2001).

The truth was that both Dobrogea and the other regions of the country did not respect the free consent principle during the collectivization campaign, with countless abuses: threats of all kinds, unjust judgments, convictions in years of heavy detention, crimes (Kligman G., 2015).

Socialist agriculture in Dobrogea. With land resources per capita virtually doubled compared to the rest of the country, with special support from the state, Dobrogea's agriculture progressed in the period following collectivization. Important investments were made, first in mechanization, then in the livestock sector and finally in land reclamation, especially in irrigation (*figure 1*).

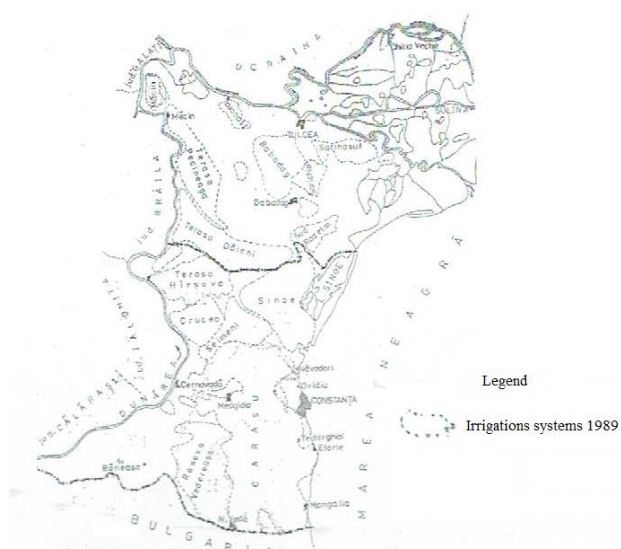


Figure 1 Irrigation systems in Dobrogea

Between 1949 and 1959, the tractor and agricultural machinery fleet of the machine and

tractor stations (SMT) in Constanta region increased as follows:

- physical tractors: from 807 to 3,871
- tractor plows: from 806 to 4,469
- mechanical seed drills: from 148 to 2,947
- cultivators: from 71 to 2,461
- different harvesters: from 10 to 1,403

In Dobrogea, within 30 years (1955-1985), the fieldwork equipment fleet increased 3.7 times as far as tractors were concerned, 2.5 times for tractor plows, 2 times for mechanical cultivators, 15.2 times for self-propelled harvesters and 92 times for chemical fertilizer spreading machines (Lup A., 2012).

Between 1955 and 1989, the number of tractors increased from 3,001 to 8,863 in Constanta County, and from 1,171 to 4,026 in Tulcea County. The area assigned to a tractor decreased during this period from 100 ha to 57 ha in Constanta County and from 313 ha to 73 ha in Tulcea County. As far as animal husbandry is concerned, between 1960 and 1989, their number increased as follows:

- cattle: from 72.0 thousand to 166.7 thousand in Constanta County and from 46.8 thousand to 75.8 thousand in Tulcea County;
- sheep: from 756.1 thousand to 1,000.2 thousand in Constanta County and from 367.3 thousand to 464.5 thousand in Tulcea County;
- pigs: from 117.8 thousand to 373.7 thousand in Constanta County and from 54.2 thousand to 185.4 thousand in Tulcea County.

In Dobrogea, the number of horses was reduced over the same period from 71.3 thousand to 34.1 thousand due to the policy of increasing the use of the mechanical drive force.

Since the end of the 7th decade of the previous century, the main investment objective has been represented by irrigation, taking into account the aridity of the area; however, this region was characterized by a shaky relief and high water pumping levels. Nevertheless, at the end of 1989, 581.5 thousand ha were equipped for irrigation, i.e. 422.3 thousand ha in Constanta County (Lup A., 2012) (82.4% of the arable land) and 159.2 thousand ha in Tulcea County (54.8% of the arable land).

As far as Dobrogea's socialist agriculture performances are concerned, they could be considered modest compared to the investment effort of this period. For instance, in terms of vegetal yield, the total grain yield increased by only 77%, having in view that at the end of the period over 70% of the arable was equipped for irrigation. It is true that the yields per ha increased by approx. 50% in wheat, but remained virtually identical in maize, cultivated on much larger areas due to the expansion of irrigated areas. Sunflower

yields increased by less than 20% in Constanta County and soybean yields increased by 50% (Kligman G., 2015).

In terms of animal husbandry, meat production increased during the socialist agriculture from 37.7 thousand tons to 84.3 thousand tons (2.2 times); cow milk production increased from 62.3 thousand hl to 1,352 thousand hl (2.2 times) (figure 2-3).

Wool production increased from 2,620 tons to 4,766 tons (1.8 times); the production of eggs raised from 94 million eggs to 365 million eggs, i.e. 3.9 times.

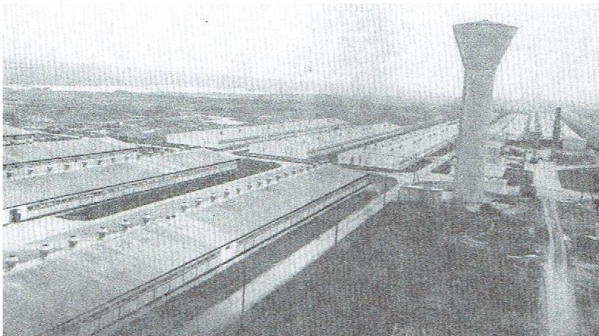


Figure 2 A large pig farm near Constanta town

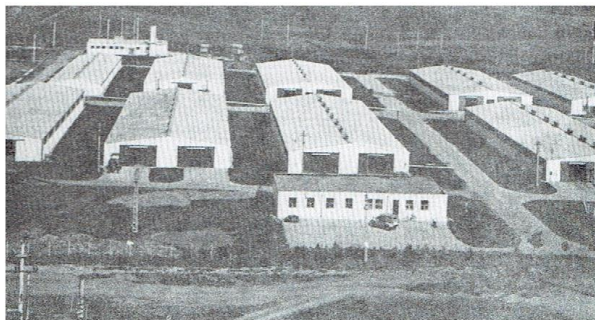


Figure 3 A cattle farm in Constanta county

The socialist agriculture period ended in 1989; at the beginning of 1990, the decision for the transition to the market economy was made. In the agricultural field, the first greatest decision was to restore the right to private property on the land; for this purpose, some preparatory acts were drafted, the most important being Law no. 18/1991 and Law no.1/2000. The recovery of the land collectivized or nationalized during the Communist totalitarian regime is still ongoing and, of course, accompanied by numerous irregularities.

The Danube Delta. In terms of area, the Danube Delta, together with Razelm-Sinoe Lakes, today part of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, represents 38% of Dobrogea. As an agricultural resource, although of lesser importance, the Delta has prompted the interest in using it for this purpose. The first steps were made by the Dutchman Lange weld and the Danish Dithmer,

who embarked several hundred ha in Mahmudia area, in the late nineteenth century, for agricultural purposes.

However, over the planned economy period, the rush for arable land was the subject of several agricultural development projects. The last project, which was drafted in 1983, provided for 144,000 ha for farming, for 20,000 cattle, 350,000 sheep, 120,000 pigs and 350,000 birds. Finally, only Pardina enclosure – with an area of 28,000-30,000 ha – was drained. However, the difficulties encountered and the biosphere reserve status have stopped the expanding agriculture trend in the Danube Delta. Nowadays, within the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, agriculture is practiced on 60,000-70,000 ha.

Dobrogea and the European Union. A new stage in the historical evolution of Romania's and, implicitly, of Dobrogea's agriculture began in 2007, when Romania joined the European Union's political and economic structures by the Treaty of Accession to the European Union (9), on January 1, 2007. Romania's accession (country with an essential geostrategic position) was late and discriminatory, and the content of the treaty reflects the Romanian negotiators' obedience, for a country with an important agricultural potential both in terms of scope and quality. One of the main consequences of this treaty was precisely the loss of land ownership or land use rights for a still half-rural country (Tratatul de aderare al României la Uniunea Europeană).

CONCLUSIONS

In the 140 years that have elapsed since Dobrogea's union with Romania, the provincial agriculture has evolved primarily in accordance with the political decisions of the regimes that have succeeded over this period, but also with the natural conditions of the area.

The first steps taken by the Romanian government took into account the order of the land patrimony exploited under the Ottoman Empire's laws. It was necessary to increase the Romanians' weight by repeated colonizations; then, reforms were implemented in line with those in Romania.

In the natural-pastoral farming system inherited from the time of Ion Ionescu de la Brad's trip (1850) improvements had to be made: increasing the arable area, changing the crop structure, introducing the machinery.

The most important changes were triggered by the communist-totalitarian regime, which invested heavily in all fields, bringing the technical level on equal footing with the rest of the Romanian provinces. The performances as well as

the failures were similar to those that affected the entire Romanian agriculture.

The transition to the market economy was the same: delay of retrocessions, accompanied by the same irregularities; merging the land into farms that went beyond the former state-owned agricultural enterprises belonging to natives or foreigners; the use by large companies of top technologies with double returns compared to the period when half of Dobrogea was irrigated. On average, in the two counties, i.e. Constanta and Tulcea, the yields per ha varied according to precipitations, without any big differences compared to the period before 1990 (Lup A., 2012).

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