

AGRICULTURE IN DOBROGEA FROM ION IONESCU DE LA BRAD UNTIL THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

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Abstract:

The paper is a historical retrospective marking the main steps taken in agriculture in Dobrogea from 1850 until present time. The authors will stop on the most representative landmarks, starting with the year 1850, as described by Ion Ionescu de la Brad in "*Agricultural fieldtrip to Dobrogea*". This is how they are described in chronological order: The status of agriculture and rural areas in 1850 Dobrogea under Ottoman rule; Agriculture in Dobrogea after the inclusion in the Romanian administration in 1878; Agriculture in Dobrogea during the interwar period; Agriculture in Dobrogea during the communist totalitarian regime 1945-1989; Transition to the market economy 1990-2010. Taken into analysis: agricultural system, technical and economic performances, demographic evolution in rural Dobrogea.

Key words: agriculture, Dobrogea, retrospective.

Evolution of rural economy in Dobrogea 1850-2010. Historical landmarks

The anniversary symposium dedicated to the celebration of 100 years of high agronomic studies in Iasi represents a good opportunity to mark the major historical landmarks in rural and agricultural economy in Dobrogea, starting from 1850, as described by Ion Ionescu de la Brad in "*Agricultural trip to Dobrogea plains*", until present day.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In drawing up the material, the authors used different sources, starting with "*Agricultural trip to Dobrogea plains*" by Ion Ionescu de la Brad and other sources, the main one being "*Agricultural Dobrogea to legend, to ... globalization*", author A. Lup.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Dobrogea in the year 1850

Being part of the Ottoman Empire at the time, Dobrogea is visited by Ion Ionescu de la Brad in the summer of 1850, and described in a report entitled "*Excursion agricole dans la plaine de Dobrogea*", published in the same year in *Le journal de Constantinople*.

The work is a real monograph, containing the natural province, demographics, the urban and rural places, transportation links, and of course agriculture and the economy, which is mainly rural. There are also described the arid climate, light soils, natural economy, population, its wealth and even its health. The demographic assessment recorded a rare population, about 60.000 people were living in a region which could feed, in the opinion of Ionescu de la Brad, around two million people. The pastoral system, cattle and grazing are the ones that dominate. It is recommended to establish a convenient report between grazing and working the fields, which would ensure the prosperity of agriculture.

It recognizes the important role of trading in the economic development of the region, and the need of building the roads on the main axis. Distances travelled between main urban centers or between regions are measured in hours travelled by cart: 12 hours from Harsova to Macin, or 6 hours from Isaccea to Tulcea. It appreciates the fact that the State is the sole owner of the land, and that between them there are no intermediaries as are in Western Europe, and that this system favors the cultivator to prosper. Not being able to be a landowner, the peasant's wealth consists of animals, which are assessed and counted by Ionescu de la Brad. It acknowledges that there should be a just report between grazing and working the fields, that there is a conflict between the pipes and the plugs, but for a region with such

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a scarce population, he seems to be on the breeder's side. Live animals and their products were what the region was exporting to the metropolis. He finds in Dobrogea a healthy, prosperous and well managed population, where justice is right and property is respected. In order to support his recommendations, some also valid today, he gives quotes from scientific or political personalities, from ancient (Catonne) up to contemporaries (Thiers). He mentions the role of the Transylvanian transhumance shepherds in the colonization and the Romanization of the province, but also in its economic development. Observer, analyst, and in good knowledge of the agricultural issues, his recommendations are valid even today.

2. Transition from the pastoral system to modern agriculture.

For Dobrogea, passing under Romanian administration at the end of 1878, marked the beginning of the modernization of the agriculture, that will last a long period of time, basically after the end of World War One.

The first regulations on land ownership were established by the Law for organizing Dobrogea in 1880, followed three years later by the rules that stated how the verifications and determinations of title deeds were being done. Few major objectives were taken into consideration: a) consolidation of ownership; b) colonization of Dobrogea with Romanian population on the left bank of the Danube.

The result of this policy will be a rapid population growth, so that in the early 20th century the number will exceed 300000, of which 160000 in Constanta county, and 144000 in Tulcea county, and 10 years later (1915) will exceed 400000.

Meanwhile the share of ethnic Romanians in the structure of the population will also increase from 32.4 % in 1880 to 62.5% in 1930. However land resources related to the population will remain most generous, a phenomenon that will persist to this day. In 1905, for example, while incumbent agricultural area per capita was 1.7 ha in the country, the incumbent in Constanta was 4.2 ha per person, in Tulcea 2.7 ha per person, and average area per farm was 16.9 ha compared to 8.1 ha on average in the country.

There were three ways of working the soil: exploitation of their land, exploitation of their land and other land holdings, and exploitation of only leased and rented land. In all three cases, peasants who owned tools, animals and working laborers, leased land from large landowners, even subleased from the lessees. Rarely peasants worked their own land with their own tools.

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century is the period in which mechanized work is introduced in the Romanian agriculture, the most important agricultural machines will be those that make it easy and save manual labor, threshing machines, harvesters and sower. Cars were usually owned by large landowners and richer farmers. Technical capital of the peasants was still composed of draft animals to plow, harrow, car wagon and labor force. Threshing was done with horses and lasted until late fall.

The prevalence of animals as the driving force had consequences on the structure of crops. They grew more barley and oat than wheat, very little corn, the main use of the land continued being the pasture, and in the slightly more wet areas, the meadows.

3. Land reform between 1918-1921 and the interwar period

In Dobrogea, land reform was achieved based on the law on Land reform in Oltenia, Muntenia, Moldova and Dobrogea. It was taken into account the situation of the land as resource on 15th of August 1916 and the land sold under certain circumstances until February 1 1921. Given land would be, in order: - participants in the 1913 campaign and world war one; - widows and orphans of war; - peasants deprived of land and those who owned less than 5 ha.

The source for the land consisted of: expropriation of over 100 ha to foreigners, the absentee and other categories of land. The peasants in Dobrogea were given 115271 ha, of which 57244 in Constanta and 58027 in Tulcea County. It is worth noticing a few changes in the farming system practiced in Dobrogea in the period during the two world wars. First it went from the pastoral system to a significant increase in the arable growing areas. Between 1878 and 1927, the cultivated area went from 242000 ha to 757000 ha, which is more than three times.

Along with the changes in arable areas, the structure of cereal cultures changed in favor of species of primary importance for food or feed, while some traditional species were reduced in some areas. Here, for example, are the areas planted with cereals in 1896, and the average for the years 1920-1927:

| | 1896 | 1920-1927 |
|-----------------|------|-----------|
| • Wheat thou ha | 45.9 | 76.1 |
| • Rye „ | 7.1 | 4.3 |
| • Barley „ | 95.6 | 216.6 |
| • Oats „ | 10.9 | 78.1 |
| • Maize „ | 36.9 | 133.5 |
| • Millet „ | 34.0 | 12.0 |

Further cultivation of large areas of barley and oats is explained by the fact that the main thrust was represented by cattle and especially horses and in order to maintain their feed concentrated, the grain constituted the base. At the same time, the cultivated area for different species of vegetables such as cabbage, onions, melons and other food species doubled. Although increased, the technical capital was much poorer than in the rest of the country. There were large differences even between the two counties in Dobrogea, Constanta and Tulcea. In 1935 the arable land that could be worked by a machine was:

- a tractor for 4097 ha in Dobrogea, 80963 in Tulcea, compared with 2843 ha the national average;
- a grain thresher for 3832 ha in Constanta, 80963 in Tulcea, compared with 909 ha the national average;
- a mechanical drill for 219 ha in Constanta, 4582 in Tulcea, compared to 183 national average;
- seeding-machine for 42 ha in Constanta, compared to 154 in Tulcea and the national average.

The main equipment that marked some progress was all owned by the large landowners. For small and medium peasant the main technical equipment remained steady household inventory, draft animals, and power arms.

4. Planned economy period

Between the years 1945-1949, following the establishment of the communist regime, agriculture will significantly change from a structural point of view, turning Dobrogea in a bridgehead of socialist agriculture in Romania. It all began with an agrarian reform, revenge and propaganda aiming to destroy the old structures of landownership and land exploitation.

Large properties were expropriated up to the limit of 50 ha and their properties confiscated from large categories of people, such as prisoners and war criminals, foreigners, people who had left or not worked the land etc. In total, over 62000 ha were expropriated and were given to 18187 families. The peasants' joy was cut short because according to the historical Plenary of 3-5 March 1949, it was decided the socialist transformation of agriculture, and Dobrogea will become the first region to be collectivized in 1957. Socialist agricultural system installed in Dobrogea will last until 1990, during which time agriculture has progressed so much in the technical equipment, but also in the production per unit area and per animal. Forms of exploitation of land were established after the soviet model:

- State households (GAS) with state owned land;
- Collective farms with group owned land (GAC);

- Machines and tractor stations of the state, which were intended to perform work for tariffs against goods or money, both for households and the collective state.

Later, in 1965, the collective farms will be renamed agricultural production cooperatives, state farms will become agricultural enterprises, the state machines and tractor stations will be called the resort to mechanization of agriculture. The latter, as state service units had a coordinating role in cooperative agriculture throughout the entire communist period, because the charges paid in products by the cooperatives were the main source of agricultural products to fund the centralized state. In the early 80's on their skeleton will be a political-bureaucratic superstructure CUASC (Single council and state agroindustrial cooperative), which will be coordinated by a party activist with a few more classes than a train, but a graduate of Stefan Gheorghiu Academy.

Technical and economical achievements.

The organization and management formula that was set out in the period covering 1960-1989 analysis, the evolution of agriculture in Dobrogea can be decomposed into three distinct phases: a) rise period (1950-1975), b) standstill period (1975-1985) and c) decline period (1985-1989), plus the inevitable collapse in 1989.

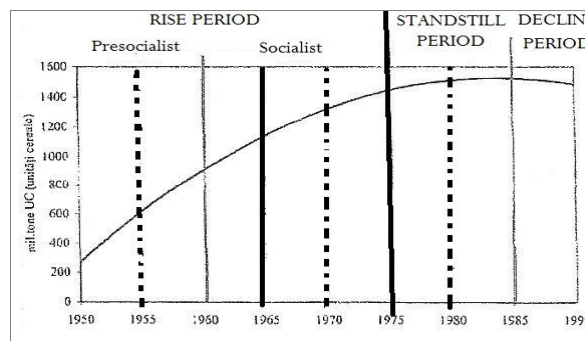


Figure 1

a) Rise period. The longest period, falling roughly between the end of 1949 (which marks the beginning of the collectivization) and the mid 70's. Agricultural policy of the totalitarian regime embodied by the proletarianization of the peasantry under the false formula of cooperativisation, the high rate of accumulation, the price system, the poor remuneration for work allowed the release of financial resources that were needed for the recovery of agriculture and the achieving of high performances, at least compared to the post-war early years affected both by destruction and the catastrophic draught of 1945-1946. The key areas for investment were mechanization, development of irrigation areas (over 5500 thou ha by the end of 1989),

widespread cultivation of varieties and hybrids recommended by research in the field, improving the organization and production management.

Compared with 1960, taken as a basis for comparison in the five-year period from 1971 to 1975, grain and wheat production has doubled. Oilseeds production was 2.5 times higher and corns were five times higher. The results mentioned were due to increased yields, more than the extension of cultivated areas. In the livestock industry, as opposed to crop production, performance was more modest and was due to increasing production per animal, rather than the animal industry. The evolution of cattle, pigs and sheep in Dobrogea during the planned economy was as follows:

| | | 1960 | 1975 | 1990 |
|--------|------|--------|--------|--------|
| Cattle | thou | 119.7 | 215.3 | 242.5 |
| head | | | | |
| Pigs | „ | 172.0 | 556.5 | 559.1 |
| Sheep | „ | 1123.3 | 1358.6 | 1174.1 |

For bovine and porcine more significant growth is evident as is the capping in the second period. In contrast to sheep, numerical evolution is almost linear with a slight maximum in the early 70's. Evolution to livestock is similar to that of the number of animals. The most spectacular increase is in the meat production in the first period, mainly due to large building complex growth and fattening pigs. Milk production was almost 2 times higher in 1975 than in 1960, but in late 1989 it was higher than in 1975, but with only 27.5 mil. hl.

b) Apogee and standstill period. It is situated roughly between 1975-1985, when although the capitalization continues and additional resources are brought in, malfunctions occurred in the system slow down or even stop the growth in production, and in some industry sectors, both plant and animal breeding branches, decline appears.

Financial resources are directed towards the priority objects of investment (land reclamation, special work force, equipment becoming more sophisticated but unreliable, complex giant livestock) which caps economic efficiency as well. To exploit new production capacity resources will be allocated with a growing greed. In the last decade, only 40% of fertilizer will be delivered to agriculture. In the same period there were about 560000 tractors produced in Romania, but in agriculture in 1989 there were only 152000. There was also a widening gap between prices of agricultural products and industrial products used by farmers. Under these circumstances, transferring research results, the main source of

technological progress is slow and taking a formal character.

c) The decline period. Appears in the mid 80's and will continue until the final collapse in late 1989 amid extremely ambitious development programs supported by only party propaganda.

This last phase of socialist agriculture will be characterized by the depletion of the resources destined for the exploitation of the huge production capacities created through immense investments (possible due to excessive rates of accumulation), catastrophic and irreversible degradation quality process, weakening the material incentives (wages of agricultural cooperatives is kind of a minimum wage).

The last episode of the decline phase will be characterized by accelerating economic collapse, in particular. Physical production in sharp decline will be maintained by material efforts ever higher by maintaining livestock (growth cannot be there), disciplinary measures (conditioning factors responsible for the remuneration plan, sanctions from the party, or penalties for so-called technological indiscipline, waste etc).

For the economical aspect, the fall will be catastrophic. Bubbles of oxygen received by the increase of agricultural prices in the last decade of socialist agriculture, the most important of which was in 1981, covered only partially and briefly the gap with the rising prices of industrial products needed in agriculture accompanied by their deteriorating quality. On average in the last years of socialist agriculture, most of the plant and animal products were losses. Positive results will be obtained only in a few crops which included wheat, barley, sunflower. Instead, in maize, soybeans and other cultures considered strategic (potatoes, vegetables, rice), losses will increasingly be larger.

The whole business branch of plant production will end in loss, just like in the animal branch, with a few exceptions. Global development related to the volume or value of fixed assets will also mark a decline, eloquent evidence of the use of increasingly waste of resources.

5. Transition to market economy

In early March 1949, a party plenary decided the socialist transformation of agriculture on a model coming from the east, and 40 years later it was decided the transition to a market economy model coming from the west. Abolition of totalitarian political and economical system in 1989, has meant profound changes in the area of agricultural ownership forms of exploitation of

the land, the government and management of the farms.

Giving the former owners or their heirs the collectivized land confiscated by the communists in accordance with the law 18/1991 and then the law 1/2000, meant the abolition in Dobrogea of 37 state agricultural farms with a heritage of agricultural land of 261200 ha, of the 162 agricultural cooperatives exploiting 522400 ha of land, of the 46 inter-economic associations and of the 36 stations for mechanization of agriculture. There were also abolished other structures in sections II and III of the economy, manufacturing and sale units, and other specialized services.

In accordance with other regulations, there have appeared many forms of exploitation of land of different sizes, with ambiguous legal status, with longer or shorter life. Time, market, interests have polarized land forms of work organizations and technology in two tips of large and very large farms on one hand, and small and very small on the other hand. In 2007 the farms in the two counties in Dobrogea sorted by size and legal status are presented in table 1.

Large farms, some of thousands of acres are private companies with owned or rented land, often having activities in sectors II and III of the economy, respectively in storage, processing, recovery, including on foreign markets.

Table 1

| | County of Constanța | | | County of Tulcea | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------|
| | Number/% | SAU thou ha | Ha/farm | Number/% | SAU thou ha | Ha/farm |
| Total farms | 65592 | 561 | 8.5 | 61019 | 327 | 5.4 |
| from: | | | | | | |
| individual farms | 64871 | 266 | 4.1 | 60649 | 118 | 2.0 |
| % from total | 98.9 | 47.4 | x | 99.4 | 63.8 | x |
| public farms | 721 | 295 | 409.3 | 370 | 209 | 565 |
| % din total | 1.1 | 52.6 | x | 0.6 | 36.2 | x |

Favored by the facilities offered by the EU through the structural funds, investors, rather than the farmers are the ones moving towards the staircase economy, with its advantages and disadvantages, of which the worst is scaring away ordinary peasants from village agriculture and make them stop at the gates of the *Schengen Area*.

CONCLUSIONS

Since 1850, agriculture and rural area evolved from feudal period towards the phase of pre-capitalist, capitalist, socialist stalling confused in the market economy. Farming system has been modernized, machines took the place of arms, from plow, past the levers, pedals, washer, then the buttons, onboard computers and then the air

conditioning. Yields have increased several times, output per head too. Animals have disappeared, motors are running, usually on paved roads. Ancestral carts stubborn enough to resist time

Yet the early twentieth century, several ha farms worked with arms and snipers were sustainable for the peasant family in Dobrogea. Tens of large farms with hundreds of ha no longer exist.

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