



## Obstacles to agricultural extension in Romania

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### Abstract

This study is concerned with addressing the challenges facing the Romanian system of Agricultural Extension. Generally, the extension system of agriculture denotes to the scientific research as well as novel knowledge to the agricultural practices with farmer education. The focus of this study is on the agricultural extension in Romania that is dominated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) which is liable to the extension of institutional building on the community sector. The system of agricultural extension in Romania is distinguished by its connection with ANCA (National Agency for Agricultural Consulting), which is the primary European origin based institutional structure established in 1998 depending on the PHARE RO 9505 01 0 Program. Thus, ANCA was settled with a purpose to start the delivery of the services of agricultural consultancy to the Romanian farmers. The study outlines a set the challenges that have negative impacts on the Romanian agricultural extension that are multi and due to many factors, that are political, social, educational, and others. Among these challenges is the share of the Western European countries in the wage and employment system where most of the wages and benefits go to the Western European employees leaving minimum wages to Romanian employees. Another challenge in Romanian agricultural extension is the lack of training level of the farmers. Labor force in the Romanian agricultural sector has an inadequate level of training in the Alliance report. The third challenge is due to the lack of foreign languages and communication skills that are more important for providing knowledge needs for the interviewed young Romanian farmers. This has affected the Romanian employees' skills in management, particularly the environment management and technological skills in comparison to Western employees. Despite these challenges, studies have shown that farmers training can be improved by implementing a variety of solutions such as modernization of professional and agricultural education through adapting a professional curriculum, raising farmers' awareness of these challenges, defining the farmer's professional status and his / her association with technical education, and providing funds for supporting training programs. Overall, this study has dealt with an essential issue regarding the system of Romanian agricultural extension. The importance of the study may be in identifying the challenges facing the Romanian agricultural extension that might be of value for other specialists in this field even though living in other regions and counties. The study contributes to the knowledge of agriculture through providing practical diagnoses and solutions to the issues and challenges affecting the system of agricultural extension based on the quantitative methodology and statistical tools.

**Keywords:** Obstacles, Agricultural extension, Romania

### Introduction

Currently, the system of Romanian extension is epitomized by both private and public sector. Thus, MARD (Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development) is accountable for the building of institutional extension on the sector of public. Consequently, this system of public extension is being in process since 1988 & also comprises of ANCA (National Agency for Agricultural Consulting) which is the 1<sup>st</sup> European origin institutional structure that was established in 1998 depending on the Program of PHARE RO 9505 01 0. The purpose of establishing the ANCA was the initiation of the services of the agriculture consultancy for the farmers of Romania. This agency works underneath the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural

Development's framework. Hence, this is considered essential by the European Union. The latest years have also exposed increasing activity in the sector of private consultancy (Staicu, 2007). The innovative order of ANCA comprised of three main fields:

- (provide farmers with information regarding the EU requirements and to train the farmers and maintain the associations of producers.
- Funds' sources which could be retrieved to encounter these requirements
- Support the farmers in enlarging the multi-annual business plans of farm.

Alterations and trials upsetting the extension are indicative of broader forces at work in the society. The public policy impacts those extensions which inclines to the policy of parallel development,

institutional evolution's extension imitates what is happening in other fields of institutions (Rivera and Gustafson, 1991).

Universal agricultural extension hires the extension workers of at least 800,000, hundreds of thousands more leader farmers or farmer technicians attaining up to the 1200million

individuals. Presently, around 80% of the extension services of world are funded publicly and civil servants brought them (World Bank, 1997). So, one of the obstacles in agricultural extension in Romania might involve a low number of extensions workers.

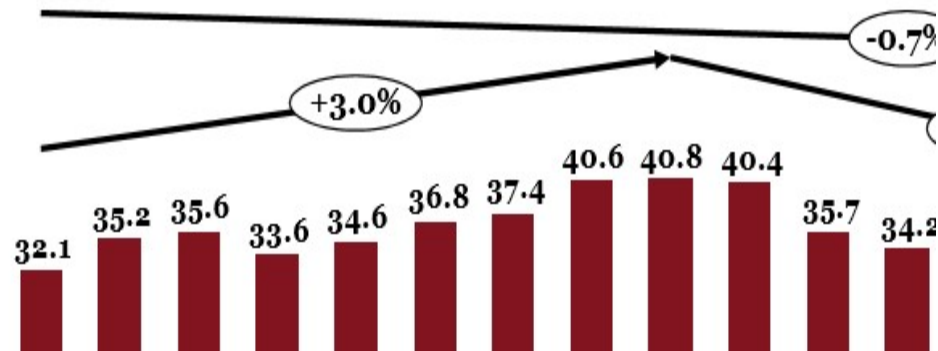


Figure 1. The employed population's share in agriculture of the total employed Romanian population (% , 1992-2014). Source: INS

In 2014, the portion of labor hired in agriculture in Romania was about 27% of the total population occupied. The share of labor force in Romania occupied in agriculture had in 2014 a very large share of the value registered in 1992, although the share of agriculture in PIB decreased more than 4 times in this period, signaling significant loss of efficiency. There was an increase between 1990-1999 -punching of communism, in parallel with the restitution of agricultural land, a part of the population migrated to the riparian zones, reorienting towards the activity of the subsistence in small family farms.

4.4% of the total population in the EU-28 are working in agriculture, with the percentage being found in the Central Eastern countries, considering that Western Europe's share of agriculture is in the European average. Approximately, about 84% of the Romanian agriculture workers come under the non-salaried employees' category (employers, cooperative associations and unpaid family workers); distinctively, the nonagricultural worker's average share is about 72%in the sector of EU agriculture, whereas the farms that were owned by state showed the share of about Germany -55.8%, France- 63.1%, and Spain -50%. The countries with the poorest employed workers in agriculture are those who register the most mildly added value of the worker. All of this leads to the central difficulty that the Romanian agriculture is fronting, naming as the agriculture production's relative yield, implicitly and lower labor productivity (Eurostat, 2014).

Another problem in Romania would be the level of training of the farmers. In Alliance report, the

sector of Romanian agriculture's labor force has an insufficient level of training. Therefore, agreeing to European Commission, the overpowering mainstream of about 96.4% of the Romanian farmers described that they attained their agricultural field' knowledge firmly on the base of practical experience in comparison to the 70.9% of the farmers in the European Union. The level of training of the farmers in the Romania is even in the position of the new Member States such as Hungary and Poland, in which 17.9% & 47.8% farmers state that they had full scale as well as basic agriculture training. Another problem characteristic of the agricultural sector in Romania from the perception of human resource in a statement that there is no precise professional rank for the worker of agriculture. This has strong implications for tax and social security and health care (Eurostat, 2014).

The Romanian agricultural sector's labor force has an insufficient training level in the report of Alliance. Therefore, rendering to the European Union, a vast majority about 96.4% of Romanian farmers believed that they attained the knowledge in the field of agriculture on the base of practical experience in comparison to the 70.9% of EU farmers.

The level of training of the farmers in the Romania is even in the position of the new State Member like Poland and Hungary, in which 47.8% & 17.9% farmers record that they had full & basic scale training in agriculture. Alternative problem distinctive of the Romanians' agricultural sector from the perception of human resource is the element that there has been no precise

professional status for the agricultural workers. This has strong implications for insurance and tax purposes (Eurostat, 2014). According to a pilot project named as *Exchange schemes for young farmers* (Zondag et al, 2015), Young farmers of Romania reported the following needs, as seen in

the figure below).

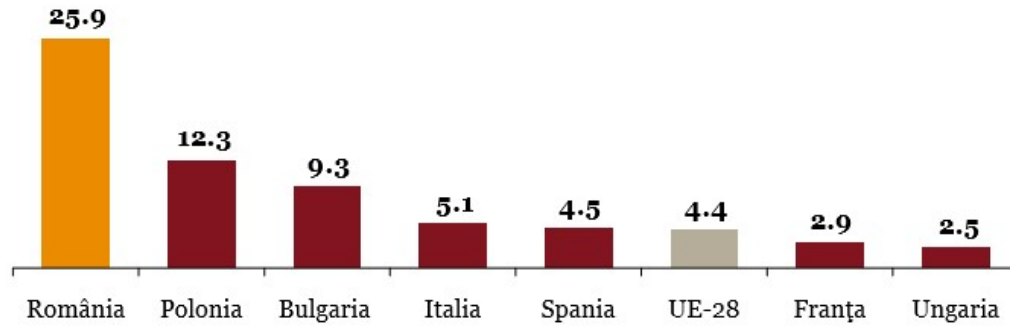


Figure 2. The population's share in the Romanian n agriculture and other EU countries (2015,% of the total employed population).

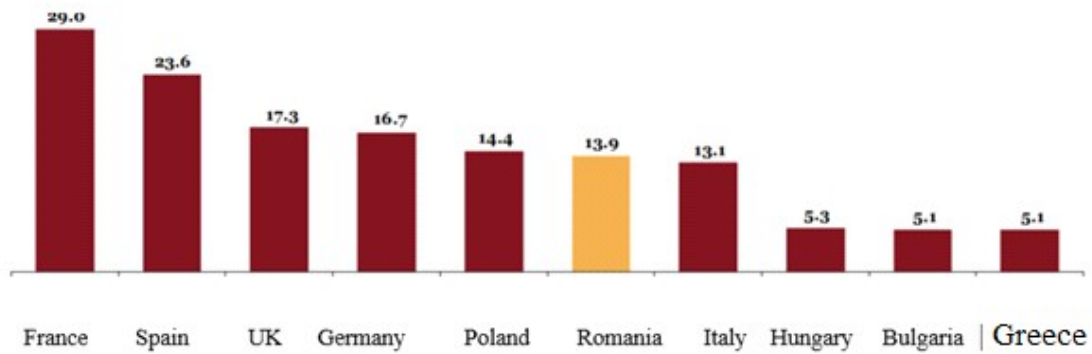


Figure 3. Share of wage and non-salaried workers in the total employment in agriculture (2015, %) Source: INS

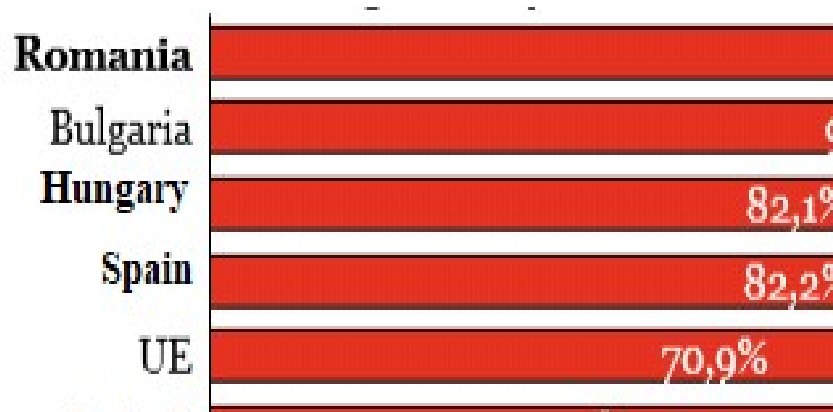


Figure 4. Level of training of farmers (2013, % of respondents) Source: Eurostat, European Commission

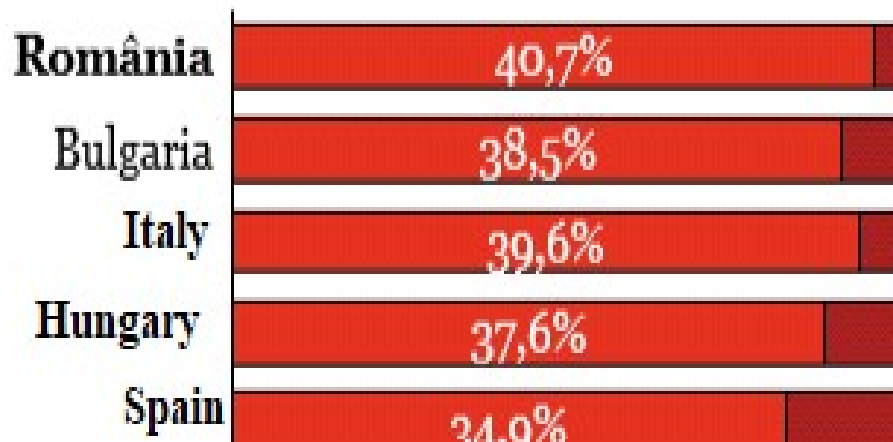


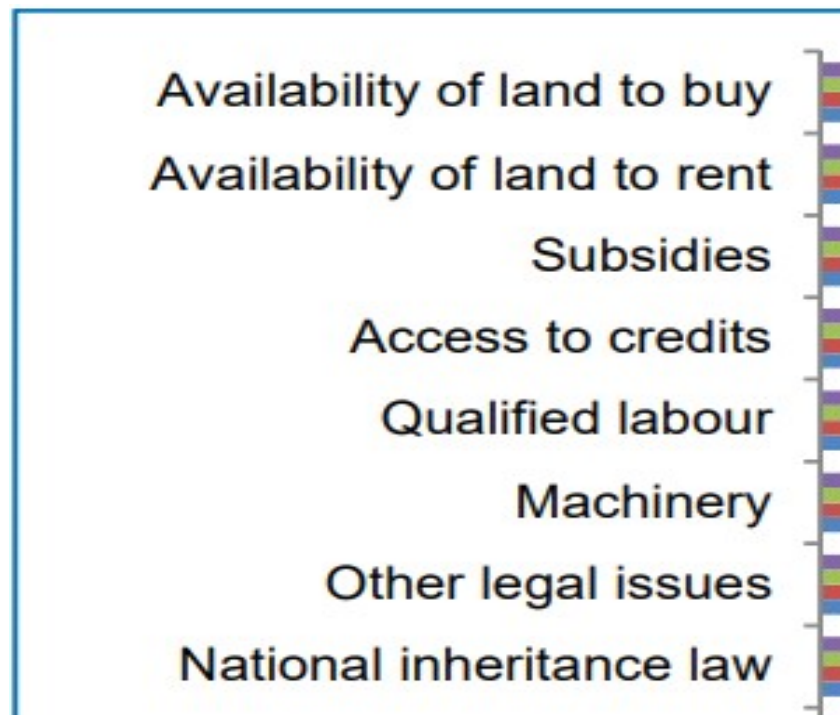
Figure 5. Farmers' distribution by age group (2015, % of respondents) Source: Eurostat, European Commission



Figure 6. Needs of young farmers in Romania, Source: (Zondag et al, 2015)

Foreign languages and communication skills are more important knowledge needs for the interviewed young Romanian farmers than for other EU's young farmers. Comparatively, young Romanian farmers that have been interviewed distinguish it less in comparison to the young

farmers of EU that they would grow in skills relevant to the nature, resources, environment management or management skills & technological skills necessary for the farm. They also identified the following issues:



**Figure 7. Issues identified by young farmers in Romania. Source: (Zondag et al, 2015)**

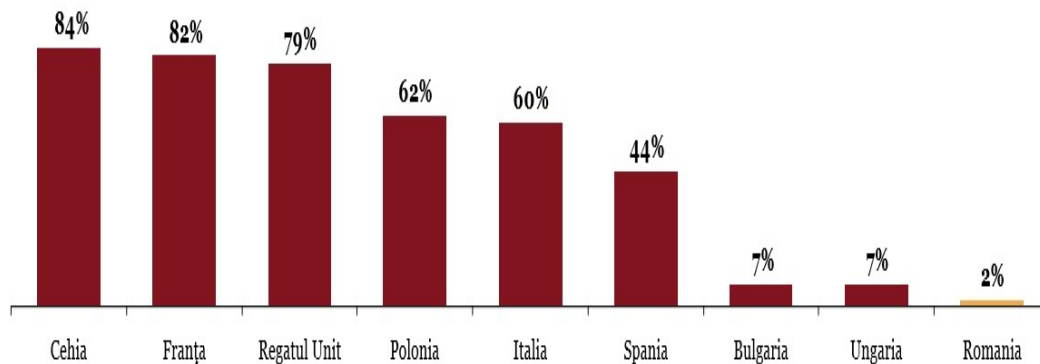
Compared to their peers, the Romanian young farmers that were interviewed used more sources to attain knowledge. This is especially true for study groups and networks, workshops and seminars, exchange schemes, considerations on internet, e-learning and online training through internet. Agricultural courses or trainings are less interesting to them. The European Commission has appointed this project to the Directorate General for Agriculture & Rural Development (DG AGRI) to detect the requirements of the young farmers as well as to take an overview of the already present exchange schemes for young farmers and to form a guideline to create or progress the schemes of exchange for young farmers (DG AGRI, Tender No AGRI-2012-Eval-03). This research has been executed in the cooperation with Ruimte, Aequator (2014-2015) & LEI by Ecorys.

Agriculture has already extended the edges of water and land. Hence, the future escalation in the production of food exploit the biological yields on the present lands (World Bank, 1997). Facing this technical challenge, agriculture go through a crisis in several parts of developing world. However, in Asia, the rate of growth promoted by the green revolutions has reduced. But, in Africa, the production of food per capita has deteriorated in most of years since 1970 which is showed in the recurring famine. In several parts of Latin America & Caribbean, the pressure of population

completely threaten the environment (World Bank, 1990). While, in the industrialized world in contrast to the higher agriculture input is escalating in reaction to these problems like water, soil pollution, fears of genetically engineered products and animal rights.

In this context, it is important to understand what is happening in Romania from this point of view as well. The technological endowments of agricultural holdings are underdeveloped. They account for 2% of the Romanian mines exploited by a tractor, one of the basic technological equipment in the agricultural field, as opposed to 84% of the mines exploited in the Czech Republic. In addition to the quantitative aspects, there is a difference in the qualitative level, in Romania being in operation a large number of equipment already depreciated and purchased at the second hand. Thus, at the level of 2012, about 73.1% of tractors and 69.6% of cereal harvesters have been living for more than 7 years, rendering to the statistics delivered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Eurostat)

The foremost hindrance to the technical variation of the Romanian farmers is represented by the surface of agricultural farms, and this does not permit the competent usage of modern technological revenues as they do not validate their investment regarding harvested yields.



**Figure 8. The share of ferries that have a tractor (2014) Source: INS**

Increasing the degree of technology of agricultural holdings can be achieved by establishment of agricultural credit guarantee funds. Supporting agricultural crop insurance by taking part in the cost of insurance premiums from the state budget. It was attempted to set up a mutual fund for agriculture in 2015, but it failed. There are EUR 400 million in the NRDP to set up funds for the management of agricultural land. The agricultural extension's generic difficulties are bound to its various functions and the environments of social, bureaucratic, political operation systems as well in which the systems of extensions operate.

The system of public extension comprises of the National Agency for Agricultural Consulting (ANCA), along with its Bucharest' headquarter & its network of the Agricultural Consulting county offices (OJCAs) formed in 41 county capitals of Romania & about 600 of Local Centers for Agricultural Consulting (CLCA) at an insignificant portion of Romania nearly about 2400 of communes (the equal municipality with elected mayor by means of its greatest officials).thus, it could be stated that extension system comprises a pyramidal structure ( national, county and communal level). From the financial concept, funds came from the budget of state, their own incomes and conferring to the decision number 22/2005 of Government permitted by the Law number 77/07.04.2005. Relating with other "actors on the extension market", approximately all services

delivered to the farmers are free of any charge (Verzea, 2007).

Moreover, the human resources' structure included in the activities of extension is as follows: at the completion of 2006, the (county level) OJCAs, (national level) ANCA & (local level) comprising of authentic information of individuals on the basis of selected communes, these CLCAs were hiring 430, 70 and 600 people correspondingly for a total staff of 1100 people. The majority of this staff of about 85% has a background of technical agriculture (Salajan, 2004). However, only 3% of these had a background in business and economics, while the rest of them were employed in administration and other fields like communications, legal and food processing recently. Though, in latest years, the younger staff consisting of fresh graduates was employed having a background of business management and economics. Concerning the staff's quality, the positive side is that all the field staff is not university graduated rather they have upright knowledge and technical skills. Thus, the (ANCA) public extension service's beneficiaries are farmers, more specifically from the smaller, average / medium farm of family along with other rural side's economic agents (Staicu, 2007).

According to a study conducted by Rasouliazar et al (2010) in the International Journal of Agricultural Science and Research, the results showed the advantages of extension and obstacles.

**Table 1. Advantages of Agricultural Advisory Services**

Obstacles	Mean	SD	C.V	Rank
Increasing management skills of farmers	4.33	0.80	0.184	1
Improving access to services	4.32	0.80	0.185	2
Increasing participation of farmers in planning and decision making process	4.26	0.80	0.187	3
Increasing the experience of extension services	4.36	0.82	0.188	4
Increasing accountability of extension consultants	4.28	0.86	0.200	5
Increasing negotiating skills of farmers	4.15	0.90	0.216	6
Reducing cost of public extension	3.84	0.97	0.252	7
Increasing awareness level of farmers	3.74	0.97	0.259	8
Increasing quality of extension services	3.79	1.02	0.269	9
Increasing incomes of farmers	3.41	0.93	0.272	10
Improving public extension	3.66	1.04	0.284	11

Source: Rasouliazar et al (2010)

Also, the obstacles seem to be the following:

**Table 2. Priorities of obstacles from consultant's perception**

Obstacles	Mean	SD	C.V	Rank
Lack of necessary facilities (vehicle) by the consultants	3.76	0.96	0.255	1
Illiteracy of farmers	3.59	1.03	0.286	2
Lack of cooperation of other institutions and organizations(public) with AASC	3.62	1.04	0.287	3
High cost of consultancy services	3.41	1.05	0.307	4
Weak interaction between the public research institutions and private sector	3.46	1	0.289	5
Lack of coordination between public and private sector	3.48	1.02	0.293	6
Lack of subsidies and grants from the government for companies and farmers	3.72	1.11	0.298	7
Lack of trust in advisory services companies	3.45	1.06	0.307	8
Unhealthy competition between advisory agencies	3.39	1.05	0.309	9
Lack of expert and technical personnel in AASC	3.44	1.07	0.311	10
Lack of executive power of AASC	3.51	1.09	0.313	11
Lack of monitoring and evaluation activities of AASC	3.38	1.11	0.328	12
Lack of services to marginal farmers	3.44	1.17	0.340	13
Little attention to the needs of women farmers	3.37	1.20	0.356	14

Source: Rasouliazar et al (2010)

### Conclusions

The common complications of the extensions of agriculture are bound to its varied roles as well as social, political and bureaucratic operational environment in which the systems of extension function. Some of the obstacles in the extension of agriculture in Romania are farmer's preparedness, tax elusion in the sector of agriculture, an insignificant amount of technology in the holdings of agriculture and lack of promotion of rural sustainable development. Increasing farmers' preparedness can be achieved by implementing the following measures:

Modernization of primary, secondary / professional and agricultural education by adapting curricula to the defined goals of agriculture and the training of personnel

- Providing training programs to raise farmers' awareness of the challenges of modern agriculture and providing the necessary elements for improving the management of agricultural holdings (technical, legal, information technology)
- Promotion of agricultural and agricultural education by increasing the attractiveness of professional and agricultural schools in agriculture and related activities as a result of information campaigns in the rural environment, curriculum adequacy of the real needs of the agricultural sector, increased emphasis on practical training, etc.
- Defining the farmer's professional status and his / her association with technical education.
- Supporting the information in accessing the funds available through the NRDP for the



development of training services in rural areas  
Increasing the degree of technology of agricultural holdings can be achieved by establishment of agricultural credit guarantee funds and it is important to also find solutions for the reduction of tax invasion.

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