

CAUSES THAT LEAD TO THE SEVERE DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF CATTLE BRED BY SUBSISTENCE FARMERS IN PLATARESTI COMMUNE, CALARASI COUNTY, ROMANIA

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Abstract

Romania is a country of contrasts especially as agriculture is concerned. On one side we have state of the art machinery and equipment being used on farms larger than 100 ha and on the other side we have small subsistence farms operated by an aging and poor population. The paper aims to highlight few causes that have stressed even more the difficult situation of the rural population of this country; especially those that have been brought about by the financial crisis initiated in 2008 and that have gotten even worse with the passing of time. We have performed a qualitative and quantitative analysis showing the decline in the number of cattle bred, either for milk or meat, by the subsistence farmers from Plataresti commune, Calarasi County, Romania, allowing us to identify few causes that could be counteracted by a proactive social measure. The results of our research indicate one possible measure meant to counteract negative effects that subsistence farmers are now facing.

Key words: aging population, beef, cattle, farmer, meat, milk, rural area, subsistence

INTRODUCTION

There are two types of beef in Romania, specifically there is domestic beef and import beef. The domestic beef, the fresh one, is produced in Romania, either in large, medium, small or subsistence farms. The beef that is consumed from import usually comes from countries such as Argentina, Brazil, New Zealand and other places around the world. National statistics show that most of the beef consumed is from import and is shipped to Romania as frozen meat. Romanians eat more frozen beef than fresh beef. Also it is important to mention that the import beef is found mostly in urban areas, being served in restaurants, and this loses physical, chemical and organoleptic qualities due to the freezing process compared to the fresh beef.

In Romania the beef quantity consumed is up to 7 kg/inhabitant, according to the reports issued by processors and slaughterhouses in

2012. If to this we also consider the animals sacrificed in house, by subsistence farmers is highly likely that the quantity consumed will be 2 or 3 kg/inhabitant larger than the official figure. Worldwide the average beef consumption is of 12 kg/inhabitant. From this we can conclude that there is a real need for breeding cows for their meat. [1]

Beside this, beef is a pharmaceutical product used in advanced technology countries that succeed in extracting nutritional compounds from the cows' muscles, creative and other enzymes capable to replace certain human enzymes and ensure a good health state. Also, it is helpful to know that most anabolic substances, normally considered as drugs for sportsmen are extracted from cows' meat.

This subject was approached because of the facts and information we observed during the past 5 years. It is our professional opinion, reinforced by our professional work experience that a new problem has aroused due to the low employment rate, an aging population, a low revenue level in rural areas,

and all these seen in the context of an economic crisis that does not seem to cease, leading to a severe decline in the number of cattle bred by subsistence farmers – either for milk or meat.

We have chosen for our study a small rural locality in Calarasi County, having a population of 4,317 inhabitants - declared, Plataresti comuna, comprising of 4 villages. [2]

Agriculture is the main element of the local economy, this being founded on the available land: arable land 4,261 ha, grasslands and meadows 210 ha, vineyards 60 ha, forests 57 ha, ponds and lakes 256 ha. [3]

Agriculture here consists of crop growing (wheat, corn, sunflower, clover, beets or canola) – either small farm, farmers’ association or subsistence farming, and of animal breeding (pigs, cows, rabbits, chickens, ducks, geese or turkeys).

Most of the farmers are elders who work with out-dated technology or still use draft animals for working the land.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present paper has been prepared using data collected directly from the local hall and from the field (inhabitants) in February 2013 and from the available statistics on national and local levels.

The methods used were: comparative, qualitative and quantitative analysis of data with the purpose of creating a context that would in turn allow us to draw pertinent conclusions and facilitate the process of planning a viable solution. In our quest we were given the opportunity to observe that our target area and population have both the human and land resources that could represent the grounds for re-launching, on a small scale, the local economy, thus encouraging the development of other activities in the area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

About 20 year ago Romania had approximately 8 million cattle, with the last agricultural census we were given to observe that in 2011 there were even less than 2

million cattle. For the survival of this sector of the economy there is a need for strategy and government support, where farmers would embrace the cooperation concept and apply it in order to negotiate with the beef and milk processors.

The census also revealed that most of the cattle belong to natural persons and around a quarter belong to private businesses. Also, private businesses face this market with difficulty due to the great efforts implied by breeding cattle compared to other animals – nutrition, disease etc. Also the cattle’s breeding is affected by an intricate legislation and a media war meant to discourage this type of business (due to the fact that we are trying to enter to the EU “free” market that is close to saturation).

Another issue to be taken into account in this analysis is that private businesses operating in producing beef have great operation expenses that add to the costs incurred by the slaughterhouses to develop their activity in the fit conditions (safe, secure and in a timely manner). [5]

Similarly, milk processors face difficulties due to the fact that local farms cannot provide the milk quantities their equipment should process daily and the milk collected from subsistence farmers (peasant households) cannot be processed in class A processing units, being sent only to certain units designed for traditional products processing.

Table 1. Animal production for human consume [3]

	MU	2008	2009	2010
Meat	Thousand tons, live weight	1,426	1,442	1,305
of which beef	Thousand tons, live weight	306	264	205

From the data above we can observe that the production of beef has steeply decreased with almost 100 thousand tons between 2008 and 2010.

Table 2. Livestock number [3]

	MU	2008	2009	2010	2011
Cattle	Thousand heads	2,684	2,512	2,001	1,989

From the table above we can observe again a significant decrease in the number of cattle

bread for the period 2008-2011, that is expected to be even lower for 2012.

Another aspect we have considered in our analysis is population. On January 2011 there were 11.8 million individuals living in urban areas, meaning more than half of the country's population.

In the rural areas of the country the population was counting no more than 9.6 million individuals. A different important figure recorded in 2011 was that of people changing domicile from rural to urban areas, specifically 324.6 thousand people.

Also we have analyzed the employability and unemployment as follows: there was a continuous increase for the years prior to 2008; starting with 2009 the working population began to drop, reaching in 2011 the lowest value recorded in the past 23 years (9,138 thousand individuals). 2011 furthermore recorded the lowest concerning the occupied rural population. The number of unemployed individuals was in 2011 of 730 thousand individuals of which 28.8% were young, aged between 15-24 years. The share of individuals employed in the primary sector - agriculture was of only 2.2%, having dropped with 0.1% from the previous year, still having increased with 0.1% compared to 2008. [4]

The rate of activity relating to the working population ranging between 15 to 64 years was of 63.3% in 2011 (63.9% urban, 62.6% rural).

Between 2008 and 2011 the main source of income were the households was cash, although the income in kind recorded for the same period an ascending trend reaching in 2011 to 18.3% due to the value of the agro-food product consumption from own sources (an increase of 2.7% compared to 2008). [4]

In 2011 the salaries and all the other benefits formed the most important class of income, representing 59.6%, showing an increase of 0.8% compared to 2010. Noticeable is moreover the fact that incomes from agriculture, independent activities, and property rights bring about a small share of the household financial resources.

In Plataresti commune there are 123 milk cattle, counted in 2013, having the following

distribution: Plataresti village - 47, Dorobantu village - 23, Cucuieti village - 32, Podu Pitarului village - 18). The same commune had 402 cows only 5 years ago, in 2008.

In 2013 the data collected physically from the analyzed place revealed that only the elder population grows and breeds milk cows for domestic consumption, the owners of the livestock having an average age of 70 years.

The severe decline in the livestock number was caused by the economic crisis that led in turn to a decrease in the purchasing power (revenues in this locality mean to lei 566 - minimum national net salary, lei 450 - retirement allowance, lei 200 lei - baby allowance, lei 42 - child allowance, lei 125 - social allowance), the fact that the young population had to go look for work in the nearest city (Bucharest) in order to support themselves and their families, lack of state support, insufficient education, lack of support from processors, old and outdated equipment etc.

The consumption of beef in the area is relatively reduced, people preferring to breed cattle for milk and not meat. The meat consumption is mostly represented by home grown pork and poultry.

The livestock that is no longer in the local records has been sold to livestock owners from other areas - from hill or plateau - where pensions were established and other people try to operate agro-tourism, or for reproduction. Correspondingly, most of the livestock that is no longer in the area were sacrificed in legal or improvised slaughterhouses.

An additional significant fact we were given to observe was that the local meadows and pastures are not fitted and no visible efforts are made to obtain fodder. The workers that used to take the cows to feed on the local meadows and pastures from April to late September have found themselves without jobs.

CONCLUSIONS

The evident aging rural population, lack of money and fodder - either due to drought, lack of irrigation, or of that the land is not

being worked by the people any more have determined an accentuated drop in the number of cattle in the analyzed locality.

Other causes we identified were that cattle are a type of animals that are more difficult to breed than others, or that the young population rather migrates to the cities in search for work, or lack of investment in the sector.

We are not going to generalize, although the solution we propose with the purpose to give a little incentive to the population, in order for this to breed milk cows and to the processors so that they would come collect the milk, could work for a larger scale. We propose to introduce a new type of private agricultural practice stages (agricultural internships) that would bring the young closer to their elders. For the young this would be an opportunity to practice, to acknowledge the real situation, to come closer to traditional habits, and warm and hardworking people. The aging local population, the elders, would get the chance to share their life experience, find out about new technologies and methods of caring for their livestock, and the processors would in time obtain good milk from our own rural areas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We bring our utmost gratitude to all the respondents who showed us courtesy, who answered our questions truthfully and supported our study.

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