
SUMMARY

of the doctoral thesis entitled:

RESEARCH ON INCREASING FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE IN THE AGRI-FOOD SECTOR

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In the current economic climate, characterized by increased globalization and intense competition in international markets, the performance of agri-food chains is of great importance for ensuring the viability and longevity of the agricultural sector.

Agri-food chains are complex chains, work and processes, that transform natural resources into consumable food, and these value chains are essential for both rural and urban economies, affecting the direct livelihoods of producers, as well as those of processors and consumers. Researching the performance of agri-food chains is crucial for understanding market behavior, recognizing challenges and opportunities specific to the chain, and developing strategies to enhance competitiveness. The efficiency of these sectors is attributed to several factors, including the effectiveness of production and distribution processes, product quality, innovation potential, and flexibility to market changes.

This doctoral thesis, titled "RESEARCH ON INCREASING FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE IN THE AGRI-FOOD SECTOR," aims to analyze the performance of the main agri-food product chains, utilizing a rigorous methodological approach based on both statistical and empirical data. By analyzing performance indicators and determining factors, I will provide a detailed perspective on the strengths and vulnerabilities of these chains and simultaneously explore ways to optimize performance, based on both internal economic conditions and international factors which influences both consumer and market behaviour.

Chapter I, titled "CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES REGARDING THE AGRI-FOOD BRANCH AND ITS PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT" focuses on the concepts of agri-food chains and the assessment of the efficiency of the agri-food system. The agri-food chain is defined as encompassing all economic agents involved in the stages of production, processing, and marketing of an agricultural product, from producer to consumer.

The structure of an agri-food chain includes four phases: pre-production, production, processing and distribution, with three main types of chains: those with intermediate stocks, those with forecast buffer stocks, and those with variable rhythm stocks.

Assessing the performance of the agri-food system involves achieving strategic objectives, generating value and the organization's efficiency, using input, output, process, and added value indicators. Performance evaluation systems, such as KPIs, Balanced Scorecard, or Benchmarking, support organizations in monitoring progress, identifying problems, and evaluating the achievement of established objectives.

Chapter II, titled "PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH," presents the evaluation of agri-food chain performance, focusing on the sustainability of consumption and consumer perception regarding meat and meat products.

The research combined statistical data analysis with empirical methods, targeting production costs, selling prices, profit margins, and market competitiveness.

Factors influencing performance, such as agricultural policies and climate change, were also analyzed. The methodology included online distributed questionnaires and data analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics 24.0, revealing consumer preferences for local and sustainable products and providing recommendations for optimizing the chains.

Chapter III, titled "ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN FOOD CHAINS," refers to five categories of chains: fruits and vegetables, cereals, meat, milk, and eggs. Within the fruit and vegetable chains, the research showed that Romania faces low consumption of fresh fruits, as indicated by the analysis, with low incomes and the perception that these products are expensive being identified as causes. To stimulate consumption and production, I believe there is a need for political intervention to control prices supporting local production with access to European funding. The introduction of technology and subsidies could also allow for increased production of fruits and vegetables, ensuring greater competitiveness of the Romanian agricultural sector. In order to increase consumption, it is necessary to adopt policies that follow the level of prices, stimulate local production and allow for investments and access to subsidies. Another chain is that of cereals, which is important both economically and nutritionally for Romania, as it provides essential food products for consumers which is supported by the continuous growth of agricultural production of grain, a consequence of both the application of technological innovations and the level of subsidies granted.

Flour production in the milling industry fluctuated during the analyzed period, and for basic products in this sector, which are bread and fresh bakery goods, remain a strong market, as bread is a fundamental element in the diet of Romanians.

Meat plays an essential role in nutrition: pork meat, with a high-fat content, provides valuable proteins, iron, and zinc but should be consumed in moderation; lamb meat can be beneficial for bone health but may cause digestive issues; chicken meat is an important source of essential vitamins and minerals, such as zinc, iron, and vitamin B12. Statistical analyses indicate fluctuations in meat production in recent years, with decrease in meat of bovine, porcine and poultry, but an increase in sheep and goat. Changes are influenced by economic factors, agricultural policies and consumer preferences.

Data reflect significant variations in livestock numbers across EU countries between 2012 and 2022; this analysis is essential for understanding the impact on livestock production. Animal density varies considerably between countries, reflecting differences in agricultural practices and consumer preferences. Furthermore, the livestock sector has experienced a steady increase in the number of active enterprises, with variations depending on turnover.

The industrial production of meat products has increased during the analyzed period, as has meat consumption, especially pork and poultry, influenced by factors such as income, prices, cultural habits, and religious practices. The dairy chain has undergone significant changes due to a decrease in cattle numbers and an increase in sheep and goat populations.

However, milk production has declined, one cause being the low investment value in this sector, resulting in Romania having one of the lowest milk production yields in Europe. Within the area for the consumption of dairy products, a significant development was achieved, as well as cheese production.

In Romania, the egg chain is influenced by a complex set of factors requiring strategic and careful management. This field is shaped by legislative regulations, technological innovations, economic conditions, environmental concerns and consumer preferences.

By adopting modern and sustainable methods, producers can ensure both the quality and safety of products, as well as their competitiveness in the market. Regulations from the European Union and national legislation establish stringent standards for quality and food safety.

Rules on poultry farming, egg processing and labelling are essential for consumer protection and maintaining a competitive advantage. The use of advanced technologies on farms, such as automated systems for egg collection and modern equipment for sorting and packaging, contributes to improved efficiency and product quality. Additionally, adopting sustainable practices in poultry raising and waste management is becoming increasingly important.

Producers are encouraged to reduce their environmental impact by using renewable energy and decreasing carbon emissions. The growing demand for organic products and free-range eggs influence farmers production and marketing strategies. Moreover, optimizing the logistics chain from production farms to sales points plays a significant role in reducing costs and minimizing losses.

In Chapter IV, titled "RESEARCH ON THE PERCEPTION OF ROMANIAN CONSUMERS REGARDING THE MEAT AND MEAT PRODUCTS BRANCH," I aimed to investigate the level of trust of Romanian

consumers in various categories of meat products, to evaluate the impact of various factors on purchasing decisions, and to determine the level of demand elasticity for this category of products. The results obtained are important for both producers and traders, as they provide a solid basis for understanding Romanian consumers perceptions regarding the meat and meat products branch and can guide future research to effectively address their needs and concerns. Investigating consumers awareness and the importance attributed to aspects related to the sustainability of meat production and its environmental impact are also important aspects, as well as investigating the influence of emotional and cultural factors on consumer perceptions and behavior regarding this category of products.

In the research, I conducted an extensive analysis of agri-food chains and applied research on the meat chain, with the aim of providing a detailed and updated perspective on Romanian consumer behavior. The data obtained are valuable for future research and for underpinning effective public policies.

Chapter V, titled "CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS," brings together the research results and identify directions for the development of public policies that support both production, and responsible consumption. The study of food chains highlighted the importance of traceability and transparency in all stages of the supply chain. Traceability helps, not only in the rapid identification of contamination sources in case of food safety issues, but also in assuring consumers regarding the quality and origin of products. Furthermore, analyzing food chains opens opportunities for improving efficiency and reducing food loss and waste through optimizing production, collection, processing, and distribution stages, which contributes to resource savings and diminishes ecological impact. It is essential for food chains to be adaptable and to integrate technological innovations to meet market demands and global challenges, such as climate change and demographic growth, etc.