



Arable land per capita is the lowest in Europe. Self-sufficiency in grain production achieved in 1976, according to government figures. A wide variety of temperate-zone crops and livestock raised. Up to 1990, Albania was largely self-sufficient in food; thereafter drought and political breakdown necessitated foreign food aid. Agriculture is the largest single sector of the Albanian economy.

The feudal system that operated before the second world war was abolished by the communists, who introduced an inefficient form of collective farming. Terracing, irrigation, drainage and desalination projects in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in a near doubling of arable land compared with 1950; however, few collective farms were mechanised, and although members' household plots achieved much higher yields, they were restricted in area to 0.1 ha. Whereas most other communist states allowed households to retain their own farm animals, livestock in Albania was confiscated and integrated into communal herds. Farm households took control of land and livestock as soon as the communists' grip on power loosened at the beginning of the 1990s

. Collective farm buildings were damaged or lost in the wave of wanton destruction that followed, and orchards were hacked down for use as firewood or for makeshift construction. In 1993 there were only 3.2m fruit trees (apples, pears, peaches, figs and citrus), compared with 8.3m trees in 1990; the vineyard acreage was reduced to one-third of its level in 1991. Nevertheless, the gross output of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in 2000 was 58% above its lowest point in 1992. This may not quite equal the volume produced by the quasi-state collectives of the 1980s, but inefficient crops grown for self-sufficiency, such as rice and cotton, have been eliminated, and more fodder is grown because livestock is privately owned.

However, the sector remains inefficient by foreign standards because it is overstaffed. As opportunities for non-farm employment are created, agriculture will continue to supply the domestic market with foodstuffs, but should find specialist export markets for medicinal crops, wine and olive oil. Its very backwardness could become an advantage because its low use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers could tap into the burgeoning Western market for organic foods. Pressed into costly grain self-sufficiency under the communist leader, Enver Hoxha, Albanian agriculture has already begun to diversify - it now satisfies only about half of national cereal consumption - but the lack of agricultural equipment and transport to markets, along with inadequate irrigation, were only being addressed in the late 1990s.

A survey conducted in 1999 showed that 42% of farmers still tilled their land with the aid of animal and manpower alone. Peasant self-sufficiency, forced on collective farmers by the communist government's prohibition of private marketing, remains high: the 1999 survey indicated that almost half of farm households never bought arable or animal produce from outside.

Trade (export vs imports): Italy (67 % vs 37.6), Germany (6.4\$ vs 5.5\$), Greece (14.4 vs 28.2%), East European countries, and China.