



Agricultural Regions

The historic provinces of Walachia, Transylvania, Moldavia, Dobruja, and the Banat have distinct soil and climatic conditions that make them suitable for different types of agriculture (see Climate , ch. 2; Land , this ch.). The breadbasket of Romania is Walachia, which provides half the annual grain harvest and roughly half the fruit and grapes. Truck farming, especially in the Ilfov Agricultural District surrounding Bucharest, is also important. Despite the fertility of Walachia's soil, yields fluctuate considerably from year to year because of recurrent droughts. Transylvania, which receives more precipitation than Walachia, has poorer soils and more rugged terrain that restricts large-scale mechanized farming. Livestock raising predominates in the mountains, and potatoes and grains are the principal crops in the central basin. Moldavia has generally less fertile soil than Walachia and receives scant rainfall. Its primary crops are corn, wheat, fruit and grapes, and potatoes. The Banat region has a nearly ideal balance of rich chernozem soils and adequate precipitation. Grain, primarily wheat, is the principal crop; fruits and vegetables are also important. Dobruja, a region of generally inadequate rainfall, was becoming agriculturally more important during the 1980s, because much of the marshland in the Danube Delta was being drained and brought under cultivation. The traditional crops of Dobruja are grain, sunflowers, and legumes.

Major Crops

Corn and wheat (predominantly of the winter varieties) occupied nearly two-thirds of all arable land in the 1980s and about 90 percent of all grain lands. Corn, the staple of the peasant diet, was grown on 3.1 million hectares in 1987, while wheat was sown on 2.4 million hectares. Other important grains included barley (560,000 hectares), oats (70,000 hectares), rice (47,000 hectares), and rye (42,000 hectares). Among the major nongrain crops, the most widely grown in 1987 were hay (870,000 hectares), sunflowers (455,000 hectares), potatoes (350,000 hectares), soybeans (350,000 hectares), sugar beets (271,000 hectares), feed roots (70,000 hectares), corn silage (50,000 hectares), and tobacco (35,000 hectares). Wine and table grapes were widely grown, but the best vineyards were in Moldavia. Romania had gained a reputation for fine wines as early as the nineteenth century, and subsequently became one of the major producers of Europe.

Thanks to the increased use of fertilizers and plant-protecting chemicals and the expansion of arable land area through irrigation and drainage, grain output rose steadily from only 5 million tons in 1950 to between 20 and 30 million tons in the 1980s. How much grain was produced in the late 1980s was unclear because official figures had become unreliable. The Romanian government reported a 1987 grain harvest of more than 31.7 million tons, a record amount and far larger than the 1985 harvest of 23 million tons. The United States Department of Agriculture, however, estimated the 1987 harvest at only 18.6 million tons--well below the harvest of 1985.

Farming Practices

By the mid-1980s, more than 30 percent of the country's 10 million hectares of cropland was irrigated. The remaining 7 million hectares were subject to recurrent and sometimes severe droughts, which were particularly destructive in the southern and eastern regions.

At the same time, large areas of land along the Danube and in its delta were waterlogged, and the government decided to drain much of this marshland and make it arable. The Danube Delta, covering more than 440,000 hectares, was being developed rapidly after 1984. By 1989 some 35,750 hectares had been made arable and large areas of pastureland had been created. By 1990 more than 144,000 hectares of the delta were expected to be useful agricultural land.

Poor crop rotation practices, with corn and wheat sown year after year on the same ground, led to serious depletion of soil nutrients, and supplies of chemical fertilizers were inadequate to restore the lost fertility. In the early 1980s, for example, only thirty-four to thirty-six kilograms of fertilizer were available per acre. Furthermore, much of the best farmland had been severely damaged by prolonged use of oversized machinery, which had compacted the soil, by unsystematic application of agricultural chemicals, and by extensive erosion.

During the first three decades of communist rule, agricultural planners ordered the slaughter of thousands of workhorses, which were to be replaced by more powerful tractors. Indeed, the number of tractors available to agriculture grew from 13,700 in 1950 to 168,000 in 1983. But with the onset of the energy crisis, the regime reversed its policy. A program adopted by the National Council for Agriculture, Food Industry, Forestry, and Water Management in 1986 called for increasing horse inventories by 90,000 head by the end of the decade and reducing the number of tractors in service by nearly one-third. By 1990, according to plans, horse-drawn equipment would perform 18 to 25 percent of all harvesting and virtually all hauling on livestock farms.