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GENERATIONAL RENEWAL IN AGRICULTURE AND ITS ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF SĂLAJ COUNTY, ROMANIA

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The aim of this paper is to analyze the process of generational renewal in the agriculture of Sălaj County, regarded as a determinant factor for ensuring the continuity of sustainable rural development. The study investigates the age structure of farm holders, the size and typology of agricultural holdings, and the extent of young farmers' participation in the support measures provided under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The results reveal the low proportion of young farmers and underline the need to reinforce public policies that promote generational renewal as a core component of sustainable rural development in Romania.

• Introduction

Sălaj County, located in northwestern Romania, has the second lowest urbanization rate in the region (39.7%), reflecting its predominantly rural character. The county faces a shrinking and aging agricultural population, with limited involvement of young farmers. This demographic imbalance poses major challenges to agricultural continuity and sustainable rural development.



The study examines the age structure of farm holders, the typology of agricultural holdings, and young farmers' participation in CAP-funded measures, aiming to highlight the importance of generational renewal as a key driver of rural sustainability in Romania.

• Material and method

The analysis combines quantitative and documentary methods, using data from the National Institute of Statistics (INS), the 2021 Population and Housing Census, and the Agency for Rural Investments Financing (AFIR), complemented by the Sălaj County Development Strategy 2021–2027 and official CAP program reports for 2023–2027.

A comparative approach was applied to evaluate generational renewal trends in Sălaj County in relation to regional and national patterns, emphasizing both structural constraints and potential pathways toward sustainable rural development.

• Results and discussions

Sălaj County shows a significant aging of the farming population, with less than 10% of farm holders under 40 years old. Most farms are small and fragmented, which limits competitiveness and access to investments.

This demographic imbalance poses a major challenge to agricultural continuity and highlights the need for targeted measures to attract and support young farmers.

According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, the rural population of Sălaj County represented 61.3% of the total population, confirming the county's predominantly rural character. As of January 1st, 2024, the resident population reached 237,896 inhabitants, showing a slight decrease compared to the previous year. This demographic trend, combined with the aging structure of farm holders, highlights the increasing need for policies that stimulate generational renewal and ensure the long-term sustainability of rural communities.

• Conclusions

Sălaj County shows a significant aging of the farming population, with less than 10% of farm holders under 40 years old. Most farms are small and fragmented, which limits competitiveness and access to investments.

Generational renewal is a key condition for sustaining agriculture and rural vitality in Sălaj County. Encouraging youth engagement in farming will ensure the continuity, resilience, and competitiveness of the rural economy.