

STRUCTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DETERMINANTS OF THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE CARPATHIAN REGION OF UKRAINE

Oleksandra Palenychak¹, Liudmyla Goncharenko², Andrii Hadzalo³

Abstract. This article examines the territorial differences in the structural and institutional factors that influence the competitiveness of Ukraine's agricultural sector in the Carpathian region, which is characterised by a unique combination of natural resource potential, land use patterns and production conditions. It analyses the dynamics of agricultural enterprises' development within the Lviv region. Particular attention is paid to identifying region-specific mechanisms for developing the competitive advantages of agricultural enterprises amid structural production transformations and intensified European integration processes. The study analyses sectoral differentiation, the level of land use concentration in the corporate sector and the institutional parameters of state financial support, all of which shape the initial conditions for production activities and the export orientation of enterprises. It has been established that growth in export performance is driven by the concentration of production and resources. While this generates short-term economic advantages, it does not fully reflect European trends in balanced development. A low level of social, economic and environmental responsibility poses long-term structural risks to the sustainable development of the agricultural sector. The methodological framework combines a statistical and comparative analysis of agricultural development indicators with an institutional approach to assessing the impact of state agricultural policy and regional analysis methods. Failing to consider regional structural characteristics when applying uniform or fragmented financial support instruments, or ignoring balanced development principles, limits the realisation of export potential and does not ensure sustainable competitive advantages. The scientific novelty lies in the comprehensive justification of adapting institutional and economic mechanisms to the characteristics of regional development and the requirements of the European economic space. This provides a basis for a differentiated agricultural policy at a regional level and for identifying adaptation measures in line with EU standards.

Keywords: sectoral specialisation, land-use concentration, state financial support, export orientation, state regulation mechanisms, structural polarisation, EU agricultural policy.

JEL Classification: Q18, R11, O13, L25

1. Introduction

Experience from around the world shows that ensuring the economic sustainability of industries that underpin a country's food security is a key priority of modern economic policy. The agricultural sector plays a system-forming role by combining food production with supporting employment in rural areas and forming the export potential of the national economy. In the context of globalisation and Ukraine's path towards European integration, it is becoming increasingly

important to analyse the competitiveness of the agricultural sector, taking into account territorially differentiated production systems and the current institutional environment.

The uneven development of agricultural enterprises in different regions is caused by structural, natural resource and socio-economic limitations, which increase interregional disparities and negatively affect the overall level of competitiveness. Nevertheless, the agricultural sector has significant production and export

¹ Institute of Agriculture of Carpathian Region National Academy of Agrarian Sciences, Ukraine (*corresponding author*)

E-mail: lxan.ua@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6880-0029>

² Lviv Regional State Administration, Ukraine

E-mail: lv_goncharenko@ukr.net

³ Institute of Agriculture of Carpathian Region National Academy of Agrarian Sciences, Ukraine

E-mail: ahadzalo@ukr.net

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0675-2831>



potential. The realisation of this potential depends on regional economic conditions, land use structure, and the effectiveness of state support instruments.

Despite numerous scientific studies on the competitiveness of the agricultural sector, the regional aspect of the interaction between structural characteristics and state policy instruments remains insufficiently systematised. This necessitates an in-depth analysis of the territorial determinants of enterprises' competitive advantages.

The objective of the present study is to identify and assess the impact of structural and institutional factors on the competitiveness of Ukraine's agricultural sector at the regional level. For the purpose of this study, an analysis was conducted of theoretical and methodological approaches, regional features of the industry structure and land use, as well as the role of state financial support instruments in the formation of competitive advantages. The directions of the formation of a differentiated, territorially oriented agricultural policy were substantiated.

The study expands the scientific approach to analysing the competitiveness of the agricultural sector by combining structural and institutional analysis within a territorially differentiated framework. This is particularly relevant in the context of European integration processes and Ukraine's alignment of its agricultural policy with EU requirements.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations of the Study

The analysis of the competitive positions of industries and regions is based on classical theoretical approaches to the theories of competitive advantage and new economic geography. According to these approaches, competitiveness is the result of the interaction between productivity, the spatial concentration of economic activity, and access to markets (Porter, 2001; Krugman, 1992; Bennett & Smith, 2002).

In applied research on the agricultural sector, competitiveness is increasingly understood in terms of the interplay between productivity, resource efficiency, and the institutional conditions of management. The competitive position of agricultural and agri-food enterprises is influenced not only by technological factors, but also by the structural characteristics of production, the scale of activity, and access to politically determined support instruments (Latruffe, 2010).

In the contemporary economic literature on domestic agriculture, the competitiveness of this sector in the context of European integration is regarded as a multidimensional category formed under the influence of structural, institutional and regional-spatial development factors (Pylypenko et al., 2018). This necessitates the analysis of not only external economic

results, but also the internal structure of agricultural production and the conditions of its functioning.

Further development of scientific approaches involves taking into account the structural heterogeneity of the agricultural sector and the asymmetry of institutional conditions determining access to resources and state support mechanisms. Empirical studies confirm that the competitiveness of agricultural enterprises is influenced by the structure of the production industry, the concentration of resources, and the quality of the institutional environment (Khalatur et al., 2024; Vasylytsiv et al., 2023; Rudenko et al., 2022).

Generalising theoretical and applied approaches makes it possible to develop a conceptual framework for studying the competitiveness of the agricultural sector. This framework considers competitiveness to be the result of the interaction between the sector's production structure, land use concentration, and the institutional mechanisms of state financial support (Popova, 2024).

The theoretical and conceptual framework that has been developed determines the logic of the subsequent empirical analysis, which is aimed at evaluating the structural and institutional factors that influence the competitiveness of Ukraine's agricultural sector at a regional level. Section 3, in particular, analyses interregional differences in the sectoral structure of production and land use concentration, as well as the impact of financial and economic instruments of state support on the export performance of agricultural enterprises.

2.1. Sectoral Structure of Agricultural Production and Its Impact on Competitiveness

A defining feature of Ukraine's agricultural sector is its operation within a context of ongoing structural imbalances, stemming from the dominance of specific types of agricultural activity and the uneven distribution of production resources across sectors. The institutional prerequisites formed in the post-reform period mean that the production and commodity structure does not ensure balanced sector development and makes it difficult to guarantee food security. As an optimal combination of sectors contributes to balanced regional development, strengthening local markets and increasing food security, this issue is becoming increasingly relevant at regional and national levels.

Between 2019 and 2024, crop production dominated the structure of agricultural production in Ukraine, consistently accounting for over 80% of the sector, which indicates high concentration. The decline in livestock farming, which is more labour-intensive and less profitable, reduces production diversification and the sustainability of the agricultural system.

This emphasises the need for a strategic balance between sectors and increased competitiveness.

Stable crop specialisation contributes to strengthening the export orientation of the agricultural sector while limiting the potential for forming value chains through processing sub-sector production capacities. In Eastern European countries with post-transition economies, this issue was resolved through institutional measures, which simultaneously solved socio-economic problems.

In the Carpathian region of Ukraine, crop production accounts for a smaller proportion of the total compared to the national average, reflecting the specific characteristics of territories subject to natural, climatic, geographical and spatial constraints. In particular, the Lviv region's indicator fluctuated between 73.5% and 76.0% during the analysed period, indicating a relatively more balanced industry structure compared to Ukraine's average (see Table 1).

The dominance of crop production is the result not only of market conditions, but also of the institutional priorities of state agricultural policy, which focuses on supporting the production of agricultural crops that can compete in the export market. However, this development model hinders the revival of livestock farming and limits the diversification of agricultural producers' incomes, reducing the potential for the sustainable development of rural areas – particularly mountainous and foothill regions.

The increasing contribution of agricultural enterprises to the total production volume reflects the institutional transformation processes in the agricultural sector, the consolidation of economic structures, and the strengthening of the corporate segment (see Table 2).

According to statistical data, structural changes in the agricultural sector can increase export competitiveness through economies of scale, the concentration of resources, and the growth in producers' investment capacity. However, they can also lead to long-term

regional imbalances due to small and medium-sized enterprises having limited access to resources and sales channels. In contrast to Ukraine, structural transformations in EU countries occur amid institutionally balanced state support, enabling the growth of export orientation to be combined with the relatively stable development of farming and rural areas.

2.2. Concentration of Land Use and Structural Polarisation

The results of the land use concentration analysis indicate an increase in the structural polarisation of Ukraine's agricultural sector, as evidenced by the growing economic and social importance of large agricultural enterprises. This trend is due to the current model of state support, access to financial resources, and the regulatory environment being asymmetric, creating different development conditions for different groups of economic entities.

The processes of land use concentration in the agricultural sector have an economic and an institutional dimension. Research shows that, in EU countries, land consolidation is often accompanied by the displacement of small- and medium-sized producers, as well as the creation of unequal access to resources and state support (Kay et al., 2015). Such trends are considered a potential risk to the socio-economic sustainability of rural areas, contradicting the stated aim of balanced territorial development.

A high concentration of land use in the agricultural sector can be considered a prerequisite for increasing economic efficiency, as it facilitates the adoption of new technologies and increases investment and export capacity. However, in the absence of appropriate institutional conditions, such processes can hinder the development of small and medium-sized farms, which has a negative impact on employment, entrepreneurial

Table 1

Share of crop production of agricultural enterprises in the structure of agricultural production, %

| Region | Year | | | | | | Average | 2024 to 2019, ± |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|---------|-----------------|
| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | | |
| Ukraine | 83,8 | 81,7 | 85,3 | 81,3 | 84,4 | 83,2 | 83,3 | -0,6 |
| Carpathian region | 73,5 | 74,1 | 76,9 | 75,8 | 76,9 | 76,0 | 75,5 | +2,5 |
| Lviv region | 76,7 | 76,8 | 76,0 | 75,8 | 76,2 | 75,9 | 76,2 | -0,8 |

Source: calculated on the basis of data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine

Table 2

Share of agricultural production in total, %*

| Region | Year | | | | | | Average | 2024 to 2019, ± |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|---------|-----------------|
| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | | |
| Ukraine | 67,4 | 66,0 | 69,3 | 67,0 | 70,2 | 71,0 | 68,5 | 1,1 |
| Carpathian region | 36,8 | 38,9 | 42,1 | 42,4 | 44,1 | 47,2 | 41,9 | 5,1 |
| Lviv region | 49,3 | 50,6 | 54,2 | 56,2 | 57,5 | 61,5 | 54,9 | 5,6 |

Source: calculated on the basis of data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine

activity, and the socio-economic sustainability of rural areas. In this context, the concentration of land use has two effects: it provides short-term economic benefits but simultaneously deepens structural imbalances, contradicting the institutional principles of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, which focuses on supporting farms and promoting territorial cohesion and balanced regional development. The absence of differentiated state support instruments for small and medium-sized producers exacerbates these destructive effects and hinders the adaptation of national agricultural structures to European sustainable development principles.

The data presented in Tables 3 and 4 show that agricultural land use in the Lviv region is clearly polarised, as evidenced by the imbalance between the distribution of land resources and the quantitative structure of agricultural enterprises. According to statistical data, land use in the region is characterised by a high concentration of land in the hands of large agricultural enterprises. Between 2022 and 2025, farms with an area of over 1000 hectares consistently accumulated 69–71% of the total agricultural land area, confirming the dominant role of large-scale production. Enterprises with an area of up to 100 hectares accounted for less than 5% of the total, and the smallest group (up to 20 hectares) showed a tendency to decrease, indicating marginalisation. Medium-sized enterprises (100.1–500 hectares and 500.1–1,000 hectares) collectively used around 25–27% of the land and remained relatively stable throughout the study period. However, their impact

on the overall land use structure remained limited, confirming the presence of structural barriers to scaling up medium-commodity production (see Table 3).

In terms of the number of agricultural enterprises, small and medium-sized farms prevail in the region. Between 2022 and 2025, enterprises with land areas of up to 500 hectares accounted for over 70% of the total number of agricultural entities. This reflects the quantitative dominance of small- and medium-scale commodity production, which is characteristic of most EU countries (see Table 4).

The share of the smallest farms (up to 20 hectares) gradually decreased from 24.7% in 2022 to 18.5% in 2025. This indicates increased structural pressure on this group and limited economic sustainability. Conversely, a significant increase in the proportion of enterprises in the 20.1–100 ha and 100.1–500 ha categories suggests a shift towards more viable and competitive land usage.

Enterprises with an area of over 1000 ha retained the dominant positions in the use of land resources, accounting for only about 10–11% of the total. The asymmetry between the quantitative and land structures confirms the dualistic nature of agricultural land use at the regional level. This limits the inclusive development of rural areas and complicates the coordination of the regional agricultural structure with the institutional principles of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy.

The existing structural polarisation of the agricultural sector in the Lviv region highlights the need for targeted measures to support small and medium-

Table 3
Share of agricultural enterprises by land area in Lviv region, %

| Group | Year | | | |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
| Up to 20 ha | 0,5 | 0,5 | 0,5 | 0,4 |
| 20.1–100 ha | 3,4 | 3,6 | 3,8 | 3,8 |
| 100.1–500 ha | 12,3 | 12,2 | 11,9 | 12,8 |
| 500.1–1000 ha | 13,0 | 13,3 | 13,6 | 14,1 |
| Over 1000 ha | 70,8 | 70,5 | 70,3 | 68,9 |
| Total | 100,0 | 100,0 | 100,0 | 100,0 |

Source: calculated on the basis of data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine

Table 4
Share of agricultural enterprises by number in Lviv region, %

| Group | Year | | | |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
| Up to 20 ha | 24,7 | 20,8 | 20,6 | 18,5 |
| 20,1–100 ha | 30,0 | 32,6 | 34,0 | 33,8 |
| 100,1–500 ha | 25,2 | 26,5 | 25,9 | 27,9 |
| 500,1–1000 ha | 8,9 | 9,3 | 9,2 | 9,4 |
| Over 1000 ha | 11,2 | 10,8 | 10,3 | 10,4 |
| Total | 100,0 | 100,0 | 100,0 | 100,0 |

Source: calculated on the basis of data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine

sized farms, and to create a more balanced agricultural structure. This structure would be capable of ensuring the sustainable development of rural areas, which is a key prerequisite for their preservation and inclusion in the context of decentralisation and European integration processes.

2.3. State Financial Support and Export Performance

Without effective state financial support for agricultural producers, the formation of a competitive agricultural sector is impossible, and such support plays a stimulating role in the development of rural areas. In the current climate, such support requires a systemic review focused on the principles of sustainable, inclusive and diversified agricultural sector development, as well as coherence with the strategic principles of the European Green Deal.

The EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is increasingly combining competitiveness with territorial cohesion. According to European Commission documents (European Commission, 2023), CAP implementation involves considering the regional specifics of agricultural systems, applying flexible support tools, and strengthening the role of national and regional strategic plans. This approach aims to mitigate structural imbalances between regions and ensure the more inclusive and balanced development of rural areas.

A comparative analysis of the objectives and key performance indicators of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and Ukraine's national strategic documents reveals imbalances. While economic guidelines prevail in Ukrainian programmes, environmental and social indicators are presented fragmentarily. This limits the implementation of the principles of sustainable development and complicates integration into the European economic space. By contrast, EU CAP approaches provide for a comprehensive combination of economic, environmental, and social objectives in state support programmes, as well as differentiated instruments depending on farm type and regional conditions (European Commission, 2021). Even within the framework of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, however, there are still certain compromises to be made between economic efficiency, environmental objectives and social inclusion, particularly in structurally heterogeneous and peripheral regions.

In EU countries, state support for agricultural production is systemic and long-term, with the aim of strengthening the competitive position of small and medium-sized producers, supporting rural areas, and maintaining the ecological balance of land use. In Ukraine, financial support is mainly provided through short-term measures, which restricts the development

of sustainable structural changes and reduces the efficiency with which budget expenditure is multiplied.

The preservation of export volumes of Ukrainian agricultural products, particularly amid the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation, was ensured by a significant surge in exports to EU countries in 2022. This surge reached unprecedented levels during Ukraine's period of independence (Pugachov, 2023). This was due to a combination of institutional, logistical, and market factors, such as the abolition of temporary trade restrictions, the diversification of transport routes, and the ability of agricultural enterprises to adapt quickly to new conditions. At the same time, the competitiveness of Ukrainian products on European markets was preserved, ensuring stable demand even amid increased risks.

Ukraine is not only a recipient of international support, but also an active participant in ensuring global food security. Realising the export potential of the agricultural sector strengthens the state's foreign economic security by generating foreign exchange earnings, diversifying sales markets, and stabilising macroeconomic indicators.

At the same time, the current instruments of state financial support do not ensure a comprehensive structural transformation of the agricultural sector according to European standards. This limits Ukraine's integration into the EU's economic space and hinders the long-term increase in the competitiveness of agricultural enterprises. According to institutional economics, the agricultural sector is a system influenced by formal and informal rules, redistribution mechanisms and state regulation (North, 1990). EU countries' practices demonstrate that an effective structural transformation of the agricultural sector can be achieved by combining state financial instruments with an agricultural policy adapted to the specifics of regional agricultural systems (European Commission, 2021). Differentiating state support instruments according to the natural, climatic, spatial and socio-economic characteristics of regions, while orienting them towards supporting small and medium-sized producers as key actors in the sustainable development of rural areas, is a necessary condition for adapting the agricultural sector to the principles of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This systemic approach aligns with the theory of regional development, which states that regional competitiveness is shaped not only by the available resources, but also by the quality of the institutional environment (Storper, 1997).

Financial support for agricultural producers in the Lviv region is provided through a combination of state and regional programmes, as well as international assistance. Programmes for developing the region's agro-industrial complex, implemented within state and regional budgets, are the main financing instruments. However, analysis of the effectiveness of budget support

indicates limited effectiveness due to insufficient coordination between instruments and a lack of clear performance indicators at different management levels (Rykovska et al., 2024).

The structure of financial support in the Lviv region underwent significant changes in the ratio of funding sources between 2015 and 2023 (Table 5). At the same time, there was a lack of a stable, long-term budget support model.

Correlation analysis revealed a moderately strong positive correlation between the volume of state financial support and the export performance of the region's grain sector ($r = 0.61$). Although the corresponding indicator shows a trend of increasing export volumes with increasing budget incentives, a direct causal effect cannot be established due to the influence of the foreign economic situation, logistical restrictions, and military risks. Therefore, while state financial support is important, it is not the sole determining factor of competitiveness.

It should be noted that the aim of the correlation analysis is not to establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the volume of state financial support at the regional level and the export performance of the agricultural sector. The results presented reflect general trends in the relationship. Further research using econometric methods and panel regional data is required to provide a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of institutional influence on the export competitiveness of the agricultural sector.

The study showed that the competitiveness of the agricultural sector at a regional level depends on industry specialisation, the concentration of production resources, and state financial support. These factors interact within a specific regional agricultural structure. However, the current evolution of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reflects a combination of economic, environmental, and social goals. The SAP is gradually transforming into a policy that is more environmentally oriented, with increased decentralisation and expanded opportunities to adapt

support instruments to national and regional conditions (Lenormand, 2023). This is particularly relevant for Ukraine, where regional agrarian systems differ significantly in terms of production structure, land use and socio-economic characteristics.

4. Conclusions

The study showed that the competitiveness of the agricultural sectors in the Carpathian and Lviv regions of Ukraine is shaped by a complex interplay of structural and institutional factors. While the dominance of export-oriented crop production ensures the sector's current competitiveness, it limits the diversification of production and the development of livestock farming. This reduces the sustainability of the agricultural system and the potential for the sustainable development of rural areas. Analysis of land use concentration revealed clear structural polarisation within the sector, manifested by the dominance of large enterprises in terms of land area, while small and medium-sized farms remain numerically superior. While such a dualistic structure increases management efficiency and export potential, it also creates barriers to inclusive development, limiting the access of small and medium-sized producers to resources and markets and reducing the region's socio-economic balance.

Although state financial support is an important institutional factor, its impact on competitiveness and export performance is indirect and contingent on external market conditions, logistical constraints and military risks. The support system combines unified approaches with fragmented and unstable implementation practices, which limits its effectiveness in the regional context. It also partially fails to comply with the EU Common Agricultural Policy's principles of supporting farmers and promoting balanced territorial development.

The work's scientific novelty lies in its comprehensive justification of the need to adapt institutional and

Table 5

Financial support to the agricultural sector of Lviv region and grain exports

| Year | State budget | | Regional budget | | Grain export |
|------|--------------|------|-----------------|------|--------------|
| | million UAH | % | million UAH | % | thousand USD |
| 2015 | 16,3 | 74,1 | 5,7 | 25,9 | 61 819,9 |
| 2016 | 9,1 | 44,8 | 11,2 | 55,2 | 78 621,5 |
| 2017 | 45,0 | 80,1 | 11,2 | 19,9 | 89 748,5 |
| 2018 | 107,5 | 84,6 | 19,5 | 15,4 | 133 724,9 |
| 2019 | 117,4 | 86,7 | 18,0 | 13,3 | 214 458,2 |
| 2020 | 120,5 | 92,1 | 10,4 | 7,9 | 281 332,0 |
| 2021 | 260,4 | 93,6 | 17,7 | 6,4 | 340 118,2 |
| 2022 | 215,9 | 90,0 | 23,9 | 10,0 | 164 382,0 |
| 2023 | 134,1 | 74,8 | 45,1 | 25,2 | 161 304,7 |
| 2024 | 150,0 | 93,6 | 10,2 | 6,4 | 190 393,0 |

Source: according to the Department of Agro-Industrial Development of Lviv Region

economic mechanisms to the specifics of regional agricultural systems and EU requirements. This creates the basis for a differentiated, territorially oriented agricultural policy. The results obtained can be used to increase the effectiveness of state support, diversify

agricultural production, reduce structural imbalances and stimulate inclusive rural development. This will strengthen the competitiveness of agricultural enterprises and realise their export potential at national and international levels.

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Received on: 08th of February, 2026

Accepted on: 13th of May, 2026

Published on: 03rd of July, 2026