



UDC 338.43:352.07

The impact of the agricultural sector on the sustainable development of rural territorial communities

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► **Abstract.** The agricultural sector is one of the key components in achieving a higher level of sustainable development goals in Ukraine. Consequently, examining the interaction between these two aspects, including at the regional level, remains highly relevant. This study aimed to assess the impact of Ukraine's agricultural sector on the country's ability to achieve sustainable development at the regional level. The research focused on the agricultural sector of Mykolaiv region. Based on available statistical data for the region and Ukraine as a whole, the study summarised trends indicating a decline in livestock production and identified the underlying causes of this trend in the country. In particular, it was noted that contributing factors include climatic conditions (such as droughts and water shortages, exacerbated by the destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant), technological constraints, outdated equipment, and insufficient breeding programmes. It was shown that while there has been an overall increase in crop productivity across the country, the trend has been inconsistent: productivity initially rose but began to decline following the full-scale invasion in 2022. Additionally, examples of corporate social responsibility initiatives aimed at developing rural territorial communities were presented. The complex interplay of economic, environmental, and technological factors shaping the current development characteristics of the Mykolaiv region was also highlighted. The findings of this study may be utilised by national and local authorities in formulating strategies for achieving sustainable development goals, as well as by agricultural enterprises in developing their own long-term growth strategies

► **Keywords:** local economic development; microeconomics; corporate social responsibility; local authorities; standard of living

► **Suggested Citation:** Pavliuk, S., Poberezhets, H., Kravchenko, T., & Miroshkina, N. (2025). The impact of the agricultural sector on the sustainable development of rural territorial communities. *Ekonomika APK*, 32(1), 59-69. doi: 10.32317/ekon.apk/1.2025.59.

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► Introduction

Agriculture is a cornerstone of achieving sustainable development goals, particularly in countries where the agricultural sector is a leading driver of economic growth. Given this, the interrelationship between agriculture and sustainable development is significant in Ukraine. Special attention should be given to the experiences of communities, especially in the Mykolaiv region, which has suffered from prolonged military actions by Russia.

L.M. Zomchak (2023) assessed the potential for achieving better results in terms of sustainable development goals in Ukraine. The researcher constructed a model using a three-component approach – economic, social, and environmental. The economic component was represented by GDP, influenced by wages, turnover, exports, and inflation; the social component was represented by per capita income and employment levels; and the environmental component encompassed expenditures related to environmental protection. Based on the model, it was concluded that household incomes are growing faster than GDP, although the latter correlates with increases in both household incomes and environmental expenditures. The relationship between these variables indicates a complex interplay among these components of sustainable development. Furthermore, significant attention was paid to the negative impact of Russia's full-scale invasion on Ukraine's sustainable development. The conceptual foundations for sustainable development in Ukraine were examined in the study of T. Kharchenko (2021), which emphasised the importance of considering the agricultural sector and rural areas as a complex system requiring the application of the sustainable development concept for its formation. Moreover, the study highlighted the need to utilise mechanisms such as government regulation and economic, social, environmental, and managerial spheres of influence.

Research on the experience of rural areas through the stimulation of agritourism was conducted by Ye. Romanenko *et al.* (2020). In their view, rural development depends on the rural population, labour productivity, and government support for innovation. The tourism industry significantly contributes to the development of rural areas, unlike the agricultural sector, which is playing an increasingly smaller role in both national and regional economies. Therefore, policies focused on addressing environmental issues, increasing the competitiveness of European tourism, boosting demand for services, improving tourism products, and developing technologies in the sector are crucial. The potential for developing agricultural tourism was also described by M. Dziamulych *et al.* (2021). They highlighted the potential for agritourism development in Ukraine to improve the standard of living both nationally and locally, as well as to preserve cultural heritage. With its unique natural and cultural resources, the western region of Ukraine is particularly suited for agritourism development (Roman *et al.*, 2024). While numerous scholars associate the potential for regional development in Ukraine with agritourism, it is crucial to recognise that its formation and development are only feasible after the war has ended.

I. Petrunenko *et al.* (2021) noted the importance of overcoming current threats to the development of the agro-industrial complex in Ukraine. They suggested that improved economic security could be achieved through the agricultural sector by utilising unused farmland.

Meanwhile, N. Martynovych *et al.* (2023) explored the possibilities of rebuilding Ukraine's territory while considering the need for sustainable development. These authors concluded that the country required a new economic development model in the post-war period, primarily based on exporting agricultural raw materials. The researchers also noted that sustainable development has become a central concept for Ukraine's post-war development and proposed a set of indicators that can be used to develop a methodology for adhering to sustainable development principles in the country.

Thus, contemporary economic literature places significant emphasis on research into the interplay between the agricultural sector and the achievement of sustainable development goals. However, relatively little attention has been paid to the livestock sector compared to crop production. Nevertheless, at the regional level, assessing the impact of agriculture on regional sustainable development remains a relevant topic. Given this, this study aimed to evaluate the influence of agricultural sector development on achieving sustainable development goals in regions.

► Materials and methods

The study utilised specific statistical data to comprehensively assess the role of the agricultural sector in Ukraine's economic development. One of the primary sources of information was the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (n.d.). This resource provides access to detailed indicators, enabling analysis of trends in various sectors, particularly the agricultural sector, which is especially valuable for economic research. However, the bulk of the data for this study was sourced from the Main Department of Statistics in Mykolaiv Region (n.d.). Some data, particularly in the tables comparing the situation in Ukraine as a whole and in the Mykolaiv region, was only used up to 2022 (inclusive). This limitation is due to the unavailability of more recent data for this period. Furthermore, it was not possible to analyse data for individual united territorial communities, as statistical information in the public domain for these communities is absent. This source provided specific information, including the number of farm animals slaughtered, milk production volumes, the number of cattle and pigs, and crop yields for grains, legumes, and sunflowers. Additionally, the Mykolaiv Regional Statistics Office provided data on the GDP of agriculture, allowing for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of agricultural productivity in the region. This data was used to assess the role of the agricultural sector at the regional level and to compare it with national indicators. Information from various other sources was also utilised, including the European Commission, National Institute of Strategic Studies (2023), the Zabolotiv Territorial Community website (Areas of agricultural..., 2024), and others.

A mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods, was employed in this research to comprehensively assess the impact of agriculture on Ukraine's economy. Specifically, the study focused on Ukraine as the primary case study, while also including an analysis of international sustainable development practices, particularly those of the EU and the USA. This comparative framework helped to identify opportunities for integrating international sustainable

practices, such as animal welfare, environmental protection, and greenhouse gas emissions reduction, into the Ukrainian context. This allowed for an evaluation of the effectiveness of relevant international approaches and the drawing of conclusions regarding their potential adaptation in Ukraine to improve outcomes in the agricultural sector. A comparative method was used to assess the situation in Ukraine, the USA, and the EU, highlighting similarities and differences across these countries. Additionally, tabular and graphical methods were employed to visualise trends and structural changes.

The study examined case studies of cooperative initiatives and educational projects in Ukrainian agricultural enterprises to demonstrate the sector's role in social and economic resilience. Statistical tools were employed for quantitative analysis to identify correlations between agricultural development indicators in Mykolaiv and Ukraine as a whole. A correlation was considered significant if the coefficient exceeded ± 0.6 . This indicated a strong relationship between the indicators, while lower values suggested a lack of significant correlation between the variables. This approach allowed for an assessment of the extent to which trends in agriculture at the regional level correlate with national indicators and how the Mykolaiv region aligns with or deviates from the overall dynamics of agricultural development in Ukraine. In cases of low correlation, specific factors unique to the Mykolaiv region were considered, as these factors would likely have influenced changes in sectoral development at the local level due to its differences from the national average.

► Results

The agricultural sector plays a pivotal role in economic development, particularly in countries where farming is the primary source of income and employment. It is a fundamental source of food, essential for a nation's population, as self-sufficiency in food reduces reliance on imports, ensuring economic stability. Moreover, in many countries, the agricultural sector is a major employer, providing jobs for a significant portion of the population, especially in rural areas, thus reducing unemployment and improving living standards. In Ukraine, the sector constitutes a substantial portion of GDP and exports (a primary source of foreign exchange earnings, positively impacting the balance of payments and strengthening the national currency). The agricultural sector stimulates the development of other economic sectors such as agricultural machinery, chemical industries (fertilisers, pesticides), transport services, and the food processing industry. Its growth enhances living conditions in rural areas, including access to education, healthcare, and infrastructure, and ensures the sustainability of ecosystems (Lazarijeva, 2022).

Sustainable development is also a critical component of any country's development (Laurett et al., 2021), including Ukraine. It encompasses economic, social, and environmental aspects that together contribute to improving the quality of life for the population and ensuring

long-term well-being. Sustainable development also fosters economic growth but in a way that does not deplete natural resources and ensures lasting economic stability (Carmela Annosi et al., 2020; Patkós, 2020; Chopra et al., 2022). The implementation of sustainable technologies and practices can create new jobs in green energy, eco-friendly construction, and organic agriculture (Lehtonen et al., 2021). The concept positively influences the development of technologies that increase resource efficiency and reduce negative environmental impacts. Socially, sustainable development can improve living conditions by providing access to clean water, sanitation, healthcare, and quality education. It promotes social justice and helps to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor (Rounghi et al., 2020). Furthermore, sustainable development encourages citizen participation in decision-making that affects their lives and environment, thereby strengthening democracy and social cohesion. Environmentally, sustainable development ensures the rational use and conservation of natural resources, such as water, forests, and biodiversity. The implementation of clean technologies helps reduce air, water, and soil pollution (Qiu et al., 2021). Moreover, sustainable development contributes to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change, which is crucial for preventing environmental disasters. Achieving the goals of sustainable development has become an international development strategy for many countries (Lajoie-O'Malley et al., 2020; Hrustek, 2020). Researchers have noted that the concept also fosters international cooperation: countries that actively implement sustainable development can strengthen their position on the international stage and attract more investment.

Therefore, agriculture plays a pivotal role in achieving sustainable development goals, contributing to economic growth, environmental conservation, and social well-being (Tiurina et al., 2021; Dovgal et al., 2024). It is a primary source of income and employment for a significant portion of the population, especially in rural areas, and increasing productivity and incomes in this sector can help reduce poverty and inequality. Moreover, supporting small-scale farmers and developing agribusinesses fosters economic growth at both the local and national levels. Additionally, the development of sustainable agriculture leads to increased food production, helping to ensure food security, while improving the quality and diversity of food products contributes to better nutrition and health. The use of environmentally friendly farming practices helps reduce negative environmental impacts, including greenhouse gas emissions, and protects water resources and biodiversity. Furthermore, the development of this sector supports social stability by creating jobs and reducing migration from rural to urban areas (Bexolli et al., 2023). Due to a lack of corresponding data, it is not feasible to analyse trends in more detail for individual united territorial communities. However, such an analysis can be conducted for the region as a whole. The selected data for the years from 2017 onwards are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Selected data characterising agriculture in the Mykolaiv region from 2017 to 2023

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Area of cultivated agricultural crops (thousands of ha)	1,560.1	1,564.8	1,572.3	1,564.9	1,607.1	1,300.6	1,231
Area harvested for cereal crops (thousands of ha)	874.9	867.8	890.2	880.7	950.5	705.2	617.7

Table 1, Continued

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Cereal crop production volume (thousands of centners)	26,746.4	26,734.2	31,379	23,620.6	39,255.4	21,336.4	24,131.2
Cereal crop yield (centners per ha)	30.6	30.8	35.3	26.8	41.3	30.3	39.1
Area harvested for fodder crops (thousands of ha)	3	2.5	2.3	2.2	2.2	1.4	0.9
Fodder crop production volume (thousands of centners)	492.3	390.8	417.1	338.1	441.1	255.9	156.4
Fodder crop yield (centners per ha)	161.9	155.5	182.5	156.4	200.2	179.8	178.8

Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (n.d.) and the Main Department of Statistics in Mykolaiv Region (n.d.)

Analysing agricultural production data from 2017 to 2023 reveals several key trends. Sown areas for harvested crops exhibited stability with a slight increase from 2017 to 2019, but in 2021, the area grew significantly, followed by a decline to 1,231 thousand ha in 2023, likely due to the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the temporary occupation of certain territories. Grain crop production fluctuated during the study period, also

declining after 2022 with a slight recovery in 2023, suggesting a positive trend towards increased production efficiency. Harvested areas of fodder crops have been steadily decreasing from 2017 to 2023 – from 3 to 0.9 thousand ha. Consequently, fodder crop production has also fallen, especially after 2019, indicating a potential reduction in feed production for livestock. A more detailed analysis of the livestock sector is presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Data on live weight sold for slaughter, milk production, eggs from poultry, and wool production in Ukraine and Mykolaiv region from 2013 to 2022

Ukraine					
Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Live weight sold for slaughter (thousand tonnes)	3,378.8	3,323.5	3,279.9	3,271.6	3,265.9
Milk production (gross yield) (thousand tonnes)	11,490	11,132.8	10,615.1	10,381.5	10,279.6
Eggs from poultry (million pieces)	19,603.7	19,587.3	16,781.2	15,100.4	15,525.9
Wool production (gross shearing) (tonnes)	3,525	2,602	2,270	2,072	1,971
Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Live weight sold for slaughter (thousand tonnes)	3,317.6	3,492.7	3,462.3	3,391.2	3,059.1
Milk production (gross yield) (thousand tonnes)	10,064	9,697	9,263.6	8,713.9	7,767.7
Eggs from poultry (million pieces)	16,132	16,676.6	16,167.2	14,071.3	11,921.8
Wool production (gross shearing) (tonnes)	1,908	1,734	1,574	1,497	1,237
Mykolaiv region					
Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Live weight sold for slaughter (thousand tonnes)	49.6	57.7	52	49.8	48.1
Milk production (gross yield) (thousand tonnes)	370.7	369.3	343.8	341.6	342.2
Eggs from poultry (million pieces)	299.6	500	284.1	271.5	252.7
Wool production (gross shearing) (tonnes)	101	124	123	124	132
Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Live weight sold for slaughter (thousand tonnes)	56.4	50.9	40.3	40.3	33.8
Milk production (gross yield) (thousand tonnes)	324.6	299	278.5	245.7	197.3
Eggs from poultry (million pieces)	240.1	275.4	201.6	156.9	136.2
Wool production (gross shearing) (tonnes)	146	113	98	100	75

Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (n.d.) and the Main Department of Statistics in Mykolaiv Region (n.d.)

Table 3. Data on the number of cattle (including cows), pigs, and poultry in Ukraine and Mykolaiv region from 2013 to 2022, in thousand heads

Ukraine					
Years	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Cattle	4,645.9	4,534	3,838.5	3,983.9	3,682.3
Cows	2,554.3	2,508.8	2,174.1	2,276.2	2,108.9
Pigs	7,576.7	7,922.2	7,042.7	7,313	6,669.1
Poultry	214,070.6	230,204.7	198,864.4	206,633.6	201,668
Years	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Cattle	3,573.7	3,332.9	3,117.7	2,874	2,662.8
Cows	2,040.5	1,919.4	1,806.5	1,673	1,555.3
Pigs	6,108.6	6,025.3	5,730.4	5,876.2	5,611.9

Table 3, Continued

Ukraine					
Years	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Poultry	204,751.5	211,654.4	220,463.2	200,651.9	202,243.1
Mykolaiv region					
Years	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Cattle	150.3	154.5	141.9	139.3	140.4
Cows	89.8	90.1	80.1	81.7	77.8
Pigs	139.6	147.1	113	129.5	99.9
Poultry	3,723.9	4,248.3	2,666.6	2,915.9	2,708.9
Years	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Cattle	145.1	98.5	86.9	74	66.6
Cows	74.6	60.8	54	47.4	43
Pigs	90.5	83.1	77.6	72.6	67.6
Poultry	2,723.6	2,554.2	2,453.2	1,957.1	1,994.7

Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (n.d.) and the Main Department of Statistics in Mykolaiv Region (n.d.)

As Table 3 shows, the trend in agricultural production in Ukraine and the Mykolaiv region from 2013 to 2022 has been declining in key categories: meat, milk, eggs, wool, and live weight of animals sold for slaughter. Data on the number of cattle, cows, pigs, and poultry in Ukraine and the Mykolaiv region from 2013 to 2022 indicates a general decline in livestock numbers, particularly cattle and pigs, suggesting declining profitability and high costs that are limiting growth in the agricultural sector. By identifying correlations between the corresponding indicators characterising trends in the Mykolaiv region and Ukraine, it is possible to assess the reasons for these trends. Given that the correlation coefficients are high (above 0.75) for all indicators except live weight and wool production, it can be inferred that the decline in indicators is primarily linked to overall economic trends, namely the onset of the war with Russia in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Russia in 2022. The more rapid decline in the Mykolaiv region is largely due to its proximity to the war zone and the temporary occupation in 2022.

Livestock productivity in Ukraine is influenced by numerous factors that interact in complex ways. One such factor is climate. Droughts and water scarcity, particularly in southern regions, create challenges for growing fodder crops, leading to feed shortages and directly impacting livestock productivity. The destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant has exacerbated this issue, as farmers in southern regions have lost access to irrigation water. Additionally, the quality of feed is often inadequate (with limited access to high-quality feed), which restricts production growth in the sector. Another critical aspect is genetics. Ukraine has limited use of high-performing livestock breeds, and modern genetic programs are underdeveloped, hindering opportunities to improve productivity (Shahini *et al.*, 2023). Technological factors are equally important, as many farms utilise outdated equipment, preventing the implementation of modern technologies. Farmers must now also focus on energy efficiency, as blackouts can not only cause damage to farms but also completely halt their operations, as livestock cannot survive for long without the necessary conditions. In addition, high costs of feed, fuel, and electricity significantly reduce the profitability of livestock farming. The lack of government support and subsidies further

complicates the situation, especially for small and medium-sized farms. There is also a problem with human capital, as young people often choose to migrate to cities or abroad, leading to a shortage of skilled workers in agriculture (Shyian *et al.*, 2023). Finally, the unstable market, with fluctuating prices for livestock products and dependence on imports, forces farmers to reduce livestock numbers or decrease production volumes, which also affects overall productivity (Lanchenko & Ivchenko, 2023).

The agricultural sector in Ukraine provides numerous examples of how agricultural enterprises can positively impact the local economic development of rural communities. For instance, Syngenta (One step closer..., 2023) has introduced innovative technologies such as the Interra Scan soil mapping service, enabling farmers to use resources more efficiently and increase yields, demonstrating an environmentally friendly approach to sustainable development. The agro-industrial holding Astarta has been actively pursuing a social policy since 2008, with projects aimed at improving rural infrastructure, supporting education and healthcare, developing culture and sports, and fostering entrepreneurship and community development. In 2019, in partnership with the international consulting company Deloitte (Ukraine), a project was implemented for the Volochysk community to identify problems, growth points, and develop and implement SMART ideas based on the collected information to improve the lives of residents; ensure transparency and openness of local government, partnerships with businesses, and activate the participation of residents in community development processes. The development of a Community Development Strategy for 2028 and the creation of niche businesses such as the "Pranuka" natural cosmetics business project and the "Eco-pig" family farm are underway. Furthermore, since 2020, the holding company, in partnership with the organisation Pact Ukraine and the charity "Light of Hope", and with financial support from the Canadian government, has been implementing a project in four territorial communities of the Poltava region (Hlobyne, Kozelshchyna, Bilyky, and Shyshaky territorial communities) and the city of Poltava. This project aims to improve the economic well-being of rural women by strengthening their economic security and enhancing their employment opportunities and

developing women's entrepreneurship. To date, 79 business projects have been financed. In May 2020, Astarta (n.d.), together with the public organisation "International Environmental Security", implemented the online project "Eco-education in Communities". The program was aimed at engaging young people in addressing environmental safety and eco-education.

Cooperative relationships in the agricultural sector also contribute to the development of local communities, which are spreading across the country. The creation of cooperatives allows small farmers to pool their resources for joint land cultivation, reducing costs and increasing incomes. This improves the economic stability of rural families and leads to a higher standard of living for the population. In the Khmelnytskyi region, a cooperative was established for the cultivation of raspberries, blackberries, and strawberries by local residents. They leased 9 ha of communal land and obtained a bank loan to purchase equipment. Thanks to the success of the cooperative, none of its members have emigrated abroad, and the enterprise plans to expand further by installing refrigeration equipment and a berry freezing station (Shtogrin, 2022). In the Poltava region, local communities are involved in beekeeping support programs, which increase the number of jobs. This has led to increased incomes for local residents and improved quality of life in rural areas (National Institute of Strategic Studies, 2023). Furthermore, some agricultural enterprises are implementing social projects aimed at developing infrastructure, education, and healthcare in rural areas. This includes investments in local infrastructure development and the provision of humanitarian aid (Areas of agricultural..., 2024). As practice shows, such investments in building schools, kindergartens, and medical facilities significantly improve the quality of life for local residents, create jobs, and enable the development of both local businesses and the village and community as a whole.

It should be noted that with the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, many companies have changed their social responsibility priorities (Kim *et al.*, 2025). For example, the agricultural holding Kernel, which had previously implemented projects such as supporting schools, medical institutions, and developing infrastructure and culture in the regions where the company operates, is now actively working to support internally displaced persons. For instance, the company has built dormitories for such displaced persons, provided communities with necessary goods and services, helped restore critical infrastructure, and contributed to the creation of new jobs (by helping to train women and displaced persons in new professions) (War changes the rules..., 2024).

Despite challenging conditions, agricultural enterprises continue to operate and support local communities. They ensure food security and support social programs, including investments in local infrastructure and the provision of humanitarian aid (Hromov, 2022). Regarding youth education, there are some initiatives underway. For example, Bayer has been collaborating with the educational master's project "AgroKebety" for five years, aiming to cultivate a new generation of Ukrainian farmers. Students undergo a six-month internship where they acquire both theoretical knowledge and practical

skills under the guidance of Bayer experts. This practical experience includes studying business operations directly at the factory and in the field. Similarly, Continental focuses on youth development through its own internship programs designed for future employment within the company. Initially, these programs focused on agronomy and engineering, but have since expanded to include other professions. Efforts are also made to improve the skills of existing specialists and to attract veterans to the sector. This is relevant in the context of the war in Ukraine, given the need for mutual support among different segments of society, as well as addressing challenges related to sustainable development.

In the context of international sustainable development, the EU has made significant contributions by integrating environmental, economic, and social aspects into agricultural production. One key focus is on high animal welfare standards, which include restrictions on cage confinement, requirements for free range access, and adequate space for animals. This promotes animal health, improves product quality, and reduces the risk of zoonotic diseases. Another important focus is on environmental sustainability: the EU supports practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as limiting intensive grazing, using biogas plants, and reducing nitrogen fertiliser use. These measures help to mitigate the negative impacts of livestock farming on soil and water resources. Simultaneously, the EU is actively working to reduce the use of antibiotics in livestock farming to combat antimicrobial resistance, promoting disease prevention through improved husbandry practices and vaccinations. This enhances food safety and prevents the spread of antibiotic-resistant microorganisms. Supporting innovation and research through programs such as Horizon Europe (European Commission, n.d.b) is of great importance. These programs fund the development of technologies to increase production efficiency and reduce environmental impact, such as using artificial intelligence to monitor animal health. The EU also supports biodiversity and landscape restoration: farmers receive financial incentives for implementing environmentally friendly practices, such as extensive grazing, which helps to preserve the diversity of local plant and animal species. Social sustainability of rural communities is supported through grants for small farmers and short supply chains – from farm to fork, which reduces the carbon footprint of products. Within the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU, a significant portion of funds is allocated to supporting sustainable practices in agriculture, where farmers receive subsidies for meeting environmental requirements such as preserving natural landscapes and limiting the use of fertilisers (European Commission, 2019). However, this represents only 5-6% of the total subsidies, with the majority going to support farmers' incomes rather than specific environmental measures.

The approach in the USA is generally similar. One of the country's primary initiatives is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through waste management. For instance, biogas plants on farms can convert waste into energy, reducing methane emissions and providing farmers with an additional source of income. Furthermore, to reduce environmental impact, there is a strong focus on controlling

water and fertiliser use: farms optimise irrigation processes and minimise the amount of nitrogen fertilisers, which pollute water resources. Additionally, there are standards regarding animal welfare, including increased space for free range and improved indoor conditions for animals. Moreover, reducing the use of antibiotics is a priority: there are legislative restrictions on their prophylactic use, decreasing the risk of antibiotic resistance; and innovations such as digital animal health monitoring and automated feeding processes are being implemented. One of the largest financial support programs for farmers in the USA is the Farm Bill (National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, 2018), which specialises in providing subsidies, loans, and other forms of support for the agricultural sector. Specifically, this program provides subsidies for growing major crops, crop insurance programs, and disaster relief, as well as funding for farmers transitioning to organic production. To support small and medium-sized farms, the US Department of Agriculture offers the Microloan Program, which helps cover ongoing operational costs, including the purchase of equipment and seeds. There is also the Risk Management Agency's Crop Insurance Programme, which provides insurance policies to protect farmers from losses due to natural disasters or price fluctuations.

In Europe and the USA, the development of digital technologies in livestock farming has gained significant traction. A notable example is the use of sensors to monitor environmental conditions in real time: they are used to control temperature, humidity, CO₂ levels, and other air parameters (Neethirajan, 2020). Beyond monitoring the environment, European and American farms actively utilise sensors to monitor feed and water resources, ensuring accurate feed and water delivery. This prevents deviations in animal feed intake, reduces costs, and increases resource use efficiency. European countries and the USA are investing heavily in developing "smart" farms where digital technologies are integrated into a single network, allowing data from various systems to be tracked and changes to be responded to instantaneously (Idoje *et al.*, 2021). The development of the Internet of Things and cloud-based data storage platforms enables farmers to analyse data in real time and make informed management decisions aimed at increasing productivity and reducing costs. Regarding farmer education in the context of digital technologies, this is also a crucial component of agricultural development in the country. Approaches are based on adapting farmers to new technologies and their understanding of how innovations can contribute to farm growth. Educational programs organised by agricultural universities and colleges offer courses covering modern digital technologies in livestock farming. Additionally, government and international initiatives, such as the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development in the EU and initiatives from the US Department of Agriculture, provide financial support and professional training for farmers, fostering the adoption of digital technologies in agriculture (European Commission, n.d.a).

Therefore, conducting agricultural activities following the principles of sustainable development, and aligned with the main goals for 2030, will contribute to the rational use of natural resources, environmental conservation,

increased responsibility for the development of rural communities, and the creation of a competitive wage system and decent living conditions for local populations.

► Discussion

Sustainable development is crucial for a country's long-term well-being, encompassing economic, social, and environmental aspects. In Ukraine, promoting agricultural development within this framework contributes to food security, improved nutrition, and increased social stability by creating jobs and reducing rural-urban migration. Correlation analysis has revealed a link between indicators of agricultural sector development in regions and the standard of living of the population. Given this, promoting the development of this sector is of paramount importance in Ukraine, especially in times of war.

The current study has provided numerous examples of how Ukrainian farmers have contributed to achieving sustainable development goals in Ukraine. A similar component was described in the research of C. Nhemachena *et al.* (2020), which examined the impact of climate change on the water and agricultural sectors in Southern Africa. They noted that climate change poses a significant threat to water and food security, affecting poverty reduction and sustainable development efforts. Understanding these impacts on water and agriculture is crucial for developing resilient systems. It highlights the urgent need for pathways towards sustainable food systems and transformative solutions, particularly in Southern Africa, where decreasing rainfall and rising temperatures threaten water availability and agricultural productivity. Investments in efficient irrigation technologies are vital for adapting to limited water resources and meeting the food demands of a growing population while enhancing the resilience of water and agricultural systems is essential for sustaining agricultural productivity and achieving regional development goals (Wang *et al.*, 2024). The current study also provided examples of how Ukrainian farmers have contributed to regional development. It was concluded that the activities of these farmers have a positive impact on both the development of agriculture in the country and the ability to achieve higher levels of sustainable development.

The current research has demonstrated that local enterprises can independently contribute to achieving sustainable development at the local level through concrete actions taken by farmers. The role of achieving sustainable development goals was also highlighted by E.B. Ali *et al.* (2021). The researchers wrote that the transition to a "green" economy has significant potential to mitigate environmental, economic, and social risks, while simultaneously sustainably improving all sectors of the economy. Attention was also drawn to the role of the state in achieving such goals, and the dangers that can arise from high levels of corruption in countries implementing such approaches. The development of small-scale enterprises in the agro-industrial complex was investigated by A. Ruml *et al.* (2022). They evaluated the development of small-scale palm oil producers in Ghana and Indonesia. Indonesia has successfully implemented large-scale programs that have united small landowners and private companies, thanks to a large amount of suitable land and favourable land tenure systems. In contrast, Ghana focused on

state-owned plantations and attempted to attract private investors, but the lack of secure land tenure and traditional land control hindered agricultural investment. In other words, Indonesia's actions towards developing such small-scale enterprises proved to be more effective as they were more centralised and state-directed, enabling both farmer development and improved living standards for residents in these regions. This suggests that in Ukraine, policies aimed at regional development should be formulated centrally by the state. Politicians should develop programs focused on the development of small-scale farming in the country: this would provide a significant number of jobs in regional areas, thus improving the living standards of local populations. Given the positive impact of such farms on the more effective development of communities, the state should support the activities of agricultural producers.

The rapid development of the agricultural sector can also lead to the emergence of agrotowns, a concept explored by N. Galluzzo (2022) concerning Italy. The researcher noted that the formation of agro-towns in regions such as Calabria, Apulia, Basilicata, Sicily, and Sardinia over the past century (1900-2000) has contributed to the development of social capital, which, combined with human capital, has fostered economic growth in surrounding rural areas. The study highlighted that increasing social capital through initiatives funded by national and European authorities is crucial for strengthening interactions among all stakeholders in rural areas and agro-towns. These initiatives have transformed agro-towns from degraded areas with high underemployment in agriculture into advanced socio-economic structures. This transition has narrowed the urban-rural divide, emphasising the positive role of rural areas, especially where agro-towns are culturally dominant. As a result, some farms have become efficient enterprises with specialised production, meeting the new functional needs of rural tourism (Trusova *et al.*, 2020). Researchers have argued that, with adequate funding and support from national and European policies, the combination of social development, social capital, innovation, and investment can protect the environment and ensure sustainable economic growth in rural areas. While this research did not specifically focus on the role of government in promoting more effective local development, it is important to note that achieving results in this area is difficult without government involvement. This is because farmers may require additional support from government authorities to achieve higher levels of local development. Furthermore, interaction with local authorities is necessary to develop a comprehensive and effective plan for achieving the set goals for territorial development. Thus, through joint efforts between the state and enterprises, significantly better results can be achieved in attaining sustainable development goals.

As previously mentioned, this research did not delve deeply into the specific actions that governments can take to improve the efficiency of local farmers. However, one potential solution is the creation of cooperatives. The possibilities of agricultural development through cooperatives were explored by Y. Qu *et al.* (2023). The researchers noted that the implementation of such policies has faced numerous challenges, including declining membership, weak capital growth, talent shortages, limited-service

capabilities, low standardisation of production, and inadequate surplus distribution systems. However, there are successful regional cases that have managed to implement integrated development models and improve the situation in terms of poverty reduction. Key recommendations for addressing cooperative challenges include improving project planning, encouraging family farms and large households to join cooperatives, increasing market competition, enhancing financial management systems, and providing more comprehensive government support, including investment guarantees. An assessment of sustainable agriculture and rural development in China was conducted by S. Hu *et al.* (2022). The study revealed that areas with low levels of agricultural development and sustainability are predominantly located in mountainous regions and southeastern traditional agricultural areas with poor agricultural environments. Given the importance of ensuring that all areas of the country achieve a higher level of development over time, the researchers noted that these components have received significantly less attention than necessary. The researchers paid significant attention to the importance of achieving sustainable development goals for these areas and highlighted the need for more efficient resource use in such regions. In light of this, it was emphasised that there is a need to more actively involve the state and its representatives in achieving sustainable development goals, formulating government programs, and incentivising farmers. However, it should be noted that additional funding or other forms of incentives are essential for achieving these goals.

► Conclusions

Agriculture plays a pivotal role in the economic development of many countries, particularly those where it is the primary source of income and employment. Moreover, this sector is crucial for achieving sustainable development as it positively impacts economic growth, environmental protection, and social well-being. Environmentally sound agricultural practices reduce the sector's negative impact on the environment, including greenhouse gas emissions and the protection of water resources and biodiversity, while sustainable agriculture increases food production, ensuring food security and improving the quality and health of food. The research demonstrated that various agricultural enterprises in Ukraine have shown how agricultural activities can positively impact local communities, as exemplified by the practices of agricultural holdings such as Astarta and Kernel. Agricultural enterprises have also invested in social projects that develop infrastructure, education, and healthcare in rural communities, significantly improving the quality of life. New jobs provide stable incomes for families, and social projects support education, healthcare, and social protection. In light of this, it can be concluded that the activities of key players in the agricultural sector play a significant role in achieving sustainable development goals in Ukraine. The study also assessed the experience of EU countries and the USA regarding sustainable development policies in agriculture. It was shown that the models share many similarities, and their integration in Ukraine could significantly improve policy effectiveness in this area. A relevant area for future research is to assess the existing

opportunities to stimulate the development of the agricultural sector in Ukraine, particularly in the regions, to ensure both higher quality and more rapid development of these areas, and to ensure more effective achievement of sustainable development goals.

► Acknowledgements

None.

► Conflict of interest

None.

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► **Анотація.** Аграрний сектор є одним із основних в контексті забезпечення більш високого рівня досягнення цілей сталого розвитку в Україні. У зв'язку з цим, дослідження взаємодії даних двох складових, у тому числі на рівні регіонів, є актуальним. В рамках даного дослідження метою було оцінити те, який вплив чинить сільське господарство України на можливості досягнення країною сталого розвитку на регіональному рівні. Дослідження було зосереджено на аграрному секторі Миколаївської області. В роботі, на основі наявних статистичних даних по області та Україні в цілому, було узагальнено тенденції до зниження виробництва тваринницької продукції, описано причини, що викликають даний тренд в країні. Зокрема було зазначено, що причиною цього стали кліматичні чинники (посухи та дефіцит води, посилений руйнуванням Каховської гідроелектростанції), технологічні обмеження, застаріле обладнання та недостатні програми розведення. Було показано, що в країні спостерігається підвищення продуктивності посівних культур в країні в цілому, але тенденція є непостійною: спочатку показник зростав, але почав знижуватися у зв'язку з повномасштабним вторгненням 2022 року. Крім того, наведено приклади соціальної відповідальності бізнесу щодо розвитку сільських територіальних громад. Також було зазначено складну взаємодію економічних, екологічних і технологічних факторів, що формують актуальні особливості розвитку Миколаївської області. Висновки, отримані в роботі, можуть бути використані представниками державної та місцевої влади для формування стратегій досягнення цілей сталого розвитку, а також підприємствами аграрного сектору для формування власних довгострокових стратегій розвитку

► **Ключові слова:** місцевий економічний розвиток; мікроекономіка; соціальна відповідальність бізнесу; місцева влада; рівень життя