

## DIVERSIFICATION OF FRUIT MARKETING MARKETS - AS A BASIC FACTOR IN THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE SECTOR

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**Abstract:** Agriculture plays an essential role in society, the environment and the economy, contributing significantly to the social and economic well-being of a country. One area of major importance in this sector is horticulture, in particular fruit production, which influences both the economy and the health of the population and environmental sustainability. This sector covers the entire value chain from production and processing to distribution and marketing, including both fresh and processed fruit. The diversification of fruit markets is a key factor in ensuring the sustainability of this sector. Throughout the value chain, producers face challenges such as price volatility, international competition and climate change. This paper examines the importance of accessing new local, national and international markets and the impact of this diversification on the economic stability of producers. To achieve the proposed objective, several materials, studies, comprehensive research and analysis related to this important link of the national economy, statistical data, international rankings were analyzed. The research results demonstrate that through effective distribution strategies, marketing innovation and adoption of quality standards, producers can reduce business risks and optimize their revenues. The study emphasizes that smart diversification of markets not only contributes to the financial stability of producers, but also to the sustainable development of the whole fruit sector.

**Keywords:** market diversification, fruit sector, sustainability, export, agriculture.

**JEL Classification:** Q1, Q10, Q12, Q17.

### 1. Introduction

In the context of globalization and the increasing challenges faced by the agricultural sector, market diversification has become an essential element to ensure the sustainability of the fruit sector. Fruit producers face fluctuations in demand, unpredictable climatic conditions, price fluctuations and fierce competition, both internally and externally. Under these conditions, access to a wide range of local, regional and external markets is no longer just an opportunity for growth, but a strategic necessity for economic stability and sustainable development of the sector. Market diversification contributes not only to increasing producer incomes, but also to reducing risks and strengthening agricultural value chains. This paper aims to highlight the importance of this diversification as a fundamental pillar in maintaining the competitiveness and long-term viability of the fruit sector.

### 2. Basic content

Agriculture is an essential pillar of the Moldovan economy, contributing about 10% to the gross domestic product (GDP), generating about 45% of total exports and providing employment for about 30% of the working population (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova, 2021). Although the agricultural sector has considerable natural and human potential, its development is often limited by scarce economic resources. There are also major discrepancies in the level of technical equipment, labour productivity, use of fertilizers and degree of innovation. However, through the implementation of coherent modernization policies, the adoption of well-founded measures and strengthened cooperation between authorities, producers and exporters, it is possible to revitalize and sustainably develop agriculture. This process can make a significant contribution to national economic progress

and improve the living standards of the population (Iatisin, 2023; Stratan, Iatişin and Ceban, 2023; Stratan and Iatişin, 2022).

According to the data of the National Bureau of Statistics on all forms of ownership, a total of 2.50 million ha of agricultural land was registered in the country on January 1, 2024. Utilized agricultural area in agricultural year 2023 was 1870.5 thousand ha (about 76% of total agricultural land), of which 1600.8 thousand ha (86.4%) belonged to privately owned farms and 269.7 thousand ha (43.9%) to publicly owned farms. Multi-annual plantations account for 265.7 thousand ha, which is about 11% of the total area of agricultural land. In the private sector, multiannual plantations amounted to 228.4 thousand ha or 86%, and in the public sector only 14%. The land occupied by fruits, nuts, fruit bushes and strawberry bushes constituted 120.2 thousand ha, and that under vineyards 120.5 thousand ha. Only 13.3 thousand ha of the area of multiannual plantations are irrigated (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova, 2021).

The fruit sector occupies a central place in the agricultural economy, playing an important role in ensuring food security and income generation. The fruit sector is characterized by its high economic value, due to the diversity of cultivated species, constant market demand and the multiple possibilities for valorization, including processing. Compared to other agricultural crops, fruit offers greater flexibility in marketing, as it can be sold fresh or processed into juices, jams, jellies, jams, compotes or dried fruits. This characteristic allows for the expansion of sales channels and an increase in added value, thus contributing to the economic consolidation of the sector and the development of domestic and foreign markets (Balan, Manziuc and Peşteanu, 2018).

At national level, fruit growing generates income for thousands of households and commercial farms, providing jobs in production, processing, packing and distribution. By expanding production capacity, modernizing plantations and increasing product quality, fruit can become an important vector for local economic development, especially in rural areas. In addition to the direct economic aspect, fruit growing also helps to protect the environment by maintaining biodiversity, reducing soil erosion and making use of hilly or less fertile land unsuitable for other agricultural crops. Fruit consumption is also promoted in public health policies, which supports long-term demand and provides market stability. Thus, the fruit sector should be seen not only as a source of income for farmers, but as a strategic pillar in the sustainable development of agriculture and the rural economy.

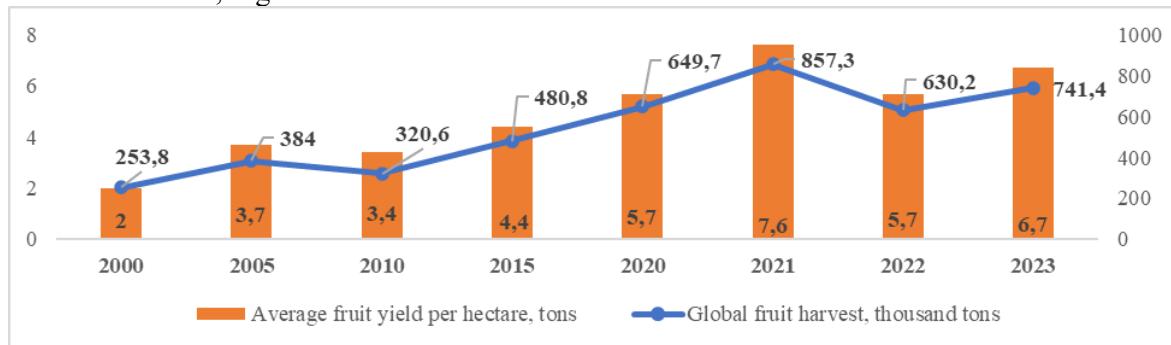
The dynamics of the areas planted with fruit are tending to decline slowly, as a large part of the orchard areas are out of date (they are being cleared on a massive scale) and the planting of new orchards is mainly based on more intensive technologies, which is timely and much more competitive for farmers and for accessing new markets. Thus, in 2023 the area of orchards amounted to 130.7 thousand ha being decreased by 2.2% compared to 2022, this trend has been recorded since 2000, when the area of plantations amounted to 135.9 thousand ha, Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Area of orchards, all categories of households, thousand ha**

Source: Elaborated by the author using the data from the National Bureau of Statistics, [https://statistica.gov.md/files/files/publicatii\\_electronice/Anuar\\_Statistic/2024/16\\_AS.pdf](https://statistica.gov.md/files/files/publicatii_electronice/Anuar_Statistic/2024/16_AS.pdf)

The fruit-growing sector is a basic sector that generates employment, agricultural production for export and is a source of income for rural localities. In 2023, the orchard areas in the country amounted to 130.7 thousand ha, of which 109.8 thousand ha are under fruit set, where the largest share is held by seed fruit 38.9% (50.8 thousand ha), followed by stone fruit 31.1% (40.7 thousand ha). The volume of production differs from one species to another, given the biological peculiarities of the crop fruiting. In the species of apple, walnut, fruiting shrubs and strawberry it has been increasing from year to year, with the highest values in 2016 and 2018. These results confirm that the production volume is increasing from year to year due to the implementation of new modern technologies. In the year 2023 the global fruit harvest amounted to 741.4 thousand tons being 17.6% more than in 2022 (global harvest amounted to 630.2 thousand tons). In the structure of the production volume for 2023 we note, that the seeded species have the largest share of 71% (about 525.9 thousand tons), stone species 26.2%. In the year 2023 both the production volume and the average productivity per hectare increased, Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Overall harvest and average harvest per ha of fruit in households of all categories**

Source: Elaborated by the author using the data from the National Bureau of Statistics, [https://statistica.gov.md/files/files/publicatii\\_electronice/Anuar\\_Statistic/2024/16\\_AS.pdf](https://statistica.gov.md/files/files/publicatii_electronice/Anuar_Statistic/2024/16_AS.pdf)

If we analyze in territorial profile, we observe that most orchards are located in the northern part of the country, occupying an important position in the fruit-growing sector, ranking first in the country in terms of the size of the area of orchards and the volume of fruit produced in the country, see Table 1.

**Table 1. Area and overall yield of multiannual plantations on agricultural enterprises and peasant (farmer) households, by territorial profile, 2020-2023**

	2020		2021		2022		2023	
	plantation area, ha	global harvest, thousand tons	plantation area, ha	global harvest, thousand tons	plantation area, ha	global harvest, thousand tons	plantation area, ha	global harvest, thousand tons
Chisinau Municipality	748	1,4	694	2,9	709	1,6	677	1,9
Northern Zone	27096	208,8	26112	3376,7	25291	221,3	23735	277,7
Center Zone	20141	63,5	21137	929,6	20986	81,8	20467	100,8
Suth Zone	8487	30,7	8121	41,7	8032	33,3	8071	33,4
U.T.A. Gagauzia	3187	8,6	3266	15,3	3250	5,8	3238	0,3

Source: Elaborated by the author using the data from the National Bureau of Statistics, [https://statistica.gov.md/files/files/publicatii\\_electronice/Anuar\\_Statistic/2024/16\\_AS.pdf](https://statistica.gov.md/files/files/publicatii_electronice/Anuar_Statistic/2024/16_AS.pdf)

According to Table 1, we observe that the northern area has a high potential for the development of fruit growing, due to the high natural fertility of soils and climatic conditions of the region. In 2023, in the northern area of the Republic of Moldova, about 288 thousand tons of fruit will be produced, which accounts for 65.4% of the total volume of fruit produced in the country. This indicator is decisive for the whole economy and demonstrates the importance of the sector for the northern region and the national economy in general. Thus, it is estimated that the fruit sector in the northern region in the next period will maintain a growing trend, and by 2025 the volume of fruit will increase by 38.1% (747 thousand tons) on account of new orchards, modernization of technology and the entry of new orchards into fruitfulness (ADR Nord, 2020).

As a result of the analysis carried out, in the internal context of the fruit sector development in the Republic of Moldova a number of positive trends have been registered, reflecting significant progress in the field.

Increased productivity per hectare has led to an increase in the total volume of production. In this context, the export of fresh fruit has been the main driver of the sector's development in recent years, playing a key role in strengthening its position on foreign markets.

According to the data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics, the annual per capita consumption of fruit and vegetables per capita grew by 12% in 2018-2023, reaching 244.8 kg, which exceeds the minimum threshold of 144 kg recommended by the World Health Organization. However, the consumption of horticultural products by the population continues to offer opportunities for development, in particular by ensuring their availability in

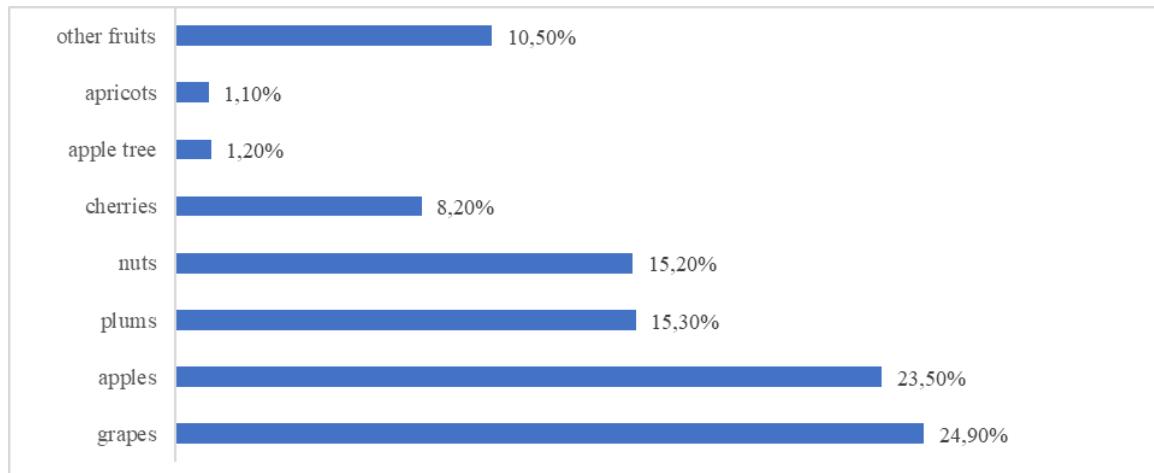
the off-season and increasing the accessibility of local products in retail networks. Seizing these opportunities is essential to ensure a balanced and sustainable development of the sector (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova, 2021).

Fruit growing is a major structural element in the national economy. It generates significant multiplier effects along value chains, positively influencing other sectors of the economy. Furthermore, economic agents in the fruit sector are an important source of employment and income, especially in rural areas, thus contributing to social cohesion and regional development (Balan, Manziuc and Peșteanu, 2018; ScriGroup, 2025).

The analysis of the distribution of horticultural production in the Republic of Moldova shows us, that the consumption of fruit by the population is important, as it has a significant share, followed by export which is developing rapidly (as it increases competitiveness and local fruit can compete with those of competitors). The processing sector has a stable development and serves as a means of risk mitigation in case of overproduction and utilization of unprofitable fruit production that is intended only for processing (Stratan, Iatișin and Ceban, 2023; Stratan and Iatișin, 2022).

In the external context of the development of the fruit sector of the Republic of Moldova we note a significant development in recent years, characterized by the diversification of markets, increasing export volumes and adaptation to international quality requirements. The total volume of agri-food exports in the analyzed period 2011-2024, had an increase in dynamics compared to the growth of the total volume of exports of the Republic of Moldova, which proves certain competitive advantages of agri-food exports compared to exports from other sectors of the national economy (Boico, 2025). This can also be seen from the share of agri-food exports in the total volume of exports which increased from 43.2% in 2011 to 45% in 2024. Regarding horticultural products the Republic of Moldova is a net exporter. By categories, nuts, fresh fruits, dehydrated fruits and canned vegetables and fruits, including juices, have a positive balance of international trade (Institutul Național de Cercetări Economice, 2025).

The export of horticultural products, fruits, nuts and berries in 2017 amounted to 221.6 million dollars, in 2023 about 266.1 million dollars, and in the third quarter of 2024 a value of 292.7 million dollars (Ioniță, 2024). In the year 2023, based on the analyzed data, we observe that, grapes held a fairly significant share in the export, namely 24.9%, apples about 23.5%; plums 15.3%; plums 15.3%; walnuts 15.2%; cherries 8.2%; pomelos 1.2%; apricots 1.1%; other fruits 10.5% (Figure 3). This result was possible due to favorable factors such as the increase in purchase prices and the diversification of both the types of fruit exported and the markets, the reduction in internal consumption, available stocks from previous production.



**Figure 3. Export of fruits, nuts and berries, % (year 2023)**

Source: Elaborated by the author, according to the data, <https://ionita.md/2024/11/29/179-analize-economice-agricultura-principala-ramura-de-export-a-moldovei/>

In 2024, the export of fruits registered an increase, being the same compared to previous years (about 18% in value and about 16% in quantity), the most essential increases being apricots, fresh grapes, apples and fresh pears. However, the export of apricots marked a historic success, with a volume of about 12 thousand tons being exported, 56% of which reached the EU market. At the same time, Moldovan plums managed to consolidate their position on the EU market, registering an increase in exports to 79.2% (Agroexpert, 2024; MADRM, 2025; Institutul Național de Cercetări Economice, 2025). Also, apple exports are increasing by about 10% compared to the previous year, due to the efforts of promotion and adaptation to market requirements.

Over the last two decades, exports have been the main driving force for the development of the horticultural sector in the Republic of Moldova, while at the same time consolidating as a priority activity to ensure its sustainability. The value of horticultural exports, both fresh and processed, has followed an upward trend. However, these values have varied significantly from year to year, influenced by climatic factors - such as droughts, early frosts, heavy rains or hail - both at national level and in other major producing regions, as well as by geopolitical factors, including the imposition of embargoes or restrictive import duties.

A key element of foreign trade in horticultural products is the continued diversification of markets. This strategy not only allows products to be better exploited in the markets that offer the best rewards, but also contributes to making the sector more resilient to geopolitical or economic risks. At the same time, this positive development of the horticultural sector is due to investments in modern technologies, product quality and favorable trade agreements with international partners (Institutul Național de Cercetări Economice, 2025). The European Union has suspended import duties and quotas for seven categories of Moldovan agricultural products, including tomatoes, garlic, table grapes, apples, cherries, plums and grape juice, thus facilitating access to the European market for Moldovan products (MADRM, 2025). In addition, the Republic of Moldova has signed the Free Trade Agreement with the European

Free Trade Association (EFTA) and has made progress in updating the Free Trade Agreement with Turkey, contributing to the diversification of export markets (Botnaru, 2024).

According to data of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry of the Republic of Moldova and the National Bureau of Statistics in 2024 about 67.4% of exports went to the European Union (EU). Romania became the main export market for Moldovan fruits with a share of 23.5%, closely followed by the Russian Federation 22.9%, Germany 8.8%, Poland 8.1%, Belarus 5.4%, the Netherlands, France, Ukraine and Switzerland. In total, Moldova exported fruit to more than 60 countries (MADRM, 2025).

Despite all this progress, the Moldovan fruit sector faces significant challenges, the loss of the CIS market has negatively affected apple exports, which have decreased by about 50% compared to 2021 (Cancelaria Guvernului Republicii Moldova, 2020; Institutul Național de Cercetări Economice, 2025). To fully capitalize on the export potential, investment in modern technologies, diversification of the variety assortment and strengthening cooperation between producers are needed. Also, adapting to the stringent requirements of international markets and promoting Moldovan products remain key priorities for the sustainable development of the sector (Moldova Fruct, 2022).

Diversification of fruit marketing markets is therefore a key strategic vector in strengthening the sustainability of the horticultural sector in Moldova. In the context of an agricultural economy deeply influenced by external factors, orientation towards multiple markets with varied requirements and more favorable price structures not only ensures a significant reduction in commercial risks, but also an increase in the sector's competitiveness. Increasing access to markets in the European Union, the Middle East, Asia and Africa reflects not only technological and logistical progress, but also the ability of the horticultural sector to adapt to international quality standards. Moreover, this diversification has a multiplier effect on the rural economy, by fostering income stability for farmers, promoting sustainable investment and job creation. The continued expansion of the network of outlets is therefore an indispensable element in building a resilient, modern agricultural sector in line with the principles of sustainable development.

### **3. Conclusion**

The current international context offers favorable prospects for the development of the fruit sector in the Republic of Moldova, but capitalizing on these opportunities depends crucially on the ability of domestic producers to adapt to the dynamics of global trade. Adaptation involves both alignment with international quality and food safety standards, as well as receptiveness to innovation and integration of international trade regulations into business strategies. In this framework, institutional support and collaboration with external partners become key factors for strengthening competitiveness.

Given the strategic importance of the fruit sector in the national agricultural economy, the sustainable capitalization of the existing potential must be treated as a national priority. Exporting fruit not only contributes to the economic development of the horticultural sector, but also to increasing the resilience and sustainability of Moldovan agriculture as a whole. In this respect, the continued diversification of markets, linked to demographic and global economic trends, is a fundamental condition for maintaining the competitiveness of Moldovan products.

In order to support this process, strategic measures are needed, such as: strengthening producers' associations for effective integration into international value chains; expanding the

export portfolio by penetrating emerging markets with high potential; developing the logistics and marketing infrastructure; implementing international certification systems; stepping up horticultural research activities; and promoting the 'Fruit from Moldova' brand consistently on foreign markets. These lines of action can make a decisive contribution to transforming the fruit sector into a pillar of sustainable economic development and integrating the Moldovan economy into the international agricultural circuit.

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