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**STRENGTHENING FARMERS’ RESILIENCE IN THE
REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA THROUGH THE PROMOTION
OF DROUGHT-RESISTANT CROPS**

MBA thesis

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ANNOTATION

to the MBA Management in Agribusiness requalification thesis developed by the Tiltu Nicolae

The master's thesis is structured and includes annotation, introduction, 3 chapters, conclusions and recommendations, bibliography, annexes.

Keywords used in the thesis: strengthening farmers' resilience, drought-resistant crops, competitiveness; risk; profitability, crop rotation, agrifood sector.

The field of study of this thesis is the analysis of the strengthening farmers' resilience in the Republic of Moldova through the promotion of drought-resistant crops, through the agrotechnology and economic argumentation of the most efficient methods for sustainable agriculture.

Purpose and Objectives of the Thesis. The purpose of this thesis is to assess the potential of drought-resistant crops as a practical approach to strengthening farmers' resilience in the Republic of Moldova and to examine their contribution to reducing climate-related production risks, improving agricultural competitiveness, and supporting the sustainable development of agrifood businesses.

To achieve this purpose, the following objectives have been established:

1. To examine and systematize the theoretical and conceptual approaches to farmers' resilience, climate adaptation, crop diversification, and the role of drought-resistant crops in sustainable agricultural production.
2. To analyse the current situation and key challenges affecting the resilience of farmers in the Republic of Moldova, with particular attention to drought and climate-related risks, agricultural production patterns, crop diversification, and the economic sustainability of farming activities.
3. To assess the potential for integrating drought-resistant crops into Moldovan farming systems, including their role in diversifying crop rotations, reducing production risks, and improving the resilience and competitiveness of agrifood businesses.
4. To identify the main economic, technical and institutional factors that may facilitate or constrain the adoption of drought-resistant crops by farmers in the Republic of Moldova.
5. To formulate practical conclusions and evidence-based recommendations for farmers and relevant stakeholders aimed at promoting drought-resistant crops and strengthening the climate and economic resilience of Moldova's agricultural sector.

The novelty and scientific originality of the results obtained consists in: analysis of theoretical and practical aspects for the strengthening farmers' resilience, the promotion of drought-resistant crops and identification of strategic directions for the development of the agricultural sector, formulation of applicative conclusions and recommendations for the strengthening farmers' resilience in the RM.

Theoretical Importance of the Work. The theoretical importance of the work lies in the systematization of key concepts related to farmers' resilience, climate adaptation, crop diversification, and sustainable agricultural production in the specific context of the Republic of Moldova. The thesis contributes to a better understanding of the role of drought-resistant crops in reducing climate-related production risks and strengthening farming systems, while also highlighting strategic directions for increasing the resilience and competitiveness of Moldova's agrifood sector.

Applied Value. The applied value of the thesis lies in the practical applicability of its findings and recommendations to crop production in the RM. The proposed approaches focus on the integration of drought-resistant crops into diversified crop rotations, contributing to reduced vulnerability to drought, improved production stability, and more efficient use of agricultural resources. Their application can support farmers in strengthening the resilience and economic sustainability of their farming activities contributing to a more resilient, sustainable, and competitive agricultural sector.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains a strategically important sector of the Republic of Moldova's economy, making a significant contribution to GDP and playing an essential role in rural employment, food production, exports and the development of agrifood businesses. According to the latest available annual statistics, agriculture accounts for around 8-10% of Moldova's GDP, while its broader economic importance is considerably greater when its linkages with food processing, trade and agrifood exports are considered.

Moldova has considerable agricultural potential, supported by fertile chernozem soils and favorable conditions for the cultivation of a wide range of field and horticultural crops. Nevertheless, agricultural production remains highly dependent on climatic conditions and is increasingly exposed to recurrent droughts, high temperatures, uneven precipitation, water scarcity and progressive soil degradation. These challenges directly affect agricultural productivity, farm incomes and the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of agrifood businesses.

Recent developments have further highlighted the need to strengthen the resilience of Moldova's agricultural sector. Climate variability and increasingly frequent extreme weather events create significant production and economic risks, particularly for small and medium-sized farmers with limited access to irrigation, modern technologies, finance and agricultural risk-management instruments. Strengthening farmers' capacity to anticipate, absorb and adapt to climate-related shocks is therefore becoming an important condition for maintaining viable and competitive farming businesses.

In this context, agricultural adaptation requires an integrated approach combining crop diversification, drought-resistant crops and varieties, improved crop rotations, sustainable soil and water management, conservation agriculture, climate-smart technologies and improved access to agricultural knowledge and advisory services. Particular attention should be given to crops that are better adapted to water-limited conditions, including sorghum and other drought-tolerant alternatives that can complement traditional cropping systems and reduce farmers' dependence on a limited number of climate-sensitive crops.

Medium- and long-term measures should also focus on integrating agricultural risk reduction and climate adaptation into farm-level decision-making. Practical extension approaches, including Farmer Field Schools and demonstration plots, can facilitate the testing and adoption of climate-smart and conservation agriculture practices under local conditions. At the same time, reliable

agrometeorological information, climate advisories and early-warning systems are essential for supporting farmers in making better-informed decisions regarding crop selection, sowing, irrigation, crop protection and harvesting.

The transition towards more diversified and climate-resilient production systems should therefore be considered not only as an environmental adaptation measure but also as an economic strategy. By reducing production risks, improving yield stability and diversifying potential sources of farm income, drought-resistant crops can contribute to strengthening farmers' resilience and supporting the development of more sustainable and competitive agrifood businesses in the Republic of Moldova.

Field of Study

The field of study of this thesis is the resilience of farmers and agricultural production systems in the Republic of Moldova to drought and climate-related risks, with particular emphasis on the promotion and integration of drought-resistant crops. The study examines the agronomic and economic rationale for crop diversification, improved crop rotation and the adoption of resilient production practices as instruments for strengthening the sustainability and competitiveness of farming businesses

Purpose and Objectives of the Thesis

The purpose of the thesis is to assess the potential of drought-resistant crops as a practical approach to strengthening farmers' resilience in the Republic of Moldova and to determine their contribution to reducing climate-related production risks, improving agricultural competitiveness and supporting the sustainable development of agrifood businesses.

To achieve this purpose, the **following objectives** have been established:

1. To examine and systematize the theoretical and conceptual approaches related to farmers' resilience, climate adaptation, crop diversification and drought-resistant agricultural production.
2. To analyse the current situation and the main climatic, agronomic and economic challenges affecting farmers' resilience in the Republic of Moldova, with particular attention to drought-related risks and the sustainability of crop production.
3. To assess the potential for integrating drought-resistant crops into Moldovan farming systems, including their contribution to diversified crop rotations, production stability and more efficient use of agricultural resources.

4. To analyse the agronomic and economic potential of selected drought-resistant crops, with particular attention to sorghum as an alternative crop for agricultural areas increasingly affected by drought and water scarcity.
5. To formulate practical conclusions and recommendations aimed at promoting drought-resistant crops, improving crop diversification and strengthening the climate and economic resilience of farming businesses in the Republic of Moldova.

Novelty and Scientific Originality

The novelty and scientific originality of the thesis derive from the integrated analysis of farmers' resilience from both agronomic and economic perspectives, with a particular focus on the potential role of drought-resistant crops under the specific agricultural and climatic conditions of the Republic of Moldova.

The thesis establishes links between climate-related agricultural risks, crop diversification, improved crop rotation and the economic sustainability of farming businesses. Particular attention is given to assessing the potential of drought-resistant crops, including sorghum, as part of diversified production systems and as an adaptation option for agricultural areas increasingly exposed to drought and water scarcity.

Based on the theoretical analysis and applied assessment, the thesis identifies strategic and practical directions for strengthening farmers' resilience and improving the sustainability and competitiveness of agricultural production in the Republic of Moldova.

Theoretical Importance of Work

The theoretical importance of the work lies in the systematization of key concepts related to farmers' resilience, climate adaptation, drought-resistant crops, crop diversification and sustainable agricultural production and their application to the specific conditions of the Republic of Moldova.

The thesis contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between climatic risks, agricultural production systems and farm economic resilience. It also provides a conceptual basis for assessing how diversified crop rotations and the integration of crops better adapted to drought conditions can contribute to reducing production vulnerability and supporting the sustainable development of the agrifood sector.

Applied Value

The applied value of the thesis lies in the practical applicability of its findings and recommendations to crop production in the Republic of Moldova. The proposed approaches focus on

the integration of drought-resistant crops into diversified crop rotations with the objective of reducing vulnerability to drought, improving production stability and supporting more efficient and sustainable use of agricultural resources.

The findings can support farmers in identifying appropriate options for crop diversification and adapting their production systems to increasingly variable climatic conditions. Their application can also contribute to strengthening the economic sustainability of farming businesses and to the development of a more resilient and competitive agricultural sector.

Climate Risks and the Need for Drought-Resilient Agriculture

Climate change represents an increasing challenge for agricultural production in the Republic of Moldova. Recurrent droughts, prolonged periods of high temperatures, irregular precipitation and declining soil moisture have increased production uncertainty and exposed the vulnerability of conventional cropping systems. Traditional field crops, particularly maize, can be significantly affected by prolonged water deficits during critical stages of plant development.

The experience of severe drought years, including 2007, 2020, 2022 and 2024, has demonstrated the vulnerability of Moldova's agricultural production to climatic extremes. Significant fluctuations in crop yields can translate directly into reduced farm incomes, difficulties in meeting financial obligations and reduced capacity to invest in the following production cycle.

Dependence on a relatively narrow range of traditional crops can further increase production and income risks. This creates a strong rationale for diversifying farming systems and introducing crops and varieties with greater tolerance to drought, heat stress and increasingly variable climatic conditions.

Drought-Resistant Crops and Crop Diversification

The integration of drought-resistant crops represents one of the practical adaptation options available to Moldovan farmers. Sorghum is particularly relevant in this context because of its relatively higher tolerance to heat and water stress and its potential use for grain, animal feed and other value-chain applications.

Under appropriate agronomic and market conditions, the inclusion of sorghum in crop rotations may provide farmers with an additional option for diversifying production and reducing exposure to drought-related losses. However, the transition towards resilient agriculture should not be limited to replacing one traditional crop with another.

Greater resilience requires diversified crop rotations designed according to local soil and climatic conditions, water availability, farm structure, production technologies and market opportunities. Sorghum and other drought-tolerant crops and varieties can therefore complement traditional crops and contribute to the development of more diversified and adaptable production systems.

Crop diversification can also have broader agronomic and economic benefits by distributing production risks across different crops, improving crop rotation and potentially creating additional market opportunities. From a farm-business perspective, these factors are particularly important in an environment characterized by increasing climatic and market uncertainty.

Knowledge Transfer, Climate Services and Farmer Support

The adoption of drought-resistant crops and resilient agricultural practices depends considerably on farmers' access to technical knowledge, practical demonstrations and effective advisory support. Farmer Field Schools, demonstration plots and other participatory extension approaches can provide practical mechanisms for testing crops and technologies under local conditions and transferring knowledge directly to farmers.

Such approaches allow farmers to compare production practices, assess their economic and agronomic performance and make better-informed decisions before adopting new technologies or crops on a larger scale. They can therefore play an important role in reducing the knowledge and implementation barriers associated with agricultural adaptation.

Climate information and early-warning services represent another important component of agricultural resilience. Modern agrometeorological monitoring and timely agricultural advisories can improve farmers' preparedness and support decisions related to sowing dates, irrigation, crop protection, harvesting and the selection of crops and varieties adapted to local conditions.

Strengthening the connection between climate information, agricultural advisory services and farm-level decision-making is therefore essential for improving the capacity of Moldovan farmers to anticipate and respond to drought and other extreme weather events.

Conservation and Climate-Smart Agriculture

Crop diversification and drought-resistant crops should be complemented by broader climate-smart and conservation agriculture practices. Reduced soil disturbance, appropriate crop rotations and maintaining soil cover can contribute to improved soil structure, reduced erosion, better water infiltration and conservation of soil moisture.

These practices are particularly relevant in drought-prone areas, where maintaining soil moisture and reducing land degradation are essential for long-term production stability. Their effectiveness, however, depends on local soil and climatic conditions, appropriate technologies and farmers' capacity to adapt production systems accordingly.

The combined adoption of drought-resistant crops, diversified crop rotations, sustainable soil and water management, climate information, conservation agriculture and improved advisory services provides a more comprehensive approach to agricultural resilience than reliance on a single crop or technological solution.

Such an integrated approach can contribute to reducing climate-related production risks, improving the stability of agricultural production and strengthening the economic resilience of farming businesses. In the longer term, it can support the transition towards a more climate-resilient, sustainable and competitive agricultural and agrifood sector in the Republic of Moldova.

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