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2019
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Discovering the largest farm in Europe

57 thousand hectares of land, a thousand workers and cutting-edge technologies make Agricost, in Romania, the largest farm in Europe and one of the most innovative



by Tommaso Cinquemani



Agricost is located on an island south of Braila, Romania

Photo source: AFK Equipements

The **Agricost** farm , probably the largest in Europe, is located on the island of Braila, in southern **Romania** . The numbers are staggering. More than a **thousand workers** , cutting-edge technologies and **57 thousand hectares of land** on which different crops rotate. Wheat is king, followed by corn, sunflower, barley, soy and then rapeseed and alfalfa. Managing such a large company is not at all easy and for this reason the land on the island, reachable only by ferry, has been divided into **29 small companies** , each with its machinery, its plants and its storage silos.

Technology and work specialization

Each company has, for example, a **Claas Lexion 780** to thresh the fields of competence, various **dumpers** for transporting crops as well as high-power **tractors** such as **Fendt 939** and **Case IH Steiger 600HD**, plus others, some of which are **tracked** and equipped with **double tires**. In a company like this, a machine downtime can cost millions and therefore there is a workshop and four mechanics for the maintenance of the machines, ready to intervene in case of breakdowns.

Different equipment is used to work the land, including those of **Maschio Gaspardo**, and **Horsch** seeders of different types. Like the **Horsch Pronto**, which with a working width of 12 meters can sow 120 hectares of alfalfa in one day.

The thousand workers move through the dozens of jeeps present and a **shuttle system** that runs inside the property. The **employees** are divided into various areas, those directly related to agriculture and those in support, such as cooks for the canteen.

There is also a **research center** where tests are conducted every year to improve the productivity of the company. New seeds, sowing methods, crop protection products and fertilizers are tested. The various **cultivation operations** are carried out with the support of **parallel driving** and prescription maps, in order to **rationalize inputs**, avoid waste and obtain the best productions. Sowing takes place, where possible, **on firm ground**, in order to reduce the consumption of diesel and preserve the characteristics of the soil.

Since the land is located on an island, the **storage and transport** of food takes place through silos (with a capacity of 40 thousand tons) located on a port built **on the Danube** that allows products to be sent all over the world comfortably. On the other hand, water is a fundamental element of Agricost's agriculture. The Danube has in fact given rise to the island, blessed with a very fertile land, and provides water for their **irrigation systems**, which cover 40 thousand hectares (plus 10 under construction) through pivots, rangers and hoses.

To reduce **storage** costs, Agricost has also introduced a grain storage system (40,000 tons last year) under plastic sheets. An economical and simple way, already widely used in the United States, which allows to reduce the storage costs of the product while not affecting the health of the grain.

Commodity production, a millionaire business

The company is so unique that in the summer of 2018 it was bought by **Al Dahra Agriculture**, an important **Abu Dhabi** agribusiness group linked to the Emirati royal family, for around **230 million** euros.

Khadim Al Darei, vice president and co-founder of Al Dahra, commented on the operation underlining the determination *"to invest in the agricultural sector in Romania as we firmly believe that through investments in **technology and innovation**, we will improve efficiency and productivity"*. On the other hand, the **United Arab Emirates**, like the other Gulf countries, they are rich in financial resources, but lack arable land and therefore shopping abroad is strategic to ensure the supply of food.

The agreement provides for control of the company, which owns the concession of **state-owned** land until 2032, and a **five-year investment plan** worth half a billion euros. The goal is to reach one million tons of grain and feed by 2022.

Among the planned interventions, explained the founder of Agricost **Constantin Dulute**, *"an expansion of operations in the **port of Braila**, two new generation ferries to connect the island to the mainland, a new **dewatering plant** and the updating of almost all machinery"*.

Romania, the El Dorado of European agriculture

Agricost is just the flagship of a country, **Romania**, which is carving out the role of El Dorado of agriculture in Europe. Its huge expanses of arable land alone represent **12.5% of European agricultural land**, and are

prey to many foreign investors, including many Italians.

In the country there are over **one thousand** registered **Italian farms**, which cultivate over 25% of the Romanian agricultural land managed by foreign companies (200 thousand hectares). The main crops are only corn, wheat, rapeseed and sunflowers. In some areas, Italians represent 50% of foreign presence. The case of **Timisoara** is exemplary, capital of the Timis district where 135 Italian companies operate known as 'the eighth Venetian province'.

The reasons for the Romanian land race are at least four: **fertile soil**, rather low **labor costs**, the **tax burden** of only 16% and **land prices**. Today, things have changed, with prices soaring after the interest of foreign investors. But Romania, like Ukraine and the other former Soviet republics, still represent a pole of attraction for agribusiness funds.

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Source: Agronotizie

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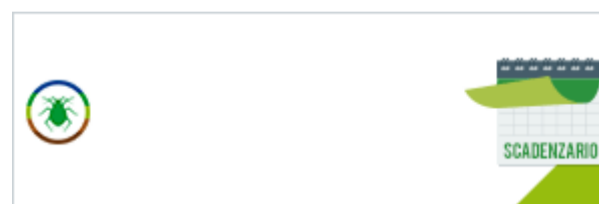
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