

Small-scale Farmers in Ukraine and the EU: Commonalities and Differences in the New Reality

On November 21, 2025, an International online conference "**Small-scale Farmers in Ukraine and the EU: Commonalities and Differences in the New Reality**" was held, serving as a professional discussion platform where Ukrainian and European farmers, scholars, and civil society representatives exchanged experiences, opinions, and ideas, and identified priorities for Ukraine's European integration in the context of post-war reconstruction of its agricultural sector. The conference brought together over 60 participants from Ukraine, Poland, Sweden, Spain, Italy, and Romania.



The event moderator, **Olena Borodina**, Head of the Department of Economy and Policy of Agrarian Transformations, Doctor of Economics, Professor, and Academician of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, welcomed the conference participants and expressed sincere gratitude to Ukrainian farmers: Viktor Sheremeta, Mykola Stryzhak, Viktor Honcharenko, Oleh Bondarenko, Oleh Hannenko, Yurii Shapkin, Eduard

Shultz, Maryna Sheremeta, Ivan Tomych, Anatolii Boiko, Taras Voitovych, Mykola Boichenko, Viacheslav Rashchupkin, Hryhorii Dubyna, Hryhorii Sheliazi, Vasyl Radkevych, Yurii Rozovyk, Mykola Liashchuk, Oleksii Loburets, Oleksandr Dmytruk, as

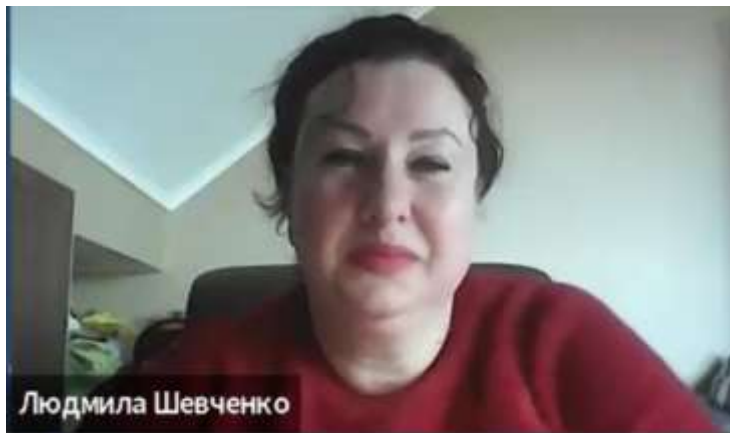
well as Liudmyla Shevchenko and Valerii Burov, who throughout the recent war years, despite difficulties, actively supported cooperation with academic science and the farming community, participated in sociological research aimed at studying the processes of food security for Ukrainians during the war, farmers' access to markets for production and financial resources, changes in access to land, and other issues.

Handing over the floor to Brian Kuns, O. Borodina announced that this event was organized with the support of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and expressed gratitude to Brian Kuns for his personal contribution to establishing cooperation with Ukrainian agricultural economists.

As a sociologist, **Brian Kuns** works directly with farmers and seeks to gain a deeper understanding of their challenges through direct dialogue – a point that, as the scholar emphasized, should not be underestimated. The speaker thanked the attendees for their participation, particularly given the difficult circumstances caused by Russian aggression, and noted the resilience



of Ukrainian farmers, scholars, and research institutions. He also drew attention to the importance of international solidarity and cooperation between European and Ukrainian farmers and researchers, emphasizing the value of joint projects and future in-person meetings. Separately, B. Kuns highlighted the collaboration within the framework of a project funded by the Swedish Research Council, involving the Institute for Economics and Forecasting of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.



Lyudmila Shevchenko, co-owner of the family farm "Olymp Agro" (Verkhnodniprovsk rajon, Dnipropetrovsk region), shared insights into the farm's operational experience. She briefly outlined the development trajectory of the farm, which cultivates major field crops, from its initial 14 hectares to an expansion of approximately 300 hectares with full technical

equipment on the eve of the full-scale invasion.

Following February 2022, Ukrainian farmers faced a sharp decline in procurement prices, the inability to sell their produce, and a significant increase in input costs, forcing them to economize extensively and restructure their crop portfolios. Despite these challenging

conditions, "Olymp Agro" continues to operate through its own flexibility, supplier commodity credits, and rare instances of bank lending, which remains inaccessible to most small-scale farmers. L. Shevchenko also mentioned the existence of state support programs and initiatives from foreign partners. However, in practice, small farmers most often lack access to these programs, and "obtaining assistance through the State Agrarian Register is quite an ordeal."

Lyudmila Shevchenko drew attention to current wartime challenges: labor shortages, restrictions on machinery use, elevator overload, logistics problems, and constant risks from falling drone debris and fires. All of this, combined with the overall increase in production costs, falling prices, climate change, and depletion of water resources, places small farms on the brink of survival. In her view, small farmers remain the backbone of the country but require more equitable state policy, accessible financing, and conditions that would enable development according to European models. Concluding her presentation, the speaker emphasized that the most crucial condition for agricultural recovery is the establishment of peace in Ukraine, and thereafter, under peaceful skies, "Ukrainians will rebuild and restore everything, because Ukraine has incredible and indomitable people!"

Mykola Stryzhak (Sodzhus farm, Znamianka rajon, Kirovohrad region) emphasized in his presentation that Ukrainian farmers maintain resilience despite all challenges. Following each war, the country's revival has begun precisely in rural areas, and today farmers are once again working on multiple fronts simultaneously.



The first front is external aggression, which destroys the economy and infrastructure. The second comprises internal difficulties associated with state decisions that often do not facilitate the development of small and medium-sized farms. According to the speaker, a significant proportion of legislative initiatives creates advantages for large agricultural companies, while family farms remain without access to financing and substantive support. Mykola Stryzhak noted that agricultural policy in the Verkhovna Rada and executive bodies is often shaped by representatives of large agroholdings; consequently, decisions rarely account for the needs of small-scale producers. Even well-designed legislation, he stated, fails to function effectively due to underfunding or imperfect secondary legislation.

The speaker separately highlighted the problem of mobilization and employee reservation: small farms bear the primary personnel losses, whereas large companies often have greater capacity to protect their staff.

Drawing on his experience of communication with European farmers, M. Stryzhak also noted that European partners are prepared to cooperate specifically with Ukrainian family farms, while the agroholding model raises concerns among them. The speaker proposed

building direct partnerships between Ukrainian and European farmers. He recalled that in 2017–2020, when the state created appropriate conditions, the number of farms increased substantially. This demonstrates the effectiveness of policies oriented toward family farming development.

In conclusion, the speaker emphasized that Ukrainian farmers, who are now defending their country at the front, expect clear prospects in the post-war period and equitable treatment. He called for consolidating efforts, strengthening interaction with European partners, and advocating for the development of small and medium-sized farming as the foundation of a democratic society and the country's economic resilience.



Valeriy Burov (Private Entrepreneur "Almond Orchard Nursery", Oleksandriia rajon, Kirovohrad region) shared his unique experience in almond cultivation, which he began acquiring in 2016 in the Kherson region. Initial trials of old Ukrainian, Crimean, and Moldovan almond varieties revealed their poor resistance to spring frosts, prompting the farmer to turn to European, primarily Spanish, varieties.

Spanish breeding attracted interest due to self-fertility and significantly later flowering periods, which minimize the risks of orchard damage from unpredictable cold snaps.

In 2019, a nursery was established in the Kherson region where comparative studies of different varieties were conducted. As a result of occupation and military operations in 2022, the farm was completely destroyed, and the farmer had to evacuate his family and restore operations in Svitlovodsk, where he created a new nursery from scratch and continued research.

Valeriy Burov drew attention to the low proportion of almonds among Ukrainian nut crops and growing domestic consumption, a significant portion of which is covered by imports, emphasizing that the development of domestic plantations could ensure import substitution and the creation of a new high-margin sector.

In this direction, a licensing agreement was signed in November 2022 between the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) and the Ukrainian Nut Association regarding the distribution of modern Spanish almond varieties in Ukraine. In 2023, two leading Spanish varieties – Penta and Makako – were entered into the State Register of Plant Varieties of Ukraine. Work is currently underway with the CEBAS research center, particularly regarding the identification of territories suitable for establishing almond orchards. V. Burov thanked Spanish partners and colleagues for their support, for the opportunity to familiarize himself with almond cultivation experience in Spain, and for their participation in the first international conference of Ukrainian almond growers, which took place in 2025 in Svitlovodsk.

The key research findings of the Center for Edaphology and Applied Biology of Segura (CEBAS-CSIC), which collaborates with the Ukrainian Nut Producers Association on the development of Penta and Makako almond varieties in Ukraine, were presented by its Senior Research Fellow **José Alberto Egea Larrosa**. The research group in which the



speaker works conducts activities in the Spanish region of Murcia. Within the group's work, various almond varieties are studied, including Penta, Makako, and Alaska, characterized by late or very late flowering. Some varieties (e.g., Alaska) have limitations for Ukrainian conditions due to poor frost resistance. The analysis utilizes long-term daily temperature series from 178 Ukrainian weather stations for 1946–2020. Results indicate rising average winter temperatures, creating new opportunities for almond cultivation. Specifically, the increase in winter temperatures provides the necessary range from 0° to +12°C, which facilitates cold accumulation important for late-flowering varieties.

Scientists modeled various scenarios for almond adaptation to Ukrainian conditions, accounting for frost risks during critical periods (before and after flowering). Territories were identified where cultivation is impractical due to minimum temperatures and frequency of severe frosts. Conversely, a number of regions demonstrated high suitability for cultivating Penta and Makako varieties.

The model accounts for several uncertainties – the date of cold accumulation onset, the influence of negative temperatures, differences between Spanish and Ukrainian conditions, and potential changes associated with global warming. The author emphasized that the approach is conservative and based on historical data, while more northern regions may prove promising – this requires further field research.

José A. Egea Larrosa thanked the conference organizers and expressed readiness to continue cooperation within joint projects.



Ramona Duminicioiu, President of ECO RURALIS, the Romanian Small Farms Association, which unites approximately 20,000 small farmers in Romania (family farm, Vâlcea County, Romania), thanked the conference organizers and expressed support for Ukrainian farmers who are currently working in fields and defending their country at the front. She outlined Romania's experience with implementing the

EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) from the perspective of small farms. The speaker emphasized that Romania's path to EU accession occurred during peacetime, whereas Ukraine is integrating under wartime conditions, requiring a particularly equitable and inclusive approach.

Ramona Duminicioiu characterized current CAP imbalances, including land concentration, unequal access to financing, bureaucratic barriers, and insufficient support for small farmers, which in Romania led to the disappearance of a significant portion of small farms. The speaker emphasized the need to adapt European policy to national contexts, support cooperation, ecological practices and short supply chains, as well as the importance of limiting subsidies to large agrohholdings. She urged Ukraine not to repeat Romanian mistakes, to ensure equitable distribution of support and protection against land speculation during post-war reconstruction. Ramona Duminicioiu emphasized the courage of Ukrainian farmers and the importance of their role for food security, democracy, and the country's sovereignty, stressing the necessity of EU farmer solidarity and support for Ukraine's European integration.

Malgorzata Kacperczyk-Kopcińska, a farmer and consultant from Poland (private farm, Zwolen County, Masovian Voivodeship), presented her farm's experience. On 250 hectares in the central part of the country, her family cultivates grain crops, sunflower, wheat, corn, fruit plantations, and raises fish, applying eco-schemes and integrated plant protection.



Expressing support for Ukrainian farmers, the speaker noted significant polarization of opinions in Poland regarding the war and trade with Ukraine. She noted that despite criticism, some Polish farmers continue to help Ukrainian colleagues

– from purchasing grain to providing generators. At the same time, M. Kacperczyk-Kopcińska explained that most Polish farms, which have 5 to 10 hectares of land, view agriculture as a supplementary activity rather than the primary source of income, which significantly influences their position and market perception. In her opinion, the key difference between such farms and farms that provide the family's primary income lies in the level of engagement and responsibility.

Małgorzata Kacperczyk-Kopcińska dwelt in detail on the challenges of Polish agricultural policy: excessive bureaucracy, legislative complexity, inaccessibility of consultants for small farmers, and large volumes of documentation identical for farms of any scale. Some farmers refuse to participate in eco-schemes due to reporting requirements, although her farm has been implementing integrated plant protection for many years. The speaker also emphasized serious climate risks – prolonged drought, absence of winter snow, water shortages in lakes, affecting both crop production and fish farming. She emphasized that due to different moisture conditions, yields within her farm can differ twofold.

Separately, the speaker emphasized the importance of dialogue between farmers of Eastern and Western Europe, participation of national associations in European processes, and the need for their support by governments. After all, only a few active farmers' associations operate in Poland, and their voice at the EU level is insufficient if associations do not act jointly and consistently.

Concluding her presentation, Małgorzata Kacperczyk-Kopcińska expressed confidence that with active participation of farmer organizations and appropriate state support, Ukraine's EU membership could be very beneficial for Ukrainian farmers.



The experience of Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries demonstrates that their EU accession provided countries not only with financial support but also created preconditions for institutional changes, noted **Vitalii Krupin**, Research Fellow at the Institute of Agricultural and Rural Development of the Polish

Academy of Sciences (IRWIR PAN), participant in the Rebuild Rural Ukraine (rUAR) project. The scholar emphasized that in Polish public discourse, farmers' concerns regarding Ukraine's economic integration are growing: specifically, apprehensions are being expressed about the strengthening presence of the Ukrainian agricultural sector in EU markets and possible redistribution of the Common Agricultural Policy budget in the event of Ukraine's EU accession. At the same time, the speaker noted that these processes

are already occurring, regardless of Ukraine's EU membership, and it is precisely open dialogue between farmers of the two countries that will help in finding common solutions.

In Vitaliy Krupin's opinion, Ukrainian small farmers view potential EU membership not as a source of additional payments but primarily as an opportunity to obtain predictable and protected institutional working conditions – Including counteracting raiding, excessive inspections, and other forms of pressure. He emphasized that level and fair rules of the game are more important than financial support, and the key demand of the Ukrainian agricultural sector is precisely for a stable institutional environment.

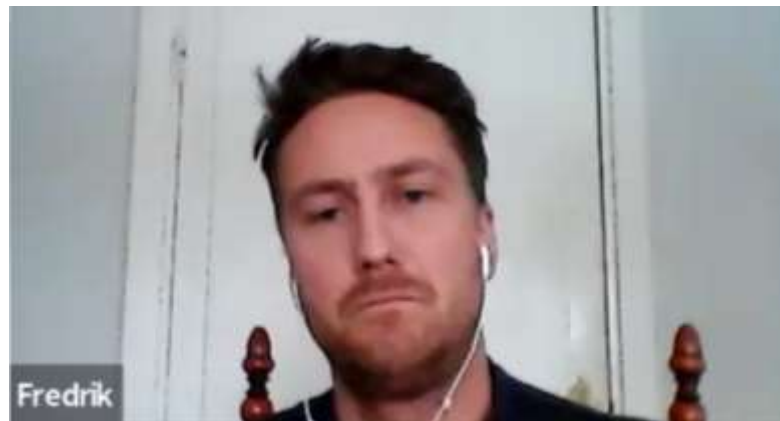
Vitalii Krupin presented research results being conducted within the Rebuild Rural Ukraine project with the participation of the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Institute for Economics and Forecasting of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and the Institute of Land Use of the National Academy of Agrarian Sciences of Ukraine. The research encompasses issues of food security, land markets, restoration of degraded and destroyed territories, and other areas.

The scholar devoted special attention to the structure of the Polish agricultural sector, which numbers approximately 1.3 million farms, predominantly with land areas up to 5 hectares. Small farms are widespread in the eastern and southern regions of the country, predominantly use family labor, and have limited modernization opportunities. The situation is complicated by social tensions and the outflow of Ukrainian workers, leading to labor shortages during seasonal work.

Among the key challenges for small Polish farms, he identified low profitability, rising resource costs, limited access to credit, farmer aging, and low levels of trust, which hinder cooperation. Despite EU financial support, a significant proportion of farmers avoid participating in eco-schemes due to bureaucratic difficulties and the risk of sanctions for non-compliance with requirements.

In summary, Vitalii Krupin noted that the EU Common Agricultural Policy has both advantages and disadvantages but generally ensures small farming development. He emphasized that adaptation of its instruments in Ukraine could become a significant impetus for the development and strengthening of rural population rights and opportunities.

The stories of colleagues from Ukraine who lose their entire harvest as a result of fires following the falling of Russian drones on their fields profoundly affected Swedish farmer **Fredrik Kjellrejer** (Birch Village farm). He emphasized that despite his own difficulties, the challenges facing his farm are incomparable with those



Ukrainian farmers are going through, thanked for the opportunity to participate in the conference, as the discussions are extremely valuable and inspiring, and for the openness of its participants.

Fredrik Kjellrejer's own farm has 60 dairy cows, and according to modern Swedish classification, it belongs to small farms (fewer than 75 heads). The farm encompasses 100 hectares of land, predominantly pastures and areas for fodder crops – barley, rye, wheat; rapeseed and almonds are not cultivated there. Part of the land cannot be used as arable, so cows and sheep are grazed on it. In such conditions, the speaker emphasized, the best way to preserve biological capital is careful treatment of land and maintaining a sustainable production scale. The farm has been managed by the third generation of their family.

Demonstrating statistics on dairy farm development in Sweden over the past 50 years, Fredrik Kjellrejer, as head of an organic dairy farm, noted radical changes: whereas farms previously mainly kept 15–30 cows, today even the average size of his own herd of 60 cows is already rare for Sweden, as farms are experiencing a period of consolidation – the number of animals kept by one farmer is increasing. Also in Sweden, as in Poland, production intensification and specialization remain subjects of constant discussion. Despite this, Fredrik Kjellrejer is convinced of the importance of preserving small farming and the existence of farms of various sizes, as this reflects society's diversity and supports the life of local communities.

Referring to Ramona Duminicioiu's words, Fredrik Kjellrejer agreed on the importance of establishing local cooperation, supporting diversity of farm models, and expressed understanding regarding the challenges faced by Polish farmers.



Claudia Cupidi (multifunctional family farm "Fattoria Cupidi", Gallese, Lazio region, Viterbo province, Italy) shared the operational experience of a family organic farm in central Italy that has existed for five generations and combines poultry raising, organic egg production, cultivation of fodder crops, grapes, olives, and nuts.

The farm encompasses owned and leased lands, numbers approximately 9,000 head of poultry, has its own feed production, quality control laboratory, and uses solar panels and biomass for energy provision. A separate direction of the farm is educational activity: practical classes and demonstrations of production processes for children and students, which is also part of its marketing strategy. C. Cupidi emphasized the farm's social orientation, particularly describing a program for involving people with special needs, which the farm supports as an element of social responsibility.

Andrea Ferrante, Director of the International Agroecology School (Italy), emphasized that although today's world is extraordinarily complex and divided, the needs of small farmers and the challenges they face remain common to all. Therefore, in his opinion, small farms must unite to genuinely influence state policy, which still often supports large players and creates unequal



conditions for small and medium farmers. He emphasized that farmers are at the center of society: together with scientists and educators, it is they who care for preserving lands, communities, and producing healthy products. Therefore, farmers need to be protected, their knowledge and capacity strengthened, as modern technologies and digitalization often work against small farms. In his conviction, it is precisely small and medium farms that return people to the land, care for soil, and create natural nutritious products necessary for a healthy future.

The scholar warned that society is already capable of producing food even without farmers, which transfers the political choice to an extremely acute plane: will there be a place for farmers in the future food system? In A. Ferrante's opinion, without farmers, guarantees of democracy and the right to quality food are impossible. Large farms are displacing small ones, and therefore fair agricultural policy is necessary that supports small and medium farms as the foundation of food security. He noted that in Ukraine, which is experiencing the most difficult times of war, it is precisely farmers who are capable of feeding 40 million people, restoring communities, preserving land, and building a resilient food system. This requires equal rules for market access, effective safety standards, support for local chains, and political recognition of the important role of farmers. A. Ferrante is convinced that only by rethinking income, sales markets, relationships with communities, and creating policy that places small and medium farms at the center of the food system can a sustainable, multilateral, democratic food system capable of ensuring the future be formed.



Viktor Honcharenko, President of the Association of Farmers and Private Landowners of Ukraine, thanked the organizers and all participants, emphasizing that despite the difficulties faced by farmers in various European countries, for Ukraine the main challenge remains the war, which daily takes the lives of farmers, civilians, and children. In such conditions, according to him, farmers'

priority becomes not development but state survival and ensuring food security so that people under shelling do not remain hungry.

V. Honcharenko drew attention to the fact that farmers work under extraordinarily difficult conditions of labor shortage – many machine operators and tractor drivers are now at the front. Moreover, there is an acute shortage of accessible credit, as loans are issued at extraordinarily high interest rates, which practically makes business development impossible. He noted that the greatest pressure on small farmers is created not so much by state bodies as by large agroholdings, which through political influence shape legislation that works against small farms.

The speaker emphasized that the Association of Farmers and Private Landowners of Ukraine represents the smallest producers, closely connected with rural communities. But today in legislation the difference between small and large producers disappears, which opens possibilities for manipulation. He also appealed to European Union farmers with a call not to perceive Ukrainian farmers as competitors or enemies and emphasized that grain crises of previous years were initiated not by farmers but by large trading companies.

In his address, V. Honcharenko called for mutual understanding and solidarity, emphasizing that Ukrainian and European farmers work for a common cause and must remain partners, and also expressed gratitude to European colleagues for support, understanding, and constant dialogue, emphasizing faith in common victory, restoration of peace, and further strengthening of cooperation between Ukraine and the European Union.

Concluding the conference, **Olena Borodina** thanked all meeting participants for fruitful cooperation, support, and sincere solidarity that partners from various countries consistently demonstrate during this extraordinarily difficult time for Ukraine. She emphasized that the united efforts of scholars, farmer organizations, and international institutions are critically important for protecting food security, supporting small producers, and restoring rural territories. Olena Borodina expressed deep gratitude for readiness for dialogue and mutual support and expressed hope for further deepening of cooperation, joint research, and strengthening of partnerships that will contribute to strengthening sustainable agricultural and rural development in Ukraine and Europe.