

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENSURING THE PROFITABILITY OF A SMALL WINEMAKING HOLDING IN ROMANIA

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### Abstract

*The paper aimed to identify the opportunities to ensure the profitability of a small wine holding of 5.15 ha in Romania. It is based on the analysis of good practice models from Romania and Europe, as well as an economic and financial analysis of the current situation of the holding, together with a market study to identify the preferences of Romanian consumers in the field of wine tourism, culminating in exploring funding opportunities through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in Romania for the period 2023-2027. Research shows that the profitability of wine production on a small wine-growing depends to a large extent on the visibility of the product, and wine tourism is the most effective way. Wine tourism is already known among romanians, with 44% of respondents having already experienced wine tourism home and abroad. As a conclusion, supporting a small-scale wine-growing holding implies, firstly, financial resources and, secondly, the development of complementary income-generating activities that increase the visibility of the agri-food products. Therefore, limited-edition quality wine can generate profits comparable to large wineries with adequate funding and the right image policy.*

**Key words:** winemaking, small vineyard, CAP in Romania, wine tourism, business profitability.

### INTRODUCTION

Romania's current socio-economic situation shows a significant decline as a result of the crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-19 pandemic, which is also confirmed by the data provided for the HoReCa (Hotel/Restaurant/Catering) industry. In 2021, the most affected wine sales channel was the hospitality segment, which, compared to the same period of the previous year, suffered a 90% loss of wine sales, according to the "Best Wine Importers" database ([www.bestwineimporters.com](http://www.bestwineimporters.com)).

The effects of the pandemic are not the only limiting causes of the vine and wine industry, the Russo-Ukrainian War also causes numerous economic imbalances generating alarming price increases and, implicitly, higher production costs in the agri-food sector. All these imbalances, at national level, are also intensified by a growing shortage of specialised staff, but also of agricultural workers. Climate change, in conjunction with the difficulties of small romanian holdings to move towards the market, the imbalances between imports and

exports existing in Romania, determine more and more farmers, including wine growers, to abandon their agricultural areas, focusing on other income-generating activities.

In this context, the paper aims to identify solutions to ensure the profitability of a small wine holding of 5.15 ha, of which only 3 ha are owned; a family business which currently sells only wine grapes, its profitability being even below subsistence level with a ratio of income to expenditure being less than 6000 Euro annually.

Market research on small businesses shows that in order to achieve a higher-than-average level of performance, SMEs aim to occupy the ground through large-scale economic consolidation and development or make a difference through quality or innovation (Newton et al., 2015; Ageieva & Agarkova, 2018). Thus, an increasing number of winegrowers are expanding their agricultural business towards the diversification of marketed products (e.g. grape seed oil, grape juice, food supplements made from grapes), including ideal conditions for tourism, but also

leisure activities (Nemethy et al., 2016). There are three groups of tourism services/products in a wine-growing region: the 'basic product' referring to wine itself, 'augmented services' covering all services and activities under the control of the winery, such as wine-growing activities, customer services and social events or wine clubs, and ultimately 'ancillary services' refer to services and activities that are mostly out of the winery's control, including other regional tourist activities, local entertainment, accommodation and transport. The basic benefits like wine tasting or wine purchase, seem to be the most important factors for attracting tourists to a wine region or a specific winery (Byrd et al., 2016).

However, the uniqueness of a small business does not lead to differentiation unless it is valuable to a buyer, and the basis for differentiation is the role of the product offered by a small enterprise in the market value chain in line with the buyer's needs (Porter, 1985).

A model of good practice in France, which demonstrates that it can meet the needs of consumers by adding innovative elements for the success of a small wine business, is the *Barbossi Domain*, which operates an area of 4 ha, planted with the grape varieties Cinsault, Grenache, Syrah, Chardonnay and Muscat, offering consumers wines with designation of origin and blends. Since 2021 the replanted vine areas have become organic certified and the wines are produced in accordance with the organic winemaking rules, so the owners are geared towards giving all the necessary conditions to obtain exclusive Grand-Cru wines in limited quantities at appropriate prices.

In terms of complementary activities, the *Barbossi Domain* offers accommodation in a 4-star hotel "Ermitage de l'Oasis" and gives a bottle of wine for the guests, as well as invitations to free wine tasting sessions. It also organises a series of events that include: culinary associations with the produced wines; wine presentations, sports activities (tennis, riding, golf), parties in the vineyard, thus covering a wide range of consumer needs. They also have a store with traditional products obtained from agri-food activities such as honey and olive oil, products have local specifics ([www.domainedebarbossi.fr](http://www.domainedebarbossi.fr)).

This business model reached a turnover of EUR 681 800 in 2019 and EUR 496 700 in 2020 for the commercial and wine-growing holdings. The decrease in turnover is caused by the losses generated by the crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-19 pandemic, but the investments in re-improvement of the services offered alongside marketing and promotion techniques show the sustainability of this business and the development of promotion in the online environment.

In Romania, there are few successful models for small wine businesses, but those that exist demonstrate that it is possible to develop a small wine holding for a real profitable business (Neacșu, 2012). About the pioneers of these types of wine cellars, we mention: Ferdi Winery (4.5 ha) in Dealu Mare Wine Region; Cote Winery (2 ha) in Cotesti Wine Region and Gabai Winery (3 ha), in the region of Dobrogea Hills.

*Ferdi Boutique Winery*, founded in 2006, owns 4.5 ha of vineyards in the Wine Region Dealu Mare (Ceptura and Vulcănești). The winery's vision involves tradition, crafts and exclusivity, and the wines produced are obtained from the following varieties: Fetească neagră, Merlot, Syrah, Tămâioasă românească and Sauvignon blanc. As a marketing strategy, the winery carries out tasting activities (standard, premium and private); but it also offers accommodation facilities through the collaboration with KIM Country Club (Premium Team Events SRL), which allows access to the restaurant, the swimming pool and the organisation of wine tastings, also offering the possibility to organise events in the location ([www.cramaferdi.ro](http://www.cramaferdi.ro), [www.kimcountryclub.ro](http://www.kimcountryclub.ro)). Another good practice model in Romania is the *Gabai Boutique Winery* in Murfatlar vineyard, founded in 2014, and which capitalises on an area of 3 hectares with grapevine (Muscat Ottonel, Riesling italian, Fetească neagră, Pinot noir). The financial situation of the wine cellar shows good profitability before the crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-19 pandemic, reaching a profit of EUR 298 695 in 2018, followed by major decreases in the following years, so that in 2021 the profit reached less than half compared to 2018 (Figure 1).

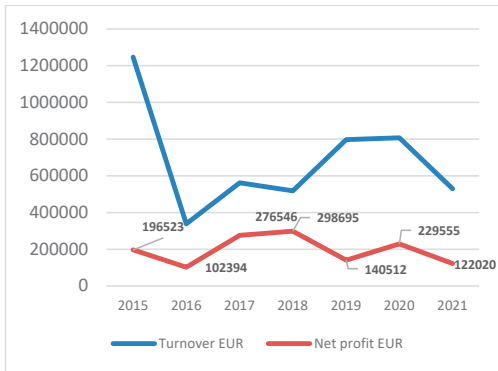


Figure 1. Financial data Winery Gabai, 2015-2021 (source: <https://www.listaфирme.ro/>)

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study aimed at *identifying alternatives for increasing the viability of a small winegrowing holding*, by proposing an integrated business plan that, together with the activity of obtaining wine grapes, would contribute with added value through wine production, but also by creating oenotouristical and recreational activities and, last but not least, identify innovative business models to access the wine market in Romania and ensure the long-term sustainability and profitability of the holding.

*Winegrowing holding location, varieties and cultivated areas.* The analysed small winegrowing holding is located in the Odobești Controlled Designation of Origin area, in the viticultural region of Moldova, on the ancient domain of the Beciul Domnesc, with easy access to water, electricity, gas and paved agricultural roads. The area owned is 5.15 ha consisting of separate physical blocks cultivated with noble wine grape varieties (Table 1). The sale of grapes and must (on request) is carried out only with the customer's packaging, thus eliminating the costs of packaging the products. In order to identify the best opportunities to ensure the profitability of the small winegrowing holding, a mix of methods was used such as an *economic-financial analysis* and a *SWOT analysis* of the current situation of the holding. The SWOT analysis was used as a method of assessing the performance, competition, risk and potential of a business by identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the current winegrowing holding small business.

Table 1. The structure of the wine farm - cultivated areas and varieties, 2021 - (Matei & Bucur, 2022)

Variety	Surface (ha)	Age (years)	Yield (t/ha)	Utilization of the harvest
Muscat Ottonel	1.7	6	10-13	selling grapes and must
Riesling italian	1.0	35	6-8	
Fetească regală	0.2	40	3-5	
Sauvignon blanc	0.8	35	6-7	
Merlot	1.45	35	7-8	

It has also been conducted a *market survey* on consumer preferences for wine and oenotourism carried out on a representative sample of 390 persons, between May and June 2022, with responses collected through the Survey Monkey platform. The questionnaire, entitled "The perception of Romanian consumers on wine tourism" included questions on the age, gender and income of respondents, the willingness to spend time or money to enjoy the wine experience, but also preferences in terms of wine tourism and leisure activities in the wine environment. In order to obtain relevant results, it was spread both in urban and rural areas, on the social media pages of HoReCa entrepreneurs, among corporations, students and teachers, but also among civil servants.

In order to identify the best resources to develop the business, *funding opportunities offered by the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for Romania* for the proposal of a business plan were also explored.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

*Results concerning the economic and financial analysis of the winegrowing holding.* An economic and financial analysis (Table 2), together with a SWOT analysis on the Odobești vineyard holding, shows that there is overproduction, giving up quality in favour of quantity, in order to obtain a profit, which is extremely low in relation to the operating costs of the 5.15 ha of vines (only 26% of expenditures and 21% of income). Also, technological facilities are precarious and obsolete, winegrowing areas are not merged, which is why there is a loss of income, by moving agricultural machinery and labour from

one parcel to another. Also, the profitability of the holding is so low that it could not provide a monthly income to the farmer, the EUR 5 829 collected annually, providing an income of less than EUR 500/month.

The SWOT analysis (Table 3) identified opportunities for financial support such as the availability of European funds dedicated to the wine sector, making it possible to restructure the business in order to increase its profitability, but also to integrate best practice models that aim at alternatives in the diversification of the wine-growing activity. An important strength identified is the involvement of the family members. Thus, the farmer's

daughter, who has adequate skills in the agri-food sector, is the most suitable family member who could continue to manage the holding and develop it as a young farmer (34 years old), which becomes an opportunity, next to other opportunities identified like the accelerated expansion of the online environment including marketing and promotion or the access to advanced technologies to make labour costs more efficient and avoid production losses.

All these opportunities can be seized, given the openness of young people to new technologies and to the online environment.

Table 2. Estimate of expenditure and revenue for holding of 5.15 ha (year 2021) (Matei & Bucur, 2022)

Expenses	Details	Value (EURO)
The workforce 12 days/year	team Leader (1) and teams (8)	3600
Agricultural works	manual and mechanised works	16951
Maintenance of machinery	tractor repair	640
Flat-rate tax	annual	60
Marketing	online and newspapers	38
Cost of rent	20 % of the harvest	1126
<b>Total expenditure</b>		<b>22416</b>
Income	Details	Value (EURO)
Single area payment scheme	Payments and Intervention Agency for	492
Redistributive payment	Agriculture	248
Simplified scheme for small farmers	(PIAA) subsidies	926
Environment Agricultural Practices		298
Valorization of the harvest	sale of grapes and must	26281
<b>Total income</b>		<b>28245</b>
<b>Income-to-expenditure ratio</b>	<b>+ 5829 EURO</b>	

Results of the market study in terms of profit alternatives that can be obtained from tourism and leisure activities. The market study undertaken revealed that the range of consumer preferences is wide and the main places are successfully occupied by culinary partnerships, guided tours to wineries, participation in grape picking and must processing for entertainment purposes, and Romanians seem keen to practice these activities. The respondents (1.79%) also provided new ideas like setting up a blending laboratory (Figure 2). Furthermore, over 43% of the 390 respondents have never practised wine tourism but would like to try it, while almost 25% of them would not even want to

try. But an aggregation of the main answers shows that about 75% of respondents are interested in oenotourism, and over 44% of them have already practiced it in the country (26%) and abroad (18%). These data confirm the assumption that oenotouristic activities have the potential to be increasingly preferred by consumers. Moreover, given that tourism involves both leisure but mainly accommodation, questions were dedicated exclusively to the interest of accommodation in a weekend destination, and surprisingly, for most respondents (48%) it does not matter the number of hours spent on the road, if the destination is worth visiting.

Table 3. The SWOT analysis of the holding of 5.15 ha (Matei & Bucur, 2022)

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Location in a wine-growing area of notoriety, loaded with history;</li> <li>- Good quality of the grapes obtained (leads to faithful customers);</li> <li>- Possibility of involving family members in business development;</li> <li>- Holding functional buildings for the harvesting campaign (agricultural workers accommodation and grape storage);</li> <li>- Owning solar panels for energy efficiency.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of adequate technological equipment for wine production, in order to obtain added value on the product;</li> <li>- Low profitability of the holding maintaining it in the subsistence area;</li> <li>- There are no risk management practices;</li> <li>- Transport and delivery of grapes are not offered;</li> <li>- Difficult access to the wine market.</li> </ul>
Threats	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accelerated price increases for agricultural inputs without adequate mitigation measures;</li> <li>- Accelerated climate change effects leading to production losses;</li> <li>- Fiscal and legislative instability at national level;</li> <li>- Delay in the implementation of the Strategic Plan CAP 2023-2027.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advanced technologies to make labour costs more efficient and avoid production losses;</li> <li>- Availability of EU funds dedicated to the wine sector;</li> <li>- Increasing visibility of wine tourism;</li> <li>- Accelerated expansion of the online environment including for marketing and promotion.</li> </ul>

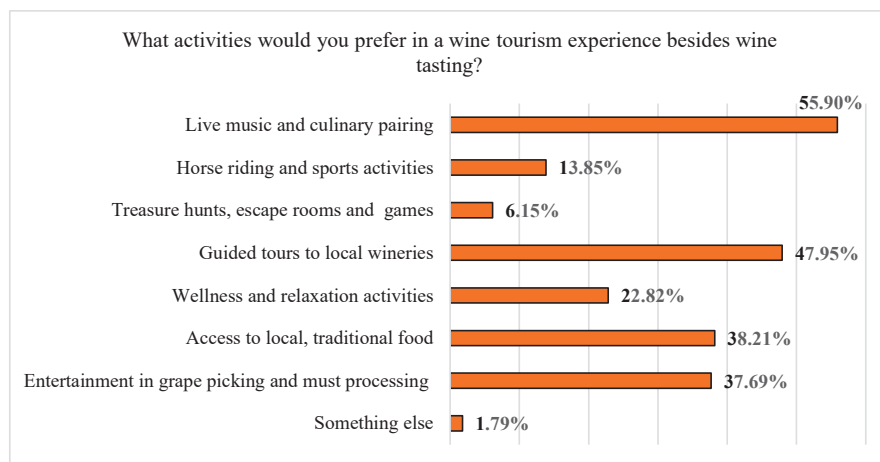


Figure 2. Favourite oenotouristic activities, the results from with the questionnaire during the period May - June 2022 (Matei & Bucur, 2022)

*Results on the development of an integrated business plan to ensure the profitability of a small wine-growing holding*

Business models represent both the connections between the key components of the business model (the theory building approach) and the transformational tools for addressing change, introducing innovation and competitive advantage in enterprises. Business models therefore serve the purpose of generating new value by anticipating new possibilities, as well The CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 offers a set of interventions for financing agricultural and rural development activities. Every intervention

as changing, challenging and even defying existing business models within broader socio-technical transitions (Voelpel et al., 2004).

Thus, given the strength identified in the SWOT analysis regarding the possibility of family involvement in farm activities, as well as the opportunity regarding the availability of European funds, the study channelled into an analysis of EU funds available through the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 and which could be accessed by the farmer and his family. has a particular code and number chosen by the Member State, and the codification is related to the object of the intervention *I-S-V* meaning

“Sectorial Intervention in Viticulture” and “DR” meaning *Rural Development Intervention*.

Therefore, a new business plan is proposed with a time horizon of 5 years, starting in the spring of 2023, when the first calls for accessing European funds will be opened. The first intervention to be accessed is "DR-30 - Support for setting-up of young farmers", which will grant in the first phase 75% of the 70 000 EUR, from which a series of essential purchases will be made to eliminate financial losses. Thus, family involvement will be

achieved through the setting-up of the farmer's daughter as a young farmer under this intervention. All the details of the investments proposed by the new Business Plan model are shown in Table 4 (for the period 2023-2024) and Table 5 (for the period 2025-2027) and the intervention IS-V-03 *Crop Insurance*, aimed at insuring wine plantations will be accessed annually (with a 80% reimbursement of insurance payments).

*In the first phase*, the new Business Plan Model focuses on ensuring the performance of the current wine-growing holding.

Table 4. Investments proposed by the new Business Plan model (2023-2024)  
(Matei & Bucur, 2022)

Year 2023 Funding	Year 2024 Funding		
<b>DR-30</b> Support for setting up young farmers	<b>DR-17</b> Investments in hops and/or table grapes	<b>DR-34</b> Cooperation and innovation in agriculture through EIP Operational Groups	<b>DR-36</b> Leader Community-led local development
<b>The acquisitions:</b>	<b>Investments:</b>		
Tractor BCS Volcan K105	Establishment of 2 ha table grapes	Setting up a wine festival	5 accommodation units made of biodegradable materials
A/C machine 24000 BTU	Establishment/modernisation of hygiene and biosecurity facilities at farm level	Purchase of a refrigerated caravan for agri-food freight transport	Purchasing tent events
Working capital	Establishment, extension and modernisation of farm-level conditioning units	Acquisitions of licenses and software	Designing the tent events
Online marketing	Development of the sales /marketing component at farm level (stores at the farm gate)	Construction of a 124 m <sup>3</sup> refrigerated warehouse	Arranging the events space and planting hedges
<b>Amount (100 % EU)</b>	<b>Amount (65 % EU)</b>	<b>Amount (100 % EU)</b>	<b>Amount (65 % EU)</b>
<b>EUR 70 000</b>	<b>EUR 400 000</b>	<b>EUR 300 000</b>	<b>EUR 200 000</b>

*The second phase* of the business plan involves the orientation towards touristic and leisure services and the third phase of the business plan involves the setting up of table grape vineyards in order to increase the profitability of the holding next to the basis for winemaking. The fourth phase of the business plan involves the construction of a guesthouse and a restaurant within the pension, as well as a wine tasting space, similar to the French best practice model, which supports a cluster of agricultural and non-agricultural businesses in an integrated system that ensures sustainability, visibility and international success. Thus, by providing a total investment of EUR 2 370 000 of which EU funding represents 71%

(EUR 1 685 000), over a 5-year time horizon, there is the possibility of developing the small wine-growing business of 5.15 ha towards competitiveness, innovation, environmentally friendly agriculture practices by increasing resource efficiency and increasing the visibility of the area by creating a large-scale event attracting small producers who want to sell and promote their products, ultimately resulting in the production of quality wine, at international standards with an appropriate visibility for success.

The main risks identified concern difficulties in accessing European support, bureaucratic, administrative and legislative obstacles, delays in launching national calls and delays in



approving projects. There is the risk of ex-ante investments for which the amounts invested can no longer be recovered, but all these risks are mitigated by identifying a wide range of

financing measures with European funds, entering into partnerships with specialists in the field and flexibility regarding the implementation period of the business plan.

Table 5. Investments proposed by the new Business Plan model (2025-2027)  
(Matei & Bucur, 2022)

Year 2025		Year 2026	Year 2027
<i>IS-V-07</i> Investments in tangible and intangible assets to increase the sustainability of wine production	<i>IS-V-02</i> Investments in tangible and intangible assets for the wine sector	<i>DR-12</i> Investments in strengthening holdings of newly installed and newly installed farmers	<i>DR-24</i> Investments in the creation and development of non-agricultural activities
<b>Investments</b>		<b>The acquisitions</b>	<b>Investments</b>
Procurement of water-saving drip irrigation and fertilisation systems	Construction of buildings intended for winemaking	Precision agriculture equipment, including for the management/use of fertilisers and/or plant protection products	Construction of an agropension of 180 sqm, with accommodation capacity 30 persons
Machinery and equipment for: application of organic and mineral fertilisers, spraying with low volume of solution	Installations related to reception, production, packaging, storage	Installations for the local control of hail fall and ground generators	Restaurant hall for wine tasting events
Seeder for sowing the intervals between rows	Setting up a blending laboratory  purchase of a pellet production machine from chopped vine ropes	Production and use of energy (electrical and/or thermal) from renewable sources (solar, wind, aerothermal, hydrothermal, geothermal, etc), intended exclusively for own consumption	Installation of solar panels on the roof of the restaurant
<b>Amount (50 % EU)</b>	<b>Amount (50 % EU)</b>	<b>Amount (80 % EU)</b>	<b>Amount (65 % EU)</b>
<b>EUR 250 000</b>	<b>EUR 400 000</b>	<b>EUR 550 000</b>	<b>EUR 200 000</b>

## CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, the new Business Plan model will include complementary activities that financially support agricultural activities, directing the activities carried out towards producing their own exclusive wine, addressing an educated with financial resources audience, applying a price policy suitable for the majority of respondents participating in the market study. The promotion strategies will also take place in the online environment which will allow the creation of content to promote the various local producers in the area which will then represent a channel for promoting their own products and services of the small wine-growing holding.

In order to start the wine production activity, it will be necessary to contract the services of a wine technologist, who will be co-opted from

Australia, to create a limited-edition niche wine similar to the *Ferdi Winery* good practices model.

All the investments are therefore intended to lead the current wine holding towards the production and sale of wine on the market, with the necessary equipment, with the application of appropriate and economically efficient agricultural practices.

The labour cost will be reduced by the installation of metal trellises within the owned wine areas (3 ha) along with the renting of a harvesting machine, but this can only be done after the wine cellar has been established.

The Business Plan model is based on European funds, as the Common Agricultural Policy was set up to mitigate the losses of farmers and it is well known that agricultural activities are not sufficiently profitable and competitive, especially among small farmers. Without

substantial financial capital (between EUR 1 000 000 and EUR 3 000 000), one cannot start a business in the agricultural sector, especially in the wine-making field, and without investments to drive businesses towards competitiveness, small farms remain at the subsistence stage, producing at a loss most of the time, agriculture being practiced in many cases from debt to acquired inheritances, or from the specific mentality of Romanians who prefer to be owners on unproductive land, rather than handing them over to farmers with investment power.

The support of a small wine-growing holding involves, first, financial resources and secondly the carrying out of complementary revenue-generating activities that increase the visibility of the agri-food products offered, so that the market orientation is supported by a continuous flow, through relevant partners for promotion and marketing, and last but not least, the creation of own brand that achieves success in sales without the need for additional actions specific to an integrated business plan, by offering high quality wine and creating an attractive image in line with trends in the national and international market.

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