BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS ON STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY FARMS[1]

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Abstract

The family farm represents an important part of the rural environment, both economically, ecologically, and especially socially. In this context, for the revitalization, or resilience of the rural environment, it is necessary to establish the strategic directions for the development of family farms. This study provides an overview of the strategic directions for the development of family farms, as presented in the specialized, mainly scientific literature stored in the international WoS database. Using the VOSviewer software, data extracted from the WoS on the topic of "family farms development strategies" were processed, while adequate maps that correlate the predefined keywords in the study with those identified in the specialized scientific literature, have been additionally created.

Key words: Bibliometric study, family farms, strategies, development, sustainability.

JEL:[5] Q01, Q13, R11

Introduction

Family farms are characterized by the transmission of ownership and management among members of the same family, over several generations (Björkhaug, Blekesaune,

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2008). These farms play a fundamental role in agri-food production, sustainable management of natural resources, and supporting the economic development of rural areas (Brune et al., 2023). Family farms also have a crucial involvement in ensuring food security and strengthening the resilience of food systems against the climate change (Chao, 2024).

The family farm remains the most common form of agricultural enterprise worldwide, being the pillar of rural society for decades, stabilizing rural economies, and strengthening social and cultural tradition. Many authors, both national and international, have addressed the topic of defining the family farm, the ideology underlying this definition, and the differentiated gender roles of members involved in family farms. The work of Luhrs (2018), which proposes a definition of family farming, provided an important conceptual framework, on which subsequent research was built.

In the context within the U.S. agricultural economy, family farms represent a crucial component, contributing significantly to the economic prosperity and overall sustainability of rural communities. However, the future of farms is threatened by uncertainties related to intergenerational succession, especially regarding the farm management (Lally, Mars, 2024). The study by Haws et al. (2025) examines how farms are transferred between generations in the U.S., using historical census data. It is found that daughters rarely inherit farms, and firstborns are more likely to take over only when their parents are working. Sons with experience as tenants are more likely to become successors. However, less than 20% of farms are passed down to a son. The study highlights the need for access to modern data due to better understand agricultural holdings succession.

In Australia, approximately 90% of farms are owned and operated by families. Family farms remain embedded in a pervasive agrarian mythology, characterized by tight constructions of gender and family relations that often obscure more complex realities (Downey, Clune, 2023).

Sheridan et al. (2023) explores how changing gender norms and rising asset values are influencing farm succession in Australia. Through interviews with agricultural advisors, the authors show that the traditional patrilineal model is increasingly being challenged. New economic and social conditions are leading to more flexible and equitable forms of succession, where tradition and change mutually coexist.

In Europe, the number of family farms is declining as farmers grapple with issues related to climate change, sustainability, farm structural change, and intergenerational farm succession (Farrell et al., 2022). Uncertainty associated

with intergenerational leadership succession, has directly threatened the resilience of family farms (Lally, Mars, 2024).

According to Poczta Wajda (2020), the economic viability of family farms is crucial for their long-term survival, influencing succession, land use, development, and quality of life. As the predominant form of entities in agriculture in Europe, process of ensuring their viability is essential for the sustainable development of overall agriculture and rural areas. In this context, understanding the factors determining economic viability of family farms is key issue for the development of effective policies.

In Hungary, the number of family farms has decreased, while the average size of farms has increased. At the same time, smaller family farms show a more pronounced growth compared to larger family farms. Thus, the ongoing process of restructuring family farms depends on their latter size, and refers to their characteristics and government policies (Bojnec et al., 2022).

In Bulgaria, family farms in rural areas play a key role in preserving tradition, supporting the local economy and ensuring sustainable development. They contribute to job creation, food security, biodiversity conservation and the involvement of the younger generation in agriculture. The study by Tsvyatkova (2024) analyses family farms' advantages and challenges, highlighting the influence of factors such as available resources, political support, and access to infrastructure. By strengthening these farms, related industries can be stimulated, agricultural risks can be reduced and innovations can be introduced. Mentioned have a positive impact on combating poverty and strengthening the rural economy (Nikolova, 2020).

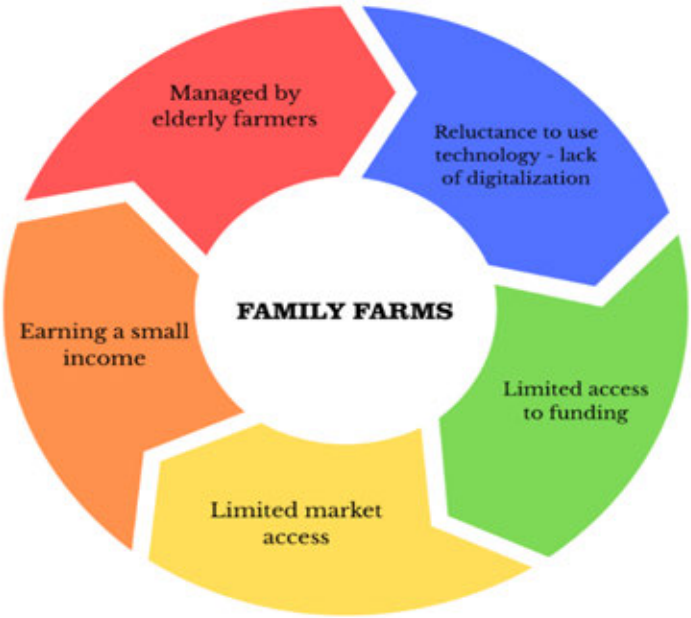
Family farms are a key element of Ukrainian agriculture, with notable progress in staple food production, despite uneven results and lower efficiency compared to other forms of farming. The study by Vasylieva and Harvey (2020), analyses their evolution since 2002, comparing data with European ones, while highlighting the potential of commercial family farms. Despite social and economic challenges, the development of family farms is crucial for food security and improving living conditions in rural Ukraine (Nechitailo, 2023).

Family farming plays a key role in Portugal, employing in 2019 about 68% of the agricultural workforce, where almost half are women. Although the significant presence of the women in this sector, their voice remains underrepresented in performed research. The study by Gomes et al. (2022) analyses the perceptions and experiences of female farmers in two Portuguese regions, highlighting difficulties such as solitary work, insecurity, and gender inequalities, especially

in decision-making and tasks allocation. However, young women are starting to overcome traditional barriers, choosing farming as a sustainable lifestyle (Costa Pereira et al., 2024).

Family farms represent the backbone for development of Romanian society. In recent years, certain legislative has encouraged the development of larger holdings in order to ensure food security, while neglecting family farms, which are characterized by lack of organization, absence of adequate classification, as well as shortage in measures that have to protect them and encourage their development (Micu et al., 2022). Although there came to decrease in number of family farms, or increase in number of large-scale holdings, the Romanian Government was aware of importance that family farms have on economic development of rural environment. It has prioritized their support through proper policies involving direct payments, rural development instruments, and support that boosts their economic performances (Maican et al., 2021).

Figure 1. The main factors influencing sustainable development of family farms



Source: Authors' vision of specialized literature using the Canva application.

In line to previously mentioned, the purpose of this study is to provide informational basis for further research on the development of family farms. Performed survey has to initiate more in-depth research on observed topic, even throughout the wider academic debates on researched issue.

Material and Methods

The performed study represents systematic analysis of existing publications visible in the Web of Science (WoS) database on strategic directions for the development of family farms. The aim of research is to present a conceptual framework on evolution and directions of research in underlined field.

Among the main limitations of the research next could be singled out: partly incomplete coverage of sources, dependence of the analysis on predefined key words „family farms development strategies", deeper leaning on quantitative analysis, or difficulties due to contextual interpretation determined by the translation of analyzed scientific works.

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research method that centralizes scientific studies according to predefined criteria, such as: subject, title, keywords, authors, years, countries, etc. The research has started by creation of database, i.e. by configuring the "subject" field in the WoS database, which support search for scientific articles by specified keywords, title, abstract, or author. For the survey search, the term "family farms development strategies" were entered within the subject field. The results have been displayed after querying two selected words, which had the subject as a search filter, i.e. displayed sample counts 725 publications in the WoS database, while through the VOSviewer software, all publications' data were represented graphically by maps and then interpreted. Further, qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to process the data. Content analysis is the qualitative method used in the study. The quantitative method is the analysis of statistical data provided by WoS regarding the statistics of the identified publications.

Results with Discussion

Study of specialized literature

Several international studies have highlighted the complexity of family farms' development processes, as well as the impact of structural, economic and psycho-social factors on them.

Some study focused to decision-making models and strategic orientation of seven farming families has observed the influence of family patterns on direction of farm development. Families characterized by rigid roles are more oriented towards maintaining traditional agriculture, while have shown resistance to innovation. Contrary to that, families with flexible roles, where responsibilities are distributed according to members' skills and interests (additionally valuing women's contribution) have usually adopted future-oriented approach, either through constant development or gradual withdrawal (Rossier, 2005).

Another study, with qualitative and longitudinal character, has been conducted over a period of 14 years on 74 Austrian farming families involved in organic agriculture. Study has identified diversity of developmental strategies: 35 families opted for the professionalization of agricultural activity, 18 were turned to gradual withdrawal from agriculture, 8 have strived to maintain economic stability, while 13 had quite an unstable development. General conclusion was that economic stability of the farm is closely linked to the degree of professionalization and the role that agriculture plays in the family's professional life (Larcher, Vogel, 2010).

Certain study performed in the U.S. has showed that although the number of farms has decreased by 33% in last five decades, share of family farms has showed stability at 96% of overall number of farms. Mentioned study, based on stress and adaptation theory, has analyzed the experiences of 26 family farm members. It identifies two major stressors (environmental and financial), and three coping strategies: reframing family relationships, nature connection, and farmer identity. Gained results highlight the interdependence between stressors and coping mechanisms, as well as the importance of cognitive reframing in the stress management process (Paskewitz et al., 2023).

Daniele's research (2024) conducted at European level, has showed that the issue of succession in family farms decisively influences the farm management strategy. Research conducted on a sample of 768 farms from nine European countries explained that the presence of a successor stimulates the adoption of innovative strategies (diversification, cooperation, or technology), thus contributing to both continuity and modernization. Polcyn (2021) believes that family farms represent source of income for approximately half of the population. His study determines the relationship between eco-efficiency and efficiency of human capital at family farms, covering five countries: Lithuania (960 farms), Moldova (532 farms), Poland (696 farms), Romania (872 farms), and Serbia (524 farms). All observed countries are characterized by a high fragmentation of agricultural holdings. Based on gained results, author has formulated following conclusions: indices of ecological efficiency and human capital efficiency are increasing together with the growth of

area at small and medium-sized family farms. Also, link between the increase in ecological efficiency index and increase in available agricultural area suggests that decrease in size of farm area directs to achieving of more extensive agricultural production. In addition, increase in human capital efficiency together with increase in used agricultural area indicates that there was an inefficiency in the use of human capital resources at studied farms.

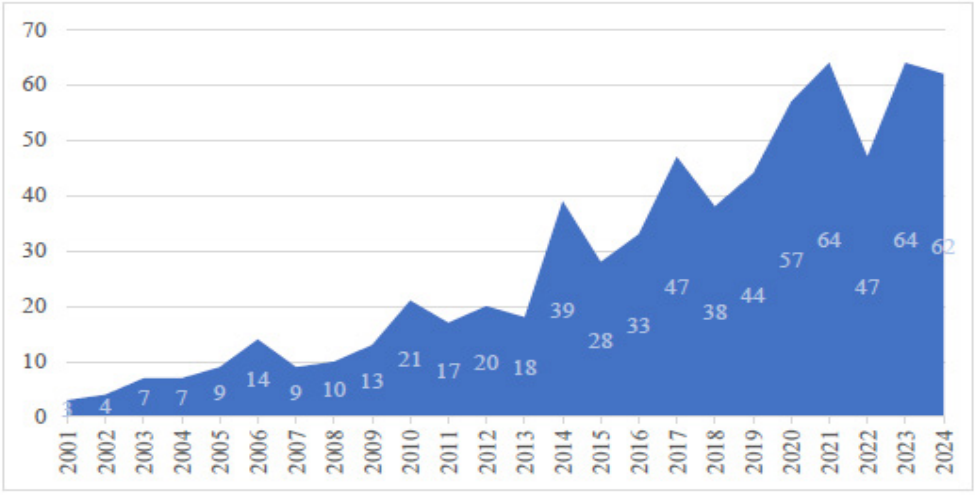
Bibliometric analysis

Research results are organized in few sections. In the first part, evolution of publications related to "family farms development strategies" visible in WoS database is analyzed, using the bibliometric research method. In the second part, the term map generated by support of the VOSviewer software is examined and interpreted. Mentioned was based on the titles and abstracts of preselected articles, presenting the considerations of authors that write the works with the greatest impact, both in terms of citations and relevance to the analyzed field.

Evolution of articles on "family farms development strategies" published in the WoS database during the period 2001-2024

In the WoS database, according to keywords "family farms development strategies", 725 documents were identified. Analyzing the frequency of works by years (Chart 1.), there could be seen that the concept of "family farms development strategies" was almost non-existent within the academic debates until 2010.

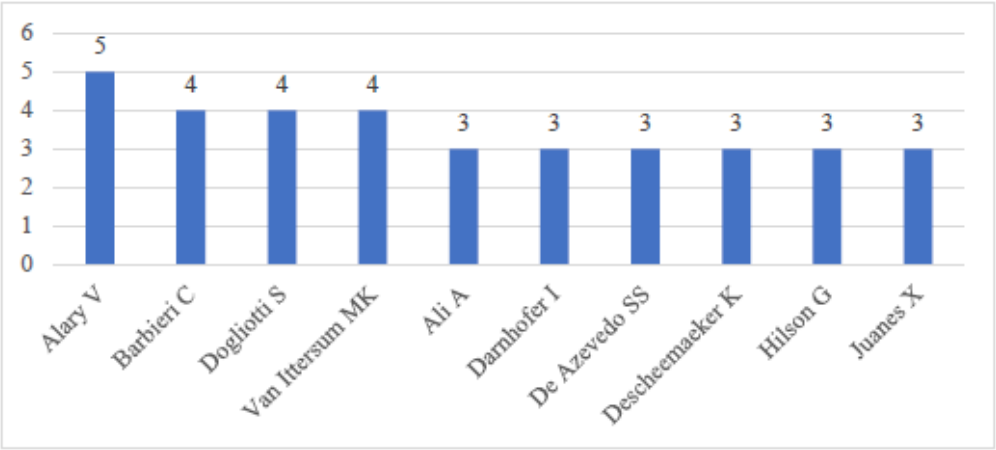
Chart 1. Evolution of published works on the topic "family farms development strategies" deposited in WoS (number of documents/year)



Source: Authors' own data processing of the WoS database, 2025.

After 2010, the concept "family farms development strategies" has shown increasing interest among academic community, following an upward trend, with small variations. The peak was reached in 2021, respectively 2023, with more than 60 articles published on this topic. Upward trend is consequence of the increasing interest of researchers in contributing to the knowledge in field of family farming and possibilities of its development through established strategies and policies. Increase in the number of articles in 2023 compared to 2020 was 12%, or approximately 205% compared to 2010.

Chart 2. Main authors of the articles on the topic "family farms development strategies" visible in WoS (number of documents/author)



Source: Authors' own data processing of the WoS database, 2025.

Author with the most papers on the topic "family farms development strategies" (Chart 2.) is Alary V. with five published articles. His works are relatively recent, as the oldest being from 2016, while the most recent is from 2022. The next author is Barbieri C., followed by Dogliott, S., and van Ittersum M., with four published papers each towards the observed topic. After deeper analyzing of their works, it can be seen that there are collaborations between these authors for works published on this topic.

VOSviewer term map

Figure 2. shows the term map, which includes 4,633 terms grouped into seven distinct clusters, according to their frequency of occurrence within the specialized (mainly scientific) literature. Red, green and blue clusters are the most extensive, indicating a more consistent presence of the observed themes, while the purple, light blue and orange clusters are more restricted towards the researched topic.

Of these, the red cluster (Figure 3.) is the best represented, highlighting the fact that term "family farm" is frequently associated with concepts such as "food security", "resilience", "agriculture", "rural development", "sustainability", "food security", "strategy", or "adaptation". Therefore, the sustainable development of family farms is necessity for promoting the revitalization of rural environment, while the development strategies represent a point of interest for researchers active in observed field. Mentioned is found in works such as those written by Duan and Luo (2024), or Nepomoceno and Carniatto (2023).

Figure 2. Correlation map of the term "family farms development strategies"

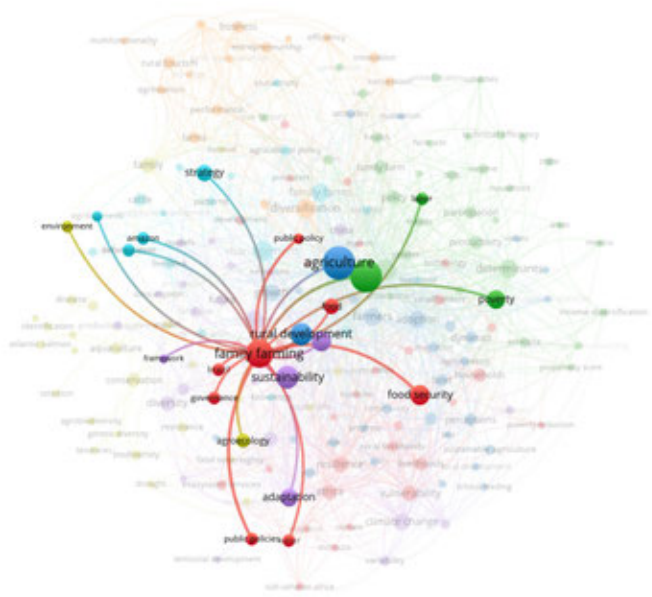
Source: Authors' own data processing, 2025.

So, Duan and Luo (2024) have shown that in the context of family farms in China, sustainable development is seen as essential condition for rural revitalization and increasing agricultural resilience. Based on sample of 357 cereal farms, there was found that market-oriented perception positively influences sustainable development, while organizational resilience has essential mediating role in this process. Gained results support the idea of integrated approach that combines market adaptation with internal farm strengthening.

On the other hand, Nepomoceno and Carniatto (2023) have also argued that climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, thus increasing the interest in solutions that can strengthen the resilience of family farming. However, the link between these solutions and sustainable rural development remains insufficiently

explored. Authors systematically reviewed 23 studies published between 2000 and 2021, previously selected on predefined criteria. Although survey based on evidence suggests that adaptation strategies can significantly improve the capacity of rural communities to cope with climate change, still persists several limiting factors. Towards sustainable rural development, long-term actions are outlined while focused on territorial reorganization that have to be done in local, inclusive, equitable, and participatory way. Possible justification of underlined directions and proposals for future research due to opportunities in family farming are also discussed.

Figure 3. Correlation map of the term "family farming" with other terms found in the specialized literature



Source: Authors' own data processing, 2025.

The second cluster (Figure 3.) colored in green is focused to the term "strategies". Green cluster includes terms from the area of family farm support policies, while terms have a strong connection with terms from red, blue and purple clusters. The blue cluster includes terms such are "agriculture", "rural development", "farmers", "perceptions", "policies", or "yield". The need for expanding the policies due to development of family farms was encountered in studies of Berchin and associates (2019) and Fernandez (2016). Mentioned studies analyze how public policies support family farming to ensure food security, focusing to experiences from Brazil and Argentina. In Brazil, policies turned to family farming had a significant impact

on increasing food security. In Argentina, performed research was directed to influence of the Rural Territorial Development (RTD) approach on agricultural policies, underlined by inequalities in agricultural sector.

Yellow cluster is focused on biodiversity, containing the terms such are "agrobiodiversity", "conservation", "agroecology", "aquaculture", "genetic diversity", or "temperature". Focal point of this cluster is "conservation". Cluster is closely connected with other clusters, as a proof of increased concerns about the limitation of natural resources. Study of Fonseca Carreño and associates (2019) deeply observes mentioned issues. Study has showed that agroecological family farming has increased interest due to its ability to maintain soil fertility and agricultural productivity, actively contributing to the conservation of biodiversity and supporting ecological balance in multiple dimensions, as are economic, ecological, political, social, and cultural. Study derives conclusion that agroecological family farming can be exercised as sustainable agricultural practice, capable to generate good agroecological activities, characterized by biological diversity (availability of various species of plants and animals), while capitalized on local or traditional knowledge. In the same time, this form of agriculture can support the stability of the use of natural capital and promote sustainable development.

Purple cluster contains terms such are "sustainability", "adaptation", "climate change", "sustainable development", "systems", "variability", or "adaptation strategies". The most of these terms come from the scientific area that analyze the impact of climate change on family farms, or rather the potential of adaptive capacity of family farms to climate change. Good examples are the studies of Tagang Tene and associates (2025), Nepomoceno and Carniatto (2023), or Ali (2021). In study of Tagang Tene and associates (2025) has been identified the factors that influence the adaptation of family farms to climate change. Study also analyzed the complementarity of used adaptation strategies (based on secondary data from 721 family farms). Derived results have showed that 72% of farmers correctly perceive the increase in temperature and variations in precipitation as reality, underlining the drought (52%) and floods (34%) as the most worrying climate phenomena. Regarding the determinants of adaptation, performed econometric analysis has revealed that farmer experience, household size, religion, agro-ecological zone, cooperation between producers, and credit institutions, etc. significantly affect farmers' adaptation decisions.

Regarding adaptation alternatives in agriculture, Ali (2021) investigated the determinants of mentioned alternatives in northern Togo, using the data from 704 family farms. Study identified key factors such are minimum consumption needs, gender of farm heads, available land area, access to credit, and presence of

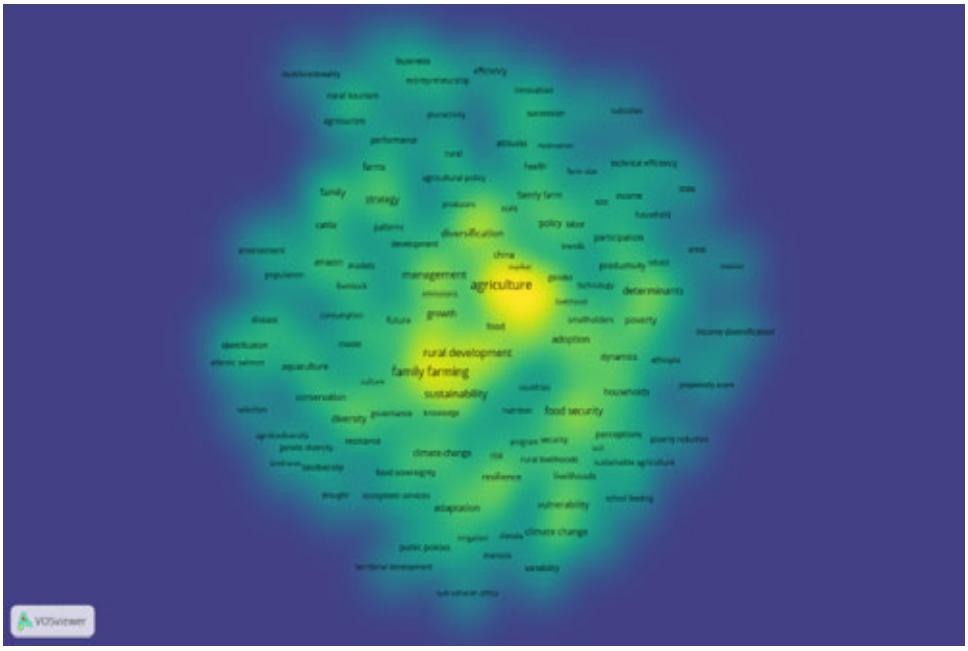
agricultural extension services. Commonly adopted strategies included the use of resistant varieties, crop and livestock integration, soil and water conservation, the use of organic fertilizers, and adjustment of sowing time to weather conditions. Study has highlighted the complementarity between the adopted strategies and importance of institutional factors, as are market access and extension services, in promoting environmentally friendly and climate-smart farming practices.

Light blue cluster contains terms such as "family farms", "management", "agricultural policy", "resources", "livestock", or "population". These terms mainly originate from different research methods used by authors in their studies related to family farm management. Good example is study of Li and associates (2022) that relates to efficiency of family farm management. Mentioned study analyzes efficiency of family farms in China and identifies key factors influencing their productivity. Gained results, based on data from 532 farms from 27 provinces, show that the efficiency of family farms is still low, while its improvement depends on factors such as investment in land, capital, labor, education of farm leaders, or implementation of new technologies. Study emphasizes the importance of financial support and longer land transfer periods to increase farm efficiency. Managerial implications have recommended adoption of effective management strategy, recruiting qualified staff and creating favorable environment for further development of family farms.

Orange cluster, the least represented, contains terms such are "diversification", "performance", "family business", or "rural tourism". These are terms that could come from the studies focused on rural development through diversification of economic activities in rural areas. Adequate example is a study made by De Rosa and McElwee (2015) that highlights adoption of Rural Development Policies (RDP) at family farms in the Lazio region, which highly depends from internal characteristics of the farms, as are family life cycle and farm structure. Mentioned study also underlines a low degree of coherence in adoption of RDP by farms in rural areas, explaining that many of them do not have clear and effective strategies to attract funds or implement projects compliant with RDP requirements. Authors believe that the success of farmers in accessing financing depends largely on their ability to adopt entrepreneurial, proactive and coherent vision that meets the requirements imposed by regional policies. In this context, farmers require to be more strategically oriented, as to develop projects that demonstrate sustainability and alignment with RDP objectives. Study also emphasizes importance of deeper understanding of entrepreneurial behavior in rural areas, recommending multidisciplinary approach to support their development.

Study of Grillini and associates (2025) highlights the complexity of impact of agritourism on farms and local rural communities, especially due to adoption of ecological practices and social interaction. In essence, study has showed that agritourism supports adoption of ecological farming practices, contributing to environmental sustainability, while align farmers with sustainable production trends. This is caused by the fact that farmers engaged in tourism activities are more likely to adopt more ecological methods, due to market demand and visitors' interest in natural agri-food products. Besides, study points out that although the agritourism brings benefits to ecological sustainability, it also imposes a social and family costs. Hosting the tourists are reducing farmers' free time and decrease farmers interactions with the local community. So, it was suggested the transition to more complex agricultural model, which includes service-oriented activities (e.g. agritourism), that may lead to a series of unforeseen side effects, affecting the social and personal lives of farmers.

Figure 4. Graphical representation of the density of the keywords "family farms development strategies"



Source: Authors' own data processing, 2025.

Due to the frequency of certain keywords, the density map can indicate areas of interest, or research topics that are relevant in observed field. Thus, for the topic "family farms development strategies" the following keywords are identified:

„agriculture", "strategies", "family farming", "sustainability", "rural development", "management", "systems", "diversification", "determinants", or "food security" (Figure 4. and Table 1.).

Table 1. Ten the most used terms linked to analyzed corpus

No.	Term	Number of appearances
1.	Agriculture	80
2.	Strategies	78
3.	Family farming	56
4.	Sustainability	38
5.	Rural development	35
6.	Management	35
7.	Systems	33
8.	Diversification	31
9.	Determinants	29
10.	Food security	28

Source: Authors' own data processing, 2025.

Regarding the territorial distribution of papers indexed in WoS database on the topic "family farm development strategies", Brazil is ranked as the first, with 99 visible documents. It was followed by the U.S. and China. Romania has only 6 indexed papers on this topic, ranked as 40th according to scientific contributions in the field (Table 2.).

Table 2. Top 10 countries with the largest number of papers indexed in WoS

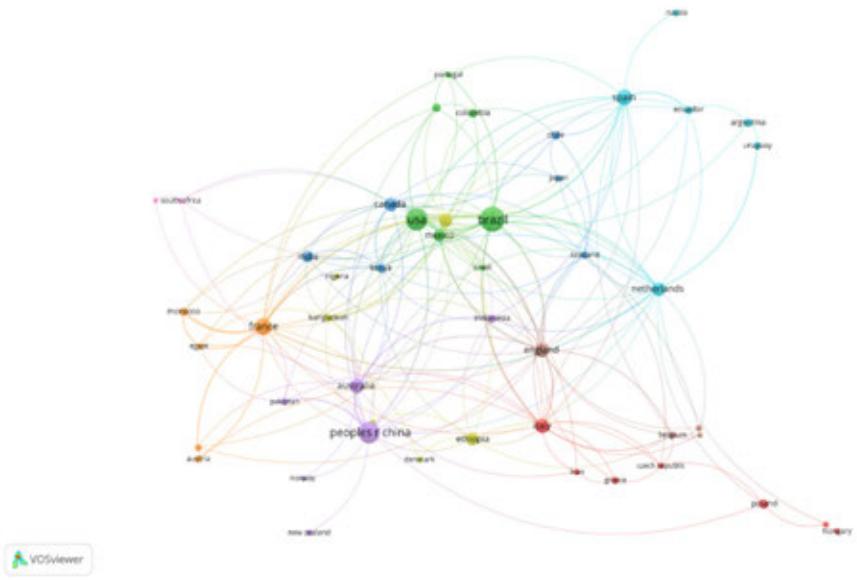
No.	Country	Number of documents
1.	Brazil	99
2.	USA	81
3.	China	74
4.	France	48
5.	Spain	40
6.	Italy	33
7.	Australia	32
8.	UK	32
9.	Canada	31
10.	Germany	31

Source: Authors' own data processing, 2025.

For a more detailed analysis, there was created a map highlighting the level of interrelationship between the countries that most frequently address the topic of "family farm development strategies". Map has been built according to co-authorship and international partnerships, using the nodes to mark the countries

involved in certain survey. Colors used allow distinction of different research directions, while the distances between nodes reflect to degree of collaboration between the states (Figure 5.).

Figure 5. Map of correlation between the countries and theme "family farms development strategies"



Source: Authors' own data processing, 2025.

Analysis reveals ten countries with high interest in observed subject, as are Brazil, U.S., China, France, Spain, Italy, Australia, UK, Canada, and Germany. In total, nine distinct directions of research in observed field were identified. It has to be mentioned that Brazil, as a country with the highest number of published papers shares the same research direction with several countries, as are Egypt, Morocco, Mexico, Canada, Australia, UK, Scotland, Italy, France, Germany, and Romania. Map also suggests that Romania is closely linked with Brazil, UK, or Belgium (Figure 5.).

Conclusion

Analysis of the dynamics of publications visible in the WoS database towards the topic "family farms development strategies" showed increasing research interest during the previous decade. Approach to topic is highly diverse, but all relations had in common the concept of family farms and presentation of ways how they could be

developed efficiently and sustainably. Thus, derived research results should serve as a reference base for further researches on "family farms development strategies" or similar topics, as it provides in-depth observation on current state due to topic, or it could initiate new academic debates on topic.

Observed topic "family farms development strategies" has the strongest correlation with the keywords such are „agriculture", "strategies", "family farming", "sustainability", "rural development", "management", "systems", "diversification", "determinants", or "food security", as all of these words originated from agriculture and rural development sector. In-depth analysis of studies that correspond to mentioned keywords showed that strivings to develop family farms, also require political and implicitly economic support.

According to correlation between the topic and authors' country of origin, strong connections has been found between Brazil and countries as are U.S., Mexico, Canada, Australia, France, Italy, UK, Spain, the Netherlands, or Romania. Referred correlation indicates a high degree of collaboration between the authors, highlighting the strategic partnerships between the countries from which they come. At the same time, strategic partnerships aim to carry out common studies and research in fields related to agriculture and rural development, organizing scientific events on topics related to "family farms development strategies". During the data analysis from available scientific literature, there was noted that several studies are part of certain research projects funded by EU scientific funds, or other types of funding.

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