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Croatia, Populations
Agriculture and Food Disparity in Croatia

Croatian households put a strong emphasis on family, as it is the basis for the country's social structure. In a traditional household, the inhabitants would include grandparents, parents, and children, the grandfather acting as the patriarch of the household. Although this is the traditional type of family, it has become more common for nuclear families to live in their own single-family homes. Adults typically live with their parents until they can financially support themselves or get married, although on occasion some children move out to pursue an education and then move back into the family home. Honor is also highly regarded within the Croatian culture, and sacrificing for one's family is a highly admirable act. As mentioned before, honor is a core Croatian value, if not the *most* important core value in the Croatian social structure. This tie between family and honor places a huge emphasis on spending time with one's family, weekends are regarded as family time and the general expectation is that business matters or matters of work should not interfere with family affairs and activities. Among Croatians, reverence to one's elders is an important part of honor as well, the elderly generally receive the highest amount of respect from those that are younger than them, and are revered for their knowledge of tradition, culture, and history. Children and young adults are also expected to seek out and ask for their elder's knowledge in regards to making important life decisions that could economically and socially impact the family. In addition to respecting the elderly in the family and caring for them, the eldest male family member is regarded as the head of the family, as Croatia is a patriarchal society (Chara Scroope, 2017).

Following World War II, Croatia became one of the six 'republics' which made up the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, which was a communist centralized state under the rule of Josip Broz Tito. Under this communist government, which was in power until the year 1990, women were encouraged to join the workforce and since then have maintained similar status to men in terms of the population involved in the workforce. However, the expectation for women to be homemakers who cook, clean, and raise children is still prevalent in their culture and thus women end up both working and homemaking. The husband and wife of a modern Croatian household typically collaborate and come to a consensus together involving important decisions.

The population in Croatia is condensed mainly within the urban cities. "Roughly 60% of Croatia's population live in or around urban centers" (*Croatia Population*, 2021). As one can tell, the population density of Croatia lies within the urban cities of the country. The most populated city, which also happens to be the capital, is Zagreb. "Zagreb has a city population of 804,200." (*Croatia Population*, 2021). Although this is to be expected in most countries around the world, in Croatia there is a particular disparity of agricultural workers such as farmers and cattlemen due to a lack of population in rural areas. This population disparity can be seen in statistics such as their total population size 4,078,596 (*World Population Review*, 2021) compared to the population of their capital Zagreb, which has a population of 804,200 (*World Atlas*, 2021). In viewing the statistics comparatively, one can see that more than one fifth of Croatia's entire population is located in one city. This disparity is evident in these figures, even when compared to its neighboring country of Slovenia, which has a total population of 2,078,724 (*World Population Review*, 2021) with its capital population being 280,140 (*World Atlas*, 2021). The population of their capital makes up roughly 1/10th of its total population, a stark contrast of Croatia. A similar trend can be seen with numerous other countries, save for the outliers such as China and Singapore which also have seen large disparities regarding their population density. There are several disparities that this unbalanced population has caused:

"If compared to an urban area, major disadvantages of living in a rural community are: lack of entertainment and cultural events and fewer opportunities for economic, political and educational development. It is somewhat expected that rural areas provide less opportunities for personal advancement and usually young ambitious people need to leave in order to realize their ambitions." (*African Journal of Agricultural Research Vol. 5(8)*, pp. 653-660, 18 April, 2010)

It seems that with the lack of jobs in rural areas, it is necessary to move to a city if one wishes to economically succeed. However, this could be fixed. The primary profession in rural settings are typically farmers, but with the lack of proper funding to the agricultural industries of Croatia, these farmers often own very small farms and make very little profit. Due to this, farming is seen as a considerably unattractive profession to young people, but this is also why it is so important to focus on this part of Croatia's workforce and help develop it into a more popular profession. This profession is the key to providing self-sufficient food sustainability within Croatia.

Keeping that in mind, it is also important to first understand the agricultural background of Croatia and its terrain. During the communist reign of Josip Broz Tito, planned market socialism was instilled, "Market socialism, also called liberal socialism, economic system representing a compromise between socialist planning and free enterprise, in which enterprises are publicly owned but production and consumption are guided by market forces rather than by government planning." (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2010, August 27). This change within the economic system of the country was the beginning of its metamorphical journey from an agricultural nation to an industrialized one. In the late 1940s, almost all of Croatia's privately owned businesses and land became nationalized under the agrarian reform movement. This was a socialistic movement, which in theory was supposed to guarantee the safety of Croatian markets. This idea was largely influenced by the economic system of the Soviet Union. With all land and factories being government-owned, Croatia was put in a difficult economic situation as J.B. Tito passed away and the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia crumbled. As the communistic centralized state faded from power, the aftermath included a mess of independent nations without a self-sufficient economic system, which included Croatia as was aforementioned.

The Croatian government began to make desperately needed economic reforms, this began as the government opted to replace planned market socialism with market-oriented capitalism. "This required such measures as the sale of state-owned enterprises to private owners, the establishment of functioning markets, and the creation of stable prices, interest rates, and currency." (Britannica, Croatia, Economy, 2021, March 2). This would prove to be no easy task, Croatia had been heavily industrialized throughout the 1970s and 1980s its agricultural production was the least of its strengths, despite the rich, fertile lands Croatia occupied. This has become one of the main problems with Croatia's national economy, even in modern times. It was and still is difficult for farmers to succeed in Croatia, not just due to population disparities in rural areas, but also to the continued recovery from the communistic state of its previous economy. According to Britannica Encyclopedia, "Agriculture (grazing and tilling) occupies less than one-fourth of Croatia's land and contributes less than one-tenth of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Most agricultural land is privately held, but many landholdings are too small for profitable production." (Croatia, Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, 2021, March 2). The potential Croatia's agricultural industry holds is astonishing, yet they choose to import over 3.5 billion euros worth of food every year, according to Total Croatia News (2020, May 20). This is a tremendous sum of money to pay to import foodstuffs into a country that is capable of self-sufficient agricultural practices. Croatia is a land of unused potential, the land when it has the fertile land to produce much of its sustenance, especially the Alluvial soil of the Pannonian and para-Pannonian plains, and the underappreciated soil of the central mountainous belt which has the potential to yield cultivable lands. It is worth noting that considerable rainfall is present in the central mountainous belt and its valleys, along with a mild climate which is ideal for growing such crops as barley, rye, oats, potatoes, and numerous types of fruit-bearing trees.

The answer as to why these lands are not taken advantage of by various types of farmers is not so black and white. The issue that lies in front of our eyes is as easily spotted as the prepared game bird at the center of the table during a feast, but it is not as easily accessed. There are numerous layers to this issue

that need to be dissected and repaired individually, and to pretend as if this is simple work with a one-step solution would be foolish. The base of the problem lies in population disparity, most of Croatia's population, as mentioned earlier, lies within urban cities. Rural living is not necessarily encouraged which makes farming a more rare profession among Croatians. I believe the first step in growing the agricultural industry of Croatia is the government-guided encouragement of moving to more rural areas. Encouragement that targets people of working age, whether in the form of advertising, a small grant of currency, or even a land-grant, to get the citizens more interested in an agricultural career. Aside from benefiting the economy and reducing spending on foreign raw materials, the creation of new farms and the expansion of existing ones can create job opportunities for those who need them. Now, subsidies and land grants are not cheap, so the money must come from another source, and said source has recently fallen into Croatia's metaphorical lap. Croatia very recently became a member of the European Union (E.U).

“Croatia's EU membership has enhanced its economic stability and provided new opportunities for trade and investment. Despite having access to a substantial amount of EU funds, the Croatian economy has yet to gain the full benefits of membership in terms of growth and sustainability. Croatia will receive more than \$30 billion in EU funding through 2030, which has the potential to provide a significant boost to the economy.” (*US Department of State, 2021 Investment Climate Statements: Croatia, 2021*)

In receiving said funds under the terms of EU funding, the Croatian government would be wise to allocate a part of these funds into land grants for willing citizens, giving each family a certain amount of money to move into rural areas and begin a homestead. Again taking inspiration from the Homestead Act of 1862. Another possible use for these economically stimulating funds could be tax breaks for farmers, or yearly monetary incentives for those who actively own and work on farms. This second option would also fix the small size of Croatia's farms since the farmers who would be getting extra money could invest said money back into their farm and therefore grow in size and production. This added incentive and/or tax break would help to popularize the profession among younger people.

As the number of farmers increases due to the popularization of the profession, Croatia will begin to see a decrease in spending on foreign raw materials. This excess money can now be allotted to farmers in numerous ways, whether in the form of pure currency, stimulation of the agricultural markets, or even the implementation of a more vertical integration type of marketing structure. A vertically integrated market structure would be beneficial to the growth of small farms. Since in present-day Croatia, farms are far too small for any real profit, “the average size of agricultural holdings of 11.6 hectares is inadequate” States Lauren Simmonds of Total Croatia News (2020, May 29). This is a problem farmers in Croatia have been facing but vertical integration could be a solution if implemented correctly, as it favors large-scale farming. Essentially, vertical integration in terms of Croatia's agriculture would look like small, privately owned farms making a market contract with industrial companies and/or marketing companies that process raw materials. The idea behind this concept is to ensure the safety and success of the supplying farm while controlling the quality of raw resources the manufacturer receives. In these market contracts which the two or more sides must sign, oftentimes the manufacturer is the only manufacturer to which the farm sells goods, guaranteeing the supply of natural resources and the quality of the product. In turn, the farm would receive benefits such as farm assistance from its manufacturing partner, “Overall, farm assistance can include input supply programmes, investment assistance, trade credit, bank loan guarantees and extension and management advisory services” (World Bank 2005). This can favor the growth and economic security of farmers, while also favoring the creation of larger-scale farms and lowering the complexity of the system, lowering the levels of food disparity across the country as well. This system of farm-to-manufacturer trading could be very beneficial to the agricultural system of Croatia, supplying a greater amount of locally manufactured and grown goods, stimulating the local economy while also saving money that would traditionally be spent on importing raw materials.

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