



The EU agri-food system in the recent crisis scenarios

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Abstract

The European Union agri-food system has faced major challenges in the last years due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian war. In a scenario where millions of people all over the world suffer from hunger, the uncertainty of food availability and commodity price surge have made it difficult to find and afford food on a large scale even in countries, which apparently are not exposed to those risks. Within the European Union (EU), this has depended upon the vulnerabilities and dependencies inherent in the agri-food system. In order to react and cope with emergency scenarios, the European Institution has adopted some temporary measures. The present paper verifies the level of the EU agri-food Self-Reliance system through the development of Self-sufficiency calculation and the Import Dependency Indices as well as the EU comparative advantage through the Gerard-Lafay Index and the relative comparative advantage proposed by Vollrath. Focusing on wheat and maize, these indices show a good level in the former case, but it may no longer be considered as such in the event of a crisis, and poor levels in the second case already at present time. Based on the achieved results, recommendable actions have been suggested in order to secure the EU food supply and to satisfy the EU demand even in case future adverse events might occur. In addition, further recommended actions to be taken by the European institutions, have been described.

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Introduction

The European Union agri-food system and not only (Bin-Nashwan *et al.*, 2022), have faced major challenges over the last years. First, the Covid-19 pandemic, and second, the current war between Russia and Ukraine have resulted in commodity price spikes (European Commission, 2022a) and in concerns about the availability of resources, thus posing the global food security at risk (Zarbà *et al.*, 2021; Howard, 2022; Kemmerling *et al.*, 2022).

While addressing the food security issue, three aspects may be worth considering here: the physical availability (Amin *et al.*, 2022; Polukhin *et al.*, 2022) relating to the physiological needs of the population, the economic availability of food and food adequacy, which entails health and safety implications (Jerzak and Smiglak-Krajewska, 2020).

FAO *et al.* (2021) estimated that 720 to 811 million people across the world faced hunger, next to an increased level of undernourishment, varying from 1.5 percent to 9.9 percent.

Russia and Ukraine have historically played a leading role in global trade. According to FAO (2022), Russia (14%) and Ukraine (4%), used to export a combined total of 18% of the world's cereal production between 2016/17 and 2020/21. However, the Russian-Ukrainian war has changed this scenario, undermining their (Yazbeck *et al.*, 2022) capacity to supply global markets with foodstuffs. Due to the war, Ukraine has stopped its exports, while the labour shortages have made the harvests uncertain. This has affected global food security and impacted the global food market (Ben Hassen and El Bilali, 2022).

The purposes of this paper is to investigate the way the estimated decrease in Ukrainian wheat and maize production during 2022-2023 found out by (Lang *et al.*, 2022; Nasir *et al.*, 2022), and the changes in political relations between Russia and the European Union, as underlined by (Chen *et al.*, 2023), have affected the European Union's agri-food system. Moreover, this paper it explores also as to whether the decreased grain trade volume found out by (Feng *et al.*, 2023; Oteh *et al.*, 2022) and the global wheat average price forecasted by (Lin *et al.*, 2023) could lead to a food insecurity of these products in EU.

According to Jerzak and Smiglak-Krajewska (2020), the European Union production volume of protein raw materials does not seem sufficient to satisfy the internal demand. Therefore, the agri-food system of the internal market has to rely on imported goods (Romanelli and Giovanardi, 2023). That consideration, which regarded the EU agri-food system dependency, preceded even the covid-19 pandemic and so, it could be only reasonable to think that the situation may indeed have worsened. On the contrary, however,

other authors (Nasir *et al.*, 2022) affirmed that the European Union covers domestic needs for most agricultural products through its production.

Faced with these different points of view, the present paper aims to verify the agri-food system Self-Reliance index (SRI) in the EU, and the resilience capacity of that system.

Considering the fact that cereals are one of the staple foods of the Mediterranean diet (Serrano *et al.*, 2021; Martinez-Lacoba *et al.*, 2018; Tosti *et al.*, 2018), and that in comparison with other commodities mainly the trade in cereals has been affected by the war (OECD & FAO, 2022), the present investigation focuses on this agri-food category.

Therefore, the Self-Sufficiency and Import Dependency indices (SSI and IDI) were determined first. Second, the Gerard Lafay Index (LFI) was computed to assess the EU's competitiveness. The result allows one to determine whether the EU is relatively specialized in the agri-food sector, as well as its comparative advantage. Third, through the Relative Trade Advantage (RTA) index (Vollrath, 1991) the present analysis verified the influence of the relative export-import competitive performance of the EU versus the Russian Federation and Ukraine, given their marked participation in international markets (OECD & FAO, 2022).

The Covid-19 crisis has shown that severe supply challenges, even in the EU, were possible (Pappalardo *et al.*, 2022) and recently the Russian-Ukrainian war has presented new challenges. This uncertainty is in sharp contrast to Article 39.5 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union regarding the importance of ensuring food supplies and food security.

The adverse events that occurred forced drastic and sudden changes that severely put a strain on the resilience of European agri-food systems. It required the need to implement policy and institutional changes in order to enhance its ability to deal with future emergencies (Saboori *et al.*, 2022).

To ensure the future food supply and food security, the European Commission proposed a Contingency Plan (European Commission, 2021) (European Commission, 2022b) to set up and coordinate a food crisis response mechanism to discuss several topics with a transversal approach involving Member States (Matthews, 2021). The goal was to identify the different phases of the crisis management cycle with a view to pointing out which could be the risks in the future landscape for the EU food supply and food security.

The preparedness phase of the contingency planning tends to identify the potential hazards and impacts of the agri-food systems. This results in a prodromal work for the planning of specific emergency measures to mitigate the impact of any actual occurrence of damaging events.

Therefore, the European Commission pointed out some threats through that mechanism. Among the main risks identified were climate change and

environmental degradation, which lead to increasing adverse weather events (Indriawati & Prasetyani, 2021; Pengue, 2022).

The European institution's concern is that, apart from the Covid-19 crisis, climate and environmental issues may have a strong impact on the EU food supply. This is probably the case because, recently, severe climate events have appeared to be not sporadic and capable of endangering agricultural productivity, as well as hitting the agri-food system (Brassescio *et al.*, 2022; Khojasteh *et al.*, 2022). In fact, the extreme weather events, which occur due to climate change, together with the increased probability of occurring, have the potential to affect agricultural and seafood production within the EU (Lassa *et al.*, 2019; Ionescu *et al.*, 2022). The failure of fodder crops due to droughts are concrete examples (Muralikrishnan *et al.*, 2022; Mazwi *et al.*, 2022). Climate change in particular, is leading to potential dangerous meteorological disasters and water scarcity (Ercin *et al.*, 2019), thus affecting the food supply chain (Møller *et al.*, 2022; Zupančič *et al.*, 2022). Disasters can destroy healthy crops (Brás *et al.*, 2019), make infrastructural damage to the agricultural production system, and create food products supply difficulties due to transport impossibilities. In case of water scarcity, the production capacity results limited and may lead to inability to produce healthy crops. Among other things, such events may generate price volatility and food stocks insecurity (Götz *et al.*, 2015; Haile *et al.*, 2014; Santeramo *et al.*, 2018; Howard, 2022). These aspects show the vulnerability of the agri-food system, which may be regarded as one of the outputs of the disaster cycle mechanism and therefore, a weakness to be addressed through new EU acts.

Another dependence of the agri-food sector is related to imports. In today's globalized world, food variety availability in a specific country depends on the production capacity of other regions and states (Jerzak and Smiglak-Krajewska, 2020).

Numerous are the imported crop categories, as the EU relies on a limited internal number of sources (No Authors listed, 2022; Brás *et al.*, 2019). EU oilseed meals for feeding are an example of the fact that 76% of the whole amount is imported together with the 14% for the top five species of fish consumed (European Commission, 2021c.).

Considering that cereals are one of the main staple foods of the Mediterranean diet (Roberto *et al.*, 2018; Martinez-Lacoba *et al.*, 2018; Tosti *et al.*, 2018) and that in comparison with other commodities mainly cereals trade has been affected by the war (OECD and FAO 2022), it becomes even more relevant to check as to whether the EU's agri-food system is dependent on this category of products. There mainly two reasons for focusing the attention of this paper on cereals and in particular on wheat and maize.

First, cereals are, in general, one of the main staple foods of the Mediterranean diet (Martinez-Lacoba *et al.*, 2018; Tosti *et al.*, 2018; Serrano *et al.*, 2021).

Second, wheat and maize, specifically, had a pronounced participation in international markets in the current Russian-Ukrainian war context as they constituted the predominant share of cereal production in the agri-food sector in the three-year period 2018-2020, accounting for 46% and 24% respectively of the main cereals produced in the EU (FAOSTAT). Indeed, in comparison with other commodities, mainly cereals trade has been affected by the war (OECD & FAO, 2022) and this is the second reason.

1. Materials and methods (Self-Reliance, Gerard Lafay and Vollrath Indexes calculations)

The present paper aims at identifying the EU Self-Reliance level with respect to wheat and maize, the EU Self-Sufficiency Index (Kaufmann *et al.*, 2022) and the Import Dependency Index (Pavlović, 2018). Furthermore, Gerard Lafay's index (LFI) (Platania *et al.*, 2015) provided the possibility to find out the comparative EU advantage in the agri-food sector.

The analysis is based on FAO statistical data. The imports and exports that EU flows were selected for the whole agri-food system and singularly for wheat and maize for the period 2018-2020. The product codes of the products under investigation within the FAO international nomenclature were wheat [0111] and maize [0112].

In order to determine the degree of importance when it comes to the production of those cereals, in relation to the internal consumption within the EU, the Food Self-Sufficiency Index (SSI) was determined with reference to the years defined above. Specifically, the food Self-Sufficiency refers to the ability a specific territory to meet its own food requirements from domestic production without taking into account the shares of exports of the same product (Brás *et al.*, 2019; Clapp, 2015).

Given that the domestic availability (total supply) is the total of foodstuff produced together with the related imports in the relative territory excluding the exported shares, SSI equals the total domestic food production as a ratio of total supply. SSI formula consists in dividing the total domestic food output and total supply in a certain country for a certain year (Brankov, 2022) as follows below:

$$SSI = \frac{P_j^i}{P_j^i + I_j^i - E_j^i}$$

Where:

P_j^i = production of region i of a product in economic sector j to the rest of the world;

I_j^i = imports of a product in economic sector j from the rest of the world to region i ;

E_j^i = export of a region i of a product in economic sector j to the rest of the world.

When the ratio is less than 100 percent, it expresses low levels of domestic production; the results equal to 100 percent show that the sector's food production capacity is on the edge in supporting the food needs of the population; when the results are greater than 100 percent, it shows that domestic production is efficiently able to support the domestic requirements. The higher the ratio, the greater the Self-Sufficiency (Clapp, 2015).

On the other hand, through food Import Dependency Index (IDI), it is possible to assess the extent to which the EU relies on external resources from its own territory for food needs. It indicates what the weight of imports is on the amounts of Domestic supply and, thus, the degree of linkage from imports, as well as how much comes from the country's own production. IDI is given by the ratio of the amount of imports to total domestic supply. The formula is the following (Smutka *et al.*, 2019):

$$IDI = \frac{I_j^i}{P_j^i + I_j^i - E_j^i}$$

Where:

I_j^i = imports of a product in economic sector j from the rest of the world to region i ;

P_j^i = production of region i of a product in economic sector j to the rest of the world;

E_j^i = exports of region i of a product in economic sector j to the rest of the world.

The higher is the resulting value, the higher will be the extent of dependency on imports. As regards the LFI, this is an indicator that determines the specialization of a territory in a given sector both in relative "internal" terms, i.e., with respect to the other sectors that make up the economic system of that territory, and in relative "external" terms with respect to a set of countries taken as reference (Zarbà *et al.*, 2020). In the present paper, the aim is to express the degree of specialization (Brasili and Barone, 2011) of wheat and maize in the EU context, in relative terms i.e., compared to the rest of the EU agri-food system. The EU may consider itself to be relatively specialized in a given sector, compared to all other sectors, if the normalized ratio in that sector is higher than the measured average of the normalized ratios of all other sectors in the EU economy itself.

For the calculation of LFI trade flow analysis is used, i.e. imports and exports data, being LFI highly reliable when considering import and export

two-way flows (Allegra *et al.*, 2019). In this way, the resulting normalized ratio is a function of the percentage difference between exports and imports. The sum indicates the totality of imports and exports of agri-food with respect to the degree of specialization of wheat and maize products. Therefore, normalization is achieved by ‘weighing’ the contribution of the cereal sector in the agri-food trade balance.

The LFI algorithm is expressed, in particular, by the following formula (Boffa *et al.*, 2009) where subscript J indicates the wheat sector or the maize sector, whereas index i identifies the EU; symbol Σ_j indicates the whole of the EU agri-food chains.

Export and import volumes are indicated by the variables x and y respectively.

$$LFI_j^i = 100 \left[\frac{x_j^i - m_j^i}{x_j^i + m_j^i} - \frac{\sum_{j=1}^N (x_j^i - m_j^i)}{\sum_{j=1}^N (x_j^i + m_j^i)} \right] \frac{x_j^i + m_j^i}{\sum_{j=1}^N (x_j^i + m_j^i)}$$

Where:

x_j^i = exports of region i of a product in economic sector j to the rest of the world;

m_j^i = imports of a product in economic sector j from the rest of the world to region i ;

N = is the number of traded goods.

The Gerard Lafay Index can take negative value, 0 and positive values. 0 value indicates that in the territory of reference exports and imports are equal; positive values denote the specialization of that territory while negative results indicate the contrary. The higher the values of the LFI are the higher is the degrees of specialization. In case the values turn out to be negative, it shows a state of *despecialisation* in the sector, i.e. a situation of reliance on imports.

The Relative comparative advantage guides towards a better identification of the consequences of policy and/or factual changes (Zarbà *et al.*, 2011; Zarbà *et al.*, 2013) and it derived from Balassa index eliminating the criticizes double-counting of Country and product (Crescimano and Galati, 2014; Pappalardo *et al.*, 2013).

The relative comparative advantage (RTA) index introduced by Vollrath (1991) is defined as the difference between the relative advantage index of exports (RXA) and the relative advantage index of imports (RMA). Specifically, RXA refers to the share of exports of a product (a) for the country under consideration (i) at the EU level compared to the share held for other products, while, likewise, RMA refers to the share of imports. The RTA of Vollrath shows a commercial advantage when it assumes positive

values and vice versa a comparative disadvantage when they are negative (Bernini Carri & Sassi, 2008). Moreover, compared with Lafay's index, Vollrath eliminates the effect of "double counted" by subtracting the product and the country in question respectively by total exports and by all the countries concerned (Zarbà *et al.*, 2011; Zarbà *et al.*, 2013).

The Vollrath index is expressed as follows:

$$RTA_a^i = RXA_a^i - RMA_a^i = \left[\frac{X_a^i}{X_n^i} - \frac{M_a^i}{M_n^i} \right] - \left[\frac{X_a^r}{X_n^r} - \frac{M_a^r}{M_n^r} \right]$$

Where:

X = exports of region;

M = imports;

i = region/country;

a = traded good;

r = European Union;

n = all products exchange except product (a).

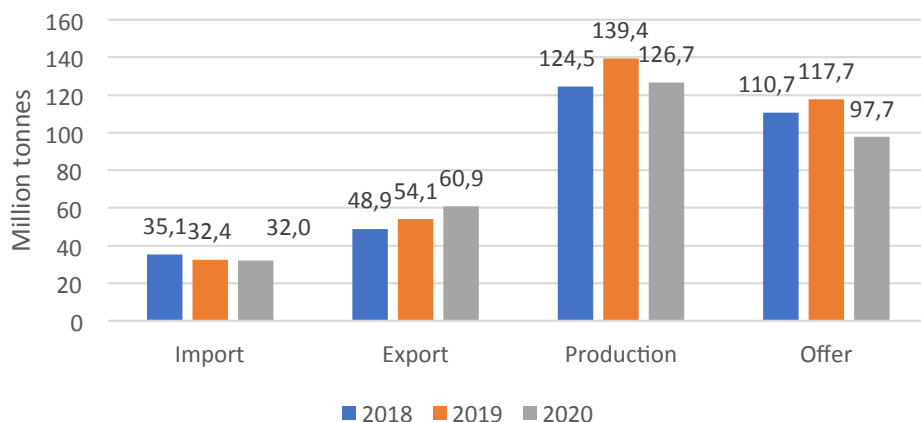
The Vollrath analysis is based on UN COMTRADE statistical data in order to take information relatively to singular Countries, namely the EU, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The import and export flows were selected for the whole agri-food system and particularly for wheat and maize for the period 2018-2020. The product codes of the items under investigation within the FAO international nomenclature were wheat [1001] and maize [1005].

3. Results and Discussions (Self-Reliance, Gerard Lafay and Vollrath Indexes)

Food Self-Sufficiency related to EU cereal production showed, for the period under examination, different results depending on the types considered: wheat (Figure 1) and maize (Figure 2).

With regards to wheat the calculation of the Self-Sufficiency Index for the three-year period 2018-2020 shows a consistent progressivity moving from one year to the next; in fact, from just over 12% the index rises to just over 18%, and finally to 30% (Table 1). This indicates that the majority of wheat utilization in the EU derived from the internal domestic production. Therefore, SSI's trend displays a consistent progressiveness, which goes from 6% between 2018 and 2019 and doubles between 2018 and 2020 (Table 1).

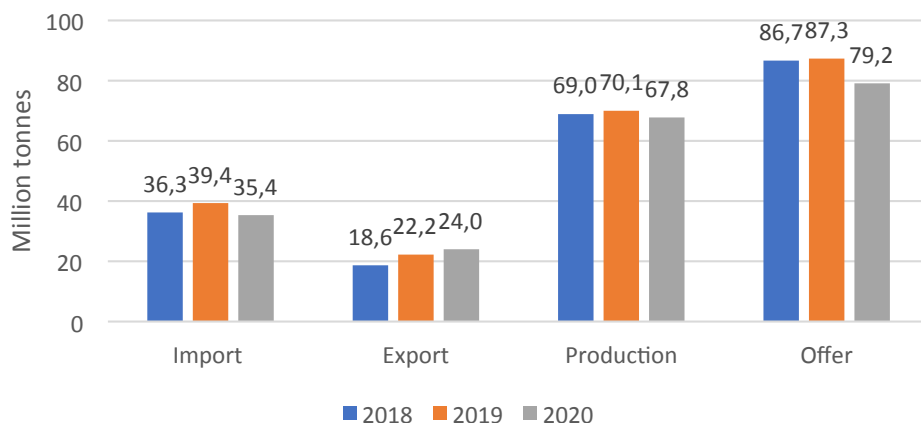
Figure 1 - Evolution of Wheat supply in the European Union



* Our elaboration.

Source: Faostat.

Figure 2 - Evolution in Maize supply in the European Union



* Our elaboration.

Source: Faostat.

Table 1 - Self Sufficiency Index (SSI) and Import Dependency Index (IDI). % Wheat

Index	2018	2019	2020
SSI	113	118	130
IDI	32	28	33

* Our elaboration.

Source: Faostat (www.fao.org/faostat/en/#home).

This demonstrates that EU wheat production supports the level of food self-sufficiency for this product category as Nasir *et al.*, 2022 stated. However, the wheat self-sufficiency condition could prove to be insufficient and unable to meet the needs of the EU's domestic demand in the event of any crises, which could bring to the surface the vulnerabilities and dependencies already mentioned in paragraph 2.1 above.

In addition, imports from third countries play an important role in wheat availability in the EU. Indeed, the dependency ratio indicates that the external contribution to the overall wheat availability would be 1/3; imports in particular contributed to about 32%, more than 27% and almost 33% in the years 2018, 2019 and 2020 respectively.

As for maize, the food contribution to the EU appears rather unsatisfactory, although it tends to improve slightly when taking into account the fact that the self-sufficiency index indicates deficient values, which from -20% in both 2018 and 2019, rises to -14% in 2020 (Table 2). Thus, this trend reveals the inadequacy of the EU's food production level to meet domestic cereal demand, especially in the consideration of the abovementioned vulnerabilities to which cereals production and the agri-food system in general, might be subjected.

Table 2 - Self Sufficiency Index (SSI) and Import Dependency Index (IDI). % Maize

Index	2018	2019	2020
SSI	80	80	86
IDI	42	45	45

* Our elaboration.

Source: Faostat (www.fao.org/faostat/en/#home).

With regard to the role of maize imports in the EU's food needs, Import Dependency Index notes the relative importance of the corresponding traffic flows over the three years under consideration. Specifically, the IDI confirms SSI results; in fact, in 2018 it was over 41%, in 2019 about 45% and in 2020 almost 45% (Table 2).

Therefore, in the light of these findings, it appears advisable to boost the production of these two products, thus, raising the extent of domestic grain supply by increasing its production capacity.

With regard to the Gerard Lafay Index, over the period 2018-2020, the trend of the specialisation level for wheat showed increasingly satisfactory trends, as Table 3 shows. Specifically, it was 2.06 %, in the year 2018, 2.73%, in the year 2019 and 3.35% in the year 2020 (Table 3).

Table 3 - Gerard-Lafay Index (GLI)

Cereals	2018	2019	2020
Wheat	2,06	2,74	3,35
Maize	-1,91	-1,93	-1,36

* Our elaboration.

Source: Faostat (www.fao.org/faostat/en/#home).

In addition, when it comes to maize, no specialization conditions prove to be as evident as the results of the Gerard Lafay Index. In fact, they are negative. The figures in Table 3 (-1.91, -1.93 and -1.36 referring to the years 2018, 2019 and 2020) show the weight of the EU's dependence on third countries.

Therefore, the affirmation of Nasir *et al.*, 2022 stating that the European Union covers domestic needs for most agricultural products through its production does not seem to apply to maize.

Given that, the level of specialization of both types of the cereals in question is not sufficient to establish satisfactory conditions for the needs of the EU internal market. Thus, it seems grounded the statement of Romanelli and Giovanardi, 2023 about the dependency of EU market on imported goods. These results are not reassuring in a context where the recent crisis events that have led to the decrease and, in some cases, to the halting of trade flows of the products under consideration from the Russian Federation and Ukraine (Yazbeck *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, it is recommendable to adopt strategies to raise the EU's level of productivity for both agricultural products. This should be done in order to increase both the level of EU Self-Reliance and comparative advantage, since the higher the degree of specialization of wheat and maize is, the higher their contribution to the cereal trade balance becomes.

The results about maize are in line with Jerzak and Smiglak-Krajewska (2020) who found out a EU dependence in respect to protein raw materials.

Vollrath's index (RTA) allowed for a step forward; in fact, it was calculated in order to propose a more circumstantial analysis on the two products, wheat and corn, considered in the present survey and addressed specifically to the trade relations between the European Union and Russian Federation, and separately between the European Union and Ukraine.

The results, for both products, show a relative comparative advantage for both Eastern European countries (Table 4).

Table 4 - Vollrath Index (RTD)

Indications	Maize			Wheat		
	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020
Russian Federation						
RXA	1,45	0,98	0,59	11,20	7,68	7,32
RMA	0,02	0,02	0,03	0,18	0,11	0,12
RTA	1,42	0,96	0,56	11,02	7,57	7,21
Ukraine						
RXA	10,63	11,82	10,36	2,53	2,2	1,97
RMA	0,14	0,10	0,07	0,02	0,01	0,04
RTA	10,49	11,72	10,29	2,51	2,19	1,93

* Our elaboration.

Source: Faostat (www.fao.org/faostat/en/#home).

Specifically, with regard to maize, the Russian Federation's RTA is 1.42 percent in 2018, 0.96 in 2019, and 0.55 in 2020. Therefore, although there is a relative comparative advantage, the values have been decreasing in the period under review.

In relation to Ukraine, the relative comparative advantage is very high, in fact it stands at 10.49 % % in 2018, 11.71 in 2019 and 10.29 in 2020, and unlike the situation in Russian Federation shows constant levels.

With reference to wheat, Russian Federation shows high levels of relative comparative advantage.

In fact, those are 11.02% in 2018, 7.56 in 2019 and 7.20 in 2020 characterized by a slight inflection between the year 2018 and subsequent years remain constant with each other.

In contrast, the levels of relative comparative advantage of Ukraine are 2.51% in 2018, 2.18 in 2019 and 1.93 in 2020 and show a slight inflection regarding the latter year.

A look at the volumes (Table 5) of the European Union's wheat and maize imports from Russian Federation and Ukraine arise some considerations.

It allow to quantify in detail the extent to which the EU relies on the flows from these two countries (the extent to which the EU relies on these two countries' exports) and thus how much the halt in trade of those two products, due to the Russia-Ukrainian war, may impact the European Union's Agribusiness System.

Table 5 - Maize and Wheat Imports Evolution in the EU from Russian Federation, Ukraine, and World

Indications	2018		2019		2020	
	Thousand Tonnes	%	Thousand Tonnes	%	Thousand Tonnes	%
Maize						
EU - Russian Federation	497.859,1	2,3	202.744,0	0,9	213.113,6	1,0
EU - Ukraine	11.367.457,7	52,4	15.244.997,0	64,1	8.763.052,7	55,8
EU - World	21.678.304,5	100,0	23.771.621,4	100,0	15.716.498,3	100,0
Wheat						
EU - Russian Federation	1.296.672,0	22,0	411.315,2	9,2	318.737,6	6,7
EU - Ukraine	1.342.906,6	22,7	1.068.032,0	23,9	734.259,3	15,4
EU - World	5.906.355,1	100,0	4.460.637,5	100,0	4.757.465,6	100,0

* Our elaboration.

Source: Un comtrade (<https://comtradeplus.un.org>).

As a matter of fact, the EU's wheat imports from Russian federation and Ukraine together stand at about 45% in 2018 and specifically 22.0 % and 22.7 % respectively, in 2019 at 33% i.e. 9.2% and 23.9% and finally in 2020 at 22% i.e. 6.7% and 15.4%.

The European Union's maize imports from the Russian Federation and Ukraine together stand at about 58% in 2018 and specifically 2.3% and 52.4% respectively, in 2019 at 65% i.e. 0.9% and 64.1% and finally in 2020 at just over 57% i.e. 1.4% and 55.8%.

From the above, it appears that a large part of EU imports come from the aforementioned Eastern European Countries and so a situation of scarcity in the availability of raw materials for the agri-food system for the years 2021, 2022 and onwards is foreseeable. These results support the suggestion to strengthen the agri-food sector, not only in terms of increasing productivity levels, but also as a system. In fact, increasing productivity alone may not be enough, but also not feasible, as it requires a greater exploitation of resources in a context of their scarcity in nature. To address this issue the attempting to develop environmentally and economically sustainable production systems could represent a feasible solution. However, after the crises derived from the war in Ukraine and the covid 19 pandemic that challenged the idea of a globalised world open to continuous exchange, the agri-food system must set itself resilience objectives to strengthen its capacity to be self-sufficient in the event other potential adverse events trigger new crises.

Conclusions

The Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have presented the EU agri-food system with challenges.

The decrease and, in some cases, the halting of trade flows of agri-food commodity across the world allows one to foresee a situation of scarcity in the availability of raw materials for the EU agri-food system, which was expected for the years 2021, 2022, and as of now, onwards.

The present analysis showed that even if wheat EU production seems to maintain the level of food self-sufficiency, imports from third countries play an important role in wheat and maize availability in the EU.

As for maize, the self-sufficiency index indicates deficient values. This trend reveals the inadequacy of the EU's food production level in meeting domestic demands for this product category.

Similarly, the level of EU agri-food system' specialisation and the relative comparative advantage of both cereal types in question did not appear sufficient enough to establish satisfactory conditions for the needs of the EU internal market.

In view of the above-mentioned, next to the consideration of the discussed vulnerabilities to which cereals production and the EU agri-food system in general might be subjected, the agri-food sector does not seem prepared to additional potential adverse events. In fact, the one already occurred have forcefully revealed the cracks that have long existed in the EU agri-food system. However, the next challenge could be turning weaknesses into opportunities, which could activate a transformative change that would lead to the implementation of resilience strategies that would include a higher level of productivity in the EU's regrading both agricultural products.

Providing a resilient response means organising a system that would combine at its core the achievement of food security and sustainability objectives (set by European policy and legislation) with the ability to cope with any known (such as resource scarcity, vulnerabilities and dependencies in the agri-food sector) and unknown (such as the various emergencies that may occur) criticalities.

This entails the re-design of the current systems in order to make agricultural production and processing processes sustainable and circular, for instance, by extending the life cycle of products, developing renewable energy sources, which can replace the current fossil-fuel based ones; the purpose of all this is to overcome system dependence and transform vulnerabilities into strength. A potential strategy may be implementing the ecological transition in accordance with the objectives designed by Horizon Europe, while ensuring, at the same time, the flexibility and adaptability of systems towards potential new crises.

Accelerating the global transition of the agri-food system towards sustainability and resilience is the European institutions' preferred way to mitigate climate change and contain the threat of resource scarcity (European Commission, 2021). The reorganisation of systems should include the adoption of key approaches to achieve an ecological transition, such as sustainability and circularity (Zarbà *et al.*, 2023). This implies less pollution footprint, the reuse of resources and waste reduction next to the reduction of food loss, which could feed around 1.26 billion people per year (FAO, 2022).

In light of the above considerations, in order to prepare a better response to future crises and make the EU agri-food system more stable, the EU institutions should orientate the general and overall re-design of the agri-food systems by dealing in the long-term with its dependence issue, because especially in case of potential crises, triggered by climate disasters or other adverse events, the agri-food vulnerabilities may disrupt the entire system itself.

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