FARM SUCCESSION IN ROMANIA

Who will take over the lands from an aging peasant generation?
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On behalf of: Eco Ruralis – In support of peasant farming

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The report “Farm succession in Romania. Who will take over the lands from an aging peasant generation?” has been elaborated by Eco Ruralis, a Romanian peasant association that was founded in April 2009 in Cluj-Napoca.

In the “Land Rights Campaign” Eco Ruralis researches the important aspect of generational renewal in peasant farming and its complex relation with land tenure and stewardship. Being aware of the multiple threats to small-scale, agroecological food production, Eco Ruralis also exposes through documentation and analysis the deep implications of land grabbing in Romania, creating transparency over secretive large scale land acquisitions which are reshaping the country’s farming and social landscape.

First of all, we aim to disseminate the information to our members, Romanian peasants, and deepen their understanding and capacity to react to the imminent threat in the near future: the loss of peasant farms due to age and the lack of generational renewal. Also, we aim to strengthen the capacity of peasant farmers to defend themselves against unjust land deals and land grabbing. Eco Ruralis also calls upon all citizens and media representatives to stand up for traditional and agroecological practices and peasant farming. Last but not least, the Association demands that the Romanian political leaders take responsibility for implementation of appropriate policies regarding peasant family farming and generational renewal.

At the beginning of the report the reader is introduced to the current situation regarding the ‘aging peasantry’ problem (Chapter 1) with a specific focus on Romania and also adding to the discussion the matter of ‘Farm Succession’ (Chapter 2). The following part points out the consequences of disappearing small family farms, with a special focus on food and land sovereignty and the rise of the land grabbing phenomenon in Romania (Chapter 3).

The significant benefits of small-scale farming and intra-family farm succession (Chapter 4) are presented in a holistic way, focusing on the social, environmental and economic benefits. It is essential to understand that peasant farms and small family farms are not disappearing out of choice but are instead being forced out of existence. The barriers and obstacles faced by peasants are addressed in Chapter 5 while in Chapter 6 we focus on the positives, highlighting good practices and examples from Romania and other regions from all over the world. We conclude the study with important recommendations particularly based on the FAO’s Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests.

SUMMARY
There is a growing crisis facing farms and peasants who work the land around the world. The problem is that peasant farmers are aging and the future of their farms is in jeopardy. It is causing serious concerns about the current state of farm succession. Globally, the average age of farmers is 60 years,[1] with only slight variations across continents and countries. In Africa the average farmer’s age is also 60 despite the fact that 60% of the rest of the population is under twenty-four.[2] In the United States 84% of farmers are over 45 years old, while in Taiwan a massive 92% are over 45 years old.[3] Europe is no exception, with only 7% of farmers under the age of 35, and half of all farmers poised to retire within 10 years.[4]

It is first important to define ‘peasants’ and to understand how the term differs from the European Union’s understanding of ‘family farmers.’ The EU’s definition of ‘family farmers’ is based on a few factors: the amount of work performed by the family itself, the amount of land, and whether the family owns most of the operation.[5] La Via Campesina defines a peasant as a person “who has a direct and special relationship with the land and nature through the production of food and/or other agricultural products.”[6] Eco Ruralis uses the term ‘peasant,’ because it includes individuals who are not otherwise recognized in agricultural policies. ‘Peasant’ includes landless people, people who sell their products outside of the family, those with a minimal amount of land, and people whose working of the land is not recognized as an occupation by the Romanian government. As part of La Via Campesina, Eco Ruralis is working to reclaim the word ‘peasant’ and increase its use in the European context.

This report looks specifically at Romania, which reflects the global statistics on aging peasants. In Romania, 66.4% of peasants are over 55 years old and only 7.3% are under 35 years of age. One noteworthy point, however, is the size of these peasants’ farms. Older peasants tend smaller farms while younger peasants tend larger farms. This is demonstrated by the fact that one third of farms over 100 hectares were run by individuals under 45 years old. At the other end of the age spectrum, 70% of farms less than 20 hectares were run by peasants over 55 years old.[7] The reason that the average age is still so much older...
is because of the sheer number of smaller farms. An impressive majority of farms in Romania sit on less than 20 hectares of land: in 2010 these totaled 99% of all agricultural holdings in Romania.[8] Thus, there are many more small-farm holders than medium or large-farm holders. With so many peasants on the verge of retirement or death there is great uncertainty about what will become of their farms, lands, and products.

This report describes the types of farm succession, the reason disappearing farms is a problem, why small peasant farming is highly beneficial, and what some of the obstacles are to peasant farmers. The final sections include descriptions of current organizations and networks fighting to preserve peasant farming, the concluding remarks, and finally, Eco Ruralis’ recommendations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&lt; 35 YEARS OLD</th>
<th>&gt; 55 YEARS OLD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>6</td>
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</table>
2. FARM SUCESSION

Farm succession is the process of passing agricultural land from one person to another person or entity. It differs from the concept of inheritance in that the land being passed along will continue to be used for agricultural purposes, whereas inheriting land does not necessarily ensure its continued agricultural use. An individual who inherits a farm is not required to continue farming and in many cases will choose to sell or lease the land. There are a number of ways in which farm succession occurs but they can be roughly categorized into five types.

Types
The first type, and the main focus of this report, is intra-family farm succession. In this scenario the farm passes on to another family member, typically in a younger generation. This is the ideal scenario for a number of reasons that will be explained later. Keeping farms as family operations is even lauded in a European Parliament publication where it is stated that “family farming [...] can be an important factor in mitigating rural poverty,” and that family farms “contribute to food security at regional, national and European level[s].”[9] Although historically this form of farm succession has been the most common, it has been losing ground in recent decades. In one study from 2010, there was only a 26.5% rate of intra-family farm succession.[10] In cases where there is no family successor, the peasant is forced to turn to other options.

Three of the other succession possibilities offer alternatives to intra-family succession that may still maintain small, peasant agriculture. One option is for the farm to pass to a known and trusted individual outside of the family, perhaps a neighbor or friend. Or the farm could pass to an unknown individual, possibly a new peasant or someone wishing to relocate. The third option is for the farm to pass to an alternative land redistribution program, examples of which can be found in section 6’s Positive Schemes. These involve organizations or groups that purchase land and then sell or lease it to peasants or individuals, usually for agricultural or related purposes. However, alternative land redistribution programs are non-existent in Romania.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROMANIA AT A GLANCE (ROMANIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average gross monthly salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty and social exclusion rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area (hectares)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arable land</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The final succession scenario is the most damaging and has been increasingly prevalent in recent decades. The farm could go to an industrial-sized agribusiness. A more accurate term for this type of transaction is land grabbing, which has financial, environmental, and political repercussions that will be explained later in the report. Eco Ruralis defines land grabbing as “large acquisitions or long term leases and concessions of lands from public or private entities for the development of large agro-industrial projects or for speculative purposes.” A full-length report on land grabbing was published by Eco Ruralis in 2015 and provides a great deal of important information.[11]

Whether as a result of land grabbing, aging peasants or other reasons, small farms are disappearing. This distressing trend can only be expected to continue in not just Romania but the rest of the world as well. Between 2003-2013 the European Union’s number of agricultural holdings decreased by over 4 million.[12] Romania lost over 625,000 farms between 2003 and 2010.[13] Furthermore, a 2009 study in four Romanian counties revealed 23.1% of peasants planned to either partially or totally abandon agricultural production upon retirement.[14] Even those who did not plan to give up farming were still faced with uncertain situations. Only 40% of the heads of households had successors and one-fifth of those successors did not plan to work the family land at all.[15] This shows that a majority of peasants did not have anyone to take over their farming operations. Even those who had successors still faced the problem of whether or not their successor would continue agricultural work. These farms could be incorporated into larger farms, abandoned, or developed for non-agricultural purposes such as housing developments or businesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATORS IN ROMANIA</th>
<th>TOTAL FARMS 2010</th>
<th>FARMS OWNED BY PEOPLE 2010</th>
<th>FARMS OWNED BY COMPANIES 2010</th>
<th>FARMS OWNED BY COMPANIES 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of farms</td>
<td>3 859 000</td>
<td>3 828 000</td>
<td>31 000</td>
<td>28 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilized Agricultural Area (UAA)</td>
<td>13 306 000</td>
<td>7 450 000</td>
<td>5 856 000</td>
<td>5 785 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arable land</td>
<td>8 306 000</td>
<td>4 725 000</td>
<td>3 581 000</td>
<td>3 640 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastures and hayfields</td>
<td>4 506 000</td>
<td>2 307 000</td>
<td>2 199 000</td>
<td>2 083 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent crops</td>
<td>312 000</td>
<td>236 000</td>
<td>76 000</td>
<td>62 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family gardens</td>
<td>182 000</td>
<td>182 000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average UAD/farm</td>
<td>3,45</td>
<td>1,95</td>
<td>190,78</td>
<td>207,49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. CONSEQUENCES OF DISAPPEARING SMALL, FAMILY FARMS

The most obvious reason to be concerned about disappearing farms, peasants, and the state of farm succession is because family farms are major food providers. There are an estimated 500 million family farms around the world that are responsible for feeding billions of people. In India these peasant farmers supply half of the food supplies. In Latin America they supply almost 70% of the food supplies. Each of these percentages is almost certainly an underestimate since it is extremely difficult and time consuming to obtain information on small gardens or farms. In Romania, small farms of between one and ten hectares contribute at least 30% of national food consumption, though the actual amount is more because many peasants in Romania are subsistence farmers who do not sell their products. As these numbers show, small peasant farmers are an irreplaceable source of food. Without them, the world would quickly face a massive food shortage.

3.1 Food Sovereignty

Disappearing small farms pose a significant threat to food sovereignty. La Via Campesina briefly defines food sovereignty as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.”[18] Ideally this would mean people and communities would determine which kinds of food they wanted access to, how those foods would be produced, and their prices. There are other policies that are essential to successful food sovereignty, such as gender equality and fair access to land. All together, food sovereignty is a holistic approach to nutrition, land, food, and natural resources. It puts the power of food choice and access into the hands of communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>FOOD PRODUCTION BY SMALL FARMS VS AMOUNT OF LAND THEY HAVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>With 17% of the land, small farmers produce: 87,5% of fruits and berries; 82% of potatoes; 80% of vegetables and 32% of eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>Small farms are 93% of all farmers, have less than 8% of the agricultural land, and produce: 100$ of groundnuts; 99% of maize; 90% of millet; 73% of beans and 25% of sorghum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>84% of farms are small and control 24% of the land, yet they produce: 87% of cassava; 69% of beans; 67% of goat milk; 59% of pork; 58% of cow milk; 50% of chickens; 46% of corn; 38% of coffee; 33,8% of rice and 30% of cattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Family farms are 99% of all farms, and have 53% of the land, and they keep: 99% of sheep; 99% of goats; 99% of bees; 90% of cattles; 70% of pigs and 61% of poultry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>Small farmers operate 16% of agricultural land, but provide 55% of agricultural output, including: 97% of potatoes; 97% of honey; 88% of vegetables; 83% of fruits and berries and 80% of milk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Food sovereignty faces a precarious situation in Romania. Prior to joining the EU in 2007, Romania was a major grower of GMOs, a practice outlawed within the EU. Now, industrial farms in Romania use hybrid seeds and have limited varieties of products in order to increase efficiency. Fewer crop variations mean more streamlined operations without the hassle of adjusting equipment, timing, or strategy. Rather than planting traditional, indigenous crops these farms plant hundreds or thousands of hectares of the same crop, preferring those products that will be popular exports. One example is the Roundup Ready soybean produced by Monsanto, which was grown on over 137,000 hectares in 2006.[19] Another example is the company TCE 3 Brazi, which controlled 57,000 hectares of land near the Danube Delta on which it only grew a handful of different crops. In 2013 they estimated that just their wheat crop would total 117,000 tons. Similarly, Cerealcom Dolj grew 23,000 hectares of exclusively wheat, maize, and sunflower.[20] Monocultures, or such mass production of limited crops, undermine food sovereignty, health, and sustainability, which will be discussed in later sections.

3.2 Land Sovereignty
Land sovereignty is also threatened by the disappearance of peasants and small farms. The Transnational Institute defines land sovereignty as “the right of working peoples to have effective access to, use of, and control over land and the benefits of its use and occupation, where land is understood as resource, territory, and landscape.”[21] Land provides food, fuel, income, water, shelter, and a cultural space, all of which are essential for thriving communities. Concerns for water and food supplies are growing as the global population increases. If individuals are not granted land sovereignty, they risk poverty, malnutrition, pollution, starvation, and marginalization.

3.3 Land Grabbing
Land grabbing is a critical issue that also causes problems with both food and land sovereignty. In the European Union, 1% of farmers hold an incredible 65% of agricultural land.[22] Romania is a popular land grabbing destination, with an estimated 700,000 hectares of agricultural land held by foreign companies.[23] One of the main repercussions is how it limits access to agricultural land both literally and financially. The European Parliament publication acknowledged: “Large non-family farms are able to influence land rental prices and rental contract conditions, which distorts the markets for land.”[24] As agribusinesses and companies purchase land they remove it from the market, and because there is less land available the price of the remaining land increases. Padova Agricultura is an excellent example of this phenomenon. In its area of operation land prices soared in just five years from €200 in 2005 to €1,000 in 2008,[25] and have continued to increase since then. As a result, small peasant farmers find themselves unable to afford new land or maintain their newly expensive land and are forced to abandon their farms.[26] Further information on land grabbing is found throughout this report, but a comprehensive account is available in Eco Ruralis’ report on its fact-finding mission, “Land Grabbing in Romania.”[27]
3.4 Environmental
Land grabbing, industrial farming, and thus disappearing peasant farms, all have severe environmental consequences. According to the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, “The modernization and intensification of agriculture...is expected to bring about an increase in the loads of agricultural pollutants.”[28] Industrial farming uses more machines and creates more pollution than small farms in order to maintain their vast swaths of land. A peasant's small field of hay can be cut by hand, but a larger field requires at least one machine. Large farms also require more storage space that must be kept at a certain temperature and humidity, requiring more energy and emitting more pollutants.[29] This contributes to the ongoing pollution of the Danube river system, and water and land areas elsewhere, where much of the industrial runoff in the area settles. Large farms also drastically change the natural landscape, such as when marshland along the Danube was dried out and converted to cropland.[30] The amount of space required by agribusinesses causes vast landscapes to be flattened, resulting in entire ecosystems' destruction. Other issues include soil degradation and lack of crop rotation, both typical of large, monoculture farms.

3.5 Financial
There are also great financial implications of small farms disappearing. In addition to an increase in the cost of agricultural land, there would be an increase in food prices for consumers, causing even greater rural poverty.[31] Larger farms have much lower production costs and much higher EU subsidies under CAP. They are therefore able to sell their goods at significantly lower prices. Small family farmers will be forced to decrease their own prices in order to compete, but will eventually be unable to sustain their farms or livelihoods. As peasants disappear and competition decreases, the larger agribusinesses will be able to increase prices as they wish. Since 20% of Romania’s agricultural area is considered subsistence farming,[32] peasants no longer supplying their own food would have to pay exponentially higher prices to obtain the same amount of nutrition. With global food expenses per family already totaling 35.5% of household incomes,[33] and totaling 45% in Romania,[34] the combination of price increases and lack of subsistence farms would be devastating. The country already has a poverty rate of 44 percent,[35] and does not need any type of increase.
4. BENEFITS OF SMALL FARMS AND INTRA-FAMILY SUCCESSION

There are significant benefits to having greater numbers of small farms, particularly family-owned and operated, but it is first essential to understand the scope of small farming in Romania. With approximately 14.6 million hectares of utilized agricultural land,[36] Romania is one of the top farming countries in Europe. This land is extremely fragmented due to land reforms and redistribution after the communist era. A staggering 98% of all agricultural holdings are less than 10 hectares.[37] Even when the number of large farms is included, the average size of land holdings is just 2.16 hectares.[38] As mentioned earlier, despite their small sizes, these farms produce a large portion of Romania’s food. In short, small farms are an integral part of Romania’s culture and economy.

4.1 Employment

The sheer number of peasant family farms is a great economic boost. In the European Union, “family farmers are the main agricultural employers”: in 2010 there were 25.5 million people employed in agriculture throughout the EU, 24 million of who were employed on family farms.[39] For comparison, Romania’s population is around 20 million people. Agriculture is also a huge employer in Romania. In 2010 there were 7.1 million people employed in agriculture, an incredible 73% of the active working population. Plus, of the agricultural labor force, 98.5% were considered family.[40] To summarize, the majority of working people in Romania are employed in agriculture, and only a small fraction of those workers are non-family.

This signals that farms, particularly family farms, are essential to the economic wellbeing of not only those individuals but also Romania. If peasant farms were to disappear, the jobs they supply would also disappear. This would in turn put greater pressure on the government to supply benefits, pensions, and aid to the unemployed and their families. Unfortunately, the number of farms is already on the decline. Between 2003 and 2010 over 625,000 farms in Romania were lost, causing 1.7 million people to no longer be employed in agriculture.[41] The overall unemployment may seem hopeful at only 7.7% in 2011, however the youth unemployment rate is a shocking 23.7%.[42] Romania’s economy would be unable to absorb even a fraction of the more than 4 million peasants were the current trend to continue or accelerate.

4.2 Environmental

Agroecology

In addition to jobs, peasant farms provide extensive environmental benefits. Whether consciously or naturally, most small farms practice agroecology. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations describes agroecology as the focus on ecosystems when utilizing agricultural land, taking into consideration the natural, societal, and technological environments.[43] Many small farms in Romania unknowingly follow agroecological practices. Traditional tools and technology are often used out of financial necessity and familiarity, but also emit significantly less pollution than modern farming machines. For example, a scythe produces less pollution than a tractor. A wide variety of crops and animals help keep soil from being overused, a
practice which is a requirement for families who rely on their farms for continual sustenance.[44] Crops are rotated to keep the soil viable, and grazing pastures are rotated to ensure that vegetation has time to regrow and thus continue feeding the herds.

One of Eco Ruralis’ aims is to increase the number of peasants growing traditional, indigenous varieties through their Seed Campaign, which provides seeds free of cost.[45] This strategy not only preserves traditional plants but also benefits the environment in general because the plants are already known members of the habitat and are unlikely to cause problems. Another noticeable environmental benefit of peasant farming in Romania is the preservation of plant and animal biodiversity. Often, “these vegetal and animal diversities are related to ancestral farming practices.”[46] With small plots there are frequent breaks in the fields that act as boundaries and offer habitats for native animals and plants. There is a greater tendency to adhere to natural obstacles for simplicity’s sake rather than manufacturing flat, clear areas. As a result, Transylvania has some of the finest biodiversity in all of Europe.

**Land Stewardship**

Land stewardship is closely related to agroecology, but with a greater emphasis on maintaining the quality and abundance of natural resources and biodiversity.[47] Peasant family farms are uniquely connected to land stewardship. Family farms are deeply invested in long-term sustainability and have a “higher standard of environment care,” according to a publication for the European Parliament.[48] The incentive to take care of land is much higher when it is being passed on to loved ones whose future one is intimately connected to.

Small farms in Romania have further incentive for excellent land stewardship due to the use and importance of the Commons, communal land used for animals. Over half of the 3.4 million hectares of permanent pasture are owned by either the state or local communities.[49] The land is then used by individuals who send their animals to graze all together. Those who use the land either do so as collective leasers or through subsidies, though this is less common. Since 98% of peasants have less than 10 hectares of land,[50] the communal pastures are essential to their ability to raise livestock. Without access to this land they simply would not have space to graze their sheep, cattle, or goats. Communal lands also preserve biodiversity, offset carbon pollution, and are even useful for harvesting medicinal plants. The incentive to ensure the land is being used sustainably is incredibly high because peasants rely on it for their livelihoods. Finally, the collective administration of such lands prevents individuals from negatively altering or destroying its usage or the environment.[51]

However, much like small farms in general, the number of active users of communal lands has been steadily decreasing over the past decades. There is currently a slight influx of newly formed grazing associations but these are outnumbered by individuals opting to rent land privately. Private renting draws wealthier individuals with large herds who can easily offset the leasing costs through their animals. A partial explanation for the decrease in use of the Commons is Romania’s historic experience with communal practices during Communism, which will be discussed later. At the current rate of decline, it is predicted that common pastures will be practically extinct in Romania in a mere decade,[52] a situation that would have cultural, economic, and political consequences.

**4.3 Local Communities**

There are a number of peasant farm benefits to local communities in addition to those from communal land use. One highly tangible benefit is the close proximity in which small farms find each other. Due to their size, small farms automatically result in rural households being closer together. Physical closeness builds stronger rural communities. If people are nearer then they are more likely to share resources, culture, and time. Individuals in communities naturally have greater access to services, whether medical, spiritual, social, or environmental. Working with or at least beside others is even shown to slow
depression. Closer physical proximity is also important for preserving cultures and traditions. As the EU publication states, “Family farmers enhance the vitality of the rural economy and preserve traditional cultures.” These include holiday traditions, daily customs, clothing, music, and cuisine.

Additionally, peasant farms are less likely to have unequal political influence. However, it must be understood that this is not true of all family farms, especially not physically or economically large ones. Large farmers and landowners in Romania are often intimately connected to local mayors or magistrates who can ensure policies and decisions are in the farmer or landowner’s favor. In a series of investigative articles, journalist Luke Dale-Harris uncovered numerous instances of local politicians controlling large swathes of land and making rulings in large farmers’ favor. Several of these politicians are now in jail or under investigation for corruption or fraud. Small family farms typically do not have the economic power to influence politicians and simply cannot offer the necessary bribes.

4.4 Historical and Traditional Knowledge Exchange

Finally, small family farms are extremely important for the exchange of farming knowledge not just in Romania but also throughout the world. Most Romanian farmers, 97.5% in fact, acquired their knowledge and skills from practical, hands-on experience. Only 2.1% received basic agricultural training at an institution and 0.4% received full formal training. This demonstrates that even though most areas of expertise, including farming, prefer formal institutional training, practical experience is still the more dominant method for acquiring career skills and knowledge. This is most likely because peasant farming and intra-family succession have significant advantages over formal education that are only just beginning to be officially recognized.

To begin with, peasant families have the advantage of exclusive information. Since their families have been working the same land, in some cases for centuries, they are experts on their specific locations and crops, as well as the best tools for the job. While formal education gives theoretical guidelines, the family farmer of a certain plot can discern the best course of action based on decades of proven effectiveness. All of the oddities of particular plants or areas have been taught to the peasant throughout their lifetime, much longer than an education at any institution. In its current form, agricultural education at an institution can rarely provide location-specific instruction, and cannot come close to covering the wide range of topics that are necessary for running a farm. In addition, agriculturally-focused high schools decreased by 40% between 2000-2011, and the number of graduates from these schools declined by 44% in the same period, totaling only 0.76% of all high school graduates. Peasant family farmers are shown early on how to best store products, properly care for animals, and irrigate a field, among many other subjects. Such a holistic exchange of farming knowledge is extremely different from the typical institutional approach, which focuses only on agribusiness and agroindustrial practices. This extensive length of hands-on, ingrained training is impossible to replicate outside of intra-family farm succession.

One of the programs that works to provide a version of this peasant experience and share peasant knowledge is WWOOF. WWOOF Romania is run by Eco Ruralis and was established in 2008. Via the 42 hosts throughout the country, individuals can work on organic farms in exchange for food and accommodation. WWOOFers participate in planting, harvesting, maintenance, construction, animal care, and other typical tasks, learning about proper techniques and traditional knowledge along the way. The program teaches people extremely valuable knowledge through hands-on experience while also benefiting the peasant hosts. It is a truly symbiotic exchange.
5. OBSTACLES AND BARRIERS

Despite the extensive benefits of peasant farming and small family farming especially, there are numerous obstacles preventing this type of agriculture from flourishing. It is essential to understand that peasant farms and small family farms are not disappearing out of choice but are instead being forced out of existence. This section describes some of the greatest barriers to continuing peasant family agriculture.

5.1 “Exchange programme for young farmers”
In order to identify the greatest barriers for young peasants, and to assess exchange scheme options, the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development authorized a study of 2,205 farmers under 40 years old in the European Union. There were notable differences between New Member States (NMS) and those in the EU prior to 2004 (EU15), particularly when it came to their general needs, the skills they perceived as necessary, and how individuals access information. The NMS were more likely to use the Internet for information, consider learning a foreign language a necessity, and be interested in how to access subsidies, grants, and credit.[60] These are all characteristic of peasants in a country such as Romania. The lower income-level makes it necessary for peasants to gain funding. The larger EU presence and general international presence makes it more necessary for them learn another language. Finally, the largely rural, dispersed population makes it necessary to use the Internet for information rather than attending trainings or workshops.

Not all needs were dependent on location, though. The overall top four needs regardless of location were access to land to buy, access to land to rent, subsidies, and access to credits. For the NMS, qualified labor was actually the third most important,[61] another indication that people are abandoning agricultural work. However, the overall top four are indicative of the problems of land grabbing and aging peasants and are either partially or entirely ameliorated by intra-family farm succession. Passing land on through families eliminates the need for purchasing or renting new land unless the new generation wishes to expand. The need for start-up costs is also eliminated when established farms are passed on to family members.[62] Though there may still be costs associated with upgrading or expanding, the overall costs are significantly lower than for peasants starting with a blank slate.

5.2 Migration and agricultural exodus
As mentioned before, a major obstacle to intra-family farm succession is the lack of individuals willing or able to work in agriculture. In a study of youth in Cluj County, Romania, only about 1% of those surveyed chose agriculture as their intended future career.[63] This phenomenon is not just a problem among youth. It is also evident in the amount of migration and the chosen destinations. In 2012 there were approximately 0.75 million people who migrated within Romania.[64] The most common direction of internal migration was between urban areas, with the second most common being urban to rural migration.[65] Though the second point may seem like good news for agriculture and rural areas, it is not. Instead it is a result of the growing suburbanization in Romania and is not beneficial to agriculture, small farms, or peasants. The counties that were the destinations for people between 1990 and 2009 were the same ones with GDPs above the Romanian average,[66] and are not indicative of a trend towards agricultural areas specifically. It shows that people are searching for lucrative financial opportunities with the increasing number of companies and factories that are setting up in small towns or outside cities.[67]

Romania is also losing individuals to other countries. In 2010, 2.8 million people equaling 15% of the entire Romanian population migrated out of Romania, though this is considered an underestimate since it is impossible to know how many unofficial migrants there were.[68] The top destinations for officially sanctioned individuals were Germany, the US, and Canada. Less official destinations were far more popular, with roughly 30% of Romanian migrants going to Italy and 40% going to Spain.[69] Often the individuals are working as migrant labor, an unstable and frequently inhumane endeavor. A report by the
European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions included extensive information about migrants facing systemic discrimination, higher levels of work injuries, extremely low wages, and poor conditions.[70]

The two main reasons for Romanian migration are jobs and education. There are limited job opportunities within Romania and even more so in the Romanian countryside. Plus, the wages in the destination countries are significantly higher. In 2014 President Traian Basescu actually thanked Britain for providing work for Romanians and keeping "unemployment at a reasonable rate."[71] Presumably, if Romanians did not migrate to other countries they would be unable to find work domestically. Even if people were to find jobs within Romania they would still risk settling into poverty. According to Migration Watch UK, a Romanian individual would earn about 70 euros per week in Romania versus 326 euros in the UK, even after the varying costs of living are taken into account.[72]

Education in other countries is also highly sought after, and as higher education becomes more available in Romania individuals are likely to travel farther to obtain degrees both within and outside of the country. On top of this the average length of education has increased.[73] Finally, there is the added problem that higher education decreases the likelihood that an individual will work in the agricultural sector.[74] This is strongly connected to the search for higher paying jobs since agriculture is typically a lower paying industry. Another contributing factor is the widely held attitude that since so many farmers do not have formal education then practicing agriculture does not need any education and is not prestigious.[75] It is generally accepted that higher education correlates to higher wages over a person's lifetime. This disinterest in agriculture is demonstrated by the fact that agriculturally-focused high schools decreased by 40% between 2000-2011, and the number of graduates from these schools declined by 44% in the same period, totaling only 0.76% of all high school graduates.[76]
Even those agricultural programs that are available at educational institutions work against positive farming models. Agricultural higher education in Romania tends to be very biased, mostly focusing on agribusiness and industrial agriculture. Small farming and peasant farming are not typically part of the curriculum, especially not the socio-economic aspects of either agroecology or agribusiness. Excluding this information does students a disservice. They may not understand the larger consequences of agribusiness and will not reap the benefits of agroecology and peasant farming.

5.3 Governments
Romania’s historical experience with Communism and collectivization left the general public with an aversion, or at least skepticism, toward any cooperative endeavors, particularly when connected to the government. When collectivization began in the early 1950’s, the pace was slow and involvement was typically voluntary. By 1955 less than half of all rural households were part of collective structures. Starting in 1957, in order to accelerate the process, peasants were violently forced to join collectives, and over 800,000 were put on trial for alleged resistance. At the end of 1962, 96% of arable land was in collectives with over 3 million households involved.[77] The strategy was both highly effective and highly scarring. Over forty years later one of the obstacles to greater cooperative participation and visibility is still the very term “cooperative” and the memory of the Communist experience.[78] Any cooperative or communal efforts are automatically connected to oppression, poor economics, and ultimate failure.

CAP
One major government and international impediment to peasant farming and intra-family farm succession is under the guise of assistance via the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Originating in 1958, the CAP was just for the six participating Western European countries.[79] It has since undergone various overhauls, none of which have fully addressed the needs or concerns of the NMS who are primarily poorer and less developed, but bear a rich cultural heritage through the millions of deeply rooted peasant farms. Its current policies

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reinforce large-scale farming and land consolidation. Pillar 2 is supposed to provide direct payment assistance and subsidies to farmers, yet 40% of Romanian peasants are actually ineligible because their farms are too small and do not meet the minimum requirements. Of those who are eligible for direct payments, a mere 3% of the farmers receive 70% of the payments,[80] leaving the vast majority with very little assistance or none at all. More generally, there are sizeable differences in the monetary distribution amongst EU member states. Between 2007 and 2013 Romania’s development funding per hectare under Pillar 2 averaged 82 euros, compared to the overall EU average of 140 euros. Direct payments to Romania under Pillar 1 were 183 euros per hectare in 2013, compared to the EU average of 285 euros per hectare.[81] These discrepancies are both harmful and highly suspect. Eventually funding from Pillar 1 was altered to target peasants under 40 years of age,[82] but it does not address the larger issue of aging peasants, which is a sizeable obstacle to young peasants.

Pensions
Aging peasants would not be such an obstacle if they were already in the process of passing their farms along to the next generation. Instead, aging peasants are actually unable to retire or take subordinate positions because they rely on the income from their farms, and the Romanian government pension is not enough to survive.[83] This agricultural income could be both financial and subsistence. In 2014 the average monthly pension in Romania was a paltry 189 euros,[84] hardly enough to survive on. Unfortunately, in one study almost 75% of peasants abandoning agriculture were going to rely on pensions and social security for their incomes.[85] Elderly peasants who rely on their farms for their future financial income are more likely to lease or sell their land than to pass it on to a family member,[86] because they need the money for their savings to supplement the pension. This often results in land consolidation and land grabbing as agribusinesses take advantage of older peasants who are desperate to sustain themselves financially.

Agricultural Life Annuity Law
The Romanian government attempted to address the aging peasants’ financial issues with the Agricultural Life Annuity law 247/2005. The program was set up to pay peasants over 62 years old with less than ten hectares of land to stop farming and to sell or lease their land. They would be allowed to keep a ½ hectare for self-consumption, but the explicit purpose was to decrease the number of peasants and consolidate land. Until it ceased accepting applicants in 2009 it pulled in almost 89.000 people out of the targeted 1.9 million.[87] Most likely this was due to the low incentive. The program only pledged an annual amount of 50 euros per hectare for leasing and 100 euros per hectare for selling,[88] a low amount given average prices per hectare in 2005 were almost 900 euros in Romania.[89] This greatly affected land in Romania, as approximately 330.000 hectares were either leased or sold.[90] It is unclear how much of the land remained in the hands of peasants or was grabbed my agribusinesses and multinational speculators. Though this initiative provides long-term payments (until death), the amount cannot replace the quality of food grown on one’s own plot or the environmental benefits of agroecological small farms, and is not equivalent to the cost of purchasing food to replace the lost production. These measures are not supported by Eco Ruralis, because they don’t treat the root causes of problems for peasants. Instead, Eco Ruralis supports creating government-funded incentives for young farmers to continue peasant farming and agroecology coupled with succession assistance that ensures land goes to young, small and local farmers.

National Policy
As part of the 2014-2020 Rural Development Plan, the Romanian government is constructing an integrated package aimed at supporting and boosting small and middle class farmers. The proposal would use EU money from CAP to make direct payments to small and medium-sized farms for product diversification, and to older farmers for selling or leasing their land. Though this proposal has positive aspects and seems beneficial, there is a lack of protection for peasants. Since the package does not specify who may buy or lease the older farmers’ land, it will most likely be grabbed by agribusinesses and multinational corporations rather than new peasant farmers. One way to prevent more land grabbing and consolidation is to create a land ceiling that would limit the total number of hectares an individual could control under this project. Although this proposal is not very ambitious
in scope, it has the potential to be a positive pilot project, but only if it clarifies the targeted audience and protects small peasant farmers.

Overall, the national government’s preference for the future of Romanian land is to move towards industry and consolidation. The 2013-2016 Program of Government declares this intention, pushing authorities to take “measures that lead to land consolidation and reduction [of the] number of farms and holdings.”[91] The government-sanctioned consolidation and industrial efforts limit opportunities in rural areas, exacerbating rural poverty and migration. The influence and power of agribusinesses, mentioned earlier in reference to local communities, isolates resources and political power to the detriment of others. Agribusinesses are wealthy enough and often have international connections to sway the Romanian government’s decisions in their favor. This has a snowballing effect, causing more land grabbing which in turn exacerbates peasants’ positions.

Finally, there is a fundamental problem with the way the Romanian government defines farmers and farm size. Law 37/2015 classifies farms based on their economic size in order to align with EU funding requirements. Under this law, semi-substance and small commercial farms are considered those with outputs of between 2,000 and 49,999 euros.[92] Therefore, farms with outputs of under 2,000 euros are generally unaffected by CAP and national funding. This is extremely problematic for Romania, where approximately 91% of total agricultural holdings are left out under this definition, some 3.8 million farms.[93] Small peasant farmers are further disadvantaged by their exclusion from the ranks of ‘employed’ persons: “Subsistence farming is also recognized by the Romanian System of National Accounts (SNA) as ‘household production for its own final consumption’ and forms a distinct sector of the so-called Non-Observed/Non-Registered economy sitting alongside ‘undeclared work’.”[94] These individuals cannot generally receive unemployment assistance because of their lack of previous formal employment, and are unable to access many government funds and assistance. Peasants thus find themselves on the margins of Romania’s formal sectors, stuck in a disadvantaged position with no substantive aid from the government.
6. POSITIVE SCHEMES

In the midst of the crisis of aging peasants and the obstacles facing the rejuvenation of the agroecological, small farming sector, there are networks and organizations working hard to ameliorate the problems and demonstrate good practices. What follows is a non-comprehensive sample of these groups from around the world.

6.1 Ferma Ecologica Topa (Romania) [95]

Stretched between three branches of the Carpathian Mountains lies the Transylvanian Plateau, an expanse of valleys, forests, and ravines where Ferma Ecologica Topa sits. The farm is run by Dan Cismas and his wife Tincuta, both of whom grew up in the village of Topa in Mures County. Dan Cismas has been farming for 30 years but for the past seven years the family’s entire livelihood has been their farm. Motivated by the desire to provide both their family and their community with healthy food, the couple aims to promote environmentally friendly, sustainable farming while strengthening their community.

Located just under nine kilometers from the city of Sighisoara, the village of Topa has an estimated 370 inhabitants whose main occupation is agriculture. About 1/3 of the working population is considered ‘self-employed’ while others have been forced to migrate. Those who have migrated tend to work in seasonal agricultural jobs outside of Romania. As mentioned earlier in the report, these jobs are highly unstable, and leave the laborers vulnerable to poor conditions, exploitative wages, and even violence.

Another problem facing the village and its peasant farmers is land grabbing. One Romanian, a man named Aflat, has managed to buy thousands of hectares for monocultures in the area through questionable practices. There are some instances where he simply began working plots of land without having the owners’ consent or giving them notice. In one case in 2015, Aflat plowed a local peasant woman’s land and seeded corn on it. The land was previously a certified organic rose plantation, but after Aflat’s planting the certification was rescinded and the direct payment agency demanded that the organic subsidies the woman had received for the past few years be repaid. This land grabbing has had numerous negative consequences: economic ones for the peasant woman, environmental ones for the land, and social ones regarding the general trust and morale of the community.

In contrast stands Dan Cismas’ farm. Ferma Ecologica Topa consists of 40 hectares of land: the family owns 2 hectares and leases the rest of the land from neighbors within their village. This arrangement is beneficial to everyone as it provides the Cismas family with essential land and their neighbors with a steady source of income. The original leasing price per hectare was 250 lei, but as Dan Cismas’ farm flourished and received subsidies he decided that he should not be the only one benefiting. Over 7 years the Cismas’ voluntarily doubled the rent they paid per hectare to 500 lei. On their certified organic farm, the family produces a wide variety of vegetables including tomatoes, eggplants, beets, garlic and medicinal plants (all of which are also used for jams, zacusca, syrups, and teas) in addition to larger amounts of corn and wheat. There are cows, pigs, chickens, sheep and goats from which the family gets eggs, meat products and cheese. From their own production Dan and Tincuta ensure 70-80% of their family’s consumption, leaving 60-70% to be sold. Some customers buy directly from the farm but others live in neighboring towns and villages. Ferma Ecologica Topa is also part of Biocoop, a cooperative of organic farmers with a store in Sibiu, and sells at fairs and local events. Another example of their dedication to positive practices is Dan Cismas’ participation in the local community cow raisers’ association, which is part of a national association. The Asociatia Crescatorilor de Bovine Albesti manages the 300 hectares of communal pastures, also called Commons.
The family’s expertise is spread through their participation in WWOOF. Through this program volunteers assist in the harvesting, cheese preparation, preserved food preparation, planting, and general maintenance of Ferma Ecologica Topa. This sense of community is probably the most important aspect of farming for the family, along with strong land stewardship. Dan summed up this outlook by saying “Farming at a small scale, makes that human interactions are kept alive, people are tied to each other and it develops the spirit of the community...Our direction is towards keeping our neighbors close and to develop our community spirit.”

6.2 Provision (Romania)[97]
Nestled at the foot of the Vladeasa Mountains lies Sancraiu, a commune composed of five villages in Transylvania. One of the villages is Alunisu, a small, largely ethnic Hungarian enclave that provides an exquisite example of Romania’s subsistent peasantry. Here, Lars Veraart and Robyn Bors-Veraart set up their farm called Provision, the Transylvania School of Self Sufficient Living, which not only sustains their small family but also acts as a learning center for people looking to start their own farms, learn more about sustainable living, or just travel in an environmentally and socially conscious manner.[98] The School is based on the following values: self sufficiency, agroecology, permaculture, non-violence, voluntary simplicity and food sovereignty. Lars and Robyn left their respective jobs as a veterinarian in the Netherlands and a psychotherapist in the U.S. to search for a simpler, more sustainable life. After exploring multiple continents, they found their home amidst the hills in Alunisu where they have lived for the past 7 years.

In Alunisu at least 15 people have either passed away or permanently left the village in the past 7 years, a large percentage given there are currently only 100 inhabitants. Young people are rare and the elderly are numerous, leaving more land uncultivated and more houses uninhabited. This has attracted the attention of wealthier individuals from neighboring areas, even as far as Budapest, who are setting up summer and weekend houses that lie abandoned during the majority of the year and bring few benefits to the village. Alunisu is also very attractive to land grabbers because of its available land and proximity to Cluj-Napoca.

In the midst of these struggles, Provision is striving to not only preserve the peasant way of life but to revive it. Lars and Robyn own a total of just one acre (about 0.4 hectares), on which they have kitchen gardens and an orchard, but use more land from neighbors or the Commons. They use a further 0.1 hectares for staple foods, 2.5 hectares for haying, and the Commons for grazing. Though this may seem like a small amount of land, Provision is able to provide the majority of its own food. In addition to crops, they raise goats, ducks, and chickens. Instead of using machinery, the farm relies on a horse and traditional tools, and they are extremely careful about adhering to agroecological, sustainable practices. For example, the composting outhouse and animal manure are used as nutrient-rich, natural fertilizer. So far Lars and Robyn have invested approximately 36,000 euros in their farm, the vast majority of which has gone towards the buildings on their two properties. Currently they are looking to expand their land by two hectares. With this expansion the family would be able to grow grains and cut down even further on the amount of items purchased from outside suppliers.

Provision’s benefits are not just reaped by the immediate family, though. Lars and Robyn have been very intentional in their outreach and integration into Alunisu. The Transylvania School of Self Sufficient Living recruits villagers to give classes and demonstrations on a wide variety of topics, including traditional woodworking, sheering, and orchard planning. The wider village also benefits from Provision’s WWOOFers and volunteers who are encouraged to help villagers with labor-intensive tasks that would otherwise be extremely difficult, such as potato harvesting. Thus the WWOOFers and volunteers not only gain valuable knowledge and experience but also provide a service to the community and their hosts.
The community’s response to Lars and Robyn, and Provision, was initially uncertain. As time passed and the two continued to cultivate their land and practice agroecological, organic peasant farming, Alunisu realized they were serious about their commitment to the land and assisting others in finding their own successful yet simpler and natural lifestyle. Lars, Robyn, and their son are conversant in Romanian, are learning Hungarian, and are quick to offer assistance or a friendly word to their neighbors and community members. Their impact is perhaps best summed up by their friend Reverend Szilard Berde who stated in an interview with a visiting writer that, “Lars and Robyn’s project makes our eyes open, to find out what treasures we have in our lives, in our style of living. Our citizens are used to look at life in western countries, how high level it is, how good it is. Through their project now we can find out our own values. This helps us also, to keep this lifestyle going on, saving its values for the future too.”

6.3 Jaglea Family (Romania) [99]

In a case study by Access to Land (see 6.6) the Jaglea family’s farm and agricultural style is explored as an “emerging ‘new peasantry.’” The way in which Ioan and Ramona Jaglea operate their farm is an excellent example of how agroecological farming can be successful, innovative, and feasible.

The Jaglea couple became farm owners in 2006 after getting married. They started out with one cow, a wedding present, and the use of 3 hectares of family land. Over the next few years Ioan and Ramona worked their farm as a second job while they worked at a bank and raising the children, respectively. In 2010 the farm became their main job and source of income and subsistence. As of 2011 the Jagleas had a total of 17 hectares: 3.4 ha directly owned, 5 ha owned by family, and 10.5 ha rented from neighbors or nearby community members.

At the time of the case study the couple raised dairy and meat cows, lambs, chickens, and pigs. Crops included animal fodder such as corn, cereals, and hay, as well as a variety of vegetables for human consumption. Their milk quota was approximately 28,000 liters per year, with about half going toward making cheese, yogurt, butter, and cream. The family grows or raises almost all of their own food and is still able to sell a massive 75% of their output. Ioan, along with a small group of organic farmers in the area, started a shop called Biocoop, where they sell their organic products directly to the public. The Jagleas also have about 50 customers who they specifically sell to, quite a few to whom they deliver.

All of Ioan and Ramona’s work is even more impressive since it is mostly performed without the use of machines. Ioan only uses machinery for select tasks, such as hiring a neighbor and their tractor to take care of the larger fields. One of the benefits of this traditional, hands-on approach is that they are able to recognize and treat the animals’ health problems very early. In the past ten years they have only had to resort to antibiotics once. However, the Jagleas do not think that traditional farming methods must exclude innovation. The couple’s farm is agroecological and organic. Ioan went to trainings to learn agroecological practices, which they now utilize. Crops are regularly rotated to prevent soil erosion, a mixture of crops are planted to maintain biodiversity and avoid monocultures, and the animal waste is composted and used as fertilizer for the fields.

At the time, the Jagleas hoped to expand their peasant operations with more dairy cows, more hens, a greenhouse for the garden, and organic certification. One of the biggest obstacles to these plans was finding accessible land, particularly accessible pasture. Though the area received an agro-environmental subsidy of 200 euros per hectare, the town hall required a minimum herd of 40 cows, a number unattainable for Ioan without first having access to pasture. It is also problematic trying to find land close to their existing home and farm, a set up that would help prevent crop thefts.

Whether Ioan and Ramona expand their land or continue with their 17 hectares, their farm is an exceptional example of traditional yet agroecological farming.
6.4 Rosia Montana (Romania) [100]
Located in the mountains of Western, Central Romania sits Rosia Montana, a mining and cultural area that dates back at least 1,882 years. In Roman and Pre-Roman times, it was a major gold mining center. In a study by Oxford and Leicester universities, experts declared, "The Roman mines at Rosia Montana represent the most extensive and most important underground Roman gold mines known anywhere."[101] However, in the early 2000s a Canadian company started what would turn into more than a decade-long bid to destroy the site via the largest open-pit gold mining operation in Europe.

The company, Gabriel Resources, already had some questionable ethics and dealings. The founder, and chairman at the time, was convicted twice of heroin possession with intent to sell.[102] Their Romanian subsidiary, Rosia Montana Gold Corporation (RMGC) would later be investigated for money laundering and tax evasion.[103] Most concerning perhaps was Gabriel Resources complete lack of experience in mining operations, which in turn caused a host of other issues.

Gabriel Resources' proposal was for 4 open-pit mines in the Rosia Montana Valley with an unlined cyanide storage 'pond' in neighboring Corna Valley. The consequences would be drastic. First, there are a number of villages on the site, meaning over 2,000 people would be displaced and almost 1,000 homes would be torn down. Seven churches would be demolished and 11 cemeteries would be relocated. A further 6,000 people would be endangered by the annual 12,000 tons of cyanide that would be required for the operation. In exchange for this turmoil, Gabriel Resources estimated a mere 634 jobs would be created over 17 years, not necessarily for the local people.

As the company put forth proposals, the public's outrage grew, led by the Alburnus Maior association. The Alburnus Maior association was founded in September 2000 and initiated the "Save Rosia Montana" campaign that successfully activated over 100,000 active supporters. Through its work lobbying, protesting, and educating the public Alburnus Maior and its followers pushed the case of Rosia Montana into the international spotlight. Various institutions, universities, and groups performed feasibility studies, cultural impact studies, and assessments on the area's future welfare.

Throughout almost all of the past 15 years the Romanian government has ultimately supported the operation, even as it rejected Gabriel Resources proposals. However, in February of this year the government announced that Rosia Montana is one of Romania's candidates to become a UNESCO World Heritage site. This designation would prevent Rosia Montana from ever being exploited and destroyed.[104] The immense hard work and dedication of the “Save Rosia Montana” campaign preserved this historic and beautiful location.

6.5 European Coordination Via Campesina (Europe) [105]
The European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC) is the regional organization of La Via Campesina, and is an umbrella group for all peasants in Europe. ECVC works toward food sovereignty, agroecology, sustainability, and government policies that reflect the best interests of peasants and humanity in general. It holds general meetings to determine courses of action and advocates at an international level. Within ECVC are regional, national, and international organizations that also work towards these goals, including Eco Ruralis. Another partner is the Hands on the Land Campaign, which educates about and draws awareness of food sovereignty, peasants, and marginalized peoples in general.

6.6 Access to Land Network (Europe) [106]
The Access to Land Network is made up of grassroots organizations working for land stewardship, land use and management, and access to land through national and EU policies. They also strive to improve information sharing and access for agroecological peasants. Their activities range from advocacy to research to communication, one example of which is a collection of case studies. Access to Land's partner organizations put together case studies of
environmentally and socially responsible farms throughout the EU. Eco Ruralis is also a member of this network.

6.7 Regionalwert AG (Germany) [107]
Nestled near the border with France, the organization Regionalwert is a citizen shareholder corporation. Unlike most other corporations, Regionalwert “invest[s] in small and medium enterprises of the organic agricultural and food sector in the region of Freiburg,” and is not stock-listed. The group has raised almost 3 million euros and preserved at least 250 hectares of farmland. Their investments have funded 3 shops, a box-scheme, a wholesaler, and a vast array of agricultural products, to name only a handful of their activities.

6.8 Terre de Liens (France) [108]
Terre de Liens was started in 2003 and has gone on to provide extensive support to peasants and their wider communities and networks. One of its main focuses is accessing land for peasants, often by directly purchasing land as an organization and renting or selling it to peasants. They own over 2200 hectares to be used for sustainable agricultural use. The organization also advocates for land stewardship by educating the public and authorities.

6.9 CIVAM (France) [109]
In English CIVAM stands for the ‘Centers for Enhancing Agriculture and Rural Initiatives.’ The organization has a number of roles and services it provides the 7000 farmers in its network. They assess the sustainability of farms and provide training and resources to improve sustainable functioning. CIVAM also promotes food solidarity and food sovereignty through their programs connecting producers and consumers, such as farmers’ markets. They also organize farm exchanges and promote rural activities that include entrepreneurship opportunities and trainings.

6.10 Xarxa de Custodia del Territori (Spain) [110]
The Xarxa de Custodia del Territori (Land Stewardship Network) is based in Catalonia, Spain, where it promotes land stewardship and particularly agricultural stewardship. XCT raises public awareness through trainings, and supports other land stewardship organizations as well as individuals. The organization also assists agroecological peasants in accessing land. In addition, they offer assistance on how to utilize and enact agroecological practices and good land stewardship.

6.11 Rurbans-School of Shepherds (Spain) [111]
The School of Shepherds works to foster a new, younger generation of shepherds and peasants who do not have previous experience. At the school young trainees, on average 31 years old, are given a practical education. They are taught how to herd and care for sheep, and advised on organic agricultural practices. The organization also helps new entrants access land by matching buyers and sellers. One other example of the group’s work is their job platform that matches trainees with established peasants looking for labor.

6.12 Land Workers’ Alliance (UK) [112]
In its own words, the Landworkers’ Alliance “is a producer-led organization of small-scale producers and family farmers who use sustainable methods to produce food, fuel, fibre and flowers.” The Alliance organizes workshops on how to save seeds and the historical background and importance of seed saving. Another part of the group’s work is campaigning for greater GM labeling, particularly for animal feed and animal products. Finally, the Alliance advocates for CAP reform and national policy reform that would benefit small and family farmers.

6.13 Fresh Start Land Enterprise Centre (UK) [113]
Land partnerships are one of the main projects of the Fresh Start Land Enterprise Centre. The organization works to connect landowners with land entrepreneurs, typically peasants or agriculture-related enterprises. Their approach aims to make the situation beneficial to both parties. For example, they partner established
peasants looking to diversify (without the added work) with people looking to set up a related business. A peasant growing vegetables could lease land to a peasant looking to sell local products, especially the landowner’s vegetables. In addition, the organization runs academies on business practices and general agricultural information such as horticulture.

6.14 Ecova Mali (Mali) [114]
Founded in 2007, Ecova Mali works to increase food security, economic development and land stewardship. The organization provides micro-loans and mini grants, trainings on requested topics, and assistance with business planning, accounting, and marketing. Grants and loans have been used to purchase and distribute seeds, to obtain oxen for sowing fields, and to improve a water pump. Their list of projects highlights ongoing work in orchards, gardens, and aquaculture.

6.15 Deccan Development Society (India) [115]
The number of programs and activities executed by the Deccan Development Society is impressive, ranging from three educational institutions to childcare to medicinal plant healthcare. One of the organization’s focuses is food security, which is broken into four parts. The first, Eco-Employment, improved land that was given to women’s associations so that it produced 5-10 times as much yet still in a sustainable way. Land Lease connected women’s associations with landowners in order to lease the land and produce food for families. The Community Grain Fund aimed to address the entire community’s food needs by making sure enough food was produced for everyone. Finally, the Community Gene Fund continues to provide easy access to seeds, the most essential part of food production.
7. CONCLUSION

Aging peasants is a problem on every continent except for Antarctica. Since the majority of peasants average between 55 and 65 years old, there are a staggering number of small farm plots whose future is uncertain. Many older peasants do not have anyone to take over their land. The options facing them are rarely beneficial in the long-term. The current trend is toward land consolidation, when small plots are purchased by larger agribusinesses and absorbed into their operation. This situation limits food variety and food sovereignty. It has many negative effects on the environment, particularly on biodiversity. There are also negative economic and social impacts on the peasants, consumers, and general public. It is essential to promote and assist the new generation of peasants.

Unfortunately, this new generation faces many obstacles. Governments tend to support industrial-scale farming and actively encourage peasants to consolidate and abandon their land. Policies such as CAP’s two Pillars and the Romanian government’s current pensions promote the destruction of peasants and small farming. Furthermore, as a result of these policies that make agriculture unattractive economically, many Romanians migrate to wealthier locations in order to survive. In the face of these obstacles it is crucial that peasants, family farms, and small farms survive and succeed.

There are vast benefits to peasant farming. It promotes land and food sovereignty, and is typically much more sustainable and environmentally friendly. It also provides an incredible number of jobs and livelihoods. The benefits to local communities include improved health and wellbeing, strengthening of culture and tradition, and greater knowledge exchange. Despite the previously mentioned barriers, there are a number of grassroots organizations working to preserve peasant farming and small farm access for these beneficial reasons. Some positive examples are individuals, while others are continent-wide networks, or small organizations in rural India.

Finally, it is important to remember that intra-family succession is the ideal scenario. All extra-family succession “implies the loss of skills and expertise accumulated within the family farm,”[116] as well as lower incentive for land stewardship and agroecological practices. While there are extra-family scenarios that maintain the small plot and peasant farming, the ideal is for intra-family succession. Eco Ruralis’ recommendations on how to promote intra-family succession and preserve peasant farming are in the following section.
8. Recommendations

Eco Ruralis’ primary recommendation is for peasants and small farmers not to sell their land to individuals or groups involved in land consolidation, agribusiness, or industrial enterprises. These endeavors are incredibly harmful to local communities, global economies, and the environment. To counter these situations, peasants must maintain the small, agroecological use of their land. In order to do so, however, the Romanian government must dramatically increase its involvement and adherence to these recommendations, particularly the FAO’s Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests[117] (henceforth referred to as the Tenure Guidelines) of which it is already a signatory.

The government should focus more resources on peasants and small-scale farmers due to the immense, positive impact they have on the world. Peasants and small farmers are the heart of Romania. A large percentage of the food consumed in Romania is produced by peasants on small plots of land. They provide cultural, economic, and environmental benefits as well. The Tenure Guidelines specifically mention these peasants, referring to them as ‘small-scale producers.’ Article 11.8 explicitly calls for their political protection in the market. Article 12.2. calls for greater government support of ‘smallholder’ investments, citing that they “contribute significantly to food security, nutrition, poverty eradication and environmental resilience.” Peasants and small farmers should be treated as local and national investors, which they actually are: investing in the land, food production, food sovereignty, their time, and their communities.

Peasants’ informal and customary land tenure rights should be respected and upheld.

The Romanian Government cannot only focus on legally documented entities. As a result of Post-Communism confusion regarding land, there are numerous instances of individuals or groups having informal or customary land tenure rights. As the Tenure Guidelines state in Article 3.1–1, these should be recognized, respected and upheld whether or not they are formally recorded. Articles 8.2, 8.7, and 10.1 further encourage such treatment. Informal and customary tenure rights would include communal land, access to forests for foraging, and farms that may not be legally registered but have been in use for decades.

Land grabbing and large-scale agriculture should be banned.

As mentioned throughout this report, land grabbing has massive negative consequences ranging from environmental damage to economic hardship. This is recognized in the Tenure Guidelines. Article 12.6 calls for the protection of smallholders from the risks of ‘large-scale transactions,’ a term synonymous with land grabbing. Article 15.4 also calls for the restriction of land consolidation if fragmentation is beneficial, and cites risk reduction and crop diversification as two beneficial examples. As stated earlier, these benefits extend into cultural and economic spheres, too. One option for preventing land grabbing is the imposition of land ceilings (mentioned in Article 15.2), or limits on the amount of land any individual or company can own.

Agricultural education needs to be improved and expanded to include peasants, agroecology, and land stewardship, particularly in higher education.

In order to encourage a new generation of peasants and farmers, the education system must include agriculture earlier in the curriculum, preferably at the start of children’s schooling. A hands-on, practical approach is not only important for transferring knowledge but also a simple way to engage students. School gardens are an easy option. Universities and vocational schools should increase their agricultural programs and degrees, putting greater focus on agroecological practices rather than industrial farming.

An important part of this education, and peasant farming in general, is land stewardship. The Tenure Guidelines mention in Article 20.5 that
land planning should include sustainable management, and in Article 20.1 that land development should be sustainable and balanced. Land stewardship is an integral part of peasant farming practices and traditions, and must be included in any agricultural education.

Access to resources should be vastly increased so that peasants may have sustainable livelihoods; these resources should include credits and subsidies.

The Tenure Guidelines declare in Article 4.6 that governments should remove and prohibit any and all discrimination related to tenure rights including lack of access to economic resources. This includes affordable legal aid and mobile services for rural populations, both mentioned in Article 6.6. Peasants should also have greater access to subsidies and credits, two of the top four greatest needs for young farmers as mentioned earlier. In order to make these finances available, they must be less contingent on farm size and productivity, which favors agribusiness, and more focused on social and economic indicators. With these funds more accessible, peasants will have greater protection from the international free market and agriculture will be more economically sustainable, and appealing to young people. The Tenure Guidelines acknowledge in Article 11.2 that unregulated, ‘free’ markets are not always good or beneficial. One disastrous example of this is the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which the Romanian and EU governments must not agree to if peasants are to survive. Some of the side effects of TTIP would be increasing land prices, possible GMO access, increasing debt for peasants, and general destruction of food sovereignty.[118] This trade agreement must be halted and discarded to prevent complete agribusiness domination to the detriment of peasants and small farmers.

Where intra-family succession is not an option, the government should support and promote positive alternatives, such as community land banks.

As discussed throughout this report, intra-family succession is not always an option for peasants. However, this does not have to mean that all their land goes to corporations or gets consolidated. Community land banks, mentioned in Article 13.2, are an excellent alternative, as in the case of Terre de Liens. Land restitution programs, mentioned in Article 14.2, are also important for returning land to individuals or their family. Another option is for governments to support networks and organizations that connect retiring peasants without successors to younger peasants searching for land, or individuals selling land to peasants seeking land, as in the case of the Fresh Start Land Enterprise Centre.

The government must actively respect and defend all rights of peasants and small-scale farmers.

Overall, the Romanian government must take a greater role in defending, respecting, and upholding the rights of peasants. The Tenure Guidelines state in Article 4.8 that these must also include civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights. This shift towards comprehensive human rights is essential for the future of the environment, the economy, and humanity.
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