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Romania- Recovering and Prospering

The communist regime of the late 1940s was a dark time in Eastern Europe's history. Individual freedoms were suppressed, economies suffered, and millions were killed because of their thoughts. Nations in the Warsaw Pact were told what to make, and how much to produce. Farmers had to produce a designated amount of food for the government, and, if they were fortunate, have food left over for their families.

Romania, like the other Warsaw Pact communist countries at the time, was controlled by an unsympathetic dictator, who enforced strict quotas of fruit, vegetables, meat, and dairy products. Because the government was in control of farm supplies, such as machinery, fertilizers, weed killers and other pesticides, it could choose to simply not supply farms with such necessities. If farmers were consistently late or lacking the amount of goods the government could just take away their farms. Farmers were trapped in a viscous circle with no easy way out except the loss of their land and their livelihood. In the 80s farmers were allowed to take extra crops, (That the government or their families didn't need) and sell them in farmers markets. However the government took a step backward when it decided to create a 'self-sufficiency' program which took all of the food produced, and attempted to spread it between villages, giving each village only what it needed. Crops were grown in improper regions of the country, which lowered yields, and many families went hungry when less food was deemed necessary than what was actually needed.

The Romanian Revolution of 1989 brought about a new form of government, and more economic uncertainty. The nation had forgotten how to democratically govern itself, and with a less controlled economy inflation and unemployment rose while food supplies sank. With the help of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Romania found its footing and privatized most of its farms, factories, and other businesses.

Romania is now part of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In 1996 Romania had a democratic election with its first tranquil exchange of authority since communism.

Things appear to be looking up for Romania. Yet the country, like any country is having difficulties within. Even more established economies like Japan, Great Britain, and France are struggling in our current slow economy, but Romania's economy is very young and fragile.

Romania's estimated 2009 population is about 22,215,421, and its area is about 92,043 square miles, which gives a population density of about 240 people per square mile. Romania's population is almost evenly split in half between urban dwellers and rural farmers. The average family is a household with a father, mother, and one or two children, although orphanages are very crowded, because many parents believe they can't care for their children. Romanians are required to attend school for ten years, and Romania's literacy rate is 98%. Typical Romanian income is \$6,800 in U.S. dollars. Major food sources are corn mush called mamaliga, and pork. Beef is also popular. Nearly 36% of household income is spent on food.

Romanian farmers have an average of 2 hectares, or about 5 acres of land to work with. Romania has the climate and land ability to grow many different crops. The majority of crops

grown are cereal grains; especially corn and wheat, potatoes, and both table grapes and wine. Livestock such as cattle, pigs, poultry, and sheep are also found on Romanian farms.

Romania has the possibility to grow, and become an influential and helpful nation in the world's economy.

The first hurdle is helping Romania help itself. Romania is already miles ahead of where it was two decades ago. Most of Romania's land is in the hands of private farming families, but without proper education they may repeat the mistakes of the communist regime before them. Over farming can lead to extreme and irreversible erosion, compaction of the soil, and loss of organic material. Un-educated farmers may follow the more is better theory and use far too much fertilizer or pesticide, and pollute Romania's streams. Farmers may also try to grow the wrong crop for their farm land. By simply educating the farmers they can obtain better yields from their soil, and prevent destruction of Romania's natural beauty.

Many farmers in Romania have never had the opportunity to raise livestock before, and need to be instructed on how to raise poultry, cattle, sheep, and hogs. They need to learn how to grow feed for the livestock, and what will make the livestock produce for their needs. Education is the key.

Many groups and organizations have stepped up to educate and enlighten Romanian farmers. One such group is World Vision. Using religion as a driving force, World Vision trains farmers, teaches them the necessities of farming to produce a profit, such as management, cultivation, pest and disease control, harvesting, post-harvesting, and marketing.

World Vision states that one in three Romanian families live on less than \$1.35 a day, and two in three rural families have no cash income, and rely on subsistence farming. They believe this leads to the crowded Romanian orphanages.

After Romanian farmers have passed the farm education classes they have the opportunity to be given livestock of their own from World Vision, which they then can raise and breed in order to give the young to other needy farmers so they can start their own homestead.

Heifer International is very similar to World Vision, with its mission to give animals to needy people. Heifer International specializes in Romania, Moldova, and Bulgaria. Heifer International also prefers to educate people who are at a greater disadvantage than poor families; the elderly, orphans and other disadvantaged children, and the Romas, or Gypsies.

Currently Romania's farmer education has come a long way from where it was during its communist era, but it may never be over. New generations will always need to learn, but hopefully future generations will learn from their parents, or form Grange like groups to meet with other farmers to gather, share, and distribute information about farming practices.

With help from organizations like World Vision and Heifer International Romania's farmers should be able to help themselves, and each other, keep their countries resources pure and beautiful, take care of the land they have, and prosper enough to begin to help other countries.

If and when Romania becomes more of a world power, and begins to create a surplus of food it may be able to donate food to other needy countries, and pass on what its people have learned to other developing agricultural countries.

A perfect cash crop for Romania is wine. Romania is located east of the great wine countries, Italy and France, but has the same general climate, perfect for wine grapes. The entire country of Romania could be involved in production, from the farmer who tends to the vineyards, to the workers in the fermentation and bottling process. As of 2003 Romania was the twelfth largest wine producing country. With special effort and careful control of the entire wine making process Romania could easily rival France and Italy as far as quantity and quality of wine.

Another huge potential income of Romania is tourism. With Romania's large border on the beautiful Black Sea and its Carpathian Mountain range, Romania is perfect for a vacation any time of the year. Romania has a large forest, great fishing, a wide variety of flora and fauna, and is excellent for any naturalist. And Romania's castles bring back memories of medieval times. Vacationers can ski and hike in the mountains one day, and relax on the beach the next. And Romania's wine may be an attraction all itself. Wine enthusiasts can see the entire process, from the vineyards to the bottling, and finally tasting, wine could bring in a lot of income.

Vacationers can also feel good about helping the country they visit. Unlike some Western European countries, Romania and East Europe is still developing. Romanians could use the money gained to create noticeable differences such as improving facilities for more tourists, and keeping its natural wild life pristine. The more humble tourist could stay with a Romanian family, and help them improve their land, crops, and village, like a volunteer vacation. Because Romania is still developing, every cent, and hour of effort helps. Tourists who come back year after year could see the way their money is being used, and the people they have helped.

Romania is not what comes to mind when 'underdeveloped country' is heard. Romania is quite advanced compared to other developing countries. Although it started off slower than other Warsaw Pact countries, Romania has rebounded beautifully after nearly half a century of communist rule.

Emigration or leaving a country is a problem in Romania. Perhaps with increased industry and opportunities people would believe they had a future there, and stay.

Romania already exports machinery, textiles, and raw materials. And Romania has the ability to be a popular tourist destination, it just needs publicity first. Romania also has the space, soil, workforce, and ability to be a contender for wine excellence, maybe even rival Italy and France.

Knowledge truly is the key in developing Romania. Romania has exceptional soil, that, with a little care and knowledge of which crop grows best in which territory, produces many varieties of crops throughout the country. If the country taught its citizens better and more efficient crop growing methods, Romania could get itself out of debt. If the Romanian government can't find someone within the country to teach its residents proper techniques, then they need to look elsewhere to find someone who can. Neighboring countries with similar climates may be able to give advice on how to improve yields, and which crops grow best in which climate. Many programs and volunteer organizations exist to help individuals, families, and entire communities help themselves. If Romanian farmers prosper enough, and grow a surplus of foods to feed themselves, they can then feed the city dwellers through farmer's markets, and then begin to feed the world.

Romania has a trade deficit, but if farmers become more knowledgeable, produce higher crop yields, and consume more of their own goods, Romania may be able to turn the trade deficit around.

Romania currently has a delicate economy, but with a little care and guidance Romania will be able to grow and bloom and feed the world. The story of Romania is bloody and peaceful, great and poor. With help and nurturing, Romania will be great again, and the story will have a happy ending.

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