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# HUMAN RESOURCE POTENTIAL OF THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR: FORMATION CHALLENGES AND UTILIZATION

## ABSTRACT

The modern scientific paradigm of the formation of human resources of industries and the developed set of approaches and framework conditions for the training of high-quality personnel for the field of agricultural production create ample opportunities for the selection of constituent elements in the development of national systems of staffing of the agricultural sector. At the same time, the local context is always individual and its use will contribute to solving the specific problems of the sector to a greater extent.

The paper analyses the key indicators of the functioning of the agricultural sector of the Vinnytsia region with an emphasis on remuneration, analyses the reasons for the difficulties of employers in recruiting personnel for work in the agricultural sector and the difficulties of graduates of vocational (vocational and technical) education institutions in employment. The situation with the training of specialists for work in the agricultural sector and the subsequent employment of graduates of agricultural specialities of higher education institutions in the Vinnytsia region is investigated in comparison with all-Ukrainian indicators. The key problems of the processes of formation and use of human resources in the agricultural sector of the Vinnytsia region are substantiated and a list of possible ways to solve them is proposed.

The originality of the study lies in establishing regional differences and features in the formation of human resources of the agricultural sector in comparison with all-Ukrainian trends and substantiating on their basis promising areas for improving the processes of formation and use of human resources by the agricultural sector of the Vinnytsia region.

The results obtained allow us to focus on the main problematic aspects of the processes of formation and building of human resources in the agricultural sector of the region and can serve as a basis for further development of possible ways to eliminate them.

**Keywords:** agricultural sector, agricultural production, human resources, Vinnytsia region, formation and use of human resources

**JEL Classification:** Q16, Q19, J43

## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary economic landscape of Ukraine has been undergoing a protracted crisis, which has been significantly exacerbated by the initiation of a full-scale military invasion, resulting in systematic disruptions across various sectors. The agricultural industry, acknowledged as the "key driver of the Ukrainian economy at all levels" (FAO, 2022), is no exception to the pervasive challenges. While from a global perspective, issues of food security are most problematic in the specified context for specific countries or regions (Foundation pour la nature et L'Homme, 2022) or dignified employment in the agricultural sector for countries with low economic development (Losch, 2022), the past decades have been marked by considerable attention to the challenges of human resource management in the development of agribusiness and the utilization of human resource potential. In particular, researchers (Collett K., Gale Ch., 2009) emphasise the issue of gender inequality in labour remuneration and education for those engaged in the agricultural industry. Effective mechanisms to overcome this inequality would help increase the proportion of self-employed women in the agricultural sector, thereby enhancing the efficiency of their entrepreneurial initiatives.

Zikhali W. (2017), having examined the correlation between the intensification of the educational process and personnel development with indicators of labour productivity in the agricultural sector, concludes that standalone initiatives such as qualification enhancement programs, consultive support, etc., even if organized at a centralized level, do not yield discernible effects unless effective motivational incentives are concurrently established to enhance the productivity of those employed in the agricultural industry.

In the scholarly investigation conducted by Szabolcs B. (2015), the focus is directed toward examining the human resource potential within the agricultural sector of Hungary, with a particular emphasis on the escalating demand for labour. The study's findings posit that the potential, as mentioned above, is balanced for augmentation in the environment of state subsidisation, tax incentives, and the fortification of its competitive standing. Furthermore, the motivation of individuals to work in the agricultural sector is determined by the presence of a full range of conditions and services for comfortable living in rural areas.

International entities emphasise the realm of training personnel for engagement within the agricultural sector, as TFRA (2019) exemplifies. They underscore the crucial imperative of crafting a personnel training framework based on the "knowledge triangle". Each vertex of this triangular construct is purposefully aligned with education, research, or innovation facets. The developers substantiate the necessity of basing personnel training systems on the combined use of educational and research platforms and innovative centres to ensure the process's efficiency in building the industry's human resource potential.

The contemporary scientific paradigm governing the cultivation of human capital within industries, complemented by an elaborate array of methodologies and structural prerequisites tailored to training adept personnel within the agricultural domain, establishes ample opportunities for the selection of components in the construction of national human resource frameworks specific to the agro-industrial sector. Simultaneously, there is a widespread assertion that "a fruitful way to form the human resource potential of the agricultural sector is to thoroughly study and utilize the potential of local (territorial) approaches since the local context is always individual and its use will contribute to solving the problems of the sector as a whole" (Losch, 2020; OECD, 2020). In view of this, the issue of detailing the opportunities and features of forming the human resource potential of the agricultural sector in Ukraine at the regional level is becoming relevant.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The conducted analysis reveals a series of studies dedicated to the comprehensive and specialised investigation of issues related to the formation and utilisation of personnel potential in Ukraine's agricultural sector. Specifically, Kolomiets O. and Samoiliuk M. (2022), in their investigation of challenges associated with ensuring workforce resilience to crisis phenomena, emphasise that "it is through quality education and an effective system of retraining and professional training that it is possible to compensate for the labour force shortage partially." The authors conclude that Ukraine's efforts to enhance the quality and relevance of education at all levels, especially those most closely linked to the labour market, are insufficient (Kolomiets O., Samoiliuk M., 2022). They propose comprehensive solutions in both the education sector and the labour market to augment the country's human capital.

While investigating issues related to the formation of human capital in the agricultural sector at the regional level, Khaianok T. M. (2015) conducted a categorisation of influencing factors on the specified processes into two groups: general and specific industry-related factors that contribute to the development of various organisational and technological tools for functioning.

Fedorova V. I Karpenko T. (2011) dedicated their attention to the theoretical substantiation of the characteristics of the personnel potential of the national economy. They also explored the formation of personnel potential as a systematic and purposeful process aiming to provide economic entities in individual sectors with personnel.

More detailed investigations addressing the issue above have been conducted in the scholarly contributions—specifically, the study by Kotelnikova Yu. (2021) is devoted to formulating a robust framework for personnel support within the agricultural sector, employing a process-system approach. This involves the formulation of specific qualification requirements and competencies for the workforce. Additionally, Zinshaieva N. (2019) examines the migration intentions exhibited by domestic specialists within agriculture.

The key findings of existing scientific research in addressing the current issues of personnel provision in the agricultural sector are confined to the necessity of promoting agrarian education and enhancing the quality of practical training for specialists (Havrylko, 2012). This includes raising the prestige of professions in agricultural production (Zastrozhnikova,

2021), creating opportunities and guarantees of employment for graduates with agricultural specialisms (Halytska, Domanchuk, 1012), and establishing cooperative processes between local authorities and businesses in matters related to the formation of the personnel potential of agribusiness (Dumenko, 2009) among others. However, regional peculiarities and issues in the formation of the personnel potential of the agricultural sector remain poorly studied, ultimately hindering the development of quality programs (mechanisms) for the growth and improvement of the efficiency of personnel potential utilisation in the agricultural sector of regions.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of this scholarly article is to analyse issues in the formation and utilisation of personnel potential in the agricultural sector of the Vinnytsia region and determine prospective directions for their resolution.

The achievement of the set objective involves addressing the following tasks:

1. Analyse the dynamics of key indicators in the functioning of the agricultural sector in the Vinnytsia region.
2. Conduct a comprehensive analysis of remuneration indicators in the agricultural sector of the Vinnytsia region.
3. Investigate the reasons for difficulties in recruiting personnel for agricultural enterprises in Vinnytsia.
4. Evaluate the situation in the field of vocational and technical education in agricultural specialisms in the region and the prospects for the employment of graduates of vocational (technical) education institutions.
5. Conduct a comparative analysis of the situation with higher educational institutions in the Vinnytsia region training specialised professionals for the agricultural sector compared to those in other regions.
6. Identify issues in the formation and utilisation of the personnel potential in the agricultural industry of the Vinnytsia region and propose viable strategies for their resolution.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in identifying regional differences and peculiarities in the formation of the personnel potential of the agricultural domain compared to nationwide trends. Based on these findings, it also involves substantiating prospective directions for improving the process of personnel formation and utilisation within the agricultural sector of the Vinnytsia region.

## METHODS

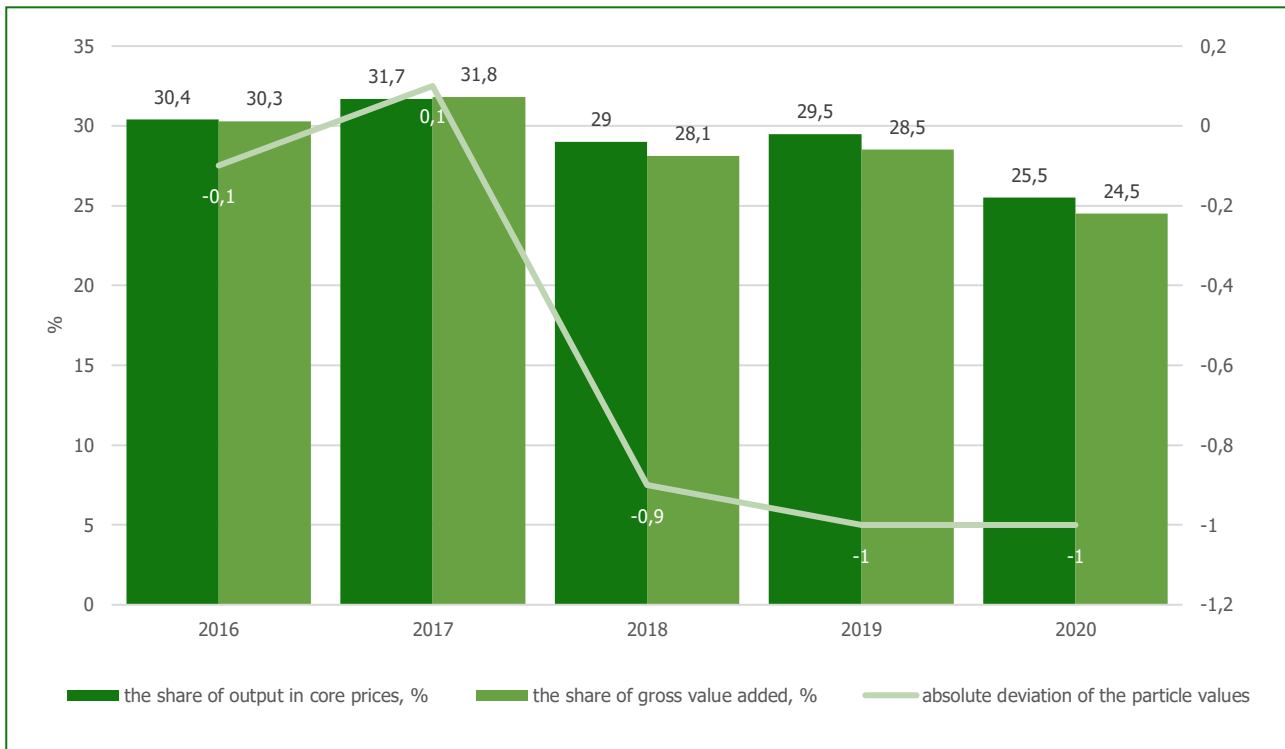
The study encompasses a comprehensive examination of statistical data on the activities of the agricultural sector in the Vinnytsia region throughout the period spanning 2015 to 2021. The analysis involved the computation of output and gross value-added shares within the context of the gross regional product, alongside determining the absolute deviation between the output share at basic prices and the share of gross value added. Furthermore, the dynamics of production indicators for the main types of agricultural products in the Vinnytsia region were studied, and their absolute growth for 2015–2021 was calculated. An analysis of average labour remuneration indicators in the agricultural sector of the Vinnytsia region and the broader regional context was undertaken. The study included calculating indicators denoting deviations in average wages within the agricultural production sector vis-à-vis the regional average. A structural analysis of the workforce in the agricultural sector of the Vinnytsia region was executed, leveraging average monthly wages and the employment status of graduates majoring in agriculture from vocational and technical education institutions. This analytical process incorporated the utilisation of cumulative frequencies and the application of a prototype of ABC analysis. Furthermore, the research considered key performance indicators related to state contract fulfilment regarding training specialised personnel by agricultural higher educational institutions in Ukraine for 2020–2021. This assessment involved the calculation of both state contract fulfilment and the application of a rating approach. Notably, each higher education institution received a ranking ordinal number contingent upon the level of the state contract, similarly determined based on the share of its fulfilment.

The investigation involved a comprehensive analysis of statistical and monitoring data sourced from the State Statistic Service of Ukraine, the Principal Department of Statistics in the Vinnytsia region, the State Employment Service of the Vinnytsia region, and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

During the investigation, methodological approaches encompassed applying statistical techniques, including structural analysis, dynamic series construction, chain and base growth rates computation, averages, and comparative analysis. The objective was to establish ranking relationships for a series of analysed indicators.

## RESULTS

Agriculture is one of the most developed types of economic activity in the Vinnytsia region, providing approximately 30% of the region's annual production output. However, there has been a consistent decrease in its share in the structure of gross value added in recent years (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Share of agricultural products in the gross regional product of the Vinnytsia region in 2016-2020\*.** (Source: constructed and calculated by the authors based on the materials (Gross Domestic Product, 2021; Gross Regional Product, 2021))

The provided data allows us to note that the year 2020 was characterised by the lowest values of the shares of agriculture in the structure of output and gross value added in the Vinnytsia region during the investigated period. At the same time, official statistical information regarding the analysed indicators for 2022-2023 is currently unavailable, making it impossible to extend the study period.

A salient point meriting attention is the dynamic fluctuation in the disparity between the share of agricultural production output and the share of gross value added in agriculture. Positive values were only documented at the end of 2017, which may indicate an increase in income within the region's agricultural sector. Nevertheless, during the interval spanning 2018 to 2020, the dynamics of this fluctuation underwent an inversion, with the adverse differential between the proportions of agricultural production output and value-added in the Vinnytsia region increasing to one per cent. In other terms, the agricultural sector of the Vinnytsia region exhibited a diminishing revenue generation, culminating in a diminished apportionment of value added and, correspondingly, a diminished contribution to the region's economic advancement. Negative trends were observed in specific indicators of agricultural production in the region during the studied period (Table 1).

Specifically, wool production in the region was completely stopped, and the production of milk and eggs decreased significantly by 18.2% and 17.3% respectively. Overall, the livestock of Vinnytsia has demonstrated the most significant negative trends within the investigated period. In general, the most negative trends were detected in the livestock industry of the Vinnytsia region. First of all, it is worth noting the extraordinary increase in the number of slaughtered farm animals. In the first years of the full-scale war, its volume increased by 41.2% compared to the indicators of 2021, and compared to the data of 2017, it doubled. This indicates an acceleration of the reduction in the number of farm animal processes both in farms and in private households as a result of the full-scale war. At the same time, we are primarily talking about the reduction of the number of cattle, because the volumes of milk production in the region demonstrate a similar trend of significant reduction in the same period. Egg production volumes also decreased significantly during the studied period. This decrease amounted to 14.6% only in the first year of the full-scale war. Although in 2023 an increase in egg production was recorded, its value decreased by 33% overall throughout the investigation.

**Table 1. Dynamics of the main indicators of agricultural production in the Vinnytsia region in 2017-2023.** (Source: constructed and calculated by the authors based on materials (Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2023))

Indicators	Year						
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Animal husbandry							
Slaughter weight of agricultural animals, thousand tons	319,9	351,4	459,1	472,6	471,0	658,9	665,1
							<b>+107,9 %</b>
Milk production, thousand tons	851,3	824,8	763,3	730,3	686,1	631,1	596,2
							<b>-29,9 %</b>
Number of eggs produced, million	945,7	917,5	933,7	868,3	708,7	605,5	633,6
							<b>-33 %</b>
Wool production volume, tons	11	9	9	8	9	0	0
							<b>-100 %</b>
Gross harvest of agricultural crops, thousand tons							
Cereals and legumes	48888,8	59110,9	59361,6	40152,7	65355,3	35637,3	49917,7
							<b>+2,1 %</b>
Factory sugar beet	28342,2	31494,5	19505	20013,9	23065,8	23528,6	25883,8
							<b>-8,7 %</b>
Sunflower	7258,5	8080,8	8460,5	7733,7	9848,6	7508,8	9118,4
							<b>+25,6 %</b>
Potatoes	18849	19076,3	18266,8	19077,6	15952,7	17472,3	17775
							<b>-5,7 %</b>
Vegetable crops	4833,3	4613,9	4556,7	4297,2	5029,7	4912,6	5029,4
							<b>+4,1 %</b>
Fruit crops and berry crops	2337,1	3323,1	2347,7	2190,4	2708,5	2295,6	2596,1
							<b>+11,1 %</b>
Hunting and forestry activities							
Roundwood harvesting, m <sup>3</sup>	639,5	646,2	671	-	-	651,4	597,3
							<b>-6,7 %</b>
Number of hunted game animals, thousand	65,6	64,4	60	64,3	0	0	0
							<b>-100 %</b>

There is no statistical information on hunting and fishing in general for a long period. In addition, the growth in the number of animals caught in hunting, that is, hunting prey, cannot be considered unambiguously positive, although it showed an increase of 13% in 2020. However, 64.3 thousand animals (including birds) were hunted in 2020, and only 2162 animals were transferred from nurseries for settlement in their habitats according to the Main Department of Statistics in Vinnytsia region (Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2022).

Another considerable aspect that cannot be called unambiguously positive is Roundwood logging. So, during 2020 - 2021, there were no relevant statistics under the pretext of a ban on felling trees. However, during the full-scale war years, felling was resumed actually in the volumes of 2020. In particular, in 2023, 597.3 thousand m<sup>3</sup> of Roundwood were harvested, which is only 6.7% less than the pre-war volumes of logging.

In 2019, Vinnytsia region ranked first in Ukraine in terms of gross agricultural production, including sugar beet, potatoes, meat and milk. The region's share in the national agricultural production amounted to 8.5%.

In 2023, the region strengthened its position, ranking second in the ranking of economic stability of Ukrainian regions, second only to the Kyiv region. The volume of agricultural production reached UAH 105.1 billion, which is 9.4% of the total volume in Ukraine. In particular, the region ranked first in both crop production (UAH 74.1 billion) and livestock production (UAH 31 billion).

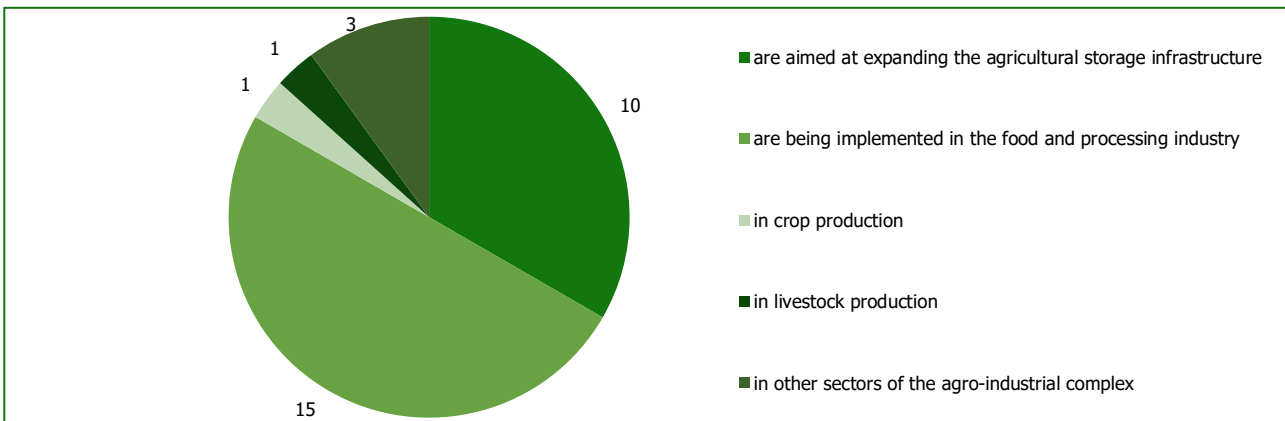
Vinnitsia region ranked first in both crop production (UAH 74.1 billion, or 8.2% of the harvest in Ukraine) and livestock production (UAH 31 billion, or 14.7% of the total Ukrainian result).

The growth rate of agricultural production amounted to 18.7% (fifth place). Crop production increased by 28.5%, in particular, significant growth was recorded in the gross harvest of soybeans (up 66.2%), wheat (up 44.6%), rapeseed (up 40.5%), corn (up 40.4%), and sunflower (up 21.4%).

Thus, the agricultural sector of the Vinnitsia region, while holding a “leading position in the production of gross agricultural output compared to neighboring regions and being one of the most powerful agro-industrial complexes in the country” (Strategy, 2020), inclusive of four research hubs, Podillya Institute of Forages and Agriculture of the National Academy of Agrarian Sciences, and Vinnitsia National Agrarian University, is not exempt from challenges and negative trends.

Moreover, the Strategy for Balanced Regional Development of the Vinnitsia region by 2027 defines the primary goal of the agricultural sector as “augmentation of agricultural productivity and market saturation with food products, achieved through modernization and renewal of production capacities, the implementation of contemporary forms of cooperation, and the advancement of organic production” (Strategy, 2020). Considering those mentioned above, the Strategy identifies establishing an advisory support centre for agriculture, support for forming a local network of agricultural advisory services, and other related initiatives as key measures to achieve the specified goals.

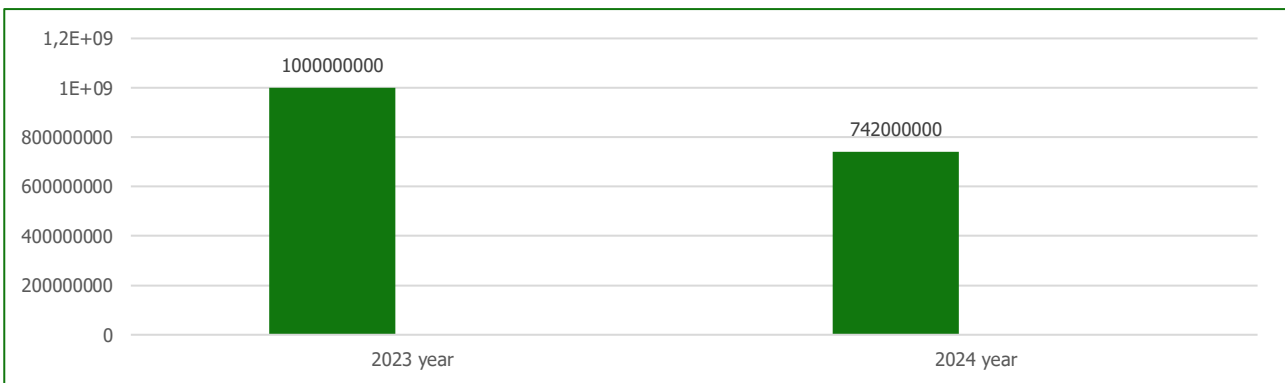
In 2024, farmers in the Vinnitsia region will implement 31 investment projects with a total value of almost UAH 742 million. These projects are aimed at expanding the agricultural storage infrastructure, developing the food and processing industry, and other sectors of the agro-industrial complex (Figure 3).



**Figure 2. Number of investment projects by direction in 2024.** (Source: constructed by the authors according to the Main Department of Statistics in Vinnitsia region)

Currently, the processing industry is among the most promising areas for investment in the region's agro-industrial complex. Investors will be able to avoid logistical problems in the sale of raw materials, work in the domestic market and provide products to the population, which has increased by 10% since the beginning of the full-scale war.

In 2023, agribusinesses in the Vinnitsia region completed 28 investment projects worth about UAH 1 billion (Figure 3).



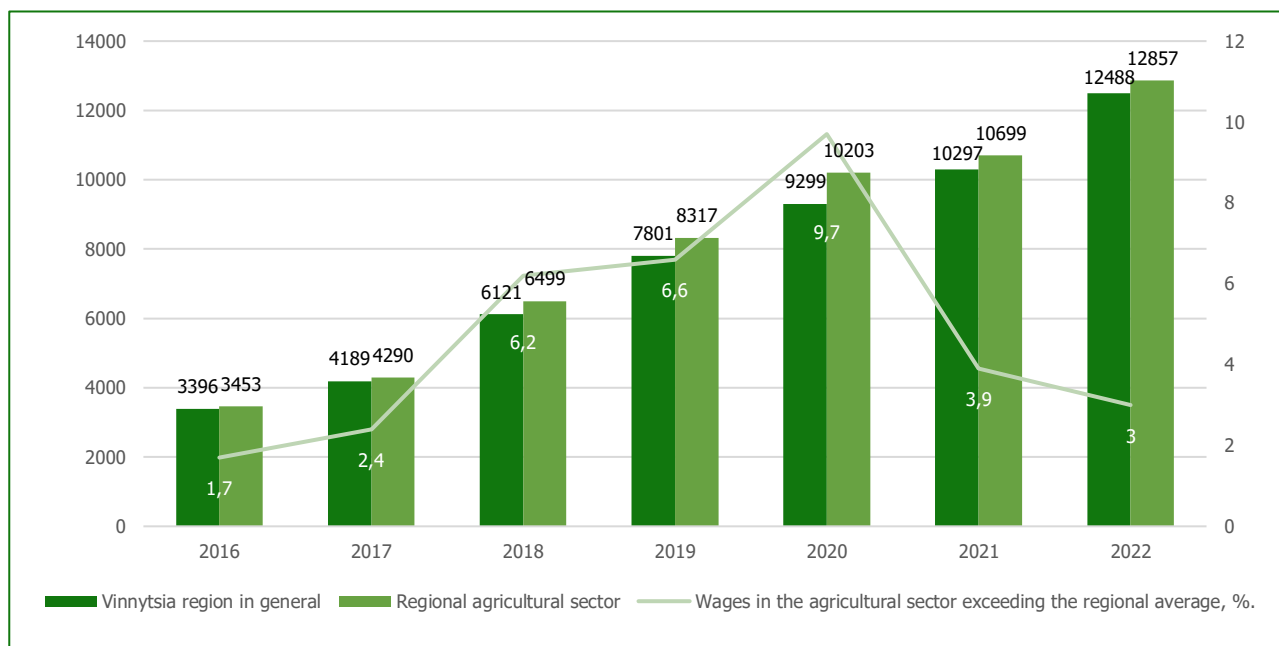
**Figure 3. Comparison of investment volumes by year in the Vinnitsia region, UAH.** (Source: constructed by the authors according to the Main Department of Statistics in Vinnitsia region)

Investments were directed, in particular, at expanding the agricultural storage infrastructure and the processing industry.

Although, for instance, the Vinnytsia Regional Employment Service (2021) notes the presence of personnel issues in the agriculture sector of the region, there is a proposal to address these challenges through the enhancement of the material and technical infrastructure of the education system, raising the level of qualification skills of graduates of vocational and technical educational institutions, and the improvement of the internship mechanism for undergraduates.

On the national scale (Economic Development Vectors, 2020), notable barriers to the progress of the agricultural sector have been identified. These include a shortage of qualified personnel and deficiencies in the educational and technological infrastructure for training professionals and entrepreneurs in agricultural production. However, at the same time, the proposed strategic vision for the development of the "Agricultural Sector of Ukraine" by 2030 contains a singular assertion regarding personnel, stating that "every participant in the sector possesses practical skills" (Economic Development Vectors, 2020).

Hence, the issues of staffing provision for the agricultural sector and the formation of its personnel potential do not receive due attention at either the national level or the Vinnytsia region level. Moreover, from our perspective, there is a somewhat biased perception of the actual demands of employers and employees in the sector. For instance, governmental structures (Economic Development Vectors, 2020) acknowledge that "there is a shortage of qualified workforce in the market despite the increase in wages in recent years". Indeed, when it comes to the Vinnytsia region, the average wage indicators in the agricultural sector are higher than the average overall salary level in the region (Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Average wages in the agricultural sector of the Vinnytsia region in 2016-2022.** (Source: constructed and calculated by the authors based on materials (Labour of Vinnytsia region, 2022))

Notwithstanding, negative nuances are observed even in this particular aspect. While by 2020, there was a clear upward trend in the average wage indicators in the agricultural sector, rising from 17% in 2015 to 9,7% in 2019, the dynamics of the investigated indicator underwent a reversal in the years immediately preceding the onset of full-scale conflict. As of the findings for 2021, the disparity between the investigated indicators narrowed to a mere 3%, favouring the agricultural sector.

Furthermore, a comprehensive study of the remuneration scale within the agricultural sector of the Vinnytsia region indicates that the actual situation is far from positive. A predominant proportion of individuals engaged in agricultural, hunting, and fishing activities receive compensation below the regional average, as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Comparative structure of the agricultural sector personnel in the Vinnytsia region by remuneration in 2021.** (Source: built and calculated by the authors based on materials (Labour of Vinnytsia region, 2022; Labour market of Vinnytsia region, 2021))

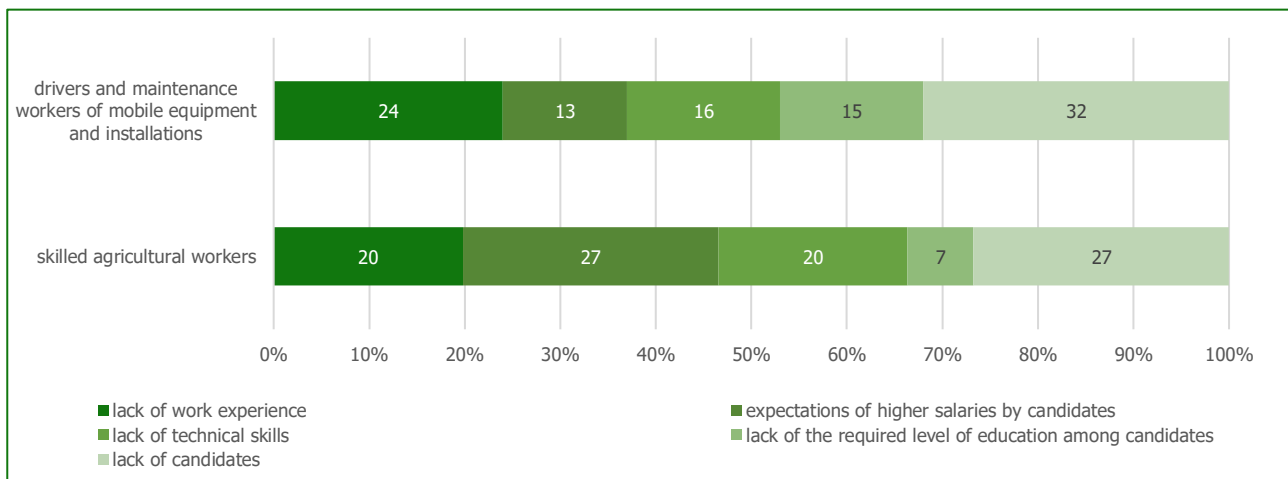
All employees in the agricultural sector		The amount of the average monthly salary	Employed graduates of agricultural specialities of VET	
Cumulative frequency, %	Share of employees, %		Share of employees, %	Cumulative frequency, %
21.5	21.5	less than UAH 6 thousand	25	25
53.1	31.6	UAH 6–10 thousand	43	68
72.4	19.3	UAH 10–14 thousand	13	81
80.6	8.2	UAH 14–18 thousand	6	87
86.7	6.1	UAH 18–22 thousand	5	92
100	13.3	over UAH 22 thousand	8	100

The obtained findings allow the conclusion that the state of remuneration within the sector is less optimistic than presented in the official documentation (Economic Development Vectors, 2020). To be precise, a majority exceeding fifty per cent of the workforce engaged in the agricultural sector within the Vinnytsia region receives remuneration below UAH 10,000 per month, falling short of the regional average. Additionally, among recent graduates from Vocational and Technical Educational Institutions majoring in agriculture, nearly 70% receive salaries below the regional average.

Furthermore, the data demonstrate that while 27,6% of the workforce in the sector receive a monthly salary exceeding UAH 14,000 in total, a mere 19% of recent graduates of vocational and technical educational institutions fall into this category. Notably, the established minimum wage stipulated by the Ministry of Finance in 2021 (Minimum wage, 2023), ranging from January 1, 2021, to November 30, 2021, was UAH 6,000. During this period, 21,5% of employed individuals in the agricultural sector received remuneration below this specified amount. This proportion rises to 25% among recent vocational and technical educational institution graduates.

The prevailing condition concerning remuneration within the agricultural sector of the Vinnytsia region not only fails to stimulate the selection of this sector for prospective professional engagement but also fosters the migration of skilled personnel towards alternative industries. In 2020, 17% of agricultural enterprises demonstrated plenty of openings, and the aggregate proportion of the agricultural sector within the overall vacancy distribution of the region throughout the year amounted to 15% (Labour Market of Vinnytsia Region, 2021). Furthermore, a survey conducted by the Vinnytsia Region Employment Service showcased that the majority of graduates holding agricultural specialisms from vocational and technical educational institutions are in pursuit of employment for a duration exceeding one year, with only 39% successfully securing positions within their professions in the Vinnytsia region. This scenario implies a discordance between the extant demand for personnel within the region's agricultural sector and the available workforce, encompassing the proposed directions for personnel training.

A survey of employers in the region's agricultural sector (Labour Market of Vinnytsia Region, 2021) demonstrated that 11% encountered difficulties with personnel recruitment. The primary reasons for these challenges were, firstly, a deficiency of candidates and, secondly, their expectations of higher levels of remuneration (Figure 5).


**Figure 5. Structure of key problems of agricultural employers in recruitment.** (Source: generalised according to the survey of Vinnytsia Regional Employment Service)

The presented data enables us to conclude that the challenge of sourcing qualified personnel for positions involving operators of mobile machinery and equipment is relatively more prevalent among employers in the region compared to the scarcity of candidates for positions requiring qualified agricultural professionals. The former instances demonstrate difficulties in finding candidates in 32% of cases, as opposed to 27% in the latter. However, in any scenario, approximately 30% of the challenges faced by employers in the region's agricultural sector in filling existing vacancies are attributed to the absence of suitable candidates.

One more critical point is the anticipation of higher-level remuneration by prospective candidates. Indeed, 27% of employers encounter challenges in the recruitment process, stemming from the reluctance of candidates to engage in employment commitments aligned with the suggested salary levels. Multiple underlying factors contribute to the observed phenomenon within these scenarios. Most employers are convinced that fair remuneration is not imperative for workers within the agricultural industry, as confirmed by the data obtained and presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Performance of the State Order for Training by Specialised Higher Education Institutions of Ukraine in 2021-2022.** (Source: built calculated, and ranked by the authors based on materials (Hapon V. V., Popkova L. V., Chymbai L. V., 2021; Unified state electronic database on education, 2023)

University ranking by 2021 indicators				University ranking by 2022 indicators			
UNIVERSITIES	state order	% fulfillment	state order	% fulfillment	UNIVERSITIES	state order	% fulfillment
Vinnitsia National Agrarian University	336	85.5 (14)	89.8 (3)	315↓	Poltava State Agrarian Academy	315	31.3 (5)
Sumy National Agrarian University	326	70.3 (15)	76.2 (5)	305↓	Sumy National Agrarian University	305	42.9 (2)
Poltava State Agrarian Academy	320	66.9 (7)	72.6 (14)	294↓	Mykolaiv National Agrarian University	294	36.8 (6)
Mykolaiv National Agrarian University	313	58.3 (8)	69.8 (15)	290↓	Vinnitsia National Agrarian University	290	48.9 (10)
Uman National University of Horticulture	310	57.2 (3)	68.6 (11)	260↓	Dnipropetrovs'k State Agrarian and Economic University	260	55.9 (11)
Kharkiv V. Dokuchaev National Agrarian University	299	57.1 (1)	63.6 (10)	259↓	Kharkiv V. Dokuchaev National Agrarian University	259	54 (9)
Dnipropetrovs'k State Agrarian and Economic University	293	55.9 (11)	62 (2)	242↓	Uman National University of Horticulture	242	51.1 (4)
Tavria State Agrotechnological University	259	54 (9)	61.7 (4)	239↓	Tavria State Agrotechnological University	239	47.1 (12)
Lviv National Agrarian University	239	51.1 (4)	60.3 (8)	227↓	Lviv National Agrarian University	227	45.2 (13)
National Forestry University of Ukraine	225	48.9 (10)	53.3 (1)	184↓	National Forestry University of Ukraine	184	44.2 (3)
Kherson State Agrarian University	179	47.1 (12)	52(9)	172↓	Kherson State Agrarian University	172	30.7 (13)
Odesa State Agrarian University	153	45.2 (13)	39.3 (7)	139↓	Odesa State Agrarian University	139	31.3 (5)
Podilskyi State Agrarian and Technical University	124	42.9 (2)	37.1 (6)	114↓	Podilskyi State Agrarian and Technical University	114	28.8 (12)
Berezhany Agricultural Institute	62	36.8 (6)	30.7 (13)	84↑	Berezhany Agricultural Institute	84	28.8 (12)
Nizhyn Agricultural Institute of NULES of Ukraine	37	31.3 (5)	28.8 (12)	43↑	Nizhyn Agricultural Institute of NULES of Ukraine	43	28.8 (12)
top 5 in the ranking of universities by the number of state orders							
6-10 places in the ranking of universities by the number of state orders							
11-15 places in the ranking of universities by the number of state orders							
↓↑ direction of change in the volume of the state order							

Considering that “the majority of agricultural tasks, by their nature, involve physically demanding activities, protracted periods of standing, bends, and execution of repetitive movements in ergonomically challenging postures, etc., and working

hours for hired agricultural labourers frequently exceed 45 hours per week, remaining predominantly unregulated, especially during peak periods of planting and harvesting" (Hurst P, 2007), the intentions of skilled agricultural labourers to seek analogous employment opportunities abroad and receive fivefold higher remuneration appear entirely logical.

Typically, when selecting drivers and service personnel for mobile machinery and installations in the agricultural sector, this issue is also observed, albeit only in 13% of cases. Thus, employers are more willing to pay this category of workers a much higher wage level than skilled agricultural labourers. The origins of this issue can be traced back to historical epochs when the labour of agricultural workers was significantly undervalued for many years. As indicated by the dynamics of wage levels in the agricultural sector, the solution to this issue will require considerable time and concerted efforts from governmental bodies, local authorities, employers, and even the qualified workforce.

The other aspect of the situation, as mentioned earlier, involves the entirely justifiable inclination of employers to offer lower salaries to individuals with formal education but lacking work experience compared to experienced workers occupying similar positions when hiring.

For instance, 20% of the challenges stem from the absence of candidates possessing the requisite technical skills while recruiting qualified agricultural workers. Hence, mechanisms must be developed to foster collaboration between vocational and technical educational institutions, prospective employers, and potential candidates to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills. Although the Vinnytsia region faces a complex set of problems in this regard, a key issue is the reluctance of agricultural sector employers to participate in training future professionals. The proportion of those who, in any format, collaborated with vocational and technical educational institutions to enhance workforce training in the region does not exceed 8%, even though around 20% of employers provide internships for vocational education undergraduates (Labour Market, 2021). Consequently, vocational education students lack opportunities to gain practical experience applying their acquired knowledge to actual work conditions, leading to challenges in securing employment. Figure 3 demonstrates that 20% of employers encounter difficulties with recruitment due to a lack of work experience among job seekers. Notably, the absence of experience complicates candidate searches in 24% of cases in the context of the profession of agricultural tractor driver-machinist.

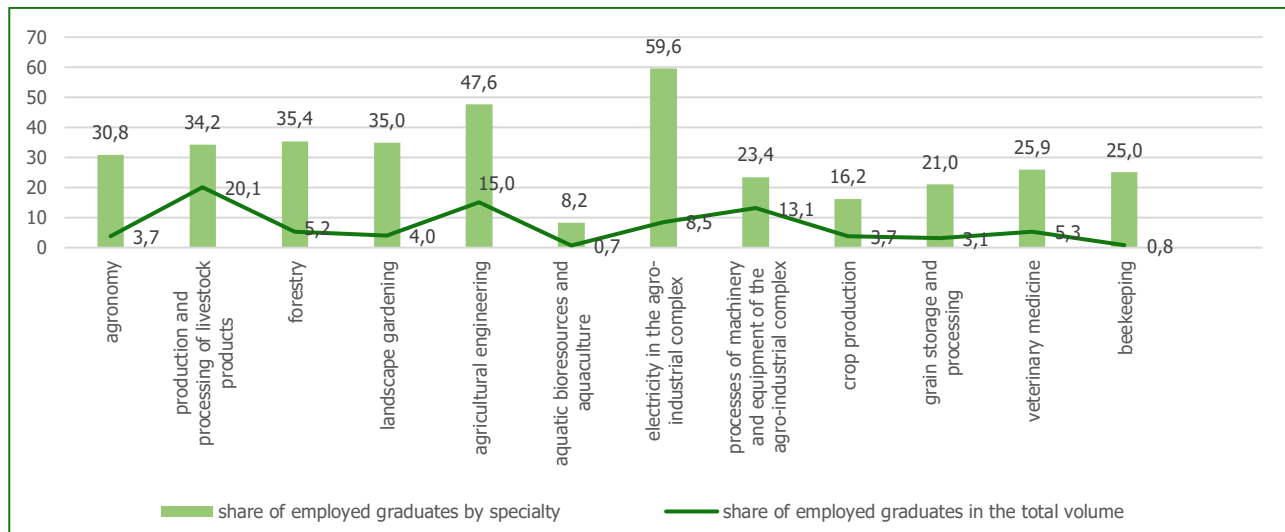
Thus, a cyclical pattern of challenges in training the workforce for the agricultural sector is observed within the Vinnytsia region's vocational and technical education domain. This phenomenon accounts for the nationwide trend of diminishing enrollment in vocational and technical educational institutions across Ukraine. As of January 1, 2021, the aggregate student population in these institutions had contracted by 66,6% compared to January 1, 2012 (Education in Ukraine, 2021). Moreover, in 2021, a mere 4% of vocational and technical education students chose the profession of agricultural tractor driver-machinist. The enrollment in courses related to skilled workers in agriculture and forestry, fisheries, and fish farming did not exceed one per cent (Turin Process, 2021).

The training of skilled professionals for the agricultural sector in higher education institutions in Ukraine overall, and in the Vinnytsia region in particular, is not devoid of negative aspects, with a critical issue being the systematic reduction in the number of undergraduates in agricultural specialisms (Table 3).

Indeed, Vinnytsia National Agrarian University was the leader among specialised higher-educational institutions in Ukraine in terms of the levels of the state contract received in 2021. However, it fulfilled only 57.1% of it. In 2022, the university marginally improved its performance on the state contract to 61.7%, albeit at the cost of a further decline in its position within the ranking of agricultural higher educational institutions in Ukraine.

When considering higher agricultural education in Ukraine, a clear inverse relationship between the levels of state contracts for specialist training and the percentage of their fulfilment is observed in 2021. Higher education institutions with the lowest levels of the state contract demonstrate the highest rates of applicant enrollment. Although, in 2022, two institutions from the top 5 in state contract levels held top positions in the ranking for fulfilment indicators, the overall situation in higher agricultural education in the country showcases a consistent decline in demand for specialisms in the domain "Agricultural Sciences and Food."

Hence, the decreasing number of individuals aspiring to obtain professional agricultural education is a trend in the Vinnytsia region and across Ukraine. This means that addressing specific issues related to the formation and utilisation of personnel in the agricultural sector falls under the purview of nationwide governance. Simultaneously, while the overall employment rate of graduates in the combined domain of Agriculture and Veterinary in Ukraine is 58.23% (Monitoring Report 2022) in the Vinnytsia region, this figure is only 30.8% (calculated based on Impersonal Statistical Data, 2022). Nevertheless, some specialisms within this field in the Vinnytsia region demonstrate higher employment rates among graduates (Figure 6).



**Figure 6. Employment rates of graduates of higher and vocational pre-higher agricultural education in Vinnytsia region in 2022, %.**  
(Source: constructed and calculated by the authors based on materials (Impersonal Statistical Data, 2022))

Taking into account solely the number of graduates funded through state or regional initiatives, it can be asserted that the market demands and the suggested training vectors for professionals in higher educational institutions in the region do not quite correlate and, even more, do not align with the preferences and aspirations of applicants. For instance, the agricultural sector predominantly demands technical professionals, including engineers and designers, alongside ordinary workers equipped with vocational (professional and technical) education. Conversely, undergraduates are oriented toward professions that offer high salaries and do not involve working with technical documentation.

## DISCUSSION

While we fully agree with a number of problematic issues in terms of forming the human resources potential of the agricultural sector of Ukraine as a whole and its individual territories, identified by the researchers of this issue, we should note that some of their conclusions and proposals are quite controversial. In particular, the statement about the need to base "human resources policy in the agricultural sector on the principles of digitalisation, which will reduce the influence of the human factor and train modern digital specialists" (Zastrozhnikova, 2021). Even without taking into account the context of martial law and the extremely difficult economic situation in wartime Ukraine, employment in the agricultural sector is mainly physical or mechanised labour. And in this aspect, it is possible to talk about digital technologies only in terms of training mechanised labourers to work with modern machines and mechanisms, agricultural machinery, etc. with digital control panels. At the same time, given the inability of VET institutions to finance the purchase of such training equipment, the solution could be to create virtual or augmented reality curricula at the state level to organise the learning process on simulators. However, when it comes to the regional level, this problem can only be solved by establishing cooperation with potential employers, leaders of the region's agricultural sector, and enterprises that manufacture or sell machinery, equipment, etc. for the region's agricultural sector.

The next statement we cannot agree with is the belief that "the problematic nature of the provision of agricultural enterprises with qualified personnel is largely due to their increasing turnover and the lack of effective mechanisms for retaining young specialists in agricultural production" (Halytska, Domanchuk D, 2012). Any young specialist can be retained (secured) in a particular job only by a clear perspective and current results. First of all, we are talking about the salary, which is the measure of the current result of own activity for each employee: if it is low or insufficient, no mechanisms other than direct coercion will keep a young specialist. Secondly, it is the availability of basic infrastructure to meet the needs of the future or existing family of a young specialist - preschool and school education institutions, medical facilities, transportation to district and regional centres, etc. Thus, in this issue, we support the opinion of N. Zingaieva (Zinhaieva) on improving the infrastructure of rural areas, but at the same time, we cannot agree with the author's statements about the effectiveness of social advertising as a means of popularising professions in the agricultural sector. In this case, we consider more appropriate the proposal to "implement a set of measures to develop retraining and vocational education of unemployed peasants" (Havrylko, 2012), which, in fact, is already being implemented in some way within the framework of the programs of the State Employment Service, but acquires a new role in modern conditions, when, firstly, a significant part of the male population of rural areas is excluded from the labour processes in agricultural production; secondly, the

proportion of people with various forms of disability due to war-related reasons is increasing; thirdly, urban settlements are saturated with immigrants from the regions of hostilities or occupied territories. Therefore, in this aspect, especially from the point of view of regional self-government, it is advisable to take a comprehensive approach to solving the problem of preserving and increasing the human resources potential of the agricultural sector by creating programs to provide housing for IDP families with their simultaneous involvement in employment in the agricultural sector, while promoting the development of rural infrastructure and, secondly, encouraging employers to work towards identifying possible activities and jobs for specialists with disabilities.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research concludes that significant challenges exist in Ukraine overall, particularly in the Vinnytsia region, regarding forming and utilising the personnel potential in the agricultural sector. A critical nationwide issue identified is the deficient level of remuneration. In this context, any initiatives aimed at enhancing the prestige of agricultural specialisms, including social advertising and improvements in the educational infrastructure, are unlikely to yield positive results. In our opinion, the perceived prestige of a profession by potential undergraduates or employed individuals is profoundly influenced by working conditions and remuneration. If the job is physically demanding and low-paid, no artificial means can create prestige.

Therefore, when discussing the regional context, specifically the Vinnytsia region, the most problematic aspect, from our perspective, is the complete isolation of business from the personnel training process and the engagement of interns solely in crop harvesting or gardening. In practice, undergraduates are not provided with opportunities to acquire skills in professional activities (decision-making) in actual conditions, even during their internships. This situation stems from a similar formal approach by authorities at all levels. However, the most effective resolution lies at the local level – only local government bodies can organise and facilitate systematic efforts to establish local agribusiness for active participation in shaping the personnel potential of the industry. In this regard, the key directions of work with employers in the agricultural sector of the region, in the context of collaborating with employers in the agricultural industry of the area, addressing the issues raised in the study, should include the following:

1. Development of methodological and analytical materials on business opportunities and prospects in the case of its active participation in the personnel training process, as well as on specific ways to engage agribusiness in the educational process.
2. Systematic awareness-raising efforts targeted at emphasising the necessity of ensuring a fair level of remuneration for hired professional employees.
3. Monitoring the actual needs of the agricultural sector for professionals in various fields to determine a substantiated level of regional demand.

In addition, significant focus areas should involve engaging agricultural professionals who have encountered challenges securing employment. This engagement includes participating in courses and training programs to stimulate entrepreneurial skills by leveraging the knowledge acquired during their education. It also entails offering professional guidance to high school graduates. This professional guidance program should primarily target senior high school students. Its emphasis should not solely be on assessing the students' abilities, inclinations, or preferences. Still, it should also involve presenting the array of existing professions in the agricultural industry engagingly and unconventionally. Thus, the ultimate objective of this guidance initiative is to enlighten students about the diverse range of occupations within agricultural production and the potential for personal growth, entrepreneurial endeavours, and more upon acquiring a specific profession or specialism in the field.

In any case, it is essential to realise that significant shifts in the processes of enhancing the utilisation of the workforce potential in the region's agricultural sector should not be anticipated soon, especially in the context of uncertainty about the timing of the war's end. For instance, an increase in wages in the industry can only be expected in the context of economic recovery, which currently has limited prospects. Therefore, further research in this area should comprehensively examine existing mechanisms for establishing trilateral cooperation in forming personnel potential in the agricultural sector. This entails identifying key problem areas and developing possible approaches to address them, ensuring the high efficiency of the processes involved in building and expanding the workforce potential of the region's agricultural sector.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors have contributed equally.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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## **КАДРОВИЙ ПОТЕНЦІАЛ АГРОСЕКТОРА: ПРОБЛЕМИ ФОРМУВАННЯ ТА ВИКОРИСТАННЯ**

Сучасна наукова парадигма формування кадрового потенціалу галузей і напрацьований комплекс підходів і рамок умов до підготовки якісних кадрів для галузі агровиробництва створюють широкі можливості вибору складових елементів при розбудові національних систем кадрового забезпечення агросектора. Водночас місцевий контекст є завжди індивідуальним і його використання більшою мірою сприятиме розв'язанню специфічних проблем сектора.

У роботі здійснено аналіз ключових показників функціонування агросектора Вінницької області з акцентуванням уваги на оплаті праці, аналіз причин труднощів роботодавців у підборі персоналу для роботи в агросекторі та труднощів випускників закладів професійної (професійно-технічної) освіти при працевлаштуванні. Досліджено ситуацію з підготовкою фахівців для роботи в агросекторі та подальшим працевлаштуванням випускників агроспеціальностей закладів вищої освіти у Вінницькому регіоні з порівнянням її із загальноукраїнськими показниками. Обґрунтовано ключові проблеми процесів формування й використання кадрового потенціалу в агросекторі Вінницької області та запропоновано перелік можливих шляхів їх розв'язання.

Оригінальність дослідження полягає в установленні регіональних відмінностей та особливостей у формуванні кадрового потенціалу агросектора порівняно із загальноукраїнськими трендами та обґрунтуванні на їхній основі перспективних напрямів удосконалення процесів формування та використання кадрового потенціалу агросектором Вінницької області.

Отримані результати дозволяють акцентувати увагу на основних проблемних моментах процесів формування й нарощування кадрового потенціалу агросектора регіону та можуть служити основою подальшого напрацювання можливих шляхів їх усунення.

**Ключові слова:** агросектор, агровиробництво, кадровий потенціал, Вінницька область, формування й використання кадрового потенціалу

**JEL Класифікація:** Q16, Q19, J43