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Report from the Conference: ‘Shared Harvest: Ukraine’s EU Integration and Europe’s Food Security’

The academic conference ‘Shared Harvest: Ukraine’s EU Integration and Europe’s Food Security’ was held on 24 November 2025 in Warsaw, at the seat of the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Polish: IRWiR PAN). The event was organised by IRWiR PAN in cooperation with the Stefan Batory Foundation. It brought together representatives of the academic community, experts, policymakers, and practitioners from the agricultural sector in Poland and Ukraine (IRWiR PAN, 2025).

The conference’s introduction underscored the topicality and importance of issues related to Ukraine’s process of integration with the European Union (EU) in the field of agriculture, and the resulting implications for Europe’s food security. The purpose of the meeting was to present the latest analytical report, ‘Shared Harvest’, and to initiate a broader discussion of the challenges and opportunities brought by the EU’s enlargement to include Ukraine. The aim of the conference was to create a platform for dialogue between academia, public administration, industry organisations, and business, conducive to the exchange of views and experience from both a political and a practical perspective.

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Photo 1. Opening of the conference

Source: Rural and Urban Research Foundation RURall.

The opening session featured remarks by the Director and Professor of IRWiR PAN, Monika Stanny, DSc, and the President of the Batory Foundation, Edwin Bendyk. In welcoming participants, Prof. Stanny highlighted the Institute's long-standing engagement in research on Ukraine's integration with the EU. She recalled that IRWiR PAN has long maintained cooperation with Ukrainian institutions and employs Ukrainian researchers, which makes it possible to gather knowledge about the processes taking place in Ukraine. In her address, she stressed that the conference was taking place at a significant geopolitical moment, one that requires Ukraine's integration to be viewed also through the lens of regional security. She noted that if Europe is to take on the leading responsibility for Ukraine's future, one of the key priorities becomes ensuring its food security and the appropriate inclusion of the Ukrainian agri-food sector in the EU single market. Speaking about the ongoing public debate, Director Stanny called for discussion based on facts rather than myths, and on knowledge rather than emotion, in line with the message of the report, which stresses that sound analysis should replace simplified, fear-based narratives. She wished participants an inspiring, fruitful debate and the formulation of bold policy recommendations.

In his address, Edwin Bendyk emphasised the importance of the 'Shared Harvest' report, prepared under the Batory Foundation's ideaForum programme, as the substantive foundation of the conference. He expressed satisfaction that the report had become a starting point for a broader discussion, extending beyond the presentation of the study's findings alone. President Bendyk drew attention to the exemplary cooperation between the academic community and a non-governmental organisation in producing the report, thanking its authors (Sławomir Kalinowski, DSc, Professor at IRWiR PAN; Wawrzyniec Czubak, DSc, Professor at the Poznań University of Life Sciences; and Vitalij Krupin, PhD, Assistant Professor at IRWiR PAN) for their effort in combining top-quality scholarly knowledge with the practical needs of the Foundation's advocacy work. He then discussed the broader context that had prompted the Foundation to take up the subject of agriculture in relations with Ukraine. He recalled that the Ukrainian issue had always been important to the Foundation's mission, but that the outbreak of war in 2022 intensified these efforts. Bendyk pointed to the events of 2023, including the crisis surrounding the blockade of Ukrainian grain exports at the Polish-Ukrainian border, as a moment that exposed a serious shortage of reliable information and analysis in public debate. He noted that the dispute over grain imports exposed the dominance of emotion and disinformation narratives (such as claims about 'poisoned grain'), alongside a simultaneous lack of hard data and substantive arguments. This made the Foundation's experts aware of the need to prepare an in-depth, fact-based study that would provide a basis for rational discussion. Bendyk described how, in response, a project was launched inviting Polish and Ukrainian experts to work together to identify potential flashpoints in the integration process and to propose solutions turning them into areas of cooperation. The fruits of this work included a roadmap for the Polish-Ukrainian accession dialogue and a series of detailed reports (devoted, among other things, to the issue of corruption and to demographic questions in Ukraine).

The speaker also stressed the importance of filling knowledge gaps on both sides, noting that both Poles and Ukrainians have limited knowledge of one another's socio-economic realities, particularly in rural areas, which gives rise to misunderstandings. In his view, one of the goals of the Foundation's work is therefore to 'give Ukraine a voice' and to disseminate reliable knowledge about Ukrainian transformations in Poland, as well as to convey knowledge about Poland to Ukrainians. Bendyk also pointed to the phenomenon of Ukraine's social and economic resilience during the war, the ability of the state and society to keep functioning despite enormous burdens, suggesting that an analysis of this experience could yield valuable lessons for building the resilience of a country such as Poland in the face of various crises. In closing, he noted that the agricultural sector is

an excellent example of an area where general, slogan-level treatment provokes unwarranted fear, whereas in-depth analysis makes it possible to break the problem down into concrete issues and interests that can be managed. Such an analytical approach, supported by expert knowledge, is essential in order to find solutions, in keeping with the conference's intent, that benefit all sides of the integration process.



Photo 2. Presentation of the ‘Shared Harvest’ report

Source: Rural and Urban Research Foundation RURall.

The next item on the programme was the ‘Shared Harvest’ report, presented by Sławomir Kalinowski, DSc, Professor at IRWiR PAN, co-author of the study. The report provides a comprehensive analysis of the potential consequences of Ukraine’s EU membership for agriculture and the agri-food processing sector, with particular attention to the consequences for Poland. In introducing the study, the speaker outlined the current picture of the Ukrainian agricultural sector and possible scenarios for its further development. The scale and structure of Ukrainian agriculture were presented as key conditioning factors: two-thirds of the country’s territory is agricultural land, of which as much as approximately 41.3 million hectares, is actual agricultural land in use (an area more than twice as large as in Poland). Agriculture plays a fundamental role in the Ukrainian economy, yet it is marked by deep structural differentiation: alongside millions of small family farms, there are a relatively small number of large agricultural enterprises, belonging to

agroholdings, which generate most of commercial output. The report drew attention to a striking degree of polarisation: 118 of the largest agricultural enterprises each farm areas exceeding 10,000 hectares, a scale unattainable for farms in Poland. These corporate entities command vast resources (land, capital, infrastructure) and determine the direction of production, focusing on the export of raw commodities (chiefly wheat, maize, barley, sunflower, and rapeseed). As a result, Ukrainian agriculture has a narrow commodity profile and low diversification, which makes the sector both a powerful commodity producer and a system vulnerable to price fluctuations, environmental degradation, and structural inequality. This dual structure, black-earth soils and agroholdings on the one hand, small farms on the other, creates a set of realities that Polish agriculture is already encountering on the single market and which will shape the future pattern of competition and food security in Europe (Kalinowski, Krupin, Czubak, 2025).

The presentation of the report also covered the scenarios for Ukraine's EU integration considered by its authors. Four possible variants for how the situation might develop were presented, ranging from a scenario favourable to both sides (win-win), through asymmetric win-lose arrangements, to a variant that would be extremely unfavourable for both sides (lose-lose). Prof. Kalinowski characterised the main implications of each scenario. From Poland's point of view, Ukraine's potential EU membership would above all mean increased competition on the agricultural market. A free inflow of cheaper food from Ukraine could put price pressure on domestic products, posing a serious challenge for Polish producers. At the same time, significant opportunities were identified: integration creates the possibility of closer economic cooperation, for example by relocating part of processing operations to Poland (which would mean an inflow of raw materials and the creation of added value domestically). It would also force the modernisation of Poland's agri-food sector to accelerate, increasing its competitiveness over the longer term. From Ukraine's perspective, accession would likewise entail a significant increase in competition: entry into the EU single market would require Ukrainian agriculture to rapidly adapt to EU sanitary, quality, and environmental standards. Should Ukraine be brought within the mechanisms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP; for example, the direct-payment system), this could simultaneously provide its farmers with additional resources for development, significantly raising the sector's competitive potential. However, enormous structural challenges were highlighted on the Ukrainian side, arising from the dual structure mentioned above: large agricultural enterprises (agroholdings) are today already largely adapted to EU requirements, whereas small individual farms would struggle to quickly meet high production standards and need particular support in the integration process. For the EU as a whole, Ukraine's inclusion would mean gaining a vast new sales

market as well as a source of supply: Ukraine's enormous production potential would translate into an increased food supply in Europe (and thus an improvement in the physical availability of food products).

At the same time, the EU would have to grapple with issues of competitiveness and concentration on the agricultural market: the emergence of such a strong producer creates a need to ensure balanced development across the whole region, so that the benefits are not achieved at the cost of excessively privileging the strongest players. In this context, the need was mentioned to prepare appropriate protective mechanisms, such as transitional periods in access to full payments or quotas, that would shield farmers in EU countries from a sudden competitive shock.

In concluding the presentation, Prof. Kalinowski presented the recommendations flowing from the report, indicating the actions needed to prevent a possible negative integration scenario from being realised at the expense of the Polish and European countryside. The initiatives considered most important were those ensuring a win-win arrangement between Poland and Ukraine. On the Polish side, proactive preparation for integration is recommended: not passively waiting to see how events unfold, but taking steps now to strengthen the sector's competitiveness. One example concerned export infrastructure: the speaker recalled that, immediately after the outbreak of war in 2022, experts had called for the expansion of domestic seaports to facilitate the transit of Ukrainian grain, yet action was taken with considerable delay (as a result, it was Ukraine and neighbouring Romania that more quickly increased their handling capacity). The conclusion is that lessons must be learned from this neglect: Poland should get ahead of events and invest now in logistical capacity and adjustment programmes for agriculture.

The report also calls for pursuing sectoral cooperation with Ukraine: developing cross-border agri-food clusters and joint processing ventures, and, above all, an intensive exchange of knowledge and experience between producers and experts from both countries. Such cooperation makes it possible to draw on complementarity, specialising production in areas where advantages are clear, while avoiding direct rivalry in spheres where it could be destructive. It was stressed that placing greater emphasis on added value (developing the food industry rather than exporting unprocessed raw materials) is in the shared interest of Poland and Ukraine. Broadly speaking, the report's recommendations amount to a single appeal: not to 'sleep through' the coming years of preparation for accession, but to build the foundations for lasting integration now, so that the moment of Ukraine's entry into the EU, which will presumably come only some years from now, finds both sides prepared and cooperating rather than in conflict.

Immediately after the presentation of the report, a panel discussion was held devoted to discussing its conclusions and exploring selected issues from the report

in greater depth. The discussion's moderator, Paulina Sobiesiak-Penszko, PhD, proposed focusing on the future perspective, on possible scenarios for how the situation might develop and practical ways of preparing for integration, building on issues flagged in the report. The panel brought together co-authors of the report from Poland and Ukraine (including Vitalij Krupin, PhD, Wawrzyniec Czubak, DSc, Professor at the Poznań University of Life Sciences, and Sławomir Kalinowski, DSc, Professor at IRWiR PAN), as well as a representative of agricultural practice, Grzegorz Brodziak, President of the Management Board of Goodvalley Agro S.A., representing the business sector.



Photo 3. Panel discussion at the conference

Source: Rural and Urban Research Foundation RURall.

The discussion made it possible to set the academic perspective against industry experience. The panellists agreed that the key challenge of the coming years will be reducing disparities within Ukrainian agriculture and between Poland and Ukraine. It was noted that large Ukrainian agro-industrial enterprises already operate today at a level close to the European one, whereas small family farms will need far-reaching assistance (advisory, financial, and organisational) to meet the requirements of the single market. Integration should therefore be understood not only as Ukraine's incorporation into EU structures, but also as a process of

internal transformation of the Ukrainian countryside, requiring protective and developmental policies analogous to those applied to new member states in earlier rounds of EU enlargement. The business representative, for his part, stressed that Polish farmers and agri-food companies are already feeling Ukrainian competition, but that the answer to these concerns should be a strategy of cooperation rather than protectionism: jointly seeking market niches, and trade and investment cooperation, can bring benefits to both sides.

During the debate, the need to change the narrative in public discourse was repeatedly emphasised. Instead of a confrontational portrayal of Polish-Ukrainian relations in agriculture (based on fear of competition), it was proposed that a narrative of cooperation be built, based on facts and mutual benefits. The panellists pointed out that easing social tensions, especially among farmers concerned about their livelihoods, should become a priority for public policy. The creation of dialogue mechanisms between farmers from Poland and Ukraine was suggested (for example, joint forums, farm partnerships, or partnerships between agricultural organisations), which would facilitate the exchange of experience and the building of trust (Federacja Rolna, 2025). Measures of this kind can prevent misunderstandings and conflicts from arising, while also forming the foundation for lasting integration within the EU. It is worth noting that the panel discussion had an interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral character: different points of view clashed within it, but a consistent conclusion emerged on the need for a well-thought-out integration strategy that would draw on the potential for cooperation while minimising social and economic costs.

After the break, the part of the conference devoted to the broader issues of food security in the context of new countries joining the EU began. The thematic panel included, among others, experts from Statistics Poland (Polish: GUS), IRWiR PAN, and the Main Inspectorate of Agricultural and Food Quality Inspection (Polish: GIJHARS). This discussion broadened the perspective to include the macro-social and definitional dimensions of the issue. At the outset, it was recalled that 'food security' is a multidimensional concept defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), comprising four essential pillars: the physical availability of food, economic access (the ability to purchase food), the utilisation of food (adequate nutritional quality and food safety), and the stability of supply over time.

Panel participants noted that the integration of as significant an agricultural producer as Ukraine could affect each of these dimensions. On the one hand, the physical availability of food on the European market would increase: the inflow of a large stream of Ukrainian agricultural products could strengthen the EU's food security in quantitative terms. On the other hand, questions arise about food

quality and safety, and about how to maintain sanitary and quality standards amid increased imports from Ukraine. Panellists stressed that any political friction around this issue should be resolved on the basis of facts and scientific data. It was recalled that the subject of food security is sometimes exploited politically and can provoke strong emotions, the controversy over the quality of Ukrainian grain being one example, which is why it is so important that public debate be grounded in reliable information rather than in rumour or emotive slogans. The discussion also pointed out that Ukraine's accession to the EU could, paradoxically, strengthen the resilience of the whole union to food crises: a larger internal EU raw-material base means a lower risk of shortages in the event of disruptions to international trade. It was noted, however, that achieving such a positive effect requires coordinated policy, both in terms of market regulation (for example, the management of reserves and interventions) and support for the sustainable development of rural areas (so that the benefits of integration are felt not only by large producers but also by small rural communities). This part of the proceedings rounded out the picture of the challenges, indicating that Europe's food security is a complex issue that Ukraine's accession will affect in many ways, requiring policymakers to take a broad view and adopt long-term strategies (Witryna Wiejska, 2025).

The 'Shared Harvest' conference constituted an important step towards understanding the consequences of Ukraine's agricultural integration with the EU and towards developing policy recommendations on this basis. Throughout the proceedings, it was consistently emphasised that this process carries both opportunities and risks: it may help strengthen the food security of the whole of Europe and create new development opportunities, but at the same time it raises concerns among some agricultural producers and requires the careful management of change. The key message emerging from the conference is the need to continue the debate on integration on the basis of scientific knowledge and objective data, rather than emotional disputes.

By bringing together the perspectives of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from Poland and Ukraine, it was possible to outline research and policy priorities for the coming years. These include, among others: ongoing monitoring of the actual effects of mutual liberalisation of agricultural trade, identifying areas requiring intervention (such as support for small farms and infrastructure adjustment), refining mechanisms for social dialogue on rural affairs, and preparing instruments to mitigate any negative effects of integration. The exchange of views during the conference also showed how valuable direct cooperation between Polish and Ukrainian experts is: the transfer of knowledge and experience between the two countries proved essential for dispelling certain myths and prejudices and for formulating constructive solutions. The 'Shared

Harvest' report and the panel discussions presented provided a solid factual and analytical basis that both national policymakers (in shaping Poland's position in accession negotiations) and EU institutions responsible for agricultural policy and cohesion can draw on. The significance of the conference therefore extends beyond a single meeting: the conclusions and recommendations formulated during it will stimulate further academic debate and analytical work on the integration of Ukrainian agriculture with the EU. Moreover, they may contribute to better preparation of public policies, so that the process of EU enlargement proceeds in a sustainable and socially acceptable manner, ensuring food security for the whole of Europe and mutual benefits for partners on both sides of the border.

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