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Review article

Current state of private farms in Kazakhstan

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Abstract

Background and Aim. Research conducted by scientists in the field of determining the role of the personal subsidiary sector in agriculture cannot clarify the issue of the nature and essence of the phenomenon of personal subsidiary farms (hereinafter referred to as PSF), and do not clearly define their socio-economic role. Of course, this aspect of consideration is important for the modern changing conditions of the economic environment. The purpose of the study is to assess the state and dynamics of the development of personal subsidiary farms in Kazakhstan; identify the main problems hindering the effective functioning of personal subsidiary farms; determine incentives and mechanisms for the development of personal subsidiary farms to increase their contribution to the agricultural economy and food security; and develop recommendations for supporting personal sub-sidiary farms at the state level.

Materials and Methods. The materials and sources of information were publications of agricultural scientists, annual Consolidated analytical reports on the state and use of lands of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as data from the Bureau of National Statistics. The study used economicstatistical and abstract-logical methods.

Results. The assessment of the state of development of private household plots in Kazakhstan showed that this sector of agricultural production is the most vulnerable in terms of lack of state support. Given the current state of the village and the fact that the rural household has eco-nomic stability, it is necessary to support the initiative of villagers in running households, to provide them with state support in various forms and at various levels.

Conclusion. Analysis of the development of private household plots as a form of economic entity specializing in the cultivation of agricultural products showed that it is not affected by the crisis in the country's economy. Today, in order to strengthen the role of private household plots in the agricultural sector, increase incomes and employment of rural residents, a comprehensive approach and legislative reforms are needed that provide for the stimulation of cooperation between private household plots and state support, including subsidies, microcredit and educational initia-tives.

Keywords: land use; land holdings; forms of management; database; efficiency.

Introduction

The International Year of Family Farming, declared by the United Nations (UN) in 2014, provided an opportunity to reflect on the status of family farming worldwide concerning food security, socioenvironmental sustainability, and equitable economic development. However, the diversity within this global sector in terms of farm characteristics and their position in the global food system creates significant challenges for the systematic design and development of policies aimed at maximizing global food security, reliable livelihoods, ecological sustainability, and socioeconomic development [1,

2]. Recent political debates at international and regional levels have shown a shift in attitudes towards smallholders and family farms: whereas they were once seen as part of the problem of hunger, they are now recognized as playing a central role in its solution [3, 4, 5].

In the global food system, the contribution of family farms to food security, as well as local and regional development, is surprisingly poorly documented [1]. According to estimates based on the analysis of only 30 countries using data from the 2000 agricultural census, there are approximately 500 million family farmers worldwide who produce 80% of the world's food, highlighting the need for more accurate accounting and appropriate policy analysis. B.E. Graeub et al., in their study, examine the policy environment to ensure the contribution of family farms to food production, food security, and sustainable agricultural development. They analyzed a broader range of international agricultural census data for 105 countries and territories, including new data from the 2010 agricultural census, which collectively covers the majority (85%) of global food production. B.E. Graeub et al. used regional and country-specific definitions of family farms to provide the best available estimates of the percentage of family farms, the share of agricultural land managed by family farms in each country, and the calories produced by family farms in selected countries. They found that family farms constitute 98% of all farms and control at least 53% of agricultural land, thereby producing at least 53% of the world's food [6].

The primary challenge in any review of family farming is that the term itself is not a clearly defined statistical unit at a global or even national level. The FAO, as part of its strategic planning for the International Year of Family Farming in 2014, defined family farming as: "a means of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral, and aquaculture production which is managed and operated by a family and predominantly reliant on family labor, including both women's and men's labor. The family and the farm are linked, coevolve, and combine economic, environmental, social, and cultural functions" [7].

The relatively small scale of farming operations is often used as a proxy for defining a family farm. Many organizations, such as the World Bank in its Rural Development Strategy [8], use land size as a criterion for defining smallholders – most commonly less than 2 hectares [8, 9, 10]. The High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) defines small-scale agriculture as "undertaken by families (including one or more households), using exclusively or predominantly family labor and deriving a significant but variable proportion of their income from this activity in either cash or kind. Agriculture includes crop farming, livestock rearing, forestry, and artisanal fisheries. These farms are managed by family groups, many of which are headed by women, who play a key role in production, processing, and marketing activities" [3].

Household Subsidiary Plots (HSPs) play a key role in Kazakhstan's economy. The concept of "household subsidiary plots" is enshrined in the Land Code of Kazakhstan and represents a form of activity aimed at meeting personal needs on land plots located in rural and suburban areas. They produce a significant portion of food products, including vegetables, milk, and meat. HSPs, which are primarily represented by families not employing hired labor, act as major suppliers of food to the domestic market in Kazakhstan, thereby fostering one form of family entrepreneurship [11].

However, HSPs do not have the full status of agricultural commodity producers and therefore lack appropriate state support. Moreover, leading experts from the Kazakh Research Institute of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development note that the primary challenges faced by HSPs include operating on just a quarter-hectare of land, often not solely managed by the owners themselves [12].

Additionally, some experts equate the challenges faced by HSPs to those of small business entrepreneurs. In their view, the main issues for HSPs stem from insufficient government support [13]. However, few advocates of this perspective explore alternative solutions to address the precarious conditions and low welfare levels of farmers. Most experts agree on the need for coordinated grouping and collective unification of HSPs to tackle common problems.

Materials and Methods

In our study, we examined the development of HSPs to identify trends over time and attempted to find optimal solutions aligned with the primary goal of this work, which is to identify the key incentives for the development of HSPs in Kazakhstan. In our study, various methodologies were employed,

including economic-statistical and abstract-logical approaches, to analyze a wide range of reliable data sources, such as the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan and consolidated analytical reports.

Our research revealed that scientific publications on the development of HSPs are carried out within the framework of two methodological approaches: functional-transformational and organizational (Table 1).

Table 1 – Approaches to defining the concept of private household plots

Name of the approach	Content
Functional- transformational	The private household farm performs certain functions in the system, which will lose its significance in the future
	The private household farm performs certain functions in the modern period and can transform into peasant farms and cooperatives formations
	Private household farming is a specific way of life, it performs certain functions and can be transformed into other forms of production
Organizational	Private household farming is an independent way of life
	Private household farming is a specific form of production, an integral part of the country's agro- industrial complex, but not an independent structure

Scientific works carried out from the standpoint of the functional-transformational approach consider private household plots from the point of view of the functions they perform in society in different periods of time, as well as their transformations in connection with changes in the external environment. Within the framework of the organizational approach, private household plots are studied as a specific form, an independent structure, one of the organizational structures of the agro-industrial complex, as an element in the system of cooperation with agricultural enterprises, peasant (farming) households and other organizations. In relation to the genesis of private household plots of the population in modern literature there are several points of view. Some researchers [14, 15, 16] believe that they arose during the period of collectivization, while others - [17, 18] consider their existence throughout the history of the development of land ownership and the formation of agrarian relations.

In our opinion, the origins of the private household plots of the population lie in ancient times. In this regard, the period from the emergence of the estate settlement to the emergence of the private household plots of the population is associated with a change in the socioeconomic system: from the primitive communal to the market economy.

Results and Discussion

Kazakhstan's experience of developing private farms. Almost all currently existing large agricultural enterprises were created on the basis of former collective Soviet farms and therefore their equipment with fixed production assets was much better compared to farms, which allowed them to launch the production process at the initial stage of economic activity after the 1990s with lower costs compared to farms that did not have the fixed assets necessary for economic activity. Another advantage of large farms was that certified workers such as agronomists, machine operators and others remained to work in these enterprises. However, the number of large farms at the moment in comparison with farms and private farms is much lower. This situation is primarily explained by the fact that initially the policy of denationalization of collective farms and the creation of a private property system in the agricultural system was carried out. Over time, practice has proven that private property did not develop to the fullest extent, since there were no key levers stimulating market relations in agriculture. For example, private ownership of land resources did not develop to the full extent, although the law allowed the purchase of agricultural land into private ownership. One of the main reasons for this is the relatively low cost of land lease, which served as a kind of support measure from the state, since farmers did not have sufficient financial resources to buy out the land, and representatives of other businesses were not interested in investing in agriculture due to its low profitability and increased risk [19].

Private subsidiary farms have played and continue to play an important role in the formation of gross agricultural income in Kazakhstan. Despite the fact that private subsidiary farms account for only 0.9% of the total area of agricultural land, they produce more than 60.0% of all livestock products in the country.

Usually, private household plots have a small plot of land from 0.06 to 0.25 hectares and, as a rule, this is a garden plot (vegetable garden) where they grow vegetables, fruits and berries, and there is also the possibility of keeping livestock, mainly dairy cows and several heads of sheep.

Private household plots produce goods primarily for domestic consumption, the rest is sold at the market or to neighbors.

Let us consider the dynamics of growth of gross agricultural output in Kazakhstan by farm categories from 2010 to 2023 (Table 2).

Table 2 – Gross output of agricultural products (services) by farm categories, billion tenge

Indicator	Agricultural enterprises				Individual entrepreneurs and peasant or farmer farms				Households of the population			
	2010	2016	2020	2023	2010	2016	2020	2023	2010	2016	2020	2023
Gross release products (services) rural farms	280.6	856.2	1699.6	2140.7	360.3	1043.7	2033.6	2556.2	1181.1	1784.3	2630.8	2880.7
Gross products plant breedertva	198.3	628.2	1237.4	1352.6	291.7	796.4	1554.3	2002.8	405.3	622.8	895.7	1197.3
Gross products livestock breedertva	76.4	212.7	423.0	775.5	68.5	247.2	479.3	553.4	775.8	1161.5	1735.1	1683.5

Source: [20]

From Table 2 it can be seen that from 2010 to 2023:

- Gross output of agricultural products of agricultural enterprises increased 7.6 times from 280.6 to 2140.7 billion tenge; the main contribution comes from crop production, which increased 6.8 times from 198.3 to 1352.6 billion tenge; livestock production increased 10.1 times from 76.4 to 775.5 billion tenge.

- Gross output of agricultural products of individual entrepreneurs and peasant or farm households increased 7 times from 360.3 to 2556.2 billion tenge, the gross output of crop production increased 6.8 times from 291.7 to 2002.8 billion tenge, and livestock production increased 8.1 times from 68.5 to 553.4 billion tenge.

- Gross output of agricultural products of private household plots increased by 2.4 times from 1181.1 to 2880.7 billion tenge, the gross output of crop production increased by 2.9 times from 405.3 to 1197.3 billion tenge, and livestock production by 2.2 times from 775.8 to 1683.5 billion tenge.

The reduced growth rates of gross agricultural output in private household plots are associated with several factors: limited resources and access to financing, low mechanization, focus on self-sufficiency, difficulties with access to sales markets and integration into supply chains.

At the regional level, the formation of target programs is the development of individual industries that provide for the rational use of the resource potential available in the region. For example, one of the most promising sectors of agriculture with export potential is rice growing; consumer demand for rice is growing every year. The increase in demand for rice on the world market and the simultaneous decrease in supply will undoubtedly lead to an increase in prices for this product. Under these conditions, each country is forced to solve the problem of satisfying the population's need for rice, relying only on its internal resources. In the rice-growing region, the efficient use of arable land and crop rotation areas, as well as engineering and irrigation systems, is of great importance. Rice cultivation by small business entities, including private household plots, accounts for 51.5%. For the promising development of the industry, Kazakhstan has irrigated land, a huge capacity of the domestic market and labor force.

Land Allocation for Household Subsidiary Plots

In many developing countries, access to land remains crucial for people living (and producing) in rural areas, who partially or largely depend on agriculture, livestock farming, and the use of forest resources for their livelihoods. In this context, rural poverty is also closely linked to access to and control over land. As a critical resource for rural life, inequality in land distribution and productivity is one of the key factors hindering the growth of rural areas and ensuring food (and nutritional) security. However, land is more than just an economic resource and therefore holds broader significance; this is particularly true for small family farms, for whom land represents a way of life and carries cultural importance. Land is also a vital political resource that establishes or challenges power relations between individuals, households, and communities [21, 22].

Over the past decade, interest in land resources has increased and been renewed, driven by growing demand for food (and meat-based diets, which have led to a rapid expansion of the livestock sector [23], high food prices, and increasing demand for biofuels and animal feed [24]. For a long time, it has been argued that providing rural poor residents with secure ownership of the land they depend on for their livelihoods is a central factor in poverty reduction. The World Bank has been a leading advocate of land tenure security (based on individual and private land ownership rights) as a necessary and critical condition for reducing rural poverty [25] and improving agricultural productivity [26, 27].

Analyzing the land used for household subsidiary plots (HSPs) in Kazakhstan over the past 20 years reveals a significant increase in their total area: the growth has been substantial, amounting to 102,000 hectares or 30%. However, the number of allocated plots has decreased – from 1.7 million hectares in 2003 to 1.1 million hectares in 2023, indicating an enlargement of the land plots allocated for HSPs. When examining the regional distribution of areas allocated for HSPs in Kazakhstan, it is evident that their land area is significantly larger in the southern part of the country, which is associated with settlement demographics (Table 3).

Table 3 – Provision of lands into private ownership by regions of Kazakhstan

Name of areas	Provided for personal use subsidiary farming	
	thousand hectares	%
Abay	39.0	11.8
Akmola	13.1	4.0
Aktobe	8.4	2.6
Almaty	31.9	9.7
Atyrau	5.3	1.9
Zhambyl	1.8	0.7
Zhetisu	15.7	4.9
West Kazakhstan	2.0	0.9
Karaganda	6.2	2.6
Kostanay	13.7	4.8
Kyzylorda	11.4	3.5
Mangistau	0.1	0.03
Pavlodar	6.2	2.6
North Kazakhstan	16.6	5.7
Turkestan	143.3	43.5
Ulytau	2.1	0.8
Total	329.4	100
Source: [20]		

In accordance with the National Project for the Development of the Agro-Industrial Complex of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2021–2025, the task is to increase the volume of gross agricultural output by 1.3 times compared to the 2019 level, which amounted to 3.2% (with the plan being 7%). In order to achieve this task, it is planned to implement anchor investment projects in 7 areas (meat, milk, grain, processing of oilseeds, fruits, vegetables and sugar production). They unite all links of industry chains in each region, taking into account the natural and climatic conditions of the regions [28]. In this regard, let us consider the data in Table 4, which presents the dynamics of land areas in private ownership from 2003–2015 and on which the main product of private household plots is directly produced.

Table 4 – Dynamics of the area of land provided to citizens and legal entities for private ownership (2003-2015)

Targeted appointment land plots	2003		2008		2013		2015	
	Number of land plots, thousand	area, thousand hectares	Number of land plots, thousand	area, thousand hectares	Number of land plots, thousand	area, thousand hectares	Number of land plots, thousand	area, thousand hectares
Lands populated points	2262.2	315.9	1 595.3	260.9	2795.9	581.4	2989.5	656.2
of which for: management personal subsidiary farms	1725.0	227.4	1 595.3	260.9	1672.0	259.3	1705.2	258.2
Source: [29]								

Since 2013, less and less land has been allocated for private household plots, which has only become more and more pronounced in significant differences each year (Table 5).

Table 5 – Dynamics of the area of land provided for private farming in the Republic of Kazakhstan

Indicators	2003		2013		2023	
	Number of land plots, thousand	area, thousand hectares	Number of land plots, thousand	area, thousand hectares	Number of land plots, thousand	area, thousand hectares
Lands populated points private property	2262.2	315.9	2795.9	581.4	2 759.5	1 052.7
Lands for management personal subsidiary farms	1725.0	227.4	1672.0	259.3	1094.5	329.4
Ratio of the area of private household plots to the private fund of rural settlements, %	-	72.0	-	44.6	-	31.2
Source: [12]						

In the total area of rural lands, the share of private household plots is small – only 1.6%, but they have a fairly significant share among the lands of rural settlements provided for private ownership – 31.2% [30].

Further Development and Regulation of Household Subsidiary Plots in Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, small rural entrepreneurship plays an increasingly important role, which includes farms, household farms (including private farms), consumer cooperatives, without the support of which it is impossible to achieve the revival of agriculture and improve the lives of the rural population. Farms allow its subjects to overcome and eliminate alienation from the means of production, to become their real owner with the development of motivation for effective work on the land, and the organization of corporate governance allows preserving this motivation and at the same time strengthening it through collective work aimed at combating market competition and achieving an increase in the efficiency of its results by combining all types of resources and accumulating their potential in larger volumes, providing significantly greater opportunities for sustainable development of production in agro-formations than small peasant productions operating in a market environment can carry out. One of the main approaches to the implementation of state programs introduced in the country was the involvement of small and medium-sized farms in agricultural cooperation [31].

To clearly demonstrate this statement in the context of the development of private household plots in Kazakhstan, let us consider the statistics on the state of cooperatives in Kazakhstan. As of October 1, 2017, 745 cooperatives were created, including 273 cooperatives with a milk collection point, 358 cooperatives with a slaughter point. 6,159 family fattening sites for 102,587 heads of cattle were created. State support measures made it possible to involve about 56 thousand private household plots and small farms in agricultural cooperation. Cooperatives procured more than 44 thousand tons of milk and 13 thousand tons of meat, which made it possible to increase the work-load of enterprises. In addition, a Database of processing enterprises was formed, which included almost all enterprises, with the exception of flour mills. As of January 1, 2020, according to statistics, there were 2.32 million private household plots (PHP) in Kazakhstan. They grew agricultural products worth 2.6 trillion tenge, that is, about 40% of the country's total harvest [32].

In Kazakhstan, the introduction of regulations, a law on private household plots, has already been considered three times, but these issues are still awaiting a solution. The main problems prompting such a decision were "the absence of a separate law regulating the activities of private household plots, and ineffective regulation within the framework of the existing land legislation, as well as environmental problems associated with the lack of veterinary safety standards, etc. Legislative measures could include stimulating cooperation between private household plots and state support, including subsidies, microcredit and educational initiatives" [33].

The country is promoting various activities related to the development of private household plots. Thus, in pursuance of the instructions of the Head of State, in 2025 Kazakhstan will conduct a full census of agricultural enterprises, peasant, farm, private household plots in cities and villages, as well as gardening and dacha cooperatives. In accordance with the recommendations of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO UN), for the quality and objectivity of statistical information on the state of the agricultural sector, agricultural censuses in countries are conducted every 5-10 years [34]. Let us recall that the first national census in the country was held in 2006-2007.

In the 2025 census, it is planned to use administrative data from the IS "Identification of Farm Animals", for lands – the Unified State Real Estate Cadastre (USRRE), for agricultural machinery – the IS "State Register of Agricultural Machinery" (GRST), for subsidies – the IS "Unified State Information System for Subsidies" (EGISS).

In order to test census questionnaires, methodology, information systems, conduct field work, assess the budget, quality of Internet coverage and the operation of information systems without the Internet, a pilot survey was conducted in all regions in August 2024. Based on its results, reports were compiled on the problems identified, including an assessment of the quality of administrative data, the readiness of government information systems and the possibility of using administrative data at the main stage of the census. This event is a very effective event because without reliable data it is very difficult to qualitatively plan the development of the industry, identify errors and shortcomings in the work in order to conduct a high-quality census in 2025.

Conclusion

The results of the scientific article allow for the following justified conclusions:

1. Personal subsidiary farms (PSFs) form the foundation of Kazakhstan's food security, providing more than 60% of livestock production with minimal resources. Despite small land plots and low levels of mechanization, their role in ensuring the country's food sovereignty cannot be overstated.

2. The main challenges for PSFs are related to the lack of status as agricultural commodity producers, which limits their access to state support, subsidies, and credit. Additionally, low levels of infrastructure, market integration, and mechanization hinder productivity growth and competitiveness.

3. Cooperation between PSFs and farming enterprises is a key direction for their sustainable development. Collective associations can reduce transaction costs, improve access to markets, technologies, and state support, and enhance production efficiency.

4. State support should aim to create a favorable legislative and institutional environment for PSFs. It is necessary to develop and adopt a special law regulating the status, rights, and obligations of PSFs. Measures such as subsidies, preferential loans, educational programs, and the introduction of technologies need to be intensified.

5. Analysis of the dynamics of PSF lands shows an increase in their average size, indicating a trend toward the consolidation of farms. This opens prospects for productivity growth but requires active state policies to ensure the availability of land resources and guarantees of their legal status.

6. The 2025 agricultural census should provide high-quality and objective data on the state of PSFs, including their contribution to production, infrastructure provision, and socioeconomic development. This will help identify weaknesses and develop targeted support measures.

7. PSFs have the potential to transform into more sustainable forms of agribusiness, including farming enterprises and cooperatives. It is essential to develop strategies to stimulate this transformation to increase their efficiency and integrate them into supply chains.

8. Enhancing the sustainability and efficiency of PSFs requires a systemic approach, which includes not only financial support but also infrastructure development, raising farmers' knowledge levels, modernizing production, and integrating into regional and international markets.

9. PSFs are not only an economic but also a social category, contributing to the preservation of rural traditions, improving the quality of life in rural areas, and reducing migration from rural territories. Supporting PSFs helps strengthen social stability and reduce poverty.

10. Further research and in-depth analysis are required based on key socioeconomic indicators of rural development, including the passportization of each rural territory, assessment of its potential, and development of specific mechanisms for activating rural areas in the socioeconomic processes occurring in these territories and the country as a whole.

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