

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

The New Cooperative Identity and Agricultural Cooperatives in Türkiye

Yeni Kooperatifçilik Kimliği ve Türkiye’de Tarımsal Kooperatifler

Tülin TUNÇ¹ , Eylül Ece DEMİR²  & Sevgi TÜZÜN RAD³ DOI : [10.63556/ankad.v10i2.330](https://doi.org/10.63556/ankad.v10i2.330)

Geliş/Received: 01/09/2025

Kabul/Accepted: 23/02/2026

Abstract

Due to the continuing significance of the agricultural sector in Türkiye today, agricultural cooperatives, whose primary functions include providing inputs and credit to their members/partners, harvesting, storage, processing, marketing, and selling their products, are important organizations. The United Nations has declared 2025 as the international year of cooperatives, while the FAO has emphasized the important role of cooperatives in the fight against hunger and malnutrition, particularly in the agri-food sector. However, there are various obstacles that hinder the ability of cooperatives to perform their functions and maintain their existence. In order to overcome these challenges, it is essential to discuss not only the protection of their universal principles and identity but also the possibility of engaging in commercial activities. An examination of data obtained from official institutions and relevant studies indicates that agricultural cooperatives suffer from limited effectiveness and weak competitiveness due to inadequate capital accumulation. Consequently, it is seen that it is important for agricultural cooperatives to engage in commercial activities and generate capital while preserving their universal principles and identity, in order to become stronger and more efficient and to ensure their long-term sustainability.

Keywords: Cooperativism, traditional cooperatives, commercial cooperatives, agricultural sector, Türkiye.

Öz

Günümüzde Türkiye’de tarım sektörünün hala büyük önem taşıması nedeniyle, temel işlevleri üyelerine/ortaklarına girdi ve kredi sağlama, ürünlerini toplama, depolama ve işleme, pazarlama ve satış vb. olan tarımsal kooperatifler önemli örgütlerdir. Birleşmiş Milletler 2025 yılını uluslararası kooperatifçilik yılı olarak ilan ederken, FAO kooperatiflerin özellikle tarımsal gıda sektöründe, açlık ve yetersiz beslenmeyle mücadelede önemli bir rol oynadığını vurgulamıştır. Ancak kooperatiflerin işlevlerini yerine getirebilmesi, varlığını sürdürebilmesinin önünde engeller bulunmaktadır. Kooperatiflerin önündeki engelleri aşabilmesi için evrensel ilkeleri ve kimliklerini korumak yanında ticari faaliyetlerde de bulunabilmesine ilişkin konuların tartışılması önem taşımaktadır. Resmi kurumlardan elde edilen veriler ve yapılan çalışmalar incelendiğinde tarımsal kooperatiflerin sermaye yetersizliği nedeniyle etkinlik ve rekabet gücünün zayıf olduğu görülmektedir. Sonuç olarak tarımsal kooperatiflerin evrensel ilke ve kimliklerini koruyarak ticari faaliyette bulunmaları ve sermaye

¹ Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding Author, Arş. Gör. Dr., Mersin Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi/Mersin, Türkiye, E-mail: tulintunc@mersin.edu.tr

²Arş. Gör. Dr., Mersin Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi/Mersin, Türkiye, E-mail: eyuldemir@mersin.edu.tr

³Prof. Dr., Mersin Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi/Mersin, Türkiye, E-mail: srad@mersin.edu.tr

Önerilen Atıf/Suggestion Citation

Tunç, T. – Demir, E.E. & Tüzün Rad, S., (2026). The New Cooperative Identity and Agricultural Cooperatives in Türkiye. *Anadolu Kültürel Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 10(2), 880-891.

oluşturmalarının kooperatiflerin daha güçlü, daha etkin olması ve uzun vadeli sürdürülebilirliği açısından önemli olduğu görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Kooperatifçilik, geleneksel kooperatifler, ticari kooperatifler, tarım sektörü, Türkiye.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In many developing countries, agricultural cooperatives have generally been established by governments from the top down, primarily to achieve agricultural policy objectives. Following the 1980s, neoliberal economic policies became dominant worldwide. These policies prevented financial support for cooperative activities on the grounds that they distorted competition in the market and held monopoly power. In other words, while cooperative activities were largely supported by governments and foreign funds in earlier periods, this support gradually decreased until the global financial crisis of 2008. Global transformations driven by shifts in neoliberal policy, financial crises, the pandemic process, trade wars and geopolitical tensions have brought the strategic importance of the agricultural sector back to the forefront. In this context, ensuring food supply security has become a key focus of agricultural policies. Moreover, these developments have reopened the debate on the role of agricultural cooperatives, one of the fundamental organizational forms within the agricultural sector.

Historically, both globally and in Türkiye, agricultural cooperatives have played a significant role in protecting small-scale producers, facilitating access to resources, marketing agricultural products and ensuring income stability. However, the reduction of public support following the implementation of neoliberal policies in the 1980s has led to the weakening of cooperatives' financial and institutional capacities. During this period, cooperatives have faced numerous challenges, including insufficient capital accumulation, limited access to finance, a lack of professional management, and difficulties in adapting to competitive market conditions. Accordingly, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) emphasised the strategic importance of cooperatives in the fight against hunger and malnutrition, thus highlighting the necessity of supporting agricultural cooperatives. In general, agricultural cooperatives are very important organisational structures for protecting small farmers from unfair competition, improving their welfare and ensuring the continuity of agricultural production by enabling them to remain in rural areas. Furthermore, they are organisations that generate significant social capital by upholding democratic principles, promoting social and economic development, and encouraging entrepreneurship. In this context, cooperatives must enter new markets and create new business opportunities in order to fulfil their functions and maintain their existence.

Traditional agricultural cooperatives are mostly found in developing countries (Von Pischke & Rouse, 2004). This is also the case in Türkiye. Currently, agricultural cooperatives in Türkiye primarily operate within the confines of a traditional interpretation of cooperativism. This restricts their sustainability and competitiveness. While they preserve the universal principles and values of cooperatives, engaging in commercial activities and enhancing their capacity to generate capital has become a key challenge. Von Pischke & Rouse (2004) emphasized that agricultural cooperatives should be restructured in line with the "commercial cooperative" approach to solve their financing problems. Within this framework, cooperative members are positioned not only as beneficiaries but also as investors, and cooperatives are encouraged to generate capital through commercial activities. By contrast, in the traditional understanding of cooperativism, members are primarily defined as individuals who benefit from cooperative services, with capital accumulation and profitability being secondary considerations. This situation increases the vulnerability of cooperatives, particularly in competitive and capital-intensive markets. A review of the literature indicates that studies addressing the role of commercial activities in resolving the financing problems of cooperatives remain limited.

This study aims to examine the financial challenges that threaten the sustainability of agricultural cooperatives in Türkiye within the framework of both traditional and commercial cooperative approaches. It argues that, while remaining committed to universal cooperative principles, agricultural cooperatives in Türkiye need to engage in commercial activities and undergo restructuring in order to overcome their financing constraints. Discussing the potential for capital accumulation by agricultural cooperatives from the perspective of a new cooperative identity is expected to contribute to the existing literature and to provide guidance for policymakers and cooperative managers.

2. METHODOLOGY

The distinction between traditional and commercial cooperatives is based on members' economic relationship with the cooperative, their understanding of capital accumulation, and their approach to commercial activities. "Traditional cooperatives" are defined as structures that primarily position their members as beneficiaries, have limited capital accumulation capacity and prioritise short-term member benefits. In contrast, "commercial cooperatives" are characterised as organisations in which members also assume the role of investors, adopt capital formation as a strategic objective and engage in commercial activities to compete in the market. This study provides a conceptual and analytical framework for explaining the financing problems of agricultural cooperatives. This approach enables us to discuss why agricultural cooperatives in Türkiye experience capital insufficiency and to explore potential pathways for overcoming this constraint.

This discussion examined the financial problems of Turkish agricultural cooperatives using qualitative research methods, specifically document analysis. Document analysis is a research method in which various documents and data are used as primary sources and analyses are conducted from an inquisitive perspective (Sak et al., 2021). In this context, this analysis was based on reports and official data from the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Trade, and the Turkish Statistical Institute and the Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye. Furthermore, the literature has presented the concepts related to agricultural cooperatives theoretically.

2.1. Ethics Committee Approval

In all stages of this research including the preparation of the conceptual framework, the implementation of data collection tools, the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data ethical principles have been strictly observed. The ANKAD Editorial Board bears no responsibility for any ethical violations that may arise; all responsibility rests solely with the authors. I hereby declare that this study has not been submitted for evaluation to any other academic publication venue outside of ANKAD. All rules specified in the "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" have been followed in the conduct of this study. None of the acts defined under the second section of the Directive, titled "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics," have been committed. Since this study uses publicly available primary sources, it does not require approval from an ethics committee.

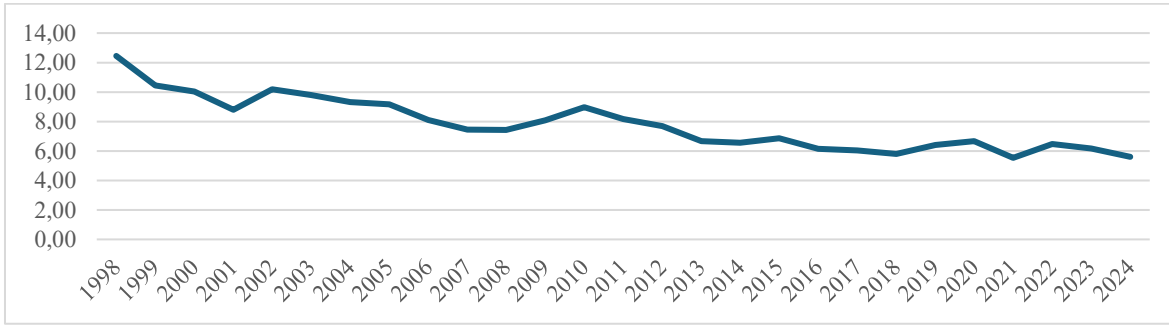
2.2. The Contribution of The Agricultural Sector to The Economy of Türkiye And The Role of Agricultural Cooperatives

This section addresses the significance of the agricultural sector within the Turkish economy in order to demonstrate the necessity of transforming agricultural cooperatives into strong and financially sustainable structures.

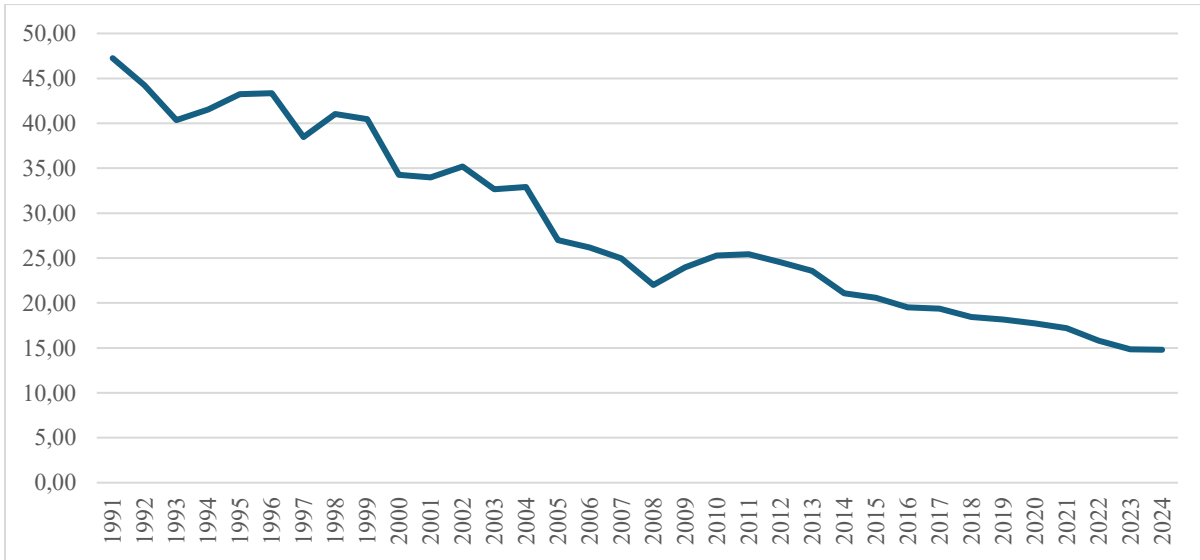
At the global level, the agricultural sector employs approximately half of the world's labor force (ILO, 2022a). Nearly 80% of the world's extreme poor live in rural areas, and two-thirds of them are employed in the agricultural sector. Particularly in low- and middle-income countries, agriculture is a significant source of economic growth and development (FAO, 2022). Therefore, before evaluating cooperatives, which play a critical role in rural development and improving the welfare of rural communities, it is important to explain the role of the agricultural sector⁴ in the Turkish economy. This will contribute to a better understanding of the importance of agricultural cooperatives. The sector's position in the national economy is briefly explained below using indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employment, and foreign trade. Although the share of the agricultural sector in GDP, employment, and foreign trade has decreased over the years, its importance for the national economy remains significant.

An analysis of the Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye (CBRT) data from the 1998-2024 period reveal that the share of the agricultural sector in GDP has steadily declined, falling from approximately 12% to below 6% (Figure 1).

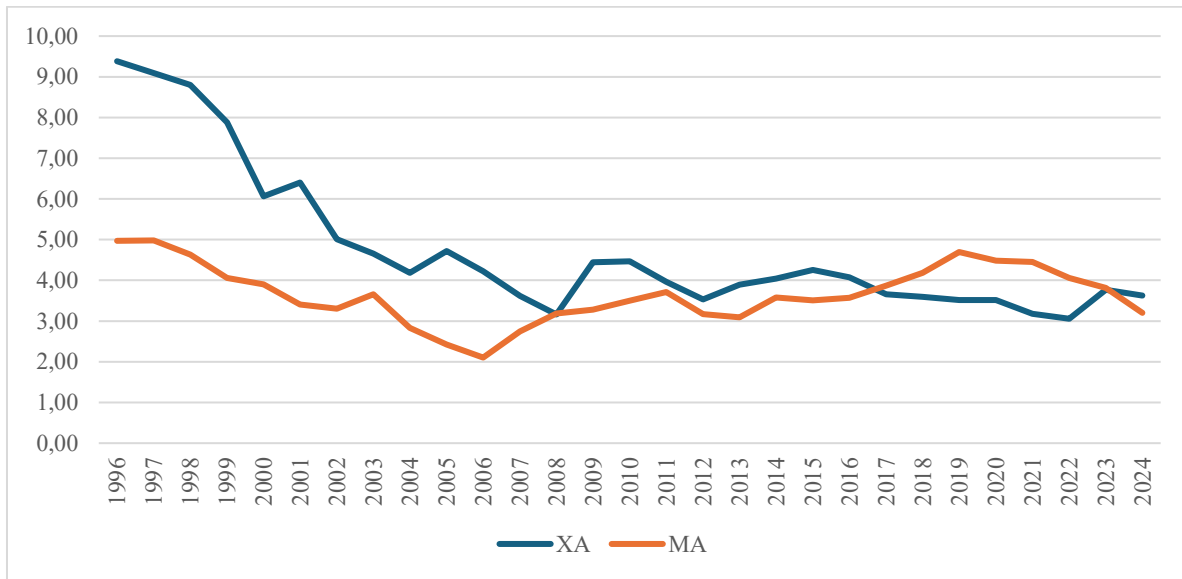
⁴ Throughout this study, the term agriculture sector is used instead of agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sector.

Figure 1: The Share of the Agricultural Sector in Türkiye's GDP (%)**Source:** CBRT

Similarly, the share of agricultural employment in total employment dropped from 48% in 1991 to 15% in 2024 (Figure 2). Although this ratio continues to decrease, it remains high compared to developed countries. For the EU-27 in 2024, the share of agriculture in total employment is 3.96%; in Belgium, it is 1.1%, in Germany, 1.23%, and the share is higher than in Türkiye only in Romania (20%) and Serbia (25.2%) (EUROSTAT, 2026).

Figure 2: Share of Agricultural Employment in Total Employment in Türkiye (%)**Source:** TURKSTAT

An examination of the share of agricultural production in Türkiye's exports reveals that this ratio has steadily declined between 1996 and 2024. Particularly after 2013/2014, agricultural imports began to rise (Figure 3). The economic crisis that Türkiye has experienced between 2017 and 2023, the COVID-19 pandemic, and geopolitical and trade conflicts worldwide have affected Turkish foreign trade. As a result, the share of agricultural products in total imports surpassed their share in total exports. In other words, the ratio of agricultural exports to imports has steadily declined. This situation can also be seen as a problem for self-sufficiency in the agricultural sector. However, in 2023, the export and import levels became equalized, and in 2024, there was a slight improvement in favor of exports.

Figure 3: The Share of Agricultural Products in Foreign Trade (%)

Source: TURKSTAT, CBRT

XA: Exports of agriculture, forestry, and fishing / Total Exports (%), MA: Imports of agriculture, forestry, and fishing / Total Imports (%).

Countries implement agricultural policies to shape the agricultural sector and ensure the security of supply for food and agricultural products. Within this framework, cooperatives play an important role in the implementation of agricultural policies and the sustainability of agricultural production.

Therefore, ensuring the effective and strong presence of cooperatives is among the fundamental objectives.

In conclusion, sustaining the contribution of the agricultural sector to the Turkish economy depends largely on supporting small-scale farmers within organized structures such as cooperatives. Agricultural cooperatives are strategic economic actors that directly influence the sector's economic performance, employment capacity, and foreign trade balance. Therefore, when evaluating the contribution of the agricultural sector to the economy, the structure, functioning, and financial sustainability of agricultural cooperatives must also be considered.

2.3. Agricultural Cooperatives And Its Implementations in Türkiye

Agricultural cooperatives are legally classified and distinguished based on their statutory status, fields of activity, or regulatory framework, such as agricultural marketing cooperatives, agricultural development cooperatives, and agricultural credit cooperatives. However, in this study, cooperatives are examined within the framework of "traditional" and "commercial" approaches, based on their financing practices and capital formation capacity. This is because agricultural cooperatives in Türkiye, regardless of their legal status, face similar financial constraints, low capital accumulation, insufficient investment, and difficulties in adapting to market competition. Accordingly, it is important to elucidate why, historically, agricultural cooperatives in Türkiye have exhibited structural vulnerability in terms of capital accumulation.

The tradition of mutual assistance, solidarity, and cooperation among farmers in rural areas still exists today. Villagers continue to help one another in tasks such as making bread or tomato paste and in labor-intensive agricultural activities like harvesting. They come together in collective efforts for the construction of village fountains, mosques, and schools, contributing their labor voluntarily. Additionally, they support each other in social settings such as weddings and funerals. In this sense, agricultural cooperatives stand out as organizations capable of institutionalizing and organizing this existing spirit of cooperation and solidarity in rural communities (Soysal, 2006, 76).

Agricultural cooperatives play a vital role in eliminating the disadvantages faced by people living in rural areas and sustaining their livelihoods through farming, particularly in meeting basic needs. These

cooperatives are based on shared identity, collective awareness, the fulfillment of common needs, and mutual responsibility. In rural areas, where state influence in the economy has decreased and capital dominance has increased, cooperatives offer a democratic and egalitarian alternative, serving as effective tools for distributing income more equitably. Brass (2007) also states that cooperatives are of great importance in rural development, as they enable small farmers to come together and benefit from the advantages of economies of scale. In other words, cooperatives can be regarded as effective and appropriate instruments for achieving both national and rural development goals.

The first initiative to support cooperativism in Türkiye was the establishment of the Turkish Cooperative Association (Türk Kooperatifçilik Kurumu) by Atatürk in 1931. The first Cooperative Law came into effect in 1969 under Law No. 1163. Since then, cooperative activities have been governed by the Law No. 1163 on Cooperatives (24 April 1969), the Law No. 1581 on Agricultural Credit Cooperatives and Unions (18 April 1972), and the Law No. 4572 on Agricultural Sales Cooperatives and Unions (1 June 2000). The principle of promoting cooperativism was first included in the 1982 Constitution. Article 171 of the 1982 Constitution states: “*The State shall take necessary measures to ensure the development of cooperativism that aims primarily at increasing production and protecting consumers, considering the interests of the national economy.*” This clause highlights the importance of cooperatives in safeguarding production, producers, and consumers in Türkiye (Ministry of Trade, 2025).

Cooperatives in Türkiye operate under various ministries depending on their area of activity. There are 44 different types of cooperatives in total, 34 under the Ministry of Trade, 5 under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and 5 under the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change. In terms of proportional distribution, the Ministry of Trade oversees 76% of all cooperatives, while the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change each oversee 12%. As of 2024, there are 49.040 cooperatives (both active and inactive), 325 unions, 14 central unions, and one National Union of Turkish Cooperatives. The number of registered members in the Cooperative Information System (KOOPBİS) is 4.485.001 (Ministry of Trade, 2024). Regardless of the supervising ministry, the core goal of cooperatives is to improve the welfare of their members and, indirectly, that of society as a whole—because cooperatives are centered around people.

Table 1 presents the distribution of agricultural cooperatives affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Ministry of Trade as of the end of 2024. According to this data, the 8.317 agricultural cooperatives under these two ministries represent 41% of total cooperative membership. When irrigation cooperatives, fisheries cooperatives, and sugar beet growers’ cooperatives are included, the number becomes even higher. Therefore, supporting agricultural cooperatives is of great importance for both rural and national development.

Table 1: Agricultural Cooperatives and Related Ministries (2024)

	2024 number of cooperatives	2024 number of members/partners
Under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry:	7992 (%16)	1574469 (%35)
1163 Agricultural Development Cooperatives under the Cooperatives Law	6369 (%13)	722848 (%16)
Agricultural Credit Cooperatives under the Law No. 1581 on Agricultural Credit Cooperatives and Unions	1623 (%3)	851621 (%19)
Under the Ministry of Trade: Agricultural Sales Cooperatives	325 (%1)	255525 (%6)
Total agricultural cooperatives	8317 (%17)	1829994 (%41)
Total cooperatives	48889	4485001

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (2024), Ministry of Trade (2024) reports.

During the 1960 -1980 period, expectations regarding the functions of cooperatives were strongly supported by organizations such as FAO, the World Bank, development institutions of industrialized countries, and national governments. However, in recent years, these institutions have changed their priorities and significantly reduced the funding allocated to the agricultural sector and agricultural cooperatives (FAO, 2022). On one hand international organizations scaled back support for cooperatives; and on the other hand the stabilization program implemented under IMF guidance in 1999, Türkiye began to dismantle both state-owned agricultural enterprises and agricultural cooperatives.

For instance, public enterprises that supplied agricultural inputs and raw materials—such as the Turkish Agricultural Equipment Supply Organization (TZDK), General Directorate of Agricultural Enterprises (TİGEM), and Turkish Fertilizer Industry Inc. (TÜGSAŞ)—were privatized. Additionally, under the guise of autonomization, some agricultural cooperative unions were forced to sell off their assets, including land, processing facilities, and technology. As a result, cooperatives became weakened and unable to fulfill their functions. This process left farmers struggling with rising input costs, limited access to credit and marketing channels, and product prices that failed to cover production costs. Yet, producers need cooperatives to improve their income and welfare, to obtain inputs more affordably, and to sell their products at better prices (Hansen, Morrow & Batista, 2002; Kılıç Topuz, 2017).

Türkiye made various commitments regarding the agricultural sector in the letter of intent submitted to the IMF as part of the Stand-by Agreement dated December 9, 1999. One of these commitments was to sever ties between the state and cooperatives (Önal, 2012, 159). In this context, Law No. 4572 on Agricultural Sales Cooperatives and Unions, which came into force on June 1, 2000, prohibited state aid to cooperatives. Through this legislation and the accompanying letter of intent to the IMF and World Bank, the government claimed that organizations like the Agricultural Sales Cooperatives and Unions (TSKB) were a burden on the state budget and thus excluded them from any form of financial support. Consequently, TSKBs were compelled to liquidate or sell their financial assets, effectively being left to their own fate. The law also mandated that the factories owned by cooperatives and unions be converted into joint-stock companies. As a result, agricultural cooperatives were significantly weakened. Especially the TSKBs, which needed capital, began selling their assets (Kafaoğlu, 2001, 65-71). For example, unions such as ÇUKOBİRLİK, ANTBİRLİK, and TARIŞ sold some of their lands, food processing facilities, real estate, and equipment. This law became a turning point for agricultural cooperatives in Türkiye. Susam and Bakkal (2008) also emphasized in their study that this law weakened agricultural cooperatives. By the late 1990s, the decisions and practices initially implemented only for TSKBs began to be applied to other agricultural cooperatives as well. Çelik and Korkmaz (2023, 357) noted that since 2020, Agricultural Credit Cooperatives have faced increasing liquidity problems and emphasized the need for efforts to improve their financial stability.

2.4. Financial Problems And The Distinction Between Traditional And Commercial Cooperative Approaches

Today, changes in economic conditions that threaten the sustainability of agricultural cooperatives in both developed and developing countries, the reduction of funding by international institutions, and the withdrawal of governmental support for cooperatives have made solving the financing problem one of the most pressing issues for cooperatives. Compared to other business models, cooperatives usually begin operations with low capital due to limited and low member contributions. Because capital accumulation is restricted and cooperatives often operate with low profit margins, they cannot meet their financial needs through internal resources and must seek external financing. However, many cooperatives lack sufficient collateral and thus cannot access credit suitable to their financial structures. Consequently, cooperatives that cannot finance new investments fail to grow and compete with other enterprises. They often struggle to repay their debts, and those unable to do so face bankruptcy (İNGEV, 2021, 29).

The financial challenges of cooperatives can be grouped under three categories: i. Ensuring and sustaining sufficient equity capital to finance growth and meet increasing working capital needs. The variability in agricultural input and output prices, the dependency of production on natural conditions, and advances in technology have increased cooperatives' asset requirements. ii. Achieving and maintaining profitability. Cooperatives must ensure cash flow and profitability from their investments.

For effective risk management, they also require sufficient liquidity. iii. Managing business risk while maintaining ownership. Cooperative members expect investment in assets that increase profitability while reducing operational risks (Barton et al., 2011).

However, when discussing financing issues, it is important to distinguish among cooperatives based on their fields of activity and capital formation processes. In general, member funding paves the way for cooperative development. In this context, cooperatives around the world have begun to develop new and differentiated strategies based on their operational fields, capabilities, and opportunities. For instance, some agricultural cooperatives have adopted innovative methods whereby members take on dual roles as both beneficiaries and investors. However, this dual role may result in conflicts that stem from cooperative principles. In general, cooperatives are categorized into two types: traditional cooperatives and commercial (business-oriented) cooperatives.

Traditional agricultural cooperatives are predominantly found in poorer countries and operate in non-dynamic markets. They are characterized by a small number of members and low levels of investment. Membership generally requires only the purchase of a small-value share certificate. After deducting operating costs and legal allocations from their annual income, these cooperatives distribute the remaining surplus to their members in cash. Since they accumulate very little capital, these cooperatives offer little promise of becoming dynamic or sustainable enterprises in competitive environments.

Commercial agricultural cooperatives, by contrast, regard their members not only as service users but also as investors in the cooperative enterprise. These cooperatives strive to protect and support their members while also developing financial strategies that link members to investment. They distinguish themselves by accumulating member equity through deferred payments, offering modest dividends on shares, and developing other tools aligned with cooperative principles. The members of such cooperatives are generally more commercially oriented and tend to operate in competitive markets, showing loyalty by supporting their cooperatives. Advanced commercial agricultural cooperatives often become part of larger cooperative networks that offer additional services. Some even establish or participate in ventures beyond cooperative boundaries, such as limited liability companies or non-cooperative business structures. Their motivations include raising capital, managing risk, and establishing responsive and effective decision-making structures in dynamic markets (FAO, 2022).

In developed countries, most commercial cooperatives adopt a new cooperative identity that distances them from the universal principles of traditional cooperatives. They behave more like companies engaging in commercial activities and prefer to innovate accordingly. This identity is based on recognizing the equal importance of members as both users and investors.

In traditional cooperatives, practices are aligned with the interests of beneficiary members. However, in commercial cooperatives, the role of the beneficiary member may not always align with the cooperative's commercial operations and investment priorities. That is, there is a risk of conflict between the interests of cooperatives and those of their members. Therefore, aligning the interests of members and the cooperative is the key to capital formation. In other words, for cooperatives to engage in commercial activities and accumulate capital, it is vital to integrate the interests of members, who act as both investors and beneficiaries, with those of the cooperative in collective operations. Using the framework of Von Pischke and Rouse (2004), the financial problems caused by capital formation challenges in traditional cooperatives in Türkiye and around the world can be explained as follows:

The problem of developing a vision: This arises when a cooperative focuses on short-term member interests instead of investing in activities that will generate greater long-term benefits. As a result, the cooperative gradually loses its competitive power.

The problem of limited diversification in the cooperative's investment portfolio: This occurs when cooperatives fail to diversify their investment tools and cannot generate returns for their members. Consequently, members become less motivated to invest in their cooperative. Members typically hold a portfolio of assets such as land, livestock, machinery, equipment, and savings. They want their investments in the cooperative to yield returns comparable to — or better than — those from other investment options. They seek savings methods that will allow them to maintain their livelihoods comfortably in old age or provide liquidity in times of need.

The problem of disproportionate benefit among cooperative members: This problem arises when new members who have contributed little capital benefit equally from the cooperative as long-standing members who have contributed significantly in terms of fixed and working capital.

To date, agricultural cooperatives in Türkiye have predominantly followed a traditional approach. They have experienced all three of the financial problems described in the Von Pischke and Rouse (2004) framework: lack of vision, limited investment diversification, and disproportionate benefit among members. These financial problems are also linked to governance issues. Most cooperatives lack professional financial management, and the financial literacy and knowledge of accounting and legal regulations among cooperative managers is often inadequate, which deepens both financial and administrative problems (İNGEV, 2021, 29). In today's competitive and risky world, commercial activity and capital accumulation are essential for cooperatives to survive, just as they are for commercial enterprises. Various legal arrangements have been implemented both in Türkiye and internationally to facilitate capital formation for cooperatives. For example, Türkiye has introduced legal provisions granting cooperatives special business status and tax exemptions. However, it is believed that legal regulations alone are not sufficient for cooperatives to solve their problems and achieve success. Without engaging in commercial activities and making investments, cooperatives are unlikely to overcome their financial difficulties or attain sustainability.

3. CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

In this study, the concept of the “commercial cooperative” is discussed within the context of cooperatives' universal principles and identity. The findings indicate that the primary factor limiting the effectiveness and competitiveness of agricultural cooperatives is insufficient capital. In particular, the limited capital accumulation within traditional cooperative structures weakens their capacity to invest, enter new markets, and adapt to market conditions.

In Türkiye, agricultural cooperatives largely prioritize the short-term benefits of their members, which adversely affects their long-term financial sustainability. As highlighted in the literature, cooperatives that focus solely on member services and fail to develop mechanisms for capital accumulation increasingly struggle to survive under competitive market conditions. In this context, it can be argued that the financing challenges of agricultural cooperatives are structural in nature and cannot be resolved solely through external support or legal regulations.

Engaging in commercial activities that enable capital accumulation, without deviating from the universal principles and identity of cooperatives, represents an important means of enhancing their effectiveness and competitiveness. However, this should not imply that commercial activity becomes an end in itself for cooperatives.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that, in addressing the financial challenges faced by agricultural cooperatives in Türkiye, the traditional cooperative model is insufficient in terms of capital formation, highlighting the need to consider commercially oriented practices. For agricultural cooperatives to become stronger, more effective, and sustainable organizations, it is essential to balance the member-beneficiary approach with the role of members as investors.

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Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

The New Cooperative Identity and Agricultural Cooperatives in Türkiye

Yeni Kooperatifçilik Kimliği ve Türkiye’de Tarımsal Kooperatifler

Tülin TUNÇ , Eylül Ece DEMİR  & Sevgi TÜZÜN RAD 

DOI : [10.63556/ankad.v10i1.330](https://doi.org/10.63556/ankad.v10i1.330)

Geliş/Received: 01/09/2025

Kabul/Accepted: 23/02/2026

Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

1980’li yıllar sonrasında dünyada egemen olan neoliberal ekonomi politikaları, piyasada rekabeti bozduğu ve tekel gücüne sahip olduğu gerekçesi ile kooperatif faaliyetlerinin finansal olarak desteklenmesini engellemiştir. Yani önceleri kooperatif faaliyetleri büyük ölçüde hükümet ve yabancı fonlarla desteklenirken; bu destekler 2008 küresel finansal krize kadar gittikçe azaltılmıştır. 2008 küresel finans krizi sonrasında özellikle Covid-19 pandemi krizi, coğrafi ve ticari savaşların küresel düzeyde neden olduğu artan eşitsizlikler ve küresel tedarik zincirinde bozulma, ülkelerin tarım ve gıda ürünlerinde arz güvenliğini sağlama konusundaki hassasiyetlerini artırmıştır. Küresel düzeyde yaşanan bu olumsuz gelişmeler tarım sektörü yanında, temel işlevleri üyelerine/ortaklarına girdi ve kredi tedariki, ürünleri depolama ve işleme, ürünleri toplama veya bir araya getirme ve üyelerinin ürettiği ürünleri satma vb. olan tarımsal kooperatiflerin önemini artırmıştır. Nitekim Birleşmiş Milletler Gıda ve Tarım Örgütü (FAO, 2025) açlık ve yetersiz beslenmeyle mücadelede kooperatiflerin stratejik önemini ve bu nedenle tarımsal kooperatiflerin desteklenmesi gerektiğini vurgulamıştır.

Yöntem

Başarılı tarım kooperatifleri, üyelerinin hem yararlanıcı hem de yatırımcı olarak ikili rollerini ele almak için çeşitli yenilikçi stratejiler geliştirmiştir. Sermaye artırmak ve ayakta kalmak için kullandıkları stratejiler, kooperatiflerin yönelimlerine ve onlara sunulan fırsatlara bağlıdır. Sermaye konusunu tartışırken, çeşitli tarım kooperatifleri türlerini ve bunların fon sağlama sorununu nasıl ele aldıklarını ayırt etmek gerekmektedir. Bu ayırım genellikle geleneksel ve ticari kooperatiflerin tanımına göre yapılır. Geleneksel tarım kooperatifleri çoğunlukla gelişmekte olan ülkelerde bulunur (Von Pischke & Rouse, 2004). Bu tartışma kapsamında, bu çalışmada, nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden döküman analizi kullanılarak, Türkiye’de tarım kooperatiflerinin finansal sorunları incelenmiştir. Döküman analizi, çeşitli belgeler ve verilerin birincil kaynak olarak kullanıldığı ve analizlerin sorgulayıcı bir bakış açısıyla yürütüldüğü bir araştırma yöntemidir (Sak et al., 2021). Bu bağlamda, çalışma Uluslararası Çalışma Örgütü (ILO), Birleşmiş Milletler Gıda ve Tarım Örgütü (FAO), Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarım ve Orman Bakanlığı, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ticaret Bakanlığı, Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Merkez Bankası’nın raporları ve resmi verilerine dayanmaktadır.

Tartışma ve Sonuç

Buna göre TCMB ve TÜİK veri tabanından elde edilen veriler Türkiye ekonomisinde tarım sektörünün GSYH’de, istihdamda ve dış ticaretteki payının azalma eğiliminde olduğunu göstermektedir. Buna karşın tarım sektörü hala ülke ekonomisi için önemli ve stratejik bir önemdedir. Bu kapsamda tarımsal kooperatifler stratejik sektör olma özelliğini korumaktadır. Ülkeler tarım politikaları ile tarım sektörünü şekillendirerek, tarım ve gıda ürünleri arz güvenliğini sağlamaya yönelik politikalar uygulamaktadır. Tarım politikalarının uygulanmasında ve tarımsal üretimde sürdürülebilirliğin sağlanmasında kooperatifler önemli bir rol oynadığından, kooperatiflerin etkili ve güçlü olarak varlığını devam ettirebilmesi temel amaçlardan biri olmaktadır.

Kooperatiflerde finansman konusu tartışılırken farklı faaliyet alanında bulunan tarımsal kooperatif ve fon toplama süreçleri konusunda ayırım yapmak gerekmektedir. Genel olarak üyelerin/ortakların kooperatiflerini fonlaması, ilerlemenin yolunu açmaktadır. Bu bağlamda dünyada faaliyet alanları değişen kooperatiflerin yönelimlerine, olanaklarına ve fırsatlarına göre farklı ve yeni stratejiler geliştirilmektedir. Finansman bakımından kooperatifler genel olarak “geleneksel kooperatifler” ve “ticari kooperatifler” olmak üzere iki gruba ayrılabilir.

Türkiye’de tarımsal kooperatifler büyük ölçüde üyelerinin kısa vadeli yararlarını önelemekte ve bu durum uzun vadeli finansal sürdürülebilirliği olumsuz etkilemektedir. Buna göre Türkiye’de tarımsal kooperatiflerde genel olarak geleneksel yaklaşımın benimsendiği söylenebilir. Ancak yalnızca üye hizmetine odaklanan ve sermaye oluşturma mekanizmaları geliştiremeyen kooperatiflerin, rekabetçi piyasa koşullarında ayakta kalmaları giderek zorlaşmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, tarımsal kooperatiflerin finansman sorunlarının yapısal nitelikte olduğu ve yalnızca dış destekler veya yasal düzenlemelerle çözülemeyeceği söylenebilir.

Tarımsal kooperatiflerin evrensel ilke ve kimliklerinden sapmadan, sermaye birikimini mümkün kılacak ticari faaliyetlere yönelmeleri, kooperatiflerin etkinliğini ve rekabet gücünü artıracak önemli bir araçtır. Ancak bu, ticari faaliyetin kooperatifler için başlı başına bir amaç haline gelmesi anlamını taşımamalıdır. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, Türkiye’de tarımsal kooperatiflerin karşı karşıya olduğu finansal sorunların çözümünde, geleneksel kooperatif anlayışının sermaye oluşturma kapasitesi bakımından yetersiz kaldığını ve bu nedenle ticari eğilimli uygulamaların tartışılmasının gerekliliğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu durumda tarımsal kooperatiflerin daha güçlü, daha etkin ve sürdürülebilir örgütler olabilmeleri için, üye-yararlanıcı yaklaşımının yatırımcı rolüyle dengelenmesi son derece önemlidir.