

A SYSTEMATIC MAPPING STUDY ON INTERNATIONALIZATION IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR



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Abstract

This study presents a Systematic Mapping Study on the topic of internationalization, with a particular contextual focus on the agricultural sector. Internationalization in this context extends beyond sports to encompass research collaborations, strategic alliances, and the adoption of cross-border technologies. Although the agricultural sector holds a significant role in the global economy, scholarly attention to its internationalization processes remains relatively limited compared to other sectors. This mapping study identifies research trends, methodological approaches, and key thematic areas across existing literature. The findings reveal stagnation in publication activity, with notable growth only emerging in 2024. Most studies apply survey-based methods and primarily investigate the drivers of internationalization. Future research is needed to broaden geographical representation, diversify methodological perspectives, and address gaps in the current body of knowledge.

Keywords: Internationalization, Systematic Mapping Study, Agricultural Sector, International Business

INTRODUCTION

Food is a fundamental necessity that sustains life worldwide. Alongside access to clean water, food security remains a top priority for many populations as a result, the agricultural sector plays a crucial role and stands as one of the world's largest industries. Agricultural productivity contributes to a nation's trade balance and ensures food security and public health (Simpson, 2024). Unlike manufactured goods, which are often influenced by consumer preferences, the agricultural sector has distinct characteristics, including its dependence on land, specific biological conditions, and the involvement of seasonal labor, particularly in fruit and vegetable production (Charlton & Castillo, 2021; Luckstead et al., 2021; Beckman & Countryman, 2021).

A report from the FOASTAT Analytical Brief 96: Agricultural Production Statistics 2010-2023, published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), indicates that the global production of key crops increased by 28% between 2010 and 2023, reaching 9.9 billion tons in 2023. These crops are primarily used as food, livestock feed, or raw materials for various products, including biofuels and cosmetics. Cereals remain the dominant crop group with a global production volume of 3.1 billion tons in 2023, followed by sugar crops (2.3 billion tons), vegetables (1.2 billion tons), oil-producing crops (1.2 billion tons), fruits (1 billion tons), and tubers and roots (0.9 billion tons). Since 2010, the share of sugar crops and tubers has declined, while fruit and oil-producing crops have expanded. Notably, oil-producing crops recorded the highest growth rate during this period (45% increase), whereas sugar crops exhibited the slowest growth (23% increase). Various factors, including policy changes, productivity innovations, and climate variability, influence these shifts in production composition.

The evolution of the agricultural sector extends beyond production characteristics, as globalization and international market participation have increasingly shaped its development. Serrano et al. (2018) argue that the internationalization of agricultural firms is key to ensuring the sector's long-term sustainability and success. Given the significance of international trade in agriculture, agricultural enterprises face both challenges and opportunities in the global marketplace (Sisto et al., 2021).

The international expansion of agricultural firms has significant implications for economic growth and global food security. By accessing multiple markets, these firms contribute to the stability of global food supply chains and help address local food shortages (Serrano et al., 2018; Ramírez-Gómez & Turner, 2023; Reyes-Parga et al., 2025). While extensive research has been conducted on gradual internationalization strategies and export activities (e.g., Serrano et al., 2023), studies on firms that internationalize from inception or during their early development stages remain limited in the agricultural sector (Senik et al., 2016; Losilla et al., 2020; Martos-Martínez & Muñoz-Guarasa, 2023; Da Silva de Camargo Barros & de Almeida, 2024).

In an increasingly interconnected global economy, large corporations from developed countries play a major role in driving globalization through their engagement in international markets. Their participation is often driven by the need to overcome intensifying domestic competition and seize expansion opportunities abroad. Since the 1970s, firms from developing economies have also demonstrated rapid export growth, increasing their share of global trade and emerging as strong competitors to well-established multinational

corporations from developed nations (Losilla, 2017). However, the internationalization process remains challenging for many firms, particularly small enterprises. Entering foreign markets requires significant investment and the ability to navigate a more complex and dynamic business environment than domestic markets. Agricultural exporters, often small-scale businesses with limited resources and expertise, frequently encounter obstacles in achieving the profitability necessary for sustainable international operations (Serrano et al., 2015). Nevertheless, these challenges can be mitigated through collaboration and network-building with other firms. Such networks provide access to market knowledge and help businesses understand regulatory frameworks and institutional structures that facilitate internationalization and enhance competitiveness in the global market (Serrano et al., 2016).

In the context of agriculture, internationalization is not limited to trade but also encompasses various forms of global market engagement, such as strategic alliances, technology transfers, and international research collaborations. As agricultural internationalization continues to evolve, a comprehensive examination of existing research is essential to understand its development and scholarly focus. Therefore, this study aims to provide a systematic overview of existing research on agricultural internationalization using the Systematic Mapping Study (SMS) approach. Additionally, it aims to lay the groundwork for future research and offer deeper insights into internationalization within the agricultural sector.

To identify relevant studies on internationalization, this research draws upon the Scopus electronic database. The selected articles are analyzed based on the following research questions (RQs):

1. RQ1: How have the publication trends evolved across different countries over time?
2. RQ2: What research methods and paper types have been used?
3. RQ3: What is the main research focus of these studies?

This study seeks to support researchers in identifying prior studies on agricultural internationalization. Systematic mapping offers a comprehensive overview of existing literature, helping to establish a strong research foundation and guiding future studies in this field.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Internationalization

Internationalization is widely viewed as a progressive process where firms increase their knowledge of foreign markets and engage in cross-border activities based on available strategies, structure, and resources (Caputo et al., 2016; Barłożewski, 2017). The Uppsala Model (Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975) remains one of the key theoretical frameworks to explain this process, emphasizing the role of psychological and geographical distance between domestic and foreign markets. Initial international market entry is often through exporting, particularly to nearby or familiar markets, allowing firms to gain experiential knowledge while minimizing risk (Igwe et al., 2022).

Exporting is recognized as the most common entry mode due to its low resource commitment and flexibility (Gkypali et al., 2021). According to the Uppsala Model, firms typically move through four stages of internationalization: sporadic export, export via intermediaries, establishment of sales subsidiaries, and establishment of production

subsidiaries. each stage reflects increasing commitment and market familiarity. Although the model suggests a sequential path, larger firms may skip early stages and advance directly to establishing subsidiaries. In contrast, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) tend to follow the gradual approach that the model originally intended to describe (Arvidsson & Arvidsson, 2019).

Systematic Mapping Study

A systematic mapping study (SMS) is a form of secondary research designed to present a broad overview of a specific topic based on findings from primary studies. It typically aims to reveal trends in research over time, highlight existing gaps, and summarize key areas of focus within the field. The term “systematic” refers to the structured and transparent process followed by researchers, allowing the study to be replicated by others. This differs from the narrative literature reviews often found in many scientific papers, which discuss previous studies without a clearly defined or reproducible selection process (Taipalus, 2023).

SMS originated from the systematic literature review (SLR), which was first introduced in medical research by Kitchenham (2004). While SLR is designed to identify, evaluate, and interpret relevant literature related to a specific research question or area of interest, SMS is more exploratory and tends to address broader research questions (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007; Munir & Yani, 2019; Fauzi et al., 2020). In this study, SMS is utilized to map various types of research activities conducted in the field of agricultural internationalization.

RESEARCH METHOD

To ensure a comprehensive and structured investigation of the research landscape, this study employs a Systematic Mapping Study (SMS) approach. The primary goal of this study is to analyze the frequency of publications as a means to identify research trends. Specifically, this research aims to classify topics related to the internationalization of agriculture. The search process in this study is conducted with a high degree of rigor. Therefore, this section outlines the steps taken in selecting data sources, applying strategies for constructing search strings, and establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria (Munir & Yani, 2019; Waliyyan et al., 2024). This study adopts the search method developed by Petersen et al. (2008), where each step produces structured outputs, culminating in a systematic mapping of the research landscape (Munir & Yani, 2019).

The Scopus electronic database was accessed on February 4, 2025, for data collection. The search process incorporated Boolean operators to refine and specify the keyword combinations (Waliyyan et al., 2024). Initially, the keyword “internationalization” yielded 30,344 articles. Subsequently, the Boolean operator AND was applied, using the search string “internationalization” AND “agriculture”, which narrowed the results to 170 articles. Figure 1 provides a comprehensive of the SMS process implemented in this study, following guidelines proposed by Petersen et al. (2008).

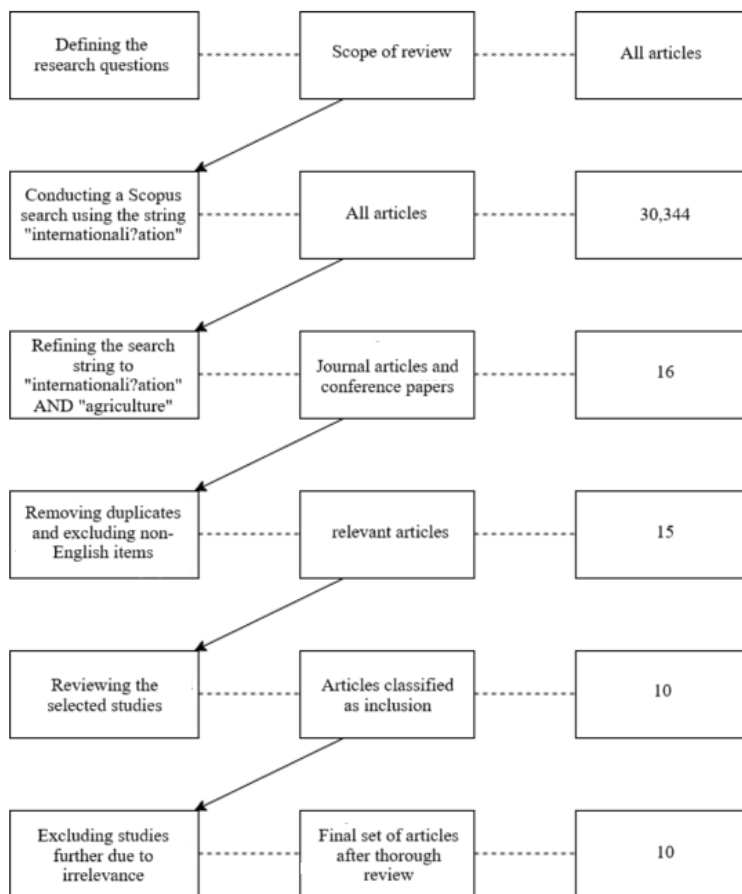


Figure 1.
Stages of Research Tracing Process
Source: Data Processed (2025)

The researchers defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to filter relevant articles. Setting these criteria in a systematic mapping study helps eliminate irrelevant articles, ensuring that only those aligned with the research topic are analyzed. the criteria are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1.
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

No.	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1.	Studies focusing on internationalization	Articles unrelated to internationalization
2.	Articles written in English	Articles written in languages other than English
3.	Articles from scientific journals or conference proceedings	Articles from books, book chapters, or review papers

4.	Articles examining internationalization in the agricultural sector	Articles discussing internationalization in other industries
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Source: Data processed (2025)

A classification framework adapted from Jørgensen & Shepperd (2007) was employed to systematically analyze and categorize the selected articles. The articles were classified into three main categories. The first classification was based on the research methodology utilized in each study. The primary research focus determined the second category, identified through a structured keyword analysis. A more detailed overview of the classification process is presented in Figure 2.

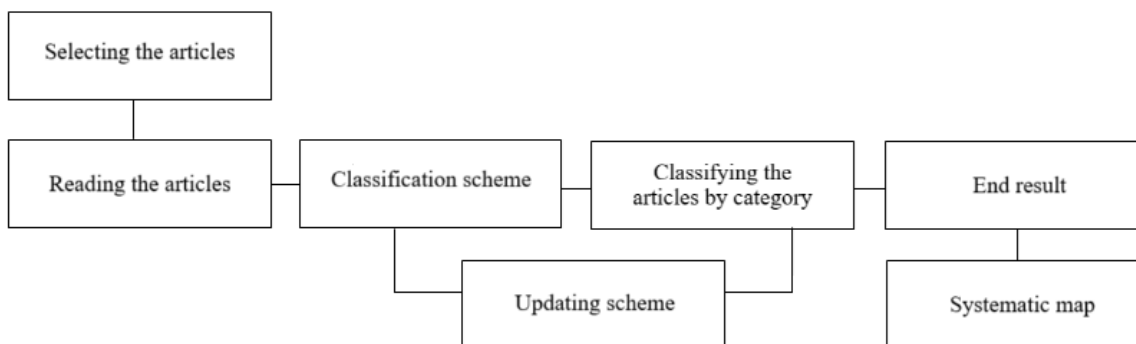


Figure 2.
Classification Process
 Source: Munir & Yani (2019)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the established criteria, a total of 10 articles on agricultural internationalization were identified. These articles were categorized using Microsoft Excel according to publication year, research focus, locus, country, research method, and article type, as presented in Table 2 below. The analysis indicates that all 10 articles were published in reputable international journals indexed in Scopus.

Table 2.
Results of Systematic Mapping of Internationalization of Agriculture

Category	Sub Category	Number	Percentage
Year	1994	1	10%
	2015	1	10%
	2016	1	10%
	2017	1	10%
	2019	1	10%
	2021	1	10%
	2023	1	10%
	2024	3	30%
Country	Croatia	1	10%
	India	1	10%
	Romania	1	10%
	Switzerland	1	10%

	Ukraine	1	10%
	United Kingdom	2	20%
	United States	3	30%
Focus	Barriers to internationalization	1	10%
	Impact of internationalization	2	20%
	Internationalization strategies	3	30%
	Drivers of internationalization	4	40%
Locus	Exporter	1	10%
	MNC	1	10%
	Organization/Institution	2	20%
	Agroindustry	2	20%
	SMEs	4	40%
Article Type	Evaluation research	6	60%
	Solution proposal	4	40%
Approach	Quantitative	6	60%
	Qualitative	4	40%
Methods	Case study	5	50%
	Survey	5	50%

Source: Data processed (2025)

The systematic mapping results reveal that among the 10 analyzed articles, research on agricultural internationalization first emerged in 1994. However, studies on this topic remain limited, with no publications recorded between 1994 and 2015, and only one article published in 2015. In the subsequent years, research output remained limited, with only one article published annually. The highest extent of publication activity was recorded in 2024, with three articles comprising 30% of the total scholarly output on agricultural internationalization, as illustrated in Figure 3.

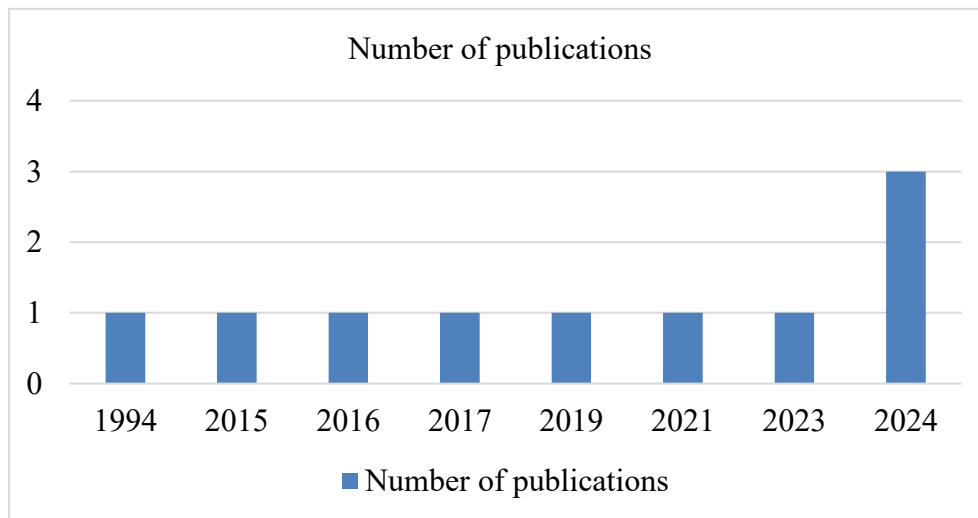


Figure 3.

Research trend mapping in the internationalization of agriculture

Source: Data processed (2025)

As illustrated in Figure 4, Europe emerged as the leading contributor, representing 60% of the publications, with the United Kingdom contributing 20%. North America

followed with 30% of the publications, predominantly driven by the United States, which had the highest number of studies on agricultural internationalization.

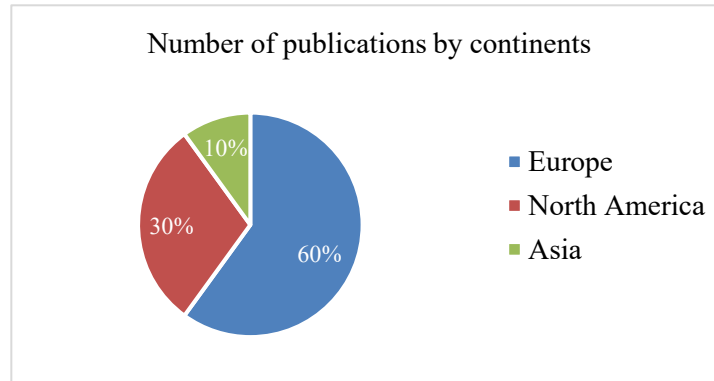


Figure 4.
Number of Publications by Continents

Source: Data processed (2025)

The following figure, as presented in Figure 5, maps the geographical distribution of scholarly publications on agricultural internationalization. Most studies in this field originate from European countries, including the United Kingdom, Croatia, Romania, Switzerland, and Ukraine. The United Kingdom has the highest number of publications, contributing two articles. The United States also plays a notable role, with three published articles on this subject. Despite these contributions, research on agricultural internationalization remains relatively scarce. India is the only Asian country represented in the dataset, with just one published article. Moreover, no publications were identified from Africa, South America, or Australia, indicating a significant research gap. The lack of studies from these regions highlights the need for further investigation to gain a more comprehensive understanding of agricultural internationalization in different geographical contexts.

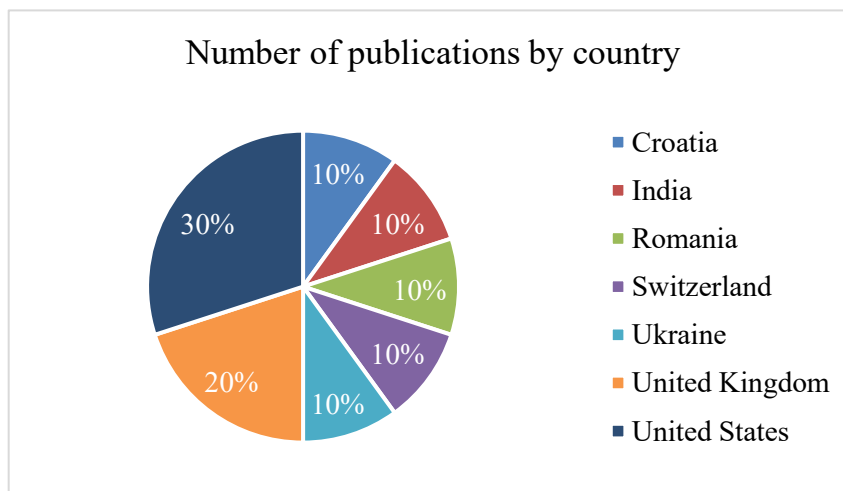


Figure 5.
Number of Publications by Country

Source: Data processed (2025)

The classification of research article types on agricultural internationalization, as shown in Figure 6, indicates that evaluation research is the most prevalent. These studies primarily assess the implementation of existing frameworks and their outcomes. Additionally, solution-oriented research, which proposes strategies or interventions to support the internationalization process, is also relatively common. In contrast, other article types, including validation research, philosophical papers, and experience papers, remain limited in this field.

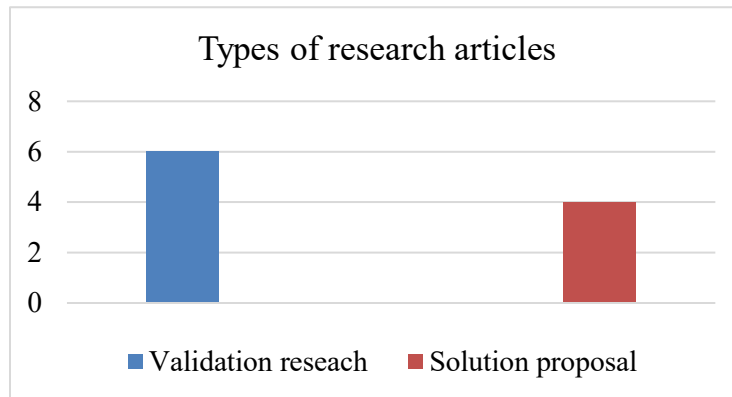


Figure 6.

Types of Research Articles

Source: Data processed (2025)

Figure 7 presents the classification of agricultural internationalization research based on the methodological approaches employed. The findings indicate a predominant use of quantitative approaches, as most studies focus on examining the relationship between internationalization and other variables. In contrast, qualitative approaches are less frequently adopted, representing 40% of the total publications. These studies aim to provide an in-depth exploration of existing phenomena and perspectives on agricultural internationalization. Meanwhile, research employing mixed-method approaches remains limited in this field.

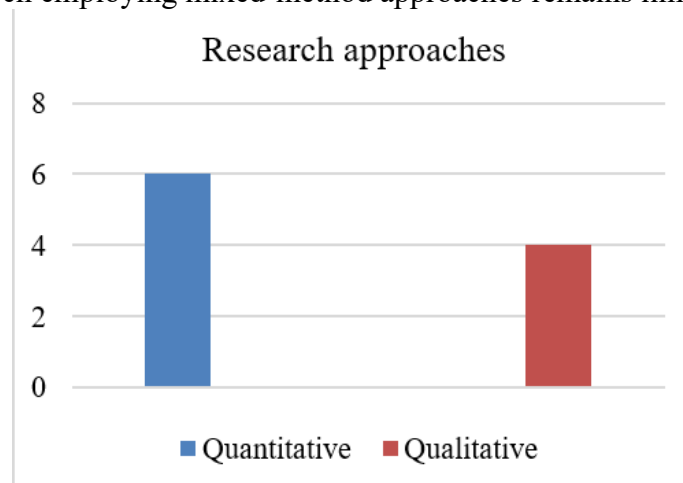


Figure 7.

Research Approaches

Source: Data processed (2025)

This study also presents an overview of the research methods employed, as shown in Figure 8. The analysis indicates that surveys and case studies are the most frequently utilized methods, each appearing in five articles. In contrast, other methods, such as literature reviews, are less commonly applied. Surveys are widely used in agricultural internationalization research due to their ability to systematically collect data from many respondents, providing a broader perspective on the phenomenon under investigation. Meanwhile, case study is frequently adopted as they allow for an in-depth exploration of specific contexts or entities, offering detailed insights into the dynamics of agricultural internationalization.

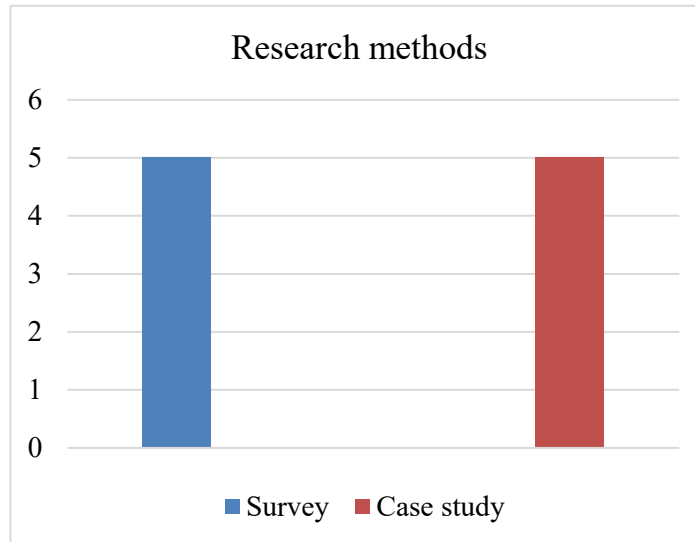


Figure 8.
Research Methods

Source: Data processed (2025)

The research focus on agricultural internationalization has been systematically analyzed, as illustrated in Figure 9. Existing studies in this field have primarily concentrated on the drivers of internationalization, encompassing the internal and external factors. These include government support, industry competitiveness, and technological innovation, all of which play a critical role in enhancing the global positioning of the agricultural sector. Additionally, several studies have examined internationalization strategies implemented within the industry, highlighting exports as the predominant market entry mechanism, the role of research and development (R&D) in strengthening competitiveness, and the influence of organizational factors and commercial attributes on the effectiveness of international expansion. Moreover, the impact of internationalization on firms and national economies has also been a significant research focus. Studies have examined aspects such as privatization, structural transformation, and the globalization of food markets, all of which contribute to shaping the overall dynamics of the agricultural sector. Despite these efforts, research on the challenges and barriers to agricultural internationalization remains relatively scarce. A comprehensive understanding of constraints, including regulatory complexities, market access limitations, and firms' internal preparedness, is essential for facilitating a more sustainable internationalization process in the agricultural sector.

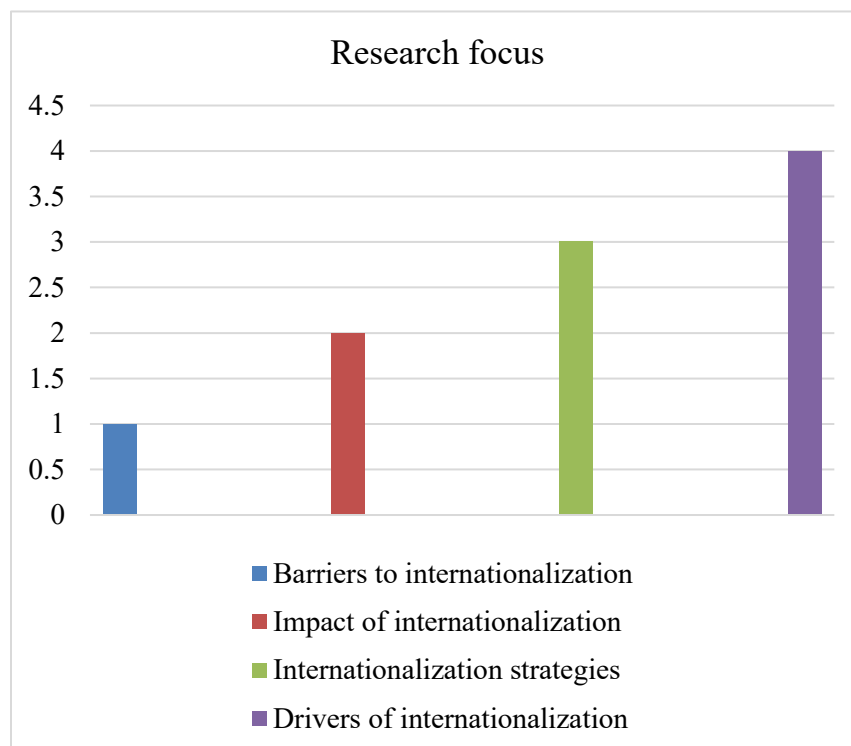


Figure 9.
Research Focus

Source: Data processed (2025)

The distribution of research on agricultural internationalization based on its locus of study is presented in Figure 10. Most studies in this field focus on small and medium enterprises (SMEs), highlighting their crucial role in the agricultural sector's development and their potential to expand market access through internationalization. Additionally, research has explored the agro-industry, which includes enterprises involved in agricultural processing and contributes significantly to global trade. Institutions and organizations have also been analyzed, as well as regulatory frameworks that facilitate internationalization. However, compared to these areas, scholarly attention to multinational corporations (MNCs) and agricultural exporters remains relatively limited.

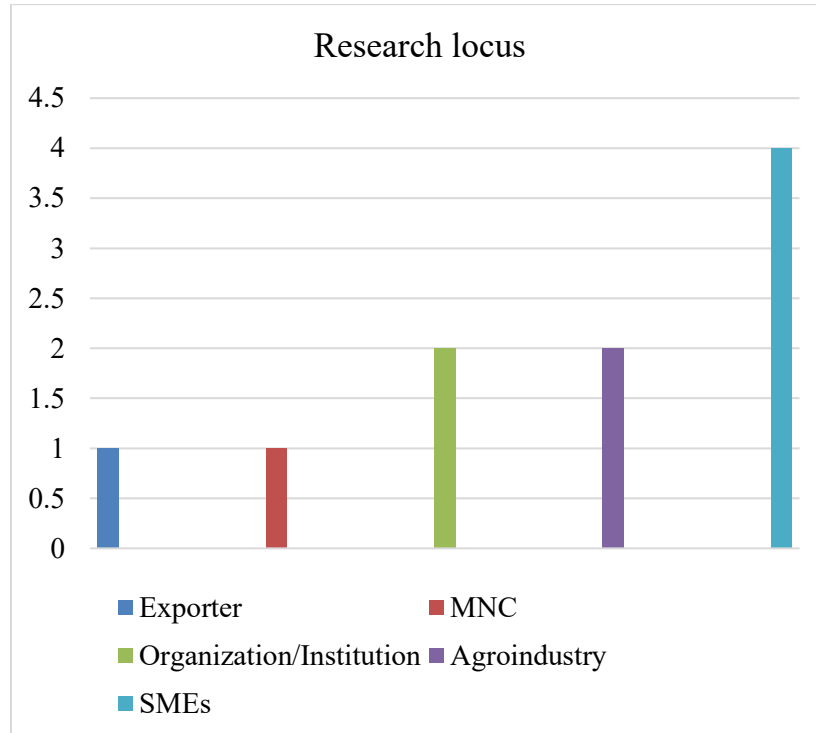


Figure 10.
Research Locus

Source: Data processed (2025)

The systematic mapping presented in this study offers a comprehensive understanding of agricultural internationalization, serving as a foundational reference for both scholars and practitioners aiming to further explore this field. An initial identification of 16 articles from the Scopus database was conducted, and after applying predefined criteria, 10 articles were deemed relevant for analysis. These articles were categorized based on research type, methodology, and primary research focus.

The findings reveal that research on agricultural internationalization remains limited. A preliminary research of the Scopus database on February 4, 2025, initially identified 30,344 articles related to internationalization, however, only a small subset specifically addressed the agricultural sector. Following the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, along with further analysis, only 10 articles were deemed suitable for an in-depth review. This scarcity of relevant studies underscores the limited attention given to agricultural internationalization. Notably, the earliest publication in this field dates back to 1994, marking the inception of a research trajectory that has since exhibited minimal expansion. The temporal analysis of publications reveals an inconsistent research trajectory, with no relevant studies identified between 1994 and 2015. Research activity resumed between 2015 and 2017, with one article published in each of these years, followed by additional studies in 2019, 2021, and 2023. A notable increase occurred in 2024, with three articles published. In terms of geographic distribution, the majority of research on agricultural internationalization has been conducted in Europe, followed by the United States. In contrast, Asia contributed only one article, and no relevant studies were identified from Africa, Australia, or South America.

From a methodological perspective, quantitative approaches are the most frequently employed in research on agricultural internationalization, primarily focusing on examining the relationship between internationalization and various influencing factors. These studies often utilize statistical analyses to assess the impact of different variables on firms' internationalization decisions. Meanwhile, qualitative approaches, though less common, are used to provide in-depth insights through narrative analysis and case-based exploration. The analysis also highlights that surveys and case studies are the most frequently employed research methods in this field. Surveys are commonly utilized to collect data from industry stakeholders, enabling the identification of key factors influencing internationalization in the agricultural sector. Meanwhile, case studies provide in-depth insights into the internationalization processes undertaken by specific firms or organizations.

Most studies on agricultural internationalization fall within the category of validation research, where existing theories are utilized to assess the internationalization process. These studies primarily aim to confirm or expand the understanding of the factors that influence internationalization in this sector.

The research locus has predominantly centered on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the context of agricultural internationalization. This focus highlights the significant role of SMEs in expanding the sector's global market reach while also navigating various challenges and opportunities in the internationalization process. Additionally, studies in this field have primarily examined the drivers of internationalization, emphasizing the key factors that encourage firms to participate in global trade.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that research on internationalization in the agricultural sector remains limited. A total of 10 relevant articles were systematically mapped in this study. Research on agricultural internationalization began in 1994 with only one published article and has not shown significant growth over the years. There was a publication gap between 1994 and 2015, with a noticeable increase in 2024, when three articles were published. The majority of studies on agricultural internationalization have been conducted in European countries, followed by the United States, whereas research in Asia remains limited. No studies were identified from Africa, Australia, or South America. Beyond the limited number of studies, research on agricultural internationalization is predominantly based on survey and case study methods, with quantitative approaches being the most common. The primary focus of these studies is on the driving factors of internationalization, which encompass both internal and external motives. The studies primarily focus on small and medium enterprises (SMEs), highlighting their essential role in expanding agricultural markets globally and their strategies for navigating the challenges and opportunities of internationalization.

These findings suggest that research on agricultural internationalization still requires further development. There is a noticeable lack of studies offering solutions or strategic recommendations. Given the crucial role of internationalization in promoting agricultural sector growth and enhancing global competitiveness, research in this field is expected to expand in the future. This study presents certain limitations that should be considered. A primary limitation is the reliance on the Scopus database for article selection, which excludes publications from other electronic databases. Furthermore, the analysis is limited to English-

language journal and conference articles. To enhance the comprehensiveness and representativeness of agricultural internationalization research, future studies should incorporate a broader range of electronic databases to provide a more holistic understanding of the topic.

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