Dear Reviewer,

Thank you very much for your generous and insightful review of our manuscript. Your feedback was truly encouraging, and we are grateful for the time and care you devoted to evaluating our work. We especially appreciate your recognition of the novelty of applying the ADKAR framework to agricultural sustainability, as well as your comments on the structure and clarity of the Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion sections. Your observations helped us refine the manuscript and ensure that it communicates its contributions as clearly and rigorously as possible.

In response to your recommendation regarding citations in the introduction, we added the necessary references to support the factual statements and claims made in lines 62, 63, 65, and 89–90. These additions strengthen the evidentiary foundation of the introductory section and ensure that all key figures are properly grounded in the literature.

Your suggestion to clarify the meaning of vertical integration in the Romanian swine sector was also extremely helpful. To address this, we added a short explanatory paragraph at the beginning of Section 3.3 (rows 586–592). This addition clarifies that vertical integration typically refers to corporate or investor-owned production systems coordinating multiple stages of the supply chain. Making this distinction explicit helps readers better understand the structural differences between integrated and independent farms and provides important context for interpreting ownership-related results.

We also revised Figure 2 based on your feedback. As you noted, the original red and green indicators were too similar and could be difficult to distinguish for some audiences. We have now updated both the color scheme and the marker shapes to ensure clear visual contrast and improve accessibility.

In the discussion section, you correctly observed that subsections 4.2 and 4.3 previously shared the same heading. This was an oversight, and we have corrected it by restoring the correct title, “The ADKAR role in facilitating ESG implementation”.

Your comment regarding potential unintended consequences of policy recommendations was particularly valuable. Based on your suggestion, we added a cautionary paragraph to the policy implications section (rows 957–972). This new text clarifies that, while larger integrated farms in our sample display higher Knowledge

and Ability scores, this does not imply that vertical integration is the preferred or only pathway to sustainability. We now emphasize the importance of balanced policies that support all farm types, including small independent producers, and highlight the risks of overconcentration within vertically integrated systems. This addition substantially strengthens the nuance and balance of the manuscript's policy recommendations.

Finally, we truly appreciated your observation regarding the "chicken and egg" issue in interpreting the ADKAR-S Index. Your point was well taken, and we have now clarified the conceptual nature of the index in Section 2.2 (rows 320–328). The revised text explicitly states that the ADKAR-S Index measures organizational readiness and capacity for sustainability-oriented change, rather than current sustainable performance. While the index correlates with existing practices, its primary purpose is to capture potential and preparedness rather than outcomes. This clarification helps prevent misinterpretation and makes the methodological design more transparent.

We want to thank you again for your thoughtful review, which has greatly improved the manuscript. Your comments helped us refine key sections, strengthen the conceptual framing, and enhance both clarity and coherence throughout the paper. We are sincerely grateful for your constructive guidance.

Kind regards,
Corresponding author, on behalf of all co-authors

**All updates are highlighted in yellow in the revised file for easier tracking*