The role of women in Hungarian Agriculture

(Eva Laczka)

Thanks to the geographical features, farming has played an important role in the Hungarian economy in the past and the same can be said even today. Due to the traditions, the specific structure of Hungarian economy, agriculture, the specific characteristics of the Hungarian society, the women's role has developed in a special way. The many small farms (most of which cannot even be considered farms in the economic sense) were in most cases managed by women, at the same time, their production contributed significantly to the output of the Hungarian Agriculture. The economic crisis, marked changes in the environment and society caused significant changes in almost all countries. The purpose of the paper is to show what changes have occurred over the past few decades (including period of EU accession too), how this has affected women's roles and the Hungarian Statistics. How statistics (the methodology of statistics) could follow the changes, how a Hungarian statistician in Statistics see the processes.

Key words: agriculture, statistics, women's role, methodology

Main characteristics of Agriculture in Hungary

Agriculture has played a significant role in the Hungarian economy in the past and even today. The size of productive land area is about 70 percent of the total area of Hungary, the share of Agriculture in the GDP used to move about 3-5 percent and that of the food industry is about 6 percent.

In the past a relatively small number of large farms (state farms, co-operatives) and food-industrial holdings were operating. At the end of the twentieth century fundamental changes have taken place as regards the ownership and the structure of Agriculture in Hungary. After the privatisation of the land area of state farms, co-operatives a large number of small and medium size private farms were established.

System of Agricultural Statistics in Hungary

System of Agricultural Statistics dates back in Hungary almost 2 hundred years. The first Agricultural Census (AC) was implemented in 1895. Since the foundation of the independent Hungarian Statistical Service in 1871 agricultural surveys have been carried our yearly. The methodology of the second Agricultural Census (1935) was in line with the recommendation of the International Institute of Agriculture (IAA) in Rome, the predecessor of the FAO.
Since 1972 Agricultural Censuses have been carrying out every 10 years, according to the FAO recommendations. Agricultural Census implemented in 2000 – over the FAO recommendations – met the EU regulations too.

- In line with the EU regulations – over the Agricultural Censuses – so called Farm Structure Surveys (FSS) have been implemented every 2nd, 3rd year following the Agricultural Censuses. Between 2000 and 2010, three FSSs were implemented, and since 2010 every year ending in 3 and 6 FSSs are conducted. Over the censuses - in the past decades - the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) conducted 20-23

data collection with different frequences (monthly, quarterly, yearly) on Agriculture each year.

The general feature of Agricultural Surveys was that all legal units engaged in agricultural activities were obliged to report their data, while the private holdings (private farms) were surveyed by a representative sample. The farm concept (definition) was defined on the basis of the AC. Whereby all legal units involved in agricultural activity were qualified as farms irrespective of size. Households engaged in agricultural activities were qualified as farms in the size of their activity *(household has at least 1500 m^2 agricultural area, 500 m^2 vineyard or orchard area, at least 1 cattle, 1 pig, 1 sheep, 50 poultry, 25 rabbit or 5 family of bees).* The above mentioned "first farm definition" was defined in 1972 (based on the AC 1972 data).

In 2020, the Hungarian Statistical Office changed the threshold defined in 1972. Legal units engaged in agricultural activities continued to be classified as farms, but the threshold for households has changed. Since that time, only those households are qualified as private farms that have *at least 1 ha productive agricultural areas, 0,25 of ha potato, or 0,25 ha vegetable, or 0,25 ha orchard area, or 0,1 ha vineyard area, or 0,01 ha greenhouse, or at least 30 piglets of a live weight of below 20 kg, or 2 pigs of a liveweight of 20 kg or above, or 1 cattle, or 10 sheep, or 10 goat, or 50 poultry, or 30 turkeys, or 100 duck, or 50 goose, or 3 ostriches, or 50 rabbit).*
In some respects, the raising of farm threshold is understandable. The reason is that the censuses and surveys put a smaller burden on the statistical services and reduce the census and survey costs.

The Hungarian agricultural literature has been dealing with it since the turn of the new millennium, has been dealing with the structure of Hungarian Agricultural, namely which units can be considered a "farm in the economic sense", and which should be surveyed – just as statistical units. Several publications have been published about this, by the way, this was also the topic of my PhD dissertation too.

The reason is that - like in many Mediterranean countries - Hungary has had a large number of small households producing for their own consumption for decades. According to some estimates, there were years when the output of households producing for their own consumption was close to ten percent of the total agricultural production. Traditions, the economic and social situation of the countryside stood behind the situation.

EU accession (2004) brought marked changes, in the economic, social and cultural sense as well. The decrease in the number of farms has accelerated in recent years, mainly farms using smaller agricultural land and keeping a few farm animals have abandoned farming. In addition to the aging of the farming community, there was no significant change in the size and structure of the agricultural area.

Today, uncertainty continues to characterize the world economy, serious political risks threaten the growth of economies. Currently there are only three countries in the EU – unfortunately among them Hungary - where the economy is in a technical recession. The question is how the people living in the poorest (rural) regions of the country react to the economic processes. All this might have a sensitive effect on the households who live there; does the increase in food prices and inflation bring production for own consumption to life again?

While monitoring the output of farms in an economic sense is extremely important, we must not forget the agricultural activities of "small producers", households striving for self-sufficiency.

It is indisputable that - from a statistical point of view – the surveying of large farms results in substantial savings, the "other side" should not be forgotten either. The luck in the misfortune is that the abundance of data/information in the digital world gives many new opportunities. New data sources and new opportunities are created every day, which reduce the costs of surveys. Just think of the work of the Hungarian statisticians, who develop the so-called "experimental statistics" with this very goal in mind. These tools should be used as soon as possible, since the cultivation of small farms is basically the work of women.

Gender related analyses

Gender sensitive data have been surveyed in the framework of Censuses (Agricultural Censuses, Population and housing Censuses) as well as regular surveys. Despite the surveyed rich gender-related data sources no gender-disaggregated analyses were done for decades. Thanks to the international forums, the EU accession (2004), the EU policies gave an impulse to grow user demand. More and more questions appeared in the questionnaires of agricultural censuses, surveys and censuses.

In Hungary – first – gender related re-tabulation of Agricultural Census data was initiated and supported by the FAO Gender and Population Division. Between 2003 and 2005 the Hungarian Central Statistical Office carried out the tabulation of Agricultural Census 2000. The analysis of the tables, as well as creation of new tables was an important step.

The gender-related re-tabulation of the Agricultural Census 2000 yielded a series of tables of 369 pages. The database provided new information for decision makers, researchers, professional institutes, analysts even for the farmers. The results led to another Hungarian (national) initiative too. The Hungarian statisticians created, compiled an integrated database (data of the 2000 Agricultural- and the 2001 Population and housing Census - at household level). Based on the integrated database, seven analytical volumes were compiled - per region. In the following years, following the Farm Structure Surveys gender sensitive analyses have become a practice. As an example, see some results from the FSS 2003 data.

According to the FSS 2003, 7 800 agricultural enterprises (legal entities) and 766 thousand private holdings (households) were engaged in agricultural activity in Hungary. In 2003 the objective of production of private holdings were also surveyed. That time **60 percent of the private holdings (households) produced exclusively for own consumption**, while the share of private holdings producing for market was only 8 percent. 32 percent of private holdings produced for selling the surplus. Production exclusively for own consumption was mainly typical for private holdings engaged in livestock farming (83 percent), whereas the share of production for market was the highest in case of crop farming (19 percent).

In year 2003 105 thousand full-time and 19 thousand part-time employees were involved in agricultural activity at the agricultural enterprises.

The average family labour of private holdings (households) was 1,8 heads, while the average number of days worked per main holders was 82. In average male main holders worked 23 percent more (86 days) than, their female colleagues.

89 percent of the management staff of agricultural enterprises and 74 percent of staff involved in agricultural activity was male. In case of private holdings (households) only **24 percent of the holdings were managed by female main holders.**

The share of main holders involved full-time in the agricultural activity of private holdings was 62 percent, but the share of female workers employed full-time (75 percent) significantly exceeded that of the male workers (58 percent).

In 2003 – in case of private holdings - only 2 percent of main holders had college or university level qualification, and 6 percent had medium level agricultural qualification. Most of the main holders may only rely on many years of working experience. The agricultural qualification of male main holders significantly exceeds that of the female main holders.

Table 1

Main characteristics of the Hungarian private holdings, main holders 2003

Denomination	Main holders, Men	Main holders, Women	Main holders, Total
Agricultural qualification, %			
Medium level	6,7	**1,9**	**5,5**
High level	2,6	**0,7**	**2,1**
Economic activity, %			
Unemployed	3,3	**2,3**	**3,0**
Retired	42,5	**61,7**	**47,1**
Some other characteristics			
Share of main holders having no gainful activity other than farming, %	57,7	**75,0**	**61,9**
Average days worked per years, day	86	**70**	**82**
Average age of main holders, year	54	**59**	**56**

Sources: Central Statistical Office (2003)

The share of female holders is not even one third of the total number of holders, their share is higher in the younger and in the elder age groups. The reason of the elder female holders is that the share of the widow, producing for own consumption, living alone is almost 20 per cent of the total holders. The younger female holders are from unqualified population who are not employed in any other branches.

After the turn of the millennium, the economic and political changes and the accession to the European Union caused fundamental changes. But how did all this affect the Hungarian agriculture specially the life of households living in agricultural areas?

In the case of the data for 2020 and 2023, it should be taken into account that the farm threshold has changed from 2020. Therefore, the data is back-calculated to the new threshold for the period before 2020, that is, the data are comparable.
Over the decades, the concentration of agricultural production continued.

The number of farms decreased over twenty years, while the proportion of crop products increased from a quarter to a half of the farms, the proportion of specialized crop farms increased in a similar way. Livestock farming have also become more concentrated. The labour input continued to decrease, including the number and share of the family workforce.

Hungarian agriculture is still characterized by an aging farming community.
We do not see any fundamental changes; the women engaged in farming are still older than the men. The situation is very similar to the data of previous decades.

There is some improvement in the case of agricultural skills (qualification), namely the proportion of women with medium level qualification has increased a little bit. While there is no significant change in the number of days worked per year, nor even in the number of days by gender.

Table 2

Main characteristics of the Hungarian private holdings, main holders (2020-2023)

2020			2023		
Man	**Women**	**Total**	**Man**	**Women**	**Total**
Average age of main holders, year					
57,3	**59,7**	**58,0**	57,5	**59,9**	**58,2**
No Agricultural Qualification, %					
55,9	**74,4**	**61,2**	49,1	**69,9**	**55,1**
Medium level Agricultural Qualification, %					
33,6	**19,7**	**29,6**	38,7	**22,8**	**34,1**
University, College level Agricultural Qualification, %					
10,4	**5,9**	**9,1**	12,2	**7,3**	**10,8**
Share of main holders having no gainful activity other than farming, %					
97,0	**97,3**	**97,1**	97, 9	**97,9**	**97,9**

Average days worked per years, day					
98,6	**69,1**	**88,6**	92,1	**61,8**	**82,9**

Sources: Central Statistical Office (2020, 2023)

About a third of farmers' income comes from agricultural activity performed within the own farm. In this regard, there is no big difference between genders. Within their own farm (neither the women nor the men) they hardly carry out meaningful non-agricultural activities. At the same time, the income of a third of the farmers comes from non-agricultural activities outside the farm. The ratio of income from pensions and other social benefits is also telling; that the rate of income coming from pensions and other social benefits is 10 percent higher in the case of women (main holder) than for men holders.

Table 3

The main source of the farmer's income (2023)

Denomination	Men	Women	Total
	percent		
Agricultural activity on the farm	31,0	**26,6**	**29,7**
Non-agricultural activity on the farm	1,5	**1,5**	**1,5**
Agricultural activity outside the farm	5,5	**1,4**	**4,3**
Non-agricultural activity outside the farm	37,7	**33,8**	**36,5**
Other activity (pension, other social benefits)	24,3	**36,6**	**28,0**

Sources: Central Statistical Office (2023)

The data confirm that the pandemic, economic crises and - in our case high inflation - did not change the functioning of our society, especially the functioning of our agrarian society too much.

The question arises as to how women reacted to the crises of recent years. Women who - for decades - produced agricultural products in small "not-farms in economic terms" to supplement their income. Due to the fact that the census, survey threshold is higher, the focus has shifted to the large farms (farms in economic terms). Today, we know less about the activities of women (older women) producing for their own consumption in rural areas. The situation may raise many social problems and questions. In addition to the rational decision in several respects, the tools of statistics have - fortunately - expanded. The digital world also enriches statistics with new data sources every day. I am convinced that we will find suitable data sources for the output, characteristics of "small production, production for family consumption" carried out by women in rural areas. The experimental statistics developed by Central Statistical Office are very good examples of this.

Conclusion

Thanks to Hungary's geographical features, agriculture has always played an important role over the centuries. In addition to geographical features, specific economic and social events also contributed to the development of the structure and characteristics of agricultural production. In a certain sense, an agrarian structure and an agrarian society similar to the Mediterranean countries emerged. Throughout the centuries, Hungarian statistics have always strived to present the most important economic and social characteristics of agriculture, and it still does today. Methodological changes and changes in focus can be mention here. They include the gender-sensitive re-tabulation supported and initiated by FAO Gender and Development Service was needed after the agricultural census of 2000. It was already a Hungarian initiative that statisticians compiled a joint population and agricultural census database, publications after the 2000 - 2001 censuses. Challenges and tasks never end. In the digital world it is necessary to look for new (digital) sources that provide answers to economic and social questions such as women's agricultural activity, production in households.

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