EVERYTHING AND NOTHING CHANGED
Gender relations in Hungarian agriculture
during the transition

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PREFACE

This exploratory study on changing gender relations in Hungarian agriculture is part of a project of the Department of Gender Studies in Agriculture of Wageningen Agricultural University, the Netherlands. The research was conducted in cooperation with the Department of Rural Sociology of the Agricultural University of Gödöllö, Gödöllö, Hungary.

The project was the first step in an attempt to gather knowledge and gain a better understanding of the very interesting but complex processes of agricultural restructuring in Eastern Europe, and the role of gender in these processes. Until now, very little has been known about how rural and farm women have been affected in many aspects of their lives due to the economic, political and social transformation of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In addition to this empirical study, a bibliography was published as part this project. It provides an interesting overview of the existing literature on gender, family farming and agrarian change in Central and Eastern Europe.

The activities of the Department of Gender Studies in Agriculture centre on the analysis of the interaction of changing gender relations and rural transformation in various contexts. Gender is approached as an organizing principle of society (such as race and class), which invokes specific social relations. Gender relations are the result of a historical process and are continuously produced and reproduced in human interactions and form an intrinsic part of social transformations. They vary according to place, time and social context. Gender relations change as a consequence of, and have their consequences for, agrarian change and rural transformation. This means on the one hand that developments (e.g. those resulting from changing agricultural policies) have different consequences for men and women. On the other hand, processes of agrarian and rural change can be influenced by existing gender relations. Men and women are both active participants in rural transformation. However, they are situated differently in these processes, often have different interests and develop different strategies. The interest of the Department for Eastern Europe stems from the comparative approach it advocates in its research and teaching. Hitherto, the main focus was on rural women in Western Europe and Asia, Africa and Latin America. Knowledge from Eastern Europe and improving our understanding of the
complicated changes in this region can shed light on and provide new approaches to the study of gender dynamics in agriculture and rural areas in other parts of the world, and vice versa.

The results of this research show the importance of women’s labour and activities for Hungarian agriculture and rural development. The case of Hungary can fill some of the existing knowledge gaps concerning the situation of women in rural areas in Eastern Europe and will hopefully contribute to the recognition of the involvement of women in sustainable rural development.

Ir. Marina Endeveld (project coordinator)  
Department of Gender Studies in Agriculture
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In January 1994, I saw a documentary about an old widow at the Rotterdam film festival. She lived in a Hungarian village and was a retired member of a collective farm. The film, made in the early seventies, recorded the daily life of this wonderful, authentic woman. It showed how she got permission, with help of the president of the collective, to visit her only son in London. It was touching to see how she, despite the difficulties this caused, carried a big self-baked bread with her into the airplane and gave it to her son as a present. Seeing this film gave me the extra inspiration to continue the efforts for setting up the research project about gender relations in Hungarian agriculture. The next winter, instead of watching films, I was visiting Hungarian farms.

For this, I am very grateful to Marina Endeveld. Without her support and advice this project would not have been realised. Also, I would like to thank the Department of Gender Studies in Agriculture for giving me the opportunity to work out this research project and Prof. Dr. Els Postel for her constructive remarks.

The enjoyable cooperation with the Department of Rural Sociology at the Agricultural University of Gödöllő was an essential part of this study. Their sincere interest and involvement was very encouraging. Special thanks to Dr Kulcsár László for the many-sided support: arranging housing, informing me about the road conditions, introducing me to key informants and sharing his knowledge of rural Hungary. I would also like to express my appreciation to Pénzes István and Monica for arranging visits to the farms. And of course my thanks to all the women and men on the farms who gave up many hours for the interviews during which they patiently explained their situation and impressed me with their hospitality.

During this project, I became seriously ill. It is thanks to my family, dear friends and Natasja, who during these months were, and still are, an enormous help and motivation for me, that I was able to finish the project.

Ir. Mary van der Graaf
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1. THE STARTING POINT

1.1 Introduction

In Hungary, as in all Central and Eastern European countries, the fall of the Berlin wall marked a period of radical political, economic and social change. The process of democratization and the shift from a centrally planned to a free market economy caused a state of confusion in society. A transition period began with its new challenges and perspectives, but with great uncertainties as well.

The restructuring of Hungarian agriculture plays a vital role in the transition process as a whole. Agriculture is a key sector for the Hungarian economy and represents a main source of employment in rural areas. Vast regions are mainly agricultural in character; activities other than agriculture are rare. The fate of agriculture is decisive for the development of rural areas. Stable food production is of major importance for Hungarian society. A successful agricultural transformation is thus essential for the stability of the newly formed democratic system (Répássy, 1993).

The discussions about the prospective integration of Hungary into the European Union have also put an accent on the significance of this sector. Agriculture has been pointed out as a bottleneck in many of the ongoing negotiations. The development of agriculture and the forthcoming integration process might have a great influence on each other.

The restructuring of agriculture and changes in rural decision making structures have a large impact on the lives of rural men and women. For more than 40 years the political and economic power was in the hands of the communist party. Authoritarian structures that arose from this denied the worth of the individual. The inheritance of the communist period also included a production system based on central planning, state and collective ownership of land and assets, large scale production units and monopolistic market structures. Within the new situation all these have to be altered. Although rural men and women have a lot in common, their needs and interests are not always the same. Rural society is,

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1 By transition is meant the social and economical restructuring after the collapse of the communist system in 1989.
like any part of society in general, divided according to gender. Because men and women have different tasks, responsibilities and interests, transformation processes will have different consequences for both sexes. Transformation processes are not gender neutral.

The topic of rural and agrarian women in Hungary (or other former communist countries) has so far received little or no attention. In general, there was not much interest for the position of women under the communist regime. According to communist ideology and legislation, men and women had equal rights. Thus there was no need to focus on women or their 'potential problems'. This situation hardly changed after 1989. Although some women have undertaken gender studies, independently or within the scope of university research, women's issues have not yet become very popular. This is rather ironic, since the changes seem to have been proportionally more disadvantageous for women than for men. In post-communist society women are pushed aside to the political periphery. Governmental cuts in social programmes reduce facilities like childcare and maternity leave. The position of women in the labour market has been affected and women's domestic burden increased because they have to manage with less household income (Adamik, 1993).

Neglecting women's or gender issues is not exclusive to Hungary. Dutch and other Western governments who launched support programmes for agricultural and rural development showed the same gender blindness that characterized the development policy in Third World countries. Lack of information may be one of the reasons why policy makers fail to address the involvement of women in Hungarian agriculture. The invisibility of agrarian women and their under-representation in the public world of agricultural and rural development are reasons to focus this research on gender relations in Hungarian agriculture.

The objective of the present research is to obtain better understanding of:
- the gender relations on Hungarian farms and the possible changes to these relations as a result of the ongoing transformation process.
- the constraints on and potential for agrarian women to improve their position.
This exploratory research may yield a framework for the development of further research questions.

1.2 Structure of the report

This first chapter continues with an explanation of the conceptual framework, in which I set out my departure points for analyzing gender relations. This is followed by the research questions arising from these assumptions, a description of the research method used and of the target region.

Chapter two features the historical background and the current transformation process in Hungarian agriculture. It provides an overview of the context in which agrarian women live.

The findings of the interviews on two cooperative farms are reported in chapter three. The process of internal reorganization of the cooperatives and the participation of women in this process are emphasized. Attention is also paid to the way women look at the 'new' situation in the re-established cooperatives.

Chapter four focuses on private farms. First, the common characteristics of the twenty family farms under study are described. Next, the division of labour, the participation of women in decision making about family and farm affairs and the way women perceive their own situation are considered.

Finally, the fifth chapter contains a discussion of the results obtained and recommendations for further research.

1.3 Conceptual framework

Women and agriculture

A vast amount of literature on women in agriculture has been published during the past decade. Most of this literature concerns women on family farms, since this is the dominant form of agricultural production worldwide. The present research makes use of the concepts and analytical framework proposed in this literature. This is because agricultural production in family households is also very important in Hungary, and the majority of the research population lived on family farms.
A unique feature of family farms is that they are both production and consumption units, where working and living domains are entangled. It is within the boundaries of the household that decisions are made on what will be grown and how, who will work for wages, who will go to school, and whether or not a new video recorder should be bought. Family life and the farm as an enterprise are closely intertwined. Due to this situation, the relations between men and women have a special character. Husband and wife have not only a love relationship, but a work relationship as well. They are not only spouses, but colleagues.

The first research carried out on women in farming attempted to make women more visible within the categories already established. Labour and economic activity on the farm were measured in terms of number of hours worked, tasks performed and involvement in decision making within the farm. The shortcoming of this kind of research lies in the fact that it stresses production work at the expense of domestic labour and the contribution to the continuation of the farm (e.g. reproduction of the labour force) (Whatmore, 1994).

Later on, the differences between men and women and the specific effects of agricultural restructuring on the role of women were put forward. The concept of the farm household as an organic or unitary unit with common goals was also criticized. The gender differentiation and inequalities within farm households, the separate activities, rights and responsibilities of women and men, and the existence of competing and conflicting interests were emphasized (Smetsers, 1995).

It became clear that there is a gender division of labour on family farms in which women are responsible for the domestic tasks and child care. Furthermore, there are differences in skills, income, social networks and organizations as well as in identities. The expectations of women and men (or farm women and farm men), what they should or should not do, their ideas and ambitions, are not the same. What is self-evident for women or not and the values to which they have to comply, are factors which shape their daily lives. However, focusing on the gender difference alone did not provide insight into the key question of why women do certain tasks while men do others.
The differences between men and women on the farm have been emphasized, but a total separation of interests between both groups is not a correct representation of reality. On family farms, respect, friendship, intimacy and cooperation between husband and wife are also present. Men and women also have common interests. They can, for instance, share the same concern for the proper functioning of the enterprise. Interactions and negotiations play an important role on the farm. The forms taken by these interactions and the ways in which they change are also determined by gender relations (Endeveld, 1994).

**Gender**

This study explores the situation of women under changing social and economic conditions. When addressing the different aspects of the daily life of women, it is important to consider the relations between women and men. Women are not a separate or isolated category. Therefore gender is a central concept in this study. Focusing on the larger subject of gender instead of specifically on women is a consequence of the notion that the problems women face are not so much related to biological differences as to the social-cultural differences between men and women. This does not mean that the biological differences between males and females would be irrelevant. But sexual differences alone cannot explain the totality of social relations between men and women. It is rather the social usage and social meaning which are attributed to these biological differences which are more important (Whatmore, 1991). In other words, biological differences have meaning only within a social context.

Gender relations allude to the socially and culturally constructed relations between women and men. When analyzing gender relations, it is important to be aware that the explanation for the existence and continuation of sexual inequality is based on a combination of material and ideological factors. Material factors comprise aspects related to production and division of labour, while ideological factors refer to the culturally determined view on masculinity and femininity. What is regarded as typically feminine work in one culture can be work for men in another. Gender relations are, therefore, specific to each situation. They are not static, but vary according to place, time and social context.
An important point of departure for this research is my belief that power always plays a role in human relations. I regard gender relations as asymmetric power relations between men and women. It can be implied from this approach that it is important to gain more insight into the functioning of power and into the sources of unequal power relations, in order to interpret the relations between women and men. Autonomy can be a useful analytical concept for power mechanisms. Autonomy concerns the control over one's own life and body, the possibility of making choices and influencing the processes of social change (Schrijvers, 1985). Schrijvers defines autonomy as being based on four elements. Generally speaking, these elements refer to the physical, economic, political and ideological areas where power relations become manifest.

- The physical aspect relates to the control over sexuality and fertility. (It is connected with the attitudes of society towards motherhood)
- The economic aspect relates to the access to resources such as labour, land, capital, information and power positions.
- The political aspect relates to the possibility of serving interests by one's own choice through equal participation in political decision making at all levels.
- The ideological aspect relates to culturally determined views of masculinity and femininity and the self image of women.

By dividing complex reality into several fields of attention, the operation of power mechanisms can be better understood. It is, however, important to bear in mind that the four elements mentioned above are interrelated and exert mutual influence upon each other.

The approach used in this report allows analysis of the constraints placed by unequal power relations on women, but also of the way in which women can exercise a certain degree of control over their lives. Farm women should not be regarded as mere victims of others or of external social circumstances, but also as capable actors that can influence the course of events on the farm. Women have bargaining power, although the strategies that women develop to reach their goals do not frequently lead to open conflict or to an overt power struggle (Endeveld, 1994).
Regarding the application of the concept of autonomy, it is important to emphasize that my research concentrates especially on the economic aspect. This has to do with the importance of the economic component to the recent changes in Hungarian agriculture, but also with the scarcity of information on gender relations in Hungarian agriculture. For these reasons, my research focuses on activities which are easily observed and which allow one to obtain an initial impression about the lives of farm women. Focusing on the economic aspect provides an efficient way of describing the balance of power between men and women, as well as the extent to which both have access to and control over resources. It is also useful for mapping out the gender-differentiated occupancy of key positions. However, this does not mean that the ideological aspect is neglected. The cultural ideas about 'proper' male and female behaviour are always an essential topic in the observation of power relations between men and women.

1.4 Research questions

A number of research questions arise from my approach to gender relations and from the information available on agrarian women in Hungary:

1) What characterizes gender relations on the (new) private family farms and in the reorganized, large scale cooperatives, in terms of:
   - division of productive and reproductive labour
   - the role of women in decision making
   - the access to land, capital, knowledge and power positions.

2) What are the main features of the ongoing process of agricultural transformation and what impact might the present changes have on gender relations.

3) What do farm women regard as gains and as losses brought about by the current transition.
1.5 Research method

To find answers for the above questions, I combined literature research and a period of field work. The literature research was used to construct the conceptual framework and to collect information on the recent developments in Hungarian agriculture. Until now, most literature on the transition in agriculture featured its macro-economic consequences. Information on the implications of the transition process on a micro scale (i.e. farm level) is still scarce.

The research in Hungary was carried out during a 3-month period (December 1994 - February 1995). The field work was organized in cooperation with the department of rural sociology of the University of Gödöllő in Hungary. The research took place in the region surrounding the village of Kunhegyes, 180 kilometres east of Budapest. The choice of a single region was dictated partly by practical reasons, but mainly by the fact that this research was not meant to collect data representative of Hungarian agriculture as a whole. Instead, the aim of this research was to obtain an idea of the processes occurring on farms within the context of the present transformation. Qualitative information was collected in order to paint a detailed picture of the daily lives of women on Hungarian farms, and to assess the extent to which gender principles structure their lives. Semi-structured interviews were used instead of questionnaires, because the women's own experience and the image they have of themselves are important aspects in this research. A female interpreter was present during all interviews, in order to overcome language obstacles.

This research focused on farm women on both large scale cooperatives and small scale private farms. Cooperatives are still the dominant type of farm in Hungarian agriculture. During the socialist era this form of agricultural production was also the most important. Therefore, cooperative farms were included as part of this research. Two reorganised cooperative farms were visited. Seven women who were currently working on them or had previously worked there were interviewed. The visits also included discussions with the farm management about the transformation process. Small private farms
were included in this study because they have always provided a significant contribution to the agricultural output. Furthermore, during the restructuring process it was originally intended to use family farms as models for developing the agricultural production units in the new economic situation. The existing private farms could therefore be seen as pioneers of the new agricultural structure.

Twenty women from private farms were interviewed. All the selected farms were oriented towards market production. This type of farm is assumed to be better integrated within the institutional surroundings of primary agricultural production than farms having a subsistence character. The effects of the transformation process are probably more visible on market oriented farms than subsistence farms.

Only women were interviewed for the purposes of this research, due to the emphasis this study places on the ways women experience their own situation, and on the possibilities or constraints they are faced with when making their own choices. This decision was also made on the grounds of the limited time available.

1.6 The region

The target area for this study was located around Kunhegyes and its neighbouring villages. Kunhegyes is a village of 9600 inhabitants, situated approximately 20 kilometres east of the Tisza river. The Tisza flows through the eastern part of the country and is, together with the Danube, one of the main rivers of Hungary.

The region of Kunhegyes is a part of the Great Plain, a very flat area famous for its prairies or pustas. This area is almost completely cultivated. Large scale production of cereals, sunflower and fodder crops can be found. The summers can be very dry. This, in combination with high temperatures and sunshine, can cause damage to and salination of the soil. In this respect the region is quite vulnerable. Water management, irrigation and drainage are of vital importance, but are extremely difficult to achieve.

Kunhegyes is a small regional centre. It has a vocational school, a cinema, several bars, a restaurant, two discos, various kinds of shops, a local bank and a cultural centre. Prior to the transition there were two state owned industrial companies in Kunhegyes, employing approximately 1500 people. These companies collapsed,
and although some private entrepreneurs then started new activities, there was a drastic reduction in employment. These private entrepreneurs provide jobs for only about 200 persons. Agriculture is the most important economic activity in Kunhegyes and its surroundings. Before the transition, agriculture was dominated by large scale cooperatives and state farms. Private production was concentrated in small household plots. The structure of land ownership changed radically with the process of privatization. Large scale farms went bankrupt or underwent a reduction in size, while a new, diverse group of private producers emerged. As a result of the drastic decrease in the number of jobs in agriculture, the region is presently faced with a high unemployment rate (about 40%).
2. GREEN GARDENS: HUNGARIAN AGRICULTURE

This chapter aims at providing the reader with an idea of the context in which agrarian women live. It focuses on the features of Hungarian agriculture. Section 2.1 discusses the historical background, to facilitate understanding of the present situation. The agricultural system during the communist period is emphasized because the circumstances during this period left a deep impression on the current transformation process and affect the opportunities for agricultural development in the near future. Section 2.2 concerns the main characteristics of the agricultural transition. The final section discusses the effects of the transformation process and the social changes taking place in rural areas.

2.1 Historical background

The collectivization

Throughout history, Hungary has been a predominantly agrarian country. Nowadays, agriculture is still a key sector of its economy. Its overall contribution to the Gross National Product and to exports is around 20 percent, and it represents a significant source of employment in rural areas. According to the Ministry of Agriculture (1994), half of the Hungarian population is, directly or indirectly, linked with the agricultural sector. However, unlike Western European countries, Hungary never developed a tradition of family farming.

Until World War II, Hungary was mainly a feudal country. Most of the land was owned by a small group of landlords and by the Catholic Church. After World War II, many members of the ruling elite were regarded as collaborators. Their land was confiscated, as was the property of the Catholic Church. During the land reform that took place between 1945 and 1948, the confiscated land was distributed among the peasants and landless people. As a result, the country then had about 3 million peasants with farms of one to four hectares.

When the communist party took over power completely in 1948, a collectivization campaign began. State and collective farms were
formed according to the soviet model. That meant a change towards a large scale, industrial type of production based on common ownership of the land. Collective farms were established in every village, often by means of administrative, economic and physical force. In some areas, however, collectives were established spontaneously. Landless farm workers who had been left out of the land reform in 1945, as well as a group of more pragmatic owners of larger farms who were promised leading positions in the new collectives, joined voluntarily. (WOL, 1990; Kovács, 1993).

Food production dropped drastically during the first years after collectivization; the communist government gave priority to the development of industry. As a result, agriculture was not provided with enough funding to adjust its technology to the changes which had occurred in its production structures. The decline in agricultural production contributed to a severe economic crisis, which was one of the main impulses behind the revolution in 1956 (Varga, 1991).

A second wave of collectivization took place when the communist party, lead by Janos Kadar, re-established its power. Agriculture received more financial support during this period than it had before. Obligatory deliveries of products at low prices were abolished. The collectivization process was completed in the early sixties. By then, there were almost 4200 collective farms, with 1100 hectares and 283 members on average. Only a small group of private independent farmers were left, confined to areas with difficult natural conditions such as mountainous terrain and sandy soils (Varga, 1991).

Features of the communist agricultural system

Basic features of the communist agricultural system were the control exerted by the state bureaucracy (by means of direct production plans and price setting), and the monopolistic character of the production chain. As a consequence of central planning and monopoly markets, a system of economic relationships was established, linking individual enterprises to the central administration rather than to each other. Due to the weak connections between supplying, producing, processing and trading enterprises, shortages of all sorts of goods (spare parts, packing materials etc.) was a common occurrence.
A main objective of the communist agricultural policy was to achieve self-sufficiency, although this goal had to be met by providing large subsidies to maintain low consumer prices.

When compared with neighbouring communist countries, Hungarian agriculture performed quite well. It even had a big share in the national exports. Nevertheless, the system had many shortcomings. Enterprises could not go bankrupt because state support would ultimately cover their losses. Managers were therefore not encouraged to cut costs and reallocate resources in order to improve efficiency. In an attempt to solve these problems, the agricultural sector was reformed along liberal lines. The management of the enterprises was given more autonomy in making investments and in designing production plans. Moreover, private production on household plots was tolerated and even encouraged (de Groot, 1994).

Initially, these reforms met some success, but the tide turned when world market prices came under pressure as a result of the tremendous surge of agricultural production within the European Community. Around the same time, prices of imports rose sharply following the 1973 oil crisis. Hungarian agriculture was not flexible enough to react to the changing quality demands and lower world market prices (van Berkum, 1992). The regime responded with a rationalization scheme based on further economies of scale. Many village based collectives were forced to merge with neighbouring collectives. These changes did not prove to be adequate, and led to further deterioration of the financial situation on the large scale farms. However, the crisis in agriculture was not so much the result of internal problems as a reflection of the broad economic crisis that gripped Hungary (Répássy, 1993). The model of central planning was more and more discredited by the stagnation in agriculture as well as in the other sectors of the economy. Economic and political reforms gained momentum when the strong man of the communist party, Kadar, finally resigned in 1988.

Agricultural structure

When compared with other Central and East European countries, Hungary had a moderate, centrally planned economy and a liberalized communist dictatorship. Officially, Hungary walked in step with the other communist countries, but in practice extensive
experiments with private initiative took place (van der Graaf, 1990).
Due to this pragmatic course, small scale private agriculture had an opportunity to develop. Three modes of agricultural production could thus be observed in Hungary under the communist system: the large scale state farms, collective farms and small scale private or family farms.
State farms occupied 15% of the agricultural land. They served mainly as experimental farming units, specialized in the production of seeds and pedigreed animals.
Collective farms were the dominant type of agricultural enterprise, operating on 70% of the total agricultural area. In 1989, there were around 1250 collective farms with an average size of 4500 hectares. Officially, the assets were owned by the members, but in fact they had no say in the use of these assets. Ownership rights were so attenuated as to be meaningless. The property rights of land could be inherited by the next generation only if the progeny was working on the farm. Upon leaving the collective, members would lose their rights over the land and other means of production they might have contributed when joining the collective. The collective paid them only a symbolic amount of money as compensation. In this way the amount of land owned by the collective gradually increased. By 1989, the collectives owned almost two thirds of the land they cultivated. The remaining portion of land was registered under the names of the active and retired members (OECD 1993).
In principle, the General Assembly was the highest decision making body, but the actual control of the collective farm was held by the management and the local party elite. The involvement of the members with the enterprise was usually quite low. This was due to the hierarchical decision making structure, the large size and complex nature of the enterprise, the organization of the work into specialized, rather fragmented jobs and the low correlation between wages and the performance of the collective.
A typical feature of Hungarian collectives were the non-farming activities, varying from construction work to food processing or chemical production. These non-farming activities were established to overcome the low profitability of agriculture and provide additional employment for redundant agricultural workers.
The collective farms also provided a wide range of social services to their members and to the local communities: nurseries, village canteens, cultural centres, sport facilities and support for pensioners in the form of cheap energy (wood) and additional pension. In
fact, the government regarded the provision of social services as a major task for the collectives (de Groot, 1994).

Next to the large scale farming activities, small scale private farming was very important for both domestic and export production. Private farmers accounted for one-third of the total agricultural production in the late 1980s (Agócs, 1994). Private farming was largely carried out on a part time basis and was strongly integrated within the framework of the collectives. The collectives took care of tasks such as ploughing, harvesting, supplying inputs (e.g. fertilisers and pesticides), but they also provided extension services. The farmer could deliver the products to the collective or, depending on the mutual agreement, could sell it directly on local markets. Private farmers specialized in labour intensive products like vegetables, fruit, grapes, pigs and poultry. Activities that required large amounts of land and/or massive capital investments were carried out by the collective. The symbiosis between small scale and large scale farming was an important factor for the relative success of Hungarian agriculture (van der Graaf, 1990).

Members of collective farms and state farm employees were originally granted allotments of 0.5 hectare. These allotments were subsequently extended to a much wider range of the population. Therefore, most of the rural households became involved in private agriculture (Répássy, 1993). In Hungary, with its 10 million inhabitants, there were about 1.4 million small farms by the end of the 1980s. About three-fourths of these farms were smaller than 0.5 hectare.

Within this large group of private farms, a distinction could be made between subsistence farms and those that were more market oriented. Many of the subsistence producers were pensioners who liked to grow their own products and breed cattle in a traditional way. However, the majority of the farmers aimed at production for the market as well as for the family. Farming was regarded as a way of supplementing the salary with additional income derived from the household plot. Private farming thus played an important role in the improvement in rural living standards, and it also contributed to a well balanced food supply.
Women in agriculture

Hungary, like other communist countries, had an extremely high level of participation of women in the paid work force. Therefore, it is not surprising that there was substantial involvement of female labour in the agrarian sector. In 1981, one-third of the workers in large scale agriculture were women.

One could observe an extensive gender division of labour in large scale agriculture. Manual work, either in the fields or in green-houses, and the more ‘caring duties’ in pig and calf raising, were typically tasks for women, while the mechanized field work was a male dominated territory. Administrative work was predominantly a female task; nevertheless very few women occupied managerial positions. In general, women were employed as semiskilled or unskilled workers with low salaries. The average salary of women employed in agriculture was thirty to forty per cent lower than that of their male counterparts. Due to their lack of qualifications, women were engaged in low paid jobs with lesser professional requirements (Répássy, 1991).

Women played a prominent role on small scale private farms. According to Répássy (1991), the average time spent working on the farm was between two and four hours per day. Women participated mainly with the goal of production for subsistence. The more market oriented the production, the more visible was the influence of men in decision making and in the bulk of the work.

Women involved in agriculture had to combine this work with their daily household duties. Although women’s emancipation was part of the official communist ideology, the family’s internal division of labour was not challenged. Emancipation was conceived of as simply participation in productive labour. Women were still supposed to be responsible for reproductive duties, while men were seen as the main breadwinners. No male involvement in domestic labour was expected.

State-supported facilities like childcare and maternity leave were established out of concern for declining fertility. These measures were supposed to balance the conflict between women’s role as mothers and as workers. Early childcare was assumed to be women’s duty, while men’s lack of participation in reproductive labour was not seen as problematic. (Asztalos-Morell, 1995)
2.2 The agrarian transformation

After the democratic revolution of 1989, Hungary had to face the gigantic task of converting its centrally planned economy into a free market economy. The policy for the radical economic reforms was, to a great extent, based on the IMF (International Monetary Funds) recipe. Macro economic stability was seen as an important condition for a successful transformation. Containment of the state's budgetary deficit through drastic cuts in subsidies, reducing the high rate of inflation, liberalization of prices and trade, and privatization of property were envisaged as guidelines for this reform programme.

The transition of agriculture was a hot political issue. The objective was to transform the existing system into market orientated agriculture, based on private property. High expectations were placed on family farms as models for healthy agricultural production. The privatization of land, assets and enterprises was regarded as essential for achieving efficient, market oriented agriculture. A controversial point was the method for creating the new land ownership structure. The discussion on this topic was guided by political motives (getting rid of the communist system) rather than by economic rationality. The party of small holders (FKGP), which formed the first democratic government with the MDF party, supported the most radical point of view. They advocated full compensation for people who suffered from the actions of the communist regime. They wanted the return of agricultural assets to the 'original' owners or their heirs, and the dismantling of large scale agriculture. Other parties stressed that such a policy would result in an enormous fragmentation of farmland. They feared that Hungarian agriculture would no longer be viable after such a radical division into many small holdings.

After a long political debate, the two most important laws regarding the process of agricultural privatization were enacted in 1991 and 1992. The first was the so-called Law of Compensation, which regulated the compensation for expropriated land and non-material damage caused during forced collectivization. A system of compensation coupons was conceived for this purpose. Those who handed in a claim would receive coupons corresponding to the value of the losses claimed. These coupons could be used to buy land during
special auctions, organized by local compensation committees. They could also be sold to other persons. The value of confiscated land was expressed in an old Hungarian unit: Gold Crowns. The Gold Crown indicated the value of a piece of land, taking into account the soil quality, the position of the field, the accessibility, drainage etc. The land which was designated for compensation came from the commonly owned land of the collective farms and from the state farms. The collectives reserved 1.9 million hectares for compensation. Approximately 2 million hectares of land used by the collectives was officially registered under the names of presently active and retired members. This land was returned to them in Gold Crown units. Measures were taken to prevent speculation. Land purchased at an auction had to be cultivated for at least five years, otherwise it might be claimed by the state. The land could be sold or leased, but only to someone who would farm it (OECD, 1993).

The second law was the Law of Transformation of Cooperatives. This provided rules to divide the common assets among the members and former members or their heirs. The number of years worked in the collective, the original contribution to the collective at the time of its founding and the position held in the collective were criteria used for the division. These criteria were not particularly favourable for women, because they usually occupied low positions. The assets were distributed in the form of 'share papers', which could only be converted into real assets during the transition period. This law also mandated that each member would get 30 Gold Crowns worth of land and each employee 20 Gold Crowns worth (OECD, 1993).

2.3 The effects of the transformation process

Taking stock five years after the transition began, the restructuring of Hungarian agriculture appears to be a slow and complex process. The ultimate result of this process is still not clear. The process has not yet resulted in the rebirth of family farms. Cooperative members were more reluctant to leave the coope-
and start their own private farms than was expected. Only about ten per cent of the cooperative members made this step. The difficult conditions for private farming are one of the reasons for this lack of enthusiasm. The market situation is unclear and adverse. Access to credits, an infrastructure for family farms and adequate political representation are lacking (Kovács, 1995).

The restructuring of agriculture is taking place under difficult conditions. The Hungarian economy is, on the whole, confronted with a severe recession, while the agrarian sector has been in crisis since 1990. The internal demand for food declined drastically, due to the withdrawal of food subsidies and the decreased purchasing power of the population. The main export markets for Hungarian agriculture, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, collapsed. Moreover, the ratios between industrial and agricultural goods became more and more out of balance. The profitability of agricultural activities declined (Répássy, 1994). The uncertainty about landownership, due to the compensation scheme, and the severe lack of capital resulted in a sharp drop of the use of fertilizers and pesticides. This brought about a dramatic decrease in agricultural production.

Due to its lack of financial means, the government was unwilling and/or unable to support agriculture. Instead, the agrarian policy was characterized by the state withdrawing from its previous role. In 1993 the agrarian sector was subsidized by only 8%, in contrast to the 40-60% subsidy in (Western) European countries (Székely, 1994).

Following the transition, nearly one-fifth of the 1300 cooperatives went bankrupt and most of the remaining cooperatives were (and still are) faced with severe financial problems.

After the forced privatization of land and assets enacted by the laws from 1991 and 1992, the cooperatives had to opt for a new structure. Some turned into limited companies, but over ninety per cent of them were re-established as new cooperatives, leasing the land from the members. In practice, this meant that these enter-

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2 As used in this report, the word 'collective' refers to the joint agricultural enterprises existing before the reform of 1992. The word 'cooperative' will be used for the new cooperatives established after the enactment of the transformation law. The main difference between these concepts is that it is not obligatory to join the cooperatives, whilst collectivisation was mandatory.
prises would operate as before, without noticeable changes in their organization and structure: the same managers were leading them and the same activities took place. The only visible changes were the reductions in the number of workers and the amount of land (OECD, 1993).

What did change, however, was the integration between small and large scale farming. In a context of overproduction, the small producers were, to a certain extent, turned into competitors. The small scale farmers were made to pay for the services of the cooperative, and the marketing of the products became their own responsibility. For many private farmers it became difficult to make farming pay and they shifted towards subsistence farming (Agócs, 1994).

Nevertheless, some of the new economic units (large areas taken over by individuals or reorganized cooperatives, the successors of former production collectives) have promising aspects. They have a much healthier organization than their predecessors. These results must be regarded as a sign of improvement (Bihari, 1994).

The process of privatization was accompanied by massive unemployment. Considering only the cooperative farms, there was a decline in employment from 450,397 jobs in 1989 to 197,374 in 1992 (KSH, 1992). In some rural regions of Hungary, unemployment has reached 35-50 per cent. The high rate of unemployment is partly due to the exposure of hidden unemployment within the communist economy. For an increasing number of people, beginning agricultural activities or enlarging their presently small production are the only possibilities for generating an income (Kovách, 1994).

Most people are disappointed by recent developments. The transformation, together with the economic recession, has caused a lot of uncertainty and a decrease in the living standards. A process of stratification into rich and poor can be observed in rural areas.

Due to the transition in agriculture, the social position and economic situation of people living in rural areas has changed considerably. New groups appeared, and new networks of social relations have to be established between them. A large group of private agrarian producers has emerged, and within the re-established cooperatives, groups with different interests can now be distinguished: active members, pensioners, outsiders and managers.
The active members have chosen to continue to work in a joint enterprise and to invest their shares in the new cooperative. Their objective is to maintain their employment. It is important to them to ensure that the cooperative will operate profitably in the long run. They hold, in general, a minority of the shares (40%).

The pensioners consider their share of property as a source of income, not as a job opportunity. They are more interested in obtaining high dividends from their shares. They own around 40% of the assets (shares) on average.

Outsiders are former members of collectives or their heirs. They are also concerned with receiving a high dividend. On average, 20% of the shares are in the hands of outsiders. Since most cooperatives have negative results, the dividends from the shares are not very interesting to them. Therefore, the expectations are that most of the outsiders will decide to cash in their shares (Székely, 1994).

The managers had a privileged position, due to their knowledge, managerial experience, relative wealth and local influence. They played a central role in the process of restructuring the enterprise and could manipulate the course of events to their own advantage. Managers were among those able to benefit from the changes by utilizing their knowledge and contacts to develop successful private farms (Kovách, 1994).

Since the start of the transformation a wide variety of private agricultural producers arose, ranging from the traditional self-sufficient peasants to individuals operating the farm as entrepreneurs. However, it is difficult to obtain a reliable overview of the number and type of private farmers, because the transition process is still going on. The collection of statistical data is also affected by the ongoing changes.
3. WORKING TOGETHER: THE COOPERATIVE FARMS

This chapter describes two cooperative farms, Tisza and Red Star. The visits to these farms lasted two-and-a-half days and one day, respectively. Seven women, as well as the (male) leaders of the cooperatives (president, vice-president and financial manager), were interviewed.

The information collected allows the presentation of a picture of recent developments and of the present situation at the cooperatives. The process of internal restructuring that resulted from the transformation and the involvement of women in this process is described. Equal attention is paid to the position of women in the cooperative and to the ways in which they experience the present changes. Finally, the life of women in the cooperative is illustrated by portraying a single member. The selection of this woman as an example was based on pragmatic reasons. The interview was carried out under beneficial conditions; enough time was allowed and there were no interruptions. She was therefore able to describe her own situation very clearly.

3.1 Cooperative Red Star

Under the former system, the cooperative farmed 10,600 hectares, on which cereals, sunflower, sugar beet and lucerne were grown. The cooperative was also involved in dairy production, pig fattening and breeding, as well as in construction activities. Due to the compensation regulation and privatization, the structure of land ownership changed drastically. The cooperative retained only 3400 hectares for farming, the rest went into private hands.

Another striking effect of the transformation was the decrease in the number of workers. Before 1989, the cooperative employed 600 people. After the transformation, this number dropped to 180. A few people left the cooperative, while others retired, were fired or dismissed with early retirement. For example, all 140 workers of

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3 In order to protect the anonymity of the informants, these names are fictive.

4 Although this former collective farm is now officially a holding, everybody in the village still speaks of 'the cooperative'. Therefore, the word cooperative is used in this part of the text.
the construction department were fired when this activity ceased in 1991.

A special committee of seven persons was formed to prepare the transformation of the cooperative. This committee included the president of the cooperative, the financial manager, leaders of the various production branches, a pensioner and a woman who was (and still is) the head of the clerical department. She was assigned the task of checking the estimated value of the assets which had to be divided among the members. She was not involved in designing the new structure of the cooperative because, as she put it: "I did not have the knowledge to decide about such complicated matters." Designing the new organization was a controversial issue. One group favoured a new cooperative in which each member would be entitled to one vote. The other group wanted to take capital investment into account. They believed that the influence of each member on decision making should be related to the number of shares owned. The latter group got its way, and the cooperative was transformed into a holding with five limited companies: one for pig farming, one for cows and three for machinery.

Another conflict developed concerning the specific criteria for distributing the shares. Distribution according to the number of years worked in the cooperative was one of the criteria established by law. Since this cooperative decided to favour the younger members, the first five years of work in the cooperative were multiplied by five, the next five years by three and the rest just by one. Despite these conflicts, the restructuring progressed rather quickly and easily. It began in 1991 and was completed in 1992.

The cooperative was also affected by the changing economic conditions. The state subsidies decreased, and the cooperative could not get credit from the bank due to the uncertainty of property ownership. Production had to be attuned to the market. Due to the sudden glut on the market and a sharp decline in prices, this was a very difficult task. The previous relationships between processing companies and suppliers (state companies) broke up, and finding new, reliable buyers was a problem. Altogether, these factors led to a fall in production, although prices and trade circuits have become more clear and stable during the past year.
3.1.1 Women in the cooperative

Out of the 600 workers in the cooperative before 1989, 70 were women. Presently, women account for only 26 out of the 180 remaining workers. The number of female workers in this cooperative, both before and after the transition, is quite low when compared with the national average. Before the transition, the average proportion of women in cooperatives was one-third. The head of the cooperative explained this situation by stating that the cooperative did not have a labour intensive horticulture department. However, the tasks assigned to women within the cooperative matched the general picture. The clerical work was mainly done by women; 14 of the 26 women in the cooperative worked in this department. The only man involved in this department was the financial manager. In this respect, not much changed following restructuring of the cooperative; in the previous situation the clerical department of 30 persons consisted almost completely of women, except for two men, one of whom was the supervising manager. The only significant change was cutting the number of employees in half. The women were able to cope with this situation by working harder and also because the work load was reduced. Regarding the positions occupied by women in other departments of the cooperative, four women worked in the kitchen, four in the dairy department, three in pig farming and one sold milk. The women employed in the dairy department were responsible for cleaning the dairy equipment, checking the hygiene of milk and taking care of the calves. In the pig department, women did the cleaning and the clerical work. Both before and after the transformation, no women were present on the management board.

The contribution of the women to agriculture was not limited to their work at the cooperative. They were also involved with agricultural production at their homes. As mandated by law, all members and employees of a cooperative were entitled to a plot of land. These plots were usually part of a larger field. In this way, the cooperative could take care of the cultivation, fertilization, planting and harvesting. The yield from these fields would be paid to the members either in kind or in cash. The members had to take care of the weeding, had to check on the growth and would often choose to do the harvesting themselves. This meant that the women were quite busy with their own agricultural production on
the household plots. They often spent three to four hours a day in the field during the summer. Besides a piece of land for field crops, it was also common for the members to have a garden with fruit and vegetables for their own consumption, along with a few animals, such as chickens, geese, sometimes a cow and/or pigs. The women were also engaged in these activities. Considering that they were also responsible for the household chores, it was not surprising that these women had very little free time. Some of them stated that their husbands helped with the household duties, but upon further inquiry, this help turned out to be chores such as painting the house or cutting wood, and occasionally cooking a meal.

In general, the women did not consider the transition to be an improvement. It was clear from their testimonies that living conditions nowadays were harder. Compared to the situation under the old system, their living standard had fallen. They experienced more stress and there was less room for social contacts. For example, social activities were no longer organized by the cooperative. Prior to the transformation, the cooperative had a women's committee, that gave women the opportunity to meet each other. This body officially represented the interests of the women in the cooperative, but its actual function tended to be the organization of social events, like trips to the zoo or theatre, and charity activities for the elderly or poor families. With the disintegration of the party, the women's committee disappeared, as did most organizations or groups which were more or less connected to the party structure.

3.2 Cooperative Tisza

Before the transformation, this cooperative cultivated 2900 hectares, mostly for the production of cereals, but there were also 500 hectares of woodland. In addition, the cooperative kept dairy cattle and sheep. It employed about 160 people, 120 of whom were members, the rest being employees.

After the political changes, a confusing situation arose for the cooperative. The reduction in subsidies and the deterioration of the market undermined the financial situation. The president of the cooperative was forced to cut production. Purchasing of inputs had to be decreased, and machinery and cows were sold to meet
financial obligations. At the same time, the cooperative carried out the demands of the Law of Transformation and distributed the assets among members and former members, assigned land for compensation purposes and allocated land to members and employees. Letters with a proposal for dividing the assets were sent to the members and employees. The final decisions were to be made in the general assembly. During this period, nine of the leading members launched a plan for splitting up the cooperative. They had no confidence in the president, and wanted to take the best parts and best members of the cooperative to establish their own 'new' cooperative. To achieve this, it was important to persuade the active and retired members to put their shares into this 'new' cooperative. The only woman involved in this operation was a well-respected former group leader, who was working at that time in the clerical department. Her task was to talk to the members (mainly pensioners) in order to get their support. In 1992, following a lawsuit, the cooperative split up into the 'new' and the 'remains of the old' cooperatives.

This led to a rather bizarre situation, because the main building of the former collective became the administrative centre for both of the re-established cooperatives, which were now competing with each other.

The 'new' and the 'remains of the old' cooperatives operated on 1200 and 600 hectares, respectively. They counted a total of 72 members between them, 15 of whom were women. Five members left the cooperative and started their own farming enterprises. Thirty members, ten of whom were women, could not find a job in either of the cooperatives and were fired. Other members were retired or went on leave for health reasons.

During this research, it was not possible to develop a clear image of the future perspectives for both cooperatives, since they were rather reluctant to provide information on their financial situation. However, the enthusiasm present in the 'new' cooperative could not be detected in the 'old remaining' one. In the 'old remaining' cooperative the president himself often mentioned the lack of motivation among the members. His own future, at any rate, was not entirely dependent on the survival of the cooperative, as he had acquired 33 hectares of land for himself during the reorganisation by buying coupons and shares from other members. He invested half of this land in the cooperative, but kept the most
Working together: the cooperative farms 27

profitable portions for his own use. Besides being the president of a cooperative, he was now a private farmer as well.

3.2.1 Women in the cooperative

The 'new' cooperative employed 9 female and 43 male members. The leading positions were occupied by men. As before, the clerical department was a female domain. Five of the nine women worked there. The pay for clerical work was rather low. The head of the department earned 26,000 forint, the other women 18,000, while the president got 70,000 and the tractor driver's salary was 30,000.

Of the remaining four women, one worked in the dairy section and three in the wood section. The woman working in the dairy department was in charge of milk hygiene (sampling and analyzing), and was responsible for cleaning the milking machines and tank. She also had to take care of the young calves. There were no significant alterations in her situation at work following the split up of the cooperative. The only visible change was that only two milkers now worked during her shift, whereas there were 20 milkers before the split. The number of cows, however, had decreased from 400 to 100. As a result of having fewer cows, only one of the three existing stables was used. The other two should have been sold, but were left to decay instead. According to the dairy women, the new conditions required them to work harder than before, but there were also positive aspects. She pointed out an improvement in the attitude of the workers: "everyone has more responsibility now, because nobody wants to lose their job or let the cooperative go bankrupt."

Relatively few women were working in the cooperative. The deputy president mentioned that no suitable labour for women was left after the horticulture section was closed in 1981. The concentration on mechanized cereal production demanded qualified labour and the forestry sector required mainly physical strength. There was a certain notion about men's work and women's work in the cooperative, endorsed by both men and women. In the wood section, however, this distinction between female and male labour seemed to be rather arbitrary. Building pallets with hammer and nails was done by women, but sawing the wood in the right sizes was men's work, sometimes taken over by women. The remuneration for both
jobs was based on piece-wage. In fact, the women saw no difference between their work and the work done by the men. They actually preferred the sawing because the work was certainly not any harder, and one could earn more money doing it.

A distinction between the roles of men and women in the wood section became more visible when they finished their work. The men went to the nearest shop to drink a beer together. (Because the cafe is more expensive, the shop has also become a public drinking place.) The women passed the shop and hurried home. Because the women were responsible for the domestic tasks, they had to cook dinner. In addition, the women were engaged in agricultural production on the household plot and in taking care of the animals in the yard. In fact, they had three jobs. In case they had some spare time, there were few ways to spend it. Before the transition, the women's committee of the former collective provided at least some leisure activities. But this committee simply disappeared after the split.

3.3 An example of a female worker of the cooperative

The following case illustrates the situation of Julia⁵. She is a young woman of 25 who had been employed by the cooperative for six months as a leader in the pig breeding department with 200 sows. She got the job by responding to an advertisement in the newspaper (this was, by the way, the only vacancy since the re-organisation). She had been selected because of her education: four years of high school with a specialization as veterinary assistant and three years of animal breeding, which closely fitted the desired profile. The application procedure progressed smoothly, except for one uncertain moment, when Julia was asked whether she planned to have children. She answered that this would not be the case the next few years, because she was not engaged and also had no economic basis to have a family. However, such a question indicated that women are not seen as reliable members of the workforce.

Julia works as a team with the leader of the fattening branch and the general leader of the pig department, who is responsible for

⁵ For reasons of privacy a fictive name is used.
Julia has to coordinate the work of 12 employees, all men. Earmarking, injecting and castrating piglets, removing animals to other spaces and inseminating sows are some of the activities which have to be planned every day. She remarks: "Being a woman and a young person, it is difficult to be accepted as a leader. Not that I am confronted with obscene remarks or anything like that. It is difficult to explain, it is more a case that they are not yet used to a female worker in the pig department, and surely not to a female leader. Most men have never worked with a woman, except the cleaning woman, so for them it is simply very unusual to regard a woman as a leader".

Finding the right management style is the biggest challenge for her. She does not want to be authoritarian; instead of giving orders she prefers asking and when needed, assisting her colleagues with the work. In this way she tries to gain the respect of the workers. "I want to prove that I know the business".

Although she finds her work very interesting and the remuneration of 35,000 forint (gross income) very satisfactory, she is not too happy with the living conditions. She finds herself in a very isolated situation. "For a young woman in a strange village - my home village is 70 kilometre away - it is very difficult to make new friends. My colleagues are all men, and besides that, I am their leader. In the village itself there is not much to do for a single woman. Most women my age are married and have their own families." Julia hopes that after a while she will become more integrated into the community. And in the mean time she is looking forward to the better housing promised by the cooperative.

3.4 Summary

The cooperative farms in this study employed a relatively low number of women. This could be explained mainly by the absence of labour intensive horticulture and gender ideology.

For the two cooperatives, the main effects of the transition process were: a reduction of area, a sharp decline in the number of workers and a split into new units, together with a deteriorating economic climate. The participation of women in the transformation process within the cooperative was marginal. The involvement of these women in the privatization and reorganization was
merely on an executory level because they occupied positions which
did not give access to the decision making level nor to the knowl-
edge necessary for designing new organizations.
The pre-existing gender division of labour at the cooperatives
remained after the transition. As before, administrative work,
'caring duties' for calves or taking care of the hygienic aspects of
milk production were still typically women's tasks, while the mecha-
nized field work persisted as a male territory. The argument that
men performed the physically hard labour was an insufficient
explanation for this distinction between men's work and women's
work. As the example of the wood section revealed, women's
labour could be just as physically demanding as men's.
There were no women present in the management level of these
cooperatives. Since women generally occupied the lower positions,
they consequently had lower salaries than men. Women were only
found occupying leading positions in the clerical department, and
in one exceptional case, in the pig department. In this particular
case, the woman worked in a male dominated environment. This
implied that workers were not accustomed to female leadership.
Therefore, this woman felt she had to prove she was qualified for
her task.

As the observations revealed, the women's workload was high.
Since there was an unequal division of responsibilities for house-
hold and family tasks, these women actually had three jobs.
Besides their work at the cooperative they had domestic duties and
were also engaged in agricultural production at home. Free time
was rare. Moreover, there were not many opportunities to spend
the leisure time that was available. For example, social activities
were no longer organized by the women's committee of the coo-
perative because these committees disappeared simultaneously
with the disintegration of all other communist party structures.
Due to the decreasing standard of living, more stress and less
room for social contacts, these women were not enthusiastic about
the transition.
4. BUSY OR BUSINESS: WOMEN ON FAMILY FARMS

4.1 Family farming around Kunhegyes

All of the farms selected for this study were oriented towards market production. There was, however, a wide variation among the 20 farms under study. There were differences in size, labour input, part time or full time farming, the kind of products grown or manufactured and farm management. When classifying the farms according to their main production unit, the following picture emerges:

- Eight dairy farms, with 5 - 20 cows per farm and with 7 - 35 hectares of land, used mainly for fodder production.
- Six farms in which crop production was the most important activity. The smallest farm in area was 6 hectares in maw seed production, while the largest farm cultivated 188 hectares. These farms often had some livestock in the backyard as well.
- Four farms with geese, two for liver production and two for goosdown.
- One farm with broilers (chickens).
- One farm which depended mainly on providing mechanized services (ploughing, combining).

The history, organization and range of products of these farms are representative of Hungarian agriculture as a whole, as it is described in chapter two. However, the composition of this group also reflects regional characteristics. Livestock (especially dairy) and arable farming traditionally were the most important agricultural activities in this region. Due to unfavourable conditions, horticulture is not as significant here as in other regions of Hungary.

The farms were regarded as family farms, which meant that labour, capital and decision making were predominantly in the hands of family members. However, it was questionable whether all cases were in fact family farms. There was, for example, a farm on which the use of hired labour was vital. This agricultural enterprise was set up by a former financial manager of a cooperative when, due to the privatization process, it became possible to rent and buy (through buying coupons) land. He rented 13 hectares for labour intensive cucumber production and purchased 175 hectares for
cereal production. Besides the farm, he had his own consulting company and was still working on a freelance basis as financial manager of the cooperative. His wife (34) had worked in the clerical department of the cooperative and was now involved with the administration and coordination of the farm. During the summer season they hired 100 to 120 labourers to help with harvesting.

Another exceptional case was the farm of a divorced woman (39) who began her career as an agricultural entrepreneur through a series of coincidences. In 1993 she lost her job, but at the same time she and her family (mother, aunt, uncle) received 105 hectares of land as compensation. Due to her agricultural education and managerial skills, she was (in the eyes of the family) the right person to take on the challenge of operating a farm. She made large investments in machinery, purchasing a tractor, a plough, a cultivator and a spreader. She hired a young man to work in the fields. He was qualified to handle the machinery, and would do this kind of task while she would do the planning, buying and selling.

**Changing farm size**

Almost all of the farms (18) existed before the transition process began. Within this group, there was only one full time farm. The others were part time farms. It was quite common (eleven cases) that both husband and wife had an off farm job. On six of the farms, the husband had a job elsewhere and the wife stayed at home, taking care of most of the agricultural work.

A common feature of the farms was the considerable change in their size as a result of the transformation. Due to the compensation and privatization process, all farms except three obtained (more) land, ranging from five hectares to 188 hectares. The land was acquired in various ways; by claiming the land that once belonged to their ancestors, by getting land from a cooperative or state farm because they were members or employees, by buying coupons from other people, by renting land or by a combination of these methods. Wheat, barley, rye, oats, maize and sunflower were the most common products grown on this land. For more profitable crops, such as sugar beet, it was too arid.

Most farms were not equipped with all the machinery required to cultivate the land, due to their lack of financial resources. Almost all farms had a tractor, but lacked the accompanying machinery,
such as ploughs, cultivators and spreaders. They were therefore forced to hire machines or do the work (fertilizing, harvesting) manually. As a result of the uncertain situation on the agricultural market, most families were not eager or able to obtain the high level of credit necessary to complete the mechanization of their farms.

Shift to full time farming

Another characteristic of the farms was the shift to full time farming. Eleven of the seventeen part time farms switched to full time farming. Among the remaining part time farms, there was only one case in which both husband and wife still had off farm work. On two of the farms, the man held a job and in three situations additional income was provided by the work of the woman (two of whom had a flower and grocery shop).

It was doubtful whether the move to full time farming was prompted by the attractive prospects of independent farming. It seemed instead that a combination of factors had made those people decide to concentrate totally on agriculture. They saw full time farming as the most realistic option when they became unemployed and could, at the same time, obtain (more) land. Looking for a new job was not considered by most people as an alternative, because they regarded themselves as too old or lacking proper qualifications. In this context, too old meant around forty.

Family composition

Most men and women in this research were around forty, only four couples were in a different age category. Two couples were in their early thirties. They were the ones who took out large loans and started with the largest farms. One couple was around fifty and another couple, who had always been engaged in full time farming, was around sixty.

There were children in all families. The most common situation, for Hungary as a whole as well as for this group, was a family with two children (12 cases). The ages of children ranged from 3 to 41, but most were in the age group around 20.

As usual with family farms, the children contributed to farm labour. Their contribution, however, was limited, because they
attended school (outside the village), were in the army or had a job in town. On three farms a son was working full time on the farm and in four other cases they hoped that the farm would provide future employment for their son(s), because other job opportunities were rather bleak. In two families there were unemployed children for whom working at home offered no perspective, due to the limited size of the farm.

Farmers' organization

Many of the farms in the research sample had contacts with the Gazdakör. The Gazdakör is a farmers' organization, re-established in 1991. The objective of this organization is to protect the interests of the private farmers and to provide its members with information needed for production and marketing. To achieve this, it organizes courses and lectures and initiate collective buying and selling. It operates on national, county and local levels. The functioning at the local level differs greatly and depends to a large extent on the abilities of the local president.

The Gazdakör in Kunhegyes was very active, partly due to the support of the mayor, who provided facilities in the village hall. In the other villages, this organization was still in a developing stage. Some people complained about the president. In their view, he could not organize the marketing (negotiating with companies) very well.

Another important institution for the private farms was the network of agronomists. This network was set up by the government. The agronomist's duty was to advise the farmers on governmental regulations, marketing, production, and technical aspects.

4.2 Women on family farms

In this section, the life of women on family farms will be portrayed. There is a large diversity in the degree of involvement of women on the farm, as well as in the developments within the farms. In order to illustrate this range of differences, three individual cases are described.
The first case, Eva and István, represents a situation where the wife operates the farm together with her husband. It also reflects a development where the character of the dairy farm is not changed entirely by the transition; the agricultural activities were primarily expanded because they acquired land for their own fodder production.

The second case, Katalin and Lázslo, is illustrative of a woman working on the farm more as an assistant. Here the transition had a significant impact on the farm management; when the former family property (a considerable amount of land) was returned to them, they switched to arable farming.

The third case, Olga and Imre, is an example of a woman who has the main responsibility for agricultural production. In this case, the transition has actually not altered the situation on the farm.

4.2.1 Eva and István

The family living on this dairy farm consists of István (39), Eva (37) and two sons of 19 and 17. Both sons attend school. Before the transition, both wife and husband were working at the agricultural cooperative in the hog department. At home, they had some pigs and chickens and a small plot of land for their own vegetables. They started their own dairy farm in 1988 with the purchase of three calves. It was their intention to raise them for sale, but because István liked the animals they kept them for dairy production.

In 1992, they both became unemployed and decided to concentrate on developing their own farm. This became a realistic option because land was returned to them during that period. Under the compensation scheme, they were entitled to land which had once belonged to István’s mother. They also received a piece of land from the cooperative because as members they both were entitled to a plot. In total, they have seven hectares of land that is used for the production of their own fodder. With the shares of the cooperative, they bought some machines such as a tractor and a cultivator from the cooperative.

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6 In order to protect the anonymity of the informants the names are fictive.
attended school (outside the village), were in the army or had a job in town. On three farms a son was working full time on the farm and in four other cases they hoped that the farm would provide future employment for their son(s), because other job opportunities were rather bleak. In two families there were unemployed children for whom working at home offered no perspective, due to the limited size of the farm.

Farmers' organization

Many of the farms in the research sample had contacts with the Gazdakör. The Gazdakör is a farmers' organization, re-established in 1991. The objective of this organization is to protect the interests of the private farmers and to provide its members with information needed for production and marketing. To achieve this, it organizes courses and lectures and initiate collective buying and selling. It operates on national, county and local levels. The functioning at the local level differs greatly and depends to a large extent on the abilities of the local president.

The Gazdakör in Kunhegyes was very active, partly due to the support of the mayor, who provided facilities in the village hall. In the other villages, this organization was still in a developing stage. Some people complained about the president. In their view, he could not organize the marketing (negotiating with companies) very well.

Another important institution for the private farms was the network of agronomists. This network was set up by the government. The agronomist's duty was to advise the farmers on governmental regulations, marketing, production, and technical aspects.

4.2 Women on family farms

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The shift to full time farming was an economic necessity. Eva considers it as a big change. "It is difficult not to have a secure income any longer. You must calculate more carefully now. During the first year, the financial situation certainly caused stress. On the other hand you are your own boss and it is a challenge to make the best out of the farm". What she sometimes misses is the contact with her colleagues.

The division of labour on the farm has not changed. As before, they share the work with the animals. Together, they milk and feed the nine cows. She takes care of the calves and chickens. He takes out the manure and delivers the milk at a collecting point in the village from where the milk is transported to the factory (in this respect the dairy production did not change).

The household is the exclusive domain of Eva. During the winter, she spends roughly as much time on domestic tasks as on agricultural work. In the summer, however, much more work needs to be done in the fields and she manages to do only the most essential housekeeping, like preparing a quick meal and making sure that there are enough clean clothes.

In the fields she does manual work like weeding, spreading fertilizer and gathering hay. Her husband is busy with the tractor work, and sometimes the sons help him. Nevertheless, when the situation on the farm demands it, Eva also occasionally drives the tractor.

The bookkeeping, (in this case, collecting the bills and keeping track of the costs) is also done by Eva.

She does not consider domestic work as the most satisfying of her tasks and if she could change the situation she would prefer to spend more time in agricultural production. "Household work always has to be done. The farm work is more visible, you see the plants grow and it generates income".

Decisions are made by Eva and István, separately or in consultation with each other. When big investments are being considered, they decide together what to do, but if machines are involved, István suggests the type which should be bought. Household expenditures are the responsibility of Eva, except for big purchases like new furniture. Decisions about what to grow on the fields are mostly the concern of István, but now and then Eva comes up with ideas. Her work on the field is more of an executory kind. Correspondingly, her participation in the decision making process is relatively weak, or as she puts it: "Because it is more his work". In
matters related to the animals, such as calling a veterinarian or choosing a bull, both Eva and István make the decisions.

It is clear that Eva works on the farm on a regular basis. Some of her work is in her own labour domain, while other tasks could be characterized as helping out. She participates in the strategic as well as the day-to-day decision making. She has an overview of the production process and has an influence on the development of the farm as a whole.

Their work on the dairy farm does not involve frequent selling of products. Occasionally, they sell a pig and in most of these cases István does the bargaining. But external contacts are not by definition the man's territory. During the past year, for example, Eva has maintained contact with the agronomist. On the other hand, it is István who has joined the Gazdakör and attends the meetings. Eva is interested in this organization, but she feels it is sufficient if only one person from the family goes to the meetings. She does not attend because the time the meetings take place is inconvenient for her. They usually start around six o'clock in the evening, when she has to prepare dinner.

While shopping, she sometimes discusses issues related to agriculture with other women. It is not possible for her to do this in a more structured way because there is no organization for rural or agrarian women in Hungary.

4.2.2 Katalin and Lázslo

The second case is an arable farm where Lázslo (50), Katalin (42), Lázslo's father and their two sons are living. The youngest son (22) works on the farm while the other is a teacher in mathematics. Katalin has had several jobs. She worked for the local government in the tax and financial department and was also head of the kitchen at the nursery, but became unemployed in 1991. Her husband worked at a cooperative for soil tillage until 1990, when he was fired. In the past, they had four cows, four bulls for fattening, a few sheep and pigs and two hectares of land. At that time, Katalin took care of the animals while Lázslo mucked out the stables. Because Lázslo's grandparents had owned quite a lot of land, they got back 70 hectares through the compensation scheme. On this land, they grow wheat, rye, sunflower, maize and pumpkin. They combined the parts from two old combines to make one that
worked, and also bought a plough, a seeder and a cultivator. They already owned a tractor. Because her husband and one of her sons now work on the farm, she no longer has to feed the animals. Instead, she delivers newspapers every morning. This job takes about one and a half hours. Collecting spare parts and doing the bookkeeping are her tasks on the farm. She also does all the housekeeping. During the summer, however, she spends most of her time in the fields. "I help with planting, weeding and I look after the workers. It is good that we have a microwave, because it allows me to serve dinner quickly."

Katalin says she is not involved in the management of the farm. That is the territory of her husband, but they discuss major decisions with each other, such as buying all the machinery mentioned above. They also talk a lot about when and how to sell the products. Purchasing farm inputs and selling the products is still a complicated matter, because a market infrastructure has not yet been built up. Steady relations with traders are not yet accomplished, contacts with traders change frequently and the dealers are mostly unknown to the family. Therefore, Katalin regularly looks in the newspapers for traders and prices, but Lázslo does the bargaining.

In this family, the farming tradition never disappeared. The grandfather still knows a lot about agriculture and they also read the newspaper for small holders and use a textbook, 'Planting on plough land'. Furthermore, Lázslo is a member of the Gazdakör which also provides him with information on farming. Katalin sees herself primarily as a mother; providing a friendly atmosphere at home and keeping the family together. This does not imply that she likes domestic work best. As a matter of fact, she regards cooking and other household work as routine duties. She finds outdoor work in the fields more enjoyable, she can see the results of her labour and even more importantly, "by doing this work I contribute to the family income," she said.

4.2.3 Olga and Imre

The third case is a farm where they produce goose liver. The family consists of Olga (44) and Imre (45), their two sons (19 and 20) who still study in another town and their young daughter (4).
In the past Imre worked as a teacher and Olga worked at the telephone factory in Kunhegyes, but she stopped working there in 1985. At that time they moved (they had been living with Imre's parents) to their own house and set up the goose farm. They raise around 1100 geese a year.

Olga preferred agricultural work at home because in such a situation she could combine income producing work and domestic tasks in a more convenient way. Olga's main tasks are feeding the geese and preparing the fodder (cooking maize). The geese are kept for three weeks and during the final week the frequency of feeding is raised to seven times a day. This means that the geese must also be fed at night. During this final week Olga spends around 40 hours per week doing farm work. She is also responsible for the marketing, i.e. purchasing the fodder and keeping in touch with the company that delivers the geese and buys them back after fattening. Decisions concerning the farm are also taken by Olga: "I decide how many geese we will buy. This is actually the only decision which needs to be taken, because the rest is obvious."

The transition process has not changed the situation surrounding geese production. They still have the same contact with the company who, on a contract basis, delivers and buys back the animals, although Olga mentions that the prices have become less favourable.

The only tasks of Imre are cleaning the barn and helping once in a while with fodder preparation. This division of labour did not change after Imre lost his job in 1993. Since then, he hangs around the house, sometimes repairing cars, and figuring out what to do in the future. His participation in housekeeping activities has not increased and is limited to occasionally cooking fish soup.

Olga has a rather contradictory opinion about the division of the reproductive work. On the one hand, she does not mind being responsible for the domestic tasks and taking care of the children, because she also enjoys this work. On the other hand, when talking about the position of women in general, she declares that the life of women is harder than the life of men because women always have to do the housekeeping. She hopes that her daughter will find a husband who will participate in or even share the domestic work, but she does not raise her sons according to this philosophy. When her sons are at home, they do not have to perform any household tasks, or as Olga puts it: "When the boys are at home I want to be
a good mother for them, doing their laundry and preparing a good meal for them”.

Olga has little free time. She sometimes watches TV, but often falls asleep in front of the screen. In this respect she thinks there are big differences between rural and city life. "In the countryside, women have no time to go out or take holidays, there is always more work to do, producing and processing food."

4.3 Gender analysis

The case studies provide a general idea of the various developments on family farms caused by the transition and the different positions of the women on these farms. They supply an outline in which the more general observations about gender relations can be placed. As explained in the first chapter, the focus is placed on the division of labour and participation in the decision making about family and farm affairs. Access to land, capital, information, knowledge, involvement in the public sphere and how the women consider their own situation are other important aspects, and will also be addressed here.

Division of labour

It has already become clear from the cases that household tasks are more gender segregated than farm tasks. Housekeeping and child rearing are the women’s responsibility, regardless of whether they have an off-farm job or are solely responsible for the agricultural work. In only three families does the man occasionally help with the domestic work.

Nearly half of the women spend as much time with domestic tasks as with farm tasks or with the off-farm job and the agricultural work. Only four women are mainly occupied with household affairs, while for the rest of the women agricultural work is more time consuming. During the summer, this picture changes, because the field work then demands more time. During this period only the most essential housekeeping is done. The domestic tasks have less priority than the agricultural tasks. In situations when the women cannot manage all their planned work, they first finish the farm work and in the time remaining they do the housekeeping. They sometimes feel guilty about not being able to pay enough
attention to their children or to provide the family with a tidy home.

All women are involved in agricultural work, although the degree of involvement varies from supporting tasks to having the main responsibility for agricultural production. Some women were at first quite modest about their contribution to the farm work, but after inquiring about their daily routine it became clear that they played a more significant role on the farm than initially stated. For instance, taking care of the animals around the house was not always regarded as work. Because the interviews took place during the winter, women sometimes 'forgot' about their work in the field during the summer.

The work with animals does not obey a strict gender pattern. The work can be performed by the man as well as by the woman, although men tend to do the mucking out of the stables, while cleaning the milking equipment and taking care of the small animals (calves, piglets, chickens) is a female task. The work in the fields is much more a male domain. This does not imply that women do not work in the fields, on the contrary, but that they join their husband when he needs assistance with his work. The mechanized work such as ploughing, fertilizing, sowing and mowing is done by the men. In farms with a low mechanization standard, some of those tasks are performed by hand. In such cases, the women do help with these tasks. Weeding is predominantly manual work and typically women's work. Harvesting grain or pitching and loading hay is usually done together by all household members.

Bookkeeping for management purposes is not a common practice on all these farms. Of course, all families keep track of their financial situations in one way or another. Women deal with this aspect of farm work. They usually accomplish this without doing any actual bookkeeping. A woman describes this task as follows: "I collect the bills in a box and then store figures for income and expenses in my head."

During the interviews, it was quite difficult for the women to say how much free time they had. One reason is that the distinction between work and leisure time was not very clear. For instance, sewing clothes and playing with the children is regarded as spending free time. Estimating the amount of free time is also complicated by the fact that their work is rather fragmented and
consequently there are no clearly marked intervals of free time. The information some women reveal about their free time varied from having three to five hours a day to: "The only free time I have is when I am on the toilet or taking a bath." Quite often the women state they have, or think they have, less leisure time than their husbands or women in the city. The most common ways of spending leisure time is watching TV and occasionally reading a newspaper or magazine. Many women remark that in the village there are few possibilities for occupying their leisure time, no theatre, no sports and rarely something like a singing group.

Decision making

A very common statement of the women in relation to decision making is: "We make decisions jointly." The reality on the farms is, however, more diverse. Decisions about family affairs, such as choosing a school, are indeed made in consultation with each other. But men do not interfere with the household expenditures, except when major purchases like furniture or a new washing machine come up for discussion.

As described in the three cases above, all women are involved in decision making about farm affairs. It is common that strategic decisions, such as investing in land, buildings and machinery or choosing products, are made jointly. However, men usually suggest what kind and type of machine is best.

The participation of women in day-to-day decision making is generally related to their contribution to the agricultural work. Decisions such as which crop, type of seed or time for ploughing should be chosen are mostly the concern of the men, although women also make suggestions. In matters related to the animals, such as composition of the fodder, calling a veterinarian and determining the right time for artificial insemination, there is not such a strict pattern in decision making. Either the man or the woman (depending on who notices something first), or both of them, decide about these things.

On five of the farms, decision-making is, to a great extent, in the hands of the women. On these farms, the woman is responsible for most of the agricultural work, the daily decisions are made by her, as are the marketing tasks and contacts with the bank.

Marketing is not an exclusively male or female task. Women may have skills which play an important role in marketing. One woman declared: "I am the best in assessing the weight of the pigs and the
right time for slaughter. I can also negotiate better than my hus-
band. Therefore, I'm doing most of the selling." On most of the
farms, the nature of women's involvement is: being consulted about
the best time for selling or searching in the newspaper for traders.
The actual bargaining tends to be more a man's job, or as a woman
explains: "Trading is my husband's business because he knows
more people." However, whether or not they are involved in the
actual bargaining, all women are very well informed about the
prices.

**Access to land, capital, information and organizations**

The results of this study make it clear that men as well as women
have access to land and to land ownership. For example, some
women have obtained title to land from the collective of which
they were once a member or through the compensation scheme
because their parents or grandparents were the former owners.
Land is one of the resources that provides a certain degree of
autonomy.

Prior to the transition, most women on the farms visited had their
own income from an off-farm job. In Hungary, two salaries were
needed in order to have a sufficient family income, so it was a
common practice that women earned money to support the finan-
cial position of the family. The women in this group still regard it
as important and self-evident that they contribute to the family
income. For those women, this is one motive to be active in agri-
culture.

Information about (new) production methods and the market is
usually obtained by reading the newspaper and/or an agricultural
weekly. In addition, several families use textbooks like 'animal
breeding' or 'arable farming'. Women as well as men read these
materials. On three of the farms, the agronomist is also a source of
information. In these cases as well, the woman and/or the man
maintain regular contact with this person.

Attending courses seems to be a male affair. In one case, the
entire family (husband, wife and two sons) attended a farm mana-
ment course, but in the three other situations only the man participated.

Although women play a significant role on the family farms, they are under-represented in the farmers' organization Gazdakör. Nine farms belong to the Gazdakör, but only two women are registered as members (one of them is the single woman who is farming on her own).

It is not that women were uninterested in the Gazdakör, they simply do not find it necessary to attend a meeting when the husband is already going. Besides, going to gatherings is difficult to coordinate with the household duties. In such a case, it is not taken for granted that a woman should give priority to this type of farm affair above the domestic chores. In this respect, it is not self-evident that the woman represents the farm and should resist the attitudes which were described by a woman as follows: "In this village, people think that a married woman ought to stay at home with her family and not go out by herself".

Women's perception of their situation

When the women are asked how they see themselves, they all answer that in the first place they are mothers. Working for the children, providing an intimate atmosphere within the family or keeping the family together are considered important tasks. If they have to fill in a form which asks their profession, most women will write down 'housewife' or the profession of their last job, even when they spend most of their time doing farm work.

The women are not particularly enthusiastic about performing domestic duties. Having the sole responsibility for housekeeping is occasionally expressed as 'not an ideal situation'. "My husband does not consider household work as his task. When we both come back from the cows, he sits down and waits for his dinner. If he spills his coffee, he takes it for granted that I will clean it up. But sometimes I want to sit down and be served as well".

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7 This corresponds with the impression I obtained during a visit to a plant protection course in Kunhegyes. Of the 27 participants, four were women, all sitting together in the front row.
Only one woman prefers doing household work, but in general agricultural work is considered to be more satisfactory. Eight women explicitly say that they like to spend more time in agricultural production. They find agricultural labour more satisfying than household work. They enjoy working outside and like working with animals, the farm work is more visible, one can see the crops grow and it generates money. Furthermore, it is a change from the housekeeping and it can divert them from the everyday routine. Several women would like to spend more time in agriculture, but their domestic obligations do not allow this.

Not all women have such a pronounced opinion. In three cases, the women find all the work they do equally important, and during some interviews this topic was not approached.

While talking about their own situation and the gender relations within the family, these women tend not to complain. However when the position of women in general is discussed, they very often describe the domestic tasks as a burden for women. More then half of the women (11) expressed this in much the same way: "Men and women are equal and can occupy the same positions, but the life of women is harder because they have the responsibility for children and housekeeping," or "One can talk a long time about equality between men and women, but as long as men do not participate in the domestic work this equality stays out of reach." In order to improve this situation they frequently mention making good arrangements (about the division of labour) with the husband. Nevertheless, this issue is not raised within their own family.

The changes

The women referred only in general terms to the changes in their live during the last six years. This was due to the fact that the average time of the interviews (two to three hours) was not enough to get a detailed picture of the division of labour before the transition. Unemployment and the changes in land ownership structure have affected the family farms to a great extent. The extent of the changes differs from farm to farm. In five situations, the farm size or management have hardly changed and the division of labour and responsibilities have also stayed the same. Most of these
women are disappointed with the transition. The unemployment and the related economic uncertainty are cited in this respect. On most of the farms, however, the agricultural activities have been expanded and the extra labour available due to the loss of the off-farm job is absorbed by this expansion. In general, the work in the fields has become more dominant than before. The shift to full time farming clearly changed several aspects of life. One facet, frequently pointed out by the women, is coping with insecure financial conditions, i.e. the total dependence on farm profits and no longer having a steady source of income from a job. On the other hand, working as your own boss is considered to be a positive challenge, but the disappearance of social contacts with former colleagues is a negative consequence. As a result of the change in conditions, two women have started completely new farms. They have made large investments and are responsible for running the farm. Prior to the transition, they were employees of a company, and now they work as agricultural entrepreneurs. They see their new situation as an improvement; although the work is harder, this is compensated by more independence.

4.4 Concluding remarks

This research shows that there is a rigid gender division of domestic labour, while gender specific patterns in agricultural work are much more flexible. Domestic work is a female domain and men rarely help with these tasks. Housekeeping is regarded as a boring, obligatory chore. When farm labour demands more time, the women reduce their domestic work to the most necessary tasks. Many of the women acknowledged that the division of reproductive labour reflects a social inequality between men and women. According to these women, this problem should be solved in the private sphere by making arrangements with the husband. However, they are rather ambiguous about this strategy because the division of domestic labour is not a real point of discussion with their own husbands. All women have a strong involvement in family farming. The extent of involvement, however, differs from case to case. A quarter of the women take care of almost all tasks and responsibilities in
Busy or business: women on family farms  

agricultural production. They are the driving force behind the farm.

In half of the families, wife and husband operate the farm together. Those women work on the farm on a regular basis, they have a labour domain of their own, but they can also have tasks where they assist their husbands, especially with work in the fields. The women participate in strategic as well as in daily decision making. They have an overview of the production process and can influence the course of events on the farm. Their work on the farm is, however, fragmented due to the obligations of domestic work.

Domestic work is the primary responsibility of another quarter of the women. They work on the farm more as assistants, helping whenever necessary. This is especially the case with the work in the fields during the summer. Moreover, because these women are also occupied with the bookkeeping and information gathering, they are well informed about what is going on at the farm and discuss the developments with their husbands.

The position of women on the farms is strengthened by their access to land, capital, information and organizations.

From land ownership, women can secure the decision making power to determine how the land will be used. It is, however, important to realize that the situation of land ownership is quite new. During the transition, everybody -both men and women- who could claim land apparently did so. Nevertheless it is uncertain if these equal opportunities for land ownership will be reflected in future practice. In some families, a son was already working on the farm, and in other cases the women hope that the farm will provide future employment for their son(s). Sons are regarded as potential farmers who will continue the enterprise, while it is not as obvious that their daughters will be active on the farm. Under these circumstances, the land will be turned over to the son. This might imply that in the future, men will own the land.

Their contribution to the family income and their labour input can also allow the women to influence the course of events within the household. An accurate assessment of the relative power of the women can only be obtained by focusing on their control over the use of the income.

Women also strengthen their position by making sure that they keep informed about agricultural affairs. As long as information gathering takes place in the informal sphere, women are involved,
yet when it becomes more institutionalized women are rarely present. The limited access to information, which is partly related to their limited access to organizations, can weaken women’s influence on farm affairs.

In this research, there was no observation of a tendency for women on the family farms to be pushed aside by men as a result of the reorientation towards market production. A probable explanation is that the sudden changes on the farm required help from all available hands in order to cope with the new situation. Whether the women will keep their prominent role when things are more settled is not certain. Women’s labour input might become redundant due to the arrival of a son on the farm or further mechanization. Furthermore, the under-representation of women in the farmers’ organization and their lack of participation in more formal extension activities constrain them from keeping in touch with new knowledge and developments. Consequently, this might affect their position on the farm.
5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Developments in agriculture

In this study, it becomes clear that the agricultural landscape has been radically changed by the transition process. New private producers have emerged, operating on quite a large variety of farms. Some people have embraced the new opportunities and have set up a farm which they operate as entrepreneurs. Among them are managers of cooperatives, who have utilized their knowledge and contacts to develop a successful private farm. Other people, those who have skills and/or a sufficient financial basis, perhaps due to the return of a large amount of land, or people that simply have the guts to take risks, have also started private agricultural enterprises. Some of the larger land owners profit from the surplus of labour by hiring laid-off workers (formerly workers of collectives) on a seasonal basis. This research reveals that women also accepted the new challenges of starting or enlarging a farm.

Most of the private producers were already engaged in private farming on a part time basis prior to the transition. In many cases they switched to full time farming due to a coincidence of circumstances: losing their jobs while simultaneously being given the opportunity to obtain (more) land. To concentrate totally on agriculture is seen by them as the most realistic option, as there are no opportunities on the labour market. There are farms, however, on which the restructuring of agriculture did not have such profound consequences on farm size or farm management. Nonetheless, uncertainty is common to all the farms. They are confronted with a deteriorating economic climate, a crisis in agriculture and a general decline of the standard of living. It has to be understood that the farms are still in a state of transition. Whether the farms will be viable or marginalized in the future is not clear. Most families have been involved in the new developments only for a few years, and do not know if they can or want to proceed in the chosen direction.

Although the significance of family farms has been increasing, the family farms have not entirely replaced the former collective farms. A massive disintegration of cooperatives into small private properties has not occurred. The cooperatives that survived bankruptcy have been re-established as 'new' cooperatives or limited
companies. They continue to operate in the same way, but with a reduced labour force, a smaller size and less production. Cooperative farms still dominate Hungarian agriculture. Especially in regions with arable farming, suitable for large scale agriculture, cooperatives can be expected to maintain their importance in the future.

5.2 Women on cooperative farms

Women could not exert much influence on the transformation process within the cooperatives because they were mostly excluded from positions providing access to the knowledge necessary for designing new organizations. The involvement of women has instead been limited to the executory level. The situation of women within the two cooperatives investigated in this study has not changed much. The rigid gender division of labour that existed before the transition has remained. This means that most of these women are still occupied in lower positions, and are limited to specific sections of the cooperative such as the clerical department, 'caring duties' for young animals or dairy hygiene. This horizontal and vertical gender stratification is likely to have an unfavourable effect on the job opportunities for women on large scale farms.

Due to the transition, employment on the cooperative farms has been drastically reduced. It is beyond the scope of this research to say whether women in general are more affected by unemployment in large scale agriculture than men. It is possible that employment on cooperatives has been, or will be, reduced more for women than for men. Large scale farms are especially advantageous for arable farming, so one might expect that cooperatives will concentrate on crop production. Since the mechanized field work is a male territory, this may imply that job opportunities for women will be restricted.

As in the period before the transition, and as is customary in Hungary, these women are, in addition their work at the cooperative, responsible for domestic tasks and are engaged in agricultural production at home. Since the standard of living has decreased, the women have to perform their roles as wives and mothers under more difficult circumstances. It is therefore not
surprising that they do not regard the transition as an improvement.

5.3 Women on family farms

This study shows that women play a significant role on the family farms around Kunhegyes. In general, these women spend as much or even more time in agricultural work than in domestic labour. A quarter of the women can even be regarded as the driving force behind their farm. Women consider their involvement in agriculture to be important. They enjoy the work because, in contrast to housekeeping, it yields visible results and, above all, it generates income.

Due to their contribution to the farm work and their involvement in bookkeeping and information collecting, these women are well informed about agricultural affairs; they clearly have a voice in the development of the farm. Even when women work on the farm in partnership with their husbands or in the situation where they are mainly engaged with domestic tasks, their labour input is essential for the functioning and performance of the farm. From this, they derive bargaining power. Moreover, some women have taken advantage of the changed situation by obtaining land property. In some cases, this has resulted in new farms being started by women. These facts indicate that women can influence to a greater or lesser extent the course of events on the farm and that they have a certain degree of control over their own lives.

On the other hand, the strict gender division of reproductive labour persists. The cultural norms concerning women's role in the private sphere as wives and mothers that prevailed during the communist period are still present. Child raising and household work are supposed to be exclusively female duties. The women's primary commitment to reproductive labour limits them in their ambitions and diminishes the likelihood of their further engagement on the farm. Ideological factors also restrict the representation of the women in the public sphere. Participation of women in information gathering on a more institutionalized level or in the farmers' organization is only marginal. This demonstrates that women are not fully recognized as farmers. Since there is no platform for rural women, they are limited in their ability to address their needs and to influence the processes of change.
5.4 Recommendations

Since agriculture is a key sector for the Hungarian economy in which women play a significant role, it is crucial that women and women's agricultural interests be involved in the policy and support programmes for the development of agriculture and rural areas. Certainly during a period in which new institutional structures are being formed, it is important that conditions be created which support rural women in fulfilling their agricultural roles. Women, as active agents in shaping agriculture, cannot be ignored. Therefore, attention should be paid to the following points.

It is essential that women can participate in training programmes. Not only for the sake of creating or keeping equal job opportunities for women, but also for the efficient transmission and application of knowledge.

It is important to establish a network for rural women, in order to facilitate the maintenance or enlargement of their contributions to local rural development.

Furthermore, the integration of women on cooperative farms should be promoted, so that they are not only represented at the executory level.

This research has an exploratory character, it is a 'snapshot' of the ongoing transition process. Additional research is needed for a better understanding of the impact of the transition on future developments on the farms and the gender patterns. A clear picture of the nature and the extent of women's labour is indispensable for formulating support programmes for the restructuring of agriculture and rural areas. Women's work and responsibilities must be made visible. In the first place, it is important to gather supplementary statistical data and carry out time studies of unpaid labour in order to get a more complete picture of the participation of women on the large scale farms and on the existing and newly formed family farms.

Research topics that could be derived from this research include:
- It is observed that women's relationship to the family enterprise varies greatly. Future research should certainly compare women's role on farms in different sectors and regions. Factors such as farm scale, the available labour input, standard of mechanization as well as how individual women make use of opportunities, influence the involvement of women. The mode and extent to which these
Factors exert their action in women's lives should be taken into account.

- More qualitative research about the decision making processes on family farms must be done in order to identify possible constraints in this process. Attention should be paid to the ambitions of women, to their views on farming, to the tools that are available for them when negotiating about the division of tasks and to the strategies they develop in reaction to the changing conditions. In doing so, it should be acknowledged that the perceptions men and women have are intertwined with the culturally determined notions of femininity and masculinity.

- The results of this research reveal that women consider their contribution to the family income as self evident. This study does not fully answer the questions: to what extent do women have control over this income and which income resources are accessible to them? Women's income strategies need to be further investigated, in order to obtain a better insight into the relative power women derive from supplementing the family income.

- As mentioned above, land ownership is important for women. Under the present circumstance, they have access to land. Whether this implies that in the future women can obtain land property as easily as men is not clear. To gain insight into this it is necessary, amongst other things, to take a closer look at the kinship relations and examine how the inheritance arrangements turn out for women. Because new laws, new regulations and new institutions have been formed in Hungary, further research should certainly explore the legal status, economic position and social security of agrarian women.

- This study shows that there is no organization that defends the specific interests of agrarian and rural women. Access to rural organizations and institutions is vital to influence the processes of change. An issue for research could therefore be: how to promote the representation of agrarian and rural women. Aspects to be focused on are channels of communication, staff training and which institutional structures can best be approached in order to get a role in local and national policy making. In this respect it would be interesting to examine whether a new farmers' organisation like the Gazdákör can serve as a platform for women.
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