CONCLUSIONS OF AGRICULTURAL HISTORY, REQUIREMENTS OF AGRARIAN POLICY*

PÁL ROMÁNY[1]

The scientific study of agrarian policy is indispensable. Not only to identify solutions to secure mankind's nutritional requirements, but also to understand intrinsic social links between farm businesses and agricultural regions. A study of the latter and the development of answers to these vital issues are performed most effectively at national level. In formulating agrarian policy, a synthesis of the lessons of agricultural history is as crucial as the integration of research findings in farm sociology and agricultural economy. The application of mathematical methods is also an additional requirement. All these tasks require professionally trained staff and a relatively stable research environment. This is all the more needed in Hungary because, with the failure of 'imported agrarian policy' and the liquidation of what was called 'the Hungarian agrarian model' at the end of the last century, the sector has lost its sense of direction. In order to stem the tide of rural exodus, prevent large masses from abandoning farming and return to production levels known in the past, new programs are needed and the agrarian society must be stabilised.

KEYWORDS: Agricultural history; Agrarian policy; Agricultural program.

For years it has been a common notion, shared even by scientists, that agriculture has lost its traditional relevance. Statistical data demonstrate the way in which its contribution to the GDP has shrunk to a few percentage as well as the way in which the cost of food takes an ever-decreasing share in household budgets. In summer 2001, the question whether the development of an agrarian policy is justified and, if so, in what form was a key issue at an international conference in Rome.[2] However, the age-old and fundamental argument whether or not and especially how the Earth can maintain mankind may perhaps be put to rest today. The present paper address challenges attempts to underestimate agrarian policy, agricultural economics or agriculture as a whole, and all simplified conclusions deduced from the natural shift in proportions.

* Based on a lecture delivered at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences on November 19, 2001, organised by Section IV. of the Academy and the Szent István University as part of a conference, 'The Day of Hungarian Science'. The paper's topic forms part of OTKA's research project No. 029844. The Hungarian version of this study was pblished in the *Statisztikai Szemle* Vol. 80. No. 7. p. 663–673.

[1] President of the Agricultural History Committee of the Magyar Mezőgazdasági Társaság (Hungarian Agricultural Society), professor at the Szent István University, Gödöllő.

[2] CAESAR Rómában, 2001-ben. (2001) *Számvetés*. Vol. 2., No. 2., p. 1–12. old., and *Romány P.* (1996): Az elveszejtett agrárápolitika. *Magyar Nemzet*, March 26., and *Fertő I. – Éder T.* (eds.) (1998): Az agrárpolitika gadaságtana. Századvég Kiadó. Budapest.

The fact that in technologically advanced societies the number of active farm workers has decreased, as a result of the social distribution of labour, precisely confirms the opposite of what is often proclaimed and enacted in undue haste. When the reliable food supply for an increasing number of the population depends on the efficiency and resolution of a decreasing number of people, the role of those ‘few’ (whether called farm-hand, landwirth, farmer or anything else), will obviously grow in significance. The fact that in the average family budget the cost of food has dropped to 8 to 10 percent does not in any way diminish the crucial importance of the production, distribution and daily availability of provision. In fact, the consumer expects an ever-improving level of services from all participants of the sector.

It is evident that, as a result of expanding incomes, spending on non-food items continues to claim a larger share in the consumer basket, including car maintenance, services etc. Should this lead to less need for food and an agrarian policy relegated to the sideline? Does it not suggest instead that when agriculture provides reliable supply with provisions for 80 to 90 percent of the population (due to the declining number of self-sufficient farms) and could even guarantee its survival in times of international conflicts, the agrarian sector deserves special attention; and not only for the sake of agriculture itself, but also for the stability of the entire economy and the needs of society? Without domestic production, inadequate and dwindling supplies produced by ‘primary producers’, what comes next? Should we look for basic foodstuff on foreign markets? And if that fails, should we return to rationing? As was declared at the United Nations’s 1973 General Assembly that from a moral point of view, there is no difference whether a man is killed in war or whether he is condemned to starve to death by the indifference of others. At the 1974 Meeting of the Club of Rome, *Willy Brandt* stated that they must find the way out of poverty, because if they fail to learn this lesson in time, thousands of thugs will terrorise those considered ‘affluent’ today. Recent events lend special relevance to these and similar warnings.

For a long time, Hungary has counted on its relatively favourable agricultural resources, keeping its interests in mind, it ensured its products were in demand in foreign markets. (Particularly when its other products were not really marketable.) With the exception of a few short periods, Hungary managed to maintain this ability over the past century. The quantity of food sold in domestic and foreign markets grew steadily (agricultural exports in particular), while the farm population continued to decrease until it became less than one tenth of what it was a hundred years ago.[3] By the logic of mathematics, agriculture today should produce at least ten times more than a century ago. In turn, it should enjoy a correspondingly higher social prestige and the attention of science devoted to its improvement. The sector should be taken seriously not because of the percentage of its producers within the general population, their absolute numbers, or by virtue of some ‘primeval force’ they may represent, but simply due to the important role they perform. One should avoid confusing cause and effect, GDP and photosynthesis, exports and balance sheet, as is so often the case.

[3] *Balás Á. – Hensch Á.* (1896): *Magyarország földművelése.* Földmívelés-, Ipar- és Kereskedelemügyi M. Kir. Minisztérium kiadása „…. 75 percent or ¾ of the country’s population is engaged in primary agricultural production or makes a living in that sector, i.e., belongs to the class of primary growers, while the industrial sector employs 17 percent of the population ...” p. 99. In 1996 302 thousand individuals (8.2%) were employed in agriculture, forest management and fisheries, and 972 thousand (26.6%) in industry. (*Magyar statisztikai zsebkönyv, 1996*. Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, Budapest. 1997. p. 42.)

I insist, not for the first time, that we must restore the rights of agrarian policy as a scientific pursuit, the analysis of agrarian policy as the twin disciplines of agricultural economy and farm sociology. These subjects (including agricultural history, rural and co-operative policies) were taught and researched in Hungary by such professors and academicians as *István Bernát*, *Jenő Czettler*, or *Imre Nagy* and *Ferenc Erdei* as well as *Sándor Domanovszky*, *Károly Ihrig*, *Mihály Kerék* or *István Szabó*. We should not forget *Vilmos Lázár* and *Rudolf Andorka*, former presidents of the Agricultural History Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

After due revaluation, it is high time to restore a sense of continuity. Utopias must be set aside, theories need to be put in balance, and enduring values must be preserved and utilize. In the words of *Domokos Kosáry*, academician and founding editor of *Agrártörténeti Szemle*: 'Accepting our past in humility as a mature nation, without anguish and self-mutilation is, instead of weakness, the sign and the very source of strength'.[4]

LESSONS, REQUIREMENTS AND THE XXTH CENTURY

We have had plenty of lessons to learn from the most recent agricultural development. We must choose among them. We probably do not select those sufficiently proven by scientific methods. In a survey of the following five propositions, we may have to resort to some hypotheses as well.

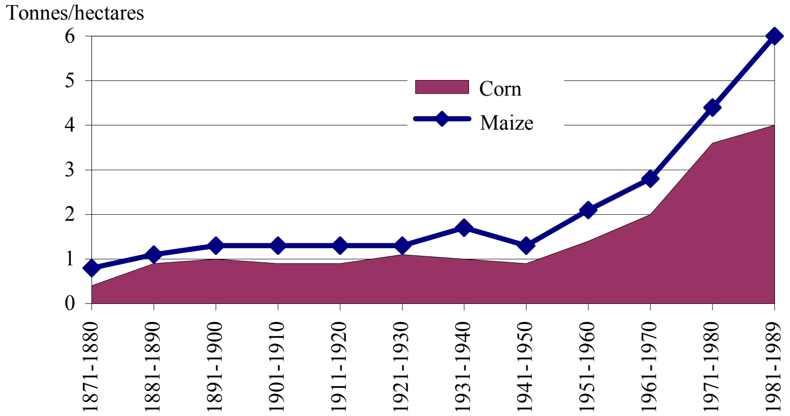
1. Our first already proven proposition is that by the last third of the past century, Hungarian agricultural output reached the level of top European producers. Besides a number of other factors, which shall be discussed in the following, we maintain that these results were due to cooperation between science and practical implementation as well as the professionalism and flexibility of the participants involved. The age was characterised by innovation in land cultivation and forestry, in food industry and water management. All other contributing factors cited with justification (i.e., the hard work of farmers, political balancing, and many other elements of what was called 'the Hungarian agricultural model') can be traced back to expertise acquired through hard work, its application and a perhaps unique offensive by agricultural engineering that may never be repeated. This was a huge achievement (demanding to be continued), even allowing that it was not unprecedented. During the ministership of *Ignác Darányi*, who was the minister of agriculture for twelve years at the turn of the XXth century, both the development of a network of research labs and professional training achieved significant results. Rural development was served already with the establishment of Ministry Agencies in the Mountain Region (Munkács),[5] and in Székelyföld[6] and, along with other laudable measures, the first steps were taken for the protection of natural resources in the regions of Lake Balaton and the High-Tátra Mountains.

These favourable initiatives could not be continued in the XXth century. Until the 1945 land reform in the middle of the century, the country's landholding system remained unchanged. Between the two world wars, school system was expanded while lag-

[4] Quotation from *Ágnes Tóth* (1988): Kosáry Domokos: A történelem veszedelmei. *Forrás*, Vol. 20., No. 1. p. 94.
[5] Munkachevo now in Ukraine.
[6] Now in Romania.

ging agricultural production improved little without significant contributions of science and expertise. For a long time, yields remained at XIXth century levels, as illustrated in the following Figure.[7]

Average yields of Hungary's two main plant: corn and maize



Source: Based on data provided by *Béla Győrffy*.

For the first time in the history of the nation, average corn yield exceeded 2 thousand kilogrammes per hectares in 1965, and reached twice that is 4 thousand kilogrammes per hectares in 1977 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Average yields of corn, over a 50-year period

Year	Average yield (kilogramme per hectares)	Total production (thousand tonnes)	Sown area (thousand hectares)
1939	1630	2688.6	1650.7
1948	1150	1583.1	1379.4
1965	2170	2442.6	1125.5
1971	3070	3921.9	1273.2
1977	4050	5319.0	1311.2
1984	5410	7392.0	1360.6
1993	3050	3020.7	986.0

Source: *Magyarország népessége és gazdasága.* Múlt és jelen. Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, Budapest. 1996. p. 104–105.

There can be observed three to fourfold increases from the same acreage (see Table 2.). It is evident without further elaboration that this level of improvement constituted a sort of green revolution itself; it required new crop varieties and advanced technical and financial support structures. The ten-tonne leaps in maize production point to that direc-

[7] Farmworkers and farm-servants did not send their children to school. *Gyula Illyés* mentioned in his book, *Puszták népe*: I do not know one field-hand who would send his son to secondary school […] Anyone caught reading a book before the war (World War I. – *P. R.*) was labelled as uppity, after the war simply as communist. (Századvég Kiadó, Budapest, 1993. p. 207.)

tion as well. These achievements also defined the quality of plant cultivation and that of agriculture as a whole, as well as the decline, which followed in the 1990s.

Table 2

Average yields of maize over a 50-year period

Year	Average yield (kilogramme per hectares)	Total production (thousand tonnes)	Sown area (thousand hectares)
1939	1840	2185.3	1186.1
1966	3160	3906.7	1237.1
1973	4090	5963.2	1472.9
1975	5020	7171.7	1422.8
1982	6860	7959.2	1157.8
1992	3650	4404.9	1159.0

Source: *Magyarország népessége és gazdasága.* Múlt és jelen. Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, Budapest. 1996. p. 104–105.

However, for the sake of our future, we should pay close attention to past achievements of the Hungarian Academy of Science, the performance of the research–training network and its lessons. The first endogenous maize hybrid of Europe was developed in Martonvásár. The new technology, variety and production methods gained nationwide acceptance in Hungary in just one or two years. Hungarian agriculture applied all new achievements of biochemistry, genetics and reproduction biology practically overnight (in secret, when it was necessary). Zygota transplantation was adopted from Canada, hybrid technology from Iowa, aerial plant protection from the Soviet Union, and the insecticide Simazin was acquired from Switzerland. Few people are aware that for decades Hungarian cartography and remote sensing experts have served the needs of agriculture with their space images of the highest quality. Tens of thousands studied in the country's agriculture universities, in vocational schools or received local training. Many lessons of these advances have not yet been drawn and await further study.

But one thing is already evident: in the last third of the past century the improvement of Hungarian agriculture production followed its own direction, while it remained open to any new information coming from Europe or the world. The method employed may have been defined as some kind of production system or what was called 'Tessedik Socialist Brigade' (as, for instance, the papillonaceae plant seed program started by the academicians *Andor Jánossy* and *G. Adolf Manninger* after 1956), the emphasis was always on the primacy of expertise and concentration to the task at hand with a minimum of protocol. At the same time, these programs brought development and nationwide recognition to small agricultural communities. The unique achievements of agriculture are also illustrated by the fact that in fifty years the number of towns more than quadrupled; villages became urbanised.

The first requirement from practitioners of agrarian policy and agricultural sciences in general (based on lessons of agricultural history as well) is that they should promote scientific achievements and represent their professional position at every forum. Putting theory into practice and selecting among alternatives continues to be the responsibility of decision-makers. This responsibility extends to providing opportunities for the dissemination of expert opinions. The current outdated and backward state of agrarian policy is not caused by the lack of preparation on the part of relevant disciplines (i.e., farm management, property law or civil engineering), but rather by the ignorance of decision-makers, the tangled and often conflicting interests of stakeholders in position.

It is my conviction that scientists (in this case representatives of agricultural history, agrarian policy and agricultural economics) are bound to make their voices heard today as well.[8] For they had not only swore under oath, but are well trained to follow their vocation and mission. They must take up the challenge posed by the growing deficit of knowledge among producers and managers, including distributors of farm products and people working in related services. A comprehensive teaching–learning program needs to be developed. Not only because of the country's upcoming accession to the EU, but for our own sake and at more than elementary level.

2. The second lesson is the need for stability. This is based on the fact that the entire XX[th] century Hungarian agriculture had all but two or maximum three peaceful decades of development. Years of war and political turmoil followed each other with monotonous regularity. A long succession of latifundia, entailed property, the promised land reform, war economy, mandatory contributions, restructuring and its reversals, and the transfer of property followed each other. No wonder, investment capital avoided agriculture and the middle-class failed to take root in the countryside. Moreover, the promise of social mobility was realised only during short periods.[9]

A careful study of data from the century under review does not support the idea that the wide fluctuations in agricultural output were due to climatic conditions. Comparative annual data collected from 1950 indicate that large year-to-year fluctuations in output (and not only in average yields, but also in total agricultural product) were caused by constant disruptions in management and distribution, by a looming threat of political and institutional quarters. In other words, in addition to purely economic and climatic factors, the crisis was brought about primarily by the intolerant enforcement of extraneous considerations with no regard to the structure of economy. Looking at a few numbers: in half a century, Hungarian agriculture experienced four setbacks compared to total production levels it had already achieved in the past. First in 1952 and 1953, second in 1956, third in 1960 and 1961 and then in the 1990s. Total output dropped significantly by 50 points from a high of 220 index of 1989 (taking 1960 output as 100 percent). The lowest point came in 1993 (142), but we have not seen a true recovery to this day (see the columnar composition on the next page).

Our negative world record is matched by three countries outside the former Soviet member countries, namely Bulgaria, Slovakia and Cuba (in the latter country, 1999 agricultural output in volume dropped to 60 percent as compared to the 1989–1991 base).[10]

[8] The Agricultural Sciences Section of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences expressed its dissenting opinion prior to the collectivisation drive of 1958, and *Ferenc Erdei* laid out his concerns in a letter to political leaders. These have been ignored by decision-makers, just as was the case in 1992 when the Section called attention to anomalies in the sector, forwarded to politicians by the Presidency of the Academy.

[9] *Rudolf Andorka* (1989) considered as the greatest achievement that upward mobility for agricultural workers' children improved significantly (*Társadalomtudományi Közlemények*. Vol. 18. No. 2., p. 192).

[10] If we take 1989–1991 as a base of the gross agricultural production, then in 1999 the total world average comes to 117.3. The adequate figures are in Hungary 72.3, in Bulgaria 63.8, in Slovakia 72.1 and in Cuba 62.0. (*FAO Quarterly Bulletin of Statistics*; 1999. No. 3–4.)

Total agricultural output against 1950 figures

Year	Percentage	Year	Percentage
1950	100	1969	155
1951	117	1971	157
1952	86	1973	171
1953	105	1975	183
1954	105	1977	198
1955	118	1978	200
1956	102	1980	206
1957	117	1982	226
1958	123	1989	220
1959	128	1991	196
1960	120	1993	142
1961	118	1994	146
1962	122	1995	147
1967	144	2000	148

Source: *Magyarország népessége és gazdasága*. Múlt és jelen. Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, Budapest. 1996. p. 103.

Our lag cannot be excused by a 250 percent performance in crop production (compared to a 1990 base, but calculated at current prices), which without the price adjustment barely reaches 70 to 75 percent. And we have not even mentioned the decline in improvements and capital investments which should serve future production.

One should not forget that for agents in agriculture faith in stability, ownership and distribution structures and the future of farming enjoy priority above all other considerations. The rural community and agriculture in general must be an island of peace and stability. The process of embourgeoisement and property rights are also closely linked. In the darkest years one encounters a series of disruptions and the resulting erosion, which is evident in the repeated changes of the agrarian elite. One cannot eliminate with impunity or, to put it mildly, leave on the sidelines eminent experts who, among others, maintained accurate records of the soil structure of a particular field. The effects of these mistakes can be measured in billions, and repeated several times over many generations.

Building on the future viability of agricultural regions is a crucial issue of rural development as well,[11] allowing and accepting that various regions of the country and their agricultural potential show great variation. Competition is a function of diversity and varied talents. There have never been two enterprises that would be identical in their operations or performance. The real question lies in the rate of gross value added, wages and income levels based on one cultivated hectare and one employee.

In short (in addition to familiarity with legal, political, administrative and other requirements) for recovery one needs to have a thorough knowledge of farming and reaction mechanisms as well as other professional tools to understand the problems of agrobusiness. A bit of wisdom and attendant patience are also recommended. Moreover, there is a need for personal continuity in key agricultural positions, allowing the development of skills listed previously and that of public trust.

[11] *R. Kapusinsky*, the globe-trotter publicist wrote: As long as the countryside is backward, the entire country will remain backward ... As long as the young man settled in the big city sees his village as an exotic scenery, the nation he belongs to has not yet joined the modern world. *P. R.* (2001): Az agrárpolitika tizenkét pontja. *Gazdálkodás*, Vol. 65., No. 2., p. 15–21.

3. The third lesson we should not forget is the fact that agriculture and forest management are seasonal in nature and require shift-work at the height of season. Labour requirement is not shaped by social conditions. Wherever possible, the first problem is solved by the introduction of everbearing crops, while in many places they still try to solve the lack of sufficient farm-hands by employing seasonal employees, migrant workers, youth (temporary) camps, military recruits or family members, etc. Cash flow is similarly seasonal. The creation of financial bridge and, particularly, the establishment of business operations providing regular and stable income may represent true solutions. Large farming co-operatives in Hungary have developed subsidiary production or service operations (e.g., quarrying, egg powder production) and they have integrated small-scale production (by smallholders, small- and medium-size operators). They employed a unique combination of creative solutions. They operated 'agro-businesses' and what are called agro-industrial complexes. State administration encouraged these efforts. Agricultural experts from China studied the methods of diversification and adapted those achievements to their conditions.

The method of relying on several sources lost none of its relevance in the age of recently re-discovered 'multi-functional' agriculture recommended by the EU. In Hungary, balancing the wages of agricultural and non-agricultural workers' at the given period and the socio-political emancipation of the former ones must be regarded as the greatest achievement of the approach. It also reduced the number of long-distance commuters and successfully integrated traditional and modern production and management solutions. It created local employment opportunities, benefiting both agricultural production and the community at large. Today, the 20 to 30 percent or even larger loss in agricultural wages carries the risk of a new wave of migration.

Current agrarian policy must take account of previously discussed issues, and not only from the point of welfare, but also for reasons of business and regional policy. At the same time, the complementary aspects of farming and forest management and other successful forms of cooperation should not be neglected either.

4. The fourth lesson relates to the lifestyle of Hungarian agricultural communities. Agricultural history (but agricultural sociology and agrarian policy even more so) records epochal changes and their consequences that characterise the period under discussion. Former positions in the social hierarchy underwent radical change or disappeared completely. The farm community gradually lost its sharecropper gang-leaders and pickers, and farms started to do without the granary, the yoke oxen and the oven in the living room. At harvest time, the lead mower was replaced by the combine operator, as was the teamster by the tractor driver, and further changes were still to come. While in 1949 seventy-three percent of all homes in the countryside had one room, in 1994 only 14 percent. The traditional self-sufficient farming family that once purchased barely more than salt and kerosene for lighting from the local general store is long gone. With all players having been replaced, why use the old scenario? Once vibrant traditions have been relegated to the stage of folklore festivals.

One can argue whether such haste was justified; whether the drastic transition caused more harm than good, or wonder if there is need for gas heating where traditional fuel sources are still abundant. But competition brought on by modernisation, the desire for a breakthrough in villages and small towns had no patience for more delay. As the farmer was despised for things he could have been proud of, he was eager for change and impatient to make up decades of lost opportunities in a few years.

However, instead of just the countryside, the entire country has fallen behind. For instance, one could look at the level of mechanisation: in 1938 375 inhabitants had one car as compared to 24 in Denmark.[12] While today the same index stands at 5 persons per car, rural communities lose population at an alarming rate. In small villages (from Cserhátszentiván to Bakonyszentiván) the number of young inhabitants under 18 has dropped to 10 to 15 percent. Demographic analysis can and must be performed urgently, but that is evidently not enough any longer, and the same is true for welfare programs. A balance between agricultural population and farm structure must be created before one may even start discussing embourgeoisement.

There is a need for agrarian policy built on rural research, long-term and realistic regional policy and thorough restructuring. We must also be prepared for the task of large-scale reforestation projects.[13] All this requires time, scientific foundations and national commitment from intellectual, economic and legislative quarters, even if local communities receive more and effective support from government agencies, the church and society in general. If the farm population inevitably continues to decline, Hungary may forever lose the chance to develop intensive farming methods along the Dutch model.

One of the most important and attractive challenges for agrarian policy doctrine may be defined as follows: how to coordinate various resources to generate the best results for agricultural production, the farm community and the national economy as a whole, making sure that the rural population comes out ahead. Moreover, the following pitfall must also be avoided: 'Private farmers attached to state budget through an umbilical cord may easily become an economic and political burden as well loss-making co-operatives of the past years', as the academician *Csaba Csáki* stated recently.

5. And finally, a few words about foreign trends and the rest of the world. Many signs point to the fact that Hungarian agriculture turned into itself, shows little interest for the latest international trends, innovative policies, agricultural and scientific advances in Europe and the neighbouring countries.[14] Only a few years ago, the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the UN highly appreciated the contribution of Hungary to the solution of third-world agricultural problems and erected the FAO-office for Central and Eastern Europe in Budapest. What advantage have we taken of this position? The World Bank would hire Hungarian agricultural experts to analyse farm conditions in the former Soviet Republics, and other opportunities could be mentioned, opportunities that are missed for the most part.

Referring back to our opening thesis, in our opinion the argument that agriculture in general or in Europe has reached marginal status (allegedly supported by statistics, an argument deserving little attention) is based on a fundamentally flawed logic.

Undoubtedly, trends of the past 100 to 150 years point to a gradual shift to other sectors of the economy. However, the process of this restructuring is not repeated the same

[12] *Magyar Statisztikai Zsebkönyv*, 1939. Magyar Kir. Statisztikai Hivatal, Budapest, p. 294.

[13] *Solymos R.* (2001): Gondolatok az erdőprogrammról – erdőstratégiáról. *Gazdálkodás*, Vol. 65., No. 4., p. 8–15., *Veress L.* (2001): Falvaink balsorsa. *Valóság*, Vol. 64. No. 9., p. 54.

[14] *Hoffmann T.* (1998): *Európai parasztok*. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest. The working culture of peasantry everywhere becomes history, while it is not replaced by modern farm operations. *Nagy O.* (1989): *A törvény szorításában.* Gondolat. Budapest. The village as viable living space for the young has ceased to exists. (Report from Romania. *P. R.*); *Hayes, J.* (ed.) (1975): *That we may eat U. S.* Department of Agriculture. U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington.

way from one country to another. There might be similarities and some overlaps, but there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. (If there were such uniformity, it would not be called agriculture.) National agrarian policy had a chance to evolve where and when leaders recognised the historical moment and realised what free movement the limitations and opportunities of the age afforded. In Hungary, *Ignác Darányi* and *Ferenc Erdei* were among those few who attained such insight. They managed to turn their knowledge of local conditions and international experience to the benefit of the nation, at least in theory.

Hungary will fall farther behind unless the country rediscovers what had already been known and practised by abbots of monasteries, members of medieval guilds and bailiffs: one must understand the needs of others and cooperate in as many ways as possible. In other parts of the economy, consortiums and other old-new forms are gaining ground. In agriculture, however, the term 'co-operative' has lost its credibility, and the term 'agriculture association' used even by Darányi has also become exiled. In a welcome but insufficient development, the Agricultural Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences set up again a co-operative sub-committee. But much more would be needed. As in 1946, the responsible ministry should set up a co-operative unit under the supervision of a re-established Agrarian Policy Department. Most important of all, the principles of mutual support, the lessons of centuries should be taught, respected and adopted. For, instead of 'garage slaughter-houses', the road to the Danish model and international standards leads through co-operatives and well-run export operations. As early as the XIXth century, the Országos Magyar Gazdasági Egyesület (Hungarian National Econonic Association) was among the first to promote the idea of farm associations.[15]

While this goes beyond the scope of the present overview, one more issue must be discussed here. The problem of caring for an ageing farm population in scattered farms goes back to 25 to 30 years (taken up by agricultural co-operatives at the time), but today the problem has spread to villages. In the Western European countries the stability of farming communities has been established over several generations. With their contributions made before, farmers earned and secured their right to decent care in old age. And if they let their lands go for the 'improvement of property structure', they were granted special retirement benefits, having been practiced in France since 1961.[16] In Hungary the old form of life has disappeared, while protection offered by the new one has not yet been realised.

The country is far behind in providing answers to current issues facing the farming community. This is one of the key responsibilities of national agrarian policy. And we should note that the justification of national scope in issues of agrarian policy is advocated and practised in a number of EU member countries.[17]

Instead of a discussion of various agrarian policies, let us simply look at a long-forgotten definition: 'Being a synthetic discipline […], the theoretical definition of agrarian policy is a difficult task; by its very nature, our attempts at definition keep

[15] *Az Országos Magyar Gazdasági Egyesület Alapszabályai*. (1892) Hungária Könyvnyomda. Budapest,

[16] *Romány P.* (1965): Franciaország. In.: *Romány P.*: *Mezőgazdasági üzemekben Skandináviától Itáliáig*. Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest. p. 172.

[17] *R. Künast,* German Federal minister said on February 8, 2001 in the Bundestag that the majority of Germans demand a new agrarian policy. She tried to convince most federal states to take an active role in its development. Signals from Brussels are rather encouraging. The Germans recommend to Brussels to expand their freedom of movement to reform farm supports at the national level. (BMELF Sajtószolgálat, No. 6–7, February 12, 2001)

shifting between scientific and practical considerations, or a combination of the two ...', is how *Jenő Czettler*, professor of agrarian policy and economic history at József Nádor University of Technology and Economics defined it. 'From a scientific point', professor Czettler continues, 'agrarian policy is anchored in the regular study of historic, natural, economic, public policy, social and partly cultural factors whose combined effect and management shape agricultural production to provide most efficiently a livelihood for smaller and wider social groups and their historically developed agricultural needs […] within the bounds set by nature.'[18]

Key objectives have not changed in decades. To realise them, our work must be taken up each year anew.[19]

A defined set of equations determines whether agriculture and the farm community is destined for success or failure; whether a given agricultural region is abandoned and becomes vulnerable or survives as a viable area. In designing an optimal action plan, the application of the tools of mathematical methods will be indispensable and, even with the best achievements of cybernetics, human creativity and trained people will remain key to any solution.

*

To sum up one can state:

1. Relative to its size, Hungary has the largest percentage of arable land (over 60 percent of its territory) in Europe, an asset that may be further exploited in the future;

2. Hungary's agricultural structure, topography and traditions, as well as its wealth in human resources offer sufficient room for manoeuvring its agriculture into a favourable position;

3. Future social, economic and scientific development must be promoted by agricultural economics through soil management, i.e., boosting profits in agricultural production, and agrarian policy by identifying solutions for social issues resting on indigenous foundations.

At times agriculture is considered as a gift of nature. However, modern agriculture requires professionalism and a lot of careful work, and a quality of life that stands up to the competition posed by other sectors of the economy. National agrarian policy and strategy as well as a system of regulations must rest on such solid foundation. The better the conditions created for realising these objectives, the better chance our agricultural production has to meet both domestic and international requirements. Simultaneously, our other main objective, sustainable development will become a feasible strategy as well.

In creating conditions for agricultural development, agricultural experts may not place their full trust in the presumed omnipotence of the markets or the illusory 'supremacy' of a planned economy. Theories and the best and proven experimental methods of agrarian policy must be dusted off and applied in practice, accepting the fact that agrarian policy has always been and will remain a defining force in all our future efforts.

[18] *Czettler J.* (1945): *Agrárpolitika*. Vol. 1., p. 66, p. 69.

[19] It would be naive to write off agriculture and food production as a negligible segment of the economy. A recent, albeit arguable, position from London. *Colin Tudge* (2001): Az eke. In*: Az elmúlt 2000 év legfontosabb találmányai*. Vince Kiadó, Budapest, p. 28.