

FARMING ON THE PLAINS REGION OF TRANSCARPATHIA

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***Abstract:** The laws of the Ukraine allow individual farming, based on the private property of land. At present there are 1,157 smallholders involved in individual farming on the plains region of Transcarpathia, an area populated primarily by ethnic Hungarians. The restricted size of lands 7,9 hectares on the average, does not make it possible to achieve high efficiency rates. The majority of the farms work for the direct needs of the family, and only the surplus is marketed. It is expected that farms that are unable to survive shall be eliminated, and the ownership of land shall be concentrated in a small number of wealthier farms. It is also expected that after the old-type cooperatives were closed down, new cooperatives, meeting the demands of a market economy, shall come into being.*

***Key words:** farming – private land ownership – farm sizes – efficiency*

Transcarpathia, an area populated primarily by ethnic Hungarians, was a part of Czechoslovakia after World War I and obtained by the Soviet Union after World War II, is an extension of the Hungarian Plains, reaching beyond the Ukrainian border. The natural conditions of agricultural production are therefore the same as those in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County, on the other side of the Hungarian border. The private property of land was eliminated in Transcarpathia as a result of the collectivization in the late 1940s. The lands of the state farms – Sovhoz in Russian – belonged to the state, whereas the lands of "kolkhozes" were owned by the "people."

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the parliament of the freshly independent Ukraine passed a law on Land Reform in 1991. The new law allowed individual farming for a family's own needs and for the market as well. The Law on Land Property of 1992 introduced, with certain limitations, the private ownership of agricultural land. In 1994 and 1995 two presidential decrees were issued: "On Identification of the Lands Transferred to the Joint Use of Agricultural Companies and Organizations" and on "The Reform of Agricultural

Production.” In accordance with these decrees, members of the kolkhozes, converted into collective agricultural companies, had the opportunity of take lands out of the joint property for their own personal use. They paid for the land with their privatization vouchers. It is to be pointed out, however, that the laws and presidential decrees of the Ukraine do not make it possible to obtain land through restitution – that is, the original owners (or their inheritors) of the lands that were taken in the days of nationalization are not allowed to reclaim the same lands.

According to reliable statistical figures, the total area of agricultural lands in Transcarpathia is 429,5 thousand hectares. Out of this, 117,3 thousand hectares are used by state farms, private enterprises, new cooperatives and the limited liability companies replacing the former kolkhozes in accordance with the presidential decree on ”The Pressing Measures Aimed at Accelerating the Reform of Agriculture,” issued in 1999. Smallholders have a total of 302 thousand hectares.

The constraints of time do not make it possible to provide a thorough analysis of individual farming, so only the most important characteristic features shall be pointed out. According to figures of the statistical annal of 2002, in 1992 there were only 135 farms with a total of 420 hectares, but in 2002 the respective numbers are 1,420 and 10,240. It is also to be noted that both the number of farms and the area in their cultivation diminished as compared to the previous year (the number of farms was 1,459 in 2001). In the four plains districts of Transcarpathia, where the population is largely ethnic Hungarian, the same changes are observable. In the Beregszász district there were 305 farms in 2001 and 294 in 2002. In the Nagyszőlős district the number of farms reduced from 424 to 407, but the total area cultivated by the farms increased from 1,413 to 1,482 hectares. In the Munkács district both the number and area of farms increased: 200 and 206 farms with 1,931 and 2,211 hectares. In the Ungvár district the reduction of the number of farms took place together with an opposite change in the area of land: the number of farms reduced from 263 to 250, but the total area of their lands increased from 3,172 to 3,284 hectares. All in all, the number of farms on the plains districts of Transcarpathia was 1,192 in 2001 and 1,157 in 2002. The total cultivated area was 9,542 hectares in 2001 and 9,156 in 2002. In a breakdown according to individual districts, the average size of a farm in the Beregszász district was 9,9 hectares in 2001, and in 2002 this figure reduced to 7,4 hectares. In the Nagyszőlős district the corresponding figures were 3,3 and 3,6 hectares, in the Munkács district the figures were 9,7 and 10,7 hectares, and in the Ungvár district 12,1 and 13,1 hectares respectively.

The reason why it is necessary to study these statistics in detail is that the individual farms were unable to increase their areas in spite of the presidential decree eliminating the monopoly of cooperatives, and the small size of the farms in itself – especially in the Nagyszőlős district – questions the success and efficiency of agricultural production. Considering the fact that the majority of the farms in the plains districts of Transcarpathia do not considerably exceed one hectare in size (109,000 farms) it is possible to assert the majority of these small farms produce crop primarily for family needs and not for the market. This statement, however, does not exclude the possibility that some of the farms are close to efficient and modern agricultural production.

The regional statistical bureau conducted a thorough survey of the smallholders and farms in 2000. Figures from 2001 are not available, and the data for 2002 are being gathered now. The figures of 200 suggest that the proportion of ploughlands is 100% in the Beregszász district, 97,5% in the Nagyszőlős district, and 98% in both the Ungvár and Munkács districts. Farming is therefore primarily based on crop growing. The yield of grain crops was 3, ton/ha in the farms of the Beregszász district, 3,5 tons/ha in the Nagyszőlős district, 3,4 tons/ha in the Munkács district, and 3,3 in the Ungvár district. The average yield of corn approached 4 tons/hectare. Considering the low mechanization of the farms – only one in three has a tractor, and only 20 of them have a combine, the figures of average yield are acceptable.

Animal husbandry at the farms is primarily based on the fodder grown at the farms themselves. The average number of cattle does not exceed two heads per farm, the same figure for pigs is four, and practically none of the farms is specialized as a ranch of animal keeping.

It is important to note that work is mostly done by the owner of the farm and their family members – 89% of all the mandays – whereas the share of permanently employed assistance is 4%, that of temporary, not full-time assistance is 7%.

Apart from an insignificant number of exceptions, the farms on the plains region of Transcarpathia do not have any means of processing their own produce. In this way any surplus that exceeds the direct needs of the family is sold in an unprocessed form.

In the mountain districts of Transcarpathia – and it includes the lower mountain ranges as well – the natural conditions of agriculture do not allow large-scale production or efficient individual farming. The overwhelming majority of the food produced on the farm is consumed by the family. At the same time, the formerly emphasized and anticipated advantages of individual farming are still not observable on the plains region.

In the future it is expected that the individual farms unable to survive on their own shall disappear, and the lands shall be concentrated in the hands of fewer but more successful farmers. (At present only 16% of the farms have more than 20 hectares of land each). In parallel with this, the quantity of food produced around the house shall continue to be significant. Considering the low mechanization and the high costs of purchasing machinery, it is also possible that several farms will purchase and share machines together. It is especially likely in the Ungvár district.

Only two years have elapsed, and it is not yet easy to correctly evaluate the performance and efficiency of the limited liability and other agricultural production companies replacing the former state farms and cooperatives. These companies are expected to meet the requirements of a market economy and the majority of their management – as opposed to the owners of individual farms – have advanced degrees and high qualifications in agriculture. It is therefore expected that as the number of individual farms diminishes, the companies shall increase their share in the total agricultural output, thus increasing the concentration of lands and production in fewer hands. It may determine the efficient forms of agricultural production in the plains regions of Transcarpathia in the future.

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