

## **THE HISTORY AND THE PRESENT STATE OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN HUNGARY AND ITS IMPORTANCE CONSIDERING THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN AGRICULTURAL STUDIES**

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In Hungary, agriculture contributes approximately 4% to the GDP, which is slightly higher than the European average. When other sectors which depend directly on agriculture are also taken into account, this ratio increases to 10-12%.

Alongside tourism, the only sector that demonstrates a positive financial balance in foreign trade is agriculture, which indicates its importance within the Hungarian economy. In 1999, a total of 275,000 people were employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing together. In 2005, this number dropped to 194,000 and in 2008, employment figures declined further to 174,000. The fact that the agricultural society is aging only adds to this problem. A staggering 31% of farmers are over 65 and the average age is 56 years. Young people's interest in agriculture has been deteriorating year-over-year. A survey conducted among undergraduates suggests that a degree in agricultural studies is simply not popular with this group and the social status and prestige associated with agriculture is considered low. People commonly link agriculture with manual labour, however, the competitiveness of this sector and gaining access to EU funding require profound knowledge in economy and finances while precision farming requires a high degree of technical skills. Consequently, professionals in agriculture need to possess a broad range of knowledge and expertise nowadays.

Arguably, young people ought to learn the basics of these specific areas at school. Hungary has played a pioneering role in the field of agricultural education in Europe. The first elementary school teaching agricultural studies was founded in 1779 by Szorgalmatossági Tessedik Samuel Lutheran pastor under the name of Practical School of Economics in Szarvas. While basic subjects relating to agriculture had already been taught in elementary schools in the nineteenth century, in 2015 a total of only 48,640 students obtained agricultural qualifications, which represents a mere 3.67% of all the degrees issued in that year.

In respect of higher education, 7,522 students commenced their advanced agricultural studies in 2001, while only 4,037 students were admitted to college or university in 2016. This represents a significant decline of almost 46%.

Undoubtedly, demographic data is showing a decrease in the number of students participating in public education, though this reduction is much more severe in agricultural education.

So that Hungary is able to maintain its leading position in agriculture, it is vitally important to educate future generations, which needs a purposeful guidance from the government. I believe that one way to revitalise the aging agricultural sector is to encourage the passion of young farmers together with the implementation of an effective, thoughtful and step-by-step generation change. In order for this to be successful, we need to reconsider the environmental aspects of the region, revisit traditional practices in agriculture and establish a suitable incentive system.