

FARMING AND MANAGEMENT OF HAY MEADOWS IN CSÍK (CIUC) AND GYIMES (GHIMES) – EXPERIENCES FROM SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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Within our hay meadow conservation programme we conducted a sociological survey between January and March 2010 on the two demonstration sites of the project, Csíkelne and Jávárdipataka. This research was important because there are no reliable data of this type about local farmers and without these we cannot establish a picture of the current agricultural situation.

Our main goal was to gather information and data from farmers that own a hay meadow, on the following topics:

- The size of farms (hay meadow, arable land, pastures, animals, others) now and 10 years ago;
- The process of mowing (when do they cut the grass, how many times per year, by hand or by cutting machine, who is doing it, etc.);
- General details about meadow management (fertilizers, other actions on the hay meadow besides mowing);
- Motivation and future plans related to farming (why are they farming, would they rather buy more animals or sell, plans and hopes, difficulties, will they continue farming as a job/source of living);
- Creating income from selling products (what kind of products do they sell, to whom, how much, at what price, which products would they be willing to sell but now can't);
- Descendants' attitude to farming (will they continue what parents and grandparents started to do, what would motivate them);
- Other aspects (subsidies, agro-tourism, etc.).

The secondary objective of the survey was to inform the farmers about the project, to delineate its objectives, achievements to the moment and also to give them the opportunity to take part in the project in any way they can or would like to.

During the research we interviewed farmers in Csíkelne and Jávárdipataka, 30 in each. In my presentation I would like to present the results of the survey. Below are some statistics that I would like to emphasize:

- Mean age of farmers 56 (Csík 62, Gyimes 50);
- Mean size of hay meadow owned 3.89 hectares (Csík 2.90 hectares, Gyimes 4.76 hectares);
- Mean number of cows owned 3.8 (Csík 1.5 cows, Gyimes 5.8 cows)
- Around 36.5% of the respondents said that they mow only using a hand scythe (Csík 17.4%, Gyimes 48.3%);
- In 98% of cases farmers use only animal manure on the hay meadows;
- Mean of produced hay per year 1.25 t (minimum 0.4 t/ha, maximum 10 t/ha);
- More than half of farmers will continue farming for the rest of their lives;
- 54.3% of respondents say that they believe their children and grandchildren will continue farming and on the other hand 37% say that their descendants won't farm at all.

From the information gathered during this research one can draw many conclusions, but unfortunately these can be categorized in two parts:

- Concerning the present we can say that many farmers still hold on to traditional methods of

farming, there is an everyday struggle to keep this alive, but because selling their products at a reasonable price is not assured many of them already quit;

- The future, with a few exceptions, is interpreted in a very pessimistic way, and if this perception prevails and no solutions are found, then this type of agriculture will disappear from our region too.