

# **Family farms in Slovenia: Who did the measures 'Setting Up of Young Farmers' and 'Early Retirement' actually address?**

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## **Abstract**

The development of Slovenian agriculture is oriented towards sustainable multifunctional farming, yet small dispersed agricultural holdings and their low economic productivity place Slovenia among the EU member states with the most unfavourable agricultural structure. The recently introduced measures of “Early Retirement of Farmers”, and “Setting Up of Young Farmers” were aimed directly at improving agricultural productivity. But to whom were these two measures addressed? In this essay, the author discusses some results of the anthropological fieldwork carried out in 2009 in Prekmurje (NE Slovenia), a region with favourable conditions for farming. The research seeks to explain the divergences and correspondences of the farms with and without aid. The semi-structured interviews revolved around topics on farm history and organisation of farm work from a generation and gender perspective. The results show that the measures addressed farms that had substantially enlarged the size of their farmland, the number of livestock and the capacity of their buildings when the young operators took over the farms. These farms are also better equipped (mechanised) and more family members work full-time on them compared to the non-beneficiary farms. Both forms of aid stimulated the farm transfer from the older to the younger generations. The two types of farms observed do not differ in the organisation of farm work by gender. In general, the differences between the male and female working domain are determined by the time-period observed (political regime) and the introduction of tractors in the late 1960s. However, the care for the elderly and children is the working domain of women in all of the generations observed.

**KEYWORDS:** family farms, Setting Up of Young Farmers, early retirement, generations, gender, Slovenia

## **The research rationale: Towards a multifunctional farming**

The Resolution on the Developmental Orientation of Slovenian Agriculture (RSRSKŽ 2011) puts multifunctional farming and its implementation at the forefront of the medium-term period (by 2020) through the goals of sustainable development and a sustained increase of agricultural competitiveness. These goals, however, do not meet the facts on the ground, particularly those related to the prevailing form of agricultural activities in Slovenia, i.e. family farming. The average size of agricultural holding in Slovenia is relatively small with 6.4 ha, compared 11.5 ha in the EU-27. Agricultural units are as a rule divided and dispersed on several locations, mostly situated in less favourable areas for farming. Family farms are mainly self-sufficient and their economic productivity is low. Farmer's income is two to three times lower than the income of persons employed in other occupational sectors (Kovačič 2001), which requires supplementing the family farm budget with off-farm resources.

Next to the unfavourable farm size structure, the education and age structure of farmers also contributes to the low economic productivity. Nearly half of farm operators are without any formal education, less than half have vocational or secondary education, and only four percent of them have completed higher, university or postgraduate education (RSRSKŽ 2011: 6). More than half of the operators are over 55 years old, while the share of operators under 45 is only nineteen percent (RDP 2008: 23).

The recently introduced measures of Early Retirement of Farmers (2004) and Setting Up of Young Farmers (2005) were aimed directly at improving agricultural productivity and assuring farming continuity. It became more than obvious that the existence of family farms was endangered and that only the transfers of farms to younger farmers can make an important contribution to the greater innovation and raised competitiveness of agriculture in Slovenia. To whom these two measures were actually addressed was the main research question of two successive research projects: a survey on generational and gender relations on farms in Slovenia (2007–2008), and a follow-up fieldwork on intergenerational assistance in farm families (2009–2011). The ensuing research was designed on the survey's general finding that the most vital (as to the size of farms, education of its members and their fertility) were the farms that had received both forms of aid. By upgrading observations, the ethnographic study sought to provide more in-depth descriptions of the complex dynamics between genders and generations in every adult member of farm household selected; the survey indirectly captured the family atmosphere through the view of only one household interviewee.

In this essay, the presentation of fieldwork results revolves around the question of whether both types of farms, the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, differ in their farm development and management through the generation and gender lenses.

## **Switch to the past: A farmer-industrial worker**

To better understand the particular strategy of family farming in Slovenia, it is necessary to clarify specific historical circumstances. In their estimation of the negative characteristics of farming from a developmental point of view, the majority of national documents more

or less reiterate “the burden of the past” (SRSK 1992, PRP 2004, PRP 2008, SRK-UKPS 2009), mainly referring to the period after the Second World War when agrarian reforms were introduced.<sup>1</sup>

Many historians believe that the post-war agrarian reform (1946) was basically “class and politically” oriented, in the function of supporting the achievements of the socialist revolution (Čepič 1996: 146). The first measures referred to the expropriation of farms that exceeded the maximum of 45 hectares. Other measures pertained to the distribution of land to those who were capable of cultivating it by them. Professional farmers were to be eligible for the land allocation, yet the priority was given to the participants of the national liberation army, farmers without land and those who did not possess enough land to make a living out of it (Čepič 2005a: 887).

Since the Act of Agrarian Reform and Colonisation assured land only to farmers who possessed less than five hectares of farmland, predominantly small estates were created that did not secure a living either to the owner or his family. Moreover, since the act did not allow hired labour in agriculture, the farmers were forced to seek additional sources of income outside of farming, mainly in industry, or they simply worked only for their own needs. The main aim of the authority was to achieve the equation of social classes in the village by the prevalence of “small and medium” farmers. Contrary to expectation, the collectivisation, i.e. the pulling of small individual farm producers into the farm labour cooperatives, i.e. the Yugoslav type of *kolkhoz*, failed since every member of a cooperative had to invest their entire farm inventory, cattle and farm buildings in it (Čepič 1996: 158; 1999: 186; 2005b: 937–39).

This was the main reason why the state again radically intervened in the ownership structure. The second agrarian reform is marked by the famous Act of Land Maximum introduced in 1953. The Agrarian Fund accumulated land of those farmers who had cultivated more than 10 hectares of land. Usually the farmers who lived close to the industrial centres were allowed to make a living in a “double” way: in both local industrial plants and on the farms. Therefore, a farmer-industrial worker became a specialist of Slovenian industrialisation and not of the effective modernisation of farming itself. Those who were employed in off-the-farm activities still lived in the village and were occupied with farming only in the afternoon and evening.<sup>2</sup>

The second agrarian reform was the final act of transforming the ownership structure until the process of denationalisation after the proclamation of Slovenian independence in 1991. The “old practice” of combining on-farm and off-farm income resources still reflects the established socio-economic typology of family farms that, in line with the number of employed persons on or off the farm, distinguishes between pure, mixed, subsidiary and aged farms.<sup>3</sup> The prevailing share of mixed and subsidiary farms (more than 70 percent)

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<sup>1</sup> At that time, Slovenia was one among six republics of Socialist Yugoslavia.

<sup>2</sup> Very illustrative is a calculation that in 1953, 63% of the population in Slovenia was employed in a non-agricultural sector, yet people lived in villages in ‘mixed holdings’ (Čepič 2002: 59).

<sup>3</sup> A pure farm is defined as a farm household with all of its members employed only on the farm; at least one member of a household is employed on a mixed farm; nobody is employed on a subsidiary farm; on an aged farm people older than 64 years old live.

proved the still typical profile of Slovenian farmer: a half-farmer and a half-worker. As some experts emphasise, the combining of various income resources on the farm as one of the strategies of multifunctional farming, remains the leading farm development strategy in Slovenia (Udovč et al. 2006: 71).

## **Theoretical framework: Current emphases**

The concept “multifunctional agriculture” emerged in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit in discussions on promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development (DeVries 2000). Since then, the concept itself has stimulated a wide-ranging debate among researchers and policy-makers. Many of them agree that the most frequently used definition pertains to the OECD (2001), which explains the multifunctionality of agriculture as the existence of multiple commodity and non-commodity outputs that are jointly produced by agriculture (Vatn 2002: 4; Bedrač & Cunder 2006: 243). To put it simply, farmers are viewed as rural entrepreneurs who by various activities produce different outputs and services that may have a use or non-use value for society (Durand & Huylenbroeck 2003: 13).

Somewhat simultaneously, the researchers of family farming describe the increasing shift towards pluriactivity as a livelihood strategy (e.g. Gasson 1986; Fuller 1990; Eikland & Lie 1999; Sofer 2005). Usually they identify two strategies of farming entrepreneurial behaviour. One alternative refers to the intensification of primary production by increasing the size of the farm or the production unit, i.e. specialising in a certain line of production. The other strategy is found in business diversification on the farm, i.e. in deepening the agricultural activity by some other business than conventional agricultural production (e.g. tourism, transportation services, wood processing, metal industry, energy production) (e.g. Vesala & Peura 2005).

Several case studies discuss such developmental strategies in farm-family businesses in the view of changing gender and generation roles and positions within the families (e.g. Rossier 2005). Such research shows that farm families in which the roles are rigidly allocated concentrate on traditional agricultural production and show distance from innovation. Moreover, some case studies led to a hypothesis that farm families with flexible roles and constant re-negotiation among family members on their activities and decision-making on and off the farms would easily tackle the challenges of technical, economic and ecological developments in the agrarian sector. Women and men who earn additional income off the farm are supposed to better confront an economic crisis, and without the participation of all family members, their strategies in various services are generally unsuccessful (Brandth 2002; Bock 2006). The studies that indicate the on-going changing gender relations on farms (Brandth 2002; Asztalos Morell & Brandth 2007) also demonstrate that developmental orientations of farms are strongly linked with the increasingly visible and active role of women working on or off the farms; however, providing care (to children and elderly) still remains their domain. Only a few studies show opposite evidence, in a sense that male farmers (e.g. sons) contribute more to caring for their parents simply because they live on the same family farm (e.g. Elder et al. 1996; Melberg 2005).

Intergenerational exchange and assistance is also indirectly discussed in the studies on farm succession due to the intertwined property, managerial and know-how transfers

among generations in farm families (Villa 1999). These studies try to show various life stages and social positions of an observed actor – a farmer – in a wider social context. Some cases show the tendency towards transformation from farming as an occupation that the older generations were obliged to carry on, to farming as one option among many for the current generation (ibid.).

In Slovenia, there is almost no anthropological research on contemporary family farms; the few anthropological monographs are some decades old (see Winner 1971; Minnich 1979). Comparable to the studies on family farms as a business and a family is the two-decade-old survey *Farm Family – the Social Elements of Family Farm* (1991). The main goal of the survey was to obtain data for a better understanding of the circumstances and possibilities of existence and development of farm families in Slovenia. The research model included the farm both as economy and household as well as its individual members on the other. The survey was a basis for several partial analyses about the farm family and its members by rural sociologists.<sup>4</sup> For instance, in her study on self-renewal of farmers as a social class in Slovenia, Barbič (1993; 2005) analysed the occupational mobility of farmers compared to their parents' mobility. The results showed that self-renewal was characteristic for farmers as a social class. The farmers mostly married among themselves, and, from a generational viewpoint, they were oriented to other occupations, while the opposite, i.e. going from other occupations to a farm occupation, was not the case (Barbič 2005: 267).

Also worth mentioning is the survey *Generations and Gender Relations on Farms in Slovenia* (OGS), carried out in 2007 (Knežević Hočevar & Černič Istenič 2010). The survey sought to determine who the recipients of the measures of Setting Up of Young Farmers and Early Retirement were. The results showed that from the developmental point of view, the measures addressed relatively more vital farm households with regard to the size of farms, the education of its members and their fertility, which also shared some “rigid” features. The young successors (the state beneficiaries) did not participate in wider social networks. Their social network still consisted of their closer siblings only, the division of labour among the family members was less flexible in view of their particular interests, and the younger generation was still committed to providing care for the older generation, either due to the “preservation of tradition” or the lack of some services in their living environment. Due to the methodological design of the survey, which was limited to obtain information about family members of the households from the view of only one household interviewee, these results did not enable broader conclusions on farm household family dynamics as understood by their respective members. Yet these findings on the general profiles of family farming developers served as a start for designing the initial themes of a semi-structured interview for the ensuing anthropological fieldwork.

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<sup>4</sup> See works of Barbič (1993; 2000; 2005), Hribernik (1992; 1995) and Černič Istenič (2006; 2007).

## Fieldwork

Pomurje is a region situated in the northeast of Slovenia, bordering Austria, Hungary and Croatia, and its main town is Murska Sobota. Pomurje is one of Slovenia's least developed regions, with economic activity orientated to industries producing a lower added value per employed person. In general, the service sector is poorly developed as well. The region is clearly agricultural countryside, either by the share of agricultural areas<sup>5</sup> or by the share of farm population (20% at the state level). Livestock production is the most important agricultural branch; the most widespread is cattle production followed by pig production and poultry. The specialty of the region is that more than half of the households are at least partially engaged in farming (RRP 2006: 55), indicating that the share of half-workers half-farmers prevails.

In 2009, the largest Slovenian apparel producer, Mura, and a meat-processing company, Pomurka, located in Murska Sobota, declared bankruptcy; thousands of employees lost their jobs. I expected this economic crisis to trigger full-time employment on farms of those workers who lost their jobs and who had previously combined their off-farm employment with work on the farm.

The fieldwork was carried out in three counties close to (each within 10 kilometres) the municipality Murska Sobota. Six three-generational farm households were chosen by snowball. The main criterion required at least two generations of people to co-reside together under "the same roof" and earn at least a share of the family's net income from agricultural activities. To better understand the generation and gender aspect in more-or-less developed family farms, the cases selected pertain to three farms, the beneficiaries of the measures of Setting Up of Young Farmers and Early Retirement, i.e. the farms with a secured successor. The other three were not the beneficiaries of the two forms of aid, and were without a secured successor during the course of the research.

The elder generation belongs to the time of socialism, when agrarian reforms significantly determined the farming structure and strategies in the country. The younger generation of collocutors mainly belongs to the post-socialism in which Slovenia proclaimed its independence (1991), joined the EU (2004) and adapted to the CAP reforms.

All family names are pseudonyms. The use of terms *older* and *younger* generation pertains merely to the generational sequence, not the chronological age of the family members.

The introductory theme included the description of the family farm through the narratives on the farm history in each collocutor's view. By the example of the previously established database on generations and gender relations, the collocutors discussed some *a priori* designed themes related to various transfers, the division of labour tasks and assistance among their family members. Yet due to the "nature" of fieldwork some topics emerged completely anew.

The preliminary results given below revolve around the major divergences and correspondences observed between the beneficiary and non-beneficiary farms discussing the characteristics of the farms and their functioning through the organisation of work from a generation and gender perspective.

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<sup>5</sup> At the state level, the Pomurje region comprises 22.3% fields and gardens, 12.7% orchards, 11.7% vineyards and a minor share of grasslands (4.5%) and forests (3.5%) (RRP 2006: 55).

## **Introduction of six family farms**

A review of the basic characteristics of the six selected farm families (see Appendix) shows that all farms are oriented to livestock-crop production and are “mixed” family farms. The cases are differentiated by the number of employed family members on and off the farm. The first three cases (two beneficiaries of the aid of Setting Up of Young Farmers (SYF) and Early Retirement (ER), and one candidate for SYF) have on average at least one member employed outside the farm. The second three (the non-beneficiaries), however, have one member employed on the farm, usually the operator. The regional crisis is mirrored in the type of occupations of unemployed persons who mainly lost their jobs in the textile industry (three individuals out of five from Cases 2, 4, 5).

The education of collocutors does not illustrate a typical pattern among the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the aid. University educated interviewees are found in both groups; however, they are always the representatives of the younger generation (three individuals from Cases 1, 3, 4). Among the younger generation, secondary education prevails, and their study programmes are mostly related to regional needs: agriculture and the textile industry. In general, the older generation over 60 have lower education (completed elementary schooling prevails) compared to the older generation under 60 (vocational schooling prevails).

As a rule, a son stays at home on the family farm. This applies for both the older and the younger generations. A woman is a transferee only in a case when there is no other male heir (Žerdin Family), or in exceptional circumstances. For instance, the older sister of YF (Novak Family) married on the neighbouring farm and after the death of her husband, an only child, she took over the farm of his parents. Even in cases when a daughter stayed at home, the farm was usually entrusted to her husband (the mother in the Novak Family).

With one exception only (Horvat Family), there are two houses on the farm. The new house usually belongs to the younger generation and is built some 10 metres away from the old house.

The holding size and the farm equipment vary substantially in view of the time period observed: socialism and post-socialism. The introduced land maximum in 1953 entailed that no family farm in this time period exceeded 10 hectares of owned farmland. Until the late 1960s, family farms as a rule were not equipped with machinery. However, there is an obvious increase of the size of farmland among the younger generation at the time of taking over the farm, particularly in the beneficiaries of SYF (Cases 1 and 2) compared to their parents' generation: from 7 hectares to 35 hectares (Case 1), from 0.3 hectares to 60 hectares (Case 2). The exception goes to the Car Family (a non-beneficiary) which was already one of the largest in the village in socialist times. The present operator of this farm has also enlarged the size of the farmland compared to his father, i.e. from 10 hectares to 40 hectares. Also worth mentioning are the enlarged capacities of the tourist farm in the candidate for the SYF aid (Benko family) compared to the business beginnings of his parents. By the time the younger operator took over the tourist farm in 2003, the guest house had been enlarged from a capacity of three rooms to nine rooms, and the size of agricultural land had slightly increased from 11 hectares to 16 hectares.

All farms substantially improved their equipment with machines after the introduction of tractors in the late 1960s. Unrelated to the aid received and the size of the farmland, each farm has at least one tractor with several attachments. Two cases (1, 3) from the beneficiary group possess two tractors, and one case (2) owns three tractors and a combine. Two cases from the non-beneficiary group (5, 6) own one tractor; the exception, with four tractors, is again the Car family.

Irrespective of the time period observed, all the cases increased the previous average number of livestock per farm holding. Similar to the increase of holding size, significant growth is observed among the beneficiaries of the two forms of aid (SYF and ER) and in the Car Family from the non-beneficiary group. Two farms from the beneficiary group (1, 2) increased the average number of livestock from 4 to 56, and from zero to 30 breeding pigs and 500 porkers; the old Car farm reared 10 to 15 cattle and now, as a pig farm there are some 40 breeding pigs and 1000 porkers.

Finally, all partners who married on the farm of their husbands or wives stem from multigenerational families and farm settings.

The following analysis of farm histories and the life stories of their current family members show the dynamics of relationships between the generations and genders regarding the division of tasks in both their families of origin and present family farms.

## **Work on the farm: Are there any differences between the two types of farms?**

The older generation of interviewees from all farms explained that until the introduction of tractors in the late 1960s all work was done simply “by hand”. Fields, grasslands, vineyards and forests were manually cultivated using cattle only, and work in the stables and houses was not mechanised. The parts of their narratives that refer to the division of labour in their family of origin in their periods of growing-up do not illustrate a uniform pattern or principle of task division as to gender or age. Yet a majority of the older generation reiterated that before the introduction of machinery on the farms, women had performed the major part of work “inside and outside” the house. The others, however, assured me that all the family members irrespective of gender and age executed every farm task according to their physical capabilities. In a majority of cases, the burdening with farm work of a single family member was dependent on the employment of other family members outside the farm. Only a minority of the older generation mentioned the distinct division of labour before the introduction of a tractor: males worked in the field and females worked with the cattle and in the house.

The introduction of tractors and other machines on the farm and in the house (refrigerators, freezers, washing machines) was, according to the collocutors, the turning point that determined the radical differentiation of tasks by gender and age. As a rule, the mechanised work on the land and in the stables became the working domain of men, and the rest remained the working field of women. Such a dividing line also strongly delineated male and female housekeeping tasks, which became a generally female domain. Such division is also characteristic for the employed members off the farm, who assisted at home

after coming home from their jobs. In the case of a man employed off the farm, he would work at home with the machines on the land. A woman employed off the farm, however, would be more engaged in non-mechanised chores on the land and in the stables or she would work in the house. The individual cases show the following picture.

#### *Case 1: Novak Family*

Working six years in Germany at the end of the 1960s, the father of YF earned enough money to buy his first tractor. In the next ten years, the father successively bought seven tractors with all possible attachments, and together with neighbours in the so-called machinery community they bought a harvest combine. Since then, his work has been “work with the tractor” on the land, his wife has been occupied with the stable and his mother has worked in the kitchen. His son, now the YF, has worked independently on the farm since he was ten years old, yet in the stable only. His father allowed him to work with a tractor only when he reached thirteen years of age. Now, the son alone carries out most of the work with tractors and machinery and the father gives his assistance when necessary. The mother is still active in the stable (milking), the son feeds and spreads bedding for the cattle while the father is occupied with the bulls. Housekeeping is also the mother’s domain; she is sometimes assisted by her younger daughter or daughter-in-law.

The partner of the young transferee is employed off the farm; yet her domain at home consists of housekeeping, arranging the farm’s files (e.g. monthly tax reports, fertilisation plans, crop rotation plan), and caring for their new house and surroundings. She assists in farm tasks only if necessary.

The older sister of YF (a widow), who is a transferee of her parents-in-law farm, regularly assists her brother with machinery; in fact, they work on both farms. Their younger sister, who is also employed off the farm, is engaged in the farm work only as an ‘assistant when needed’. She usually gives help to their mother in the house; on the farm, however, only in seasonal common work.

#### *Case 2: Horvat Family*

Leaving their jobs in a transport service in the early 1980s, the parents of today’s young transferee made a decision to start farming “from scratch”. Following the example of a majority of farmers, they also equipped their own farm with stables and machinery. Since then and until her son’s taking over of the farm, work in the stable (domestic and hired) has been the domain of the mother. Now, she and her daughter-in-law share the labour in the domestic stable, in the house and with the children. Before his “early retirement”, her husband cultivated the farmland with machinery. Their son has assisted on the farm since his childhood. When he was ten years old, he started to drive a tractor and helped his mother in the stables. As he grew up, he tackled more demanding tasks. Now, he admits that he does not do the majority of so-called female work, such as washing, cooking and ironing, but he would if necessary. He regularly performed such work when he attended elementary school. Now, his wife is more engaged in bringing up their children, but he usually assists her. On the farm he works alone, and he also organises the farm documents.

### *Case 3: Benko Family*

The older operator worked as a tractor driver in a cooperative after he married; he also worked on his own farm with the cooperative tractor. From 1965 to 1967, he and his wife were employed in a textile plant in Austria, but they regularly returned home in the summers to give a hand on their parents' farm. His parents barely managed the farm since his father has only one arm. In 1967, the older operator bought his first tractor in Austria, and by 1975 they already had three tractors on the farm. He and his wife were employed abroad again between 1971 and 1973, this time in Germany. Assisting in a restaurant, he became gradually interested in tourism in the countryside, already well established in Germany at that time. With the birth of his son in 1973, he was determined to stay at home and to undertake a subsidiary activity: farm tourism. The tasks were distributed as follows: his wife cooked for guests and family members while he *only* worked with machinery on the land. His domain was also guest services. At that time, their daughter and son did not assist in tourism due to their school obligations, and they did not work on the farm at all.

Since his marriage, the son, now a candidate for SYF and a transferee of a tourist farm, has managed the tourist farm mainly alone: he plans the work, runs the administration, works with the cattle, cultivates the land with machinery and is occupied with service. His father only assists on the land; if necessary, he hires additional labour. His wife is responsible for housekeeping and the purchases for guests. For cooking and cleaning, she has additional help or occasionally an employed assistant. Children are more her concern than his.

### *Case 4: Car Family*

The operator believes that women have always worked on the farm much more than men, both before the machinery introduction and after it. The only difference is that since the introduction of tractors, there is no need for 'so many hands.' Now, he is the only one who works on the farm. His wife assists in a stable and runs bookkeeping and finance. His wife has been self-employed as a seamstress for thirty-six years and works part-time, four hours per day, on the farm as well. Their younger daughter lost her job at Mura during her maternity leave. Now, she takes part with her mother in working in the house and in the garden. When necessary, they both assist outside the house. The daughter's partner also lost his job in the same year, so he assists the operator mainly on the land, seven hours per day. The exception is cattle, which is the domain of his parents-in-law. Finally, he believes that today's generation of men is more engaged in the house, including playing with children, than the older generation.

### *Case 5: Kučan Family*

The operator runs the farm, which was managed before by his parents, who were typical farmers-industrial workers. As a teenager, he assisted on the domestic farm and state farm estate in a neighbouring county. By means of pair-horse, he loaded the silage on the carriage. Very interested in farm machinery, he enrolled at the vocational school for car mechanics. Now, he possesses all necessary machinery for farm work. His domain is also the work in the stable. His son only assists in physically less demanding work (sowing), not to burden his heart, which was recently operated on, and still works in his unregistered joiner's workshop. The kitchen is predominantly the women's domain.

When the operator's wife married on the farm, there was no one fully employed on it. A family worked on the farm in the afternoons when they were off duty. As a full-time employee at Mura, she also only assisted on the farm (on the fields and in the stable), nearly three hours per day. Now, temporarily unemployed, she is more occupied in the house and sometimes she looks after grandchildren. Her daughter, currently on maternity leave, believes that today a large-sized farm is a precondition for successful farming. Their farm functions more as a hobby. However, the farm proved as indispensable in this economic crisis in the region.

#### *Case 6: Žerdin family*

The female operator believes that obvious changes in the division of labour emerged with the introduction of tractors. In her case, this is visible on the farm, the domain of her otherwise off the farm employed husband, and in the stable, her and her mother's working place. However, they still assist her husband on the land and in the forest with whatever can be done by hand. Their son helps with machinery while their daughter helps in the house.

A similar picture of gendered division of labour can be extracted from those parts of collocutors' narratives that refer to mutual assistance of neighbours and relatives in general. Men commonly give machinery services and transportation and they normally receive such services. Women, on the other hand, offer help related to the household chores and care for children and the elderly and they also receive such favours from their neighbours and relatives. Yet the talk of mutual assistance revealed another important aspect: some members of a family farm can also be active on the farm of their close relative, thus significantly enlarging their everyday work engagement. Illustrative are the examples of the Novak family from the beneficiary group and the Kučan family from the non-beneficiary group. The older daughter of the Novak Family, after the death of her husband, the only child on the neighbouring farm, took over the farm of his parents and worked on it. At the beginning, her father assisted her on the 20-hectare farm; today, she farms her estate mainly with her brother's assistance and at the same time, she assists her brother (YF) on his farm. In the latter case, the operator's sister married into his wife's brother farm (25 kilometres distant). The result of this cross-marriage is that his sister renounced her inheritance at home in his favour and the opposite holds for his wife. Now, all of them cultivate 10 hectares of common forest and some 50 vines.

The introduction of tractors significantly marked the division of tasks among the family members and is also a symbol of a farm's success and prestige, irrespective of its type. However, the involvement of both generations working full-time on the farm has proved to be a more decisive element of farms' differentiation than the level of the farm mechanisation. In the beneficiary group, at least three family members work full-time on each farm regardless of the retirement status of the old generation, while on the non-beneficiary farms only the operator is fully employed on the farm. Keeping in mind the 2007 survey's observation that the young successors who are state beneficiaries do not participate in wider social networks but are confined to their closer siblings only, the following question remains: what distinguishes the beneficiary farms from the non-beneficiary farms as to the common life of generations?

## **What does it mean to live in a multigenerational farm family?**

To avoid the commonly believed myth about close kin ties in multigenerational farm families and to clarify two other findings from the 2007 survey about (1) the less flexible division of labour among the beneficiary family members in view of their particular interests, and (2) the commitment of the younger generation to provide care for the older generation, the “fields of dis/agreement” among and within farm families’ generations were observed through their assessments of the dis/advantages of living in a multigenerational family. Each case shows the following picture:

### *Case 1: Novak Family*

The older operator (72) is convinced that at times the common life of young and old people in multigenerational families was not a problem. According to him, generations started to live separately when people from the Prekmurska region began to work abroad. In the West, the locals saw such a way of life up close, and when they returned they practiced it at home.

His wife (66) is more cautious in assessing the common life of generations. Women were expected to take care of the elderly, and she remembers how it was hard to work in the fields the entire day and then all the work in the house was waiting for her. She alone took care of her grandmother; her husband assisted only in lifting the elderly woman from the bed.

The younger generation sees the advantages of living together primarily in better organised work; each member of the family has only some tasks and not all of the work. The individual is disburdened and expenses per individual are usually lower in such a community. The son (32), YF, for instance, is happy that both parents still assist in the stable and his father in the fields although they are both retired. Yet he is also aware of a disagreement with his father on how to work, when to work and who will do something.

The younger daughter (37) also indicating some disagreements among generations, especially in view of feeding habits. Parents do not understand her daughters and she sometimes misses more intimacy. Yet she would not choose the life in an urban apartment alone with her daughters only.

The older daughter from a neighbouring farm (42) sees only advantages of life in a multigenerational family. More people know more things, they help each other and you are never alone in long winter evenings. The biggest privilege is secured care for children and older people. She identifies disagreements only in arguing with her father about different ways of farming.

### *Case 2: Horvat Family*

The older operator (60) and his wife (55) are convinced that to live in a multigenerational family is more a benefit than a shortcoming if all the members get along. Grandchildren make the operator happy who, now retired and unfortunately seriously ill, is much more occupied with them than before. At the same time, he is secure in his old age, having trans-

ferred the farm to his son some years ago. His wife recognises as the major advantage of such a life in intergenerational teaching: the younger from the older and the opposite.

The son, YF (31), sees more benefits in such a community. You may always ask anybody for advice and there is always somebody to look after your children. The only disadvantage is if you are too attached to and dependent on your parents. When they die, you are lost. His wife (31) identifies as the most important gain that an individual is disburdened, because there is always somebody who can do something instead of you.

### *Case 3: Benko Family*

The older operator (69) believes that a common life with various generations may lead to disagreements. As a child, he was faced with such a disagreement between his mother and his aged paternal grandmother. His grandmother even moved to his daughter's family in the other village because she could not live together with his mother anymore. Yet his mother did not get along with his wife as well. This negative experience with a mother-in-law was the main reason that she supported her children 'to live their way of life.'

The younger generation in the Benko family is more optimistic. The son (37), a candidate for YF, and his older sister were looked after by their grandfather. This was his main task as an old member of a family who with one arm only could not assist in the fields anymore. When he also lost a leg, amputated for diabetes, the family's mother and grandmother nursed him. Similarly, he as a transferee of a tourist farm took care of his grandmother for three years before she died. Today, the care for his children by his parents is indispensable since the nursery school is closed during the weekends, and for the weekends there is the major work on the tourist farm. As he emphasised: 'Mutual help in such a family is beyond any disagreements.'

His wife (28) is satisfied that they live apart from her husband's parents but close enough to be at their disposal when it is necessary.

### *Case 4: Car Family*

Comparing his life in both his family of origin and current multigenerational family, the operator (58) emphasises the respect towards the elderly as the most distinct characteristic between his two families. In previous times, old people were much more respected than they are today. Now, he is disappointed due to the 'missed philosophy' of the young generation whose motto says that old and young people do not go together.

His wife (55) agrees that, in the past, there was much more respect among generations than there is today. When she married on her husband's farm, she had good relationships with all family members: she was taught how to cook with the help of her mother-in-law. When her parents-in-law became seriously ill, she automatically provided nursing care.

The younger generation voices some criticism as well. The younger daughter (31) admits that a multigenerational family means mutual assistance. However, conflicts emerge when two generations do not listen to each other. The younger daughter prefers a separate life, maintaining contacts with her parents from a distance.

Her partner (32), who married into the 'best farm' in the village, is persuaded that his parents-in-law do not respect him enough. The only benefit is that the parents-in-law cover the majority of expenses and occasionally look after their children.

The older daughter (32), who lives in a separate household across the road sees the benefit of a common life among the generations in the fact that children become aware that 'they are not the only ones in the world.' Her husband (42) is more careful to defend clear boundaries between the generations, because grandparents are inclined to spoil their grandchildren, which is not good for their future.

#### *Case 5: Kučan Family*

In general, all from the Kučan family agree that life in a three-generation family is primarily a benefit because you always get help when you need it. The operator (49) cannot even imagine the other life. His wife (47) mainly agrees but with a roguish smile she also adds that 'we all contribute dirt but only one cleans.' Their son (27) appreciates that you can get help at any time, particularly baby-sitting. Yet he warns that 'the big house is always too small for all of us!' He believes that a new house, twenty metres away, will provide more 'free space' for everybody, not only for his family. His sister (24) supports her brother's decision. With her husband, they also plan to rearrange the upper floor in the old house into a separate apartment with a detached entrance. Finally, the operator's mother (73) explains that she preferred to live with her partner in the town simply because she did not want to remain a 'pig-maid' at home.

#### *Case 6: Žerdin Family*

The operator (43) has lived her whole life in a multigenerational family and she likes it very much. She explains that in such a community there is always somebody who talks to you when you are in trouble, you can trust somebody, and there is always a person who will do something for you. The income is common: if somebody does not have money, then nobody has it. If somebody has money, then they all have some. Her children attended nursery school only one year because there was always somebody at home. Even her disabled grandmother, who was confined to a wheelchair for six years, took care of them. Her children did their homework on her bed and she supervised them. The children were also very attached to their great-grandmother. The operator and her mother took care of her and it never occurred to send her to an institution. Her grandmother was not lonely at home, and she loved to participate in the kitchen. Sometimes she simply cleaned the things from the table and carried them to the cupboards, and she washed the dishes until the time they bought a dishwasher. The parents of the operator did not even send her older sister, who had mental and physical troubles, to a home for disabled persons. She stayed in domestic care until she died. Her mother (69) would never put anybody in an institution, especially a disabled child or an aged person. She is convinced that these people and the care for them bonded them as a family.

The operator's husband (47) thinks that the decision to live in a multigenerational family is a matter of habit. He has never thought to live with his wife and children separately from the older generation. He says that minor discrepancies do not count compared to the advantages of such a life. This attitude is also shared by his son (23) and a daughter (20). Although youth is always misunderstood, they enjoy always having somebody available for a talk.

The assessments of the dis/advantages of a common life in a multigenerational family as recounted by each collocutor do not reveal a “typical difference” between the beneficiary and the non-beneficiary families. Both groups show that their members predominantly favour a common life in a multigenerational family. The older generation usually stresses the mutual assistance in providing and receiving care; the younger, however, emphasises better organised work, evenly distributed tasks, intergenerational teaching and a common budget. Those individuals from both groups (Case 3 from the beneficiaries and Case 4 from the non-beneficiaries) who express more disadvantages of such a way of life refer mostly to their personal negative experiences when ‘generations do not listen to each other’ or when they had to provide care for the elderly ‘confined to bed’; they also favour the separate life of generations.

Not surprisingly, the latter collocutors also prefer institutional care when discussing aging on the farm, while the majority of others speaks in favour of “aging at home” irrespective of their gender and generation. The collocutors from the beneficiary households (Cases 1 and 2) uniformly support the view that the elderly have a right to die at home since they have worked on the farm their entire lives. Together with other supporters of aging at home (Cases 5, 6), they also share the view that providing care for parents at home is the duty of the transferee, moreover, of his female partner. Practically, there are no differences among generations: the elder male collocutors and also the younger ones stick to the idea that caring is primarily the domain of women’s work. Surprisingly, even the younger generation of women is convinced that this is their field of concern.

## **Conclusion**

Only since the Slovenian proclamation of independence in 1991, and particularly since Slovenia joined the EU in 2004, has agricultural legislation sought to re-value the farm occupation, which was devalued compared to the socialist worker. By means of various domestic and European subsidies, the effort was defined towards the improvement of the property structure of poor farms and the age structure of farmers. This progress would further affect better economic productivity of the agricultural sector and hinder, if not stop, the abandoning of family farming in the country.

Contrary to my expectation, the fieldwork material shows that the operators who are the beneficiaries of aid for Setting Up of Young Farmers and Early Retirement do not differ from the non-beneficiary operators in terms of education. In the beneficiary group, all three levels of achieved education are represented from elementary school to a university degree. Education matters only related to generations: among the younger generation, secondary education prevails, while in the older generation, vocational schooling is prevalent.

All respective spouses of the operators stem from multigenerational families and farm settings. The number of their children does not distinguish the observed beneficiary from the non-beneficiary group.

The type of farm does not matter either. Livestock-crop production is characteristic for all the farms observed and they all combine a family farm budget with on- and off-farm resources. All the family farms are mixed as to the number of employed family members on and off the farm. Yet the two groups of farms are differentiated by the number of family members who work permanently on the farm. In the beneficiary group, at

least three family members work full-time on the farm compared to only one who is fully employed on a farm in the non-beneficiary group.

Two measures also addressed family farms, which had substantially enlarged the size of farmland, the number of livestock and the building capacities at the time the younger operator took over the farm. As a rule, these farms are also better equipped and mechanised compared to the non-beneficiary farms (the exception is the Car farm family). It seems that this improvement of the farms in the beneficiary group was also motivated by the secured successors on these farms. As the young farmers emphasised, they would have continued with farming irrespective of the aid received. Therefore, both forms of aid accelerated and did not cause the farm transfer.

The fieldwork material also shows that the introduction of tractors in the late 1960s primarily contributed to a more clear-cut division of tasks between genders, irrespective of the farm group observed. Despite the speciality of each presented case, it is not an exaggeration to formulate the general conclusion that since the introduction of tractors the domain of men has been primarily mechanised work, while women have mainly performed the rest of the work on the farm and in the house. This gendered pattern of divided tasks also exists for family members who are employed off the farm, i.e. for half-workers-half-farmers. Moreover, this model is obvious also in temporarily unemployed family members irrespective of the status of the observed farm in the sense of whether it is the beneficiary of both forms of aid or not.

A similar conclusion may be summarised for the time period before the 1960s. Despite the various contexts of the single family farms observed, before the introduction of tractors it was a rule that women performed all kinds of work outside and inside the house. This was not the case for men; their domain was limited to “outside work” only.

Irrespective of the time period observed and the farm type, the care for the elderly and children is the working domain of women. Despite the tacit rule that a son usually takes over the farm and consequently he should be responsible for the aged parents, the practice shows that this is the field of the son’s wife or his partner. Moreover, women are aware that this is their task, and they take it for granted.

It is also worth mentioning the particular cases that do not fit the model of the above rules. Such is the case of the Horvat Family, whose older couple commenced with farming from scratch and gradually developed one of the most prosperous farms in the village, now also the beneficiary of both forms of aid. Yet the older couple themselves stem from a farm setting and multigenerational farm; they were not fresh starters. Another case is about the female transferee of a farm who started farming due to the immense love of her late husband (Novak Family); before, she was a full-time employee in the municipal insurance company. Yet again, she comes from a family farm.

That a multigenerational farm family is also a “family firm” is proved by the engagement of each and every family member including the disabled or the aged. In such a community, work is found for everyone who is capable of contributing to the family budget. The retired members work on the farm after becoming retired, and it seems that age and disability are not obstacles. Younger and older members of both groups predominantly favour a common life in a multigenerational family due to the more evenly distributed tasks and secured care for children and the elderly. The only precondition for a meaningful life in a multigenerational farm family is “to get along with each other”.

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## **APPENDIX: Background information for Cases 1-6**

I. Background information for Cases 1–3 (two beneficiaries of SYF and ER, and a candidate for SYF)

### *Case 1: Novak Family*

Owner/status on the family farm	Farm owner and operator: the beneficiary of SYF (in 2006) His partner: employed off the farm (a supervisor of cross compliance at a private agency in Murska Sobota) Younger sister: employed off the farm (in a private bakery in Murska Sobota) Father: a retired farmer, the beneficiary of ER Mother: a retired farm woman
Age/Education	Farm operator 32/ Elementary School His partner 27/ Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences Younger sister 37/ Secondary School for Food and Food Processing Father 72/ Elementary School Mother 66/ Elementary School
Living arrangements	Old house: parents with divorced daughter and her two children: daughters 14 and 16 New three-storey house (20 metres away): farm operator (son) with his partner Total number of FF members: $5 + 2 = 7$
Farm after being taken over by the YF in 2006	Size of agricultural land: 35 ha (12 ha owned, 23 ha rented); 56 livestock (16 cows and 40 bulls); agricultural machinery (two tractors with 12 attachments)
Farm after parents' marriage in 1964	Size of agricultural land: 7 ha (4 ha forest); 4 cattle (2 cows and 2 calves); agricultural machinery (none)
Other: older sister (42) married to a neighbouring farm	Both families work on both farms. Sister's farm: 25 ha; 40–50 cattle; agricultural machinery (2 combines)

*Case 2: Horvat Family*

Owner/status on the family farm	Farm owner and operator: the beneficiary of SYF (in 2005) Wife: currently unemployed (before: employed in a private textile firm in a neighbouring county) Father: a retired farmer, a beneficiary of ER Mother: a farm woman
Age/Education	Farm operator 31/ Secondary School for Agriculture Wife 31/ Secondary School for Textile Industry Father 60/ Elementary School and Vocational Training for (1) Goods Vehicles (1 year) and (2) Barrel Maker (two years) Mother 55/ Vocational School for Agriculture and Housekeeping
Living arrangements	House: farm operator (son) with his wife and two children (son 5, daughter 3) and his parents (father and mother) Total number of FF members: 6
Farm after being taken over by the YF in 2005	Size of agricultural land: 60 ha (20 ha owned, 40 ha rented); 30 breeding pigs and 500 porkers; agricultural machinery (3 tractors with all attachments, 1 combine)
Farm after parents' marriage in 1974	Size of mother's inherited parcel: 0.3 ha
Other: older sister (34) married on a farm in another village	Her family occasionally gives and receives some help

*Case 3: Benko Family (a tourist farm)*

Owner/status on the family farm	Farm owner and operator: a candidate for the beneficiary of SYF (about 2012) Wife: employed on tourist farm (service and kitchen) Father: a retired farmer Mother: a retired farm woman 1–2 temporary employed workers in service and kitchen
Age/Education	Farm operator 37/ Faculty of Economics and Business Wife 28/ Commercial High School Father 69/ Secondary School for Agriculture Mother 63/ Elementary School
Living arrangements	Renewed old house (guest house): farm operator (son) with his wife and two children: son 4 and baby-son under 1 Renewed wine cellar into a house (100 metres away): parents Total number of FF members: $4 + 2 = 6$
Farm (after being taken over by the farm operator in 2003)	Size of agricultural land: 16 ha (14.5 ha owned, 1.5 ha rented); livestock (12 cows, 10 pigs, 2 horses for riding); agricultural machinery (two tractors with several attachments); guest house (9 rooms of first category, 80 seats for guests)
Farm (after parents' marriage in 1964)	Size of agricultural land: 11 ha owned (3.5 ha orchards, 1.5 ha vineyards, the rest fields); 8–10 livestock (cows and horses); agricultural machinery (none)
Other: older sister (42) married off the farm	Her family occasionally gives and receives some help
Other: transformation to a tourist farm in 1976	First adaptation of an old farm house into a guest house with a three-room capacity – the first tourist farm in Slovenia: the tourist farm as subsidiary occupation

## II. Background information for Cases 4–6 (Non-beneficiaries of the SYF in ER and without a secured successor)

### Case 4: Car Family

Owner/status on the family farm	Farm owner and operator since 1995 Wife: partly employed on the farm, partly in subsidiary occupation (sewing) Younger daughter: currently unemployed (before: employed in the state textile firm Mura in Murska Sobota) Younger daughter's partner: currently unemployed (before: employed in a private motor mechanic firm in Austria)
Age/Education	Farm operator 58/ Secondary School for Agriculture Wife 55/ Vocational School for Sewing Younger daughter 31/ Faculty of Mechanical Engineering (Programme: Design and Textile Materials) Younger daughter's partner 32/ Vocational School for Car Mechanics in Austria
Living arrangements	House: farm operator with his wife and younger daughter with her partner and two sons (6 and baby under 1) Total number of FF members: 6
Farm (now)	Size of agricultural land: 40 ha (18 ha owned, 22 ha rented); 30–50 breeding pigs and 1000 porkers; agricultural machinery (four tractors with several attachments); 200 hours of hired labour per year
Farm (after operator's father took over in 1947)	Size of agricultural land: 10 ha owned (3.5 ha forest); 10–15 livestock (cows and horses); agricultural machinery (none)
Other: older daughter's family across the street	Older daughter's family (daughter (32) with husband (42), son (16) and daughter (11)) lives in a house across the street (20 metres away) and occasionally gives and receives some help

*Case 5: Kučan Family*

Owner/status on the family farm	Farm operator and not the owner since 1989 Wife: currently unemployed (before: employed in the state textile firm Mura in Murska Sobota) Son: currently waiting for confirmation of a disability pension (before: employed in a private joiner's in Murska Sobota) Son's wife: employed off the farm (in a private textile firm in a neighbouring county) – refused to be interviewed Daughter: currently on maternity leave (before: employed in a construction firm in Murska Sobota) Daughter's husband: employed off the farm (in the private metal industry firm in a neighbouring county)
Age/Education	Farm operator 49/ Vocational School for Car Mechanics Wife 47/ Vocational School for Sewing Son 27/ Secondary School for Wood and Technology Son's wife / Daughter 24/ Secondary School of Economic Daughter's husband 25/ Secondary School of Electro-technology
Living arrangements	Old house: parents (father and mother) with son's family (a couple and two children: son (8), daughter (6)) and daughter's family (a couple and 9-month-old baby) New house (20 metres away): still empty but built for son's family Total number of FF members: 9
Farm (now)	Size of agricultural land: 9 ha (5 ha owned, 4 ha rented); 8 cows; agricultural machinery (tractor with several attachments)
Farm (after parents' marriage in 1956)	Size of agricultural land: 6 ha (1 ha forest, 1 ha grassland, the rest fields); 8 cows; agricultural machinery (none)
Other: sister (44) married to a farm of brother's wife (cross-marriage)	Both families help each other
Other: farm operator's mother the owner	Mother (73) lives with her partner in Murska Sobota

*Case 6: Žerdin Family*

Owner/status on the family farm	Farm operator and the owner since 1986 Husband: employed off the farm (at first, 29 years in Mura, now, in a private horticulture firm in Murska Sobota) Son: employed off the farm (in a private horticulture firm in Murska Sobota) Daughter: a student at university Mother: a retired farm woman
Age/Education	Farm operator 43/ Secondary School for Agriculture Husband 47/ Elementary School Son 27/ Secondary School of Electro-technology Daughter 24/ 1st year at the Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences Mother 69/ Elementary School
Living arrangements	Old house: farm operator's family and her mother New three-storey house (20 metres away): still incomplete Total number of FF members: 5
Farm (now)	Size of agricultural land: 11.5 ha (2.5 ha forest, 2 ha grassland, the rest fields); 16 cows; agricultural machinery (2 tractors with 2 attachments)
Farm (after parents' marriage in 1959)	Size of agricultural land: 10 ha (3 ha forest, 2 ha grassland, the rest fields); 13 livestock (4–5 cows, 5 calves, 2 horses, 1 breeding pig); agricultural machinery (none)

## **POVZETEK**

Razvoj kmetijstva v Sloveniji je usmerjen v trajnostno, večnamensko kmetovanje. Toda po velikosti majhna in razpršena kmečka gospodarstva in njihova nizka stopnja produktivnosti uvrščajo Slovenijo med članice EU z najbolj neugodno kmetijsko strukturo. Cilj nedavno vpeljanih ukrepov zgodnjega upokojevanja kmetov in pomoči mladim prevzemnikom kmetij je ravno izboljšanje kmetijske produktivnosti. Toda, koga sta ukrepa dejansko nagovorila? V prispevku avtorica presoja nekatere rezultate antropološkega terenskega dela, ki je bilo izpeljano leta 2009 v Prekmurju, v regiji z najbolj ugodnimi pogoji za kmetovanje. Raziskava skuša pojasniti razlike in podobnosti družinskih kmetij, ki so prejemnice pomoči z naslova obeh ukrepov in take, ki niso prejemnice pomoči. Pol-strukturirani intervjuji vključujejo vsebine o zgodovini kmetije in organizaciji dela na kmetiji z vidika generacij in spola. Rezultati kažejo, da sta ukrepa nagovorila kmetije, ki so bistveno povečale velikost kmetijskih površin, število glav živine in stavbnih kapacitet, ko je mlad gospodar prevzel kmetijo. Te kmetije so tudi bolje opremljene (mehanizirane) in na njih je polno zaposlenih več članov družine v primerjavi s kmetijami, ki niso prejemnice pomoči. Kmetije, prejemnice pomoči, so imele zagotovljenega naslednika; državna pomoč je pospešila predajo kmetije s starejše na mlajšo generacijo. Obe vrsti opazovanih kmetij se ne razlikujeta v organizaciji dela po spolu. Delitev opravil med generacijami in spoloma se na splošno razlikuje glede na opazovano obdobje (politični režim), še posebej pa se je uveljavila z uvedbo traktorjev. Skrb za ostarele in otroke je delovna domena žensk vseh opazovanih generacij.

**Ključne besede:** družinske kmetije, pomoč mladim prevzemnikom kmetij, zgodnje upokojevanje, generacije, spol, Slovenija

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