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The Viti-viniculture Sector of the Festetics Estate at the Beginning of the 19th Century

Abstract

At the end of the 18th century, only 3-4 % of the cultivated area was covered with vineyards. However, the importance of viticulture was not proportionate with the extent of its territorial size - due to the poor public health conditions, most of the waters were non-drinkable, so people usually drunk wines with a 4-5 % alcohol content. The wine production was 13-17 million hectoliters in the first third of the 19th century. During this period, several large estates switched from the former taxation approach to income-oriented market production, in which winemaking played a key role, as it had been an important vital market product before. According to Kaposi, lordships' cellar economy of lordships was engaged in the storage and treatment operations of wine community customs duty, ninth wine, the supply of wine to inns and public houses, and other wine sales.¹ In our study, we examined the most important characteristics of the viticulture and wine sector of the Keszthely-based Festetics estate in the period between 1785-1807, both in terms of production and profitability. We concluded that the share of income from wine within the total income decreased at the beginning of the 1800s, besides high production fluctuation characterized the production of lordships as well as production of the estate; however, the production of the lordships could compensate each other to confirm the diversified production in space.

Keywords: Festetics, estate, viticulture, production, profitability

Introduction

According to Csoma, viti-viniculture played an important role in the national economy at the beginning of the 19th century. After the expulsion of the Turks, the planting of vines was supported by tax incentives, which increased the size of the vineyards, but many fresh plantations were destroyed during the Rákóczi War of Independence. After the end of the War of Independence, viticulture flourished again, it was already typical in the flat areas, but the growth slowed down in at the beginning of the 19th century.²

Viti-viniculture has a special role in the management of the feudal large estate. Besides wine collected as a tax (e.g. wine community customs duty, ninth wine), wine produced in lordship-managed vineyards was also sold. During a certain period, serfs also had the right to sell their wines, but for most of the year this took place in pubs, which were either operated by the lordships or leased out.

¹ *Kaposi, Zoltán*: Gazdasági változások Széchenyi István gróf Zala vármegyei birtokain (1814-1860). In: Közép-Európai Közlemények XI. No. 40. (2018) 2.; *Kaposi Zoltán*: Uradalmi gazdaság és társadalom a 18-19. században. Budapest-Pécs, 2000; *Wellmann Imre*: A magyar mezőgazdaság a XVIII. században. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1979.

² *Csoma, Zsigmond*: Szőlészeti, borászati hagyományok, a megújulás és a közösség kötelékében. Kapcsolatok, hatások, konfliktusok Dunántúl és Európa között a XVII. század végétől a XX. század elejéig. (Doktori disszertáció, manuscript) Debrecen-Budapest. 1994-1995.; *Csoma, Zsigmond*: Kertészet és polgárosodás. Budapest, 1997.; *Csoma, Zsigmond*: Haszonkertészeti ismeretek és uradalmi gyakorlat a Dunántúlon és Nyugat-Magyarországon a XVII. század végétől a XIX. század közepéig. In: Agrártörténeti Szemle 39. (1997) 3-4. 343-452.; *Csoma, Zsigmond*: Szent Vincétől Szent János poharáig. Budapest, 1997.

Material and research

In our paper, we analyze the data collected from the archival material of the Festetics Family, in addition to presenting the most important requirements for viticulture of the Festetics estate management guide entitled “*Közönséges Instructio...*” [in Hungarian, Ordinary Instructions] written by János Nagyváthy in 1795. We examine the extent to which the income of the viti-viniculture contributed to the income of the estate.

Results

The practice of viticulture on the Festetics estate is known thanks to research of Zsigmond Csoma and his extensive publishing activities.³ In his studies he presented in detail the work of János Nagyváthy in viti-viniculture. Nagyváthy, who was born in Miskolc acquired the basics of viticulture in his childhood, and was well acquainted with viticulture in Hegyalja. As the head of the central directorate of the estate, he gave detailed instructions to his overseers on viticulture, cellar operation, wine treatment and record. For reasons of space, we cannot go into this in detail; we characterize only the valuable knowledge of Nagyváthy with some typical quotations to prove what he pointed out: good wine could only be produced with more accurate, quality work⁴:

- „Grapes and winter- or late-season fruit should be harvested until it is covered by hoarfrost. When harvesting, be careful that the fruit be harvested is not hit, but be dry and stack it in a dry place. It is better to preserve the grapes if they are suspended on rods and dried in the light of noon.”
- „Harvest usually starts in the middle of October in good vineyards. It is good to wait for the grapes to be covered by hoarfrost at least one night. But after that you have to harvest right away, because as soon as a two-night hoarfrost increases the grape juices and propagates the wine, the several times frosts decrease it.”
- „The farmer need to know in advance if he wants to filter a lot or good, he need to know when the grape is in a state to give a lot or a little, but good wine. For this reason, it is necessary to look at the vineyards of the Citizens as well, so that he could not cause himself or the lordship damage.”
- „Grape canes producing good wine are propagated by Farmer in every way; but since experience shows that when planted with such canes they tend to degenerate so that labor and cost are not useless, such noble varieties must be propagated by grafting.”
- Nagyváthy suggested some alternative solutions for arising work organizational problems to increase the efficiency.
- „Although the farmer always knows in advance how many workers are needed to harvest the grape field, but it is possible that the workers are not being able to harvest because of the Rain, or harvesting it sooner, in order to the day-labor will not be lost without gain, men should be set to harvest weak trunks and girls and children should be set to take out the picket.”
- „When the grape harvest is over and the canes have dropped their leaves, it is time top lant. At that time, the ‘better varieties’ can also be identifeid and the canes assorted.”]

³ Csoma, Zsigmond: A szőlészeti-borászati szakirodalom kialakulása Magyarországon (18-19. század). In: Századok, 132. (1998) 4. 859-908.; Csoma, Zsigmond: Az európai és magyarországi szőlészeti-borászati ismeretek oktatása a keszthelyi Georgikonban (XVIII. sz. vége - XIX. sz. közepe). In: Agrártörténeti Szemle 37. (1995) 1-4. 190-242.

⁴ Csoma, Zsigmond: The development of Hungarian technical literature of oecology. Eger, 2012. Eszterházy Károly Főiskola

- „Low-quality Wines, if not desired for Inns, will not be kept for years, because instead of ‘improving’, they will be worse.”

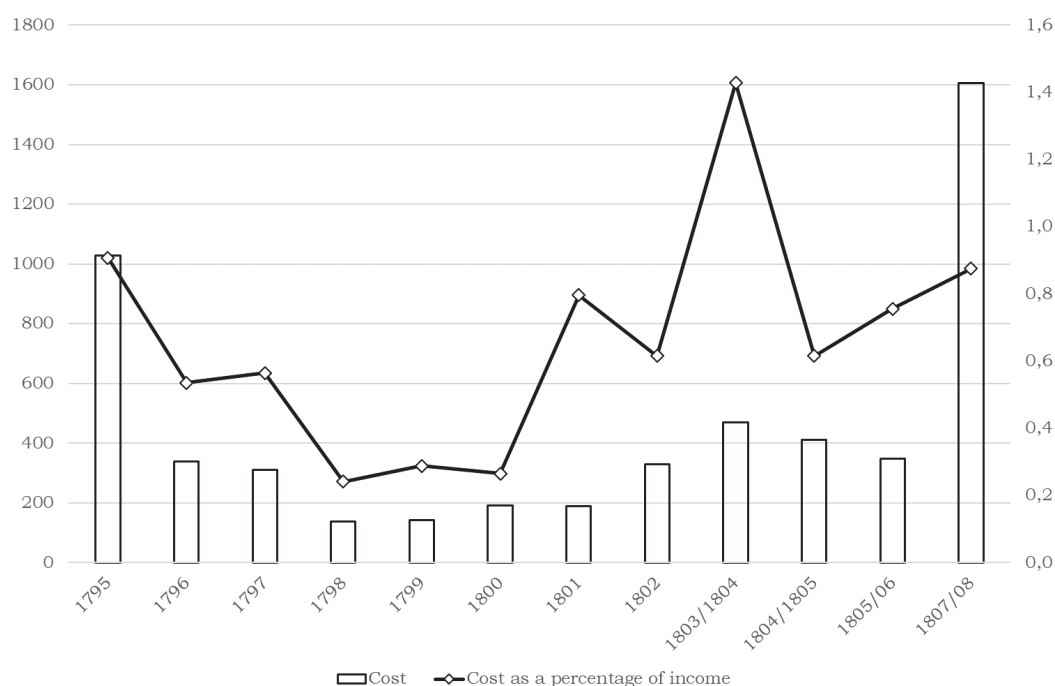
The Festetics estate’s highly educated „Director” renewed not only the technology of production, but also the account system, he ordered the keeping accurate records, including the oenology:

“The followings had to be noted down onto the barell: 1. Number of the Container burnt onto the bottoms 2. Number of ako burnt onto the barell 3. Wine white or red 4. Lordship production 5. Ninth wine 6. Purchased wine 7. The vineyard where the wine was produced 8. The year of its production Thus, everything is being separated from each other.”

Economic approach was a basic requirement in Nagyváthy’s system, which is well illustrated by the following example „only Prominent Inns are allowed to have two or three kinds of wine on tap at the same time for those who want a better kind of wine.”

Nagyváthy introduced in 1795 the obligatory record of the costs for “cellar operation” comparing them with the income for wine sales (see Figure 1). On the basis of Figure 1 we can conclude that the viticulture-viniculture sector had outstanding profitability - due to its specialty mentioned in the introduction, with costs accounting for only around one percentage of the income, and ranging in size from RhF 400 to 1,600.⁵

Figure 1: **Vinicultural cost and cost as a percentage of income in Festetics estate (1795-1807)**

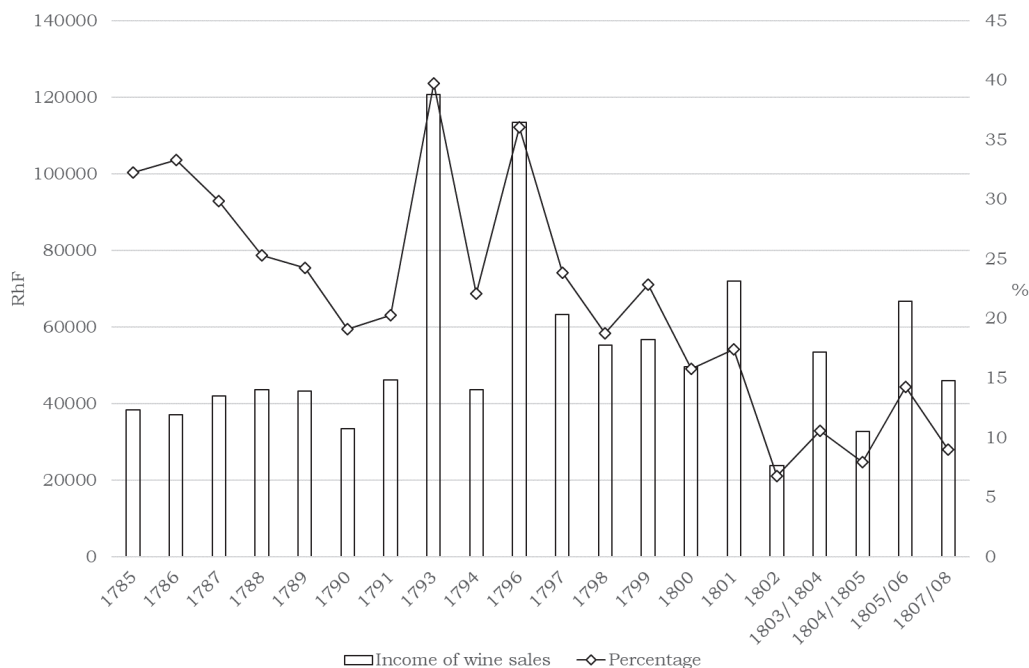


Source: On the basis of the data of the Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára. Festetics család levéltára (hereinafter MNL OL. FCsL.) P 235/147. I-XIX. Vol.

Examining the three most important sources of income of agriculture from the Festetics estate (sales of cereals (1), livestock (2) and wine (3)) (see Figure 2), it can be observed that wine sales became the most significant source of income on the Nagyváthy-managed estate (accounted for 30-35 percentage of total income). A few years later its role receded, mainly due to the grain boom, but still accounted for 8-10 percent of income.

⁵ Lukács, Gábor: A Festetics birtok gazdálkodási reformja a XVIII. század végén. PhD disszertáció, Pannon Egyetem, Gazdálkodás- és Szervezéstudományok Doktori Iskola. Keszthely, 2009.; Nagyváthy, János: „Közönséges Instrukcio a Mltgos Tolnai Gróf Festetits György Királyi Kamarás Urodalmiban gyakoroltatni szokott Gazdaságnak rendjén keresztül”. Keszthely, 1792. (Manuscript).

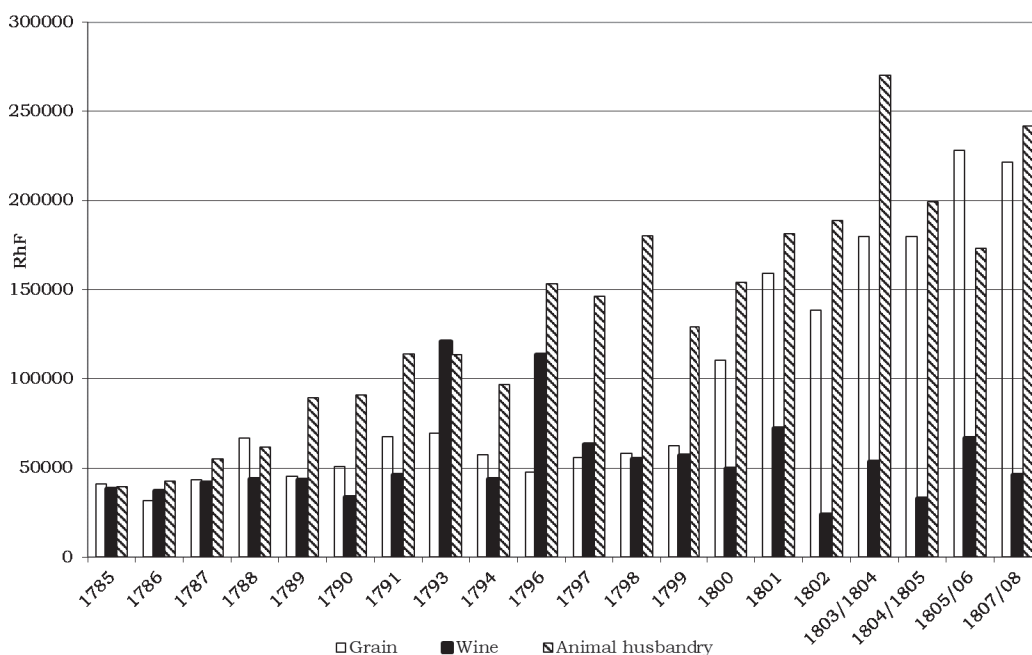
Figure 2: Income of wine sales and its percentage in Festetics estate (1785-1807)



Source: On the basis of the data of the MNL OL. FCsL. P 235/147. I-XIX. Vol.

The share of income from wine within the total income - in addition to the grain boom - was also pushed back by the rapid development of animal husbandry on the farm. Comparing the estate's income of 1785 with the income of early 1800s (see Figure 3), in 1785 most of the income came from the sale of crops of extensive production and the sale of the collected serf's ninth grain, however in the early 1800s the largest share of income already came from animal husbandry, and the viniculture retained its important role in farm management.

Figure 3: The major sources of income on the Festetics estate RhF (1785-1807)

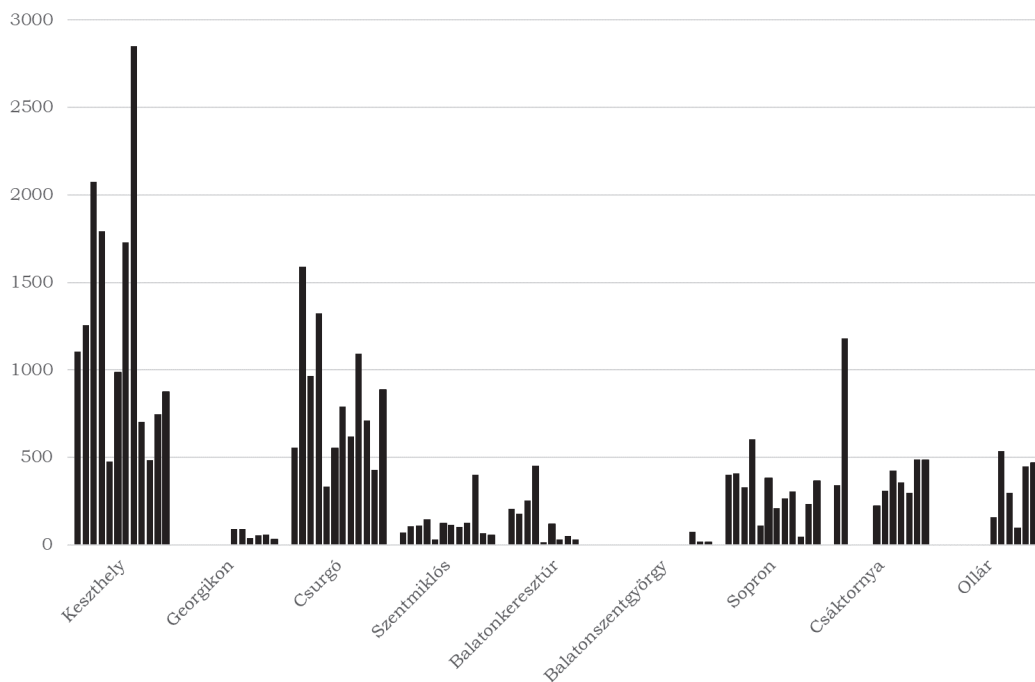


Source: On the basis of the data of the MNL OL. FCsL. P 235/147. I-XIX. Vol.

At the beginning of the 19th century one third of the wine-growing area of the estate belonged to the Keszthely lordship, however it provided 50% of the estate wine production. Although within the sources of income, the proportion of wine decreased, but it still played a decisive role in Keszthely lordship.

Figure 4 shows the wine production of each lordship between 1795-1807. It can be seen that the role of Csurgó and Keszthely was extremely important as well in the wine production of the estate. On the basis of the data we can state that the production fluctuation characterized the wine production is more significant in case of lordships characterized by high-volume wine production. The production of the lordships producing smaller volume of wine (Sopron, Balatonkeresztúr, Ollár and Szentmiklós) was more stable.

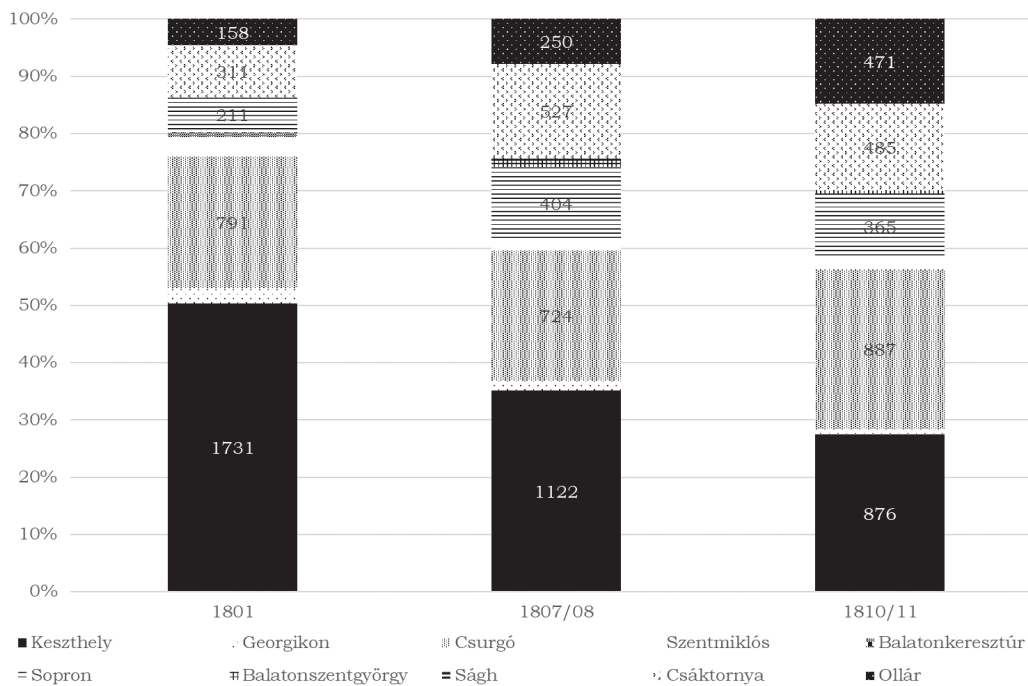
Figure 4: Wine production in the lordships (akó) (1795-1810)



Source: On the basis of the data of the MNL OL. FCsL. P 235/147. I-XIX. Vol.

The production fluctuation characterized not only the lordships but also the estate, the greatest production was in 1790 (7070 akó) and in 1795 (5474 akó), and the smallest was in 1799 (1189 akó). The wine production of the estate was almost the same in 1801, 1807/08 and 1810/111 (3434, 3191 and 3187 akó). Examining the production structure in these three years (Figure 5), it can be seen that the role of Keszthely lordship decreased between 1800 and 1810, while the role of the smaller lordships increased with the stable production of Csurgó (around 800 akó). The production of these three years shows and it can be concluded that the production fluctuation of the lordships could compensate each other to confirm the diversification in space.

Figure 5. The role of the wine production in the lordships (1801-1807/08-1810/11)



Source: On the basis of the data of the MNL OL. FCsL. P 235/147. I-XIX. Vol.

Conclusions

In Festetics estate at the beginning of the 19th century, high-quality viticulture and viniculture activities were introduced. The management of the Festetics estate was transformed under the leadership of János Nagyváthy, it adapted much better and more efficiently to the market demand, thus increasing the income. By the beginning of the 1800s, the intensive sectors came into the focus, in our opinion János Nagyváthy played a decisive role in this, by writing his book “*Ordinary Instruction*” and by his brilliant work as an organizer and leader.