

The Beginnings of Agricultural Economics in Hungary – the 225th Anniversary of the “*Ordinary Instructions*” by Nagyváthy

Abstract

János Nagyváthy (1755-1819) was Director in the Festetics estate between 1792 and 1797, and during this time he wrote his book entitled *Ordinary Instructions according to which farming is managed in the estates of the Honourable count of Tolna, György Festetics, royal chamberlain* (*Közönséges Instructio a Mltgos Tolnai Gróf Festetits György Királyi Kamarás Urodalmiban gyakoroltatni szokott Gazdaságnak rendjén keresztül*). The work was intended to assist the proper management of the agricultural estate. The main practices of farming had not been put in writing, these were imprinted only in the farm managers' and bailiffs' minds, therefore new workers learned these tricks only at the expense of trial and error, so he wrote the *Ordinary Instructions* to improve this situation. In Nagyváthy's approach the practical application of theoretical methods played a crucial role, as well as the teaching for farmers and estate bailiffs, stewards, as he wrote: practical experience is a certainty, above all other strengths. Nagyváthy's working as Director led to the founding of Georgikon in 1797. Through his managerial work and books, he contributed not only to the establishment of Europe's first agricultural higher education institutions, but also to the creating the theory and practice of agricultural economy in Hungary.

Keywords: large estate, managerial reform, agricultural economy, János Nagyváthy, Keszthely

Introduction

János Nagyváthy arrived to Keszthely in February 1792, and took the position of *Director* in the Festetics estate. The estate was badly in need of reform, although in spite of its conditions, it possessed excellent economic potentials, with ten of its eleven estate centres situated in Transdanubia, the most developed western part of Hungary, having favourable market conditions, where “*a small feudal kingdom was offered to Nagyváthy*”, who “*insisted on having full powers so that the count (...) did not put any restrictions on the activities of his favoured friend.*”¹ However, at the time of Nagyváthy's arrival to Keszthely, the estate suffered from severe lack of capital. The positions of the estate and its owner, György Festetics, are well reflected in the letter that the count wrote to his father in law: “*I suffer from such distress, that I will quickly arrive to my final ruins, unless I find a true friend who can govern the operations of my estate by wise guidance and by bridling my pilfering and wasteful servants.*”² The count, who belonged to the opposition of the aristocracy, was in a hopelessly desperate financial situation: he had a debt of 1.662.000 Ft, owing mainly to his brothers, whom he paid out from his father's inheritance (though it was against his father's last will and testament).

Book and its influence

János Nagyváthy was Director between 1792 and 1797, and during this time he wrote his book entitled *Ordinary Instructions according to which farming is managed in the estates of the Honourable count of Tolna, György Festetics, royal chamberlain* (*Közönséges Instructio a Mltgos Tolnai Gróf Festetits György Királyi Kamarás Urodalmiban gyakoroltatni szokott Gazdaságnak*

¹ Borotvas-Nagy, Sándor: Nagy magyar gazdák. Szeged, 1942. 42.

² Szabó, Dezső: A herceg Festetics-család története. Budapest, 1928. 218.

rendjén keresztül). In June 1795, on a directional meeting “Mr. Director Nagyváthy, in relation to the estate management, submits 9 copies of the perfectly completed ordinary Instructions.”³ The work was intended to assist the proper management of the agricultural estate, the foundations of it “standing on such pillars, which have proven to be laws according to the practical experience from several occasions, and with the purpose of amending the frequent occurrences of mismanagement and deficiencies, there was need to summarise these methods in the form of Instructions, that give a standard for earning revenues and spending costs sparingly, with keeping good accounts.”⁴ The main practices of farming had not been put in writing, these were imprinted only in the farm managers’ and bailiffs’ minds, therefore new workers learned these tricks only at the expense of trial and error, so he wrote the *Ordinary Instructions* to improve this situation.⁵

Nagyváthy’s system contained gradual innovations, for the farmers and bailiffs were not to “give up the old habits just for the sake of doing something new, nor to stick to the old ingrained methods and think wrongly about all new ideas”, as this quotation reflects the approach typical of the *Ordinary Instructions*⁶. The book survived in a manuscript format, and the copy in Keszthely, that we used, consists of 438 pages. The significance of the book lies in the fact, that this was the first educational work intended for estate bailiffs and stewards about farm management, and it served as the theoretical foundation for managing large agricultural estates: professional farm managers studied and copied it. Nagyváthy checked the copies, corrected the errors and added his signature to the corrections.⁷ The farm governor’s chamberlainship book, that described the good management of large estates, clearly demonstrates, that he perfectly understood the problems of managing and governing a feudal estate. The first lines in the “Introduction” are about good management, that lies on three turning points specially, namely, – the farmers should earn what they do not have – they should save what they have earned – and they should faithfully take account of these.”⁸

The book, in order to assist the implementation of these ideas, is structured into three relatively distinct chapters. The first part (*The calendar of field farmers – A Mezei Gazdák Kalendáriuma*) described the farming processes in a calendar format, and outlined several useful new ideas and innovations recommended for the farming practice. The second chapter (*The obligations of estate bailiffs – A Gazdálkodó tiszteknek kötelességei*) describes the tasks that estate governors and workers should do, as well as the requirements demanded from them. The third part (*Keeping accounts – Számadások vezetése*) contains the basic principles of a new farm accountancy system that Nagyváthy recommended instead of the old reporting system of the estate, including the key parameters of the necessary certificates, documents, vouchers. In the introduction Nagyváthy clearly identified the purpose of his book: what “a practical farmer should know, is soon to be described here, with the goal that all who keep these will not be in error, and if someone finds a better way, may deserve praise and reward.”⁹

Compliance with the ideas described in the book and leading to improved farming standards, soon became a basic requirement, the suggested methods were to be applied in accordance with the local endowments, and the unique theoretical knowledge was suitable for practical

³ Vörös, Károly: Fejezetek Nagyváthy János életéből. In: Agrártörténeti Szemle 3. (1961) 3-4. 379.

⁴ Vörös, Károly: Fejezetek... 379.; Magyar Országos Levéltár, Festetics Családi Levéltár (hereinafter MNL FCSL.). Proth. 1795: 455. No. 926.

⁵ Vörös, Károly: Fejezetek...379.; MNL FCSL Proth. 1795: 455. No. 926.

⁶ Nagyváthy, János: A Szorgalmatos Mezei-Gazda. A Magyarországon gyakoroltatni szokott gazdaságnak rendjén keresztül. Pest, 1791. I. 113.

⁷ Unpublished, in manuscript format. For the research I used the 438 page copy written at 1795, and stored Keszthely.

⁸ Nagyváthy, János: “Közönséges Instructio a Mltgos Tolnai Gróf Festetics György Királyi Kamarás Urodalmiban gyakoroltatni szokott Gazdaságnak rendjén keresztül” (manuscript). Keszthely, 1795. 3.

⁹ Nagyváthy, János: Közönséges Instructio...3.

application, relying on Nagyváthy's advice. When writing the *Ordinary Instructions*, outlining modern ideas about management and organisation, he could not rely on Hungarian authors, as he later wrote: “*Regarding writers before me, neither foreign, nor from my home country, there are none as I know*”, therefore we can state, that he opened a new chapter in the history of Hungarian management science.¹⁰ The book was used in the education practice of Georgikon, and according to Zsigmond Csoma, a manuscript from 1828 – “*Farming calendar which was written by Josef K. G. Schmidt, practitioner (of Keszthely Georgikon) at Keszthely in the year 1828*” – was also founded on Nagyváthy's list of instructions.¹¹

Besides the purposes of practical application and education, Nagyváthy, the author, later enlarged his work and systematised its knowledge content, to write a new book *Hungarian farm steward (Magyar Gazdatiszt)*, that was published in 1821 after his death. This latter book is very similar to the former one, both in contents and in structure, but besides a thorough revision (including the removal of the full farming calendar), the main emphasis was put on the description of leadership, the system of accounts, and the management of human resources. In Nagyváthy's approach the practical application of theoretical methods played a crucial role, as well as the teaching for farmers and estate bailiffs, stewards, as he wrote: “*practical experience is a certainty, above all other strengths.*”¹²

During the land estate reform the knowledge content of *The Hardworking Farmer of the Field (A' szorgalmatos mezei gazda)*, was made available in every estate, and the *Ordinary Instructions* also makes frequent reference to this book. As far as we know today, these two books formed the foundations of the economic part of the estate reform, together with the command by Festetics about *Directio* – unfortunately this command has been lost. Nagyváthy also wrote a “*Circularé*” about sheep breeding, and a copy of this is kept today in Csurgó. The fact, that sheep breeding deserved a separate book of instructions, reflects the outstanding importance of sheep farming. Nagyváthy's set of instructions had governed the management of the estate for several long decades. After Nagyváthy's 'retirement' several minor issues received new management instructions, but the decisive set of instructions for the overall management of the estate remained those written by Nagyváthy, while the importance and volume of the others became negligible compared with Nagyváthy's monumental work. The *Estate Instructions (Uradalmi Instructiók)* from the first decade of the 19th century, kept in the Festetics Archives, contain the body of knowledge of Nagyváthy's work, although in slightly restructured form (the order of the individual chapters was changed).¹³

Nagyváthy, however, always gave priority to the practical applications of theory, and in his book *Hungarian farm steward (Magyar Gazdatiszt)* he wrote: “*I have not just taken a shot in the dark (as the saying goes), but I collected everything good that I saw in practice.*”¹⁴ Nagyváthy's approach is well demonstrated by this quotation, he collected the best practices and applied technologies, and recommended their improvement. His works keep returning to the topics of intensification and income-generation as the main focus in farm management, as he said: “*the most hard-working farming is useless if the farmer cannot sell his produces at good prices*”.¹⁵ He adapted the economic theories of the time (Adam Smith's theories and those of his predecessors) to the needs of the practice, ordering, among other things, that “*we have to maintain, that each farmer*

¹⁰ Nagyváthy, János: Magyar Gazdatiszt. Pest, 1821. Előbeszéd IX.

¹¹ Csoma, Zsigmond: Kertészet és polgárosodás (Az európai szőlészeti-borászati ismeretek oktatása, szaktanácsadása a Georgikonban és a Keszthelyi Uradalomban a 18. sz. végétől a 19. sz. közepéig). Budapest, 1997. 140.

¹² Nagyváthy, János: A Szorgalmatos... 397.

¹³ MNL FCsL. P 274./9-10. 107-720. The volume contains: “Közönséges Gazdaságbéli Instructio”, “Gazdaságbéli Kalendarium”. It is nearly fully the same as Nagyváthy's “Közönséges Instructio”.

¹⁴ Nagyváthy, János: A magyar gazdatiszt... Előbeszéd IX.

¹⁵ Nagyváthy, János: Közönséges Instructio... 299.

should produce what is best grown in his land, and can earn the best money for him”.¹⁶ Nagyváthy recognised the importance of the joint management of various farm enterprises, underlining, that “the greatest purpose of cattle farming is the earning of the money income, and the production of manure”.¹⁷ At the same time he correctly identified the factors hindering the spread of intensive farming, including the market-related, financial and social barriers present in many places. He stated, for instance, that “while the plains are so wide and productive, it would be a jest to insist on giving up extensive cattle herding and change for manor farming”.¹⁸

During his activities as the governor of the estate, Nagyváthy gave directions for solving the problem of labour deficiency, giving a solution for manure handling, a task typically requiring considerable workforce, as “if compared with the number of acres the number of workers is lacking, then the remedy may be to hire cheap labour for the smaller tasks, and these estates should be divided according to the reapers and scythe-men and other necessary farm-hands, mainly among the local people. If this may not be enough, then take as much as can be worked fairly, and the rest should be rented out in exchange for tithes or work, with a contract that requires the tenant to apply manure to the soil”.¹⁹

Where the above directions were not sufficient, there the field “was not possible to manage by manure application and human labour, nor by renting in exchange for tithes or labour, (...) those lands should be divided to three parts farmed in three-field rotation”.²⁰ If they were unable to finish the ploughing for spring sowing “then the farmer should leave the not ploughed piece of the field in fallow, or let it out in exchange of tithe, with the condition that some manure should be spread on it”.²¹ Eventually, if there were no ways of arranging the spreading of manure on the field, then “rather than allowing it to lose its nutrient, it should be put to fallow, instead”.²² As a result of the Napoleonic wars, the demand for cereals increased and the owners of large estates strived to increase their allodial property so that they could produce cereals in larger extensively farmed lands. Wherever it was possible, they increased their allodial areas at the expense of their serfs, and where it was not possible, then they chose to clearing forest areas and turning them to arable land. Nagyváthy did not recommend the clearing of the already diminishing forests in densely populated regions, but he considered it possible, and even necessary to find “forests useless for a long time”, and “turn them under the plough. However, occasionally such fallow lands may be too large. In such cases the nearest parts of such areas”, i.e. an area sufficient for a three-field rotation system, should be cleared up – as he recommends, – “and the rest should be divided among tenants for a one-time lease, under the condition, that in the 4th year the land should be manured”.²³ In densely populated areas, where “the labour force is more than the cultivated land, then the allodial areas should be extended by clearing forests, but instead of cutting out some good and nearby forests, the allodial land should be taken in a two-field rotation system (*Calcutura*), applying manure over it, and cultivated with care”.²⁴ In manors where lack of grassland prevented animal husbandry, but animal manure was still needed, then “fat oxen should be contracted, and cattle brought here from other manors for winter keeping, pulling up a cattle stable, and grow clover in fallow lands for them. The clover will make the cattle give more milk, and produce better manure, and will also make the land fatter”.²⁵ The promotion of growing fodder crops was also included in the book, and the various ways of applying manure to grasslands were also discussed.

¹⁶ Nagyváthy, János: Közönséges Instructio...143-144.

¹⁷ Nagyváthy, János: Közönséges Instructio... 281.

¹⁸ Nagyváthy, János: Közönséges Instructio...393.

¹⁹ Nagyváthy, János: Közönséges Instructio...136.

²⁰ Nagyváthy, János: Közönséges Instructio...141.

²¹ Nagyváthy, János: Közönséges Instructio...142.

²² Nagyváthy, János: Közönséges Instructio...142.

²³ Nagyváthy, János: Közönséges Instructio...140-141.

²⁴ Nagyváthy, János: Közönséges Instructio...136.

²⁵ Nagyváthy, János: Közönséges Instructio...141.

In spite of his success, Nagyváthy worked only for a few years for György Festetics. The reasons for the early “retirement”, the end of the joint work, has remained in obscurity for centuries, but there are many guesses about it. The direct cause of the breakup might have been the full powers that Nagyváthy required, as estate bailiff: Festetics dictated an independent regulation to the book of decisions, but his bailiff considered it a wrong regulation, and crossed it out, using his full powers. The count’s reaction is described by Gereben Vas (1823–1868, born as József Radákovics) as of what “*the collector of historical anecdotes from Somogy and Zala counties has also heard (...). The words by György Festetics are told by the people, that he spoke when his regulations were crossed out: Yes, indeed, I know well that I am a stupid ass, yes; but it was a pity to waste so much ink on crossing out my stupidity, a lighter crossing line should have been sufficient, yes, indeed.*”²⁶ Following the seemingly insignificant incident, and the resulting arguments “*Nagyváthy, following the expiration of his contract, moved to Csurgó*”.²⁷ Maybe the bailiff’s full powers led indirectly to the breakup, while the direct, true cause is searched in various different explanations, hinting at the possibility that the true background of it is deeper, and more complex. Probably the former confidential relationship between them had deteriorated, and some sources explain this by the count’s personality, others by the differences between their social status, views and principles. According to Vilmos Lázár, “*the class divide has widened*” between the count and the gentry. “*The count had become increasingly estranged from the plebeian Nagyváthy after the Martinovics-movement*”.²⁸ As Sándor Süle states, “*Festetics has exploited Nagyváthy to the utmost, his estate started to boom, and the ‘precipitous’ count started to find the careful, highly educated, methodical director burdensome*”²⁹, while in other places he calls the count “*inconsistent*”, or “*someone who does not care for anything besides his self-interests*”, referring to Nagyváthy’s dismissal.³⁰ According to some sources the “breakup” was caused by the bailiff’s extensive learning and accomplishments, and “*Nagyváthy’s unstoppable intentions for cultural development*” resulting from it.³¹ Another idea is that count Festetics had a “*personality too unbearable, (...) restless, changeful, to respect an employed man like a prophet for long*”.³² Besides the count’s personality, Károly Vörös sees another reason in the count’s new economic aspirations, for Nagyváthy was no longer suitable for the impementation of these.³³ The count perhaps did not approve of the mutual respect and appreciation that has developed between his wife and his bailiff, as it was well known, that his marriage with Judit Sallér (1764–1829) was a marriage of propriety. The mutual respect and appreciation is shown by not only a few letters, but by the fact, that Nagyváthy’s book, *The Hungarian Housekeeper (Magyar Házi Gazdaasszony)* (1820) was inspired by the countess. The respect that the countess felt for Nagyváthy is testified by the letter she wrote to her daughter, Mrs. László Nyikos, after Nagyváthy’s death: “*the deceased noble Father possessed indeed great knowledge and experience about the skills of farmers and farm housewives, and I do respect him for his acknowledging my experience of a young age, so that he had included that in his highly esteemed collections: now, if he lived, I would be able to serve him with more valuable housekeeping experience, but god almighty wanted it differently, and he departed this life first, and I will be the second to follow him*”.³⁴

The professional reasons for Nagyváthy’s retirement may possibly be that during the Napoleonic wars the enormous demand for cereals for human nutrition led to the dominance

²⁶ *Nagyváthy, Kálmán: Nagyváthy János élete.* Pozsony, 1891. 22.

²⁷ *Lázár, Vilmos: Nagyváthy János emlékezete.* MTA Agrártud. Osztály Közleményei 3-4. Budapest, 1955. 253-254.

²⁸ *Lázár, Vilmos: Nagyváthy János emlékezete...* 253-254.

²⁹ *Süle, Sándor: A keszthelyi Georgikon 1797-1848.* Budapest, 1967. 24.

³⁰ *Süle, Sándor: A keszthelyi...* 14.

³¹ *Kuthy, Ferenc: Nagyváthy János, a haladó kispazda.* Csurgó, 1943. 9.

³² *Nagyváthy, Kálmán: Nagyváthy János...* 21.

³³ *Vörös, Károly: Fejezetek...* 394.

³⁴ *Nagyváthy, Kálmán: Nagyváthy János...* 59. (the date on the letter is: Molnári, 1821. September 25.)

of extensive, traditional arable farming in large estates. Nagyváthy knew that the real boost of farming can be ensured by intensive farming, and more intensive animal husbandry, and he intended to manage large agricultural estates accordingly, and this was the basic principle in his *Ordinary Instructions*, too. Somewhat contradicting to this, Károly Vörös states, that the bailiff was not suitable to implement the new economic ideas initiated by Festetics.³⁵ Besides the reasons provided before, György Festetics probably wished to use this early retirement as a signal towards the Court in Vienna, the dismissal may rather be understood as a symbolic act: the ultra-rich aristocrat dismissing the bailiff of plebeian birth, who had freely distributed his enlightened thoughts in pamphlets, so that the count could show his loyalty towards the court, and his separation from the ideas of the Enlightenment. Nagyváthy was a freemason, and “*his presence at Keszthely could easily bring about more drawbacks, than advantages, for Festetics’s enterprises of cultural policy*”.³⁶ The regulation of 13th October 1797 written in Keszthely about the dismissal shows, that the leaving Director was replaced with several transfers and relocations, which suggest a sudden change, as well as the fact, that a message was soon sent to Csurgó: “*Mr. János Nagyváthy should be given one of the 3 new houses built in the present year, and in case these may not be fully completed, then the Squire of Csurgó should give him one room with a kitchen, from the rooms of the Interveniens, for the winter*”.³⁷ Therefore they did not prepare a house in advance for the Director, although he was given proper severance payment, but besides the large number of sudden relocations and the unfinished status of the house, the sudden nature of the ‘retirement’ is also reflected by the beginning of the third point: “*It should be inquired from Mr. Nagyváthy, whether Kemendi Officer wrote about the half year dues...*”.³⁸ These suggest, that the transfer of tasks and affairs was not quite seamless, and the divorce was probably not quite cloudless. Unfortunately, up to now Nagyváthy’s official contract has not been found in the Archives of the Festetics Family, the only information known at present is, that Nagyváthy worked on the estate from February 1792, and assuming the annual renewal of the contract, as the typical practice of the times, it is impossible that his contract would have expired on 13th October. Although the relevant sources do not mention it among the possible causes of the sudden breakup, it is easily imaginable that it was Nagyváthy, who grew tired of the management of the estate, a job of great responsibility, and much work, therefore he decided to retire after completing the most difficult initial stage of the reforms, and transformations. The success of his work is demonstrated by the fact, that “*the count’s estate has long used the management system, operational regulations, accounting and evaluation methods that had been established by Nagyváthy*”.³⁹ Summing up the reasons for Nagyváthy’s early retirement, these probably included personal conflicts, but the most likely reason seems to be the demonstrative separation to satisfy the Court in Vienna, and this is confirmed by the substantial benefits the count gave to his departing Director.⁴⁰ At the same time, Count Festetics probably followed Nagyváthy’s recommendations when he made the decision to establish the first agricultural higher education institution of Europe. However, the year of the foundation (1797) is the year when Nagyváthy left Keszthely, and in light of the foundation the count’s decision is particularly incomprehensible, because this way the college, at its opening, had to miss the person, who was one of the most knowledgeable farming experts

³⁵ Vörös, Károly: Fejezetek... 394.

³⁶ Fehér, György – Kurucz, György – Zsidi, Vilmos: Georgikon 200. Keszthely, 1996. 75.

³⁷ “*Directornak Muraközy Prefectus, ennek helyébe Pozsonyi György Keszthelyi Tisztartó Úr Inspectori Titulussal, Keszthelyre György nevezetű Ttónak, Keresztúrra számtartónak Rezeretits (?) Ferencz Kemendi Kasznár, ennek helyébe Horváth Paál Csurgói Kasznár, Csurgóra Kasznárnak Zatureczki György vári Ispány, ennek helyébe Nyát Sopronyi Gazda Ispánynak rendeltettnek*”. MNL FCsL. P 279/12. cs. 1797. évi iratok. 534.

³⁸ MNL FCsL. P 279/12. cs. 1797. évi iratok. 534.

³⁹ Galgóczy, Károly: Nagyváti János. In: Az Országos Magyar Gazdasági Egyesület Emlékkönyve. Budapest, 1879. 62.

⁴⁰ Fehér, György – Kurucz, György – Zsidi, Vilmos: Georgicon... 75.

of Hungary. This might have offended the “Director”: the teachers of the college founded according to his advice became Karl Bulla and Ferenc Pethe, while he himself was formally left out of the education. Nagyváthy and Ferenc Pethe might have been together employed by Festetics for a short time, as Pethe arrived to Keszthely at the end of October 1797. Perhaps the interruption of a study created some tension between the two excellent specialists. The journal entitled “*Hungarian News (Magyar Újság), that aims at enhancing the agricultural production and industriousness in Hungary and Transsilvania*” published a sequence of articles by Nagyváthy about meadow management, presenting many useful practical tricks for farmers, and was based partly on “*The Hardworking Farmer of the Field*”, and partly on the *Ordinary Instructions*.⁴¹ Ferenc Pethe was the editor of the journal from issue XXV, and the promise written at the end of the article published in issue XXIV, “*to be continued*”, never came true, the title of the journal changed from issue XXXVI to *Curious Hungarian Farmer (Vígálgató Magyar Gazda)*, and soon afterwards the journal was terminated, due to lack of subscribers.

Nagyváthy, in his works written at an old age, and published posthumus, often gave his opinion about farmers insisting on implementing Western innovations at all costs. His book, “*The Hungarian practical producer (Magyar Practicus Termesztő)*” was written “adjusted” to the Hungarian conditions. His opinion was that since the publication of his first book the production standards had improved considerably: “*Perhaps my book 'The Hardworking Farmer of the Field' was useful at least in making the farmers more cautious about their activities*”.⁴² However, he disagreed with those who, based on the achievements up to the time, advocated the development of Hungarian agriculture directly following the examples of the economy in England or the Netherlands. His viewpoint was, that in order to attain the development level of the West, “*first the practice of ley-farming, fallowing should be given up*”, then common grasslands should be turned to cropland, and finally, “*acquire as much cheap farm labour and drain tanks and sinks*” as there are in other countries. He could see hardly any chance for “*this to occur in the current century*”.⁴³ He wrote about the ‘innovations’ adapted from the West, that some of these had already been known and applied by Hungarian farmers. For example, “*Circular sowing*” was already an old practice in Vas and Somogy counties, although the practice was born “*because of the population and the limited land areas, and not from skilled and trained farming practice*”.⁴⁴ After mentioning a few similar examples he warned the farmers: “*I do not want us to become immodest, and to deny everything that comes from abroad: but that we should not make ourselves the pupils of Taer, Fellenberg, and Schönburg in every new small things and not either in great things, because, the things they teach to be applicable for us, can mostly be learned at home, too. A nation that imitates other nations, will lose its national character*”.⁴⁵

Summary

Nagyváthy fought for the development of Hungarian agriculture, and for the improvement of the standards of agricultural production that guaranteed the livelihood of the Hungarian people. Knowing the agricultural situation in depth, he introduced effective production methods applicable in the Hungarian farming practice. His works were the predecessors of the modern agricultural professional literature, and he earned eternal merits in committing the farming knowledge in writing, and spreading Western culture and agricultural science in Hungary. An important feature of his economic works is the attention he paid to every economic agent of the

⁴¹ “*Magyar Újság, mely Magyar és Erdély Országban a Mezeigazdaságot, Szorgalmatosságot irányozza*”. XXII. darab 169-171. XXIII. darab 181-184. XXIV. darab 187-190.

⁴² Nagyváthy, János: Magyar Practicus Termesztő. Pest, 1821. III.

⁴³ Nagyváthy, János: Magyar Practicus Termeszt...III.

⁴⁴ Nagyváthy, János: Magyar Practicus Termeszt...VI.

⁴⁵ Nagyváthy, János: Magyar Practicus Termeszt...IX-X.

epoch, and he created everlasting value in all styles of the agricultural professional literature. For the smallholder squirelets and the more affluent serf farms he wrote the books *The Hardworking Farmer of the Field* (*A szorgalmatos mezzei gazda*) and *The practical Hungarian producer* (*A Magyar Practicus Termesztő*). He summarised the skills and knowledge recommended for the farm housewives in the book *Hungarian Housekeeper* (*Magyar Házi Gazdaasszony*), written in calendar format, and also used the calendar format in the first chapter of the *Ordinary Instructions* that he wrote when being the *Director* of the Festetics estate. In this latter book he dealt with issues related to the problems of the financial chamber of the government, too, as well as in his book entitled “*The economy of the Hungarian Homeland worked out according to the ideas of Smith and Soden* (*Magyar Haza Gazdálkodása Smith és Soden után kidolgozva*)”. Nagyváthy could perfectly comprehend all the problems of the Hungarian economy of the times, and the possible directions of development. During his activities as farm manager and governor he based his work on the optimal exploitation of the agricultural production technologies of his time, together with the rational utilisation of feudal rents. He was familiar with the agricultural knowledge of Western Europe, but he gave priority to practical applications compared to theory, and he always adjusted the advice given to farmers to the Hungarian situation: “*I will only describe the methods that can be practised with some, or full use, in farmhouses of our homeland*”.⁴⁶ He took pains to stick to the realities of the country, and he considered it impractical to translate the economic works of foreign authors, because “*those were not written for the housekeepers of our country*”.⁴⁷ Methods may not be suitable for Hungary even if abroad they “*proved to be good by pressure or by economic science, cannot be applied generally to my sweet country*”.⁴⁸ An interesting parallel can be drawn between his reform ideas proposed in his political pamphlets regarding the social and the economic conditions of Hungary, because he made very cautious suggestions in both areas. He did not propose radical changes about the actual systems, but only their gradual improvements based on the initial situation. In his works he highlighted the importance of reasonable management, and the role of training in development: “*There is no greater mistake in the society than when in rural schools children are taught the Latin language (...) Oh! if only the time came that in rural schools (...) the Master would teach his pupils to understand the beauties of the good life in the fields, because the happiness of the house and the homeland depends on this*”.⁴⁹ Nagyváthy’s attention focused not only on educating farmers and estate officers, but on educating women, too, and he thought that girls ought to be trained to good housekeeping in the strict sense of the word, therefore the man “*when marrying, will not get a puppet but a half assistant*”. The contemporary world considers *The Hardworking Farmer of the Field* his major work, and he extended, and revised the systematic contents of this book in his later works, adding his acquired experiences, at such high standards, that, as Lázár says, “*browsing in his works, we find a series of statements that are unquestionably valid today*”.⁵⁰ It is worth noticing, that in contrast to the many foreign references in “*The Hardworking Farmer of the Field*”, he hardly mentions any foreign works in his later books. The book written by the estate bailiff about the management of the large estate clearly shows, that he wonderfully understood the problems of the economic management and governance of the feudal estate. *The Hardworking Farmer of the Field* is book written with the approach of “*the landlord*”, while the *Ordinary Instructions*, a book written with regard to the problems of the national financial chamber, with its first chapter written in a calendar format, testified, that Nagyváthy was able to create something new in the full spectrum of the agricultural

⁴⁶ Nagyváthy, János: Magyar Practicus Termesztő... Előbeszéd VI.

⁴⁷ Nagyváthy, János: Magyar Házi Gazdaasszony. Pest, 1820. 3.

⁴⁸ Nagyváthy, János: Szorgalmatos... Elöl-járó beszéd.

⁴⁹ Nagyváthy, János: Szorgalmatos... 470-471.

⁵⁰ Lázár, Vilmos: Nagyváthy János emlékezete. In: MTA Agrártudományi Oszt. Közleményei 3-4. Budapest, 1955. 254.

professional literature. When assessing the role of the *Ordinary Instructions* a few facts should be highlighted: it has been applied for long by the *Directio*, the central management unit of the estate, in the management and organisation practice of the Festetics estate. It was only in 1817 – i.e. about 25 years after Nagyváthy published his book – that the deservedly famous and respected Széchenyi family started to apply instructions for improving the efficiency of production and management in their estates of County Zala.⁵¹ The significance of Nagyváthy's book is reflected by the fact, that his famous peer, Ferenc Pethe, was required “*as a senior teacher in Georgikon, to learn and apply Nagyváthy's Instructions*”. It is an interesting fact, that count Festetics also commissioned Ferenc Pethe to write a textbook for Georgikon, and he completed his enormous work (later published under the title *Refined Agriculture – Pallérozott Mezei Gazdaság*), but this book was not received favourably by Festetics, he called it “*skimble-skamble*”, futile.⁵² Nagyváthy, however, carried on writing about issues of leadership, management, organisation, and agricultural economics, his book “*Hungarian farm steward*” was focused on leadership, discussing not only its professional requirements, but human endowments as well. His goal was to enhance the social status of the formerly despised profession, if “*the estate owners in our country, due to taking a public office or to sheer contempt, consider farm management as a negligible entertainment: it is rarely not to their detriment. The sensible and hardworking farm stewards may, however, repair the damage*”.⁵³ He considered hard work and rational management important, because foreign authors attributed the agricultural productivity of Hungary “*simply to the result of good soil, and denied the merits of rational and industrious work by the Hungarian farmer*”.⁵⁴ He outlined ideas about agricultural economics in his books, e.g. “*the volume of production is everywhere an undeniable proof of the fact, that there are many people living there, and the prosperous breeding shows, that the farmers are affluent, because breeding requires capital*”.⁵⁵ His opinion about the development of the Hungarian economy always took into account the actual Hungarian situation and practices. From 1797 he became an independent farmer in Csurgó, until his death in 1819. He paid attention to the local secondary school, and also maintained his professional writing activity. In his book he summarised his valuable knowledge of practical economics, applying his personal experience gained about managing a large agricultural estate. His work points well beyond his agricultural writings: he wrote essays about economics, and social sciences, and also wrote poetry. Based on his experiences acquired in the written usage of the professional language, he became involved in the language reform of the Hungarian language, and maintained good relations and regular correspondence with Ferenc Kazinczy, until Nagyváthy's death. As Borotvás-Nagy states, Nagyváthy was an early representative and promoter of the modern, income-focused economic system, as “*being experienced and well read in world languages, he recognised, what his world famous German contemporary, Albert Thaer discussed in a systematic way, that the traditionally managed feudal estate, relying on the feudal serf system for its labour force, cannot detach itself from the impacts of the ever expanding monetary economy, and sooner or later will be forced to transform itself into a capitalist enterprise*”.⁵⁶

⁵¹ *Tilkovszky, Lóránt*: Széchenyi István Zala megyei uradalmi. In: Gazdaságtörténeti tanulmányok. Zalai Gyűjtemény 34. (1993) 113-165.; and *Kaposi, Zoltán*: Gazdasági változások Széchenyi István gróf Zala vármegyei birtokain (1814-1860). In: Közép-Európai Közlemények XI. No. 40. (2018) 1. 138-153.

⁵² *Süle, Sándor*: Kisszántói Pethe Ferenc. Budapest, 1964. 95.

⁵³ *Nagyváthy, János*: Magyar Practicus Termesztető...Elő Beszéd 1.

⁵⁴ *Nagyváthy, János*: Magyar Practicus Tenyésztető. Pest, 1822. Előbeszéd III.

⁵⁵ *Nagyváthy, János*: Magyar Practicus Tenyésztető...Előbeszéd, IV.

⁵⁶ *Borotvás-Nagy, Sándor*: Nagy magyar... 43.