

The social land programme in general

The Social Land Programme is not a recent institution in the Hungarian welfare system. In the second half of the 19th century and between the two world wars it was part of the social policy based on charitable benefits.

The Social Land Programme, created in 1992, offers opportunities for socially disadvantaged people with no assets for agricultural production to support farming and to increase self-sufficiency.

Since its inception, the basic objective is to strengthen the economic autonomy of participating households and improve their quality of life.

In the years following the change of regime, very hard difficulties occurred in employment in the country. It was also necessary to recreate the social assistance system. The situation has forced new procedures and new solutions. The Governmental Commissioner Office of Social Crisis Management Programmes was set up under the leadership of Zoltán Lakner, the government commissioner. The idea of the Social Land Programme was formulated in this office. Detailed elaboration included the experiences derived from the settlements of the regions hit by the social crisis. In 1992, seven programmes started on the basis of ad hoc requests from local governments, two in Békés County, five in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County. Since 1993, the support was provided by call for tenders. Some settlements of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County joined to the programme in that time.

The number of supported counties and settlements has been steadily increasing over the past 25 years. During the quarter century, the programme operated in 746 settlements in 14 counties. Almost one fifth of the settlements (137 settlements) received fund to operate the programme through ten years at least. The programme operated and operates permanently nearly in the half of the affected settlements (323 places). More than three-quarters of the supported settlements (581 settlements) has habitants under 2000 persons, about half of these settlements (285) has less than 500 habitants.

From 1992, the programme was coordinated by the Ministry responsible for social affairs. To operate the programme the financial fund was provided exclusively from national funds. Expenditure of the programme multiplies the invested value.

In the 25 years, the programme provided nearly HUF 5 billion (HUF 4,862,521,000) as support. Two counties (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén: 29.3%, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg: 26.0%) received more than half of the total support.

Different types have formed in the local system of social land programmes over the years. Typically, the people in the settlements produced for self-supply, but in several places they also gained production on the market. In some places, the combination of the two systems was realized because there was among the families who were able to produce the local market, too. Over the years, a variety of social land programme models have evolved. The social character of the programme has been preserved for all of the time.

This active social policy tool for social convergence has been fundamentally transformed since 2010, and the employment element has become more significant. In the traditional household framework

the programme element combined with public employment was preferred besides supporting the traditional self-supplying production.

Over the next 25 years, the social land programme has become an integral part of local social policy in disadvantaged small settlements. By the economic activation of people in need the goal is empowerment and motivation rather than sanction.

Municipalities have a continuous support system for the participants (provision of seeds and breeding animals, expert support, participation in training, free or low-cost service provided by agricultural machines, etc.), and the affected people may receive support for several years. Successful programmes will bring the restoration of self-sustaining household economy (which has former traditions but now they got in the marginalized groups) and the improvement of the self-sustaining ability of the target group.

A jubilee conference was organized by Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County Chance Social Public Foundation in March 2018. The Public Foundation was the National Methodological Institution of Social Land Programmes for 15 years. The Association of Professional and Interest Representatives of Social Land Programmes (SZOFOSZ – shorten in Hungarian) in 2004 was established by the initiatives of the Public Foundation as the interest protection organization of the affected settlements. The Association has been in charge of the methodological development and advocacy activities of the Social Land Programmes since its establishment and it was a partner in the realization of the 'The social land programme was 25 years old' national conference in Lakitelek held on 22-23 March, 2018.

Compiled by: Ilona Dr. Nagyné Varga, director

Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County Chance Social Public Foundation