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Small-Scale Farming in the Post-Socialist Rural Transition*

Introduction

There is always a problem writing about the 'silent majority:' it has no voice and it is so much part of the social landscape that it seems unworthy of particular comment or analysis. Small-scale, subsistence or supplementary farmers or gardeners constitute just such a silent majority in the post-socialist Central and Eastern European countryside. Virtually everyone who lives in a rural setting (and many too who live in urban settings) in the countries 'in transition' from 'actually existing socialism' to something else is engaged in some sort of agricultural production to meet family needs. Villagers everywhere have gardens, but in Central and Eastern Europe they are and have remained practical gardens. There are rows of vegetables, maize or vines rather than flowers and grass; and sheds and outbuildings house chickens and pigs rather than lawn-mowers: they have not been replaced by patios. Marxist-Leninist theorists had a dream of abolishing the difference between the town and the country, but in 'actually existing socialism' urban and rural ways of life remained radically different. This is not to say that there was no contact between urban and rural. (The industrial labour force was, on the contrary, at least as likely to be village-domiciled as urban: only the intelligentsia remained an overwhelmingly urban class.) But the suburbanization of the countryside that accompanies advanced capitalism did not take place, neither in the sense of the middle classes colonizing rural settlements, nor in the sense of the extension of the activities of national (and increasingly international) food retailers to rural areas. Thus, whilst it is not only conceivable but also quite common for a British farming family to buy all its household needs from

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the local supermarket, the farm being an entirely separate commercial venture that only happens to be related to the production of food, in Central and Eastern Europe it is almost inconceivable that any rural family, not just commercial farming ones, does not use the opportunities provided by the rural setting to produce at least some of its own food.

But herein lies the problem for this paper, and it is a problem with both practical and theoretical components. On the practical level, the silent majority of subsistence or supplementary agricultural producers is so much part of the landscape that research into rural restructuring tends to ignore it: it is the common thread, the constant presence that continues while so much else changes. Behind the radical class conflicts of land restitution, collective farm transformation and State Farm privatization, it is something that can easily be overlooked; and, in fact, for social researchers from the countries concerned it is so much part of everyday life that it scarcely merits comment. So, from a practical point of view, despite intensive research into the rural transition in Central Europe and the Balkans, this 'silent majority' also remains an 'invisible majority.' We know it is there, but focus to-date has been on more radical transformations rather than on how the 'transition' has effected the majority in the socialist countryside. This paper will therefore not be so rich in illustrative material as might be hoped.¹

The theoretical problem is that it is rather uninteresting to say simply: 'there is a lot of it.' We need to know why 'there is a lot of it;' and, because, as has already been suggested, 'there always was a lot of it,' we need to know why 'there always was a lot of it' and how it has changed. This paper will therefore be structured as follows. The first section briefly considers the importance of small-scale agriculture to 'actually existing socialism' and to different varieties of 'actually existing socialism,' because the countries of Central and Eastern Europe were no monolith: 'actually existing socialism' was not everywhere the same.

The second section considers why this situation changed and why and how this change transformed the context for small-scale agriculture. Globalization of production and homogenization of consumption patterns is a common theme of much economic and sociological writing, but it is often forgotten that the collapse of 'actually existing socialism' was itself part of a global process: the countries were globally uncompetitive and could not

¹ The paper is based on materials obtained during the course of four research projects funded by the British Economic and Social Research Council and the European Commission: *Transitions to family farming in post-socialist Central Europe* ESRC (L309253037), *Rural employment and rural regeneration in Central Europe*, European Commission (CIPA-CT92-3022), *Agricultural Restructuring and Rural Employment in Bulgaria and Romania*, European Commission, ACE (94-0598-R) *Agricultural Protection and Agricultural Interests in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia*, ESRC (R000221863).

afford the social benefits their populations expected and deserved. And it is this global reality of economic failure which provides the local context for small-scale agricultural production. As the 'pillars of the socialist countryside'² collapsed, ever greater numbers were forced out of employment and became dependent on agriculture and other opportunities in the rural economy for making a living. If the motive force driving families to engage in agriculture in the socialist years was *increasing* income, in the post-socialist years it was *replacing* income lost due to unemployment.

The final two sections of the paper illustrate these processes. Section three reviews briefly some of the statistical evidence on the predominance of small-scale farming, and the final section presents some qualitative materials identifying various combinations of small-scale agriculture and other income sources based on interviews conducted in rural communities in Central Europe and the Balkans.

Section One Actually existing socialism and part-time farming

Recognition of the importance of part-time, supplementary private agricultural production within the socialist collective farm and the socialist village more generally began with the path-breaking work of Karl-Eugen Wädekin who studied its significance in the Soviet Union.³ There has been no systematic research into the role of the 'household plot' or 'personal' plot throughout the socialist countries of Central Europe and the Balkans, although numerous agricultural commentators have noted the fact that the plots made up a tiny percentage of agricultural land yet produced a disproportionately higher proportion of agricultural output; and much has been written, by myself and others, on Hungary's unique creation of a fully symbiotic set of relations between the small-scale private and large-scale socialist sectors of socialist farming.⁴

Household plots were always central to the household economy of collective farm members, but their role within the overall household economy and the significance of their contribution to national agricultural output varied. In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (excluding the former Soviet Union) there were four models of socialist agriculture, and one of the defining characteristics of each was the role accorded to the private plot. These models can be termed: 'Stalinist collectivization,' 'collectivization

² Nigel Swain, *Rural employment and rural unemployment in the post-socialist countryside*, Eastern European Countryside, No. 2, 1996, pp. 5-16.

³ Karl-Eugen Wädekin, *Privatproduzenten in der sowjetischen Landwirtschaft*, Köln, Bundesinstitut für Ostwissenschaftliche und Internationale Studien, 1967.

⁴ Nigel Swain, *Collective Farms which Work?*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985.

abandoned,' 'neo-Stalinist collectivization' and 'Hungarian collectivization.'⁵ Under the Stalinist model, household plots were barely tolerated and highly taxed, but for the household there were essential to sheer survival. Their role in the Soviet context is described by Belov.⁶ The model was introduced everywhere in the Stalinist Eastern Europe of the early 1950s, and remained essentially unchanged in Romania and Albania until the end of the socialist years.

Collectivization abandoned refers to the developments in Poland (and Yugoslavia) where the reaction to the manifest failings of the Stalinist model was to abandon collectivization altogether. Thus more than 80% of arable land in Poland remained in peasants' hands. But, because the regimes were afraid of allowing capitalism to develop in the countryside, peasant farms remained as small as they had been before the socialist epoch and private farming became an increasingly part-time and increasingly supplementary phenomenon as opportunities for industrial employment increased. Thus, while, since the 1970s or so, a class of so-called 'specialist farmers' who produced commercially and full-time emerged, the bulk of Poland's agricultural population lived in households where agriculture was not the sole and increasingly only a supplementary source of income.⁷

The reaction of most of the countries of Eastern Europe to the failure of the Stalinist model of collectivization, however, was not to abandon the idea but to force it through and then somehow make it work, even if this entailed radically transforming the model. The result was 'neo-Stalinist collectivization' which, in its essential features (certainly in terms of the household plot), emerged in the former Czechoslovakia, the former GDR and Bulgaria. Household plots were tacitly encouraged not only as a means of ensuring the survival of rural households but also as a means of generating additional household income (which was not immediately taxed away) and increasing the supply of food to the national economy. State agencies willingly bought as much produce as householders were willing to sell, and were encouraged to assist members in the sowing and harvesting of their land. But for ideological reasons the governments, with the partial exception of Bulgaria which by the 1980s talked of (but only partially implemented) Hungarian-style reform, did not publicize such policies and even portrayed developments such as consolidating all household plot land and farming it as a single unit in order to farm it more efficiently as a decline

⁵ Nigel Swain, *A framework for comparing social change in the post-socialist countryside*, *Eastern European Countryside*, No. 4, 1998.

⁶ Fedor Belov, *The History of a Soviet Collective Farm*, Praeger, New York 1955, pp. 176–190.

⁷ Nigel Swain, *Collective farms as sources of stability and decay in the centrally planned economies of East Central Europe*, University of Liverpool, Centre for Central and Eastern European Studies Working Papers No. 30, April 1994.

in the significance of 'individual plots' (because it was a communal operation) even though, if anything, it strengthened these plots because it provided fodder for private livestock, always the mainstay of the plots, more cheaply.

Hungary, finally, introduced all of the 'neo-Stalinist model,' but much more besides. It encouraged first commercial production on household plots by providing channels within the collective farm and outside it for marketing produce, and developing a complex relationship of symbiotic mutual benefit between private producer and the cooperative farm.⁸ Then, in the 1980s, it provided a context in which some, wholly independent commercial farms (concentrating as always on livestock or market gardening) could emerge.⁹ Under the Hungarian model, then, household plot production could become not only an important source of additional family income but could also develop into the sole source of income of a privately farming family.

Supplementary agricultural activity in rural communities in Central and Eastern Europe was always there, was always important and always related to meeting family needs. But its role varied over time and between countries, from providing the bare necessities for survival to generating very significant additional household income.

Section Two

Globalization, the collapse of 'actually existing socialism' and the destruction of the 'pillars of the socialist countryside'

It is impossible to understand current developments towards increased self-supply in Eastern Europe without placing the developments of the last few decades in their global context. 'Experts' frequently comment that it is, 'unfortunate' that the post-socialist transition in Eastern Europe should have coincided with a recession in the West so that the loss of eastern markets could not easily be replaced by the growth of western ones. But to see this as a coincidence is to misread the situation. The collapse of Eastern European socialism is as much part of the same long-term structural readjustment to the 'oil shocks' of the 1970s and the change of 'techno-economic paradigm'¹⁰ engendered by the introduction of the micro-chip as

⁸ Nigel Swain, *Collective Farms...*, pp. 551–79.

⁹ See especially Iván Szelényi, *Socialist Entrepreneurs: Embourgeoisement in Rural Hungary*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988. Szelényi was particularly influenced by the ethnographic film *Földi Paradicsom (Earthly Paradise/Tomato* [the same word in Hungarian]) which also reveals the insecurity of such market-oriented production and the hard lives endured by women in such households.

¹⁰ The term is used in C. Freeman, *The case for technological determinism*, [in:] R. Finnegan et al. (eds.), *Information Technology: Social Issues — a Reader*, Hodder and Stoughton, Sevenoaks 1987, p. 14.

is the West's inability to reproduce the consistent and significant growth rates of the post-war boom.¹¹ Socialism collapsed because its economies remained irredeemably uncompetitive in a world economy where industrial production was either automated or relocated to 'third world' countries. Because of their insensitivity to costs, they failed consistently to meet the technological challenge of 'post-fordism' and 'flexible specialization;' yet their socialist commitments to welfare made them uncompetitive with countries where labour costs were low and social provision minimal.

This long-term uncompetitiveness of the socialist economies in relation to advanced capitalism not only explains the collapse of 'actually existing socialism,' it also constrains the possibilities for post-socialist development. Foreign direct investment has been less than hoped for, because there is so little that it would be profitable investing in (except in green field sites on the perimeter of the European Union such as western Hungary). Governments have been unable to cut their budget deficits as much as western advisors require, because the middle classes of post-socialism do not appreciate having their welfare benefits reduced. As a consequence, the high levels of unemployment that accompanied the immediate change of system (irrespective of whether or not it was misleadingly labelled 'shock therapy' or 'gradual change') has become structural and persistent and is unlikely to improve in the short term.

In the rural economy, it is not just a question of an increase in unemployment generally, but of a collapse of what has been termed the 'three pillars of the socialist countryside': the collective farm as an agricultural employer, the collective farm as an industrial employer, and the ending of the commuting worker way of life, which also suffered because of increased travel costs as subsidies were removed.¹² The consequence of this was not only a reduction in the extent to which villages offered job opportunities, but also an increase in the number of people who relied on the village (rather than non-agricultural employment external to the village) on providing them with a livelihood. But villages have little to offer besides agriculture. Large-scale commercial farms, even where cooperatives have not been transformed into new private farms, cannot employ the numbers they used to. Establishing a full-time family farm is difficult (although not impossible)¹³ and in any case not an option for everyone because there is

¹¹ Nigel Swain, *The Visegrad countries of Eastern Europe*, [in:] Bernard J. Foley (ed.) *European Economies since the Second World War*, Houndmills, Macmillan 1988, pp. 177–208.

¹² Nigel Swain, *Rural employment and rural unemployment...*

¹³ See for example Iveta Námerová, *Private Farmers in Slovakia: Social Backgrounds and Conflicts over Resources*, University of Liverpool, Centre for Central and Eastern European Studies Working Papers No. 45, September 1997; Ewa

not enough land to go round. Plugging the 'service gap' of the socialist village¹⁴ by opening a pub or a shop is a real possibility and has taken place extensively everywhere, but these are all family-run businesses which provide virtually no net additional jobs. What remains is subsistence farming to eke out unemployment benefit or a disability or old-age pension. For many, probably the majority, the increased importance of small-scale farming is something that was forced on people by changing circumstances. But for others it was a more positive choice. The possibilities offered by cooperative transformation provided the opportunity to adopt a way of life that they had dreamed of for years — farming for themselves. Only belatedly did such 'nostalgia farmers' realize that a farm that was viable in the 1940s could barely provide subsistence by the 1990s.

In the previous section the differences between models of collectivization were stressed. The particular model of collectivization adopted in each country had a significant impact on the process of post-socialist rural transformation, and this has had an impact on the degree to which rural populations are dependent on subsistence farming. Countries which had abandoned collectivization such as Poland experienced least change. The struggle for control over and ownership of former socialist assets took place within the context of privatizing State Farms, most of which were privatized, in smaller units, to members of their former management (although some larger private farmers acquired some former State Farm land). Part-time, mainly subsistence farming carried on much before, but farming households had to support more people as unemployment increased. In the countries which had retained the Stalinist model, the destruction of collective farms was almost total (total in Albania, almost total in Romania). Agriculture reverted to a scale which could never do more than provide a meagre subsistence unless it was supplemented by income from another source, either pension, income, or state benefit. In the neo-Stalinist countries and Hungary, where people had benefited greatly from socialist agriculture, there was no spontaneous move to break up collective farms. In the Czech Republic and especially Slovakia, where the newly independent government openly identified with the cooperative form, many cooperatives remained and the bulk of rural dwellers continued to keep small-scale plots, with only a small majority embarking on full-time family farming.

Nalewajko and Hanna Podedworna, *Agricultural Protection and Agricultural Interests in Poland*, University of Liverpool, Centre for Central and Eastern European Studies Working Papers No. 42, September, 1997.

¹⁴ Nigel Swain, *Rural Employment and Rural Regeneration in Post-Socialist Central Europe: Summary of Findings and the Qualitative Research*, University of Liverpool, Centre for Central and Eastern European Studies Working Papers No. 38, January 1997.

In Bulgaria political forces enforced the liquidation of most cooperatives and the destruction of many of their assets. More new cooperatives have emerged than has been the case in Romania, but very few large-scale private farms, and the bulk of plots are far too small to provide a living beyond subsistence unless supplemented by an alternative income source. In Hungary and the former GDR, although there were political pressures too, it was economic pressure that enforced a more radical transformation of cooperatives than in the former Czechoslovakia, although cooperatives remained in both countries an important sector of the rural economy. This resulted in the emergence of more private corporate farms (as managers acquired former cooperative assets for themselves), and more private family farms. In Hungary the latter came mainly from amongst those who had been successful in household plot farming in the 1970s and 1980s. In the former GDR they came from those who had continued to identify themselves as farmers during the socialist years,¹⁵ especially in the more southerly regions, and westerners who had rights to land in the East.¹⁶

The consequence of these different patterns of transformation is that there are in the Balkan countries, which destroyed socialist agriculture, relatively more people who are more wholly dependent on subsistence agriculture than there are in the Central European countries, which used socialist assets as a springboard for the development of private, predominantly corporate farming. The latter countries have more large-scale farms and more medium-sized family farms. But, despite these differences, the largest group by far involved in agricultural production everywhere is those who engage in very small-scale, family needs-oriented agriculture; and everywhere the importance of this activity is increasing as unemployment increases.

Section Three

The extent of post-socialist subsistence farming

The role and significance of small-scale farming can be illustrated by means of national statistics, although it is important to realize that there is no uniform definition of those engaged in agriculture, something that can

¹⁵ Lutz Laschewski, *Continuity and Changes — Development of Farm Structures in East Germany*, paper presented to Working Group 10, XVIIth Congress of the European Society for Rural Sociology, Chania, Crete, 25–29 August, 1997.

¹⁶ The fullest account in English of the Land Reform to date in the former GDR is Volker Beckmann and Konrad Hagedorn, *Decollectivization and privatization policies and resulting structural changes of agriculture in Eastern Germany*, [in:] Johan F.M. Swinnen, Allan Buckwell and Erik Mathijs (eds.) *Agricultural Privatization, Land Reform and Farm Restructuring in Central and Eastern Europe*, Ashgate, Aldershot 1997, pp. 105–160.

lead to considerable confusion. Poland's famously large agricultural population could be reduced to a figure much closer to that of the other countries of Central Europe if a definition closer to the Czech or Slovak one were used.¹⁷ Unlike the statistics from the countries of the former Soviet Union, there is no handy category of 'household plot' which might be taken as a fair equivalent of the sort of supplementary, subsidiary plot under consideration. (For the record, in Russia household plots make up 97 per cent of 'farms,' cover 6.2 per cent of agricultural land and provide 39.6 per cent of agricultural production.¹⁸)

In Albania, the average size of farm of the country's 400,000 'farmers' is between 1 and 1.5 hectares.¹⁹ In Romania, there are 3.7 million small peasant farms of an average size of 2.24 hectares, 40 per cent of which are under one hectare and 73 per cent of which are under three hectares. In Bulgaria the average size of non-corporate private farms is 1.39 hectares and over 86 per cent of them are under one hectare. In Hungary, where the Central Statistical Office records all land holdings, not simply those operated by those who have registered as agricultural producers, 81.4 per cent of all holdings are under one hectare.²⁰ (Even if the farms under one hectare are excluded, 90.6 per cent of the remainder are under 10 hectares.) These figures clearly show the numerical predominance of 'farms' so small that they can only provide for more than bare subsistence if supplemented by some other source of income.

In the statistics of the countries making up the former Czechoslovakia, it is necessary to follow a more circuitous statistical route. Figures for the amount of land transferred from cooperative to private use give an approximate guide for the size of the household plot sector, because the socialist household plots disappeared at the time of cooperative transformation and any new plots had to be reclaimed as private land. In the Czech Republic an area equivalent to only 16 per cent of total agricultural land was transferred from (transformed) cooperatives to private use by the legal owner, the average size being 3.5 hectares, and 90 per cent of all such transfers being under 10 hectares.²¹ In Czech conditions, a farm of 3.5 hectares constitutes nothing more than a larger than previously household plot. In Slovakia, the area of land transferred from cooperative to private use was only 8 per cent of total agricultural land, suggesting a predominance of

¹⁷ Swain, *Rural Employment and Rural Regeneration...*

¹⁸ Stephen K. Wegren (ed.), *Land Reform in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, London and New York, Routledge, 1998, p. 39

¹⁹ Unless otherwise stated, the figures in this section come from Swain, *A framework...*

²⁰ Mihály Andor, Tibor Kuczsi and Nigel Swain, *Central European villages after 1990*, Szociológiai Szemle (Special English edition), Summer 1998.

²¹ OECD, *Review of Agricultural Policies: Czech Republic*, Paris 1995, p. 79.

even smaller plots.²² These figures also include, of course, land taken out by larger scale private farms, but these were very few in number. Private farms accounted for 5.2 per cent of agricultural land in Slovakia, and 76 per cent of them were smaller than 10 hectares. In the Czech Republic, 80 per cent of private family farms were under 10 hectares, but they accounted for 23.2 per cent of agricultural land.

The above figures indicate clearly, then, that by far the most numerous form of agricultural holding in the countries of Central Europe and the Balkans is the small-scale, supplementary agricultural plot.

Section Four

Some examples

As the previous sections suggest, 'standing on two feet' in post-socialist Central Europe and the Balkans can consist of a variety of combinations of agriculture and other forms of income generation. Some of the most common are illustrated below.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND HOUSEHOLD PLOT

Given the socio-economic context of the post-socialist countryside described above, perhaps the most significant new development in relation to small-scale farming is the combination of unemployment and household plot agriculture, although this particular combination is only really possible while at least one household plot member is in receipt of unemployment benefit. An example is a middle-aged couple in the village of Ts in Bulgaria. Both were victims of the closure of the local chicken-processing factory but were remarkably unconcerned about the future. Their unemployment benefit was at the same level as the minimum wage and continued for 9 months; and they only required cash to buy bread, salt, clothes, shoes, transport and coal. Their small-scale plot provided both food for most of the year and extra income: the fruit that they sold on the wholesale market provided the necessary income for buying bread. They also received fodder for their livestock and other forms of income in kind because they had 5 hectares of land in the (transformed) cooperative.

But unemployment benefit does not last forever, and if household plots can provide for survival, they scarcely provide an adequate income, especially where the quality of the soil is not so good. In the Bulgarian village of H, situated in the southern mountains by the Greek border, the mayor reported that he had a strategy of, wherever possible, providing employment for at least one family member so that no family had to live from agriculture alone. In two nearby villages, higher up in the mountains, virtually

²² OECD, *Review of Agricultural Policies: Slovak Republic*, Paris 1997, p. 65.

all of the inhabitants had reverted to subsistence agriculture on the roughly one hectare plots, scraping a living using animal traction because the land is unsuited to tractors.

Perhaps the biggest losers in the post-socialist transformation anywhere in the region, but certainly in East Central Europe have been Polish State Farm workers. Housed for the most part in blocks of flats that stick out incongruously in the rural landscape, with private plots scarcely bigger than kitchen gardens and no tradition of independent farming, they had little to fall back on when privatization left the bulk of them unemployed. Their fate is poignantly illustrated by the case of a family on a former State Farm in a village near the small town of S in north eastern Poland. The mother struggles to keep the family fed from their kitchen garden, but she can only afford to clothe the children by buying them from second-hand shops. Her eleven year old son became so depressed at being taunted by his classmates for wearing hand-me-downs that he twice attempted to commit suicide.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND 'FARMING'

This combination differs from the previous one in degree and intention. Families with this combination generally operate on a slightly larger scale but, more important, see themselves as having embarked on farming as a solution to their unemployment. An example is a Mr D. and his family who live in a village in western Hungary not far from the northern banks of Lake Balaton. He had been a driver (of both lorries and tractors) with qualifications in crop protection on the cooperative, but was made redundant when the cooperative was transformed. In fact, he was made redundant twice. The first year he and his colleagues were laid off for the winter months only and taken on the following spring, a strategy that is very common throughout Central Europe and the Balkans. The second year they were laid off again, and again on the apparent understanding that they would be re-employed the following spring; but this time the 'successor company' to the cooperative 'forgot' to re-employ them. He used the cooperative shares that he was allocated under the cooperative transformation process to buy a tractor and began farming on his own. But, because the idea of private farming had not been a life-long dream but something forced on him by unemployment, he was too slow to get either land or machinery cheaply from cooperative transformation. He feels he is worse off now, both when compared with the socialist years and with the pre-collectivization period; and, although he ended up with 30 hectares of land and expects to be allocated some more, he feels that it is insufficient to maintain a family and household. Survival is dependent on the small but regular fixed income that his wife earns. On the other hand, he wants to farm the land, is proud to be one of the three or four villagers who actually do farm

their land, and is convinced he gets more by farming it than by renting it to the 'successor company' as most villagers do.

EMPLOYMENT (OFTEN NEW EMPLOYMENT) AND HOUSEHOLD PLOT

A more prosperous variant is when household plot agriculture is combined with employment, which is often a new form of employment given the changing economic and political circumstances. Having a job is more significant than simply generating income: it provides a pension in the future. As the deputy mayor of the village of L in western Romania near the Hungarian border remarked, 'People cannot make a living from factory wages. If they do not have any land, they are dead. But they do not leave their factory jobs for the land, because everyone wants to get a pension. You must work two shifts to live.'

This is such a common life-strategy that it is perhaps the most invisible of all. One example, however, is the former mayor of the village of A in north eastern Bulgaria. Until 1979 he had worked as an accountant for the local cooperative and in 1979 he was suggested as mayor in the neighbouring village. Two years later, he returned to A as mayor and was responsible for the design and building of the complex of council buildings in the centre of the village. In 1985, however, he was urged to leave because of personal conflicts, and he went to work in the light engineering works in the village. His wife has an invalidity pension. In 1991 he became caretaker in the local school and part-time farmer. He took from the cooperative only one hectare of the land that he was entitled to because he has no one to help him farm it. Although he had had an exclusively white collar career until then, he had always had some land on which to farm, including his period as mayor. He was never cut off from agriculture, so does not feel it strange now to be so dependent on it.

EMPLOYMENT AND 'FARMING'

As in the case of the unemployment combinations, this category only differs in degree from the previous one: there is a greater commitment to farming as a source of income generation rather than needs fulfilment. The deputy mayor of the village of L in western Romania is a good example. He has a job as an administrator in the school where his wife is the secretary, and has used his contacts to help the school. But he also farms on a considerable scale, and he was brave enough, as he saw it, to take a loan and buy two tractors. Having known real poverty as a child, he was content to work his 'double shift' to make a living for himself and his family. But he is not certain that the younger generation is willing to make such a commitment.

The mayor of the same village also nicely illustrates pluriactivity on the grander scale. He works in commerce and owns a bar in the village in addition

to the 37 hectares of land that were returned to him, as the child of a rich peasant family, by the cooperative. His non-agricultural activities provide him with the capital necessary to purchase agricultural machinery. In the village of Ch near Cluj it is the local policeman who is both a local dignitary and a farmer of significance, although here it is livestock rather acreage that defines wealth. The policeman fattens 30 pigs. Other significant livestock holders in the village are MT who keeps ten dairy cows, and a young man, the child of villagers, who lives and works as a driver in Cluj but keeps 70 pigs in a former cooperative building leased from the local council. He also rears hundreds of sheep. All the most significant farmers in this village also have non-agricultural jobs.

PENSION AND HOUSEHOLD PLOT

Combining a pension with household plot agriculture differs little from the first category, except in relation to the age of those concerned and their relationship with the younger generation of family members. In fact, if disability pensions are included, it differs scarcely at all. In the village of K in eastern Hungary, for example, a suspiciously large number of inhabitants went onto disability pensions with the 'change of system,' calculating that, although lower than unemployment benefit, such pensions provided longer term security.

The relationship with younger family members works two ways. Sometimes, as in the case of a pensioner couple in the Hungarian village of T in the Tokaji wine-making region, the pensioners support the younger family members. They manage this by living exceptionally frugally. Food is cheaper in villages than in Budapest, and they buy only a very limited number of items regularly from shops: bread, herbs and spices, sugar, flour, matches, and so on. They do not need oil because they kill a pig twice a year and use pig fat for most cooking. Additionally, they very occasionally also buy butter, curd cheese and sour cream. Almost all other food items come from the plot: meat (in addition to the pigs, they keep 80–100 chickens, regularly selling the eggs,) potatoes, cabbage, beans, peas, lettuce, carrots, paprika, cucumbers (some eaten fresh, the rest pickled for the winter), and all kinds of fruit (some made into preserves, the rest into syrup.). Clothes and hardware come from the so-called Polish market, and kitchen cupboards, arm-chairs, and a gas cooker were obtained from a bankrupt agricultural cooperative. For the first half of the heating season, the boiler, which provides both heat and hot water, can be fuelled with maize cobs and vine-shoots. Their joint income from their pensions is less than 40,000 forints per month, but they rarely spend more than 25,000 forints per month, so allowing them to support their daughter financially with major purchases.

Even if the pensioners do not provide money for the children and grandchildren, they often provide benefits in kind and a week-end retreat. This

can be illustrated by a Slovak case in the far East of Slovakia near the Ukrainian border where the father, who had qualified as a 'kulak' in the 1950s because of only six hectares of land, took back half a hectare after cooperative transformation in order to provide food for his family. His daughter lives in the nearby town, but spends most week-ends and holidays in the village, returning to her small town flat loaded with provisions.

In other cases, as in the Romanian village of Ch, younger family members help the pensioners. K I is a 75 year old widower whose joiner's shop was taken over by the cooperative in the 1960s. He receives a tiny pension from the cooperative and has re-established his joinery business. In addition he has land, but he has to rely on the assistance of his daughter and son-in-law to farm it. The younger couple have their own and the two plots are cultivated jointly.

Of course, pensions can be combined with other activities as well as agriculture. In the village of P near Braşov in Romania, DDC is a pluriactive pensioner in the extreme. Already a pensioner, when he received his land back at the age of 70 he bought an old tractor, repaired it, and obtained a tractor driving licence. He farms about one hectare, growing potatoes and beet. He keeps two horses (he leases the horses to one of the local Agricultural Associations) and two cows; and also fattens pigs. In addition, he uses his tractor to work for others, mainly in exchange for manual work on his plot. He has his own sausage and bacon smoking equipment and in the winter works as a butcher; and he also makes small carts and barrows to order in addition to helping other members of the extended family.

PENSION AND 'FARMING'

The same distinctions of scale and intentions between household plot agriculture and 'farming' can be made in the case of pensioners. In the Bulgarian village of B near Plovdiv, RA, a retired tractor driver on maximum pension and his wife left the cooperative in 1994 and decided to be private farmers with 1.3 hectares (including 0.5 hectares of cherry orchard, 0.2 hectares vineyards, and 0.2 hectares maize) rather than leave their land in the cooperative (although 0.3 hectares is still rented to the cooperative). His son has a business repairing cars that are insurance write-offs and lives separately. His daughter also lives away from home; but two of his grandchildren work on the farm and are planning to build a house there and take it over in the future.

MV and his wife, both pensioners in the village of Ch in Romania, are also examples of pensioners who have embarked on private farming rather than supplementary agriculture. He had worked as a postman in Cluj and she had worked in the cooperative. They now farm 10 hectares and own 10 cows, horses, pigs, and various pieces of agricultural machinery including a tractor. He supplies milk to the local dairy, produces cereals for the

state purchasing company on the basis of an annual contract, and is locally regarded as a 'good farmer.'

The case of FA, also a pensioner from Ch, on the other hand, illustrates why the word 'farmer' is in quotation marks. She has 7 hectares of land, three cows and four pigs, a tractor, a plough and all the necessary accessories, all of which suggests a scale of activity rather larger than supplementary household plot agriculture. Nevertheless, helped by her two children who live in nearby Cluj, she produces only for her own needs and those of the urban relatives. Her children visit her every week-end, and in the summer season they help her on the farm.

In the Romanian village of L near the Hungarian border, on the other hand, family members have begun to help SM full-time. SM is a pensioner from a relatively rich peasant family who married into the village in 1952. The family had started intensive green house production of vegetables as early as 1983 and so was not new to private farming in the 1990s. In addition to SM's pension, the extended family, which number ten in all, generates income from a business selling flowers and making and selling wreaths, and from agriculture. They have ten hectares of land, three cows, four heifers, a horse, 19 pigs, geese and chickens, a tractor, disk-harrow, a seeder and a combine harvester, all bought at auction locally from a Machine and Tractor Station. Work on the farm takes up the whole family's time and during peak periods they have to hire day labourers for four or five days. Her sons recently gave up factory jobs to work full-time on the farm, and learned how to use agricultural equipment so that they no longer had to engage the services of a contractor.

Finally, it is in this category that 'nostalgia farmers' are encountered, those whose primary motivations are sentiment, most often a sense of obligation that the wrongs visited on their parents during collectivization should be righted by re-establishing the family farm. For example, a pensioner in the village of B in Central Slovakia struggled for years (his restitution claim was still not fully settled in the Spring of 1997) to gain return of his family's land which had been confiscated after his father's arrest for expressing mild opposition to the idea of collectivization in 1950. He farms 34 hectares, of which only 12 is owned by him and only 5 is arable. Livestock is more important in the area. He has 12 cows and 27 sheep. Although he is confident that he can survive in the short-term, he is pessimistic about long-term prospects, and his children and grandchildren have little interest in the farm.

In the Hungarian village of N close to the northern shore of Lake Balaton, a pensioner couple took up farming for similar reasons, even though neither husband nor wife had been involved in farming (beyond maintaining their own kitchen garden) during the socialist years. The instigator of this radical change was the wife who came from a 'kulak' family, had been

excluded from higher education because of her class background and never forgot the injustices that her parents had suffered. The couple obtained some 20 hectares of land under restitution and commenced farming. But they are finding it hard to survive in a pricing climate that assumes far more efficient production than they can possibly achieve. They regret the family decision in the 1970s to sell the old family house with numerous out-buildings and build a new modern one with none, which means that, like so many new farmers, they cannot balance cropping with livestock. So, whilst they see themselves as farmers, they acknowledge that: 'No one farms without working somewhere else. We can only dare to do it because we are pensioners. We wouldn't dare do it if we only had agriculture to live from.'

Conclusion

This paper attempts to do rather more than say that there is a lot of self-supply agriculture in the countries of East Central Europe and the Balkans. It argues that there always was a lot of it, that there is still a lot of it, so much so that its practitioners constitute the invisible silent majority, that there are a number of variations of it, that its meaning is changing because of globalization and it is becoming more important as rural incomes fall. What all of the combinations have in common is that they are consequences of the inability of governments to provide sufficient incomes to rural populations rather than a dissatisfaction with the nature and quality products provided by the food industry. All variants are still, overwhelmingly, a response to the poor in their struggle for survival rather than a rejection of the homogenized commodities offered by an increasingly global food industry.