

“..DEKALB is also part of the heritage..”

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A family farm approaching the time for a generation change will typically think about how the “baton should come to be passed on” in theory but in most cases actual steps towards changes to be made tend to be put off.

The “master of the farm” does not usually involve his successor in serious decision making, keeping key information to himself. This is because the life story of a successful agricultural entrepreneur is practically one with that of the business that he has built up and this is the basis of the “no-one can do it as well as I can” way of thinking. A business of this kind usually functions in a unique way, it is dominated by the personality of the farmer himself, and as such, it is not similar to any other organisational unit.

But what happens when tragedy strikes and the generation change is forced to take place, from one moment to the next?

This is the kind of story that brought me to For Milk Kft. in the village of Telekgerendás.

The owner of the enterprise, **Mihály Nemes**, suddenly died, at the age of 55 in 2011. In addition to the loss of a loved one and the unceasing pain of bereavement the family was also having to face the daunting tasks of managing a prospering enterprise.

Gábor Ságodi – Mihály Nemes’s son-in-law – and I discussed those difficult years while I had a feeling that it was during those few hours that some of the tensions in the young man I was talking to were easing up. Why could this be? Perhaps only because he now had an opportunity to talk about those things – for the family kept avoiding these questions and they were concentrating on work in an effort to suppress their grief.

“My father-in-law, Mihály Nemes, founded the business in 1994.

He placed a successful bid for a dairy unit of a former state-owned agricultural enterprise with 200 heads of dairy cows and heavily used machinery and equipment, together with 700 hectares of state-owned land and a 20-year lease term.

At present we have 38 employees, 720 milking cows plus their calves, a total of some 1500 animals, which is expected to be supported by the much slower area of 300 hectares, as the term of lease of the state-owned lands are expiring.

We are also engaged in crop production on a total of 200 hectares – also owned by the family – at the village

of Kötegyán, some fifty kilometres from the dairy farm in Telekgerendás – and we are also farming some 250 hectares of land under contracts. Our produce drying and produce trading services are supported at present by a 15,000 tonne storage capacity. My mother-in-law, my wife and I have been managing the enterprise for four years now, since the tragic death of my father-in-law.

I like to recall my years at university when my strict looking moustached father-in-law immediately took to liking me when we first met, which he expressed by immediately suggesting that we should address each other on familiar terms, an agreement sealed with a small shot of fruit brandy. It was by 2007 that I deserved his trust and confidence when he put me in charge of the complete management of the drying facility operation and the produce trading activities within the enterprise – of course by that time I belonged to the family – and at the same time he involved me in other activities relating to the farm on a day-to-day basis.

He was an immensely accurate person and I went to great lengths to learn as much as possible about this respectable accuracy and his extensive knowledge, based on experience. Unfortunately, however, he had no chance to share quite a lot of knowledge and information with me. I am full of regret for not having asked him enough questions about all sorts of things during those four years – he explains with tears in his eyes. And all this because, like me, he also tended to share his thoughts with others sparingly.



I enjoyed his unconditional trust and confidence in both the family and as regards work. We always discussed business and briefed the employees at seven in the morning in the office, while having a cup of coffee. I learned the ins and outs of cropping from him but even today I can only look upon animal husbandry as an economic unit.

There were many differences between my father-in-law and myself, for instance, he related to workers in a way that was in stark contrast to my approach. He was an employee-oriented manager, indeed, he was too emphatic, so work morale was similar to that of a charity organisation at his enterprise. My working rhythm is rather fast by contrast, I am always thinking a few steps ahead and I demand performance accordingly. It was perhaps last year after I spent three years managing the business that I first had the feeling that I am being accepted by our workers. Many of them had been working here since the nineties, i.e. they were committed and loyal to my father-in-law so I did not have an easy job.

I find it difficult to make decisions. My father-in-law concluded from experience accumulated during 17 different economic years that it may take 10-15 years for one to be no longer afraid to make his own decisions and even then there will be risks to face. His very career an example for this, when a hastily taken decision in produce trading nearly axed the business. He found it extremely difficult to deal with failure. Moreover, he did not discuss his problems, trying to protect his family from difficulties, this is something I have also come to know. No matter how I saw him battling with himself in trying to make the right decisions, I was just not mature enough to realise what was going on in his mind.

I am realistic and cautious, indeed, prudent, in some ways, one must always remember that there are ups and downs, like my father-in-law used to say. So I am definitely going for security.

The show must go on, that was my first thought that night. So I turned up at the office at seven just as well and gave work assignments, showing no emotion. I wanted to make the workers know that they would continue to have a secure future with us. And I did so without the sense of security, that carefree happiness of a golden life that he had created for all of us.

I nearly broke down in tears whenever I was left alone. And the business just kept pouring tasks on me, we had a peak work period after harvest at the drying unit and I had to source feed for the cattle and make sure that all of the milk would be delivered to the processor. So to suppress my personal grief and fear I buried myself in work.

Something got lost at that time from this farm, something I cannot describe or even illustrate. This farm was the result of his very own work, modelled after his image, something he had given life to and managed for 17 long years.

I am doing my best to keep up his spirit, adding to the dynamic of my youth, my different knowledge and insights, as it is demanded by today's "constantly changing world".



After a while I changed work schedules and jobs and with the involvement of a reliable professional even the efficiency of production was improved in the livestock division. We took economic decisions and increased the size of our livestock – but now that we can no longer farm state-owned lands we need to reconsider things. At present we produce 18,000 litres of milk a day thanks to the improved efficiency of production – all delivered as raw material to the domestic factory producing the traditional quark dessert called "Túró Rudi".

DEKALB is part of the heritage.

Maize production for us is synonymous with fighting water scarcity. The way I see it, timing is key, since weather conditions strongly reduce the time available for various cropping operations.

Our relationship with DEKALB dates back to the early days of the business, established by my father-in-law, one of the cornerstones of our cropping division. I have preserved a most reliable relationship with sales representative Mihály Viszok and we select the best possible solutions through continuous consultations, whether in regard to choice of variety or cropping techniques. Managing the enterprise takes immense challenges and tasks and this is the very reason for my reliance on guidance from professionals who keep abreast of progress in their respective fields when it comes to technological questions determining the profitability of our cropping and livestock divisions – this way they ease some of the burden from my shoulders.

My father-in-law went to great lengths to make sure that he was the first one to do the sowing in the spring because silage maize must ripen early, way before we run out of the previous year's silage. Our very survival depended and still depends on this. DEKALB is popular here in Békés county primarily for its drought tolerance, the fact that it can be sown early and for its high yield. For us however, it is also key that the hybrids we use can tolerate higher plant densities. Thanks to its quality and quantity parameters we have sown the **DKC5542** hybrid on 140 hectares and since this hybrid is the basis of our feed supply, we really feel secure. I am saying this because it is crucial for us that everything should go to plan. **DKC6031** is also part of the hybrid line, it produces an immense quantity of green mass and grains so it is excellent for use not only for silage but also as grain. I often produce silage out of maize produced for its grain and **DKC3623** is an excellent option for this with its high yield potential. These are tall plants, which is why they are a good raw material for silage.

I always try newly developed genetic material, and then in view of our own experience in our own fields I decide whether to use a new hybrid or not.

The question is never whether a DEKALB or not but which DEKALB.

The future of the business was crucial for my father-in-law, he practically lived for this enterprise. I also love my work and I can say that I am devoted to the profession and as time has been passing and as I see success coming, we all feel more and more as owners of this business. My goal is to keep it going and this may perhaps be more of a challenge than creating one.

My father-in-law gave me his unconditional trust and confidence and I want to use it. But at the same time I also want to live. Live for my family and my hobby.”

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What I was thinking while I was listening to what his slightly still dejected, very warm-hearted young man, was this: They say a girl will marry a man the like of her father.

But there is a major difference between this young man and his father-in-law: this young man has a passion other than work and devotes time to it while his father-in-law had no hobby or time for it.

This young man likes hunting, his father-in-law did not. Gábor has been going hunting on a weekly basis for some 15 years now, he loves nature where he can be alone, recharge his energy and think about future plans because “like his father-in-law in his day” Gábor also keeps thinking and planning how to run and improve this farm.