

# **Farming Family Counseling in Germany**

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# Where I come from

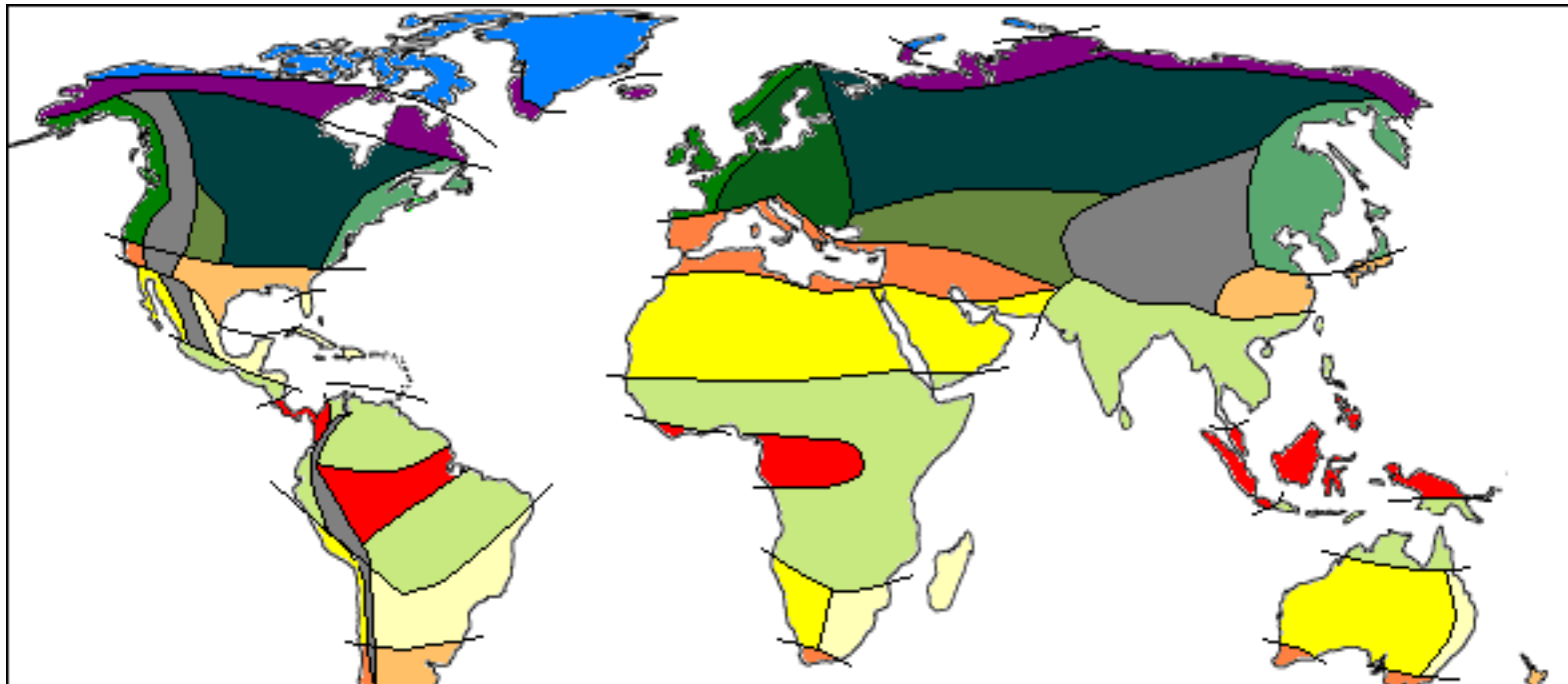


# Freiburg in the south of Germany



# Farming in Europe (EU)

- temperate zone
- big variety of plant-, dairy- and meatproduction
- about 6,5 million farms in the EU, 13 mill.employees
- about 350.000 farms in Germany, 1 mill. employees
- the farms are run by the families
- Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) since 1962



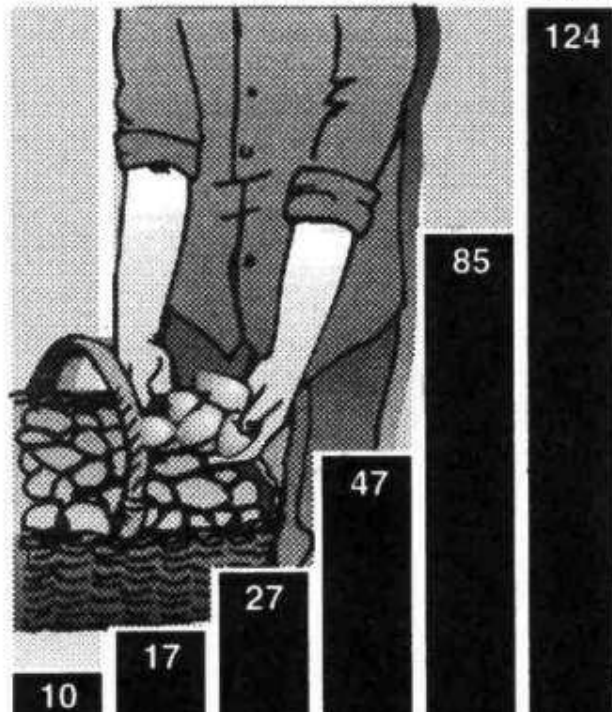
# yesterday farming today



# Structural change in agriculture

**One farmer feeds...  
... so many people**

1950 1960 1970 1980 1991 1998



**Germany**

**2,3 mill.  
farms  
8,5 ha**

**350.000  
farms  
45 ha**

- Enormous increase of agricultural productivity.
- The number of farms is declining steadily. The surviving farms are getting bigger and bigger.
- Even today 50% of the German farms don't leave enough profit to cover the families living expenses.

**More families will be forced out of farming.**

# Psycho-social problems

- The surviving farming families are often exhausted and overworked.
- Living with the fear of losing one's livelihood leads to stress which can affect the individual's physical and mental health, his efficiency and his relationships.
- Special situation for farmers: *„When a man has been brought up on a farm and has never expected to do anything other than farming, as the generations did before him, there is a tremendous identity crisis if that land is lost. The feeling of failing the present family ... is coupled with a sense of failing his ancestors – he feels he has let everyone down.“*

Linda Dixon

# Development of farm family counseling

- Especially the churches became aware of the farmers' difficult social situation.
- Initial farming family counseling services were founded nearly 20 years ago in the south of Germany.
- By now there are 20 different farming family counseling organisations in Germany and similar activities in other European countries.

# Farming family counseling in Europe



Germany

Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft

France

Solidarité Paysans

United Kingdom

Farm Crisis Network

Ireland

Farmer Support Network

Netherlands

Farming People Crisis Network

Spain

Plataforma Rural

Portugal

Mundo Rural

Italy

Demetra

Austria

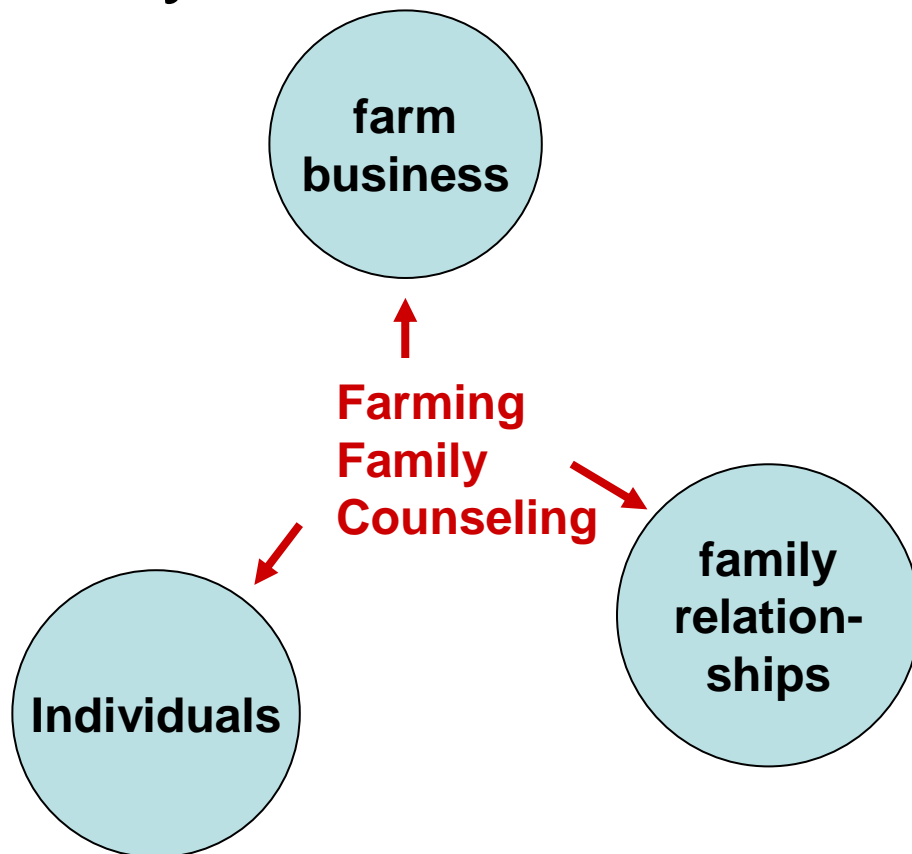
Switzerland

# European Network of Farmers SOS Charter from 1999

- „The goal is to help farming families who are in crisis.“
- „That essentially involves working with farming families who are affected economically, socially, spiritually and in their farming and relationships.“
- „The organisations are based on the principle of being open to all these aspects.“

# Approach

- Humanistic and client-centered (ROGERS)  
(A relationship of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and authenticity is offered by the counselor.)
- Systemic-resource-oriented



Farm family counseling attends to each of the subsystems, and particularly to the conflicts between the subsystems. The intention is, to help the clients solving their problems in an integrated way.

# Family & Farm



- Counseling for farm families since 1989
- Advisory service of the Catholic Archdiocese of Freiburg (rural division)
- Registered charitable association
- Financial support by the state and by the catholic church
- 3 offices (see leaflet)
- 4 employed counselors (agricultural scientists with further education in counseling)
- 16 volunteers with different professions (farmers, family therapists, agricultural economists, bankers, pastors)
- We advise more than 200 families every year.

# Family & Farm



Location of our office in St. Ulrich near Freiburg



# Family & Farm



## Counseling Staff



# Family & Farm



**Farming families can rely on us when:**

- they are confronted by important decisions in the family or business
- questions of succession arise, the next generation wants to (or doesn't want to) take over the family farm
- arguments inside the family occur, or when the marriage partners no longer get along
- the business does not produce sufficient income for survival
- they become overwhelmed by the work load and health problems arise
- the retirement years are not sufficiently financially secure
- debts accumulated over the years are impossible to shoulder

**Then our counseling service can help.**

# Family & Farm



## We are able to offer:

- advisors, who are good listeners
- mediation of discussion between family members
- help to develop strategies, which lead to solutions
- the chance to discuss imminent decisions with neutral advisory staff
- the ability to refer families to suitable competent specialists when specific questions arise
- ways to strengthen the families bargaining position when dealing with the authorities, or with the creditors

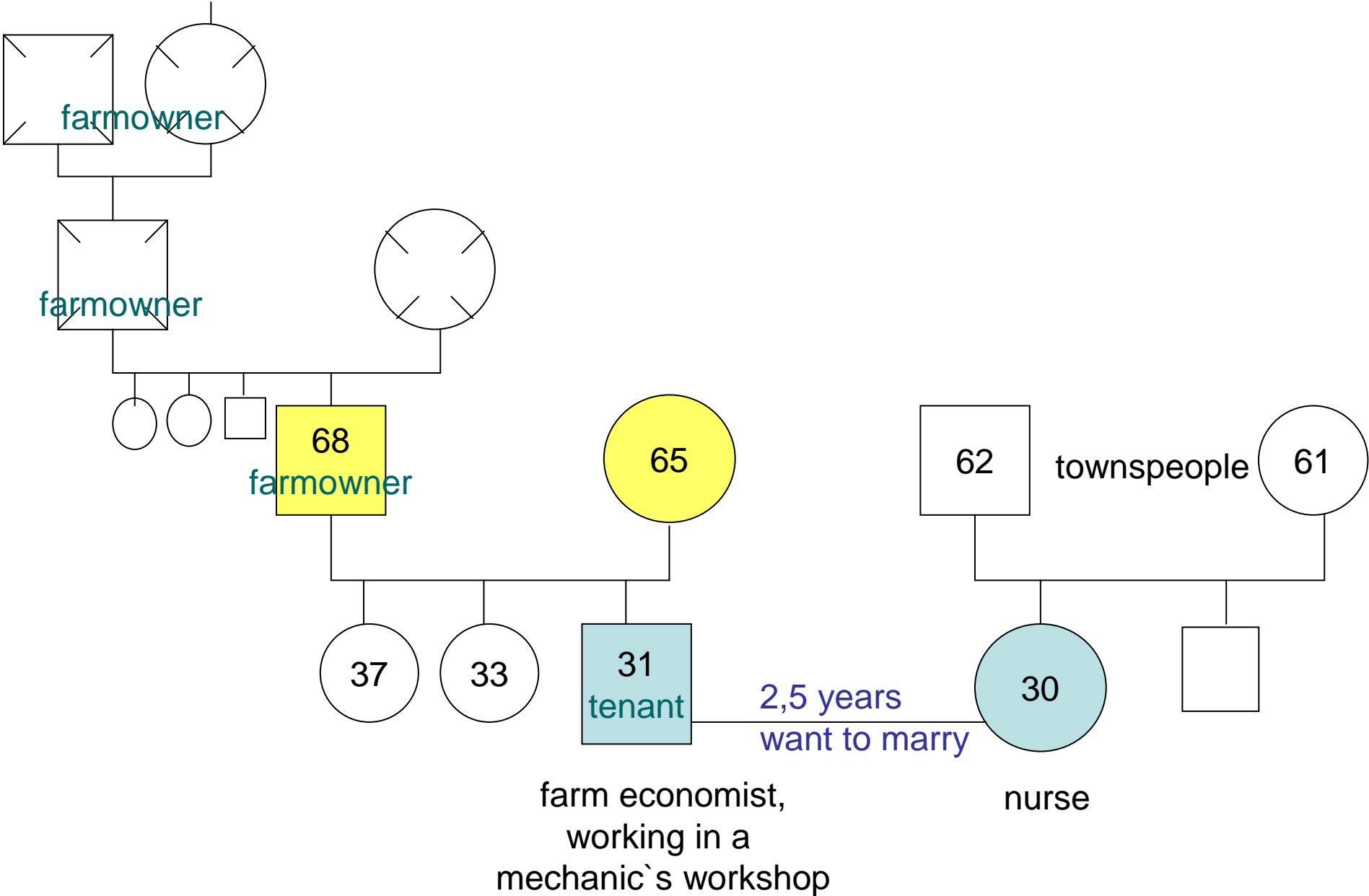
**Every conversation is strictly confidential!**

# Ex.1: „starting a family – but where?“



# Ex.1

# Genogram



# Ex.1 counseling process

## PROBLEMS

- If the male client leaves the farm
  - what happens to the land and the buildings
  - who cares for the parents, when they are old?
- If the couple decides, to live on the farm
  - will she become happy?
  - can she live so far away from everything? (shops, workplace, school)
  - will the parents in law accept her and her way of living?

## COUNSELING SESSIONS (The initial sessions were individual.)

- Perspective of the female client: She can't imagine to live on the farm. Perspective of the male client: He is torn apart between the farm and his girlfriend, he feels guilty if he leaves the farm. Mourning.
- Next step: **Couple sessions.**  
What is important for each of the partners in his / her life? Talking about the different feelings, hopes, needs and expectations. How can they find a joint solution? Sculpting techniques are probably helpful.
- If required: **family sessions** (the young couple and his parents).

## RESOURCES

- They love each other, they really want to find a good solution.

# Ex. 2: „It can't go on like that anymore!“



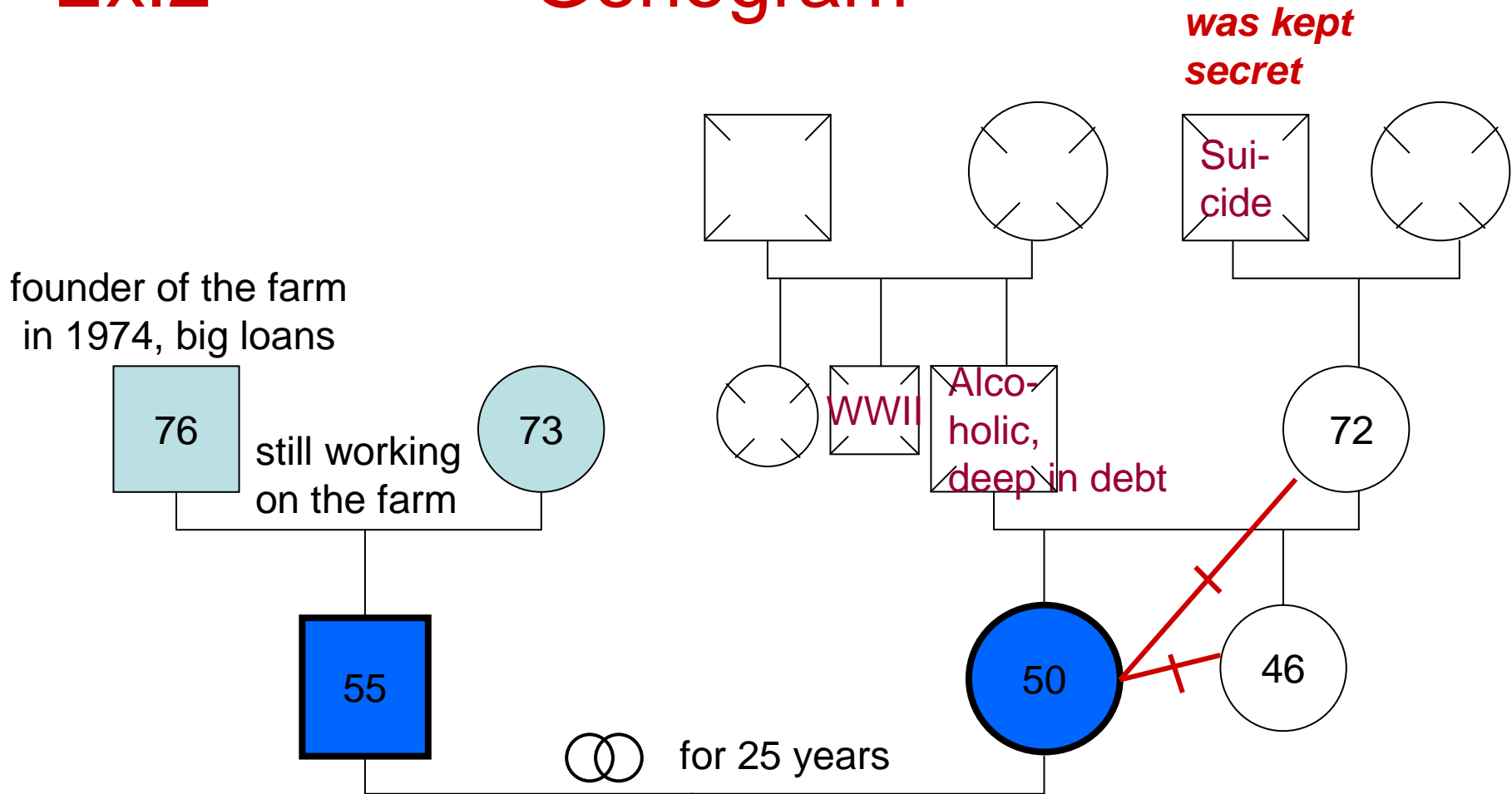
not enough profit  
family struggle  
health problems

Farm (orchard) in a village  
different sorts of fruit, some crops  
all members of the family help  
15 seasonal workers



# Ex.2

# Genogram



- „depressed, lonely“
- orchard technician
- farm owner since 1999
- used to be a passionate farmer

- \* „complaining“
- \* grew up in the same village
- \* recently lost her job as a secretary
- \* backbone problems

# Ex.2                      counseling process A

- **Problems**
  - not enough income
  - the roles in the business and family are not clear (who is the leader in the family, in the farm?)
  - she wants to be co-owner of the business and does not want to work for nothing
  - the children play the parents off against each other
  - she has severe conflicts with her sister and mother, he suffers from that
- **Developmental tasks**
  - the interaction and communication of the couple has to improve
  - the farm has to become restructured
- **Resources**
  - good financial bookkeeping  
clear view over income and expenses in business and family
  - longing for a better marriage

# Ex.2 counseling process B

- Procedure

- couple sessions**

- Initial meeting with the couple on the farm:

- \* building a counseling working relationship
    - \* listening -> break down anxiety and shame
    - \* clarifying expectations
    - \* encouraging to start a changing process
    - \* analysis of the present situation, family history of her
    - \* homework, topics of the next session

- Next meeting(s) in our office: „*Do we want to give our marriage a new chance?*“ Going along together or separate?  
Maybe his family history.

- If required

- family sessions** in different settings (*for ex. couple and children, couple and his parents, all persons who live on the farm, couple and her sister and mother*)

- business sessions** in different settings (*for ex. couple and a business advisor, a banker...*)

# Statements on family&farm

- *„I was afraid, that my husband would do something to himself. After getting advice from Family&Farm he now sees a future. It saved our marriage and the family coherence.“*
- *„If we hadn't had the meetings and discussions with you, our family could well have dis-integrated.“*
- *„Through the discussions we were able to recognise a change in conditions before it was too late. This saved us from making unwise investment decisions. What we like is that you can speak freely, without inhibitions.“*
- *„Your work sets an example to social services.“*

# References

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**Thank you  
for your attention!**

If you have any questions,  
I will do my best  
to answer them.

