

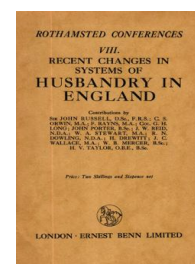
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Recent Changes in Systems of Farming in Buckinghamshire

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Summary

From the experiences quoted it does appear that although the labour bill on the beet crop is heavy it is at least repaid on a cash basis, and the residue of the crop relieves the farm labour account of the very heavy item of root crops grown entirely for stock.

Present-day costs of pulp returned from the factory are 7s. 6d. per ton for wet, and £4, 15s. *ex* factory for dry.

As the usual recognized proportion between beet pulp and mangolds is about 1 lb. of pulp = 8 lb. mangolds, this would represent mangolds at about 12s. per ton. It will be realized that as beet pulp is received in a form ready for feeding, the very heavy cost of carting roots from clamp to farm and pulping and cleaning is entirely dispensed with, and as beet pulp can be usefully supplemented by the tops fed either green or as silage, the residue of the crop is most assuredly an economic substitute for the usual root crop.

As to the effect on other crops in the rotation, we in East Anglia have always maintained that close-folding roots by sheep was absolutely essential for the following barley crop, not only for the value of the fold manure but for the mechanical action of treading the land by sheep. The experience of the past nine years on this farm proves beyond doubt that barley can be as successfully grown following beet as following roots folded; indeed in most seasons it is of far better quality, and little or no difference has been noticed in the barley whether the tops have been folded or ploughed in.

The deep cultivation for beet has also, without doubt, given our thin-skinned lands of West Suffolk far greater drought-resistance, which in this dry district is of considerable importance.

In conclusion, the last and all-important factor of the entry of sugar-beet into the economy of the farm is the fact that during the past lean years the beet crop alone has made the farm an economic proposition, and in fact has saved many of us in East Anglia from the Bankruptcy Court.

RECENT CHANGES IN SYSTEMS OF FARMING IN BUCKS

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THE fall in prices of farm produce generally since 1920 has not been accompanied by a corresponding fall in the cost of production. The continued production of much of the farm produce on pre-war systems has, therefore, become an uneconomic proposition.

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The average price of English wheat fell from 18s. 10d. per cwt. in 1920 to 11s. 6d. in 1927; oats fell in the same years from 20s. 5d. to 9s. 1d. per cwt.; beef fell from 21s. 9d. per stone in 1920 to 11s. 1d. in 1927.

As to production costs, the prices of new implements, feeding-stuffs, and, to a smaller degree, fertilizers, have remained comparatively high since 1920. The weekly wages of agricultural labourers have increased from 14s. 8d., not considering perquisites, in 1910, to a minimum of 32s. at the present time. In fact, farmers living in close proximity to industrial towns, such as High Wycombe, Slough, etc., have to pay wages considerably above this weekly minimum, and even then it is possible to induce new agricultural labourers to come only so long as suitable cottages are available. Apart from the actual amount of wages, the stipulations as to hours in the Agricultural Wages Act, as well as daylight saving, have tended to increase the cost of production in many cases.

Directions in which Changes must be effected

There are at least two ways in which farming may become a better paying proposition—viz.

(1) The income from the farm must be increased in some way or other to meet the present comparatively high cost of production.

This may be brought about by Government protection or subsidies—which is unlikely—or by introducing new crops or new branches of live stock into the system of farming, which will bring in an increased revenue.

(2) The system of farming may be modified in such a way as to reduce the cost of production.

Either or both of these methods might bring about the desired result.

Changes which are taking place to Reduce or Eliminate Unprofitable Branches

Reference to the Agricultural Returns supplies the following valuable information as to reductions which are taking place in various branches on Bucks farms—viz.

(1) *Horses*.—The number of agricultural horses has gone down by approximately 2000 between 1915 and 1925, and another 2000 between 1925 and 1927, which reflects adversely on the number of heavy horses bred. This depression may be due to the partial substitution of horses by tractors.

(2) *Beef Cattle*.—In spite of graziers having had a very bad time, there is no indication that the cattle of two years and over are declining. The cause of the trouble is to be found in the steady fall in the average price of beef since 1920.

(3) *Arable Land Sheep*.—Although the sheep population has

remained fairly steady, arable land sheep have decreased in numbers considerably, owing to the labour costs connected with hurdling sheep on arable land.

(4) *Rough grazings* have increased by about 7000 acres between 1915 and 1924, and have remained at substantially the same figure since.

(5) *Arable Land*.—The acreage of arable land has declined steadily in recent years, and on the 1927 figures is 26,000 acres less than it was in 1915, and 17,000 acres less than in 1924.

(6) *Arable Land Crops*.—The *wheat* acreage fell by fully 17,000 acres between 1915 and 1927. Between 1924 and 1927 the *oat* and *barley* acreage declined by 5000 acres, and *rotation hay* by 4000 acres. Since 1915, *beans*, *mangolds* and *turnips* (including *swedes*) have each declined by 2000 acres, and *vetches* and *lucerne* by, roughly, 50 per cent., while *bare fallow* has increased by 4000 acres.

Branches of Farming which are being Retained or have Increased

(1) *Cows-in-milk* have increased by fully 3000 since 1915, while cows-in-calf are 1000 up, and heifers-in-calf 2600 above the 1915 figure. This makes a total increase of dairy cows and heifers-in-calf of about 6600 since 1915.

(2) *Sheep*.—The total sheep population has remained fairly steady; but grass-land sheep have replaced arable-land sheep in many cases.

(3) *Poultry*.—These have increased since 1921 by no less than 150,000 fowls, 5000 ducks and 2000 turkeys.

(4) *Permanent Grass-land*.—Since 1924, permanent grass-land has increased by 19,000 acres.

(5) *Arable-Land Crops*.—*Sugar-beet* has increased since 1924 by fully 200 acres; *cruciferous green crops* for cattle- and sheep-feed have increased over 200 acres since 1925. *Other crops*, which are chiefly market-garden crops, have increased by 1170 acres since 1915. *Orchards* have shown a steady increase in acreage since 1925.

General Changes in Systems to meet Present Conditions

These may be outlined shortly as follows:—

(1) Permanent grass-land is being increased at the expense of arable land.

(2) There is a great stimulus in milk production for the raw-milk trade, which has a far-reaching effect on the systems of farming—*e.g.*

(a) An increased number of dairy cows is being bred.

(b) Better bulls and, in several cases, premium bulls are being used to improve the dairy stock.

(c) There is an increased interest in milk recording, clean-milk production, etc.

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(d) The root-break in arable land is being modified to include kales (chiefly marrow-stem), forage crops and silage, with corresponding reduction of mangolds and swedes.

(e) Much more attention is being paid to rationing of the dairy cows, and there is a distinct tendency to use home-grown grains, etc., as far as possible, rather than to sell the home-grown grain and buy cake.

(f) Wet pastures are being mole-drained, and poor pastures dressed with basic slag, or basic slag and kainit, to increase the stock-carrying capacity of the pasture-land, as well as to reduce the necessity for supplementary concentrated foods to a minimum.

Further, there is some interest being taken in the use of nitrogenous manuring to secure an early spring bite, as well as a late bite in the autumn, so as to reduce the cost of milk production.

(g) Increased interest is being taken in milking machines.

(h) In North Bucks, farmers supplying milk to the Buckingham Factory are being paid bonuses on cleanliness as well as on quality of milk supplied.

(3) Grass-land sheep are in many cases replacing arable-land sheep in order to reduce labour costs of hurdling, etc. However, on some arable farms, arable-land sheep are being retained, and appropriate forage crops grown for them, as the folding of green crops on the land is one of the chief ways of manuring the land.

Bucks is one of the most important counties for the breeding of Western Horn sheep, which are much favoured for crossing for "early lamb" production.

(4) *Pig-keeping*.—There is a distinct tendency to concentrate more on porkers than on bacon pigs. In North Bucks at least one farmer keeps pigs on the open-air system. During the summer months the pigs receive nothing but the grass they pick up, except at farrowing time and a short time while nursing the piglings. On the Chiltern Hills several farmers keep the pigs in the beech woods, where they pick up the beech-mast, acorns, etc.

(5) Poultry for egg production is becoming a more important branch on many farms, as it is a means of bringing in ready money.

(6) *Arable-Land Crops*.—The changes in cropping are largely confined to the root-break, where the comparatively expensive mangolds and swedes are being replaced by (a) crops which can be more cheaply grown—e.g. kales, forage and silage crops, etc.; (b) sugar-beet or market-garden crops (brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, cabbages, peas and beans picked green, etc.), the idea being to substitute crops which would bring in considerably more money.

Possible Future Developments

(1) There would appear to be scope on the lighter classes of arable land for the introduction of a system of three or four years leys containing wild white clover, because there is probably no better way of increasing the fertility of the soil for the economical and successful growing of grain crops, as well as for providing a maximum supply of rich, succulent grass for the stock, and in this way reducing the cost of producing milk, beef, mutton, etc.

(2) *Fruit and Vegetable Culture.*—In South Bucks vegetables are widely grown on a field scale as a substitute for mangolds and swedes in the root-break. The crops grown most extensively are early potatoes, brussels sprouts, cabbages, cauliflowers and broccoli, peas and beans picked green.

On the Chiltern Hills one progressive firm, with over a thousand acres, grows fruit extensively as well as vegetables. Fruit and vegetables are taken by motor-lorry from this farm direct to Covent Garden, Southampton, etc. In addition, hundreds of tons of fruit are bottled at their factory, near Marlow.

In the Aylesbury district fruit and vegetable culture is practised on a limited scale, and to a smaller extent vegetables are grown on a field scale in North Bucks.

There would appear to be ample scope for an extension of the acreage under fruit and vegetables as long as the grower realizes he is dealing with perishable crops, and knows how to make full use of alternative methods of their disposal, etc.

(3) *Flower Culture.*—On some of the smaller of smallholdings in close proximity to towns a very useful business has been worked up in growing and supplying cut flowers to hotels, restaurants, town houses, etc. The flowers are grown outside, and of varieties that are fairly easily grown. Obviously, this is rather a seasonal trade, and is fittingly coupled up with fruit culture and, to some extent, the growing of vegetables. Bee-keeping is often included, as the bees help to set the fruit. In this way a farmer with a son or two may make a useful living.

(4) *Seed-growing.*—There would appear to be ample scope on farms and smallholdings for developing the growing of many kinds of seeds—*e.g.* flowers, roots, vegetables, grasses, clovers, etc.

(5) Everyone realizes that much of the existing arable land is getting somewhat short of lime, but that the cost of lime and the labour involved in liming frightens most farmers. Lime shortage means that the land will be more difficult and costly to cultivate, while the crops obtained will be in many cases more or less disappointing. An effort is being made to avert this calamity by using nitrogenous and phosphatic manures containing calcium.