

# MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

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HANDOUT

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## THE NATIONAL FARM SURVEY

### I. "The Modern Doomsday Book"

1. "After this the King had a large meeting and very deep consultation with his Council about this land, how it was occupied and by what sort of men. Then sent he his men all over England into each shire commissioning them to find out; how many hundreds of hides were in the shire, what land the King himself had and what stock was upon the land; or what dues he ought to have by the year from the shire."

This is from a contemporary account, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 1085.

2. It is clear that the central object was to extract money from agriculture. The aim of the present Survey is very different. It is to assist farmers to make full use of their land by improving efficiency. It has other objects too.

3. The Doomsday Book was not the only mediaeval survey, though it was by far the greatest. There were several other local surveys, of which only fragments have survived. Then at intervals there were a number of ad hoc enquiries, some with a curiously modern flavour, like the Inquisition of Depopulation (1517) which was concerned with the social effects of converting arable land to pasture.

4. There is an interesting connection between the inauguration of Surveys and the agricultural background of the day. William the Conqueror had in effect acquired by conquest a vast estate, and wanted to know how rich it was. Today it is more important than ever before in our history to extract from the land the last ounce of food that we can, and bring together all the knowledge needed for carrying out that task. Moreover, we have to prepare now for a post-war future in which a modernised home agriculture will play a greater part in our national economic life than for a long time past.

### II. Description of the Information being obtained

5. This falls into three sections:-

- (a) A "farm record" for each farm which gives information under these heads: conditions of tenure and occupation; the natural state of the farm, including its fertility; the adequacy of its equipment; the degree of infestation with weeds or pests; the adequacy of water and electricity supplies; the management condition of the farm, and its war-time ploughing up record. (Some specimen completed records will be handed round). Every farm over 5 acres in the country is covered. The information on the management condition of the farm is summarised in the grading of the farmer as A, B or C.
- (b) The complete 1941 June 4th census return for the farm, including all the usual statistics of crop acreages and livestock numbers, together with supplementary information asked specially for Farm Survey purposes, on rent and length of occupation of the farm.
- (c) A plan of the farm showing its boundaries and the fields contained in it, on the 6" or 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ " scale (Specimen completed maps will be displayed).

6. All this information taken together provides a substantially complete record of the farm and enables anyone at a glance to get a full picture of its main features.

7. The Survey was started in the spring of 1941 and the field work is now nearing completion.

### III. Method of Surveying

8. The compilation of the "farm record" and the drawing of the maps, has been entrusted to the County War Agricultural Executive Committees. Most of these have in turn sublet the task to District Committees and other local bodies, the members

of which, mostly consisting of practical farmers, have done the actual surveying. Other Executive Committees have preferred to engage a special Survey staff, and there are also other arrangements, such as surveying by District Officers in conjunction with their other work, or surveying by members of the land agency profession.

The usual procedure has been for the surveyor to visit the farm, make a preliminary general inspection of the crops, livestock, buildings, etc., and then find the answers to the specific questions asked in the farm record, which will involve a detailed examination of the particular feature - such as the drainage system - covered by the individual question. On the more factual questions, the farmer himself is asked directly for the information - some of the questions he alone can answer - but where a judgment is required, the surveyor has to form his own impression, without fear or favour to the farmer concerned. The surveyor will then return to the Committee's Office with a sheaf of notes, and a rough plan of the farm, and these in due course are transcribed on to the farm record or the map.

Much of this work is being carried out by surveyors in conjunction with inspections required in any case for the allocation of ploughing up quotas, certification of drainage work for drainage grant, etc., so that duplication of effort is avoided. Nevertheless, a great debt is owed to the farmer-surveyors who without financial reward have shouldered the main burden of the field work of surveying nearly 300,000 farms, in addition to the other onerous tasks they have undertaken as members of the District Committees.

A considerable volume of work also falls to the eleven Provincial Agricultural Advisory Centres. The Advisory Economists attached to these centres are undertaking the task of assembling these farm records, mating them with the respective June returns and maps, and attending to their filing. The work under these heads, which includes a large volume of checking and the compiling of a full record of all the agricultural holdings in the country, has amounted to little less than that involved in the field surveying. The Advisory Economists are also playing a large part in the statistical analysis of the material thus assembled.

#### IV. Objects of the Survey

Apart from the Doomsday Book object of the Survey there are two other main objects. First, the Survey has yielded much information of value to County Committees for their war-time administrative tasks. Wherever the Survey has disclosed faults and failures on the farm, it has been the duty of the surveyor to report back to his Committee. A considerable number of farms has been identified as requiring supervision, as there were obvious deficiencies in the technical knowledge or managerial capacity of the occupier, and many more have been reported as in need of improved drainage, greater use of fertilisers, and so on. These are two examples out of many. Thus the Survey has directly contributed to upgrading the productive capacity of the farms during the last eighteen months and played a part in securing the abundant yields of 1942.

Secondly, the Farm Survey can be described as a Blueprint for Post-war Agricultural Planning. Examples of the planning use that will be made of the farm record material can be found in the sections on cottages and on water and electricity supplies. The provision of a sufficient number of farm workers' cottages in decent structural condition will be one of the most pressing post-war tasks, and the Farm Survey will give a great deal of information on the inadequacy of the numbers and condition of the present cottages. The same applies to water and electricity supplies.

The map material is likely to be used in conjunction with other information in determining what agricultural land shall be reserved as such and protected from "development". The Report of the Scott Committee is still under consideration, but it is evident that whatever decision the Government reaches, it will be necessary to identify the better-class agricultural land in map-form. Similarly, it is necessary to ensure that when land is withdrawn from agriculture for any approved purpose, it does not arbitrarily cut across the boundaries of existing farms, thus making them hopelessly uneconomic. This can be guarded against by having the boundaries of all farms delineated.

The mapping has already confirmed that the agricultural land of this country is excessively fragmented into pieces that do not form efficient management units. Thousands of so-called farms exist as mere parcels of land strung out among several parishes. This is bound to become one of the subjects of post-war land planning, but it is too early to forecast anything definite.

Another aim is to derive from the survey material a large number of statistical inferences that can be used for post-war policy or administration. Post-war administration is likely to require much more statistical information than has been available in the past, so that we can measure the dimensions of the problems to be solved and choose the right remedies with more certainty. Such problems will concern various aspects of land improvement, the fuller utilisation of scientific knowledge, and the establishment of more accurate criteria of economic efficiency. The material will also be of value to the Provincial Agricultural Advisory Service in locating farms on which there is scope for further technical guidance.

The general direction of the Survey is in the hands of a Farm Survey Supervisory Committee.