

THE ECONOMICS OF AGRICULTURE

THE CAMBRIDGE ECONOMIC HANDBOOKS

General Editors

J. M. KEYNES (Lord Keynes)	1922-1936
D. H. ROBERTSON (Sir Dennis Robertson)	1936-1946
C. W:- GUILLEBAUD	1946-1956
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THE ECONOMICS OF AGRICULTURE

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INTRODUCTION

TO THE CAMBRIDGE ECONOMIC HANDBOOKS BY THE GENERAL EDITOR

Soon after the war of 1914-18 there seemed to be a place for a series of short introductory handbooks, "intended to convey to the ordinary reader and to the uninitiated student some conception of the general principles of thought which economists now apply to economic problems".

This Series was planned and edited by the late Lord Keynes under the title "Cambridge Economic Handbooks" and he wrote for it a General Editorial Introduction of which the words quoted above formed part. In 1936 Keynes handed over the editorship of the Series to Mr. D. H. Robertson, who held it till 1946, when he was succeeded by Mr. C. W. Guillebaud.

It was symptomatic of the changes which had been taking place in the inter-war period in the development of economics, changes associated in a considerable measure with the work and influence of Keynes himself, that within a few years the text of part of the Editorial Introduction should have needed revision. In its original version the last paragraph of the Introduction ran as follows:

"Even on matters of principle there is not yet a complete unanimity of opinion amongst professional economists. Generally speaking, the writers of these volumes believe themselves to be orthodox members of the Cambridge School of Economics. At any rate, most of their ideas about the subject, and even their prejudices, are traceable to the contact they have enjoyed with the writings and lectures of the two economists who have chiefly influenced Cambridge thought for the past fifty years, Dr. Marshall and Professor Pigou."

Keynes later amended this concluding paragraph to read:

"Even on matters of principle there is not yet a complete unanimity of opinion amongst professional students of the subject. Immediately after the war (of 1914–18) daily economic events were of such a startling character as to divert attention from theoretical complexities. But today, economic science has recovered its wind. Traditional treatments and traditional solutions are being questioned, improved and revised. In the end this activity of research should clear up controversy. But for the moment controversy and doubt are increased. The writers of this Series must apologize to the general reader and to the beginner if many parts of their subject have not yet reached to a degree of certainty and lucidity which would make them easy and and straightforward reading."

Many though by no means all the controversies which Keynes had in mind when he penned these words have since been resolved. The new ideas and new criticisms, which then seemed to threaten to overturn the old orthodoxy, have, in the outcome, been absorbed within it and have served rather to strengthen and deepen it, by adding needed modifications and changing emphasis, and by introducing an altered and on the whole more precise terminology. The undergrowth which for a time concealed that main stream of economic thought to which Keynes referred in his initial comment and to which he contributed so greatly has by now been largely cleared away so that there is again a large measure of agreement among economists of all countries on the fundamental theoretical aspects of their subject.

This agreement on economic analysis is accompanied by wide divergence of views on questions of economic policy. These reflect both different estimates of the quantitative importance of one or another of the conflicting forces involved in any prediction about the consequences of a policy measure and different value judgments about the desirability of the predicted out-

come. It still remains as true today as it was when Keynes wrote that—to quote once more from his Introduction:

"The Theory of Economics does not furnish a body of settled conclusions immediately applicable to policy. It is a method rather than a doctrine, an apparatus of the mind, a technique of thinking, which helps its possessor to draw correct conclusions."

This method, while in one sense eternally the same, is in another ever changing. It is continually being applied to new problems raised by the continual shifts in policy views. This is reflected in the wide range of topics covered by the Cambridge Economic Handbooks already published, and in the continual emergence of new topics demanding coverage. Such a series as this should accordingly itself be a living entity, growing and adapting to the changing interests of the times, rather than a fixed number of essays on a set plan.

The wide welcome given to the Series has amply justified the judgment of its founder. Apart from its circulation in the British Empire, it was published from the start in the United States of America, and translations of the principal volumes have appeared in a number of foreign languages.

The change to joint Anglo-American editorship is designed to increase still further the usefulness of the Series by expanding the range of potential topics, authors and readers alike. It will succeed in its aim if it enables us to bring to a wide audience on both sides of the Atlantic lucid explanations and significant applications of "that technique of thinking" which is the hallmark of economics as a science.

C. W. GUILLEBAUD

PREFACE TO EIGHTH IMPRESSION

APART from some small verbal corrections, this edition has not been revised. I must therefore remind readers that the last revision was made in 1949, and that some paragraphs in Chapter IX are now out of date. In particular, food production per head is about back to pre-war (p. 165); the financial arrangements on the change of use of land have been altered (p. 169); animal feeding stuffs are no longer subsidized (p. 172); owing to the fall in world food prices and the rise in the prices paid to British farmers, the general food subsidies must be regarded as being more for the benefit of farmers than of consumers (p. 208); rationing has ceased and consumer demand again limits sales of food (p. 208).

R. L. C.

Newnham College, Cambridge, 1954

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

The outlook for farmers in this country, and possibly in the world, has been profoundly modified since the first edition of this book was completed just before the war. But the basic economic factors affecting agriculture, with which it mainly deals, have not been modified sufficiently to lead me to rewrite it. I have consequently made only minor alterations from the first edition in all chapters except the last. Some of the changes refer to recent developments, but I have generally left unchanged my old illustrations referring to pre-war conditions. The majority of alterations have been made to clarify points previously left obscure; the most substantial change I have made for this purpose is in the section dealing with diminishing returns on pp. 23-31.

Chapter IX, on State Intervention in Agriculture, I have largely re-written, though retaining some of the paragraphs

PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

from the first edition, and most of the old framework. The war, the post-war food shortage, and general inflationary conditions have led to far more State intervention in agriculture than existed before. This chapter deals with the theory more than the practice of State intervention; but it is illustrated by examples of actual intervention, both pre-war and during and since the war. It concentrates, still, largely on the type of intervention that may be expected when prices are so adjusted that unrationed demand is no more than aggregate supplies. But the experience of recent State intervention has led me to change substantially the emphasis of the different parts. I have also dealt briefly with the more far reaching controls which become necessary when retail prices are kept below this level.

R. L. C.

Newnham College, Cambridge, July, 1949.

PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

This book was completed in July 1939, and deals largely with the economics of agriculture in peace-time. The greater part of it, however, is, I believe, applicable, with only such modifications as readers can easily make for themselves, to the agriculture of a country at war. Even war, profoundly though it must change the fortunes and appearance of agriculture, cannot alter the underlying conditions of the most conservative of occupations. There is one main tendency, however, which is no longer valid. I have assumed the probability that the community's real income would rise, though I have also referred to the effect of a fall. Such a probability no longer exists, and the reader must adjust the argument accordingly.

I must express my gratitude for the assistance given me by my colleagues at the Agricultural Economics Research Institute, particularly to Mr. K. A. H. Murray, and to Mrs.

R. L. Hall, for their many helpful suggestions.

R. L. C.

OXFORD, FEBRUARY, 1940.

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The Economics of Agriculture

Not uncommonly the economics of agriculture have been treated as a subject distinct and isolated from general economics. This book applies the technique of ordinary economic analysis to agricultural problems. It discusses first the organisation of production and marketing under more or less static conditions and then considers the dynamics of agriculture-its adjustment, both in the long and in the short periods, to changing internal and external influences. Finally, after dealing with its position under conditions of free competition, modified in certain directions by only a small degree of monopoly, the study outlines the economic justifications, objections and consequences associated with the most common forms of State intervention. This concluding chapter has been re-written in the present edition, mainly to include the problems which arise when prices are kept below the level which permits supplies to meet an uncontrolled demand.

MISS COHEN is Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge

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