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BELGIUM

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EUROPEAN CONFERENCE
ON RURAL LIFE

2



An old farm in Campine.

(Photo Sergysels-OBLUT

[The illustration on the cover is from a photo by OBLUT.]

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MONOGRAPH OF BELGIUM

INTRODUCTION

Before the reader is brought to the clearly defined subjects which are treated individually in the eight chapters of the present monograph, he should first be given a general outline of the characteristic features of Belgian rural life as a whole.

In accordance with the various points of view, this survey will include a brief description of the agricultural aspect of the country, its agriculture in the past, and rural life in the proper sense of the term.

THE AGRICULTURAL ASPECT OF THE COUNTRY

Passing from west to east, there is first, at the foot of the dunes, a low coastal plain from five to seven miles in width. This consists of the polders, the hard-won prize of our ancestors' victory over the waters of the North Sea. They are protected by dykes from the danger of flooding at high tide.



Sand-dunes at Coxyde.

(Photo OBLUT.)

The soil, composed of clayey alluvium, is in many places too heavy to be tilled; and hence it has been converted into rich pastures, which follow the course of the Yser as far as

Dixmude. The monotony of the plain is broken here and there by solitary farmsteads, linked together by roads, bordered with wind-bent trees.

Bearing away towards Bruges, the traveller comes to the sandy part of the country, which stretches from North Flanders and beyond the Scheldt to the Province of Antwerp, and also includes a large part of Limburg. In these last-named provinces, it takes on a peculiar aspect familiar to poets and artists; this part of the country is known as the Campine.



Steeping flax at Courtrai.

(Photo OBLUT.)

The development of these areas, which originally consisted entirely of heath and uncultivated land, is likewise a triumph for our agriculture. Thanks to the dogged persistence of the Flemish peasant and to age-long practical experience acquired, parts of this region even became highly productive, like the Waas district, where, for centuries past, the soil has been cultivated so carefully as to become known as the "garden of Europe".

To prevent the loss of the water needed to keep the land fertile, every field is surrounded by a plantation of trees, providing a screen from the drying action of the wind and giving this sandy district its characteristic wooded aspect.

The picturesque cob-walled, thatch-roofed farms are now being replaced by modern buildings made of more durable materials.

If, instead of taking this route, the traveller makes for Courtrai, he will find himself, on leaving the polders, in the plain of Flanders, a densely populated area where methods of intensive cultivation are employed. The arable land, which is divided and subdivided into a multitude of fields, is cultivated with jealous care to the very last inch. It looks like an immense chequer-board on which pale blue flax alternates with grey-green rye, and dark green chicory with purple clover. Here and there are interspersed meadows surrounded by pollard willows.

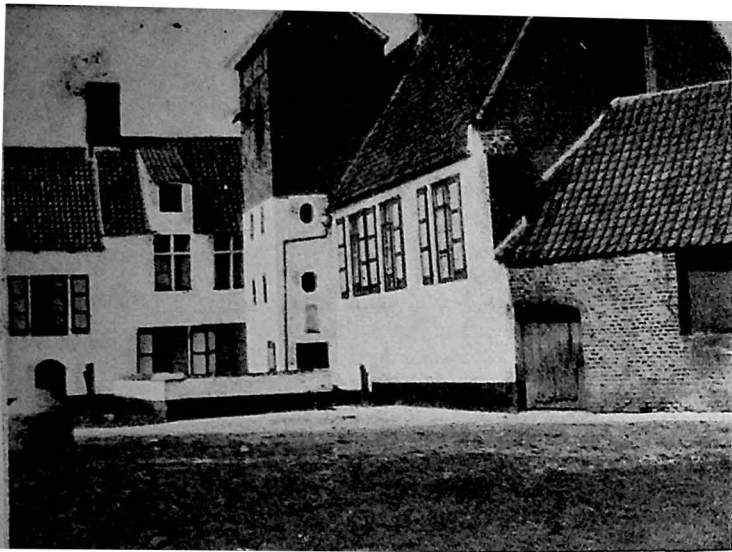


A street in Damme, Flanders. (Photo Scrgyscls-OBLUT.)

The farms, with their red-tiled roofs and brick walls, which are often rough-cast and lime-washed, have a neat and cheerful aspect. Only a few dairy cattle are to be seen in the pastures, as they are foddered in the sheds even in summer.

Between the Flemish and the Campine plains on the one side and the highly cultivated Walloon area on the other, there is a rich intermediate region, picturesque and hilly and essentially agricultural. This region has probably been cultivated for a longer time than any other in Belgium. It extends from the Tournai district to South Limburg, covering South Flanders and the rural area of Brussels.

The light and deep alluvial soil lends itself to a great variety of crops; vegetables and fruit are grown on a large scale side by side with industrial crops such as hops, tobacco and medicinal



Modernised farm in Flanders.

(Photo OBLUT.)

plants. The farms are almost hidden by the surrounding orchards, which, in Limburg, are sometimes very extensive. It is on the excellent artificial pastures of this region that the heavy Belgian draught horse, the pride of our stock-raising in-

dustry, has been reared, and also the famous grey cattle of Middle Belgium.

Then comes the undulating alluvial plain of Hesbaye, stretching as far as the eye can see. Here are immense fields covered with wheat and oats, or with the lush vegetation of sugar-beet. There are few trees, few houses, and only one or two main roads. Here and there a church-tower emerges from the vast plain; around it are grouped the few large farms which work the land. This is the centre of Walloon agriculture. The solidly built farms with their lime-washed rough-cast walls, are both imposing and cheerful-looking, and have a well-to-do appearance. The good pastures produce fine animals. Belgian horse-breeding is centralised in this region, where strong beasts are needed to work the heavy, fertile soil and to draw carts over the undulating ground.

After crossing the Meuse and the Sambre, the traveller reaches Upper Belgium. The nature of the soil has changed, and a broad, chalky strip runs through the country from south to north. In the south it forms the Condroz district, which is extensively cultivated, and in which cattle are raised. The farms, slate-roofed, severe and strongly-built of local stone, look like manor-houses. To the north lies the Herve district, a verdant and picturesque plateau, very undulating, with clay soil and chalky subsoil. This district is given up entirely to pastures and the dairy industry.

Higher up, the traveller comes to less fertile parts—first of all, at an altitude of 200 to 300 metres, to the Famenne, and then, at an altitude of 400 to 600 metres, to the Ardennes. The high plateau of the Ardennes, fringed with vast forests, has the coldest and wettest climate of Belgium. Most of the farms are small, and are worked by the farmer and his family. Until the end of the nineteenth century, agriculture was primitive

and poor. Nevertheless, excellent horses were bred, small in size, but hardy and spirited; these were formerly much in demand for military purposes, and rendered great service to Napoleon during his Russian campaign. It is in the Ardennes that agricultural progress has been most marked during recent decades.

Lastly, the traveller, leaving Belgium by way of Arlon, passes through one more agricultural district, which is more fertile than the Ardennes, thanks to its jurassic soil and milder climate—namely, Belgian Lorraine.

BELGIAN AGRICULTURE IN THE PAST

A striking feature of agriculture in the northern part of Belgium is the way in which the arable land is cut up into small parcels. Even the large farms—and, in this part of the country, a farm of 50 hectares is considered large—rarely have all their land in a single piece. In this region, the land has always been divided up.

As a result, the Flemish and Brabantine peasants have always cherished the hope of one day becoming landowners, and this powerful motive makes them sober, thrifty and hard-working. These are, in fact, the three cardinal virtues of the Belgian peasant.

Whereas, on the large Walloon estates, the same systems of extensive cultivation were employed as in the neighbouring French provinces—with the unchanging three-course rotation followed by fallow—Flemish farmers cultivated the land intensively, and were the first in Europe to do away with the fallow period by adopting a more elastic and varied system of rotation, many different industrial and fodder crops being grown. They revolutionised agricultural economy by introducing and propagating the cultivation of clover; at a time when chemical fertilisers were unknown, they encouraged the intensive production of manure by growing forage plants and feeding their animals in the sheds; they even succeeded in producing two crops a year by growing turnips as a catch-crop. It was the first

Group of small-holdings in Evere (Brussels neighbourhood).



time that this had been done in Europe, and the feat was performed in the Waas district, in spite of its sandy soil, which is by nature not very fertile. It is not without pride, therefore, that the inhabitants of Waas bear on their blazon a turnip proper on an azure field.

The old empirical system of agriculture reached its peak in Brabant and Flanders in the eighteenth century. Belgian



Landscape in Flanders. *(Photo Sergysels-OBLUT.)*

agriculture served as a model for that of neighbouring countries, on which it had a profound influence.

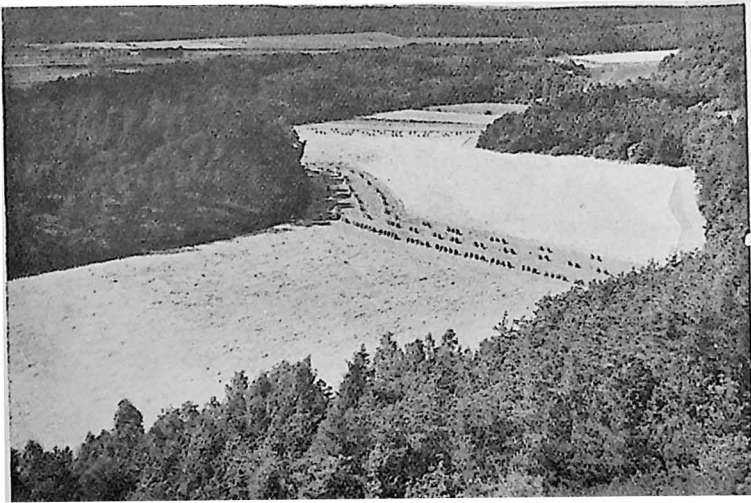
GENERAL ASPECT OF RURAL LIFE

In Belgium, which is densely populated, where industrial and agricultural centres overlap, and where there are numerous easy means of communication between town and country, the visitor will seek in vain for national costumes, national dances or any other picturesque and colourful manifestations of national folklore such as are still to be found in some more isolated places which are less influenced by the modern world.

The only occasions when vestiges of the old-time arts and customs of the people are likely to be encountered are traditional processions or festivals. Then peasant women of the Campine

may be seen wearing their stiff head-dresses trimmed with dark-brown ribbon, and their grandmothers' big shawls, or girls from the Liège district with large conical hats, or Brabantine peasants in shiny blue smocks with tall black silk caps.

Yet Flemish women still wear large red white-spotted kerchiefs on their heads when they are working in the fields, thus adding to the landscape a gay poppy-red patch of colour.



Landscape in the Ardennes. (Photo C. E. B.-OBLUT.)

I

- A. INFLUENCE OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION
 - B. DENSITY OF THE AGRICULTURAL POPULATION
 - C. STATE OF HEALTH
-

A. INFLUENCE OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION

At the end of December 1930, there were in Belgium 2,671 communes, of which 2,357 had less than 5,000 inhabitants each and an aggregate population of 3,198,321—that is to say, 39.52% of the total population of the country.

314 communes with more than 5,000 inhabitants each had an aggregate population of 4,893,683 inhabitants, or 60.48% of the total population of the country.

According to the census of 1930, the number of persons engaged in agricultural work would seem to be 635,032 out of a total of 3,750,285 working persons—that is to say, 16.9%. Persons temporarily employed in agriculture should also be counted. Thus, the number of persons engaged in agriculture would be about 800,000—that is to say, 20.5% of the working population of the country.

B. DENSITY OF THE AGRICULTURAL POPULATION

The table which follows shows, by cantons and provinces, the number of persons employed in agricultural work per hundred hectares of area cultivated. These data are obtained by calculations based on the statistics of the agricultural census of 1929.

AGRICULTURAL CENSUS OF 1929

Table showing, by jurisdictional areas of cantons, the relative intensity of the areas cultivated.

Serial No.	Name of canton	Report	Serial No.	Name of canton	Report
Antwerp			32	Louvain	54.5
1	Antwerp	43.5	33	Nivelles	24.9
2	Arendonck	30.0	34	Perwez	31.9
3	Berchem	71.9	35	Saint-Gilles	17.2
4	Boom	61.4	36	St-Josse-ten-Noode	72.0
5	Borgerhout	83.3	37	Schaerbeek	115.8
6	Brecht	32.6	38	Molenbeek-St-Jean	115.0
7	Contich	58.3	39	Tirlemont	48.9
8	Duffel	94.2	40	Uccle	43.3
9	Eeckeren	28.9	41	Vilvorde	71.4
10	Herenthals	39.3	42	Wavre	27.6
11	Heyst op den Berg	74.9	43	Wolverthem	61.0
12	Hoogstraeten	31.5	44	Léau	36.9
13	Lierre	60.6	<i>The Province</i>		47.6
14	Malines	79.4	Western Flanders		
15	Moll	33.1	45	Ardoye	57.4
16	Puers	70.8	46	Avelghem	47.3
17	Santhoven	36.7	47	Bruges	37.8
18	Turnhout	39.4	48	Dixmude	38.9
19	Westerloo	46.8	49	Ghistelles	37.5
<i>The Province</i>		45.2	50	Harlebeke	51.1
Brabant			51	Hooglede	55.1
20	Aerschot	55.5	52	Ypres	35.1
21	Anderlecht	93.8	53	Iseghem	40.1
22	Assche	69.0	54	Courtrai	48.1
23	Brussels	209.7	55	Menin	36.1
24	Diest	44.7	56	Messines	36.5
25	Genappe	20.1	57	Meulebeke	45.3
26	Glabbeek-Surbempde	51.9	58	Moorseele	39.3
27	Haecht	64.8	59	Mouscron	40.6
28	Hal	37.4	60	Nieuport	29.6
29	Ixelles	78.5	61	Ostende	33.6
30	Jodoigne	40.9	62	Oostroosebeke	46.6
31	Lennick-St-Quentin	55.7	63	Passchendale	43.4
			64	Poperinghe	43.5
			65	Rousbrugge-Haringhe	34.1

Serial No.	Name of canton	Report	Serial No.	Name of canton	Report
66	Roulers	49.4			
67	Ruyssselede	46.5			
68	Thielt	39.9			
69	Thourout	52.8			
70	Furnes	25.2			
71	Wervicq	40.6			
	<i>The Province.</i>	40.2			
	Eastern Flanders				
72	Alost	64.0			
73	Assenede	65.7			
74	Audenarde	43.6			
75	Beveren	32.5			
76	Caprycke	37.8			
77	Cruyshautem	55.6			
78	Termonde	68.4			
79	Deynze	47.5			
80	Eecloo	50.8			
81	Evergem	80.1			
82	Grammont	46.3			
83	Ghent	46.2			
84	Hamme	61.9			
85	Herzele	56.2			
86	Ledeberg	51.8			
87	Lokeren	76.3			
88	Loochristy	61.0			
89	Nazareth	54.8			
90	Nederbrakel	53.8			
91	Nevele	45.0			
92	Ninove	53.6			
93	Oosterzeele	58.6			
94	Renaix	35.7			
95	Hoorebeeke-Ste-Marie	53.5			
96	Saint-Nicolas	61.2			
97	St-Gilles-Waes	49.7			
98	Somergem	48.2			
99	Tamise	48.9			
100	Sottegem	50.5			
101	Waerschoot	57.9			
102	Wettere	68.7			
103	Zele	70.0			
	<i>The Province.</i>	53.8			
				Hainaut	
			104	Antoing	36.9
			105	Ath	38.0
			106	Beaumont	16.0
			107	Binche	32.3
			108	Boussu	53.4
			109	Celles	32.6
			110	Charleroi	81.3
			111	Châtelet	30.4
			112	Chièvre	38.6
			113	Chimay	13.6
			114	Dour	31.6
			115	Enghien	31.1
			116	Flobecq	38.3
			117	Fontaine-l'Evêque	37.8
			118	Frasnes-lez-Buissenal	38.3
			119	Gosselies	29.3
			120	Jumet	40.6
			121	La Louvière	49.0
			122	Lens	30.3
			123	Lessines	42.2
			124	Leuze	38.2
			125	Marchienne-au-Pont	33.3
			126	Merbes-le-Château	22.3
			127	Mons	41.5
			128	Pâturages	26.1
			129	Peruwelz	36.4
			130	Quevaucamps	37.2
			131	Roeulx	30.0
			132	Seneffe	27.3
			133	Soignies	22.9
			134	Templeuve	33.4
			135	Thuin	27.7
			136	Tournai	42.3
				<i>The Province.</i>	30.9
				Liège	
			137	Aubel	34.0
			138	Dalhem	38.9
			139	Dison	50.6
			140	Eupen	17.1

Serial No.	Name of canton	Report	Serial No.	Name of canton	Report
141	Ferrières	17.4			
142	Fexhe-Slins	31.8			
143	Fléron	40.7			
144	Grivegnée	48.1			
145	Hannut	40.8			
146	Héron	28.1			
147	Herstal	61.6			
148	Herve	45.2			
149	Hollogne-aux-Pierres	33.2			
150	Huy	24.6			
151	Jehay-Bodegnée	31.0			
152	Landem	47.2			
153	Liège	169.0			
154	Limbourg	19.0			
155	Louveigné	24.4			
156	Malmédy	20.5			
157	Nandrin	17.2			
158	Saint-Nicolas	130.7			
159	Saint-Vith	20.8			
160	Seraing	23.7			
161	Spa	22.2			
162	Stavelot	17.7			
163	Verviers	48.6			
164	Waremme	32.1			
	<i>The Province</i>	26.6			
	Limbourg				
165	Beerlingen	34.8			
166	Bilsen	33.9			
167	Looz	39.2			
168	Brée	31.4			
169	Hasselt	46.7			
170	Herck-la-Ville	42.1			
171	Maeseyck	32.5			
172	Mechelen	32.1			
173	Neerpelt	31.8			
174	Peer	30.7			
175	Sichen-Sussem-Bohré	38.9			
176	Saint-Trond	35.5			
177	Tongres	34.8			
	<i>The Province</i>	35.4			
				Luxemburg	
			178	Arlon	22.4
			179	Bastogne	21.0
			180	Bouillon	11.1
			181	Durbuy	18.3
			182	Erezé	16.2
			183	Etalle	13.5
			184	Fauvillers	17.0
			185	Florenville	14.6
			186	Houffalize	19.2
			187	La Roche-en-Ardenne	15.4
			188	Marche	14.7
			189	Messancy	28.8
			190	Nassogne	13.0
			191	Neufchâteau	19.3
			192	Paliseul	14.5
			193	Saint-Hubert	13.0
			194	Sibret	19.6
			195	Vielsalm	19.6
			196	Virton	16.4
			197	Wellin	12.0
				<i>The Province</i>	16.6
				Namur	
			198	Andenne	20.8
			199	Beauraing	10.6
			200	Ciney	14.9
			201	Couvin	10.3
			202	Dinant	13.3
			203	Eghezée	26.9
			204	Florennes	13.5
			205	Fosse	21.8
			206	Gedinne	14.5
			207	Gembloux	27.1
			208	Namur	22.3
			209	Phillippeville	13.0
			210	Rochefort	13.2
			211	Walcourt	18.2
				<i>The Province</i>	16.8
				The Kingdom	32.7

C. STATE OF HEALTH

In a general way, the state of health of the rural population is less good than that of the urban.

The death rates do not vary much as between town and country, but the birth rate in the country is much larger, and hence the rural population is younger than the population of the towns.

According to statistics compiled in 1935, small or medium-sized places—that is to say, those with a population varying from 2,000 to 5,000 and 5,000 to 25,000 respectively—show lower figures—12.08 and 12.39 deaths per thousand inhabitants—whereas small villages and large towns seem to be in a less favourable position, with figures of 13.35‰ and 13.52.

Infantile mortality is much higher in the country than in towns. In the larger localities, though the birth rate is lower, deaths are fewer among infants.

This is an example of the results that may be obtained from general measures for improvement of health conditions, better living conditions and more active health services. Not only can the unfortunate influence of town conditions be overcome, but also the mortality among small children can be reduced far below the level it has reached in country districts.

On the other hand, the greater infantile mortality in country districts as compared with towns is due in part to the fact that the families are larger, and that the farmer's wife has her time taken up by much agricultural work (tending cattle, etc.) which takes her away from home, so that she is often unable to give proper care to her young children.

Death Rate per Thousand Live Births : 1934/35.¹

	Population of communes			
	Less than 2,000	2,000- 5,000	5,000- 25,000	More than 25,000
1-2 months	8.0	9.5	9.3	7.4
2-3 months	8.7	9.7	9.2	7.4
3-6 months	5.7	5.8	5.7	5.5
(monthly average)				
6-12 months	3.0	3.2	2.8	2.7
(monthly average)				
1-12 months	52.2	55.7	52.7	47.6

The situation is relatively better in the very small communes, and the excess of the rural death rate is more pronounced during the third month.

¹ According to the comparative tables of the Official Register (Central Statistical Office).

(These tables have been copied from "La Mortalité en Belgique", by Willy SELLESLAGS, which appeared in the review *Archives de Médecine Sociale et d'Hygiène* 1938, Place Royale, 2, Brussels.)

For example, the infantile mortality rate of the province of Antwerp is 7.66‰, but only 5.06‰ for the city of Antwerp. In the same province, fifty-six villages have a death rate of more than 10‰, and four of more than 20‰.

The main cause of infantile mortality is ignorance among mothers as to the care of children.

Nevertheless, the still-birth rate is lower in the country than in the towns. This may be explained by the direct relationship between the still-birth rate and the number of illegitimate children, which is very much greater in towns.

Category of commune	Still-birth rate per 1,000 total births (1934/35)
Less than 2,000 inhabitants	28.7
2,000-5,000 inhabitants	29.3
5,000-25,000 inhabitants	32.7
More than 25,000 inhabitants	37.1
The whole Kingdom	32.2

There are no statistics available which would enable a comparison to be made of the damage done by the various diseases in town and in country.

Nevertheless, it may be said that pulmonary tuberculosis, which till recently appeared to be a specifically urban disease, cannot now, it seems, be regarded as such, the tuberculosis death rate in large towns having diminished proportionately more than in country districts.

In recent years, it seems that the former rule is being reversed, and the smaller the locality, the greater the tuberculosis death rate.

*Pulmonary Tuberculosis in Belgium :
Death Rate by Categories of Communes.*

	1903-1905	1923-1925	1933-1935
	(Rate per 100,000 inhabitants)		
Less than 5,000 inhabitants	99	53	50
5,000-25,000 inhabitants	95	66	53
25,000-100,000 inhabitants	120	104	79
More than 100,000 inhabitants	163	105	68
	(Indices showing decline in rate)		
Less than 5,000 inhabitants	100	54	51
5,000-25,000 inhabitants	100	69	56
25,000-100,000 inhabitants	100	87	66
More than 100,000 inhabitants	100	64	42

There has, in recent times, been a general increase in cancer. There would also appear to be an epidemic of influenza in every village every year.

One of the specific diseases of rural areas is melitococcia, which is also called Malta fever, Mediterranean fever, or undulant fever. This disease, which appeared in the Mediterranean region at the beginning of this century, is now spreading generally. Its definite existence was reported from sixty-four French departments during the year 1936; fourteen certain cases were diagnosed at the Provincial Bacteriological Institute in the province of Namur alone; but there must be many more cases, for this is a proteiform disease which can only be diagnosed by means of a blood test.

This disease, which in itself is not specially serious, may involve complications in the nerves and lungs. It is transmitted to man by domestic animals, particularly cattle, through direct contact or through the digestive tract.

In conclusion, the general state of health among rural populations may be said to be satisfactory. Naturally, considerable improvements may and ought to be made in the future. Such improvements will be effected through the joint activities of the public authorities and of private persons in three fields: education, by the spread of the principles of health and child care; rural improvements, mainly by the extension of the drinking-water supply; and, lastly, in the economic sphere, by the improvement of the conditions of life among the rural population.

II

- A. LAND TENURE, HOME LAND SETTLEMENT, AGRARIAN REFORMS
- B. IMPROVEMENT OF SYSTEMS OF CULTIVATION
- C. LAND RECLAMATION AND IMPROVEMENT
- D. IMPROVEMENT OF VEGETABLE AND ANIMAL PRODUCTION
- E. EQUIPMENT
- F. RURAL INDUSTRIES
- G. REDUCTION OF COSTS OF PRODUCTION, ORGANISATION OF SALES AND MARKETS
- H. STANDARDISATION

A. LAND TENURE, HOME LAND SETTLEMENT, AGRARIAN REFORMS

In Belgium, there are two methods of farming land :

1. Direct working or farming by the owner himself.

Such an agriculturist may devote himself to utilising the full resources of his land with no risk of having to leave the farm, such as always interferes with the continuity essential to good farming. Moreover, on the security of his property he can easily obtain credit for improvements or developments.

2. Indirect working or farming by an agriculturist holding his farm on lease.

By the Law of March 7th, 1929, the lessee is assured of a first tenancy of at least nine years. If the lease is then renewed, the owner may evict the tenant, provided only that he observes the clause requiring notice of two years. Many farmers are urging that greater security of tenure is desirable, especially in the form of renewals of leases for a further nine years. A proposal to this effect is at present being discussed in Parliament.

Belgian law also embodies the principle of payment of outgoing compensation to an evicted farmer for works, planting and development carried out during his tenancy, and for outlay on crops planted at the end of the lease. The incoming tenant frequently neglects to prepare an inventory of the property as required by law, and hence often forfeits the outgoing compensation.

The organisation of credit for tenants [might with advantage be made broader and more flexible. In this connection, however, the Raiffeisen banks have been of great service.

An Institute of Agricultural Credit was established by royal decree on September 30th, 1937, but is still only at the beginning of its work.

In the two following tables, agricultural holdings are classified according to their method of working, and the evolution is shown from 1880 to the present day.

Classification of Holdings according to Method of Working.

(a) Number of holdings.

Year	Total	Freehold		Leasehold	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1880..	910,396	293,524	32.24	616,872	67.76
1895..	829,625	231,319	27.88	598,306	72.12
1910..		No returns available			
1930..	1,131,146	545,117	48.19	586,029	51.81

(b) Area of holdings.

	Total	Direct working	On lease
1880..	1,983,570	713,059	1,270,511
1895..	1,916,617	596,259	1,320,358
1910..	2,017,964	616,753	1,401,211
1930..	1,906,598	726,834	1,179,764

The indirect method of working (leasehold) will be seen to have steadily increased until 1910.

The returns for 1930 seem to indicate a break in this upward movement of the method of indirect working. This break is due to the temporary period of prosperity experienced by agriculture from 1925 to 1928, which enabled numerous agriculturists to get rid of mortgages and to purchase or redeem part of the land they cultivated.

As regards the area of agricultural holdings, there was a marked predominance of small-holdings (5 to 10-15 hectares), together with a tendency to divide up land. Faced with the difficulties of to-day, the great landed proprietors find it to their advantage to divide up their estates into holdings of medium size.

Small-holdings have withstood the effects of the depression more firmly and more successfully, owing to the varied nature of their produce and more especially to the self-sacrifice of the farmer and his family.

In the following table, holdings are classified according to area at intervals of thirty-five years :

Classification of Holdings by Area.

Area	Number of holdings		Remarks
	in 1895	in 1930	
Less than 1 ha. ..	544,041	838,883	The agriculturist has another occupation.
1-5 ha.	191,833	194,914	
5-10 ha.	49,065	56,311	Increase in the number of small-holdings.
10-20 ha.	28,151	27,882	
20-30 ha.	8,163	7,010	Decrease in the number of large holdings.
30-50 ha.	4,788	3,656	
50-100 ha.	2,661	2,026	
More than 100 ha.	923	464	
Total	829,625	1,131,146	Evidence of division of properties.

In this connection, attention may also be drawn to the activities of the National Society for Small Landed Property. This society, founded in 1935, is starting a "back to the land" movement. Founded under Government auspices, the Society has been supplied with funds to put its plans into execution.

It helps the families of small agriculturists or workers to become owners of small-holdings, agricultural buildings or garden plots by lending them a considerable proportion of the purchase-price at a low rate of interest. Repayment is effected in ten to twenty-five years by annual instalments which may not exceed a normal rent or similar charges.

Further, as regards social reforms, legislation is being prepared with a view to organising agricultural wages.

Joint committees are now being set up to regulate relations between employers and agricultural workers. Collective contracts have been drawn up which, though without the force of law, constitute a semi-official guide to the work of the agricultural labourer (minimum wages, length of work per day, based upon the total amount of work performed during the year, estimates of perquisites in kind, etc.).

The application of social laws to agricultural workers has now reached the practical stage.

B. IMPROVEMENT OF SYSTEMS OF CULTIVATION

The Belgian agriculturist farms his land on a highly intensive system. By the rational application of methods of cultivation and the appropriate use of natural and chemical fertilisers, he turns the productive power of the soil to the best advantage. This does not mean that more could not be produced per hectare ;

but the increase in expenditure involved by further improvements and heavier dressings of chemical fertiliser would not be covered by the additional yield from increase in production.

The Belgian agriculturist tries to reduce production costs by modernising his methods of cultivation, including the reduction of the number of hands wherever possible, by the use of tractors and of agricultural machinery with a large output. Labour is one of the chief items in an agricultural balance-sheet. The following are a few figures taken from the 1937 accounts of farms at Hesbaye, a predominantly agricultural district.

On a farm of 10 hectares, out of a total expenditure of 30,800 francs, 10,000 francs went to pay labour costs.

On a farm of 20 hectares, out of an expenditure of 63,750 francs, 20,000 francs were devoted to the same purpose.

On a farm of 100 hectares, 100,000 francs were absorbed by labour costs out of a total of 263,500 francs.

In other words, labour accounts for approximately 25% to 35% of production costs. It would therefore be highly desirable to reduce this item by the mechanisation of agricultural holdings. Unfortunately, such mechanisation would require a fresh outlay of capital, which agriculture can ill afford. Secondly, most Belgian farms are small; hence the widespread use of tractors and powerful agricultural machinery is not feasible.

The mechanisation of farming also presents a by no means negligible danger through the fact that it is a direct competitor of horse traction; and this is an important consideration because horse-breeding is a very big branch of Belgian agricultural economy.

C. LAND RECLAMATION AND IMPROVEMENT

The Belgian peasant has always set his heart on possessing good land, kept in perfect condition; and to achieve this result he has spared neither time nor trouble. Unfortunately, owing to the high cost of reconditioning it, he cannot always improve the land as he would wish. This question of fertilisers is one of the chief preoccupations of Belgian agricultural circles.

As regards the periodical liming of land, great progress has been recorded in the past twenty years. Whereas formerly only a minority of farmers limed their land, all are now familiar with advantages gained and the majority have recourse to this process.

Other improvements, such as drainage and the removal of stones, are not carried out as widely as could be desired.

It would also be an advantage if waste land were properly utilised, although the area of such land is very small in Belgium. This will not be possible for some time to come, however, on account of the current price of agricultural produce. In fact, the paying capacity of land newly brought under cultivation

would have to be such as to provide remuneration for the capital outlay. The Department of Agriculture places both the technical co-operation of the agricultural water-supply service and subsidies in money at the disposal of those wishing to improve the quality of their land.

D. IMPROVEMENT OF VEGETABLE AND ANIMAL PRODUCTION

The future of agriculture rests on a rational use of the scientific data now available through the research work of agricultural experts and technicians.

Belgium possesses a remarkable galaxy of research-workers and scientists enthusiastically devoted to the investigation of agricultural problems. The selection of seeds, nutrition tests and milk inspection all claim their skilled attention.

To bring before the public the theories evolved by agricultural research workers, all the modern methods are employed, such as newspaper articles, leaflets, booklets, lectures, broadcasts, practical demonstrations, etc. Live-stock-breeding and crop-raising competitions contribute to the same end.

Belgium may also be proud of possessing a body of agricultural experts whose skill and zeal are universally recognised. Thanks to this élite of officials, the farmer receives constant advice and guidance in the way of agricultural progress.

Other factors making for the improvement of agricultural production include Government measures such as the grant of subsidies for the construction of silos and liquid manure pits, and subsidies and credits for the improvement of stables, cow-sheds, etc., in addition to the organisation, under official auspices, of competitions and expert appraisements for the various categories of live-stock raised in Belgium. Subsidies are granted by the Government, in the form of bonuses, for Belgian draught stallions, approved for public stud purposes by specially appointed official boards.

The owners of the best fillies and brood mares of Belgian draught stock receive similar prizes. Companies engaged in raising cattle, pigs, goats and sheep also receive subsidies for the improvement of the species.

Attention may also be drawn to the establishment of the National Milk and Milk Derivatives Office, which is intended to co-operate with the Department of Agriculture in improving the production, distribution and marketing of milk and its derivatives.

E. EQUIPMENT

If the statistics for 1910 are compared with those for 1929 in regard to the number of machines used for agricultural work, it will be found that more or less primitive appliances such as

wind-driven machinery, simple ploughs, harrows, etc., have greatly declined in number or have almost completely disappeared and have been replaced by more highly perfected machines capable of a greater output, such as oil and petrol engines, double Brabant and multiple-shere ploughs, weed-extractors, reapers and mowers. Again, machines which were unknown, or almost unknown, in 1910 have made their appearance in 1929; these include electric motors, tractors, motor-ploughs, potato-planters, straw- and forage-presses, sulphur-sprayers, incubators and foster-mothers, Dutch barns and mechanical milking appliances.

In some matters, such as the improvement of country roads and the electrification of farms, the authorities might do useful work to improve the conditions of country life. The State subsidises schemes for the improvement of main roads in rural areas, and also for the electrification of outlying districts.

That the agriculturist understands and appreciates the assistance which electrical energy offers him in his work is proved by the increase in the number of electric motors used on agricultural holdings from 348 in 1910 to 27,336 in 1929 (when the last agricultural census was taken).

F. RURAL INDUSTRIES

Most industries depending on the products of agriculture, such as sugar-refining, milling and brewing, have reached a high stage of development and may be regarded as models of their kind.

These industries soon became highly concentrated, and the process has led to the formation of trusts or virtual monopolies which in practice control the entire market.

The number of sugar-refineries fell from 100 in 1900 to fifty-one in 1928, and is no more than thirty-six at the present time. In 1937, they produced some 230,000 tons of unrefined sugar. An agreement has quite recently been reached between sugar-refiners and sugar-beet growers with a view to ensuring the inspection of sugar-beet received and thus giving a full guarantee to both parties.

In 1910, there were 3,350 breweries, large and small; this number fell to 1,555 in 1930 and to 1,300 in 1934. The production of beer in 1937 amounted to 14,300,000 hectolitres, almost all of which was made from raw materials (barley and hops) of foreign origin.

The local watermills and windmills are steadily disappearing in face of the competition of industrial mills, the largest of which—to the number of about eighty—are tending to replace the others.

The industrial mills chiefly use foreign wheat. With a view to ensuring a higher price for native wheat, millers are now obliged to include a variable percentage of native wheat in their milling flour.

The preserved-vegetable industry is of great importance on account of the markets which it provides for agriculture. The productive capacity of the Belgian factories, which are world-renowned, has increased in particular since 1927, and, in 1935, amounted to 100 million half-litre tins.

At the instance of the Ministry of Agriculture, which was seeking new markets for our milk products, chocolate-makers concluded in 1937 a supplies agreement with the Belgian manufacturers of milk powder, enabling the latter partially to reopen their factories, which had been closed for a number of years.

Belgium contains some 180 co-operative dairies, comprising 36,000 members and some 109,000 cows. In 1934, these dairies sold milk products (milk, butter, cheese, etc.) to the value of 218,171,000 francs.

The cheese-making industry is, in general, little developed. The Department of Agriculture is making an effort to improve it in districts where it constitutes a speciality.

G. REDUCTION OF COSTS OF PRODUCTION : ORGANISATION OF SALES AND MARKETS

In the present economic situation, agricultural work consists mainly of an incessant struggle against costs of production.

Since the paying capacity of his holding is extremely precarious, the agriculturist must endeavour to reduce his production costs to a minimum. Not even the smallest expense can be incurred without careful consideration, and then only if absolutely necessary.

From the point of view of professional organisation, it is to be regretted that agriculturists do not co-operate more, especially for purchases of raw materials.

After devoting his whole attention to reducing costs of production, the agriculturist must try to obtain the best possible sale price, if there is to be a margin of profit. To do so, he must offer the consumer a product of good quality, fresh and attractive.

The agricultural producer must also learn to make supply meet demand. He must be capable of judging the quantity of products which a market can absorb; he must also know in which markets he can offer any given product for sale.

This commercial knowledge is, however, of value only to fairly large producers who have the requisite means of transport and can afford certain expenses for the preservation of their products. The small agriculturist is obliged to sell his products in the nearest market, as and when he harvests them; and in

doing so, he is completely at the mercy of the consumer or the middleman. The milk industry offers a typical example of this unfavourable situation.

In the sphere of international trade, we are obliged to protect our home market and our products against foreign competition and dumping. Hence the very flexible system of quotas and licences, which is constantly being adapted to meet current requirements.

With a view to increasing agricultural markets abroad, the Government proposes to establish a National Agricultural and Horticultural Markets Office to co-ordinate the efforts already made by private enterprise, and especially by the Association for the Development of Agricultural and Horticultural Markets.

This Markets Office will perform a useful service for Belgian agriculture by ridding our home market of its surplus, and thus automatically raising the value of our agricultural products within the country.

H. STANDARDISATION

If the agriculturist wishes to build up a steady and regular custom—which is, indeed, the only one worth while—he must always try to offer his customers good quality products similar in appearance to those to which they are accustomed.

Hence the necessity for carrying on the movement to standardise products both in quality and in size, appearance and packing.

Standardisation enables the producer to make sure of his home markets and to develop markets abroad.

Regulations are gradually being drawn up to unify Belgian agricultural production. The first products studied for purposes of standardisation and subjected to fixed regulations were those for which there was still a definite market abroad, such as "Witloof" chicory, potatoes, eggs and fruit (cherries, apples).

Such standardisation must of course be introduced gradually, and only after careful consideration of all the factors concerned: possibilities of production, methods of preservation, means of transport, consumers' requirements, packing and appearance, etc.

Further, the producer also requires training. Skilful and persuasive propaganda in favour of standardised products is required, so that the qualities of products thus guaranteed may become known and appreciated by the consuming public.

Consequently, this is a far-reaching undertaking which can bear fruit only in course of time. Once the first step has been taken, all that is needed is to persevere along these lines, and the logical outcome will be the universal adoption of guarantee marks for most agricultural products.

III. AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATION

Classified according to character, agricultural associations in Belgium fall into five main groups :

- A. ASSOCIATIONS OF AN EXCLUSIVELY OFFICIAL CHARACTER
- B. ASSOCIATIONS OF A SEMI-OFFICIAL CHARACTER
- C. AUTONOMOUS ASSOCIATIONS
- D. ASSOCIATIONS WITH UNRESTRICTED OBJECTS
- E. ASSOCIATIONS WITH RESTRICTED OBJECTS

A. ASSOCIATIONS OF AN EXCLUSIVELY OFFICIAL CHARACTER

These are organised on the basis of the *comice* (conference), which operates within a given administrative area, usually a canton ; the *comice* looks after the professional interests of its members, and arranges exhibitions and local competitions. Its area of activity is fixed by the Minister of Agriculture, who also decides its internal organisation and functions.

The various *comices* in a province together form a *Provincial Agricultural Association*. The latter supervises and controls the *comices* and concerns itself with all matters connected with the agricultural activities of the province. Its executive, known as the Provincial Agricultural Committee, is responsible for ordinary administrative affairs. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman and a representative of each *comice* are members of the provincial association.

B. ASSOCIATIONS OF A SEMI-OFFICIAL CHARACTER

These may be regarded as a link between the official and autonomous associations.

First come the *Provincial Chambers of Agriculture*, founded in 1924, one in each province. They consist of :

(1) One representative from the Provincial Agricultural Association for every *comice* ;

(2) An equal number of representatives of the autonomous associations founded to promote the general interests of agriculture ;

(3) Representatives of the autonomous associations formed for special purposes, numbering one-fourth of the total number of representatives in the first two groups. A representative of the Permanent Deputation is *ex officio* a member of the provincial chamber.

The provincial chamber takes any action that it thinks may serve the general interests of agriculture in its province, and gives its views on all questions affecting agriculture progress. It answers requests for information from the central administration or Higher Agricultural Council, and reports to it any facts prejudicial to rural industry that come to its notice. It assists in the organisation of competitions and the enforcement of Government measures to encourage and protect the various branches of agriculture.

Next comes the *Higher Agricultural Council*, the composition of which was amended in 1924 to permit of the wider representation of autonomous agricultural associations. It consists of :

- (1) Six members appointed by the Minister of Agriculture ;
- (2) Five representatives of each provincial chamber, elected by secret ballot ;
- (3) Twelve members co-opted from among the best qualified and best informed representatives of the agricultural community. These twelve members are appointed by the ministerial representatives and the representatives of the provincial chambers at their first meeting.

The Higher Agricultural Council concerns itself with the development and progress of the various branches of national agriculture, gives opinions on questions referred to it by the Government, and studies recommendations and proposals communicated to it by the provincial chambers and members of the Council. A central committee deals with routine business and advises the Government on urgent questions and on matters not of sufficient importance to be discussed by the Council.

C. AUTONOMOUS ASSOCIATIONS

The common object of these associations is to improve the well-being of the agricultural community. Their success is due to the fact that their immediate aims are not purely economic in character, since they also carry on social activities. Some associations are definitely denominational.

I. *The Belgian "Boerenbond", Louvain.*

This association, which operates in the Flemish provinces and the Walloon part of Brabant, is the strongest, best organised and most comprehensive of its kind. Its activities are both social and economic : *social*, because it concerns itself with the corporate life of its subsidiary groups and the religious, moral and social well-being of its members, their vocational training and the defence of their agricultural interests ; *economic*, because, at the same time, it looks after their material interests.

The unit is the *guild* or local communal or parish agricultural association ; only the head of the family is registered, but all members of the family enjoy the benefits of co-operation.

Representatives of all the guilds in the administrative area (*arrondissement*) constitute the District Federation, which looks after the agricultural interests of the district, and makes itself responsible, in particular, for the political representation of the agricultural community.

At the top are the *Higher Council* and the *Managing Committee* ; the latter deals with routine business and supervises and controls the various activities of the Boerenbond.

For carrying out its programme, the Boerenbond has various central services :

(a) The *General Secretariat*, which forwards to the guilds instructions regarding organisation and social activities, looks after their moral and religious interests, seeks to extend vocational training and general education and to improve agricultural technique and the yield of rural holdings, and defends the professional and social interests of the farming community ;

(b) The *Countrywomen's League*, for the wives and daughters of members, which looks after their religious, moral and social well-being and seeks to raise the level of general education ;

(c) The *Inspection Service*, which acts as an intermediary between the Directorate and the local guilds and supervises the latter's various activities ;

(d) The *Technical Service*, which directs and carries out works of importance to agriculture and the rural population, and furnishes technical advice and information ;

(e) The *Buying and Selling Agency*, which accepts orders from the buying and selling departments of the guilds and directs the sale of produce ;

(f) The *Central Rural Credit Bank*, which opens credit accounts, accepts deposits, grants loans, etc. ;

(g) The *Insurance Department*, which transacts insurance business—fire, life, accident and hail.

2. *The Belgian Agricultural Union.*

This body was founded in 1930 by the merging of the provincial associations of Liège, Luxemburg, Hainaut and Namur. Its objects are to group the Walloon farming community in a professional Christian organisation for the defence of their moral and material interests and to promote agricultural prosperity.

The unit of the organisation is the *local parish association*, these local bodies combining to form *district associations (circonscriptions régionales)*. At the head of the organisation are the *Higher Council* and the *Managing Committee*. The special function of the Higher Council is to defend the professional interests of the agricultural community *vis-à-vis* the public authorities and political parties. The main duty of the Managing Committee is to direct the commercial and financial operations of the association for which it is solely responsible. It is also responsible for the organisation and inspection of the local associations and clubs.

The Belgian Agricultural Union devotes itself to the professional training and education of the farmer and the defence of his interests.

It helps to extend the professional knowledge of farmers through its periodical publications (journal, review, and bulletin), special pamphlets, lectures and advice, by means of its experimental and selection grounds, gardening and grazing competitions and correspondence courses in agriculture, and by organising post-school and teachers' training courses.

It has concluded a special agreement regarding economic services with the Buying and Selling Agency of the Belgian Boerenbond.

3. *Professional Agricultural Unions (U.P.A.).*

A post-war creation, the Professional Agricultural Unions, or U.P.A.'s, recruit most of their members among the big farmers in the Walloon provinces. The unions, which are undenominational and non-party, aim at influencing public opinion in a policy favourable to agriculture.

The unit is the *cantonal association*, these bodies being affiliated to a *provincial federation*. The various provincial federations form the *National Federation*, whose powers are vested in a Managing Committee and a *General Council*.

As economic institutions, the U.P.A.'s have founded the Agricultural Bank of Belgium, which transacts all kinds of banking business, and a commercial agency. In insurance transactions, the unions deal with those insurance companies which, in their view, offer their members the most advantageous conditions. They have mixed youth groups (J.A.P.), combined in provincial federations which together form a national federation.

Other autonomous associations—such as the *Eigenaars en Landbouwersbond*, at Bruges; the *Redt u Zelveu*, at Alost; the *Fédération des Ménagères rurales*; the *Boerenfront*, etc.—exercise, on a smaller scale, activities similar to those of the larger professional organisations above-mentioned. There is

not room in the present monograph to describe their organisation or activities.

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From the standpoint of activities, the agricultural organisations can be subdivided into associations with unrestricted and restricted objects, respectively.

D. ASSOCIATIONS WITH UNRESTRICTED OBJECTS

The main feature of these associations is the creation in their ranks of sections which are *independent* of one another, each having their separate management, accounts and funds. This is necessary in the pursuit of certain special objects, in view of the varied nature of the agricultural activities and the manifold interests of the members affiliated to these associations.

The latter include the guild, the local agricultural union. Most guilds have a buying and selling department, a rural credit department, a youth section, a research section, a country-women's club and, according to the district and the interests they have to defend, a beetroot-growers' union, a co-operative dairy, a stock-breeding union, an insurance department, etc. The guild takes part in competitions and agricultural exhibitions and, with the support of the public authorities, helps to organise agricultural and horticultural instruction. Actually, it constitutes a local agricultural "clearing house" for all activities designed to promote the material and moral well-being of the agriculturist.

E. ASSOCIATIONS WITH RESTRICTED OBJECTS

These associations whose economic objects are strictly limited, do valuable work on behalf of the various branches of agriculture.

(1) *Co-operative dairies* aim at producing butter of better standard quality, while operating on more economic lines and obtaining a higher yield.

(2) *Beet-growers' unions* defend the interests of their members and arrange for the joint marketing of their beets if necessary; when the crop is gathered, they supervise delivery at the factory, weighing, taring, and check the analyses.

(3) *Mutual associations for the insurance and re-insurance* of cattle, farm-horses, goats, pigs, etc.—The local mutual associations are federated with provincial companies, which receive large grants from the Government and the provinces.

(4) *Stock-breeding unions*, which are numerous and diverse in character, qualify for public grants by uniting in provincial federations, these in turn forming national federations :

(a) Cattle-breeding unions and bull unions, which help to improve cattle by encouraging good strains ; they keep herd-books, and organise competitions at which the animals are judged by reference to their external features and their origin, progeny, productivity, etc. ;

(b) Small live-stock unions, which endeavour to give their members up-to-date expert information concerning the rearing of birds, breeding of dogs, etc. ;

(c) Pig, goat and sheep unions, which supervise selection and breeding and look after the professional training of their members.

(5) *Horticultural, bee-keeping and other specialised unions* are formed according to the special crops or activities in a particular district. There are, for instance, federations of growers of "*witloof*", strawberries, tobacco, federations of fruit-growers, hop-planters, flower-growers, market-gardeners, chicory-growers, vine-growers, etc.

(6) *Co-operative buying associations* purchase, on behalf of their members, on favourable terms, all agricultural requirements—fertilisers, cattle-feed, coal, straw, plants, seeds, agricultural implements.

(7) *Co-operative selling associations* aim at securing for members better prices and new markets for their produce. They also train members to give more careful consideration to the requirements of consumers.

There are joint sales agencies for potatoes (*Comptoir du Boerenbond Belge*, Malines), eggs (*Comptoir du Boerenbond Belge*, Hasselt, Brussels, Ghent and Antwerp), vegetables (*Minques du Boerenbond Belge*, Malines and Hasselt), cereals and butter (*Minques*, at Antwerp, Hasselt and Brussels).

(8) *Credit institutions* accept deposits from members and grant them loans on security. There are also local rural credit banks affiliated to a Central Bank such as the Central Rural Credit Bank of the Boerenbond at Louvain.

* * *

This plenitude of professional associations serving and effectively defending the moral, professional and material interests of the agricultural community is evidence of the great progress achieved in the agricultural sphere and proves how well Belgian agriculturists have realised the need for co-operation.

IV. AGRICULTURAL CREDIT

A. THE IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURAL CREDIT AS A MEANS OF RAISING THE STANDARD OF RURAL LIFE

Agricultural credit, properly organised, is certainly one of the most effective methods of specifically improving the standard of rural life.

It enables several aims to be achieved which all combine to raise the standard of life of the agricultural class.

First of all, it helps the peasant to become an owner of land. By enabling him to buy the land he tills and the farm he works, agricultural credit conduces to an equitable distribution of agricultural property. Besides, to turn a tenant into an owner is to render a social service of the first importance. Moreover, a farmer will undoubtedly get the maximum yield from land which is his own property, and this is bound to react favourably on the results of his operations. The tenant farmer is always liable to have his lease terminated; insecurity of tenure prevents him from undertaking long-term land improvements and reduces his chances of earning a profit.

Generally speaking, the peasant who owns his farm will have an easier life and, consequently, a higher standard of living than the peasant who is only a tenant. The value of agricultural credit as a method of extending the class of peasant proprietors is very considerable.

The same applies to the other directly productive aims which agricultural credit renders attainable, such as credits for the purchase of fertilisers and selected seed, credits for the purchase of agricultural machinery, and credits for the purchase of live-stock. In this last connection, particularly, agricultural credit is a decisive factor in raising the standard of rural life—in the case of outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease, for example. This scourge causes severe losses among live-stock. In such lamentable circumstances, agricultural credit must come to the relief of the sufferers and supply them with the necessary funds to bring up their stock to its former level. By the very fact of bringing the number of live-stock up to the level needed by the farm, agricultural credit maintains the standard of rural life. It thereby prevents this standard from collapsing completely, and enables it eventually to be raised.

Agricultural credit may also contribute indirectly to the maintenance and improvement of the standard of rural life. When property passes by death, for example, it prevents excessive splitting-up of agricultural holdings, the size of which should never fall below the minimum sufficient to feed and

maintain a family. Agricultural credit will provide for this contingency by granting the necessary credits to buy out the other beneficiaries, thus ensuring that the successor to the property is placed in a position where he can work it economically.

The above results, however, will not be achieved unless agricultural credit is adapted to the needs of the rural population which must have at its disposal short-, medium- and long-term credits.

Short- and medium-term credit must always be made available to the agricultural community with the minimum of formalities, and at cheap rates. To achieve this purpose :

- (1) Repayments must be spread over the whole term of the loan ;
- (2) Earlier repayment must be permitted at any time, without compensation for loss of interest ;
- (3) Loans must be made solely on personal security in countries where mortgage registry fees are high, as usually happens ;
- (4) The rate of interest must be low. Though this means that the normal rate charged for bank advances is generally prohibitive, it does not necessarily imply that the public authorities are absolutely bound to provide agricultural credit at exceptionally low rates.

Mutual credit, as practised on a very large scale in those countries where the Raiffeisen system is applied, has as a rule always been granted at moderate rates such as agriculturists can afford to pay. The principle of mutual sharing on which the system is based produces excellent results. The surplus funds of some members help those who need credit. On deposits, a reasonable rate of interest is paid, which in most cases approximates to the rate allowed by the public savings banks. Overhead expenses are extremely low—in most cases, less than a quarter of general banking costs.

Long experience has shown that mutual credit is in fact the right kind of credit for agriculturists, and is extremely beneficial in that it conduces to the economic prosperity of the agricultural populations to which it is extended.

On the other hand, there is no evidence that agricultural credit, organised on official lines and at reduced rates, would be serviceable to agriculture or raise the standard of rural life.

If this method were adopted, there would have to be a guarantee that State funds would always be available to furnish the necessary capital.

If, during a serious financial crisis, the Government found itself short of money and was obliged to suspend such loans,

agriculturists accustomed to very cheap credit, whose costs were calculated accordingly, would be unable to meet competition if they suddenly had to obtain credit at normal rates. The whole purpose of the scheme would be immediately frustrated, and the agricultural community would be plunged into a serious crisis which would lower its standard of living.

The solution to be recommended is that Governments, by means of general or, where necessary, special fiscal measures, and a proper system of supervision, should assist existing mutual credit organisations—and there are many of them in Western European countries—to continue to play the rôle of distributors of agricultural credit which they have so successfully filled in the past.

This is how public authorities can most effectively assist in raising the standard of rural life.

B. AGRICULTURAL CREDIT IN BELGIUM

1. *Raiffeisen Banks.*

At the end of 1937, the Belgian Farmers' Union Central Agricultural Credit Bank, Louvain (Caisse centrale de crédit agricole du Boerenbond Belge) comprised 1,097 local branches (known as Raiffeisen Banks). Most of these banks are in the Flemish-speaking part of the country. They are authorised to transact all kinds of agricultural credit business, but most of the loans are made on personal security. At the end of 1937, the total amount of loans outstanding exceeded 25 million francs, and, during that year, 1,388 loans were granted.

2. *Agricultural Agencies (Comptoirs agricoles).*

By a law of April 15th, 1884, the General Savings and Pensions Bank of Brussels (Caisse générale d'épargne et de retraite) is authorised to employ a portion of its available funds in loans to agriculturists. These operations are conducted through the medium of agricultural agencies which are responsible to the Savings Bank for all business they submit to it. The rate of interest is 4% on loans not exceeding 20,000 francs, and 4½% on loans over 20,000 francs. The maximum amount which can be loaned by agricultural agencies is 100,000 francs. At December 31st, 1937, the twenty-two banks then existing in the country had 27,019 loans outstanding for a total amount of 405,390,686 francs. Loans granted during 1937 numbered 3,853, and amounted in all to 73,308,850 francs.

3. *The National Agricultural Credit Institute.*

This public institution was set up by a decree of September 30th, 1937. Its object is to assist or undertake, directly or indirectly, all agricultural credit operations. As it has only recently been set up, no summary of its activity so far can be given.

4. *National Small-holders' Society*
(*Société nationale de la petite propriété terrienne*).

The purpose of the National Small-holders' Society, which was constituted by a Royal decree of February 27th, 1935, is to settle industrial workers in rural suburbs and to assist agricultural labourers and small-holders to acquire as much land as will afford them the minimum livelihood necessary to maintain their families. It is therefore designed exclusively for the poorer country folk for whom it tries to obtain small-holdings. The necessary funds are advanced by the State at low rates of interest, and repaid by the beneficiaries in the form of annuities which do not exceed a normal rent. At the end of 1937, the Society had granted 1,055 loans, totalling in all 31,918,485 francs.

V. EDUCATION

- A. GENERAL, DOMESTIC, TECHNICAL AND ADULT EDUCATION
- B. PEASANT ART, PEASANT CULTURE, FOLKLORE
- C. ORGANISATION OF LEISURE IN THE COUNTRY

A. GENERAL, DOMESTIC, TECHNICAL AND ADULT
EDUCATION

PART I.—GENERAL SURVEY

I. *The Elementary School and the Part played by the Teacher.*

Elementary education has been compulsory since 1914, and, thanks to this instruction, children receive throughout their school career a type of education adapted to the environment in which they are living.

A child brought up in the country learns the names of the objects and creatures surrounding him and the why and wherefore of the daily tasks performed by his parents and fellow-villagers ; in this way, he will learn also to appreciate life in the country and to understand the beauty of agriculture, notwithstanding the hardships attaching to farming life.

These first favourable impressions of the country will never be forgotten.

Not every farmer's son can find occupation on the land, but all children born of peasant families will be anxious later, whatever occupation they take up, to add to the well-being of agriculture and thus improve the conditions of country life.

The importance of this education in early youth, in the elementary school, is taken into account in the preparation of the training-school curriculum. The various programmes and instructions stress the particular vocation of the rural teacher, and the following passage, for example, appears in the pedagogic instructions for elementary training schools issued by the Ministry of Education :

“ The school garden should produce in sufficient quantities specimens of the various vegetable families described in the lessons. It should be looked after by the pupils themselves, under the direction of the competent teacher. Small animals should be reared, to illustrate the lessons.

“ Our training schools contain many young people who know and are interested in country life. Most of them will

obtain posts as teachers in rural elementary schools. It is important that they should be made conversant with scientific methods, so as to apply them in their agricultural courses."

These general principles are intended to create in the future teacher a sympathetic outlook to rural life and to prepare him for the various activities which may help to improve rural conditions.

The Ministry of Agriculture,¹ when organising educational propaganda among farmers, decided at once to enlist the help of rural teachers. The latter, living as they do in the midst of the rural population, understanding their mentality, realising their difficulties and occupational deficiencies, and, at the same time, possessing their confidence, were eminently suited to serve as a medium between the new science of agronomics and those for whose benefit it is intended.

Thus, from the outset, general education has been instrumental in furthering the progress of agricultural knowledge.

2. The Development and Principles of Agricultural and Domestic Education.

Since 1860, the public authorities have devoted particular attention to agricultural and domestic education, which constitutes the principal factor in determining the standard of living among rural populations.

Side by side with all the different forms of education properly so-called—to which a brief reference will be made in due course—the Ministry of Agriculture has employed, in the education of the agricultural classes, various means of propaganda which have finally won acceptance.

These efforts to make known modern scientific discoveries and methods in the sphere of agriculture have duly increased the agricultural production of Belgium, so that, notwithstanding the density of the population (243 inhabitants per square kilometre), the agriculture of the country now supplies four-fifths of its food requirements.

It is believed, moreover, that, thanks to the close network of agricultural, horticultural and domestic science facilities at present existing, the majority of the young people of either sex are now conversant with the methods and processes best suited to their particular occupation.

One last point is deserving of mention.

¹ Until 1932, the organisation of agricultural education was entirely in the hands of the Ministry of Agriculture. In 1932, it was transferred to the Ministry of Education (Office for Technical Training), the Ministry of Agriculture remaining responsible for its technical direction.

The public authorities, in all their efforts to disseminate recent scientific data of interest to farmers, have consistently borne in mind the following considerations :

(1) The need for encouraging private initiative and granting subsidies whenever suitable. The subsidy system was revised when the Office for Technical Education was opened in 1932. There are definite rules for subsidies, which are granted on the recommendation of technical and administrative inspectors.

(2) The need for taking into account regional requirements and the mentality of the farmers, to whom the well-known saying that "nothing reaches the mind otherwise than through the senses" is particularly applicable.

(3) The need for forgetting book-learning and seeing that the instruction given is practical, self-explanatory and in keeping with the realities of the life of the agricultural masses.

(4) The need for framing suitable programmes.

PART II.—AGRICULTURAL EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS

I. *Education of Boys and Youths.*

(a) *Higher Education.*

Higher Agricultural Institutes.—The organisation of higher agricultural education has been carried out in virtue of the Law of 1860, as amended by the Laws of April 4th, 1890, and November 15th, 1919.

More recently, under the Royal Decree of June 30th, 1933, and, in particular, the Royal Decrees of October 31st, 1933, and April 30th, 1934, the curricula and statutes of the State institutes have been revised, as have the conditions for the conferring of diplomas. There are three higher agricultural institutes : at Gembloux, Ghent and Louvain.

The first two, situated respectively in the centre of the two main linguistic regions, are State institutions, the third being attached to the free University of Louvain.

All three establishments provide higher agricultural education.

The Royal Decree of October 31st, 1934, lays down the conditions for admission and for the conferring of diplomas.

For admission to the first year's course, students must be 16 full years of age and must hold a higher middle-grade certificate (*certificat d'études moyennes du degré supérieur*) or a certificate showing that they have passed one of the

preparatory examinations prescribed by the Law of April 10th, 1890-July 10th, 1891, on the conferring of academic degrees and the programme of university examinations. Admission is also granted to holders of certificates stating that they have passed the entrance examination for the Military Academy (Special Arms Section) or schools conferring the diploma of civil engineer.

Foreigners applying for admission must produce evidence that they have attained a degree of educational proficiency equivalent to what is required in the case of Belgian students.

Under the terms of the above-mentioned Royal Decree of October 31st, 1934, the instruction consists of three stages : the first comprises two years' study, on the conclusion of which a diploma of *candidat ingénieur agronome* is conferred ; the second also comprises two years' study, on the conclusion of which the degree of *ingénieur agronome* or *ingénieur chimiste agronome* is conferred ; the third comprises one year's optional study, on the conclusion of which degrees are conferred in the following special subjects : watercourses and forestry (eaux et forêts), colonial agronomy, horticulture, rural engineering, agricultural industries.

Holders of these degrees enjoy legal protection (Law of September 11th, 1933).

Agricultural Stations.—Attached to the State Agricultural Institutes are the following agricultural stations : Rural Engineering Station, Dairy-work Station, Phytopathological Station, Entomological Station, Research Station for the Improvement of Plants cultivated on a Large Scale, Agricultural Chemistry and Physics Station, Forestry Station, Rural Economy Station, Station for the Improvement of Forage Plants. These various stations are specially equipped for scientific and experimental agricultural research. They also provide farmers with information on request.

Schools of Veterinary Medicine.—The schools of veterinary medicine are organised in accordance with the principles laid down by the Law of April 4th, 1890, as amended by the Laws of May 28th, 1906, and May 23rd, 1924, and the Royal Decrees for their execution.

The oldest school is that of Cureghem-Anderlecht.

Recently, a veterinary school, where the only language used is Flemish, was attached to the Medical Faculty of the State University at Ghent.

For admission, students must hold the diploma of *candidat en sciences* (veterinary medicine group).

The period of study is four years.

The diploma of *candidat vétérinaire* is conferred after one year's study and an examination consisting of a single test.

The degree of *docteur en médecine vétérinaire* is obtained on the results of an examination consisting of three separate tests at intervals of not less than one year.

(b) *Middle-grade Agricultural Education.*

The organisation of the first middle-grade agricultural schools in Belgium was due to private initiative, supported, as stated above, by the public authorities.

The education provided at this stage may be considered under two heads ; schools and sections. Both are intended for farmers' sons with a middle-grade education.

Schools.—Pupils are admitted after having passed the third elementary standard. They continue to receive general instruction to the extent laid down by the Law on Elementary Education and the special rules applicable to agricultural schools.

The normal period of study is three years.

These schools usually have a farm at their disposal, with the land required for agricultural and other demonstrations.

There is only one State middle-grade school. All the others belong to the provinces or to special autonomous committees subsidised by the State.

Sections.—These are as a rule attached to the middle-grade general educational establishments (humanities section, lower standard). Pupils belonging to the agricultural section all attend certain agricultural courses which are not attended by students belonging to the classical or modern sections, and *vice versa*.

(c) *Post-school Agricultural Education.*

This type of education applies to young people of 14 years and over employed on the farm, who are no longer liable to compulsory school attendance.

It may be considered from several aspects.

Post-school Sections.—These are organised by the Government agricultural experts, private individuals and agricultural associations. They are on the lines of the temporary winter courses for adults.

The courses are generally held at the elementary school and the instructor is often the school-teacher himself, provided that he holds the special diploma conferred after attending a normal agricultural course.

The Government agricultural experts are responsible for the technical inspection of post-school sections.

The instruction is free of charge.

As a rule, the programme covers two years—*i.e.*, 100 hours each year—devoted to the study of plants and animals in turn. But the time-table may be reduced to a smaller number of hours (minimum 30 hours).

One or two excursions of an optional character to places of agricultural interest may be organised at the conclusion of the course.

Regional Agricultural Schools.—The regional school is intended primarily for students who have previously attended a post-school section course. This type of education may be compared with the industrial school for technical education proper, which the worker attends at night, after his work, in order to obtain from specialist teachers the scientific knowledge of his trade which will enable him to become a skilled worker.

The courses at the regional agricultural schools are held during the day, throughout the winter. As in industrial schools, there is a specialist teaching staff. It is recruited from among agricultural engineers, horticulturists, electricians, mechanics, accountants, veterinary surgeons and doctors of law.

The programme, totalling 100 to 240 hours a year, may be spread over a period of two years.

The State organises schools of this kind through its agricultural experts. Under certain conditions, it also subsidises schools founded by private individuals or agricultural associations.

Courses and Lectures.—Courses and lectures are a popular means of disseminating agricultural knowledge.

They too are held during the winter, during the week or on Sundays, according to the region. They consist of a talk on some subject included in the programme of agricultural schools in general, after which the lecturer converses with members of the audience and gives any additional information connected with his lecture.

These talks and this form of direct contact with farmers, which at first were inevitably greeted with indifference and even mistrust, finally became popular.

They did much during a period of agricultural depression (1884-1895) to assist farmers, to help to get them out of a rut, and to introduce modern methods of cultivation and stock-breeding. They are most valuable in the present period of agricultural difficulty.

The success of these talks among young farmers suggested the same idea for the organisation of leisure in the case of men in military service.

“Courses for the troops” have now been instituted in the barracks for members of the forces who are farmers.

Lectures on subjects of topical interest are also given in connection with agricultural congresses, competitions and exhibitions, and are largely attended by farmers who come to these agricultural gatherings.

Lectures subsidised by the Ministry of Agriculture are subject to inspection by State agricultural experts.

School of Farriery and Agricultural Mechanics.—Side by side with agricultural education proper should be mentioned, as of very real interest from the point of view of agriculture, the training given in farriery and agricultural mechanics.

There is only one farriery school in Belgium—the Central Practical Farriery School belonging to the State, at Anderlecht, a commune in the Brussels district.

Pupils are recruited from among those who have passed out successfully from the farriery courses instituted by the Ministry of Agriculture.

The school confers the diploma of *Maitre maréchal ferrant*. The courses are held daily, except Sundays, from October to the end of July.

This school has indirectly rendered great service to agriculture : village blacksmiths holding its diploma are tradesmen with superior training.

Moreover, being acquainted with the anatomy and physiological and pathological peculiarities of the horse's hoof, they pursue their trade knowledgeably—one might almost say in a humane fashion—thus prolonging the useful life of the horse in a country, such as Belgium, where the small and medium-sized farms, of which the arable land mostly consists, cannot afford mechanical traction.

Mechanics, which is included in the curricula of the middle-grade schools and also of the regional schools, is taught as a special subject at two schools.

2. Education of Girls.

Instruction in agricultural domestic science, like the instruction provided for boys and youths, is very conveniently arranged in three stages : higher-grade, middle-grade, elementary.

(a) Higher Education.

The first higher-grade school for agricultural domestic science was founded by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1919 ; it is the Institut normal supérieur d'économie ménagère agricole at Laeken (Brussels). Immediately afterwards, six other schools were founded in succession, by religious communities.

There are still five of these, approved and subsidised by the State.

The course is a three year one, on the conclusion of which the diploma of *régente ménagère agricole* is conferred.

Elementary-school teachers and *régentes* are allowed to take the course in two years.

The period of study will shortly be increased to four years, to supplement the general and pedagogic training of future *régentes*.

The object of these higher-grade schools for agricultural domestic economy is twofold : to train *régentes ménagères agricoles* who intend to teach, and to prepare a picked body of women for rural organisations, who can if necessary take charge of a farm.

Candidates must be 16 full years of age on December 31st of the year of admission.

The curriculum includes the usual general subjects, natural science, agricultural science, domestic economy and pedagogics.

More than half the time-table consists of practical work.

(b) *Middle-grade Education.*

Schools.—These schools are intended for girls who have passed out of the third elementary-school standard. The course is normally a three-year one.

They are attended by farmers' daughters and other country girls desirous of preparing themselves for their future rôles as mothers, rural housekeepers and farmers' wives.

The curriculum is based on this triple objective and includes the usual general subjects, theoretical courses in natural science, domestic economy, agricultural science and hygiene, and, more particularly, practical courses in nutrition (cooking) and housewifery.

All the middle-grade agricultural domestic science schools, except two belonging to provinces, are organised by autonomous committees. The State has no schools of this kind ; it subsidises the others under certain conditions.

There is generally a boarding-establishment attached to the school, which itself forms one of a group of schools belonging to some autonomous organisation.

Sections.—The sections differ from the schools only as regards the period of study and the scope of the curriculum. The latter is spread over a period of two years, each including 300 hours. The courses are held throughout the winter, in the daytime, on several days or half-days each week.

For admission, girls must be not less than 14 years of age.

(c) *Elementary Education.*

Elementary instruction in agricultural domestic science, which is organised, as in the case of boys, in the form of post-school sections and courses and lectures, also takes the special form of travelling State schools.

Post-school Agricultural Domestic Sections.—The minimum age of admission is 14 years.

Instruction is entrusted preferably to *régentes ménagères agricoles*. Some sections are still staffed by elementary-school teachers who have attended ordinary holiday courses and hold the special diploma for the teaching of agricultural domestic economy.

All post-school sections are on a footing of equality from the point of view of State subsidies.

The curriculum comprises 200 hours, which may be spread over two years. The courses are generally held in the winter, in the daytime, at the hours most suitable for regular attendance. Certain sections hold their courses on Sunday mornings.

The following table shows the number of hours devoted to the various subjects in a two-year curriculum :

	Hours
Nutrition	48
Washing and ironing	25
Dressmaking	40
Hygiene	16
Domestic economy	9
Zootchnics	15
Dairying	15
Poultry-keeping	10
Agriculture and gardening	20
Agricultural associations	2
Total	200

Travelling Agricultural Schools of Domestic Economy.—The travelling agricultural domestic economy schools afford an interesting opportunity for the professional training of the country housewife. Whereas young girls who wish to attend secondary or intermediate schools are compelled to leave their villages and exchange family life for that of the boarding school, the travelling schools move from village to village, provided with all the necessary material for teaching, class equipment, kitchen, dairy fittings and the necessary machinery for cheese-making, laundering and ironing. Sometimes agricultural machinery is used for demonstrations of incubators and foster-mothers.

The travelling schools also carry with them a library of books.

The courses last from three to four months (one session). Sometimes, where the school attendance is sufficient, there is a second session in the same locality.

The communal administrations, or the associations which apply for the travelling school teaching, are obliged to supply adequate premises.

Teaching is given daily, except, as a rule, on Saturday. The practical courses take place in the morning (three hours) and the theoretical courses in the afternoon (two hours).

Teaching is thus essentially practical and based on actual demonstrations.

The pupils are divided into two groups for the practical courses and combined for the theoretical courses.

Pupils under 14 years of age are not accepted, except in very infrequent cases by special permission of the Cantonal Inspector of Elementary Education.

The teaching is exclusively in the hands of the agricultural domestic economy teachers, two in number; and the management of the schools is in the hands of the agricultural domestic economy advisers, who are attached to the Popularisation Service which will be dealt with below.

There are nineteen travelling schools—that is to say, an average of two to each province.

Shortened Courses : Lectures.—Shortened courses of agricultural domestic economy are held where the seasonal agricultural work is such as to make attendance at a travelling school for four months impossible.

Shortened courses of two to three weeks may be organised either in rural or semi-rural centres.

These courses follow the programme of the permanent and travelling schools in an abridged form. They are excellent propaganda for a more extensive system of training.

They are generally organised by the agricultural domestic economy advisers. Where this is so, the State is responsible for the entire cost.

Lectures are given on Sundays or in the week, as local conditions may require, at the demand of the independent women's associations. The State gives grants on the report of the agricultural domestic economy advisers, one of whose duties it is to supervise this particular form of activity.

Other features of interest to farmers' wives are the milking competitions (at which the agricultural domestic economy teachers of the travelling schools give demonstrations and advice on hygienic milking, conservation of cream and butter-making) and the gardening and window-box competitions which are a development of the movement, originating in the celebrations of the Centenary of National Independence, to make Belgium a "land of flowers".

3. *Horticultural Training.*

Horticultural training is organised on the same lines as the agricultural training described ; and its development is proceeding, within its natural limits, in directions similar to those of the latter.

Horticulture is a subject in the programme of higher educational institutions (horticultural section).

In intermediate education, there are two State schools, one at Ghent and the other at Vilvorde. The studies at these schools last three years ; and the best pupils are given facilities to enable them to spend a fourth year there as probationers.

These schools give preference to the sons of actual horticulturists.

Besides the two official schools, there are also about a dozen independent schools in receipt of grants of public money.

In lower-grade institutions, the teaching of horticulture is organised on similar lines to agricultural training—viz., in temporary courses, district schools and courses for teachers.

The State horticultural advisers are responsible for the inspection of the various courses.

4. *Service of Agricultural Information Propaganda.*

(a) *State Agricultural Experts.*

The State Agricultural Expert Service dates from 1884, in which year the Ministry of Agriculture was set up. From the outset, these technical experts have lived among persons actually engaged in agriculture. Their main duties are :

(a) To popularise the conceptions and processes of agricultural science—*e.g.*, by lectures, verbal or written consultations, demonstrations and experiments and so on ; they get into direct touch with agriculturists and give them advice, free of charge, as desired ;

(b) To inform agriculturists of the advantages they may derive from combined organisation, and furnish particulars of the organisation and working of agricultural groups ;

(c) To keep the Central Administration informed as to the activities of official agricultural societies and agricultural societies in receipt of State grants within their several official districts, and to report as to the inducements which should be made available ;

(d) To organise and direct agricultural courses for adults within their several districts.

Certain provinces and agricultural associations, taking example from the State, have engaged agricultural experts for the technical management of their internal or external activities.

(b) *Horticultural Advisers.*

The horticultural advisers are for horticulture what the agricultural experts are for agriculture.

This service was set up some years before the war at the same time as the Horticultural Office at the Ministry of Agriculture.

(c) *Agricultural Domestic Economy Advisers.*

The service of agricultural domestic economy advisers was set up after the war. They are, as the name indicates, primarily advisers in connection with the activities of farmers' and other rural housewives.

The agricultural domestic economy advisers organise and direct the State travelling schools and shortened courses. They act as inspectors for the courses and lectures to farmers' wives: they help organise competitions in the women's associations; and they give advice, and reply to requests for advice. They organise milking competitions, milking days, experiments in the rational feeding of cattle, and so on.

There is one agricultural domestic economy adviser for each province.

(d) *Zootechnical Advisers.*

The activities of zootechnical advisers are limited to the application of genetic data in connection with the improvement of breeds of domestic animals.

(e) *Publication of Literature.*

The Ministry of Agriculture publishes a collection of pamphlets in the form of advice to agriculturists containing the laws, decrees and instructions concerning agricultural training. Since 1932, when the agricultural schools were attached to the Ministry of Education, a special collection of documentary material relating to the legal position of agricultural teachers in relation to the State has been prepared to serve as an "Agricultural Education Code".

In addition to the regulations, the Ministry of Agriculture also publishes a number of popular pamphlets in the form of "Advice to Agriculturists" and "Model Lessons for Horticulturists", giving succinct and simple information of special interest to agriculturists, horticulturists and farmers' and other rural housewives.

TABLE SHOWING THE PRESENT SITUATION IN REGARD TO AGRICULTURAL TRAINING IN BELGIUM¹

Nature of institution		Numbers
A.	State Veterinary School	1
	Central School of Practical Farriery	1
B.	Agricultural training :	
	1. Agricultural institutions :	
	State	2
	Independent	1
	2. Middle-grade schools :	
	State	1
	Independent	18
	Middle-grade Sections :	
	Independent	21
	(a) After-school agricultural sections ..	597
	(b) District schools	100
	(c) Teachers' training courses	6
C.	Horticultural training :	
	(a) Middle-grade schools :	
	State	2
	Independent	12
	(b) Post-school training :	
	(a) Post-school sections	8
	(b) District courses	59
	(c) Teachers' training courses	1
D.	Agricultural Domestic Economy Training :	
	(a) Higher institutions :	
	State	1
	Independent	6
	(b) Middle-grade schools and Sections in receipt of grants	42
	(c) Domestic economy district courses	31
	Women teachers' training courses	1
	Post-school agricultural domestic economy sections ..	168

¹ Year 1936/37.

B. PEASANT ART, PEASANT CULTURE, FOLKLORE

Education has been developed among the peasant class, and, since the middle of the nineteenth century, has been extended to the very numerous category of small agriculturists and farm labourers. At the present time, there are very few farms in which a local newspaper or weekly is not taken; and the same applies to technical periodicals and books. Public libraries in the past twenty years or so have been increasingly popular in country districts. During the winter season, many villages organise popular lectures (similar to university extension lectures) which are extremely well attended. Agricultural lectures, and those which are specially intended for farmers' wives and young agriculturists, always find an eager audience. Popular theatres and musical societies (bugle bands, choral societies, etc.) flourish even in the most out-of-the-way parts of the country. The younger generation, thanks to the schools, is beginning to speak a more educated language.

Peasant art (or rather "popular art"—that is to say, the art of rural artisans) has almost entirely disappeared in Belgium, where communications are easy and the process of industrialisation dates from the first half of the nineteenth century. Local costumes and furniture no longer exist, and any revival of them can only be artificial. On the other hand, there is a very considerable movement for the study of the home country (*Heimatkunde*). In many places, there is already a local museum. The new elementary education schedule attaches great importance to a study of village conditions. The collective "folklore" manifestations (festivals, processions, pageants, etc.) have lost none of their former spirit. It is rather family and individual folklore which has declined. Several organisations are trying to revive the old popular dances; and publications connected with local history and folklore are very numerous.

C. ORGANISATION OF LEISURE IN THE COUNTRY

In the winter evenings, the family room is better heated and lighted than formerly. Newspapers, reviews and books have found their way into the farm. The family *reads*. On the other hand, the family folklore treasury of stories, legends, songs, riddles and the like, which formerly served to kill time round the hearth in a badly lighted room, are becoming a thing of the past. The *wireless* has reached a number of farms, bringing a new means of entertainment. Of family pastimes, cards are almost the only one remaining.

Journeymen jobs in winter and gardening in summer have not ceased to find favour in the eyes of many peasants; and the women knit, mend, etc., where their grandmothers spun.

On Sundays after Mass, the peasants visit the café, and, in the afternoon, when the weather is suitable, they go for a walk in the fields. The younger generation take an interest in cycling, or in carrier-pigeon competitions. Cinemas and dance-halls (at the innumerable local Kermessen or in the neighbouring town) are a potent attraction ; but, in the last few years, there has been a considerable reaction on the part of the youth organisations against the materialistic conceptions of life which were threatening in the post-war years to annihilate the moral sense of the rural, no less than of the urban, population.

The activities of the various cultural organisations (lectures and readings in the Flemish provinces, activities of the Davids Fund, musical societies, village theatres, etc.) are in general appreciated by the peasant population.

The inhabitant of the country districts is no longer what he was—a stay-at-home. He is quite prepared, for example, to take part in collective tourist excursions by cycle or autocar.

It may in short be said that the peasant's spare time is at once better organised and more varied than it used to be.

VI. MEDICO-SOCIAL POLICY

The State has taken an active interest in improving the health conditions of the rural population, particularly of recent years and since the creation of the Public Health Department, which has done much to encourage the establishment of hospitals, hostels and maternity homes and the institution of health centres, playing-fields and swimming-baths.

As a rule, the central authority confines itself to encouraging district or local schemes. It subsidises and supervises the work of the provinces, communes and communal associations. Administrative activities follow the principle of communal autonomy. This principle is adhered to, subject to such modifications as may be required in the general interest, and with occasional allowances for more local considerations. While, therefore, the central authority does not directly interfere with communal prerogatives, it has one particularly effective weapon at its disposal : it can refuse to subsidise works of which it does not approve. When it does give its approval, the subsidy is substantial, one-third of the cost being paid by the Public Health Department and one-third by the Ministry for Public Works and Unemployment.

Notwithstanding this encouragement, the more thinly-populated rural communes show little enterprise. The Government's problem is to decide when, to what extent and by what means certain less fortunately placed communes shall be given the advantages already possessed by others. Institutions will often have to be opened or work be carried out to meet the needs of several smaller communities : the idea of building a small hospital cannot be entertained. Rather, a completely equipped hospital should be founded, to serve several communities. The communes are not widely separated and are usually supplied with excellent means of communication. At the same time, distance still constitutes a difficult problem. A peasant only leaves his home when this is absolutely essential. In less serious cases, arrangements must be made to have him examined and treated on the spot. That is why the authorities are considering the creation of travelling dispensaries completely equipped for such work. For some years, the Province of Liège has had a travelling X-ray laboratory for detecting tuberculosis among school-children. A larger supply of these vehicles would greatly increase the efficiency of school medical inspection, which still leaves much to be desired.

Travelling dental clinics are required, to overcome the deep-rooted indifference of country dwellers to the care of the mouth and teeth.

The work done by the public authorities in the field of public health needs to be supported by intensive propaganda with a view to making the principles of hygiene more widely known. Propaganda of this kind is particularly necessary among the less enlightened country population.

Propaganda has indeed been very successfully conducted by means of the health drives instituted by the Health Department under the direction of the Belgian Red Cross in 1937 and 1938.

With the participation of all kinds of organisations and the co-operation of the medical and teaching professions, of national agencies, women's leagues, athletic associations, etc., these health drives have been the means of organising both in rural areas and in urban centres, lectures, courses and demonstrations which have been enthusiastically attended by tens of thousands of adults and children.

To take a case in point, in the Province of Namur alone, with its 366 communes and a population of about 356,000, the representatives of the Central Committee of the Red Cross carried out a systematic inspection of 159 communes ; it made a detailed investigation into the health situation, obtaining its information from burgomasters, doctors and principals of schools, and drew up reports on the conclusion of each visit. In this province, the health crusade was particularly actively carried on in the schools : five important pedagogical lectures were organised, attended by 400 teachers. Practical talks were given in 106 schools, for the benefit of some 10,590 children.

In the sphere of nutrition, public attention was drawn to the adulteration of foodstuffs by means of three large exhibitions, at which talks and demonstrations were given, in particular by the Belgian National Anti-Tuberculosis League and the "Œuvre nationale de l'enfance".

Emphasis should also be laid on the work done by such agencies as the country housewives' clubs, the women's Christian leagues and the "Femmes prévoyantes socialistes", which reach thousands of women and girls in different communes.

The enormous interest aroused by these activities and the various schemes which have been initiated as a result show the importance attached to health questions by rural and urban dwellers alike.

VII. NUTRITION

In 1935, the Ministry of Health carried out an exhaustive survey of the effects of the economic depression on the health of adolescents. The surprising discovery was made that it was the young people in the country who were undernourished, not those who lived in industrial centres suffering from unemployment.

Like townpeople, country dwellers do not consume sufficient quantities of the protective foods (milk, butter, eggs, meat, green vegetables, fresh fruit). They produce these foodstuffs but, from poverty or false economy, abstain from eating them. Except when they are well off, peasant families do not kill more than one pig a year and they buy meat only on Sundays; margarine takes the place of butter, not enough vegetables are eaten and, above all, the diet is not sufficiently varied.

VIII. RURAL PLANNING

A. REGIONAL : TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS ; WATER-SUPPLY ; SEWAGE DISPOSAL ; ELECTRIFICATION, ETC.

1. *Transport.*

Belgium is one of the countries where public transport facilities are very highly developed.

There is an extremely dense network of standard-gauge railways operating about 5,732 kilometres of lines over an area of 30,506 square kilometres.

Narrow-gauge railways total 5,130 kilometres, 3,863 kilometres worked by steam and 1,267 by electricity (in 1935).

Motor-bus services have greatly increased ; on December 31st, 1937, there were 484 regular lines, with 1,400 vehicles, compared with 125 lines in 1929.

As regards transport, therefore, rural areas are well served.

2. *Communications.*

The Belgian State owns 8,832 kilometres of roads and the provinces 1,585 kilometres.

There are 1,703 kilometres of secondary roads, of which 1,411 kilometres are of *pavé* (stone sets) while 292 have a metal surface. The upkeep of the latter might be considerably improved.

3. *Water-supply : Sewage Disposal.*

In 1850, only five communes had proper water-supply systems ; the figure had risen to 573 in 1912 and 738 in 1935. On January 1st, 1938, 883 communes out of a total of 2,672 had regular water-supply systems.

The above figures show the steady progress and the special efforts made in recent years.

This progress is due to the Société nationale de distribution d'eau, which was formed on May 15th, 1914, by the State and the nine provinces, and to the Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, which, through the agency of its Public Health Works Inspectorate, concerns itself more particularly with the various autonomous water-supply services (communal and inter-communal services).

The Public Health Works Inspectorate examines and rectifies plans, sanctions tenders and supervises the execution of works.

Works are subsidised to the extent of one-third by the Public Health Department, and a further one-third grant may be made by the Department for Public Works and Unemployment.

In spite of the activity thus shown, 67% of the communes were still without any water-supply system on January 1st, 1938. True, these were all smaller and less thickly-populated communes, but they nevertheless comprised 3,288,561 out of a total population of 8,330,959.

On December 31st, 1930, there were 2,357 communes—out of a total of 2,671—with less than 5,000 inhabitants, making up 3,198,321 of the total population of 8,092,004. It will be seen that the 3,288,561 inhabitants who, on January 1st, 1938, were without any public water-supply system, represent almost the whole population of the smaller rural communes.

The number of water-supply systems, however, is in point of fact greater than the figures shown; many communes have several independent systems, chiefly in Luxemburg and the areas in the south of the provinces of Liège and Namur, where there are very large communes grouping a number of separate settlements or hamlets.

On the other hand, not all the inhabitants of communes with a water-supply system are necessarily supplied by that system. In many cases, the water is piped only to part of the commune; again, isolated inhabitants may often not be connected with the water-supply because they live at a distance from the built-up area.

Bearing in mind these two observations, the present position is that two out of every five Belgians still have to obtain their supplies from springs, wells or pumps. Most of these peasants need large quantities of water for their stables or byres, for preparing cattle-feed and for dairy work.

The lack of a water-supply system means extra physical fatigue, and considerable loss of time. Reckoning the time spent in fetching water at the ordinary wage rate, it will be found that the cost of this "free" water is two or three times higher than if water were laid on. The actual installation costs per head of the population are low. They vary, of course, with the size of the commune, being proportionately higher in the less thickly-populated communes. But even in communes with under 3,000 inhabitants, the cost of installation does not on the average amount to more than 21 centimes per head per day. Counting Government grants, it is only 7 centimes per inhabitant per day.

It should be added that the installation of a public water-supply system not only lessens the work of the rural population, but is at the same time a powerful contributory factor in improving its health, the health of the live-stock and the quality of the farm produce.

The effect of increasing the number of water-supply systems is particularly noticeable in connection with the campaign against typhoid fever.

Between 1850 and 1880, the death rate from this disease varied between 65 and 110 per 100,000 inhabitants; that figure has gradually declined to under 10 in the last twenty-five years and under 2 in recent years.

Closely connected with the problem of water-supply systems is that of sewage disposal.

On December 31st, 1930, only 550 out of the 2,670 communes had sewage disposal systems, these being lacking mainly in the rural communes. Some of the latter possessed drains for the evacuation of waste water, but they had never worked out a comprehensive drainage scheme, even though State grants were available on the same scale as for water-supply systems.

Problems still awaiting solution are the draining of ponds, which constitute centres of infection for animal diseases—such as strangles, glanders and foot-and-mouth disease—and represent a constant source of danger to children; the improvement of dung-pits, which should be cemented and fitted with a curb to prevent the leakage of liquid manure; and lastly, the improvement of stables or byres, for which purpose the State makes a grant of 30% of the cost of the work.

Much still remains to be done in these various respects.

4. *Electrification.*

There are only some ten communes left in the whole of Belgium which are not connected up with some central source of electricity supply. To electrify isolated hamlets and farms, an additional 35,000 kilometres of high- and low-tension lines would have to be constructed. The Department of Agriculture gives grants to the extent of 20% of the cost of work of this kind. If the grants remain at the same figure in future years, the electrification will be completed by 1943.

While, however, electricity is available in almost all communes, its effective and rational use in farmhouses and on farms is still little developed.

In most cases, farmers only use electricity to light their houses and sheds. The installation is sometimes of a very rudimentary character; and with their ingrained frugality, farmers are satisfied with a few lamps of very low lighting power.

The use of electrical installations in households (cooking-stoves, drying-machines, washing-machines, irons, etc.) and farms (lighting of hen-houses, use of electric incubators and foster-mothers, heating of hot-beds and greenhouses, etc.) is uncommon. Development in this connection has still to come.

Electric threshing and ploughing are not practicable, except on very large farms, of which there are few. A company in the east of Belgium began to hire out electric threshers in 1933 at a relatively low charge (some 25 francs an hour). The following table shows the headway made by this undertaking :

	1933	1934	1935	1936
Number of threshers used . .	3	3	3	4
Number of farms served . .	198	240	220	384
Number of tons of grain threshed	750	930	800	960
Consumption (kwh.)	5,750	7,870	8,202	11,801

Electric ploughing is unknown.

B. STATE ACTION IN SUPPORT OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND CENTRAL ORGANISATIONS

I. *Public Libraries.*

Belgium has a very complete and well-organised system of public libraries. Its existence is due mainly to the Law of October 17th, 1921, on Public Libraries, the principal provisions of which are as follows :

“ Communes may establish communal libraries or adopt one or more such, according to their requirements. In communes where there is no library of the kind to which the present Law relates, the communal administration shall be bound to establish such a library whenever so requested by not less than one-fifth of the whole body of electors of the commune. All communes establishing or adopting libraries must devote not less than 25 centimes per head of the communal population to the installation, upkeep and development of the library. Libraries, whether communal, adopted or free, shall have the benefit of State support and State grants if they comply with the following conditions :

“ (a) They must have suitable premises ;

“ (b) They must have a minimum number of books and make a minimum number of loans ;

“ (c) They must be accessible to all ;

“ (d) They must make no charge ;

“ (e) They must be open for lending purposes a minimum number of times per week ;

- “ (f) They must submit to State inspection ;
“ (g) They must be managed by a librarian possessing a certificate of qualifications, issued by a State board of examiners.”

The State makes annual grants of books (the extent of the grant varying according to the classification of the library) and pays annual salaries to librarians (varying according to the size of the commune).

As a result of these inducements, as also of continual propaganda by public library inspectors, libraries of this kind have spread to an extent exceeding all expectations, especially in country districts.

The following figures show the progress made since the Law of 1921 was passed :

In 1920, there were 1,370 libraries of a more or less public character in Belgium. Many of them were only semi-public—such as school libraries, technical libraries, libraries of societies, etc.

At the present time, the number of recognised libraries complying with all the conditions laid down by the Law is 2,370.

In 1922, the number of volumes in the possession of recognised public libraries was 1,540,547. At the present time, the number is 5,245,527.

In 1922, the number of loans of books by these libraries was 2,686,319. At the present time, it is 9,898,967.

At the head of these libraries are 2,441 librarians, the majority of whom hold librarianship certificates.

Belgium may not have the large model libraries of which the United States and the United Kingdom can boast ; but it may be said that reading facilities have penetrated to the remotest parts of the Belgian countryside.

Both the librarians, moreover, and the inspectors constantly endeavour to raise the standard of books borrowed.

2. *Inducements to Private Organisations.*

The inducements offered to private organisations derive first from the Post-school Organisation Department and, secondly, from the National Office for Workers' Spare-time. The former, which was set up in 1922, gives grants to all school continuation training activities. The grants are given chiefly for lectures, educational film displays, high-class dramatic performances and concerts.

In addition to the work done by the Ministry of Education, magnificent work is being done for the cultural development of the Belgian rural population by private institutions such as

the Davids Fund and the Socialist Workers Educational Centres :

(a) *The Davids Fund*.—In 1936, the local sections of this important fund gave 724 dramatic performances or concerts and 1,316 lectures (a large number of them with films¹) and held 254 meetings of young people and 154 film exhibitions, and arranged for 360 travel study trips and 177 competitions. It further organised 477 public libraries. The great majority of these activities were for the benefit of the rural population.

(b) *The Workers' Educational Centre* confines its activities almost entirely to industrial workers in towns and industrial centres, and consequently is not a movement affecting the purely rural population.

Mention might also be made of the Willems Fund, the objects of which are substantially the same as those of the Davids Fund ; but its eminently fruitful and well-organised activities are mainly confined to urban centres.

C. RURAL DWELLINGS AND OUTBUILDINGS

Not so very long ago, a well-to-do peasant with a taste for novelty and display, who wished to build himself a fine house, would erect a commonplace dwelling of an urban type, with unwindowed gables and more than one storey, which was both ugly and inconvenient, while the poor peasant sometimes lived in an inadequate and insanitary dwelling, without air or light. Both types of dwelling were a blot on the beauties of the villages, out of harmony with the fine farmhouses and other rural buildings of the past, whose simple and characteristically regional style served to enhance the rustic charm of the countryside. The problem was how to bring rural dwellings up to date.

But that does not mean that country houses should lose their rustic character. A country house which is not rustic in character can never be anything but a misplaced imitation of a town house. On the other hand, a rustic character is not incompatible with comfort.

The ideal dwelling is that which is best suited to the needs, manner of living, occupation and resources of the family which occupies it.

The external appearance of a country house is incidental to the primary consideration—viz., the number of rooms

¹ The Davids Fund has a centre for instruction by films, which has already 106 projectors of its own.

required. It is for the architect to produce something which is at once pleasing to look at and in harmony with local characteristics.

In this respect, the older rural dwellings in Belgium, with a single plain roof and minimum upkeep requirements, were much more rational.

The regional style, which is the outcome of regional habits and local materials, should be preserved as much as possible.

The defects still to be found in certain old buildings include :

Too few, or too small, rooms ;

Too low ceilings, not more than two metres from the floor ;

Absence of, or defects in, stone flooring, built flush with ground level ;

Dampness of walls owing to saltpetre rot ;

Absence or inadequacy of cellarage ;

Windows too narrow or too low to give good light ;

Non-existent or inadequate ventilation ;

Defective orientation ;

Direct communication between rooms, occupied by the family and premises occupied by animals.

To these constructional defects there may be added :

Lack of drinking-water, or water-supply from distant wells not always immune from surface infiltration ;

Rudimentary, offensive and insanitary water-closets ;

Lack of hygienic arrangements for disposing of dirty water, and dung-heap in the courtyard, rendering the surroundings dirty, unhealthy or malodorous.

Although these defects are not always found together, and the great majority of old buildings have been improved as far as was possible, there are still too many unsatisfactory dwelling-houses.

In the case of farms and small properties, the chief efforts made have been directed towards the improvement of the farm buildings or sheds for animals, towards which the Government gives grants, especially the improvement of stables, and the construction of liquid manure pits and barns for storing fodder.

The *slum* scourge is not confined to cities : it extends to rural regions, though it is not known to what precise extent.

A recent enquiry by the Provincial Government of West Flanders showed that 30% of the slum dwellings in the province were in rural communes. Statistics show that the number of victims of tuberculosis is proportionately greater in rural districts.

The National Smallholders' Society, whose activities date from some two years back, is conducting a vigorous campaign against rural slums.

Since 1905, the founders of the National Commission for the Beautification of Rural Life have set themselves to improve rural dwellings by active propaganda and, in particular, by the construction of model rural dwellings and farms for show at international exhibitions. The publicity given to these models, which are fruits of study by hygienists, agricultural experts and architectural specialists, has had a favourable effect on the work of improvement since that time in country districts.

CONCLUSION

All things considered, the Belgian cultivator can claim to have made in the past fifty years a big effort to improve his situation in every respect.

Industrious and frugal, he is able, by the united efforts of all the members of his family, to wrest the means of existence from the soil on properties which are often extremely small. By continually increasing the yield of the land and live-stock, the rural population has contrived to live—if not prosperously, at any rate to subsist—on a limited area. It has been asserted that the Belgians in the past fifty years have trebled the extent of their country without firing a shot.

As regards the technical aspects of production, the Belgian cultivator need not fear comparison with any of his neighbours ; but the same cannot perhaps be said of the marketing of his products. The commercial sense and its corollary the co-operative sense are not yet sufficiently developed in him. The economic difficulties with which he is confronted are no doubt due in the main to obstacles of an international character ; and the contribution that Government authorities can make in this direction is to mitigate as much as possible the effects of the prohibitions or other bars to the maintenance and expansion of the natural outlets for Belgian agricultural and horticultural produce.

Rural life in Belgium is dominated at the present time by the economic problem—in other words, by the problem of how to make agriculture pay. All social or hygienic improvement seems to be conditioned by the solution of this problem.

Accordingly, all efforts must be directed towards the improvement of the system of marketing, which is the precondition of any revival of rural life.



(Photo Lumière — OBLUT.)

Landscape in Brabant (Gaesbeek neighbourhood).