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A TYPICAL FARM IN SOUTH DEVON

Report, No. 1.

**AN AGRICULTURAL SURVEY
IN SOUTH DEVON**

J. R. CURRIE, M.S., B.Sc., N.D.A., N.D.D.,

DARTINGTON HALL

AND

W. H. LONG, B.A., Dip.(Agr.),

SEALE-HAYNE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

SEALE-HAYNE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

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AND

DARTINGTON HALL

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FOREWORD

The progress of overseas agricultural production, combined with quickness of modern transport and efficiency of cold storage, render the farmer vulnerable to-day to competition he has never before experienced. Beef from the Argentine, butter and mutton from New Zealand and Australia, pork, butter and bacon from Denmark, enter this country at prices the home producer cannot face. Farmers are slowly adjusting their type of output to the new conditions, and in the process of finding out what is profitable to produce and what is not, are naturally passing through a period of difficulty. The economist can help to find the correct answers to the following questions which are indeed of considerable importance to the whole community :

How can the producer obtain a fair return for his labour and on his outlay of capital?

How can a reasonable charge for distribution of farm products be ensured?

How can the consumer obtain high grade fresh farm products at reasonable prices?

To the farmer the answer to the first question is of vital importance, and it was with the object of assisting the farmers of South Devon to measure the results of their own system of farming with that of others in the neighbourhood, that this survey was undertaken jointly by Dartington Hall and Seale-Hayne Agricultural College, the former being an estate of 900 acres purchased in 1925 for the purpose of carrying out research and experiments in education and rural reconstruction.

Information obtained from financial farm accounts by the two institutions suggested that the best prospect for farming in the neighbourhood lay in transferring emphasis from the production and sale of beef, mutton and butter, to the production and sale of fluid milk, fresh eggs and poultry, products which are not easily imported and which are all in good demand in the rapidly growing seaside resorts of South Devon. A second object of the survey was, therefore, to ascertain, as far as possible, if this was borne out by the experience of not less than 200 farms in the same part of the country.

If, as is hoped, a survey can be made in the near future of the methods by which the different farm products of the neighbourhood are being marketed and distributed, we shall have travelled some distance along the road towards the achievement of our general aim.

We desire to express our gratitude to the farmers who supplied the information upon which this study is based, and without whose co-operation this work could not have appeared.

To Dr Warren, of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Farm Management, Cornell University (New York State College of Agriculture), for all the assistance he and his Department gave, and to Dr Pearson, Dr Misner, and Dr Ladd, for their assistance in compiling the data, we would tender our grateful thanks.

Acknowledgment is due to Mr D. Trevains, formerly of Seale-Hayne Agricultural College, and now with Messrs Nitram Ltd., for his valuable assistance in taking survey records, and to Mr A. R. Gans, Agricultural Economist of the Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station, Burlington Vermont, U.S.A.; to Mr E. C. Hope, of the University of British Columbia, Canada; to Professor R. J. Saville, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, U.S.A.; and to Mr E. C. Storm, Landwirtschaftliche Hochschule, Bonn, Germany—all graduate students at Cornell University, who assisted in the tabulation of part of the material.

L. K. ELMHIRST, *Director*.
Dartington Hall, Totnes.

D. R. EDWARDES-KER, *Principal*.
Seale-Hayne Agricultural College.

INTRODUCTION

A considerable part of the outstanding advance that has been made in agricultural economics has been due to the application of the survey method to agriculture. Human progress is primarily based on the trial and error method. Farmers, in their ordinary business of farming, must necessarily experiment with all kinds of methods, all kinds of crops, all kinds of livestock, and only by experience finally learn the best practices. Many of the most important experiments in the world are those conducted on ordinary farms. It is seldom, however, that a statistical analysis of results is made, and frequently not even the farmer who conducts the tests is in a position to appreciate fully their significance. Thus, it is very difficult for one generation to pass on to another the results of these many experiments. The survey method is a means of recording statistically the results of experiments on thousands of farms under widely varying conditions. The more that is known of the results of experiments that are being conducted by farmers in England and elsewhere, the less is the friction that the present and coming generations will have to overcome.

DEVELOPMENT OF SURVEY WORK

In 1911 Warren and Livermore published the results of an agricultural survey of Tompkins county, New York¹. This was the first farm management survey made in the United States, although L. H. Bailey had already made a number of field studies, of an observational nature, of conditions in New York, and two bulletins relating to apple orchards had been published². The possibilities of this form of research into problems of farm management were quickly appreciated. By 1914, Cornell University alone had taken 2743 records in New York State, while similar work was being done in 14 other States³. Between 1907 and 1924, 71,515 farm business records had been taken, in 435 localities, in 45 States⁴. By 1928, Cornell had taken 9371 survey records, and had published 32 bulletins relating to this line of research⁵, the total number⁶ published by this date in the United States of America was no less than 156.

¹ Warren, G. F. and Livermore, K. C., *An Agricultural Survey of Tompkins County, N.Y., Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 295*, March 1911.

² Warren, G. F. and McCourt, W. E., *An Apple Orchard Survey of Wayne County, N.Y., Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 226*, March 1905.

³ Warren, G. F., *An Apple Orchard Survey of Orleans County, Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 229*, May 1905.

⁴ Warren, G. F. and Livermore, K. C., *Some Important Factors for Success in General Farming and in Dairy Farming, Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 349*, p. 657, July 1914.

⁵ *United States Department of Agriculture Yearbook*, 1925, Table 652, p. 1306, 1926.

⁶ *Research Method and Procedure in Agricultural Economics*, published by the Advisory Committee on Economics and Social Research in Agriculture. The Social Science Research Council, p. 58, 1928.

⁷ Based on information obtained by Professor E. G. Misner for the Advisory Committee on Economics and Social Research in Agriculture. Social Science Research Council.

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