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Farmers

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OCCASIONAL PAPERS NO. 13

OCCUPATIONAL IMMOBILITY OF SMALL FARMERS

by

RUTH GASSON

A study of the reasons why small farmers
do not give up farming

Issued by the

FARM ECONOMICS BRANCH
DEPARTMENT OF LAND ECONOMY
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

January 1969

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Foreword

This is the third report on family farms issued by the Farm Economics Branch. The first¹ dealt with the income of small farmers and the possibilities of increasing it by intensification. This formed part of the background material used in formulating the Small Farmer Scheme. Although that scheme had a large measure of success in setting under-capitalised holdings on a sound basis, it became increasingly obvious that many of them were too small ever to provide a reasonable living for a family. The second report² thus dealt with the effect of increasing the size of small farms operated by one family. The possibilities of higher income were obviously substantial. This again was part of the material used in formulating the Payments to Outgoers Scheme, which provides pensions or lump-sum payments to farmers with uneconomic holdings to quit farming if they wish.

This report in some ways completes the picture. It is an attempt to discover the point of view of the family farmer himself. How does he view his future? Does he encourage his son to follow in his footsteps? What could he do if he left farming? The picture that emerges from this survey is on the whole reassuring. There are still many small farmers who like the life and have very little intention of leaving it. Their standard of living may be below that of a farm worker, who has invested no capital and faces none of their risks. But he has his compensations. Above all, he is his own boss. He may have to work longer hours than the wage-earner but no one tells him what he must do. This attitude is a warning to the economist, who may be tempted to measure human welfare entirely in terms of income per head. Money is an incentive, not for itself, (except for the miser) but for what it can buy in the satisfaction of wants and ambitions. The family farmer who owns his land is a capitalist, a manager and an employer in a small way and (so long as he stays solvent) he takes orders from no one. There are few people in industry, even among our highest-paid executives, who can claim as much.

There is, however, a price to be paid. The older man who has never known any other life is inured to hard work and is loath to change. His son, however, may resent the drudgery and lack of amenities and may be glad to quit as soon as the father dies. It should also be remembered that two significant groups are by definition omitted from this survey. There are the few gifted or lucky farmers who have climbed the farming ladder from a small to a large holding. Then there are the failures and the dissatisfied who have left the industry to find a more congenial life elsewhere. The latter are being followed by several thousand more every year. Although some of the farmers questioned were sceptical of the benefits of the new amalgamation scheme, it is still too soon to judge how much use will be made of it. There are probably many small farmers who are prudently waiting to see how the first applicants fare before they commit themselves to following suit. The requirement that the newly-formed unit shall not be broken up for forty years is also a handicap.³ This is far too long a period and in spite of official assurances that reasonable developments will not be hampered, it has frightened off landlords who do not wish to have their hands tied. The consequence is that elderly tenant smallholders who wish to retire may be deprived of a pension open to the owner-occupier, who also benefits from the proceeds of selling his land.

¹ *The Family Farm* F. G. Sturrock and D. B. Wallace. Occasional Paper No. 4, 1956.

² *The Optimum Size of Family Farm* F. G. Sturrock. Occasional Paper No. 9, 1965.

³ A limit of twenty years and if need be a regulation stating that no second grant will be given for the same land would surely be sufficient protection for the taxpayer.

The position is thus that small farmers have been given a capital injection to help them to make the best of their opportunities. They have also been provided with an exit if they wish to retire or try their fortune elsewhere. If they now choose to remain on their farms it is because they prefer the life and, it should be added, many of them are prosperous, happy and successful. Such men are an asset to any industry. They can be contrasted with the millions of small uneconomic holdings in Europe that can exist only with artificially high prices that are a burden on the taxpayer and the housewife.

The present writer is indebted to all the farmers who patiently answered the questions posed to them, to the co-operation of members of the National Agricultural Advisory Service and to Miss Gasson who, under the direction of Mr Wallace, has opened up a new field of investigation to the department. He is also glad of the encouragement given to such studies by Professor Sir Joseph Hutchinson, who has always believed that the economist's standpoint should be a balanced one.

F. G. Sturrock

Director, Farm Economics Branch

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the part played by the National Agricultural Advisory Service in this research project, in providing the sample, undertaking much of the early clerical work and for help and advice in the planning stages. I am most obliged to Mr. Burr, Director of the N.A.A.S. Eastern Region, Mr. Clarke, County Agricultural Adviser for Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely, the District Agricultural Advisers of Hertfordshire, the Holland division of Lincolnshire and the Isle of Ely and in particular to Mr. Woolley, who shared the field work. My thanks are due also to Mr. Sturrock, Director of the Farm Economics Branch, Mr. Wallace who initiated the project and helped at many stages, Dr. Turner, a sociologist at the University of East Anglia and to Mr. Hardaker, Mr. Popplestone and Mr. McLeod, all formerly at the Farm Economics Branch. My greatest debt is to the farmers, both in the sample and others, without whose help this survey could not have taken place.

Ruth Gasson

Contents

	FOREWORD	3
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
CHAPTER 1	THE SMALL FARMER PROBLEM Reasons for Remaining in Farming	7
CHAPTER 2	DESCRIPTION OF THE SURVEY Farming Patterns Contrasts in the Local Economies Numbers of Holdings The Survey and the Sample	12
CHAPTER 3	INCOMES OF SMALL FARMERS Farm Incomes and Profits Reactions to the Farm Income Situation Other Sources of Household Income Costs of Living	16
CHAPTER 4	OCCUPATIONAL IMMOBILITY Age, Training and Experience Choice of Other Occupations Comparisons over Time Locational Aspects	20
CHAPTER 5	PERSONAL IMMOBILITY Family Ties with Farming Ties with the District Local Contrasts Attitudes towards Moving Farms	24
CHAPTER 6	FARMING AS A WAY OF LIFE Farmers' Opinions on Farming Satisfaction with the Present Occupation	29
CHAPTER 7	PLANS FOR RETIREMENT Disposal of the Farm The 'Copper Handshake'	33
CHAPTER 8	GENERATIONAL MOBILITY Means of Starting to Farm The Rising Generation Succession to Farms	36
CHAPTER 9	CONCLUSIONS	40
APPENDIX 1	DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE	42
APPENDIX 2	INFLUENCE OF LOCATION ON POTENTIAL MOBILITY	43
APPENDIX 3	PERSONAL TIES WITH FARMING—SOME LOCAL COMPARISONS	44

CHAPTER 1

The Small Farmer Problem

The incomes of farmers in this country have been falling in comparison with the rest of the community. This has been shown by Bellerby,¹ who calculated the income per head of farmers and compared it with the income per head of the rest of the working population.* His index, the 'farmers' incentive income ratio', has been calculated for the post-war period (Table 1).² It showed that twenty years ago, farmers were earning rather more than the rest of the working population (e.g. 112 in 1948). This declined to 90 in 1959 and after a brief increase has again fallen to 90 in 1966. In other words, the farmer was earning for his manual work and his skill as a manager only nine-tenths as much as the rest of the population.

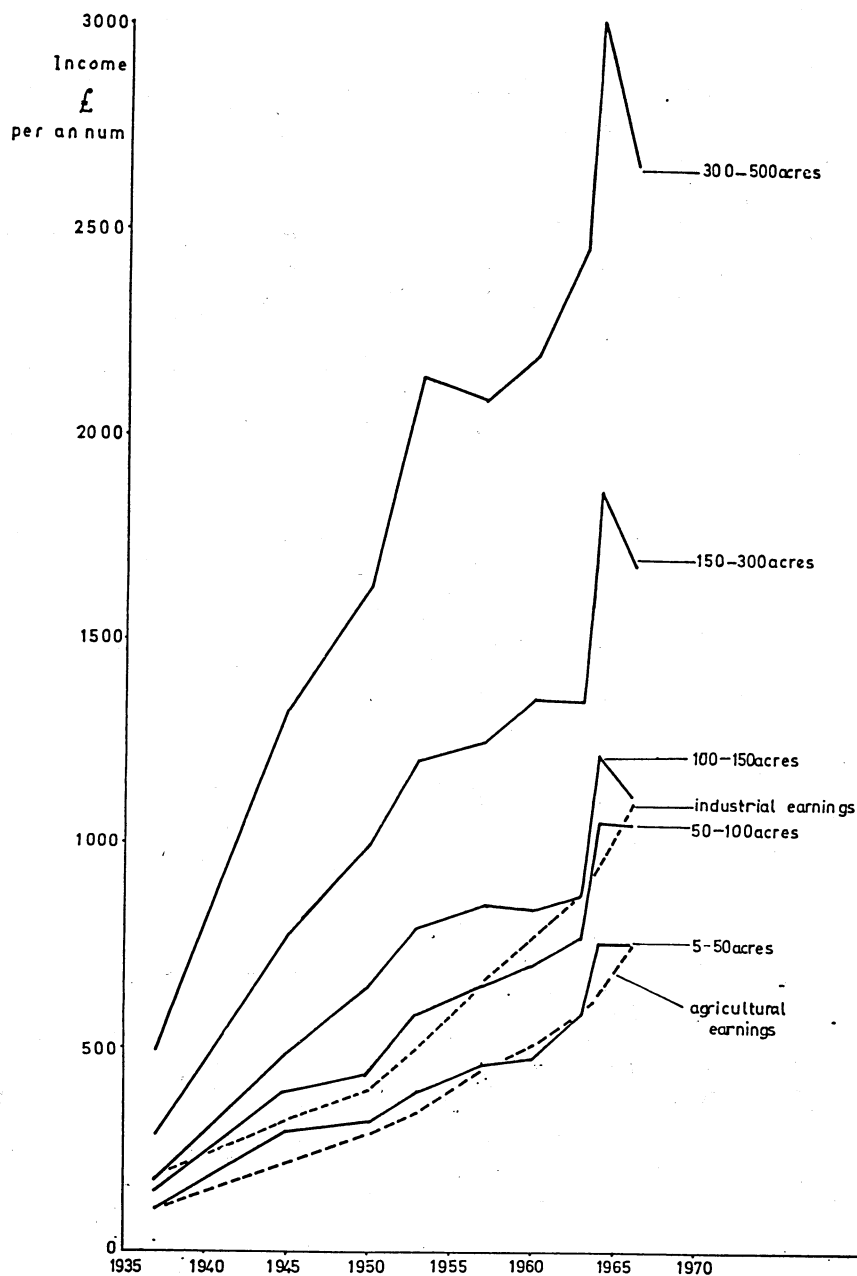
Table 1. Farmers' incentive income ratio in the U.K.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
1948	112	1954	99	1960	94
1949	113	1955	92	1961	95
1950	110	1956	95	1962	95
1951	105	1957	94	1963	94
1952	108	1958	92	1964	90
1953	104	1959	90	1965	92
				1966	90

The prospects for raising the incomes of farmers by increasing the share that agriculture draws from the national income are not favourable. The inelastic demand for food and the claims of foreign producers on the home market limit the scope for expanding output. While returns remain fairly steady, costs are rising and the farmer is expected to absorb much of the increase in costs through greater efficiency. Only the technological revolution of the past 25 years has allowed the profitability of farming to rise as much as it has. Inevitably, however, net income, or the difference between the value of output and costs, cannot grow as rapidly in agriculture as in some other industries where there are greater opportunities for expansion and for passing on to the consumer increases in costs.

* It should be noted that it is *farmers* (i.e. employers and self-employed—not farm workers) who are being compared with employers and workers in all other industries.

Figure 1. Farmers' Incentive Income in England and Wales by Farm Size, with Industrial and Agricultural Earnings



Source: G. H. Peters *Farming as a Successful Business*
British Association 1966

Although the incomes of farmers as a whole are low, the range is very wide. Large farmers can be making considerable profits while some small farmers are earning less than the lowest-paid employees. In Figure 1 and Table 2, drawn from the Farm Management Survey, the 'farmer's incentive income' for farms of different sizes is compared with the earnings of adult male workers in manufacturing industry, with agricultural workers' earnings included for comparison.³ Since about 1960, incomes on farms of 100 to 150 acres have been more or less on a level with industrial earnings. Farmers with 150 to 300 acres have been making half as much again whilst the incentive income on holdings of 300 to 500 acres now exceeds £2,500. The problem farmers are those with less than 100 acres and incomes of under £1,000. Farms of 50 to 100 acres now yield less than the industrial wage and since 1964 the 5 to 50 acre farmer has averaged only £750, no higher than the earnings of many agricultural workers. In other words, after the small farmer has been repaid for his manual work, there is nothing left to recompense him for his activities as a farm manager.

Table 2. Incentive income in farming compared with industrial earnings, by size of farm
(Industrial earnings = 100)

Year	5-50	Size of farm in acres				Agricultural labour
		50-100	100-150	150-300	300-500	
1937	56	80	75	156	268	54
1945	91	121	150	240	406	n.a.
1950	81	110	162	251	407	72
1953	79	116	158	239	423	68
1957	70	99	132	189	317	68
1960	62	90	108	174	281	65
1963	67	88	100	153	278	67
1964	80	110	128	194	319	66
1966	69	80	102	153	242	64

Source, except 1966: G. H. Peters, *Farming as a Successful Business*, British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1966.

This study is particularly concerned with the *small full-time* farmer. Due to the scale of his business, he is often worse off than those above and below him in size. Smaller farmers cannot benefit as well as larger ones from economies of scale and they have less flexibility in the choice of farming systems. With lower incomes, they have less opportunity to accumulate capital with which to expand the business, so the vicious circle is perpetuated. On the other hand, unlike the smaller part-time farmer, they cannot often spare the time to manage another full-time job.

The problem of small farms is a familiar one to agricultural economists, and much has been written on the subject.⁴ From the economist's standpoint, the way to maximise welfare is to encourage farmers to leave the industry, so that the total income from agriculture will be divided between fewer claimants, each of whom will receive a larger share. This has been happening to a certain extent, as Table 3 shows. Between 1957 and 1967, the number of agricultural holdings in England and Wales fell by 15 per cent and most of the decrease was among farms of less than 50 acres.⁵ By contrast, holdings over 300 acres in size have grown rapidly. With farms disappearing at the rate of 6,000 a year, Britton estimates that by 1976 there will be only about 106,000 full-time holdings in England and Wales.⁶ Much of the decrease will be due to small holdings, mainly under 30 acres, being taken into larger units and holdings of 30 to 50 acres becoming part-time farms.

Table 3. Changes in the number of holdings in England and Wales 1957 to 1967

<i>Size group (acres crops and grass)</i>	<i>Change 1957 to 1967</i>	<i>Percentage change</i>
0-5	-18,934	-25
5-20	-16,524	-20
20-50	-13,388	-21
50-100	-8,421	-14
100-150	-3,529	-12
150-300	-2,184	-7
300-500	1,096	+12
500-1,000	1,293	+39
Over 1,000	426	+74
All holdings	-60,165	-15

Under the 1967 Agriculture Act,⁷ the Government is encouraging the trend towards amalgamation of small farms. In contrast to earlier palliative measures offering grants to increase the size of the farm business, the new Act tackles the problem radically by offering grants towards the cost of amalgamating holdings and pensions or lump-sum payments to those who quit farming. Regional Development Boards, to be set up in problem farming areas, will have the power to buy and hold land in order to improve farm structure. Thus the course appears to be straightforward. Some farmers, especially those on smaller holdings, should be encouraged to leave farming, in order to raise the incomes of those who remain, rationalise production, make British agriculture more competitive and safeguard the future of the industry. But while economic law dictates that they should leave their farms, many small farmers remain. It is essential, therefore, to discover the real objections to outward mobility, for without such an understanding no programme of action can be effective.

REASONS FOR REMAINING IN FARMING

Immobility can arise from two causes. Either the farmer has certain reasons for accepting a low income or there are factors which make it impossible for him to leave agriculture, even if he would. The main reasons for accepting the situation, in Bellerby's view,⁸ are the intangible or 'psychic' attractions of the land, lower costs of living and relative skills in agriculture and industry. Attractions of the land are probably one of the strongest reasons for remaining in farming. Besides the open-air life and contact with nature, independence and freedom are valued highly, and this attitude may not be conducive to 'rational' economic behaviour. The guarantee of employment in times of depression and of being self-supporting in a major war may be strong inducements to farm. There are opportunities, too, for engaging in subsidiary occupations such as forestry, catering or trading which would make for greater financial security. If the costs of living are less on a farm than in other occupations, whether this is due to lower real costs or a more modest standard of consumption, farmers might be better off than at first appears. Moreover, if they *believe* themselves to be better off, this could be a reason for accepting a lower income. Thirdly, farmers' ideas about their own skills and hence their bargaining position in other jobs, will colour their opinions of the proper relationship between farm and other incomes.

In the other category, namely causes of income disparity, Bellerby lists occupational mobility into farming coupled with immobility outwards, personal immobility, inertia and social immobility. When agriculture and industry are expanding, the opportunities for leaving agriculture are greater but the incentives are less. In times of depression agricultural incomes are among the hardest hit but it is difficult to find alternative work. Coupled with this are the ease with which newcomers can enter the agricultural industry and the fact that it is traditional for at least one son

per farmer to be destined for farming. Once he has entered farming, his lack of other skills and the strength of family ties and eventually his age all help to prevent his leaving. There may not be any other work available locally and disinclination to leave the district may prevent him seeking employment elsewhere. Social immobility arising from differences in background and education, customs and values, might hinder the movement out of farming, but is probably not significant in this age of mass-culture. Inertia may be a more important factor; that is to say, a considerable income disparity may be needed before farmers are aware that there is any problem to overcome.

If it is true that farmers have to accept low incomes because they cannot move out of farming, this implies that measures taken to remove these difficulties would encourage greater mobility. On the other hand, farmers may be willing to forgo income because they value life on a farm above higher financial rewards in other jobs. In either case, the 'straightforward economic solution' based on financial incentives is seen to be ineffective. It is by no means certain that to provide higher incomes for fewer farmers would result in a greater sum total of satisfaction.

While social issues are less tangible than economic facts, they are nevertheless too important to be ignored. An attempt is made here to shed light on some of the problems associated with occupational mobility of farmers. The investigation was begun with four questions in mind. First, how badly-off are small farmers on the whole, allowing for supplementary income from other sources and possible differences in costs of living? Second, do small farmers with low incomes accept this situation or do they try to improve the position by expanding the farm business, looking for additional means of earning a living or moving out of farming? Third, if farmers are prepared to continue farming for low returns, is this mainly a voluntary decision, or do circumstances prevent them from moving to another occupation? Last, what recommendations can be made in the light of this evidence, for policy in dealing with the problems of small farmers? Although not all aspects can be quantified, it is hoped that this study will help to qualify the problem and show it in its perspective.

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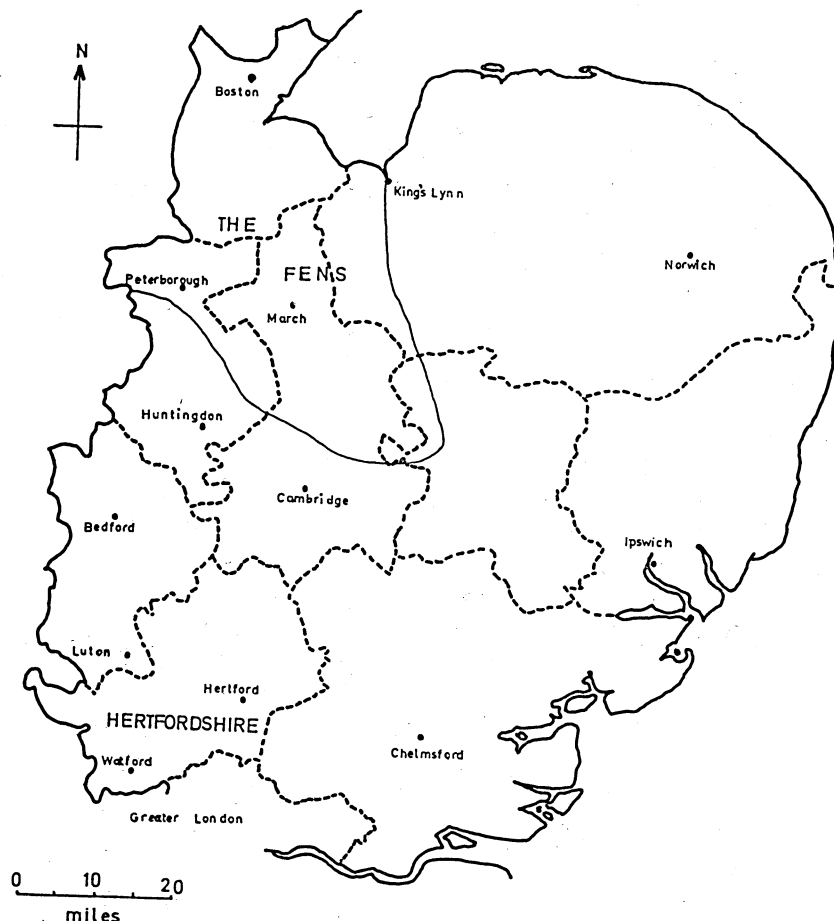
CHAPTER 2

Description of the Survey

FARMING PATTERNS

Two contrasting areas within the Eastern Region, the Fens and Hertfordshire, were chosen for the survey.¹ (Figure 2). The Fens of the Isle of Ely with parts of Huntingdonshire, the Soke of Peterborough and west Norfolk and the silt lands of south Lincolnshire, constitute the richest farming area in the British Isles. Due to its high fertility, level topography and low rainfall, the land is eminently suited to arable cropping, and consequently there is very little grassland and few livestock to be seen. In the Black Fens which include most of the Isle of Ely, about half the acreage is under cereals and one-third cropped with potatoes and sugar beet. Some vegetable crops such as carrots, celery and bulb onions are widely grown on farms. Arable production on the silts to the north, around the Wash and in south Lincolnshire, is even more intensive and might almost be described as industrialised. Potatoes are of major importance on most farms, and besides cereals and sugar beet, a large acreage of vegetables including cauliflower, cabbage,

Figure 2. The Eastern Region



Brussels sprouts, peas, beans and onions, is grown for marketing fresh or for processing. Over half the outdoor bulbs grown in England and Wales come from south Lincolnshire, while the Wisbech area is renowned for its concentration of orchards, strawberries and gooseberries.

Although the farming pattern in Hertfordshire is described as 'Livestock with Arable', it is truly mixed. No particular type of farming can be said to predominate and wide variations occur in the size of holdings, systems of husbandry and nature of the soils. About a third of the agricultural land is under grass, much of this being permanent pasture on the cold, wet, intractable London clay. Here in the south of Hertfordshire, where farms are generally smaller, dairying is traditional. Livestock are much more significant in the county than in the Fens, and numbers of pigs and poultry have increased considerably in recent years. Nine-tenths of the tillage consists of cereals, with a large acreage of barley, but potatoes and sugar beet are of minor importance. Market gardening and fruit growing are scattered over the county, with some concentration in the north near the border with Bedfordshire. The glasshouse industry of the Lea Valley is on the decline, however, and less than a third of the early post-war acreage remains.

CONTRASTS IN THE LOCAL ECONOMIES

Besides the very great differences in farming patterns due to the nature of the physical environment, the farmer's way of life is influenced by the nature of the local economy and the relative importance of agriculture within it. In terms of the proximity to towns and cities, the availability of alternative work, the proportion of farm to non-farm population and the dominant culture and values, the Fens and Hertfordshire are poles apart.

Farming is the main activity in the Fens and the few alternative sources of employment are closely allied to agriculture, as for instance the processing of agricultural products. The nearest centres for non-agricultural industry are Peterborough, with its heavy engineering and brick works, Cambridge with light industries such as electronics and precision engineering and Huntingdon and Kings Lynn, where new factories are developing. As these towns are all peripheral, the cost in time and money of the daily journey to work makes the proposition less attractive. Consequently, a high proportion of the Fen population remains working on the land and in closely-related occupations. Hertfordshire differs in that urban influences predominate. Only a small fraction of the inhabitants works in agriculture, for the county serves as a dormitory area for London. A number of other towns such as Watford and Luton in Bedfordshire also draw on the working population of Hertfordshire. The great variety of industries and the general shortage of labour mean that young, unskilled farm workers are readily attracted into factories, where they might earn twice the agricultural wage. In the Fens, on the other hand, landwork is often better paid than work in local factories.

The population of Hertfordshire grew more rapidly than that of any other county in Britain in the decade 1951 to 1961, increasing by 36.5 per cent.² This meant that agricultural land was needed for housing and industry, including the three post-war New Towns of Hatfield, Stevenage and Hemel Hempstead. Over this period, 3½ per cent of the agricultural land area was taken, while at the same time, a net gain of farmland was recorded in the Fens, due mainly to coastal reclamation, land drainage and a return of land borrowed by the War Department. Agricultural land accounts for over 90 per cent of the land area of the Fens, higher than any other part of Britain, contrasting with only 67 per cent in Hertfordshire.

In the Home Counties, where farmers are so heavily outnumbered by the non-farming population, the farmers' relatives and friends are likely to include many non-farmers and it is inevitable that farm families should absorb urban values, tastes and styles of living. One consequence could be that farmers compare their own incomes and hours of work with industrial earnings and

conditions. In the Fens, isolated from the effects of urban growth, there seems to have been little movement of population. Many Fen families have lived in the same district for generations. Therefore a farm background, a rural upbringing, education in village schools, rural culture and values are widely shared and accepted. In this area of working farmers, high value is placed on hard work and good husbandry and Fen farmers are typically unostentatious in their homes and styles of living.

In future, the development of agriculture and particularly the destiny of the small farm in the Home Counties and the Fens will be likely to diverge even more. In the Fens, there is keen competition for vacant small holdings from larger farmers, who wish to amalgamate them with their existing land. The profitability of large-scale arable farming and the excellent quality of the land mean that prices of £500 per acre are often reached and even £600 is not uncommon. In Hertfordshire, too, there is a tendency for smaller holdings to be absorbed by larger farms but in addition there is the growing demand from city businessmen and industrialists for part-time farms. Attractive farmhouses in the county are often owned by businessmen, who farm in their spare time or as a subsidiary enterprise. Hertfordshire is particularly likely to see an increase in part-time farming of this nature, for besides its accessibility to London and other towns and the high amenity-value of areas like the Chilterns, both the A1 and M1 trunk roads and the mainline railway services to the Midlands and North run through the county. With the large farmer and the businessman bidding for small holdings, the genuine small farmer will be kept out of the market, since the price the others are prepared to pay would not be an economic proposition for him.

NUMBERS OF HOLDINGS

The survey was concerned with the small full-time farmer, defined as one whose farm requires between 275 and 600 Standard Man-Days of labour per year, acreage alone proving to be an inadequate guide to size of business. Below 275 Standard Man-Days the farm would hardly keep one man fully occupied and would therefore be run as a part-time business. Farms with more than 600 S.M.D. are regarded as commercial businesses, usually employing at least one full-time man besides the farmer. The small full-time farm is typically run by the occupier and his wife, with additional help amounting to rather less than another full-time man.

In 1967 small full-time farms accounted for about 61,000 holdings in England and Wales, one-fifth of the total (Table 4). With an average of a little over 60 acres, they occupied one-fifth of the area of agricultural land and produced a fifth of the output of the industry, using only about a seventh of the full-time male workers, the occupiers themselves contributing a large share of the labour. They tended to concentrate on dairy cows, beef and pigs with rather less emphasis on crops.³

Table 4. Distribution of holdings by size of business, England and Wales, 1967

<i>Size in Standard Man-Days</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Number of holdings</i>	<i>Proportion of holdings %</i>
Under 100	} part-time holdings	114,000	37
100-275		45,200	15
275-600		61,200	20
600-1,200		51,700	17
Over 1,200	large commercial holdings	34,500	11
All holdings		306,600	100

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: June Census 1967.

Although East Anglia is usually regarded as the region of large-scale farming, small farms comprised one-sixth of the total number of holdings. Hertfordshire had more very small holdings and rather more large commercial businesses but proportionately fewer small full-time farms than

the Fens, as Table 5 shows.⁴ Most small full-time farms in Hertfordshire were between 50 and 300 acres whereas in the Fens, due to the more intensive system of farming, fewer acres were needed to give the same size of business, and most holdings in this category were of less than 50 acres. The small arable farm has been the subject of a number of studies, two of which are listed below.^{5,6}

Table 5. Distribution of holdings in the Fens and Herts by size of business in 1967

Size of Business S.M.D.	Number of holdings		Proportion	
	Fens*	Herts	Fens %	Herts %
Under 100	3,927	1,060	31	42.5
100-275	2,280	258	18	10
275-600	2,533	340	20	14
600-1,200	1,893	371	15	15
Over 1,200	2,013	465	16	18.5
Total	12,646	2,494	100	100

* Including Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.

THE SURVEY AND THE SAMPLE

A random sample of full-time small farms, classified as such on the basis of their 1966 June Returns, was supplied by the Ministry of Agriculture. This consisted of one in five of holdings with 275 to 600 S.M.D. from Hertfordshire and one in twenty from the Isle of Ely and Holland, Lincolnshire. The sample was screened by the N.A.A.S. District Advisory Officers and any holdings known to be parts of larger farms or run in conjunction with another business or as 'hobby' farms were discarded. It was significant that many more were rejected from the Hertfordshire sample. Those remaining were sent an introductory letter and visited during 1967. Sample composition and the response rate are shown in Table 6, whilst more details of the farms are given in Appendix 1.

Table 6. Composition of the sample of small farmers

	Fens	Herts	Total
Number in original sample ..	72	73	145
Number rejected as unsuitable ..	8	19	27
Contacts refusing to co-operate ..	3	2	5
Contacts found to be unsuitable	2	7	9
Survey completed	59	45	104

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CHAPTER 3

Incomes of Small Farmers

No financial information was collected from the farmers in the survey. Instead, use was made of the data from the Farm Management Survey carried out by the universities in England and Wales. In the latter survey, accounts from a permanent sample of farmers are analysed each year, primarily to show trends in farm incomes. It is assumed that the small full-time farms included in the eastern counties' sample will be representative of other farms of this size in the region. Out of 380 F.M.S. farms in East Anglia in 1964, 75 were estimated to be small full-time businesses, although by 1967 only 58 of the original 75 were left in the sample. These farms averaged 87 acres of crops and grass; working capital amounted to a little over £6,000 per farm and turnover was slightly higher than this.

FARM INCOMES AND PROFITS

Net farm income, the return to the occupier for management, interest on his working capital and for his own and his wife's unpaid manual labour, averaged £1,485 per farm per annum over the four years. After deducting the elements of interest and wages, the pure profit or 'profit surplus' remaining was £540 per farm. The range of incomes and profits, however, was considerable. One farm in twenty was making a loss whilst one in seventeen made an income of more than £3,000.

Table 7. Distribution of small F.M.S. farms by net farm income and profit surplus over the four years 1964-1967

<i>£ per farm</i>	<i>Net farm income % of farms</i>	<i>Profit surplus % of farms</i>
Negative	5	28
0-500	9	23
500-1,000	19	22
1,000-1,500	24	14
1,500-2,000	17	8
2,000-3,000	20	3
Over 3,000	6	2
All farms	100	100

Profit surplus, being a residual, ranged even more widely. As Table 7 shows, more than a quarter of the farms on average made a 'negative profit surplus' each year. In fact in 1967, a good harvest year, one farmer in three made no profit. That is to say, farm income was insufficient to recompense them for their manual labour and interest on working capital, let alone provide any reward for management. Moreover, the net farm income may not all be available in the form of cash; some may represent an increase in valuations, because the farmer is investing additional capital in the business.

REACTIONS TO THE FARM INCOME SITUATION

Although incomes on these small farms were not usually below the subsistence level, and some farmers were able to earn a handsome profit, many were making less than they could command as wage-earners. Besides a low income per head, the prospects for a global improvement are not promising. Nowadays, farmers are having to run faster in order to stay in the same place and those who take no action are likely, sooner or later, to have it forced upon them. Are small farmers attempting to raise their incomes or are they mainly content to accept the situation and

tighten their belts? Survey results suggest that the reactions are mixed, with some trying hard to improve their position and others preferring the status quo. Three ways of raising farm profits are to enlarge the turnover, increase the acreage or cut costs.

Two-thirds of the small farmers in the Farm Management Survey had increased the size of the farm business between 1964 and 1967, by enlarging existing enterprises or moving towards a more intensive system of farming. Increases were twice as frequent as decreases and usually larger. Small farmers visited in 1967 were asked if they had made any changes in the farming system over the past two years. Only half of them recalled any significant alterations over this period, but once again expansion was more common than contraction. (Table 8).

Table 8. Changes in size of business among small farmers visited in 1967

<i>Change in size of business 1965 to 1967, measured in Standard Man-Days</i>						<i>Number of farms</i>
Decreased by more than 10 per cent	..	..	..	..	..	13
Decreased by up to 10 per cent	..	..	..	..	..	8
Increased by up to 10 per cent	..	..	..	..	..	15
Increased by more than 10 per cent	..	..	..	..	..	21
All farms decreasing	..	..	..	..	..	21
All farms increasing	..	..	..	..	..	36
No significant change in size	..	..	..	..	..	47
All farms	..	..	..	..	..	104

Most small farmers are anxious for more land. As Table 9 shows, 24 of those visited in 1967 had been able to increase their acreage between 1965 and 1967, while eight more had lost some land. All the losses were in Hertfordshire, usually for some form of urban development. Other Hertfordshire farmers, however, had gained a substantial area, whereas additions in the Fens were normally of a few acres only.

Table 9. Acreage changes between 1965 and 1967 on small farms in the survey

<i>Acreage lost (acres)</i>	<i>Number of farms</i>	<i>Acreage gained (acres)</i>	<i>Number of farms</i>
21 to 50	2	1 to 5	9
6 to 20	5	6 to 20	8
1 to 5	1	21 to 50	2
		more than 50	5
No change	72		
		All farms	104

The third approach a farmer may use to maintain his income is to try to cut costs. Here the small farmer is at a disadvantage since unavoidable overheads form a large proportion of his total costs. On a small farm where the occupier does most of the manual work himself, there is little opportunity for cutting the labour bill. At most one full-time worker would be employed but more often the farmer makes use of casual, part-time or contract labour, youths, pensioners or occasional help from members of the family. Often, too, small farmers help each other without any money changing hands. The small farmer is tending, however, to economise in paid labour, either by doing more work himself or replacing an employee by a member of the family. On the F.M.S. farms, the value of labour contributed by the farm family was rising each year more rapidly than wages paid to other employees. (Another interpretation might be that, with the present shortage of labour, farmers are having to pay their sons a realistic wage to keep them on the farm.) The same tendency was found in the small farmer survey. Between 1965 and 1967 there was a net addition of $6\frac{1}{2}$ full-time family workers to the labour force on the 104 farms and a net

loss of $3\frac{1}{2}$ non-family workers (Table 10). More change had occurred in Hertfordshire than in the Fens, particularly among the non-family workers and this was largely due to high wages in the local factories.

Table 10. Changes in the labour force on small farms in the survey between 1965 and 1967

							<i>Numbers of full-time equivalents</i>	
							<i>Family workers</i>	<i>Non-family workers</i>
Gains	..	..	..	..	..	..	$9\frac{1}{2}$	5
Losses	..	..	..	..	..	..	3	$8\frac{1}{2}$
Net change	..	..	..	..	..	..	$+6\frac{1}{2}$	$-3\frac{1}{2}$

Altogether 30 out of the 104 small farmers had made substantial efforts to expand their farming operations between 1965 and 1967, and can be regarded as 'dynamic' farmers. Twenty had increased the size of business by more than 10 per cent, without large changes in acreage, four had taken on additional holdings, four had moved to larger holdings and two had begun farming. Among the remaining 74, most had kept the business relatively static but 13 had made reductions, often due to the loss of land or labour, and had given up enterprises such as dairying. Two farmers had ceased full-time farming altogether. There are two other ways in which farmers may be compensated for low incomes; they may be able to supplement their earnings from the farm and they may be able to live cheaply.

OTHER SOURCES OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The family may have more cash to spend than the net farm income, if for example wages paid to family members remain in the household budget. If the farm is owned free of debt, the farmer has the imputed rental value at his disposal and for a limited period the payments set aside for interest on working capital and as machinery depreciation could be 'consumed' instead of being re-invested. The 'farm household income' or maximum sum a farmer could draw from the business in a given year, averaged £2,340 for the small farms in the F.M.S. sample.

Apart from the possibility of 'consuming' reserve payments, the farm family income may be supplemented by pensions, income from investments or earnings from another occupation. A third of the survey farmers had other means of livelihood. Some were part-time agricultural contractors, thereby making fuller use of their time and machinery capacity. Some linked other businesses, such as cattle-dealing, butchering or plant-hire contracting with farming or worked on other farms and a few in Hertfordshire had pensions or private incomes. As might be expected, more Hertfordshire farmers had outside occupations, more had employment unconnected with agriculture and fewer depended wholly on the farm income. (Table 11).

Table 11. Other occupations and sources of income of survey farmers

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number of farmers</i>		
	<i>Fens</i>	<i>Herts</i>	<i>Total</i>
Agricultural contracting	10	7	17
Own business related to farming ..	—	5	5
Landwork	3	—	3
Own business not related to farming ..	—	2	2
Other non-farm work	2	2	4
Private means	—	3	3
All farmers with other sources of income	15	19	34
Total number of farmers	59	45	104

In only about a third of the cases did the other occupation absorb more than half the farmer's time or provide more income than the farm. Sons and daughters living at home might also make a

contribution to the family finances. It was estimated that 46 of the 104 families received supplementary income, as illustrated in Table 12, but that in most cases this was less than £500.

Table 12. Estimated household income from other sources on survey farms

<i>Additional income £ per farm</i>	<i>Number of farms</i>
0	58
1-100	6
100-500	21
500-1,000	7
Over 1,000	12
All farms	104

COSTS OF LIVING

Although farm incomes are low, farm living expenses may also be modest. The imputed value of 'private drawings' on F.M.S. farms is probably too low, in terms of the replacement cost. For instance, the share of rent and rates of the farmhouse attributed to private use was £97 on average, implying that the farm family pays less than £2 per week for accommodation. The private share of the farm car was charged at only £50, a figure which is probably exceeded by the majority of car-owning families. Produce consumed in the house was estimated to cost £18 per farm but could well be worth twice this amount at retail.

Co-operators in the small farmer survey were asked whether they thought their costs of living would be higher if they moved into another occupation. Nearly 60 per cent thought this would be so, whilst only 6 per cent thought their overall expenditure would be lower. Living was cheaper on a farm, it was suggested, because some food was home-produced, certain items could be charged against Income Tax and styles of living were less exacting on a farm than elsewhere. Most farmers agreed that housing was not expensive on a farm and many that food was cheaper there. A number felt they would spend more on leisure activities if they had more free time, while rather fewer thought that costs of transport and clothing would be higher in a non-farm job, as the Table 13 shows.

Table 13. Farmers' views on costs of living in another occupation compared with farming

<i>Item of expenditure</i>	<i>Proportion of farmers thinking this item would be</i>			
	<i>higher %</i>	<i>same %</i>	<i>lower %</i>	<i>total %</i>
Food	63	35	2	100
Housing .. .	72	26	2	100
Clothing .. .	48	40	12	100
Transport .. .	53	35	12	100
Entertainment .. .	58	41	1	100
All above items .. .	59	35	6	100

In these days of increasing specialisation, farm families obtain less and less from the holding. Garden produce is important, but not confined to farms. Half or more of the small farmers in the survey said they consumed farm-produced eggs, potatoes, fruit or vegetables but very few had milk, and not many poultry or game. On the other hand, as a number of farmers' wives pointed out, many food items could be purchased more cheaply in town supermarkets than in village stores. Nevertheless, it is what farmers *believe* to be the case that will determine their actions, whether or not their assumptions are correct. More of the older farmers and those from the Fens thought the various items would be considerably more expensive if they left farming. Younger farmers and those from Hertfordshire, likely to have styles of living closer to their urban contemporaries, were more inclined to think there would be no difference and would therefore have less to lose by changing their job.

CHAPTER 4

Occupational Immobility*

Farmers' ideas on the skills required in farming compared with other jobs and their ability to bargain in the labour market colour their views on the proper relationship between farm and non-farm incomes. Due to their age, lack of qualifications and limited experience in other fields of work, many farmers are deterred from trying to move out of farming and are obliged to accept low incomes in agriculture. The availability of alternative work locally also has a bearing on farmers' occupational mobility.

AGE, TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE

Whether or not employers are willing to take on ex-farmers, most farmers themselves felt that there was little chance of obtaining a good post after the middle forties. This alone would discourage more than half the sample from making a move, as Table 14 shows.

Table 14. Age distribution of small farmers in the survey, 1967

<i>Age range</i>	<i>Number of farmers</i>	<i>Age range</i>	<i>Number of farmers</i>
Under 30	3	46-50	16
31-40	21	51-60	29
41-45	19	Over 60	16

Most of them had received only a minimum amount of education and three-quarters had left school when they were fourteen years of age or earlier. The majority had attended local village schools (Table 15) and this fact, too, would be likely to restrict their choice of occupations. Lack of awareness of other opportunities plays a part as well as the absence of training facilities.

Table 15. Last schools attended by survey farmers

<i>Type of school</i>	<i>Proportion of farmers</i>
	<i>%</i>
Local village/elementary ..	63
Secondary modern/town central ..	19
Grammar	8
Public, boarding	10
All farmers	100

Out of 104 farmers, only one had a university degree in agriculture, 7 others had attended agricultural colleges or farm institutes, two had been farm pupils and one had worked on a dairy farm in New Zealand, making 11 per cent in all. That this is a typical result is confirmed by Table 16. The other farmers had gained experience by working for other farmers and at least one-third of them had worked only on their father's farm before starting on their own. While they would undoubtedly gain valuable knowledge about local conditions of soils and climate, markets and

* *Occupational mobility* may refer to a change of occupations between generations or within the life of one person; here it is used in the latter sense only.

labour, and acquire useful contacts in their own areas, it might be difficult to transfer this knowledge and experience to a different area. A person with a formal qualification in agriculture should have a broader picture of the industry and be able to 'stand back' a little from the individual farm.

Table 16. Proportion of farmers with training in agriculture in five surveys in England and Wales

Research worker	Year	Size of sample	Type of training				All types
			College, institute, etc.	Farm pupil	Abroad		
Chapman ¹	.. 1944	1,968	3	7	1		11
Ashton ²	.. 1950	147	4	4	—		8
Beal ³	.. 1960	104	7	—	—		7
Sheppard ⁴	.. 1960	652	11	—	—		11
Gasson	.. 1967	104	8	2	1		11

Surprisingly few farmers had any experience of other work. The great majority were brought up on farms and many of them had left school during the 1920s or early 1930s when unemployment was high and, as they frequently said, 'There was nothing else'. Particularly for those living far from manufacturing towns when there was little public or private transport, unemployment in the towns coupled with the assurance of work and subsistence on the farm, were sufficient to keep many farmers' and farmworkers' sons on the land. As it was also hard to sell farms in the depression, there was an unusually high recruitment of farmers' sons into agriculture at this time. Although this did not show up clearly in the present survey, Ashton found evidence of a higher proportion of farmers' and farmworkers' sons starting to farm in the depressions of 1926-30 and 1936-40.⁵ In the buoyant periods such as 1921-25 and 1946-50 when more capital was needed to start a farm, more new entrants came from other backgrounds. It was perhaps not surprising that in the present survey, some farmers who had left school between 1925 and 1940, now aged between 45 and 60, regretted having lost the chance to enter other occupations which they felt would have given them greater satisfaction. Such farmers were anxious that their own sons should make the most of the opportunities for technical education open to them nowadays.

Two-thirds of the farmers had never worked outside agriculture, apart from National Service in a few cases, as Table 17 shows. Furthermore, of the 36 with experience of other work, only 24 had been in one occupation for more than two years and could expect to use this experience in applying for another job.

Table 17. Experience of other work of small farmers in the survey

Type of occupation	Number of farmers
Work on family holding only	30
Work on other farms, agricultural contracting	32
Farm work and National Service	6
Other work:	36
White-collar	6
Own business	6
Regular forces, police	4
Skilled mechanic	4
Building trade	7
Factory work	4
Lorry driving	5
	36
All farmers	104

CHOICE OF OTHER OCCUPATIONS

When asked what jobs they thought they would take if they gave up farming now, suggestions ranged widely, from the professions, starting a business, clerical and technical occupations to manual work or remaining on the land as a farmworker. Some had no ideas and a few older

farmers suggested retirement, as shown in Table 18. A number would have liked posts as farm managers, advisers or technical representatives but these jobs are harder to obtain nowadays if a man has no formal qualifications.

Table 18. Farmers' suggestions of alternative occupations to farming

Type of occupation	Proportion of farmers suggesting this %
Professional or other white-collar	18
Own business	18
Manual non-farm work ..	21
Other farm work	13
Retirement	11
No ideas	19
All farmers	100
Number of farmers ..	104

Farmers recognise that if they have been in farming for some years, the range of other occupations open to them is limited. Indeed, jobs such as the professions or skilled trades that they had once considered were no longer feasible and they would have to take unskilled manual work or the lower-paid, routine white-collar jobs. The advantage of working on their own, on the other hand, is that they would possess some capital, enabling them to start another business, as Table 19 shows.

Table 19. Alternatives to farming considered once and now

Type of occupation	Number of farmers	
	Considered once	Considered now
Profession	4	1
Clerical	4	3
Service/technical ..	7	12
Forces	9	1
Own business related to farming	5	10
Own business not related ..	4	8
Skilled manual work ..	16	5
Semi-skilled and unskilled ..	12	15
Farm work	1	13
Other and no ideas	42	36
All farmers*	104	104

Farmers were by no means convinced that they would gain financially by changing their occupation. In fact, less than half thought they would be better off and more than a quarter, that they would be worse off (Table 20). Some thought they would have been better off had they entered another occupation earlier but that a move at the present stage would not be to their financial advantage. The 37 farmers with a formal qualification in farming or other work experience were more optimistic about their prospects in another job. Those without qualifications or outside experience were more evenly divided between optimism and pessimism.

Table 20. Farmers' views on relative financial position if in another job

Views on relative position if not in farming						Farmers with some experience of other work %	Farmers with less other-work experience %	All farmers %
Better .. ..	..	..	..	..	..	58	39	46
Same .. ..	..	..	..	..	..	15	31	25
Worse .. ..	..	..	..	..	..	27	30	29
All farmers .. ..	..	..	..	..	..	100	100	100
Number of farmers ..	..	..	..	..	..	37	67	104

* From now on, the sign * indicates that distributions are significantly different at the 99 per cent level of χ^2 , and † indicates significance at the 95 per cent level.

COMPARISONS OVER TIME

Many farmers in this survey started work between the wars, when farm incomes were exceptionally low. Today the income of the small farmer, if not falling, is not rising as fast as in other industries. In both periods, therefore, economic forces should be attracting farmers from agriculture into other occupations where they will be better remunerated. But conditions today differ from the inter-war period in two important respects. Farming was so depressed at that time and it was so difficult to sell a farm and regain the capital sunk in it, that farmers tended to stay. Today the high values of agricultural land serve to recoup the retiring owner-occupier very well. Tenant farmers are somewhat cushioned from these effects, neither suffering the losses of landowners of thirty or forty years ago nor enjoying the benefits of a rise in land values. In addition, there are more well-paid occupations open to the young man today compared with pre-war. On these grounds, the occupational mobility of farmers ought to be higher now than in the 1920s and 1930s.

LOCATIONAL ASPECTS

The *opportunity cost* or the earnings which might be attained in the best alternative occupations would generally be higher for the Hertfordshire farmer or any others close to a conurbation than for those in the Fens or in similar 'deep rural' areas. As a group the Hertfordshire farmers were younger and, probably arising from this, they had been longer at school and more had formal training in agriculture. Of the eleven farmers with agricultural training, ten came from Hertfordshire and the eleventh had only recently moved to the Fens. Appendix 2, Tables D, E and F illustrate these differences between farmers in the two areas, which were highly significant in every case. More occupations would therefore be open to the Hertfordshire farmers. Apart from these attributes of the farmers themselves, Hertfordshire offers a far wider range of well-paid jobs, so should they decide to move, these farmers would have less trouble in finding employment close at hand. This was reflected in the choices of possible occupations by the two groups given in Appendix 2. Hertfordshire farmers tended to suggest white-collar jobs or business as an alternative, while in the Fens a larger proportion thought they would work on other farms or take unskilled jobs like lorry-driving and quite a few had no ideas on the subject. Consequently, the Hertfordshire farmers were more optimistic about their earnings in other jobs compared with farming, but overall the prospects for occupational mobility can scarcely be described as promising.

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CHAPTER 5

Personal Immobility

The previous chapter dealt with factors affecting occupational mobility, such as age and experience, of interest to a potential employer. Such conditions must be fulfilled before a farmer can take another job, or at least a job likely to satisfy him. But these conditions alone are not sufficient to make him move. Irrespective of the necessity or the opportunity or even the inclination to leave farming, there are personal factors which might discourage a farmer from moving. Advancing age, background, upbringing, family ties with farming and with the district may well hold a farmer firmly to his accustomed path. The need or the incentive to leave farming would have to be considerably stronger in order to overcome these ties. The age of the farmer can be a strong deterrent to mobility. As already shown (Table 14) nearly half the farmers in the survey were over 50 and hence not likely to be keen on changing their way of life. Quite apart from the difficulties of finding fresh employment after the middle forties, a farmer like anyone else will find it hard to adjust to a different type of work, hours and conditions. This problem may well be more severe for farmers than for others because working alone and running the business serve to develop a strong vein of independence.

FAMILY TIES WITH FARMING

Farmers with close family ties in farming probably find it difficult to break away. Two-thirds of the co-operators in the survey were sons of farmers and, according to Table 21, this was fairly representative of farmers as a whole. Many others came from families with agricultural connections (Table 22) and altogether more than 80 per cent grew up in homes where farming was a familiar

Table 21. Proportion of farmers from farming families in six surveys in England and Wales

<i>Research worker</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Size of sample</i>	<i>Proportion of farmers from farming families</i>
Ashby and Morgan Jones ¹	1924-25	Wales	771	77%
Chapman ²	1944	England and Wales	1,968	81
Ashton ³	1950	Warwick/Oxon ..	147	69
Nelson ⁴	1960	Staffs	172	81
Beal ⁵	1962	English counties ..	104	60
Gasson	1967	Fens/Herts ..	104	65

Table 22. Backgrounds of survey farmers

<i>Occupation of father</i>	<i>Number of farmers</i>
Farmer, smallholder	66
Own business connected with farming	6
Farm worker	9
Own business unrelated to farming..	6
Other non-farm work	12
Not stated	5
All fathers of farmers	104

and often dominating influence. Two-thirds of the farmers said that half or more of their close relatives, brothers, brothers-in-law, cousins and so on, were engaged in agriculture or its ancillary industries and out of 300 relatives mentioned, at least 120 were farmers and 43 farm managers or farm workers. As one farmer put it, 'When the family gets together we all talk farming.' In such circumstances a farmer is less likely to learn of prospects in other occupations, and indeed to quit farming might be regarded as an admission of failure by the rest of the family.

It is reasonable to suppose that if the farmer's wife comes from a farming background and has never lived in a town or away from a farm, the husband would be reluctant to leave farming.

Table 23. Occupations of farmer's wives prior to marriage

Occupation	Wives of small farmers in Fens and Herts 1967	Wives of farmers in Staffs 1960
	%	%
Farm work, at home or elsewhere	50	55
Domestic or personal service ..	8	17
Office or shop work	26	5
Factory work	8	17
Teaching or nursing	8	4
Other	—	2
All wives	100	100
Number of wives	91	145

Farmers' wives from non-farming backgrounds speak enthusiastically about life on a farm and can draw vivid comparisons with their previous existence, but whether or not they are more wedded to agriculture than those brought up to it, is difficult to judge. Of 91 married farmers 25 had wives from towns and at least 35 wives came from farms. The rest were from a rural background, being the daughters of land-workers, blacksmiths and so on. At least half had worked on the land before marriage. Table 23 gives the occupations of farmers' wives prior to marriage, a pattern very similar to that found in Staffordshire in 1960.⁶ Although some had worked in other occupations, only three had full-time jobs away from the farm at the time of the survey and two-thirds worked at least part-time in the family holding. All these findings suggest that the farmer's personal ties are an obstacle to moving out of agriculture.

TIES WITH THE DISTRICT

'Occupational mobility' strictly refers to a change of jobs between generations or between different periods in the working life of one person. On both these counts the farmers in the survey were on the whole immobile. A related concept is that of 'geographical mobility', the movement from place to place resulting from a change of occupation. Many people are able to change jobs without moving house but farmers find this more difficult. Besides the dearth of alternative work in a rural area, the farmer may be obliged to surrender the farmhouse when he gives up the occupancy of the land. This means that to leave farming involves not only a change of occupation but also a new home and a breaking of local ties. Farmers in the survey had made few moves. Three-quarters had been brought up in their present county, more than half had always lived in the same parish and 27 had never lived anywhere but on their present farm, as Table 24 shows.

Table 24. Geographical background of small farmers in the survey, 1967

Farmer's place of upbringing	Number of farmers
Same farm	27
Same parish	25
Other local parish	21
Elsewhere in survey counties	6
Other eastern counties ..	4
Greater London	11
Elsewhere	8
Not stated	2
All farmers	104

For the majority, too, most of their close relatives lived in the same district, that is, an area within the sphere of influence of the same local market town. It can be appreciated that farmers are reluctant to break the ties of upbringing and experience, family relationships and associations

with a particular locality, by which they are bound to farming. Many had never known anything else, either as a home or as a way of life. In cases where both father and grandfather had had the holding before them, farmers were particularly opposed to a move which would sever the association.

LOCAL CONTRASTS

Once again, the Hertfordshire farmers showed themselves to be potentially more mobile than the Fen farmers. In the Fens, as in other isolated rural areas, inter-marriage between farming families is common but unlike other such areas, the profitability of farming remains high and there has been less outward migration. Consequently most farmers in the Fens have many relatives farming locally. Hertfordshire represents a contrast, being close to London and experiencing urban growth at an unprecedented rate since the war. Communications are good, opportunities for employment numerous and farmers form a small minority of the population. Fewer Hertfordshire farmers in the survey came from families closely associated with farming, and fewer of the farmers' close relatives were engaged in agriculture as a whole (though proportionately more were farmers in their own right). Fewer of the Hertfordshire wives came from farms and correspondingly more from towns. It was unusual for a Hertfordshire farmer's wife to have worked on the land before marriage, whilst more than half the Fen wives had done so. Besides stronger family associations with farming, the Fen farmers had stronger local connections than the Hertfordshire farmers. All but four had spent their childhood in the Fens and most had never lived away from the area. Only half the Hertfordshire farmers, on the other hand, had been brought up in that county. Naturally, most of the Fen farmer's relatives lived in the Fens while the Hertfordshire farmers' families were more dispersed. These characteristics are shown in Appendix 3.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS MOVING FARMS

For a number of co-operators in the survey, any move from farming was clearly out of the question. Since answers to purely hypothetical questions are not reliable indicators, it was unrealistic to measure mobility in these terms. Most farmers, on the other hand, have considered the possibility of moving to a larger farm and some have had the opportunity to do so. The co-operators were therefore asked a series of questions to measure their attitude towards a move *within* agriculture, and it was assumed that this would be related to their potential mobility *out* of agriculture. The question was asked, 'If you had the chance to move to a larger farm, which of the following considerations would stop you from moving?' Ten possible deterrents to making an advantageous move were suggested and the greater the number of reasons the farmer gave for not moving, the greater was his potential immobility. On average, five conditions were regarded as unfavourable to a move to a larger farm. One farmer in four gave all ten conditions as obstacles to moving; that is to say he would be unwilling to move under any circumstances. Only six farmers were wholly mobile, seeing none of the conditions as strong enough to prevent an advantageous move.

Table 25. Order of importance of obstacles to mobility among farmers

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Percentage of farmers deterred by this factor</i>
Different type of farming	68
Borrowing a large sum	54
Not such a good house	50
Moving from the district	47
Working longer hours	46
More paper-work	46
Having to employ (more) labour ..	45
Different type of land	45
Living further from shops and schools	44
Having a farm sale	40

The conditions that cause a farmer to reject an opportunity to move to a larger farm suggest possible reasons for immobility (Table 25). Farmers were most opposed to moving to a different type of farm, and they were predictably cautious about taking on a large debt. While these are purely rational business decisions, personal considerations soon enter the picture. A move would be rejected by nearly half the farmers if it entailed having to live in an inferior farmhouse or leaving the district. On the whole, conditions implying more trouble or work for the occupier, suggested by working longer hours, having to do more office-work or employing labour, were of secondary importance.

As expected, older farmers were strongly disinclined to make any changes in their way of life whereas the younger farmer, ambitious and with a capacity for many years' hard work in front of him, who might have started in a small way, was naturally keen to expand. Farmers in their late forties also showed considerable willingness to move. It might be that this group had had more time to become established and thus had a secure base from which to expand, while younger farmers struggling in their first years had not the necessary resources to allow them to move.

Table 26. Age of farmers and potential mobility between farms

<i>Estimated age</i>	<i>Average number deterrents to moving</i>	<i>Estimated age</i>	<i>Average number deterrents to moving</i>
Under 30	1.3	51-55	5.6
31-35	1.8	56-60	7.3
36-40	3.6	61-65	8.8
41-45	3.2	Over 65	9.4
46-50	2.6		
		All farmers	4.8

A number of farmers in the 40-50 age-range, too, were hoping to increase the size of business so that their sons could join them (Table 26). Clearly the turning-point comes at about the age of 50; after this time farmers are progressively less inclined to move. On all grounds the older farmers were less mobile, showing a particularly strong objection to leaving their houses, moving from the district or living in a more remote place. Younger farmers were less concerned with these personal ties, but having had less experience and probably with less capital behind them, they were most opposed to changing their type of farming or having to take a loan, as shown by Table 27. The farmer's background and location did not significantly affect their response to this question. From their attitudes towards a move *within* agriculture, it is assumed that farmers over 50 years of age will be most unlikely to change their occupation voluntarily.

Table 27. Age of farmers and importance of factors deterring a move

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Age of farmers</i>	
	<i>Under 50</i>	<i>Over 50</i>
	<i>Percentage of farmers deterred by following conditions</i>	
Different type of farming	59	73
Having to borrow a large sum	36	73
Not such a good house	27	76
Moving from the district	24	73
Working longer hours	27	67
More paper-work	29	64
Employing more labour	27	64
Different type of land	22	71
Further from shops and schools	25	73
Having a farm sale	20	62
All factors (average)	30	69

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CHAPTER 6

Farming as a Way of Life

Non-farmers often suggest that the farmer is willing to accept a low income because farming is 'a way of life'. Protagonists of this view might say that others work in order to live but that farmers live in order to work. There may be some truth in this idea. Farming is an all-absorbing occupation, involving the farmer in the capacity of business organiser, farm manager, manual worker and often land-owner also. The farm is usually the home and may be isolated, so that the family members spend much of their time in close contact with one another and with the farm. In many respects farming is a demanding occupation and it involves considerable risks, while the satisfactions can be compensatingly great. It is not without its parallels, however, among other vocations.

If farming fulfills different needs from other jobs, it may not be possible to compare the alternatives on the same plane. Nevertheless, an attempt was made to investigate the satisfactions derived from farming and attitudes towards other types of employment. The results would, it was hoped, give some guide to the obstacles to outward mobility and the reasons for remaining in agriculture. Farmers were asked to rank in order of importance five attributes representing values in being a farmer and five disadvantages, and similarly sets of favourable and unfavourable attributes for non-farm occupations. If there were no agreement between members of a group on the relative positions of the five attributes, each would receive on average one-fifth of the points, a score of 20 per cent. The greater the agreement within the group on the order of preference for the values, the greater the divergence of the score from a purely random distribution and the more highly significant would be the answer. The values presented in each question and their rating by the survey farmers are given in Table 28.

Table 28. Farmers' evaluation of farming and other occupations

	percentage score
a. What are the greatest advantages in being a farmer?	
Independence	29
Open-air life and satisfaction in the work	29
Variety in the work	23
Challenge and risk	14
Chance of capital gain	5
b. What are the worst drawbacks in being a farmer?	
Worry, risk and uncertainty	29
Low income	27
Long hours of work	16
Being tied to the farm	15
Working outdoors in bad weather	13
c. What are the greatest attractions in being an employee?	
Less worry	29
Higher income	29
Shorter hours and regular holidays	26
More companionship	13
Working indoors	3
d. What are the worst disadvantages in being an employee?	
Loss of independence	31
Less satisfaction in the work	23
Being involved in labour disputes	18
Risk of unemployment	17
Lower status	11

FARMERS' OPINIONS ON FARMING

Are the attitudes towards work, as revealed in these answers, conducive to 'rational economic behaviour?' The small farmers were seen to value their independence, outdoor life and varied work above the opportunities to make more money. Low incomes were of no greater significance to them than worry, risk and uncertainty, which usually represented the vagaries of the weather rather than financial difficulties. As to the attractions of other jobs, working under more congenial conditions would be no great draw and although freedom from worry, a regular wage-pocket, shorter hours and annual holidays would be appreciated by some, almost as many expressed dislike of the prospect of regulated hours or holidays. Loss of independence and less satisfying work would be a high price to pay for these benefits. All in all, their attitudes suggested that it would be no easy task to persuade farmers to sacrifice independence and the way of life to which they are accustomed.

When the attitudes of various groups of farmers were compared, some differences emerged although the order of preference was generally the same. Most consistent differences appeared to be associated with age and background. Those from farming families held stronger views on the advantages and disadvantages in being a farmer, while those from non-farming backgrounds, often with contacts and experience in other occupations, had more significant views on the pros and cons of other work. Older farmers, too, showed more agreement among themselves than the less-experienced younger group. On the whole, those who had entered farming from other walks of life placed rather higher values on some of the non-material aspects of a farmer's occupation while those brought up in farming were more concerned with factors threatening their financial position. A similar but less marked cleavage was observed in respect of age; farmers under 45 tended to set more store by the intangible assets while those over 45 were, understandably, more anxious about security and maintaining their income.

On the advantages in being a farmer, those from a non-farming background scored higher in respect of both *independence* and *open-air life and satisfaction with the work*. *Variety in the work* had more significance for those from farming families; to the others *challenge and risk* and by a small margin *chance of capital gain* scored higher. Hence those with a longer association with farming, by upbringing and age, tended to value the work itself, in its variety and outdoor aspects, while those who had chosen to farm more recently were most conscious of the subjective elements of independence and challenge. Younger farmers and those from non-farm backgrounds considered *loss of independence* and *less satisfaction* to be severe drawbacks in being an employee, attributes referring to the farmer's own experience in the work. Older farmers and those with a longer association with farming, and hence little non-farm experience, were more disturbed at the threat of *being involved in labour disputes* and particularly with *the risk of unemployment*. Farming to them represents security and factors threatening security may be very strong deterrents to outward mobility. *Loss of status* was not given a high score by any group. Younger farmers in particular suggested that status nowadays is judged on current levels of consumption rather than land ownership. On this scale the small farmer might occupy a very modest position.

Respondents with a farm upbringing placed much more emphasis on the economic disadvantages in being a farmer whereas the physical discomforts seemed more irksome to those from other backgrounds, who were not yet resigned to these conditions. Younger farmers in particular objected to *long hours* and *being tied to the farm* and were most strongly in favour of *shorter hours and regular holidays* in non-farm employment. To summarise: farmers as a whole tended to value the satisfactions derived from their work and their independence above considerations of income. Those groups with better prospects of employment outside farming—the younger

farmers and those who have not always been in farming, placed relatively higher values on these non-material aspects. In very broad terms, therefore, those who could move out of farming are unwilling to do so; those who are more willing would be less able.

SATISFACTION WITH THE PRESENT OCCUPATION

Another measure of farmers' satisfaction with their way of life was given by the numbers who thought that if they had to make the decision again, they would still choose to farm (Table 29).

Table 29. Farmers' satisfaction with incomes and farming

<i>Financial position in another job</i>	<i>Would farm again Number</i>	<i>Would not farm again, not stated or unsure Number</i>	<i>All farmers Number</i>
Better	29	14	43
Same	15	9	24
Worse	21	6	27
Not stated	3	7	10
All farmers*	68	36	104

Nearly 70 per cent said they would make the same choice and only 23 per cent were dissatisfied and would in retrospect have preferred a different job, the remainder being undecided. Moreover, 29 farmers who thought they would be better off financially in another occupation were nevertheless prepared to farm over again if the choice were open, indicating that they were willing to sacrifice a certain amount of income to remain in farming.

If might be expected that farmers with better prospects of employment outside farming, those who have a higher 'opportunity cost', would be more dissatisfied with the present level and future prospects of incomes from small farms. Those with a low opportunity cost would have a smaller incentive to move and it would be logical to suppose they also had less reason for dissatisfaction. A young farmer, for example, whose family has business connections, who is making £1,200 from a small farm might be able to command £2,000 for shorter hours of work if he were employed in business or industry. On the other hand, a small farmer nearing retirement age, whose net farm income was only £500 might not be able to earn more if he took another job. In theory, the younger farmer should feel more dissatisfaction with his lot.

On the contrary, the reverse appears to be the case. In the survey, those who were younger, who were expanding the farm business and were more anxious to move to a larger farm and those from Hertfordshire, from non-farm backgrounds and with experience or training for other work, also seemed to be more satisfied with their present way of life. Those with longer and stronger connections with farming, through upbringing, location and lack of other skills and those who were older, less disposed to move to a bigger farm and who showed no evidence of enlarging the farm business to improve their standing in agriculture, were more doubtful about farming again if they had the chance, as illustrated in Table 30. (To eliminate the effects of interdependence between variables, two-way comparisons were made between each pair of factors and the other five pairs in turn. This in no way alters the above conclusions.) Of 29 farmers who said they would not farm again or were doubtful, 26 lived in the Fens, 25 had static farm businesses, 24 came from farming families, 21 were without experience of other work and 21 were past their middle forties; 23 showed at least four of these characteristics.

Table 30. Factors influencing a farmer's satisfaction with his way of life

(Percentages indicate proportions of farmers who would choose to farm again)

				%					%
<i>Location</i>					<i>Age</i>				
Herts	..	..	..	92	Under 40	..	..	..	91
Fens	..	..	..	56	40-49	..	..	..	63
					50 and over	..	..	..	65
<i>Family background</i>					<i>Farm business</i>				
White-collar	..	..	..	94	Dynamic	..	..	..	87
Manual	..	..	..	76	Static	..	..	..	63
Farm	..	..	..	62					
<i>Experience of other work</i>					<i>Potential mobility† between farms</i>				
Some	..	..	..	76	High	..	..	..	81
None	..	..	..	67	Medium	..	..	..	68
					Low	..	..	..	61

† High .. -0 to 2 objections to moving to a larger farm
 Medium .. -3 to 5 objections to moving to a larger farm
 Low .. -6 to 10 objections to moving to a larger farm.

This surprising result challenges the traditionally-held view that farmers with the lowest opportunity cost cling to farming as a way of life. On the contrary, farmers with less chance of taking a different occupation or with less inclination to improve their financial standing within agriculture were less mentally committed to farming and less anxious to repeat the experience.

One interpretation is that farmers feel they must justify the choice they have made. Those who have recently chosen to enter farming rather than other occupations, in other words younger farmers, those from non-farming families, with experience or opportunities for other work, are bound to express their satisfaction with the farming life; to do otherwise would be to admit that they had made the wrong decision. Older and more experienced farmers, on the other hand, are cautious of admitting to any satisfaction; the natural optimism of youth and subsequent pessimism may be significant here. Another suggestion is that progress of any sort is encouraging. The younger farmer who is keen to move to a larger farm or one who is actively expanding the farm business, has a goal before him and will sacrifice present income to achieve it. Although his opportunity cost now may be high, he believes that in a few years his farm income will be higher than the best alternatives. Hence he feels no urge to give up farming. On the other hand, an older farmer may feel deprived of income *now*, in comparison with his position earlier. A farmer who had been on the same holding for many years, with a static business and no prospect of taking on a larger farm, would probably have been better off during the early 1950s than in the late 1960s relative to other sectors, irrespective of changes in his own real income. This situation could well lead to dissatisfaction, which the farmer expresses by saying that the industry has treated him badly and he would not choose to farm again.

The evidence of this chapter gives a new slant to the problem of occupational mobility among small farmers. Those with a better chance of moving show greater devotion to farming as a way of life and say they are prepared to stay even if this involves a loss of income. Farmers less anxious to remain in farming are those with less prospect of moving out, and with little chance of finding a satisfactory alternative. To put it in a nutshell: those who could move will not whilst those who would move cannot. This being the case, there seems to be little scope for attracting the established small farmer out of agriculture into another occupation by financial incentives. Instead, it would be more profitable to consider the movement out of farming by those at the end of their working life and the entry of newcomers to the farming industry.

CHAPTER 7

Plans for Retirement

Traditionally it is held that farmers never retire until forced to do so. The Wise Committee on Statutory Smallholdings¹ found that 41 per cent of tenants were not prepared to retire, whilst among the farmers in his survey in 1950 Ashton found few that expected to retire.² This attitude seems to be disappearing, however, and farmers are coming to accept an age for retirement. Half the small farmers in the survey, and naturally these were mainly older men, expressed some ideas about retiring. Eleven said they would not give up until bedridden and hoped to die in harness but the remaining 39 were prepared to retire, usually at 65. The plans of these older farmers for disposing of their holdings and their attitudes towards the Government's scheme for structural improvements and retirement grants have a bearing on the severity of the small farm problem in the future.

DISPOSAL OF THE FARM

When asked what they planned to do after retiring, nineteen farmers at least hoped to continue in an active life. Six intended to take another job and thirteen to keep an interest in practical farming, either on a part-time basis or by helping on a son's farm at busy times. One farmer in three had a son, son-in-law or nephew to continue the business and half said they would sell the farm or return it to the landlord. (Often in these cases they expected the land to be joined to a neighbouring farm.) The rest would hold the land, either running it as a part-time enterprise or having a tenant or manager. As Table 31 shows, more Fen farmers expected to release the land, more in Hertfordshire to hold it or hand it on to an heir.

Table 31. Farmers' plans for disposal of their holding

<i>Disposal of farm</i>	<i>Fens</i> %	<i>Herts</i> %	<i>All farmers</i> %
Sell or return to landlord	61	27	49
Hand over to heir	29	46	35
Farm part-time, let, or have manager	10	27	16
All farmers†	100	100	100

The need to find a new house can be an obstacle to retirement, especially for the tenant farmer who may have difficulty in finding suitable accommodation, within his means, in the same neighbourhood. It was not a serious problem for these farmers, however. In the Fens tenant farmers commonly live in a village, often at some distance from their land. A number of farmers foresaw that when they gave up, their farms would be amalgamated with other holdings, leaving them free to stay in the farmhouse. Sometimes the son who expected to inherit already had a home. In all, two-thirds of the farmers questioned planned to continue living in the same house when they retired, seven others to stay in the locality and only six to move out of the district.

THE 'COPPER HANDSHAKE'

Under the 1967 Agriculture Act³ the Government introduced measures designed to improve farm structure. Besides grants for amalgamation, incentives are offered to small farmers to quit farming. Among the conditions are the disappearance of at least one genuine farm which was an 'uncommercial unit' and the formation of either a commercial farm requiring more than 600 S.M.D. or an intermediate unit (275 to 600 S.M.D.). The retiring farmer is entitled to a pension,

in proportion to the acreage released but must undertake not to engage in full-time farming again. Those under 55 may take a lump sum, which could be used to start a business or for retraining, whilst those between 55 and 65 may choose either a direct payment or a pension. Certain features of the scheme would accord with the wishes of farmers in the survey; for instance, the retiring occupier may continue living in the same house and even farm a small area of land.

Reactions of all the farmers in the survey to the 'copper handshake' were sought. The survey was carried out during 1967 when the bill was before Parliament and frequently being aired in the farming press, yet surprisingly few farmers claimed to have heard of it. A higher proportion of the younger and Hertfordshire farmers were familiar with the scheme (Table 32).

Table 32. Proportions of farmers who said they knew of the 'copper handshake'

<i>Age of farmer</i>				<i>Location of farmer</i>			
			%				%
Under 40	..	..	74	Herts	..	..	64
41-45	..	..	70	Fens	..	..	49
46-50	..	..	56				
Over 50	..	..	47	All farmers	..	..	56

General reactions to the scheme were unfavourable. Only seven farmers said they were prepared to apply, six others thought they might consider it in a few years' time, while seven more thought the scheme was well-conceived. More were doubtful about its acceptability or thought they were not eligible, while the majority said they would not apply. As Table 33 shows, older farmers, those with static businesses and those from the Fens tended to be more favourably disposed than younger, dynamic-business or Hertfordshire farmers respectively, the differences being highly significant in each case. (Those from farming families were a little more inclined to apply than those from non-farming backgrounds but not significantly so.) These findings, insofar as they reflect farmers' true feelings, suggest that the scheme will not be taken up very readily and this is proving to be the case. With 6,000 agricultural holdings disappearing each year in England and Wales, only 996 applications for 'quittance' grants had been made up to the end of July 1968, a little under 1,800 for the whole of the United Kingdom.⁴ (So far, 80 applications had been approved, the estimated cost being £64,000 or an average of £800 per farmer.)

Table 33. Factors affecting farmers' attitudes towards applying for a retirement grant

<i>Whether farmer would apply</i>			<i>Herts</i>	<i>Fens</i>	<i>Under 50</i>	<i>Over 50</i>	<i>Dynamic</i>	<i>Static</i>	<i>All farmers</i>
			%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	..	..	4	8	3	11	0	10	7
Possible	..	..	7	17	12	14	10	13	12
Doubtful	..	..	29	29	32	24	20	32	29
No	..	..	51	31	41	38	53	34	39
No views	..	..	9	15	12	13	17	11	13
All farmers	..	..	100	100*	100	100*	100	100*	100
Numbers	..	..	45	59	59	45	30	74	104

Farmers' reactions are summarised in Table 34. Objections were not always clearly defined and farmers often subscribed to more than one of the statements shown. It was commonly felt that a farmer who had been successful would not need a Government pension. Accepting a grant would therefore be an admission of failure and this may have been in the minds of those who thought the scheme would not attract the majority of farmers. There is perhaps a parallel in the elderly who are too proud to draw the Old Age Pension. This attitude will probably disappear in time, as farmers see how others have fared under the scheme.

Table 34. Farmers' attitudes towards the 'copper handshake'

	Attitude	Number of farmers
Good scheme and considers applying	10
Good scheme for other farmers and those retiring anyway	11
Does not want to retire, not interested, thinks not eligible, plans for son to have farm, etc.		26
Will not attract majority of farmers	21
Good farmers do not need a pension	8
Better to sell in the open market	9
Insufficient incentive	5
Opposed to Government interference	6
Numbers of farmers expressing views	96

A few farmers considered that the sum was insufficient to attract many applicants and others thought they could sell their farms more advantageously without being hampered by the restrictions attached to the scheme. The condition that the amalgamated holding cannot be broken up for forty years is a heavy handicap, since land use and farming methods can change radically in a much shorter time. (The Minister of Agriculture is now easing this restriction.) It was felt, too, that if it were known that the vendor's pension depended on his selling the farm to a close neighbour, he would be in a weak bargaining position. For the two survey areas it is probably true that small farmers could sell their holdings very favourably without becoming involved in the scheme. In the Fens, the pressure for expansion from large, highly-mechanised arable farmers coupled with the very high quality of the land mean that any small acreage will almost certainly command a high price. A number of the older farmers said their land was already bespoken by neighbouring farmers. In Hertfordshire, where there are proportionately fewer small full-time farms, the pressure for land for amalgamation is matched by a strong demand for part-time farms and it may be in the farmer's interest to sell his small holding to a London businessman rather than to another farmer. It would seem that the retirement scheme has far less application in agriculturally-rich areas like the Fens or in the economically-favoured, highly urbanised south-east, than in the remote uplands of the north, west and Wales where it may well meet a real need.

Finally there were farmers who resented the retirement scheme on the grounds that it interfered with their rights and independence. Since the scheme is entirely voluntary on the part of both amalgamator and recipient, it can scarcely warrant this criticism. The choice is with the farmer. If he feels it is time to 'give up the unrewarding struggle', the means are available but if he values his independence above all, he is free to remain in farming. The existence of a safety net does not detract from the skill of those who perform on a tightrope.

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CHAPTER 8

Generational Mobility

One of the greatest obstacles to raising farmers' incentive income is the facility with which newcomers can enter the industry. If entrants were limited there would be less competition for holdings and therefore more opportunities for improving farm structure. At present, the entry of outsiders is restricted by the amount of capital needed to buy and equip a farm but this may not apply to farmers' sons. In fact, they may find it easier to stay in agriculture than move to another occupation. It has been traditional for at least one son in a farmer's family to take over the family holding. While the availability of the farm with its associated working capital is a considerable asset, it may also carry the obligation to work for the father for a number of years and later to provide for his old age. The force of family interests and local expectations may make it hard for the son to refuse. In addition, a farmer's son learns about farming from an early age but may be quite ignorant of the range of alternatives, conditions of work and prospects elsewhere. This tendency to follow on is strengthened where parents, relatives and close acquaintances have never worked outside agriculture. Where the farm is isolated, this might involve a long journey to work or the son's leaving home altogether in order to have another job. All these factors increase the likelihood of the son remaining on the farm.¹

MEANS OF STARTING TO FARM

Between 60 and 80 per cent of the present generation of farmers in England and Wales has originated from farming families, and in this sample the proportion was 65 per cent. As expected, there were more farmers with farming backgrounds in the predominantly agricultural counties than near London. Some information was gathered from the small farmers in the survey on their means of starting to farm. Exactly half had started by taking over from or joining forces with their father (42 farmers) or another close relative (10 farmers). A few had subsequently moved but 49 were still farming land once held by a relative. Roughly half these farmers had had to wait for the death of the previous occupier, suggesting that retirement of farmers was indeed less common in the previous generation than it is now. In a few cases the farmer had joined partnership with the previous occupier or had been given part of his land (Table 35).

Table 35. Means of entry to farming for those taking over relatives' farms

<i>Means of taking over</i>						<i>Number of farmers</i>
On death of occupier	..	..	..	..	..	24
On retirement of occupier	..	..	..	..	..	20
Joined partnership with occupier	..	..	..	..	..	3
Given part of farm	..	..	..	..	..	3
Not known	..	..	..	..	..	2
All farmers taking over from relatives						52

Ashton, in his survey of farmers in Oxfordshire and Warwickshire in 1950, found that farmers' sons started to farm at a significantly earlier age than other sons, because the father had been able to help them become established. Nalson, on the other hand, working in the Pennines, showed that farmer's sons who had to wait to inherit the family holding, started significantly *later* than other entrants. The evidence of this survey was much closer to Nalson's than to Ashton's and it suggests that whilst larger farmers may be able, or were perhaps able in the past, to start their sons on farms of their own, small farmers' sons have to wait for the father to retire or die before they can start independently. (Tables 36 and 37).

Table 36. Farmers' backgrounds and age starting to farm

Age starting to farm	Ashton's survey		This survey	
	Farmers' sons	Others	Farmers' sons	Others
Under 25	29	18	16	21
25-29	23	20	29	24
30-39	40	42	37	37
40 and over	8	20	18	18
All farmers	100	100*	100	100
Number of farmers ..	102	45	66	38

Table 37. Farmers' age and means of starting to farm

Age starting to farm	Nelson's survey		This survey	
	From parents	Otherwise	From parents	Otherwise
Under 35	52.5	71	53	73
35 or over	47.5	29	47	27
All farmers	100	100*	100	100*
Number of farmers ..	61	111	42	62

THE RISING GENERATION

In view of the uncertain, if not discouraging, outlook for the small farmer today and the wealth of other opportunities, one would expect fewer farmers' sons to come forward to take over family farms. The survey evidence did not seem to point this way, however, since a high proportion of sons were being recruited for agriculture. Out of 46 sons at work, over half were engaged in agriculture, 20 working with their fathers at home, two employed on other farms and two farming on their own account. The others were divided equally between white-collar and manual occupations. Ashton and Nelson both found about the same proportion of sons working on the family farm, as seen in Table 38, but rather more working for other farmers or farming independently. This reflects the diminishing opportunities in agriculture today and the decline in the size of the labour force.

Table 38. Occupations of farmers' sons in three surveys

Occupation	Ashton	Nelson	This survey
	1950	1960	1967
Father's farm	48	40	44
Other farm	8	15	4
Farming on own account	17	5	4
Non-farm work	27	40	48
All sons working	100	100	100
Number in sample	111	132	46

If a farmer comes from a farming family, his sons are likely to farm also. Nelson found this in his study² and in the present survey nearly two-thirds of the sons of farmers who were themselves farmers' sons were working in agriculture, as compared with only one sixth of those whose paternal grandfathers were in middle-class occupations or two-fifths from manual-working families (Table 39).

Table 39. Farmers' backgrounds and occupations of sons

Type of occupation of sons	Background of farmers' father				Numbers
	Farm	White-collar	Manual	Total	
Farming	64	17	42	52	24
White-collar	25	33	16	24	11
Manual	11	50	42	24	11
All sons	100	100	100	100	46

Besides the 46 sons at work there were another 56 in the sample and 23 of these were at secondary school. According to the parents, at least 14 of these boys were hoping to come into agriculture, suggesting a recruitment rate of 60 per cent. Once again the proportion was higher in the Fens (71 per cent) than in Hertfordshire (45 per cent). While this gives an indication of the continuing attraction of farming for farmers' sons it does not necessarily mean that half or more of small farmers' sons are likely to take over the family holdings. Circumstances may change and the farm may not be available for inheritance. Parents' aspirations for their son's careers may not be fulfilled; the son may change his mind or he may never have intended to farm. Conversely, some of the schoolboys with other plans or with none might choose farming. Of those who make careers in agriculture, only a few can farm on their own account. Some will become farmworkers and others will leave agriculture for better-paid jobs with better prospects elsewhere. Agriculture attracts 5 per cent of the boys entering employment in Britain each year but keeps only 3 per cent of the adult male workers, showing the magnitude of the loss.³

The fact that many farmers' sons start working in agriculture is important, because those who change their job later have often missed the opportunity to train for a highly-skilled or professional post. Consequently they tend to move into the lower-paid and less-skilled manual or routine non-manual jobs. The responsibility for advice on careers rests largely with the parents, who are more likely than not to encourage their sons to farm. A number of parents professed not to influence the sons either way, yet admitted they would be pleased should they choose to farm. Only half as many small farmers said they would try to dissuade a son from farming in view of the prospects. Most of them appreciated the difficulties facing an aspiring farmer who had no chance of inheriting a farm and more said they would try to dissuade such a young man from farming, as Table 40 shows.

Table 40. Farmers' advice to sons and other youths on entering farming

<i>Advice on entering farming</i>						<i>Sons per cent of farmers</i>	<i>Other young men per cent of farmers</i>
Encourage	..	..	..	..	..	44	39
Neutral	..	..	..	..	..	22	12
Discourage	..	..	..	..	..	20	38
No views	..	..	..	..	..	14	11
<hr/>							
All farmers*	..	..	..	..	..	100	100
Number of farmers	..	..	..	..	..	104	104

By no means all the farmers were in favour of formal training at an agricultural college or farm institute for those who were anxious to farm. Fifty-five were in favour and thirty-seven against such training, the other twelve expressing no views. This means that there could be a considerable number of sons in this survey and on other small farms, without formal qualifications which might enable them to take other jobs, working for their fathers until their middle-thirties. By the time they are able to assume occupancy of the holding, the outlook may not be so favourable. This may give too pessimistic an impression, not justified in every case. For instance, there were elderly farmers in the survey co-operating with their sons to expand the farm for the son's benefit and several in their 40's keen to move to larger farms in order to allow their sons to join them in the business.

SUCCESSION TO FARMS

Out of 104 farmers, half were unlikely to be succeeded as there were no heirs or the sons were not interested in farming (Table 41). A few of these farms might yet remain in the family, for at least one farmer was retiring in favour of a nephew and several had sons-in-law, actual or prospective, already in farming. Among the other half, 30 farmers had sons already farming or anxious to do so and most of the 21 with younger sons hoped that one would come into the business. Thus a

third of the farms were likely to remain in the same families and up to a half might do so. Half to two-thirds of the holdings were hence likely to be available at the end of the present occupancies, to be absorbed into larger units, or become part-time farms or to employ the energy and resources of another new aspiring farmer.

Table 41. Succession to farms in the survey

<i>Probability of farm remaining in the family</i>	<i>Number of farms</i>
No sons—most unlikely	41
Sons not engaged in farming—unlikely ..	12
Sons below 11 years—not determined ..	21
Sons over 11 years keen to farm—possible	8
Sons already in agriculture—probable ..	22
<hr/>	
Total number of farms	104

REFERENCES

1. R. Gasson, 'Occupations Chosen by the Sons of Farmers', *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Vol. 19 (3), September 1968.
2. J. S. Nalson, *op. cit.*, Chapter 7.
3. M. C. Whitby, 'Labour Mobility and Training in Agriculture', *Westminster Bank Review*, August 1967.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusions

Many small farm businesses below commercial size will cease being full-time units over the next twenty years. Most of these will be absorbed into larger farms, become part-time holdings or be transferred to non-agricultural use. This change is taking place already, but not rapidly enough to prevent the incomes of small farmers as a whole from falling. At the present time, some small operators are making strenuous efforts to expand into the 'commercial' range. Others are increasing turnover a little or cutting back expenditure, but scarcely fast enough to maintain their incomes, while some are marking time and thus declining relative to other sectors of the economy. Whilst many small farmers are keen to have more land, they can obtain it only at the expense of another holding. When it comes to competing for a vacant holding however, the small farmer is often outbid by the larger operator with more capital and credit.

Ways are being sought to reduce the numbers of 'uncommercial' small farmers with the minimum of social hardship. The three methods under consideration are, to hasten the retirement of elderly farmers, to encourage established farmers of under 55 to change their occupation and to limit the entry of newcomers. The idea of retiring at 65 is now more generally accepted by farmers but as yet the Government's pension scheme is not popular. Many of the small farmers approached in the survey were tenants of statutory smallholdings and it was not clear whether they would be eligible for the grant. For the owner-occupier, the incentive may not be sufficient, especially in the south-east of England where land commands high prices in the open market. If the scheme gains popularity and hastens by a few years the retirement of small farmers, the effect on farm structure will be favourable but not overwhelming, since these would be farmers who were prepared to retire anyway. It does, however, ensure the disappearance of uneconomic holdings.

There seems to be less prospect of encouraging younger farmers to quit farming for other jobs. Far from wanting to give up, the majority in the survey were satisfied with their occupation and keen to expand. Those who were younger, with experience of other work, more training and better chances of finding alternative employment were also likely to be making more progress with the farm. Moreover they set a high store by their independence and other non-material values in farming. Older farmers with static businesses and less inclination to move or expand had often had little experience of other work and would be chary of committing themselves to the untried world of industry. The 'quittance grant' might, however, attract some farmers between these two extremes, those who had entered farming early and had become fully aware of their position rather later in life. Especially if there is no son to follow them, such farmers may become dissatisfied in their forties and be prepared to change their occupation.

By far the best approach of the three would be to tackle the young aspiring farmer before he is committed to farming, while there is still time to train him for another career and before his sturdy independence has had time to harden. It would be preferable not to embark on an ill-conceived career in farming rather than to start and have difficulty in salvaging the capital in five years' time. The problem is mainly one of communications. The entry of newcomers from outside agriculture is effectively restricted by the very high capital requirements and the shortage of farms to rent. Those with unlimited capital behind them are not prevented from coming but neither are they likely to make a start on farms which are too small. Farmers' sons can slip into farming rather more easily, sometimes for the lack of making any other decision. In the survey, at least a third of the small farmers expected to hand the farms over to their sons. Here those who can influence them—school teachers, Youth Employment Officers, leaders of Young Farmers' Clubs

and above all the parents themselves, have a responsibility to make the young aware of the difficulties facing the small farmer today and the probability of his problems increasing. Most farmers in the survey and their wives appreciated their position and had tried to put it across to their sons. Some new entrants attend agricultural colleges, where there is an opportunity for them to be made familiar with the prospects for the uneconomic small holding. Such a campaign needs to be backed up by an introduction to the other opportunities and training facilities available.

In training every future farmer, and particularly those with more limited resources, it is important to show not only the nature of the farming operation but the problem of making a living, the future outlook and the possibility of enjoying a higher income for less effort in another occupation. Those who start farming today would still be of working age in the year 2000, by which time the structure of British agriculture may have changed beyond all recognition. More than at any previous time, it is essential that those who launch themselves into farming should do so with their eyes open. Of course, those who are sufficiently keen will always find the means to farm and many will undoubtedly make a success of it. The danger is for those who miss other opportunities and drift into farming by default, only to realise the difficulties when it is too late.

APPENDIX 1

Description of the Sample

The average size of all farms was 67 acres of crops, grass and rough grazing. The Fen farms were naturally much smaller, averaging 33 acres compared with 110 acres in Hertfordshire. Half of the latter exceeded 100 acres, (Table A), contrasting with the Fens where the largest farm was only 80 acres. As the size distribution in the sample did not differ significantly from that of all small farms in the areas in 1967, the sample can be taken as representative.

Table A. Acreage distribution of survey farms, 1967

<i>Acres crops, grass and rough grazing</i>	<i>Fens</i>	<i>Herts</i>	<i>Total</i>
	<i>Number of farms</i>		
1-5	4	5	9
6-20	17	4	21
21-50	24	6	30
51-100	14	5	19
101-150	—	9	9
151-200	—	10	10
Over 200	—	6	6
All farms*	59	45	104

Half the total acreage was owned and half rented. Rather more than half was owned in Hertfordshire, while in the Fens renting of land was more common (Table B). Many of the farms, particularly in the Fens, were statutory smallholdings. Most holdings were run by one man but six in the Fens and seven in Hertfordshire were partnerships, usually of two brothers or a father and son.

Table B. Tenure of land in the survey farms

	<i>Fens</i>	<i>Herts</i>	<i>Total</i>
Total acreage in all survey farms (acres)	1,956	4,975	6,931
Proportion owned by occupiers	32%	53%	47%
Proportion rented	68%	47%	53%

Two-thirds of the occupiers had come into possession of their holdings after 1951; the rest had started earlier and six had been in occupation since before 1930. Fen farmers had spent more years on their present farms, only 30 per cent having come within the last ten years as against 58 per cent in Hertfordshire (Table C).

Table C. Distribution of survey farmers by year of entry to present holding

<i>Year first occupying present holding</i>	<i>Number of farmers</i>	<i>Fens %</i>	<i>Herts %</i>	<i>Total %</i>
1961 onwards	22	13	33	22
1956-60	21	17	25	20
1951-55	21	25	14	20
1946-50	17	18	13	16
1941-45	7	10	2	7
1931-40	10	10	9	9
1921-30	4	4	4	4
Pre-1921	2	3	—	2
All farmers*	104	100	100	100

APPENDIX 2

Influence of Location on Potential Mobility

Table D. Age distribution of farmers in the Fens and Hertfordshire

	<i>Age range</i>						<i>Fens per cent of farmers</i>	<i>Herts per cent of farmers</i>
25-35	3	16
36-45	27	40
46-55	31	20
56-65	34	18
Over 65	5	6
All farmers*	100	100
Number of farmers	59	45

Table E. Age leaving school of farmers in the Fens and Hertfordshire

	<i>Age leaving school</i>						<i>Fens per cent of farmers</i>	<i>Herts per cent of farmers</i>
Under 14	24	3
14	67	44
15	7	32
16 or over	2	21
All farmers*	100	100

Table F. Type of school last attended by farmers in the Fens and Hertfordshire

							<i>Fens per cent of farmers</i>	<i>Herts per cent of farmers</i>
Local village/elementary	..	..	..	..	..	..	81	28
Town central/secondary	..	..	..	..	..	..	14	28
Grammar	..	..	..	..	..	..	5	14
Public or boarding	..	..	..	..	..	..	—	30
All farmers*	..	..	..	..	..	..	100	100

Table G. Farmer's location and suggestions for other occupations

	<i>Type of occupation</i>						<i>Fens per cent of farmers</i>	<i>Herts per cent of farmers</i>
White-collar	7	34
Own business	8	34
Skilled manual	3	8
Semi- or unskilled	19	11
Farmwork	20	3
Retire	14	5
No ideas	29	5
All farmers*	100	100

APPENDIX 3

Personal Ties with Farming—some Local Comparisons

Table H. Occupations of fathers of farmers in the Fens and Hertfordshire

<i>Father's occupation</i>						<i>Fens</i> <i>per cent of farmers</i>	<i>Herts</i> <i>per cent of farmers</i>
Farmer ..	..	..	..	..	..	71	61
Own business connected with farming	..	..	..	..	..	5	7
Farm worker ..	..	..	..	..	..	15	—
Own business not connected	..	..	..	..	..	—	15
Other non-farm work	..	..	..	..	..	9	17
All fathers of farmers*						100	100
Number of farmers ..						59	45

Table I. Occupations of close relatives of Fen and Hertfordshire farmers

<i>Occupation</i>						<i>Fens</i> <i>per cent of farmers</i>	<i>Herts</i> <i>per cent of farmers</i>
Farmer ..	..	..	..	..	..	39	44
Farm manager, worker	..	..	..	..	..	20	—
Other occupations connected with farming	..	..	..	..	..	6	6
Unrelated occupations:							
Own business	..	..	..	..	..	4	6
White-collar	..	..	..	..	..	11	28
Manual	..	..	..	..	..	20	16
All relatives of farmers*						100	100
Number of relatives ..						214	86

Table J. Backgrounds of farmers' wives in the Fens and Hertfordshire

<i>Wives come from</i>						<i>Fens</i> <i>per cent of wives</i>	<i>Herts</i> <i>per cent of wives</i>
Farm ..	..	..	..	..	..	50	30
Country ..	..	..	..	..	..	27	27
Town..	..	..	..	..	..	23	43
All farmers' wives†						100	100
Number of wives ..						55	36

Table K. Local ties among farmers in the Fens and Hertfordshire

<i>Farmer's place of upbringing</i>						<i>Fens</i> <i>per cent of farmers</i>	<i>Herts</i> <i>per cent of farmers</i>
Same farm ..	..	..	..	..	..	28	23
Same parish ..	..	..	..	..	..	31	16
Local parish ..	..	..	..	..	..	27	12
Elsewhere in survey counties..	..	..	..	..	..	7	5
Other eastern counties	..	..	..	..	..	—	9
Greater London	..	..	..	..	..	—	26
Elsewhere	..	..	..	..	..	7	9
All farmers*						100	100

Table L. Proportions of farmers' near relatives living locally

<i>Proportion living in same district</i>						<i>Fens</i> <i>per cent of farmers</i>	<i>Herts</i> <i>per cent of farmers</i>
More than half ..	..	..	..	..	..	85	53
About half ..	..	..	..	..	..	3	10
Less than half ..	..	..	..	..	..	12	37
All farmers*						100	100

