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University of Reading
Department of
Agricultural Economics & Management

MILTON KEYNES 1967-84: THE FARMING STORY

A.K. Giles
D.J. Ansell

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A.K. Giles and D.J. Ansell

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Preface

As recorded in the main text, this Department has concerned itself in one way or another with 'the farming story' at Milton Keynes from 1966 until the date of this publication: a total of nearly twenty years. As will be seen, the story is not completely over - and it may have an important sequel when farming on the perimeter takes on a new permanence as the city emerges in its more complete state. So far as the displacement of agriculture in the Designated Area is concerned, however, the major part of the story is over and we have decided therefore (but in part also because of constraints on our own resources) that we should conclude our account of the story at this point. This is not to say that, if there is a fresh chapter to add, we will not pick it up again at some future date.

This report is essentially a summary of all of our previous reports, brought up to date by details of events since we last reported on them in 1978. During the course of our five previous reports, and here in this one, we have tried faithfully to record and analyse the impact of urban development on this scale on a particular part of the farming community and, especially, to draw attention to the changes in that impact over the years in terms of events, attitudes and feelings. We have tried to remain detached in an often emotive arena. And if in this report we have, sometimes, referred back to some of that emotiveness "it is not to rekindle old feelings - but because they are, to our minds, an integral part of this farming story, which should not therefore be glossed over because it is in the past. Important lessons can be learned from it for the future".

It is precisely for that principal reason - to learn from lessons - that this project was embarked upon by this Department in the first place. It is also why we have remained interested for a longer period of time than with any previous particular piece of research.

Note. Because of the time span over which this study has been conducted it has been thought appropriate, throughout, to express land area in terms of acres rather than hectares.

Acknowledgements

This Department has been and remains grateful to many individuals in and around Milton Keynes who, over the years, have helped us in one way or another, and without whose friendly co-operation this story, in its various parts, could not have been written.

It goes without saying that paramount amongst these were the farmers, their wives, sons and daughters, and their employees who patiently answered our many questions, often, one suspected, long after they would have preferred to put the episode out of their minds. There were, in addition, however, many individuals representing various groups and organisations who were equally helpful: included amongst them representatives of the National Farmers Union, the then National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers, the Country Landowners Association, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food, the Bucks Agricultural Executive Committee, and the Milton Keynes Development Corporation itself.

There were too many individuals involved to mention them all here and it would be invidious anyhow, to mention any but a very few. All of them are sincerely thanked but four, in particular, we must single out for special mention because of the nature and duration of their help: the late Mr. J. W. Shirley, Chairman of the Bucks Agricultural Executive Committee, who encouraged and helped us in various ways during the speculative beginnings of our work; Mr. W. G. Snook who, as Chairman of the local Farmers Action Group, helped to create a general climate of willing co-operation in which we could work; Mr. Henry Diamond, our always helpful point of contact, for a long time, with the Development Corporation and finally, Major Sir Philip Duncombe of the C.L.A. Sir Philip had the distinction of being the only 'official' whom we were able to consult throughout our study. Without exception everyone we consulted or questioned - named or unnamed - was helpful and encouraging without wishing to over-influence us or to become 'identified' with any of our views or findings. The responsibility for these was, and is, ours alone.

Within our own Department, it is probably true to say that more people have been involved (29) in one capacity or another (and often in several capacities) than in any other comparable piece of work. Some helped briefly with one particular survey; others were involved for much of the time. Only the authors of this report have been involved throughout. Like their various colleagues they have valued the experience as much for the personal friendships and the human insights it has offered as for the seriousness and interest of the study itself. At various times the colleagues involved, and their particular functions, have been:-

Research Planning Team:

D. J. Ansell*
H. Casey
A. K. Giles*
A. Harrison*
F. D. Mills*
C. Ritson
J. I. Wittenberg

Field Workers:

D.J. Ansell
Mrs. Wendy Milloy (née Brooker)
R.S. Cook
J.A.L. Dench
Mrs. J.A. Burns* (née Fletcher)
A.K. Giles
N.W.F.B. Hill
E.G. Hunt
C. Ritson
G.A. Urquhart
R.L. Vaughan*
J.I. Wittenberg
J. Wright*

Data Analysts:

R.B. Arkell*
F.G. England
H. Casey
J.A.L. Dench
N.W.F.B. Hill
E.G. Hunt
A.K. Martin*
P.J. Cheshire**
R.J. Tyler**

Reproduction of Reports:

F.G. England
Mrs. B.L. Fisher
Mrs. M. Gibbs
Mrs. M.G. Gray*
Mrs. K.M. Hilton
Mrs. C.M. Patience
Mrs. L.E. Turner (née Brind)

Report Writing:

D.J. Ansell
H. Casey
J.A.L. Dench
A.K. Giles
A. Harrison
C. Ritson

Press Cuttings Officer:

Miss E.M. Elderfield

Consultant:

R.H. Tuck*

Project Co-ordinators:

A.K. Giles
D.J. Ansell

* Still in the Department at time of publication (asterisk used only
where name first mentioned in above list)

** Students

Introduction - The 'Reading' Interest

For various reasons the Department of Agricultural Economics and Management at this University has taken a close interest in events at Milton Keynes. During the course of many years of research and routine investigational work into the economics of farming in the counties surrounding Reading, a special interest has always been taken in Buckinghamshire. This stemmed partly from proximity and partly because of the varied nature of farming in a latitudinally large county. The pre-war work of Thomas and Elms⁽¹⁾ on the structure of farming in the county was followed in the post-war by the work of Harrison⁽²⁾ and it was natural, at the time, that development on the scale proposed at Milton Keynes (not to mention the one-time possibility of a Third London Airport site close by) should concern us. We were, in addition, influenced at the outset of our work by the lack of any previous detailed documentation of the impact of urbanisation on agriculture, and by the unique opportunity that this situation offered for an ongoing study.

Our earliest ambitions were to examine the impact of Milton Keynes on the whole fabric of rural life, but, in the event, unavoidable limitation of resources confined us strictly to farming. Between 1967 and 1984, we have carried out six surveys in the area with a view to identifying in particular three factors: first, the influence of development on farming and farming systems, both inside and outside the designated area, second, the mobility (or lack of it) of individuals who are compelled to move; and third, the nature of some of the social costs that they have to bear.

The findings of our first five surveys carried out between 1967 and 1977⁽³⁾ have each been published separately. No two of our surveys have been identical in design and coverage. Our work has been adjusted according to the stages of development in the designated area: in 1967, a blanket survey of all the resources employed in agriculture in the area - human and financial; in 1971 the first 'revisit' as development and the farming exodus began to get under way; in 1973, after a gap of only two years, with the exodus in full spate and our emphasis on individual case studies - some of hardship, some of benefit; again, after two years in 1975 with a particular examination of the effect of urban development on farming immediately outside the designated area; and then in 1977, with agriculture, as the title of our report suggested, clinging on.

-
- (1)* The Farms and Estates of Buckinghamshire 1938 (Survey Studies No. 4)
- (2)* The Farms of Buckinghamshire 1966 (Misc. Study No. 40)
Farming Change in Buckinghamshire 1967 (Misc. Study No. 43)
- (3)* Milton Keynes: 1967 An Agricultural Inventory
Milton Keynes Revisited: 1971 (Misc. Study No. 51)
Milton Keynes: 1973 Case Studies in a Dwindling Agriculture
(Misc. Study No. 57)
Milton Keynes: 1975 Farming in and out of the Designated Area
(Misc. Study No. 61)
Milton Keynes: 1977 Agriculture Clings On. (In Farm Business
Data 1978)

* All published by the Department of Agricultural Economics and Management, University of Reading.

In a sense the frequency and nature of our surveys and reports --not to mention their titles - tells its own story: an initial and fairly long period, following the establishment of a designated area and a Development Corporation, when relatively little change occurred, followed by a decade of development during which agriculture in the area began and continued to "dwindle" and was finally left "clinging on". It is, of course, not possible here to produce all of the detail of our previous reports; and neither would it be our wish to. Rather, we are concerned to outline the main features of 'the farming story' as reflected in those reports, to bring the story up to date following our latest (and perhaps final) examination of the area in 1983/84, and to draw what general conclusions and lessons we can.

For the reader - whether farmer, administrator, planner, student or local historian - who may be seeking more detail than is contained here, we can only refer him or her to the publications listed on the previous page. It may well be the case that at some future point in time the need will be felt and the resources will be available for us to extend our work in Buckinghamshire - and in the Milton Keynes area in particular - in order to examine new situations. For the time being, however, partly because of the farming 'plateau' that seems to have been reached at Milton Keynes and partly because of the dramatically changed resource situation in this University Department, (like all others) a further report in this series is not envisaged. It should perhaps be said here that one of our particular disappointments in this work has been the reluctance of any organisation - many of whom showed a genuine interest in what we were doing - to make any contribution towards providing the resources to make it possible. In the event we have therefore had to do what was possible, believing it to be important and of interest. It seems improbable though, that, over and above our normal investigations into farming economics, our long standing interest into the structure and circumstances of farming in Buckinghamshire will not draw us back again at some point in the future. In the meantime here is a summary of the "farming story" at Milton Keynes.

Development and Farming

The target population for Milton Keynes was originally set at 250,000 by the end of the present century, rising from a hoped for 150,000 by the mid 1980's. At the time of writing, the population is close to 110,000 and is, therefore, despite the national economic difficulties of recent years, not far from its scheduled growth rate. The principal aim, of course, has always been to develop a city, not to preserve an agriculture and, sooner or later, when that aim is accepted, agricultural and urban land use become incompatible. During the years of development, however, there can be difficulties for all concerned. It is these years of transition and the associated difficulties which this particular 'farming story' is about.

The post-war uptake of agricultural land in England and Wales for various urban and transportational uses has been proceeding regularly at the rate of about 35,000-40,000 acres per year: about 0.1% of the so called 'national farm'. Public and private attitudes to this have varied depending upon opinions towards a complex balance of environmental, economic and strategic issues. This report is not concerned with the many delicacies of that balance, which, as recent events have shown, may clearly change with time, but rather with the effect on one sector of the community - the farming one - when the enforced displacement of some of that community occurs, in this case to make way for a new city.

The picture of farming as a relatively declining sector of developed economies is, of course, a familiar one, stemming from the fairly inelastic demand for most agricultural products. To the extent that resources (especially labour) tend to be drawn out of the farming sector and into other sectors, this is one way of ensuring that those who remain do not necessarily have to enjoy a constantly diminishing slice of the national cake. Frequently in the face of some kinds of urban development, resources transfer themselves in a piecemeal and voluntary way - sometimes associated with retirement - and it is questionable in these cases how much genuine hardship, if any, is involved. Where, however, centrally taken decisions involve enforced displacement of populations then it is very likely indeed that there will be hardship and difficulties for those affected, often stretching over a longer period than is popularly imagined, and it is perhaps in the case of new towns - or the major expansion of existing ones - that enforced displacement occurs in its most extreme form.

This displacement has nothing at all to do with natural and therefore gradual social or economic structural changes within the industry. By contrast, it simply removes from the farming scene a 'bundle' of agricultural resources some of which (the land, for example) will be lost to agricultural production for ever and much of which (the management, the labour and possibly the working capital) will only find re-employment in the same industry if room is made for it either by a compensating exodus or by intensification. Farmers have been likened in this respect to lighthouse keepers: they can't easily start or restart operations unless someone else makes room for them. The authors are not suggesting, of course, that somebody should necessarily make way for them nor that there is anything, from a national economic and social viewpoint, necessarily wrong with the normal transfer of resources out of agriculture into other parts of the economy. Various national and, in Europe, international policies are currently designed to bring about just that. But, from a farming point of view, developments on the scale of Milton Keynes are not normal. It is not necessarily the 'marginal' resources that are

removed, but all -efficient and inefficient - that happen to lie in the area to be developed. We are merely describing here, the impact of that 'removal' as it is; hence the analogy of the lighthouse keeper. At Milton Keynes there were about one hundred of them and those they employed.

The Planning Background

It is not the authors' aim here to describe the detail and intricacies of the planning discussions and events which led up to designation and subsequent development. We are not qualified to do so. It is important to the 'farming story' however, to take note of the time scale that can be involved on these occasions from the earliest rumours until actual development and the effect of that time scale on the confidence and morale of those affected - and therefore on their capacity to make reasonable business and personal decisions. Without any implied criticism of anyone, it can be a lengthy process by any standards, and this can have particularly delaying and therefore damaging effects in an industry like farming, where planning horizons tend also to be lengthy.

It was early in 1967 that the then Minister of Housing and Local Government announced his decision to designate 21,900 acres, including Wolverton and Bletchley. The path leading up to this event had been long drawn out and was perhaps best described by the County Architect and Planning Officer at the time, F.B. Pooley in his booklet entitled 'North Bucks - New City' (1966). Precisely when the concept of a major new city in North Bucks first took root in the minds of those involved it is impossible to say, but certainly a series of policy reports, with the help of which the Buckinghamshire County Council reviewed its 1954 Development Plan, examined the problem of 'overspill' in the county and in particular the feasibility of a new city in the north of the county with a target population of 250,000. This led early in 1964 to the County of Buckinghamshire Development Plan Review and there was little conflict between this Review and the Government's 'South East Study' which, in the Spring of the same year, envisaged the development of the Bletchley area into one of three major new cities for the South East. A year later, planning consultants reporting to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government with a 'Northampton, Bedford and North Bucks Study' confirmed that in their view the area near Bletchley was 'an excellent choice for one of the new cities envisaged in the South East Study'.

There then followed, in April 1966, the Government's Draft Designation Order; in July, a Public Enquiry and in the following January (1967) the Minister's Designation Order. The Milton Keynes New Town Development Corporation was appointed in 1967 under the chairmanship of Lord Campbell of Eskan and towards the end of the year the South East Economic Planning Council acknowledged in its 'Strategy for the South East' that 'plans for the new city of Milton Keynes are well advanced' and recommended that they 'should be implemented as rapidly as possible'. Planning Consultants (Llewelyn-Davies Weeks Forestier-Walker and Bor) were duly appointed and submitted an Interim Report to the Development Corporation late in 1968, followed a little over a year later, in 1970, by the final 'Plan for Milton Keynes'. This plan provided 'a strategic framework in which the city can be developed' and was soon built upon by the Corporation's own 'Implementation Strategy', showing the broad pattern of the proposed uptake of land between 1971 and 1977.

All of this did not mean that uncertainty for the farming community was at an end; it was, in the nature of these particular events, that that simply could not be the case. It did mean, however, that approaching

twenty years of rumour, speculation and uncertainty - which, inevitably took its due toll of the farming community (and of many others, no doubt) in this part of Buckinghamshire was, relatively speaking at an end. In one form or another a degree of uncertainty inevitably continued for some of them for some years more; for a few it is not over yet: and cannot be. The full effect of these years on farming morale and practice became clear to us during the course of our surveys and has been reported by us in detail at the time; it will be referred to again briefly, as part of the whole story, later in this report. Suffice here to acknowledge that it existed, and to understand what caused it.

The Agricultural Interest

In case the impression is given by the last section of this report that farming was in some way deliberately treated badly or kept in uncertainty, that impression must be countered. As explained, uncertainty and frustration there undoubtedly was, but, also as explained, much of this was inherent in the nature of the exercise. No doubt, with hindsight (and certainly at the time) it would be easy for individuals to feel that the whole decision-making process could have been speeded up and that, in any event, more information about the 'state of play' could have been made available. To an extent both of those feelings might be justified but it is characteristic of the democratic process for it to be time-consuming - and bureaucracy moves slowly also. It is also the case in many situations, that, during the decision-making process, there may be no worthwhile information to divulge -- other perhaps than to say that that is the case!

Retrospectively - if not at the time - it would probably be admitted by many who were involved, that, although the ultimate incompatibility of farming and urban development may be inescapable, in all that followed at Milton Keynes, farming was given far more attention and thought than had previously been customary in such circumstances. At the outset, given the need for a new city at all, the Government, in choosing a site, had 'weighed the needs which the new town must help to meet and the advantages of the site against the effect on agriculture and the quality of the land'. Not unnaturally, many local farmers, led by a forceful local N.F.U. Action Group, were anxious to refute this, but in fact very little of the designated area rated higher than grade III on the M.A.F.F.'s five-point land classification scale, and a good deal of it was of a lower grade.

In the subsequent planning procedures, agriculture was the subject of one of many separate Technical Supplements to the Planning Consultant's final report published in 1970. Wibberley and Boddington, both of them at Wye College, were the authors of that Supplement which, amongst other things, proposed the re-letting of any land purchased by the Development Corporation but which was not immediately required for development, in blocks that would be fitted into the proposed grid-network of roads. The proposals were designed to preserve farming in viable units during development and to avoid the creation of a rural slum resulting from 'farming to quit'. In the event, no such neat solution proved feasible but the general philosophy of the report was accepted in an endeavour to 'phase out agriculture in a neat and orderly way'. Proposals to this end were incorporated in 'The Plan for Milton Keynes' and in due course policies have been adopted by the Development Corporation to ensure the maximum possible use of agricultural land, the creation of natural and man-made barriers to minimise the possible growth of an unsightly rural fringe, and genuine endeavours have been made to ensure the retention of viable units within that fringe. In fact, the average size of holdings

within the Designated Area gradually increased during the main spate of development. This is not to say that, in the early days some mistakes were not made, especially in the matter of re-letting land, and that antagonisms were not felt. Compulsory purchase is an emotive area in which to work. Neither is it to say that the ultimate job of the Corporation's land agents has not been to acquire land so that development can proceed in a smooth way. Many farmers, whilst deploring the whole episode, privately acknowledged the difficulties of their task.

Now, in the middle 1980's, farming is confined to a major block of land comprised of nearly 3000 acres in the West of the Designated Area and to certain other scattered areas, notably in the North East, which are owned by the Development Corporation but which, pending development, are let on one year licences. The general pace of economic development suggests that this pattern of farming activity is likely to continue at least for several years. It appears to the authors that this relatively settled picture (compared with that of the previous decade) had led also to a period of tranquil, friendly relationships between the farming community who remain and the staff in the Development Corporation with whom they deal. That relationship has varied over the years depending upon the personalities involved, the magnitude of the problems in hand and the passions engendered. For some time, however, we believe that these relationships have been good, if not very good. Officials on 'both sides' have played a key part in this.

It could not yet be said that the Development Corporation has completed its job in its dealings with the farming community, but it would probably be agreed that it has broken the back of its job. Looking back they are capable of being self critical and know that early mistakes were made. They would also claim, that, within the constraints set by their primary task - to make the appropriate land areas available for development - they have tried to be good landlords. They would point to recent instances of financial assistance with building maintenance and even with land drainage where continued agricultural use can be envisaged for a further five years. More generally, however, they have tried to remove the uncertainty for those still farming which characterised the early years and hope that, apart from some inevitable areas of 'waste land' hemmed in by development, there is little or no evidence on the genuinely farmed land, of 'farming to quit' - a phrase commonly heard in the area in the seventies.

What the Development Corporation has resisted has been pressures that have come from the farming community and those representing their interests either to recreate tenancies on licensed land, or to comply with those who would like to see land that is apparently not required for development in the immediate years ahead de-designated. Recreating tenancies, the Corporation argues, would reopen questions of compensation that have been settled, and dedesignating land could lead to an ultimate and unhappy imbalance between the needs of incoming populations and land available to meet those needs. These issues have been debated and now seem to be resolved in accordance with the Corporation's understandable views.

So, pockets of farming continue, with an emphasis (which became evident quite early on in events) on cereal growing, with some beef and sheep farming in the area's two river valley flood plains. Most of the land is owned by the Development Corporation, Rents for land held on a one year licence averaged (in 1983) £25 per acre - close to average rents paid by sitting tenants in the wider locality, but substantially below the level obtainable on the open market. After initial mistakes which

caused annoyance, a rational policy of letting has been followed with first choice going to those previously farming the land, followed by others farming inside the designated area, before others are considered.

Finally, here, it should be said that there has been no evidence made available to us in our discussions with members of the farming community that the policy of using natural and man made boundaries (major roads, rivers, parks, existing development etc.) in order to minimise the effect of an unsightly urban fringe, has not worked reasonably well. It is difficult for building development not to be unsightly at certain stages, but slum conditions on boundaries have largely been avoided and whilst, in certain localities, vandalism and the deposition of rubbish have increased, their scale does not appear to be greater than we have known it to be around other urban areas with which we are familiar. It is agreed within the farming community that to some extent, at least, the extent of these irritations tends to coincide with the extent to which property, especially fences and gates, is obviously cared for or not. Lack of care invites interference.

On balance, then, it can be said here that whilst agriculture has clearly suffered, it has not in our view, and given the nature of the exercise, been generally badly treated. And as time has gone on those who have continued to farm in the Designated Area have increasingly known where they have stood and have come, with growing familiarity, to see the Development Corporation like any other landlord - albeit with a specific long term brief to fulfil. In our recent enquiries we have been left in little doubt on these scores. As already implied, however, things have not been that way from the outset. At times the farming community has had plenty to grumble about, both in response to the initial decision to locate a city in North Bucks and in the subsequent early handling of affairs. With the passing of time, and with lessons learned, attitudes have changed. We have witnessed and monitored changes and recorded them in earlier reports. Briefly they are summarised in the next section of this report - not to rekindle old feelings - but because they are, to our minds, an integral part of this farming story, which should not, therefore, be glossed over because it is in the past. Important lessons can be learned from it for the future.

Changes in farming and farming attitudes

In the Spring of 1967 - shortly after the Minister's Designation Order had been published and before the Development Corporation had been appointed, the first of this Department's surveys was carried out. A team of research workers stayed in the locality for a week prior to which every farmer known to have land in the Designated Area was invited to take part. Not surprisingly they were ready to talk. Some ninety percent of them agreed to meet us, and with them, their farm workers. A wide range of information was obtained about their personal and farming circumstances, about their attitudes and plans in the face of urban development, as well as about the structure of farming in the locality. It was all reported in detail in our 'Agricultural Inventory' published a year later; it embraced 90 farmers, 30 farmers sons, 79 farm workers, 90 businesses and 14,652 acres.

The area was found to be dominantly one of small-to-medium sized farms, about half owner-occupied and half tenanted; about half arable and half grass, with cereals and the most frequently occurring enterprise (on 74% of the farms) followed by beef (60%), sheep (51%), poultry (45%) and dairying (39%). There was, on average, less than one regular hired worker per farm and, in the face of rumour and counter rumour, some evidence that investment in fixed equipment had begun to fall off from the early 1960's onwards. Farmers' attitudes were dominated at the time

by three things: resentment; a desire to remain in farming, preferably close at hand; and by an intense anxiety and uncertainty about possible future plans and compensation. There was an understandable and genuine loss of professional purpose. Farmers' sons and daughters were no less affected by these uncertainties than their parents. Like most farmers, farm workers also expressed a desire to stay in farming but did not express great anxiety about finding alternative jobs if necessary. With no Development Corporation to whom to talk, the farming community was bewildered and we wrote at the time:

'The feelings of resentment and of being ill-informed may or may not be justified by the facts; equally they may or may not have been modified since this survey was made. Nevertheless, they were in fact being felt then and to that extent were important to the individuals who felt and perhaps still feel them. Uncertainties of one sort or another will continue at Milton Keynes for years to come; they will almost certainly be reflected - from the earliest rumours through to the final stages of actual development - elsewhere in the country. Such uncertainties constitute social costs to the communities disturbed. It would seem that it should be a major objective in any such operation, so to conduct the public relations aspect of the work as to minimise these costs by ensuring the earliest possible communication of all the known facts, as soon as they become available, to the individuals whose security is threatened. In this task planners, administrators, advisers and trade union officials will all be involved'.

The four years that elapsed between our first and second surveys saw the establishment of the Development Corporation, the publication of the Planning Consultant's Interim Plan, followed a year later by the Plan itself. A good deal of the early uncertainty, if not the anxiety had been removed by the existence of the Development Corporation which embarked on a widespread and successful public relations exercise. In farming terms the situation had changed substantially during those first four years. The total area available for farming had been reduced from an original figure of over 16,000 acres to some 9,500.⁽¹⁾ The pattern of farming had swung away from livestock (especially dairy cows) and towards non-labour intensive arable farming, i.e. cereals. Although there was no evidence that day-to-day farming practices had deteriorated, there was a total reluctance by landlords and owner occupiers to invest in new fixed equipment or to spend money on any but the most necessary repairs.

The passing of four years also saw a change in the mood and attitudes of those affected. In dribs and drabs a quarter of the farmers and more than half of the farm workers had left the area - but for those who remained, changing circumstances dictated a changing attitude of mind.

By 1971 early anxiety and resentment had given way to resignation. We recorded at the time that farmers in the area 'are no more enamoured with the whole concept of Milton Keynes now than they were four or five years ago - they have merely become resigned to it and so far as their farm businesses are concerned are making the best of a bad job'.

(1) Because of the continual state of change and adjustment in the Designated Area, and the problem of avoiding double counting and/or the omission of particular parcels of land, all such figures could only be best estimates and could only relate to the precise time at which the count was made.

Despite the gradual increase in the tempo of urban development, the years between 1971 and 1977 saw gradual rather than dramatic change so far as agriculture was concerned. In the Spring of 1977, when this Department surveyed the area for the fifth time, 27 of the 90 farmers originally interviewed by us were still farming in the Designated Area. In addition to that number, however, a small number of farmers' sons, who, in 1967, had been employed by their fathers either as wage earners or as junior partners, had, by 1977, become the proprietors in their own right. Also, a further small number of farmers had taken on land in the Designated Area during the intervening years, which previously they did not have. Altogether this means that there were, in 1977, at least 39 individual farm businesses operating either wholly or partly in the Designated Area. At the same time, there were, surprisingly, over 7,000 acres of land still in agricultural use; only slightly under half of the original amount.

Agriculture, therefore, seemed to be 'clinging on', or, more accurately was being allowed to cling on. The word "surprisingly" was used in the last paragraph to describe the situation only because it was possible by then to travel through parts of the Designated Area and to wonder amidst the tree-lined highways, industrial and domestic settlements and the embryo city centre, whether any farming remained at all. Equally, however, it was possible (and to some extent still is) to the North East and the West of this development, to look across farm land and to wonder where the city was! Indeed, in overall terms, the amount of change between the agricultural situation recorded by us in the Spring of 1977 and, for instance, two years earlier, in 1975, was minimal. In that time only five more of the originally interviewed 90 farmers had departed. The number of agricultural businesses had declined by only three and only another 750 acres had disappeared from agricultural use.

The explanation for these very limited changes during a period when the new city itself had begun to emerge in a tangible form is that the main uptake of land necessary for that development, and the corresponding exodus of farmers, had already occurred during the very early 1970's. Indeed, by 1971, land in agricultural use within the Designated Area had been reduced to 65% of its 1967 level. The situation had thus been prepared for development, and between 1971 and 1977 agricultural land was reduced by only another 16% of the original total. The Development Corporation's declared policy of leaving as much land as possible in agricultural use for as long as possible was being carried out in practice.

It would be wrong, however, to imply that during the middle of the 1970's agriculture and the agricultural community had been witnessing no change: it was rather the case that change was gradual - and in some respects increasingly gradual after the initial fairly clear cut changes of the early days. It was also the case that subsequent changes merely continued a pattern that was established fairly early on.

Changes, for instance, in the pattern of farming itself, which have already been mentioned were accompanied by changes in the patterns of land and asset ownership. In our first stock-taking survey in 1967, one half of the farm holdings in the Designated Area were rented, nearly a third were owner-occupied, with the remaining fifth part-owned and part-rented. By 1977 approaching 90% of the area was being rented and the vast majority of that, on leases of varying lengths, from the Milton Keynes Development Corporation. Also, in 1967, land being farmed in the Designated Area represented 73% of the total land being farmed by the farmers concerned, with the balancing 27% lying outside the Area. By 1977 these proportions had changed to 57% and 43% respectively. In

more strictly farming terms, the main change of emphasis away from grass-land and intensive livestock enterprises (notably dairy cows) and towards cereals, had already occurred as early as 1971. This change reflected farmers' desires to retain their assets, as far as possible, in a liquid state and not to involve themselves unnecessarily in possible difficulties of keeping the right kind of labour on their farms.

Coming more up to date, there are (in 1984), 16 of the original 90 farmers still operating in the area. They farm between them just over 2,500 acres compared with nearly 3,600 acres in 1977; their average farm size has thus fallen from 224 to 158 acres. A summary of the current position is as follows:

	<u>No.</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Average Size</u>
Original farmers who are still farming in the Designated Area	16	2,532	158
Farms passed on to sons and others since 1977	3	180	60
New farmers	6	1,991	331
	<u>25</u>	<u>4,703</u>	<u>188</u>

At the time of the previous survey in 1977 there were 27 original farmers still operating, 22 of whom were interviewed. In the interim, therefore, eleven more have departed in one manner or another.

Before the city began to emerge there were 16,000 acres of farmland in the Designated Area, so approximately one third remains. For a small group of farmers in the South-West corner of the area, there are prospects of some long-term future, as development is not likely there in the foreseeable future. Indeed these farmers still own their farms. There is some 500 acres in this category. All the other occupants are licencees of the Development Corporation, who let just under 4,000 acres on annual licences, with a further 297 acres on mowing and grazing licences. Discussions with the Development Corporation make it clear that further substantial reductions in the farmed area will take place before too long and that most of the remaining farmers will have to move on.

The evidence of the last 18 years, however, demonstrates that whatever the difficulties and frustrations of farming in the midst of an emerging city there is, in the short-term, no shortage of willing tenants. This is partly a reflection of the fact that payments for the use of land are low, although, no doubt, farmers face additional costs as their farms become fragmented. Most farmers who have been able to do so have farmed on to the bitter end and new entrants have come into the area when opportunities have arisen. Land which could be used for farming has been used for farming.

So far as farmers' personal attitudes have been concerned the appearance in 1971, of the Development Corporation's Implementation Strategy was an important landmark. It was only from that point on that individuals had a reasonably clear idea of how long they could go on operating on their existing farms, if they chose to. From that point on the original feelings of anxiety and resentment tended to get replaced by feelings of irritation brought about by the increasingly unsightly but unavoidable paraphernalia of physical development; but also by a genuine disappointment

at what many farmers saw as unimaginative and ugly housing development. There were, of course, regrets also at the gradual break-up of a previously closely knit rural community with, at the time, relatively little in the way of new social amenities to call on. Now in 1984, the overall situation looks very different. Whatever the subjective view of the individual may be, there can, objectively, be no denying that things have moved on on all fronts. Maturing relationships between the Development Corporation and the farming community have already been referred to. That community, mostly living outside the Designated Area, now finds itself adjacent to new patterns of commercial and housing development interspersed with tree lined highways, green parks and lakes and a variety of cultural and social amenities ranging from an Open University to a unique shopping centre - all on a scale not to be found elsewhere in the country - and perhaps lacking, mainly at this stage, simply the social cement of 'proximity' to give it the normal cohesion of a city.

The Pattern of Departure

Whilst, as we have observed, a small number of farmers continue with their farming operations inside the Designated Area, the majority of those originally interviewed by us (and their employees) have now departed. The pattern and timing of their departure is of interest. In 1967, 70% of all the farmers who were interviewed, and 80% of all the farm workers expressed a desire to continue farming. One clear lesson to emerge from our enquiries, however, is that early statements about future intentions are not always a reliable guide to what, in these kinds of circumstances, individuals actually eventually do. This was especially true in the case of employed workers, uncluttered as they are by the impediment of a business, virtually all of whom have now quit the area.

Farm workers had never expressed any special anxiety to us about finding other jobs and in the event the 'call of the land' did not prove a strong one in the face, usually, of better paid jobs, without a tied cottage and with more regular working hours. The kind of jobs they have moved to have included lorry driving, factory work, gardening, labouring and grounds maintenance. On the evidence of those whom we have been able to interview in their new surroundings, there has, in general, been nothing to suggest that in material terms movement out of farming has been at all disadvantageous. That is not to say that they did not suffer anxiety and uncertainty and in some individual cases, genuine hardship, depending on how such factors as an individual's age, his alternative skills and his housing arrangements effected his mobility.

So far as farmers have been concerned, although there were numerous individual cases of early plans not matching up with eventual behaviour, the overall picture has not been too inconsistent with originally expressed intentions. Those who moved to non-farm jobs (e.g. salesmen, roundsmen, advisers, factory hands) accounted for about a quarter of all those who stopped farming at Milton Keynes by 1977. A further quarter moved to other farms and the remaining half retired or died. Since 1977, a further eleven of the original farmers have departed. Five of those have either retired or died, two are farming outside the Designated Area, one is agricultural contracting, and three are working in other sectors. Three more of the original farms still exist but have been taken over by sons or other members of their family.

In 1967, 18% of those interviewed said they would definitely not remain in farming. Seventy per cent hoped that they would, but clearly, the extent to which the passage of time can normally be expected to solve the problems of some individuals in these circumstances will depend on the duration of the early stages of planning and development and on the age

structure of the farming community at the outset. The time lag at Milton Keynes between the setting up of the Development Corporation and the real emergence of a city centre was about 10 years, at the outset of which 70% of the farmers in the area were over 50 years of age and 40% over 60.

As in the case of farm workers there is, overall, little evidence to suggest, once a move has been made, that it has proved to be disadvantageous. Given that hasty moves are seldom necessary in these circumstances, this state of affairs is understandable. Those who reach retirement age simply retire in the normal way, in some cases with compensation they would not otherwise have received; those who have struggled over the years on small acreages have told us that they now sometimes wonder why they did not make the move out of the industry before, and the majority of those who moved to other farms moved to businesses with an enhanced potential, even if it has taken a few years before that potential has been reached. Again, this is not to say that there are not individual cases of hardship, and some of these have been described in the series of case studies which were included in our 1973 report, highlighting for example, 'the plight of the tenants who are compelled to seek new farms in unfamiliar areas outside their normal run of landlord, trade and advisory contacts; the utter impossibility of employing compensation funds at times of rapidly rising land prices (e.g. in the early 1970's) to buy farms on anything like the scales operated hitherto; and the difficulties of adapting to urban living patterns and costs'.

Some questions of costs, benefits and compensation

The great majority of the farmers (and farm workers) who have taken part in our surveys have remained helpful to us for as long as we have sought information from them. In numerous cases lasting friendships have been made. It has also been the case, however, that, after they have moved out of the area, to farm elsewhere, to take up other jobs or to retire, most people's direct interest in an episode of this kind has waned - if not disappeared.

Understandably, new lives and new interests take over whilst, for some, strong feelings of resentment make them disinclined to want to recall the events which caused such feelings. For these reasons, as well as for ones of distance and cost, we have not been able to follow up those who have given up farming in anything like the numbers and detail that we had originally intended to. As a consequence the full documentation of the 'before' and 'after' story of these farmers and their staff has not been quantified in the detail we would have wished. Nevertheless general impressions and attitudes have been faithfully recorded over a limited transitional period in as many cases as possible, the results of which have been presented in our earlier reports and have been briefly referred to in the previous section of this one.

Our limited ability to document ongoing financial details did not, however, mean that questions of costs and benefits (to the individual and to society generally) and of compensation have not, throughout our work, formed an important part of our discussions with farmers and officials alike. It would have been surprising if this had been the case. In fact, not unnaturally, such considerations occupied a prominent part in much of our own 'internal' thinking and discussions as economists. It seems appropriate, therefore, to repeat here, one or two of our principal general beliefs on these issues: first with regard to costs of disturbance and other compensation and then on wider cost/benefit issues.

First, on the question of compensation for disturbance costs, it must be said, at once, that, with a few exceptions, farmers in the area have told us over the years that they have felt they have been treated fairly in the matter of compensation so far as the law stands. Dealings on this score between farmers and the Development Corporation have generally speaking been amicable, with compulsory purchase orders the exception rather than the rule. Many tenants received compensation from their landlords who then sold advantageously to the Development Corporation with vacant possession. Any resentment that has been felt has been largely with the law which, except where 'hope value' exists, allows owners the equivalent of the agricultural value of land and makes scant recognition of the real costs of disturbance as opposed to costs of removal. The fact that (as we have indicated) eventually, the majority of individuals who find themselves in the pathway of development can look back without too many regrets and even with some advantage, should not be allowed to disguise the fact that they did not choose to make the move; for preference they would have remained where they were. The long-term outcome in such circumstances is often more of a testimony to 'admirable powers of resilience, adaptability and managerial ability' than to anything else.

It is fairly certain, however, that the shorter term (which can often be quite long!) will usually be characterised by cost rather than benefit - and this is so for two reasons. First, simply because in the nature of things it is the costs rather than any benefits which tend to occur in the short period, the full impact of which is felt there and then; and, secondly, because most of those early costs are unlikely (if only because of the near impossibility of identifying them) to be fully compensated by the community. This is especially true of items which lie less in the realms of clearly definable costs of removal or financial loss, and more in the realms of uncertainty of knowledge, and inability to make plans, and the various forms of personal anguish that stem from these things. Nevertheless, costs of this kind are as real to those who experience them as are the items on which monetary values can more easily be placed. We believe that society in this country, has yet to face up to this issue.

Turning from compensation of the individual to wider questions of costs and benefits, we believe these are two sometimes neglected points that concern agriculture and which are worth mentioning.

No matter what way one tries to measure the contribution from a particular locality to the national economy and general well-being, it would usually be difficult, in any individual planning venture, to pretend that agriculture - even on 'good' agricultural land - could show advantages over the eventual contribution flowing from industrial and urban development. Of course, it is always sensible to avoid building on 'good' agricultural land whenever that is possible, but in strict cost/benefit terms purely agricultural arguments will always be outweighed in the sums - especially in times of agricultural surpluses. In spite of this, however, there are two important considerations which agriculture raises in our minds.

First, as the average material standard of living in the United Kingdom rises, increasing attention is being placed upon non-material aspects of welfare, including what are (often loosely) referred to as environmental considerations. Quite apart from the almost total loss of 'visual amenity' to these original inhabitants who remain in an area during development, and who will enjoy none of the final benefits, there is the question of the longer term visual and physical impact of any new development on farming and the countryside close by. The planners at

Milton Keynes have shown that they are aware of the importance of this and in order to protect agricultural land outside the designated area a great deal of non-residential development will be placed along the new city boundary. As we have seen, education sites, parks, industrial sites, waterways and a motorway are being used in an attempt to limit interference with the rural economy just outside the city and to avoid an unsightly rural/urban fringe. We believe that the importance of protecting agriculture and the countryside from unhappy urban influences in this way cannot be over estimated - perhaps especially at a time when it is fashionable for farmers to be blamed for 'spoiling' the countryside. We have spoken to some agriculturalists who believe that despite the 'barriers' that have been erected, the lasting farming problem at Milton Keynes will not be the lingering circumstances of those who continue to farm within the Designated Area, but, the feasibility of farming effectively 'beyond the fringe'. So far it seems not to be a major problem, but it needs careful watching.

A second important and broad aspect of the cost/benefit issue concerns the question of the incidence of costs and benefits. The general philosophy of cost/benefit analysis is that if total benefits, to whom-so-ever they accrue, exceed total costs, upon whom-so-ever they fall, then in principle a project should be deemed worthwhile. Quite apart from the inherent difficulties of measuring all of the items involved (which we have already demonstrated) it may well be that, in overall terms, the costs associated with the impact upon the agricultural industry of a development like Milton Keynes are quite small in relationship to the overall balance between costs and benefits - but they invariably fall on a relatively small number of people. The cost/benefit principle seems less attractive if a certain small number of individuals in society are obliged, personally, to bear a disproportionate share of the costs in the wider national interest, and it could reasonably be argued that those who are farming in designated areas suffer unfairly in this respect - also in a way that society has yet to acknowledge. The contention is not, of course, limited to farmers.

In conclusion

We are reluctant at this stage to draw itemised conclusions in a report which has already condensed (even knowingly glossed over in parts) so much detail. The report is in a way itself "a conclusion" to five previous reports; a culmination to many hours of survey work and analysis over approaching twenty years. It depicts a story concerning many individual lives and livelihoods set against an exciting urban experiment. We would encourage the reader not to look here first for neat conclusions drawn by the authors, but to read the whole report and to draw his own.

Perhaps, however, following the concern of the last section with questions of costs and benefits; we might say one thing in conclusion. It concerns the individual as opposed to the community and perhaps reflects the extent of individual contact those of us who have taken part in these surveys have had with many individuals - farmers, farm workers, their wives and families, with planners, officials of organisations and with many others. It is simply this: The balance, in any one country, between land required for food production and land required for urban development is a delicate one; others have grappled with it and continue to do so; it is not the concern of this report. It may be, however, that technological advances in agriculture and food technology will, in the future, alter that balance even to the extent that the present (and even an increased) rate in the loss of agricultural land will become less important than it is today. Who knows? What must never become less important, however, is the personal fate of individuals who are asked to bear costs in the broader community interests. Such people will reasonably be looking for, and should receive, adequate degrees of information, consideration and compensation. Perhaps that is our main conclusion.

