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Labor & wages, Agric



**ATTITUDES
TO INCENTIVE SCHEMES**
and their Importance in Agriculture

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the investigation discussed in this preliminary report is to determine farmers' attitudes to bonus schemes and piece rates, and to assess both the present and potential importance of financial incentive schemes in Agriculture.

Bonuses are sometimes paid to stockmen and other specialists and piece rates have long been associated with a few seasonally important manual jobs, but neither form of incentive payment has ever been very widely applied in Agriculture. In view of this, and as a first step, it was thought important to discover what had been the collective experience of as many farmers as possible, and to obtain their opinions of any schemes they may have tried.

Two farming areas in the North were chosen as being most suitable for the investigation. The first, Tweedside, is an area in which there are many large farms, and in which cash cropping is important. It was expected that here there would be more than average interest in incentive schemes, and perhaps rather more experience of applying them. The other region chosen was North-East Durham. This is a mixed farming area containing many small and medium sized farms, and is somewhat more typical of other lowland farming areas in the North.

In order to approach a large number of farmers contact was made with them by postal questionnaire. This limited questions to those that could be easily understood and readily answered, but it was expected that only a small proportion of the questionnaires would be returned. However, a main object was to make contact with a sufficient number of farmers willing to try out different schemes.

It was thought that those replying would include most of the farmers seriously interested in incentive schemes, and that the majority of nonrespondents would have little or no interest. This has since been verified by visiting a proportion of the farmers who failed to reply. Only one out of thirty seven was at all interested in incentive schemes. He had intended to reply, but had not yet done so.

The reasons given for not returning the completed questionnaire were as follows:-

	%
Little or no hired labour employed ...	22
Intended to reply but had forgotten or been too busy	38
Lack of interest in the subject ...	24
Dislike of clerical work ...	8
Change of ownership or tenancy ...	8
	100

There are 123 farmers with more than 50 acres on Tweedside, and 540 in the selected area of North-East Durham. The questionnaire was sent to each of these Tweedside farmers, and to 50% or 270 of the farmers with over 50 acres in North-East Durham. The exclusion of those with less than 50 acres from the investigation was, of course, arbitrary. By doing so both small non-agricultural holdings and a number of small farms on which little or no hired labour will be employed were excluded. All farmers with more than 50 acres, however, do not necessarily employ sufficient hired labour to justify interest in bonuses and piece rates. Indeed, on small or medium sized farms, or where family labour is available, it has been shown that this is an important reason for not completing the questionnaire.

The questionnaire is presented in the appendix. The first three sections are alternatives and relate only to incentive payments. Section 4, which all the farmers were asked to complete, contains a number of additional questions, the replies to which provide information as to the size of each farmer's business, the labour force employed and some indication of his approach to labour management. They were included because it seemed that there may be some association between the size of each farm, its labour force, and the farmer's attitude towards incentive payments in particular, and labour management in general.

Only eleven percent of the farmers in Durham completed and returned the questionnaire. Twenty seven percent were returned from Tweedside. This compares with a forty seven percent response from a recent postal questionnaire relating to herd maintenance policies, and despatched only to farmers known to have a dairy herd. This response shows a lack of interest in incentive payments, but does not, of course, necessarily mean that piece rates and bonus schemes have little potential value in Agriculture. On the contrary, analysis of the replies received suggests that lack of interest may be as much due to objections based on hearsay, as to any proven difficulty of applying incentive schemes successfully which can not be overcome by good management.

The Attitudes of Farmers operating Incentive Schemes

Eleven farmers operating bonus schemes and twenty three paying piece rates replied to the questionnaire. Some of these operate a number of schemes. Their reasons for operating them, and the advantages they believe to be obtained, are summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

REASON STATED	BONUSES		PIECERATES		IMPLIED OBJECTIVE
	TWEED -SIDE	DURHAM	TWEED -SIDE	DURHAM	
1. To encourage extra effort, time or interest	IIIIII IIIIII I	IIII			To increase quality or
2. For speed, timeliness, & to meet labour peak			IIIIII IIII	IIII	quantity of output.
3. To pay according to the work done and control labour costs			IIIIII IIII		To reduce costs.
4. To reduce other costs					
5. To attract casual labour & regular workers outside normal hours			IIIIII	I	To attract or retain labour.
6. As a reward for exceptional efficiency or responsibility	IIIIII I	I	IIII		

TABLE 1 Reasons for operating Incentive Schemes

In seventeen instances bonus schemes are intended to encourage workers to apply extra effort, or to give more time and interest to their jobs. In eight others their object is to reward exceptional efficiency, or responsibility. In all cases, therefore, the aim is either to add to the value of output, or to attract and retain labour. In this they would appear to be successful, for the farmers operating them believe that nineteen bonus schemes result in extra effort, time or interest being applied by their workers, that this is reflected in higher yields or a better quality product, and that in twelve instances their employees are more contented because schemes are operated.

ADVANTAGES STATED	BONUSES		PIECERATES		IMPLIED OBJECTIVE
	TWEED -SIDE	DURHAM	TWEED -SIDE	DURHAM	
1. Extra effort or more time & interest put into job	IIIIII IIIIII III	IIII	II		Increased quality or quantity of output.
2. Speed & timeliness required to meet seasonal labour peak			IIIIII IIIIII II	IIIIII	
3. Payment according to work done & control over labour costs		I	IIIIII IIII	I	Reduced costs.
4. Reduction in the cost of feed or other inputs	II				
5. The additional labour required is attracted			IIIIII	I	Adequate labour obtained and retained.
6. More contented employees	IIIIII IIII	I	IIII	II	

TABLE 2 Advantages stated to be obtained from Incentive Schemes

These are by far the most important reasons for bonus payments, and it is clear that they are largely looked upon as a means of encouraging a more intensive use of labour, rather than as a method of reducing labour or other costs. In only three instances is a reduction in costs among the advantages stated to be obtained.

In contrast piece rates are paid more to encourage speed and timeliness, and to meet the need for additional labour at busy times of the year. Fifteen are paid for this reason. Ten are considered to be a means of paying according to the work done, and of controlling labour costs. In addition, seven are used to attract casual labour, or as encouragement for regular men to work longer hours. Four are simply intended to reward exceptional efficiency, or extra responsibility.

Although the immediate reasons for applying piece rates and the advantages said to be obtained from them differ from those given for bonus schemes, their general objectives are very similar. Piece rates like bonus schemes are apparently regarded firstly as a means of increasing the quality or quantity of output, secondly as a method of attracting or retaining labour, and only thirdly as a means of reducing labour costs. This is perhaps surprising as both bonuses and piece rates would appear to offer many opportunities of reducing labour and other costs, and it is to reduce costs and increase earnings that they have been widely and successfully applied in other industries.

The Attitudes of Farmers who have ceased to operate Incentive Schemes

Further evidence as to the advantages and disadvantages of incentive schemes was sought from farmers who had discontinued them. Their views are summarised in Tables 3 and 4.

If the generally accepted view that incentive schemes are difficult to apply in agriculture is based on proven objections to them one would expect that a considerable number of farmers who had tried out schemes had found them to be unworkable or unprofitable. This does not appear to be the case. Only three questionnaires were returned by farmers who had tried out bonus schemes and found them to be unsatisfactory. In one case, that of a bonus paid to a cowman based on milk yields, the farmer stated that it had proved impossible to work out a scheme that was considered fair. In a second case, where a stockman was paid a fixed amount for each beast sold fat, payments were stopped because the farmer thought that too much attention was being paid to fattening beasts, and too little to store cattle. In the third case a stockman was given two and a half percent of the profits obtained from Winter cattle feeding, but payment lapsed because, after deducting income tax, the small amount of bonus earned seemed to cause dissatisfaction rather than act as an incentive. In at least two of these instances it appears that the stated objections could have been readily overcome.

MAJOR REASON STATED	BONUSES		PIECERATES	
	TWEED -SIDE	DURHAM	TWEED -SIDE	DURHAM
1. Lack of suitable workers prepared to undertake piecework instead of overtime			IIIIII I	II
2. Innovations made unnecessary			II	IIIIII
3. Innovations made constant revision of rates necessary			I	
4. Poor quality work or abuse of scheme		II	II	III
5. Provided little or no incentive	I			

TABLE 3 Major reasons for ceasing to operate Incentive Schemes

By contrast, fifteen farmers had discontinued piecerates. Only five, however, gave poor quality work as a major reason for reverting to ordinary time rates. Nine cited lack of suitable workers prepared to undertake piecework as a major reason, regular workers preferring overtime rates to the piece rates offered. On seven farms technical innovations, notably those associated with drilling, thinning, singling and harvesting roots have so successfully reduced labour peaks that the farmers no longer feel the need for piece rates to cope with certain important seasonal jobs. In addition one farmer who had paid a piece rate for ploughing, found it inconvenient to make repeated revisions to take account of innovations and constant improvements in ploughing techniques.

Apart from these major reasons for ceasing to make incentive payments, farmers were asked if they were critical of the schemes tried out for any of the six reasons suggested in Table 4.

SECONDARY REASONS STATED	BONUSES		PIECERATES	
	TWEED -SIDE	DURHAM	TWEED -SIDE	DURHAM
1. Too much trouble				
2. Cause of poor quality work			IIIIII II	IIIIII I
3. Open to abuse		I	IIIIII	IIII
4. Unsatisfactory to workers	I	I	I	II
5. Unfair in any other way		II	I	II
6. Unprofitable			III	III

TABLE 4 Secondary reasons for ceasing to operate Incentive Schemes

None thought bonuses to be either too much trouble or a cause of poor quality work. One thought them to be open to abuse, two to be unfair, and two to be unsatisfactory to their workers. None, however, specifically thought them unprofitable.

Similarly, piecework was not considered to be too much trouble. In each case, however, the possibility of at least some poor quality work was suggested as a secondary reason for ceasing to pay piece rates, and in nine instances piece rates were considered open to abuse. A few farmers also thought them unsatisfactory to their workers, and unfair in other ways. Six were opposed to them because they thought them actually unprofitable.

Of fourteen farmers, therefore, with first hand experience of bonus schemes, those who either are operating or have operated such schemes, only three considered them to be unsatisfactory.

Similarly of thirty eight farmers with experience of piece rate payments only five have found them to be unsatisfactory, and have reverted to time rates, although a further ten farmers who have stopped using piece rates for other reasons all agree that they have some disadvantages.

The majority continue to operate one or more incentive schemes, and are apparently satisfied that the advantages outweigh their disadvantages.

The Attitudes of Farmers with no experience of Incentive Schemes

A further twenty one respondents have had no personal experience of either bonus schemes or piece rates. Their views are summarised in Table 5.

	MAJOR REASONS		SECONDARY REASONS	
	TWEED -SIDE	DURHAM	TWEED -SIDE	DURHAM
1. Too much trouble			III	II
2. Cause of poor quality work without extra supervision	II	II	II	IIIIII III
3. Open to abuse			II	IIIIII
4. Unsatisfactory to workers	II	I	I	II
5. Unfair in other ways	I	II	II	IIIIII
6. Unprofitable		II	II	IIIIII
7. A cause of jealousy between workers	I		I	
8. Unnecessary	II	IIIIII IIII	III	
9. Would not enable a reduction in staff			I	
10. Mechanisation considered a better alternative		I		

TABLE 5

Reasons for not operating Incentive Schemes

Among the major reasons given for their lack of interest, twelve state that they consider incentive payments to be unnecessary. In addition, a few think them to be unfair, unsatisfactory to their workers, or unprofitable. Only four give poor quality work in the absence of extra supervision as a major reason for their disinterest. However, all these objections rank high in their list of secondary reasons for not operating bonuses or piecework.

It appears that many of the farmers with no first hand experience of incentive schemes think them to be unnecessary, ineffective or impracticable. Yet with few exceptions those farmers with experience of them have found them to be workable, and think that the advantages they offer outweigh their disadvantages.

Incentives and Attitudes to Labour Management

It was not thought practicable to include questions relating to output and profit in the questionnaire. Therefore, from the information so far obtained, one can not assess to what extent existing schemes influence profitability.

The average number of regular workers employed per 100 acres is 1.40 on the Tweedside farms, and 2.22 in North East Durham, but different average amounts will be required on farms of different sizes. In Figures 1 and 2 average regular labour use on farms of different sizes is compared with averages for farms from which different replies to certain of the questions in Section 4 were received.

None of the farmers thought labour costs to be unimportant. The majority thought them very important, and many of the remainder less important because they had wider considerations in mind. This perhaps explains why the Figures show no clear connection between labour use and the importance attached to labour costs.

A majority of farmers also claim to plan jobs well in advance, to plan each day's work beforehand, and to detail men each day before starting work in a morning.

There is of course some tendency for the farmers who plan jobs ahead also to plan each day's work in advance, and to consider labour costs very important. To this extent the importance of each alternative shown in Figures 1 and 2 will be exaggerated. It appears, however that collectively their importance may be quite considerable.

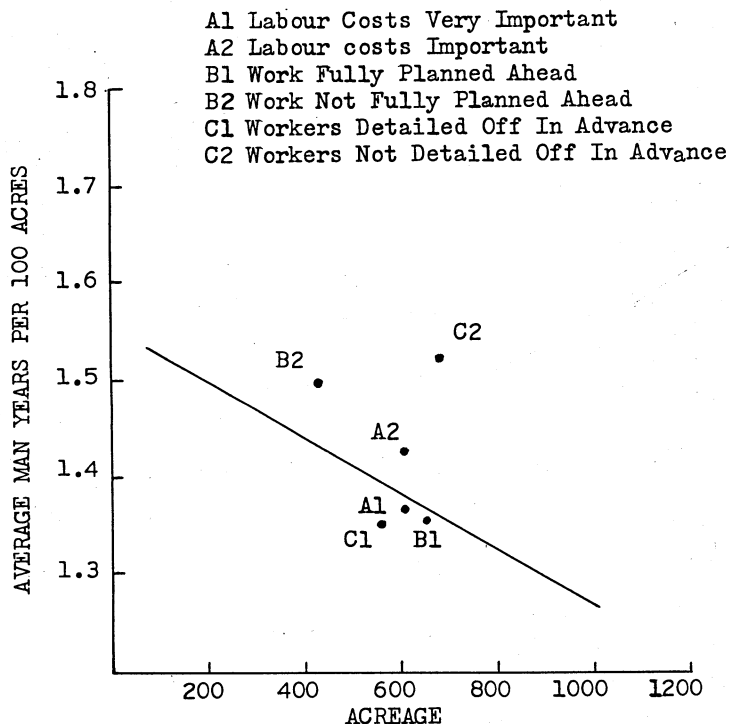


Figure 1 Differences in the Average Regular Labour Use per 100 acres of Tweedside Farmers with different approaches to Labour Management

In neither area is there any marked relationship between importance attached to labour costs or forward planning and farm size. Jobs are planned ahead more on the larger farms, whilst the day to day work is planned ahead rather more on the smaller farms. This is not surprising. None of the groups considered have an average size much below 200 acres, and on both medium and large farms the majority of farmers try to plan ahead.

Although both may be important, Figures 1 and 2 suggest that control of the day to day work, and of labour, is more effectively used as a means of keeping down labour costs on these farms than planning jobs in advance in some detail.

- A1 Labour Costs Very Important
- A2 Labour Costs Important
- B1 Work Fully Planned Ahead
- B2 Work Not Fully Planned Ahead
- C1 Workers Detailed Off In Advance
- C2 Workers Not Detailed Off In Advance

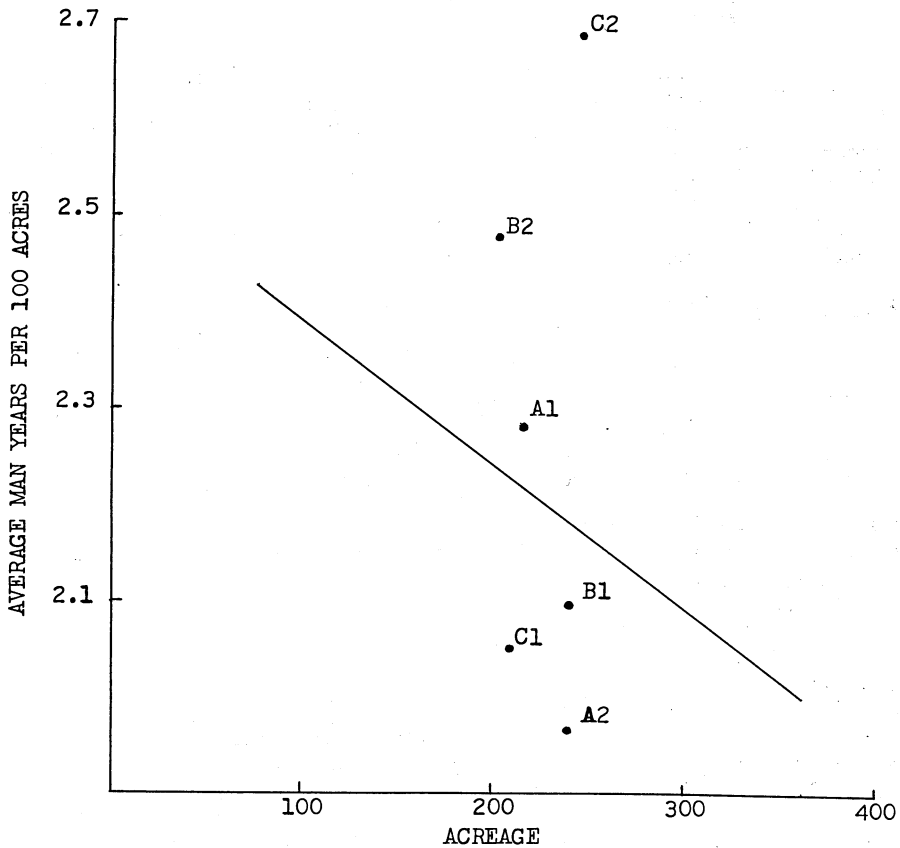


Figure 2 Differences in the Average Regular Labour Use per 100 Acres of Farmers with different approaches to Labour Management in North East Durham

There appears to be no association between the importance attached to forward planning and the use of incentives, but the answers to Section 4, Question 4, do suggest some connection between the latter and the importance attached to labour use. The answers received are summarised in Table 6.

Percentage of Farmers in each Group considering the under-mentioned factors of most importance to the success of the Farm Business.

G R O U P	Efficient Labour Use	Better Bldgs & Equipt	General Organis -ation	General Manage -ment	Factors Affectg Output	Efficient Marketing
TWEEDSIDE:-						
Incentives operated	56	6	13	19	6	13
No incentives operated	46	8	23	15	15	15
DURHAM:-						
Incentives operated	75	0	13	13	13	0
No incentives operated	41	23	5	14	23	14
BOTH AREAS COMBINED:-						
Incentives operated	63	4	13	17	8	8
No incentives operated	43	17	11	14	20	14

TABLE 6 Summary of Factors considered most important to success on Farms with and without Incentive Schemes

Sixty three percent of the farmers using incentives, and forty three percent of those who do not, consider efficiency in the use of labour to be the most important single factor influencing the success of their businesses. If in addition the provision of better capital equipment is accepted as being largely a substitution of capital for labour, sixty seven and

sixty percent respectively of farmers operating and not operating incentive schemes consider efficient labour use to be of most importance to success. Of the remainder many emphasise the importance of more general managerial and organisational considerations.

It is in fact clear from the replies received that whilst farmers operating incentives tend to emphasise the importance of direct efficiency in the use of labour, many of those not operating incentive schemes look to mechanisation and better buildings as means of reducing their reliance on labour.

A Labour Reducing Incentive Schemes Operated
 B Labour Increasing Incentive Schemes Operated
 C No Incentive Schemes Operated

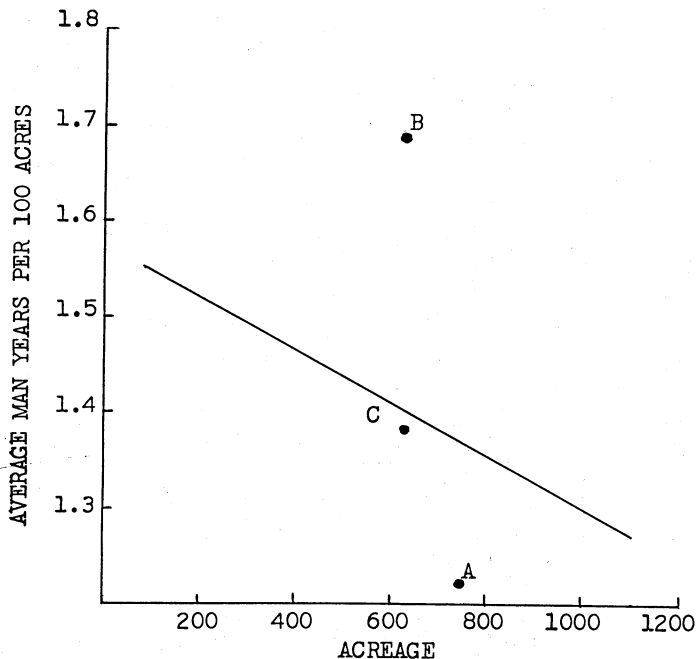


Figure 3 Differences in the Average Regular Labour Use per 100 acres of Tweedside Farmers operating and not operating Incentive Schemes

It will be noted that all the factors considered to be most important to success are concerned with six main objectives, and that apart from efficiency in the use of labour and capital, good organisation and management, efficient marketing, and a satisfactory output are all recognised as being particularly important.

Differences in the average labour use of farmers operating and not operating incentive schemes are shown in Figures 3 and 4. It is not suggested that these are a measure of the incentive effect of existing schemes, rather that the schemes operated, the greater importance attached to labour by the farmers operating them, together with any other differences in their attitudes to labour management would seem to have a marked effect on labour costs.

- A Labour Reducing Incentive Schemes Operated
- B Labour Increasing Incentive Schemes Operated
- C No Incentive Schemes Operated

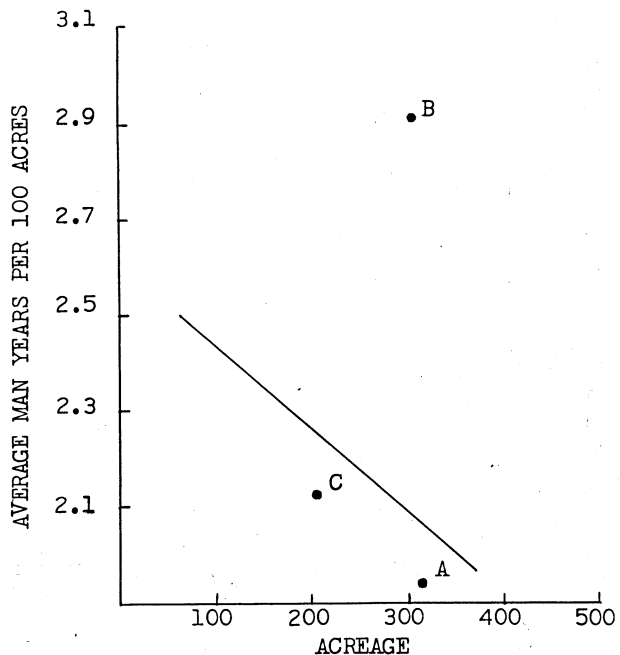


Figure 4 Differences in the Average Regular Labour Use per 100 Acres of Farmers operating and not operating Incentive Schemes in North East Durham

Without knowledge of the outputs and incomes obtained, it is not known whether their aims are justified, but Figures 3 and 4 do suggest that farmers offering incentives to more intensive labour use are at least achieving this successfully. Likewise, much less than the average amounts of labour seem to be required by the farmers in each area who operate labour reducing incentive schemes. In Durham, however, this may be due more to the greater size of the farms on which incentive schemes are operated, and only in very small part to the effect of the latter. This is rather to be expected. The schemes at present operated, particularly in the Durham area, are limited in scope, and in many cases offer workers the opportunity of earning only small additional amounts over and above their regular wages. It would be surprising if they had a more important effect on labour use than the data suggests, and in fact none of these farmers look upon the use of incentives as an important way of reducing labour costs.

The Importance attached to Methods of reducing Labour Costs

The main ways in which these farmers do attempt to keep down labour costs are summarised in Table 7, and again are quite unconnected with their attitudes towards incentive schemes.

Percentage of Farmers emphasising the importance of keeping down Labour Costs by:-

	Substitution of Capital for Labour	Efficient Job and Labour Organisation	Seeking a High Output	Any Other Means
TWEEDSIDE	52	93	11	0
DURHAM	71	51	4	4
BOTH AREAS COMBINED	60	71	7	2

TABLE 7 Main Ways in which these Farmers attempt to reduce Labour Costs

The majority consider efficient job and labour organisation, and the further substitution of capital as the chief ways of reducing labour costs. On Tweedside the large arable farms are already heavily mechanised, and mere efficient organisation is considered to be the more important. In Durham the average size

of farm is much smaller, livestock are of greater importance, and more emphasis is placed on the need for better buildings and more machinery.

Each farmer was also asked to list eight possible ways of reducing labour costs in what he considered to be their order of importance. The replies received are summarised in Tables 8 and 9, and again emphasise the importance attached to both the more efficient organisation of jobs and labour, and to the further substitution of capital for labour.

Number of Farmers stating indicated order of importance

Further mechanisation	15	3	4	3	1	-	1	1
Improvement to buildings	7	10	5	3	2	2	1	1
Improvement to farm layout	2	4	7	5	4	1	3	3
Changes in work methods	4	4	6	4	6	4	1	-
Changes in cropping & stocking	3	3	7	4	3	3	1	5
Greater reliance on casual labour	-	1	2	3	7	4	7	5
Greater reliance on overtime	-	-	1	4	5	10	6	3
More work done by contractors	2	1	3	4	1	2	9	8
Stated order of importance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Table 8 **Importance attached by Tweedside Farmers to eight possible ways of reducing Labour Costs**

In both cases the greatest number consider further mechanisation to be the most important single way of reducing labour costs, whilst improvements to their farm buildings are considered to be most important by the next greatest number.

Very few farmers consider improvements to their farm layouts or in work methods to rank first in importance, but together with changes in cropping and stocking these are in many cases listed third, fourth or fifth in importance. Greater reliance on casual labour, on overtime, or on the services of a contractor are considered to offer little opportunity of saving labour.

Number of Farmers stating indicated order of importance

Further mechanisation	12	5	3	4	3	2	-	-
Improvement to buildings	11	7	6	3	1	-	-	-
Improvement to farm layout	3	10	3	5	5	1	1	1
Changes in work methods	3	1	4	7	8	4	1	-
Changes in cropping & stocking	1	3	10	4	5	2	2	-
Greater reliance on casual labour	-	1	5	3	2	5	7	5
Greater reliance on overtime	2	-	4	3	3	9	4	3
More work done by contractors	-	-	2	1	3	4	6	12
Stated order of importance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

TABLE 9

Importance attached by Durham Farmers to eight possible ways of reducing Labour Costs

Finally, each farmer was asked if he would be prepared to try out a bonus scheme or piece rate, either of his own choosing or along lines recommended by this department. Of those on Tweedside replying to the questionnaire, fifty three percent say that they would be, eighteen percent are uncertain, and twenty nine percent are not prepared to. Likewise, twenty four percent of the Durham farmers replying to the questionnaire are ready to consider introducing an incentive scheme, twenty four percent are uncertain, and fifty two percent do not wish to. In the Durham area there is little difference between the average labour use of those who are willing and unwilling to consider trying out a scheme, whereas on Tweedside the average labour use of those prepared to consider offering incentives is somewhat below the average of those who are not.

Those farmers who have expressed interest are now to be visited with a view to discussing the suitability of different schemes, and the extent to which they are prepared to co-operate in this investigation. It is hoped that a number will be prepared to try out schemes offering more incentive to greater effort than those at present in operation, and that they will be willing to provide the financial data to enable the effects of each scheme to be measured.

APPENDIX

THE POSTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME:

ADDRESS:

SECTION 1

IF YOU OPERATE ANY BONUS SCHEMES OR HAVE ANY JOBS DONE AS PIECE WORK PLEASE ANSWER THIS SECTION AND SECTION 4.

1. On what jobs are bonuses or piece rates paid?
 2. What are your reasons for paying a bonus or piece rate for each of these jobs?
 3. How do you calculate the bonus or piece rate payment to be made in each case?
 4. To what acreages and crop cultivations were piece rates applied last year?
 5. What advantages do you think are obtained from each of these bonus schemes and piece rates?
 6. Would you consider extending them?
If "No", why not?
-

SECTION 2

IF YOU DO NOT OPERATE A BONUS SCHEME OR HAVE ANY JOBS DONE AS PIECE WORK, BUT HAVE DONE SO IN THE PAST, PLEASE ANSWER THIS SECTION AND SECTION 4.

1. On what jobs were bonuses or piece rates paid?

2. How did you calculate the bonus or piece rate payment to be made in each case?
3. Why did you stop paying bonuses or piece rates?
4. Did you find these payments to be :- (Answer "Yes" or "No")
 - (a) Too much trouble
 - (b) A cause of poor quality work
 - (c) Open to abuse
 - (d) Unsatisfactory to your workers
 - (e) Unfair in any way
 - (f) Unprofitable.

Remarks or comments on answers to Question 4 :-

SECTION 3

IF YOU HAVE NEVER OPERATED A BONUS SCHEME OR HAD JOBS DONE AS PIECE WORK PLEASE ANSWER THIS SECTION AND SECTION 4.

1. Why do you not operate any bonus schemes or have any jobs done on piece work?
2. Do you think bonus schemes and piece work to be :- (Answer "Yes" or "No")
 - (a) Too much trouble
 - (b) A cause of poor quality work
 - (c) Open to abuse
 - (d) Unsatisfactory to your workers
 - (e) Unfair in any way
 - (f) Unprofitable.

Remarks or comments on answers to Question 2 :-

SECTION 4

1. What acreage do you farm?

2. How many regular workers do you employ :-
 - (a) Members of family
 - (b) Hired, full time
 - (c) Hired, part time _____
 - (d) Total

3. What importance do you attach to labour costs? Do you consider them to be - relatively unimportant
important
very important

4. What if anything do you consider to be of more importance to the success of the farm business than using labour efficiently?

5. In what ways do you try to keep down labour costs?

6. Do you organise new or seasonal work when you are ready to start it, or do you plan it beforehand in some detail?

7. Do you plan each day's work in advance and detail the men off in a morning, or do you detail your men to do jobs when you want them to start on them?

8. Please arrange the following ways of reducing labour costs in what you consider to be their order of importance by writing 1 against the most important, 2 against the next most important, and so on :-
 - (a) Further mechanisation
 - (b) Improvements to your farm buildings
 - (c) Improvement to your farm layout
 - (d) Changes in work methods
 - (e) Changes in cropping and stocking
 - (f) Greater reliance on casual labour
 - (g) Greater reliance on overtime
 - (h) Having more work done by a contractor.

9. Would you be prepared to consider trying out a bonus scheme or piece rate, either of your own choosing or along lines recommended by us?

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