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Husbandry in England

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Agricultural Conditions in Nottinghamshire As Affected by Recent Changes

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fruit-growing the productiveness of the fruit area has been considerably increased.

Poultry-keeping has come to be regarded by farmers as an important adjunct to the farm, and a large number of farmers are now paying special attention to poultry and are keeping fowls on a commercial scale. An important change has been from the ordinary nondescript barn-door fowl to definite breeds. Cockerels from trap-nested stock are much more commonly used than formerly, and attention is paid to proper methods of feeding and management. In connection with the improvement of laying stock, the County Agricultural Education Authority has helped materially by running a Cockerel Distribution Scheme whereby selected cockerels from stock with high trapnest records are distributed to farmers at a reasonable price. In recent years there has been an increased demand for cockerels under this scheme.

On the lighter-land farms—those with about one-third arable and two-thirds grass—where milk-selling is practised, where sheep are kept, and where attention is paid to side-lines like poultry and fruit, the prospects are relatively brighter. On heavy-land arable farms, however, the outlook is depressing. One farmer who farms on an extensive scale—who employs steam tackle, has large fields suitable for large-scale farming, and generally farms just about as well as is possible under present-day conditions—has lost money although his yields of wheat have been above the average. On another heavy-land farm just over the Northamptonshire border 1000 acres of arable land have been left derelict since last year. A third heavy-land farm (300 acres arable, 100 acres grass) with good buildings, and once regarded as a productive and desirable holding, cannot be let, although 8s. per acre would be accepted from a suitable tenant. It is indeed hard to see how farmers with arable farms on the poorer classes of heavy land can continue to carry on under existing conditions.

AGRICULTURAL CONDITIONS IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AS AF- FECTED BY RECENT CHANGES

BY R. N. DOWLING, N.D.A.

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IN the past, farming systems have to a large extent been ruled by soil and climatic conditions. In Notts nearly one-fifth of the total area is uncultivated, due largely to the extensive "waste" land of Sherwood Forest on the Bunter formation. The main agricultural areas are formed by Magnesium Limestone, Bunter and Keuper geo-

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logical formations, the Bunter being composed of light sandy soils, suitable for sheep-folding, and the Keuper of rather retentive soils, considerable areas of which are down to permanent pasture, where a good deal of grazing has been and is carried on. The development of the coalfields and the consequent mushroom-like growth of new areas of increased population, and the increasing demand from the larger towns and industrial areas for liquid milk, market-garden produce and smaller joints of meat, have had a marked influence on changes during such a short period as the last ten years.

The fact that no less than 16,000 acres have been lost to agriculture in the last ten years is, however, somewhat alarming; this is probably in the main due to the rapid extension of industrial areas and the return of several thousand acres of poor land to rough grazings and waste. The reduction of arable land by nearly 29,000 acres and the increase of grass-land by 13,000 is of interest, and the fact that no less than 2312 acres were laid down to permanent pasture in the one year 1926-1927 shows that the movement in this direction is a very definite and far-reaching one.

The relatively low prices for cereals in comparison with costs of production are reflected in the total decrease in the areas of wheat, barley and oats, of 34,390 acres as compared with 1918, and of 13,000 acres as compared with 1915—*i.e.* before the ploughing-up period.

While the potato area has remained unchanged, the swede, turnip and mangold acreage has suffered a drop of over 7000 acres, but sugar-beet has jumped from 29 acres to 5561, taking the place of the old root crops for the most part. This, however, has not materially affected either the permanent labour or number or type of stock kept, as sheep and cattle are run over the land and fed on the "tops" pretty nearly as long as if the land were in roots.

The tendency to keep seeds leys down for two and sometimes three years where possible, and to have a rather extended area for hay and grazing, will account for the increased acreage of nearly 9000 acres.

During the last ten years there has been a reduction of nearly 5000 horses of all ages used for agricultural purposes—*i.e.* 900 less actual working horses (which is probably due to the reduced arable area, and very little, in the writer's opinion, to the motor tractor) and 3000 unbroken yearlings and two-year-olds—due to the rather depressed markets that have prevailed. It should, however, be mentioned that there has been a decided improvement in this direction during the past year, and it is probable that the numbers of young stock will rise.

Cows and heifers in milk or in calf have increased by nearly 3000 head since 1918, and 6000 since 1915, whereas store bullocks and feeding beasts have decreased by about the same number.

Sheep, on the other hand, have not changed in numbers during

the last ten to fifteen years to any great extent, except during the two or three years immediately following the war; but if we go back as far as 1911 we find there has been a drop of something like 50,000 head. In other words, sheep have given way to this extent to increased milk production and the cultivation of saleable crops such as potatoes and sugar-beet.

The pig population is notorious for its ups and downs—due to market conditions—so that it is not wise to take much account of the increased figures shown in the returns as indications of any permanent change.

There has been a very definite increase in the numbers of poultry kept on farms. Figures are not available for the ten-year period, but for one year only—*i.e.* 1926-1927—there was an approximate increase of 47,550 fowls; and when it is realized that the type of birds kept and the general management have improved on the whole to a very marked degree, it will be appreciated that the increased egg production is enormous, and has indeed, in some cases well known to the writer, proved a very valuable and profitable change of policy. It is estimated that the poultry population has increased by 25 per cent. during the last ten years, and, more important still, that the egg output probably has increased by 60 per cent.

With regard to the size of holdings, there has not been any serious change during the past ten or fifteen years, the most marked being the increase of those from 50 to 150 acres and, in spite of the Smallholding Movement, the decrease in those of approximately 1 to 50 acres. There is a growing demand for holdings of about 100 to 150 acres by men of moderate capital, who desire to run general mixed farming, associated with milk production to provide ready money.

Markets.—There has been a noticeable change recently in the size of animals sent in fat to market. The demand for smaller joints has had its influence in this direction. Porkers of about 8 to 10 stone are in greater demand than heavier pigs, and the same applies to the two-year-old bullock. Most sheep-breeders move a fair proportion of their lambs fat, and the type of sheep has entirely changed from the June Lincoln to Crossbreds—the Hants, Oxford and Suffolk rams being largely used. Many favour the North Country sheep, and large numbers of hogs are brought into the county to be fed on roots, or grazed during the summer on the grass-land areas in the South.

The movement for clean milk and the public demand for a better milk have had their effect on the general improvement of management, resulting in some cases in the sale of Certified and Grade A. A recent development has been the formation of Co-operative Societies run by farmers for the sale of milk and making surplus into cheese. Another change is the transference of Stilton cheese-

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making from the home to the factory. There has also been a large increase in the numbers of small producer-retailers, particularly in the West or industrial areas.

The tendency in this county is to become more intensive. We have a type of young men coming forward who are availing themselves of all possible scientific information which can be applied with profit in practice. For example, they are rationing their stock right through, and are keenly interested in the economic side of their farming business. They are studying soil and manurial conditions very closely, and are out to take full advantage of any advice that we, the educational bodies, can give them; and I say without the slightest hesitation that these men are to-day doing quite well on their farms, even in spite of the depressed market conditions.

Conclusions.—The main changes that have taken place during recent years are :

(1) The decrease of arable land and proportional increase of permanent pasture.

(2) The reduced area under roots and mangolds is being replaced to a large extent by sugar-beet.

(3) The variation of the rotation to include seeds leys of longer duration, and the growth of saleable crops such as potatoes and sugar-beet.

(4) The reduction of sheep when compared with the 1910 period, the tremendous fall in numbers just after the war, and the gradual return to about 10,000 head short of 1914 numbers.

(5) The increase during the past fifteen years in cow-keeping and the sale of milk to its present steady level.

(6) The demand for smaller joints of meat has influenced the size of animal sent fat to market.

(7) The decided improvement in methods of management and feeding of farm live stock and manuring of crops and grass-land, and the keen desire of many young farmers to avail themselves of scientific and technical instruction that has direct relation to farming practice.

(8) Apart from the demand for holdings of from 100 to 150 acres there appears to be little change except in the decrease of the smallholdings of from 1 to 50 acres and of farms of over 300 acres.

RECENT BREAKS FROM THE OLD ROTATION IN SUSSEX

By H. DREWITT

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My remarks refer to the Southdown country and the plain between it and the sea in West Sussex.

The foundation of farming in this part of the world is found in