

# RURAL HISTORY TODAY

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## A new era for agriculture?

John Martin and James P. Bowen examine historical perspectives on Brexit and discuss the future of British agricultural policy.



Early Massey Harris tanker combine with bat reel, 1947 Image: The Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading.

Britain's decision to leave the European Union (EU) and with it the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has profound implications for the agricultural sector, which at present produces only about 60 percent of the country's food, whilst exporting large quantities of cereals to the EU. Some politicians have argued that, if the Brexit negotiations fail to reach an agreement on trade, Britain could meet demand by growing more – a view widely criticised by farming leaders and industry organisations, including the National Farmers' Union. Yet concerns about the possible impact of Brexit on agricultural trade are not necessarily novel given the history of the state's relationship with the industry.

### Nineteenth-century depression

Withdrawing from the CAP, which has effectively guaranteed the prices that farmers receive, means they may no longer be entitled to the same level of support. A parallel can be made with the late nineteenth century when, following the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, Britain championed Free Trade which exposed domestic agriculture to overseas competition. The immediate response of many farmers was the adoption of so-called 'high farming' when there was massive investment

into agricultural improvements such as drainage and farm buildings, some of which was not cost effective. At this stage there was as yet no large international surplus of food which could be easily exported to Britain, consequently farmers were still protected from competition and agricultural prices remained buoyant.

### In many senses the present situation is similar to the position faced during and immediately after the First and Second World Wars.

By the early 1870s, the opening up of the American prairies with transport improvements (the development of railways and steamships) made it economically viable to transport large quantities of agricultural produce to Britain. The emergence of these food surpluses, coupled with Britain's practice of exchanging its manufactured goods abroad in return for reciprocal imports of agricultural produce, resulted in agricultural depression (1870s–90s) characterised by low prices and declining output and profitability.

### Wartime protection

The present situation is similar to the position faced during and immediately after the First and Second World Wars. In the First World War, the reduction in food imports caused by the German U-boat blockade eventually compelled the government to introduce the 1917 Corn Production Act, which guaranteed prices for wheat and oats in order to encourage the conversion of grassland to arable. This was assisted by the efforts of county War Agricultural Executive Committees

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(‘War Ags’) who co-ordinated the campaign at the local level. Once the effects of the wartime food shortages were no longer prominent in the minds of policymakers, these wartime controls and guarantees were dismantled and farming was once more dependent upon free market forces. It was not until 1931, when Britain was on the verge of becoming the world’s largest single free trade area for agricultural produce that it abandoned its historical commitment to free trade. With the threat of another European war, the state again sought to direct food production, introducing guaranteed prices for most agricultural commodities coupled with the re-establishment of county based agricultural committees to coordinate the ploughing-up campaign.

## Landmark Act

Following the cessation of military hostilities in 1945, the newly elected Labour government embarked on an ambitious programme of economic and social reform. In the case of farming, this brought about the introduction of the 1947 Agriculture Act which provided the basis of state support for agriculture up to the country’s entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973. The legislation was specifically intended to ensure stability and efficiency through the provision of a comprehensive system of guaranteed prices, grants and subsidies to facilitate more efficient production methods. The legislation marked a watershed. World food production was then about 7 percent below its pre-war levels and post-war food rationing was more stringent than during the darkest days of the Second World War. Under the circumstances, it was essential to establish a system of support conducive to the rapid expansion of domestic agriculture in order to alleviate the worst effects of the food shortages. As such, the reforming Labour government’s response to supporting agriculture was not only ideological but pragmatic.

► James P. Bowen and John Martin have written an article on ‘Brexit and the great British breakfast’ published online by History & Policy.

[www.historyandpolicy.org/opinion-articles/articles/brexit-and-the-great-british-breakfast](http://www.historyandpolicy.org/opinion-articles/articles/brexit-and-the-great-british-breakfast)



Danish bacon van, 1934, from *Farmer and Stockbreeder*. Image: The Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading.

## At the crossroads

In several senses the present day situation is similar to that of 1947 and Britain stands at a crossroads. As Brexit means that the CAP will no longer apply, some alternative strategy of agricultural support needs to be devised. The simplest option would be to continue with a system of direct payments not dissimilar from the type of support which was implemented following the landmark 1947 Agriculture Act. The system of agricultural support in the future could have an even sharper focus on conservation, environmental and sustainability goals. However, the higher cost of such an approach may have limited appeal to subsequent governments, particularly the Treasury.

An alternative approach, advocated by leading figures including Professor David Harvey is to provide an ‘exit bond’ to existing holders of direct payment entitlements, making available necessary incentives and support to help them adjust to the changes. The provision of a time-constrained and financially limited system of direct support would probably be more politically attractive. A default option whereby the present system of support terminates would leave agriculture and farmers to readjust to a free market economy. Pursuing this strategy would be similar to the way British agriculture was left to fend for itself in the 1920s.

## Threats to food security

In campaigning for a better deal for agriculture it would be prudent to remind policymakers that food surpluses can be, and are in the future, more likely to be transient. There are significant threats to

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long-term food security posed by increasing world population, rising living standards and changing food consumption patterns, especially in the developing world. There is also the threat posed by climate change. It is important to bear in mind that in the short-term, demand for specific types of food is relatively inelastic. Even minor shortfalls in supply, for instance caused by weather conditions, can lead to significant price fluctuations. Conversely, relatively small increases in production, say as a result of a particularly good harvest, can result in significant price reductions. Ensuring that production is maintained in equilibrium with demand is problematic, as the beef and butter mountains, and milk and wine lakes produced in the early years of the CAP testify.

Reflecting on the lessons which can be learnt from these key events provides a valuable historical perspective on ongoing debates. Farming and the countryside needs – and consumers deserve – a long-term comprehensive system of agricultural support, enabling the country to ensure an adequate supply of food and cope with the challenges and opportunities offered by Brexit.

# A Wiltshire Lad

## Richard Jefferies and Victorian Farming

### Eric Jones

Vice-Chairman of the Richard Jefferies Society

Richard Jefferies (1848–1887) the son of a small farmer, was born in Coate, then a hamlet outside Swindon, Wiltshire. He became a journalist in 1866, rose to be chief reporter of the *Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Standard*, and attracted national notice in 1872 with letters to *The Times* about the condition of agricultural labour. In 1877 he moved from Wiltshire to be closer to London editors – triggering an outpouring of prose. In two or three years he wrote five outstanding books about life in his home county, before he died of tuberculosis aged just 38.

Jefferies' numerous writings included romantic fiction and an astonishing variety of other works such as a children's classic, *Bevis*, an autobiography, *The Story of My Heart* and a pioneering piece of futurology, *After London*. His trademark however, was close observation of the countryside. This he presented in extraordinarily limpid prose.

Jefferies does not have quite the national fame his prose deserves. He spread his work thinly because of the need to write for cash and died too young to clinch his reputation in one great book. However, there is much for the agricultural historian to mine. Start with *Hodge and his Masters* (1880) which is full of country characters and astute sociological observations, based on his experiences when a reporter in Cirencester. This on the low public house: 'Nowhere else in all the parish... can there be found such a constant

supply of food usually considered as almost the privilege of the rich... somehow, whatever is good, whatever is held in estimation, makes its appearance in that grimy little back room on that ragged, dirty table-cloth.'<sup>1</sup>

## Documenting change

Jefferies documents one of the major agricultural transitions in recent centuries and his work echoes perennial problems of the type expected to arise with Brexit. Matters of farm diversification in response to competition from imports, and questions about farming's overall ability to adapt to market change were in the air then, just as they are today. His perception of the issues was sharp. It surfaces especially in the articles he published from 1877–1878 in *The Live Stock Journal and Farmer's Gazette*.<sup>2</sup> Many of these articles have only recently been identified as his, through finding the publisher's payslips. Writing for a readership of farmers, Jefferies dealt with upcoming competition and gave a nod to the case for protection. But he did not always pander to his audience and berated them for commercial indolence and not working as hard as foreigners. More positively, he repeatedly made suggestions as to how English farmers could respond to competition. He is particularly informative about the product specialisation that had overtaken agriculture prior to the depression. There had been a concentration on mixed farming, predicated on the reasonable prices available for grain and fat-stock, while minor farm enterprises such as pig-keeping and poultry had diminished. Jefferies thought this was a mistake. Moreover, he thought farmers should establish co-operatives and open shops hard by London railway stations. Cutting out the middleman was music to his readers' ears, since they all thought they should get bigger shares of final prices. It was a notion not dissimilar to that of the modern farmers' market.



Richard Jefferies, 1879. Image: Richard Jefferies Society

*'The bark of the apple trees peels of itself – that is, the thin outer skin – and insects creep under these brown scales curled at the edges. If you sit down on the elm butt placed here as a seat and watch quietly, before long the little tree-climber will come. He flies to the trunk of the apple tree (other birds fly to the branches), and then proceeds to ascend it, going round it as he rises in a spiral.'*

Jefferies on 'The Orchard' in *Wildlife in a Southern County*, first published 1879.

## Research bursary

Richard Jefferies' flame is kept alive by the Society named after him. The President, Andrew Rossabi, has just published the first volume of the definitive biography of Jefferies: *A Peculiarly English Genius* (Foulsham, Norfolk: Petton Books, 2017). Volume I (of three) covers the early years (1848–1867).

The Society offers some awards, including a bursary or bursaries totalling £2,000 per annum to support research and publication about Jefferies or subjects associated with his concerns:

<http://richardjefferiessociety.blogspot.co.uk/p/bursary.html>

email [info@richardjefferiessociety.co.uk](mailto:info@richardjefferiessociety.co.uk)

<sup>1</sup> R Jefferies, *Hodge and His Masters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), p.160.

<sup>2</sup> R Jefferies, *The Farmer's World: Richard Jefferies' Agricultural Journalism in the late 1870* (Introduced by Eric Jones) (Foulsham, Norfolk: Petton Books, 2016).



# Feeding Anglo Saxon England

Introducing FeedSax:  
Bioarchaeological Explorations  
of an Early Medieval  
Agricultural Revolution

**Mark McKerracher,**  
University of Oxford



The agricultural revolution of early modern Britain is well known: farming practices were rationalized, intensified and technologized and, perhaps most infamously, this process saw the eventual enclosure of most of England's open field systems. Less well known but equally significant is the revolution that occurred several centuries earlier, which witnessed the genesis of those same open fields and again fed a rising population – a population which had reached unprecedented levels by the thirteenth century.

In a pattern which recurred across much of medieval Europe, cereal cultivation expanded as never before, powering demographic and economic growth. Scholars have been studying these crucial developments for over 100 years, yet even now there is no consensus as to when, where, how and why they occurred. Indeed, even the question of whether there really was a revolution, or rather an evolutionary process, remains unresolved. There is no shortage of excellent landscape-historical studies in recent literature but these often profoundly disagree with each other, despite using very similar evidence.<sup>1</sup> Could the application of innovative methodologies, drawing upon new evidence, finally break the impasse?

## The FeedSax Project

A major new project, **Feeding Anglo-Saxon England (FeedSax)**, is pursuing exactly this aim. An Advanced Grant from the European Research Council (AdG741751) is funding four years of bioarchaeological research (2017–2021) at the Universities of Oxford and Leicester, led by Helena Hamerow, Oxford's Professor of Early Medieval Archaeology. The bioarchaeological

evidence – charred crop deposits, animal bones, and pollen – will bring us closer than ever before to the very plants that grew, and the livestock that grazed, in the fields and meadows of Anglo-Saxon England. Such evidence has been studied to great effect for periods of prehistory and for the 'improvements' of early modern farming. The same methodologies, being based upon the systematic impact of farming upon the natural world, are equally applicable to the early medieval countryside.

More than 25 years of development-led excavations in Britain, in advance of building works, have produced a rich bioarchaeological dataset for the FeedSax team to draw upon. A pilot study in 2016, for instance, identified more than 250 sites across England with preserved early medieval plant remains spanning the eighth to twelfth centuries – and more evidence is undoubtedly waiting to be unearthed in the mass of archive reports that now abound.<sup>2</sup>

## Analysis of isotopes

One key strand of the FeedSax project will concern archaeobotanical analysis, the study of charred plant remains from excavated settlements. The arable weeds preserved amongst the harvested cereals, with their distinct ecological preferences, provide a unique insight into the growing environments of early medieval crops and, thus, into the husbandry strategies that were employed. Practices such as manuring and irrigation also affect the biochemistry of crops in distinctive ways, so the team will be conducting parallel analyses of carbon and nitrogen stable isotopes from cereal grains, using a mass spectrometer at Oxford's Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art. Where sheep were



grazed on the aftermath of arable fields, the altered biochemistry of the cereals would consequently have affected the chemical composition of ovine skeletons. Isotopic analyses of sheep bones will therefore be used to identify and trace this approach to grazing.

Animal bones will also be invaluable in tracing the use of the heavy mouldboard plough. Nature did not intend for cattle to

## Animal bones will also be invaluable in tracing the use of the heavy mouldboard plough

pull ploughs, and such labours invariably take their toll on bovine skeletons. A study of limb bone pathologies from large bone assemblages will therefore provide another powerful tool in tracking the spread of this 'disruptive technology' across early medieval England. The joint application of all these techniques to the material from a series of case study sites (yet to be identified) will be used to reconstruct detailed models of cereal husbandry strategies – including modes of ploughing, manuring, and sowing – across different areas of England.

## A national model of medieval land use

To set these intensive case studies within a wider context, some of the team will be compiling a national dataset of bioarchaeological information, garnered from the so-called grey literature of excavation archive reports, as well as published data, along with a wide-ranging

study of settlement plans from the same sources. The results of the case studies will provide a foil to facilitate more precise interpretation of those wider patterns. At the same time, others will be extracting and analysing pollen cores from across the country. Whereas charred crop deposits and animal bones elucidate the flora and fauna that found their way into excavated settlements, pollen sequences represent the wider floral ecosystems of the past, in both farmed and wild landscapes.

The construction of a national model of medieval land-use from this resource – the first of its kind – will provide a vital canvas against which to set the localized evidence from individual settlements. Ultimately, the combination of all these strands will enable the team to investigate geographical variation in the planning of farmsteads, cropping regimes and animal husbandry across the whole of England, allowing comparisons between, for example, the heavy champion heartlands of open field farming in the Midlands and the lighter soils of East Anglia.

## Radiocarbon dating

Last but not least, the bioarchaeological evidence of charred seeds, animal bones and pollen cores offers one further advantage: such items are directly dateable through the application of radiocarbon analysis. The predictable, systematic decay of carbon isotopes in organic substances provides a well-established means of determining how long bioarchaeological material has been in the ground, through measurement in a mass spectrometer. Even greater chronological precision is now attainable through a statistical approach – known as Bayesian analysis – that exploits the stratigraphic

and mathematical relationships between radiocarbon determinations to devise a more closely dated sequence. Crucially, this part of the project will enable the team to obtain specific date-ranges for the developments identified in the other strands, and so address long-standing questions about when, and how quickly, different innovations occurred in the Anglo-Saxon and Norman periods.

## Comparison with the Rhine

The analyses of charred plant remains, both ecological and molecular, will further benefit from a parallel study of comparable material from the Rhine valley, through collaboration with Dr Tanja Zerl of the University of Cologne. The inclusion of this German material offers two exciting opportunities to expand the scope of the project: first, through a comparison of early medieval developments on both sides of the Channel; and second, because of the extremely long chronology of the Rhenish material (from Neolithic to Medieval), to examine such developments within the *longue durée* of agrarian history. All this is possible because the project methodologies are applicable to any period of history, and practically anywhere in the world, that produces sufficient bioarchaeological material. Hence there is strong potential for similar future studies around the whole of the British Isles, and indeed across much of Europe.

- 1 Recent notable works include, for instance: T Williamson, R Liddiard and T Partida, *Champion. The making and unmaking of the English Midland landscape* (Liverpool University Press, 2013), and D Hall, *The Open Fields of England* (Oxford University Press, 2014).
- 2 M McKerracher, 'Playing with fire? Charred grain as a proxy for cereal surpluses in early medieval England', *Medieval Settlement Research* 31, (2016), pp. 63–6.

► The project team comprises Prof. Helena Hamerow, Prof. Amy Bogaard, Dr Mike Charles, Prof. Christopher Bronk Ramsey, Dr Emily Forster and Dr Mark McKerracher at the University of Oxford, and Dr Richard Thomas and Dr Mathilda Holmes at the University of Leicester.

Project website: <http://feedsax.arch.ox.ac.uk>  
 Twitter @FeedSax  
 and blog: <http://feedsax.wordpress.com>



# 'The art of beefing it up'

Hilary Matthews, a doctoral student at the University of Reading, reports on the BAHS sponsored conference about livestock portraiture held at the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) on 19th June 2017.

Dr. Ollie Douglas, Assistant Curator at MERL, began the morning session with his paper entitled, *Fat Beasts at the Museum of English Rural Life*. He focused on the Museum's collection of livestock paintings and prints which date from the end of the eighteenth century into the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

## Society and sheep shearing

The author then gave her paper on *The Wobourn Sheepshearing*, a print published in 1811 by the livestock artist George Garrard (1760–1826) in which he depicted agriculturalists and animals at the annual sheep shearing event held at Park Farm, Woburn Abbey. The print can illuminate our understanding of the social networks of enlightened agriculturalists who attended such events. They were an eclectic group,

made up not only of aristocratic landowners and gentlemen farmers, but yeomen and tenant farmers, graziers, breeders, clergy, chemists, surveyors, land agents, wool staplers, butchers and implement makers. Garrard portrayed John Ellman, a tenant farmer who farmed 580 acres in Sussex, conversing with his social 'superior' the Duke of Clarence while a good looking, young Essex tenant farmer, Edward Wakefield, was placed in profile with the Oakley Hereford bull. Garrard's intention was clearly to depict two young studs, side by side.

Professor Lawrence Weaver then presented a paper entitled *Painter of Pedigree* which looked at the life of the livestock artist Thomas Weaver (1775–1844). Weaver worked during a period of great agricultural improvement and his clients ranged from aristocratic landowners to tenant farmers. Weaver, who has written a book on the artist (see box), continued with the sheep shearing theme by talking about *Mr Marris's Sheep Show* (1810) in which Weaver portrayed agriculturalists in a manner similar to Garrard, and then looked at *Samuel Chapman with new Leicester Wether Sheep* (1803). The old man looking out of the window is Chapman's late father, George, and Lawrence talked about the subtle message of the old and the new, of pedigree and provenance, that can be deduced. The morning session concluded with a visit to the Museum.

## Painting cattle

After lunch, Alison Wright, a collaborative doctoral student with the University of East Anglia and Tate Britain, gave a paper entitled *Paul Potter on the Thames*. It examined early nineteenth-century British 'landscape and cattle' painting, identifying the ways in which artists articulated and engaged with livestock. One of these was James



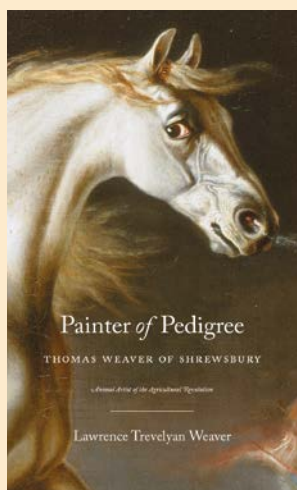
Samuel Chapman with New Leicester Wether Sheep, 1803, oil on canvas, private collection

Ward (1769–1859) and by comparing and contrasting his painting *Landscape with Cattle* (1822) with *The Young Bull* (1647) by Potter (1625–1645), she discussed how Ward's aim was clearly not only to emulate, but to improve upon the Dutch artist's work.

The final speaker was Pat Stanley who spoke on *The Bakewell Effect*. Stanley, a longhorn cattle breeder and judge, has written a book on Robert Bakewell's life and is chair of the New Dishley Society, established by Bakewell at Dishley Grange, Leicestershire in the late eighteenth century. Using some excellent visual images, she demonstrated how Bakewell's ideas revolutionised livestock breeding. His methods were never disclosed but were based on inbreeding or 'in-and-in breeding' as it was called then. Amongst the images displayed were some of Robert Fowler's Little Rollright herd of Longhorn cattle, painted by Thomas Weaver's master John Boulton (1753–1812) in the early 1790s. Like many of the top livestock breeders of the day, Fowler had been a friend and advocate of Bakewell's methods, and these animals were descended from Dishley stock.

A roundtable discussion, chaired by Dr Jeremy Burchardt, the University of Reading's rural historian, concluded an excellent and informative day.

## Painter of pedigree



Thomas Weaver was born in Shropshire and was a contemporary of John Constable and JMW Turner. His descendant, Lawrence Trevelyan Weaver, has used the family's collection of the artist's letters, diaries and paintings to write an illuminating biography of the man who 'painted pedigree animals for pedigree people'. He was one of a small group of artists who pioneered paintings of the lavishly proportioned animals that were bred during the Agricultural Revolution. Weaver's subjects included the famous *Durham Ox*, a beast considered so magnificent that he was taken on a 6 year tour of Britain travelling in a horse-drawn carriage – which he shared with his owner's wife.

Illustrated with beautiful colour plates, many depicting the improbably sized cattle and sheep that Weaver's wealthy patrons so admired, this book sheds light on a fascinating era and contains much to interest the agricultural and rural historian.

► *Painter of Pedigree Thomas Weaver of Shrewsbury: Animal Artist of the Agricultural Revolution* Lawrence Trevelyan Weaver, Unicorn, £30

# Agrarian reform and resistance

Joe Regan and Cathal Smith report on the BAHS sponsored conference on **Agrarian Reform and Resistance in an 'Age of Globalisation': The Euro-American World, 1815–1914** held at their institution, the National University of Ireland, Galway, 2–3 June 2017

Agricultural modernisation is increasingly seen as a crucial part of the history of capitalism, industrialisation and globalisation, and this conference discussed the central themes of agrarian reform and resistance in a range of different contexts from 1815–1914.

## Peasants, farmers and slaves

Daniel Brett (Open University) began by detailing the struggle for rural representation in Bulgaria and the regions that were to become Romania and Poland in the decades before 1914. The globalisation of agricultural markets led to the increasing peripheralisation of the region. The result was the 'peasant problem,' which local elites considered the cause of under-development. Elsewhere, reforms favoured by landed elites often resulted in bloodshed. This was made clear in Enrico Dal Lago's (NUI, Galway) portrait of the opposition to nation-building and modernisation by farmers in East Tennessee to the Confederate States of America and by the pro-Bourbon peasants in Northern Terra di Lavoro to the Kingdom of Italy in 1861.

Occasionally full-scale regional rebellions succeeded. James Oakes (City University of New York) re-examined W. E. B. DuBois's insight that during the American Civil War, the slaves in the South went on strike. This played a decisive role in Union victory. Radicalism and politics remained the focus for Sami Suodenjoki (University of Helsinki) who detailed how agrarian unrest was fuelled by political mobilisation in Finland between 1880 and 1917. Andrew Phemister (University of Edinburgh) explained how in the early 1880s, Irish land operated as an ideological space, with particular resonance in the United States. Focusing on these ideas in a

British context, Brian Casey (Independent Scholar) explored Michael Davitt's second tour of the Scottish Highland in 1887 and his appeals to an imagined pan-Celtic peasantry for land reform.

## Specialisation

Access to land and the increasing pressures created by global markets made the position of small landholders more precarious in many regions of the Euro-American world during the long nineteenth century. In southeastern Brazil's township of Campinas, the expansion of sugar production from the 1780s onward led to an exodus of small farmers. Laura Fraccaro (University of Campinas) analysed how the production of sugar restricted access to land and changed the relationship between free small producers and the expanding slave plantations. The increasing specialisation of agriculture also created pressure to innovate. Through specific examples of reformers in two agriculturally peripheral regions – Maine in the United States and the Hochsauerland in Westphalia – Justus Hillebrand (University of Maine) compared practical methods of farmers and agronomists who relied on the theories of other agricultural scientists. Co-operation between rival classes also occasionally occurred in rural Ireland, as John O'Donovan (University College Cork) illustrated regarding the uneasy alliance between smallholders and 'graziers' in County Cork, who united to protest against the opening of British ports to the importation of Canadian store cattle in the early twentieth century.

The conference keynote address *The Transformation of the Global Countryside: The Nineteenth Century* was delivered by Professor Sven Beckert (Harvard) in Galway city at the historic Mechanic's Institute. This wide-ranging lecture illustrated that the increasing integration and globalisation of markets meant developments in one rural region of the world typically had profound effects in others.

## Science

The importance of agricultural reform in regional and national perspectives was highlighted on the second day. Peter Gray

(Queens University Belfast) discussed William Sharman Crawford (1780–1861) who was the leading Irish agrarian reformer of his generation. Zsuzsi Kiss (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) concentrated on the role of education in Hungary, where several state-sponsored 'Agricultural Academies' were established that recognised the importance of modernising agriculture. Focusing primarily on examples from Switzerland, Peter Moser (Archives of Rural History, Bern) explored this process of institution building and how scientifically-oriented and agriculturally-anchored knowledge regimes, enabled the globalisation of crucial agricultural and industrial products in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the same period, debates on landownership and reform led to organised co-operation among rural producers across Europe. Patrick Doyle (University of Manchester) presented on how informal networks were used to promote these co-operative movements transnationally while Sarah Washbrook (University College London) outlined how rising demand for tropical commodities and agrarian reforms implemented by the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911) intensified the expropriation of the peasantry in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas.

Export-led modernisation also had profound effects in the many parts of the globe to which Europe and the Americas were connected. Illustrating these connections, Florian Wagner (University of Erfurt) detailed how the agronomic laboratories at the Buitenzorg hill station in Dutch Java gradually transformed the way colonisers conceptualised and organised agriculture. Finally, Chelsea Davis (The George Washington University) discussed the crucial exchanges in Euro-American agronomic and viticultural knowledge that helped reform wine production in Australia.

What emerged from all these papers was that the globalisation of markets associated with the Industrial Revolution underpinned the emergence of various forms of agrarian modernity, which ultimately facilitated the continued expansion of the capitalist world economy. A forthcoming edited collection based on research presented in Galway will feature as a part of the Routledge 'Studies in Modern History' series.





Sikkim is the first Indian state with the goal of being 100% organic. Image: B Scholten, 2017

# Organics matter in New Delhi

The International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM) based in Bonn, is the umbrella organization for 800 affiliates in more than 100 countries, including Britain's Soil Association. Bruce A Scholten (University of Durham) reports on their nineteenth, triennial world organic congress held in New Delhi, November 2017.

## Smog

Nearly 3000 academics, journalists, policy makers, scientists, activists and farmers attended the conference, cheerful despite thick smog – estimated to be the equivalent of smoking 42 cigarettes a day. It was the result of farmers burning stubble in their fields, cleansing the soil for the next wheat crop. Schools were cancelled and many civilians, soldiers and police wore facemasks. Conservation agriculturalists say a likely solution is for the Government of India to subsidize the use of new machines to cut stubble shorter and mulch it with the next planting.

## A flexible approach

IFOAM officials are making common cause with foodies who demand green policies, while honouring farmers' ability to innovate and make continuous improvements in crops and livestock, rather than simply meet minimums on chemicals or inputs. Led by outgoing Executive Director Markus Arbenz, IFOAM's Organics 3.0 policy team emphasized the need for flexibility. With the climate teetering toward cataclysmic change, the priority is to encourage social and economic groups toward sustainable intensification in order to feed 10 million people by the year 2050, without cutting more forest. Some claimed the way to stop Germany's atomic power plants, or Monsanto's mooted merger with another chemical giant, was marching in the streets. However others, such as Miles McEvoy, newly retired head of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program (USDA-NOP) were *Realos* – aware of the reality of agribusiness power and focused on possible compromises with like-minded groups.

## Policy discussions

In afternoon fishbowl discussions which considered changes to IFOAM rules, the hot topics of guaranteeing organic quality hinged on questions of certification, surprise inspections, and materials permitted in organic production, as well as handling and processing (soybeans processed with Hexane, cosmetics and textiles being special concerns). Roy Sabyasachi, of India's National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), explained how the progressive history of the NDDB engendered public trust in their chain, which although 'conventional' is continually improving. It also helps that leading cooperative brands Amul and Dudhsagar return around 80% of retail sales value to their – mostly small – farmer members (Scholten 2010). This bodes well for expanding India's dairy cooperatives among Rabari nomads in the hinterlands – some of which have the potential for organic status.



Smog filled New Delhi during organic agriculture conference. Image: B Scholten, 2017

The congress ambitiously widened the scope of world organics, when it passed Member Motion 67, tasking IFOAM to establish a strategy to identify and systematize non-certified organic agriculture. IFOAM Organics International is to take the lead, with the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (UN-FAO) to establish a methodologically credible figure on non-certified organic agriculture. Although much future negotiation in world trading rules is likely to be needed, this initiative has a two-pronged appeal. It could raise the value of production from marginal land – while discouraging pollution of that very land. The hope is that, for example, India's dairy farmers' cooperatives could help tribal peoples and nomads in the hills of India supply milk to the national system. As hygiene improves, it might be marketed as a higher-value product from land with a de facto status as organic, unaffected by chemical inputs or GMOs.

### Rural History Today

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Articles for the next issue should be sent by

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Front masthead image: 'Bringing home the bacon from Denmark', 1970s. Image: The Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading

Membership of the BAHS is open to all who support its aim of promoting the study of agricultural history and the history of rural economy and society. Membership enquiries should be directed to the Treasurer, BAHS, Dr William Shannon, 12A Carleton Avenue, Fulwood, Preston PR2 6YA bill.shannon@msn.com

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