

Pig clubs and backyard chickens: the significance of household producers in Britain in the Second World War

by Paul Brassley

Abstract

This article attempts to evaluate the significance of pig and poultry production on holdings of less than one acre in the UK during the Second World War. Since most of these holdings were owned or managed by people who did not identify themselves as farmers, they are termed 'household' producers, and many of them were found in urban areas. The article examines the reasons why such producers were encouraged to engage in pig and poultry production, and the difficulties they encountered in doing so. It concludes that, from a low base, their output increased rapidly, so that by the end of the war it accounted for a significant proportion of national egg and pig-meat supplies. The article also briefly examines some of the myths that subsequently developed around this form of production.

In the last year of the Second World War, roughly 10 per cent of the United Kingdom's pig-meat output, and 40 per cent of all the eggs, were produced on holdings of less than one acre, and a significant proportion of these were in towns.¹ In 1944 a Ministry of Agriculture official claimed that ten per cent of home-produced food was grown in gardens and allotments, and a survey in that year revealed that 12 per cent of urban houses were keeping productive livestock of one kind or another.² This study investigates the extent and significance of these activities, and examines the concomitant policy issues: how they were promoted or encouraged, problems of feedstuff supplies and animal diseases, and the planning, health and amenity problems that arose from the rapid expansion of urban livestock husbandry under the guidance and control of government departments with conflicting opinions and objectives.

¹ K. A. H. Murray, *Agriculture* (1955), p. 247.

² R. H. Best and J. T. Ward, *The garden controversy* (Wye College, Department of Agricultural Economics, *Studies in Rural Land Use*, 2, 1956), p. 5 quoting Hansard, 15 Mar. 1944; G. Thomas, *Domestic food*

production: an enquiry carried out for the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in September 1944 (Wartime Social Survey, new ser. 54, May 1945, London School of Economics, UK Government Collection, 13539/19-30).

I

In 1939 the UK was a food-importing economy. In his official history of wartime agriculture, Sir Keith Murray estimated that 70 per cent of food supplies, measured in terms of value, came from overseas in the years just before the war. The import proportion varied from one food to another: whereas all of the liquid milk was home-produced, imports accounted for half of the meat, 84 per cent of the sugar, oils, and fats, 88 per cent of the wheat and flour, and 91 per cent of the butter. In addition, about a quarter of domestic livestock production was dependent on the 8.7 million tons of animal feedstuffs imported annually. In the event of war it was thought that food imports as a whole could be cut by a quarter, in which case the relative cost, in terms of shipping space, would become a crucial consideration. In 1940 John (later Lord) Boyd Orr, the Scottish nutrition expert, calculated that a ton of wheat required 50 cubic feet of shipping space, and a ton of butter 55 cubic feet. The wheat produced 56 kilocalories (kcal) of energy per cubic foot, and the butter 143 kcal. On the other hand, a ton of bacon would require 110 cubic feet of shipping space and produce only 39 kcal per cubic foot, and a ton of eggs in shell would take up 120 cubic feet and produce only 12 kcal per cubic foot.³ Obviously bacon and eggs were sources of protein rather than energy, but the calculation gave some idea of the relative costs. It was not a new problem. The U-boat campaign in the First World War had also produced food shortages, and there was corresponding official concern in the 1930s that any new war would have a similar impact.⁴ The policy response was threefold: food rationing to reduce demand, extensive government control and support of agriculture and horticulture to increase home-produced supplies, and encouragement of household food production, the 'Dig for Victory' campaign.

The story of wartime food production and consumption in the UK has frequently been told, and recent work has added a European dimension.⁵ Similarly the response of the agricultural industry to the onset of war was celebrated in a Ministry of Information publication in 1945, and analysed in Murray's official history and in several subsequent historical works, of which Short's are the most recent.⁶ The principal features of the story are thus well known. The wartime diet was nutritionally adequate, relatively high in energy and fibre and low in fat,

³ Murray, *Agriculture*, pp. 39 and 45. A significant proportion of pre-war egg supplies were imported from the Netherlands and Denmark and were therefore no longer available after 1940; see Janet W. Strang, 'Farm poultry keeping: a flock for every farm', *Agriculture* 47 (1940-41), pp. 21-4.

⁴ A. F. Wilt, *Food for War: agriculture and rearmament in Britain before the Second World War* (2001).

⁵ R. J. Hammond, *Food, I, the growth of policy* (1951); A. Calder, *The People's War: Britain, 1939-1945* (1992); I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: rationing, controls, and consumption* (2000); Wilt, *Food for war*; F. Trentmann and F. Just, *Food and conflict in Europe in the age of the two world wars* (2006); L. Collingham, *The taste of war: World War Two and the battle for food* (2011); I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska,

R. Duffet and A. Drouard (eds), *Food and war in twentieth-century Europe* (2011); P. Brassley, Y. Segers and L. Van Molle (eds), *War, agriculture, and food: rural Europe from the 1930s to the 1950s* (2012); there are also several recent popular accounts such as Jane Fearnley-Whittingstall, *The Ministry of Food: thrifty wartime ways to feed your family today* (2010); D. Smith, *The spade as mighty as the sword: the story of the Dig for Victory campaign* (2011); W. Sitwell, *Eggs or anarchy* (2016).

⁶ Ministry of Information, *Land at war* (1945); Murray, *Agriculture*; B. Short, C. Watkins and J. Martin (eds), *The front line of freedom: British farming in the Second World War* (2007); B. Short, *The battle of the fields: rural community and authority in Britain during the Second World War* (2014).

and according to Calder gave nearly a pound of meat per person per week.⁷ Food imports were cut from 20.7 million tons in the first year of the war to 11.6 million tons in the final year, so the shortfall had to be met by home production.⁸ The overall home-produced output only increased a little – by about 8 per cent in volume terms – and much of the adjustment to wartime conditions involved concentrating on the production of cereals and potatoes and correspondingly reducing the output of animal products, with the exception of milk.⁹ The arable acreage increased by more than 50 per cent, the output of cereals and potatoes doubled and vegetable production nearly doubled. Milk production was maintained at roughly pre-war levels (which were sufficient to maintain only the liquid market) and beef and sheep-meat output declined only a little.¹⁰ The principal change was in the intensive livestock, pigs and poultry.

There are two different ways of feeding pigs and poultry. One is to use them as scavengers, leaving them to find their own living around the farmyard or garden, or feeding them on household food waste. This method can support only a few animals per farm or household, but it was the traditional means of keeping pigs and chickens.¹¹ The alternative was to keep greater numbers of animals in specialist units fed on specifically formulated cereal and protein rations. This is the way they are kept commercially today, and it was one of the expanding features of inter-war agriculture.¹² For wartime policymakers, the problem with this latter approach was that it used a high proportion of raw materials, often imported, that could equally well be eaten by people. As Sir Thomas Middleton argued after the First World War, ‘It is better to keep five men alive on barley meal, than one comfortably nourished on pork.’¹³ In consequence, official policy restricted the supply of rationed foodstuffs to large-scale pig and poultry producers, and so by 1943 pig-meat production was down to one third of its pre-war level. Much of what remained was processed as bacon, and pork had virtually disappeared from the market. Similarly the output of eggs in the same year was down to 38.5 per cent of its pre-war level, and poultry meat, which in any case had formed only about 6 per cent of pre-war meat supplies, was down to about 60 per cent of its pre-war output.¹⁴ At the same time, it was recognized that common household practices also produced vegetable peelings, plate waste and leftovers that might not be suitable as human food but could be used to form at least a part of the diet of intensive livestock: ‘Any development in poultry keeping to be encouraged under existing conditions should, therefore, be mainly in two directions – the keeping of a small number of birds by householders and cottagers to utilize kitchen and garden scraps, and

⁷ Calder, *People’s war*, p. 380.

⁸ Murray, *Agriculture*, p. 152.

⁹ P. Brassley, ‘Wartime productivity and innovation, 1939–45’, in Short *et al* (eds), *Front line of freedom*, pp. 36–54.

¹⁰ Murray, *Agriculture*, pp. 373–5.

¹¹ P. Brassley, ‘Animal Nutrition’, in E. J. T. Collins (ed.) *The agrarian history of England and Wales*, VII, 1850–1914 (2 vols, 2000), I, p. 577.

¹² P. Brassley, ‘British farming between the wars’, in P. Brassley, J. Burchardt and L. Thompson (eds), *The English countryside between the Wars: regeneration*

or decline? (2006), p. 194; A. Woods, ‘Rethinking the history of modern agriculture: British pig production, c.1910–65’, *Twentieth-Century British History* 23 (2012), pp. 165–91.

¹³ W. A. Stewart, ‘Pig keeping in war time’, *Agriculture* 46 (1939–40), p. 627. Middleton was the author of *Food Production in War* (1923), the official history of agriculture in the First World War, when he had been in charge of the Food Production Department of the Board of Agriculture.

¹⁴ Murray, *Agriculture*, pp. 373–5.

larger numbers on general farms, where poultry can be kept on free range and can forage for much of their food'.¹⁵ A wartime survey found that '20 per cent [by weight] of all the vegetables brought into the house became wastage in the form of peelings, outer leaves, and stalks before the vegetables were cooked'.¹⁶ Thus a return to treating pigs and poultry as scavengers, kept in small numbers close to where the waste was produced, made sense in wartime conditions, as James Scott Watson, professor of agriculture at Oxford, argued in an article in the Ministry of Agriculture's journal in 1940.¹⁷

But the problem facing wartime policymakers was not simply one of nutrition. Food also affected morale and relationships with authority. The Ministry of Information's Home Intelligence report for 24 July 1940 found that the scarcity of eggs was the chief topic of discussion in the markets of the poorer districts of London, and a few days later the shortage of eggs was said to be 'causing annoyance' in Nottingham. In September 1940 there was 'grumbling at the shortage of eggs in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, and annoyance at official announcements that eggs are plentiful'.¹⁸ The introduction of egg rationing in mid-1941 created adverse comment in the press, which was answered by a series of explanatory radio broadcasts in early 1942.¹⁹ As the Wartime Social Survey revealed in 1942, the foods that people considered essential were those items of their traditional diet that they missed most.²⁰ Similarly, those who wrote the official guide to feeding soldiers clearly felt that military morale would best be maintained by a diet founded on traditional British cooking, nutritional science and food shortages notwithstanding, and their opposite numbers in the Air Ministry also provided bomber crews with real eggs and bacon before or after their missions.²¹ Consequently, when the Dig for Victory campaign began, the production of pigs and poultry outside the farm, in gardens and allotments, was a significant part of it.²² Hitherto, however, historians have concentrated on the story of wartime food production on the farm. Despite Murray's reminder that the story would be 'incomplete' if it said nothing about backyard and garden food production, subsequent historians have given little prominence to it. Calder covers it in a paragraph, and a recent history of wartime agriculture does not mention it at all.²³ Some of those backyards and gardens containing pigs and chickens were found in towns and suburbs.

¹⁵ Janet W. Strang, 'Poultry keeping in war time', *Agriculture* 46 (1939-40), pp. 660-3.

¹⁶ G. Wagner, *Vegetable consumption in four selected towns: a survey made for the Ministry of Food* (Wartime social survey, new ser. 56, Oct. 1945, London School of Economics, UK Government Collection, 13539/19-30).

¹⁷ J. A. Scott Watson, 'Nineteenth-century pig keeping', *Agriculture* 47 (1940-41), pp. 15-21

¹⁸ P. Addison and J. A. Crang, *Listening to Britain: Home Intelligence reports on Britain's finest hour - May to September 1940* (2010), pp. 265, 275, 439. See also Vere Hodgson, *Few eggs and no oranges: a diary showing how unimportant people in London and Birmingham lived through the war years, 1940-1945* (1976).

¹⁹ R. Farmer, *The food companions: cinema and consumption in wartime Britain, 1939-45* (2011), pp. 26-9.

²⁰ Calder, *People's War*, p. 383. See also S. O. Rose, *Which People's War? National identity and citizenship in wartime Britain, 1939-1945* (2003), p. 207.

²¹ The War Office, *Manual of military cooking and dietary. Part I - General* (1940). I am most grateful to Derek Shepherd for the loan of this book.

²² Wilt, *Food for war*, p. 189.

²³ Murray, *Agriculture*, p. 245; Calder, *People's war*, p. 430; Short *et al.* (eds), *Front line of freedom*. Recent popular histories of Dig for Victory (see n. 5) either cover pigs and poultry in a few unreferenced pages, or omit them entirely, and a recent academic article (F. Ginn, 'Dig for Victory! New histories of wartime gardening in Britain', *J. Historical Geography* 38 (2012), pp. 294-305) is entirely about vegetable production except for a single sentence on chickens.

There was nothing new about livestock in towns. In the eighteenth century Whitbread's brewery in London kept large herds of pigs fed on brewery waste, and before the development of the railway milk trade in the late nineteenth century there were many town dairies.²⁴ But as cities grew larger, and noise, smells, and manure came to be seen more as civic nuisances and sources of disease than an ordinary part of life, the likelihood of finding non-companion animals in urban areas decreased. Wartime production of animal food in towns and cities therefore required some changes in the natural assumptions and expectations of town dwellers and those who administered their lives. The remainder of this article therefore deals with three questions: how was backyard pig and poultry production in cities, towns, and suburbs encouraged and promoted in wartime; how significant was it; and what were the problems associated with it?

II

Before the outbreak of the war there was a presumption against the keeping of domestic livestock in towns, especially on housing estates directly controlled by local authorities. In January 1936, for example, Mr W. F. Holmes, president of the National Pigeon Association, wrote to the Ministry of Health asking for help in persuading local councils to rescind their prohibition on the keeping of pigeons: 'there are cases where the breeding and exhibition of pigeons have been the lifelong hobby of men now forced to leave their old homes and to live on housing estates, and the enforced termination of their hobby has caused them acute distress'. Despite subsequent correspondence, the Ministry consistently took the line that it was all a matter for local councils.²⁵ In May 1939 the National Poultry Council (NPC) was receiving complaints that poultry keeping was being banned on council housing estates. Since the keeping of cockerels in urban areas was strongly discouraged for nuisance reasons – urban householders were thought to be less tolerant of their dawn crowings than country people – urban poultry keepers had to buy in their laying fowls rather than breeding them themselves. This formed an important market for the poultry industry. In June 1939 the Secretary of the NPC wrote to the Secretary of the Housing Management Sub-Committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee to point out that restrictions on poultry keeping affected 'up to 150 thousand householders, that is, counting only those on estates (about 40 per cent of the total) where poultry keeping is prohibited. Since these would normally purchase annually ... about two million half-grown chicks or pullets', his members were naturally concerned.²⁶ Over the next couple of months a correspondence with several local authorities developed concerning the desirability or otherwise of allowing domestic poultry in towns, and in particular on local authority housing estates. The Medical Officer of Health of Cardiff City Council, for example,

²⁴ J. Thirsk, *Food in early modern England: phases, fads, and fashions, 1500–1760* (2007), p. 242; P. J. Atkins, 'The intra-urban milk supply of London, circa 1790–1914', *Trans. Institute of British Geographers* new ser. 2 (1977), pp. 383–99.

²⁵ TNA, HLG 52/1298, letter from W. F. Holmes, 8 Jan. 1936.

²⁶ TNA, HLG 37/19, letters from the Secretary of the National Poultry Council to the Secretary of the Central Housing Advisory Committee, Ministry of Health (15 May 1939), and to the Secretary of the Housing Management Sub-Committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee, Ministry of Health (7 June 1939).

pointed out that his authority laid down strict regulations on poultry housing, with only one per cent of their 6750 council tenants keeping pigeons or poultry, and his was a typical example.²⁷ Pig keeping in urban areas was rarer still. Pre-war controls on urban livestock were produced by a combination of national and local Acts and bylaws, building covenants, tenancy agreements (which were usually most strict when the landlord was a public authority), and town and country planning. Section 92 of the Public Health Act, 1936, ruled that an animal should not be kept 'in such a place or manner as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance', and model bylaws were issued by the Ministry of Health specifying the distance from a dwelling house at which a pigsty could be located. By 1939 one hundred local authorities had adopted these model bylaws, and the distances imposed varied from 15 to 100 feet. Similarly, the Medical Officer of Health for Manchester prescribed minimum standards for poultry housing.²⁸ There is a clear impression that urban livestock were officially discouraged.

As Wilt has so effectively demonstrated, central government planning for ensuring food supplies in the event of war began well before the outbreak of hostilities, with the Food Supply in Time of War Sub-Committee of the Committee for Imperial Defence meeting for the first time in May 1936.²⁹ For the agricultural industry, a grant of £2 per acre to encourage the ploughing up of permanent grassland was announced in May 1939 as part of a wider campaign to encourage food production in the UK.³⁰ The corresponding measure for the ordinary householder, again announced before the actual outbreak of war, this time in August 1939, was the Dig for Victory campaign. The Minister of Agriculture, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, called for 'not only the big man with the plough, but also the little man with the spade to get busy this autumn'. The image of a single boot on a spade became one of the best-known images of the war, being used on both the campaign poster and a MAF leaflet cover (Figure 1). The aim was to provide half a million more allotments, mainly in urban areas, and encourage the production not only of vegetables but also of small livestock, such as poultry and rabbits, on them. 'Let "Dig for Victory" be the motto of everyone with a garden and of every able-bodied man and woman capable of digging an allotment in their spare time' said the Minister.³¹ Clearly, the implications of these official exhortations were at variance with pre-war legislation and practice on keeping livestock in towns.

The conflict between pre-war practice and wartime requirements was simply resolved by the passage of emergency legislation. The Cultivation of Land (Allotments) Orders of 1939 and 1941 permitted local authorities to take possession of unoccupied land suitable for use as allotments, and Defence Regulation (DR) 62A allowed them to set aside restrictive agreements on parks and open spaces for the same purpose. Most significantly for the purposes of the present discussion, DR 62B made it lawful 'notwithstanding restrictions in leases or tenancy agreements, ... to keep pigs, hens or rabbits for the war period'. It also legalized the keeping of bees, pigs and poultry on local authority allotments, a practice previously forbidden.³² The

²⁷ TNA, HLG 37/19, letter from J. Greenwood Wilson, the Medical Officer of Health, Cardiff City Council, to Mr W. H. Howes, secretary of the sub-committee on house management of the Central Housing Advisory Committee, Ministry of Health, 21 July 1939.

²⁸ TNA, HLG 71/621, Planning control over the

keeping of pigs and poultry in towns.

²⁹ Wilt, *Food for War*, pp. 59–60.

³⁰ Murray, *Agriculture*, p. 57.

³¹ Wilt, *Food for War*, p. 189.

³² TNA, HLG 71/621.

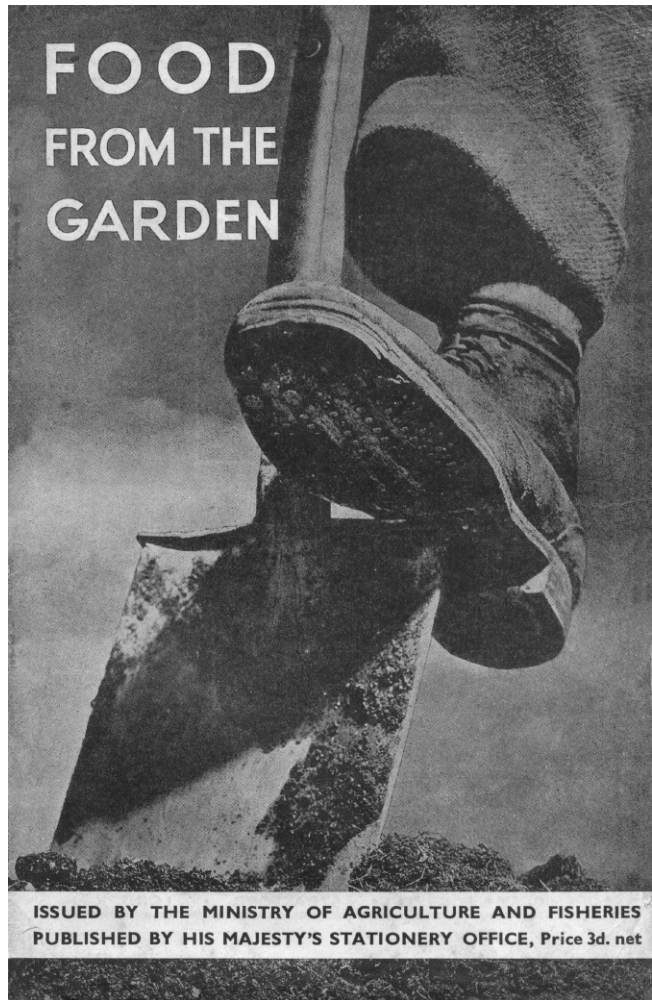


FIGURE 1. Cover of MAF 'Growmore' Bulletin No. 1, *Food from the Garden* (1941).

Photo: Library of Rural and Agricultural Literature (LIBRAL), www.libral.org.uk.

legislation was reinforced by intensive propaganda and the efforts of several semi-official organizations. There were posters, leaflets, Dig for Victory Weeks, radio talks, demonstration plots, and shows.³³ In 1941 Penguin Books published a handbook, ostensibly on the use of waste food for feeding chickens and rabbits; in fact it was a reasonably comprehensive guide to all aspects of backyard poultry and rabbit production.³⁴ From the spring of 1942 the Ministry of Information regularly released a series of short *Food Flash* films, several of which were concerned with household poultry production.³⁵

The National Allotments Society turned over its whole organization to supporting the Dig for Victory campaign, and received an Exchequer grant to cover the extra expenses involved in doing so. The Small Pig Keepers' Council (SPKC) was also formed early in the war under the

³³ Murray, *Agriculture*, p. 246.

³⁴ C. Goodchild and A. Thompson, *Keeping poultry and rabbits on scraps* (1941). Penguin published a

facsimile edition in 2008.

³⁵ Farmer, *Food companions*, pp. 37, 230–6.

auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture. Its objectives included encouragement of pig keeping 'by all persons who are not engaged in the production of pigs as a means of livelihood'; encouragement of the use of edible waste for pig food; supervising and assisting in the management of pig clubs and advising their members on pig husbandry; and arranging for the provision of feedstuffs. In March 1940 the Domestic Food Producers' Council was established to cover all aspects of home food production, and from it, in September 1940, evolved the Domestic Poultry Keepers' Council (DPKC), with the aim of 'securing the effective use of household and garden waste and organizing available supplies of purchased feedingstuffs'. A year later, it also took on the role of assisting domestic rabbit keepers.³⁶ It is interesting to note that, in the month before the DPKC was formed, Mr Franklin, a civil servant in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, noted that the Poultry Committee of the Domestic Food Producers' Council had recommended that there should be no propaganda for backyard poultry because it was already growing as fast as was consistent with the supply of reliable birds, that backyard poultry units should normally comprise six birds, and in no case more than twelve, and that development should be mainly directed to urban and suburban areas.³⁷ By the end of 1940, therefore, the pre-war presumption against keeping domestic livestock in towns had been overturned, and arrangements were in place to encourage and organize an urban contribution to the national food supply. But how significant a contribution was it?

III

Two problems arise when discussing the contribution of 'the little man with the spade' (and presumably also the woman, especially if she was carrying a bucket of food scraps to feed the pigs and chickens) to food production in wartime.³⁸ The first is to assess the contribution of these household producers to total national food production.³⁹ The second is to estimate the proportion of household production that arose from urban areas. The first of these is more easily assessed and will be discussed first; the second is much more complex.

The secondary literature emphasizes the enthusiasm with which people took up producing their own food in wartime, but there is some evidence that this took time to develop.⁴⁰ In December 1939, for example, J. A. Caseby, an Inspector in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries at Lytham St Annes wrote to his colleague Mr Whytehead in London: 'Reports

³⁶ Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Committee on the organization of domestic food producers* (1950), pp. 1-3, subsequently referred to as 'Brown Report'. There is a copy in TNA, HLG 101/309.

³⁷ TNA, MAF 54/94, note by Mr Franklin, 21 Aug. 1940.

³⁸ A Ministry of Food advertisement encouraging the saving of food waste employed the following verse: 'Because of the pail the scraps were saved / Because of the scraps the pigs were saved / Because of the rations the ships were saved / Because of the ships the island was saved / Because of the island the Empire was saved / And all

because of the housewife's pail'. Smith, *Spade as mighty as the sword*, p. 179 contains this verse but provides no source for it.

³⁹ Official wartime publicity generally assumed that women would be responsible for food preparation in the kitchen, as Farmer, *Food companions*, pp. 22-3 demonstrates. However, as Dorman-Smith's reference above to both men and women digging allotments suggests, and the publicity given to the Women's Land Army might also indicate, the gender division in wartime food production was much less clear-cut.

⁴⁰ E.g. Calder, *People's War*, p. 430.

in local papers show that Blackpool and Fleetwood Corporation can't give away allotments. People prefer *darts* [emphasis in the original] to hard work. It is a sad business'.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the figures for the war as a whole suggest that such reluctance was soon overcome: from just over 800,000 allotments covering 95,700 acres in 1939 the number increased to 1,451,888 in 1942, occupying 142,808 acres. In March 1944 the Private Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture said, in response to a Parliamentary Question, that the output of gardens and allotments represented 10 per cent of all home-produced food, and Murray estimates that this land produced between 2.5 and 3 million tons of food. Given that the total output of cereals, potatoes, sugar beet, and vegetables in 1944 was some 24 million tons, these figures would appear to be of the correct order of magnitude.⁴²

Household producers also kept pigs and chickens. Some individuals raised pigs, and others joined pig clubs. Those in owners' clubs were allowed to kill two pigs per year for home use, and had no obligation to sell pigs to the Ministry of Food, whereas those in cooperative clubs could also kill two per year per member, but also had to sell at least the same number to the Ministry.⁴³ Members of clubs, in return for feedstuffs, gave up their right to a bacon ration amounting to 13 lbs per person per year, but their pigs would produce between 300 and 400 lbs of pig meat, equivalent to between 240 and 320 lbs of bacon, assuming all went well and the pigs did not succumb to disease. They had to apply for a licence to slaughter, and the resulting pig meat could be consumed only by the licensee, members of his household, guests sharing meals, and, in the case of farmers, living-in workers.⁴⁴ The official attitude to these pigs was that they were to be used for the benefit of those who had put the work into feeding and caring for them. The slaughter regulations (Ministry of Food form F.460, 24 June 1943) stated that 'A licence will not be granted to a person who has bought a pig and simply paid for its keep', and Mr Franklin, a civil servant in MAFF headquarters in London, felt that the regulation was justified, since its 'relaxation would open the way for the well-to-do to keep a pig and engage an odd-job man to look after it'.⁴⁵

The expansion in the number of pig clubs is apparent from Table 1, which also demonstrates that the number of pigs slaughtered on holdings of less than one acre rose as the total number of pigs in the country as a whole was more than halved. It should also be noted that, in addition to the pigs registered with pig clubs, there were also estimated to be about 50 per cent more unregistered domestic pigs.⁴⁶ This implies a total of about 210,000 pigs on holdings of less than an acre in 1944, or about 12 per cent of the national pig herd of 1.8 million pigs that year.⁴⁷ Murray's data for slaughtering of pigs from these household herds, quoted in Table 1, suggest that their contribution to the total rose from nearly nine per cent in 1940–41 to about 15 per cent in 1944, partly due to an increase in the household herd but more to a decrease in the total

⁴¹ TNA, MAF 54/91, letter from J. A. Caseby, 4 Dec. 1939.

⁴² Best and Ward, *Garden controversy*, p. 5, quoting Hansard 15 Mar. 1944; Murray, *Agriculture*, pp. 247 and 375.

⁴³ TNA, MAF 126/2, Small Pig Keepers' Council, *Annual Report*, year ending 31 Mar. 1945.

⁴⁴ TNA, MAF 126/42, Memo for the Lord President's

committee, 28 Aug. 1942.

⁴⁵ TNA, MAF 126/42, Pig Keeping Self Suppliers, 1940–44.

⁴⁶ Murray, *Agriculture*, p. 247.

⁴⁷ Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food [MAFF], *A century of agricultural statistics: Great Britain, 1866–1966* (1968), pp. 126–7.

TABLE 1. Household pig production

	<i>Number of pig clubs</i>	<i>Number of pigs in pig clubs ('000)</i>	<i>Number of pigs slaughtered on holdings of less than 1 acre ('000)</i>	<i>Total pigs slaughtered in Great Britain ('000), excluding those from self-suppliers</i>
Pre-war	0	0	272	4466
1940–1	735	15,316	260	2558
1944–5	6900	142	323	2152

Source: Murray, *Agriculture*, p. 247; Central Statistical Office, *Fighting with Figures: a statistical digest of the Second World War* (1995), p. 76.

national herd as the trend in decreasing national pig numbers continued. However, a sample survey of 3,614 households spread across 30 towns and eight rural districts in September 1944 estimated that only six per cent of the 1.33 million households that kept livestock actually kept pigs, and that on average they slaughtered 1.5 pigs per year, which implies about 120,000 slaughters per year in total. The report on the survey admits that its coverage of rural districts was inadequate, and that these were the areas in which pigs were more likely to be kept, so this figure is likely to be an underestimate, but it is enough to cast some doubt on the accuracy of Murray's estimate.⁴⁸

Just as pig keepers could surrender their bacon ration in return for permission to consume their own pigs, backyard poultry keepers could surrender their egg rations in return for 'balancer meal', a ration specially formulated to provide a balanced diet to poultry that would obtain most of their food from kitchen or garden waste.⁴⁹ The membership of the DPKC increased from 791,000 in 1940–41 to 1,369,000 in 1945, and whereas there were just over 5 million hens in domestic flocks before the war, the number was over 10 million in 1944–45. Egg production from domestic flocks increased from 650 million pre-war to 970 million in 1944–45, when total national egg production was 2075 million.⁵⁰ Across the social spectrum gardens acquired hen runs and poultry houses, although often middle and upper class householders, with their bigger gardens, must have found it easier to find room for them. Diana Cooper, for example, married to Duff Cooper, the Minister of Information in 1940, had a house in Bognor on the Sussex coast where she kept a cow, hens, four goats, and seven pigs, finding that 'the life of an intelligent rustic labourer suits me to perfection'.⁵¹ Likewise Virginia Potter, an American woman married to a Grenadier Guards officer, took a house near Windsor to be near her husband, and wrote to her mother in the USA that now she was settled '... we are going to

⁴⁸ Thomas, *Domestic food production*, pp. 3, 7, 12.

⁴⁹ Brown Report, p. 23.

⁵⁰ Murray, *Agriculture*, pp. 247 and 375. Note that Murray, p. 247, states that egg output from domestic flocks in 1943–44 was 25 per cent of the national total, which appears to be at variance with the figures he gives on the later page. Murray's figures for the size of the domestic hen flock also vary slightly from those

given in the Brown Report, p. 23, although this difference is probably a result of slightly different accounting periods.

⁵¹ P. Ziegler, *Diana Cooper* (1983), pp. 235–8; her husband later noted in his diary 'The charm of amateur farming caught many people in wartime and persists in peace. It makes no appeal to me'; J. J. Norwich, *The Duff Cooper Diaries* (2006), p. 462.

breed rabbits, ducks, geese and chickens like mad and DIG DIG DIG for Victory'.⁵² The rabbits proved susceptible to disease, but by 1944 she (with the aid of a gardener and a Land Girl) was producing large amounts of garden produce, and enough poultry to be able to sell, over the year, six geese, four sittings of goose eggs, 336 goose eggs, and 250 hen eggs.⁵³ These women had access to the space, time, money and labour that working class men and women would have found more difficult to acquire. But were they urban producers? Before the war they were both urban residents with cosmopolitan attitudes, and during the war they were living close to urban areas. We should therefore now turn to the question of what proportion of household production came from urban areas.

There is both statistical and anecdotal evidence for wartime urban food production. The initial evidence comes from a sample of 1704 town and country gardens surveyed in 1942. This revealed that before the war 47.5 per cent of the town gardens grew flowers and vegetables, with another 8.5 per cent growing only vegetables. By 1942 the proportion growing vegetables had increased to 80 per cent.⁵⁴ A larger survey of 3614 households in 30 towns and eight rural districts in England and Wales was made in 1944. A large majority – 3190 – of these households were in urban areas, and 40 per cent of them were growing fruit and vegetables, while 22 per cent had uncultivated gardens, and 38 per cent had no gardens at all. The proportion of households with cultivated gardens varied from 75 per cent in the south east region to 25 per cent in the north east and only 11 per cent in the north west.⁵⁵ The preponderance of terraced housing in northern industrial towns limited the number of gardens found in them. A wartime survey of Middlesborough, for example, found that 62 per cent of houses had no garden, and the figure rose to 98 per cent in the older parts of the city.⁵⁶ The proportion of houses with livestock in Thomas's 1944 survey varied significantly between urban and rural areas: 12 per cent of urban households had livestock, compared with 31 per cent in rural areas. As we have seen, only 6 per cent of households with livestock kept pigs, compared with 72 per cent with laying hens, 58 per cent with other fowls, 30 per cent with rabbits, and ten per cent with ducks. A few kept geese, goats, bees, or other unspecified livestock. Of the laying hens, 62 per cent were in flocks of less than six birds, and the average number of rabbits, in those households that kept them, was 5.⁵⁷ It should also be noted that the under-represented 'rural' areas in this survey meant houses in rural administrative districts, i.e. rural district council areas, and most of these contained small towns. The question therefore arises of where the boundaries can be drawn between the urban and the rural, and indeed of whether they can be sensibly drawn at all.

⁵² A. Potter, *Shared histories: transatlantic letters between Virginia Dickinson Reynolds and her daughter, Virginia Potter, 1929–1966* (2006), p. 105.

⁵³ P. Brassley and A. Potter, 'A view from the top: social elites and food consumption in Britain, 1930s–1940s', in Trentmann and Just (eds), *Food and conflict*, p. 231.

⁵⁴ Anon, 'Dig for Victory': an inquiry into the effects of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign made for the Ministry of Agriculture in August and September 1942, (Wartime

Social Survey, new ser. 20, London School of Economics, UK Local Government Collection, 13539/1–18).

⁵⁵ Thomas, *Domestic food production*.

⁵⁶ D. Chapman, *A social survey of Middlesborough, pt 1, introduction and social data*, (Wartime Social Survey, new ser., 50, Sept. 1945, pp. 29–30, London School of Economics, UK Local Government Collection, 13539/19–30).

⁵⁷ Thomas, *Domestic food production*.

The official perception, in some cases at least, seems to have been that animal keeping in towns was a success story. The Scott Committee report suggested 'that provision should be made similarly for town dwellers to keep pigs and poultry and in general to continue the rural occupations which have proved to have social, economic and educational advantages in time of war', although a civil servant in the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, commenting on this paragraph, observed that 'the recommendation ... does not make clear why it is thought desirable that townsfolk should be encouraged in pursuits more suitable to the freer spaces of the countryside, pig keeping especially'.⁵⁸ There is also a revealing list, from 1939, indicating the range of possible policy conflicts and concerns, of the organizations that should be represented on the Ministry of Agriculture's advisory committee on backyard poultry keeping. Naturally it included various poultry farming organizations, from the National Poultry Council to the Chick Producers' Association and the Federation of Accredited Breeders, and a number of bodies associated with small-scale food production, such as the National Allotment Society and the Women's Farm and Garden Association, but there were also several organizations that indicated the involvement of urban interests, such as Association of Municipal Corporations, the National Union of Townsmen's Guilds, and the Urban District Councils' Association. The Board of Education and the Ministries of Health, Food, Information, Supply and Transport, together with the BBC, were also represented.⁵⁹

Before and during the war there were poultry clubs in London: the Federation of London Poultry Societies had about 200 members, and several affiliated societies, in Walworth, Millwall, Kentish Town, Downham, Deptford, Dagenham and Bethnall Green; in other words, mostly working-class areas.⁶⁰ Whether their members were more concerned with show breeds or productive breeds is uncertain. The likelihood is that it was the former before the war and the latter during it. On an estate of 1600 houses at Frecheville in Sheffield there was a Domestic Poultry and Rabbit Club that was formed during the war at the suggestion of a Ministry of Agriculture organizer.⁶¹ The concentration of pig clubs was greatest in the industrial counties, with the West Riding of Yorkshire (596 clubs), Staffordshire (420), Warwickshire (319) and Nottinghamshire (169) having the largest numbers of clubs in 1944. London had five pig owner clubs and 162 cooperative and canteen clubs.⁶² Several Divisions of the Metropolitan Police in London started pig clubs in 1940. In L division, at Nine Elms, 80 members of the force were in the pig club, collecting waste food (swill) from local factories, cafes and schools, and the club was still in existence, albeit on a smaller scale, in 1952.⁶³ Twenty men at the Hyde Park police station joined the pig club, built a sty from timbers out of bombed houses, and collected swill from other police stations and nearby hostels. Westminster City Council collected 35,000 tons

⁵⁸ *Report of the Committee on land utilisation in rural areas* (Chairman, Lord Justice Scott) (Cmd 6378, 1942), para. 202 (iv); TNA, HLG 71/621, revised draft of comments on the Scott Committee report, 15 Feb. 1943, p. 1.

⁵⁹ TNA, MAF 54/91, organisations to be represented on the advisory committee on backyard poultry keeping, 8 Dec. 1939.

⁶⁰ TNA, HLG 101/309 contains a copy of the

Federation's *Yearbook* for 1939, from which this information is derived.

⁶¹ TNA, MAF 54/97, letter from W. H. Misfin, 12 May 1945.

⁶² TNA, MAF 126/2, Small Pig Keepers' Council, Annual Report 1945.

⁶³ TNA, MEPO 2/6516, Metropolitan Police Pig Clubs.

of waste food, enough to feed 31,000 pigs from birth to killing weight. The Home Intelligence reports in the summer of 1940 contained information on the success of communal pig buckets in Chelsea and Mayfair, although there were complaints that the residents of Brixton were taking insufficient care to separate food waste from other rubbish. The swimming pool at the Ladies Carlton Club in Pall Mall was converted into a large pigsty, and cows and sheep grazed in the parks. Although national pig numbers more than halved between 1939 and 1943, and poultry numbers almost halved, the number of pigs in Middlesex and London increased by about 50 per cent in the same period, and poultry numbers were maintained.⁶⁴ On the roof of New Zealand House the caretaker's son grew wheat to feed chickens, and, according to Ziegler's portrait of wartime London, 'certain suburbs resembled a giant poultry yard, so great was the concentration of White Wyandottes, Black Leghorns and Rhode Island Reds'.⁶⁵

As is sometimes the case, however, with stories of the Second World War, the post-war literature and popular memory preserves the positive. But there is another perspective. In May 1941 the Devon County War Agricultural Executive Committee asked Exeter City Council's Allotments Committee to consider the possibility of starting pigs clubs on the allotments. The committee's immediate reaction was to ask for more details, which were provided the next month by Mr Densham, an officer of the Executive Committee. Individual allotments committees were asked for their views: in July Stoke Hill and St Leonards associations reported that they 'did not desire to take any action in regard to pig keeping', and the St Thomas association had the matter under consideration. In September the city surveyor reported that the cost of a pigsty for six pigs would be £56, with a further £19 to bring water to the site, and the Allotments Committee resolved that further consideration of the matter be deferred until the following spring. No further action was ever taken, and neither did the committee minutes make any mention of poultry or rabbits. The Housing and Public Health committee minutes for Exeter are also silent on the subject of domestic livestock, as is the Totnes Rural District Council minute book.⁶⁶ Since it is unlikely that schools and canteens in Exeter and Totnes failed to collect pigswill, the most likely explanation for this apparent lack of interest in pig clubs seems to be that local farmers were near enough to urban sources to collect and use locally produced swill. But it is clear that not all urban residents were clamouring for membership of pig clubs or anxious to produce their own eggs.

IV

One of the possible reasons for lack of enthusiasm was the expense of constructing suitable housing. The estimate above, of a total of £75, was probably for properly built housing using new materials, and it needs to be seen in context. On the one hand, most pig and poultry

⁶⁴ Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Agricultural statistics, England and Wales, 1939-44*, part 1 (1947), p. 65.

⁶⁵ P. Ziegler, *London at war* (1995) pp. 257-8; M. Waller, *London 1945: life in the debris of war* (2004), p. 170; Addison and Crang, *Listening to Britain*, pp. 258, 265-6, 277.

⁶⁶ Devon Archives and Local Studies, Exeter City Archives, ECA/11/2, Allotments Committee Minutes, 1939-49, pp. 176-80; ECA/22/2, Housing Committee Minutes, 1936-46; ECA/26/3, Public Health Committee Minutes, 1938-44; R9/8/C/37, Totnes RDC Minute Book 1939-42.

houses were probably constructed by non-professionals using whatever materials they could find: a letter from an Urban District Council to the Ministry of Health in 1950 refers to 'all kinds of unsightly sheds and structures in ... back gardens'.⁶⁷ Conversely, even if this cost estimate is cut by a factor of three or four, it needs to be compared with an average weekly wage for unskilled labour in non-agricultural occupations of about £4 in 1940, and a Ministry of Agriculture inspector in 1939 specifically identified housing costs as a reason for the slow uptake of urban poultry 'for the majority of housing estate tenants, and there is the risk of having to give it up when the war finishes'.⁶⁸ There was also the question of expertise. At Exmouth in Devon, Esther Rowley's diary recorded that Saturday 16 May 1942 was an 'Awful day in the fowls world. Amber has squashed all her chicks ... I blame myself a bit for not thinking it all out before'.⁶⁹

Although keeping laying hens and fattening pigs does not necessarily require enormous amounts of technical knowledge or experience, urban residents were presumably less likely to have either than people living in rural areas. It was partly to deal with this that the Domestic Pig Keepers' Council employed 11 regional officers, one of whom lived in Cadogan Gardens SW3 and was responsible for London and Middlesex as well as Kent and Surrey. The Domestic Poultry Keepers' Council also had a few paid area organizers and over a thousand voluntary lecturers and local technical advisers. In March 1945, for example, the Upper Norwood Domestic Poultry and Rabbit Club enjoyed a talk, illustrated with coloured lantern slides, by Mr A. Eisen, the Ministry of Agriculture's Area Organizer. Earlier in the war the London Zoo ran courses on keeping poultry in confined spaces and rearing rabbits, bees, pigeons and silkworms.⁷⁰

There were, therefore, some good reasons why people in towns might decide for themselves not to keep domestic livestock. Equally, there were reasons why local and national authorities could also be unenthusiastic: nuisance, feedstuff shortages, and the problem of the black market. Commenting on the Scott Report in 1943, a Ministry of Health civil servant listed the problems that were perceived to result from pigs and poultry in urban areas: 'injury to amenity through the erection of home made chicken houses ... probability of smell, particularly, of course, in the case of pig keeping and of noise in the case of poultry ... the attraction of vermin. The presence of foodstuffs ... attracts mice and rats'.⁷¹ The minute sheet on the front of the relevant file reveals that the word 'hens' was deliberately used in framing DR 62B so as to exclude cockerels from the list of animals that could be kept on housing estates from which domestic livestock had been excluded before the war.⁷² Local authorities had been unenthusiastic about urban livestock before the war, and when the conflict was over they returned to the attack. Almost immediately after VE Day Mr W. H. Misfin, the president of the Domestic Poultry and Rabbit Club on the First National Housing Trust's estate at Frecheville in Sheffield

⁶⁷ TNA, HLG 52/1298, letter from the Clerk of Sedgley UDC to the Ministry of Health, Birmingham, 15 Mar. 1950.

⁶⁸ TNA, MAF 54/91, letter from J. A. Caseby, 4 Dec. 1939. Wages figures are given in Murray, *Agriculture*, p. 83. Agricultural wages were raised to £2 8s. in 1940.

⁶⁹ J. Folkes (ed.), *Dogs, goats, bulbs and bombs: Esther*

Rowley's wartime diaries of Exmouth and Exeter (2010), p. 137.

⁷⁰ TNA, MAF 126/2, SPKC Annual Report, 1952; *Brown Report*, p. 24; Waller, *London 1945*, p. 171; Ziegler, *London at war*, p. 44.

⁷¹ TNA, HLG 71/621, revised draft of comments on the Scott Report, 15 Feb. 1943, p. 6.

wrote to Tom Williams, then a junior minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, to enlist his support as a fellow Yorkshire miner. His club had been told that the Trust would withdraw permission to keep poultry 'when the end of the emergency period is reached', and he felt sure that Mr Williams, being a miner himself, would understand their feelings. Williams replied to the effect that no change was contemplated 'while the present difficult food situation continues', which meant at least two or three years.⁷³ In 1950 the Clerk to Sedgley UDC stated that his council's policy, in the light of continuing food shortages, was to permit a 'reasonable number' of hens to be kept, and not more than one or two pigs, but 'So far as other animals are concerned ... the council impose a complete ban ... and consequently noisy creatures, such as cocks and cockerels, geese and ganders, ducks and drakes, turkeys etc, are completely banned'.⁷⁴ The new post-war prefabricated bungalow ('prefab') estates created particular problems, because the building density was greater than on pre-war council estates. In 1946 the Town Clerk of Yarmouth wrote to the Ministry of Health asking for DR 62B to be amended because his council felt that 700 bungalows on a small area was too dense to allow for domestic livestock. In reply, both the Ministries of Health and Agriculture took the same line: domestic livestock could be prohibited on public health and nuisance grounds, notwithstanding the provisions of DR 62B, and the decision to do so was a matter for the local authorities.⁷⁵ This was not enough for some of them. In 1948 the Town Clerk of Grimsby wrote to the Ministry of Health asking for Defence Regulation 62B to be repealed so that his council could close down piggeries whose presence was 'far from desirable' from a planning viewpoint but which were not 'prejudicial to health or a nuisance within the meaning of the Public Health Act 1936'. In the event, DR 62B was not revoked until 1 July 1951.⁷⁶

The foregoing list of problems applied specifically to urban pigs and poultry. There were also additional problems that applied to all small intensive livestock producers, whether they were located in the town or the country. One of these was the black market, which produced a complex mixture of activities and responses.⁷⁷ Another was the shortage of feedstuffs, which applied both to urban and rural producers, although it did have one specifically urban dimension in the question of pigswill. Although both urban and rural pig keepers used swill during the war, it seems likely that one of the reasons for promoting urban pigs was that they were closer to plentiful supplies of swill. Feedstuff supply problems increased official interest in swill feeding, and a Pig Experiments Co-ordinating Committee produced a report on it in 1940. They observed that it had hitherto been mainly confined to the neighbourhood of

⁷² TNA, MAF 54/97, Removal of restrictions on keeping pigs and poultry, 1939–48.

⁷³ TNA, MAF 54/97, letters from W. H. Misfin, 12 May and by T. Williams, 28 May 1945.

⁷⁴ TNA, HLG 52/1298, letter from the Clerk of Sedgley UDC, 15 Mar. 1950.

⁷⁵ TNA, HLG 101/309, letter from Yarmouth Town Clerk 2 Aug. and reply, 26 Aug. 1946; see also MAF 54/97, Removal of restrictions on keeping pigs and poultry, 1939–48.

⁷⁶ TNA, HLG 71/621, letter from Grimsby, 23 Nov. 1948; written answers to Parliamentary Questions, 5

May 1952.

⁷⁷ In April 1945 Virginia Potter wrote 'I saw goose eggs in Fortnum and Mason's at 3s. 9d. each!! I sell mine for sixpence each, as am *not* Queen of the Black Market'. Potter (ed.), *Shared histories*, p. 211. The best recent work on the wartime black market is in M. Roodhouse, 'Popular morality and the black market in Britain, 1939–55', in Trentmann and Just, *Food and conflict*, pp. 243–65, and M. Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain, 1939–1955* (2013). Some of the issues that arose were also dealt with in the film, *A private function* (Handmade Films, 1984, dir. Malcolm Mowbray).

towns and large institutions, and felt that more use could be made of swill from smaller urban areas. Subsequent reports identified different qualities of swill, depending upon whether it comprised 'vegetable residues' or 'scraps of bread, meat or pudding', or a mixture of the two.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, and unsurprisingly in the face of significant wartime outbreaks of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), official attitudes to swill feeding remained ambivalent. On the one hand, it was clearly a way of providing additional food from the waste that was inevitable in preparing vegetables; on the other, since it was almost inevitably contaminated by scraps of meat and bone from meat imported from countries in which FMD was endemic, it was also a potential source of disease. For this reason, the Foot and Mouth Disease (Boiling of Animal Feedstuffs) Order required all swill to be boiled for at least an hour, and suspect imported meat supplies were supplied only to the cities, where the Waste Food Board, established in 1942, ran swill-boiling plants that were reasonably certain to kill the virus. The best known of these was in the Tottenham district of London. This gave its name to 'Tottenham Pudding', swill cooked to the point where it lost much of its moisture and became dry enough to be transported in sacks by rail. It became such a popular feedstuff for pigs and poultry that its price increased and many other towns installed the necessary equipment to process food waste. A contemporary textbook described Tottenham Pudding as 'good food for fattening and breeding pigs provided it did not contain such foreign materials as broken glass, crockery, and pieces of iron and nails'.⁷⁹

V

Household food production (as opposed to farm output) in the Second World War accounted for a relatively small proportion – around ten per cent – of total national food supplies. This was about the same order of magnitude as the contribution of Lend-Lease supplies from the United States, which by 1943–44 contributed ten per cent of the energy and about 17 per cent of the protein and fats.⁸⁰ However, as the figures quoted earlier in this article suggest, household producers in Britain, defined as those with holdings of less than an acre in size, were probably responsible for a higher proportion of pig and poultry (and therefore protein and fat) production. Their egg production rose by about 50 per cent, and by 1943–44 formed 25 per cent of national egg supplies. By the following year the proportion was even higher. By 1945 the data in Table 1 above suggest that pigs from holdings of less than an acre accounted for about 15 per cent of the total pigs slaughtered in Great Britain, having contributed no more than five per cent before the war. However, as the discussion of Table 1 reveals, there remain

⁷⁸ Anon, 'Pig feeding with swill', *Agriculture* 46 (1939–40), pp. 692–3; V. C. Fishwick, 'Swill as a pig food', *Agriculture* 47 (1940–41), pp. 264–6; J. W. Reid, 'War-time feeding of pigs', *Agriculture* 48 (1941–42), pp. 94–8.

⁷⁹ A. Woods, *A manufactured plague: the history of Foot and Mouth Disease in Britain* (2004), p. 87; Anon, 'Pig feeding with swill', p. 693; A. Woods, 'A historical synopsis of farm animal disease and public policy

in twentieth-century Britain', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 366 (2011), pp. 1943–54; E. T. Halnan and F. H. Garner, *The principles and practice of feeding farm animals* (sec. edn, 1944), pp. 329–30.

⁸⁰ I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Fair Shares? The limits of food policy in Britain during the Second World War', in Zweiniger-Bargielowska *et al.* (eds), *Food and war*, p. 126.

doubts about the accuracy of the official data. Ginn demonstrates that this was also true of household vegetable production.⁸¹

Distinguishing between urban and rural producers among the overall category of household livestock producers is more difficult. A straightforward urban/rural dualism is hopelessly simplistic. There is a continuum from wilderness to metropolis, taking in cultivation, dispersed settlement, nucleated villages, and small and large towns on the way. It is now very difficult to identify the precise location in which urban animals were kept. Were they mostly in the suburbs? In big cities or small towns? When does a small town become a large village, and does urbanity stop at the small town boundary? The Wartime Social Survey's figures for rural areas were defined in terms of local authority districts, but both urban and rural district council areas would contain built-up areas and fields and uncultivated land. Categorizations are thus based on arbitrary distinctions, and because they work reasonably well for administrative purposes it does not necessarily follow that they will serve equally well to distinguish between areas where different experiences and attitudes to domestic animals were found. However, it does seem clear that the more rural an area, the more likely its residents were to keep poultry and/or pigs. Similarly, the larger the garden attached to a house, the greater the likelihood that it would contain pigs or poultry. Finally, irrespective of size, the closer a farm or smallholding was to an urban area, the more likely it was to be able to practise swill feeding and therefore the more likely it was to be able to keep pigs.

In looking back on wartime emergency circumstances, the question of whether or not the effort and resources used in household pig and poultry production proved worthwhile arises. One viewpoint is simply that eggs and pig meat were so scarce that any means of increasing their supply was worthwhile, especially if it used food by-products that would otherwise have been wasted. On the other hand, even waste products had some kind of cost. As Ginn has argued, household food production, whether of vegetables or animal products, challenged the ability of national government bodies to organize and control food supply and consumption.⁸² It also required changes in the rules previously widely applied by local government, especially in regard to noise, smells and the presence of vermin. It probably made it more difficult to control the black, or (probably more accurately) grey markets for food. More specifically, there was a (probably unanswerable) question of whether the balancer meal supplied to household producers would have resulted in more or less protein production if it had been used on farms. There was also the direct cost of employing administrative and advisory staff to deal with household food producers, although it seems unlikely that the numbers involved were very significant.

To set against these costs, there were what might be called benefits to national morale, although again these were not unequivocal. Stories of producing and sharing eggs and pig meat were part of what subsequent historians have described or questioned as the 'people's war' or wartime social solidarity myth. An important part of this was the idea that rationing produced fair shares for all, irrespective of income or social class.⁸³ The fact that those who

⁸¹ Ginn, 'Dig for Victory!', pp. 303-4.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 298.

⁸³ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Fair Shares?', pp. 127-30;

Rose, *Which People's War?*, p. 35; Ginn, 'Dig for Victory!', p. 302.

lived in houses with larger gardens were more likely to have space to keep pigs or poultry presents a challenge to this, although the increased availability of allotments to those without gardens is a counter-argument. As Ginn has also argued, what this further investigation of small-scale wartime food production reveals as much as anything is the complexity of the story.⁸⁴ Although the emphasis has been on urban pigs and poultry it has demonstrated the difficulty of isolating them from animals kept further from urban centres. On the other hand, it seems clear that in terms of feedstuffs, animal husbandry expertise, and official attitudes, there were perceptible urban/rural differences, although there were also class differences in both urban and rural areas, which may have been equally significant. For example, in 1941, *The Land Worker*, the journal of the National Union of Agricultural Workers, pointed out that farm workers living in tied cottages were often forbidden to keep livestock.⁸⁵

This question of class differences in wartime is just one of the issues raised by this study of household pig and poultry production. Given the work of Sonya Rose and Ross McKibbin it is probably one of the best explored.⁸⁶ But there are others that have only been touched on here that clearly deserve further investigation. For example, although they are mentioned by most writers on wartime food production, there seems to be no recent detailed study of pig clubs. The proliferation of household production must also have posed questions for new pig keepers that they had never previously had to address, especially with regard to slaughtering and processing at a time when the domestic refrigerator was a rarity and the domestic deep freeze unknown.⁸⁷

As we have seen, these conditions did not end overnight with the end of the war, but continued into the late 1940s and early 1950s. According to early post-war textbooks, there were two options for pigs sold to the Ministry of Food. They could either be taken to official collecting centres, which were pre-war livestock auction markets, from where they were allocated to slaughterhouses or bacon factories, or sent direct to bacon factories.⁸⁸ As noted above, for those that were not to be sold to the Ministry, it was still necessary to apply for a permit to kill, and to send the pig to a licensed slaughterhouse, 'unless the owner has previously held a permit to kill or if despatch to a slaughter-house would cause undue inconvenience. In such cases, a pig may be killed at home'.⁸⁹ The extent to which this escape clause was applied in practice is unknown, and it would form an interesting area of enquiry for anyone undertaking further research on the history of pig clubs.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

⁸⁵ Rose, *Which people's war?*, p. 206. The reason that was usually advanced for this ruling was that it removed any temptation to use the farm's feedstuffs for the worker's livestock.

⁸⁶ Rose, *Which people's war?* esp. ch. 2 but also pp. 205–12; R. McKibbin, *Classes and cultures: England, 1918–1951* (1998) p. 531. See also Brassley and Potter, 'A view from the top'.

⁸⁷ Presumably it posed fewer difficulties for those who had kept pigs before the war. The author's grandmother,

for example, who lived in a Lincolnshire village, kept a pig in a sty next to her outdoor earth closet from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1950s. When its time came, her eldest son simply shot it with his rifle before helping her to butcher it and distribute the meat to the family and neighbours. At that time there were fewer slaughter regulations than there are now.

⁸⁸ H. R. Davidson, *The production and marketing of pigs* (1948), pp. 66–7.

⁸⁹ A. Morley, *The right way to pig keeping and breeding* (1950), p. 105.

VI

In April 1965 a civil servant in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food drafted a letter to be sent to Mr George Brown, who had been the first chair of the National Council for Domestic Food Production, but was then the Secretary of State for Economic Affairs:

In the post war years, when the Council was formed, there was a food shortage and the Government had a positive interest from this standpoint in the food produced from allotments and by small pig and poultry keepers and others. Now these activities must be regarded as social and recreational rather than from the standpoint of food production; and they are therefore no longer of positive concern to my Department.⁹⁰

This official reclassification of backyard intensive livestock production demonstrates a view that it was an extraordinary business for extraordinary times, a brief wartime and post-war episode when small-scale and urban pig and poultry production were seen as important enough to suspend several existing rules, regulations, attitudes, practices and expectations, and to return, temporarily, to what were seen as archaic and possibly uncivilized ways.

⁹⁰ TNA, MAF 126/100, National Council for Domestic Food Production – discussion of future, 1964–65. Another note in the same file suggests that the Ministry had come to this conclusion by 1960. In May 1965 responsibility for the Council was transferred to the Ministry of Land and Natural Resources on the grounds that the latter ministry was to enquire into policy on allotments.