

Shaping records on the farm: agricultural record keeping in France from the nineteenth century to the Liberation*

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Abstract

The practice of record keeping on French farms and the forms taken by farm records have not been widely studied. If *livres de raison* have attracted some recent discussion, little interest has been shown in the day-to-day writings contained in *agendas* (diaries). This article shows that persistent efforts were made throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to introduce onto farms accounting management tools and the media needed to keep records. The movement provided an organised body of resources: their use was advocated by authority figures such as *agromanes*, schoolmasters and agricultural masters.

Diary keeping is a widespread practice on French farms. The daily writing that fills the pages of the *agenda*, or diary, reminds us of the characteristics of the *livre de raison*, or domestic account book. All daily writing records everyday life ‘in its rhythm, in its most prosaic material aspects and in its most ordinary activities’.¹ But, while the *livre de raison* focuses on the domestic household, lineage, and experience (the ‘*livre de raison, livre de maison*’ as Sylvie Mouysset wrote in the introduction to her remarkable analysis of *papiers de famille*²), the *agenda*, with which I am concerned here, is primarily used to record agrarian activities. The materials I studied over the course of an ethnographic investigation – a series of *agendas* kept between the 1950s and 1990s in a region of eastern France³ – all contained notes taken and structured in the same way. (An example is shown in Figure 1.) In these records, a few words were enough to describe the fieldwork undertaken, when and where it was undertaken and the equipment used. Depending on the writer, these descriptions of

* I am grateful to Marie-Jeanne Rougelot (Agrocampus-Ouest) for helping with the documentary research and I wish to thank Jean-Luc Demizieux and Laura Sayre for the translation.

¹ M. Foisil, ‘L’écriture du for privé’, in P. Ariès and G. Duby (eds), *Histoire de la vie privée. De la Renaissance aux Lumières* (first edn, 1985, 1999), III, p. 334.

² S. Mouysset, *Papiers de famille. Introduction à l’étude des livres de raison (France, XVe-XXe siècle)* (2007).

³ N. Joly, ‘Ecritures du travail et savoirs paysans.

Aperçu historique et lecture de pratiques. Les agendas des agriculteurs’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Paris-X Nanterre, 1997) and N. Joly, ‘Chroniques du travail agricole et livres de compte: la diffusion des pratiques d’écriture en milieu paysan’, in *Les enjeux de la formation des acteurs de l’agriculture* (2000), pp. 239–46.

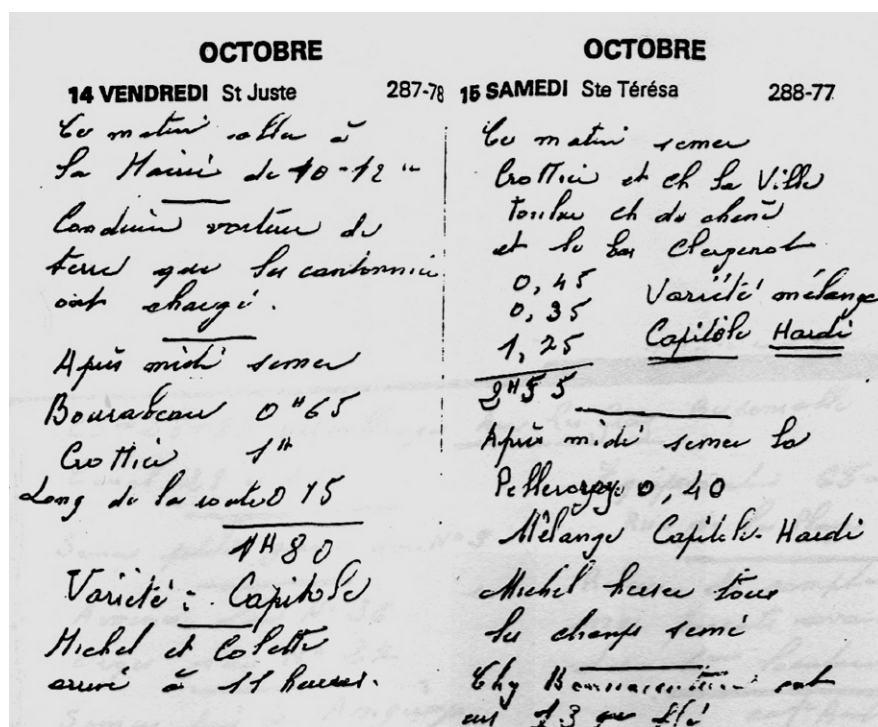


FIGURE 1. An agenda kept by a French farmer in the 1970s.

tasks might be accompanied by technical details (fertiliser rates, equipment settings, soil conditions, hectares worked, harvest quality). With regard to livestock, only major events are noted: calving, herd movements, feeding, care, sales. The notes jotted down often also encapsulated, piecemeal, the cycle of life (births, weddings, deaths, relatives' illnesses) and a few individual or family activities.

What do we know about these ordinary, unexceptional writings that seem to take the same form no matter when or by whom they were written? It is possible to analyse *agendas* when they are 'living, current documents', whose purpose and role can be described by their owners. For several reasons we know much less about 'dead documents' (as Marion Demossier provocatively called them⁴). First of all, old *agendas* are rare: their ordinariness (they are normally pocket-sized notebooks) and their aim (more pragmatic than patrimonial) means that they have seldom outlived their authors. Since *agendas* were often used to make notes that were then incorporated into other writings, whether accounting-related, family-related, or autobiographical, they have tended to disappear. Only *livres de raison*, compendia, and memoirs have been transmitted to posterity and the archives. Only a few examples of the more luxurious and book-like *agendas* have escaped the selection of time, and it is on these that we have based our study.⁵ Second, our lack of knowledge about *agendas* also comes from a

⁴ M. Demossier, *Moi, je suis vigneron: carnets, calepins, agendas, livres de raison et notices en pays de vignobles* (unpubl. report, 1994).

⁵ This is what I discovered in the course of my

research in the 1990s when I found that the families investigated possessed only a few fragments of writing belonging to previous generations, whether account books or schoolbooks used as *agendas*.

different type of selection, that is, the selections made by historians themselves.⁶ As historians have often been persuaded of the illiterate character of the peasantry, they have overlooked the possibilities offered by daily writing on farms and have only recently begun to investigate this type of document.⁷ Anthropologists and sociologists have done little to redress this prejudice, the former having privileged oral sources, allegedly a more authentic way of accessing peasant society,⁸ while the latter have neglected the study of farm work to concentrate on more general questions of innovation and socio-technical change. The aridity and repetitiveness of *agenda* texts has no doubt discouraged many a researcher from using them for information on working conditions in the peasant sphere.

Even though relatively few *agendas* survive, it is nevertheless possible to reconstitute the history of this form of writing from documentary sources such as agronomic treatises, rural economy manuals, and almanacs, and by investigating the advice and education farmers received from technical education, rural schools and agricultural popularisers. This history, although it is related to that of accounting and to the development of economic rationalisation, is not confined to these areas. In effect, the chronicles of work that have been encouraged by this medium have gradually transformed the *agenda* into a tool for learning about and reflecting on farm work. This is the history I shall delineate, distinguishing two aspects: on the one hand the emergence of book models and the development of publishing conventions that gave shape to writing practices and on the other hand the way these models were institutionalised through educational schemes and embodied by authority figures such as the *agromane*, the rural schoolmaster, the agriculture master, the populariser. My objective is to delineate the mechanisms of diffusion of a documentary form that is still valued by farmers today. How did this tool work its way onto farms? How did it find itself a place within the working day despite the hardness of the labour and the poor training farmers had in note making? Why did it become so indispensable to certain farmers that one can find sentences like, 'A blank page is as if nothing happened'?⁹

I

Let us begin by outlining the characteristics of the *agenda*. Generally speaking, the *agenda* is for the planning of activities. Antoine Furetière already put it that way in his dictionary, '*Agenda* : sm. Tablette, ou mémoire où on écrit ce qu'on a à faire durant le jour, pour s'en aller en ville'.¹⁰ Farmers, however, rather use it as a *journal*, that is, a 'Mémoire de ce qui se fait, de

⁶ About the selection-induced effects on ordinary writings, see, among others, A. Farge, *Le bracelet de parchemin. L'écrit sur soi au XVIIIe siècle* (2003) and F. Menant, 'Les transformations de l'écrit documentaire entre le XII et le XIIIe siècle', in N. Coquery, F. Menant and F. Weber (eds), *Ecrire, compter, mesurer. Vers une histoire des rationalités pratiques* (2006), pp. 34–50.

⁷ I have identified only one book dealing specifically with agendas, that of P. Madeline and J. M. Moriceau, *Un paysan et son univers de la guerre au marché commun*

(2010).

⁸ D. Fabre, 'Lettrés et illettrés. Perspectives anthropologiques', in R. Chartier (ed.), *Pratiques de la lecture* (1985), pp. 171–86.

⁹ Joly, 'Ecritures du travail et savoirs paysans', p. 240.

¹⁰ A. Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel* (1690). In English, 'Tablet or memorandum on which one writes what one has to do during the day, for the purpose of going to town.'

ce qui se passe chaque jour. Un homme d'ordre tient un papier journal de ce qu'il reçoit, de ce qu'il dépense'.¹¹ Memoranda in this sense are not specific to France. Henry Stephens mentions them in his *Book of the Farm*:

Every farmer ought to be provided with a pocket Memorandum-book, in which should be written down every transaction as it occurs, according to its date, whether connected with cash or not, and from the particulars should be posted in the proper book.¹²

When one browses the nineteenth-century agronomic literature and manuals dealing with agricultural accounting, the usage of the *agenda-journal* or similar documents such as the *brouillard* (a kind of scratch book), *mémorandum* (memorandum-book), *journal-aide-mémoire* (daily reminder book), *livre de notes* (notebook), or *memento* (aide-mémoire) is clearly encouraged. The act of writing down facts is guided by the need for an aide-mémoire, a document to which most writers of articles on accounting refer and which precedes the keeping of *livres de caisse* or *livres spéciaux*:

The first thing an *agriculteur* [farmer]¹³ must do is to buy an *agenda* or a memento which shows the days of the year and in which he jots down commitments to deliver commodities, sales agreements with basic terms, all the varied information he must remember, and all the operations which, being not yet accomplished, cannot be registered in the books. He also uses his *agenda* to prepare for his *livre de caisse*, that is, for writing down his cash expenditures as they take place.¹⁴

Such notes did not need to be neatly laid out. What was important is that they must be taken on the spot, as suggested by the article in the *Encyclopédie pratique de l'agriculteur* on the *brouillard* (waste-book, memento):

This book is little more than a *recueil* or notebook consisting of several sheets of white paper, often a pocket-sized *agenda* in which one jots down – not just once a day, but as they take place – all the commercial, industrial and even merely informative events related to accounting, or calling for the farmer's attention, including sales, purchases and markets, deliveries of commodities, animals' serving, calving, incubations, and so on, to be classified into *ad hoc* registers or tables. In some cases, the only function of the *mémorial* is to receive draft versions of the items which – but for this prior presentation – one would be afraid to

¹¹ Ibid. In English, 'Memorandum of what has been done, of what has happened each day. An organised man keeps a journal on paper of what he has received and what he has spent'.

¹² H. Stephens, *The book of the farm* (2 vols, sec. edn, 1851), I, p. 776.

¹³ As a precaution, let us here recall that the word 'agriculteur' in nineteenth-century French usage had bourgeois (or aristocratic) connotations, whereas the word 'cultivateur' designated small landowners, that is, the richest peasants. See Maurice Agulhon, 'La propriété et les classes sociales', in M. Agulhon, Gabriel Désert and Robert Specklin (eds), *Histoire de la France*

rurale, III (1976), pp. 74–95. Nevertheless, specialists in rural history acknowledge variations in the meaning of a word between regions. Qualifying adjectives such as *gros* (large), *riche* (rich), *petit* (small), *simple* (simple), *ordinaire* (ordinary) are sometimes the best way to get an idea of the social position of those referred to as *cultivateur* (cultivator), *agriculteur* (farmer) or *propriétaire* (owner). I use the word 'agriculteur' (farmer) in the generic and administrative sense it took on in the twentieth century.

¹⁴ V. Borie, *Les douze mois: calendrier agricole* (1860), p. 102.

have to litter with corrections on the *journal*. In this case the *brouillard* is given the very form of the *journal*.¹⁵

These raw writings, however, do not serve solely to give rigour to accounts by preventing the omission of a purchase, delivery or other transaction. Closer examination of the definitions leads one to notice other aspects of these notes that were to be jotted down on the spot or in the quiet of an office. On the one hand, they lead farmers into a writing process and, on the other, they predispose them to reflect on their work.

(a) *Taking to writing*

How did farmers find time for writing when so many other tasks that required exhausting physical work were demanding attention? Keeping an *agenda* or a pocket-sized notebook seems to be a practical way of managing the necessity of regular record keeping. Overall, the acquisition of such a habit was in itself a little victory for the advocates of accounts, who knew how farmers resented the accounting techniques they were taught, especially because of their abstract and/or tedious character. Concerned to diffuse the attitudes of measuring and record-keeping that are so indispensable to the development of agrarian capitalism, the promoters of accounts were ready to compromise the rigour demanded by double-entry accounting and to prioritise one or two accounting objectives, particularly for small-scale farms, which in general were run by less well-educated people. This strategy is explained quite bluntly by Lucien Moll in the *Agronomist*. He distinguishes various kinds of tools designed for various classes of farmers, providing in passing a particularly suggestive description of the practices then in use:

It is at the end of this month (December) that on most of the farms where accounting is used the accounts will be closed, and, where double-entry accounting is used, an inventory of the whole farm will be done as well. Unfortunately, this applies solely to a small number of farms in France. Not that I would like double-entry accounting to be introduced on average *cultivateurs'* farms – for I know it is impossible – but I would like to see at least the setting-up of regular accounting practices, a *livre de caisse*, books dedicated to livestock, the barn, the storehouse, crops, and so on, by our large farmers, most of whom have as a medium for accounting nothing more than the doors of their bedrooms, on which they write with a piece of chalk what they want to remember for some time. I would also like the small *cultivateur* to have his *carnet* [notebook] in which he would note his receipts and expenses, what he harvests, sells or uses, the crops and the costs generated by each harvest, and so on.¹⁶

A similar strategy of 'small steps' can be observed a century later in the entry on 'comptabilité' (accounting) in the 1921 *Larousse agricole* encyclopaedia, which leaves one to imagine how slowly the ways of record- and note-keeping were being diffused:

L'agenda de poche (pocket-sized notebook).

On the small- and average-scale crop farm, the *livre de caisse* and the *livre d'inventaire*

¹⁵ L. Moll and E. Gayot, *Encyclopédie pratique de l'agriculteur* (13 vols, 1859–71), V, p. 663.

¹⁶ Moll quoted by J. L. Antoine, 'Comptabilité', *Journal d'agriculture pratique* (1833), p. 47.

(inventory book) ... might be sufficient, but we think it necessary for the *cultivateur* to have a pocket-sized *agenda* too, in which he will record – as the facts take place – his sales, purchases, worker-using days, horse-using days, fertiliser and seed quantities used, and so on. For him, this *agenda* will be a precious memorandum.¹⁷

Writers of treatises and manuals made every effort to interest the female members of the farm household in record keeping. Were women not better qualified than men to carry out tasks requiring patience and application? Eighteenth-century manuals of domestic economy promoted this idea, urging housewives to look for the moments in the day that called for writing: keeping registers, checking accounts, establishing inventories. As stressed by Aurélie Chatenet, the authors of domestic economy books did not hesitate to be managerial, like for example the Countess of Liancourt, who conceived, for the attention of city-dwelling youth, a calendar of the documentary tasks that needed to be performed in the everyday management of the household. 'Once a week, meeting with the steward for checking the accounts. Every morning, reading through the expense sheets of the previous day. Fortnightly, our business people and I will assemble. Everything must be written down in a register'.¹⁸ Instructions of the same nature could also be found, a century and a half later, in books designed for the wives of *agriculteurs* and *cultivateurs*. Initially aimed at educated and well-off women, these books would, over time, target a larger readership¹⁹ anticipating and furthering agricultural household teaching, which was originally set up by religious houses in the second half of the nineteenth century and then furthered by the French state through the law of 2 August 1918 on seasonal teaching and post-school courses. The agricultural unions made their own contribution. In 1925, the *Union du Sud-Est des syndicats agricoles* deemed it necessary to launch a journal specifically designed for women, *Femme à la campagne*, as a supplement to the almanac it had been editing for its members since 1892. Since the beginning of the century, it had also been publishing an agricultural household teaching manual, edited by P. de Monicault, an agricultural engineer who had attended the courses of the *Institut National Agronomique*.

Overall, these books had greater ambitions: while conduct books confined women's authority to the household,²⁰ these books emancipated women by stating that 'the duty of a woman who lives in the country is to take part in managing the farm'.²¹ These books aimed to educate women in all sectors of agriculture in the activities for which they were likely to be responsible (the poultry, dairy, pigsty, garden, and orchard) and, in the main arena of household economy on farms, for maintaining accounts.

It is here that one can find instructions similar to those mentioned above. Thus it is not surprising to observe that the female readers of *La maison rustique des dames* were urged to keep a *carnet* (notebook) so as to prepare for *livres comptables* (account books):

¹⁷ E. Chancin and R. Dumont, *Le Larousse agricole* (2 vols, 1921), I, p. 380.

¹⁸ A. Chatenet, 'La femme, maîtresse de maison? Rôle et place des femmes dans les ouvrages d'économie domestique au XVIII^e siècle', *Histoire, économie & société* 2009/4 (2009), p. 29.

¹⁹ The two volumes of the *Maison rustique des dames*

sold for 7F 75 in 1868, while the *Economie domestique*, a more popular manual funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, cost 1F 25.

²⁰ Chatenet, 'La femme', p. 21.

²¹ C. E. Mille-Robinet, *Maison rustique des dames* (first edn, 1845, 9th edn, 1873), p. 1.

One must always carry a *carnet*, so that all the receipts and expenses, and even all the notes beyond the scope of accounting, can be provisionally jotted down. This book is a kind of memento; each article is written on the page of the day concerned, and crossed out once it has been recorded in other books.²²

In *La fortune de la fermière*, we learn that the practice had become an everyday feature of life:

Just content yourselves with writing down in your *agenda de bureau* [desk notebook] the incidental expenses of the household, as well as your receipts, for because of credit sales you are obliged to do that so as to avoid mistakes. As soon as they have paid their debts, tick off the names of your customers and that way you will be sure not to forget anything.²³

But, given the sarcastic tone used by the author, one guesses that such habits had still to be perfected. Were female farmers able to indicate the cost basis of the eggs they sold or the profits they made from their dairy operations? As the moralist saw it, leafing through the pages of one's *mémorial* was not the safest way of drawing up such statements of accounts. Hence the recommendations made to female farmers to adopt more efficient methods, including taking inventories and keeping *livres de caisse*. According to Arnould, this method was accessible to all and he insisted that a mere school notebook to keep records in would do the trick.

With such examples, it is clear that practising true accounting, in the sense of 'analytical, investigative, rational accounting',²⁴ required the underpinning of a quite comprehensive writing system, in which day-to-day notes were worked up into drafts. Contrary to what the manuals claimed, the tools used toward this end were certainly not the preserve of the 'lowest' class of the peasantry. In effect, many prefaces to manuals betrayed practices far removed from the authors' hopes and it can be assumed that enrolling into this writing process the top section of the peasantry was as important as enrolling its most modest section. In addition, the lack of agricultural accounting on large demesnes was regularly discussed in articles in the *Journal d'agriculture pratique*, which was edited by the *Librairie agricole de la Maison Rustique* bookshop. In this respect, it was also deplored that state-run teaching establishments did not always set an example.

(b) Accounts or work chronicles?

The first accounting lesson in the *Journal d'agriculture pratique* of 1833 contains a puzzling footnote: 'Here the word *Journal* is not understood in the sense it conveys in double-entry accounting. It is the detailed account, day after day, of the totality of work and operations of the farm'.²⁵ This footnote is interesting in that it draws to the centre what in the definitions presented so far stands at the margin. In effect, if writing is necessary to counting, not all the elements of information recorded had the calculation of profits as their goal. Discreetly, but significantly, authors encouraged the collection of other information. In this way, in his

²² Ibid., p. 24.

²³ C. Arnould, *Fortune de la fermière. Occupations féminines à la campagne* (1918), p. 9.

²⁴ Tagliabue (1873), quoted in M. L. Rossi, 'Une

comptabilité industrielle. l'entreprise agricole du Pô à l'Arno (1826 à 1922)', <http://odlv.free.fr/jhcm/papiers/rossi.pdf> (2007), p. 1.

²⁵ Antoine, 'Comptabilité', p. 47.

Douze mois (1860), Borie invited the writers to record all the varied information they must remember. As for *L'Encyclopédie pratique*, it suggested using the *journal* to keep track of a range of technical 'instructive facts': 'commodity deliveries, animal coverings, calvings, incubations, and so on'.²⁶ In the entry for 'Agriculteur', the 1921 *Larousse Agricole* encyclopaedia portrays a farmer doing his rounds with a notebook in his pocket, so as to 'take numerous individual notes: working hours, animal feed intake, fertiliser quantities, seeds, harvests, and so on'.²⁷

These authors said little about the purpose of recording such facts. What was the use of remembering the days of serving, calving, sowing, harvesting or livestock feed intake if one does not go back through the information recorded to understand them? Some discussion can be found in *La maison rustique des dames* of the 'mémoire-grenier' ('memory-storehouse'), as suggestively described by Christian Bromberger and Anne-Hélène Dufour.²⁸ In the same way, alongside the use of a *carnet-agenda*, Cora-Elisabeth Millet-Robinet recommended the use of a *livre de notes* (literally a note-book) and gave the following piece of advice:

One writes in it [the *livre de notes*] the various notes that may be useful to remember, for example the day when a beast gives birth, the number and sex of the newborns, and so on. On this same book, certain work can also be recorded daily, whose date one wants to remember, for example, certain sowing dates, so as to know whether the sowing operations took place at the appropriate time and to benefit from the experience when other sowing operations will take place. In a way, one makes – in this book – a very concise account of the events of the day. It is very easy to refer to these notes which regard a spate of things the memory cannot cope with.²⁹

When Pierre Euryale Cazeaux made his plea for the creation of an agricultural institute, he even supposed that the observations made by women might be useful to science:

There are few farms on which it is impossible to create – with the help of housewives showing great willingness – most interesting registers by consigning therein the daily events with regard to weather, vegetation or livestock. Now it is by collecting a large number of such registers kept at various places that scholars will be able to verify or extend the natural laws already known. It is by studying these that they will penetrate the mysteries of laws yet unknown.³⁰

In order to spread a taste for record keeping, a few authors added illustrative examples to show how the notes they envisaged would be kept. Thus J. L. Antoine, a teacher at the Roville Institute, who after using the forum of the *Journal pratique d'agriculture* to publish his accounting course in 1833, reproduced it in *La maison rustique du XIXe siècle* (then managed by M. Malepeyre the elder) in 1836.³¹ Nearly 200 pages of text deal with demesne

²⁶ Moll and Gayot, *Encyclopédie pratique*, V, p. 663.

²⁷ Chancrin and Dumont, *Larousse agricole*, p. 34.

²⁸ Ch. Bromberger, M. H. Dufour, 'Du bon usage du temps. L'agenda agricole d'un ouvrier-varois en 1942', *Provence Historique* 33 (1983), pp. 119–44.

²⁹ Millet-Robinet, *Maison rustique* (1873 edn), p. 28.

³⁰ P. E. Cazeaux, *Du rôle des femmes dans l'agriculture. Esquisse d'un institut rural féminin* (1869), p. 31.

³¹ J. L. Antoine, 'Comptabilité agricole', in M. Malepeyre aîné (ed.), *Maison rustique du XIXe siècle* (1836), IV, pp. 526–49.

administration, among which 50 or so relate to administrative management; and eight or so to the management of the workforce. A few differences can be observed between the two versions, one of which is worth noting since it is related to *journal* keeping. In 1836 Antoine turned his back on established models (notably those which the Director of the Roville Institute, C. J. A. Mathieu de Dombasle, had advocated in his first issue of the *Annales* in 1824, and which owed a great deal to the *Principes raisonnés d'agriculture*, written by the equally famous German agronomist A. Thaer). Thaer had recommended that farmers set up tables, which he deemed to be more convenient than a *journal*. He also recommended other recording techniques. 'Hang on the wall a blackboard with vertical and horizontal lines designed not to be erased, so as to jot down daily with a piece of chalk the work done and the number of workers involved'.³² Antoine called for detail and freedom in writing. Whether he changed his views out of experience, or to distance himself from Dombasle, is not clear, but Thaer and Dombasle both had a taste for synthesis and the synoptic view, gathering together sizeable amounts of information. They devised specimen documents, some of which were printed in an annex of the *Annales de Roville*, to assist the management of most aspects of farmwork (management of grain and fertiliser stocks, workers' food consumption, horses' work, and so on). By contrast, concerning *journal* keeping, Antoine called for detail and freedom in writing, which – as he himself indicated – made it a specific type of document: '*journal* writing is not subjected to any particular form or to any obligatory mechanism. *For me, this principle seems to be so important that I consider it as the accountant's emancipation* [italics in the original]'. The writing would be developed, 'without being prolix; and concise, without being dry'.³³

These observations are illustrated by three pages of examples, which teem with work-related comments. In the entry for 'Ferme', one can read:

Animals' consumption has not changed. Six kilos of rye flour must nonetheless be added in for sick bullocks. Marie, the cook, has told me about the state of eggs hatched in February. There were seven dozens of them, four of which were consumed by the household. The remaining three dozens cannot be sold because Lent is approaching. The cows give two litres of milk more a day than in the previous month, which makes 19 litres a day.³⁴

Notes give information about daily work:

Ploughing and Harrowing of the *Pré Battu*, for oats, made by Bradier, Denis and Faraud; at the *Champ de la Fontaine*, for potatoes, Philippe. Pierre carted manure to the wheat of the *Haut-Gravier*. This wheat is languishing.

They give information about the decisions made too:

I was carting manure to the wheat of the *Haut-Gravier*, noting that the horses and the cart were leaving deep tracks in the ground, I decided to have the cart unloaded by the path and to have the manure taken from there to the field on handbarrows.³⁵

³² A. Thaer, *Principes raisonnés d'agriculture*, Paris (1811, sec. edn, 1831), p. 275.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 533.

³⁵ Ibid.

³³ Antoine, 'Comptabilité agricole', p. 531.

The only guideline provided by Antoine was the reference to the presence at the top of the page of the *journal* to a note on the 'climatic physiognomy of the day', which the writer was to reproduce as follows: 'Temp. morn. +2; noon +7; eve. +3. Light and sunny intervals, N.E. wind.'³⁶

(c) *Writing templates*

To be successful, writing-related instructions required some education (we shall address this point in the following section) as well as a few tools. In this respect, stationers and booksellers in the nineteenth century furthered the vogue of accounting by providing specialised media. What the *Maison rustique* bookshop provided gives a good overview of the printed and blank books available to farmers in the second half of the century. Its catalogue went from the *Registre-Mémorial de l'agriculteur* selling at 3 Francs, which gathered together all the tables necessary to keep a record of the farm, to the *Agenda de poche du cultivateur* at 1F 50, a small notebook to be put together with all the common *agendas*, to various *cahiers quadrillés* (squared-paper notebooks) at 1F 25. There was then the annual edition of a 'fine *almanach-calendrier* richly printed by chromolithography that contains overleaf the information indispensable to *cultivateurs*, such as the work to be required of teams and of day labourers, weight of commodities, animal yields, and so on', retailing for 2 Francs.³⁷

Several authors of manuals mentioned the need for such documents. Among them, the agronomist Moll, who referred to the practices across the Rhine:

In Germany they have small notebooks of that type that contain the various registers with patterned lines and column heads. I am sure that their introduction into France would have a beneficial influence on agriculture, for from the day *cultivateurs* are willing to become aware of their operations and drive everything toward the final objective of cropping, namely, money, they will better understand their own interests and fend off routine when detrimental to them.³⁸

Three decades later, Moll signalled a few advances in this respect:

On certain farms, notably in the rural establishments of the Crown, we were pleased to see in replacement of the *brouillard* a daily-report sheet, lithographed in advance, which, at a place accessible to all the agents of the farms and without their losing much time, makes it possible for them to take notes of all the events as they occur during their working hours with regard to consumption, work, grain flailing, deliveries of all types, and so on, notes which the accountant has then simply to add up at will.³⁹

Hence we can see that farmers were strongly recommended to keep daily records. How was the demand for suitable books in which to keep these records met, and how, in turn, did they influence the way that records themselves were kept?

Specialists in almanac literature rightly remind us that the practice of daily writing is a very old indeed, and benefited from the diffusion of calendars as early as the sixteenth century.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 530.

³⁷ 'Catalogue de la Librairie agricole de la Maison Rustique', in F. Bastian, *Les abeilles. Traité théorique et*

pratique d'apiculture rationnelle (1868), pp. 12–36.

³⁸ Moll quoted by Antoine, 'Comptabilité', p. 47.

³⁹ Moll and Gayot, *Encyclopédie pratique*, p. 663.

About 1550, that is, when printing began to gather momentum, ‘an entirely revised and updated layout of the calendar answered the desire to jot down notes onto it. The sheets of the calendar were folded down to quarto size and bound, thanks to the reorganisation of the columns.’⁴⁰ Following the *livres d’heures* (books of hours), the *SchreibKalender* published in Germany about that time contained spaces for notes opposite the calendar page. Later on, these spaces disappeared, being replaced by ‘stories’ designed for education and entertainment.⁴¹ It seems to have been only in the nineteenth century that note recording regained some vigour with the use of the fashionable *agenda*:

The First Empire, with its precise, methodical turn of mind, seems to have had a decisive influence on the development of this annual *recueil*, which after all is no more than an account book, despite the fact that apparently some people are trying to turn it into a kind of *livre de raison* for individual notes and thoughts.⁴²

Then, unions, created in 1884, began to play a key role. The *Union Beaujolaise* decided in 1890 to launch its own almanac and to give copies for free to its members. In 1892, the nascent and soon powerful *Union du Sud-est des syndicats agricoles* took over the publishing of this almanac, whose circulation reached 20,000 the following year and which sold at 10 centimes each.⁴³ This almanac quickly had a very large readership, extending beyond the district limits of the *Union du Sud-Est des syndicats agricoles*, selling 100,000 in 1897, twice as many in 1900, and 250,000 in 1939.⁴⁴

Examination of the almanacs valued within the nineteenth-century agricultural sphere, such as Mathieu de la Drôme’s triple almanac, the *Cultivateur français*, the *Almanach de l’Union du Sud-Est des syndicats agricoles*, the *Conteur Almanach Amusant* and others, reveals that certain publishers provided a small space for short notes, in general within the weather forecast section, recommending that readers confirm or reject the accuracy of the forecast with their own observations. (For an illustration of this genre, see Figure 2.) In his book on the almanac, *Le Messager Boiteux*, Michel Vernus states that, between 1879 and 1885, a Haut-Jura Peasant jotted down in his almanacs – next to the calendar – weather indications and some agricultural work notes. This peasant slipped into an issue of the *Nouveau Conteur, Almanach Amusant* a hand-written sheet of paper on which he had copied the weather forecast included in Mathieu de la Drôme’s almanac for 1879. Arguably, his aim was to compare the forecasts between the two almanacs.⁴⁵ The famous Mathieu de la Drôme used this practice to his own advantage, seeing to it that his faithful readers became his informants and in that way – thanks to their notes – took part in the foundation of a true science of meteorology.

⁴⁰ H. J. Lüsebrinck, Y.-G. Mix, J.-Y. Mollier and P. Sorel (eds), *Les lectures du peuple en Europe et dans les Amériques* (2003), p. 17.

⁴¹ H. Meise, ‘Image de soi-même et de l’autre: Rapports interculturels et stratégie du récit dans les Geschichtskalender de langue allemande au XVII^e siècle’, in Lüsebrinck, Mix, Mollier and Sorel (eds), *Les lectures* (2003), pp. 251–7.

⁴² J. Grand-Carteret, *Les almanachs français*

(1600–1895) (1896), p. lxx.

⁴³ C. Silvestre, *Monographie de l’Union du Sud-Est des syndicats agricoles* (1894), pp. 391, 393.

⁴⁴ J. Vercherand, *Un siècle de syndicalisme agricole. La vie locale et nationale à travers le cas du département de la Loire* (1994).

⁴⁵ M. Vernus, *Pourquoi le messager boitait-il? Ou l’histoire d’un almanach fameux* (2003), p. 67.

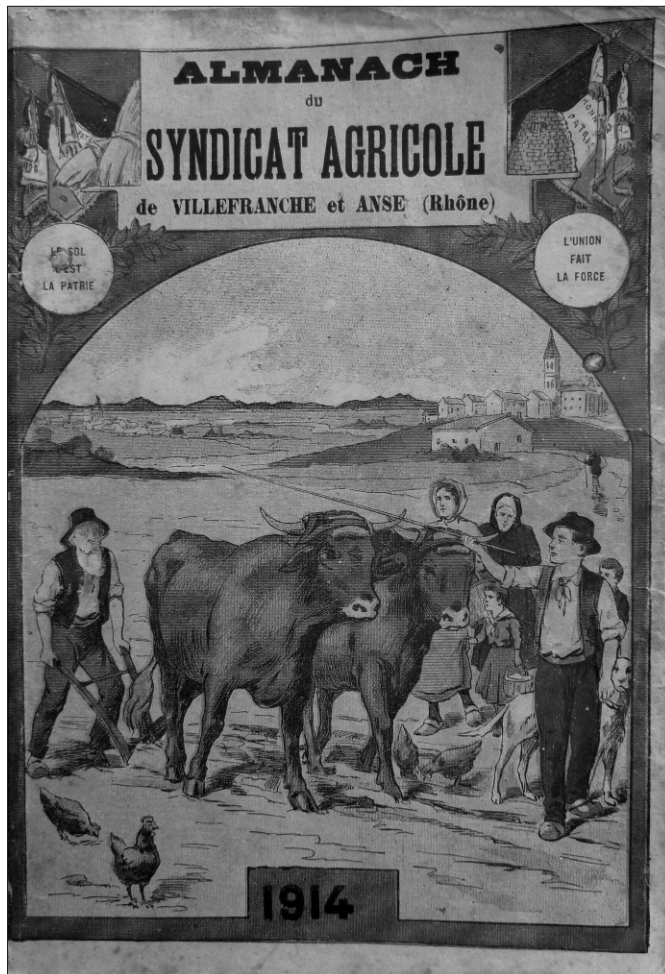


FIGURE 2. The *Villefranche et Anse* Union Almanac, 1914.

In France, *agendas* multiplied in the first half of the twentieth century. At that time, a large number of agricultural organisations began to publish them: unions, cooperatives, agricultural newspapers, banks and credit unions. Competing on the market, each of these operators boasted about their assets: expert knowledge of agriculture, scientific reliability, or the encyclopaedic character of the knowledge diffused, the quality of illustrations, the luxury or the simplicity of the medium, and sometimes the importance of the spaces devoted to individual notes. Two different types of *agenda* were available: the *agenda-calendrier* and the *agenda-almanach*. As the name indicates, the former is essentially a kind of calendar, to which a few pages of practical information (a directory of agricultural organisations, tables of weights and measures, and so on) and advertisements were added. The *agenda-almanach* contains a bigger reference section, which reveals a desire to popularise the knowledge available.⁴⁶ The

⁴⁶ L. Andriès, 'Les livres de savoir pratique dans la France des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles', in R. Chartier and H.-J. Lüsebrink, *Colportage et lecture populaire. Imprimés de large circulation en Europe, XVI-XIXe siècles* (1996), pp. 173–81.

Lyon bookseller Silvestre's *agenda-almanachs* are the epitome of this documentary form. They provided for farmers in the various branches of agriculture – the *agriculteur* (farmer), *viticulteur* (winegrower), *horticulteur* (horticulturalist), *ménagère agricole* (the farmer's wife) – a variety of knowledge useful to their agricultural practice, from the principles of fertiliser use and animal feeding, to a rural law digest and a short guide to algebra and basic arithmetic. This form of *agenda*, 'a small, practical, portable encyclopaedia',⁴⁷ appealed to the writers of manuals. Thus, the agricultural household economy book, *Pour préparer le bonheur de votre foyer*, republished regularly in the inter-war years, tells us that 'Publisher Silvestre's *agenda* is all that one could wish for'.⁴⁸

These documents influenced the process of writing far more than the advice from manuals. Sometimes they led writing toward figures thanks to the provision of narrow-columned tables, sometimes they allowed it to conquer blank spaces. The desire to guide is evidenced by numerous details in the layout: this skilfully manages to reconcile accounts with chronicles. The top of the page often has lines drawn for note taking and the bottom of the page presents a two-column 'receipts and expenses' table. An individual observations box adjoins the weather forecast and astronomical data (sunrise/sunset; moonrise/moonset) sections, with very clear instructions: the key is to measure air pressure and temperature both in the morning and in the evening and to record the rain, the state of the sky and the prevailing wind. In the end-of-the-month pages space was provided to encourage the practice of making a statement of accounts (statement of the receipts and expenses of the month and notes to be kept).

II

How was the regular practice of writing encouraged if not by example? This second section describes the ways in which the French peasant was educated to acquire the understanding and skills necessary for a rational approach to farming. As we shall show, writing practices were inculcated in a top-down fashion. First, agricultural elites were led to writing through the vocational training scheme designed for them. Next, most of the peasantry were introduced to it through primary vocational training schools (farm schools), rural primary schools and adult training schemes.

(a) *Frame of mind and writing devices*

One of the essential conditions for a successful [agricultural] enterprise is the frame of mind, as it were, that makes a man more or less apt to perform the various operations that can be referred to as farm administration. M. de Gasparin said, 'The worst cropping system, if well-run, is worth a hundred times as much as the best cropping system, if badly run'.⁴⁹

These lines illustrate the philosophy of the pioneer teachers of well-off landowners' sons. The

⁴⁷ J. A. Barral, *Le Bon fermier. Aide-mémoire du cultivateur* (sec. edn, 1861), p. viii.

⁴⁸ Y. Trouard Riolle, *Pour préparer le bonheur de votre foyer* (first edn, 1932, 1940), p. 75.

⁴⁹ C. J. A. Mathieu de Dombasle, *Annales agricoles de Roville ou Mélanges d'agriculture, d'économie rurale et de législation agricole* (1832), pp. 88–9.

same philosophy was also used as a basis for the creation of vocational training schools in 1848.

In 1826, in eastern France, the Roville Institute welcomed 30 students or so, who wanted to learn how to run an agricultural enterprise. Its head, C. J. A. Mathieu de Dombasle, was opposed to the idea of opening a school on the edges of the capital city, as was suggested by his subscribers. He did not intend to give lectures to numerous students. Rather, he wanted to train true agricultural managers, employing the tutorial model. Agricultural practice held a central place within the teaching delivered at Roville. It was through the observation of farm work that students acquired the skills deemed essential to their careers as demesne managers, but also, generally speaking, for the improvement of agriculture. Considering that the scientific knowledge available was far from complete, Dombasle, in line with Thaer's reflections on rational agriculture, invited his students to engage in an 'intellectual practice'. This was grounded in the acquisition of facts and an understanding of the context in which they were gathered.

Collecting information required sustained writing. In the first issue of the *Annales de Roville* in 1824, de Dombasle offered his views on how to keep records and presented in an annex the numerous tables he had elaborated toward this end. Twenty three auxiliary books to be kept by farmers encompassed the totality of the operations performed at the Institute. He also described his educational method, which hinged on a kind of ritual:

Every evening, the students attend the *Ordre* [order], in which all the operations of the day are written down, at the dictation of the managers who have had them performed. The secretary elected by the students themselves is in charge of jotting down every day in a register kept in their meeting room the details of the operations performed on the farm.⁵⁰

This scheme, from the work done and the observations conducted, allowed the students to ask questions of their master. In this fashion they became acquainted 'with the practice as much as with the theory of agricultural art'.⁵¹ Besides, de Dombasle tells us that the numerous trials conducted at his institute required note taking, a process carried out under his supervision.

During the Second Republic (decree of 3 October 1848), the vocational training outlined in the *Annales agricoles de Roville*, which was written in a style to appeal to a wide readership,⁵² inspired the project to provide training more widely. Two graduates of the Roville institute became heads of the newly created establishments. Examining their programmes, one discovers that 'the lawmakers included in the school time-tables half an hour for "consigning things to writing"'. They even went so far as to keep the name, *l'Ordre*, as a tribute to its instigator.

Later, in the successive training formulas proposed in both state-run and private agricultural education (whether distance courses or seasonal teaching), writing templates became more explicit, modelling the creation of work chronicles and their educational uses. A circular issued

⁵⁰ C. J. A. Mathieu de Dombasle, 'De l'agriculture moderne', in Y. Maurin, 'L'Institut de Roville', *Annales d'histoire des enseignements agricoles* (1824, repr., 1987), no. 2, pp. 17–29.

⁵¹ Mathieu de Dombasle, *Annales agricoles de Roville*

(1828), p. 115.

⁵² F. Knittel, 'Mathieu de Dombasle. Agronomie et innovation, 1750–1850' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nancy II, 2007).

on 25 August 1918 stated, for example, that a farm work *agenda* and an estate management ledger should be kept in state-run secondary school establishments:

The *agenda des travaux* [farm work diary] is the book in which the student writes down each day the types of work in which he took part and adds his observations about the crops, cowshed, and garden. The *livre d'exploitation* [estate management ledger] is a compendium in which the student summarises each week – with the help of his personal observations and the technical information that he was able to procure – all of the events relating to running the estate.⁵³

An almost identical writing plan was proposed by the providers of private agricultural education. The peasants who enrolled on correspondence courses had to keep a 'cahier de ferme' (farm notebook) in line with the following instructions:

On the left-hand page, which is split into two columns, the young people shall write down what they see each day: observations on a crop or some operation in the fields will be written in four words in the first column. All ancillary work, work having to do more with the farm than with cultivation, will be written in the second column. Here they shall content themselves with reading in the big book of practice; they will not add comments. However, on the right-hand page, opposite this dry chronicle, they will write down their observations and what they learn there from once a week.⁵⁴

Then there is the *cahier d'exploitation* or business ledger, put at the centre of the teaching methods used by the *Maisons Familiales Rurales* (Rural Family Homes) and which the learners were to fill in once a week with the help of a 'study plan'.⁵⁵

The idea that farmers should put pen to paper to build up a daily record of their own was therefore a commonplace of agricultural education in France from the early nineteenth century onwards. In this respect, however, one should not overstate the role of vocational training, whether state-run or private.⁵⁶ Writing templates certainly shaped the mind. They allowed for measurement and calculation as well as the management of events, a key capacity in a dynamic environment, in which living things, plants and animals have their own rhythms of growth. Little by little, the idea developed that daily record keeping was necessary to the proper running of a farm, an idea which the *agromanes* circulated amongst the peasantry.

⁵³ E. Chancrin, *L'enseignement dans les Ecoles Pratiques d'agriculture* (unpubl. report, 1933), p. 24. E. Chancrin was the inspector general of agriculture, responsible for agricultural education.

⁵⁴ M. Dubruel, 'Les études agricoles par correspondance', *Annales d'histoire des enseignements agricoles* 4–5 (1928, repr. 1992), p. 74.

⁵⁵ D. Chartier, *A l'aube des formations par alternance* (1986).

⁵⁶ It must be noted that few farmers attended vocational training courses. Thus, according to the 1959

general agricultural census, 96.7% of the farmers had received no technical training at all. From this situation, however, one should not leap to the conclusion that vocational training did not influence the farming sphere: first, since many former students became teachers or popularisers, the learning methods they had acquired in vocational training establishments spread rapidly; second, the practices taught in these establishments symbolically prevailed over customary practices.

(b) *Administering agromanes*

As has been widely observed, the promotion of 'practical, scientific' agriculture owed much to the socio-political context of the 1830 Revolution, which ousted the nobility from power and encouraged them to return to the land. Eager to secure more value from their estates and to try out the new ideas diffused in the scientific and propagandist literature, large landowners, both nobles and city-dwelling bourgeois, and innovative *cultivateurs*, referred to as *agromanes*, acted as a 'catalyst for and diffuser of modern agriculture'.⁵⁷ By doing so, they also reinforced their social and political basis in the country.⁵⁸

What image did *agromanes* convey of their management techniques? To know more about this, it is interesting to consider the description of the *agromane* in the *Maison Rustique du 19^{ème} siècle*. Progress, far from being the preserve of the nobility (who, when judged by the number of their subscriptions to agricultural societies and shows in various French regions, can have had little influence over innovation), can be attributed to 'a practical-knowledge elite which is able to make demesnes productive', as has recently been stressed by Nadine Vivier.⁵⁹ Thus, the landowner interested in making his demesne farm yield a profit was distinguished by his assiduous, hands-on style of management. He frequently went into his fields in order to inspect both animals and workforce and did not hesitate to put his shoulder to the wheel. As recalled by the author of the 'demesne administration' section of the *Maison rustique*, his personal supervision could only be profitable: '*l'œil du maître engraisse les bestiaux*' (the eye of the master fattens the beasts), as the saying went.⁶⁰ Monitoring and control were the essential qualities of the administrator. We soon understand, however, that the master was not only attentive to his crops, animals and personnel, he also pored over the numerous registers he or his employees were keeping. When it came to inspecting real estate, 'everywhere he records in a special notebook'⁶¹ his observations and the information he deems necessary. Once home, he makes, according to *his notes*, the decisions that were necessary for settings things straight and for restoring order. 'He plans out all the work, repairs and improvements to be carried out'.⁶² When selecting the animals destined for fattening or breeding, the administrator refers to the register containing the animals' history:

when the animal was born, its father, mother and other antecedents, its sex, the characteristics displayed at various stages of its life, its characteristics with regard to height, weight, shape, meat-product quantity and quality, fast or slow growth, ability to fatten, fertility, condition and ability to proliferate.⁶³

He also recommended giving written instructions to farm servants undertaking specific tasks:

⁵⁷ G. Désert and R. Specklin, 'Victoire sur la disette', in Agulhon et al. (eds), *Histoire de la France rurale*, III, p. 106.

⁵⁸ C. Gaboriaux, 'Entre innovations agronomiques et pratiques paysannes. La figure de l'agriculteur pratique au 19^{ème} siècle', in C. Bonneuil, G. Denis, G. and J. L. Mayaud, *Sciences, chercheurs et agriculture. Pour une histoire de l'agronomie*, (2008), pp. 45–60.

⁵⁹ N. Vivier, 'Le rôle des élites françaises en faveur du progrès agricole au xix^e siècle: Réalités et construction

d'une image', in Vivier (ed.), *Elites et progrès agricole, XVI^e-XX^e siècle* (2009), p. 204.

⁶⁰ Malepeyre aîné (ed.), *Maison Rustique du XIX^{ème}*, 'Agriculture forestière, législation et administration', (4 vols in two, 1836 edn), IV, p. 488.

⁶¹ Certain passages are italicised in the original text. The author obviously wanted to highlight all writing events and the tools available to the administrator.

⁶² *Maison rustique*, p. 485.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 489.

It is always profitable, when servants can read, that most orders (and often the totality of the instructions going along with them, especially when applied to a several-day period) be *written down* and given to the section head or to the most intelligent servant. Such orders and instructions must be written down in a clear, concise and precise way and, if need be, accompanied by a basic sketch indicating the scope, course and limits of the operation or by a graph representing it, so as to better convey the way it must be performed to be carried out properly.⁶⁴

Is this utopian? Was it ever implemented in practice? Examining the *mémoires* awarded by district agricultural shows in the 1830s, one can find some foundation for this portrait of the *agromane*. The participants, often large landowners,⁶⁵ but sometimes simple peasants,⁶⁶ clearly possessed a mastery of their technical and economic data. Thus in the farm monographs produced on such occasions, they described in detail their soils, the tools used, the cropping systems, as well as the cost basis of their animal production and their outlets for livestock. In the same way, the farmers who were rewarded with prizes by the French Ministry of Agriculture were able to demonstrate that their farms were profitable. Among the elites emerging from vocational training, moreover, there were some of de Dombasle's followers, who in their turn put pen to paper to popularise the far-reaching scheme of agricultural improvement set up by their master.

(c) *Reading, writing and counting to the benefit of agriculture*

Although proposed by Condorset as early as 1792, the introduction of basic agricultural instruction into primary education had to wait until the period of the Second Empire. Established throughout France, rural primary schools represented an unprecedented opportunity for the popularisation of the knowledge thought indispensable for perfecting agriculture. At first, they fulfilled this task through practical teaching grounded in field experiments and practical agricultural work. Later, when the financial means and skills to do so were lacking,⁶⁷ they contented themselves by including some agricultural education within their teaching. Schoolmasters also organised courses for adults in order to reach a public interested in progress. After World War I, those specialising in agriculture, the 'agriculture masters', were also responsible for post-school agricultural courses aimed at teenagers of both sexes. They also set up schemes of itinerant teaching in order to be in contact with a larger number of farmers.

What role did these various types of teaching provided by schoolmasters and agricultural masters play in the diffusion of writing practices? Not surprisingly, the acquisition of accounting techniques was given priority. As an echo of the recommendations made by accounting manuals, schoolmasters were requested during the Second Empire to make

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 497.

⁶⁵ J. M. Wiscart, 'Agronomes et fermes-modèles dans la Somme à la fin du Second Empire', *Ruralia* 9 (2001), pp. 63–87.

⁶⁶ Y. Lagadec, 'Petite exploitation et innovation agricole au XIX siècle: l'exemple d'Olivier Le Diouron, paysan trégorrois', *Histoire et Société Rurales* 17 (2002),

pp. 187–217.

⁶⁷ Despite the efforts made during the Third Republic era to introduce rural schoolmasters to agriculture through courses delivered by agriculture teachers, who were the state employees more specifically charged with popularising agriculture in the French *départements*.

students keep *registres* or a *cahier-journal*. The most determined of them benefited from state financial assistance to organise the work of their classes as follows:

Arise at 5 am; followed by field work from 5 to 8 am ... then again after class from 4 to 7 pm; in the evening from 7 to 9 pm, meeting on the events of the day and on the notes to record in the account book, which must be updated by the students under their master's leadership.⁶⁸

This orientation endured under the Third Republic. In the 1886 enquiry into agricultural and horticultural teaching, the state was concerned to know whether an accounting course was included in the programme. It asked three questions: 'Is there specific agricultural or horticultural teaching? What is the programme of such teaching? Does it include an accounting course?'⁶⁹ In the same way, when it came to giving school teaching an agricultural inflection, the commission in charge of reflecting on this issue made the following proposal: 'Why should abstract arithmetic exercises not be replaced by problems which would insist on agricultural operations? Why should we not teach children to keep a *livre-journal* by giving them examples of basic account-keeping?'⁷⁰ Half a century later, the same strategy was still being used in post-school agricultural and farm domestic economy courses, as well as in the popularisation carried out by the agricultural masters on the farms themselves.

The type of learning proposed, however, was not confined to writing. Schoolteachers also gave lessons covering various aspects of agriculture: soils, fertilisers, animal feeding, dairy hygiene, and so on. To render such teaching attractive, the idea of keeping work diaries informed school methods too. This is shown by this mock speech, which a teacher delivered to his class at the start of the new school year:⁷¹

My primary objective is to draw your attention to all that happens every day before your very eyes and to develop in you a good sense of observation and an enquiring mind. I would like to have you follow the succession of agricultural work, operations and facts of all types that take place before you during a whole year. Toward this end, I would like to turn you into true little collaborators by giving you the responsibility of recording every day what is done in the fields, vineyards, gardens, cowsheds, and farmyards, so that you could tell me about it in here and I could go into the whys and the wherefores of the situation and give you the specific notions implied by each question. We will thus make on an informed basis a true agricultural calendar which, given the topicality and immediate application of the questions addressed, will no doubt hold your attention and enquiring minds in the long run.⁷²

In this continual effort to train students in the discipline of writing, the school could rely on its personnel's qualities. Who was better placed than the schoolmaster to give students a taste

⁶⁸ 1852 teaching project, quoted by T. Charmasson, A. M. Lelorrain and Y. Ripa, *L'enseignement agricole et vétérinaire* (1992), p. LIX.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁷⁰ C. Grignon, 'L'enseignement agricole et la domination symbolique de la paysannerie', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 1 (1975), p. 82.

⁷¹ The book from which this excerpt is taken is a manual aimed at guiding schoolmasters in their agricultural teaching. The *calendrier annuel* (annual calendar) technique provides them with references to the contents to be addressed in class.

⁷² H. de Lapparent, *Le Calendrier agricole expliqué à l'Ecole Rurale. Région du Nord* (1900), p. 4.

OCTOBRE		SIGNES et LUNES	LUNE		TEMPS d'après MATHIEU	NOTES JOURNALIÈRES
			Lever	Coucher		
merc.	1 s Remi, E.	☉	5 ^h 36	7 ^h 11	brouill.	beau
jeudi	2 ss Anges gard.	☉	5 ^h 58	8 ^h 18	nuageux	pluie par intervalle
vend.	3 s Cyprien.	☉	6 23	9 26	frais	beau couvert
sam.	4 s François d'As.	☉	6 55	10 31	umide	beau
40 Jésus guérit un paralytique. Math.						
Dim.	5 s Placide, M.	☉	7 35	11 33	bon	id. brouill. beau
lundi	6 s Bruno, C.	☉	8 23	0 ^h 27	bise	id.
mardi	7 s Marc, P.	☉	9 21	1 ^h 13	soleil	id.
merc.	8 ste Brigitte.	☉	10 27	1 51	chaud	id. id. id.
jeudi	9 s Denis, E. M.	☉	11 37	2 22	couvert	id.
vend.	10 s Franç. Borg.	☉	—	2 48	pluie	id.
sam.	11 s Victor.	☉	0 ^h 51	3 11	froid	id. bise
41 Le festin des noces. S. Mathieu.						
Dim.	12 s Séraphin.	☉	2 ^h 57	3 31	vent	id.
lundi	13 s Edouard, roi.	☉	3 26	3 51	variable	id.
mardi	14 s Calixte, P. M.	☉	4 47	4 11	bon	brouill. nuageux brouill. nuageux
merc.	15 ste Thérèse, V.	☉	6 12	4 34	clair	nuageux, beau fort, 2 ch.
jeudi	16 s Gal, A.	☉	7 39	5 3	beau	beau nuageux couvert
vend.	17 ste Hedwige.	☉	9 7	5 40	fertile	id.
sam.	18 s Luc, év.	☉	10 29	6 27	sombre	nuageux, brouill. id.
42 Guér. du fils de l'of. de Caphar. Jean						
Dim.	19 s Pierre d'Alcant.	☉	11 40	7 27	pluie	pluie b. pluie fort
lundi	20 s Jean Cantius.	☉	0 ^h 35	8 38	froid	id. et vent fort

FIGURE 3. A farmer's notes in the *Nouveau conteur almanach amusant* for 1879.

for note taking? Did people not see this village notable walking in the country with a notebook in his pocket?

III

Defined in terms of technical and economic rationalisation, agrarian activities have required new forms of writing since the nineteenth century. Obviously, record keeping as such is not something new. All landowners knew how to manage their accounts. They were often accustomed to recording *novellets* (novelties) in books. But these practices are those of scholars or the elite – individuals who have a cultural advantage over the people around them. As early as the fifteenth century, some farmers in the Ile-de-France decided to invest in education in order to maintain and pass on their social position.⁷³ The novel character of the practices I have described here lies in their philosophy, aimed at the calculation of profits, and in their ambition: ultimately, their aim is to drive the whole agricultural class to writing.

Throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, well-organised and constant efforts were made to introduce into farming accounting management tools and media for recording work. As has been seen, this movement involved an organised body of resources: the production of manuals, writing tools, educational schemes, as well as the advocacy of these new writing supports by authority figures such as *agromanes*, schoolmasters and agricultural masters. The *agenda*, with its calendar form and its pocket size, thus became the favourite form of this approach. The use of an *agenda* showed that a farmer possessed a methodical approach. It demonstrated the 'enlightened' character of the farmers who adopted it (see Figure 3).

⁷³ J. M. Moriceau, *Les fermiers de l'Ile de France. XV-XVIIIe siècle* (1994), p. 210.

There remains an unexplored element in this account. How was the recording of agricultural work undertaken in practice, by individual farmers? As indicated at the beginning of this article, this question cannot be precisely answered, since the notebooks and almanacs with notes have largely disappeared. A few examples have survived and can be compared to the models displayed in manuals and almanacs. One could estimate the circulation of manuals and almanacs,⁷⁴ but it would be presumptuous to derive from this data an analysis of the reception of writing models. Those historians concerned with modern European merchants' knowledge of accounting meet the same kind of problem. They find it difficult to infer from the sale of manuals the practices actually employed by merchants.⁷⁵

This investigation of the record keeping which was enjoined on farmers has made it possible to understand the writers' logic and the cognitive resources offered by *agendas*. Daily writing, which is rarely shirked, is the most interesting feature of the diary. It provides farmers with a synoptic overview of their work on different timescales: daily, weekly, monthly and yearly. In this way, they can grasp the thread of their activities and organise their time. My study of the characteristics of *agendas* (content, format and style) has also made it possible to understand how farmers took only what they wanted from the models (in Chartier's words, they paid them 'oblique attention'⁷⁶), the ways they reformulated the normative frameworks that were suggested to or imposed on them. To shed light on these practices would require developments that lie beyond the scope of this article. I refer the reader to previous work, which highlights forms of writing appropriation.⁷⁷ This shows that, far from following a diffusionist approach, writing passed slowly down to the country through successive borrowings and reformulations. Confirmation of this is found in the writings of a Provençal journalist-peasant who was a fervent supporter of modern agriculture in the 1950s:

The peasant has to become curious. He will never be too curious. He must always question nature and learn to question it. ... All lands are valuable. One must know their value and seek it unrelentingly. It is only through trials and experiments that one can discover the value of lands. With a one-franc notebook and a pen, one must record notes and figures. It is not a question of counting to within about a gram or centimetre or of doing precise accounting. The key is to know the direction taken, whether bad or good.⁷⁸

The full power of the one-franc notebook has yet to be fully revealed, but one may already see how integral elementary forms of record keeping were to the modernisation and conduct of French farming in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

⁷⁴ This point is still to be investigated since little research on French agricultural literature has been carried out. See Marion Duvigneau, 'La naissance de l'édition agricole en France au XIX^e siècle: des Huzard à la "librairie agricole de la Maison Rustique"', in M. C. Amouretti and F. Sigaut (eds), *Traditions agronomiques européennes: élaboration et transmission depuis l'Antiquité* (1995), pp. 65–81.

⁷⁵ P. Jeannin, *Marchands d'Europe. Pratiques et savoirs à l'époque moderne* (2002).

⁷⁶ R. Chartier, *Lectures et lecteurs dans la France*

d'Ancien Régime (1987). The author develops this thesis in relation to popular readings.

⁷⁷ N. Joly, 'Vaches et blés sur le papier. Socialisations à l'écrit du monde agricole', *Communication & Langues* 159 (2009), pp. 77–90 and, 'Tracing cows. Practical and administrative logics in tension' in D. Barton and U. Papen (eds) *The anthropology of writing: Understanding textually-mediated worlds* (2010), pp. 90–105.

⁷⁸ M. Artaud, *Le métier d'agriculteur et l'agriculture nouvelle* (1968, excerpt from a 1955 article), p. 39.