

The cottage economy in sixteenth-century Sweden*

by Martin Andersson

Abstract

What was the role of cottagers in the agrarian economy of sixteenth-century Sweden? Drawing from a range of sources, such as cadastres and wealth taxation lists, the article finds that most cottagers paid land rents in small sums of money; that the majority of most cottagers' wealth consisted of only one–two cows; that most cottagers did not hold any arable land, having to buy or earn grain as an in-kind wage; and that many cottagers worked within their local community in agriculture, construction, and transportation, as well as made a living through spinning, woodcraft production, and from forest resources, such as tar and charcoal. The main argument of the article is however that the most important function that cottagers filled in their local society was as wage workers, a labour reserve which was called on by their village neighbours during the peak times of the agricultural year as well as for continuous and recurring work tasks.

Cottagers were a social group of fundamental importance to premodern Europe. As noted by Guy Bois (concerning late medieval Normandy), 'no husbandman without a small-holder, nor small-holder without husbandman'.¹ Bois meant that those households which did not own enough land to sustain themselves lived in mutual dependence on their richer neighbours, who needed their work and in return gave cottagers access to grain and agricultural implements. This interdependency between landed and landless, haves and have-nots, has often been noted by historians, among which may be mentioned included Judith Bennett (concerning medieval England), and more recently Christine Fertig, Richard Paping, and Henry French, in the introduction to an edited collection of essays on landless households in early modern Western Europe.² However, and this is also stressed by Fertig *et al.*, although the importance

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¹ G. Bois, *The crisis of feudalism: Economy and society in eastern Normandy c.1300–1550* (1983), pp. 183–5. of Brigstock, c.1295–1344 (1999), pp. 94–7; C. Fertig, R. Paping & H. French, 'Introduction', in *id.* (eds), *Landless households in rural Europe, 1600–1900* (2023), pp. 6–7.

² J. M. Bennett, *A medieval life: Cecilia Penifader*

of cottagers is a well-recognized and oft-repeated historiographical fact, there is still precious little research actually focusing on the rural strata below the ordinary peasant household. While there is no lack of studies that say *something* about the landless, knowledge regarding the specific and possibly varying role(s) played by cottagers in premodern societies is therefore still vague, and more or less lacking for many regions before the era of the agrarian revolution.

This gap in our knowledge is to a large extent due to a fundamental lack of sources, as premodern officials were more interested in recording those holding land than those who were deemed too poor to matter for taxation purposes anyway. At least in Swedish historiography, the lack of research on cottagers also stems from social questions long being seen as unimportant before the time of the agrarian revolution.³ Although a significant contribution was made in the 1970s by Lars-Olof Larsson, who concluded that cottagers made up ‘a considerable share of the rural population during the decades around 1600’, few historians followed suit.⁴ While Larsson further made some preliminary observations that many cottagers owned cows and other animals, and thought it not to have been uncommon for them to also hold some arable land, he did however not go on to study the role of cottagers in their local community. This has only been done more recently by Jonas Lindström.⁵ By going through rural seventeenth-century property taxation lists, Lindström replicated Larsson’s finding that a large share of rural households (in some parishes more than 50 per cent) had very few animals and little to no arable land. Yet, as most were of working age, Lindström concluded that many households in early modern Sweden, including those the sources called ‘crofters’ or ‘lodgers’, thus as (semi-)landless must have survived through work for others.

This is certainly not an unfamiliar picture to those well-versed in the literature on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rural proletarianization and proto-industrialization, in Sweden and elsewhere.⁶ In line with this research, Lindström interpreted the high number of ‘landless and semi-landless’ households found in seventeenth-century Sweden as the beginning of this proletarianization process, which would continue into the agrarian revolution of the eighteenth century.⁷ A similar development has also been suggested for

³ H. Forssell, *Anteckningar om Sveriges jordbruksnärning i sextonde seklet* (1884), p. 65. On cottagers and other landless households in Sweden during later centuries, see e.g., C. Winberg, *Folkökning och proletarisering: Kring den sociala strukturomvandlingen på Sveriges landsbygd under den agrara revolutionen* (1973); P. Svensson, *De obesuttna i Stensjö by* (2022).

⁴ ‘En betydande andel av allmogen under decennierna kring 1600’; L.-O. Larsson, *Kolonisation och befolkningsutveckling i det svenska agrarsamhället 1500–1640* (1972), pp. 146–7, 175–8 (quote from p. 147). Larsson’s study did sadly not attract any followers among the Swedish members of *Nordiska ödegårdsprojektet*, researchers who otherwise closely followed the methods he had developed; for an overview, see S. Gissel (ed.), *Desertion and land colonization in the Nordic countries c. 1300–1600: Comparative report from the Scandinavian research project on deserted farms and villages*

(1981). Among local studies of cottagers in early modern Sweden are B. Harnesk, ‘Rika bönder och fattiga: Hälsingland på 1500-talet’, *Scandia* 66, 2 (2000), p. 204; M. Berglund, *Gårdar och folk i norr: Bebyggelse, befolkning och jordbruk i Norrbotten under 1500-talet* (2006), pp. 54–7.

⁵ J. Lindström, ‘Labouring poor in early modern Sweden’, *Scandinavian J. Hist.* 44, 4 (2019), pp. 404–20.

⁶ Works on protoindustry and proletarianization in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rural Sweden include Winberg, *Folkökning*; C.-J. Gadd, *Järn och potatis: Jordbruk, teknik och social omvandling i Skaraborgs län 1750–1860* (1983); C. Ahlberger, *Vävarfolket: Hemindustrin i Mark 1790–1850* (1988).

⁷ Lindström, ‘Labouring poor’, p. 420; see also R. Miettinen & J. Lindström, ‘Survival in a hostile agrarian regime: Non-landed households in seventeenth-century Sweden and Finland’, in Fertig, Paping & French (eds.), *Landless households*.

Norway, where a system of cottagers (*husmenn*) was likewise important in the seventeenth century.⁸ The rich research in cottagers during later centuries has thus (at least for the Nordic countries) resulted in early modern cottagers being seen through the lens of what they would eventually become.

The aim of the present article is to instead study the function of cottagers for the local economy and society in sixteenth-century Sweden, that is, in a context that can safely be assumed to be unconnected to the proletarianization of the agrarian revolution. This is done by employing the concept of a 'cottage economy', previously used by Leigh Shaw-Taylor in a study of cottagers in Northamptonshire in England during the early eighteenth century, before the land enclosures there.⁹ The term originates in English nineteenth-century author William Cobbett, who used it in a household manual concerning 'matters deemed useful in the conducting of the affairs of a labourer's family'.¹⁰ For Cobbett, the term denoted the proper 'management', or everyday running of a cottage. While Shaw-Taylor does not strictly define the concept, it is here used to get at a holistic picture of cottagers' economic relations with their neighbours and landlords, as well as of the economic activities that took place at the cottage itself. In this way, it explores the 'embeddedness' of landless households in their local community and the mutual dependence posited by Bois and others, seeking to understand *how* cottagers related to the rural society in which they were living.¹¹ Guiding questions for the study are how cottagers in sixteenth-century Sweden made a living, how they got access to the land and resources they needed, and what they contributed to their local economy in the form of land rents, produce, and labour. Other factors, such as the forms of labour arrangements that cottagers entered, variations in remuneration practices over time, or the networks through which cottagers socialized with their village neighbours, are important aspects that have had to be left out of the study: The fragmentary nature of the sources surviving from the sixteenth century in Sweden means that many such aspects, no matter how central it would have been for our understanding of its cottage economy, unfortunately cannot be studied. This is especially lamentable concerning questions of age and gender, not least relating to labour division within the cottager households, as well as differences between cottager households headed by women and men.¹² The lapidary nature of the sixteenth-century source material (taxation lists, cadastres, tithe registers) evades every attempt to get 'within' the household, within the walls of the cottage. Thus, when the term

⁸ Hans Eyvind Næss, 'The crofter as a social group in south-western Norway: The early phase 1590–1660', in H. Sandvik, K. Telste & G. Thorvaldsen (eds), *Pathways of the past: Essays in honour of Sølvi Sogner on her 70th anniversary* (2002); H. H. Kongsrud, 'Hva er en husmann? Husmannsbegrepet og 1600-tallet', *Historisk tidsskrift* 86, 1 (2007), pp. 93–106.

⁹ L. Shaw-Taylor, 'The nature and scale of the cottage economy', *Cambridge working papers in economic and social history* (2008).

¹⁰ W. Cobbett, *Cottage economy; containing information relative to the brewing of beer, making of bread, keeping of cows, pigs, bees, ewes, goats, poultry and*

rabbits, and relative to other matters deemed useful in the conducting of the affairs of a labourer's family (2009 [1821–2]), p. 1.

¹¹ Cf., Christine Fertig, 'Cottages, barns and bake houses: Landless rural households in north-western Germany in the eighteenth century', in Fertig, Paping & French (eds), *Landless households*; Bois, *The crisis*, pp. 183–5.

¹² C. Uppenberg & M. Nilsson, 'The crofter is a woman: Gender division of labour in rural semi-landless households, Sweden 1800–1900', *Lund papers in economic history* 253 (2023).

'cottager' is used below, it is often to be understood as shorthand for all the members of the cottager household.

What, then, was a cottager? Fertig, Paping and French defined their object of study, the 'landless', as those who had little control over land.¹³ Bois and Bennett differed the smallholder from the 'husbandman' by the amount of land held, and Lindström likewise did a study of the share of households who were reported as not holding any arable land at all.¹⁴ He further discussed the terminology, noting that the English term 'the labouring poor' often denotes those households that could also be described as 'unlanded' (Sw. *obesutten*) or 'landless', but which in the sources instead would have been described by social labels such as 'crofter' or 'lodger'. (In England, and presumably also elsewhere, these households would not necessarily have been completely without land, as even 'the meanest cottager' could have access to a small plot in which vegetables would be grown).¹⁵ Of course, no one in early modern Sweden (or Germany, or France) was ever in their time called a 'crofter', and translation issues arise not only because social classifications have changed meaning over time, but also because the same individual or the same holding could be called different things in different sources. The approach taken in this study is to take those households that were called *husmän* in the sources, and to investigate what this social label meant in terms of their possessions, and how they made a living. The term has been translated into 'cottager'; this does not necessarily mean that they were equivalent to 'cottagers' in all other settings, nor that they may not be compared to say what historians of the nineteenth century have called 'crofters' or 'lodgers'. What matters is that 'cottagers' filled an important socio-economic niche in premodern Europe: only further studies may tell how this niche changed over time or varied between localities and societies.¹⁶

Husman was the by far most common word to denote a cottager in sixteenth-century Sweden, used in central and northern Sweden as well as in Finland and by the cameral scribes in Stockholm.¹⁷ It literally meant 'house-man', denoting a man who possessed only a house and not a whole farm. It was however not the only term in use. As the term was the social label of a man, words such as 'cottage-people' (*husfolk*) or 'cottage-woman' (*huskona*) were sometimes used instead. Although the latter term indicates a household headed by a single woman, either unmarried or widowed, we cannot know if a *husman* encountered in the sources was a married man: The term for the household head stood for the whole household, just as the word *bonde* did for landed peasants. In addition to *husman*, other (synonymous) terms were used in various dialects. *Gästman* was used in in western Uppland, as well as in adjacent parts of Södermanland; it denoted a 'guest' in the sense of someone who rented a

¹³ Fertig *et al.*, 'Introduction', pp. 1–2.

¹⁴ Bois, *The crisis*, p. 183; Lindström, 'Labouring poor', pp. 403, 408.

¹⁵ C. Muldrew, *Food, energy, and the creation of industriousness: Work and material culture in agrarian England, 1550–1780* (2011), pp. 106–11. Cottager vegetable gardens in eighteenth-century Sweden are mentioned in passing by Karin Hallgren, *En kåhläppa ej at räkna: Köksväxtodlingen i 1700-talets jordbrukssystem* (2016), pp. 110–4, whose focus however is on the landed

peasantry.

¹⁶ M. Andersson, 'How soldiers' women built early modern states: Stockholm, 1544–1635', in K. Dørum, M. Hallenberg & K. Katjala (eds), *Bringing the people back in: State building from below in the Nordic countries c.1500–1800* (2021).

¹⁷ Although the study builds on local sixteenth-century taxation records, as these records were rewritten in Stockholm during the audit, the terminology was often changed into the standard *husman*.

house.¹⁸ In south-eastern Småland, *hemolsman* was used instead, connected to a word *hemol* that probably denoted a small landholding.¹⁹ The most common word in use was however *innisman*, which was the term preferred in most of southern Sweden.²⁰ It came from a long lost word *inne* meaning 'house', and was thus conceptually equivalent to *husman*. As this meaning was probably not understood anymore by the sixteenth century, the word was often corrupted into *enhusman*, *eningsman*, *inhusman*, *inhysman*, *inhysesman*, etc., from which then came the later Swedish term for a lodger. In this study, these terms have however all been included and treated synonymously, and they have consequently all been translated to English 'cottage'.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. The three following sections present the empirical studies, each focused on one central aspect of the cottage economy. The first one deals with the social and economic relations between cottagers and landlords, mainly using cadastres to study land rent payments and corresponding land-use rights. It is found that most cottager households in sixteenth-century Sweden only paid a small annual sum of money as land rent, and that they in return received possession of a cottage, with some defined meadow land, and land-use rights to local commons. The next section deals with the question of what types of possessions that cottagers owned, and what agricultural activities that they engaged in at the cottage. It shows that most cottagers engaged in animal husbandry, especially by owning 1–2 cows, while grain production remained negligible. It is further also found that cottagers owned very few material objects, and that these often were described as cheap and worn. The third empirical section uses records of extraordinary taxations and corvée labour demanded by the Crown in order to study what forms of secondary production and types of work cottagers engaged in. It stresses the importance of access to common woodlands, as many cottagers produced tar, charcoal, or wooden everyday objects for sale. It further also shows that many cottager households engaged in wage work (presumably for their village neighbours), especially in agriculture, spinning, construction, and transportation. In the concluding section of the article, these results are summed up into a model of how the cottage economy functioned in sixteenth-century Sweden. The main results presented here show how cottagers made a living, what they needed to sustain a household, and what they contributed to their local society. The main conclusion of the article, which is in line with the general research assumptions and hence deepens our understanding of the role of cottagers in premodern Europe, is that wage work was not only central to the survival of most cottager households, but that the labour reserve they provided was the most important function which cottagers provided to their local economy in early modern Sweden.²¹

¹⁸ Used in Fjärdhundraland, in western Attundaland, on Södertörn, and in Åker and Selebo. C. J. Schlyter, *Glossarium ad Corpus iuris Sueo-Gotorum antiquae* (1877), s.v. 'gæster' 3, 'gæstman' 2.

¹⁹ Used in Möre, Sevede, Aspeland, Stranda, Handbörd, Konga, Uppvidinge and in Öland. Söderwall s.v. 'hemol'. Many *hemol* are mentioned in medieval charters from the region, see e.g., O. Ferm, S. Rahmqvist & L. Thor, *Det medeltida Sverige* 4, 1: Möre (1987). In south-western Småland (Finnveden, Allbo), cottagers

were not denoted by a certain label, but paid a special fee called *husbondehåll*, otherwise known only from adjacent Danish provinces.

²⁰ It dominated in Östergötland and Västergötland and was used in northern Småland. K. F. Söderwall, *Ordbok öfver svenska medeltids-språket* (1884–1973), s.v. 'innis man'.

²¹ E.g., Bois, *The crisis*, pp. 183–85; Bennett, *A medieval life*, pp. 94–7; Fertig *et al.*, 'Introduction', p. 6; Lindström, 'Labouring poor'.

I

During later centuries, that is in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sweden, the rights and obligations of those crofters that held some arable land had become well-defined in law, and were often described in detail in written contracts.²² Obligations then often included a large number of days of corvée labour at the landlord's manor or farm, in addition to substantial land rents to be paid in both money and kind. For lodgers and other rural labourers, the situation was however much less regulated, and in the sixteenth century the social position of all cottagers was still legally undefined, left to be determined by local custom. In addition, most if not all cottagers' contracts were oral agreements, which means that there is no surviving archival documentation that can be used to study what they contained. Instead, in what follows we have to rely solely on cottages that (beginning in the 1530s) were entered into the cadastral records of the Crown.²³ These records however only include one side of the agreement, the rent the cottager household had to pay, with no mention of what rights it received in return (except for the possession of the cottage itself, usually called *stuga* in the cadastres, which means 'a little house').

Only a small number of cottages in Sweden were ever entered into the Crown's cadastres, which raises a concern that those recorded were in some sense atypical. It is true that most cottagers on crown land apparently did not pay any rents to the Crown, but that does not mean that most cottagers did not pay any land rent. A majority of the cottages entered into the cadastres of the Crown had during the Middle Ages belonged to the church (either a local parish church, to a cathedral, or to a monastery), which became a possession of the Crown following the Reformation.²⁴ Others previously belonged to noblemen, who sold them to the King.²⁵ The Crown (and the King) then took possession of the cottage (which always was sold or confiscated as part of a much larger piece of land, a village or several farms) including the land rents previously paid.²⁶ The land tenure of the cottages entered into the cadastres of the Crown thus reflect the customs prevalent on land belonging to the nobility or (in the pre-Reformation period) to the various institutions of the church. However, the many cottages

²² C. Uppenberg & M. Olsson, 'Under the landlord's thumb. Municipalities and local elites in Sweden 1862–1900', *Social History* 47, 3 (2022), pp. 265–89; C. Uppenberg, 'Contracted coercion: Land, labour and gender in the Swedish crofter institution', *Scandinavian J. Hist.* 48, 5 (2023), pp. 593–614.

²³ On these, see e.g., J. A. Almquist, *Den civila lokal-förvaltningen i Sverige 1523–1630: Med särskild hänsyn till den kamerala indelningen*, vol. I (1917), pp. 1–10.

²⁴ Examples include a cottage located by the church in Gryt parish in Södermanland, which previously had belonged to Vadstena monastery; several cottages located by churches in parishes in Södermanland which are listed as former church property, and hence probably previously had belonged to the parish church; a cottage located in Käverne parish in Västmanland, which previously had belonged to the

bishop of Uppsala.

²⁵ Examples include a cottage in Boglösa parish in Uppland, which was sold to the King in 1533 by the noble woman Anna Hogenskild together with several villages.

²⁶ The only example which can be traced back into the medieval cadastres of its previous owner is the above-mentioned cottage in Gryt, which was called Rosendal when it first appears in the cadastre of Vadstena monastery in 1457. It is further mentioned in the following cadastres in 1466, 1473, and 1502, listed with the same land rent that it later paid to the Crown after the Reformation. A. Larsson, *Vadstena klostres två äldsta jordeböcker med inledning och kommentar* (1977); C. Silfverstolpe, *Vadstena klostres jordebok 1500 jemte tillägg ur klostrets äldre jordeböcker* (1897).

that never entered the Crown's cadastres may have been left out because they had agreements not with the landlord, but only with his tenants, or with peasant households which owned their own land. If these cottagers, who presumably had made a deal with their landholding neighbours instead of with an absent landlord, had a similar kind of agreement and paid the same types of land rent is impossible to say.

In contrast, in later centuries, cottagers in sixteenth-century Sweden usually only paid a small sum of money as their yearly rent. For most, the amount was 4 *öre*, rising to 8 *öre* for cottages that were entered into the accounts towards the end of the century.²⁷ In addition, a few cottagers also paid a part of their yearly rent in kind. Sixteen cottages, which all previously had belonged to Vadstena monastery but became the king's property in 1552, paid rent in iron, as they were located in an iron-mining district.²⁸ One cottage, located on a small island out in the Baltic Sea southwest of Stockholm, paid parts of its rent in herring from 1584 onwards.²⁹ And another cottage, built not in a village but on a forest common in 1595, paid its yearly rent in bast instead of money.³⁰ Although it thus seems as if there was some adjustments to the rent depending on where the cottage was located, and presumably what the cottager household was making its living from, these few cases rather underline that by custom a cottager's land rent was simple, consisting only of a monetary payment, thus starkly contrasting to the complex sets of dues known from later centuries.

Corvée labour was also mostly absent from the rent payments. Not until 1594–95 did it become included for a number of cottages that were then entered into the crown's cadastres, and then only at one or a maximum of two days *a year*.³¹ Although the Crown was keen on increasing the corvée labour burden on the country's farmers during the sixteenth century, there is no indication that it yet had become expected as a form of rent payment from cottagers.³² Yet, as we will soon see, the Crown was however instead demanding corvée labour from cottagers as a form of taxation, disregarding if the cottagers were living on crown land or not. Presumably this made it less important for the crown officials to enter a fixed number of corvée labour days into the royal cadastres.

As previously mentioned, the cadastres almost never mention what rights cottagers received in return for their rent payments. A few exceptions may however be cited. 'Sows nothing, no meadow, little grazing and firewood' says a cadastre in 1559 about a cottage that had previously belonged to the bishop of Linköping.³³ An entry about another cottage, this time from 1599, mentions that it was 'a cottager building [*husmansbygge*] without field and meadow', while the cottage Myrtorp in 1596 was listed as 'a soldier's cottage [*knektstuva*] with a small plot [*täppa*]'.³⁴

²⁷ In comparison, one barrel of grain cost about 25–30 *öre* in the 1530s; R. Edvinsson *et al.*, *History of prices and wages in medieval Sweden* (2023), vol. II, p. 110. Several cottages were entered in cadastres in Södermanland in 1594 with this higher land rent, see e.g., Södermanlands handlingar 1596:2, fos. 84r–85v, Swedish national archives [hereafter RA].

²⁸ Södermanlands handlingar 1556:14B, fo. 109r, RA.

²⁹ Södermanlands handlingar 1589:13, fo. 224v, RA.

³⁰ Södermanlands handlingar 1599:3, fo. 30r, RA.

³¹ Södermanlands handlingar 1596:11, fo. 49r, RA.

³² F. Dovring, *De stående skatterna på jord 1400–1600* (1951).

³³ Regarding the cottage Saltpannan; Östergötlands handlingar 1559:2, fo. 112v, RA. That Saltpannan was a cottage is mentioned in the cadastres only from the late 1570s and through the 1590s, e.g., Östergötlands handlingar 1579:1, fo. 19r, RA.

³⁴ Regarding the cottage Vitebro: Södermanlands handlingar 1599:11, fo. 14r, RA; Södermanlands handlingar 1596:2, fo. 84r, RA.

From these scattered examples we thus learn that a cottage in sixteenth-century Sweden could have some defined arable land and some defined meadows, although cottagers could also lack these altogether (as in the first two examples). Common rights are seldom mentioned (and were presumably defined by local custom), but for the cottager who had previously belonged to the bishop, the right to take firewood and to graze his animals in the local forest were explicitly mentioned. The right to take bast from the common forest must also be assumed for the previously mentioned case where bast made up the annual rent, and we can be certain that the cottager who paid herring in rent had rights to fish in the waters around the small island where his cottage was located. To conclude then, a cottager in sixteenth-century Sweden, in return for his annual monetary rent payment of 4 öre, would receive not only a house (a cottage) but in addition also sometimes a defined (small) plot of land, as well as a share in the common land, forest or water of the village or parish.

II

The common rights and the (small) plots of land that belonged to cottagers indicate that an important part of the cottage economy was its small-scale agriculture. This can best be studied through surviving records from the two major wealth taxations that were carried out in sixteenth-century Sweden, the first one in 1571 and the second in 1599. At these occasions, animals, precious metals such as silver and copper, and seed corn (in 1599 only) were declared by all households and subsequently valued.³⁵ Declarations of possessions were made under oath, and the trustworthiness of the sources is usually described as high in previous research, although attempts of tax evasion were probably made; more so perhaps regarding money or silver than cows and horses, as the former would have been easier to hide.³⁶ In order to test their reliability, the taxation lists are therefore below compared to post-mortem inventories (*danaarv*), a comparison which indicates their overall usability for our purposes.

From the wealth taxation lists a total number of 818 sets of possessions of cottager households have been gathered.³⁷ Figure 1 shows the share of cottager households in which a type of animal or other possession was present. All in all, only 2.5 per cent of the cottager households lacked animals altogether, thus further underlining the importance of animal husbandry for the cottage economy. This was however truly small-scale agriculture, as 21 per cent of cottager households only owned one animal, and a further 20 per cent only two. Although important for the cottage economy, animal husbandry on its own was not enough for household survival.

³⁵ The standard work on the 1571 wealth taxation remains Hans Forssell, *Sverige 1571: Försök till en administrativ-statistisk beskrifning öfver det egentliga Sverige, utan Finland och Estland* (2 vols, 1872–1883).

³⁶ See e.g., L. A. Palm, *Folkmängden i Sveriges socknar och kommuner 1571–1997: Med särskild hänsyn till perioden 1571–1751* (2000).

³⁷ Älvsborgs lösen 1571, RA; the 1599 wealth taxation lists are part of the collection *Landskapshandlingar*,

RA. The sample for 1599 was gathered first, prioritizing parish lists which contain several cottagers (if only one cottager was listed in a parish, it may be so that poorer cottagers managed to evade taxation). As this resulted in data for 409 households, most living in eastern and southern Sweden, data was subsequently collected for an equal number of households from the 1571 taxation lists from the same geographical region.

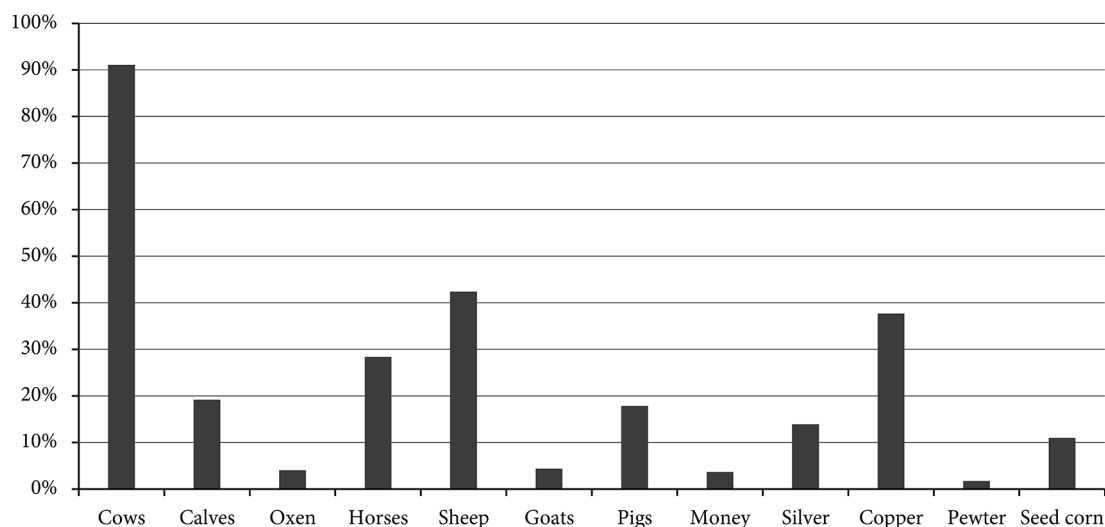


FIGURE 1. Presence of various types of animals and other possessions in cottager households according to wealth taxation lists in 1571 and 1599 (N = 818).

Sources: Älvsborgs lösen 1571, RA; Landskapshandlingar, RA.

A cottager household's most important possession was the cow: over 90 per cent of cottagers owned at least one cow, compared to only some 40 per cent owning sheep, which was the next most common animal.³⁸ As can be seen in Figure 2, owning two cows was also quite common. This may be compared to the fact that an average household in Sweden owned more than four cows in 1571.³⁹ The low number of households which reared calves however indicate that cottager households were not self-sustaining concerning cattle, suggesting that cottagers bought rather than bred their animals, and also that they rather kept cows for their dairy products than for fattening and meat production.⁴⁰

Oxen, the main traction animal in southern Sweden, were absent from most cottager households, a reflection of them holding only very little arable land.⁴¹ And although the majority of the wealth taxation records comes from eastern Sweden, where the horse was the main traction animal in agriculture, the fact that more than every fourth cottager household owned a horse still does not indicate their use in agricultural labour.⁴² As is shown below,

³⁸ These figures may be compared to early eighteenth-century England, where over 50% of cottagers were found to own cows, about 25% sheep or pigs, and about 12% horses, Shaw-Taylor, 'The nature and scale', p. 6. A larger share of cottagers in sixteenth-century Sweden were thus in possession of all these kinds of animals.

³⁹ Calculated from Forssell, *Sverige 1571*, II, pp. 348–49.

⁴⁰ The same was the in case in early eighteenth-century

England; Shaw-Taylor, 'The nature and scale', p. 13. On average, Swedish households held 2.6 calves and young cattle in 1571, that is a cow-to-calf ratio of 0.6, compared to 0.2 for cottagers. Numbers calculated from Forssell, *Sverige 1571*, 2, pp. 348–9.

⁴¹ J. Myrdal, *Det svenska jordbrukets historia: Jordbruket under feodalismen, 1000–1700* (1999), p. 249.

⁴² J. Myrdal & J. Söderberg, *Kontinuitetens dynamik: Agrar ekonomi i 1500-talets Sverige* (1991), pp. 81–2.

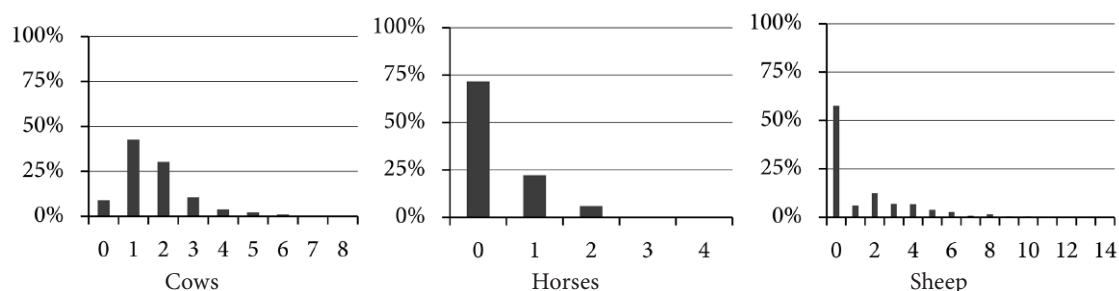


FIGURE 2. Distribution of cows, horses, and sheep in cottager households according to wealth taxation lists in 1571 and 1599 (N = 818).

Sources: Älvsborgs lösen 1571, RA; Landskapshandlingar, RA.

almost no cottager would have held enough arable land to make the investment into a horse necessary. Instead, the fact that horses were rather common in cottager households points to them being used for transport labour, as we will see in the following section.⁴³

Only about 4 per cent of cottager households declared that they owned any money. Although there is a chance that some may have tried to avoid paying taxes for their money (which however would be somewhat difficult, given that the tax then was to be paid in money), this should equally have affected the number of households declaring the possession of silver, which was about 15 per cent. In addition, those that owned some silver mostly owned as little as the equivalent of one silver spoon (which was the main object of prestige among the sixteenth-century peasantry), which was only about a fourth of the silver owned by an average household.⁴⁴ It may thus still be concluded that most cottager households had nothing but a very small savings fund that could be used to get through times of hardship.

That only 40 per cent of cottager households reported owning any copper might also be too low a figure. Copper was used for everyday food-making objects such as kettles or pans, and one sixteenth-century writer argued that these were objects of necessity in Sweden, as the cold winters made pottery vessels unusable.⁴⁵ The amount reported by those households that owned any copper, one pound, would also roughly have corresponded to one pan; again, an average Swedish household would have owned almost four times that amount.⁴⁶

Finally, we come to seed corn, which can only be analysed through the 1599 tax lists, as it was excluded from taxation in 1571. Only 11 per cent of cottager households declared any seed corn at all, meaning that most engaged in no arable agriculture whatsoever, and thus would have been only animal-rearing. Of those cottagers who did declare the possession of some seed corn (and who thus must have held at least some plot of arable land in connection

⁴³ An average household held 0.7 oxen and 1.3 horses in 1571, as compared to the cottagers' 0.1 oxen and 0.4 horses. Most cottagers included in the sample are however from central and eastern Sweden, where horses still dominated, see Myrdal & Söderberg, *Kontinuitetens dynamik*, p. 84. Numbers calculated from Forssell, *Sverige 1571*, 2, pp. 348–9.

⁴⁴ Myrdal & Söderberg, *Kontinuitetens dynamik*, pp. 94–5; Harnesk, 'Rika bönder', pp. 191–213. Calculated from Forssell, *Sverige 1571*, 2, pp. 348–9.

⁴⁵ Olaus Magnus, *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (Romæ, 1558).

⁴⁶ Calculated from Forssell, *Sverige 1571*, 2, pp. 348–9.

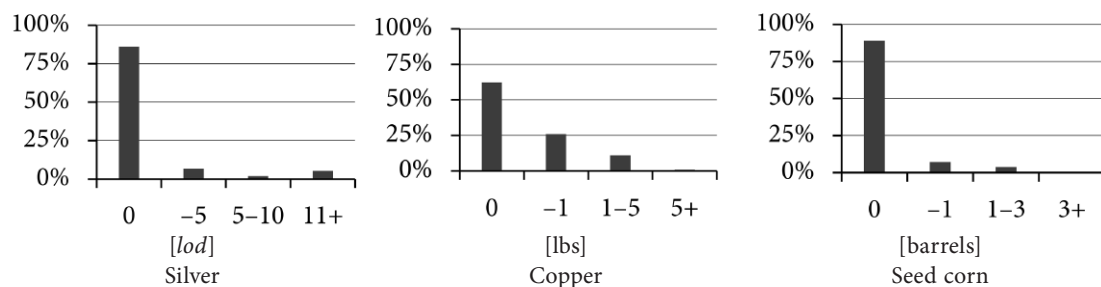


FIGURE 3. Distribution of silver, copper, and seed corn in cottager households according to wealth taxation lists in 1571 and 1599 (N = 818; N = 409 for seed corn).

Sources: Älvsborgs lösen 1571, RA; Landskapshandlingar, RA.

to their cottage), perhaps as little as 2 per cent declared enough to presumably have been self-sustaining. This can further be corroborated by some evidence from grain tithe records (which only rarely list cottagers, and of course only include those which had had a grain harvest). A few cottages can be shown to have sown between one eighth and one half of a barrel in 1578, while cottagers' harvests amounted to between one and two and a half barrels in the 1590s.⁴⁷ In comparison, the average harvest in 1576 (a year with a 'normal' harvest) was 16 barrels, and even in 1571, which was one of the worst harvest years of the century, the average household could reap close to 11 barrels.⁴⁸ Further, for the seventeenth century, the annual individual consumption has been calculated to be 2.5–3 barrels.⁴⁹ Even those cottagers that held some arable land would thus in most cases have had to supplement their own harvest with purchased grain.

By using the valuations used in the 1599 taxation scheme, the value share of the different kinds of possessions can be calculated.⁵⁰ Although there was much individual variation – 146 households had their entire wealth made up by cows, while two households owned only silver, to mention the extremes – the overall picture shown in Figure 4 still gives a good overview of the average cottager household. Its wealth was completely dominated by animals, which made up as much as 91 per cent of the total value of the household possessions. Cows alone made up 56 per cent of cottager wealth, meaning that cottagers had invested more than half of what they owned into their one or two cows. In comparison, seed corn made up only 4 per cent of the household value, again underlining the relative unimportance of arable agriculture. Further, note the small shares of silver (3 per cent of the total value) and copper (only 2 per cent,

⁴⁷ Södermanlands handlingar 1578:1, RA; Södermanlands handlingar 1592:4, 1594:19, RA.

⁴⁸ Myrdal & Söderberg, *Kontinuitetens dynamik*, p. 114; on harvests; calculations from Forssell, *Sverige 1571*, 2, pp. 348–9.

⁴⁹ M. Morell, *Studier i den svenska livsmedelskonsumtionens historia: Hospitalshjonens livsmedelskonsumtion 1621–1872* (1987), pp. 195–216 (based on the consumption of seventeenth-century hospital inmates).

⁵⁰ The values used were as follows: 1 barrel of seed corn 2 öre; 1 fullgrown [gill] oxen 3.75 öre; 1 young [kävling] oxen 2.5 öre; 1 cow, bull, or male calf 2 öre; 1 heifer 1.25 öre; 1 buck 0.5 öre; 1 young buck or female goat 0.33 öre; 1 old sheep 0.33 öre; 1 young sheep 0.17 öre; 1 old pig 0.5 öre; 1 young pig 0.33 öre; 1 horse 5 öre; 1 mare 2 öre; pot copper 1.625 öre per pound; cauldron copper 1.21 öre per pound; silver 0.33 öre per lod; 2% of all money.

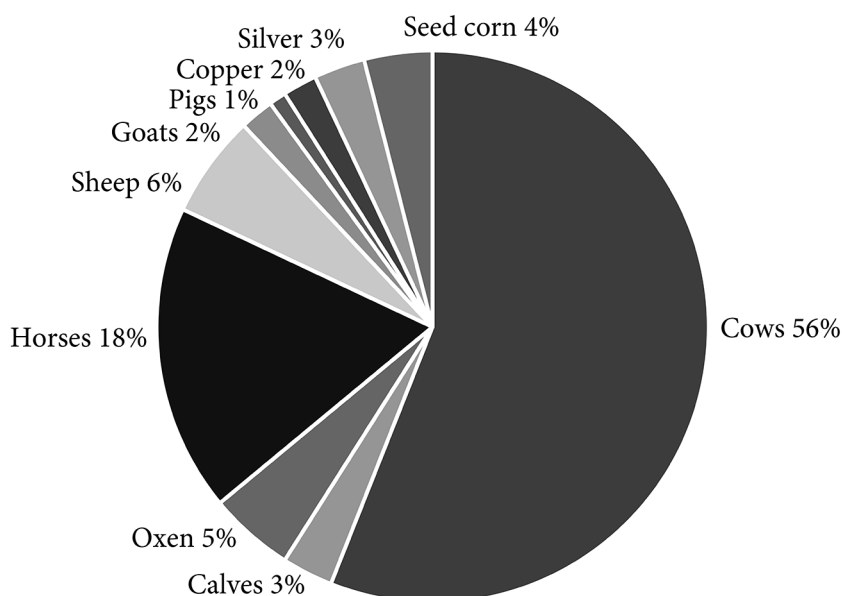


FIGURE 4. Value shares of different kinds of possessions in all cottager households according to the 1599 wealth taxation (N = 409).

Sources: Landskapshandlingar, RA.

although this value is probably under-reported), again indicating that cottager households held only very small amounts of savings, and that they had invested in few items of comfort or luxury, such as copper cauldrons for cooking.

The wealth taxation records do of course not show all household possessions, as only some objects (animals, metals, grain, and money) were taxed. In order to test how well they represent total household wealth they may be compared with a very small set of surviving cottager post-mortem inventories (*danaarv*) from the sixteenth century. According to Swedish legislation, if a person died without any known heirs the king inherited all the property; and sometimes post-mortem inventories were thus preserved in the general crown accounts.⁵¹ Four examples of such cottager inventories are shown in Table 1. Although these inventories are more complete than the wealth taxation records, they must still be treated with caution, as objects deemed worthless for the King (or rather, for use at the royal manors) were probably left out; for example, according to the inventories, none of these four cottagers left any clothes, although there are other post-mortem inventories where even the clothes of the deceased were taken by the King's officials and given to his agricultural labourers.⁵² Either the clothes of these cottagers were deemed too worn-out to have any reuse value, or else it seemed more decent in these cases to let them keep their clothes on to be buried in;

⁵¹ On these, see M. Andersson, *Från trälar till tjänstefolk: Legofolk i Sverige 1250–1600* (2023), ch. 4.

⁵² E.g., the clothes belonging to a plague-deceased

male servant were given to Finnish servants who had just arrived for work at Väsby manor in 1551, Västmanlands handlingar 1551:4, RA.

whatever the case, it shows that not all objects in the cottagers' possession would have been entered into the inventory lists.

Let us begin by looking at the categories of objects that are already known from the wealth taxation lists. We note that 3 out of 4 cottagers left little or no money at all, while the fourth had owned a substantial amount; the fact that he is said to have been 'old' invites speculation that he perhaps had sold his farm and retired as a cottager. As for copper, all households owned some, which indicates that this indeed is under-represented in the wealth taxation lists. Yet, they did not own more than one (old) cauldron or kettle each, or three old pots in one case. As for animals, 3 out of 4 owned a cow, while other animals were rare; Mats Olsson, who died in 1555, was apparently more well-off than most cottagers, and even seems to have been rearing his own animals.⁵³

Only one cottager is listed as having had any foodstuffs in store, which most likely means that this was left out of the other inventories. The quantities are however small and would not have sufficed for any longer period of time. Mats Olsson is also the only cottager who is said to have owned any object for processing food (a *läckiokar*, a mash vat for beer making).⁵⁴ Although wooden everyday objects are almost certain to have been deemed worthless and not listed, this indicates that many cottagers would not have been able to make their own beer, or perhaps bake their own bread, and instead would have had to buy or otherwise acquire this from their neighbours. Mats Olsson and another cottager is further listed as owning 1–2 sets of bedding, in both cases described as either 'old' or 'worn', which probably explains why the (presumed) bedding of the other two households was deemed worthless.

Mats Olsson was also the only cottager who, according to the post-mortem inventories, owned any instruments of production. As he lived on an island, his herring and seal nets would have enabled him to make a part of his living through fishing. He might even have been able to sell some of his catch, as peasants and fishermen from his area are known to have been selling fish in Stockholm.⁵⁵ He further also owned four tools made of iron: an axe, a drill, a wedge, and a scythe. While the scythe during the sixteenth century was still a tool used only for harvesting grass in this region, and not in the grain harvest, Mats' possession of this object further indicates that he held no arable land, but that he would have been able to access some meadow land in order to feed his seven animals over the winter.⁵⁶ The three other objects indicate that Mats also might have made a living as a woodworker or builder, either of houses or (since he lived on an island) of boats.

The wealth taxation lists thus give a good representation not only of the types of objects that they included, but also of the general wealth of the cottager households, as few would have been able to invest large sums in anything but animals. The few surviving post-mortem inventories however offer a more detailed picture of the cottagers' material possessions, highlighting the fact that many cottagers must have bought or otherwise acquired objects made of iron, copper,

⁵³ On Mats Olsson, see M. Andersson, 'A sixteenth-century Swedish cottager's inventory', blog post (2022) for 'Forms of labour: Gender, freedom and experience of work in the preindustrial economy', available at <https://formsoflabour.exeter.ac.uk/conference/a-sixteenth-century-swedish-cottagers-inventory/>

⁵⁴ Söderwall, *Ordbok*, s.v. *läckiokar.

⁵⁵ N. Friberg, *Stockholm i bottniska farvatten: Stockholms bottniska handelsfält under senmedeltiden och Gustav Vasa, en historisk-geografisk studie* (1983), pp. 273–81.

⁵⁶ Myrdal, *Det svenska jordbrukets*, p. 295.

TABLE 1. Cottagers' possessions according to post-mortem inventories (*danaarv*).

<i>Included in wealth taxation lists</i>				<i>Not included in wealth taxation lists</i>				
<i>Money</i>	<i>Copper</i>	<i>Animals</i>	<i>Grain</i>	<i>Foodstuff</i>	<i>Bedding</i>	<i>Fishing</i>	<i>Tools</i>	<i>Other</i>
'A cottager', died 1541								
1.6 marks	1 kettle	1 young cow 1 sow	6.5 barrels					
Nils Persson, 'a cottager', died 1545								
	1 old pot	1 cow		0.5 lb butter 1.5 lb pork				
Mats Olsson, 'a cottager', died 1555								
	3 old pots	1 cow 2 young calves 1 foal 3 sheep			1 worn blanket 1 worn pillow	2 seal-nets 2 old herring nets 1 worn net	1 old axe 1 scythe 1 iron wedge 1 drill	1 mash vat [for beer making]
'An old cottager', died 1566								
105 marks	1 kettle				3 old pillows, 2 old sheets, 1 old fur			

Sources: Upplands handlingar 1541:7, 1545:6, 1555:2, 1566:24, RA.

and perhaps even their bedding. At least one of the cases further also indicates through which types of work one of the cottagers made a living: this is the problem to which we now turn in the next section.

III

It is impossible to directly study the work cottagers did in their local villages, as day labourers on their neighbours' fields, or the craft production taking place within the cottage, as these activities generated no written sources that could survive to our days. Instead, I have gathered information from local crown accounts on what cottagers (especially around the middle of the sixteenth century) were forced to hand over to the Crown as 'help taxes' (extraordinary local taxations, often called *husmanspenningar* when concerning cottagers), and what work they were forced to do as 'help day labour' (extraordinary corvée labour at a nearby crown estate, called *husmandagsverken*). In what follows, I thus take as starting point the assumption that the Crown's local officials would usually not demand objects that cottagers would not be producing anyway, and that they would not employ cottagers in activities in which they would otherwise not be accustomed to work. The Crown accounts thus enable us to analyse a sector of the sixteenth-century labour market that would otherwise be completely inaccessible.

Let us begin with the extraordinary 'help taxes'. I have found more than 120 instances of these being levied from cottagers over the century, of which about 73 per cent were levied in money,

while the rest of 'the help' was levied in kind.⁵⁷ Most common were forest products: tar was evidently produced by cottager households in south-eastern Sweden, while firewood was delivered to the mines in northern Uppland by cottagers living in the area, and birch bark was probably to be used for covering newly constructed houses at a royal manor.⁵⁸ All this speaks in favour of cottager households having access to village woodlands and forest commons, and especially the tar burning shows that some cottagers were specializing in working with these kinds of products.

Other taxations targeted the cottagers' animal husbandry: butter was asked for from cottagers (both men and women) owning cows, while cottagers in southern Sweden, where mast-bearing woodlands abounded, had to give up some of their pork.⁵⁹ Cottagers who presumably made a living through fishing 'helped' the Crown with herring and cod.⁶⁰ But most common, and most revealing in terms of how cottagers could make a living, was that the Crown in one area year after year demanded to be helped by cottagers handing over large numbers of various types of wooden objects.⁶¹ Among these objects were everyday items used for food making or consumption, such as saucers (*fat*), plates (*tallrikar*), bowls (*skålar*), and serving dishes (*kålfat*), as well as quarts (*hankstop*), jugs (*pipkannor*), bottles (*flaskor*) for drinking. Further, cottager households also produced objects used in animal husbandry, such as milking stews (*mjölkstävor*), milk strainers (*silbunkar*), tubs (*såar*), pails (*ämbär*), troughs (*tråg*), and firkins (*läcktinor*). They also delivered reeds for weaving (*vävskeदार*), and wooden agricultural tools, such as hay harrows (*höharvar*) and pitch-forks (*grepar*).

Altogether, these objects both let us see what was missing in the post-mortem inventories above (everyday wooden objects of little value), and what was probably a local cottage industry, no doubt producing not only for their neighbours but possibly also for trade even with Stockholm.⁶² It should be noted that also this production relied on access to the village woodlands. Access to commons was thus as important to male cottagers burning tar or cutting firewood as it was to those cottager households in which presumably both men and women made wooden objects and went out in the forest to graze their pigs and cattle.

More common than monetary payments or help in kind was however that cottagers were called on by the Crown to perform corvée labour, of which I have found more than 200 instances in the accounts.⁶³ The labour was unpaid, although some cottagers received food at the servants' table for the duration of their work.⁶⁴ As the work was concentrated to some

⁵⁷ Landskapshandlingar, RA. An 'instance' is here to be understood as the tax being levied in one taxation district (one *härad*) in one year.

⁵⁸ E.g., Smålands handlingar 1559:9, RA; Upplands handlingar 1550:3, RA; Upplands handlingar 1555:9, RA.

⁵⁹ E.g., Upplands handlingar 1556:29, fo. 18v, RA; Smålands handlingar 1557:2, RA.

⁶⁰ E.g., Smålands handlingar 1559:2, RA.

⁶¹ E.g., Upplands handlingar 1547:6, 1553:32, RA.

⁶² Friberg, *Stockholm*, pp. 165–7 describes the import of such items from northern Finland to Stockholm in the sixteenth century; everyday wooden objects were even known as 'Finnish vessels' (*finnekärl*).

⁶³ Landskapshandlingar, RA. The total number

of days worked according to these is over 46,000, although the number in reality must have been much larger, as some accounts do not specify any number at all, and many others have been lost.

⁶⁴ Cottagers working at crown manors have been mentioned in previous research, which points out their lack of wages; U. Söderberg, *Gustav I:s arv och eget i Uppland. En godsmassas framväxt, organisation och förvaltning* (1977), p. 192; L. Hedberg, *Företagarfursten och framväxten av den starka staten: Hertig Karls resursexploatering i Närke 1581–1602* (1995), p. 274; C. Pihl, *Arbete: Skillnadsskapande och försörjning i 1500-talets Sverige* (2012), p. 58.

areas and some years, this means that the *corvée* labour of cottagers could be economically quite important for the Crown.⁶⁵

Cottagers were most commonly used by the Crown for agricultural work. They were called on to help during times of high work intensity, such as during the grain and grass harvests, but also to do regular maintenance work such as fencing. Cottagers were often put to threshing grain, and sometimes did tasks such as working the fallow, clearing the meadows, digging ditches, or taking manure out into the fields.

Some cottagers were employed in the Crown's forests, burning tar or making charcoal. Their *corvée* labour was further also used for cutting firewood, either to be used in the Crown's iron mines, or else in the castle brewery at Stockholm. Several times the accounts note that cottagers were working at lime kilns or for the brick makers, when their task mainly seems to have been to trample clay with their feet in order to prepare it for the burning. (Such a job, monotonous and probably not needing any particular previous experience, may of course not necessarily reflect what cottagers were normally paid to do, although it points to the possibility of them being employed to do all sorts of low-skilled work tasks.) Further, cottagers were commonly called on to build timber houses at the Crown's manors, including storage houses, stables, saunas, and cellars. Construction work included such tasks as preparing the site by digging, transporting timber, cutting turf for the roof, as well as carpentry work such as making doors. In a few instances, cottagers were also employed in the masonry work at the royal castles, although the accounts do not say what they specifically were doing.⁶⁶

While *corvée* labour in agriculture and construction was exclusively demanded of men, the chance survival of a list of wool and hemp put out for spinning at Örby manor in 1553 shows that also female cottagers could be subjected to 'help work' for the Crown.⁶⁷ While the main accounts of the manor just state that cloth 'was made in the cloth storage [*fatabur*] at Örby', the list shows this to be untrue, and instead highlights the importance of the work of male and female cottagers living and spinning in the surrounding area.⁶⁸ The list names 54 men and 33 women, yet it is uncertain whether the men would have spun themselves or if they rather received wool from the bailiff for their wives to do the spinning. Be that as it may; having received an amount of wool to spin did not excuse a man from also having to do a couple of weeks of agricultural *corvée* labour for the Crown at Örby, as in many case the same names show up in both sets of lists.

If we interpret the *corvée* labour tasks (including the spinning) that cottagers performed as 'help' for the Crown as things they would otherwise have been paid by others to do, we may conclude that cottagers in sixteenth-century Sweden normally made a living through agricultural work for their neighbours, by (timber) construction work, and by producing tar, firewood, and charcoal. In addition, female cottagers (married or not) would also have made a

⁶⁵ At Väsby manor in the 1550s, cottagers together performed over 2000 days' work each year, which may be compared to the fact that the annual workforce on Väsby manor numbered around 110 persons, who (assuming a work year of 250 days) would have worked 27,500 days. In addition, 4100 days of *corvée* labour were performed by peasants. Cottagers thus performed 6% of the work at Väsby manor this year. Västmanlands

handlingar 1556:2, RA.

⁶⁶ E.g., Västmanlands handlingar 1556:16A, fo. 22r, RA.

⁶⁷ The list is preserved among other documents for local use that were usually discarded after the accounts had been audited in Stockholm. Upplands handlingar 1553:9, RA.

⁶⁸ The quote is from a heading in the *fatbursräken-skap* in Västmanlands handlingar 1556:16A, fo. 28r, RA.

living from taking on spinning work. This thus supports the evidence gained from the ‘help’ taxations of cottagers, which additionally stressed the craft production of wooden objects. Once more, we find that cottager households must have gained access to village woodlands and forest commons; however, it is by now evident that this access was not solely given in return for their small land rent, but that it may also have been earned through work in agriculture, transportation, spinning, or construction.

IV

The findings concerning the cottage economy in sixteenth-century Sweden can be summarized into a schematic model, which is shown in Table 2. In the model we include those ways in which a cottager household could make a living, what it provided (in economic terms) to the local community, and what things were needed to establish and sustain a cottager household. Although it is only sometimes possible to say which of the factors listed were quantitatively more important (keeping cows would for example for most cottager households have been more important than grain production), the sources do unfortunately not generally allow us to more precisely estimate the relative importance of the various elements included in the model.

A cottager household in sixteenth-century Sweden made a living through a combination of between one and several of the factors listed in the central column. Although the particulars cannot be reconstructed for any specific household, we know from the taxation lists that most cottagers kept cows and can assume (based on the ‘help’ they provided for the Crown) that most cottagers probably also were engaged either in (wage) work for others or in craft production. In addition, fishing would have been important in some regions, with several examples found of cottagers living on islands in the Baltic Sea paying their land rent or taxes in fish. As for grain production, the sources instead indicate that only a few cottagers had any arable land, and that most of those who did, produced too little grain to sustain themselves. Arable farming was thus relatively unimportant for cottagers, who of course almost by definition were landless.

Moving on to the left column of the table, a cottager household first and foremost needed to be able to rent a cottage. Who built and maintained cottages remains unknown, as that is never mentioned in the sources, although it may be noted that cottages or houses were not listed among the possessions of the few cottagers for whom we have surviving post-mortem inventories. In addition, cottagers needed access to common land. This included fishing waters, but most importantly access either to the woodland of the village, or else to a larger forest common. The forest provided grazing during the summer months for the cottager household’s cows, but also all raw materials for the production of tar, charcoal, and firewood, as well as the bast fibres, birch bark, and wood for craft production. The precise nature of cottager households’ access to forest land during the sixteenth century remains unknown, but the taxation lists indicate that this access was essential for many cottagers struggling to make a living.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Some discussion of cottagers’ use rights of village woodlands in seventeenth-century Sweden is found in J. Starlander, *Tar and timber: Governing forest commons in seventeenth century Northern Finland* (2023), pp. 106–8. Cottagers were then often threatened with eviction if they (over-)used the commons, although Starlander stresses that this was during an era when the forest resources had become much more valuable (and scarce) than during the preceding century.

TABLE 2. A model of the cottage economy in sixteenth-century Sweden.

A cottager household		
<i>needs to</i>	<i>makes a living through</i>	<i>provides</i>
Rent a cottage (with some meadow, and possibly arable land)	Animal husbandry – 1–2 cows – Sheep, etc.	Work for others – Agricultural (harvesting, threshing, fencing etc.) – Construction – Transportation
Access common land – Forest: bast fibres, birch bark, tar, wood for craft production – Fishing waters – Grazing, haymaking	Craft production for (local) sale	Craft production of – Forest products (tar, charcoal, bast) – Household items – Yarn – Agricultural tools
Buy objects – Copper vessels – Iron tools – Animals – Grain, bedding, clothes	Remunerated work (in agriculture, construction, transportation) Fishing Grain production	Land rents (in money)

Some material objects that were found in the cottage however had to be bought, and cottagers thus had to gather the means to do so, even if their total number of possessions was low, and of little value. This included metal objects such as copper cauldrons and iron tools, which probably were found in most cottager households, even though the sources seem to indicate that they were rather rare. Bedding (and clothes) could perhaps be produced in the cottage, if a conjecture to other forms of textile work may be made from the list of women spinning for the Crown; yet, most cottagers had too few sheep to be self-subsistent in wool, meaning that also this had to be purchased. Animals, including cows, also most often had to be bought, as the taxation lists indicate that few cottagers reared young animals; there was thus a likely limit to how much grazing and meadows cottagers had access to. Yet, as cows made up *the* major part of cottagers' household wealth, buying a cow would have been the largest investment that a cottager had to make; it may even be said that setting up a cottager household was done through the purchase of a cow.⁷⁰ Grain finally also had to be acquired, as most cottagers had no arable fields of their own. This had either to be purchased (perhaps in processed form, as bread and beer), or else – and possibly more likely – earned as an in-kind wage.

This leads us over to the third column of Table 2, which lists what cottagers provided to their local community. Being a source of labour, which could be called on both during the

⁷⁰ This has previously been argued for England by Jane Whittle, 'Servants in rural England c.1450–1650: Hired work as a means of accumulating wealth and skills before marriage', in M. Ågren & A. L. Erickson (eds), *The marital economy in Scandinavia and Britain 1400–1900* (2005), pp. 97–104; Shaw-Taylor, 'The nature and scale', p. 11; and Andersson, *Från trålar*, p. 139, for Sweden.

boon works of the harvest and for more casual labour such as fencing, was undoubtedly the most important contribution that cottager households provided for their neighbours. This may very well have been the main reason why peasant households were interested in having cottages established on their village land in the first place. Although, as we saw initially, this is often generally stated in studies of medieval and early modern rural societies, it has less often been the topic of more in-depth analyses. Cottagers in sixteenth-century Sweden were further often also employed in construction work, presumably engaged to build and repair the houses of their neighbours, and the fact that horses (according to the taxation lists) were relatively common further suggest that many cottagers found work also in the transport sector, bringing iron and copper from the mining districts down to Uppsala, Västerås, Stockholm, and other important markets. In addition, cottager households contributed to the local economy through their craft production, which included both making wooden objects and spinning textile fibres. Yet, the minuscule value of those objects means that the overall effect of this production even on the local economy must have remained small.

Finally, cottagers also provided to the local economy by paying rents to their landlords. However, the cadastres indicate that most cottagers paid nothing, and that those who did have to spend money on land rents paid such small sums that it would not have been noticeable for the major landlords (be it bishops, members of the higher nobility, or even the King) if they had not. Allowing a cottage to be built on one's land was thus not (yet, as it would become during later centuries) a way to secure an additional income, which further speaks to the importance of cottagers' other contributions to the local economy. Wage work would both have been an important source of income for the cottager household, and the most important function the presence of cottagers had for their village neighbours. Even if the Swedish sources so far have failed to throw light on the specific forms of labour which cottagers engaged in, regarding such central questions as if contracts were short-term or long-term, if work was expected in return for grazing rights, or if cottagers were paid grain wages by their neighbours, it remains evident that any analysis of the organization of agricultural work in sixteenth-century Sweden, as of work in any other premodern society, must include the labour also of the (semi-)landless cottagers.