

Accounting for agriculture: The origins of the Farm Management Survey

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Abstract

The Farm Management Survey was a sample survey set up by the Ministry of Agriculture to assess the level of farm incomes in England and Wales. It continues to the present day as the Farm Business Survey. The article sets the original Survey in its intellectual context, pointing out that Britain was a relative latecomer to such survey work, and explains why civil servants in the 1920s and 1930s thought it important to have the data that it produced. It traces the initial difficulties encountered in establishing the Survey and follows its subsequent development through the Second World War and into the 1960s, pointing out that the surviving fieldbooks and summary forms constitute an invaluable source for agricultural historians of the wartime and post-war periods.

The Farm Management Survey (FMS) of England and Wales began in 1936 and has continued, now as the Farm Business Survey, to the present day. Its main purpose was, and remains, to assess the level of farm incomes, by collecting detailed data on outputs, inputs and capital investment from over 2000 farms. Initially, these data were gathered at a national level only but they now feed into the Farm Accountancy Data Network of the European Union, thereby contributing to the statistical evidence base relevant to the operation of the Common Agricultural Policy. Rather than being a function of a civil service unit directly attached to the Ministry, the survey has always been carried out by independent university- or college-based research staff working under contract to the responsible government department.¹ This article explores the origins of the FMS, focusing on what its origins tell us about the relationship between state organizations and key individuals interested in the agricultural industry in the mid-twentieth century. The FMS is used as a lens to discuss these relationships at a national level. Although the FMS itself is about the economics of practical farming², its genesis tells us more about the professionalization associated with an increasing bureaucracy and 'state' interest in all aspects of the economy. The reach of the state was growing in the 1930s. Through reconstructing the detailed processes of how the FMS began, the article outlines the form and nature of the burgeoning relationship between state and agriculture.

¹ In England, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, then the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and now the Department for the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs. All archival references in this paper, unless otherwise indicated, are to series in the

National Archives.

² For example, the authors are currently analysing the field books held at Exeter as part of an investigation into economic and technical change: ESRC Grant no. RES-062-23-1831

It is important to emphasize that this article does not deal with the potential of the FMS for exploring the history of agriculture in the twentieth century, although it may be helpful to historians considering the survey as a source of data. The original data collection field books, containing the names and addresses of co-operating farmers, remained in the university and college departments responsible for completing them, and only anonymized summary forms were sent to the Ministry. With the demise of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 2001 these summary forms were transferred to the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) at Reading, where they are now publicly available for consultation.³ The original field books are not yet available to the general public or researchers outside the relevant universities and colleges. Since the inception of the survey, the fieldbooks have from time to time been used by staff of the originating department for research purposes subject to the confidentiality clauses of successive contracts with the ministry. However, their survival even within the host universities or colleges is patchy. Those relating to Devon and Cornwall and parts of Somerset and Dorset are still held at the University of Exeter, whereas those that were held at the Universities of Manchester and Nottingham appear to have been destroyed. Some field books up to the 1960s survive at Reading and there is a large, but uncatalogued, collection at Aberystwyth.⁴ Some anonymized data from the Farm Business Survey from 1985 onwards are available on the University of Essex Economic and Social Data Service website.⁵ The field books contain detailed data for individual farms, year-by-year, on outputs of crops, animals, and animal products such as eggs and milk, crop, milk and egg yields, details of inputs such as fertilizers, feedingstuffs, seeds, labour, and machinery, and very often information on purchases of new machinery. Although, in theory, no farm was meant to stay in the survey for more than 15 years, in practice some remained for much longer, so that it is possible to trace the evolution of farm businesses for, in a few cases, as long as 40 years. It is also worth noting that the FMS should be distinguished from the wartime National Farm Survey (NFS) of England and Wales, which was a complete survey of all farms, whereas the FMS was always a sample survey, so that while farms in the FMS between 1941 and 1943 should appear in the NFS, the reverse is rarely true.⁶

As with many of the joint activities of the governmental and academic worlds, the story is partly one of policy, partly of people, and partly of contemporary ideas, and this article attempts to follow each of these. It is based to some extent on published sources, but mainly on archival material, mostly from the National Archives. Curiously, these do not seem to have been used before, either by Whetham in her study of the agricultural economics profession, by Winnifrith or Foreman in their studies of the operation and history of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, or by other writers who have discussed the FMS.⁷ Before

³ University of Reading, Museum of English Rural Life, MERL, SR FMS A/2. These forms cover the years 1936–87.

⁴ We are grateful to Professor David Colman (Manchester), Dr Paul Wilson (Nottingham), Dr Rod Vaughan (Reading), and Dr Tony O'Regan (Aberystwyth) for this information.

⁵ www.esds.ac.uk.

⁶ B. Short, C. Watkins, W. Foot and P. Kinsman, *The National Farm Survey, 1941–1943: state surveillance*

and the countryside in England and Wales in the Second World War (2000).

⁷ E. Whetham, *Agricultural economists in Britain, 1900–1940* (1981); J. Winnifrith, *The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food* (1962); S. Foreman, *Loaves and Fishes: an illustrated history of the MAFF, 1889–1989* (1989); J. Murdoch and N. Ward, 'Governmentality and territoriality: the statistical manufacture of Britain's "national farm"', *Political Geography* 16 (1997), pp. 307–24; H. C. Crowe, 'Farming at the margins:

examining this archive material in detail, however, it is important to set the beginning of the story in its intellectual context.

I

To some people – who would probably have included many of the farmers of the time – the idea that agriculture in the late nineteenth century might have an ‘intellectual context’ might appear risible. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the collection of farm income data from the 1930s onwards did not emerge, fully formed, from an intellectual vacuum. As historians of science have argued, by the mid-nineteenth century scientists were searching for objective knowledge, ‘knowledge unmarked by prejudice or skill, fantasy or judgment, wishing or striving’.⁸ Before long, similar ideas began to emerge in the social sciences and in public life. As Porter argued, ‘In public affairs, reliance on nothing more than seasoned judgement seems undemocratic ... Ideally, expertise should be mechanized and objectified’ and ‘The reverence of social scientists for statistics enshrined a vision of personal renunciation and impersonal authority in the name of higher truths and public values’.⁹ The initial institutional result in Britain of this epistemic change was seen in the formation of the London Statistical Society in 1834 (it became the Royal Statistical Society in 1887).¹⁰ In the nineteenth century the Society was concerned to further the collection of useful information about society in the form of facts and figures more than with statistical theories and methods, and the same appears to be true of the International Statistical Institute, founded in 1883 to bring together government statisticians from various countries. Major Craigie’s report to the Royal Statistical Society on the 1897 meeting of the International Statistical Institute at St Petersburg listed the topics under discussion as agricultural statistics, including crop statistics and forecasts, annual data on crop areas and livestock numbers, the distribution of landed property, and rural enquiries, in addition to population, judicial, commercial, labour and anthropometric statistics.¹¹ Theoretical mathematical work formed the minority of papers in the deliberations of British and international societies, although of course basic ideas of probability, estimation, variation, error,

Note 7 continued

upland agriculture in Westmorland, 1919–47’ (unpublished D.Phil thesis, University of Sussex, 2009); ead., ‘Profitable ploughing of the Uplands? The food production campaign in the First World War’ *AgHR* 55 (2007), pp. 205–28; R. Moore-Colyer, *Farming in Wales, 1936–2011: Seventy-five years of the Farm Business Survey* (2011). Dr Crowe’s work is based on the summary forms held at MERL. It is interesting to note that the online catalogue of the National Archives produces very few results for the search term ‘Farm Management Survey’ for the period 1930–50, when the FMS began. However, the typescript lists at Kew show a clear evolution of the archives of the FMS.

⁸ L. Daston and P. Galison, *Objectivity* (2007), p. 17.

⁹ T. M. Porter, *Trust in numbers: the pursuit of objectivity in science and public life* (1995), p. 7; id.,

‘Statistics and statistical methods’, in T. M. Porter and D. Ross (eds), *The Cambridge History of Science*, VII, *The modern social sciences* (2003), p. 250.

¹⁰ M. Shabas, ‘British economic theory from Locke to Marshall’, in Porter and Ross, *Cambridge History of Science*, VII, p. 179; D. A. Mackenzie, *Statistics in Britain, 1865–1930: the social construction of scientific knowledge* (1981), p. 8.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 8; A. Desrosières, ‘The part in relation to the whole: how to generalise? The prehistory of representative sampling’, in M. Bulmer, K. Bales and K. K. Sklar (eds), *The social survey in historical perspective, 1880–1940* (1991), p. 232; P. G. Craigie, ‘Notes on the subjects discussed at the St. Petersburg meeting of the International Statistical Institute’, *J. Royal Statistical Soc.* 60 (1897), pp. 735–88.

regression and so on were being formulated in the nineteenth century by Laplace, Gauss, Quetelet, Poisson and other pioneers of statistical theory. But basic ideas of social research using sampling methods appeared only from the end of the nineteenth century, and were still being debated in the International Statistical Institute in the late 1920s.¹² Unemployment, welfare and the cost of living became matters of state intervention and legislation in the first 30 years of the twentieth century and consequently became the concerns of government statistical bureaux.¹³ Thus the environment within which policy makers and administrators in general worked in the early twentieth century was increasingly objectified and quantified.

This trend was also apparent in the agricultural field. The agricultural counterpart to the International Statistical Institute was the International Institute of Agriculture, which had been established in Rome in 1905. After World War I it was associated with the League of Nations. By the 1930s, when 60 countries were affiliated to it, the Institute was producing a wide range of statistical, economic and scientific publications, and in 1930–31 it conducted a world agricultural census.¹⁴ However, despite the expansion of agricultural education from the 1890s and the increased availability of research funding from the Development Commission after 1910, in this period Britain was lagging behind continental Europe, especially Germany and the Netherlands, and the USA.¹⁵ This was certainly true as far as agricultural economics and farm management specifically were concerned. Although the UK had had an agricultural census – the June returns – since the 1860s, it collected physical data only, and thus provided no information on incomes or any other financial measure.¹⁶ Similarly, the 1908 estimates of agricultural output of Great Britain were also produced entirely in terms of acres, tons, and gallons etc.¹⁷ In contrast, the US Department of Agriculture began to collect data on the costs of growing wheat from the 1890s, and at about the same time simple cash expenditure and receipt systems were being applied to German farms. In Switzerland, Professor Ernst Laur, a leading figure in the Swiss Peasants' Union, published the first statement of Swiss farm accounts in 1901, and farm accounting societies were established in Denmark from 1910. The Cornell Agricultural Experiment Station surveyed farms in New York State in 1911 and developed the idea of 'efficiency factors' such as output per labour unit. The *Journal of Farm Economics*, first published in the USA in 1910, can be seen as a baseline for the profession of agricultural economics, and many of the British agricultural economists of the inter-war period spent some of their student years at Cornell or Iowa State universities.¹⁸

Britain was about 20 years behind. Among the pioneers of agricultural data collection in the UK were Sir Daniel Hall, who acted as adviser to Guinness for their hop farm (and in 1904 devised a full-cost accounting system), James Wyllie (of the West of Scotland Agricultural

¹² Porter, 'Statistics and statistical methods', pp. 238–42; Desrosières, 'The part in relation to the whole', pp. 217–18.

¹³ Desrosières, 'Managing the economy', in Porter and Ross (eds), *Cambridge History of Science*, VII, p. 559.

¹⁴ J. A. Venn, *The foundations of agricultural economics* (sec. edn, 1933), pp. 443–4.

¹⁵ P. Brassley, 'Agricultural Science and Education',

in E. J. T. Collins (ed.), *The agrarian history of England and Wales*, VII, 1850–1914, (two parts, 2000), i, pp. 613–22; Jan Bieleman, *Five centuries of farming: a short history of Dutch agriculture, 1500–2000* (2010), p. 161.

¹⁶ Foreman, *Loaves and Fishes*, p. 87.

¹⁷ Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, *The Agricultural Output of Great Britain*, Cd. 6277 (1912).

¹⁸ Whetham, *Agricultural economists*, pp. 25–9.

College), James Mackintosh (of Reading University), and A. G. Ruston, who began to collect cost accounting data in Leeds University.¹⁹ Hall later became the leading figure in the Development Commission, which funded the establishment of the Agricultural Economics Research Institute (AERI) at Oxford University. Its Director, C. S. Orwin, published *Farm accounts* in 1914, and *The determination of farming costs* in 1917. A revised edition of the latter work, under the title *Farming costs*, followed in 1921, and it is interesting to note that many of the references cited in the bibliography were American or German.²⁰ Notwithstanding these hesitant beginnings of data collection, some problems appeared to be enduring. The full-cost accounting method, as John King, the advisory economist at the Midland Agricultural College at Sutton Bonnington, pointed out, required some brave assumptions about the contribution of each enterprise to what we would now call fixed costs (e.g. items such as rent and labour). These complexities required considerable time, expertise and effort to analyse just one farm, even assuming that the farm kept records in the necessary detail.²¹ Thus the idea of collecting comparable data over the range of different farming types, enterprises and regions to be found in the UK was impracticable, unless some alternative method could be found.

The only realistic alternative was the survey method, which involved the collection of a more straightforward set of financial and physical data from a wider range of farms, subsequently analysed by type of farming and size of farm. This practice had been pioneered in the USA by Dr G. F. Warren and his co-workers at Cornell in the first decade of the twentieth century. As Sir Thomas Middleton, a former professor of agriculture, leading civil servant in the Ministry of Food, and at that time secretary to the Development Commission, who clearly had personal knowledge of the procedure, subsequently wrote:

[Warren] was personally very familiar with the types of farming followed in the Eastern States. Being himself unable to visit the hundreds of farmers whose business methods he wished to study, he drew up a careful schedule of questions, of a kind he knew farmers could answer; he then selected post-graduate students and sent them to collect and write down answers to his questions. Interesting information was thus collected which he interpreted with great skill.²²

By the 1920s Warren's approach was known and practised in the UK. Despite Orwin's expertise in cost accounting methods, the AERI over which he presided conducted a series of surveys, including Orr's studies of Oxfordshire (1916) and Berkshire (1918) and the four volumes on rural industries published in 1926 and 1927. There were also national land use and woodland surveys in the inter-war period, but these were hardly Warren-type surveys.²³ Warren's influence was, however, reflected in J. Pryse Howell's work on hill farming, which has been

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 23–4; P. Lamartine Yates, *Food production in western Europe: an economic survey of agriculture in six countries* (1940), pp. 391, 467.

²⁰ C. S. Orwin, *Farm Accounts* (1914); id., *The determination of farming costs* (1917); id., *Farming costs* (sec. edn, 1921).

²¹ J. King, *Cost accounting as applied to agriculture* (1927).

²² T 161/487 (Survey of Farm Management), Middleton to Barnes, 10 June 1931.

²³ The AERI studies are all listed in Agricultural Economics Research Institute, *Agricultural economics, 1913–1938: being the twenty-fifth annual report of the Agricultural Economics Research Institute* (1938); details of the land use and woodland surveys are in Short *et al.*, *National Farm Survey*, p. 22.

identified by Richard Moore-Colyer as ‘the first British example of a carefully-conducted farm management survey’.²⁴ John Maxton wrote a report on Warren’s methodology (of which the Ministry of Agriculture was aware, to judge from its presence in their files) for the Empire Marketing Board, and Currie and Long had employed it for their survey of 17 parishes around Dartington in South Devon.²⁵ In 1930 the Cambridge University Farm Economics Branch (one of whose members, R. McG. Carslaw, had studied farm management research in the USA) produced a survey of Hertfordshire. Most of the UK agricultural economists were by this time, it seems, leaning towards the survey approach, believing that in order to understand farming, the only meaningful method was the large scale survey of inputs/outputs, costs and incomes.²⁶ Thus there was an intellectual context within the strict confines of agricultural economics and policy that encouraged the systematic collection of data sets. Of course, this coincided with the advent of large-scale data gathering exercises in other branches of social science in the inter-war period, such as the work on land use by Dudley Stamp.²⁷

II

One possible explanation for why the Ministry of Agriculture might need a Farm Management Survey was its need for evidence on the success or otherwise of policy. Moves to investigate farm incomes had begun by the end of the nineteenth century, when the Royal Commission on the Agricultural Depression 1894–6 printed nearly one hundred examples of farmers’ own accounts, mainly income and expenditure accounts, from across the country.²⁸ They were taken further by the end of the First World War when pressures for a national post-war policy for agriculture were gathering pace. An Agricultural Wages Board committee investigating the financial aspect of farming issued a ‘Form of return of farm receipts and expenditures’, which requested details of acreages, livestock numbers, sales receipts and input costs for the years 1913/14 to 1917/18. About 1500 of these forms were sent out but only 119 were returned. In its report, the committee, reflecting on the ‘disappointing’ response, suggested that farmers would have been wise to provide the information requested and emphasized ‘... the immediate urgency of undertaking investigations and preparing records showing the general financial results of farming’.²⁹ The ‘urgency’ lay in the development of price support

²⁴ J. Pryse Howell, *The productivity of hill farming* (1922); Moore-Colyer, *Farming in Wales*, p. 9.

²⁵ J. Maxton, *The survey method of research in farm economics* (1929). Maxton was on the staff of the Agricultural Economics Research Institute at Oxford at this point. A copy of this document, which was published by the Empire Marketing Board, is in MAF 38/198 (FMS proposals, 1928–31). J. R. Currie and W. Harwood Long, *An agricultural survey in south Devon* (1929).

²⁶ Whetham, *Agricultural economists*, pp. 58–61. It is worth noting that collection of farm account data in Britain was probably still lagging behind that in continental Europe. By the end of the 1930s farm account data was being collected on a significant scale

in Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany, where it was compulsory for larger farms (over about 250 acres) to keep accounts. See Lamartine Yates, *Food Production*, pp. 82, 149, 212, 391, 467.

²⁷ Dudley Stamp’s First Land Utilisation Survey in the 1930s is the most obvious example: L. D. Stamp, *The land of Britain: its use and misuse* (1948).

²⁸ M. E. Turner, J. V. Beckett and B. Afton, *Farm Production in England, 1700–1914* (2001), p. 38.

²⁹ BPP, Agricultural Wages Board, *Report of the committee to enquire into the financial results of the occupation of agricultural land and the cost of living of rural workers*, Cmd. 76 (1919), pp. 3–4, 38. The form is printed as App. XIII to the report. We are grateful to

policies in the immediate post-war period which led to the Agriculture Act 1920, but a year later the legislation was repealed, in the so-called 'Great Betrayal'.³⁰ The next significant policy intervention came in the form of a subsidy to sugar beet production under the terms of a 1924 Act (and there were subsequent investigations of financial returns to sugar beet growers). However, the idea of public financial support for the agricultural industry as a whole was rejected by the 1926 White Paper on agriculture.³¹ But vacillation over the whether or not to subsidize agriculture has to be put alongside a growing perception that data were needed in a modern state. The emergence of similar farm accounting schemes in the USA and Germany at this time, in the absence of farm support policies, suggests that specific policy objectives and discourses were less important to the development of the FMS than the growing realization that economies are broken up into state units, the increasing meaning given to national/territorial boundaries, and a corresponding interest in measuring and collecting information as part of defining and demarcating states.³² For example, in November 1928, R. J. Thompson, the Ministry's assistant secretary in charge of the advisory economics service, wrote an internal minute (probably to the Minister's private secretary) arguing for an 'investigation and enquiry ... into the economics of agriculture from a national point of view'. It is worth quoting his reasons in some detail:

There is no question that there is an increasing need for the study of the economics of agriculture. The agricultural situation is unsatisfactory and at any moment the Ministry may be asked to advise on remedial measures involving large expenditure; although as a matter of fact we have not got the detailed information required as a basis for sound judgement.

Discussions are always taking place on the unremunerativeness of arable farming, the reversion of arable and pasture, the advantages of grass farming, the burden of wages, the inefficiency of labour, the relative advantages of small and large holdings and of ownership and tenancy and other similar questions; but exact information is woefully deficient and in the main we are dependent on casual evidence and observation which may be very misleading, whereas reasonably exact statistical data can be obtained and ought to be available for the information of the Government as a guide on questions of policy.³³

Before sending off his minute, Thompson went on to dismiss the cost accountancy approach

Note 29 *continued*

Dr Hilary Crowe for drawing this report to our attention. The Agricultural Wages Board had been established under the provisions of the Corn Production Act, 1917 (A. Howkins and N. Verdon, 'The state and the farm worker: the evolution of the minimum wage in agriculture in England and Wales, 1909–24', *AgHR* 57 (2009), p. 267).

³⁰ E. Whetham, 'The Agriculture Act 1920 and its repeal: the "Great Betrayal"', *AgHR* 22 (1972).

³¹ P. Brassley, 'British farming between the wars', in P. Brassley, J. Burchardt and L. Thompson (eds), *The English countryside between the wars: regeneration or decline?* (2006), pp. 190–1; Whetham, *Agricultural*

economists, p. 59.

³² See R. Jones, *People/states/territories: The political geographies of British state transformation* (2007).

³³ MAF 38/198, minute from R. J. Thompson, 8 Nov. 1928. As late as 1937, in an article discussing the annual agricultural output figures, which the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries had produced since 1925, Thompson noted that 'To make the picture complete, one would need to know the corresponding cost of production, but in regard to this very little information is available'. R. J. Thompson, 'Changes in the value of the agricultural output of England and Wales', *J. Royal Statistical Soc.*, 100 (1937), pp. 291–5.

favoured by Orwin as ‘not sufficiently uniform or extensive to provide a basis for the consideration of national problems’ and to examine the problems of financing the work. Subsequently, in 1931, Sir Thomas Middleton, who by then had considerable experience of the workings of government, added: ‘It is not difficult to visualize immediate uses for the figures resulting from such surveys in the work of a government office. They would provide answers to many topical questions, and thus be useful to Ministers’.³⁴ This latter point was reiterated by Thompson’s successor, R. R. (later Sir Ralph) Enfield, in an internal Ministry minute written in July 1935, by which time price support policies were again in the policy frame, in which he argued that the need for the survey ‘has not only become obvious from the modern trend of policy involving as it does State action in support of prices, output and employment, but the frequent requests for information of this kind which we have received during recent months from the Minister’.³⁵ He repeated the argument in 1937, in an internal Ministry paper outlining the scheme that was then in operation:

During the last five years we have frequently had questions or enquiries addressed to us by the late Minister which required, for their adequate answer, much more information upon farm incomes and expenditure and other farm management data than we actually possessed. I hope, therefore, that this scheme will eventually fill this gap in our knowledge.³⁶

Its main purpose, he argued, was to extend the provision of agricultural statistics ‘into the field of farm finance which will give us direct statistical data of farm incomes and farm expenditure upon which alone we can form a satisfactory judgement of the course of agricultural prosperity’. It would also, he added, ‘enable us to follow changes in farm practice resulting from changing economic conditions’.³⁷ The USA, Denmark, Switzerland and Germany had for some time, he pointed out, been able to produce farm income estimates based on farm accountancy material, which the UK had not been in a position to do until the FMS was established.

It is interesting to note, however, that Jock Currie, one of the pioneers of the survey method, saw things from a different perspective. In his Presidential Address to the Agricultural Economics Society in 1956, he confirmed that farm management studies were used for ‘political purposes’, arguing that the inter-war depression ‘encouraged exclusively political approaches to farmers’ problems. On the one hand, to determine subsidies, and on the other, for “price fixing”, and that [t]his was almost inevitable, as we see when we look back on the general outlook of the late twenties and the thirties’. But, in his view, it was something to be regretted: ‘Unquestionably it frustrated the search for, and consideration of, more suitable methods of studying “Farm Management” problems’.³⁸ In a telling phrase, Currie talks of ‘the original

³⁴ T 161/487, Middleton to Barnes, 10 June 1931.

³⁵ MAF 38/199 (FMS: grants to centres), minute from Enfield to H. E. Dale, 6 July 1935.

³⁶ MAF 38/200 (Farm Management Investigation – memorandum on the scheme), report on the Farm Management Scheme, signed R. R. E[nfield], 26 Apr. 1937, p. 6. The late Minister to whom he referred was presumably Walter Elliott, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, 1932–36. Ministers, junior ministers, and per-

manent secretaries in the Ministries of Agriculture and Fisheries, Food, and Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (after the merger of the two ministries in 1955) up to 1960 are listed in Winnifrith, *Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*, pp. 260–3, and thereafter in Foreman, *Loaves and Fishes*.

³⁷ Ibid., R. R. E[nfield]’s report, p. 1.

³⁸ J. R. Currie, ‘A review of fifty years’ farm management research’, *J. Agricultural Economics* 11 (1956),

objective of the Farm Management studies in financial profitability [being] to throw light on the internal' environment of farming.³⁹ In other words, he saw one of the main purposes of the survey as obtaining knowledge 'to guide farmers in their quest for improved farming systems to meet the severe competition from overseas'.⁴⁰ This was about international competitiveness rather than state support.

During wartime, with more direct intervention in agricultural markets in place, the FMS data was just as important in informing policy, if not more so. J. H. Kirk, one of the two Ministry civil servants most directly in control of the survey during the war, argued in a letter to a colleague in 1941 that:

[T]he data is an essential part of the statistical information required by the Minister for the determination of agricultural policy and administration. We managed to do without much financial data until 1936 since by and large agricultural policy was on a laissez faire basis, but increasingly agriculture has become planned and managed, and there is every sign that planning rather than laissez faire will continue after the war. During the war the financial data have been of particular value since agricultural prices and wages have become increasingly detached from the market, and the Farm Management Survey has therefore afforded a valuable check on the extent to which wage and price policy have [sic] resulted in profits or losses.⁴¹

Sir Donald Fergusson, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture during the war, writing a little earlier, made the same point and added that the survey also provided data for 'the confidential information of the Minister'.⁴² More than 20 years later, remarks in an internal minute by his successor, Sir John Winnifrith, made it clear that the reasons for maintaining the survey were essentially similar: 'we need reliable information about incomes on farms of different categories. This is, indeed, the only weapon with which to counter the NFU's own similar survey.' He was responding to a report on the FMS that he had asked the Economics Division to produce about two months earlier. On 1 May 1964 John Ashton, a senior economist in that division, wrote a memo to one of his subordinates, J. A. Evans, requesting him to draft the report, saying that it 'stems from the Minister's pre-occupation with the average income of full-time farmers. Generally most people are fairly certain that it must be of the order of £1,500 p.a. but no one seems to be able to prove it'. He also requested comments on a scheme

Note 38 *continued*

pp. 350–60. The passages quoted may be found on p. 357. Currie (1891–1966) was born into a Scottish farming family and studied at Glasgow University and at Cornell with G. F. Warren. In 1928 Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst appointed him to the post of adviser on farm policy and agricultural economist on the Dartington estate in south Devon, where he remained for the rest of his life. With Harwood Long he produced a pioneering economic survey of south Devon farms in the late 1920s and was later involved in numerous initiatives to improve grassland, livestock, mechanization and farm management. He was elected President of the

Agricultural Economics Society in 1955 (see obituary, *J. Agricultural Economics*, 18, 1967, pp. 321–2).

³⁹ Currie, 'Fifty years farm management research', p. 357.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

⁴¹ MAF 38/199, J. H. Kirk to W. R. Black, 24 Oct. 1941.

⁴² D4/115 (Development Commission, Agricultural advisory work, England and Wales, year ending 30 Sept. 1942. Application of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries – Farm Management Survey), Fergusson to the Secretary of the Treasury, 16 June 1941.

that the National Farmers' Union was then running to collect income data from farmers, which revealed, not surprisingly, a lower average income ('their income of £600 p.a. and all that!'). Evans's report made it clear that the basic reasons for conducting the FMS had not changed: 'to assemble a body of economic and financial facts about farms for use in farm management advisory work, in teaching and research and as an aid to decisions on agricultural policy', although the emphasis on teaching and advisory work was perhaps greater than it had been earlier. He dismissed the NFU scheme, which was less detailed than the FMS and 'cannot be represented as entirely objective considering that the sample is selected by NFU county secretaries'.⁴³ The importance of objectivity had been stressed by Winnifrith's own book on the Ministry, published two years earlier, in which he pointed out that since the FMS data 'is considered at the annual price review ... it was felt desirable that the selection of farms and collection of information should be in "neutral" [i.e. university rather than Ministry] hands'.⁴⁴ Evans also argued that Inland Revenue farm income statistics were no substitute for the FMS, as they 'do not distinguish between full-time and part-time businesses nor can they be analysed by size, type or location of farm', besides being less up to date than the FMS data. The FMS could not hide 'the fact that many farms earn low profits', Evans felt, 'because it is true. But it could be used to rebut the inference that the fault for this lies in Government policy by showing the extent that low income is caused by undersized farm businesses or poor management'.⁴⁵

This succession of Ministry of Agriculture documents reveals a variety of reasons for maintaining the FMS from the 1920s to the 1960s involving both its policy purposes and its pedagogic – potentially transformative – potential for the industry. Not long thereafter, in 1973, when the UK joined what became the European Union, a further justification took over, as the data was needed for the UK's contribution to the European Farm Accountancy Data Network. Although the main purpose of the FMS was to produce data for internal government policy purposes, inevitably its wider potential rapidly became apparent. In particular, the possibility of providing farm management data for use by farmers was recognized, and the publication of annual farm management handbooks became routine in each of the FMS provinces from the early 1960s. The data were also used in other research publications from the provincial centres from the outset although the scope and frequency of these varied between the provinces. Essentially, however, the Ministry economists wanted the information so that they had some idea of the effects of current policy and a body of data upon which they could base their responses to ministerial questions. Nevertheless, although

⁴³ MAF 283/507 (FMS scope and functions, 1964), minutes by J. Ashton, 1 May 1964 and J. Winnifrith, 6 July 1964; report by J. A. Evans on 'The scope and function of the Farm Management Survey', June 1964, pp. 2 and 6. The NFU scheme was established as a check on the FMS soon after the 1947 Agriculture Act began the practice of annual price negotiations between the farmers' unions and the Ministry of Agriculture. It relied on farm accounts being submitted on an anonymous basis by accountants. They were therefore accounts prepared for tax purposes, using accountancy definitions rather than FMS definitions, and different acreages and herd sizes. In

1975 an NFU economist demonstrated that, after correcting for these differences, the income data produced could be reconciled with FMS data, allowing for a six-month lag or lead time, and the Union therefore discontinued the scheme, preferring to use the costs and clerical time required for other purposes. We are grateful to John Malcolm, formerly Chief Economic Adviser to the NFU, and to Derek Shepherd, sometime NFU economist, for this information.

⁴⁴ Winnifrith, *Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*, p. 217.

⁴⁵ MAF 283/507, Evans report, p. 6.

the need for the survey might be apparent within the Ministry, its cost had to be justified to the Treasury, both before its initial establishment and through to the 1960s when the Evans report was written, and that did not always prove straightforward. Furthermore, the academic economists involved, and the universities and colleges for which they worked, also had to be persuaded to co-operate.

III

In order to understand the initial difficulties in setting up the Farm Management Survey, it is first necessary to outline briefly the system of advisory provision between the wars. It was constituted on two levels: county and province. Before the First World War some counties had begun to make provision for agricultural education, and during the First World War County War Agricultural Committees had been set up. After 1920 permissive legislation was introduced to allow counties to establish a county agricultural organizer, a post that was often combined with the principalship of the county farm institute in those counties that had one. By 1939 there were 55 such organizers, with a total of 468 staff.⁴⁶ The role of these people was educational and advisory, and they were supported, for more complex questions, by the Provincial Advisory Service, based on universities or national agricultural colleges, with specialists in, for example, agricultural chemistry, dairy bacteriology, plant pathology, economics, and so on. This system was in operation by 1928, when there were 12 provincial agricultural economists, each doing what seemed appropriate for their province.⁴⁷

It was on 8 November 1928, as we have seen, that the assistant secretary in charge of the advisory economics service in the Ministry of Agriculture, R. J. Thompson, wrote his minute arguing for a farm management survey, probably, to judge from the initials, to the Permanent Secretary, Sir Charles Howell Thomas. The cost of the survey, estimated at between £5,000 and £10,000, might, he suggested, be met by the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), who were 'currently taking a great interest in economic questions and particularly in the use of the survey method'. He proposed a semi-official approach to the EMB to enquire whether there was a 'reasonable probability' of a grant being made, followed by a meeting of 'the Agricultural Economists' (presumably the Provincial Agricultural Economists) to discuss the details.⁴⁸ Thomas discussed the idea with one of the influential figures in the agricultural establishment, Sir Daniel Hall, who supported Thompson's proposal.⁴⁹ It was duly forwarded to the Minister,

⁴⁶ P. Brassley, 'Agricultural education, training and advice in the United Kingdom, 1850–2000', in N. Vivier (ed.), *The State and rural societies: policy and education in Europe, 1750–2000* (2008), p. 265.

⁴⁷ C. J. Holmes, 'Science and the farmer: the development of the Agricultural Advisory Service in England and Wales, 1900–39', *AgHR* 36 (1988), pp. 78–9.

⁴⁸ MAF 38/198, R. J. T[hompson], minute to the Permanent Secretary, 8 Nov. 1928.

⁴⁹ Hall was the founding principal of Wye College from 1894 to 1902, head of the Rothamsted research institute (1902–12) and later the Development Com-

mission (1912–17), secretary to the Board of Agriculture during the First World War, chief scientific adviser to the Ministry of Agriculture (1920–27) and at that time head of the John Innes Research Institute. Hall himself had worked on agricultural accounts, and also chaired the Ministry's Agricultural Costings Conference of Mar. 1922, when it attempted unsuccessfully to achieve some agreement on methods of treating agricultural costings. See K. A. H. Murray, 'Agricultural economics in retrospect', *J. Agricultural Economics* 13 (1960), pp. 374–98; *ODNB*, 'Hall, Sir (Alfred) Daniel (1864–1942)'.

Walter Guinness (later Lord Moyne), with a covering minute in which Thomas stated that 'I am of the opinion that the time is ripe for the development of an Economic Survey of Agriculture by agreement with and through Advisory Economists attached to Universities'. 'I agree', replied Guinness. By the middle of December Thompson had discussed his proposal with Orwin at Oxford, Ashby at Aberystwyth, and J. A. Venn at Cambridge, and with members of the economic committee of the EMB. The importance of critical individuals to the development of the FMS should not be under-estimated: these personal networks and personalities provide a 'peopling' of the state, the importance of which has been highlighted in recent scholarship by Rhys Jones.⁵⁰ At the beginning of the new year, in January 1929, Maxton's report, *The survey method of research in agricultural economics* (see above), was published by the EMB, so it was presumably supportive of the methodology, but there is no evidence that it was prepared to produce the £5,000 that Thompson required.⁵¹ In January 1930 Thomas wrote, instead, to the Treasury requesting a grant of £6,000 for the survey. In response the Treasury enquired whether the work could be done by grants to the research institutions. There was then a gap of six months until H. L. French of MAF wrote to the Treasury saying that the various institutions concerned could not be persuaded to agree.⁵²

At the same time, the Ministry was becoming increasingly exasperated by the failure of the Committee on Agricultural Economics to co-ordinate research. The Committee consisted of the provincial agricultural economists, representatives from the Ministry, and staff from other bodies such as the Development Commission, the Agricultural Research Council, and the Scottish Department of Agriculture. With the exception of a national survey on sugar beet growing costs, started in 1926, little had been achieved. 'The divergence of views was extreme on most of the important issues; unanimity was rarely, if ever, reached; the views of majorities were seldom accepted for working purposes'.⁵³ In addition, R. R. Enfield, Thompson's successor and thus the leading economic specialist in the Ministry, and C. S. Orwin, head of the AERI at Oxford, just did not get on with each other.⁵⁴ In some ways the Committee seems to have combined the functions of a co-ordinating body and a learned society. It failed, however, to co-ordinate very much, and in 1926 a learned society for agricultural economics had been established. By the end of the 1920s, therefore, the reconstitution of the Committee was under active consideration. The Ministry was not interested. It simply wanted a meeting of the provincial agricultural economists with a small number of relevant Ministry officials, which is what it established in 1930 as the Conference of Advisory Economists. By the end of that year the Conference had recognized the Ministry's desire for uniform approaches to research questions, and had decided to proceed with a milk production survey through all the provincial centres, a poultry survey at three centres, and a farm management survey at two or three centres.⁵⁵ Consequently, in February 1931, Thomas again wrote to the Treasury requesting funding for a farm management survey, this time 'to proceed on a provincial basis', beginning

⁵⁰ Jones, *People/States/Territories*.

⁵¹ MAF 38/198, minutes.

⁵² T 161/487 (Survey of Farm Management, Jan. 1930–Oct. 1931), H. L. French (MAF) to C. L. Stocks (Treasury), 26 June 1930.

⁵³ Murray, 'Agricultural economics in retrospect',

p. 376.

⁵⁴ A. W. Coats, 'The development of the agricultural economics profession in England', *J. Agricultural Economics* 27 (1976), p. 386.

⁵⁵ Murray, 'Agricultural economics in retrospect', pp. 377–8.

with a survey of the eastern counties to be carried out by the provincial agricultural economists at Cambridge, with possible follow-on studies from Oxford and Aberystwyth. The Treasury consulted the Development Commission on the soundness of the proposed methodology, and received a favourable report from Sir Thomas Middleton, but then the economic problems of the depression intervened. There were pressures for government expenditure cuts, and nothing more was heard of the farm management survey until 1935.⁵⁶

In the interim, the need for the kind of information that could be provided by a survey, to monitor the effects of policy and enable the Ministry's economics specialists to answer questions from their Minister, had not gone away, as Enfield emphasized in a minute written in July 1935, when he once again argued for funds to support it. The previous month an unidentified Ministry civil servant had sent a minute to Enfield suggesting that 'circumstances are such' that the AERI at Oxford could not be relied upon to perform the whole job – perhaps as a result of the poor interpersonal relationship between Enfield and Orwin – and, therefore, arguing that the provincial advisory economists should be given the task. In order to do so they would require additional funding, and the minute suggested that an approach should, therefore, be made to the Treasury. The writer implied that the money would need to come from the Development Fund, and thus would also require support from the Agricultural Research Council (ARC).⁵⁷ This link between the Treasury and the Development Commission is, in fact, less confusing than it might appear at first sight. As the Commission's official history points out, government departments with the appropriate areas of responsibility (and thus especially the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries) saw the Commission as providing 'a source of money which was additional to their normal Parliamentary allocations'.⁵⁸

By July 1935 Enfield had passed the June minute on to H. E. Dale (his immediate superior in the Ministry), who approved the proposal, and W. C. (later Sir William) Dampier (secretary of the ARC), had written in support. In September, an application for £3,300 from the Development Commission to finance FMS work in 11 provincial centres went to the Treasury, and in November the Treasury agreed in principle to the grant.⁵⁹ Enfield lost no time. In December 1935 he convened a meeting of the Conference of Advisory Economists to discuss the construction and operation of the survey, and the conference in turn appointed a sub-committee to draft a scheme for the FMS. This sub-committee, which consisted of four representatives from the provincial agricultural economists (Ashby from Aberystwyth, Carslaw from Cambridge, Dawe from Bristol and Dinsdale from Newcastle), Orwin or Archie Bridges from the AERI, Dampier and Joe Duncan representing the ARC, and Arthur Jones and Enfield, from the Ministry who took the chair, met six times and produced a draft scheme

⁵⁶ MAF 38/198, Thomas to the Treasury, 13 Feb. 1931; T 161/487, note from Barnes (Treasury) to Stocks (Treasury), 11 June 1931, report from Middleton (Development Commission) to Barnes, dated 10 June 1931.

⁵⁷ MAF 38/199, minute to Enfield, 13 June 1935; minute from Enfield to Dale, 6 July 1935.

⁵⁸ A. Rogers, *The most revolutionary measure: a history of the Rural Development Commission, 1909–99* (1999), pp. 31–5. In 1937–8, for example, the Commission

provided, through the Treasury and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, a total of £87,047 to fourteen universities and colleges for agricultural advisory and research work, of which £24,734 was for work in agricultural economics. D4/113 (Consolidated grants for agricultural advisory work, 1937–8 to 1945–6).

⁵⁹ MAF 38/199, minute by Dale, 15 July 1935, letters from Dampier, 30 July 1935, French, 3 Sept. 1935, and the Treasury, 22 Nov. 1935.

which was presented to a further meeting of the Conference in July 1936. Jones's report states that the Conference accepted the draft scheme and reconstituted the drafting committee as the Permanent Farm Management Investigation Committee to manage it.⁶⁰ He makes no mention of the opposition to the proposal, but opposition there clearly was. On 14 July 1936 Dr V. E. Wilkins of the Ministry wrote to the eleven provincial centres offering an extra £290 of annual funding for FMS work covering 200 farms. Almost by return of post Dr Charles Crowther, Principal of Harper Adams College, replied saying that the survey would involve too much travelling for not enough money, Principal Henderson Hogg of Seale-Hayne said the same and added that he had no room for the extra staff required and, in any case, his staff were already too busy, while the Vice-Principal of Aberystwyth made the same point about accommodation. Bristol, Reading, Oxford, and Leeds, on the other hand agreed to the terms offered. It appears that, in some cases at least, the enthusiasm of the economists for the survey had outstripped that of their managers, but by the autumn of 1936 Crowther and Henderson Hogg had been won round.⁶¹

The most serious opposition came from Wye. There, the economist, James Wyllie, seems to have been intellectually unconvinced by the scheme, and the college governors took his side. As late as April 1937, Mr Kendall of the Ministry was writing an internal minute to Enfield complaining that:

There is no doubt that Mr Wyllie has behaved rather badly on this occasion as on many others. It would have been easy for him to have raised these difficulties at a much earlier stage. Mr Jones and I have considered whether there is any action which could usefully be taken to prevent a recurrence of this kind of situation, and to make Mr Wyllie more tractable in future ... Our own view is that it would be useless to raise the issue on this occasion unless we are prepared to follow it up, if need be, by a general expression of opinion to the governors of Wye on Mr Wyllie's difficult attitude.⁶²

Kendall's instinct was correct. The previous month R. M. Wilson, the Principal of Wye, had written to Dr Wilkins referring to the 'grave doubts as to the value of the Scheme' held by his governors, although they were prepared to put it into operation as long as the Ministry bore the full cost. The matter was finally smoothed over at the end of April 1937, when Principal Wilson called on Dr Wilkins on another matter, and they took the opportunity to discuss the FMS problem. The 'grave doubts', it transpired, came from some of the farmers on the governing body who were not convinced that they would be able to fill in the FMS form, having to rely to some extent on memory, but Mr Wyllie was now co-operating with the scheme.⁶³

In October 1936 the Ministry received official approval (as opposed to the approval in principle of the previous year) to spend not more than £3,300 on the FMS between 1 October 1936 and 30 September 1937. The first farm accounts, relating to the harvest year 1936–37, were

⁶⁰ MAF 38/200 (Farm Management Investigation, Memorandum on the Scheme), undated (but from internal evidence 1936), report by Arthur Jones on 'The genesis of the Scheme'.

⁶¹ MAF 38/199, letter by Wilkins, 14 July 1936; letters from Crowther, 15 July, Henderson Hogg, 15 July and 19

Oct., Owen 16 July, Barker, 15 July, Orwin, 29 July, Orr, 30 July, Comber, 16 Oct. and letter to all of these 12 Nov. 1936.

⁶² *Ibid.*, minute by Kendall, 12 Apr. 1937.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, minute by Wilkins, 30 Apr. 1937.

collected in that year. It seems clear from subsequent correspondence that there was some confusion, at least on the part of the Treasury, over whether it had sanctioned a grant for five years of FMS work, or a grant for the initial five years of the FMS. In other words, was the survey meant to be permanent, or for five years only? Much of the correspondence in a file covering grants to the Oxford AERI in this period centred on this question.⁶⁴ Then in June 1941 Donald Fergusson of MAF wrote to the Treasury requesting a continuation of Development Commission funding for the FMS, now at a level of £4,400 per annum. In August his letter was supported by an enthusiastic report on the success of the Survey from the Development Commission itself.⁶⁵ The Treasury appeared to be baffled. In October 1941 Mr Biggs of the Treasury wrote to Mr Black of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries on the question of a further five-year grant for the FMS, confessing that:

We find ourselves, however, rather puzzled about it all. The scheme had been operating for five years now and you want us to agree to its continuance for another five years. But we are in the dark as to the progress that has been made with the work up to the 30th September last and how much longer it is anticipated that it will be necessary for it to proceed in order to complete the job.⁶⁶

Black passed this to J. H. Kirk, who was by then the Ministry economist in charge of the survey, who replied, perhaps a little testily:

I also am rather surprised that Biggs should think that the Survey is a 'job' to which a definite completion date can be assigned. As you yourself very well know, the results of the Survey are analogous on the financial side to those of the June returns on the physical side, and I think we agree that it is just as desirable to have this financial data each year for an indefinite period ahead as it is to have the physical data. In both cases the data is an essential part of the statistical information required by the Minister for the determination of agricultural policy and administration.⁶⁷

There are also further notes in the Development Commission file which were clearly aimed at resolving two misunderstandings on the part of the Treasury: that the FMS was not the same as the 1941 National Farm Survey, and that the initial 1936 grant was not for a time-limited study, but for five years in the first instance. It is tempting to suggest that back in 1935 the Ministry had realized that asking the Treasury to fund an ongoing survey was less likely to meet with success than a request for a five-year-only project, so, while they were careful never to state that it was the latter, they were equally careful to avoid mentioning that it could be the former. By 1941 the Survey was up and running, there was a clear need for it, and agriculture was much more politically important than it had been five years earlier. FMS funding was continued.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ibid., letter from the Treasury, 16 Oct. 1936; MAF 33/289 (Grants to AERI, Oxford).

⁶⁵ D4/115, Fergusson to the Secretary of the Treasury, 16 June 1941; Development Commission report by Havelock and Middleton, 20 Aug. 1941.

⁶⁶ MAF 38/199, Biggs to Black, 20 Oct. 1941.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Kirk to Black, 24 Oct. 1941.

⁶⁸ D4/115; details of the National Farm Survey are in Short *et al*, *National Farm Survey*; MAF 38/199, Treasury confirmation of further FMS funding, 12 Nov. 1941.

IV

The first years of the FMS were not without their problems. These were of two kinds: administrative, and what for want of a better term might be called operational. One immediate question concerned the extent to which the survey sample accurately represented farming in England and Wales as a whole. The problem was that the survey contained either too many large farms, or was conducted in areas that contained more large farms than the national average, as Professor Ashby pointed out in a letter to the Ministry from Aberystwyth in 1938.⁶⁹ J. H. Kirk and Harry Whitby, who together ran the FMS in the Ministry during the war, were aware of this, and in a note prepared for a meeting of the economists' sub-committee quantified the disparity (Table 1). The under-representation of small farms, they noted, was 'to some extent deliberate, being due to a ruling of the Farm Management Scheme that expressly discourages the inclusion of "small specialist farms"', although it was also a result of 'the greater willingness of large farmers to join the scheme and keep the necessary records'. They suggested that future expansion of the scheme should include more smaller farms and more from areas such as the Fens and the Vale of Evesham where such farms might be found.⁷⁰

The economists doing the survey in the provinces also commented on the difficulties of finding farmers willing to cooperate: in 1937, for example, echoing in some ways the doubts that had earlier been expressed by the governors of Wye College, Mr Henderson wrote from Seale-Hayne College worrying that the time taken to complete the form might reduce the level of future co-operation.⁷¹ At the Ministry itself, Enfield was also sensitive to this issue. Writing a minute to keep the Permanent Secretary informed on the progress of the survey in 1939, he concluded:

I think I should add that the whole of the information obtained under this scheme is furnished voluntarily by co-operating farmers through the provincial advisory centres, and it is extremely important that nothing should happen to alienate their interest in the work, which would inevitably cause the scheme to break down. For this reason, I think it is desirable to avoid so far as possible, at this stage, any reference in public to the investigation, or to the results it may disclose.⁷²

The importance attached by the Ministry to this close and confidential relationship between the provincial staff and their sample of farmers is also illustrated by the response to one suggestion for cutting the cost of data collection during the war. Wartime petrol cost increases had an immediate impact on the costs of the Survey, and in 1944 M. Allan Knox, the provincial economist at what was then the Midland Agricultural College at Sutton Bonnington, suggested that his department could get an accountant to provide information on six or seven of his

⁶⁹ MAF 38/201 (Farm Management Investigation: comments on the memorandum on the scheme), letter from Ashby, 21 May 1938; a similar criticism has been made more recently in Murdoch and Ward, 'Governorship and territoriality', p. 315.

⁷⁰ MAF 38/199. The note is undated but was probably (to judge from internal evidence) written before 1944.

See also MAF 38/467 (FMS – wartime developments 1944–5) for further discussion on the representativeness of the survey.

⁷¹ MAF 38/203 (Revised scheme and amended primary returns), letter from Henderson, 8 Sept. 1937.

⁷² MAF 38/200 (Memo on scheme 1937–9), minute from Enfield to Secretary, 11 Mar. 1939.

TABLE 1. Distribution of farms by size in the sample and the Universe

<i>Size group (acres)</i>	<i>FMS sample (%)</i>	<i>England and Wales (%)</i>
1–50	9.0	43.5
51–100	18.5	23.0
101–150	17.0	13.0
151–300	35.0	15.0
301–500	13.0	4.0
500+	7.5	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: MAF 38/199, Farm Management Survey (Note for discussion at next meeting of Economists' Sub-Committee) p. 1. The title of this table is the one used in the original document.

clients' farms for only a small extra cost. Both Whitby and Kirk reacted strongly against this. Kirk replied to Knox pointing out the importance of FMS staff having personal knowledge of farms in the sample and also noting that:

It is, as you know, the essence of the present agreement between the Agricultural Departments and the NFU's [sic] that the data used for price fixing should be collected by independent economists ... we should not favour any development which could be represented, even perhaps not altogether justly, as contrary to the intention of the agreement.⁷³

The analysis of the data was not always straightforward either. In 1938, for example, some of the provincial economists were asking questions of Harry Whitby in the Ministry about what should count as income and profit, and he in return was writing notes about the importance of valuations.⁷⁴ Bringing together the data from the provincial centres to produce the national report also took more time than originally envisaged. Professor Ashby commented in 1938 that the AERI had had the first year's data for about a year without producing a report, and when Whitby eventually received the second report (during the Battle of Britain in 1940), he 'found it very heavy reading, not because of its profundity but because it is a procession of facts with no attempt at emphasis'.⁷⁵

Administrative issues were mostly concerned with costs and the difficulty of producing the information for the £290 provided in the first year. Carslaw at Cambridge claimed that it cost £1 per record for collecting the data alone, with subsequent analysis occupying a technical assistant and two clerks for six months.⁷⁶ Technical staff and clerks were paid at differing rates. Seale-Hayne paid £150 p.a. to the 'man engaged' to carry out the work, Newcastle £180, Reading

⁷³ MAF 38/467, letters from Knox, 11 Dec. and by Kirk, 19 Dec. 1944.

⁷⁴ MAF 38/202 (Programme of research on data).

⁷⁵ MAF 38/201, letter from Ashby, 21 May 1938; MAF

38/204 (AERI Oxford reports), minute by Whitby, 21 Sept. 1940.

⁷⁶ MAF 38/199, Carslaw to Kendall, 25 Sept. 1937.

£200, Manchester £275, and Cambridge £300. FMS staff were in an anomalous position in universities. Being, in effect, paid by the Ministry, they were quasi-civil servants, and meetings of the provincial agricultural economists in the post-war years often contained discussions about their salary scales and the problems caused by the fact that they were not straightforward university employees.⁷⁷ Eventually, in 1965–66, this position was regularized somewhat by the transfer of financial responsibility for the Provincial Agricultural Economics Service to the University Grants Committee.⁷⁸

The impression that emerges from a reading of this material is one of a close-knit group of people, aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses. They were spread all over the country but familiar with each other through frequent meetings, not only on Ministry business, but also through their membership of the Agricultural Economics Society and attendance at its conferences. The minutes of the Conference of Advisory Economists for 10 January 1941, for instance, reveal a list of members very similar to that of a similar meeting held in July 1936. The provincial economists included Ashby (Aberystwyth, but formerly at Oxford), Bridges (Oxford), Dawe (Bristol), Dinsdale (Newcastle) Henderson (Seale-Hayne), Jones (who in 1941 represented the Manchester department, but who had been a MAF economist), Menzies Kitchin (Cambridge, replacing Carslaw, who had been at the 1936 meeting), Knox (Sutton Bonnington), Long (Leeds, but formerly at Seale-Hayne), McGregor (Harper Adams, but at one time a colleague of Long's), and Thomas (Reading). Apologies were received from Wyllie (Wye).⁷⁹ Frequent correspondence with their MAF colleagues kept them aware of common problems and developments, and most of them had been in post long enough to have seen the development of the Survey and be, perhaps, personally involved in its success or failure.

V

It seems clear from this exploration of the FMS material in the National Archives that the original impetus for the Survey came from agricultural economists in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries who needed some evidence upon which to base their assessments of the effectiveness of agricultural policy and their answers to ministerial enquiries. They had a range of questions to answer. On one side, the Treasury and the taxpayer would want to know why farmers needed to be given so much money. On the other side, the farmers, represented by the NFU, wanted to know why they were so poor and given so little money. Ministers of Agriculture needed to answer both, and needed their economists to provide the answers. This was the case, both in the inter-war period when the Survey began, and in the post-war period when it was firmly established as part of the Ministry's (and later the EU's) statistical portfolio. Putting it in these terms runs the risk of over-simplification. Nonetheless, it appears to capture the essence of the evidence emerging from the archive.

Actually producing the evidence in some form that could be justified statistically and politically was more difficult. The FMS however, together with a smaller-scale survey of milk

⁷⁷ MAF 38/605 (PAES Committee – minutes of meetings, 1945–52), minutes of the meeting of 27 Apr. 1950.

⁷⁸ MAF 283/512–4 (Transfer of responsibility of PAES

from MAFF to UGC).

⁷⁹ MAF 38/199, minutes of conferences held on 17 July 1936 and 10 Jan. 1941.

prices immediately preceding it, marked the first point at which the provincial agricultural economists were brought together to work on a national basis. It was not the first national compilation of agricultural statistics – the June census had, after all, been going since the 1860s – but it dealt with much more sensitive information and, therefore, had to be introduced with considerable care (as Enfield's plea to the Permanent Secretary for confidentiality in 1939, discussed above, suggests). That the process was ultimately successful, and enjoyed the confidence of the farming industry, is suggested by a note sent by Jeremy Thorpe, at that time MP for North Devon, to the then Minister of Agriculture, Christopher Soames in 1961. Enclosing a copy of the Bristol II *Farm Management Handbook*, based on the FMS data, he wrote 'I have been asked *by some of my farmers* [our italics] to draw your attention to the enclosed admirable survey'.⁸⁰ This, and the fact that participation in the survey was voluntary, perhaps raises some questions about Short *et al.*'s conceptualization of agricultural statistics as 'state surveillance'.⁸¹ Although it is certainly true that the state was enquiring into the detailed business affairs of those to whom it was distributing subsidies, it was careful to do so in a way that preserved their anonymity, in particular from the Inland Revenue, and equally careful to ensure that only volunteers were involved in the survey. In addition, our evidence suggests that the categorization by Murdoch and Ward of the FMS as inherently biased to larger and more commercially oriented farms is also an exaggeration. The risk of this was recognized early by those responsible both for the management and implementation of the survey. And as far as rural historians are concerned, the result is that there remains a body of data which should in future provide much useful evidence for a vital period of agricultural change.

⁸⁰ MAF 38/864 (FMS general papers and correspondence, 1947–61), Thorpe to Soames, 1961. Bristol II was at that time the region covering Cornwall, Devon and

Dorset, with investigation officers based first at Newton Abbot and later at Exeter.

⁸¹ Short *et al.*, *National Farm Survey*.