The transfer of farms in a Dutch commercial rural society from the 16th till the 20th century

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Paper for the International Rural History Conference, University of Sussex (Brighton), 13-16 September 2010

Work in progress

Abstract

This paper explores how commercial farms were transferred to new users from the 16th until the end of the 20th century in a part of the coastal region of the Netherlands. A database with the history of the inhabitants of 80 farms in four parishes in the Marne area in the province of Groningen covering the period 1591-1991 hss been analysed. The rural Marne area was characterized by large farms, an equal inheritance system, near indivisibility of farms and high proletarianization (wage labour). Research for less market-oriented parts of Germany (Belm) suggests that there was a considerable continuity of families over the generations (with a preference for sons) on at least the more substantial farms from the middle of 17th century onwards. The limited dependence on the market and the underdeveloped money economy possibly also limited competition between farmers and protected them from bankruptcies.

In an agricultural economy like the early-modern coastal Netherlands where selling the produce on the market and buying the inputs was the primary goal, commercial, agricultural and management skills of farmers played a more decisive role. On the one hand the (use of the) farm was absolutely not secure, on the other hand the farm, land, livestock and equipment embodied not only most of the capital of the farmer's family, but also constituted the inheritance for all the children of the next generation. These factors created a completely different system of transferring farms, with a much smaller role for family succession.

At first sight, the commercial farmer families in the Marne seemed indeed less attached to the 'family farm'. The selling of farms was especially of great importance on the small farms, while for the large farms family succession played a larger role. With the increasing welfare from the 19th century onwards family succession, especially of sons, combined with early retirement, became increasingly important. Both findings suggest that even in this Dutch commercial rural society family succession of farmsteads was greatly valued, however, often family succession was in practise not feasible, taking into account the high value that was also given to living in nuclear families, without too much near relatives in the same household.

Introduction

Until the end of the 19th century (fertilizers), the importance of livestock and arable farming made the secure control of land a critical factor in macro-economic development, but also for individual social-economic chances. However, structural economic progress per capita is only

possible for economies escaping from the complete dependence on agriculture. This was indeed the case for the Dutch coastal area in the 16th century, presumably the wealthiest part of the world until the start of the 19th century. The Dutch provinces Holland, Zealand, but also to a lesser extent Friesland and Groningen were characterised by a very high urbanisation rate accompanied by a considerable specialisation of work in the countryside, made possible by a strong market-orientation, a money economy and a well-developed institutional system. Non-food production was relatively high, suggesting in some way a favourable standard-of-living. Nevertheless, the agricultural production of food on farms remained one of the backbones of the economy.

In this paper I want to investigate if such a modern economic structure is supported by a specific (more modern?) system of transmission of farmsteads.[1] What legal practises were used in transmitting farmsteads to the next generation? Did children divide the parental inheritance? Was the succession of sons preferred? What was the relation between the marriage-date and the taking-over of the (inherited or bought) farm? Did young couples live on parental farms, waiting to take over? Did retired parents stay at their transferred farm? Was it acceptable and usual for widows to stay in control of the farm? Were there differences between the various types of farms? Possibly small farms played a role in some kind of farm career, with the married children of rich farmers first temporarily living on a smaller farm, to obtain a larger farm after the death or retirement of the parents? Did the farm transfer system change over time? What happened with the farm transfer system when from the 19th century onwards on the one hand the economic welfare began to increase structurally, while on the other hand agriculture lost much of its dominance in the economy?

Often the system of farm transmission is seen as closely connected to the transfer of niches to the next generation. Implicitly, this suggests that the farmstead was seen as an important asset, which for certain reasons had to stay within the family, usually the male family lineage. On the one hand, the position as farmer on the parental farmstead can be seen as attractive for the new generation, while it solved their problem of finding a niche for themselves. On the other hand, a certain emotional attachment to the ground can have existed, which increased the personal value of a strategy directed on securing the farmstead for (certain) family members as long as possible. Normally, the family blood (lineage) is of great importance in such a family attachment to the farm. Often keeping the farmstead inside the family is suggested to be interesting in strategies to secure a comfortable old-age of the parents (Habakkuk 1955), or even to reserve a place to stay for unmarried family members. However, although the transfer of the family farmstead to the next generation, can help in reaching such goals, these goals can also be reached on other farmsteads or sometimes even in a completely different way.

Against the benefits just mentioned, there were important (social) costs. The transfer of a farmstead to a succeeding child was in practise by no means unproblematic. One of the biggest problems was the timing of the transfer of farms to one of the children. For instance Hajnal (1965), Hofstee (1954), Mackenroth (1953) and Dupaquier (1972) suggested a close link between the marriage date of the new generation and succession (compare Fertig 2003). However, in most instances when the children married, at least one of the parents was still alive. Succession around the marriage date implied in such cases a cohabitation of three generations (resulting in more complex non-nuclear households), and a handing over of the authority of the farm by the parents by life. This was not very attractive, while the living parents were often in their sixties or even fifties at that moment and presumably still able to do farm work and manage the farm. Of course, by an overall system of late marriages, by

[1] I want to thank Geurt Collenteur for help and comments, and a lot of local historians for supplying me with numerous data on the inhabitants of these parishes; especially I want to mention Menne Glas, Gert Schansker and Otto Nienhuis.

postponing marriages or by transferring the farmstead to one of the youngest children this problem could partly be solved. Different solutions were the live-in of a married couple with parents who remained in control of the farm (a situation which could possibly be prolonged for one or two decades), or the retirement of the parents, who could leave the house to settle somewhere else when becoming old. However, most of these solutions had strong negative aspects. The living together of more adult generations meant or a loss of freedom for the younger generation, or a loss of power of the older generation, postponing marriages until the death of parents was also not very convenient, while retirement of parents somewhere else meant the financing of a household in which not much income was generated.

Another negative aspect of family succession around the marriage date of the younger generation is the great risk of treating several siblings differently. The explicit favouring of one child can create antagony within the wider family. Of course, several inheritance systems are known which solve this problem by legally or traditionally giving a favoured position to for instance the oldest sons (primogeniture), the youngest son, sons in general, or even the youngest daughters. Such regulations at least diminish the chances of serious family quarrels and smooths the handing over of the farmstead to a member of the new generation.

Of course, much of the timing problems are solved when newly married couples settle outside the parental household. However, in that case it is not certain if one of the married couples of the younger generation will ever return to the family farmstead later in life, because they all might have acquired comfortable positions of their own in their first marriage years. It has to be reminded that in this case enough positions (houses) have to be available in the society, which means that there must be some kind of market. Of course, one can think of a society in which new couples after marriage had relatively bad positions (cottages and small holder farmsteads) until their parents died, and they could take over the good positions (the medium-sized farmsteads) their parents occupied. If this would be the case, very different farm transfer systems can exist next to each other in one society, with the larger farmsteads being continuously handed over inside the family, while the very small farmsteads experienced a relatively large turnover of unrelated occupiers.

Until now, I assumed that at least one of the parents lives very long and that the parents have indeed children. But demographic reality is different, wih a significant part of the married couples not have any surviving offspring. Also in some cases both parents died when both children were still adolescent. In theory, family succession does not have to be hampered by these situations. Brothers, sisters or their adult children if available can succeed as well. However, it has to be pointed out that such a successor is not always available on the right moment in time.

Another implicit assumption was that farmer families indeed can dispose of the farm the way they wanted. There are two reasons why this is not always the case. Firstly, a lot of farmers were not owners, but tenants and partly dependent on the owner of the land for the transmission. Short term tenancies of only a few years, made the control of a farmstead a very temporary phenomenon. Secondly, farmsteads are possessions which can be alienated. There are different personal and general reasons why a family can get into financial problems, and as a result is forced to pass the farmstead to strangers.

I will use the case of the Marne in the Dutch province of Groningen. Earlier research showed that in the 18th and early 19th century the selling of farms was as important as family succession by the next generation (Paping 2009). Sons were (only) slightly preferred above daughters as successors. Besides, because of frequent remarriages, the control of farms was often handed over to new partners. Social mobility tended to be very high. Can we trace this seemingly flexible farm transfer system back to the 16th century? Remained the system into being in the second half of 19th and the 20th century, when the group of farmers is said to

become fairly closed, due to the high prices of farms and land, and the deterioration of the economic position of the Dutch coastal area compared to other economies?

Picture 1: The provinces of the Netherlands. The Marne is lying in the northwest of the province of Groningen.



The Northern Dutch coastal area before 1600

The northern coast of the Netherlands (provinces Groningen and Friesland) originally consisted of moors and wetlands which were regularly flooded by the sea. Already several centuries BC a lot of mounds were thrown up. The inhabitants were mainly active in livestock farming and fishing. From the 11th century onwards large parts of the coastal land were surrounded by dikes, making the fertile ground available for arable farming. Between the 11th and the 13th century the small communities on the mounds and former seepage embankments succeeded in establishing numerous parishes around newly-built large stone churches, substantial plots of land were designed for the maintenance of the priest and the church. Several dozen of abbeys were established on vast tracks of donated land. Ancient feudal structures were nearly completely absent, and although there was a kind of noble class, this group seemed to have consisted mainly of very rich farmers marrying endogamous. Next to these partly self-proclaimed nobles, there must have been a large group of non-noble freeholders. By the 16th century the land in the coastal area of Groningen was nearly completely cultivated and divided between different owners, like the abbeys (15-20%), local institutions (10-15%), nobles (10-15%), urban patricians from the neighbouring city of Groningen (5-10%), non-nobles and freeholders. Common land was rare.

The number of freeholders decreased sharply in the 16th and start of the 17th century, but as a group they seemed to have been of considerable importance in the Middle Ages. The local medieval law, for instance, mostly had freeholders and nobles in mind, when it stated that a son inherited twice as much of the real estates as a daughter. However, by the end of the 16th century the freeholders were already a minority, even within the group of farmers. Most of the farmers rented their land from abbeys, churches, priests, nobles, urban patricians and other rich farmers. Already in the 16th century these tenants usually owned the farm buildings which were placed on the land. Because of this, they had certain rights to use the land

('*beklemming*'); however, the owner was allowed to raise the rent, usually every six year. If the farmer did not comply with this increase, the owner was obliged to purchase the farm buildings for their actual price, and he or she had to find a new tenant. These regulations were protected by a well-organised but complicated local juridical system, in which the richest farmers used to have a large say, but which had nearly completely fallen into the hands of the nobles in the 15th and 16th century. Fortunately, the rather independent urban high court had the final judgment on lawsuits regarding land, making all property rights very secure. This security was an important prerequisite for the strong market orientation and comparative wealth of the area.

Apart from farmers, the Northern Dutch countryside in the 16th century was inhabited by a large group of artisans, tradesmen, landless labourers and some cottagers. The fragmentary available sources show that around 1580 in for instance villages like Winsum, Obergum and Den Hoorn a large landless group lived, which mainly found a livelihood in production and services for the local market (Paping 2007; see for Friesland: Knibbe 2006). Proto-industrial activities and other export-oriented production seemed to have been of less importance. Specialisation, at least at the end of the 16th century, functioned wholly in service of the export-oriented agriculture on large farms. Subsistence farming was nearly absent. There are some signs that in northern Groningen the 16th century and first decades of the 17th century were a period of proletarisation, accompanied by a diminishing of small-holding and an increase in the size of farms. This process - depicted by Van Bavel (2002) for Holland around 1600 - happened in the village of Vierhuizen (western Marne). However, it is difficult to prove it for other Groningen villages. There is for example not much sign of it in the five parishes in the later municipality of Winsum from 1553 onwards (Paping 2007). For Holland Van Bavel (2006) gives a lot of evidence for the importance of rural wage labour estimating it at 48% around 1550, although he might have slightly underestimated the amount of rural labour of family members active in small and larger farms and especially of those in the numerous small firms in the handicraft and service sector.

Because agricultural production on large farms was the main economic activity in the Groningen and Frisian countryside, the control of land was of supreme importance for the material well-being of individuals and families. Generally, there were two levels of control until the end of the 18th century: 1. The ownership of land; 2. The right to use land for limited periods. The importance of land was reflected in the social structure. In the social structure, the group of large tenant farmers came directly behind the owners (nobles, freeholders and other landowners). Medium-sized farmers, merchants, millers, and more-well-to-do artisans and shopkeepers came next. On the bottom of the social structure numerous indigent artisans, tradesmen, cottagers and landless labourers could be found (Paping 2010).

In the eastern part of the Marne four adjourning parishes were researched: Kloosterburen, Leens, Wierhuizen and Zuurdijk, comprising 320 houses in 1806, including some 85 farmsteads.[2] Presumably, the number of houses and farmsteads was only slightly higher than around 1600. The population increased until the middle of the 17th century, and afterwards the number of inhabitants fell for a century. Population growth resumed again around 1750, to accelerate at the end of the 18th century till about 2,500 persons in 1880 (doubling in one century). After forty years of stagnation, population rise resumed for a short period from 1920 to 1945, followed by a steady fall at least until 1990, when the four villages again accounted for about 2,500 inhabitants. Population development until 1880 was in line with the rest of the Dutch coastal countryside. After 1880 population growth fell behind seriously, inasmuch as no industry emerged, and the region was too far away from the city of

[2] In this version only the farms in the eastern and southern part of Zuurdijk are taken into account..

Groningen for suburbanisation to take place. However, for villages along the coast in Groningen and Friesland the stagnation of population was not extraordinary in this period.

Picture 2 The parishes of Kloosterburen, Leens, Wierhuizen and Zuurdijk are situated to the northwest of the city of Groningen (Beckeringh-map 1781).



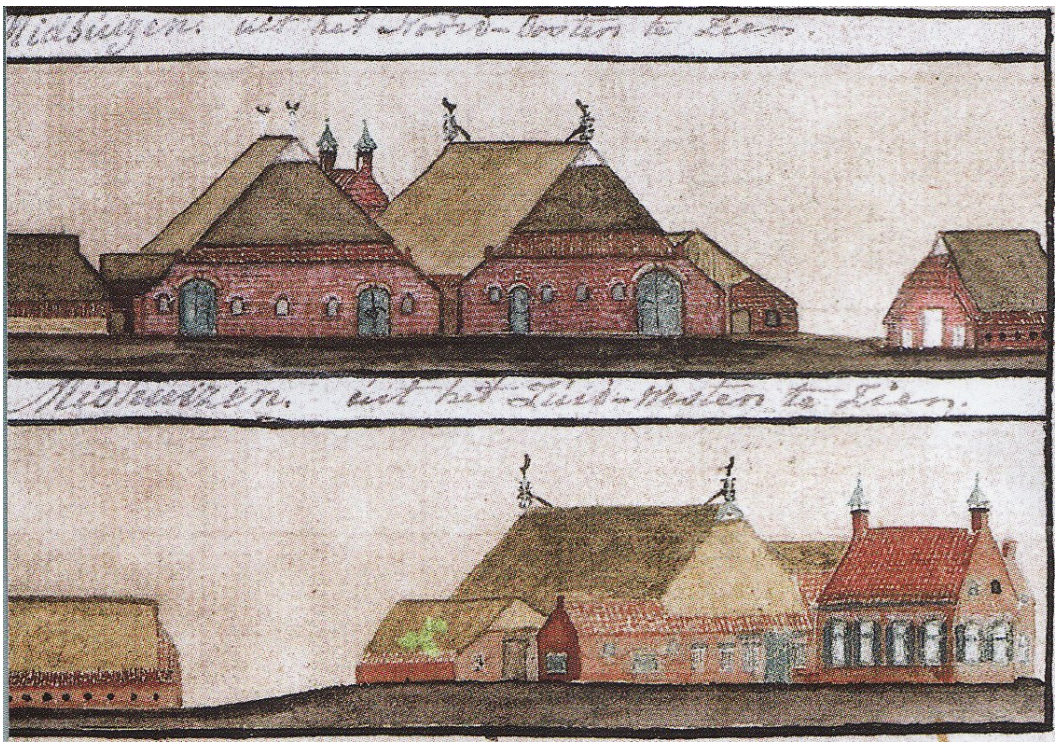
The histories of the farmsteads in these four villages have been traced back to the end of the 16th century (See Appendix). For the 17th century there are several gaps and information on births and marriages is nearly completely lacking. In the 16th century about half the land in Kloosterburen belonged to the local abbey, freeholders were on the other hand also quite numerous in this parish, while noble land was nearly completely missing. In Leens, Wierhuizen and Zuurdijk nobles, local institutions and urban patricians were much better represented under the landowners. The noble presence in Leens was connected to the castle ('borg') Verhildersum first in the hand of the Onsta family, and later of their descendents the Tjarda van Starkenborgh family. Around 1550 the Onsta's controlled most part of the north of Leens. Tithe lists from 1591 give a first systematic overview of the farmers and other land users in the four parishes. Nearly all the names of the larger land users in these lists can be connected to specific farms. Family names were rare and surnames were relating to the first name of the father. This custom makes it easy to identify sons succeeding their father.

The end of the 16th century was a period of great turbulence in the northern Dutch provinces. Between 1580 and 1594 a civil war between rebellious Calvinist forces and Roman-Catholic soldiers in service of the Spanish king was going on in the Groningen countryside. The population was divided along equal lines. The Marne was regularly harassed by armies passing through or residing for several months, burning down farmhouses and killing locals. To make things worse, the dikes broke through. Kloosterburen, which just as Wierhuizen was situated right behind the dikes, lost several hectares of land to the sea around 1584. Finally, in 1594 the Calvinists conquered the city of Groningen and peace returned. The extensive properties of the abbeys were nationalised and came into the hands of the province (who sold most land in the second half of the 18th century). Public performance of Roman-

Catholicism became prohibited, and Calvinism became the state religion. In the village of Kloosterburen a very large minority remained Roman-Catholic, while Leens, Wierhuizen and Zuurdijk were mainly Protestant. In the 17th century, in all four villages considerable parts of at least the farmers were Mennonites (a kind of Baptists). Their number decreased fast from the middle of the 17th century onwards because of the intermixture with the Calvinist majority. By 1850 the group nearly had disappeared.

As mentioned before, the names of most of the farmers are known for 1591. They survived a turbulent period in Dutch history, a period in which there were presumably more chances for people from outside the group of settled farmers to start farming. However, there are a few documented cases in which continuity during the second half of the 16th century can be proven. For example the large Bokema, Gokema, Feddema and Halsema farms in Kloosterburen were used by one family at least from 1550 to 1600, and presumably even longer backwards. These rich farmer families (mostly freeholders) had coped in one way or another with the problems of the fourth quarter of the 16th century. Unfortunately, the history of smaller firms before 1591 is obscure. We do not know much more of these farmers in 1591 than that they occupied a specific farmstead. Unclear is, if they are mainly the descendants of local tenants, freeholders, labourers or middle class, it is even possible that they migrated recently into the area from elsewhere in the province or even further away. A lot of front names were no longer typically Frisian, as had been the case before 1500 (Julle, Rijkel, Luurt, Doe, Hoike, Popke, Sicke) but were etymologically biblical (Johan, Jacob, Peter) or Franco-Saxon (Harm, Hindrik) which suggests an important influx of migrants, or at least a very strong cultural influence from elsewhere. Also in the 15th and 16th century the inhabitants seemed to have lost their Frisian language, a development in which the originally 'Saxonic' city of Groningen (30 kilometres away) played a large role (Heeroma and Naarding 1979; Huizinga 1914).

Picture 3: A farm in Vierhuizen around 1800.



That continuity of the male lineage indeed was not the rule in the 16th century can be proven for the nearby village of Vierhuizen with slightly more than ten proper farms. A dike maintenance register with the names of farmers from about 1500, 1555 and 1626 suggest that there was no continuity in names in the first half of the 16th century, with the exception of the noble family of Panser living on the local castle.[3] Between 1555 and 1626 in only one case there seems to have been long time continuity. Reiner Pieters lived on the farm Benshuizen around 1555 and still around 1588, when his property of 11 hectares was sold. In the period 1625-1638 Jacob Reiners, possibly his son, rented the same farm. The analysis of the registers of about 1500, 1555 and 1626, however, does not mean that succession of sons was nearly completely absent. There is another example of succeeding sons in Vierhuizen in the second half of the 16th century. Swiert tho Menneweer (mentioned 1546) was succeeded by his son Simon Swierts (mentioned 1555). Simon Swierts died just before 1578, leaving behind a widow Aylke (mentioned 1582). Nevertheless, his son Siert Simons came in charge of the farm, but was already between 1579 and 1584 replaced by his brother Pieter Simons. In 1606 Pieter Simons and his wife Jantien sold the farm with about 18 hectares (at that moment rented by an unrelated Pieter Cornelis) for 1287 guilders to strangers.

The control of a farmstead involved large investments for families, even for tenants. In the province of Groningen farmers owned the stone farm buildings which became pretty expensive in the 16th and 17th century. Also they had to finance the available cattle (cows, horses, sheep, one or more pigs), the agricultural equipments (ploughs, carts), and the grain harvest (for instance the cost of labour was running ahead of the benefits). Besides, a continuous stream of money was needed to pay for some of the liabilities. The farmer had to pay extensive sums for the maintenance of dikes and other costs of the polder boards. Also land users (tenants and owners) had to maintain specified parts of the dikes themselves. From the start of the 16th century most of the government tax was crushing on the use of land. Fortunately, tithes were fixed in money and extremely low. Of course the tenants also had to pay their rent, which in the 16th century was mostly stated in money terms. Already in the 16th century running a farm implied needing a lot of capital. Not surprisingly, the northern Dutch farmer's primary goal was to sell as much of the produce as possible to the market, to pay for all these obligations.

The 17th and 18th century

Astonishing is the enormous geographical stability of most of the farmsteads. The overwhelming majority of the farms continued in existence from the end of the 16th until well into the 20th century. This continuity was partly made possible by the system of '*beklemming*', which connected most of the land to specific farm buildings. The law protected the tenant as owner of the farm building and as user of the land (Formsma 1981). It was possible for an owner to evict a farmer from his farm against his or her will, but this comprised an expensive legal procedure ending mostly in the landowner paying huge sums to compensate the tenant for the investments in the land. Usually the tenant sold the farm buildings and the right to use the land to a new tenant without much problems. In these cases both were obliged to pay the owner a sum of money which was euphemistically called a present, usually amounting to the rent of a half or one year. This present also had to be paid every six year when the rent was renewed, and in case the tenant remarried or was succeeded by a heir.

[3] Groningen University Library, Hs. 267.

If a tenant was not capable to pay the stipulated rent, the right to use the land returned to the owner who theoretically could split the land into pieces. In practice even at the moment the landowner was free to dispose of the land and the farm buildings, usually nothing changed. The land of some farms was (nearly) completely of one owner, while other farms had several owners, sometimes because the farmers used different parcels, but often also because the ownership of one parcel was divided between several owners due to for example inheritances. Usually after some time one of the owners bought all the other rights of ownership. Sometimes parts of the land were split off from the farm by one of the owners. Next to these large plots of land there were also quite a lot of smaller parcels which changed user more easily, this was especially the case for the land owned by the local clergyman. Because of this, individual farm sizes could fluctuate somewhat, making the land transfer system slightly more flexible. The indivisibility of the farm holding in the Dutch province of Groningen contrasts sharply with a system in which agricultural holdings could be divided and plots of land could be transferred separately, as found for example in parts of France, Germany and the southern Low Countries (Boudjaaba 2008: 87-119; Sabean 1990: 373-415; Vanhaute 2004).

In Kloosterburen in the 17th century the number of freeholders (in this period usually owning just a part of the land used) decreased fastly. Nobles, city-dwellers and descendants of freeholders (because of the division of inheritances) were the buyers of these lands; a true freeholder of a large farm became a rarity. However, the ownership of large parts of the three parishes was characterized by continuity. Institutional ownership usually lasted for centuries, without much change. The big exception was the important sale of former abbey properties by the provincial government in the second half of the 18th century to nobles, urban patricians and to a small extent to the tenants. Privately owned land was usually handed over from one to the next for several generations. Nearly all the landowners had concluded arrangements in which the land was fastened to farm buildings. Only clergymen and schoolmasters usually rented out their land on loose contracts, to secure that a successor still had the free disposal over it.

Table 1. Farms and farm-size in Kloosterburen, Leens, Wierhuizen and Zuurdijk, 1630-1991.

	5-15 ha	**15-30 ha**	**30-50 ha**	**50 + ha**	**Total**	**Hectares**
1630	33%	29%	33%	4%	93	2,405
1806	26%	26%	28%	20%	87	2,763
1991	5%	9%	41%	45%	66	3,534

NB: In 1630 and 1806 a few non-farms are included in the group 5-15 hectare. 1630: taxable ground only.

In the four parishes there were about as many small, as medium-ranged as large farms (table 1). The division between several categories did not change much in the 17th and 18th century. The number of extremely large farms seems to have risen somewhat, which can be attributed partly to the sources and partly to land reclamation. The 1630 figures accounted only for fiscal amounts of land, however, after measurements the true size usually proved to be 10 to 20% larger. In Kloosterburen the amount of land diminished, some 30 hectares were lost in 1626 when parts of the sea dike had been restructured and rebuilt slightly further inland. After the flood of 1717 more than hundred hectares ended up outside the dike. A few farms actually disappeared, while others lost ground. However, from the second quarter of 18th century onwards the movement of the sea dike changed direction. New polders were created by enclosing formerly lost land with new "outside" dikes. Around 1727 the very large Zuurdijksterpolder was reclaimed. However, most of the new polders date from the 19th century when the number of hectares increased sharply because of the reclamation of the Zevenboerenpolder (1802), the Feddemapolder (1804), the Bocumer Ikemapolder (1809-

1815) and the Negenboerenpolder (1873). In 1923, the Julianapolder was the last to be reclaimed.

For most of the farmer families the farm was the main source of income. For the parental couple in the Groningen Marne the control of their farm was a prerequisite for life, not only supplying them with income, but also with power. Parents clung to their farms and the transfer of farms usually took place post mortem. However, post mortem transfers are not the whole story. Usually, both husband and wife had the legal right on half of the property. After one of them died the surviving parent nearly always kept control of the farm. He or she became indebted to the children without paying rent until they became 18 year. After the age of 18 the debt theoretically had to be paid, but in practise this only happened if the surviving parent could free the money. Children were not inclined to wait with marrying until receiving these sums. The scanty information on marriage ages for the 17th century seems to suggest that they were at about the same level as later on (table 3). Possibly, ages at marriage had been lower in the 16th century, at least this is suggested by the reference to the marriage of an 18 year old granddaughter of a widowed farmer in Kloosterburen in 1588 (Feith and Brugmans 1911, p. 714). Most of the children married when father, mother, or possibly a stepmother or stepfather were still in charge of the parental farm. The strategy of widows and widowers to search for a new marriage partner after the premature death of their first one, postponed the moment when a new generation could take over considerably.

Succession of children was also hampered by several other factors. Sometimes both parents died too early for children to take over. If one of the children was old enough, their guardians could in theory wait a few years with selling. However, the management of the commercial farms was quite complicated, so usually the guardians sold the farm after a short period. There was definitely a timing problem as was also pointed out by Damsma and Kok (2005) for 19th century farmers in Akersloot (Holland). Succession of children was not obvious, inasmuch as it usually did not fit well into the family lifecycle; parents either died too young, or lived too long.

Another frequent event resulting in transfers to unrelated people was insolvency. There are many examples of creditors no longer wanting to wait for their payments. In a commercial money economy people can easily fail financially. Bankruptcy was the well-accepted punishment for wrong economic decisions, inadequate farming and bad luck. If a farmer couple was significantly less capable than other farmers it would nearly inevitably lose its farm. Of course there could also be more general reasons for bankruptcies, like the large floodings in 1686 and 1717, and the low grain prices in the fourth quarter of the 17th and the first half of the 18th century. A lot of farmers went bankrupt in this period. Their cattle, equipment and also the farm buildings were usually sold to new farmers.

Table 2 shows that selling was the most ordinary way to transfer a farm in the 17th century. Unfortunately, in 14% of the cases we do not know the relation between the new and the old farmer, and also the number of transfers will be slightly underestimated for the 17th century, because in part of the cases information on remarrying widowers is missing. What we do know for sure is that the share of succeeding sons was quite small with 18%, presumably the share of succeeding daughters will be larger than the reported 5%. Inasmuch as female surnames were usually not mentioned in the 17th century sources, this kind of transfers are difficult to prove. The percentage of succeeding sons is extremely low, considering that according to Goody (1973) three quarter of the families with surviving children had one or more sons.

Married farmer couples in the 17th century and later on did not see the favouring or succession of sons instead of daughters as something extremely desirable. In nearly all the marriage contracts of Groningen farmers an article can be found that stated that sons and daughters born from the marriage should be treated equally, this in contrast with the old

Medieval rule. Nearly all the inheritances of farmers from 1600 onwards were divided equally between the children. Most of the farmers concluded marriage contracts or made wills with the same kind of provisions. Important were articles giving the surviving partner usually the usufruct of a part of the inheritance if he or she did not remarry, and those securing that in case there were no surviving children, the heirs of both the male and the female side got a share in the inheritance comparable to their original distribution. Remarkable is the high share of remarrying widows and widowers (with or without children from their first marriage) who accounted for a quarter of the transfers of farms, while it were exactly these transfers which were difficult to prove in the 17th century sources due to missing marriage registers.

Table 2. Mode of transmitting farms in Kloosterburen, Leens, Wierhuizen and Zuurdijk, 1590-1991 (percentages).

	1590-1699	**1700-1799**	**1800-1899**	**1900-1991**
Son (married)	18%	12%	21%	29%
Daughter (married)	5%	7%	9%	7%
Unmarried child or children	0%	3%	2%	7%
Other near relatives	3%	4%	6%	9%
Total relatives	**27%**	**26%**	**37%**	**52%**
Widow remarrying	14%	13%	7%	0%
Widower remarrying	10%	12%	8%	2%
Total remarriages	**24%**	**25%**	**14%**	**2%**
Unrelated new farmers (sold)	31%	40%	32%	18%
Unrelated farmers (rented out)	0%	1%	8%	17%
Empty / labourers / disappear.	4%	7%	9%	12%
Non-family	**36%**	**48%**	**48%**	**46%**
Unknown (not a son)	14%	1%	0%	0%
N	444	428	359	326

NB: Other near relatives comprise brothers and sisters, but also family members who inherited the farm from childless people. The taking over by unmarried children was only considered to be an independent transfer if the children remained in charge for more than 10 years without selling the farm or handing it over to one of them around his or her marriage date. Sons (married) and daughters (married) include those marrying within 10 years after taking over the farm. If the farm was left empty or if it was inhabited by labourers or other non-farming households for more than five years, this was also considered to be a transfer. The number of transfers for the period 1600-1700 will be underestimated slightly due to the fragmentary sources.

For the 18th century we can compare the results internationally. In Belm in Germany, between 1711 and 1860: 38% of the farms went to males heirs, 13% to female heirs, 36% to remarrying widows and widowers, and only 13% to others (Schlumbohm 1994: 385). In three villages in Westfalia less than 10% of the new farmers in the period 1750-1870 were unrelated to their predecessor, while more than 60% were descendants, about 14% other relatives and about 17% second marriages (Fertig and Fertig 2006). Also in Neckarhausen (Germany) most of the plots of land were sold to relatives and not to strangers (Sabean 1990: 373-415). In their study of two parishes in southern Sweden in the period 1720-1840, Dribe and Lundh (2005) also find only a few non-relatives and a lot of sons and daughters succeeding after the death of a widow or widower. According to them ageing peasants have two priorities. Firstly, they strived to keep their holding intact, and in this way secure the existence of a household which would care for them in their old age. Secondly, they wanted to give their children the opportunity to marry and start households of their own (also: Habakkuk 1955).

In Kapli_ky in Bohemia, a region characterized by serfdom, a stable number of farm holdings and a growing amount of landless inhabitants, the transfer of farms to strangers was

a more frequent phenomenon in the period 1651-1720. In 56% of the cases the farm went to children, in 9% to other kin and in 35% to non-related people (Zeitlhofer 2007: 527), not taking into account remarriages for the sake of comparison. Velková (2008: 108) gives similar figures for St'áhlavy in Bohemia in 1691-1720 with 63% of the farms going to children, 1% to other kin and 36% to non-relatived people. Both authors suggest that the reason for the relatively high share of non-related successors must be sought in the unstable Bohemian society after the Thirty Years' War, with for instance high migration and high death rates. Zeitlhofer even mentions several bankruptcies in this period (Zeitlhofer 2007: 528-531; Velková 2008: 102-103). However, in comparison with the Dutch Marne the importance of selling farmsteads in Bohemia was very small, even between 1651 and 1720. In the 18th century in the Marne 33% of the farmsteads went to children, 6% to other kin and 61% was transmitted to strangers (Appendix 3, table 2, not taking into account disappearing farmsteads).

In Bohemia, the importance of the transfer of farms to strangers decreased considerably after 1720, and sons began to become the overwhelming majority of farm successors. The share of strangers fell to 22% in St'áhlavy (1721-1820) and even to only 11% in Kapli_ky (1721-1840). These figures might suggest that Bohemia, after a long period of disruption after the war of 1618-1648 returned to a system in which one of the main objectives of family strategies of farmers was keeping the farm into the male lineage. A system which was quite normal in large parts of continental Europe. Seen in this respect it is not surprising that most of the international literature on the transfer of farms is mainly preoccupied with the way parents passed the farm over to one of their children (for example: Derouet 1996; Dribe and Lundh 2002; Kaser 2002; Alos 2005; Arrizabalaga 2005, Fertig and Fertig 2006; Fauve-Chamoux 2006).

Clearly, 17th and 18th century farmers in the Dutch Marne lived in a different world. Transferring the farm to strangers was an ordinary event, and compared to Belm and Bohemia the relative chances of daughters compared to sons to become the successor of a parental farm were much better. Surely these differences were related to the much higher market dependence of the Northern Dutch farms. Also in Bretzwil near Basel in Switzerland, which had a more developed land market in the first half of the 18th century, less than half the land transactions took place between relatives and the family continuity on the land was only limited (Rouette 2003: 162).

Comparable land markets we find also in some relatively market-oriented parts of French, for example Vernon in Normandy with its small vinegrowing peasants (Boudjaaba 2008: 57-65) and in the Paris basin with its large farms (Moriceau and Postel-Vinay 1992: 146-199). Farm holdings consisted usually of several small plots, which could be sold relatively easy on the land market compared to indivisible farm holdings elsewhere. The figures for Vernon show that prior to 1774 still more than half the land was inherited, but a high 42% was already acquired through the market. This share of the market even rose to 57% in the period 1807-1826 (Boudjaaba 2008: 189-196). These findings seem to be in line with the thesis that a larger market-orientation of the agricultural production indeed goes together with a larger importance of the land market for acquiring land.

From an individual perspective there were four distinct ways to obtain a farm. 1. Succeeding your parents or other relatives; 2. Marrying someone who succeeds his or her parents; 3. Marrying a widow or widower with a farm; 4. Buying or renting a farm from a stranger. Table 2 shows clearly that in the 17th and 18th century the purchase of a farm was at least as important as the taking over of a family farm. This was not a society in which one just had to wait to automatically become a farmer.

The majority of the future farmers actively had to buy a farmstead, and accumulate the resources to make this possible. The potential farmer needed money to buy the farm buildings from the previous farmer; as already mentioned capital was also necessary for investments in livestock, equipment and stocks. Farms were usually too expensive to be paid by accumulated wages as a farm servant, by inheritances or by dowries. Rich farmers donated their male and female children sometimes a certain amount of capital upon marriage, to be deducted from the inheritance they would receive later on. Others borrowed large sums of money to their children upon marriage, a strategy which seemed to have been relatively important in Akersloot in Holland in the 19th century (Damsma and Kok 2005). The most important way to finance a new farm was by borrowing the money from family members, established farmers and others. In a sense succeeding heirs often had the same financial problems. When there were more surviving children they usually had to borrow money to pay their brothers and sisters their legal share of the inheritance.

Credibility was of extreme importance for a couple wishing to obtain a farm, the creditors really had to believe that the borrowed money would be repaid. The interest rate was low (about 4% in the 18th century, 5% to 7% in the 17th century and earlier) so they insisted on nearly 100% security. If a couple was not found credible, it was very hard to borrow the money needed. Money was too important in this society to do one a favour, even in the case of a family member. In 1774 Hindrik Jurriens and Hendrika Jans (married in 1770) received 2.500 guilders as her part of the parental inheritance, Hindrik being of only humble origin. They borrowed 6.000 guilders from her unmarried uncle Remge Ottes (one of the very few celibates in charge of a farm) and were capable to pay 6.500 guilders for the farm with the tenancy of 37 hectare previously owned by her parents. After inheriting also from this uncle few years later, Hindrik and Hendrika were themselves active lending out money and buying land. Anje Jans a sister of Hendrika had married a baker in 1754. Her parents and uncle borrowed her and her husband 1.500 guilders in 1761 to start a farm with the tenancy of 16 hectares. Within ten years this enterprise ended in a disaster. The unfortunate couple had to work the rest of their life as farm labourers, even the inheritance of 2.500 guilders in 1774 could not help them escape from this unhappy fate.

Definitely the most easy way to obtain a farm was marrying a widow or widower. In this case the money to finance the part of the marriage partner could be automatically borrowed from the stepchildren.

Table 3: Age at first marriage of farmers in Kloosterburen,Leens, Wierhuizen and Zuurdijk (marriage cohorts), 1680-1960.

	Male average	**median**	**N**	**Female average**	**median**	**N**
1687-1799	28.0	26.5	148	24.3	23.6	137
1800-1849	27.6	26.4	120	25.0	23.7	125
1850-1899	29.1	28.6	117	24.9	23.5	122
1900-1960	30.5	29.4	121	25.9	25.1	117

Those men and women who acquired a farm in the Marne, though conforming to the Western European marriage pattern, did not marry extremely late in the 18th century (table 3). Figures for children of Roman-Catholic farmers in the whole of the northern Groningen countryside show significantly higher average ages at marriage (31 for males, and 26 for females: Paping and Collenteur, 2004). The reason for this difference is not completely clear.

If we leave out transfers due to remarrying widows and widowers, about half of the transfers of farms took place around the marriage date of the new owners (tables 4 and 5). In the 18th century there was not much difference between couples buying a farm or taking it

over from their parents or other family members. Only a tiny minority was already in charge of a farm as a bachelor. Succession of parents around the marriage date was in some instances related to the death of the parents, but was also made possible by the selling of the farm by the parents to one of the children. Usually only one of the parents was still alive.

Not every future farmer couple had an easy start. Nearly half of the transfers of farms took place more than two years after marriage. Newly-wed couples followed several different strategies. 1. They could go and live with the surviving parent, hoping that in the end the farm would be transferred to them. This strategy had at least the advantage of having a secure livelihood, but there was no guarantee that one indeed was allowed to succeed. 2. They could settle down somewhere in a house, hoping that in a few years there were better opportunities to buy a farm. This strategy had the disadvantage that it was difficult to make a good living. A steady income was not assured, especially not if the couple did not have the capacities to do a trade or craft. 3. They could chose to buy a smaller farm the first years, waiting for the opportunity to obtain a larger farm by sale or by inheritance.

All these three strategies were chosen by potential farmers. The first strategy of living together with the parents was usually only temporarily acceptable because of the strong preference for neolocality (Paping 2008).

The second strategy of settling down as a labourer or a tradesmen in a house was very dangerous. It was the first step to downward social mobility, and a lot of farmer children who supposedly considered this a temporary step never acquired a farm at all. Especially from the second half of the 18th century onwards population growth resulted in frequent downward social mobility, inasmuch as the number of farms did not increase (Paping and Collenteur 2004). In the 18th and 19th century only two third of the marrying farmers´ sons and little more than half of the farmers´ daughters in the Groningen clay region managed to become farmer themselves later in life.[4] For children of farmers the acquisition of a farm wasn't an automatism at all. For farmer sons it was easier than for farmer daughters. The chances for people from non-farmer origin were limited. The figures for the Groningen clay area are quite comparable with those of the children of farmers in Akersloot (Holland) marrying between 1830 and 1880, 62% of the married sons and 44% of the married daughters became farmer themselves (calculated from Damsma and Kok 2005, table 3).

The third strategy of farm-hopping was not unusual. Often the purchase of a larger farm was connected to the reception of an inheritance, or a couple in the end got the permission to take over a parental farm. However, the purchase of a larger farm could also be a sign of upward social mobility.



Picture 4: Heemsterheerd (large farm in Kloosterburen), the main building is from 1852, the middle house dates from 1667, and the barn from 1877.

[4] These figures are derived from the database Roman Catholics in the Groningen Ommelanden, and a database of the Integral History Project Groningen.

To conclude, in the 17th and 18th century the market-oriented agriculture in the wealthy northern Dutch coastal area was supported by supposedly very capitalistic family relations, which were relatively but not completely gender neutral. The self-interest of the farmers was of more importance than the goal of passing of the farm to one of the descendents. Although it happened frequently, the succession of a son or a daughter was not the prime goal of the household. For a lot of farmers the acquisition of a farm was not an automatism, and the retaining of the farm was not at all unproblematic. The market-economy made the farmstead and the right to use the land connected to it a vulnerable possession at least for those less suitable for the occupation. Only 'capable' farmers were able to survive the struggle to increase production and earnings and to lower costs, the others lived under the continuous threat of losing their wealth. It nearly seems that parents were aware of this and acted reluctantly with the possession of their farm, which embodied most of the family capital.

Not the continuity of the farm within the family, but the assurance of an income and the continuity of the family capital semed to have formed the main goal of most of these northern Dutch farmers. This was the same attitude towards land as in west Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, a coastal region in the south of the Netherlands also characterized by commercial agriculture (Van Cruyningen 2000: 309). Land was primarily a means of production for the farmers, but did not have enough symbolic or sentimental meaning to cling to it. This was a completely different attitude towards the family farm than could be found in inland Eastern Netherlands in the 19th and 20th century, where continuity of the lineage is suggested to have been of prime importance according to De Haan (1994). Research of micro-data in nearby Westfalia in Germany and elsewhere shows that in practice it was less the continuity of the male lineage on the farm, but rather the goal of the present farmer to hand the farm over to a near family member that was at the core of the farm transfer system (Schlumbohm 1994; Zeitlhofer 2003). In this light it is not surprising that much of the German literature on farm transfers is preoccupied with inheritance rules, heirs and remarrying widows and widowers keeping control of the farm (Schlumbohm 2000; Rouette 2003: Fertig and Fertig 2006), while the possibility to purchase farms of strangers playing nearly no role.

The 19th and 20th century

In the first half of the 18th century agriculture was hit by a serous depression, which resulted in land rents becoming more and more fixed in the province of Groningen. When in the second half of the 18th century agricultural prices again started to rise, it proved difficult for landowners to increase the land rents again. In contrast with the neighbouring regions of Friesland and East Friesland (Germany) which both had a quite similar economic structure, the Groningen farmers were still owners of the farm buildings and had specific rights on the use of the land connected to these farmsteads *('beklemming')*. Between 1760 and 1790 most of the landowners in Groningen concluded contracts with their tenants, which stipulated that the rents and presents became eternally fixed, and that the tenant could dispose of the right to use the land in any way he wanted. The farmers paid the landowners huge sums for these contracts, which proved extremely beneficial from the end of the 18th century onwards when agricultural prices rose to high levels during the Napoleontic period.

Not in theory but in practise, nearly all the farmers became freeholders by 1800. In a few decades, the eternal right to use the land or *'beklemming'* had become much more valuable than the ownership rights on the land. This development was confirmed by the Dutch government in the period 1820-1830, when it registered in the cadastre the tenants as the

actual owners of the land in Groningen. The former landowners only played a role as furnisher of capital for which they received a riskless allowance.

In the adjourning province of Friesland where the tenants did not own the farm buildings anymore and had no legal rights on the land, the old landowners were registered in the cadastre. Land rents were flexible in this province (Knibbe 2006) as in Holland and Zealand, and tenancies were much less secure. It already has become clear that the quite secure tenancies in Groningen even in the 17th and 18th century did not result in a very high continuity in farmers, however, this continuity presumably must have been even less in the other Dutch coastal provinces because of the weaker position of the farmers.

Groningen farmers became extremely rich from 1780 onwards as a result of the rigidity of the land rents. In the countryside, all the economic power accrued to the farmers, they monopolised municipal politics and they became the most important cultural driving force (Botke 2002). The larger farmers and their wives did not work anymore, but until the fifties of the 20th century were mainly supervising the work of numerous farm labourers and servants. Of course the families of small and medium-sized farmers had a higher share in the physical work done on the farms. Because of the mechanisation most of the farm labourers disappeared in the second half of the 20th century, making the work even on the larger farms usually nearly completely a family enterprise again.

The security of the '*beklemming*', meant that a third kind of property right became of importance from 1800 onwards. For the owner of the eternal right to use the land it was no longer necessary to use the land themselves. This made it easier for rich farmers to acquire vast amounts of land, because it became possible to let out the land on loose terms. In the past subletting was usually prohibited by the landowner and quite unusual, concerning only small plots of land.

In the 19th century a trend started in the direction of a larger influence of the family in the transfer of farms. Table 2 shows that especially the succession of sons became relatively more important, mostly on the expense of the remarriage of widows and widowers. Remarrying became less common, partly because of the falling mortality from the end of the 18th century onwards. The selling of farms to strangers remained a normal strategy in this period, but the incidence decreased slightly. Rich farmers bought extra farms which they let out, or in which they housed labourers temporarily. It was not unusual to transfer these extra farms to one of the children after some time.

If we compare the 19th century farmers of the Marne with those from Akersloot (Damsma and Kok 2005) than it seems that direct family succession was even of less importance in Holland. However, in Akersloot parents were far more active in trying to acquire a new farm for their young children, this was especially the case for the large farmers. For the children of small farmers it was usually quite difficult to establish themselves as farmers in Akersloot. This is in accordance with the low share of farm succession of children for small farmers found in the Marne. Although Damsma and Kok do not give exact figures for farm succession, they suggest that the normal practise was that a rich farmer secured a farm for his children around their marriage age, which made relatively young ages at marriages possible.

In line with the increasing involvement of parents with the start of the farming career of their children became the renting out of farms to marrying children increasingly popular during the 19th century, and was even nearly the rule in 20th century Marne. Due to the rising welfare of the farmers, the parents were capable to retire after some 20 to 30 years and build a house in the village, living from the annual rent. Today, in nearly all the larger villages a lot of these huge rentier villa's dating mostly from the period 1890-1940 can be found. Usually after the death of the last parent (which in the 20th century usually took a lot of time), but sometimes earlier, the succeeding child received the farm as his or her inheritance, buying out

the other children. This new retirement strategy made it possible to fit the transfer of the farm to the next generation perfectly into the family lifecycle. As a result succession became more and not less usual in the 19th century. Table 4 clearly shows that after 1900 most of the succeeding children (80%) came in charge of the parental farm directly after their marriage, while before 1800 this was the case for less than half of the children.

Table 4: Difference between last marriage date and moment of becoming in charge of a farm (transfers) of children succeeding their parents or receiving a farm of them to use in the Kloosterburen, Leens, Wierhuizen and Zuurdijk, 1650-1964 (percentages).

	Marriage 1 or more years later	**The same or next year**	**2-9 years after marriage**	**10 years ore more**	**N**
1655-1799	14%	47%	32%	7%	72
1800-1899	6%	59%	19%	16%	113
1900-1964	9%	80%	4%	7%	70

This early retirement strategy was very comfortable for the succeeding child, inasmuch as he or she did not have to search for a farm, borrow money or wait until some moment in the future. However, possibly it provoked postponement of marriages, because would-be farmer couples waited with marrying until the moment the parents were inclined to retire. Male and female farmers in the Marne indeed married later in the 20th century than in the 19th century (table 3) and males also married later than other population groups (Van Poppel 1993). However, it did not become easier for farmer children to acquire a farm in the 20th century. There were two related reasons for that. Most of the farms were comparatively large in the Dutch coastal region compared to most parts of the rest of continental Europe. Nevertheless, the drive towards increasing the scale of farming promoted by the agricultural policy of the European Community resulted in a fall of the number of farms in Kloosterburen, Leens, Wierhuizen and Zuurdijk from 85 in 1960 to 67 in 1991. The prices of farms and land were already high before this development, but increased even more, making it extremely difficult to buy a farm. Already from the end of the 18th century onwards the high investments needed for farming had acted as a serious hindrance for new farmers.

A lot of farmers had considerably more than two children until the sixties of the 20th century, because the fall in mortality in the Netherlands in the 19th century did in first instance only provoke a minor fall in fertility, especially among the Roman Catholics and the more orthodox branches of protestants. For farmers' children these large family sizes meant that most of them had to search for other work.

From the middle of the 19th century onwards the succession problem was increasingly solved by the staying on the parental farm of part of the off-spring as celibates. In previous centuries this only rarely took place. However, in the 20th century farmer households consisting of a few elderly brothers and sisters became a frequent phenomenon. Unmarried farmers seem to have become less and less attractive as marriage partners, which might explain the numerous farms managed by celibates. This unattractiveness on the marriage market nowadays has even become part of the Dutch conventional wisdom, which is reflected in the immense popularity of a television series called: "Farmer searches for wife".

Interestingly for those not succeeding their parents, it became less usual to acquire a farm around the marriage date after 1900 (table 5). However, the number of these farmers was only small, inasmuch as family succession in the 20th century became the most common way to transfer a farm (table 3). Non-related farmers were usually tenants moving from one farm to another, while in the 20th century some farmers form Holland settled in the Marne also. The

last group had been forced to sell their farm because of the rapid urbanisation which took place in the western part of the Netherlands.

Table 5: Difference between last marriage date and moment of becoming in charge of a farm (all transfers) of people succeeding non-relatives in Kloosterburen, Leens, Wierhuizen and Zuurdijk, 1655-1952 (percentages).

	Marriage 1 or more years later	**The same or next year**	**2-9 years after marriage**	**10 years ore more**	**N**
1655-1799	5%	40%	31%	24%	132
1800-1899	1%	33%	39%	27%	125
1900-1952	4%	23%	25%	48%	56

NB: remarrying widows and widowers were not taken into account.

It was not only the impopularity of the farmers that was the cause of the enormous fall of remarrying widowers and widows. The primary reason was the extremely low mortality of adults before their sixties in the 20th century, people simply nearly did not become widower or widow anymore at a relatively young age. The formerly common phenomenon of farmer widows remarrying and as a result transferring the farm to their new husband completely disappeared. If a women became widow at a comparatively young age she usually gave up the farm in this period. This decision was quite rational, because the role of women on the farm diminished enormously from 1880 onwards.

In the province of Groningen most farms had a mixed character combining arable farming with cattle. In the second half of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century the emphasis shifted from the production and selling of meat and butter to grain, cole-seed and potatoes, with cattle having an important role as supplier of manure. Labour tasks were quite strictly divided between the sexes. Females usually took care of the cows (milking and butter making), sheep, pigs and poultry, and they were in charge of the garden. In the 19th century weeding in springtime also was an important activity for women. The males were doing the work with horses and the hard physical work on the land. Also they threshed the grain in winter. In harvest times the men reaped grain and cut hay, while the women bound the shelves and helped with the transport of hay.

With the introduction of fertilisers from 1880 onwards stronger specialisation became possible. Most of the Groningen farms completely concentrated on arable farming and the number of animals decreased, diminishing the role of the farmer wives in the enterprise. In the farms specialising in livestock production, the role of women became less, because of the milk factories were taking over the butter making process. Men alone did the work on the new machines, so the further the mechanisation went on, the more the role of women crumbled. In the course of the 20th century farming in the Groningen countryside largely became a male enterprise. As a result sons were much more involved in the farm than daughters. The sons acquired the capabilities to run the farm, while the daughters still needed a husband with these capabilities. This development fitted into the rise of the male cost-winner model from the second half of the 19th century onwards, driving married females out of economically rewarded positions, and which reached his peak in the Netherlands in the period 1900-1980. As a consequence the share of farmer sons succeeding their parents was rapidly increasing in the 20th century, while the share of daughters even decreased (table 2).

In the second half of the 20th century one or two of the sons often started a partnership with the parents, in which they managed the farm and did the work together. Usually this was a strategy to slowly hand over the very expensive farm to a chosen successor on the expense of the share of the other children. The actual price of a farm was too high and the profitability

of the farm too low to pay the other children their legal share. A successor usually could not afford to borrow 50%-80% of the value of the farm from the bank, because of the heavy payments of interest such a loan would bring about.

Surprisingly, if we look to the number of changes of farmers. the land market in the Marne became more rigid from the middle of the 19th century onwards. In the 17th and 18th century the name of the male head of household in charge changed on average every 20 year, while it was every 25 year in the period 1850-1991.[5] However, this fall in rigidity is partly optic, and has to be related to the fall in mortality in the last period, taking into account that high mortality provoked a lot of sales and remarriages of widows. Farmers could stay in charge much longer because of this. On the one hand more farmers retired in the period 1850-1991, on the other hand farms were sold to a lesser extent.

Differences in farm-size

Table 6 makes clear that there were quite large differences in farm transmission between farms of different size in the 17th and 18th century. In small and middle-sized farms family succession played only a lesser role. Selling the farm to strangers was the normal way to dispose of the farm and the (temporary) disappearance of a farm was also a quite ordinary event. However, the larger the farm the more important was family succession instead of selling to strangers. Despite that the numbers are quite small, it is clear that the family had a far greater grasp on the very large farms in the long run. Sons were clearly the preferred successors in this category, with figures nearly comparable with those mentioned for farms in Belm in Westfalia (Schlumbohm 1994), daughters played a relatively smaller role. The figures seem to suggest that succession and especially male succession was an ideal which was only attainable for the more affluent farmers. Families controlling larger farms were indeed more able to pass their farm to a family member. However, even some of the larger farms could go broke, as for example happened to three successive farmers on the 40 hectare farm of Bokum in Kloosterburen in the 17th century.

The comparatively high incidence of family succession on large farms suggest that farmer families in earlier periods did want to pass their farm to their children, but that they possibly could not afford such a strategy, which did not fit well into the family life cycle. The smaller the farm the more pragmatically farmers had to deal with the control of the farm, depending on the best solution on the specific moment that the farm should be passed to others because of the death or incapability of the last farmers. Also smaller farmers were more vulnerable and possibly experienced more bankruptcies and forced sales. Because of the high selling-rate small and medium-sized farms also could play a temporary role in the farm-hopping strategies of children of richer farmers, who in the first years after marriage lived on small farms, to move to a large farm later on.

Taking into account the strong preference for neolocality, the retirement of the parents was an expensive decision, which could mean financing a separate home for a long period. For instance, Antje Writsers had accumulated with her late husband more than 50 hectare in Leens. She passed these tenancies in 1770 to her unmarried son and daughter and lived for some decades in the village of Leens. Three years later her son married and bought out his sister, who also moved to the village. Interestingly, the possibilities for remarriages of larger farmers were greater than for smaller ones. A sign that larger farmers were indeed very attractive marriage partners.

[5] We only took account of changes in male heads of households to make the information for the 17th century more comparable with those for later centuries.

Table 6: Mode of transferring farms in Kloosterburen, Leens, Wierhuizen and Zuurdijk for different farm-sizes, 1590-1799 (percentages).

	5-15 hectare	**15-30 hectare**	**30-50 hectare**	**50+ hectare**	**Total**
Son (married)	11%	12%	18%	27%	15%
Daughter (married)	3%	5%	10%	6%	6%
Unmarried child or children	0%	1%	2%	6%	1%
Other near relatives	3%	2%	4%	8%	4%
Total relatives	**16%**	**20%**	**34%**	**47%**	**26%**
Widow remarrying	12%	11%	16%	17%	13%
Widower remarrying	8%	10%	13%	14%	11%
Total remarriages	**19%**	**21%**	**29%**	**31%**	**24%**
Unrelated new farmers (sold)	40%	45%	29%	18%	36%
Unrelated farmers (rented out)	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Empty / labourers / disappear.	11%	6%	3%	1%	5%
Non-family	**51%**	**51%**	**33%**	**19%**	**42%**
Unknown (not a son)	14%	8%	5%	2%	8%
N	190	307	282	93	872

NB: see table 2.

Table 7: Mode of transferring farms in Kloosterburen, Leens, Wierhuizen and Zuurdijk for different farm-sizes, 1800-1991 (percentages).

	5-15 hectare	**15-30 hectare**	**30-50 hectare**	**50+ hectare**	**Total**
Son (married)	13%	23%	31%	29%	25%
Daughter (married)	12%	9%	7%	5%	8%
Unmarried child or children	2%	3%	5%	8%	4%
Other near relatives	7%	7%	5%	9%	6%
Total relatives	**32%**	**41%**	**48%**	**51%**	**44%**
Widow remarrying	4%	3%	3%	4%	4%
Widower remarrying	2%	6%	4%	8%	5%
Total remarriages	**7%**	**9%**	**7%**	**12%**	**9%**
Unrelated new farmers (sold)	37%	25%	26%	16%	26%
Unrelated farmers (rented out)	7%	14%	12%	13%	12%
Empty / labourers / disappear.	17%	11%	7%	5%	8%
Non-family	**61%**	**50%**	**45%**	**37%**	**47%**
N	122	206	190	167	685

NB: see table 2.

In general the pattern of transmission of farms split to farm-size remained intact in the 19th and 20th century. Family succession on small farms was les usual than on large farms. However, family succession became of much greater importance in this period for both groups. When farmers became more wealthy from the end of the 18th century onwards, smaller farmers also could financially afford to retire. Interestingly, relatively much daughters seem to have been able to take over a small family farm of 5 to 15 hectares, even slightly more than sons. Clearly the deteriorating position of daughters depicted in the previous section did not hold for these small family farms, which mostly were run with family labour and only to a limited part by hired labour. Sons and daughters seem to have had an equally

powerful position on these farms. Nevertheless selling remained the most important way to transmit these small farms to a new farmer.

The preference for male succession is clear for the farms of 15 hectares or more, and again the larger the farm, the higher the chance of the succession of a son and the lower the chance of the succession of a daughter. This last development fits perfectly in the explanation given in the previous section, that the involvement of daughters in the farm work diminished, a development which will be stronger on the larger farms. However, for the really large farms with more than 50 hectares the chance of male succession did not increase much compared to the 17th and 18th century, a period in which this chance was already high. Selling, renting out or disappearing as a functioning farm happened even more in the 19th and 20th century than earlier.

The taking-over of the farm by unmarried children (fraternities) or other family members was clearly increasing in all size categories. However, it still happened more on very large farms, which the family members seem to have been very eager to keep the farm inside the family with all means. Also the high share of unmarried children running a farm in these category suggest that there were severe problems in dividing the inheritance and passing the farm to the next (married!) generation. It has to be reminded that the rising share of family succession in farm transfers in the 19th and 20th century came mostly at the expense of the falling share of remarrying widows and widowers, while the number of remarriages diminished rapidly in the 19th and even more in the 20th century.

Conclusion

This study on the transmission of the relatively large and capitalistic farms in the Marne (Groningen) suggests that from the 16th until the 19th century family succession was absolutely not the rule. Continuity within one family was not an infrequent phenomenon, but in as many cases the farms were sold or rented out to strangers, or in some instances disappeared or were inhabited by farm labourers. The capitalistic way of farming created insecurity and demanded great skills of the farmers, making it necessary for the family to bring appropriate successors on the farm. Because the family farm embodied usually most of the farm capital, the transfer of the farm needed to be done carefully. Often the selling of the farm to strangers was considered the most attractive strategy for the family as a whole. This selling secured a fair price for all descendants of the last farmer. Handing it over to an insolvent family member and lending him or her the necessary money involved a risk of bankruptcy which the heirs not always wanted to take. It was the risk of bankruptcy which increased insecurity and made brothers and sisters reluctant to hand their family farm and so their inheritance over to an incapable brother or sister. However, if an incapable farmer couple came in control of the farm and it was not able to earn a living, in the long run lack of money because of the working of the market forced them to sell their farm.

This pragmatic system of farm transfers was certainly making agriculture stronger than elsewhere, because it resulted in a tendency of bringing the use of agricultural capital goods into the hands which could make the high production and profits from it. Obviously this selection process was a clear advantage compared to agricultural systems found in most of inner Europe in the Early Modern period in which farms were mostly handed over to succeeding sons in a traditional way, independent of the fact they were fit or unfit for the job of farmer. Bankruptcies as a way to dispose of incapable farmers seem to have been less frequent elsewhere, because the share of agricultural produce sold on the market was much lower than in the Dutch coastal regions. A more flexible way of dealing with the transfer of

farms must have been an element which through a higher agricultural productivity provoked or supported the Dutch economic success from the 16th to the 18th century.

In four centuries the system farms were transmitted in the Dutch coastal region did not remain unchanged. Surprisingly, there was not a clear trend towards modernisation and individualism. In the 17th and 18th century selling family farms to strangers was more usual than in the 20th century. The stronger the hold farmers had on their farms due to the system of eternal tenures with fixed rents from the second half of the 18th century onwards will have played a role. Another factor was the rising welfare which made early retirement possible for larger groups of farmers and eased the timing of the transfer around the marriage date of the child.

In the 17th and 18th century it was very unattractive for parents to give up their farm, because they could not afford to retire and living together with married children was not seen as a very desirable alternative. Keeping the family farm into the family was of relatively limited importance for parents compared to other goals, which gave them a lot of freedom to dispose of the farm the way they wanted. Before 1800, they usually chose the financially most attractive way. Richer farmers, however, already were able to secure more family continuity in the 17th and 18th century. In the last two centuries, strategies were indeed more directed towards securing farms for the children after their marriage. In the 17th and 18th century farmers rarely rented farms from their parents and nearly always owned the farmstead in their own right, in the 19th and 20th century a lot of farmers were tied to their parents who were often the actual owners of the farms they used. In some cases parents even bought farms to rent them out to their children.

Another remarkable development is the change in the position of women related to the transfer of farms. In the 17th to 19th century women had relatively strong rights on the farm. As a widow (just like a widower), they were allowed to keep the farm and remarry or not, anyway they wished, without much risk of losing the farm to their children. However, in the 19th and especially in the 20th century falling mortality resulted in the disappearance of widows as a large group. Widowed women usually gave up the farm, unless unmarried adult sons were available to do the work. Also the chances of daughters to succeed their parents on the farm were much better in the 18th century, but diminished compared to their brothers slightly in the 19th century and strongly in the 20th century. With the notable exception of small farms, farming became male work in the 20th century, and parents (fathers) looked to their sons as their potential successors. Mechanisation combined with the rise of the cost-winner model drove females out of the farm work. Before 1900 the contribution of the farmers' wife and the other women to agricultural work was large. However, the female tasks were taken over by machines run by males.

A third 20th century characteristic which appears on first sight not to have been very modern is the rise of groups of celibate children running the farm for decades after their parents death. Before 1800 this kind of household structures were very uncommon and only a temporary phenomenon. Usually after a few years the farm was sold or one of the children married and took over the farm. In the past, married couples (and widows and widowers) formed nearly always the nucleus around which the household was constructed. Possibly these 20th century households of old unmarried brothers and sisters were a sign of the falling status making it difficult for farmers to find suitable marriage partners. However, the fast rise of Dutch population in the period 1880-1960 due to the relatively large Dutch families will also have played a role. With so many children surviving remanining unmarried seemed to have been the only way for each child to become a farmer. In other cases a married and an unmarried brother, though usually not living in the same building, drove a farm jointly.

Agriculture in the Groningen Marne, despite being technologically very advanced and extremely market-oriented, has in one way become more 'backward' than in previous

centuries. In the early modern period the market forced farmers to dispose of the farms as rational as they could. In the 20th century the main drive of farmers seems more and more to keep the farm into the (male) family. The family continuity of farms was larger than ever before.

Appendix 1: the database used

For four parishes in the Eastern Marne the history of the users of the farmsteads have been constructed using a wide range of available data. Amateur historians already published two books with detailed information on these histories, which were more or less complete from 1800 onwards (Zijlma 1966; Beukema 1991). They mostly used information from the cadastre, from transfers registered in notary archives and in personal archives of the farmers themselves. In these books the histories of the 17th and 18th centuries were much more fragmented or completely missing. This gap in information had been filled by extensive research in archives. Archival sources used to fill this gap were for instance various tax registers (1591, 1630, 1719, 1755, 1806), registers of people responsible for dike maintenance (from the end of the 16th century until 1767), administrations of the province, churches and nobles, personal archives, juridical archives (tenancy conflicts and bankruptcies), and transfer contracts. For most of the 18th century the histories are quite complete. For the period 1590-1718 there were a lot of gaps, mostly of a few years, sometimes of decades. Short periods were filled by interpolation. Fortunately, the provincial administration is rather complete from 1595 onwards; securing that also for the 17th century the histories of a large minority of the farms were quite good.

With the help of baptism and marriage registers and a lot of genealogies detailed personal information (births, marriages and deaths) of the farmers has been gathered. Baptism and marriage registers for Kloosterburen start in 1722, and in Leens, Zuurdijk (only baptism registers) and Wierhuizen already around 1680. Roman Catholic baptism registration starts in 1727, while Mennonite baptism registers were nearly completely missing. Official death registration for these three parishes only starts around 1800. For the province of Groningen an index of all the baptisms and all the marriages before 1811 is available on internet which proved very helpful. In 1811 the registration service starts. For the province of Groningen most of the information in the death registers (1811-1959) and marriages registers (1811-1934) are also available on internet. The newer acts still fall under the privacy protection. The death and marriage registers contain also a lot of information on the second half of the 18th century. Consequently, we have the best personal information on farmers for the 18th, 19th and first half of the 20th century.

Appendix 2: Heads of households of farms in Zuurdijk, 31 December of each year

Farm:	Z2	Z5	Z6	Z7	Z8	Z9	Z10	Z11	Z16	Z17
Hect.	78	48	61	81	61	61	55	35	81	52
1800	CO	CO	WM	CO	CO	WF	CO	CO	CO	CO
1801	WF	CO	WM	CO	CO	WF	CO	CO	CO	CO
1802	**x**CO	CO	WM	CO	CO	WF	CO	CO	CO	CO
1803	CO	CO	WM	CO	CO	WF	CO	CO	CO	CO
1804	CO	**s**CO	WM	CO	CO	WF	CO	CO	CO	CO
1805	CO	CO	WM	CO	CO	WF	CO	CO	CO	WF
1806	CO	CO	WM	WF	CO	WF	CO	CO	CO	WF
1807	CO	CO	WM	WF	CO	WF	CO+	CO	CO	WF
1808	CO	WM	WM	**x**CO	CO	WF	EM	CO	CO	WF
1809	CO	WM	WM	CO	CO	WF	EM	CO	WF	WF
1810	CO	**s**CO	WM	CO	**s**EM	WF	**s**CO	CO	WF	WF
1811	CO	CO	WM	CO	EM	WF	CO	CO	WF	WF
1812	CO	CO	WM	CO	EM	WF	CO	CO	WF	WF
1813	CO	CO	WM	CO	EM	WF	CO	CO	WF	WF
1814	CO	CO	WM	CO	EM	WF	CO	CO	WF	WF
1815	CO	CO	WM	CO	EM	WF	CO	CO	WF	WF
1816	CO	CO	WM+	**s**CO	CO	WF	CO	CO	WF	WF
1817	CO	CO	cUN	CO	CO	WF	CO	CO	WF	WF
1818	CO	CO	UN	CO	CO	WF	CO	CO	WF	WF
1819	CO	CO	UN	CO	CO	WF	CO	CO	WF	WF
1820	CO	CO	UN	CO	CO	WF	CO	CO	WF	WF
1821	CO	CO	UN	CO	CO	**c**EM	CO	CO	WF	WF
1822	CO	CO	UN	CO	CO	EM	CO	CO	WF	WF
1823	CO	CO	**x**CO	CO	CO	EM	CO	**s**CO	WF	WF
1824	CO	CO	CO	CO	WM	EM	CO	CO	WF	WF
1825	CO	CO	CO	WM	WM	EM	CO	CO	WF	WF
1826	WF	CO	CO	WM	WM	EM	CO	CO	WF	WF
1827	WF	CO	CO	WM	**x**CO	EM	CO	CO	WF	WF
1828	WF	CO	CO	WM	CO	EM	CO	**m**EM	WF	WF
1829	WF	CO	CO	WM	CO	EM	CO	EM	WF	WF
1830	WF	CO	CO	WM	CO	EM	CO	EM	WF	WF
1831	WF	CO	CO	WM	CO	EM	CO	EM	WF	WF
1832	WF	CO	CO	WM	CO	EM	CO	EM	WF	WF
1833	WF+	CO	CO	WM	CO	EM	CO	**s**CO	WF	WF
1834	**c**CO	CO	**m**EM	**s**CO	CO	EM	CO	CO	**c**WM	WF
1835	CO	CO	EM	CO	CO	EM	CO	CO	WM	WF
1836	CO	CO	EM	CO	CO	EM	CO	CO	WM	WF
1837	CO	CO	EM	CO	CO	EM	CO	WF	WM	WF
1838	CO	CO	EM	CO	CO	EM	CO	WF	WM	WF
1839	CO	CO	EM	CO	WF	EM	WM+	WF	WM	**c**CO
1840	CO	CO	EM	CO	**h**WM	EM	sCO	WF	WM	CO
Until	1855	1857	1845	1850	1841	1853	1852	1875	1847	1862

x: marriage
c: child succeeding
m: moving elsewhere
s: sold
h: other heir succeeding

CO: couple
WF: widow
WM: widower

EM: no farmer
UN: unmarried person
+: died next year

Appendix 3: some absolute figures

Appendix table 2. Mode of transferring farms in Leens, Kloosterburen, Wierhuizen and Zuurdijk, 1590-1991 (absolute numbers)

	1590-1699	**1700-1799**	**1800-1899**	**1900-1991**
Son (married)	81	51	74	94
Daughter (married)	24	31	33	22
Unmarried child or children	1	12	6	24
Other near relatives	14	17	20	28
Total relatives	**120**	**111**	**133**	**168**
Widow remarrying	60	55	24	0
Widower remarrying	45	50	28	8
Total remarriages	**10**	**105**	**52**	**8**
Unrelated new farmers (sold)	139	173	114	58
Unrelated farmers (rented out)	1	4	27	54
Empty / labourers / disappear.	18	29	33	38
Non-family	**158**	**206**	**174**	**150**
Unknown (not a son)	61	6	0	0
N	444	428	359	326

Appendix table 4A: Difference between last marriage date and moment of becoming in charge of a farm (transfers): all transfers, 1655-1962 (absolute numbers).

	Marriage 1 or more years later	**The same or next year**	**2-9 years after marriage**	**10 years ore more**	**N**
1655-1799	17	93	66	39	215
1800-1899	9	119	77	53	258
1900-1962	12	74	19	35	140

NB: remarrying widows and widowers were not taken into account.

Appendix table 4: Difference between last marriage date and moment of becoming in charge of a farm (transfers) of children succeeding their parents or receiving a farm of them to use in the Eastern Marne, 1680-1969 (absolute numbers).

	Marriage 1 or more years later	**The same or next year**	**2-9 years after marriage**	**10 years ore more**	**N**
1655-1799	10	34	23	5	72
1800-1899	7	67	21	18	113
1900-1960	6	56	3	5	70

Appendix table 5: Difference between last marriage date and moment of becoming in charge of a farm (all transfers) of people succeeding non-relatives in the Eastern Marne, 1680-1969 (absolute numbers).

	Marriage 1 or more years later	**The same or next year**	**2-9 years after marriage**	**10 years ore more**	**N**
1655-1799	6	53	41	32	132
1800-1879	1	41	49	34	125
1880-1944	2	13	14	27	56

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