Statistics in focus

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

THEME 5 – 25/1999

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Manuscript completed on: 10/1999
ISSN 1562-1340
Catalogue number: CA-NN-99-025-EN-C
Price in Luxembourg per single copy (excl. VAT): EUR 6

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Europe's farm landscape : some examples and figures

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*Although farmers were once basically involved in production, they are now seeing their role diversify. As the public becomes increasingly interested in landscape conservation, so farmers are finding themselves entrusted with the task of managing the countryside and its component parts - be they cultural or agricultural (**Box 1**) - for the sake of the environment, the countryside or culture in general. Many policies have been implemented at European and/or national level to help farmers in their endeavours. However, there are still very few tools available for assessing the usefulness and impact of such measures. This issue looks at a number of examples at national and regional level.*

Similar methods for some basic indicators

Much of Europe's countryside is farmland. In 1997, farmland (arable land, permanent crops and permanent grassland) accounted for 44% of Europe's territory (**Figure 1**).

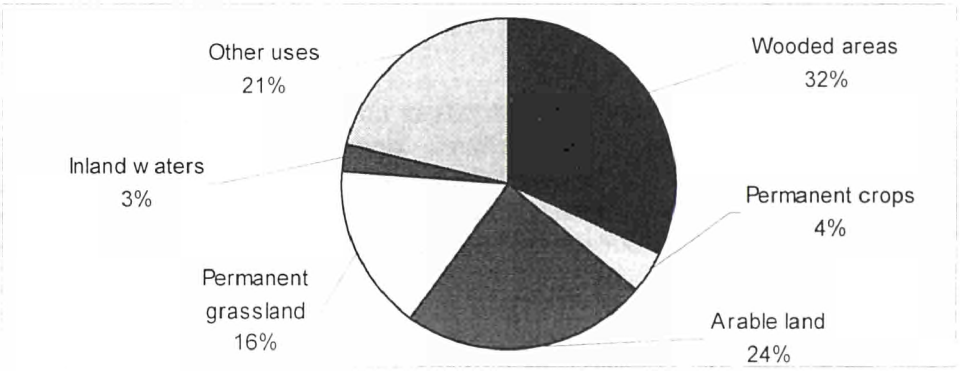

Figure 1: The role of agriculture in Europe in 1997.

Together with the other areas managed or maintained (part of wooded areas and natural areas included in "other uses") by farmers, more than half the territory of the European Union is under the responsibility of farmers [1].

In Europe, culture and agriculture are as numerous as they are diverse - the hand of man has been shaping the agricultural landscape for thousands of years, and will continue to do so.

Some Member States have implemented methods for collecting certain key data on their countryside. According to the results of the OECD questionnaire:

- the United Kingdom recorded some **229 000 ponds** in 1996;
- Denmark recorded **30 000 tumuli** ;
- in 1985, there were **125 000 km of transhumance tracks** in Spain. Land under ***dehesas*** was estimated at **1.4 million hectares** in 1985;
- Greece recorded **250 000 ha of terracing**.

Box 1: A simple classification of cultural and agricultural landscape features

The following classification has been discussed by the OECD and with the Member States at the Eurostat Working Parties on Land Use [2], and generally agreed :

- **non-linear landscape features**: these are individual objects that cover a small area only (isolated trees, ponds, monuments, windmills, cairns, tumuli, traditional farmsteads, etc.);
- **linear landscape features:** all components that are linear in nature (hedges, banks, streams, farm tracks, stone walls, traditional irrigation networks, etc.);
- **area landscape features**: these are areas of farmland that are special in that they bear the mark of ancient farming practices (crop terracing, vineyards, upland fields, Alpine meadows, etc.);
- **land-use patterns specific to certain regions**: these types of land are often not mentioned in official statistics. They point to a special type of land use. Perhaps the most common example is the Spanish *dehesa*. Mention might also be made of olive plantations associated with other crops, rice plantations, etc.

It is clear from this classification that cultural features and certain historical agricultural features are of interest in terms of the pattern of, and changes in, land use. These features have a considerable impact on the landscape and sometimes account for a significant portion of land cover and/or use. They determine how the landscape is broken up, and how heterogeneous and diversified it is. In this respect, conservation and maintenance of such features is of key significance to the quality of the landscape.

Before collecting or processing data on these landscape features, we need at least an approximate classification (**cf. Box 1**).

As yet, there are no harmonised methods or common indicators for studying (agri)cultural landscape features at European Union level. However, most countries are working on this. **Table 1** shows the information each country collects on linear structures.

An exhaustive inventory of cultural and agricultural elements seems unrealistic, both in terms of cost and time. The countries and regions concerned have thus opted for sample-based approaches. After selection, samples are investigated by means of aerial photographs or better still, in the field.

For non-linear features, collecting statistical data often means a simple count. If, for example, the geographical position is known, the data can be incorporated into a GIS (Geographical Information System).

For linear components, work is a little more involved. The first item of information collected is length (in metres or kilometres). Work of a more specific nature may then be done to ascertain the status of the features in question (whether a wall is intact or not, for example) or their function (in the case of a hedgerow, for example, does it serve an ecological, scenic, agricultural or domestic purpose?). Data are sometimes localised, which means they can be used for geographic purposes.

However, there are no detailed data at European level, in terms of methods used or available figures, for non-linear or linear elements.

The United Kingdom: the Countryside Survey

Field boundaries (such as hedgerows and walls) are a typical and important feature of the landscape in the United Kingdom. They add local flavour, are part and parcel of the landscape, and are generally pleasing. However, field boundaries are also important in terms of flora and fauna. In the sixties, agricultural policy in the United Kingdom, as in most other European countries, encouraged the destruction of linear components, which were considered an obstacle to productivity. Since the late 80s, a policy encouraging the maintenance and restoration of such elements has been in force (**cf. Box 2**).

Table 1 : data on linear features, by country

Country			Data available on following features	Type of data	Source of data	Aggregation possible
Germany			Edges of forests Field boundaries	Cartographic and digital	CORINE Land Cover	Yes
			Accommodation tracks Rows of trees Hedgerows Dykes Stone walls Terrace boundaries Drainage and irrigation channels Metalled roads, Roman roads	Not forwarded	Administrative inventory of cultivated and/or protected areas	Not forwarded
Spain			Hedgerows Windbreaks Transhumance tracks Roman roads Farm and forestry roads Aqueducts	Not forwarded	National, regional, local inventories	No
France (Brittany)			Parcel boundaries with ligneous vegetation *Bocage* banks	Cartographic and digital	TERUTI in Brittany (sampling)	Yes (at regional level)
Ireland			Hedgerows Stone walls	To be extracted	EU's Integrated Administrative and Control System	Yes
Norway			Stone walls Historic roads and tracks Land/water boundaries Avenues and rows of trees	Cartographic and digital	3Q survey (sample covering entire territory)	Yes
Sweden			Avenues Strips between fields Cattle tracks Earth walls, ditches Accommodation tracks Windbreaks (hedgerows) Rows or hedges of pollard willows Stone walls Rows of trees or hedges Wooden barriers Stream banks	Not forwarded	Swedish Countryside Survey and agri-environmental programme - "The conservation of areas containing biologically rich habitats", with aerial photographs, inventories, administrative data	Yes, for the agri-environmental programme, but not representative Not for the Swedish Countryside Survey
Switzerland			Hedgerows Walls, dry-stone walls Field boundaries Banks, embankments, cuttings Edges of forests Watercourses Tracks and paths Farm tracks	Cartographic and digital	"Disappearance of countryside and semi-natural recreational areas", study of changes in the 1:25 000 Topographical Map of Switzerland between 1972 and 1977, 1978 and 1983, and 1984 and 1989, statistical data, local studies	Yes
United Kingdom	Great Britain	Whole	Maintained hedgerows, relict hedgerows Dry-stone walls Edges of watercourses	Cartographic and digital	Countryside Survey (territorial sampling)	Yes
		Scotland	Streams, ditches, tracks Hedgerows, avenues of trees	Cartographic and digital	Land Cover Change: Scotland from the 1940s to the 1980s	Yes
	Northern Irland		Field boundaries Hedgerows (structure and composition)	Cartographic and digital	Northern Ireland Countryside Survey	Yes

Source : DG VI questionnaire, OECD questionnaire, miscellaneous information.

Box 2: hedgerow preservation policies in the United Kingdom

There are three major components to hedgerow maintenance and conservation policy in the United Kingdom [3].

First, restoration and management of traditional field boundaries is subsidised under agricultural/environmental programmes (Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Countryside Stewardship Schemes). These schemes vary from region to region. In England and Wales, payments have so far been made for around 10 000 km of hedgerows.

The 1997 hedgerows law (England and Wales) makes it incumbent upon persons planning to destroy a hedgerow to notify the local authorities of their intentions. The authorities then decide whether the hedgerow is "important" for the countryside, in terms of flora or fauna, or for historical reasons. If it is, destruction of the hedgerow is considered a criminal offence. The criteria for determining whether or not a hedge is important are currently being reviewed.

The government also makes funds available to provide farmers with "hedgerow conservation advisors".

As stated in the British government's biodiversity action plan, the object of these measures is to prevent the disappearance of relict and species-rich hedgerows and to ensure that 50% of such hedges are properly managed by 2005.

The length of hedgerows and walls in Great Britain in 1990 was estimated at 462 000 km and 188 000 km respectively, according to the findings of the Countryside Survey (**Box 3**). Between 1984 and 1990, 129 000 km of hedges and 22 000 km of walls were lost, either as a result of incorporation into crop-growing areas or replacement by another type of marker. The total length of "post and (barbed) wire" fencing increased by 74 000 km and the total length of badly damaged hedges increased by 31 000 km (**Figure 2**).

Box 3: The Countryside Survey

This sample survey covers the whole of Great Britain. Around 500 plots of 1km² are periodically surveyed (1978, 1984, 1990, 1998). Surveyors visit the plots and record details of land cover, vegetation, the aquatic environment, hedgerows, soil, etc. All these components are geo-referenced, which allows the data collected to be geographically processed.

Changes in hedges between 1984 and 1990 were as follows: two thirds remained unchanged; 7% were badly damaged; 15% were replaced by fencing or other types of marker and 11% were removed or incorporated into crop-growing areas. Three quarters of walls remained unchanged; around 14% were replaced by fencing or other types of marker and around 9% were removed or incorporated into crop-growing areas.

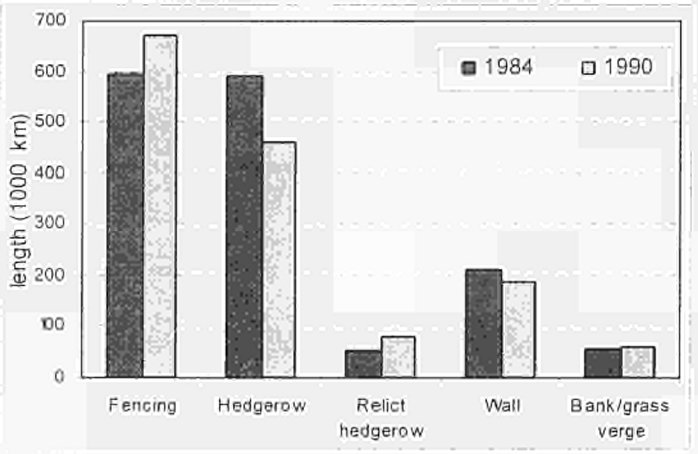

Figure 2: Field boundaries in United Kingdom

Brittany: the multiple functions of hedges

The characteristic feature of the Brittany countryside is *bocage*. By 1980, over half the wooded hedges that existed in the 60s had disappeared. The region has since made a concerted effort to help restore its *bocage*. This calls for a sound knowledge of the regional heritage, how it changes and the way it functions. A specific survey has been carried out, based on the TERUTI national land-use survey (**Box 4**). By analysing its findings, experts have been able to assess and map the current role of hedges in Brittany using basic indicators [4].

The observation unit is the parcel boundary. This allows hedges to be classified within the *bocage* management unit, i.e. the parcel. It is often the farmer of the parcel that maintains the adjacent hedge. Surveyors have recorded field boundaries for 1 592 plots measuring 9 ha square as shown on aerial photographs.

Box 4: The hedgerow survey in Brittany - a TERUTI application

The land use survey (TERUTI) provides an annual picture of physical and functional land cover for 550 000 points across France according to a two-stage sample. The survey of hedgerows in Brittany was carried out in the field using the TERUTI grid as follows :

- the first sampling stage is the aerial photograph (as in TERUTI) ;
- the second sampling stage involves selecting two plots of land 9 ha square from each photograph. In TERUTI, 36 points are surveyed for each photograph; here, squares bounded by 2 sets of 4 numbering points have been selected ;
- the third sampling stage involves surveying parcel boundaries with ligneous vegetation or *bocage* banks in each of the sample squares.

The sample represents around 1/200 of the area of Brittany and provides information on some 15 basic variables for around 16 000 parcel boundaries.

Processing of results has produced a nine-category *ex post* classification of field boundaries based on the following simple criteria: presence of a bank, continuity of foliage screen between 3 and 5 m (windbreak), presence of copse-wood shoots and/or low strata and presence of standards (**Figure 3**).

The 251 000 km of field boundaries in Brittany can thus be divided up as follows:

- continuous hedgerows cover 160 000 km, almost one third of which consists of low or ornamental hedges;
- non-continuous *bocage* totals 67 000 km ;
- open banks account for around 24 000 km.

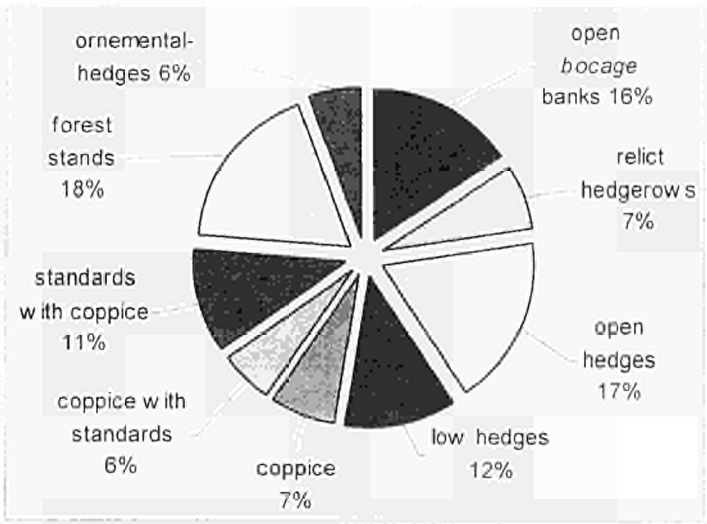

Figure 3: Breakdown of Brittany's hedgerows into nine categories

The primary function of hedges is landscape-related. More often than not, they back on to fixed structures such as roads or buildings. This type of hedge accounts for 43% of the linear total (**Figure 4**). Although hedges are tending to disappear, those bordering roads prove most resistant. One third of hedges simply separate parcels of agricultural land (meadows or crops). 23% of hedges border areas with low levels of human activity (fallow land, heath, streams, etc.).

Hedges do not just divide up land - they play other roles too (**Figure 5**).

- **a stream filtering role**: the indicator here is the number of kilometres of oblique hedges or hedges running across slopes; 62 000 km of hedges act as "filters" in this way.
- **a wildlife role**: 133 000 km of hedges (low layers covering 2/3 or more of total length) provide various types of wildlife with corridors, nesting places and food (berries).
- **a windbreak function**: the *bocage* network also serves as a windbreak in a region that is exposed to prevailing winds from the Atlantic. Around 127 000 km of hedges (foliage screen 3-5 m from the ground over 1/3 to 2/3 of the hedge's total

Figure 4: Brittany's hedgerows role in the landscape

- **a domestic function**: hedgerows are traditionally a source of timber - copses (64 000 km) provide wood for heating, whilst forest stands provide timber for construction. It has been estimated that 2.5 km of coppice will heat a household without resource exhaustion.
- **agricultural functions**: although hedgerows rarely form genuine barriers, they do help with the enclosure of cattle. Low continuous hedges or banks higher than 50 cm cover a total of 94 000 km. Furthermore, 51 000 km of hedges are a potential source of shelter for animals. For arable crops, some 50 000 km of hedges serve as high windbreaks.

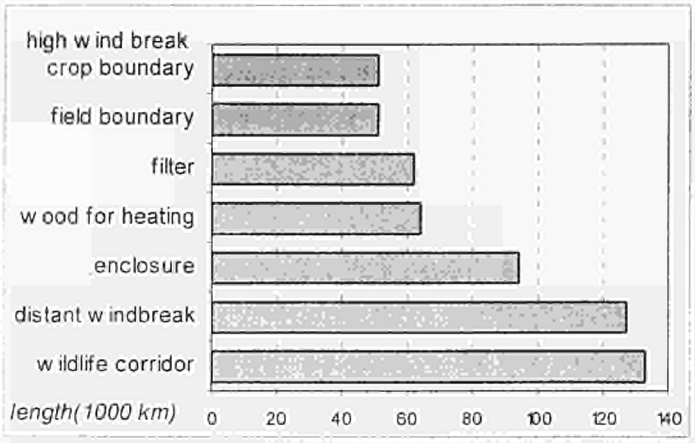

Figure 5: Various functions of Brittany's hedgerows

Charting trends in Switzerland's many "small structures"

As part of its programme on the "Disappearance of countryside and semi-natural recreational areas", Switzerland has been investigating changes in non-linear landscape components and linear landscape structures using the 1:25 000 Topographical Map of Switzerland [5]. A wealth of data has been recorded on cultural and agricultural components of the landscape. However, as work is done in cartographic form, only the quantitative aspect of components is recorded (**Box 5**).

Table 2 shows the changes that took place between 1972-1983 and 1978-1989. More isolated trees were planted than were felled. By contrast, there was a sharp drop in the number of fruit trees (applies to standard fruit trees only). Over the period, only one fruit tree was planted for every three felled. Switzerland is seeing a net decrease in traditional orchards, and there is no sign of this trend reversing.

Bushes have appeared. These are ecologically significant if they are maintained, but are often features of transitional areas prior to afforestation. In this case, they are of less value to the landscape, and their aesthetic impact is less.

Table 3 shows the scale of the changes that have taken place in Switzerland (features that have appeared or disappeared, enlargements, etc.). The length of new hedges is greater than that of destroyed hedges.

Analysing the results over the two sample plans the positive balance was around 60 km per year between 1978 and 1989, which was greater than the increase between 1972 and 1983 (around +20 km per year). New hedges are slightly longer than hedges that have been destroyed, by 20 to 40 m.

Box 5: An original Swiss method

Work is done on the 1:25 000 Topographical Map of Switzerland, which is updated every 6 years. Comparisons have therefore been made between data for the periods 1972-77, 1978-1983 and 1984-89. In other words, each new version of the map is compared with the previous version(s). This survey method does not take account of changes during each six-year period.

However, not all the national territory is surveyed. Two different sampling plans are used, one for a breakdown of territory into four landscape categories, and the other for a breakdown into six groups of cantons. In all cases, the samples selected are rectangles measuring 4 km × 3 km. They are laid over the 1:25 000 map and cover 1/16 of the territory of Switzerland. The number of samples is determined in advance (112 for the four types of landscape, 144 for the groups of cantons). Sampling is random and there is no link between the two series. Results are also presented separately for each of the series.

There were 13 500 changes in non-linear components per year between 1972 and 1983 and 17 500 per year between 1978 and 1989. This represents an average of 3 km² per area change for Switzerland.

Table 2 : Changes in small structures by geographical area between 1972 and 1989 (annual average)

		High mountain		Mountain region		Plateau		Urban areas		Total	
	Unit	72-83	78-89	72-83	78-89	72-83	78-89	72-83	78-89	**72-83**	**78-89**
New isolated tree	*u*			2340	4180	3480	2210	310	1920	**6130**	**8310**
Felled isolated tree	*u*			2010	550	2930	1200	460	320	**5400**	**2070**
New fruit tree	*u*			2200	2390	26410	13510	4160	3740	**32770**	**19640**
Felled fruit tree	*u*			7440	1050	50910	39970	29200	18390	**87550**	**59410**
New bushes	*u*		9	192	317	69	19	17	36	**278**	**381**
Grubbed bushes	*u*			8	17	29	6		4	**37**	**27**
New bushes	*ha*		0.8	100.2	97.6	30.4	4.1	34.4	12.4	**165**	**114.9**
Grubbed bushes	*ha*			1.2	36.6	7.7	1.3		1.7	**8.9**	**39.6**
New hedges	*u*		9	83	342	184	300	27	75	**294**	**726**
Hedges destroyed	*u*			83	83	58	169	7	18	**148**	**270**
New hedges	*km*		2.8	19.8	34.4	30.8	34.7	3.5	8.4	**54.1**	**80.3**
Hedges destroyed	*km*			11.2	9.6	8.6	13.7	1	1.9	**20.8**	**25.2**
New wall, dry stone wall	*km*		0.1	3.2	5.5				0.2	**3.2**	**5.8**
demolished wall, dry stone wall	*km*			5.7					1.4	**5.7**	**1.4**

Table 3: Number and density of annual changes by geographical region for the period 1972-1989

		High mountain		Mountain region		Plateau		Urban areas		Total	
	unit	72-83	78-89	72-83	78-89	72-83	78-89	72-83	78-89	**72-83**	**78-89**
Individual components											
Number	u	98	38	6744	7345	7724	7341	704	2451	**15270**	**17175**
Percentage change	%	0.6%	0.2%	44.2%	42.8%	50.6%	42.7%	4.6%	14.3%	**100%**	**100%**
Density	u/ha	0.01	0.006	0.34	0.37	0.71	0.67	0.19	0.67	**0.37**	**0.41**
Linear components											
Number	u	157	137	2495	1988	1698	1287	783	693	**5133**	**4106**
Percentage change	%	3.1%	3.3%	48.6%	48.4%	33.1%	31.4%	15.3%	16.9%	**100%**	**100%**
Density	u/ha	0.01	0.02	0.34	0.1	0.71	0.12	0.19	0.19	**0.12**	**0.1**

For linear components (including roads, which are not necessarily features specific to rural landscapes), the changes seem much greater. Between 1978 and 1983, 5 100 km of linear components were modified per year compared with the period 1972-77 (4 100 km per year between 1978-1983 and 1984-89). This represents a per-annum linear change of 12 m/ha and 10 m/ha respectively for the territory of Switzerland as a whole.

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