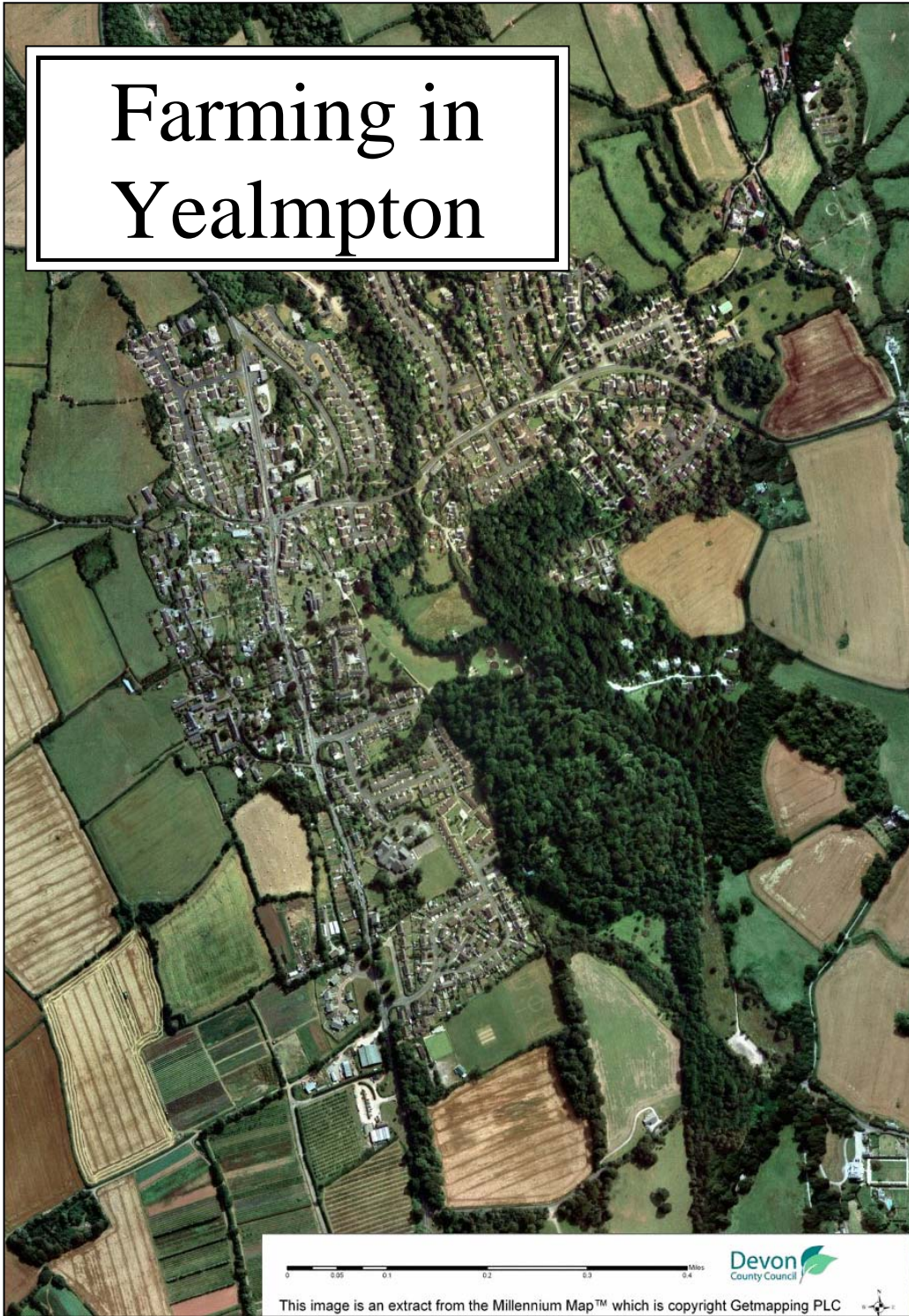


Farming in Yealmpton



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Devon
County Council

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Farming in Yealmpton Parish

The Parish, the people and farming

The parish of Yealmpton lies between Dartmoor and the south Devon coast. Most of the land in the parish is farmland occupying the slopes of the valley of the River Yealm. The Yealm estuary has an abundance of wildlife and there are woodlands scattered throughout the parish. Most of the area is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty¹. The village is just 7 miles east of Plymouth, yet very much a South Hams community. It has a thriving primary school and community centre. There are few second homes here and little that could be described as part of the tourist industry, although there is a multitude of small businesses.

Early in 2005 each household in Yealmpton parish was given the opportunity to say what changes they would like to see and what they valued most about living here. This was part of a Parish Appraisal. Almost everyone who responded said that the thing they valued most about living here was the rural environment. They were very concerned that this should be maintained, but from many comments in the response to the appraisal it was clear that there is now little contact between the people who love the countryside and the farmers who maintain it.

Much has changed over the last 150 years. In the 1851 census Yealmpton had 993 residents of whom 25 were farm labourers, 25 farm servants and 81 agricultural labourers. By the 1881 census there were 1155 residents of whom only 14 were farm labourers, 14 farm servants and 44 agricultural labourers – all men. In contrast, there are now only a handful of people directly involved in farming the land here. Inevitably, we have less collective knowledge and understanding of the countryside because there are now so few connections between the people who live in the parish and the people who look after the land.

There were 2047 people resident in Yealmpton in 2004, but only four families for whom farming is still a business. The views of these four households on farming, land use and the environment are very important to the rest of the population of Yealmpton. When preparing the 2005 Parish



Plan, we felt that we should ask them about farming, managing the local countryside, and the future, so that their views were not lost in the volume of responses to the Parish Appraisal.

This report is a summary of those views and is prepared so that people who are

interested in their local countryside may learn more about what is happening within farming and what else may happen in the near future. I would like to thank the farmers for giving their time and their views.

The scale of farming in Yealmpton

The shape of farming has changed significantly over the last 150 years. The census of 1851 gives the following information on farmers in the parish of Yealmpton, but not always the name of the farm:

440+ acres	Thomas Parnell, Bowden Farm
286 acres	Henry Ford
280+ acres	Richard Crocker, Waye Farm
190+ acres	John Willcocks, Winsor Farm
170+ acres	James Adams, Dunstone Farm
165+ acres	Henry Dawe
120+ acres	Phillip Brooks
94+ acres	George Elliott, Treby Farm
	Charles Shepherd, West Pitten Farm
90+ acres	Robert Scoble, Efford Farm
80+ acres	name not given
45+ acres	Richard Chaffe
12+ acres	Thomas Lavers, Lyneham Hamlet
9+ acres	William Maker, Hollacombe Farm

The four remaining farms in Yealmpton are Ashcombe, Kitley, Longbrook and Lyneham. Their acreage is much larger than in 1851, three have more

than 300 acres and one between 200 and 300 acres. Of the four remaining farming families, one has farmed in this area since Norman times, one since 1720, one for over 100 years and one for 20 years.

What drives change?

Farming is a business. In Europe the marketplace is distorted by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which used to link farm payments to specific crops. This approach is about to change, but in the past the CAP put a lot of pressure on farm units to become bigger, with larger machinery and fewer workers. Further reforms will intensify that pressure as farmers look for more acres over which to spread their fixed costs.

'There are now fewer people farming a greater acreage. This doesn't impact the appearance of the fields, although the smaller farm units have gone. Some of the newer harvesting machines have to work 2,500 acres a year just to pay for themselves. France and Spain have bigger farms that can work on that scale and farmers are aware that we are competing for the same business.'

The result has been a significant change in the nature of farm work.

'We now need people who are well trained, flexible, adaptable and proactive. There would be only two full time workers on a 2000 acre farm now, so each one has to be willing and able to do every job, and to know what to do and when. Good farm staff are hard to find.'

Arable farming

The Countryside Stewardship scheme (a part of the CAP farm payments) has influenced the proportion of the different crops that are grown over recent years and farmers report that less land is used for arable farming than 10 years ago. Arable crops remain the main source of income for Yealmpton farms in 2005 (30-40% of total income) and one farmer said that income from arable farming had increased. However, there remain many imponderables:

'For a ton of wheat 10 years ago we got about £110, now it is £60 yet fuel prices have risen, labour costs have gone up etc. It is hard to make the books balance.'

In the next ten years, farmers expect fuel crops to become more significant as a source of income. Fuel crops, such as elephant grass and willow and crops that can be turned into fuel, such as wheat, beet and oilseed rape, are carbon neutral. One farmer now has 120 acres of fuel crop planted - rape and linseed oil seeds. They also predict more diverse cropping due to changes in the system of farm payments: the introduction of the Single Farm Payment decouples aid from production.

'The full effect has not bitten yet but will gradually result in greater choice of crops each year. Commodity prices will have a greater impact on decisions about what to grow than subsidies. If commodity prices mean that arable farming is not profitable, more land will be left unfarmed and just topped once every two years.'

It was a relief to find that some things don't change: all our farmers complained about the weather:

'The climate here is not right for growing cereals although we have learned how to do it successfully'. 'It is too wet for some farming activities. The summers are not hot enough which can make it difficult and expensive at harvest time. Farmers on the continent just don't have the expense of drying grain. This is not the climate or terrain for intensive farming.' *'The weather could be better – more predictable.'*

Livestock

Over the last ten years some farmers have maintained their livestock levels, whereas others have reduced the amount they kept. Livestock provided 20-30% of the income for two farms and a much smaller proportion for the other two. Farmers who had reduced their livestock felt that this had been a significant (and regrettable) change. The decision to reduce livestock had been a personal choice. All have seen a general collapse in lamb prices and are getting the same price as 10-15 years ago.

Contract farming

'There has been a tendency for farms to get bigger but with contracting out of the arable farming, there is no longer pressure for mergers around here. People will wait to see what happens to farming before making big decisions.'



The acreage needed to make farming cost effective continues to increase as overhead costs (farm machinery, labour and fuel) continue to rise. Contract farming is one way to improve cost effectiveness without actually merging farms. One Yealmpton farm now earns

20% of its income from contract work. Most farms have some income from contract work such as fencing, grass and hedge cutting and land management. Farmers predict an increase in income from contract farming and that the nature of contract farming will change, with farmers having to accept more of the risks and responsibilities that contractors currently bear.

Farm payments

A fair proportion of farm income is derived from payments received through the government under the European CAP scheme (Common Agricultural Policy). This scheme has rewarded farmers for growing specific crops. Over the last ten years farmers say that they have been 'chasing subsidies' because the Countryside Stewardship scheme (part of the CAP scheme) has influenced the proportion of crops that were grown. CAP payments provided 20-30% of the income for all our farms in 2005, and all farmers say that CAP income is bound to fall.

The recently introduced Single Farm Payment scheme (SFP) will decouple CAP payments from specific crops. This will have a significant effect. Initially, payments under the SFP scheme will be based on acreage and historical claims, but eventually income from CAP will reflect a regional average. The effect of the change will be that:-

'More land will be kept as pasture, scrubland (previously called setaside) or just left to become weed that is cut once or twice a year so that the land can be brought back into agricultural use within a year.' *'Fallow land is good for wildlife whereas setaside is not because the land has to be broken up from time to time.'*

Many farmers predict that the SFP will mean less land under cultivation, more specialised farms, fewer medium sized family farms and more farm businesses.

Across the country, the SFP is predicted to force farms to merge and become bigger. Moorland farmers have been adversely affected by the scheme and some have already stopped farming. The Common Agricultural Policy is reformed on a regular basis. The next date for major change is 2012 with debate on the nature of proposed changes beginning in 2008.

Other sources of income for farms

Most farms derive some income from other activities such as renting land, pheasant shoots (up to 10% of total income) storage of non-agricultural items (eg boats) and a phone mast. One reported that income from lettings has increased.

Woodland and orchards

All farms said that woodland and orchards cost them money and are kept because they are seen as an essential part of the countryside. One said that he believed that Yealmpton is doing well for trees. It is good practice for 17% of ground to be woodland or used for trees to provide a balanced ecosystem and in Yealmpton that figure is 20%.

'All the orchards went back in the sixties and seventies.'

The future

In the next ten years, farmers expect that CAP payments will reduce and that other sources of income will not rise. They say that farming needs to become more profitable, but they can't predict how this will happen. They expect that there will be more paperwork but would like less red tape and less interference by DEFRA and Brussels. They expect the tendency towards larger machines to continue and all fear that the SFP scheme carries a risk that the fields will revert to scrubland. Some think that they will have less time to undertake land maintenance (hedge trimming, cutting weeds, keeping countryside as it used to be in 1980-2000). They would also like livestock to become profitable again. They are aware that climate change, legislation and the impact of supermarket purchasing practice

will all have a significant influence on farming practice in Yealmpton.

Land use

I asked what farmers felt about the possible use of farmland for housing. There was a mixed response, although most were very relaxed about the prospect.



'If I could sell land for housing I would buy more land.' *'Great if it is for local families'.* But one farmer was very set against the idea.

I also asked how they felt about the conversion of farm buildings for alternative uses.

There were very mixed views:

'There are some beautiful

isolated stone barns that dot the South Devon countryside. They have no place in agricultural use and can only survive if planners allow their conversion to other uses. Current policy will see the majority of them fall into irretrievable ruin. This is true vandalism.' *'Forget it'.*

'I would encourage it rather than have them fall down from disuse and neglect.' *'Use of farm buildings for housing is not right. They are industrial buildings so use for commercial purposes seems OK.'*

Maintenance of the rural landscape

All our farmers hold strong views on the maintenance of the countryside, and take their responsibilities in this role very seriously. The things they love most about farming here are:

'The beautiful countryside we have inherited from our ancestors who planted the trees we see now.' *'It is a lovely place to farm and to live. You don't hear of many people moving back to towns once they've moved out.'* *'Helping nature and wildlife; birds, flowers, animals.'* *'Being my own boss and part of the countryside.'*

There were some strong messages about threats to the local landscape:

'People have to understand that local is important. We should buy and eat local food. French supermarkets sell French food because that's what the



customers want to buy. They laugh when they see organic food for sale here that has been flown in – it is ridiculous. Many people see the countryside as a rather genial amenity – a sort of large city park.’

‘People need to be educated to eat quality local produce. They would soon notice the difference in taste.’

‘I’d like to see a lot more local produce in the shops especially local supermarkets.’

‘The fields have become much bigger than in the sixties and seventies and we have bigger gateways for equipment but there haven’t really been any big changes since then.’

‘There should be an increase in existing incentives towards smaller fields, planting hedges and more trees.’

‘Give the farmers and land managers a free hand to keep the countryside and rivers according to good agricultural practice.’

If you would like to comment on this report please e mail Linda Durman:
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¹AONB: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. *‘The primary purpose of the AONB designation is to secure the protection and conservation of South Devon’s natural beauty – its rugged coastline, wooded estuaries, secluded river valleys, open plateaux and rich wildlife – and its cultural landscape reflecting four thousand years of maritime and farming traditions. The AONB with its patchwork of fields, Devon hedges and green lanes, has been shaped by human activity: the designation seeks to foster a living, working environment where community and economic activity improve and sustain the distinctive landscape, and the high quality of land, water and air.’* - South Devon AONB Management Plan July 2002

