

'The food production campaign in the First World War: The Derbyshire War Agriculture Committees, 1915-1919'

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The food production campaign in World War One: A Case Study of the Derbyshire
War Agricultural Committees, 1915-1919

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On the 29th of May 1919, members of the Ilkeston District War Agricultural Committee met at the towns' Rutland Hotel for the final time. Under an edict issued by the Board of Agriculture in the spring of that year, the County and District agricultural committees across England and Wales were to be disbanded and their work transferred to a newly created committee of local County Councils.¹ The Ilkeston District Executive Officer, Mr. Frederick S. Ogden, a local surveyor and estate agent, took the opportunity to deliver a report that reflected on the role and achievements of the committee.² It had, he argued, dealt with 'every variety of circumstance arising in connection with Agriculture during the War', watched over the interests of farmers in connection to labour supply ('a matter in which the Military Authorities had been extremely difficult to deal with'), the cultivation of land and cropping, through which an additional 2,400 acres of grassland had been brought under arable production in the region, as well as the provision of horses, machinery, tools, seeds and additional sources of labour such as Prisoners of War and threshing gangs. The committee had kept farmers informed about the latest developments and shielded them from the volley of orders and directives 'showered upon them', as he put it, from Whitehall. Ogden was confident that their work had left firm foundations on which the new committees could build during peacetime. He concluded,

To the Agricultural Committees belongs the honour of a notable
achievement, in the organization and bringing to a successful conclusion of

¹ John Sheail, 'The role of the War Agricultural and Executive Committees in the food production campaign of 1915-1918 in England and Wales', *Agricultural Administration*, 1 (1974), pp. 141-154 (p. 153)

² Ogden had been invited to become a member when the Derbyshire War Agricultural Committee was first set up in 1915, probably, as he put it, 'on the grounds of my membership of the Agricultural division of the (then) Surveyors Institute'. Derbyshire Record Office (hereafter DRO), D331/1/28, Letter from F. S. Ogden to J. Shail, 14th June, 1972

the gigantic food production campaign, a campaign into which, though so many things were against his interest, the farmer entered wholeheartedly for the safety of the Country and the feeding of its people.³

Committee members – ‘gentlemen whose interests were in, and knowledge and experience of, the land’ – were thanked for their work, aided, as Ogden noted, by the presence of the ‘pleasantest relations’ amongst them. In his absence, the tact and acumen of the long-serving Chair of the committee, Charles Crompton, Councillor and J.P., of Stanton Hall, was acknowledged as central to his success in promoting ‘the work of the Committee and the interests of the Agriculturalist’.⁴

The self-proclaimed achievements of the Ilkeston district can be set against those for Derbyshire as a whole. In 1917 farmers in the county were issued with two main tasks, to plough and seed 30,000 acres more than in 1916 (mostly on newly broken up land) and to maintain the maximum output of food crops on existing arable. In April 1918 the Board of Agriculture wrote to congratulate the Derbyshire Executive Committee on being the first county in England to reach its plough-up quota. Farmers had been persuaded ‘to set aside hitherto accepted principles of husbandry and adopt methods required by a war emergence programme’ in order for this to succeed.⁵ In a county more suited to dairy farming than arable production, this chapter will explore how this policy was implemented. Unlike after the Second World War, when the government required all agricultural committees to keep and deposit their records centrally (now in The National Archives), the records relating to the First World War committees were largely destroyed or lost. Those that survive are patchy, but in Derbyshire Record Office there is a good deposit of material, albeit fragmentary, that has been little utilised and allows us to piece together an overview of how a national policy operated at the local level. How were the targets met? Who ran the committees and what do they tell us about the operation of power relations

³ DRO, D331/1/27, Assorted documents and miscellaneous papers relating to the War Agricultural Committee, 1915-1919, Meeting of Ilkeston District, 29th May, 1919

⁴ Ibid

⁵ DRO, D331/1/27, Quarterly report of the Derbyshire War Agricultural Executive Committee, 15th December, 1917

at the local level? Did farmers enter ‘wholeheartedly’ into the scheme? Behind the achievements of the plough-up campaign were a series of disputes and tensions, between the centre and locality and within the localities themselves, that show success in Derbyshire was far from straightforward.

In 1914 farming was emerging, bruised but intact, from decades of economic depression. Whilst those who farmed crops on the heavy claylands of the south-east of England were the worst affected, farmers who concentrated on meat, dairy, fruit and vegetables, fared better. Derbyshire was predominately a dairy county, providing milk for urban populations and to a lesser extent, cheese and butter. It was dominated by small family farms, with an average acreage of 49.⁶ Some 40,000 acres of formerly arable land had been laid down to permanent grass in the county between the 1870s and the beginning of the war (Table 1). Before the plough-up campaign therefore, arable formed one-sixth of the total acreage under crops. The number of cattle increased slightly over the same period, but sheep numbers halved.

Table 1: Agricultural statistics of Derbyshire in 1874 and 1915

	1874	1915	+/- change
Total acreage under crops and grass	501,528	483,125	-18,403
Permanent grass	361,852	402,412	+40,580
Total arable:	139,676	80,713	-58,963
Wheat	33,125	18,752	-14,373
Barley	13,264	4,105	-9,159
Oats	24,952	19,912	-5,040
Beans	2,032	146	-1,936
Potatoes	3,203	2,058	-545
Horses	18,693	20,211	+1,518
Cattle	144,565	152,087	+7,522
Sheep	275,483	140,677	-134,806
Pigs	41,197	30,641	-10,556

Source: DRO, D331/1/22, Agricultural statistics of Derbyshire, comparative acreage in 1874 and 1915

⁶ British Parliamentary Papers (B.P.P), 1919, Cmd 25, Board of Agriculture and Fisheries. Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture. Vol II. Report of investigators, South Derbyshire, p. 62

At the start of the war there was little concern over food production nationally and any possible disruption to supply lines was downplayed in the face of Britain's heavy reliance on imported foodstuffs: around 80 per cent of wheat and flour, 40 per cent of mutton and lamb, and 30 per cent of beef and veal consumed in Britain were produced abroad. Domestically the harvest was brought in without too much trouble, aided by warm weather and a sufficient supply of labour. Total wheat production in 1914 showed an increase compared with the average of the previous ten years, and yields per acre of wheat, barley, and oats were better in 1914 than they had been in 1913.⁷ Some unease was beginning to be felt by 1915 however. In the autumn of that year the Milner committee (set up by the new President of the Board of Agriculture Lord Selbourne) recommended that wheat production should be expanded through a series of deficiency payments, and War Agricultural Committees (WACs) set up via County Councils to organise the supply of local labour and examine food production in their localities. Their establishment was not mandatory, they did not have any statutory powers, and overall a 'business as usual' attitude prevailed.⁸

The structure of the agricultural committees began to take shape locally towards the end of 1915. In November Derbyshire County Council appointed the existing Agricultural sub-committee to be the WAC for the county, with powers to add to their number. Following a Board of Agriculture requirement that both a Central Executive Committee (EC) and District Committees (DCs) should be convened, six DCs were created, for Derby, Chesterfield, Ilkeston, Ashbourne, Bakewell and Chapel-en-le-Frith. On their inception the work expected of the Committees was somewhat unclear. As Mr. Jenkyn Brown, Director of Education for Derbyshire, told a meeting of farmers in December 1915, 'the Board of Agriculture itself did not know exactly what could be done'.⁹ Topics such as labour supply and how to increase the

⁷ Nicola Verdon, *Working the Land: A History of the Farmworker in England from 1850 to the Present Day* (Basingstoke, 2017), pp. 123-4; P. E. Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War* (London, 1989), Table 2.7, p. 16

⁸ Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, p. 27

⁹ *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*, 11th December, 1915

home supply of food formed part of early discussions, but there was uncertainty about the role Derbyshire could play in this. Mr. J. R. Bond, Organizer of Agricultural Education in Derbyshire, told a meeting at Cromford in late November 1915 that this county was 'not much affected by war', beyond higher grain and cake prices, and even if it had been a wheat-growing county, he would not 'on account of the shortage of hands, advise the ploughing up of grassland. This was a grazing county, and the pastures and meadows were the principal crops'.¹⁰

As part of this initial, somewhat hesitant intervention into the agricultural sector, counties were also encouraged to set up Women's Committees, attached to the WACs. This was in light of Board of Trade estimates that showed the number of women working on the land in England and Wales had declined by 16,000 between July 1914 and July 1915.¹¹ In February 1916 this voluntary step became compulsory and by the summer of that year 63 Women's War Agricultural Committees (WWACs) were in existence across England and Wales.¹² In Derbyshire each district WAC had appointed a Women's Committee by April 1916 with the remit of increasing the number of resident village women working on the land. To promote this a register of women willing to work in agriculture was established. Although all rural women, whatever their social background, were encouraged to participate in work on the land, a Board of Agriculture circular stated that 'by far the largest and also the most suitable source of labour for the farmer's need' was the working class village woman, 'the wives and families of the male labourers and other residents'.¹³ In Derbyshire arrangements were also made for a number of women to receive a three-week training course at the Midland Agricultural and Dairy College, Kingston-on-Soar, and prominent local landowners, including Captain Fitzherbert Wright, MP, of Yeldersley Hall, Ashbourne, offered to train women on their farms.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*, 3rd December, 1915

¹¹ B.P.P., 1918, Cd. 9164, Employment of Women. Report of the Board of Trade on the increased employment of women during the war in the United Kingdom, pp. 13-4. See Nicola Verdon, "'Left out in the cold": Village women and agricultural labour in England and Wales during the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 27, 1 (2016), pp. 1-25

¹² Pamela Horn, *Rural Life in England in the First World War* (New York, 1984) p. 120

¹³ Imperial War Museum, LAND 1/38, Circular letter to the Women's Farm Labour Committees, December 1916

¹⁴ *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*, 15th April, 1916

The real shift towards greater state control took place in the autumn of 1916 when a series of issues coincided to reveal the pressures the agricultural sector was coming under. The home-grown wheat crop of that year was substantially less than that of 1915, and potatoes, oats and barley showed little, if any, improvement. Inflation had rocketed and food importation became more expensive and challenging: four million tons of shipping was lost in a six-month period as the German u-boat campaign expanded. There was also concern by this time about labour shortages in agriculture: rates of volunteerism had been high amongst farm workers and although skilled workers were protected from conscription, the designation of skilled labour was disputed and the needs of the war machine continued to draw labour off the land. Although the figures are contested, contemporary estimates stated that agriculture lost around a third of its workers during the war.¹⁵ In Derbyshire, labour losses may have been even more pronounced: it was estimated that of the 7,763 men recorded as agricultural labourers in the 1911 census, around 3,500 had left by the end of 1916, whilst other men had drifted into mines and munitions.¹⁶ The start of 1917, with David Lloyd George newly installed as the coalition Prime Minister, therefore saw the beginning of a much more targeted and organised food production policy.

This food strategy took several directions. A new administrative structure was developed to frame and manage policy. In December 1916 Rowland Prothero became the President of the Board of Agriculture, and on the first day of 1917 a new Food Production Department (FPD), attached to the Board of Agriculture, was appointed. A plough-up policy was launched, to increase the acreage of land committed to arable production and assist farmers to cultivate their land more effectively. This was to be implemented through County War Agricultural Executive Committees (CWAECs), a remodelled version of the earlier WACs. As their name implied, these were organised on a county basis, were to consist of between four and seven persons, and were held responsible for ensuring that central government

¹⁵ Verdon, *Working the Land*, pp. 130-2

¹⁶ B.P.P., 1919, Cmd 25, Vol II. Report of investigators, North Derbyshire, p. 57

policies were carried out at the local level.¹⁷ To assist them were numerous sub-committees to oversee cropping, issue orders and organise labour supplies.

In Derbyshire the central EC met at St Mary's Gate in Derby, chaired by Brigadier-General Harry Chandos-Pole-Gell. J. R. Bond became its Chief Executive Officer. This was an onerous position, which carried responsibility for coordinating the work of the different branches and effectively implementing government policy, and it needed men who had comprehensive prior knowledge of the county.¹⁸ The choice of agricultural educational organisers such as Bond to take this role was therefore judicious. Costs for office accommodation and secretarial assistance were funded by the FPD. In Derbyshire sub-committees for Labour, Supplies, Finance, General Purposes, Machinery, District Representatives, Compensation, Hay Purchases, Milk Prices and the Farm Survey were established. In the quarter ending September 1917 the EC met 13 times and its sub-committees 33 times.¹⁹ Two additional DCs were added to the existing six, for Sudbury and Swadlincote. The powers of the central EC were devolved to the DCs (each with its own EC). These reported weekly or fortnightly to the county EC, had the services of a whole or part-time officer and every parish or groups of small parishes had representation on the district body.

The agricultural committees were the conduit between the farmer and the government departments whose activities and instructions impacted their daily working lives. They were, as Prothero later put it, the Board of Agriculture's 'agents in each County' and relied on the energy, efficiency and leadership skills of those who gave up their time to steer them.²⁰ Unlike their earlier incarnation, the CWAECs were given compulsion powers under the Defence of the Realm Act: they could inspect land, issue orders to plough-up, remove inefficient farmers and take over land themselves if necessary. Farmers had the right to appeal decisions, but only to

¹⁷ Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, p. 92

¹⁸ Shail, 'War Agricultural and Executive Committees', p. 147

¹⁹ DRO, D331/1/27. The Labour sub-committee met 13 times and Supplies 6. The rest met once or twice. A reorganisation in the middle of 1918 streamlined the committees into five – Cultivation, Labour, Supplies, Horticulture and Finance

²⁰ Lord Ernle [R. E. Prothero], *The Land and its People: Chapters in Rural Life and History* (London, 1925), p. 180

the EC that had issued them.²¹ These powers were implemented with two key objectives: firstly, to improve land and increase the harvest of 1917, and secondly, and most importantly, to extend the area of arable for the 1918 harvest. The network of administration to oversee food production and the new compulsion powers enhanced the role of the both the EC and DCs. As John Shail argues, state policy 'could only be implemented through local committees with an intimate knowledge of conditions on each holding'.²² The September report of the EC recognised the authority vested in it:

The Committee is becoming the regular channel of communication between the farmer and the several departments whose activities affect his business; and, by the incidence of national requirements and the farmers' difficulties, the War Agricultural organization is being made increasingly responsible for the agricultural welfare of the County.²³

A similar reorganization of the Women's Committees took place in early 1917. In addition to their on-going work in rallying and coordinating the work of local women, the WWACs took control of recruiting, training and placing recruits to the newly created Women's Land Army (WLA) at the local level, and for appointing Organizing Secretaries, Welfare Officers and Group Leaders to oversee the work. Miss Ethel B. Jackson of Stubben Edge Farm in Ashover, was the original county organizer for Derbyshire. The Women's Executive Committee met once a week in Derby, whilst Selection Committees, who interviewed and selected recruits for the WLA, were established in Derby (chair Miss M. Meynell), Ilkeston (chair, Miss Smith) and Chesterfield (chair, Mrs Peck). An additional centre at Burton-on-Trent interviewed prospective recruits for Derbyshire and Staffordshire. Jackson reassured farmers that there was 'no fear of the women of Derbyshire funking work even under

²¹ Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, p. 172

²² Shail, 'War Agricultural and Executive Committees', p. 145

²³ DRO, 331/1/27, Report of the Derbyshire War Agricultural Executive Committee for the three months ending 15th September, 1917

disagreeable conditions', and she asked farmers to 'Give us a helping hand and we shall be able to do a good deal more for you than we have done in the past'.²⁴

* * *

One of the first edicts issued under this new structure came in January 1917 when each DC was asked to produce a survey of all farmland in their area, to determine the state of farming and what land was available to plough-up. Surveyors were authorized by the Board of Agriculture to enter farms and fields. This first survey was directed to the harvest of 1917. In June the ECs were then informed of their ploughing quota for 1918, targets based upon the proportion of arable to grass in each county in 1875. In Derbyshire the original quota of 35,000 was shaved down to just under 30,000 acres. This triggered a more detailed survey aimed at the 1918 harvest. By the middle of September most districts had managed to chart much of their area – Ashbourne had surveyed 397 out of 460 farms, Swadlincote 203 out of 210 and Sudbury 225 out of 280. Others had done less well, with Chapel-en-le-Frith in the High Peak only managing 337 out of 850 farms.²⁵

The Ilkeston district comprised of around 360 farms in 28 parishes and its survey is the only one for the county that survives. It recorded the name and address of occupier, name and address of landowner/agent, a description of the holding, the 1917 land area, livestock and labour (men including the occupier, women excluding indoor servants and boys), the area of grass to be ploughed by August 1918, the assistance required in order to achieve this, and some general remarks.²⁶ These comments reveal the problems faced by many farmers. Virtually none had any assistance which could be spared, and many had labour shortages. A 43-acre farm at Barrowash and Ockbrook could not 'undertake any more with the labour that he has'. The 133-acre Scotland Farm in the same parish was 'Short of labour', with the

²⁴ *Derbyshire Times and Chesterfield Herald*, 8th September, 1917

²⁵ DRO, D331/1/27. Derbyshire War Agricultural Executive Committee report for the 3 months ending 15th September, 1917

²⁶ DRO, D331/1/21, Survey of Farms, 1917

land 'getting full of thistles'. Although Emma Land's 46-acre grass farm in Denby was reported 'in good condition', she had 'neither hands nor implements'. Some farmers complained of their sons being enlisted and the impact this had on completing work. At Dale Abbey it was recommended that Joseph Beeston's son, an infantryman, 'be recalled to manage and work the farm as his father is aged and unable to cope with it'. At Stanley, farmer Hartshorn had been 'willing to plough 4 acres but his son has been taken in the army and he is now unwilling', whilst at Cottage Farm, Breaston, the farmer was willing to plough an additional 14 acres to the eight already completed 'if could have help of his son ... who has been serving since September 1914'. Although farming was an occupation protected from military conscription, as Hilary Crowe has shown for the West Ward of Westmorland, on small family upland farms it was often the (elderly) father who was given this designation, leaving the sons, who were physically fitter and did much of the work, vulnerable to call up.²⁷

Other farms in Ilkeston were short of manure, of implements, of horses, or all three, and the survey shows that the agricultural depression of the late nineteenth century had left a legacy of dilapidated drains and fences, which were difficult and costly to correct quickly. One occupier in Draycott was noted as 'willing to plough 4ac., of an 8ac., meadow providing a fence is put up, a horse, manual labour and implements would be required'. The tenant of the 147-acre Church Farm in Sandiacre required 'mechanical cultivation, considerable labour and also financial aid to get it into anything like condition'. The scattered nature of many holdings, and difficult transport access were also cited as impediments. At Denby the 31-acre farm of Benjamin Seals was described as 'A useful grass farm, well kept, but a long way from hard road, could not get thrashing done'. The 65-acre Land End Farm in Marlpool was a 'Very scattered holding: not suitable for arable'. Back in Breaston, it was deemed 'almost impossible' to get manure onto arable land 'Owing to the state of this road in winter and the severe gradient of a portion of it'.

²⁷ Hilary Crowe, "'Murmurs of Discontent': The Upland Response to the Plough Campaign, 1916-1918", in Richard W. Hoyle, ed., *The Farmer in England, 1650-1980* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 263-293 (p. 281)

Although many of the comments in the remarks section were positive – farms were well-maintained and farmers willing to comply with the plough-up order – some show frustration, with a lack of attention given to ‘filthy’ or ‘wasted’ land. It was recommended that 30 acres of a 117-acre farm in Stanton-by-Dale ‘should be broken up at once ... a complete waste of land. Covered with thistles and docks. Very badly farmed’, whilst at the 60-acre Brook farm in Denby it was noted, ‘Wheat crop spring sown is very bad, full of rubbish’. Herbert Smith of Church Farm, Sandiacre, cited above, was castigated for his holding being in a ‘shocking state’ and a special report was commissioned for this farm. William Faulkes, who farmed 65-acres in the same parish was accused of neglecting his land. The surveyor noted pointedly, ‘He has plenty of labour and ought to improve it’. The small 16½-acre holding farmed by R. L. Nursall in Sandiacre was condemned as follows:

In pitiable condition. Full of weeds and no attempt has been made to eliminate them. He has ample labour if used intelligently. He has also a large field in Risley parish: been in his possession 3 years and already depreciated badly – It was in excellent condition when he took it. He has 10 acres which ought to be ploughed. A good deal of it barren. A very strong line ought to be taken with this man.²⁸

The results of the survey of farms, which detailed the quota of plough-up demanded for each district in the county and the area promised, was debated at a meeting of the Chairmen and Secretaries of the DCs in Derby in October 1917. As Table 2 shows, progress was patchy at best. Three districts had identified around four-fifths of their quota but six had failed to reach half. Swadlincote had pledged just 14 per cent of its quota. There was considerable complaint in some districts at the level of the quotas set, with wrangling over the totals between the EC and the DCs. Ashbourne farmers protested at their original tariff of 2830 acres against 1170 for its neighbour Sudbury, claiming it would be ‘suicidal’ to plough-up heavy and unsuitable grassland.²⁹

²⁸ All quotes taken from DRO, D331/1/21, Survey of Farms, 1917

²⁹ *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*, 23rd June, 1917

Moreover these were only the acres promised: In the Ilkeston district for example, only 99 of those agreed had been ploughed by October 1917.

Table 2: Survey of farms, as of September 30th, 1917

District	Quota of ploughing on the basis of 30,000 acres on 1915	Percentage of acres	Area promised voluntarily (% of acres)	Proportion promised to that required
Ashbourne	2,212	4.7	1,754 (3.7)	79
Bakewell	3,544	4.5	2,937½ (3.7)	83
Chapel-en-le-Frith	2,497	3.7	1,167½ (1.7)	47
Chesterfield	10,203	9.2	3,200 (2.8)	31
Derby	5,616	6.3	2,584 (2.9)	46
Ilkeston	1,930	5.9	796 (2.4)	41
Sudbury	1,471	4.9	885 (2.9)	80
Swadlincote	2,476	9.4	347 (1.3)	14
County	29,949	6.2	13,671 (2.8)	45

Source: DRO, D331/1/27, Meeting of the Chairmen and Secretaries of the District Committees, 16th October, 1917

At this stage the policy of conversion to arable was based on voluntary consent of both landowner and tenant farmer. Both were issued with a number of reassurances. For landowners, there were protections for loss of value which the ploughing of grassland might mean for their estates. There was recognition of the necessity of maintaining the milk supply, with sufficient grass retained to provide proper grazing for dairy stock and farmers were told to find land that could be ploughed without affecting the summer output of milk or prevent access of stock to other land unsuitable for ploughing.³⁰ It was stressed that crop failures should be treated as a 'national liability' rather than as a personal loss to the farmer and a

³⁰ DRO, D331/1/28, Derbyshire War Agricultural Committee, Instructions to Parish Survey Committees, May, 1917

system for financial claims was set up.³¹ In addition, the Corn Production Act, which passed into law on 21st August, 1917, guaranteed prices for wheat and oats and fixed a minimum payment for agricultural labourers under the mechanism of an Agricultural Wages Board. Government guarantees that labour, horses, machinery and supplies would be made available to assist in the plough-up campaign were also made.

The EC acted initially 'on the principle that people are better influenced by what they are taught to think than by what they are ordered'.³² But these results were clearly disappointing. Farmers were blamed for failing to realise the gravity of the situation, and the parish farm surveyors castigated for setting a poor example by not ploughing their own quota. District chairs were asked to report on activities in their area and whilst some, notably Ashbourne, Bakewell, and Sudbury, believed they could meet their quotas without interference, compulsion was urged in other regions. This frustrated Mr. German, the Chair of Swadlincote. He 'emphatically protested' that his district could only contribute 1000 acres to the scheme and several difficulties, including a significant amount of existing arable, labour shortages, and fields with timber that needed removal, had impeded progress.³³ He repeated these pleas the following month, in November 1917, where he also informed the EC that 'his committee and surveyors would not apply the necessary pressure'. He was told by an exasperated Captain Fitzherbert-Wright 'that difficulties were being met with in every district' and 'apparently Swadlincote was exceptional in not being able to overcome them'. Captain Boyd, the Board of Agriculture's Sub-Commissioner for the district, was dispatched to manager the problem.³⁴

Whilst the Derbyshire EC had initially hoped that the appeal to patriotic duty would be enough to induce farmers to comply with the plough-up order, by the autumn of

³¹ Shail, 'War Agricultural and Executive Committees', p. 149

³² DRO, D331/1/27. Derbyshire War Agricultural Executive Committee report for the 3 months ending 15th September, 1917

³³ DRO, D331/1/27, Meeting of the Chairmen and Secretaries of the District Committees, 16th October, 1917

³⁴ DRO, D331/1/27, Meeting of the Chairmen and Secretaries of the District Committees, 27th November, 1917

1917 the tone and tactics hardened. At the EC meeting in October it was 'resolved to resort to compulsory measures'.³⁵ General Chandos-Pole-Gell began a circuit of the county, where he attended DCs and meetings of local farmers, to emphasise the urgency of the situation. Addressing a meeting of farmers in Belper in early November, he argued that the voluntary effort had been given a 'fair trial' but as the results had 'not come up to expectation' it was time that 'compulsion under the Defence of the Realm Act must be put in force'. He went on,

The full amount of land allotted to each district must be taken in hand and dealt with at once ... Remember the sacrifices which have been made, and are being made, by our soldiers overseas ... I know that you have had your difficulties but they are not insurmountable ... Do not consider for one moment as to whether you have been told to plough more than your share, or that your neighbour has not been told to plough enough. Get to work at once on your own allotted task, and the more land you can put under arable cultivation over and above your allotted task will be a lasting memorial to you as having done your duty and your best for your country in her time of need. All forms of compulsion are abhorrent to Englishmen, but when necessity drives there can be no alternative, and the order for compulsion has gone out, and I give it to you now.³⁶

The turn to compulsion led to more demand and clarity from the EC, although they deferred a decision on whether to compile a Roll of Honour or a blacklist of farmers as an incentive to follow orders. They warned that no farmer would be able to avoid the ploughing up of scheduled land or the legal consequences should they fail to do so, and asserted 'that the whole war agricultural organization of the County is bent

³⁵ DRO, D331/1/27, Meeting of the Chairmen and Secretaries of the District Committees, 16th October, 1917

³⁶ *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*, 9th November, 1917

on the execution of the whole task'.³⁷ Whilst the general organization and execution of the scheme was done centrally by the executive in Derby, it was managed by the district bodies whose membership was dominated by local farmers. Whilst, as Peter Dewey argues, the government felt that farmers were more likely to take advice and requests from fellow farmers, there was anxiety amongst members of DCs that they were being put in an uncomfortable position, essentially asked to spy on their neighbours. At a meeting of the District Chairmen and Secretaries in October 1917, a letter was read from Mr. John Deakin of Coton-in-the-Elms 'stating his opposition to criticizing neighbours' farms', a task he thought 'should be the duty of a stranger'. Other districts concurred with this sentiment. However General Chandos-Pole-Gell, in the Chair, believed that 'On the contrary ... it was the duty of the Parish Representatives ... to report on farms locally'.³⁸ These tensions were similar to those found by Crowe in Westmorland, where farmers were also suspicious of providing information to people within their own farming circle (a 'delicate duty'). This, she argues, produced an atmosphere where farmer could turn against farmer, some reporting their neighbours for failures of cultivation and others accusing committee members of using their position to protect their own interests.³⁹ Back in Derbyshire, the EC showed sympathy to the farmers' position. They understood 'how unpleasant it must be for a farmer to inspect and perhaps criticize his neighbour's farm and for a District Committee to be the medium of enforcing measures they may personally regret ...'. Given the extensive flow of communication between the centre and the localities, they were also mindful that farmers may 'become embittered by the cumulative effect of the numerous and frequently unfair attacks on him by the plethora of food orders and their administration'. However the firm line was unshakeable: the EC was to 'exercise such supervision and pressure where necessary to ensure that the work promised ... is actually performed'.⁴⁰

³⁷ DRO, D331/1/27, Quarterly report of the Derbyshire War Agricultural Executive Committee, 15th December, 1917

³⁸ DRO, D331/1/27, Derbyshire WAEC, Meeting of District Chairmen and Secretaries, 10th October, 1917

³⁹ Crowe, "Murmurs of Discontent", pp. 286-7

⁴⁰ DRO, D331/1/27, Quarterly report of the Derbyshire War Agricultural Executive Committee, 15th December, 1917

The most pressing issue for farmers, and the largest break on progress with ploughing and sowing across the autumn of winter of 1917-8, was a shortage of labour. Deficient at the start of the war, the new focus on arable production exacerbated an already unstable situation. Many farmers complained that neither new land nor old land was of any use without adequate labour. Mr. W. J. Cutts, president of Derbyshire Farmers' Union warned in the middle of 1917,

We have been like voices crying in the wilderness since the war began, and it now looks as though retribution is going to come. We don't wish to cast any reflection on the Government, but it is unforgettable that the farmer has been starved, the land has been starved, and it is just possible that, in its wake, the people will be starved. And if it were not for the disaster it will bring, it will serve the authorities right.⁴¹

The January call up of 1917 was restricted by 50 per cent to 30,000 men, and in June 1917 an agreement between the War Office and the Board of Agriculture established that no more full-time agricultural workers should be called up for military service without sanction from the CWEACs. Between July 1917 and January 1918, 1,496 exemption applications from Derbyshire farm workers were received. 1,056, 70 per cent, were exempted to remain on the farms where they were presently employed. 145 were exempted to move to or assist on other farms, and 89 were exempted subject to conditions of ploughing. 196 applications, 13 per cent, were refused, and 10 deferred.⁴² A government investigator found complaints of labour shortages 'universal' across the county in early 1918, the situation in some districts 'deplorable', with skilled labour 'in most parts unobtainable'.⁴³ During the final

⁴¹ *Belper News*, 25th May, 1917

⁴² DRO, D331/1/27, Derbyshire War Agricultural Executive Committee report for the 3 months ending 29th January, 1918. See also Scott Lomax, *The Home Front: Derbyshire in the First World War* (Barnsley, 2016), p. 91

⁴³ B.P.P., 1919, Cmd 25, Vol II. Report of investigators, North Derbyshire, p. 57

stages of the military push exemptions to 18-23-year-old men were withdrawn and in May 1918 the CWAECs were issued with orders to identify a further 30,000 men for the army, with Derbyshire required to find 550.⁴⁴ One appeal from Elizabeth Titterton of Rock Farm, Middleton by Youlgreave, near Bakewell, sent in June, is interesting for a number of reasons, highlighting the difficulties faced by widow farmers, the extra labour undertaken by the family in the absence of the eldest son, the dissatisfactory nature of substitute labour and the way the system fuelled resentment in the community:

Gentlemen will you kindly reconsider the case of Titterton Bros. I am the mother and have been a widow 24 years so it will give you some idea what the struggle was for me. In fact I am almost crippled with rheumatism through working to bring them up. My three sons have worked early and late to plough extra. The eldest of the three has been in France nearly two years as a signaller with the R. G. A and is doing good work in that respect. Now we have got used to the extra work his absence causes to take another of my sons and tenant off a 2 hundred acre farm is simply cruel. No substitute can work as they have worked and take the place of my son and the land going so far off. Now I can mention 2 farms close by where five and six worker on the farm and the man got off until October. Hoping to have a favourable reply.⁴⁵

The most common source of substitute labour was soldiers. The War Office made soldier labour available from the summer of 1915, although they were initially met with distrust, as most were unskilled and unaccustomed to farm work. The selection process gradually improved, and in the spring of 1917 around 40,000 soldiers were at work on farms across England and Wales, including 21,000 skilled ploughmen, lent

⁴⁴ *Derbyshire Courier*, 1st June, 1918. In the event these men were not needed.

⁴⁵ DRO, D557/3/6, Petition from Elizabeth Titterton of Rock Farm, Middleton by Youlgreave, 13th June, 1918

for eight weeks.⁴⁶ Derbyshire farmers had posted 874 applications for soldier labour by May 1917, with most fulfilled. Further requests for ploughmen had to be turned down however, as those category A men released for spring tillage had been sent back to their regiments.⁴⁷ At their September 1917 meeting the EC reported that 500 applications had been received during the hay harvest 'but unfortunately the class of labour available was not satisfactory'. As many men were unskilled in farm work and given the heavy applications for labour – around 30 per week in that autumn – a distribution centre at Derby was organized to provide training. In October it was reported 'that some of the soldiers including those sent for training were not working well' and the EC were asked to 'repeat their request for the return of skilled agricultural labourers from the Army to carry out the 1918 programme'.⁴⁸ The following month the request had become more specific, that 'Derbyshire men be sent to Derbyshire if possible'.⁴⁹ This wasn't necessarily fulfilled: a farmer at Morley complained to the Ilkeston DC that 'instead of a skilled ploughmen being sent he had got a man who was a London barman'.⁵⁰

If soldier labour gradually came to be accepted, the reception for women workers was much more hostile. Firstly the push to engage local village women via a registration system in the middle of the war was met with reluctance. This was for several reasons. In the Peak districts of north Derbyshire, where small hill farms were worked predominately by family members with some hired labour 'living in', the employment of 'outside' women's labour was not usual. Women were not considered to possess the correct skills or physical endurance for much farm work. In the mining districts of the county, high male wages were said to discourage women from seeking paid work outside the home. At a meeting of the Chesterfield District WAC in March 1916 two invited speakers, Miss Beardsley and Mrs. Davies of the

⁴⁶ Verdon, *Working the Land*, p. 146

⁴⁷ *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 17th May, 1917

⁴⁸ DRO, D331/1/27, Meeting of the Chairmen and Secretaries of the District Committees, 16th October, 1917

⁴⁹ DRO, D331/1/27, Meeting of the Chairmen and Secretaries of the District Committees, 27th November, 1917

⁵⁰ DRO, D331/1/19, Minute Book of the Derbyshire WAC, Ilkestone, 1915-1919, Report 6th December, 1917

Nottingham and Northampton Labour Exchanges, were barracked when they outlined the valuable work women could and were doing on farms across this country and in Europe. One committee member 'ventured to suggest that if women were put to turnip thinning there would be more weeds than turnips left', whilst one farmer from Palterton predicted that the result of the register for women workers in this mining district would be 'nil' and women's labour on farms would 'be a failure'.⁵¹ A report on the operation the WWACs in August 1916 seemed to confirm this, finding that the attitude of farmers in Derbyshire was 'not favourable' and the training courses at Kingston-on-Soar had 'not been taken advantage of'. The district WACs, it concluded, with the exception of Bakewell, had failed to 'treat the employment of women seriously'.⁵² Indeed the Bakewell WAC had written to the County Council back in February 1916 'to give what assistance and encouragement they could towards helping in any way to secure and register any available women who would be willing to undertake Agricultural work' given the 'likelihood of a serious shortage of men in the near future ...'⁵³

In the second phase of the war when the focus turned to training and employing full-time workers via the National Service WLA scheme progress was still sluggish. By the end of summer 1917 there had not been many requests for large numbers of women workers. In January 1918, when only 41 WLA recruits were at work in the county, it was still reported that 'Derbyshire farmers are slow in coming forward to apply for this labour'.⁵⁴ In response to a government call in May 1918 for 30,000 more women to work on the land, a recruiting committee was formed, with a county target of 800. A public meeting and rally were held in Derby Market Place and Guildhall. With only 77 WLA members at work in Derbyshire at this time, and an additional 60 women in training, farmers were urged to take their share in the scheme by training recruits, employing them after training and advertising the

⁵¹ *Belper News*, 17th March, 1916

⁵² Her Majesty's Stationery Office, *Summary of the Work of the Women's War Agricultural Committees from their Inception to the End of August 1916* (London, 1916), p. 16

⁵³ DRO, D2478.PC.13, Bakewell District WAC. Recruitment of women to agricultural work, 9th February, 1916

⁵⁴ B.P.P., 1919, Cmd 25, Vol II. Report of investigators, North Derbyshire, p. 57

system to their fellow farmers. As Mrs. Armistead, Chair of the Recruiting Committee urged, 'The girls are volunteering splendidly, even giving up high wages to work on the land and we will do our share in helping them if the farmers will meet us half-way'.⁵⁵ Overall Derbyshire accounted for around 300 members of the WLA, which at its height in September 1918 totalled 16,000 nationally. Although some reports of women workers were complimentary, noting they were doing 'unobtrusive work, often in isolation and discomfort without which our food war could not be won', generally speaking the custom of the county remained, as one report put it, 'against women's labour'.⁵⁶ The nature of farm production, the lack of decent accommodation and the shorter hours and better pay in munitions and other war work, did not stimulate high levels of demand or support for full-time women land workers in the county.

The number of Prisoners of War (POW) working in Derbyshire was also small. In March 1918 it was reported that 'increasing use' was being made of POW labour, with 35 recently arrived in Ashbourne and 'doing satisfactory work in hedging and ditching in the neighbourhood'. Ashbourne had made further applications for this source of labour, as had the Sudbury and Chesterfield districts.⁵⁷ 43 POWs were at work in the Ilkeston district in September 1918 and at the end of the year 30 German POWs were working in five migratory gangs following threshing machines in the Chesterfield area.⁵⁸ The Ilkeston District Executive Officer described the work that these men did as 'valuable' and 'admirable' and lamented the curtailment of POW labour in 1919 'as much labour needs to be done'.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 16th May, 1918

⁵⁶ *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*, 28th September, 1918; B.P.P., 1919, Cmd 25, Vol II. Report of investigators, North Derbyshire, p. 57

⁵⁷ *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 14th March, 1918

⁵⁸ DRO, D331/1/19: Minute Book of the Derbyshire WAC, Ilkestone, 1915-1919. Report 28th February, 1919; DRO, D331/1/27, Derbyshire Agricultural Executive Committee Quarterly Report, 21st December, 1918

⁵⁹ DRO, D331/1/27, Ilkeston District, Report on farming conditions to the Derbyshire Agricultural Committee, 20th May, 1919; DRO, D331/1/19, Minute Book of the Derbyshire WAC, Ilkestone, 1915-1919, Report 28th February, 1919; Report 17th April, 1919

The EC was also responsible for hiring out horses, tractors and machinery to those in most need. Machinery was housed at depots in various parts of the Districts from which a farmer could hire them. The system was not altogether straightforward however. Tractors provided some assistance, but the terrain of the county impeded their widespread use. The EC noted in December 1917 that the 'quality performance' of tractors was 'disappointing' and the number at use in the county peaked in November 1918 at just 27.⁶⁰ The Ploughing scheme, whereby teams of horses were hired out, was criticized for not suiting north Derbyshire conditions, was prohibitively expensive at 30s., per acre and 'encumbered with heavy administrative procedure'.⁶¹ In early 1918 there were six two-horse teams on hire, with 23 ploughs, 50 harrows, 6 cultivators, 5 rollers and 61 whippetrees available. The EC also had possession of four threshing machines, but they could not be utilized 'for want of drivers and engines'.⁶² In November 1918 the threshing sub-committee noted that in many instances some machines had 'much more work than they can reasonably be expected to accomplish on the first round, whilst others are not fully employed'.⁶³ Despite the schemes for provision of labour, horses and machinery, the burden of work fell largely on family members who remained on the farms of Derbyshire during the war.

* * *

In August 1917 the FPD instructed CWAECs to issue plough orders to all land ploughed since the start of that year, whether under voluntary or compulsory action, in order to protect tenant farmers' rights to compensation.⁶⁴ By the end of March 1918 Derbyshire had issued 4,883 orders, the largest number, 1439, in the

⁶⁰ DRO, D331/1/27, Quarterly report of the Derbyshire War Agricultural Executive Committee, 15th December, 1917; DRO, D331/1/27, Derbyshire Agricultural Executive Committee Quarterly Report, 21st December, 1918. According to Shail there were 3,925 tractors hired out nationally in October 1918. Shail, 'War Agricultural and Executive Committees', p. 151

⁶¹ DRO, D331/1/27, Meeting of the Chairmen and Secretaries of the District Committees, 27th November, 1917

⁶² DRO, D331/1/27, Derbyshire War Agricultural Executive Committee report for the 3 months ending 29th January, 1918

⁶³ DRO, D331/1/30, Derbyshire Agricultural Executive Committee, 13th November, 1918

⁶⁴ Shail, 'War Agricultural and Executive Committees', p. 149

Chesterfield district, followed by Derby with 839, Bakewell 753 and Chapel-en-le-Frith with 655. Swadlincote saw the fewest number, 210, although that district had only ploughed 80 per cent of its 2,476-acre quota (see Table 3, below).⁶⁵ Farmers contested many of the orders and claimed, amongst other things, they were being asked to plough-up fields unsuitable for arable cultivation. Arthur Skevingham wrote to Frederick Ogden in July 1917 arguing that as he farmed less than 20 acres 'I do not see that I should be compelled to plough or allow it to be ploughed', that he could not look after arable land as 'we have more now than we have labour for', and finally that the land was 'worth double the rent as a grass field than it would be if it was arable'.⁶⁶ On the whole the committees dismissed such interventions, and were willing to take action to force farmers to comply. In addition to the plough-up orders, 32 warning notices had been served and eight cultivation orders by January 1918.⁶⁷

The first prosecutions for non-compliance came to court in Derby a few months later, in May 1918. The first concerned three orders, issued in January and February, to George Spencer who farmed 244-acres at Kirk Langley, near Derby (17 of which had been arable before the war). The orders were to plough five plots of land, totalling 30 acres, and he was given three weeks (the usual term) to carry out the work. Spencer had ploughed 16 acres but had written to the DC stating, 'he had ploughed as much land as he could attend to, and could not work harder than he was doing'. He was assisted by two sons and had not made any application for labour, horses or implements, partly because he lacked accommodation on the farm. In his defence in court Spencer claimed that he had no objections to the orders in principle and 'he always endeavored to carry them out to the best of his abilities'. Under cross-examination he stated one field was not ploughed as this would prevent his cattle access to other fields. The second case, James Foster of Trusley was similar in nature. His was a 44-acre pasture farm, on which a notice to plough 11 acres had

⁶⁵ DRO, D331/1/27, Derbyshire War Agricultural Executive Committee Meeting of Chairmen and Secretaries, 26th March 1918

⁶⁶ DRO, D331/1/29, War Agricultural Committee Cultivation Sub-Committee report and papers, Letter from Arthur Skevingham to Frederick Ogden, 3rd July, 1917

⁶⁷ DRO, D331/1/27, Derbyshire War Agricultural Executive Committee Meeting of Chairmen and Secretaries, 29th January, 1918

been served in mid-February. Foster claimed that although he did not willfully disobey the order, the land was unsuitable as it would prevent access to other fields. In both cases the Bench felt obliged to convict, but being the first cases, and with acknowledged difficulties, offered some leniency. Both farmers were fined 40 shillings. A third case, John Poyser of Shardlow, was thrown out of court on account of mistakes made by the committee in identifying land in his occupation.⁶⁸

As well as prosecution, ECs could authorize landowners to terminate tenancies, and they could take over the farm themselves, either directly or by placing another farmer on to the land. This was a last resort option however and only done in extreme circumstances: nationally the ECs took over 27,287 acres of badly farmed land, just 0.5 per cent of the total area of crops and grass in Britain.⁶⁹ In Derbyshire ten tenancies had been recommended for termination by early 1918.⁷⁰ One that caused ongoing concern was Scotland Farm, a tenanted farm worked by the Heath brothers in the Ilkestone parish of Ockbrook. This case shows how severe a measure tenancy closure was considered and the reluctance to pursue this to completion.

In the 1917 Ilkeston survey of farms Scotland Farm was recorded as a 133-acre farm, 112 being pasture and 21 arable. It possessed two work horses, 23 milk cows, and 19 other cows. We have already seen that at this time it was deemed short of labour, its land choked with thistles. The Cultivation sub-committee made several visits to the farm during the winter of 1917-18. On a visit of 12th November, they reported: 'The arable land is deplorably foul throughout and bears evidence of gross neglect and mismanagement'. Wheat still lay on the ground, oats had not been thatched down, some hay had not been cut and that cut had not been gathered in. The farm as a whole was 'considered deplorable ... going from bad to worse'. The case was considered 'hopeless' and they recommended 'that the Tenancy should be

⁶⁸ *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 3rd May, 1918; *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*, 4th May, 1918

⁶⁹ Dewey, *British Agricultural in the First World War*, pp. 179-80

⁷⁰ DRO, D331/1/27, Derbyshire War Agricultural Executive Committee Meeting of Chairmen and Secretaries, 29th January, 1918

terminated at once, and the Farm either put into the hands of an energetic and capable Tenant or be taken over by the Committee and worked with a good Bailiff'.⁷¹ In late January there had been 'practically no improvement since first visit' and by February the Ilkeston DC unanimously decided that the farm should be taken over by the Executive 'and that we are to find a good tenant at once'. Still time was granted, however. In April the farm continued to be 'very carefully' watched, a supervisor's report noted it was still unsatisfactory and 'If the cultivation order was not carried out at once an order would be issued to terminate the tenancy forthwith'. In May there was some 'confidence' the order would be carried out. By the end of June however the committee 'wish the recommendation that the tenancy be terminated in September next'. An inspection in August 1918 noted a general improvement at the farm, with two German POWs engaged. The following month however this case was taken out of the committees' hands and the farm was reported as for sale.⁷²

The last two years of the war saw the acreage under temporary and permanent grass fall and that under tillage increase, although there were regional differences in the extent of agricultural land use change. Across Britain as a whole tillage rose by 2.13 million acres between 1916 and 1918 (that is just over 20 per cent of the 1916 level), with wheat increasing by 33.4 per cent, barley 10.1 per cent, oats 30.8 per cent and potatoes 43.9 per cent. Crop yields on the new tillage nearly matched those for land already in production. These changes were accompanied by a fall in the output of the dairy and livestock sectors.⁷³ The spring of 1918 saw the successful completion of the plough-up campaign in Derbyshire. In March 1918 it was reported that all districts had gone beyond their ploughing quota, apart from Swadlincote, which had reached 80 per cent of its target. In all 32,636 acres had been broken-up across the county (Table 3). Looking back at the campaign the Ilkeston DC noted that

⁷¹ DRO, D331/1/29, Cultivation Sub-Committee, Report upon Scotland Farm, Ockbrook

⁷² DRO, D331/1/19, Minute book of the Ilkeston District War Agricultural Committee, 12th September, 1918

⁷³ Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*, p. 207

despite 'very many difficulties, not the least of which has been the abnormal wet weather experienced, the results must be considered excellent on the whole, and fully justifying the line taken'.⁷⁴

Table 3: Progress of Plough-up schedule in Derbyshire, March 1918

District	Quota	Acreage ploughed	No. of orders	% of task completed
Ashbourne	2212	3070.7	426	139
Bakewell	3544	4165.0	753	118
Chapel	2497	3148.8	655	126
Chesterfield	10,203	10,477.1	1439	102
Derby	5616	5711.7	839	102
Ilkeston	1930	2093.8	293	108
Sudbury	1471	1982.2	268	135
Swadlincote	2476	1968.9	210	80
Total	29,949	32,636.2	4883	109

Source: DRO, D331/1/27, Derbyshire War Agricultural Executive Committee Meeting of Chairmen and Secretaries, 26th March, 1918

But the success of the campaign was reached at a price. In Derbyshire there was a need to maintain the milk supply whilst increasing the amount of land devoted to arable production in line with government targets. The CWEACs had no authority to intervene in milk and meat production and 'while they could direct a delinquent farmer to cultivate his fields in accordance with the rules of good husbandry' they held no power 'to require him to attend to the livestock departments of his business in corresponding manner'. Moreover, in a county focused on dairy production the emphasis on arable during the war had led to areas of the county being farmed in a manner that was 'both detrimental to the holding and against the interests of food production'.⁷⁵ Substitute labour was largely unskilled, had to be trained and housed, and its use in Derbyshire was mainly restricted to soldiers. Nor did the terrain

⁷⁴ DRO, D331/1/19, Minute book of the Ilkeston District War Agricultural Committee, 28th February, 1919

⁷⁵ DRO, D331/1/27, Report of the War Agricultural (County Executive) Committee for the quarter ending 21st December, 1918

accommodate new farm machinery that became available during the war. Crowe argues that for Westmorland, the success of the 'centrally imposed production targets involved both heavy physical and psychological costs' to the land and its farmers.⁷⁶ The same conclusion applies to Derbyshire.

All ploughing orders were rescinded in early 1919. As the administrative machinery of the agricultural committees was wound down over the following months, fears about labour shortages and state protection of agriculture were expressed in Derbyshire. Little autumn cleaning and sowing had been possible because of the wet weather and infestations of wire worm, spring sowing had been delayed and there was much arrears of work. The labour situation was said to be 'as awkward as it has ever been' in February 1919, with little prospect for improvement, as POW labour was gradually withdrawn under a protracted repatriation process, soldiers who had been working on farms were sent back to their units to be demobilized and men discharged from the army failed to return to agriculture.⁷⁷ Of 600 soldiers withdrawn from agriculture in Derbyshire by March 1919, only 129 had re-engaged for farm work.⁷⁸

Anxieties over the future were shared between the key men who had operated the committees during the war. In March J. R. Bond wrote to F. S. Ogden of his fears of 'an almost complete relapse of all control of food production'.⁷⁹ Ogden in turn repeated this warning in a letter to Councillor Crompton in May, where he expressed his 'chagrin' at 'the complete collapse of the work of the Committees for the benefit of Agriculture, particularly after the hopes held out, and the rosy pictures painted by those in authority some short time ago'.⁸⁰ The final EC report in March 1919 ruminated on the conditions needed to stimulate progress in British farming in the future, including 'proper conditions for the employment of additional labour, skill

⁷⁶ Crowe, "Murmurs of Discontent", p. 267

⁷⁷ DRO, D331/1/19, Minute book of the Ilkeston District War Agricultural Committee, 28th February, 1919

⁷⁸ DRO, D331/1/27, Quarterly report of the Executive Committee for the period ended 31st March, 1919

⁷⁹ DRO, D331/1/27, Letter, J. R. Bond to F. S. Ogden, 3rd March, 1919

⁸⁰ DRO, D331/1/27, Letter F. S. Ogden to Councillor Crompton, 19th May, 1919

and capital', alongside 'a guaranteed market and prices based on costs of production...'.⁸¹ Within a couple of years this entreaty rang hollow. Amidst a severe economic downturn, the government abolished guaranteed prices for wheat and oats and disbanded the Agricultural Wages Board, effectively ending the state control of agriculture established during the war and abandoning the farmers (and labourers) who had fulfilled their national duty, often under adverse circumstances, in a time of emergency.

⁸¹ DRO, D331/1/27, Quarterly report of the Executive Committee for the period ended 31st March, 1919