

AGRICULTURE: CULTIVATION AND LIVESTOCK

The ten maps relating to cultivation account for 95 % of the total surface growing area (which had shrunk from 1 661 000 hectares to 1 383 000 hectares between 1959 and 1986); the other six sheets cover 97 % of the livestock total in 1986.

The facts used for these maps came from the agricultural censuses of 15th May 1959 and 1986 and relate to all commercial enterprises. Compared with the First Atlas of Belgium (sheets 30 and 32) exclusions have been made of rye, oats and various plants for fodder and industrial use, as a result of the decline in interest in these plants. Cultivation of maize has been added and cattle classifications have been re-arranged. The statistical unit consists of 589 communes. The many commune amalgamations of 1965, 1971 and 1977 made it necessary to recalculate the data for 1959 based on the present state of communes.

Despite the small scale of the maps, dual information on each map was opted for: the actual state of affairs and its evolution.

The present state is shown by circles whose surface area is directly proportional to the number of hectares or to the number of animals, save for low values, represented by a standard circle. Because of the difference in magnitude between the sixteen date-sets it has not been possible to use the same factors for calculating the radii of the circles.

The evolution 1959-1986 has been calculated from the appropriate data-sets (surface area or number of animals in relation to the total area) for each commune and is shown by colours. For the delimitation of classes the index 100 has been used for all maps as a limit between a relative increase (red tints) or decrease (blue tints). The other class limits have been fixed separately and differently for each map. The lowest class values are therefore often almost or completely absent. This may be explained by the fact that many communes have very low values and a very weak evolution.

The major areas of WHEAT (181 000 hectares in 1986, 198 000 hectares in 1959) are situated in the Polders, in the limon region and in the Condroz where soils are favourable and the big land holdings are the most favourable factors, guaranteeing the persistence and even the development of this cultivation. The Polders of the area between Sambre and Meuse have shown the highest relative development.

The cultivation of BARLEY (128 000 hectares in 1986, 109 000 hectares in 1959) displays fairly equal distribution even though this is at a lower level in the provinces of Antwerp and Limbourg and in the Ardenne. The more important developments are to be found in Hesbaye where its cultivation has always been considerable and in Campine where it is more recent. In the Ardenne and to the west of the Escaut (Scheldt) there has been an important diminution of the area of cultivation.

The area of SUGAR BEET (113 000 hectares in 1986, 64 000 hectares in 1959) partly comprises the same regions as that for wheat as it requires similar conditions of soil quality and adaptation to the same structures of exploitation. The area has almost doubled in seventeen years. The traditional sugar beet regions have displayed an evolution below the national average. The most important developments have taken place on the fringes (the sandy-limon region, the Condroz...) and it follows from this that the area in Middle Belgium in one block has increased.

The cultivation of POTATOES (40 000 hectares in 1986, 71 000 hectares in 1959) was concentrated in 1959 in the south east of West Flanders, in neighbouring arrondissements of East Flanders and in Hainaut: it has now also an extension into the arrondissement of Ypres and in the limon region. Altogether the national level of cultivation has fallen to two thirds. Only the arrondissement of Ypres and the limon region have shown a growth. Even the former cultivation areas show at present a decrease even if it is to lesser extent than the non-traditional areas.

Cultivation of OPEN AIR FRUIT (11 000 hectares in 1986, 37 000 hectares in 1959) has always had a privileged status in Saint-Trond and environs, and the evolution here is greater than the national average. What is impressive is a certain movement into the valley of the Lys. Whilst in Wallonia this cultivation is practically missing today apart from orchard remnants in the Pays de Herve.

In the case of OPEN AIR MARKET GARDENING (31 000 hectares in 1986, 11 000 hectares in 1959) the highest concentration is to be found in the centre of West Flanders. A second region of concentration is that of Malines. The relative importance of open air market gardening has more than tripled since 1959. The greatest developments are to be found in the centre of West Flanders where a concentric diffusion can be discerned. The Malines region has known a growth that is below the national average; on the other hand, a zone of minor importance is in course of development to the south of the Walloon industrial axis.

With regard to CULTIVATION UNDER GLASS (1 800 hectares in 1986, 1 200 hectares in 1959) we can distinguish four important regions. Aside from the traditional zones - the market gardening region of Malines and that of floriculture at Ghent which have both shown important growth - two other zones have come to light, the region of Roulers-Tielt (vegetables) and that of Hoogstraten (strawberries, tomatoes). The relative increase is important here (marked by a factor of ten) but the area is still rather limited.

GREEN FODDER CROPS (134 000 hectares in 1986, 45 000 hectares in 1959) have gained much importance by the growth in the cultivation of maize (128 000 hectares) to the detriment of FODDER ROOT CROPS (14 000 hectares in 1986, 54 000 hectares in 1959); the latter still remain most important in the areas where they had always been cultivated before i.e. in West Flanders and East Flanders. In the Flemish part of the country, the relative importance of green fodder is greater than the national average, especially in sandy Flanders and in Campine where cattle have shown a great extension. In Wallonia the increase has been generally below the national average, in the higher parts of the Ardenne there is even a decline or a total absence.

The area of GRASSLAND (661 000 hectares in 1986, 800 000 hectares in 1959) is concentrated in the north of the sandy-limon region in Flanders and in Wallonia to the south of the Condroz. With regard to relative development, their importance remains almost constant at the national level. The sandy areas of the two Flanders regions and the Ardenne show the strongest growth.

The superimposition of the three preceding maps coincides with the map of CATTLE (3 060 000 in 1986, 2 643 000 in 1959). The strongest concentration of cattle is to be found to the west of the Escaut (Scheldt), in the northern Antwerp and Limbourg Campine and in Wallonia in the Famenne and the Ardenne area where growth is highest. In Western Flanders and Eastern Flanders this augmentation equates with that of the growth in pasture area and also that of green fodder, and in Walloon cattle zones relate to the extension of grazing. In the limon regions, the Tournai area joins up with the Flemish concentration.

Inside the cattle sector MILK COWS and BREEDING COWS (1 144 000 in 1986; 1 012 000 in 1959) show similar concentrations to that of cattle in general. The most marked growth is to be found in the Ardenne (especially of breeding cows), to lesser extent in the Campine and to the west of a line from Zelzate to Tournai.

The PIGS sector (5 585 000 in 1986, 1 427 000 in 1959) shows three concentrations: the sandy western Flanders, the north of the Antwerp and Limbourg Campine. As far as development is concerned, the first of these is by far the most important. These three concentrations have also shown the strongest growth. In the sub-section of BREEDING SOWS (664 000 in 1986, 195 000 in 1959) the same spatial schema is to be found with respect to absolute numbers, but in Western Flanders the growth is lower than that in Northern Campine.

The CHICKENS sector is dominated almost entirely by laying hens and fattened chickens. In the LAYING HENS sector (6 933 000 in 1986, 6 166 000 in 1959) three nuclei can be distinguished: the oldest of these, situated at the frontier of the two Flemish areas, shows only a slight growth, it is the north of the Antwerp Campine and the north of Limbourg which have shown the strongest growth in the last decade. The FATTENED CHICKENS sector (10 612 000 in 1986, 2 067 000 in 1959) present a more widespread picture. The Turnhout region has known the strongest concentration whilst the south of Western and Eastern Flanders do not remain negligible. In these regions the growth has been greater than the national average. Elsewhere, evolution is insignificant and is connected with a variety of factors such as the establishment of large industrial activities.

The maps make it possible to obtain a picture of the evolution in the extent of cultivation. In the sandy and sandy-limon regions in the Flemish part of the country, cattle breeding and fodder production which are interconnected and also the pigs and chickens sectors show considerable relative growth. In the middle of all this are to be found intensive cultivation of vegetables, fruit, and glasshouse cultivation which, depending on local conditions, have evolved more or less strongly; by contrast, farming on a large scale has shown a strong regression. Large scale farming has kept its surface area and growth most importantly on the good soils of the limon region and of Condroz where it has also better adapted to farm structures. To the south and east of Condroz, cattle breeding continues to predominate even if it is less intensive than in Flanders. Factors such as soil quality, climatic conditions, distances, market possibilities and the size of holdings have contributed to regional specializations.