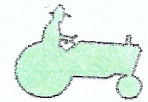


Written on 1st March 1998 Revised 25 November 1999



I am Cynthia Dixon and I live at Willow Farm with my husband and two sons.

We are situated between Bucknall and Stixwould, in the Parish of Horsington.

I joined Horsington WI about four years ago after I was taken to a meeting with a friend.

I was born a farmer's daughter, and became a farmer's wife in December 1964.



We have had five children, three daughters and two sons. Our youngest son was a late arrival and he started secondary school in September 1997. What he will do time will tell, but he spends a lot of time on the farm with his brother. Our two eldest daughters are both farmer's wives and our third daughter is a registered nurse married to a doctor.

We have, from our daughters, eight grandchildren, six girls and two boys.

Our eldest son is in partnership with us in our farming business, and our eldest daughter and son in law joined us three years ago last November with the purchase of our last farm.

OUR MAIN FARMING ENTERPRISE:

Our main farming enterprise is dairy with a hundred and eighty cows. We have stuck to Friesian cows, but we have two Limousin bulls, we use them to serve the first seventy cows, after that they are bulled with AI Friesian to get our own stock of replacement heifers.

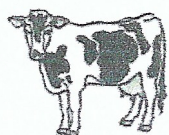


The Friesian heifers graze out in the grass field during the second summer after their birth and have their first calf when they are three years old.



Our baby calves are born in the grass field or the straw shed before being reared in the 'baby' shed in groups of four. All our Limousin calves and the Friesian bulls are reared on fresh milk and go through our finishing shed in straw bedded pens of approximately twenty head in each pen. For obvious reasons the bulls live separately to the heifers. The Limousin heifers live in different pens to the Friesian as the feed is different depending on whether they are being reared for replacement heifers or for beef. They are all fed on home grown corn and bought-in concentrate.

The Friesian bulls are sold live weight at Newark Market at about a year old, and at about 17 months old as bull beef. Heifer beef is sold the same way at about eighteen to twenty four months old. They are sold at Newark Market, the bulls weigh 500 kilos or over live weight. The heifers are about 400 kilos at 12 to 15 months old.




We milk the cows in a herringbone parlour and they live in loose straw yards in the winter fed on silage, fodder beet, rolled corn and bought-in concentrate. They graze grass in the summer. My husband and elder son take it in turns to milk the cows.

As the herd has become bigger some of the other things we used to do to earn income have withered away.

(Cynthia Dixon)


HOUSEKEEPING AND EXTRA INCOME

When we were first married I had £5.00 a week housekeeping money. That was £4.00 for food and £1.00 for my husband's 'smokes' (Senior Service were £1.00 for 100). I remember them going up in price and he had to cut down to 80.

I slowly built up an egg round, selling from house to house round the local villages. The hens were kept in huts and in the grass fields. Each year the new pullets went into a different field from the year before. I carried this on until about 1972. This brought in extra housekeeping money to help support us as the children arrived. 



Until 1996 we reared Christmas Poultry. My husband had kept turkeys before we were married and with the extra family labour we were able to increase on the numbers that he had previously kept. The most we had were 1200 turkeys, 400 chickens (balled capons in those days), 200 geese and 40 ducks. All hell was let loose from 10th December 'till Christmas Eve, plucking, and drawing hoping above hope that we had not missed any order out! Our children grew up to help in the plucking hut with the casual workers from the local villages. All the poultry were reared from day old chicks, in big wooden huts, under Calor gas brooders. The huts were bought from farm sales, dismantled and put up again in the fields. Now the only one left standing is the one we bought after the war from the Army Barracks at Lincoln. The Army built them to last!

As the family grew up and left home, so our cattle numbers increased and the poultry numbers decreased, although our two farming daughters still rear Christmas poultry. I keep my hand in by helping them with the plucking and drawing running up to Christmas. 

MONEY-MAKING PETS:



I have approximately forty Suffolk ewes. From their offspring I sell most of my boys as breeding rams when they are about eighteen months old. They go into commercial flocks as "crossing" tups. Most of the work with the sheep, feeding, lambing, docking etc., is done by myself, but with the help of my young son and the dog when needed.

The cade lambs I have reared over the years are too many (?????????) The most I ever went out to feed at bedtime was 72 lambs with individual bottles. Most years it has been about 40 lambs. **Before dried milk was invented it was only forms with fresh milk that could rear them (bad sentence)** The lambs were originally given to me, food was off the farm, (What food?)so not counting the hours of work I put in, I didn't do too badly! The only lambs I now rear on bottles are off my own ewes that are small or born to a twin and the ewe has only one working teat. Should that be... **The only lambs I now rear on bottles are off my own ewes that are small or are twins where the ewe has only one working teat.**



ARABLE FARMING:

Arable farming has increased over the last fifty years. As the farms have become bigger, so have the tractors and machinery, but the man power required has become less. In Lincolnshire, a lot of animal farms are family run. As farm incomes are going down every effort is made to save on paying overtime, so most work on Sundays and holidays is done by the Boss and his family. To a lot of hill farmers tourism trade is a much needed boost to their income, Bed and Breakfast, Pony Trekking, etc.

PRICES:

If this is to be read on the one hundredth year of Horsington WI, it may be of interest to put in some farm prices and dates of main event that have occurred over the period of my married life.

MILK: The first price has to be that of milk: The highest price we ever got was in the spring of 1997; 25p per litre, but sold in the shops at about 75p per litre. Today we get 20p per litre, but the price has stayed steady in the shops. When we started milking in 1967 we got three shillings a gallon (15p) in May and June, and three shillings and sixpence (17½p) the rest of the year. It went in 10 gallon churns, which we loaded onto the back of a lorry by hand, to the dairy in Lincoln to be bottled.

CORN: We got £18 per ton in our first year of trading in feed wheat. In 1996 we got to £135 per ton, but it only £75 for the 1997 harvest.

POTATOES: The price has fluctuated over the years for main crop potatoes, from £40 to £180 per ton, depending on quality and the way they keep.

EGGS: In the mid 60's eggs were 20p a dozen, now they are about £1.20 a dozen.

LAMB: In 1965 the price was around £6.10 each for fat lambs. The highest price we have had was in the late spring of 1996 at 200p per kilo. Today's price is 80p per kilo.

PORK: prices and trade has fluctuated through all the time we have been farming. For pork pigs this has been from 40p to 100p per kilo.

POULTRY: Chicken prices have held steady. As a nation, we are eating more chicken than ever before. In the last fifty years chicken has been produced by farmers contracted to mainly four major companies. It is to these that chickens go for processing for the fresh and frozen market.

BEEF: This is a sore point at the moment. In March 1996, we as a country, had a BSE¹ crisis, and the beef industry has gone haywire. We were getting 145p per kilo live weight before the crisis. The price is now about 90p to 100p per kilo for all prime young beef. Old drupe cows and cattle over 30 months have to be killed and burnt, the only part allowed to be used is the hide.

¹ BSE: Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, a disease which, it is thought, can be passed to humans via the food chain.

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No beef can be sold "on the bone" for human consumption, and all export of beef from the UK has been banned since March 1996. Although export is just being allowed again now.

FISH: I know fish does not concern us but it is a type of farming for some. Our seas have over the last twenty years been overfished. The price has therefore gone up and the quantity available down. To preserve fish stocks, the net mesh (used to fish with) has increased the size of the mesh to allow smaller fish to escape through and remain in the sea. In the mid 70's the price for fish from the docks, per lb, was about 10p. It is now about £2.00 per lb.



LAND: During my married life land prices have steadily risen. In 1963 we paid £100 per acre for farm land. We last paid £3000 per acre. We replaced our old house with a bungalow thirteen years ago and have added new cattle sheds etc. It is sad that a young man has no chance of starting to farm on his own as lot of the small starter farms have been swallowed up by bigger farms.

QUOTAS: These are another thing we have had to get used to! There was a quota on potatoes when we bought Willow Farm in 1963. Milk quota commenced in 1984. There are also quotas for the amount of sheep and beef cattle we are allowed to produce. In 1992 ISAC (*what does it stand for???*) was introduced to try to control the amount of food we produce. In the first year that it was introduced we had to leave barren 15% of our corn growing land. In the second year it was 15%, in the third year 10%, followed by two years 5%. We don't know yet what it will be for the 1999 growing season. The government pay us not to grow crops on this barren land, whilst people are starving in the "under-developed" countries of the world. Potatoes did have a quota on them but this was lifted in 1996.

FERTILIZER: In 1963 prices were £1.00 per unit of nitrogen. The highest price was £3.00 in 1997, and in 1998 at £2.50 per unit they are going down nicely!

STRAW BURNING:

In 1990/91 straw burning was prohibited. No stubble is allowed to be burnt anymore, it has to be chopped, ploughed back into the land, or baled and used for animal bedding.

FASHION:



On a lighter note; as a single girl in the early 60's I worked at home on the farm and trousers were a very difficult garment to buy, but they were the best thing to wear when working with the men and animals.

(Straw stuck on crêpe stockings and made your legs itch and a hand reared calf liked to suck the bare skin above stocking tops and below knicker bottoms when in a pen trying to feed another calf.) The only trousers I could buy were khaki cotton "bib and brace" left over from the war when they were worn by the "Land Girls". Underneath I wore one of Dad's shirts.

When going out, you wore, if were lucky, 15 denia stockings, knee length skirt or dress and, of course, corsets to hold your stockings up. They were very tight and stiff and the stiffening bones dug into your skin. Mini skirts were in fashion in my last year of school (I left at 15). Fashion has turned full circle. When I took my eldest son for a night out in Lincoln last Saturday, what were the girls walking about in but thin strapped mini skirts with bare legs or tights. They looked very cold it being February! There was not a cardigan or shawl in sight. Stockings can still be bought with elastic "hold up" tops or worn with very sexy suspenders. I still wear them

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in summer when it is hot. Thank goodness the corset has gone though.

During our married life we have come from a draughty old farmhouse, kitchen cabinets, open fires for warmth and hot water, lino on the floor and snip rugs for extra warmth. The wood for the fire warmed us twice, once when we sawed the logs and carted them into the house, and then as we sat in front of the fire in the evening. I used to bath the baby in front of the fire. We spent many evenings making snip rug, the children cutting thin strips of fabric from old wool coats and skirts, while Mum pulled the strips through the hessian with a latch tool. We often had the wireless on at the same time. We got our first Television in the mid 70's. When we bought Willow Farm it had gas lights (the main gas pipeline runs through the farm). The "loo" was in a proper Loo house down a stone path under the apple trees. We converted the wash-house which was within the house complex, into a loo, a bathroom, and a pantry. The whole house was damp and salt was in most of the downstairs walls.



Twelve years ago we built a new bungalow with central heating, fitted kitchen units, and carpets on the floors. This pattern of housing has followed that of many farming families over the years. Two years ago we went to Wales to fetch a Collie puppy and the farmhouse there was still just like the one we moved out of. They had a water closet, but still in the shed across the yard.

Since it seems to be getting harder and harder for farmers to make a living, many are starting to fight back. In December 1997, at Holyhead, farmers tipped beef into the sea. Why should it come from abroad when we are forced to burn ours? Many meat lorries were turned back and sent home. Locally, farmers went to Hull Docks and formed picket lines at the Supermarkets. ("British Beef is Best")

In March 1998 the biggest peaceful Rally and March was held in London with about two hundred and fifty thousand people from all over the country standing together to show the Government their support for the Countryside, and their general discontent. The issues were; to ban or not to ban fox hunting, to stop "green belt" house building, to roam or not to roam were they pleased over the countryside, to eat beef on the bone if they wanted to, and to allow export of beef again. If the public chose not to buy the beef, we as farmers would not produce it, but there should be freedom of choice.

I could go on for a long time about farming past and present. I hope that if this is read when Horsington WI have their 100th Anniversary it causes interest and discussion.

Cynthia J Dixon.

26th November 1999

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