

Adapting and Surviving

Dales farmers are among the most resilient members of our community.



▲ Haymaking at Calf Cop, c. 1900 David Johnson Collection



▲ Land Army girls at work, Horton-in-Ribblesdale Courtesy of Horton Local History Group



▲ Wartime threshing at Otterburn Courtesy of Malhamdale Local History Group



▲ Signs like this were a familiar sight across Craven Courtesy of the Craven Herald

Throughout the last 350 years, farmers have had to survive many challenges, from changes in agricultural policy, through spells of severe weather to the effects of war and disease. Periods of prosperity have alternated with periods of depression, influenced by local, national and global events.

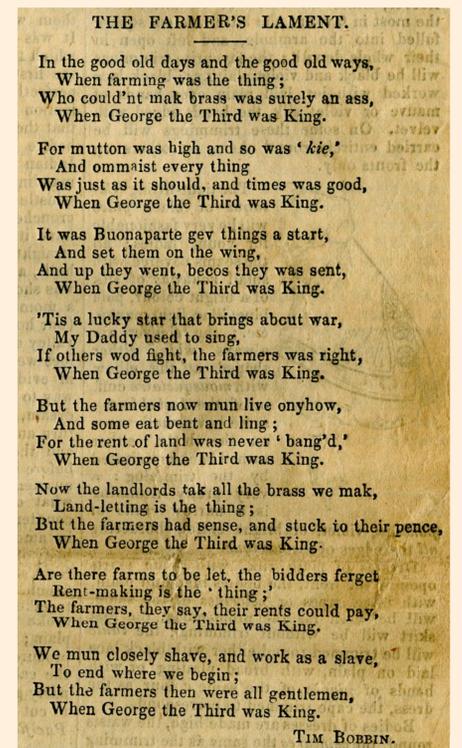
In the 19th and early 20th centuries many upland farmers worked in mining or quarrying, leaving their wives at home to do much of the farming. The farming depression of the 1930s led to the formation of the Milk Marketing Board which gave stability to the dairy industry for nearly fifty years until it was disbanded in the 1980s. Subsequent price reductions have caused a massive reduction in the numbers of dairy farmers.

Both World Wars led to major efforts to produce as much home-grown food as possible. In World War II, organisation of food production in this area was in the hands of the West Riding War Agricultural Executive Committee, the 'War Ag', who set targets for ploughing land traditionally used only for pasture. The War Ag provided tractors for cultivation at a time when most farmers were still using horses. The wet climate and thin soil were unsuitable for growing corn and yields were patchy. The most useful crops were kale and mangolds which provided winter feed for animals.

The terrible outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001 had a massive impact on North Craven. Large numbers of farmers lost their entire stock. The whole countryside was closed off and the local economy slumped. Afterwards, many farmers re-assessed their businesses, re-stocking with different breeds to take account of new market trends and diversifying into other enterprises such as the direct sale of produce and catering for the growing numbers of tourists in the area.



◀ Second World War Poster



'The Farmer's Lament' ▶ Writing in 1861, a farmer looks back to the golden days of King George III

