

## Farming in Britain

Tim Webb

### 1 Farming in Britain

### Listening, reading

- a** Before you read or listen to these texts, check in pairs that you know the meaning of these key terms. Match the term with the definition. Write the correct number under each key term.

Key terms	Definitions
Subsidy 7	1. The idea that the world is developing a single economy and culture as a result of improved technology and communications, and the influence of very large multi-national companies
Hedgerow —	2. A substance that is added to soil to help plants grow
Mechanized —	3. Bushes, small trees and plants along the edge of a field or road. These are an important part of the English rural landscape and are the home of many animals and birds
Combine harvester —	4. Including or affecting the whole world
Pesticide —	5. A large farm machine used for cutting grain crops and removing and cleaning the seeds
Fertilizer —	6. A chemical used to kill insects that damage crops
Global —	7. Money that the government or another organisation pays towards the cost of a product or service
Globalization —	8. Done by machine

- b Listen to, or read, two texts about farming in Britain and fill in the table below. Work in pairs to check your answers. Then listen or read again and correct any answers you want to.**
- c You will listen to or read the texts again. This time make notes in the boxes below. Do not write whole sentences**

	<b>Charlie Bowman 1950s</b>	<b>Frank Bowman 2008</b>
General situation for farmers, view on life		
Influence of other countries		
Type of farming, the farm's products		
Workers, machinery and farming methods		
Wildlife, the environment and landscape		

**Write an essay entitled 'Changes in British Farming since 1950'. Use your table of notes from 3, the Key concepts and Useful language boxes below. You may also like to research the topic further using books, newspapers and the Internet. Your composition should be in three main sections and total about 500 words.**

### Key concepts

Government support and subsidies  
 Competition, globalization  
 The European Union and the impact of other countries  
 Wildlife and environmental concerns  
 Labour and machinery versus modern technology  
 The main differences in farming 1950 – 2008

### Useful language

#### Section 1

*The last sixty years have seen ...*

*In the 1950s, the situation for British farmers was ... because ...*

*However today, many farmers feel that ...*

#### Section 2

*The type of farming/number of workers/landscape in Britain has changed ...*

*One thing that has changed greatly/dramatically is ...*

*Another important area of change is ...*

*... illustrates this point*

*... clearly shows ...*

*... is an example of ...*

#### Section 3

*In conclusion ...*

*To conclude/to sum up*

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#### Aims

Students listen to or read two texts, after first familiarising themselves with some of the terms used in them.

#### Time

60 minutes

#### Procedure

The following texts can be used as a listening and/or reading exercise. If using them as a reading exercise, photocopy text a and b for each student.

**Exercise a.** Tell students they are going to listen to (or read about) two British farmers talking about aspects of their jobs. Before they listen they should do the Vocabulary matching exercise in pairs. Check that everybody understands these new Key terms.

**Exercise b.** Students listen to or read the first text. It is told by a farmer in the 1950s. Ask some general comprehension questions to bring out how the farmer felt about his life, what type of farming he did, what kind of farming methods and labour he used and what the landscape was like. Then read the second text told by his son, who is still working on the same farm in 2008. Ask similar questions.

**Exercise c.** Direct students to the box of key terms and definitions and ask them to read the headings on the left. Read the texts again (or let students read them) and ask them to write notes about both farmers' lives in the boxes on their page. They should not try to write whole sentences, just words to remind them later, when they will write a composition.

#### Key

##### Exercise a

##### Key terms

Subsidy  
7

##### Definitions

1. The idea that the world is developing a single economy and culture as a result of improved technology and communications, and the influence of very large multi-national companies.

Hedgerow 3	2. A substance that is added to soil to help plants grow
Mechanized 8	3. Bushes, small trees and plants along the edge of a field or road. These are an important part of the English rural landscape and are the home of many animals and birds.
Combine harvester 5	4. Including or affecting the whole world
Pesticide 6	5. A large farm machine used for cutting grain crops and removing and cleaning seeds
Fertilizer 2	6. A chemical used to kill insects that damage crops
Global 4	7. Money that the government or another organization pays towards the cost of a product or service
Globalization 1	8. Done by machine

**Exercise b****Text A**

Britain, like many other MEDCs, has experienced massive changes in its agriculture and countryside. Charlie Bowman ran a mixed farm in the south of England for more than forty years. He retired about ten years ago. Here he talks about farming 'in the good old days', when he started back in the 1950s.



A farmer and his son

'Well of course in those days so much was different.

The first thing that comes to mind is that when I took on the farm, it was a good time for farming. We lived well and the farming business kept expanding.

The government had learnt during the Second World War that the country needed to protect its food supplies and so it helped the farmers a lot, with subsidies to produce food and so on. And there was very little competition from cheap food from abroad.

The farm was very much a mixed farm. Arable land for crops (wheat, barley and potatoes) was important, but so too was livestock. We kept beef and dairy cattle as well as a few pigs.

Although our farm was quite mechanized, we didn't rely on machinery as much as they do today; we used quite a lot of labour. We employed nine full-time workers, as well as many more casual labourers when it was needed at certain times of the year. For example, for the potato harvest many people from the nearby village, including school children, would help out.

The landscape has changed dramatically. I think the farm looked a lot more attractive then. We had some farm buildings that were very old but full of character. Some of these have now been replaced by modern ones. There also used to be many more of the hedgerows that people associate with the English countryside. In those days, I think the farm was much better for wildlife as we used far fewer chemical pesticides and fertilisers. There seemed to be many more birds and wild flowers in the fields.'

**Text B**

'To say times for farmers are hard would be a massive understatement! It's very difficult to make a living. I'm not sure if there's much future for us. Many farmers have protested, but the government doesn't seem to care and things don't get any better. Some of my friends have left farming in the last few years; I sometimes wonder if I should, too. But it's what I've always done and I enjoy my work. What else would I do?

There are all sorts of problems. The government has removed subsidies and we can't compete with foreign imports. We have to sell our food to the big supermarkets. The prices we get for our food are really low.

Today we concentrate heavily on the arable side – the wheat and barley – as this is the most profitable. In terms of livestock, the pigs went a long time ago because of competition from other EU countries such as Denmark. The only animals we now keep are a small herd of dairy cows. For years I've been thinking of giving this up, but recently global milk prices have started to rise, apparently partly due to increasing demand in China. Anyway, it's a good sign for me; perhaps this side of the farm may develop again.

We only employ three full-time farm workers. They are all very skilled. They need to be to understand all the new farming methods and machinery.

Much of the work is done by machinery, such as our new larger combine harvester. To make it economic to use this machinery we had to remove some of the hedgerows from our fields. We regularly spray our crops with pesticides and we use fertilizers too. Many people say this is bad for wildlife and the environment, but we still have to grow food.'

## Exercise c

	<b>Charlie Bowman 1950s</b>	<b>Frank Bowman 2008</b>
<b>General situation for farmers, view on life</b>	good time for farming lived well business expanding	Times are hard
<b>Influence of other countries</b>	Very little	foreign imports EU competition
<b>Type of farming, the farm's products</b>	mixed farm arable and livestock	arable small herd dairy cows
<b>Workers, machinery and farming methods</b>	9 full-time casual labour when needed quite mechanized	Very mechanized 3 full time - specialist
<b>Wildlife, the environment and landscape</b>	more attractive full of character hedgerows better for wildlife	removed hedgerows use fertilisers and pesticides

**Aim**

Students write a composition of about 500 words in three main sections on 'Changes in British farming since 1950'.

**Time**

50 minutes

**Procedure**

This composition could be set as homework, but it is important to do some of the preparation in class. Encourage your students to do further research on their own, using the library, newspapers and the Internet.

Look at the Key concepts together, and remind them they have notes on all these subjects from the listening texts. Encourage different students to give you some information about each concept. This will reassure them about how much they already know. Tell them their composition does not have to cover all these concepts – they can pick the ones they want to write about.

Make use of the Useful language box, as this will show them how to divide their composition into sections. The first section briefly explains that there have been many changes in farming between 1950 and 2008, and that farmers now feel differently about their job. Ask for some sentences round the class using the phrases in this section. Section 2 goes into more detail, giving specific examples of changes. This is where students can choose which Key concepts to include. Again, ask for some more sentences orally, using this language. Section 3 is a conclusion, drawing threads from Section 2, and also reiterating the statements in Section 1. Tell students it is very important in an English composition to 'round off' their writing with a neat conclusion, and not leave ideas 'hanging in the air'. The best and easiest way to do this is to repeat what they said at the beginning.