

# Agricultural revolution in britain essay sample

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



During the 18th century Britain was growing. As a result of this hasty expansion the existing systems and techniques used in agriculture were no longer sufficient to feed a rapidly increasing population. This meant that change to the extremely wasteful older system was needed in order to fuel the growing needs of the country, and to feed the ever growing population.

There were many causes of this agricultural revolution Britain was at war with France consequently the soldiers needed to be fed, and due to war, supplies imported from Europe (e. g. corn) were reduced. This added significant strain on the food being produced in England which added stress to the farmers. In the early 18th century, much of the countryside was farmed as an open field system. This system was more in favour of farming for personal requirements rather than for the nation's commercial needs. This open field farming was incredibly wasteful and also encouraged the spread of weeds and plant diseases. The disadvantages of the old system were now being emphasized by the growing need for food. Therefore changes were needed.

Perhaps the most important and significant development of were the enclosures. Enclosure simply meant doing away with the 'Open Field' system, replacing it with large fields, enclosed by fences or hedgerows and drained by the landowners. The system of Enclosure had the simple advantage over the 'Open Field' system, in that it produced far more food, and meant that no land was wasted. There were two methods of gaining Enclosure, either via consent of all the landholders in a village or by Parliamentary Enclosure.

With Enclosure, farming quickly became a cost-effective business and had many benefits: The banks were keen to lend to farmers who wanted to improve their land because they could see it as a profitable business. As a result of this, farmers could afford to modernise. The new system also made selective breeding easier, substantially improved people's diets and increased the amount of fresh meat, dairy products and vegetables being produced. This system, therefore, was extremely successful in dealing with the inefficiencies of the past, and dealt with the dietary needs of the expanding population.

The enclosure movement drew fierce debate at the time due to the underlying social issue whereby it was said that this was a revolution of the rich against the poor and that the basic fabric of society was being disrupted. In support of the positive effects of enclosure we can conclude that it enabled farmers to experiment and carry out new agricultural methods, it also allowed for livestock farming to be used in tandem with arable farming and encouraged selective breeding; obviously this was a big positive on the side of commercial farming.

John Middleton echoed these views and added emphasis to the advantage of enclosure, applauding the drainage system that enclosure allowed along with improvements for livestock rearing and employment of the working man.

Middleton states that the opportunity of separating and limiting rotten parts of land is of infinite consequence, stating that it would benefit the health of the nation and the production of the crop. Furthermore, Middleton states that with the aid of intelligent breeders - there would be a means to breed sheep

and cattle superior to the current crop. This was indeed the case; Robert Bakewell is noted for being one of the first to successfully breed the strongest cattle far superior to the cattle produced in the open field system. This process was called Selective Breeding, and only made possible with an enclosed field.

In profound contrast, for all the benefits that enclosure may have presented, it dealt a fatal blow to the long established lower-class domestic economy which was built on the common lands. For cottagers who before enclosure had a right to use the open fields to keep say a pig or a few hens on the common, enclosure meant the loss of an important economic safety net for them as well as their sense of having a stake in the land, this may be deemed a case of class robbery.

The poor felt as if they were being robbed of their rights. They felt that the social fabric within the communities fragmented and there was a loss of community feel. This is demonstrated by a poet John Clare, who experienced enclosure first hand

But now alas my charms are done  
For shepherds and for thee  
The cowboy with his green is gone  
And every Bush and tree  
Dire nakedness o'er all prevails  
Yon fallows bare and brown  
Is all beset with post and rails  
And turned upside down. (Goodridge 164)

In this poetic comment Clare makes his feelings towards enclosure quite clear. It turned his world "upside down, and he deeply resented such a process." (Goodridge 164) Clare saw the enclosure movement as a negative factor in his life, and in the lives of those around him.

These views are echoed by Rev. D. Davies who states that the enclosing land and raising rent meant that the peasantry was deprived of access to the land as a consequence and states that thousands of families which formally gained an independent livelihood have been reduced to the class of day laborers carrying on, an amazing number of people have been reduced from a comfortable state of partial independence, to the precarious conditions of hirelings, who when out of work must immediately come to the parish. Davies goes on to state that the number of farming families has decreased, whereas the number of poor families has increased.

Changes in the Agricultural Revolution raised productivity by a massive amount and by 1800 90% of the population's demands were being met. This is a great achievement especially as this was a time of war and bad harvests. Overall, the Agricultural Revolution was very successful indeed in dealing with the old problems, but the new solutions were not without their own problems. However, without these new problems and developments, we would have learnt nothing and made no advancement in farming, and therefore Britain would not have grown into the thriving industrial nation we became. This statement is backed up by Middleton, who again points out that after a few years a regular system of husbandry will continue to provide both food and employment. Without the enclosures, the cycle of expansion and agricultural advancement would never have started. The Agricultural Revolution almost completely wiped out the problems of the past, leaving us with the well-organized and structured system of farming that has continued to this day.

## Bibliography

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