

9 Belgian agrarian and rural history, 1800–2000

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I. Belgium: a latecomer to modern agrarian historiography

Compared to her neighbours, Belgium embarked quite late on the historiography of nineteenth- and twentieth-century agriculture. For a long time, economic historians were drawn to the 'successful' industrial rather than to the 'backward' agrarian sector. Writing in 1928, for instance, Fernand Baudhuin devoted scarcely one page to agriculture in a substantial chapter on the economic history of Belgium. Moreover, it was only in 1930 that the first history of 'national' agriculture saw the light of day, being published by Julien Vander Vaeren, a senior civil servant at the Ministry of Agriculture, to mark the centenary of the Belgian State, although its focus was very much on institutional developments since 1830. In 1949, further, A. Forget, another official from that ministry, published an article on the economic development of the agrarian sector since 1846, the year in which the first national agricultural census was carried out. The study of rural society seemed to be even less on the agenda of academic historians, as it was only from the 1960s onwards that modern agrarian and rural history became a subject of research. The inter-university *Centre belge d'histoire rurale – Belgisch Centrum voor Landelijke Geschiedenis* (Belgian Centre for Rural History), which was founded in 1962 and ceased its activities in the 1990s¹, started the ball rolling with an inventory of unpublished research papers of the *Ecole supérieure d'Agriculture* (Agricultural College) at the University of Leuven (Ballieu, 1967; *Le Centre belge*, 1992).

Certain socially or politically motivated writers had nevertheless already turned to analysing the disintegration of the old rural society in Belgium from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, interest in the topic arising after the outbreak of the structural agrarian crisis of the late nineteenth century. The first writings came from progressive liberal and left-wing circles, followed by others from socio-Catholic milieus. The authors included Émile de Laveleye (1875 and 1878), Professor of Economics at Liège, and Hector Denis (1885), Professor of Economics at Brussels and later a socialist member of Parliament. Another – taking his cue from the work of de Laveleye – was Charles Jacquet (1877), deputy-chairman of the *Société agricole du Brabant-Hainaut* (Agricultural Association of Brabant-Hainaut), who published a sketch of Belgian agriculture in the nineteenth century, in which he stressed the initiatives taken by the government. Also to be mentioned is the famous Socialist and future minister Emile Vandervelde, who published two highly debated books on the transformation of rural society (1900, 1910).

¹ The centre ceased to exist once funding from the *Nationaal Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Fonds National de Recherche Scientifique* (NFWO/FNRS – National Fund for Scientific Research) stopped.

Additionally, a series of semi-historical regional studies appeared during the early twentieth century, which used the inductive method pioneered by the French descriptive sociologist Frédéric Le Play and Germany's *Historische Schule*. The prime mover was Emiel Vliebergh, jurist and professor at Leuven's recently founded *School voor Politieke en Sociale Wetenschappen* (School for Political and Social Sciences) (Vliebergh, 1906; Vliebergh and Ulens, 1909, 1912 and 1921; Ulens, 1920; Thuysbaert, 1913; L. Verhulst, 1920 and 1926). Around 1900, the Belgian Ministry of Agriculture published eight regional agrarian monographs (*Monographies agricoles*). These remarkably richly documented socio-economic descriptions of rural regions were not written without a touch of nostalgia.

A new direction was taken towards the end of the 1920s. Under the leadership of Léon Dupriez, the *Instituut voor Economische Wetenschappen* (Institute for Economic Sciences), founded at Leuven in 1928, embarked on the systematic, long-term study of prices, wages, import and export flows, soil yields, etc. (e.g., Dupriez and Borboux, 1932–1933; Michotte, 1936–1937; Peeters, 1935–1936). This approach was gradually abandoned after the Second World War in favour of Keynes-inspired research on the impact of government intervention. Interest in agrarian history also reappeared at this time within the agricultural world itself, when a number of agronomists began to engage in historical research. The agricultural engineer Paul Lindemans wrote his thematically structured *Geschiedenis van de landbouw* (1952) as a hobby, though this monumental, two-volume work did not go beyond the beginning of the nineteenth century. Georges Bublot (1957), an agricultural engineer who studied economics under Dupriez, wrote a ground-breaking thesis on Belgian agrarian production, for which he drew on data from the agricultural censuses carried out between 1846 and 1955. Another important figure in this regard is Marc Mammerickx, a veterinary surgeon who published a history of cattle diseases and veterinary medicine (1967). Unlike those at Reading in England and Wageningen in the Netherlands, Belgian faculties of agricultural science have never included agrarian history in their teaching and research programmes. Consequently, there has been no consistent flow of publications from that angle, nor is there likely to be in the (foreseeable) future.

Modern agrarian history began to crop up on the research agendas of university history departments in Belgium in the 1960s, a logical outcome of the rapid development of historical research into the post-1789 period. The quantitative approach became the norm for social and economic historiography, following the French (*Annales*) and American examples. One of the forerunners was the economist Benoit Verhaegen (1961), with a pioneering study of the demographic and economic development of Flanders within the Belgian context up to the First World War. Three groups of researchers played a leading role in this quantitative shift. That at Ghent University, under the leadership of Charles Verlinden, devoted itself to the study of prices and wages, the results of which included the publication of nineteenth-century market prices (e.g., Verlinden, 1965 and 1972; Vandenbroeke, 1984a); subsequently, the focus at Ghent shifted to the functioning and the disappearance of rural survival structures and the village economy. At Liège University, the work of the Study Group for Quantitative History and Development, headed by Paul Lebrun, included the critical reconstruction of Belgian import and export flows (Degrève, 1982), and the physical production of the agrarian sector during

the nineteenth century (Gadisseur, 1973 and 1990). In this work, Gadisseur was the first historian to estimate agricultural output for the years between the official censuses, although he did not attempt to estimate input or to calculate the value of the output. A second generation focused on the demographic impact, in towns and on the countryside, of societal changes in the industrial region of Liège. At the University of Leuven, lastly – as part of the reconstruction of the national accounts – the Workshop on Quantitative Economic History, the driving force behind which was Herman Van der Wee, calculated agrarian production figures for 1760–1952, and reconstructed agricultural incomes (Dejongh, 1999a and 1999b; Goossens, 1993a and 1993b; Blomme, 1992 and 1993) and private consumption (Segers, 2003). Meanwhile, important progress was being made in other branches of agrarian and rural history, as will be indicated in the following pages.² An important effort has also been made to discover, open up, scrutinize and criticize a broad range of primary sources for agricultural and rural history. A brief review of the most important types of source has been added at the end of this paper (see Appendix).

This making up of lost ground has not as yet resulted in an overall synthesis of Belgian agricultural and rural history being produced. Older syntheses went no further than the first half of the nineteenth century (Vandenbroeke, 1981; A. Verhulst, 1990); others (such as those published in the *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* by Vandenbroeke and Vanderpijpen, 1981, and Craeybeckx, 1977 and 1978; Gadisseur, 1976; A. Verhulst and Bublot, 1980) still contained substantial gaps. Latterly, efforts have been made to rewrite the story of Belgian agriculture (Thoen, 2001; Segers and Van Molle, 2004), integrating recent insights based on both macro- and micro-research. The following pages will review the most important research results of the last decades, focusing on problems and points of debate.

II. Measuring the farmland

Calculating the total area of land used for agriculture, breaking down that area into arable, pasture, horticultural, forest and fallow land, and measuring arable land by crop have faced researchers with big problems of quantification and interpretation. Some very important, yet inconclusive, information is provided by the agricultural censuses carried out periodically since 1846; for the period prior to that date, and to correct post-1846 data, use has been made of Land Registry statistics (Goossens, 1993a; Dejongh, 1999a; Blomme, 1992). Cartographic material is another important source.

The usefulness of municipal land registry documents for historical research has been critically, though positively, evaluated by Hannes (1973, 1994) and Vanderhaegen (1982). Goossens and Dejongh (1997) have published quantitative data from agricultural censuses and land registry archives regarding agriculture during the 1801–1825 period. Dejongh (1999a) has calculated the land area for the years 1760, 1812 and 1846. Gadisseur (1990) has published yearly provincial data for the period 1845–1913.

² The histories of forestry, fishing and hunting are not included in this article.

III. Land ownership and land use

The balance between freehold and tenancy in Belgian agriculture drew already at an early date a great deal of attention from nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century observers (de Laveleye, 1875 and 1878; Vandervelde, 1900; Seebohm Rowntree, [1910]). All of them were concerned about the painful and steadily deteriorating position of small freeholders. They stressed the unusual position of Belgian – especially Flemish – agriculture, in which extreme fragmentation of land ownership was accompanied by spiralling land and rental prices. It was not until the 1920s and 1930s that the spiral was finally reversed. A general picture of the balance between freehold and tenancy is provided for the period from 1846 by the agricultural censuses conducted from then on. Our knowledge of the previous period depends on extrapolation from local research (e.g., Vandenbroeke, 1985; Dekezel, 1988; Vanhaute, 1992). A synthesis of existing research and a first attempt at explanation can be found in a number of studies by Vanhaute (1993a, 1996, 2001b), in which he elaborates on de Laveleye's hypothesis that the pauperization of the nineteenth-century rural population of Flanders was the result of a pernicious combination of the fragmentation of both landed property (ownership) and landholding (use). Duchêne and Segers (2000) have demonstrated that, until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, land generated two thirds of total income from real estate and that, between 1874 and 1914, a period when housing property became more remunerative, the figure fell to one third.

IV. The labour input mystery

The contradictions in the outcomes of labour statistics in the agricultural and the population censuses have given many authors food for thought. For instance, the 1880 population census recorded that, in Belgium, 807 000 people were employed in agriculture, whereas the figure given in the agricultural census for that same year was 1 199 000. Consequently, reconstructing the correct size of the primary sector workforce, not to mention that of the secondary and tertiary sector workforces, was a research goal in itself for many years (e.g., Pontanus, 1974; Gubin and Van Neck, 1981). The picture is muddled by multiple-jobs holding (and hence double counting), seasonal changes of employment, unclear professional classifications (such as 'day labourer'), the under-reporting of female labour, and so on.

Important contributions to source criticism have been made by Klep (1976) and De Brabander (1978, 1981) and the employment factor was used by Goossens (1993a) and Blomme (1992) as part of their investigation into the interaction between the different variables in the agrarian sector and the development of agricultural wages. By introducing the concept of the 'labour unit' – a labour unit (LU) is the annual input of 300 full days' labour in agriculture (male and female) – Blomme (1992) calculated the nominal and real annual income of agricultural workers (per LU) from 1880 until the Second World War. This series can be supplemented with LU figures from the *Landbouweconomisch Instituut* (now the *Centrum voor Landbouweconomie* – Centre for Agricultural Economics), which bring us up to the present day. Goossens (1993a and b) has reconstructed full-time equivalents for the years 1812 and 1846, and Vanhaute (1997) has formulated a method to calculate labour input on a local level.

V. Output and productivity

In this research area, too, figures from the national censuses have to be regarded very critically. That apart, a number of attempts were made at substantial intervals in earlier years to reconstruct agrarian output (Forget, 1949; Bublôt, 1957; Gadisseur, 1973). More recently, Gadisseur (1990) has published a monumental databank containing a full recalculation of the total area of farmland, the physical production of arable farming, cattle-breeding and horticulture, price series for arable produce, cattle, meat and dairy produce, as well as wages, land prices and rents for every year during the 1830/1845–1913 period, and with figures for the nine provinces wherever possible. With the studies conducted by Dejongh (1999a and d), Goossens (1993a) and Blomme (1992), the reconstruction of the Belgian agrarian product is now virtually complete (there are still a few gaps) for the 1760–1952 period (see also Dejongh and Vanhaute, 1999). With Belgium having national accounts for the period since 1953, a survey is available of a period of over two centuries. In addition, Kint (1989) has subjected the Province of East Flanders, renowned since the Middle Ages as one of Europe's most progressive agricultural regions, to a detailed study for the 1815–1850 period.

A few qualifications have to be made regarding this succession of analyses. Dejongh and Goossens reconstructed Belgium's gross agricultural product for the years 1760, 1812 and 1846, but not for the intervening years. Dejongh (1999a) and Goossens (1992) produced some strongly varying results for 1812, due to their different sampling methods and variations in their administrative delineation. Because of source problems, Goossens excluded horticulture but not forestry, which Blomme, for his part, took no account of. Both ignored fishery. Gadisseur devoted a brief chapter to fishing, but did not include a price series for wood and other forestry products. Kint chose 1820 as reference year for East Flanders, as opposed to Goossens' 1850, and took account of both forestry and horticulture. Kint also provided a chapter on the impact of the regional linen industry. The 1846–1880 period – the interim phase between the periods studied by respectively Goossens and Blomme – was thus neglected (Blomme, 1993). All these differences have complicated our ability to combine the respective results, while also providing ample material for discussion. Yearly output figures for foodstuffs for the 1846–1913 period have meanwhile been collected by Segers (2003, 2004), together with national data regarding foodstuff prices and human consumption.

An old, but ever present, research question is whether the industrial revolution was preceded by an agricultural one. Craeybeckx (1963) believed that the industrial revolution – the first on the continent – that took off in Belgium around 1800 had 'agrarian roots'. Billen (1987) and A. Verhulst (1990) adopted a much more cautious view. Kint and Goossens were also unable to side-step the question of the agrarian revolution. Kint came to a firm, though contested conclusion: in his analysis, Prometheus (the god of fire) was ignited in East Flanders by Demeter (the goddess of the earth and of grain). In other words, capital from the agricultural sector provided a significant amount of finance for the industry that, more particularly, sprang up in and around the city of Ghent. Goossens (1993a and b) and Dejongh (1999a, b and c, 2000) took a more nuanced view. Depending on the specific region and specific produce, their argument follows a line midway between Le Roy Ladurie's '*histoire immobile*' and the agrarian revolution theory

propounded by Slicher van Bath. Blomme, lastly, has also strongly qualified the picture of a second agrarian revolution sparked in the latter part of the nineteenth century by the agrarian crisis of 1880–1895. He does not detect the rapid and generalized spread of innovations in agriculture – in particular the dismantling of mixed farms in favour of specialized enterprises – until after 1950 (Blomme, 1992; Morineau, 1993).

Agrarian output, combined with demographic development and other variables, such as import and export flows, had a direct impact on the quantity and quality of food, and thus on eating habits (e.g., Dejongh, 2001; Scholliers, 1993). Attempts to estimate *per capita* consumption were based on various types of source, including budget surveys (Vandenbroeke, 1983; Van den Eeckhout and Scholliers, 1983; Blomme, 1986; Bekaert, 1991). Segers' in-depth research (2001, 2003, 2004, 2005a) on national consumption and purchasing power during the 'long' nineteenth century provides the necessary information to integrate Belgium's 'standard of living debate' into the international agenda. The famous cookbook of the Belgian Farming Women's Association helped him to cast light on twentieth-century eating habits in the countryside (2005b and c). The supply and distribution of food in Belgium during the First World War, including the roles of the *Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation* (National Commission for Relief) and the *Commission for Relief in Belgium*, is a topic that still needs proper research. An overview of four years of difficult food supply and rationing during the Second World War was published by Henau and Van Den Wijngaert (1986).

VI. 'Macro' versus 'micro': the village society

Macro-data suggest a process of gradual, though fundamental, change in the agrarian sector over the past two and a half centuries. However, it is only at the micro-level that the questions of how these changes took shape in the various rural regions and of how they were assimilated and (re-)directed by the local population can be answered. In regional and local analyses, the focus has been mainly on (eighteenth- and nineteenth-century) demographic changes, shifts in employment and income structure, credit networks and property relations (for examples and sources, see Vanhaute, 2003). Especially the poor and sandy regions of Belgium have been studied in depth, i.e. inland Flanders and the Kempen (Campine) region in the Provinces of Antwerp and Limburg. Regional and local research is noticeably less developed for the fertile parts of the country (the Polders and the Hesbaye and Condroz regions) and the south (the Ardennes and the Fagnes and Famennes regions).

The earliest local and regional studies relied to a significant extent on the processing of employment surveys (Coppejans-Desmedt, 1977; Gobyn, 1980; Klep, 1981; Leenders, 1983; Goossens, 1984; Vanhaute 1990). Labour input in agriculture (Vanhaute, 1997; Thoen and Vanhaute, 1999) and cottage industry (Gubin, 1983; Vanhaute, 1991) received particular attention, and ownership patterns in the countryside were the central concern of Goossens (1986), Dekezel (1988) and Vanhaute (2001b). An important advance in micro-research was made with the integration of information from demographic, economic and fiscal surveys, which enabled Vanhaute (1992 and 1993b) to demonstrate how a semi-autarkic society, that of the above-mentioned Kempen region, was opened

up in the course of the nineteenth century by disintegration of the local survival structures and was subsequently integrated into a much broader socio-economic network. Much attention has been focused on the dynamism and dismantling of internal labour and income structures. In a separate study, Thoen and Vanhaute (1999) processed survey forms from mid-nineteenth-century agricultural censuses, which enabled them to make a differentiated analysis of the farming system in small and medium-sized Flemish agricultural holdings. Other regional studies highlighting long-term structural changes and survival strategies include Servais (1982b, *Entre-Vesdre-et-Meuse*), Baert (1998, *Moerbeke-Waas*) and Meert (2000, *Hageland*). The relationship between small cottagers and big farmers during the eighteenth century was subject to analysis for the first time in a micro-study by Lambrecht (2002, 2003a). Goujon (2004) was the first to analyse the nineteenth-century land management of an important large landowner – in this case, the aristocratic d’Arenberg family. De Moor (2002, 2003) has published pioneering work on the functioning and disappearance of commons and common rights in Flanders.

VII. Focus on specialization

It is not unusual for agricultural regions to take their identity from their specialization – often stretching back over centuries – in particular forms of cultivation: industrial crops, vegetables, fruit or flowers, cattle or small livestock, and so on. The soil type can be one explanatory element, but factors such as the regional labour supply, the passing-on of know-how, transport infrastructure and the proximity of a suitable market could be even more important. The southern part of the Province of Limburg, for instance, became a renowned fruit-growing area (V. Jacobs, 1997), whereas the countryside around Ghent specialized in growing ornamental plants (De Herdt, 1990; *The art*, 1995; Viaene and Van den Heede, 2000). The regions around Veurne (West-Flanders) and Herve (near Liège) were well known for cattle-breeding and cheese-making. Grape-growing under glass was popular for over a century south of Brussels, and vegetable cultivation, with asparagus and Belgian endive as famous specialities, developed strongly north and east of the capital. Poultry-breeding became a speciality of the Province of Brabant (Van Leuven, 1990; Van Dijck and Van Molle, 2001; Nouwen, 2003) and, to the west, hops and chicory were cultivated for the flourishing beer and coffee industries (Vanhaute, 2001a). Brabant draught horses were bred on the heavy clay soil of the Haspengouw region, in which sugar beet and bread grains were grown (De Brauwer, 2004), and, since the late nineteenth century, Belgian agriculture has specialized in cattle- and pig-farming, including the development of a number of famous breeds (Van Molle, 2000; Compère et al., 1996; Pauwels and Vettenburg, 2002; Niesten et al., 2003; Segers, Niesten and Raymaekers, 2005). More in-depth research regarding these processes of specialization is certainly required.

The densely populated valley of the river Leie (Lys), with its intensive flax culture and traditional linen industry, displayed its own pattern of development (Dewilde, 1983). The growing, spinning and weaving of flax initially brought relative prosperity, but dependency on these proto-industrial activities resulted in the region’s large-scale impoverishment during the first half of the nineteenth century – competition from cheap, industrially manufactured fabrics, including cotton products from the United Kingdom,

finishing them off (Vandenbroeke, 1979 and 1981; Gubin, 1983; Haagen, 1983; Gubin and Scholliers, 1992). Good local studies on the flax industry are Lamarcq (1982) and Coolsaet (2001–2002). The combination of the structural linen crisis and the failure of grain and potato harvests during the 1840s gave an extra and dramatic dimension to the history of inland Flanders (Jacquemyns, 1929; Vanhaute, forthcoming). Other domestic industries included wool-processing, arms manufacture and nail-making in the region of Liège (Servais, 1982a; Neven, 2003). After 1850, new industries, such as lace-making and clothing manufacture, arose out of rural poverty as survival strategies within a rural structure that had been heavily battered by economic shifts (Vanhaute, 1994).

VIII. Agricultural policy and professional associations

Inspired by French and German research on agricultural politics and the processes of farmer politicization, Belgian historians blazed a new trail from the late 1970s on. Themes such as agricultural policy and the development of agricultural pressure groups appeared on the research agenda. Both in periods of sharply increased demand (as occurred during the food shortages in the first half of the nineteenth century) and of food oversupply (which was accompanied by sharp falls in price, as during the ‘agricultural invasion’ of 1880–1895), policy measures were taken in order to bring the supply of and demand for food into the ‘desired’ balance.

Exploratory research into the balance of power between interest groups (large landowners, farmers, industrial customers and urban consumers) during the decades prior to the agricultural invasion was begun by Delfosse (1983, 1990a and b). Van Dijk (2004) provided a clear insight into the complex relationship between economic thought and policy-making between 1830 and 1884, especially the shift from a ‘moral economy’ approach, to protectionism in favour of landed interests, followed by a definite free-trade policy. During the early decades of Belgian independence, countless barriers to trade were dismantled, including the sliding scale of tariffs on the import and export of grain, *octrooirechten* (octroi taxes) at city gates (Segers, 2000) and the charging of tolls on highways. Prior to the 1880s, governments did not intervene in the labour market, and before the First World War they embarked on what proved to be hesitant and modestly interventionist social policies only under pressure from social and political agitation, though that is not to say that the country did not pursue a policy of selective economic intervention after 1830. The 1830–1880 period was one of scarcity and, during it, rural municipalities, provinces and the State, together with private associations, launched a number of initiatives to support agriculture: these included the expansion and improvement of the transport infrastructure (rural roads, canals, docks and railways), the development of agricultural education from elementary to university level, the reclamation of waterlogged and infertile sandy ground, the combating of fraud (such as the adulteration of fertilisers and cattle feed) and cattle disease, and the improvement of cattle and horse breeds. The fruitless reclamation policy of the central authorities between 1750 and 1830 was examined by Dejongh (1999e) and the nineteenth-century reclamations of sandy zones in the Kempen region was analysed by Van Looveren (1983), Tilborghs (1988, 1989) and Hagen (1998). The study of official agricultural associations (local groups, provincial agricultural committees and the National Agricultural Council)

and the oldest private organizations, such as the *Société centrale d'Agriculture de Belgique* (Central Agricultural Society of Belgium), remains in its infancy (e.g., Van Royen, 1995); in particular, their impact on the agrarian economy remains unknown.

Agricultural intervention started to increase systematically in Belgium towards the end of the nineteenth century, not only because of concerns for national agriculture in the face of the agricultural invasion, but also because of the political battle for farmers' votes, following the introduction of universal male suffrage (1893). According to Swinnen (2001), there is a clear relationship in Belgium between the waves of agricultural protectionism since the late nineteenth century and the evolution of market prices. Research also shows how agrarian interests were sometimes deployed in the ideological conflict that raged between Catholics and Liberals from the 1860s on, as well as between Catholics and Socialists until 1914. Party politics even played a role in the struggle against the Colorado beetle (Bostoen, 2002). Craeybeckx (1973–1974) opened up the field of party political research with an article on the development of rural socialism in Belgium, in which he discusses both the important contribution of Émile Vandervelde (1900, 1908) to the formation of socialist theory and the fairly meagre returns generated by socialist propaganda in the countryside. Van Molle (1996) studied the anti-socialist campaigns in the countryside (see also Van Schoenbeek et al., 2002) and Adriaens (1991) published a case study on liberal influence in the southern corner of East Flanders. Van Molle (1989) also produced an in-depth analysis of Belgian agricultural policy from 1884 to the First World War, demonstrating how, during those 30 years of homogeneous Catholic governments, a noteworthy synergy developed between government and private initiatives. On the one hand, the political majority was able to develop a durable agricultural policy by means of legislative initiatives, including measures aimed primarily at stimulating cattle-farming and horticulture; the foundation and rapid expansion of the Ministry of Agriculture may be situated chiefly within that context (Van Molle, 1984; Bourgeois, 1993–1994) and it is worthy of note that, with the exception of the years 1945–47 and 1954–58, that ministry was continuously run by the Christian Democrats until 1999. On the other hand, Catholic private initiative, through farmers' associations at local and regional level, helped direct the adaptation of farms to the new market situation, at the same time assuring farmers' loyalty to the Catholic party and to the Church.

After World War I, the lead was taken in Flanders by the *Belgische Boerenbond* (BB – Farmers' League), and in Wallonia by the *Fédération des Unions Professionnelles Agricoles* (UPA – Federation of Professional Farming Unions) and the *Alliance agricole belge* (AAB – Belgian Farming Alliance). Influential co-operative enterprises arose under their wing to provide credit and agricultural insurance, and to supply fertilisers and cattle feed. The eventful history of one of those enterprises, *CERA* – the major Belgian savings and credit co-operative that was founded in 1892 within the bosom of the *Boerenbond* and according to the Raiffeisen system – has been unravelled by Buyst, Goossens and Van Molle (2002). Agricultural syndicates with a more radical programme of demands appeared in times of crisis, such as the *Boerenfront* (Farmers' Front, 1937) and the *Algemeen Boerensyndicaat* (General Union of Farmers, 1962) (Coppein, 2005a and b). Between the two World Wars, a small part of the rural electorate swung to the far right in both Flanders and Wallonia, a phenomenon that requires further study. Up to

now, only the most influential farmers' organization, the *Belgische Boerenbond*, has been the subject of thorough analysis, in this case by Van Molle (1990), who also made a study (1987) of the mixed reactions of the Belgian agricultural organizations and the Ministry of Agriculture to successive plans to unify the European agricultural market prior to the creation of the European Economic Community in 1958. Walloon agricultural organizations have also been the subject of sociological research (Simon-Mathy, 1976; Mougnot and Mormont, 1988).

During recent years, historians have been drawn into the growing interest in the delicate relationship among agriculture, nature and ecology (Burny, 1999; Bouquiaux, 1995). The *Nationale Maatschappij voor de Kleine Landeigendom* (NMKL – National Society for Small Properties), founded in 1935 to provide inexpensive housing in the countryside, has been gradually transformed into a policy instrument with new competences in respect of especially land reclamation, land-planning, the manure bank and nature conservation (Dejongh and Van Windekens, 2001 and 2002).

IX. Education and research

The development of organized agricultural education in Belgium dates back to the subsistence crisis midway through the nineteenth century, when the government began to introduce elementary agricultural education in primary schools; the first subsidized secondary agricultural and horticultural schools were also opened around this time. These initiatives were followed by the creation in 1860 of the university-level *Institut agricole de l'État* (State Agricultural Institute) at Gembloux and in 1878 of the *Ecole supérieure d'Agriculture* (Agricultural College), attached to the University of Leuven. Thanks to these two institutions, education could henceforth be supported by scientific research. Educational efforts were scaled up sharply in response to the agricultural invasion and included the introduction of rural home economics for girls and 'flying milking schools' for farmers' daughters and wives. Further heavy investments were made in education during the 1920s. Although several educational and research institutions have put out commemorative publications, more solid historical research in this field is required (e.g., Antoine and Hennebert, 1985; Woestenborghs et al. 2005). There have also been a few good exploratory articles dealing with late-nineteenth-century educational efforts (Van Paemel, 1983; De Vroede 1988). The question of effect – i.e. the relationship between educational input and agrarian output – is perhaps a purely academic one, but the complex relationship among agricultural science, education and farming offers numerous avenues for further research, among which are the role of the agricultural press and commercial advertising (Van Molle, 2005). It is striking to see how, in recent years, in a country with few farmers, several secondary agricultural schools have become successful again by teaching 'animal care' (Segers and Van Molle, 2004).

X. The physical context: farmhouses, farming equipment, household goods, agricultural and food industries

Belgium has a well developed tradition of folklore and rural-life museums; often, however, their aim is only to cherish the past for its own sake. Information on museums and local historical associations can be found on the following web sites: www.vcv.be (*Vlaams Centrum voor Volkscultuur* – Flemish Centre for Folk Culture), www.erfgoedverenigingen.be, www.vvia.be/vviamusea (*Vlaamse Vereniging voor Industriële Archeologie* – Flemish Association for Industrial Archaeology) and www.cagnet (see database ‘Het Virtuele Land’). The zeal with which pre-industrial farming equipment and old agricultural machines have been collected has unfortunately resulted in the fragmentation of collections across a few large museums and dozens of small ones, many of which lack any proper expertise. An example of how to present farm buildings of the kind found in the different regions of Flanders is given by the open-air museum at Bokrijk, in the Province of Limburg. The first solid fruit of research into the development of rural architecture was a book published by Trefois (1950), which was followed by the work of Goedseels and L. Vanhaute (1978), and the series *Architecture rurale de Wallonie* (Rural Architecture of Wallonia).

Various types of agricultural and horticultural tool, dairy equipment and farm machinery have been subject to expert scrutiny by David (1973, 1975), Eloy (1983), Van Mol (1986) and Van Leuven (1995). The process of mechanization in agriculture since the industrial revolution – reflecting the fundamental technological advances that have occurred in farming – has been addressed by Bublot (1957), by Blomme (1992), by Van Molle (1986a; including transformations in food-processing) and especially by Van Mol (1998) in a highly informative study about machine factories. Separate publications have been devoted to the famous Belgian plough manufacturer Alfred Mélotte (Billen, 1997) and the fertiliser manufacturer Beaudoin (Pirotte, 1994). The history of dairy production, which developed from a home-based activity to a large-scale industry, was the subject of the now outdated work by De Baere (1973) and is the focus of new research by Lefebvre and Segers (Lefebvre and Segers, 2003; Segers and Lefebvre, forthcoming). Belgium certainly lacks proper research into the development of other areas of agribusiness (breweries, gin distilleries, chicory-roasting, cattle feed factories, oil mills, canning and deep-freeze factories, etc.), all the more so as there are strong indications that agribusiness has been crucially important to the processes of development within agriculture itself. Local studies can be considered as a first step (Martin, 1975; Braive, 1995) and regional approaches have led to promising results (Landuyt, 1984; Sas, 1999; Heyrman, 2001).

Research into the material culture of the countryside, based on a systematic analysis of probate inventories, has yet to be performed for nineteenth- and twentieth-century Belgium, although Weyns (1974) has produced a valuable index of typical, Flemish household goods. An introduction to material culture as a research topic is provided by Daelemans (1988).

XI. The people

In spite of all the studies cited above, it remains difficult to construct an accurate picture of rural society and the complex human relationships that have regulated life in it. Attempts to form an academically sound portrayal of that society have consistently been confronted with the highly normative representation of it by contemporaries – painters, novelists, poets, industrial entrepreneurs, statisticians, clergymen and politicians – whose discourse on the ‘natural’ landscape, agriculture, and peasants was rarely matter-of-fact or disinterested. Even Van Isacker, an esteemed historian who published a revealing social history of Flanders (1978–83), was not immune to the tendency to praise the ‘good old days’. The judgement of contemporary witnesses swings between idealization and vilification (Van Molle, 1983; Pil, 1990; *Schilders*, 1990), and it is not surprising that attention has been given to the peasants’ revolt of 1798 as a reality and as a myth (François, 1998; Dupont-Bouchat et al., 2003) and to practices such as charivaris (Jacobs, 1993). Catholic farmers’ organizations promoted a very positive image until well beyond the Second World War (Mougenot and Mormont, 1988) and the picture they presented had a strong moral slant, according to which farming and farmers were a precious legacy to be cherished from generation to generation. Farmers’ wives, in particular, were seen as crucial agents for the transmission of rural culture and values (Van Dungen, 1993; Gubin, 1996; De Caigny and Vanderstede, 2005).

A certain amount of research – albeit sometimes rather tentative – has also been carried out into the role played by a number of specific sub-groups within the rural community. Billen (1993) has thrown light on the contacts of rural women with urban markets, Verstraete (2002) has sketched a lively picture of three generations of farming women, based on interviews, and Stengers (1985) has explored the political influence of large landowners on rural society. With the exception of De Moor (2001a and b), and unlike the state of affairs in countries such as the United Kingdom, little attention has so far been paid in Belgium to the situation of agricultural workers. The rapid contraction in the number of waged agricultural labourers that began during the final decades of the nineteenth century has no doubt contributed to the lack of interest in this professional group. As De Moor confirms, rural labourers vanished from Belgian agriculture with barely a peep, either through switching to paid employment in the coal mines or industry, or through upward mobility within the agricultural sector itself, whereby they became fully fledged ‘farmers’, whether tenant or freeholder. Such upward mobility was the especial hope of many of those concerned with the stabilization of rural society in the final quarter of the nineteenth century (Van Molle, 1989; Vanhaute, 1993a and 1996).

Research has also been carried out into two phenomena that contemporaries perceived as extremely important because of their destabilizing impact on the countryside: seasonal agricultural labour and emigration. From the late nineteenth century until the late 1950s, a remarkable seasonal migration of rural labourers took place from the densely populated provinces of East and West Flanders, as well as from the underdeveloped eastern part of Brabant (Hageland), to the rich farming areas and industrial regions of France and Wallonia. This rural labour migration has been mapped by Schepens (1973) and Woestenborgs (1993), and regional studies on internal migration have been made by Dumont (1994), Bruneel (1995), Capron (1999) and Oris et al. (2002).

The emigration of rural dwellers to the New World was much more limited from Belgium than it was from countries such as Ireland and the United Kingdom. Several experiments with ‘assisted’ emigration were carried out during the food crisis in the 1840s and there was some limited chain migration to North America, primarily from Flanders, between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1920s (Stengers, 1978; Feys, 2004).

For many tens of years now, demographic behaviour has been a central topic in rural history, following the tradition of the *Annales* school. However, research covering the nineteenth and twentieth centuries remains scarce (the few contributions are from Vandembroeke, 1984b; Leboutte, 1988; Poulain, 2001). Recently, a number of highly qualitative studies analysed the demographic changes in Belgium’s rural society during the ‘long’ nineteenth century; an overview can be found in Devos and Neven (2001). In her doctoral research, Devos (2005) has focused on changing mortality patterns in Flanders from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, using, among other sources, municipal data; on differential mortality, see also Capron (1998). Individual data to reconstruct life courses in three villages in the *Pays de Herve* during the second part of the nineteenth century has been assembled by Neven (2005). The timing of important transitions in the life course is related to changes within families and the local/regional economy (see also Alter, Neven and Oris, 2000), and life-course analysis seems to be becoming one of the new tools with which to reconstruct the dynamics in village society (Verhaeghe, 2003). The older technique of family reconstruction was seldom used for nineteenth-century village studies (examples are Hectors, 1979; Petit, 1987).

XII. Closing thoughts

This short review draws a picture of a steadily expanding area of research. Especially during the last few years, major steps have been taken regarding a broad range of aspects of the agrarian and rural past, such as (the history of) production and consumption, income and landholding structures, demography and the life course, education and research, and public policy and professional organization. However, many topics still need more fundamental investigation, examples including the relationship between landowners and tenants, labour division and income strategies within farming households, the position of women and children, the individual life course and family cycles, professional mobility, the production and diffusion of knowledge in rural communities, political interference (certainly since the First World War), the development of agribusiness, the gradual transformation of the countryside (including the alterations of the landscape) and the so-called emancipation of the rural population. It has to be appreciated that agriculture and the countryside have developed according to their own logic and have had their own dynamic, which cannot be compared without risk with that of urban society or industrial capitalism (Gadisseur, 1993). Terms such as ‘advanced’ or ‘backward’ need to be applied very cautiously within this context. Farmers cannot be equated with urban entrepreneurs, nor agricultural productivity with industrial productivity. The notion of ‘wages’ as understood in urban and industrial employment cannot be transposed to the employment of live-in labourers and maids on the farm. In short, in addition to ‘field research’, there is still a lot of thinking to be done.

Nevertheless, it would not be right to infer a 'pessimism' about agrarian matters. After all, the state of Belgian research was still being roundly condemned in the 1980s, as witnessed by Van Molle's statement that 'Knowledge of rural Belgian society between 1830 and 1982 is fragmentary and lacks comprehensive surveys and long-term analysis' (1982 and 1986b). A more positive assessment is certainly justified today. The research currently underway under the aegis of the *Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area* (CORN) research community is posing new questions and providing new building blocks. At Leuven, the *Interfacultair Centrum voor Agrarische Geschiedenis* (ICAG – Interfaculty Centre for Agrarian History), founded in 2000, is playing a stimulating role. In the French-speaking part of the country, the *Groupe de contact F.N.R.S 'Histoire des campagnes'* (FNRS Contact Group 'Rural History') functions as a platform for discussion.

Apart from exploring new or neglected areas of research, future study will need to focus on the following five basic questions:

1. How do social and economic processes interact with social, political and institutional ones? Belgian agrarian and rural historiography has suffered from the fragmentation and juxtaposition of research results; moreover, research has been predominantly carried out according to the classic, thematic dividing lines. There is a need for the knowledge that has been acquired to be challenged, compared and integrated, and for this to be done on an interdisciplinary basis.

2. To what extent can the results of local and regional research be generalized and can they be incorporated within the trends identified by macro-studies? Further, how can macro-models be rendered more dynamic by linking them to regional and local shifts? It is still too often the case that macro- and micro-research are carried out according to their own, self-contained paradigms. Research on several neglected regions is necessary to complete the picture.

3. Bearing in mind that agricultural history and rural history are not to be seen as isolated research fields, how did the constant interaction between agriculture and industry, the food producer and the consumer, town and countryside evolve in the highly urbanized and densely populated country that Belgium already was at the beginning of the nineteenth century? The lines of dependency and interaction within the overall system of production and provision are still often unclear.

4. How did long-term processes crystallize in the most recent period? In other words, what was the legacy of the past and how was it assimilated? Belgium needs a comprehensive agricultural and rural history that ought not only to go right back to medieval society, but also to take in the rapid changes that occurred during the second half of the twentieth century. A great deal of new material has been assembled for the nineteenth century, but the state of research into the twentieth remains inadequate to the task.

5. Have the past two centuries been a period of typically 'Flemish' or 'Belgian' agricultural development, or both, and what have the characteristics of that period been? These are matters that cannot be evaded within this process of synthesis and, to be able to address them, we require international and comparative discussion, which is precisely the aim of the CORN research community.

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Appendix

A note on sources

A broad introduction to the sources for the history of the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries can be found in Vanhaute (2003; from a local angle), in Lambrecht (2004, from a local angle for the eighteenth century) and in Van den Eeckhout and Scholliers (1999, from an institutional angle).

A. Agricultural statistics, 1796–1830

The sources dating back to the French and Dutch period are legion, but various and not particularly systematic in content and structure; they are scattered among many archive depots and therefore difficult to survey. For the late French period, harvest reports and statistics (1811–1813) and livestock counts (1809–1813) require to be mentioned. In general, the Dutch sources are less systematic and detailed.

A cardinal source regarding the organization of the agrarian sector in the first half of the nineteenth century is represented by the cadastral surveys (see below). More information can be found in Vanderpijpen (1970) and Goossens (1993a, with exhaustive bibliography).

B. Periodical agricultural censuses, 1846–1980

The general agricultural censuses, taken every 10 to 20 years on the initiative of the *Commission Centrale de Statistique*, later the *Institut National de Statistique – Nationaal Instituut voor de Statistiek* (National Statistics Institution), are the main source for the study of the economic and social development of Belgian agriculture from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. The censuses were carried out at household level. Until the census of 1910, information was published in most cases down to municipality level. Later, the published information was limited to more aggregated jurisdictions, such as cantons, districts and provinces. Archived sources about census activities are available from 1930 onwards.

The first of these censuses was *Agriculture. Recensement général de 1846* (Brussels, 1850–51, 4 vols); this was followed by those of 1856 (1 vol.), 1866 (1 vol.), 1880 (1 vol. + atlas), 1895 (5 vols + atlas), 1910 (4 vols), 1929 (1 vol. + atlas), 1950 (6 general vols + 9 detailed vols), 1959 (8 vols), 1970 (10 vols), 1980 (1 vol.) (see Vanhaute 2003: 154–157).

The importance of these censuses can hardly be overestimated, first of all because of the exhaustive way in which they were carried out. They give information about land under cultivation, crops, livestock, farm structure, labour input, machinery, fodder and fertilizers, and – importantly – they cover all enterprises, including smallholdings.

The agricultural censuses have been extensively used by Bublot (1957), Kint (1989), Gadsisseur (1990), Blomme (1992), Goossens (1993) and Dejongh (1999). The original filing cards per household or counting lists can be found only in municipal archives, though they have seldom been preserved. Examples of micro-research at household level are Vanhaute (1992) and Thoen and Vanhaute (1999).

Yearly agricultural censuses, less detailed, were carried out during the 1900–1909 period and from 1941 onwards. Small farms of less than 1 hectare were excluded from these censuses. Some general figures on yields, prices, fertilizer consumption, etc., can

be found in a range of periodical publications, such as *État de l'agriculture dans le Royaume des Pays-Bas pendant les années 1814–1827, Documents Statistiques* (series 1: 6 vols, 1832–1841; series 2: 13 vols, 1857–1869), *Exposé de la situation du Royaume* (1841–1850, 1851–1860, 1861–1875, 1876–1900), *Exposés de la situation de la province de...* (yearly), *Bulletin du Conseil Supérieur de l'Agriculture* (from 1847 onwards), *Bulletin de l'Agriculture* (published regularly from 1885 to 1914 and, as *Revue de l'Agriculture*, from 1948 onwards; irregularly from 1929 to 1938), *Agricontact* (from 1971 onwards), *Moniteur belge/Belgisch Staatsblad*, *Annuaire Statistique/Statistisch Jaarboek* (from 1870 onwards) and *Annuaire Internationale de Statistique Agricole*. For the twentieth century, the *Institut National de Statistique* has published a number of 'estimates' of the gross product and income in the agricultural sector. Other statistics can be found in *Exposé statistique de la situation des associations d'intérêt agricole* (1895–1911) and *Situation de l'enseignement vétérinaire et agricole* (triennial publication, 1882–1884 and 1912–1914).

C. Demographic censuses

The oldest 'national' population censuses (1796, 1801, 1806, 1814, 1820, 1830) are preserved only in manuscript. From 1846, the Belgian State organized decennial population censuses (1846, 1856, 1866, 1876, 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1947, 1961, 1970, 1981, 1991), the general results of which have been published. Municipal results, together with an overview of the changes in administrative geography, are given in Vrielinck (2000) (partly available on www.flwi.ugent.be/hisgis).

Together with a range of demographic variables, these sources can be used to build up professional occupation statistics. For the oldest censuses, see, e.g., Gyssels and Vanderstraeten (1986). At macro-level (provincial aggregations), the decennial censuses were used by Klep (1981) and De Brabander (1978, 1981). At municipality or household level, the researcher has to have recourse to the census lists or population registers preserved in municipal archives. Studies with a local/regional focus are those of Gobyn (1980), Goossens (1984) and Vanhaute (1990, 1992). With regard to population censuses and population registers, see Vanhaute (2003: 122–145).

D. Industrial and commercial censuses

1846 was also the year when regular industrial censuses began; commercial censuses got under way in 1910. Only the statistics for 1896 and 1910 provide reliable information on rural industries, including cottage industries. The data of the 1896 census have been analysed in a remarkable series entitled *Les industries à domicile en Belgique* (Brussels, 1899–1909, 10 vols + bibliography), which includes a number of solid monographs.

The crisis of proto-industrial linen production in Flanders can be studied by analysing the linen industry inquiries of the 1840s. A general report, *Enquête sur l'industrie linière. Interrogatoire. Rapport de la Commission. Exploration à l'étranger*, was published (Brussels, 1841). For late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century sweatshop industries, see Vanhaute (1994).

E. Cartographic sources

The territory of Belgium was mapped in great detail five times between 1770 and 1880. The *Cabinet Map of the Austrian Netherlands* prepared by Count de Ferraris (1771–78) is a small-scale map (originally 1:11500, reprinted in 1965 to a scale of 1:

25000), is in colour and has a wealth of detail. Drawing partly on the de Ferraris map, Dejongh (1999a) has reconstructed the total area of land used for agriculture in the country as a whole around 1770. The *Maps of the Military Survey* (scale of 1:25000), prepared during the period of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815–30), were largely based on the de Ferraris maps. They were drawn up for roughly three quarters of Belgian municipalities and can be consulted at the Dutch *Rijksarchief* (National Archives) at The Hague. The *Topographical Map of Belgium* (scale of 1:20000) by P. Van der Maelen, is the most complete and detailed topographical map of the country (250 sheets) after de Ferraris' and before the maps prepared by the Military Geographical Institute. It was published between 1846 and 1854 and can be consulted at the *Nationaal Geografisch Instituut/Institut National Géographique* (National Geographical Institute) (Silvestre, 1994). The *Topographical Maps of the Dépôt de la Guerre* (later: the *Institut Cartographique Militaire* and now the *Nationaal Geografisch Instituut/Institut National Géographique*) (scale of 1:40000 for 72 sheets and of 1:20000 for 427 sheets) appeared between 1861 and 1883 (Lemoine-Isabeau, 1988). For the third quarter of the nineteenth century, a unique collection of municipal, so-called 'Popp', maps can also be used for the reconstruction of land use (Hannes, 1968).

F. Cadastral and other fiscal sources

With the establishment of the revolutionary French regime, the old tax system was abolished and replaced by a new system of direct taxes, based on three assessments: property holding, trade income and external tokens of wealth. To compile reliable tax rolls, a register of real estate, its value and its owners had to be set up. This *kadastrale expertise/expertise cadastrale* (cadastral survey) – the identification and valuation of each land parcel and each building – was an enormous enterprise that began in 1807 and continued into the 1830s (into the 1840s in the Provinces of Limburg and Luxembourg). To assess real property, a cadastral survey dossier was compiled for each municipality. The dossiers contain not only the delimitation of boundaries, a comparative table of old and new weights and measures, a list of market prices and an overview of land usage, but also detailed information on crop cultivation: area, crop rotation, yields, production input, etc.; they permit thorough analysis of early nineteenth century agriculture. This assessment operation was never repeated, a fact that makes gathering comparable information on (labour) productivity for later times very difficult. Information about the cadastral survey dossiers can be found in Hannes (1973, 1994), Vanhaute (1992), Goossens (1993) and Dejongh (1999a).

Once the cadastral survey per municipality was concluded, the statistics were published in *Statistique Territoriale du Royaume de Belgique*, Bruxelles (1839 and 1853, the second edition including the data for the Provinces of Limbourg and Luxembourg). The establishment of the Belgian Land Registry Office in 1834 has resulted in there being since then a continuous inventory of real estate holding, which therefore enables patterns of property holding within a single village or town easily to be reconstructed. However, larger-scale analyses are not really feasible, simply because all the data are 'locked away' in municipal documents. Only one attempt at larger-scale analysis has been made, the research conducted by Seebohm Rowntree at the beginning of the last century ([1910]). For the use of cadastral sources on land reclamation and land use, see Van Der Haegen (1982), Van Looveren (1983) and Tilborghs (1989). For the use of cadastral sources to reconstruct property holding patterns, see Goossens (1986), Dekezel (1988)

and Vanhaute (1996, 2001b).

Indispensable to sketching the social and economic situation of the rural population are local fiscal sources. Tax rolls are first rate for completing and correcting the professional structure. The rolls for direct tax provide information on an individual (household) basis, but can be found only in the municipal archive depots for the 1796–1914 period, i.e. from the time of the French administration to the introduction of a new, income-based tax regime. The records of the tax on real estate inform us about patterns of property holding, the tax rolls for trade licensing provide information on income from independent ‘trade’ (although the agricultural sector is excluded) and the records of luxury tax (the taxation of external tokens of wealth) give a fairly reliable picture of the social elite in a village.

F. Enquiries, monographs and ego-documents

Important examples are:

- *Statistique du Département ...* (des Deux-Nèthes: C.-J.-F. D’Herbouville; de la Dyle: M. Doulcet-Pontecoulant; de l’Escaut: G.C. Faypoult de Maisoncelle, de la Lys: J.-M.-F.-J. Viry), an X – XIII.
- *Enquête agricole. Réponses au questionnaire arrêté par la commission (1886); Enquête sur le travail agricole (1920)*.
- Budget inquiries: see e.g., Scholliers (1992).
- Yearly reports of the municipal administration, kept in the municipal archives with general data on harvest, yields, livestock, etc.
- The reports and travel stories (listed in David, 1976) of such eighteenth- and nineteenth-century foreign observers as Arthur Young, Count de Raspani and Johann Schwerz, who subjected the highly productive Flemish agriculture to intensive study.
- *Monographies agricoles, 1900–1902* (Région des Poldres, Région Sabonneuse des Flandres, Région de la Campine, Région du Condroz, Région Limoneuse et Sablo-limoneuse, Région des Ardennes, Région du Pays de Herve, Région Jurassique).
- The monographs of E. Vliebergh and R. Ulens on the rural population of the Kempen/Campine (1906), Haspengouw/Hesbaye (1909), Hageland (1912) and Ardennen/Ardennes regions.
- The diaries of farmers and peasants, a source so far virtually neglected. For an overview, see Lambrecht (2003b); his book on the farmer Gilles Coucke (2002) shows the potential of this type of ego-document.

G. Ministry of Agriculture, farmers’ organizations and pressure group sources

Until 1884, agricultural matters fell within the remit of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Policy archives for these years are seldom preserved. In 1884, an independent Ministry of Agriculture was set up; however, most of its archives have been lost or destroyed, too (Van Molle, 1999: 429–433).

The three major private agrarian organizations are the *Belgische Boerenbond* (1890), the *Fédération Nationale des Unions Professionnelles Agricoles* (1919) and the *Alliance Agricole Belge* (1929). The first two have rich archival collections, of which that of the *Boerenbond* has been largely inventorized. The *Boerenbond* archives preserve rich working files for most Flemish municipalities, with information on agrarian exploitation (productivity figures, for example), social relations (municipal elites), religion, etc. (Van Molle, 1999: 845–854).