



# Your Living Environment

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## HEDGEROWS -- LUXURY OR NECESSITY?

"England's green and pleasant land is changing. Gradually miles of hedgerow, sanctuaries of much bird life, are being torn out and sacrificed to the cause of greater efficiency down on the farm.

"The patchwork quilt effect to green and brown fields bounded by shady hedgerows interspersed with groups of trees is being altered as farmers create fields which are large enough to cultivate with the most modern technical aids.

"The change is most noticeable in eastern England. Here arable, rather than dairy farming, predominates. It is commonplace to see a line of tractors or harvesting machines at work on vast acreages, a scene more reminiscent of the Canadian prairies.

"In an age of new thinking and mechanization, picture-book Britain is changing. Arable farming just will not allow farmers to hold onto 'a fossilized 18th century landscape' complete with countless trees and thousands of miles of boundary hedgerows.

"Critics say that 'grubbing out' of trees and hedges affects the wildlife that lives there and that this process aids soil erosion. They quote occasional dust storms which have lifted tons of topsoils and seeds."  
(Christian Science Monitor, p. 3, April 16, 1969).

Few issues have been more controversial than the destruction of England's renowned hedges. On one side, the conservationists accuse the farmer of sacrificing beauty and harmony for the sake of mercenary gain. Farmers counter by arguing that the hedges must go if they are to eke out enough money to support themselves.

In the words of a farmer, "If the nature-lover wants to see hedges then he should pay for them -- to the farmer who must construct and maintain them."

Who is right? How costly are hedgerows? Do they really serve a valuable ecological role in the environment. If so, what is it and is it worth it?

Believe it or not, there is a way to please both the farmer and the conservationists -- to the betterment of both. The Agriculture Research News gives you the answer in this edition.

#### Are Hedgerows Natural?

Many conservationists insist that the destruction of hedges constitutes a departure from 'nature'. This is simply not true! The natural order of England is not hedges and fields at all -- IT IS TREES!

"The ancient writer who referred to a squirrel being able to cross the country from the Severn to the Wash (from Wales to the North Sea) without ever touching the ground knew England before men had interfered with the balance of nature. A vast sea of trees, from which the chalk downs emerged like peninsulas and islands and which merged along the flat eastern coast with marshes and fens concealed by tall reeds -- that was England as nature intended it to be." (The Agricultural Merchant, October, 1968).

"Most hedges were planted between 100 and 150 years ago." (Brave New Victuals, Elspeth Huxley, p. 137).

It is clear from this historical note that hedges are not part of England's original 'natural order'. Hedgerows are very much a result of the hand of man -- and as such there is nothing sacred about them that demands that they should remain a part of the English landscape.

With this in mind we can now consider hedgerows on their own merit.

#### Benefits!

What do they add to the country economically, aesthetically and ecologically?

As the conservationists point out, hedges have played a significant role. They lessen the danger of wind erosion, serve as shelter for livestock and moderate the climate by breaking the sweep of the wind. To a limited extent they also serve as living fences, though in many cases their effectiveness in this regard is of doubtful value.

They do serve to break up the prairie-like monotony of vast stretches of modern arable farmland. Tourists and travellers appreciate this function more than most.

Proponents in Germany justly claim that hedgerows increase crop yields:

"Hedges in parts of northern Europe have been proved to reduce the evaporation of moisture from the soil to an amount equal to one-third of the annual rainfall, which may be one reason why those protecting corn in a district of Schleswig-Holstein were found to increase grain yields by as much as 20 per cent. Is it purely coincidence that in areas of East Anglia removal of hedgerows has been followed by an urgent call for more costly irrigation schemes?" (Tomorrow's Countryside, Garth Christian, p. 27).

#### Drawbacks!

Against these advantages for hedges must be balanced their very real disadvantages. One farmer listed these --

- "1. Land gained from the removal of hedges and ditches ... is equivalent to one acre of every mile run. In this case, sixty acres were gained for cropping, worth perhaps £15,000, or with interest at six per cent, £900 per year.
- "2. No hedge trimming required.
- "3. No ditch maintenance ...
- "4. Larger fields reduce the need for internal roads (releases more acreage for crop production).
- "5. Increased machinery efficiency, with reduced idle turning-time because of awkward corners and with less damage to implements through the elimination of obstructions.
- "6. ... the view is unimpeded by hedges [if they are removed], giving fewer blind corners -- a considerable safety factor."

(Modern Agriculture and Rural Planning, John Weller, p. 261, 269).

Note the following strong words from an author who has much concern for the quality of our environment:

" ... the economic usefulness of hedges is mainly over. The high cost of labour, electric fences, the need to exploit every acre, all these combine to make most hedges not merely useless, but a liability." (Brave New Victuals, Elspeth Huxley, p. 137).

### Environmental Heresy!

So it looks like a case of ECONOMICS verses BEAUTY -- but there is a way to have both!

MOST HEDGEROWS IN ENGLAND COULD BE REMOVED WITHOUT HURTING THE LANDSCAPE!

Does that sound like heresy?

Well it isn't -- as long as trees, shelterbelts and thickets are planted in their place. Such a drastic change would be advantageous to conservationists, sightseers and farmers alike.

Trees and small thickets serve even more effectively than hedges in moderating the climate, softening the landscape and breaking up the otherwise barren monotony of large arable fields.

Will the removal of the hedges decrease the amount of wildlife? Not at all, as the famous British geographer, Sir Dudley Stamp points out:

"Provided that farmers who remove hedges take the trouble to plant fresh woodlands and coppice, Sir Dudley saw no reason why the present trend back to large open fields should have any damaging effect on wildlife." (Farmers Weekly, November 7, 1969).

The additional planting of trees would be a tremendous boon to the national economy in a few years time.

"even today £1,250,000 of wood and timber products enters our ports each day." (Tomorrow's Countryside, Garth Christian, p. 50).

"We import over 90 per cent of our timber ... our consumption is expected to double by the year 2000 ... Britain has only about 4½ million acres of woods supplying 9 per cent of our needs. That is a smaller proportion of land area under trees than most other Western European countries -- only 7.3 per cent of our land area." (Daily Telegraph Magazine, December 12, 1969).

Right now the Forestry Commission is trying to correct this problem by planting huge tracts of land in the uplands of England and Scotland to coniferous trees. The effort is admirable, but the overall effect on the landscape is abominable. The regimented dark, dreary, dripping forests, a clear case of monoculture of trees, are an ecological nightmare. It would be far better to educate every farmer to plant more trees in place of his antiquated inefficient hedgerows. The effect on landscape and ecology would be vastly superior.

Few farmers should object when they realize the tremendous economic advantages:

Well established and correctly managed shelterbelts are capable of totally changing the whole farm environment. The ecological changes benefit the farmer, his family, his livestock and of course his bank balance. Every agricultural unit would draw constantly on the timber provided, for the purpose of new construction and repairs of homes, barns, yards, fences and gates.

Timber should be farmed as a regular crop by every landowner and figure in his annual income. The labour demand for harvesting a regular timber crop comes in the winter and therefore fits conveniently into most farm work programmes. Under this system, every landowner in the nation would play his part in supplying the world's lumber requirements.

There you have it, the problem, the questions it poses and the one answer that will mesh with all the rest of man's complex environment. That leaves us -- a tiny little group facing this gigantic task of changing the ecological pattern of the whole earth. Do you wonder that it will take a thousand years?

Ehrenfried Pfeiffer may have summed the situation up better than he realized when he wrote:

"Today we [the earth, its landscape and its people] very closely approach the border of the lowest possible conditions permitting life. Healing and maintenance of the landscape lead to the best possible biological and economic conditions, and besides this, stimulate a sense for beauty and help develop character. A feeling of responsibility towards the earth carries with it a capacity for building the future of the human race.

"As in all spheres of practical life, preaching and lecturing help little, deed and example accomplish everything." (The Earth's Face, E. Pfeiffer, p. 122).

Here is where Ambassador College Bricket Wood is about to take its first halting steps in what will ultimately develop into a globe-encircling project. The Agriculture Department is now planning our first reafforestation work. It is being done in conjunction with the British Forestry Commission and local bodies in the Hertfordshire area. Planting is expected to commence this autumn on a section of the disused gravel pits opposite the College.

We won't be just ringing the area with an old hedge, but fully planned forestry belts filled with lush pastures that will be a credit to the community -- Ambassador landscaping -- King-size!

We already have access to the first thirty acres -- much more is to follow -- rent-free in the first year. Inns Gravel Co. officials don't anticipate success for us in less than twelve years, but therein lies the challenge!

There are millions of these blighted acres in every 'advanced' country, so we have the chance to make an impressive contribution jointly to today's anti-pollution programme and to sorely needed knowledge for the soon coming World-Tomorrow!