

Animal or machine?

The role of farm animals during harvest time

For a long time, the question of whether animals or machines should be used for harvesting did not arise. It was not until the 1930s that motorised harvesting machines such as tractors gradually became available in Germany. Until then, agricultural equipment and carts had to be pulled by draft animals. Oxen were usually used for this purpose, or cows, especially on small farms. From the 19th century onwards, horses were increasingly used.

With the population growth in the 19th century, agricultural animal husbandry increased. In addition, yields could be significantly boosted by improved feed. Meat, milk and eggs were produced for personal consumption, and any surplus was sold at markets.

However, animal husbandry was labour-intensive: from the mid-19th century onwards, stable feeding became common, which made it necessary to grow fodder crops. In return, the manure from the animals was a valuable fertiliser for the fields.

While pig farming also increased significantly until the 1910s, this was not the case for goats, sheep and poultry.

Animal diseases posed a threat to the system, which is why they were monitored by the state.

Fun fact:

Concerned about wartime shortages of pig feed, the German government ordered the so-called 'pig massacre' in 1915. Within a few weeks, several million pigs were slaughtered. After a brief period of oversupply of meat, this miscalculation led to increased food shortages.