

Harvest in transition

Agriculture between progress and rural exodus

In 1850, more than half of the German population worked in agriculture. Depending on the region, the work was carried out under a variety of challenging conditions. This was also true of the Rhineland: parts of the Eifel region struggled with impoverishment due to the poor soil, and in the Bergisches Land region, only very limited areas were available for arable farming. The Westerwald, on the other hand, had long been characterised by wine growing, while dairy farming predominated in the grass-rich Lower Rhine region.

From the 19th century onwards, advances in agricultural science and increasing mechanisation led to a slow but profound change in agriculture. Thanks to improved cultivation methods, yields increased significantly. At the same time, the increased demand for crops due to population growth was increasingly met by imports.

Advancing industrialisation also changed the structures of rural areas. Many people now worked in newly established rural industrial locations or moved to the cities. By 1913, only about 35% of the total population was still engaged in agriculture. Despite all the changes, one thing remained the same: harvest time was the most important period of the year.

Fun fact:

The 19th century was marked by 'rural exodus,' the migration of the rural population to the cities. The main motivation was the hope for better living conditions. Between 1852 and 1871, half a million people moved to the emerging industrial location of the Ruhr area.