

Every worker counts

Harvesting as a feat of strength

The busiest time of the year in agriculture has always been the main harvest season in late summer. Grain had to be brought in from the fields, beets and potatoes had to be dug out of the ground, and vegetables and fruit had to be harvested from the gardens.

Although mechanisation, which began in the 19th century, slowly changed the way work was done with new machines, agriculture was still characterised by manual labour until the second half of the 20th century. Fertilising, sowing, tending the fields and harvesting were – just like transporting and processing the harvest – a feat of strength. In addition, daily household chores had to be done and the livestock had to be cared for.

While the physically demanding grain harvest was largely carried out by men, women also did field and harvest work. In addition, crops that required more care, such as potatoes or fodder beets, as well as fruit and vegetable gardens, were usually tended by women.

On small farms, the work was done as much as possible by the farmers themselves for cost reasons. Only in the high season were temporary workers employed. On large farms, however, maids, farmhands and day labourers were indispensable.

Fun fact:

In the 19th century, there were repeated complaints about a shortage of labour in agriculture. Foreign workers, for example from Poland, were therefore increasingly recruited. To this day, German agriculture remains dependent on foreign seasonal workers.