

The following table, extracted from successive censuses from 1901 to 1936, together with an estimate for 1945, gives the number of males and females actively engaged in farming pursuits :—

Table No. 79.—Table showing Number employed in Farming Pursuits from 1901 to 1945
(In Thousands)

Year.	Males.	Females.	Total.
1901	85·3	3·9	89·2
1906	93·5	3·5	97·0
1911	102·6	7·5	110·1
1916	107·7	9·7	117·4
1921	122·6	9·0	131·6
1926	117·0	3·3	120·3
1936	144·5	6·3	150·8
1945	154·0*	8·0*	162·0*

* Estimate by Employment Department.

The figures are not strictly comparable over the period, but show a general trend. The figures for 1945 must be taken with caution as they are computed on a basis entirely different from, although equally exhaustive, as the censuses.

If we take the year 1901 as a datum line when most of the available suitable land was taken up, we find a steadily increasing agricultural population until 1921, which would be in line with the steady development of "cultivated" land over the period. From 1921 begins the period of intensive dairy-farming with increasing mechanization. This resulted in some fall in rural population. From 1926 begins the period of increased carrying-capacity due to better farm management and the greater use of fertilizers. This fact, coupled with the drift to the country as a result of urban employment falling off during the depression, resulted in a greatly increased rural population in 1936. The importance of primary production during the war, the development of such new avenues as linen flax, and the increased attention to grain farming, all led to the increase in 1945.

This latter increase, however, may not be as large as the figures prove on account of the difference in computation.

The following table gives a comparison between the growth of male agricultural population and the total population of the Dominion between the years 1901 and 1945 :—

Table No. 80.—Table showing Index Numbers of Male Agricultural Population and Total Male Population as at the various Censuses from 1901 to 1945

Year.	Male Agricultural Population.	Total Male Population.
1901	1000	1000
1906	1096	1160
1911	1203	1310
1916	1263	1359
1921	1437	1535
1926	1372	1691
1936	1694	1863
1945	1805	2020*

* This figure makes allowance for troops overseas.

The above table shows the relative trend away from agriculture. Contrary to popular opinion, however, the trend is not so marked as is generally thought. The last two figures, however, which show a marked increase over previous figures, perhaps hide the real trends in that in 1936 the Dominion was just emerging from the depression, which as one of its incidental effects caused a temporary reversal of the drift to the towns, and the 1945 figures are influenced by the war-time agricultural drive.