The rise of landless households in the Dutch countryside ca. 1600 – 1900, especially in the nineteenth century

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Aim of paper

• Development in the share of landless/land poor rural Dutch households, 17th-19th centuries

• Concentrating on 19th century landless farm labourers
  – What were the survival strategies over the life-time of labourer families?
  – How were their employment opportunities in each season
  – How did their real wage develop in the long nineteenth century?
  – What was the social origin of unskilled labourers
  – What were the social chances of their children to escape from this existence?
Graph 1: Dutch rural population, 1600-1850

- rural coast
- rural inland
Social structure rural Netherlands in Households
(estimates partly based on Van Zanden, 1985)

- **1807 All rural households (farmers: 1 horse)**
  - Inland 33% farmers; 67% others
  - Coastal 25% farmers; 75% others

- **1850 All rural households**
  - Inland 28% farmers; 72% others
  - Coastal 19% farmers; 81% others

- **1900 All rural households**
  - The Netherlands 17% farmers; 83% others

- **1910 Agrarian households (< 50% rural popul.):**
  - Inland: 48% farmers; 24% smallholders; 28% labourers
  - Coastal: 33% farmers; 11% smallholders; 56% labourers
Rural households without cows  
(largely based on Van Zanden, 1985)

• 1800/1814 (1807)
  – Inland: Drenthe 9%; Overijssel 31%; Gelderland 32%
  – Coastal: Zeeland 71%; Southern Holland 73%

• 1910
  – Inland: Drenthe 51%; Overijssel 45%; Gelderland 53%
  – Coastal: Zeeland 86%; Southern Holland 86%
  – The Netherlands as a whole 68%
Three Dutch models of Early Modern proletarisation

• Inland region:
  – Gradual increase of originally relatively small share of smallholders and landless households in line with population growth (Overijssel: rise from less than 25% in 16th century to 44-47% in eighteenth century)

• Coastal region:
  – A. Shift from society with many smallholders and proto-industrial activities to specialised economy with few larger farmers, and many small-holders and household active outside agriculture (compare B)
  – B. Already very proletarised and specialised rural capitalistic society in 16th century: proletarisation fluctuates with population-growth
Table 2. Use of land in the Groningen clay soil region, 1755-1921 (households).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>5 ha or more</th>
<th>1-5 ha or more</th>
<th>Less than 1 ha (estimate)</th>
<th>landless and land poor households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1755</td>
<td>3,360</td>
<td>1,330</td>
<td>5,800</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>3,092</td>
<td>1,291</td>
<td>9,200</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>3,424</td>
<td>1,821</td>
<td>15,900</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>3,490</td>
<td>1,847</td>
<td>23,900</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Paping & Collenteur 1998, p. 38: includes small town of Appingedam. Land less and land poor households were estimated using estimated population-numbers and assuming an average household-size of 4.5 (compare: Paping 1995, p. 327: sample municipalities period 1809-1862 results in a range 4.3 to 4.9.)
Graph 2. Occupations of fathers of newborn children in rural Groningen and Drenthe, 1811-1900

- farmers/peasants
- labourers
- other occupations
Lifecycle of farm labourer households

• Both groom and bride: live-in servants until marriage at average age 24-30: receiving board and lodging and annual wage

• After marriage difficult to find employment for married females. Rising burden with more children

• After children become servants around 14 -> burden diminishes. However parents become increasingly less able to do wage work in old age

• At old age, all children left home, while parents are no longer able to work and recieve poor relief. Older children because of their own household situation were usually unable to support parents
Graph 3: Average employment of labourers on the large Hayemaheerd in Zuurdijk through the year, 1835-1843

- Males
- Females

Labourers per day

3 Jan. 14 Feb 28 Mar 9 May 20 Jun 1 Aug 12 Sep 24 Oct 5 Dec 17 Jan 28 Feb 11 Apr
Graph 4: Average employment of labourers on the Barlagen-farm in Scheemda through the year, 1870-1881
Graph 5: Development of real wages of married labourers and male and female farm servants in Groningen, 1770-1910 (1905=100)

- male farm servant
- female farm servant
- adult male farm labourer
Social origin and social chances of the rural labour class in the nineteenth century
Table 5. Parental occupation of people dying as married labourers between 1811 and 1859 in the Groningen countryside according to the Civil Registration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth cohort</th>
<th>Labourers</th>
<th>Farmers</th>
<th>Other groups</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1721/1760</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1761/1800</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>4,211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801/1840</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841/1880</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1,545</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Occupations of married children of labourers dying between 1811 and 1859 in the Groningen countryside according to the Civil Registration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth cohort</th>
<th>Labourers</th>
<th>Farmers</th>
<th>Other groups</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1721/1760</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1761/1800</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3,778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801/1840</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3,279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841/1880</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1,589</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7. Hisclass social positions at the marriage date of children of unskilled labourers born in the Groningen clay soil region, marrying 1811-1934 (according to marriage place).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males country-side</th>
<th>Males city of Gron.</th>
<th>Females country-side</th>
<th>Females city of Gron.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher managers and professionals</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers, peasants, gardeners</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower managers and professionals</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foremen and skilled workers</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower skilled workers</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled and farm labourers</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N)</td>
<td>29,425</td>
<td>1,307</td>
<td>32,300</td>
<td>1,770</td>
<td>64,802</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concluding remarks

• Rising share of non-landed households in Dutch countryside 1600-1900

• Large majority of Dutch rural households were non-landed in the 19th century both in coastal as to lesser extent in inland parts

• Lifecycle of non-landed farm labourer households was closely connected to lifecycle servant system

• Opportunities for wage work of married farm labourers were limited to summer half year

• Unskilled rural labourers became increasingly a closed group in 19th century Groningen, recruited from the labour class, with a deterioration of chances for children to escape the labour class

• Real unskilled wages only increased rapidly after 1870, augmenting possibilities to chose for labour households.

Consequences:
– Weakening of lifecycle servant system
– More possibilities to invest in alternative careers of children (though mainly outside Groningen countryside)
– Less wage work of married female labourers