

VALUE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

The standard mapping of agricultural activities is limited to the absolute or relative representation of the location of different types of cultivation and livestock which are expressed in different units (areas, numbers) and which are therefore impossible to sum. A common unit is therefore necessary to express total agricultural production. A monetary unit seems to be the best indicator in our case.

The use of "standard gross margins" (S.G.M.) for commercial products provides the best approach to gross added value. The notion of S.G.M. effectively corresponds to the difference between the standard production value (value at the point of production) and certain direct costs (fertiliser, trade supplies, plants and seeds etc.). The costs of fuel and oil, amortisation and rent are not subtracted from these standard production values.

The total S.G.M. for a commune is obtained by adding the products of each census category (National Institute of Statistics) for 15th May 1982 and the corresponding S.G.M. value. The S.G.M. values used have been defined by the "Institut Economique agricole" on the basis of figures over the period 1978-79 to 1980-81. These take the national averages (hence the name "standard value") which are then applied equally to the data for all communes, even though these belong to different agricultural regions. Regional values of S.G.M. are not available. However, they would provide a better picture of production results at the regional scale.

Although not completely identical, the S.G.M. values are strongly related to the concept of gross added value and this term will therefore be used in the following commentary.

The main map shows, by circles, of which the area is proportional, absolute values for gross added value of production in each commune. The circles are subdivided into sectors proportionally representing production respectively in arable, horticulture, grazing and grain-fed animals (or non-field breeding: pigs and poultry). Where the production of a commune does not reach 16 million Francs, the circle is not subdivided. For the other communes a sector of production has not been represented unless it reaches 5% of the total production. If there are several sectors which do not reach 5% each, but their total passes this level, then they are shown globally by a sector in a neutral colour.

There are two smaller maps, one represents the added value per hectare, the other by professional holdings.

The total figure for gross added value in Belgian agriculture for the period under consideration amounts to 83,3 milliard Francs; 46% of this is provided by the grazing animals sector (mainly cattle), 24% by arable cultivation, 18% by horticulture and 12% by non-field breeding.

The gross added value (expressed in S.G.M. per hectare) is the expression of the intensity of the agricultural system practised which depends on the choice of production type (viz. horticulture and non-field breeding) and the intensity of the system (e.g. the density of the livestock). This is synthesised excellently on the map. The mean value for all Belgium for the period under consideration was 59420 Francs per hectare of agricultural land.

The following commentary is made by region: first of all for Walloon Belgium, secondly for Flemish Belgium.

The Walloon communes with a few exceptions appear to fall into two areas. The threshold of 40000 Francs/Ha approximately coincides with the southern limit of the loam regions, the grassland region of Liège and the High Ardenne. To the North of this limit the Walloon communes (hereafter called North Walloon Belgium) have values lying between 40000 Francs/Ha and 50000 Francs/Ha. To the south of the afore-mentioned limit the gross added values range between 25000 and 45000 Francs/Ha (hereafter called South Walloon Belgium).

In the South of Walloon Belgium the agricultural area is often of little importance because of the extent of woodland. The chief agricultural activity — based almost exclusively on the cattle sector — is carried on in a somewhat extensive manner (low density of cattle). All these factors determine a low absolute production level, as can be seen on the main map.

In the North of Walloon Belgium, an important part of the fertile loam area is used for agriculture. Production is oriented toward the two basic sectors, arable and cattle, which one being dominant depending on physical factors. In the grassland area of Liège and in the High Ardenne production is largely dominated by the grassland sector. Cattle production in the North of Walloon Belgium is clearly more intensive than in the South and includes fodder systems using beet pulp. In the arable sector a high gross value figure is attained with the help of sugar beet cultivation, in the Tournai region with root crops and potatoes. All these elements contribute to a higher production level — expressed in absolute figures — in the North of Walloon Belgium.

The gross value added figure per hectare exceeds 50000 Francs/Ha in most of the Flemish communes. Most of Western Flanders (with the exception of the Polders), Eastern Flanders (apart from a southern section), the major part of the province of Antwerp (apart from some central communes), Flemish Brabant (apart from the southernmost section) and the southern part of Limburg are characterised by the most intensive agriculture. The high values can be explained on the one hand by a high cattle density and on the other hand by the importance of horticulture and non-field breeding.

The global picture of absolute values given on the main map is more heterogeneous than that of values per hectare because in the eastern half of the Flemish region the agricultural area is proportionally less important: communes here are structurally more urbanised and more wooded than in the west. Western Flanders, the northern half of eastern Flanders with an extension east as far as the Antwerp-Mechelen axis contribute a great deal to Belgian agricultural production.

The main map shows clearly the variety in the agricultural production of the Flemish area. The Antwerp-Brussels axis and the Ghent region are characterised by a dominant horticulture production (more than 2/3 of the total value). Specialisation is less pronounced in the other Flemish communes. In almost all these other communes grassland animals exceed 1/3 of the gross added value total but do not reach the two thirds level. In a certain number of communes a further third of the gross value added total is reached also by another section of production: non-field breeding in the sandy region of western Flanders; horticulture in certain communes in the inside of the Ghent-Brussels-Antwerp triangle, in Hageland and the damp Hesbaye; arable in the Polders and Westhoek. Whilst in other communes production is so diversified that no sector reaches one third of the total. Production is the most diverse in the Roulers (Roeselare) region where certain communes do not reach the threshold of one third for any sector while in others it is attained by horticulture.

The map showing gross added values by holdings demonstrates that those with the highest values — more than 1,5 million Francs per holding — are situated in Hesbaye, in the loam region of Brabant, in Condroz, but certain communes near Ghent and Antwerp — with horticulture under glass — reach equally high values. Communes where the average value per holding is less than 750000 Francs are situated in the High Ardenne, in the southern part of eastern Flanders, and also to the east of Ghent and in parts of Flemish Brabant and the Campine. There are therefore more Flemish communes than Walloon ones with a low gross value added figure per holding.