

Open field farming (also known as strip or three field farming)

This system had survived for hundreds of years, perhaps longer, which is testimony to its success in many ways.

Definition – land around a village was divided into three huge open fields which were divided into strips, each separated from the other by narrow, barren pathways called balks (sometimes a ditch). Members of the village owned or rented several strips in each field, scattered widely apart so that everyone, no matter how many or how few strips they had, shared the good and some poorer soil. There were no hedges or walls. The village was placed centrally from where farmers could access their scattered strips more easily.

There was also common land, consisting of rough pasture (where cattle had to be grazed) and meadow land (which offered lush, and earlier, spring grazing, and hay). Wood for burning and building could be taken from the common, as could clay for pots, berries to supplement diet, etc.

Advantages:

- It allowed a fair share of good and poorer soils.
- It was a co-operative system, encouraging sharing of oxen, ploughs, etc.
- It was environmentally friendly – close to nature.

Disadvantages:

- ☹ It did not allow experimentation – everyone had to grow the same crops in the same open field to avoid problems of cross-fertilisation.
- ☹ It was a waste of land – each year one field was left fallow.
- ☹ It was not possible to control the breeding of animals as they roamed on the common land.
- ☹ Animal and plant disease and weeds spread easily.
- ☹ It was difficult to use large machinery on narrow strips.
- ☹ Time was wasted each day as it was necessary to walk, and move equipment, from one scattered strip to another.