

Seminars in Environmental Agricultural History Series

# Working Across Disciplines on Endemic Livestock Disease

Abigail Woods of the University of Lincoln



February 26, 2021  
2:30pm–4:30 PM ET  
via Zoom

This seminar presents findings from new research into the history of lameness in UK dairy cattle from the 1920s to the 1980s, which forms part of a research programme known as FIELD (Farm-level Interdisciplinary approaches to Endemic Livestock Disease). Today, lameness is recognised as one of the most serious threats to dairy cow health, welfare and productivity. During the interwar period it was already a familiar problem to farmers and practicing vets, and from the 1960s, as dairy farming intensified, it became increasingly prevalent and complex. However, prior to the 1970s, lameness was barely acknowledged by veterinary scientists. This seminar addresses questions of whether, when and how lameness was constructed as a veterinary scientific problem by reference to the concurrent use of disease surveys as influential tools for making bovine bodies collectively knowable. Like other forms of statistical analysis, disease surveys were not neutral reflections of reality; they were both of the world, and helped to constitute it. Analysis will reveal the particular visions of agricultural modernity, versions of bovine health and productivity, and modes of veterinary endeavour that they represented and enacted, and the consequences for how lameness was perceived and managed.

The presentation will end with some reflections on how this study has been shaped by participation in the FIELD project, which brings together thirteen historians, social scientists and epi-economic modellers to interrogate the past, present and future of lameness and BVD as exemplar endemic livestock diseases. While many scholars have commented on why and how to work across disciplines, there has been less scrutiny of what is produced. Personal experience suggests that the iterative nature of historical enquiry allows interdisciplinarity to impact in subtle and previously unarticulated ways.

Register for this [event](#)

This seminar is part of the Seminars in Environmental Agricultural History Series and is sponsored by MIT's History Faculty and Program in Science, Technology, and Society. For more information, contact

[kalopes@mit.edu](mailto:kalopes@mit.edu)