



# Commander Loebner's tables and vital necessities in the Faeroe Islands in 1813

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## Abstract

The first 10-15 years of the 19th century were troublesome in the Faeroe Islands as well as in most parts of Europe as the Napoleonic wars raged over both land and sea. The supply of grain to the Faeroes was irregular. In an attempt to distribute the supply evenly, the commander of the Faeroes, Loebner, completed a registration of every household with data on demographic as well as economic geographic features. These data are analysed, for the first time, to give a picture of the living condition. The main sources of nutrition: grain, mutton and milk from the cows are calculated in relative exact quantities. The surprising result is that milk was the most important single source of calories to the Faeroese population in those years.

## Keywords

Faeroe Islands, Historical Geography, Agriculture, Demography, Food Production, Caloric balance sheet 1813.

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The Napoleonic wars in the first part of the 19th century threw the states into insecure alliances and turbulence. The map of Europe changed. Napoleon saw in 1812 Moscow on fire, and this inspired Tjajkovskij to compose a well-known Overture. Once more Denmark was a loser in a war and, according to the peace agreement in Kiel in 1814, had to cede Norway to Sweden. But the old Norwegian dependencies in the North Atlantic remained as parts of the Kingdom of Denmark.

In the winter month of February, the very same year the Commander of the Faeroe Islands, Emilius Loebner, travelled around all islands and villages to register the inhabitants, their land property, grain harvest, cows, sheep, fishing boats, fowling and wool collection. Because of bad weather this winter it was impossible for him to come ashore on the westernmost island, Mykines, but otherwise it seems as the registration is all-embracing. There was only one person, Sören Thomassen in Sumba, who refused to give Loebner the information he asked for, and the man gets this bad mark in the 'comments' column in the tables: "This person refused to give information and ought to be charged".

The purpose of this article is 1) to present the content and

value of this collection of historical-geographical data, 2) to introduce a model for the traditional Faeroese agricultural system, 3) to evaluate the main sources of nutrition: mutton, milk and grain, and 4) to set up a balance sheet for these three nutrition groups.

## The historical background for Loebner's tables

Then, which were the pressing circumstances that led to this comprehensive but troublesome project? Generally speaking it was the war against England that hindered normal connections between Denmark and the Faeroe Islands. In that way the import of grain and other necessities became unreliable and insecure. Many ship transports were arrested. The stocks in the Royal Monopoly Commercial House in Tórshavn decreased. That was the reason why Commander Loebner tried to distribute the scarce resources as evenly as possible. But this project was not without problems in a society with large social inequalities. The rich people; large farmers, clergymen and officials were able to pay and hoard amounts of commodities. The poor buggers without property were not able to buy.

Loebner wrote in his Pro Memoria to the tables about the problems. A Royal resolution from April 28th 1813 decreed that grain should be sold only in exchange for woolen commodities. This was surely to ensure that the main part of the population seldom possessing ready cash could have their part of the available grain and other commodities. But as early as August 15th that year the resolution was moderated, as a part of the people was not able to pay in woolen commodities either.

As the zealous official he was, Loebner decided to compile a complete survey of the inhabitants, "so it could be decided, who ought to pay (in cash, RG) for the ration of grain, who partly ought to pay and who completely ought to be exempted, but this differentiation could not be done without knowing the situation of every household"

This explains Loebners interest in the collection of wool. This was not a part of the nutrition, but was used for payment, usually in the form of woolen socks. In the tables he had precariously reduced the amount of wool with 5 pounds for each member of the household. This was the amount assumed indispensable for personal use during one year. Therefore the amounts given in the tables, cf. table 2, were the amounts available as means of payment.

### Form, content and reliability of the Tables

The tables have not yet been analysed comprehensively and scientifically, but some Faeroese local historians have used them to throw some light on so called *bygdasøgur* or village histories. No one has yet questioned or criticized the data contained in the tables. But in some cases I realize that they must be interpreted with care. One example of this kind is that the registered land properties of a person are not necessarily located in his home village. One of the consequences is that, e.g. the island Sandoy totally has about 2 % more *merkur* (land value units) in Loebners tables than are registered in Taxationsprotokol (1873/1973). A further problem for many writers of the past has been that there was no central register or cadaster for land property on the Faeroes. Only about half of it, the so called *Kongsjørð* (crowns property), was registered every year. Table 1 shows the differences between Svabo (1782/1959), Loebner and the comprehensive valuation of all land property on the Faeroes in 1873, the Taxationsprotokol, that must be assumed to be the accurate record.

	<i>Svabo 1782</i>	<i>Loebner 1813</i>	<i>Taxation, 1973</i>	
			<i>Outfield</i>	<i>Infield</i>
<i>Nordoyar</i>	424.76	473.86	425.38	425.38
<i>Eysturoy</i>	502.00	500.30	497.13	501.13
<i>Streymoy</i>	602.25	664.16	588.50	601.50
<i>Vágar</i>	232.25	225.21	220.00	220.00
<i>Sandoy</i>	278.25	275.53	277.75	277.75
<i>Suðuroy</i>	368.00	355.38	367.76	367.57
<i>Total</i>	2407.50	2494.40	2376.50	2393.30

Table 1: The Markatal (Land value units) record from three sources.

The problems with the land value units must be scrutinized in further detail, as there obviously must be some kind of double recording. When it comes to the sheep production in each village the same problems arise. Hansen (1971) states: "But the tables says nothing about the ownership in each separate island (and village, RG.) and are thus misleading in this way. When e.g. the number of slaughtered lambs in Fugloy is so low, the reason is the land ownership of non-resident people, and that the slaughtered lambs were sent away from the island" (p. 6).

To illustrate the extensive content of the tables, the table heads as well as the summing up for the Faeroe Islands are given in table 2. See next page.

### The traditional Faeroese village and the agricultural production

A traditional Faeroese village in 1813 consisted of one or more farms together with a number of houses. The infield around the farms, *bøurin*, was surrounded by a stone dyke, and here grain was grown for human consumption and hay was produced for winter feeding the cattle. The outfield outside the dyke, *hagin*, was a grazing area for the sheep flocks; in summer high up on the mountains, in winter in the lower areas or in the infield after the hay had been brought home. This system is newly analysed by Brandt (1992). The cattle grazed the village-near parts of the outfield from May to the beginning of October. In some villages there was a separate part of the outfield for the cattle, the *húshagi*, often separated from the rest of the outfield by a low stone dyke. During winter they stood in the cowhouse and were fed with hay from the infield. The manure from the cowhouses was collected in a dunghill. Each year a part of the infield was, after thorough cultiva-

	<i>Text in Loebner's 'Pro Memoria' to the Tables</i>	<i>Units</i>	<i>Summa</i>
1	<i>Names of the villages and masters</i>		
2	<i>Population January 1st 1814</i>	<i>Number</i>	5247
3	<i>Men and women aged 15 years or more</i>	<i>Men</i> <i>Women</i>	1853 1912
4	<i>Boys and girls under 15 years</i>	<i>Boys</i> <i>Girls</i>	746 736
5	<i>The masters land, as copy holder (crown)</i>	<i>Merkur</i> <sup>1)</sup> <i>Gyllin</i> <sup>1)</sup>	1208 38 1/4
6	<i>The masters land, as property (udall)</i>	<i>Merkur</i> <i>Gyllin</i>	807 50 7/8
7	<i>The masters land, as tenant or lease-holder</i>	<i>Merkur</i> <i>Gyllin</i>	471 45 3/4
8	<i>The farmer's milking cows</i>	<i>Number</i>	2297
9	<i>How many young cattle and bulls</i>	<i>Number</i>	745 1/2
10	<i>Sheep on the masters crown and udall land</i>	<i>Number</i>	47896
11	<i>Sheep and lambs he has slaughtred in 1813</i>	<i>Number</i>	28100
12	<i>Grain sowed the same year</i>	<i>Barrels</i>	247 1/5
13	<i>How much there off was harvested</i>	<i>Barrels</i> <i>Bushels</i>	1753 18 3/4
14	<i>Owner of a 8-man boat or part in it</i>	<i>Boats</i>	127
15	<i>How many fishing parts each man has in them</i>	<i>Fishing-parts</i>	1114
16	<i>Owner of a 6-man boat or part in it</i>	<i>Boats</i>	84
17	<i>How many fishing parts each man has in them</i>	<i>Fishing-parts</i>	523
18	<i>Owner of a 4-man boat or part in it</i>	<i>Boats</i>	270
19	<i>How many fishing parts each man has in them</i>	<i>Fishing-parts</i>	1430
20	<i>How much wool</i>	<i>Lis-pounds</i> <sup>2)</sup> <i>Pounds</i>	3463 46 1/2
21	<i>How many birds he caught in 1813</i>	<i>Number</i>	34210

<sup>1)</sup> Land value units: 1 mark=16 gyllin <sup>2)</sup> 1 Lis-pound= 16 pounds à 1/2 kg

Table 2: Content of the Loebner Tables, with the totals for Faeroe Islands.

tion and manuring, sown with 'Faeroese' barley, *Hordeum Polystichum*.

Thus there was a fixed relation between the area of the infield, the production of hay, number of cows that could be fed in winter, the collected amount of farmyard manure and the practicable area for grain. In this way the practicable production of milk as well as grain were fixed. In the same way the number of sheep in the outfield was stable, known as the *skipan*, depending on the average grass production in this area. The connection between the different area classes and their utilization is outlined in figure 1.

The data from Loebner's tables shall in the following sequences be used in an analysis of the question: What food elements supported the Faeroese population in 1813? What were the substantial sources to meet the caloric requirement of the population?

#### Importance of locally grown and imported grain

The volume of grain produced in the infield lots were, as mentioned before, dependant on the area of the infield, the amount of manure from the cows as well as it varied with shifting weather conditions. So one question to assess is the influence of the weather in 1813. There are no available meteorological observations, but one of the most well-informed and productive Faeroese local historians Hansen (1971;5) that the year 1813 must have been "*eitt toluliga gott ár*", meaning a fairly good or tolerable year; I will interpret the statement as meaning a little under an average year. Svabo ( 1782/1959; 1274) mentions that an average harvest is considered to be 2000 barrels. Loebner's data say that the harvest in 1813 was 1755 barrels, or 88% of the this average volume. Furthermore Svabo has collected a number of local estimates of average harvests. If these data are compared with the corresponding data in Loebner's tables, we have in figure 2.

If data from the two sources corresponded 100% they would lie on the dividing line, A; but they do not. Out of the 16 observations 14 are placed above the dividing line A, only 2 are below. But if we lower the average harvest to 88 %, the dividing line is moved from A to B, and this position is visibly much more central to the observations: 7 below and 9 above. The most remarkable deviation are the three villages estimated very high by Svabo, but which had bad yields in 1813: Miðvágur and Bøur on the western island Vágur and Viðareiði on the northern islands. These

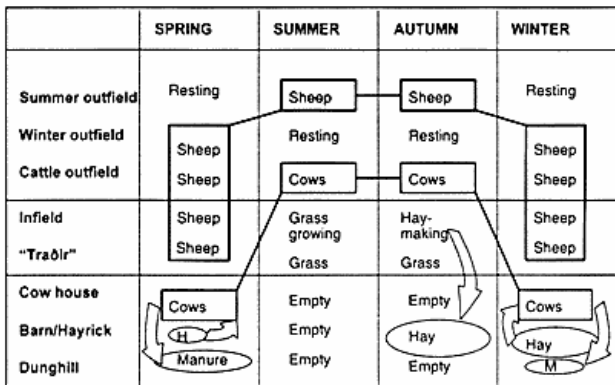


Figure 1: Sketch of the traditional Faeroese agricultural system, emphasizing the rhythm of the year and the exploitation of different area classes.

observations are reinforcing the statement that the 1813 harvest was "tolerable", perhaps 88 % of the average harvest of grain.

The rather special Faroese way of cultivating the acre, called *reinaavelting*, is documented on the film "Kornavelting í Gásadalí" (Christiansen, Guttesen & Joensen, 1986) and described in Christiansen & Guttesen (1987), Christiansen (1996), but also older authors as Debes (1673/1965) Svabo (1782/1959) and Landt (1800) have good descriptions of the Faeroese method. About 1/7 of the infield was cultivated and sown with barley. After one harvest the lot became overgrown with grass, and had good yields of grass the following years. In villages where the yield was generally low the *reinaavelting* and heavy manuring were done mainly to benefit from the side effects: better grass yields the following years and a good supplement of straw for thatching. This was also the case in this century, on the ewe of grain growing on the Faeroes

Grain harvested	1755 Barrels
Production in kg (1 barrel = 8 bushels à 10 kg)	140.000 kg
Production in kcal (1 kg = 2800 kcal)	393.120.000
Contribution in kcal/cap/day	208 kcal

Table 3: Kcal from locally grown grain 1813.

Imported grain in an average year	5500 barrels
Contribution in kcal/capita/day	652 kcal

Table 4: Kcal from the imported grain in a 'normal' year.

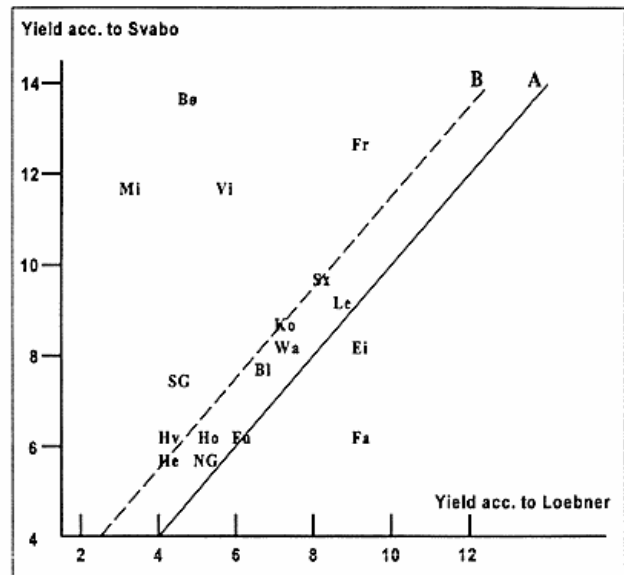


Figure 2: Yield of grain in an average year according to Svabo for 17 selected villages, related to the yield 1813 according to Loebner. The correlation would follow line A if both years were average. But line B shows the correlation when the yield in 1813 was 88% of the normal yield. Yield is here used as harvested/sown amount of grain.

when it was economically quite unprofitable to grow grain.

The significance of grain to the caloric balance sheet appears from table 3. A general comment to the following tables is that the caloric values of mutton, milk and grain are best possible estimates taken from modern data as well as older literature.

The significance of imported grain is estimated the in the same way as in table 3. The grain import recorded by Degn (1929) to be 5200 barrels in 1770. This is further discussed in Brandt & Guttesen (1978). The normal import some 40

Sheep and lambs slaughtered	28.100
Production of mutton and lamb (1 unit = 12 kg)	337.200 kg
Production in kcal (1 kg = 1600 kcal)	539.520.000 kcal
Contribution in kcal/capita/day	286 kcal from mutton
Production of tallow (3 kg/unit)	84.300 kg
Production in kcal (1 kg = 5500 kcal)	463.650.000
Contribution in kcal/capita/day	245 kcal from tallow

Table 5: Kcal from mutton and tallow in 1813

years later must have risen because of the population increase. But the year 1813 was not normal, the grain import was much below average. But if we try to reconstruct an normal year, the import should have been around 5500 barrels.

In other words, the traditional Faroese agricultural system was not able to grow enough grain to meet the local demand. More than two thirds were usually imported in that period.

### Importance of mutton and lamb

There were remarkable regional differences in the size and weight of the Faroese sheep land lambs. According to Svabo the northern race was 1/3 heavier than the southern race (on Sandoy, Skúvoy, Dímun and Suðuroy). The lambs on the northern part were 3/8 heavier. To reach some average data for this section we can start with Landt's statement (p. 201) that the weight of one average slaughtered lamb (without entrails, blood, skin and head) of the northern race is 2 *Lispound* or 16 kg. To calculate the caloric value of the meat we have to reduce for the weight of bones that are assumed to be 4 kg. Furthermore, one lamb produces tallow that was used in the cooking. Svabo (1782/1959;710) says that a lamb with 6-12 pounds of tallow were estimated as fat, whereas Landt (1800/1965; 232), sets the average to be 6 pounds. In the following I do not calculate with a smaller value for the southern race. Cf. table 5.

### Importance of the milking cows

In 1813 there were 2297 milking cows on the Faeroe Islands. In other words, a little more than two people per cow. Svabo mentions (p. 1529) that "*nowadays a cow is assumed to milk 4 pots a day*" (1pot=0.9961 or approx. 1 litre). This must be interpreted as if Svabo is meaning that this is a yearly average yield, but he does not say it explicitly. It is well-known that a cow is milking significantly more after the calving and that the amount is decreasing during the winter, when in the cowhouse. But this depends to a high degree on the foddering. If the winter was long, and the amount of fodder became scarce, it was necessary, when the spring came, to bear the cows out of the house, Effersøe tells us (1886; 24). Under these

<i>Milking cows</i>	2.297
<i>Production of milk (4 l/cow/day)</i>	3.307.680 litres
<i>Production in kcal (1 litre = 650 kcal)</i>	2.149.992.000 kcal
<i>Contribution in kcal/capita/day</i>	1138 kcal

**Table 6:** Kcal from cow milk in 1813.

miserable circumstances it can be concluded that there was no milk production. The same author has some data on the assumed milk production, without making the question quite clear. The cows were grazing in the outfield from the beginning of May to the end of September (Svabo p.1538), and they were milked twice a day. Effersøe makes the grazing period a little longer. The amount of fodder necessary for a winter in the cowhouse was called a *kúfóður*, or directly translated: a cow-fodder. Svabo has weighed this unit, and says (p. 1299) that a 1/6 *kúfóður* weighs 11 *voger* (1 vog = 36 pounds or 18 kg). One *kúfóður* is then 1188 kg or rounded off, 1200 kg.

### The three main sources to meet the caloric demand

Loebner's tables thus give us an opportunity to calculate the caloric importance of the main sources in the agricultural system: Grain from the infield (supplemented by imported grain), lambs and sheep from the outfield and milk from the cows utilizing both the in- and outfield. The comparable main data from the preceding pages are presented in the table beneath, where the respective relative contribution can be compared. The caloric consumption is calculated for two situations. First with a minimal consume of 2000 kcal/day that must be esteemed to be very low. This were perhaps the harsh reality for many people in the hunger years during this period, when regular grain supplies from Denmark failed, when the local fishery was bad and when catches of the pilot-whale were low or absent. The other situation with a caloric demand of 3000 kcal/day was, I assume, nearer to the normal at that stage.

In both situations I come to the surprising result that milk is meeting a very high part of the caloric consumption, a little less than half of the consumption. The second largest contributor is the imported grain. At first sight it is perhaps mysterious that in the first column these groups of food meet more than 100 % of the need. But in a hunger

	Daily consumption 2000 kcal	Daily consumption 3000 kcal
Grain, locally grown	10 %	7 %
Grain, imported	33 %	22 %
Mutton and Lamb	14 %	10 %
Tallow	12 %	8 %
Cow milk	56 %	38 %
Total	125%	85 %

Table 7: Contribution of main groups of food to meet the caloric demand

situation we must assume that one of the main groups of food were failing, the imported grain because of war situations, or the sheep because of extreme weather condition with high mortality as a result.

In the normal situation with a daily consumption of 3000 kcal/capita/day the remaining 15 % of the demand is met by the consumption of calves, old milk cows, fish, meat and blubber from pilot-whales, and birds in villages with fowling places. A statistical series for the catches of pilot-whales for the period 1709-1993 is found in Guttesen (1996b). In 1812 and 1813 the number was 250.

## Perspectives

The main conclusion in this paper, that cow milk was the main source in the nutrition of the Faeroese population, brings about a better understanding of the evolution and changes in the society, that started in the beginning of the 19th century and continued into the next. The population grew in number. Small lots, *traðir*, were rented or bought by the poorer and landless people, *traðarmenn*, and this process was stimulated by many of the Danish officials in the Islands, but hindered by the richer landowning peasants, as this development often diminished their land properties and gave the poor people another opportunity to make a living, than being a cheap farmhand. Near the old villages parts of the outfield were fenced off by dykes and cultivated, or new settlements, *niðursetubygdir*, were established in the remoter parts of the outfield. Common to these new lots and settlements was that they had no rights in the outfield for grazing, as these rights were bound to the *markatal*, the land value unit; the outfield and

the old infield in the villages normally had an equal *markatal*. The main resource for these people was the hay produced on the lot, sometimes enough to sustain a cow during the winter, and therefore called a cow-fodder or *kúfóður*. This small-scale agriculture was combined with fishing from open boats near the coast. Thus it can be said that the *traðarmenn* with their cow played a more important role in the evolution onwards to the modern society than did the rich farmers with their the sheep and *markatal*.

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