Inequality and wealth of the Swedish peasant farmer class 1750–1900

Erik Bengtsson and Patrick Svensson

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Preliminary version – please do not quote!

Abstract
Pre-industrial Sweden is famous for its self-owning and independent peasant farmer class and the peasant farmers have often been considered as carriers of equality and a particular brand of Scandinavian road to modernity. Moreover, it has been argued that rising income and wealth within this large segment of the population resulted in increased demand for non-agrarian products and thus that this provided the start of a domestic industrial expansion. However, quantitative studies of the wealth and inequality of Swedish farmers have been limited to studies on smaller localities. This paper contributes with the first comprehensive study of the wealth of the Swedish farmers, using a national sample of almost 5 000 probate inventories for the benchmark years 1750, 1800, 1850 and 1900, of which about 1 730 inventories are for farmers. The paper maps the farmers’ wealth positions in relation to other social groups as well as the wealth stratification within the farmer class. We show that in 1750 and 1800 Swedish farmers were relatively equal, comparable to for example free farmers in the US North, but that inequality increased gradually and that in 1900 the Gini coefficient for the farmer class has risen to 0.74, as compared to 0.46 in 1750. The equality – at least in economic terms – of Swedish farmers has thus been overstated. Importantly though, average wealth increased within the group although also here regional differences, arising from differences in soil quality as well as transportation and proximity to urban markets, are discernible.

Keywords: inequality, wealth, Sweden, peasant farmers, rural society
1. Introduction

The peasant farmer is a uniquely important figure in Swedish history-writing and self-understanding. The peasant farmer, write the historians Sorensen and Stråth (1997, p. 1), was the “foremost symbol” of what they call the “Nordic Enlightenment”, “the mythical incarnation of education (bildning/dannelse), freedom, and equality.” Serfdom was never implemented in Sweden mainly due to the large share of freeholding peasant farmers and their political power, although attempts were made by the nobility in the 15th century (Olsson, 2001:17). Generally landlords had little judicial power; in other words, the Swedish feudalism was a relatively mild one. The peasant farmers also persisted over time: unlike in Britain where “the disappearance of the small landowner” is a classic historiographical issue (Thompson 1994, pp. 11–12; Brassley et al 2010, p. 81), in Sweden peasant farmers continued to be a significant part of rural society throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. While the nobility was not as unimportant as sometimes assumed (Bengtsson et al 2016), the peasant farmer group was a major player in Swedish society before the 20th century. Furthermore, it is often argued that the group was egalitarian, and a harbinger of egalitarian values in Swedish society, maybe as a precursor of the 20th century welfare state. The peasantry is uniquely important for national self-identity in Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries (Aronsson n.d.; for a critical review of this perspective see Kettunen 1999).

However, that this social stratum has said to have been coherent in a political and social sense does not automatically transmit into it being economically equal. One explanation for an emerging industrial revolution in Sweden focuses on the rise of a domestic market during the first half of the nineteenth century. In this view rising income and wealth among the large peasants’ stratum and their demand for industrial products, e.g. textiles and iron tools,  

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1 Serfdom was neither introduced in the conquered province (from Denmark) of Scania, although moving restrictions were implemented on single manorial estates for a shorter period in the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century (Olsson, 2001).
plays a significant role. Accordingly, to value this one need to assess whether there was a rise in wealth and how widespread this was within this class. A number of studies of different localities in Sweden have studied stratification within the rural society using land holding (e.g. Martinius 1977; Isacson 1979; Olausson 2004). Most of these studies have started out with an assumption of an initially equal peasantry and have found increasing inequality, although the timing of this development has differed in different regions. Hitherto, Wohlin’s study from 1912 is the only one on national level and also this one focuses on the distribution of land over time (Wohlin 1912; tables also available in Emigrationsutredningen 1911).

The aim of this paper is to contribute to these discussions with an analysis of wealth and stratification within the peasant farmer group on national level during the agricultural and the industrial revolutions, 1750-1900. In this way, we can shed light on both the assumptions of an egalitarian farmer class and on the wealth development within this group.

2. Peasant farmers and their society, c. 1750–1900

The peasant farmers in Sweden constituted a social class defined by their cultivation of taxed land and their non-noble status. The peasant farmers that owned their land or were tenants under the crown had political representation in the then Swedish parliament (the Diet of the Estates) whereas the lower social groups in the countryside were represented through the peasant farmers. The tenants under the nobility were considered to be represented by their manorial landlords.

In 1700, about one third of arable land was owned by independent farmers (freeholders), one third by the nobility (which was about 0.5 per cent of the population), and

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footnote: It is debated to which degree freeholders actually owned their land in the early 18th century. Herlitz (1974) claimed that in practice they were as dependent upon their social superiors as tenants were, since all surplus from production was absorbed by taxes and rents. He further argues that this changed during the 18th century since the tax and rent share of output fell (cf. Winberg 1985, pp. 7–8). Gadd (2000, p. 71) also points to limitations in the
one third by the Crown (Gadd 2000, pp. 16–17). About 85 per cent of the land was worked by peasant farmers, so a large share of the peasant farmer class was tenant farmers rather than freeholders. In 1845, the freeholders’ share of ownership of land had increased to about 60 per cent as the result of purchase of both Crown land and former nobility-owned land. The nobility’s share had decreased to 17 per cent, while non-noble landlords owned 12 per cent. After significant “privatizations” in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Crown only owned 11 per cent in 1845 (Gadd 2000: 204). As in 1700, of course a larger share than the 60 per cent owned by peasant farmers was tilled by them: Gadd estimates this to 80 per cent.

The eighteenth century was a good century for the freeholding peasant farmers as taxes as a share of agricultural production fell heavily (Herlitz 1974; Gadd 2000:197–198; Olsson 2005). This also meant that the price of agricultural land increased. The reason that taxes fell in relation to production was that a new organization of the military in the 1680s included a direct tax from peasant farmers to soldiers and the fact that this tax was almost fixed over time (Herlitz 1974; Olsson 2005). This can be seen as one pre-condition for the agricultural revolution. Others were the possibility for tenants under the crown to buy their farms and become freeholder and the legislation permitting peasant farmers to apply for enclosure, thereby ending the era of the open-field system (e.g. Winberg 1990; Gadd 2000; Svensson 2006). About the economics of peasant farming, the most important debate for our period is how active the peasant farmers were in the so-called agrarian revolution, with the increase of farm productivity. This happened in Sweden c. 1750 to 1850 (Gadd 2000). In the Swedish context the debate has largely focused on the degree to which the landowning nobility led the way in improving farming methods and productivity. The older “from above view” saw the nobility as very much the leaders of development, as initiators of supposedly important reforms such as

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f Farmers’ property rights in terms of hunting, forestry, as well as the sale of land. Winberg (1985) provides a very valuable study of the individualization of property rights in the 18th and 19th centuries.

3 The measure referred to here is "mantalssatt jord", where mantal is a tax assessment of land, see Gadd 2000:204.
enclosures and with returns to scale in their production on the manorial demesnes. The most recent research, however, rather stresses the entrepreneurial spirit of the peasant farmers and the gradually higher productivity of their farms compared to that of the manors (Svensson 2006; Wiking-Faria 2009; Olsson and Svensson 2016). The implication from this for this paper is that we might expect rapidly growing wealth from 1750 to 1900; the interesting question is how equally, or not, farmers participated in this “agrarian revolution” – regionally, by type of locality (forest versus plains) as well as individually.

Nils Wohlin, in his work from the early 20th century, used poll-tax registers and registers on taxation values to assess the stratification within the peasant farmer class for Sweden (except the most northern part) 1750 to 1900 (Wohlin 1912). Due to the differences in sources it is not possible to compare 1750 with later years, but from 1810 to 1900 the inequality in landholding grew substantially and continuously in Sweden, mainly due to the growth of very small landholdings.\(^4\)

The single most influential study of rural stratification in Sweden in the 18th and 19th century is probably Christer Winberg’s (1975) study of population growth and proletarianization in Western Sweden. Winberg’s focus is not on inequality within the farmer group, but rather on the growth of the proletarian and semi-proletarian groups, located below the farmers in the rural class hierarchy. Winberg, using Wohlin (1909), showed that while in 1750 four fifths of rural families owned at least some land, in 1870 this was only true for one half of the families. While the number of farmer families had increased by about one fifth from 1750 to 1870, the number of proletarian and semi-proletarian families had almost quintupled.

There are several other studies of stratification within the peasant farmer class; the problem is that they are limited to very local designs. As Sjögren (2003) remarks, the typical finding is increased differentiation over time. Isacsson (1979) studies one parish in a

\(^4\) Even for this period, it is a bit unclear what sources are used and if the years are fully comparable, see Winberg 1975:180.
protoindustrial area of central Sweden (Dalarna) from 1680 to 1860 and finds increasing social differentiation in the early 19th century; “the process toward a more homogenous peasant class during the 18th century was turned into its opposite at the beginning of the 19th century”. This is similar to Martinius’ (1977, 1982) argument that major peasant farmers started to distance themselves from ordinary peasants around 1850, although for Isacsson this process starts already around 1800 while Martinius stresses 1830 as a break point. Olausson (2004) studies social differentiation in western Värmland from the 17th century to the mid-19th century. He finds obvious differentiation already in the 17th century, increasing in the 18th century with growth of proletarian and semi-proletarian groups; he notes that his studied area was particularly dominated by nobles (Olausson 2004:151). However in the second half of the 18th century he does find some specific expansion of peasant farmers which would indicate a more equal distribution (in relation to the nobility); this is in the 1800 to 1825 period turned to its opposite, with instead a growth of on the one hand proletarian groups, on the other hand of the large estates.

Ågren (1992) studied one agrarian district and one mining district in the central region Dalarna from 1650 to 1850 and found proletarianization and differentiation, including the development of a class of wealthy farmers. Lindström (2008) studies a mid-Swedish parish from 1620 to 1820 and finds marked stratification, with wealthy farmers dominating the local community, but no increase in inequality “within the class of landed peasants” during the 17th and 18th centuries.

For the most southern province of Sweden, Scania, a study on both distribution of land and differences in actual production is at hand (Bengtsson, Olsson and Svensson 2011). Looking at 36 parishes from around 1700 up to 1935, using poll-tax registers for land and flexible tithes for production, they found that during the 18th century land distribution was becoming more equal whereas inequality in production grew somewhat. In the 19th century,
after the enclosures, inequality both in terms of land and in terms of production grew within this province. Other studies of the same region have shown large differences in the development of production according to natural conditions and property rights (Olsson and Svensson 2009; Olsson and Svensson 2010). It was above all in the fertile plains that production grew the fastest and among the peasant farmers it was the freeholders who were the ones experiencing the strongest increase in production. This resulted in a growing inequality not only in land but also in income between certain groups of peasant farmers.

3. Data and methodology

As mentioned, the main limitation of most previous studies is that they are detailed studies of smaller localities. This has shed much light on Swedish rural society, but the problem is that it is difficult to draw conclusions for the whole country based on these results. On the contrary, in this paper we have sampled localities all over the country, to make possible conclusions for the entire Swedish peasant farmer class.

3.1 To use probate inventories

Our source is probate inventories. In Sweden probate inventories were mandatory from 1723 on, and since they were used to pay a small estate tax (0.25 per cent) that contributed to poor relief, used for solving debts, and used for division of inheritances, there were strong incentives to probate the deceased. In international comparison the Swedish probate inventories are very rich. They include all types of wealth, from real estate to loans to clothes and other minor properties.

The probate inventories are archived by härad or tingslag, which were the relevant rural judicial districts. There were 282 such districts in Sweden and we have a sample of 32 of them. They were randomly sampled after a basic geographical stratification by
population: we have 17 districts from the populous south (Götaland), 9 from middle Sweden (Svealand), and 6 from the less populous north (Norrland). We have benchmarks from 1750, 1800, 1850 and 1900. In these years we have extracted 25 random probate inventories from the relevant districts; when there were too few inventories in the chosen year, we have completed the sampling with inventories from adjacent districts, so that we have in the end 100 inventories for each district/district-pair in the sample. To this, we have inventories from 8 towns for the same years (100 inventories for each town) and inventories for the nobility which were held in separate registers. In total the sample consists of almost 5,000 inventories.

So, the dataset originally includes people from all sorts of positions in the social pyramid, from nobles to urban and rural workers. We have thus classified all individuals in a class schedule based on their title and occupation (found either in the probate inventories or in church death books); in total we have divided them into sixteen social groups based on their titles and/or occupations. We then merge these into four main groups, the nobility, the bourgeoisie, the peasant farmers, and the workers and lower middle class.5

Of these, we mainly focus on the peasant farmer group (see below). This result in that in total the sample includes 522 farmers in 1750, 452 farmers in 1800, 387 farmers in 1850, and 369 farmers in 1900. Often these people are titled in the sources (probate inventory, death books) as “bonde” (farmer) but often they have other titles: “married man”, “widower”, “wife” are common titles; in this context we have inferred the social status from other economic information in the sources. Farmers could also be titled as “ex-soldier” or upon the tasks they performed in local society: “church warden”, “local judge”. They could also be “proprietor”, “tenant”, “cultivator”, etc. Overall, “bonde” was common in the beginning of the period,

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5 These are (1) Nobility, (2) Factory owners, (3) Clergy, (4) Persons of rank, (5) Teachers and students, (6) Bourgeoisie, (7) Farmers, (8) Rural artisans, (9) Tradesmen, (10) Crofters, (11) Health care workers, (12) Soldiers, (13) Other in towns, (14) Cottagers, (15) Workers in factories, (16) Servants/labourers. We then merge these into four main groups: Nobility (1), Bourgeoisie (2+3+4+5+6+9), Peasant farmers (7), and Workers and lower middle class (8+10+11+12+13+14+15+16).
transitioning to a large share of “proprietor” in 1900, very much in correspondence with what we know about changing language on farmers in this period (Aronsson 1992:312).

3.2 The composition of the härader

Among our 37 districts (more than the original 32, as a result from using also adjacent ones in the early period), we have a healthy mix. The key natural-geographic divide for historical studies of Swedish agricultural history is the distinction between forest-dominated areas and plains-dominated areas (i.e. Hoppe and Langton 1994, Wiking-Faria 2009).

From the most fertile plains, the Västgöta plains, Östgöta plains, Scania and the areas around Stockholm, we have Kullings district on the Västgöta plains, Skärkinds on Östgöta plains, Bara in Scania, and Lagunda in Uppland close to Stockholm. We also have several districts with less fertile soil, instead much more forested: Hova in northern Västergötland, Vista in northern Småländ, and so on.

3.3. Method

We analyze and present our data in two different ways. First, we only use the inventories for the peasant farmers, in total 1,730 randomly drawn inventories from all over the country. We call, this the unadjusted sample and for particular results we in some cases also restrict this group to the ones owning a farm at the time of death (i.e. those who have a rural real estate value larger than zero), a total of 841 inventories. This can be seen as an explorative part of the paper.

Second, we use all inventories for all social groups and adjust them to the age and social structure of the living population. This is done by finding the age of all deceased in the death registers, and through using newly estimated social structures of Sweden for all benchmark years (see Bengtsson et al, 2016). Since not all deceased were found in the death
registers we end up with 4,524 inventories in this sample. These are then cloned by age and social status to reach a representative sample for the Swedish population. We call this the *adjusted sample* and it consequently can be used to assess and estimate the “true” distribution of wealth.

4. Analysis

4.1 Inequality within the peasant farmer class

We have two main aims with the paper, to estimate the distribution of wealth within the peasant farmer class over time and space, and to assess the development of real wealth within this class and its components over time. We start by using our total sample, adjusted for age and social class to reflect the total living population, and estimate the Gini coefficients for the different social groups using the net value in each inventory (the gross value minus potential debts). Table 1 shows the inequality by social group for our four benchmark years. Inequality within the peasant farmer class is low in 1750 with Gini coefficient of 0.46. From then on it increases heavily: to 0.58 in 1800, to 0.70 in 1850 and somewhat slower to 0.74 in 1900.
Table 1. Within group inequality (Gini) and total inequality, Sweden 1750-1900 (adjusted sample).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1750</th>
<th>1800</th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1900</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nobility</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourgeoisie</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasant farmers</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers and low middle class</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Another way of showing this growing wealth inequality within the peasant farmer class is to look at wealth shares. From table 2 it is obvious that the top decile’s share of the wealth is increasing continuously, from around 34 per cent in 1750 to almost 60 per cent in 1900.

Table 2. Wealth shares within the peasant farmer group (adjusted sample).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bottom 50 %</th>
<th>p50–90</th>
<th>Top decile p90–99</th>
<th>Top percentile p99</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1750</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>46.13</td>
<td>33.87</td>
<td>10.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(19.63–20.36)</td>
<td>(45.40–46.87)</td>
<td>(32.82–34.94)</td>
<td>(8.83–11.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>46.18</td>
<td>41.82</td>
<td>9.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(11.88–12.12)</td>
<td>(45.96–46.39)</td>
<td>(41.55–42.09)</td>
<td>(8.82–9.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>43.72</td>
<td>51.35</td>
<td>12.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.84–5.01)</td>
<td>(43.43–44.01)</td>
<td>(51.02–51.68)</td>
<td>(12.09–12.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>36.98</td>
<td>59.36</td>
<td>21.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Calculated with Stata command pshare. Negative values recoded as 0.0001.

How much is this? Is this low or high inequality? The country which really has spawned a lot of quantitative research on rural stratification in the nineteenth century is the United States, which also like Sweden had a very significant peasant farmer class. Atack and Bateman (1981) found a Gini coefficient of 0.63 for the rural part of the northern United States in 1860. Unfortunately they do not elaborate how much of inequality which consists of inequality
between farmers, and how much of it that depends on differences between propertied and non-propertied groups. Yang (1984) compared farmers in the US North and South in 1860. For free farmers in the South he found a Gini coefficient of 0.48 while in the North it varies between 0.46 and 0.56 depending on the wealth definition\(^6\) used (Yang 1984, table 3).\(^7\) Galenson and Pope (1992) found quite low inequality in Utah’s counties in 1860 and 1870. In Utah as a whole the Gini coefficient in 1860 was 0.62 but in individual counties the Gini could be so low as 0.37, and except for Salt Lake, which was an urban county, no county had a Gini higher than 0.57. Inequality rose until 1870 and in the non-Salt Lake counties varied between 0.39 and 0.82. Soltow (1971) found a Gini coefficient among farmers in Wisconsin in 1860 of 0.69.

To sum up, the distribution of wealth within the peasant farmer class in Sweden in 1750 and 1800 was roughly as the same level as among farmers in the United States in the mid-19\(^{th}\) century. In 1850, however, within-class inequality was higher in Sweden. (As in the US of course, total rural inequality and landholding inequality looks quite different if we do not only consider farmers but also plantation owners/estate owners at the top and landless workers at the bottom of the social structure.) Maybe we should not be surprised that Swedish farmers were less equal than their counterparts in the US, given the “frontier” nature of agriculture in the Western part of the US.

Gadd (2011: 122) describes the Swedish peasantry in 1800 as “relatively homogenous” in economic terms. Of course, the term “relatively homogenous” is slippery – relative to what? It was not very equal compared to US farmers. On the other hand, it might have been more equal than peasant farmers in many other European countries. Unfortunately,

\(^6\) More specifically, the method to estimate the value of the farm.

\(^7\) Galenson and Pope (1989, p. 16) found for Appanoose County in rural Iowa in 1860 that the lower half of the population of households held only 13 per cent of total wealth while the top decile held 38 per cent. In Trempeleau County, Wisconsin the lower half had 18 per cent and the top decile 39 per cent; in some Vermont Townships the numbers were 14 and 38, respectively. Gregson (1996) studies rural Missouri.
it is very difficult to get wealth inequality estimates for farmers in other countries.\textsuperscript{8} There are, however, studies on inequality in landholding, and at least one on income inequality (Santiago Caballero 2011). Results are pointing in different directions; whereas for example de Graef (2016: 61-70) shows an increased fragmentation in landholding in Flanders during the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, the income inequality in Guadalajara decreased during the same period (Santiago Caballero 2011). These differing results could be due to real differences in the development of inequality but could also be due to what is actually measured.

Comparing the entire country of Sweden with regions in the US might also bias the results. In table 3 below we see the Gini coefficient per region: Götaland (the south), Svealand (middle Sweden) and Norrland (the north).

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{lccc}
\hline
 & Götaland & Svealand & Norrland \\
\hline
\textbf{1750} & 0.43 (0.42–0.43) & 0.52 (0.50–0.55) & 0.40 (0.39–0.40) \\
\textbf{1900} & 0.79 (0.78–0.79) & 0.54 (0.64–0.65) & 0.72 (0.71–0.72) \\
\hline
\textbf{All rural residents} & & & \\
\hline
\textbf{1750} & 0.67 (0.65–0.70) & 0.73 (0.70–0.75) & 0.49 (0.47–0.50) \\
\textbf{1900} & 0.84 (0.83–0.84) & 0.79 (0.78–0.79) & 0.79 (0.79–0.80) \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Inequality by region for peasant farmers and for all rural residents (adjusted sample).}
\end{table}

Note. Gini coefficients on data adjusted for age and social class; 95 per cent confidence intervals in parentheses.

We see that in 1750, Svealand’s farmers clearly are a more unequal group than their colleagues to the north and to the south. Until 1900 however, inequality increases very rapidly in the north and the south, but not as much in Svealand. The small increase in Svealand is puzzling, but

\textsuperscript{8} Most of the English debate is about dispossession, enclosures and if English farmers owned any land at all. Finlay’s (2001) overview of newer German agrarian history says nothing about quantitative inequality estimates.
could be a statistical artefact in the sense that maybe impoverished farmers in this region were more likely to in terms of classification drop out of the farmer class and instead be counted as crofters, i.e. semi-proletarians. For this reason, table 1 also shows inequality for all rural residents per region in 1750 in 1900. We then see that in 1750 Svealand was indeed the most unequal region, and that if we look at all classes, there is significant increase in rural inequality there too until 1900. However, inequality still increases even more in Götaland and Norrland, so that in 1900 rural inequality in Norrland is equal to that in Svealand, and Götaland even higher.

4.2 The development of real wealth

The finding that inequality increased over time is indeed interesting and show that this took place on a national level already in the second half of the 18th century. Now we turn to assessing how wealthy the peasant farmers were compared to other social groups, how their wealth developed over time and what it consisted of.

To get an overview of their wealth compared to other groups, using our adjusted, nationally representative sample, we find that in 1750, farmers on average had 70 per cent the level of the average Swede. In 1800 the average peasant farmer had exactly parity with the average Swede, in 1850 30 per cent more wealth, and in 1900 parity once again (Bengtsson et al 2016, table 7). So, in a sense they were the typical Swedes (as in average though, not median), as compared to the nobility that were 60 times richer than an average Swede in 1750 (20 times richer in 1900), and the workers and lower middle class who had 20 to 40 per cent of the wealth that an average Swede had. The figures also indicate that there was a relative rise in the position of the peasant farmers, at least from 1750 to 1800.

To delve deeper into the development over time and its potential causes, we now turn to using the unadjusted sample. That means that we are looking at the actual inventories in
the sample, not corrected for age. This is a random sample of inventories for each benchmark year but of course the deceased population is older than the living population. Since all years contain this bias we nevertheless assume that the development over time and the composition of wealth, which is the important part, will not be affected heavily by this.

From our inventories we are able to discern not only net wealth but also its components. We have registered the sums for rural real estate, urban real estate, claims and investments (i.e. claims and for example potential shares in companies), the gross value and the debts. Additionally we derive the sum for movables by subtracting the first three from the gross value. To compare over time, we use the consumer price index (CPI) from Edvinsson and Söderberg (2010).

Starting by the development of real wealth, as measured by net value, over time it stands clear that in real terms the peasant farmers in Sweden got richer during the 19th century. From table 4 we can see that wealth increased by around 50 per cent from 1800 to 1850 and around three times during the second half of the century.

Table 4. Net value adjusted by CPI for all peasant farmers and freeholders respectively (in 1800 SEK).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All peasant farmers</th>
<th>Freeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1611</td>
<td>2182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In “all peasant farmers”, freeholders, tenants and potentially retired are included whereas in “freeholders” only peasant farmers having rural real estate value > 0 are included (so freeholders is a sub-group of all peasant farmers).

By breaking it down to only studying those who have a farm in their inventory, we see that this group is of course somewhat richer on average than the peasant farmers in general. The latter is of course due to them owning their farms and thereby this part is included in their wealth.
Overall rural real estate, i.e. land and buildings, was an important part of the wealth among the farmer group. In 1750, 24 per cent of the net wealth consisted of rural real estate and this part grew over time. In 1800 this share had risen to 52 per cent, in 1850 to 66 per cent, and in 1900 it falls back slightly, to 56 per cent. There are two main reasons for the growing share of wealth attributed to rural real estate; first, prices on land increased when the market of land expanded. Even though the freeholders constituted a large part of the peasantry, legal frameworks and inheritance practices restricted the land market before the late eighteenth century. From this time on and above all during the early nineteenth century a more developed market appeared (Dribe and Lundh 2005, Svensson 2013). Second, an increasing part of the peasant farmers became freeholders through buying their farms from the crown, or by buying noble land after 1809.

So, real wealth increased and part of this was connected to land. Now, in Swedish historiography the peasant farmers played a role in the emerging home based early industrialization through specializing in agriculture and buying industrial products, e.g. textiles and iron tools (Schön 2012). To be able to say something on this we need to decompose wealth further. One way is to look at the wealth comprising of movables, which include both textiles and tools. Indeed, the real value of movables increased on average by 40 per cent between 1800 and 1850 and two and a half times in the period 1850 to 1900. So, the increase was somewhat slower than for rural real estate but followed the same pattern. These results confirm and extend previous findings on the investment by peasant farmers in specific items. Both for western and southern Sweden, regional studies have shown that the farmers invested in transport means (e.g. better wagons containing iron parts) during the agricultural revolution (Gadd 1983; Bergenfeldt, Olsson and Svensson 2013). The increased use of iron among the peasant farmers has also been found in a study of Per Hallén (2003).
One could assume that the increase in real wealth, both overall but also in terms of movables, was larger in certain geographical areas than in other. Two regions that should stand out in this respect would be the plains and those areas adjacent to large cities and commercial trade, the former due to their natural conditions permitting surplus production and therefore increasing income, the latter due to demand and commercial structures and perhaps the availability of industrial goods. In accordance with this, we have divided the sample into six different regions, farmers on the plains, farmers close to Stockholm and the iron producing part of the country, farmers close to small towns, farmers in coastal areas, farmers in northern Sweden, and finally farmers in wooded areas.9

Table 5. Net value and value of movables (adjusted by CPI) for different regions (SEK in 1800)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Plains</th>
<th>Sthlm/Iron</th>
<th>Inland</th>
<th>Coastal</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>Woods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net value</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1741</td>
<td>2212</td>
<td>1519</td>
<td>1296</td>
<td>1302</td>
<td>1460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Movables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>1001</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>891</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>553</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This is for all peasant farmers.

As regards the net wealth peasant farmers in the plains and the Stockholm area are indeed richer than their likes in other areas. This is true as well in 1750 as in 1900. However, regional differences can be due to land ownership. In certain districts, as in southern Sweden and central Sweden, the nobility owned a large part of the land and thereby most peasant farmers were tenants, whereas in other parts freeholders dominated. Since rural real estate is a source of wealth, but not an indication on industrial demand we also look at movables.

9 There are between 4 and 7 districts in each group to enable a sufficient number of inventories for each region.
The same two areas have the highest wealth level in regards to movables, accompanied by, surprisingly, northern Sweden. Here there are relatively large differences in the development over time; farmers in the Stockholm area and those in coastal districts increased their wealth in movables the most, resulting in them and the farmers in the plains being the ones with the highest level. This points to communications and trade as important factors in peasant farmer’s acquisition of movables but also to some extent, of course, to the possibilities of generating a surplus in agriculture.

5. Conclusions

Economically, Swedish peasant farmers were a quite homogenous and equal group in 1750. During the 150 years after this, however, stratification within this group increased gradually. By the mid-19th century Swedish farmers were no more equal than their counterparts in the non-slavery North of the United States and in 1900 the indices show a large dispersion in wealth among the peasant formers of Sweden. The within-group Gini moves from 0.46 in 1750 to 0.74 in 1900 and the share of wealth owned by the 10 per cent richest peasant farmers goes from 34 per cent to almost 60 per cent during the same period.

These results confirm the pattern of stratification found for landholding in regional studies of the 19th century. It adds that this development started already during the 18th century, a century for which landholding studies have shown different results whereas estimations of production output confirms this picture. Certain farmers, in certain regions accumulated wealth and based on what we know of the agricultural revolution in Sweden, this is connected to property rights and the timing of the transformation. Freeholders were wealthier than tenants and most probably accumulation started in the grain-specializing areas of the plains and in the region connecting the iron mining districts and Stockholm.
These changes manifested themselves in accumulation of land among wealthy farmers and smaller farms, or even degradation into the landless proletariat, among less wealthy likes. Although these two movements could have cancelled each other out in respect to the impact of the agricultural revolution on the emergence of a market in industrial goods, our very preliminary result is that on average peasant farmers seem to have invested in movables, potentially in textiles and iron tools.

Overall, our study shows that the homogenous peasant farmer strata is existent to some extent in the 18th century but very much less so in the late 19th century, at least economically.
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