

AIMA Newsletter 2, 2025

March/April 2025



ASSOCIATION
INTERNATIONALE
DES MUSÉES
D'AGRICULTURE

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About this Newsletter

Dear Members and Friends of AIMA,
although this is already our second newsletter, we once more want to highlight the importance of it: as an organization, we have decided to tighten up the frequency of our traditional newsletters and report more closely on our activities as an organization as well as those of our members. This newsletter will now be published every other month and report on current topics and conferences. It is important that we are also informed by you about activities that may be relevant to the newsletter.

If you would like to subscribe to this newsletter or draw our attention to events, simply send an e-mail to:

membership@agriculturalmuseums.org

Please also indicate whether you are already a member of AIMA or would like to subscribe as an external subscriber.

In any case, we look forward to the dialog with you!

Claus Kropp, President of AIMA

Reminder: Membership Renewal Notice

To all members,

We would like to take this opportunity to ask you whether you have already renewed your membership for 2025. It is important for us to keep the membership list up to date and of course it can happen that a contribution is forgotten. That is why we are sending you this friendly reminder to check your current status and, if necessary, renew your membership by transferring the fee.

You can find information on registering and renewing your membership at any time at

<https://www.agriculturalmuseums.org/join-aima/>

Please do not forget to clearly state the name of the person or institution concerned when making the transfer so that we can clearly allocate the amount.

Over the Farm Gate

To help start our new 'Newsletter', photographs from my personal United Kingdom archive that I think may be of interest to fellow AIMA members. Perhaps you have similar images to share in future newsletters?

I am sure that many of us have spent time leaning over a farm gate watching either our livestock or crops. In my first photograph circa 1910 from Stirling, Scotland, the young people / farm workers are leaning on a typical wooden "five-bar" farm gate. That

said, it may be suggested that the young men, going by their dress are possibly young farm horsemen who have interests other than crops or livestock.



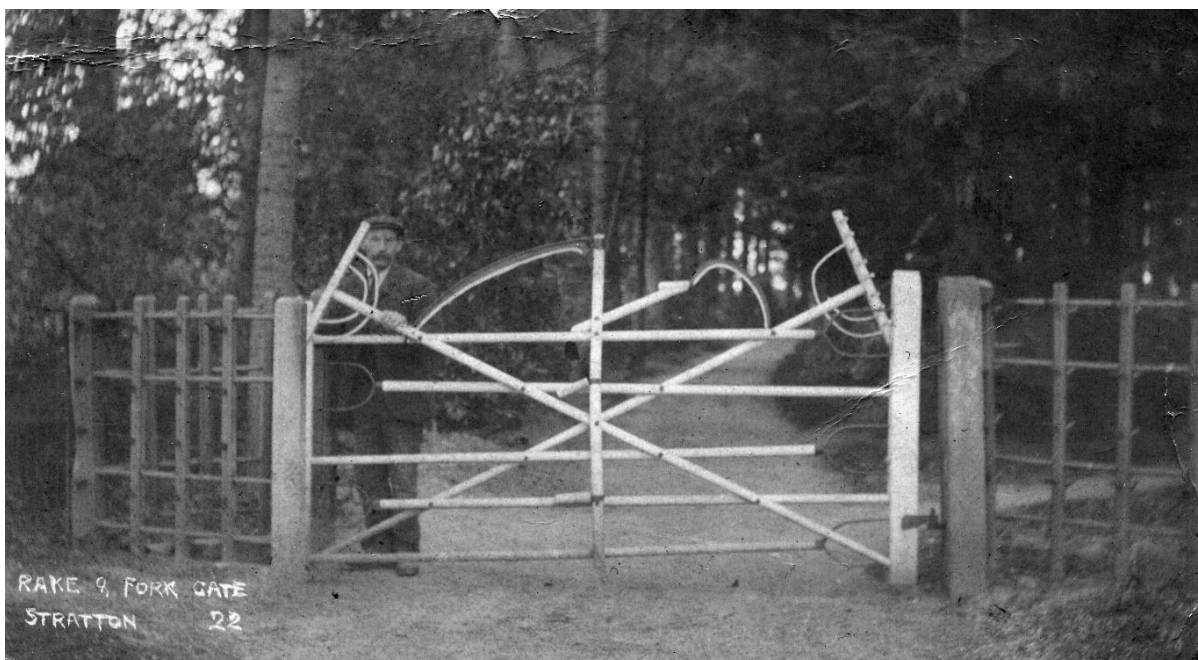
(Above) Young people at a wooden, braced, five-bar farm gate, Stirling, Scotland, c.1910. (Bob Powell Archive)

If you wonder why I pick on the young men as possibly being horsemen, note the typical clothing of the farm horsemen and aspiring horsemen in my second photograph. Again, circa 1910, from a farm at Culter, Aberdeenshire, Scotland.



(ABOVE) Horsemen, established and aspirational at Culter, Aberdeenshire, Scotland c.1910. (Bob Powell Archive)

In my third photograph, also circa 1910, this farm gate from Stratton, Norfolk, England, would be almost impossible to lean upon. Undoubtedly a novelty in the community when it was made, it represents an interesting selection of the tools used for harvesting. As shown, the five main cross bars are made from two-tined pitch forks; the central upright from a scythe; the main braces from hay rakes, and the top infill from a reaping hook. Not quite so clear are the fences on either side of the gate which are made with harrows whose teeth are pointing inwards. When I acquired this photograph, it was so faded to a brown colour that it was almost impossible to be seen. However, this is where a good computer scanner becomes a great tool for bringing out detail in photographs often dismissed by many; yet which still may be a great source of information. Bringing the gate into a modern context, a friend reminded me that the famous musician and artist Bob Dylan, also creates gates that often incorporate agricultural items.



(Above) The “Rake & Fork Gate” at Stratton (either Long Stratton or Stratton Strawless), Norfolk, England, c. 1910. (Bob Powell Archive)

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Kingussie, Scotland, 2025.

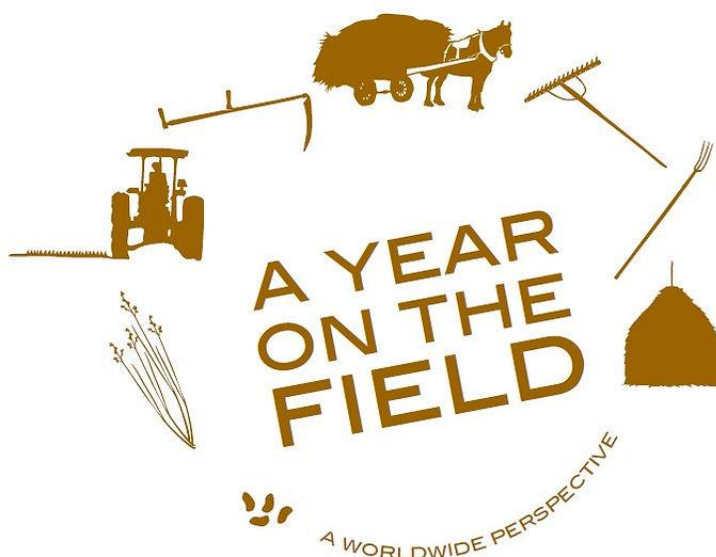
A Year On The Field – Hay Year Announcement

AIMA is supporting the so called **Year on the Field Project**, an international networking project that brings together museums, farmers, scientists among many other interest groups.

This year will be focusing on Hay and we are happy to share the call for contributions here:

<https://www.yearonthefield.net/post/hay-year-call-for-contributions>

AIMA Member and Silhouette Artist Lauren Munev (USA) designed the logo:



2025 Hay Year Logo of A Year On The Field

REMINDER: AIMA Lectures 2025 – Info and Call for Participation

AIMA Lecture 'World Bee Day', May 20th 2025

Bees at the Heart of Agriculture: Sustaining Food, Biodiversity, and Heritage

Did you know that one-third of the food we eat depends on the work of bees and other pollinators? Bees are essential to agriculture, playing a vital role in crop pollination, supporting biodiversity, and ensuring ecosystem resilience. Traditionally, beekeepers have moved their hives with the seasons—placing them in orchards, fields, pastures, and even buckwheat fields—not only to maximize honey yields but also to optimize the pollination of food crops.

The relationship between agriculture and beekeeping has always been, and continues to be, a partnership of mutual benefit. Farmers rely on bees for higher yields, while beekeepers depend on diverse floral landscapes to sustain healthy colonies and produce varied honey crops. Today, innovative collaborations are showcasing how we can strengthen the synergy between nature and food systems. Join us **on World Bee Day, May 20th**, for a dynamic panel discussion with experts in cultural heritage, apiculture, and agriculture. Together, we'll explore how bees and beekeepers have shaped food production, tackle modern challenges, and celebrate inspiring examples of cooperation worldwide.

The lecture will be organised by Barbara Sosič, Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana. If you wish to participate or require additional information, please contact Barbara Sosič at barbara.sosic@etno.muzej.si

Please send in suggestions by April 6th!

AIMA Lecture 'World Food Day', October 16th 2025

Agricultural museums, living history farms, and all who preserve trades, traditions and lifeways tied to farming play a vital but often invisible role in the battle against world hunger -- a battle led by United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

Every year since 1979, the UNFAO has called upon people everywhere to join the fight through World Food Day, an international day of awareness and action held on October 16 -- the anniversary the organization's founding in 1945. In its most recent annual report on the state of world food insecurity, it cites the compelling facts that in 2024, 733 million people faced starvation and 2.8 billion were malnourished ... as human and natural ecosystems continued to be impacted by war, climate change, and global crises in energy, population growth and economic instability.

To raise awareness of the contributions we make and stand to make as a community, AIMA is calling upon its members, supporters and followers to join its World Food Day Lecture on Thursday, October 16, when speakers from around the world will lead discussions about the work of museums, and the role of public history, in the fight against global hunger and malnutrition.

Persons interested in learning more about the program, providing a presentation or roundtable session, or assisting with program logistics are encouraged to contact Pete Watson at pwatson@howellfarm.org or at Howell Living History Farm, 101 Hunter Rd., Titusville, New Jersey, 07901, USA.

AIMA Lecture 'World Soil Day', December 5th 2025

The World Day of Soil, December 5, is an occasion to draw attention to the importance of soil and to advocate for its sustainable management. The Earth's soils are a critical piece of the natural systems on which life depends. Paraphrasing the words of Dr Maria C Hernandez-Soriano: "life on earth depends on a six-inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains."

For most of history, soil has been taken for granted as an inexhaustible resource. We are beginning to realize that soil is actually limited in both quantity and quality. Less than 30% of the earth is land, and of that, only about 14% is suitable for agriculture (producing food, fibre and other human needs). An even smaller percentage of Earth's land is arable, that is, able to grow annual plants like cereals and vegetables that humans can eat. With human population at 8.2 billion, there is an estimated 0.5 acres of arable land (0.2 hectares or about 2000 m²) per person on earth currently. Topsoil is not only limited but also fragile. Human activities can damage its structure and degrade its ability to support the normal biodiversity, making it unsuitable for plant growth. It has been estimated that industrial agriculture practices lead to the loss of a pound of topsoil for every bushel of corn produced (according to Bruno Basso, soil scientist at Michigan State University).

If current trends continue, by 2050 the earth's topsoils could be further reduced to 10% of their pre-industrial levels, at the same time that global human population would reach 9.6 billion.

These statistics are grim, but a key idea is this: The "current trends" are under human control. With increased awareness of the problematic reality, humans could choose to change the ways in which we interact with the land. This is happening in many places around the world and the changes could gather momentum. There are many ways in which to be involved!

If you would like to contribute or participate or if you would like to suggest a possible keynote contributor, please contact Barbara Corson (hooftales@msn.com)

Possible AIMA lecture on ‘Sustainable Transport’

World Sustainable Transport Day is on 26 November. Sustainable transport — with its objectives of universal access, enhanced safety, reduced environmental and climate impact, improved resilience, and greater efficiency — is central to sustainable development. Transport has always been an integral part of farming and the food chain. Historically, most on-farm transport and the movement of farm inputs and outputs was based on human energy and animal power, as well as some water-based transport. Agricultural museums and living history farms have many displays relating to animal-drawn carts and wagons, pack transport and human-transport (e.g., baskets and shoulder yokes). Bicycles and tricycles are also sustainable modes of transport, and some can be seen in agricultural museums. Animal power and cycles are still important in many farming systems. Fossil-fuelled machinery has been central to many farming systems since the industrial revolution, but climate-related sustainability strategies are promoting the decarbonisation of farming (and the agricultural food chains) and a move to electrical-powered machinery (and the early battery-powered tractors will be in the agricultural museums of the future).

It has been suggested that we have an on-line AIMA lecture (or seminar) relating to ‘Sustainable transport in farming: past, present and future’. It would be good to have contributions from AIMA members and other experts so we could have a one-hour session on key issues relating to sustainable transport in agriculture. If you would like to contribute or participate or if you would like to suggest a possible keynote contributor, please contact Paul Starkey (p.h.starkey@reading.ac.uk)

From our Archives

With this new newsletter section, we want to draw your attention to our vast article collection published on our AIMA Website (www.agriculturalmuseums.org). This time, we want to present three fantastic articles to you:

What comes to mind when you hear the word “tractor”?

[What comes to mind when you hear the word “tractor”? – Agricultural Museums](#)

by Debra A. Reid

A 100-year-old find – witness to a turbulent time in figures

[A 100-year-old find – witness to a turbulent time in figures – Agricultural Museums](#)

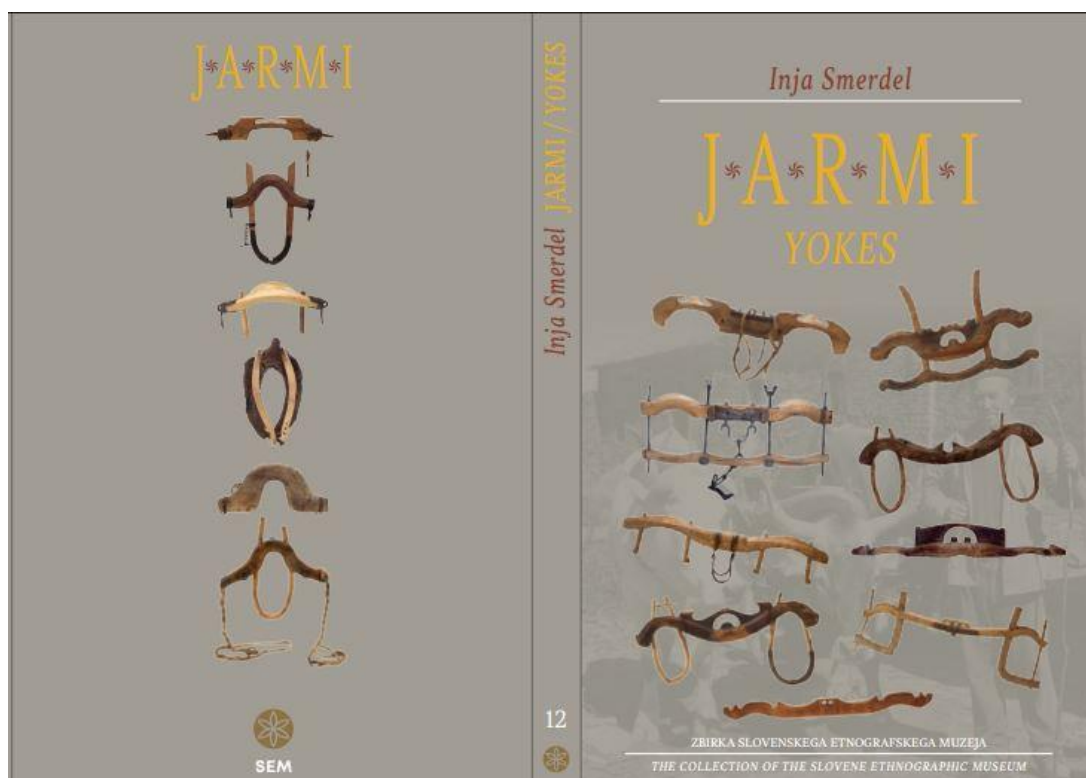
by Albert Kühnstetter (ÖLM) with the support of Hans Ziegler

From Farm to Fork

[From Farm to Fork – Agricultural Museums](#)

by Etienne Petitclerc

Publications / Book releases



Inja Smerdel: Yokes – The Collection of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana, 2024, 491 pages

The book *Yokes* is an ethnological narrative about one of the oldest tools of human civilization—the yoke. The story of this primordial object intertwines history, material culture, symbolism, and local particularities, showing that the yoke is not merely a device for harnessing oxen but also a bearer of cultural heritage.

Following the introduction, the book explores fundamental knowledge about yokes and their origins, from the simplest beginnings—when the first yokes may have been fashioned from a stick tied to the horns of cattle—to their later evolution. It then provides an overview of the use and typology of yokes across Europe, spanning from Ireland and Finland to regions in the east, south, and west, before focusing on the Slovenian context. This section offers a remarkable survey, appealing to a broad audience interested not only in oxen and their yokes but also in the way of life and survival made possible through the indispensable aid of draft oxen.

The core of the book is based on the collection of yokes at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum (SEM). It examines their history, designs, and geographical distribution, supported by cartographic representations and detailed drawings. In addition to analyzing these typologies, the book reflects on the factors that influenced the development of specific yoke designs and the silent language of the material.

Subsequently, the book delves into the craftsmen who made yokes and their expertise, highlighting notable masters. Their skills and wisdom reveal the significance of this craft and the transmission of knowledge across generations.

A significant part of the book is dedicated to the symbolic language of yokes—their meaning in language, folklore, wedding customs, and their role as a visible symbol of rural and farming identity. Thus, the yoke is not merely an object but a bearer of social and cultural significance.

The concluding section features a catalogue of 143 objects from the SEM collection, including detailed descriptions of each yoke and 76 drawn records from the SEM Archive, created after World War II. The catalogue is supplemented with indexes of usage locations and materials.

However, the catalogue does not merely describe individual museum objects—it offers much more. It presents their stories and situates them within the broader civilizational and historical context of human-animal coexistence. *Yokes* is a comprehensive study of this essential artefact, shedding light on its role in daily life, craftsmanship, and cultural heritage through ethnological and symbolic analysis. Author Inja Smerdel has undoubtedly contributed an invaluable narrative, having collected data over past decades through encounters with key informants who shared extraordinary insights—most of which are no longer accessible today.

About the Author:

Inja Smerdel, MA, was a museum consultant at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in Ljubljana. Until her retirement, she served as curator of rural economic activities from 1980 to 1995, editor-in-chief of the scientific periodical *Etnolog* from 1991 to 1995, and director of the museum from 1995 to 2005, after which she resumed her role as curator of subsistence and agriculture.

She has published over 160 treatises and articles, some of which have appeared internationally. In her work, she sought to place Slovenian ethnological heritage within a broader international context.

Throughout her research, she has been particularly drawn to the relationship between humans and animals. After exploring interactions between humans and sheep, as well as humans and birds, her final research focused on working oxen—from their practical significance in rural life to their metaphorical meanings in past and contemporary society.

A more in-depth exploration of this topic will be concluded with her monograph, *Subjugated Manhood – Man and Ox: On the Cultural Aspects of Working Oxen in Rural Civilization, the Case of Slovenia*, which has yet to be published.

News from our members

National Museum of Agriculture and Food Industry, Szreniawa (Poland)

From September 18-21, the National Museum of Agriculture in Szreniawa is celebrating the 150th anniversary of agricultural museology in Poland. This significant

occasion is linked to the establishment of the Museum of Industry and Agriculture in Warsaw on June 5, 1875, during the period of Russian partition. The institution plays a pivotal role as a scientific and educational center, integrating Polish intellectuals and providing society with opportunities for practical education in industry and agriculture. The museum operated until 1951. The National Museum of Agriculture and Food Industry in Szreniawa, founded in 1964, serves as the custodian of this heritage and continues the mission of agricultural museum formerly operating within the Museum of Industry and Agriculture.

The planned event will feature:

- An international conference “Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow of Agricultural Museology” (September 18-19)
- The opening of a temporary exhibition dedicated to historical agricultural and industrial exhibitions on Polish soil (September 18 or 19)
- A study visit to conference participants (September 20)
- An outdoor educational and cultural event (September 21)



Members and Friends of AIMA that are interested in participating in this great program can contact Hannah Ignatowicz under: h.ignatowicz@muzeum-szreniawa.pl

The Museum of English Rural Life, Reading (UK)

AIMA meeting and visit to the Museum of English Rural Life (The MERL) Reading, UK

9th – 11th May 2025

There is an opportunity for AIMA members to contribute to this event.

Places can be booked from late March onwards so please look out for more details.



For infos, contact Isabel Hughes i.m.hughes@reading.ac.uk

Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana (Slovenia)

Stories of *Steljniki*: The Interweaving of Common Bracken, Animals, and Humans, by Dr Barbara Turk Niskač, Barbara Sosič

At the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in Ljubljana, visitors can explore an exhibition on environmental changes resulting from the decline of animal husbandry in Bela Krajina, a south-eastern region of Slovenia. Running from February 21, 2025, to June 22, 2025, the exhibition highlights the significance of *steljniki*—landscapes dominated by common bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), known locally as *stelja*—bedding for animals.

Steljniki were traditionally used for spring grazing and autumn bracken harvesting, providing essential bedding for livestock. As animal husbandry declined, the need for bracken harvesting diminished, leading to landscape succession. Within 40–50 years, unmanaged *steljniki* transform into oak and hornbeam forests, the natural forest communities of the lowlands in Bela Krajina, reflecting broader shifts in agricultural practices. Today, *steljniki* are valued for their biodiversity, with regularly mowed areas proving richer in species diversity than those undergoing natural succession. As such, *steljniki* represent a unique blend of natural and cultural heritage.

The research behind the exhibition explores agricultural memories, human-nature relationships, and the transformation of traditional landscapes. It is part of the accompanying programme of the permanent exhibition *Man and Time: From Monday to Eternity* and uses personal stories to illustrate the past and present roles of *steljniki*. The exhibition is authored by Dr Barbara Turk Niskač, an ethnologist and cultural anthropologist and recipient of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Tampere in Finland. It is curated by Barbara Sosič, curator for rural economy and transport at SEM, with visual design by Tina Dernovšek.

Dr Turk Niskač was particularly interested in how relationships were formed through work—not only among people but also with nature, animals, and ultimately the land itself. The exhibition tells the story of the abandonment and overgrowth of extensive agricultural landscapes and the changes in the agricultural structure, a trend observed throughout Slovenia and closely linked to traditional animal husbandry. Exhibited materials include archival photographs from the Bela Krajina Museum in Metlika, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, and personal archives from Bela Krajina, as well as exhibits related to *steljniki* life and work. Objects on display come from the SEM collection and are accompanied by items loaned by research participants. Visitors can listen to interviews about farming and self-sufficiency, discover foods associated with *steljniki* labour, and explore childhood memories of grazing livestock. A short documentary film captures the traditional mowing and stacking of bracken in Vinomer *steljniki*, a protected Natura 2000 site. Additionally, three animated short films, directed by Zarja Menart and produced by Finta Film in collaboration with RTV Slovenia and the Slovenian Film Centre, present first-hand memories of *steljniki* and farm work.

The exhibition is funded by the European Union through the Horizon Europe program (*Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions*, grant agreement 101061450) and is partially supported by the Ministry of Culture of Slovenia.



New exhibition on *steljniki*—landscapes dominated by common bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), known locally as *stelja* and traditionally used as animal bedding—at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in Ljubljana. Photo by Miha Špiček, 2025.

Do you have suggestions for the newsletter? Please do not hesitate to contact us under membership@agriculturalmuseums.org