

# 50 FARMERS' TALES

*An Archive of Interviews  
with Kent Farmers*

Report on the project and some findings

50

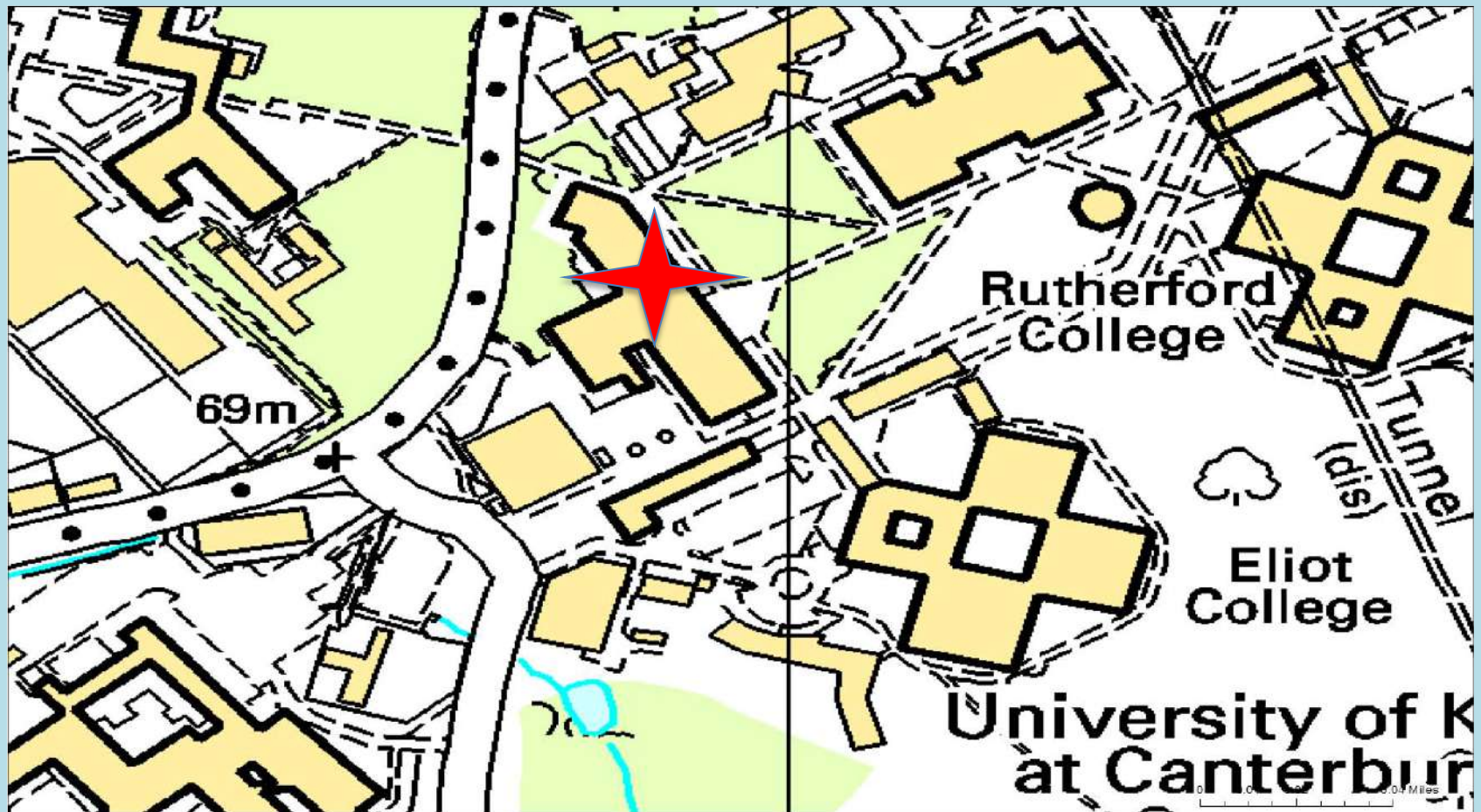
1965-2015  
THE UK'S  
EUROPEAN  
UNIVERSITY

University of  
**Kent**

Centre for  
Biocultural  
Diversity (CBCD)

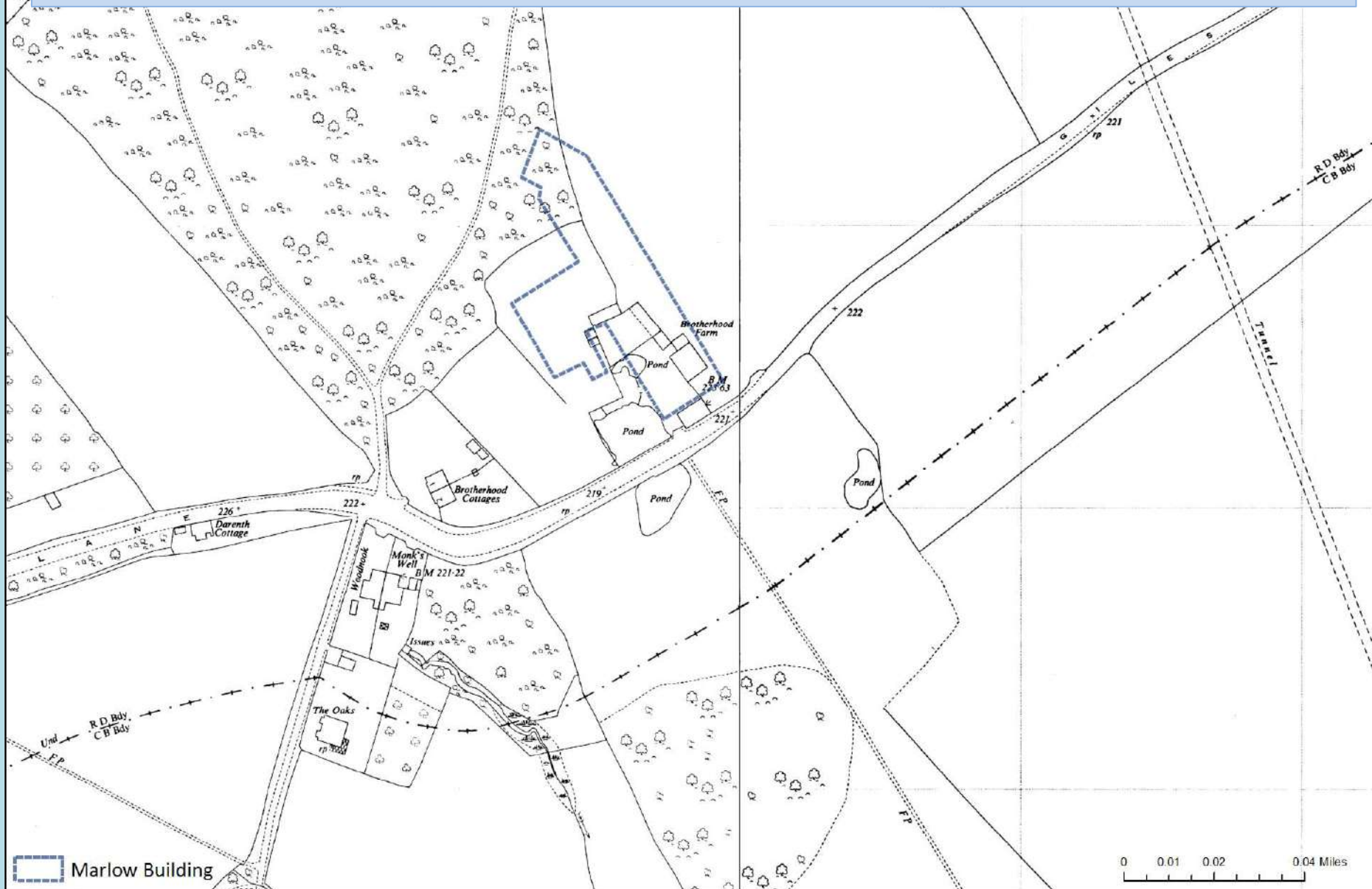


# School of Anthropology and Conservation at Marlowe Building, University of Kent 2015



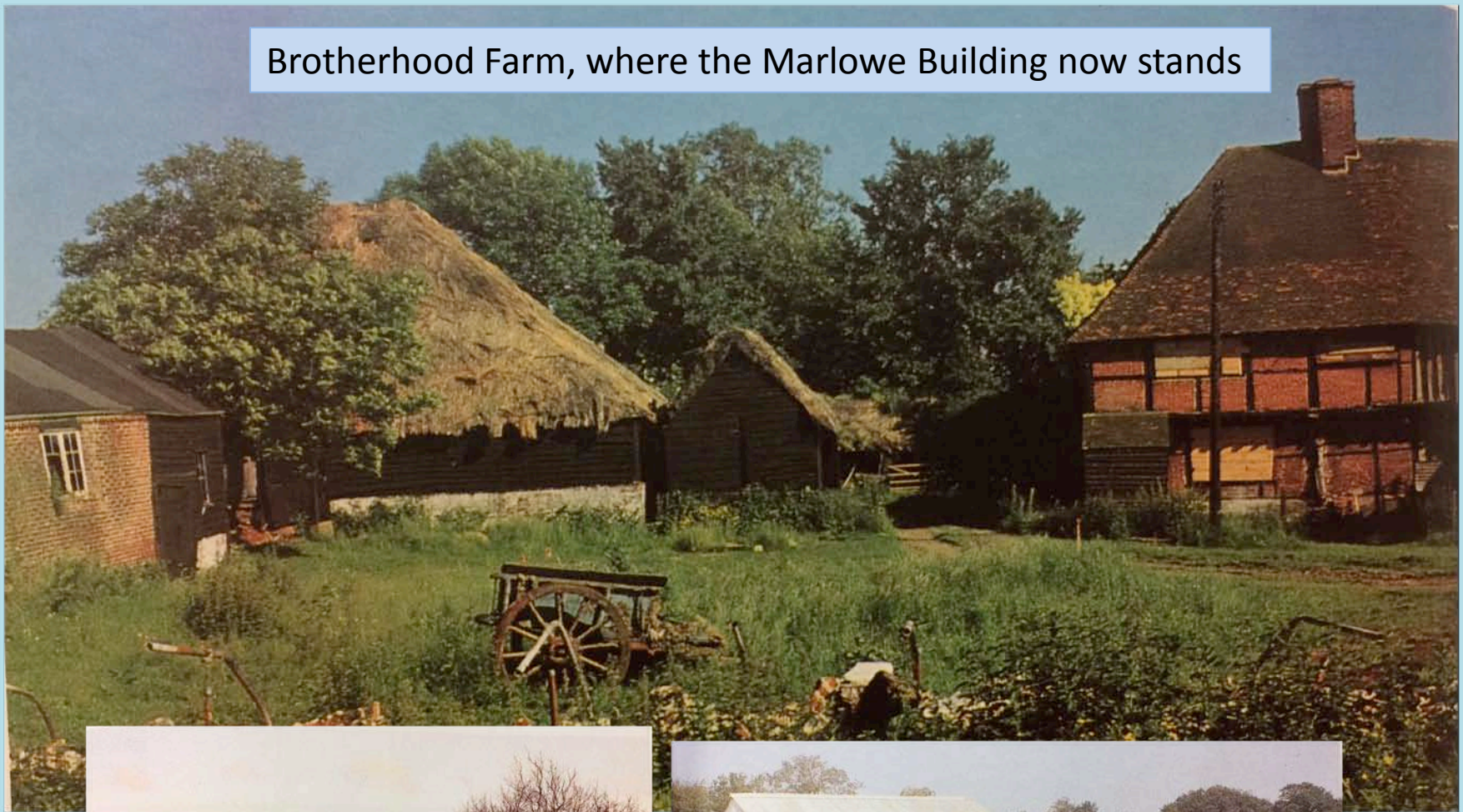
Home of the 50 Farmers Tales Project

Footprint of the Marlow Building on a 1961 Ordinance Survey Map, showing farm buildings, roads, woodlands and fields.





Brotherhood Farm, where the Marlowe Building now stands





# University of Kent lands 1961



# 50 Farmers' Tales Project Aims

*In celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the University of Kent in 2015:*

Explore the ecological, social, cultural, economic and political causes of change and response among Kent Farmers over the last 50 years.

Examine the idea that change is not just driven by EU policies, and that the needs and values of farmers and families play a role in decisions taken as well.

Explore the diversity of responses to change, recognizing the creative, experimental nature of farmers in Kent.

Produce an archive of the collected materials that will be around in 50 years

# 50 Farmers' Tales Project Methods

A Macro View of Change: Spatial analysis of land use change in Kent using GIS (Geographic Information System); using OS Map data from 1961 and 2008.

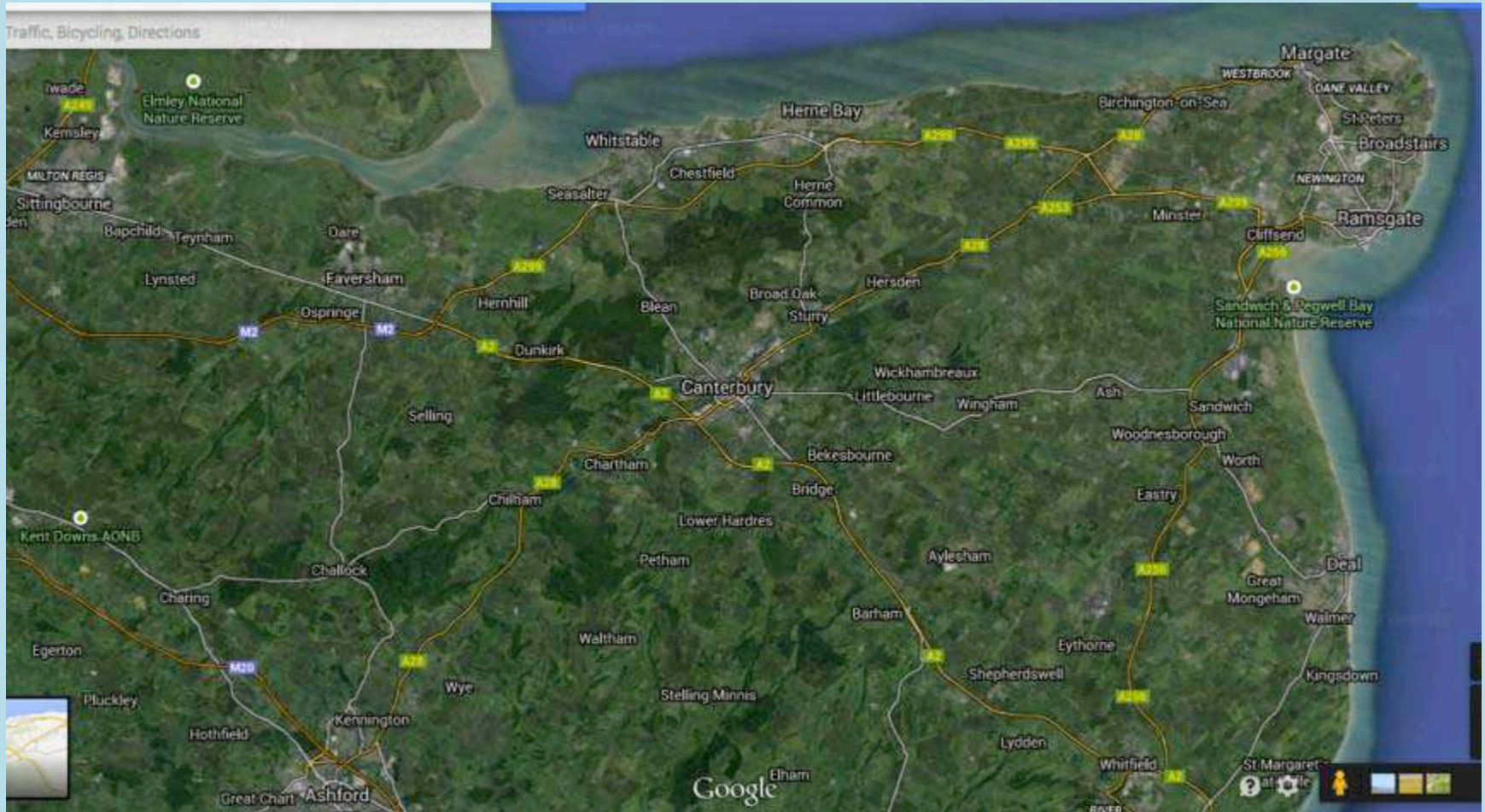
A Personal View of Change: Interviews with 50 Kent Farmers on how their farms have changed. 17 were filmed.

Films produced by Joe Spence (see Videos)

Archive of all the material collected, transcripts and audio recording, plus maps, resources, videos and opportunity to feedback.



# Kent 2015 : Land use change



Google Earth Image showing Kent from above



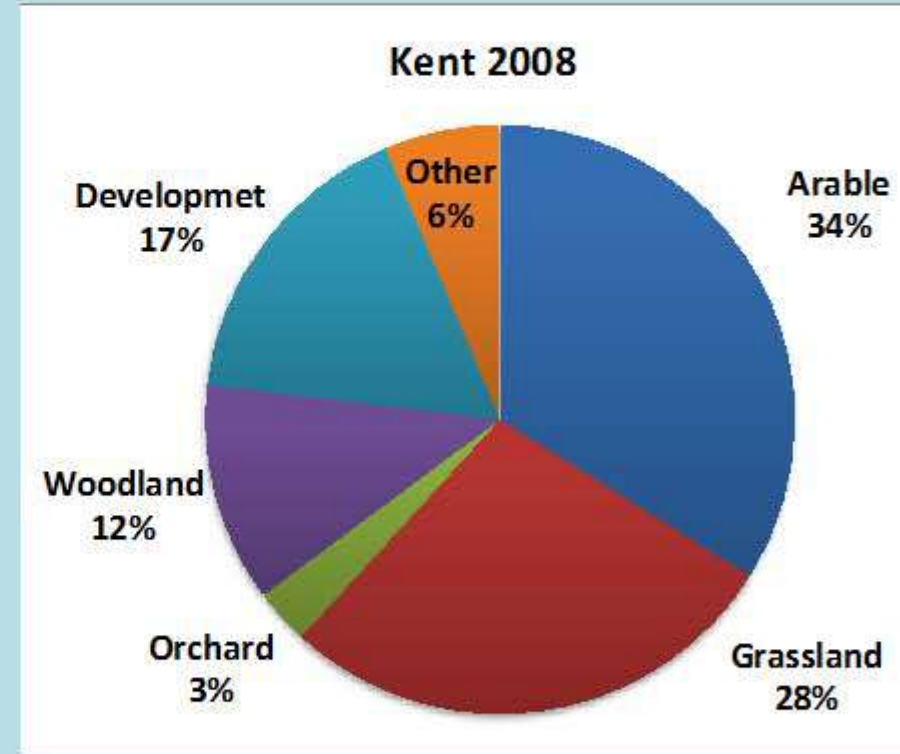
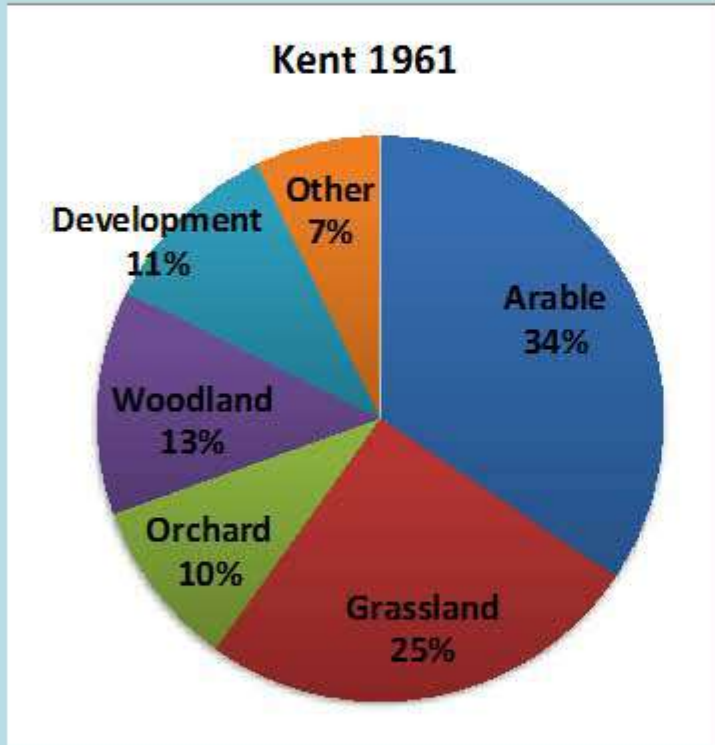
# LAND COVER CHANGE IN KENT (1961-2008)

Kent County: 388237 hectares

Broad land cover	2008 Land Cover (ha)	Net change 1961-2008 (ha)	% Change
Arable	131712 (34%)	-2006	-1.50%
Grassland	108116 (28%)	9378	9.50%
Orchards and Hops	11816 (3%)	-25619	-68%
Woodland	46712 (12%)	-3081	-6%
Development (Urbanization and Roads)	65128 (17%)	24450	60%
Other (Wetlands, Coastal)	24753 (6%)	-3122	-11%

Source: KISS and Kent County Council

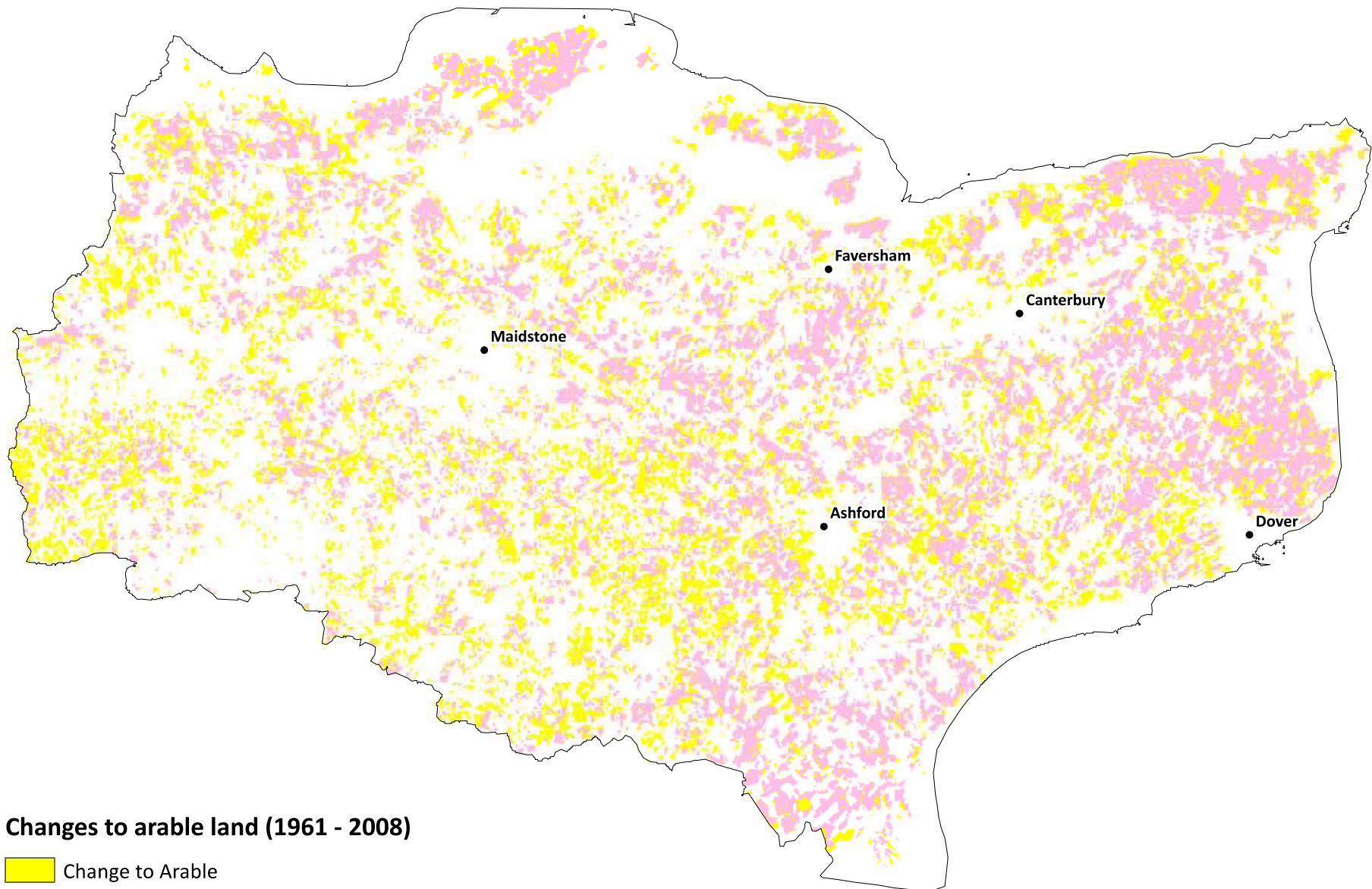
# Change in Kent Land Use 1961-2008





Increases in development and grasslands at the expense of orchards, woodland and coastal areas.



# Arable increases in the west and inland

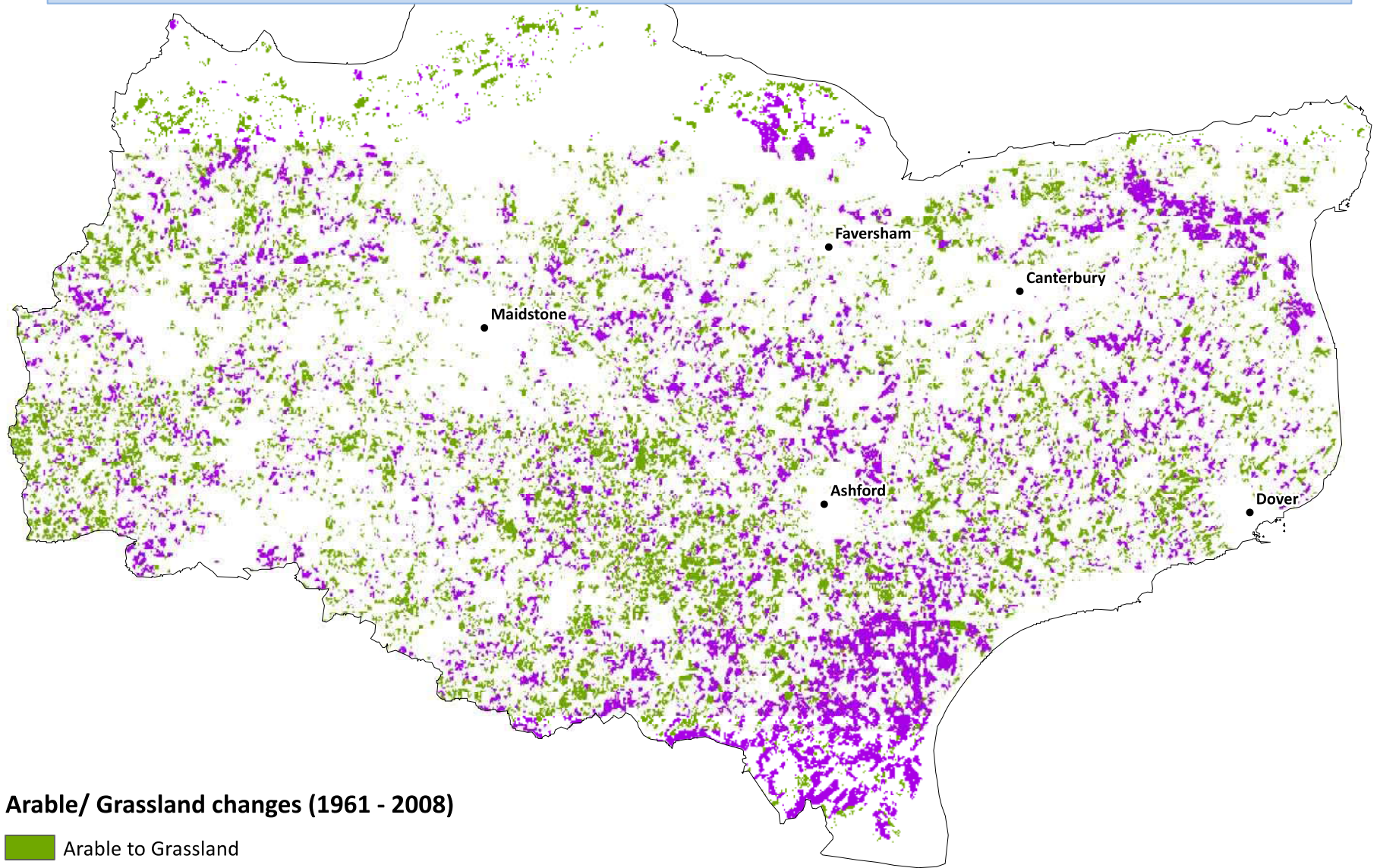


**Changes to arable land (1961 - 2008)**

-  Change to Arable
-  Arable no change

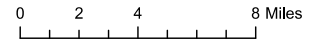
0 2 4 8 Miles

While overall arable land only decreased less than 2% across Kent, most converted to grasslands, it has increased in the Romney Marsh and Thanet areas.

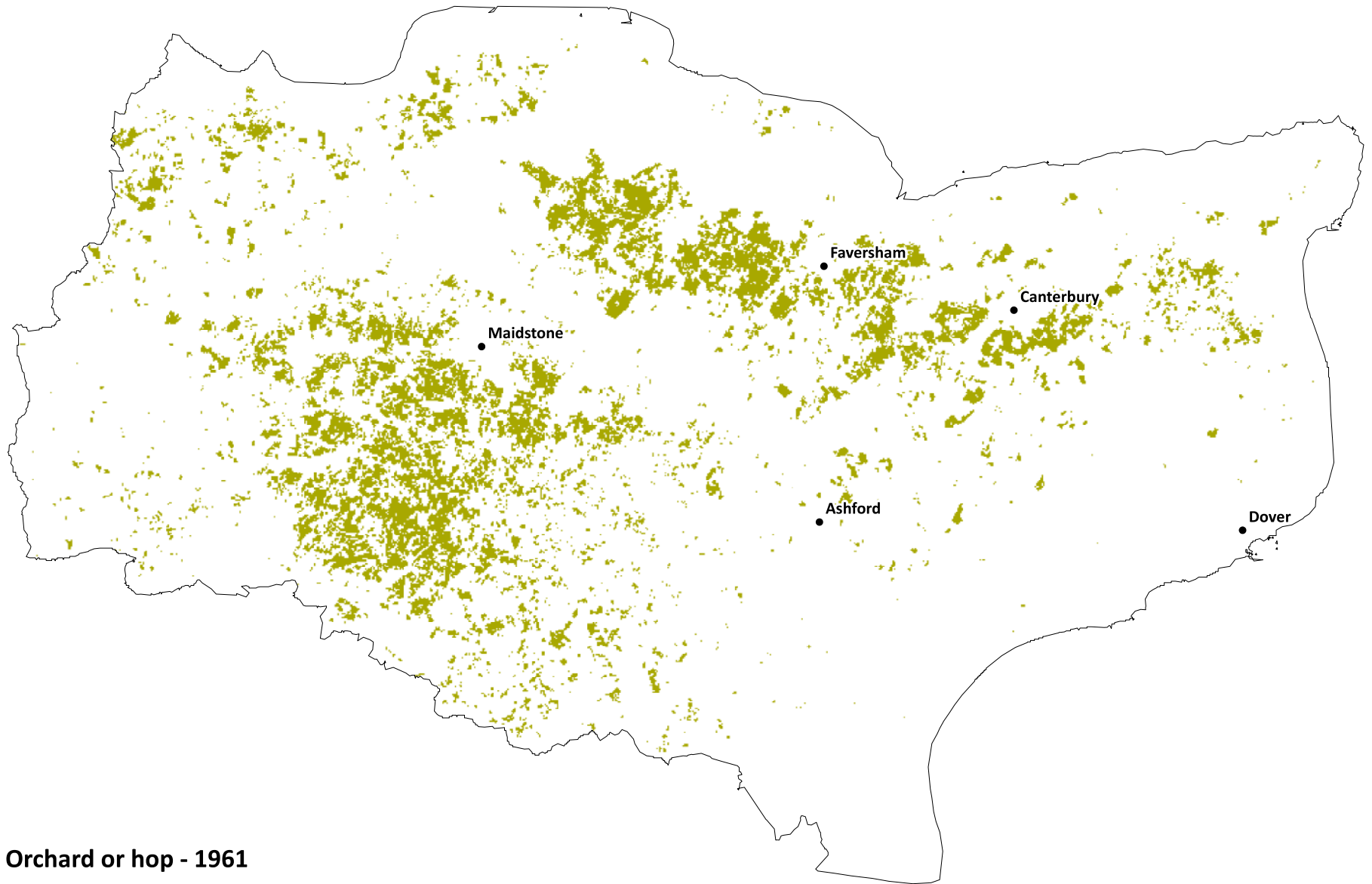


**Arable/ Grassland changes (1961 - 2008)**

- Arable to Grassland
- Grassland to Arable



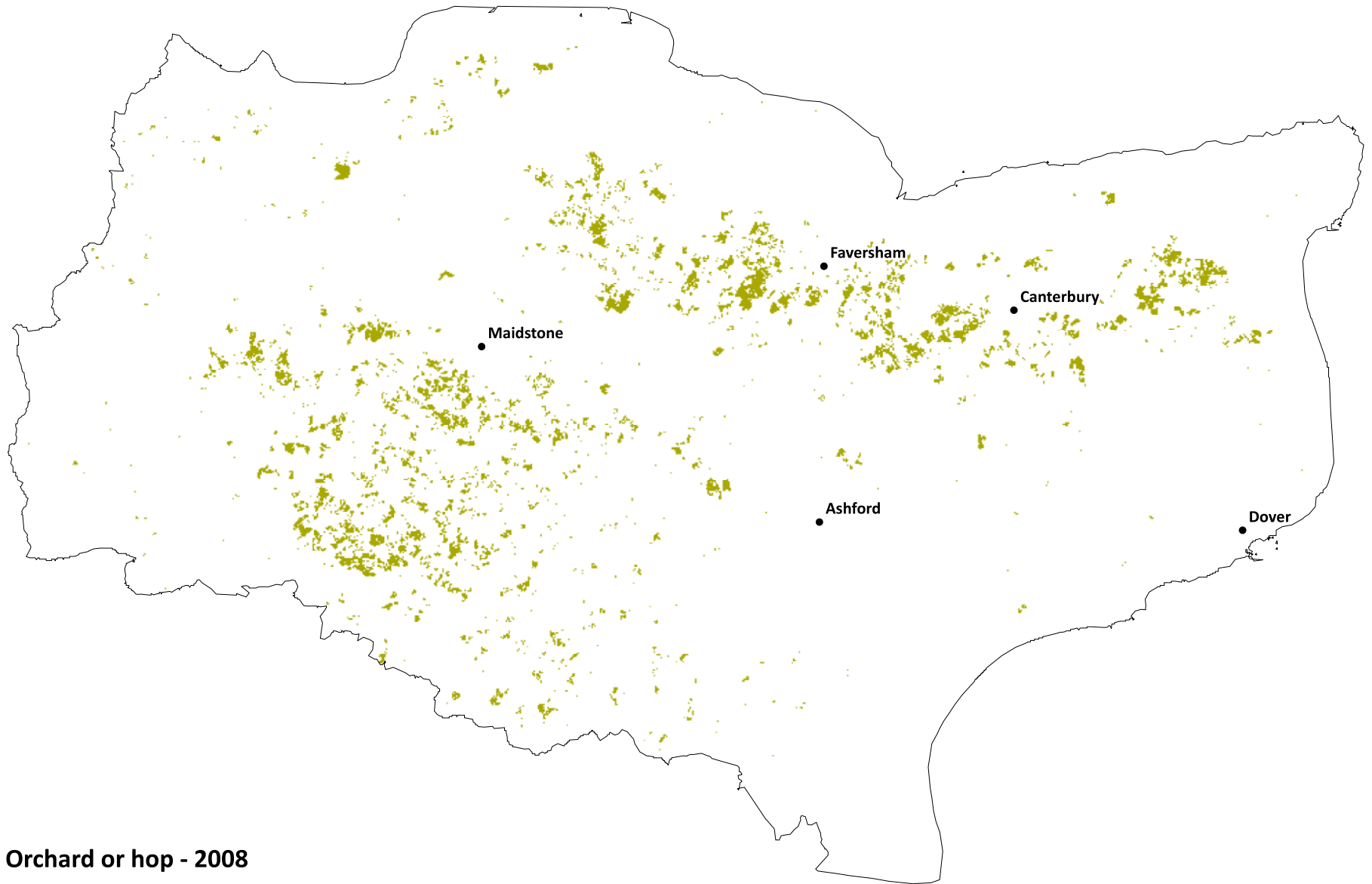




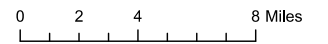
**Orchard or hop - 1961**



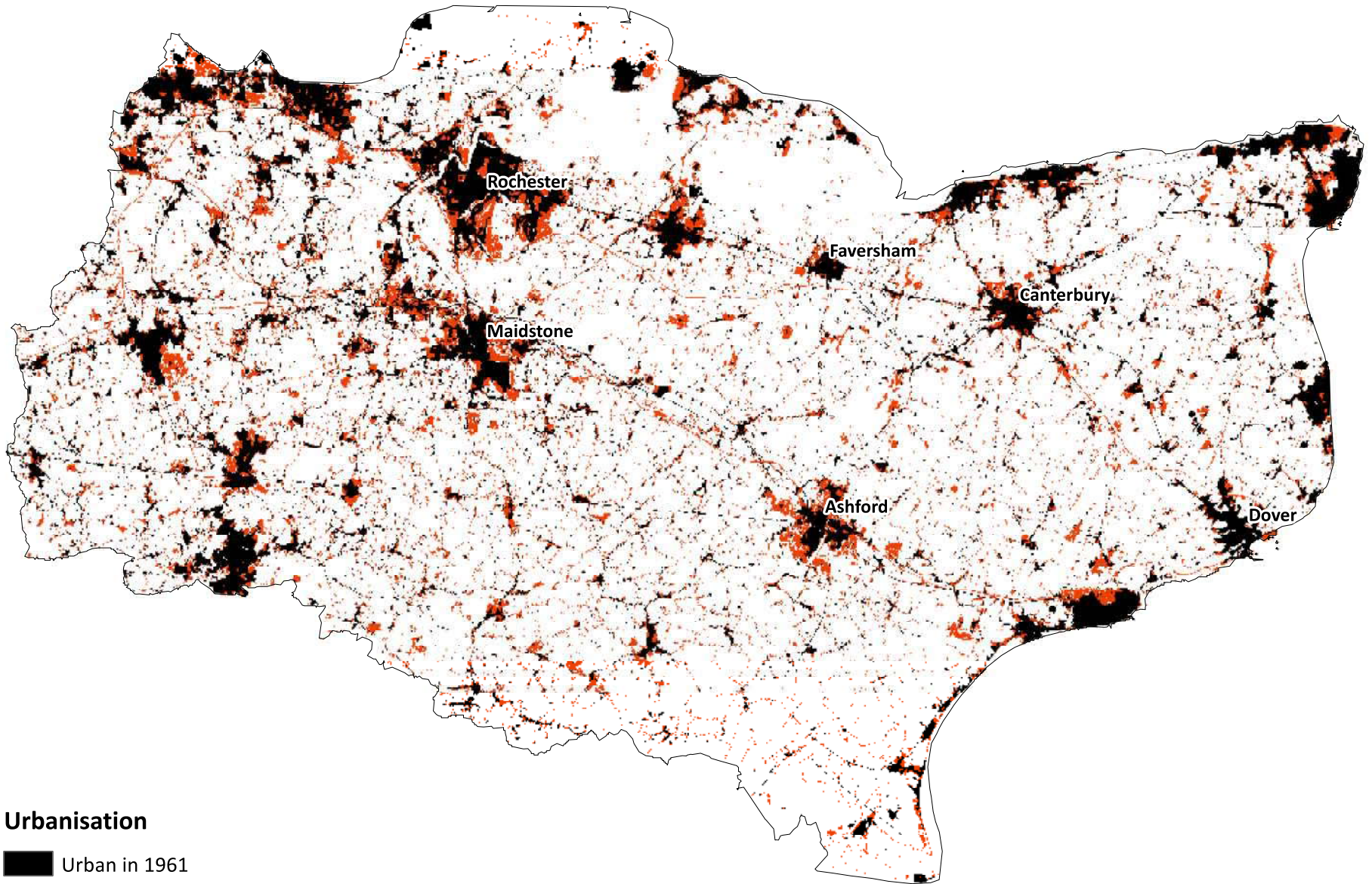
0 2 4 8 Miles



**Orchard or hop - 2008**



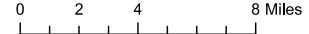




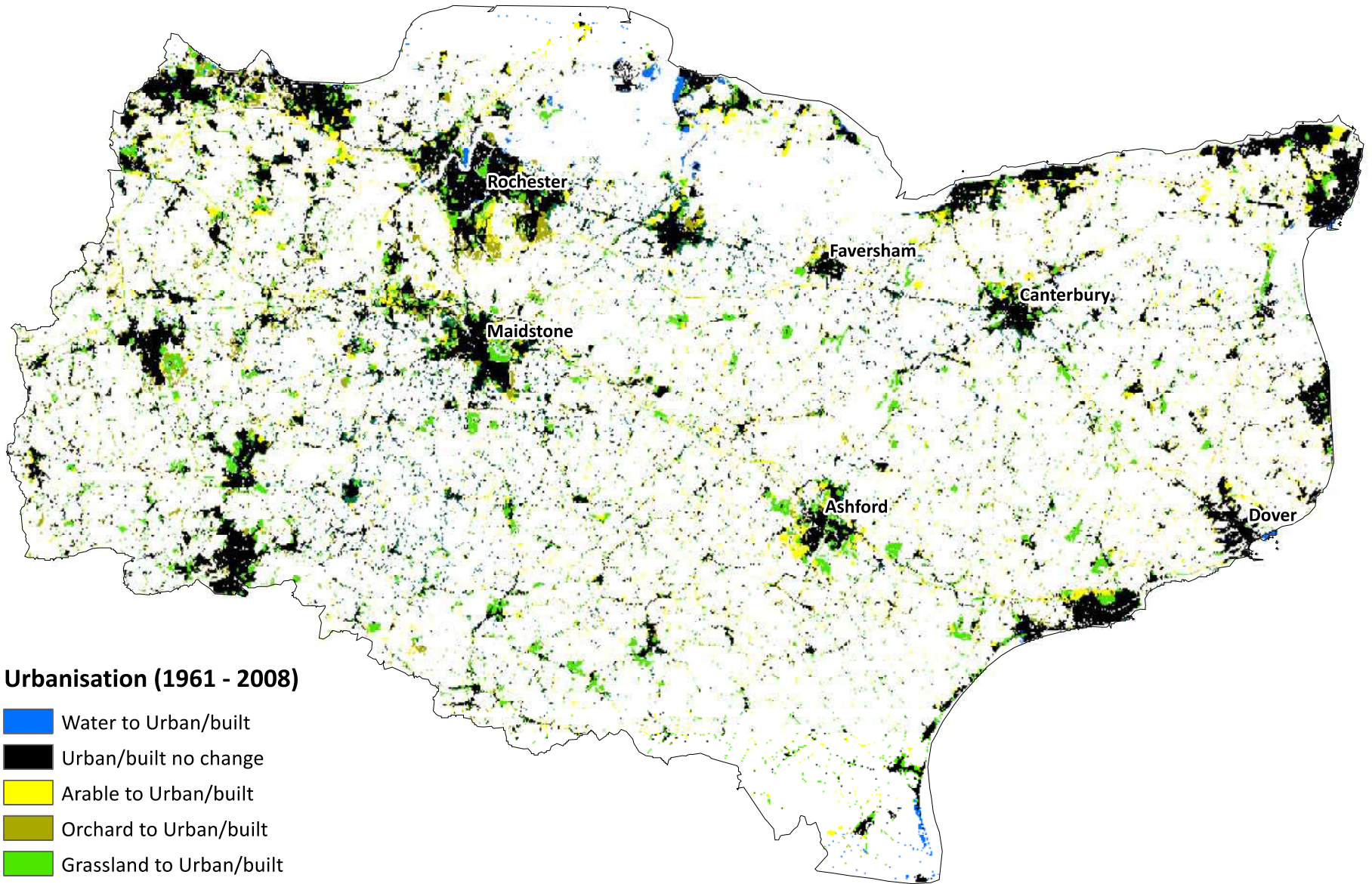
**Urbanisation**

Urban in 1961







Urbanisation (2008)







**Urbanisation (1961 - 2008)**

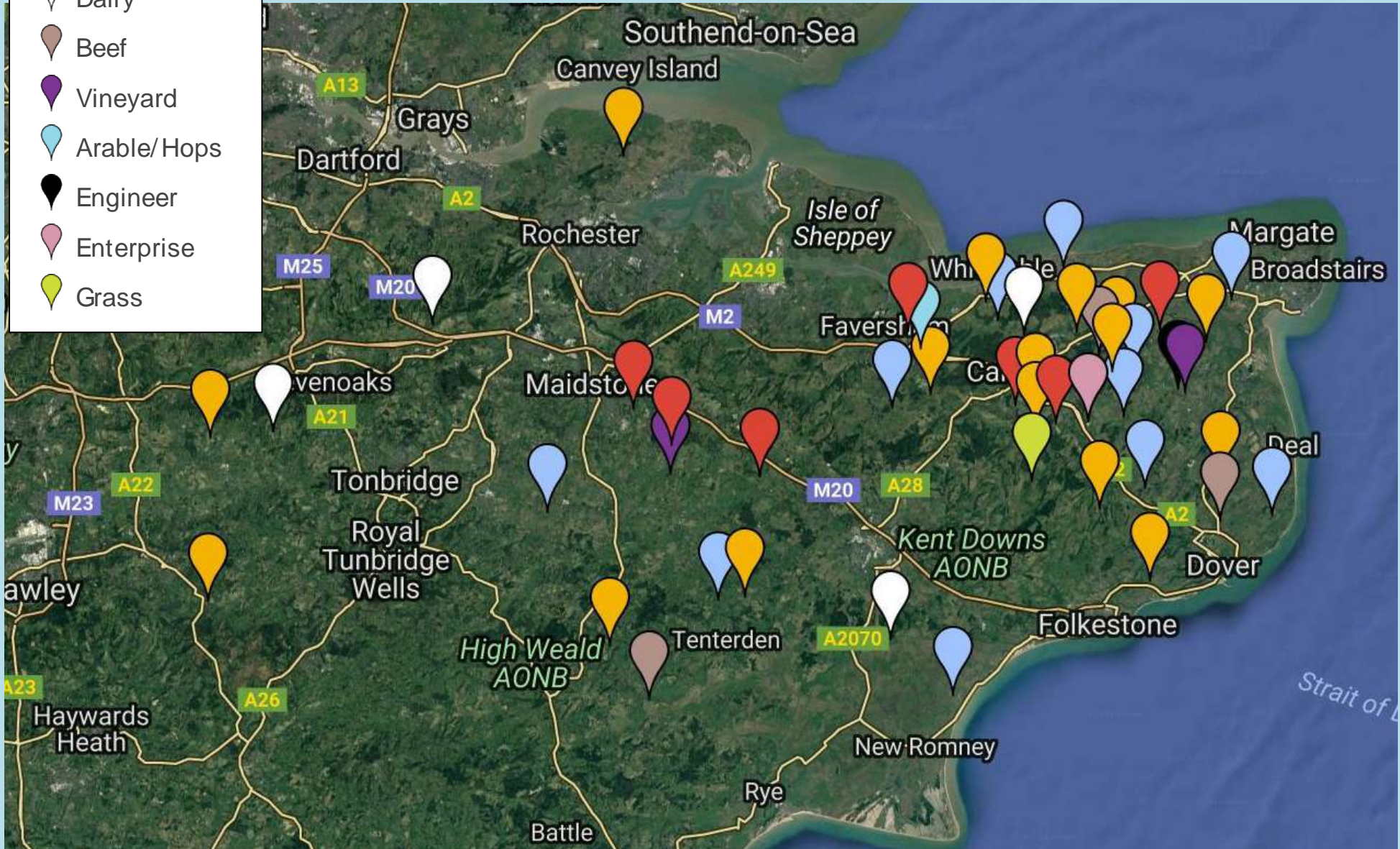
-  Water to Urban/built
-  Urban/built no change
-  Arable to Urban/built
-  Orchard to Urban/built
-  Grassland to Urban/built
-  Woodland to Urban/built

0 2 4 8 Miles



# Where are our farmers?

- Mixed
- Arable
- Fruit
- Dairy
- Beef
- Vineyard
- Arable/Hops
- Engineer
- Enterprise
- Grass



# Who are our 50 Farmers?

- 46 men, 4 women
- Ages: 40s to 94
- Farm owners, Farm tenants, Farm managers, Farm workers, Agricultural engineers
- From farm families or from business
- Some with formal education in agriculture (at Hadlow or Plumpton) most educated through learning on farm (from parents) and experience
- Most married with children, grandchildren



# What are their farms like?

- AGE: Doomsday book to 2012 (Many bought in 1930s depression, from Scotland; some after the WWII; recent business adventures (3))
- SIZE: From 7 to 3000 acres (owned and leased): 0 (4); < 100 (7); <500 (27); < 1000 (37); >1000 (9); Ave=608; Median=484.5
- TYPE: Mixed (16) Fruit (9) Arable (8) Dairy (4) Arable-Fruit (3) Beef (2) Vineyards (2) Grass (1) Hops (1) Enterprise (1)
- 101 crops, animals and other income generating activities on farms today
- Some intensify, some diversify, some get out, few get in





## Change in production of our 50 farmers

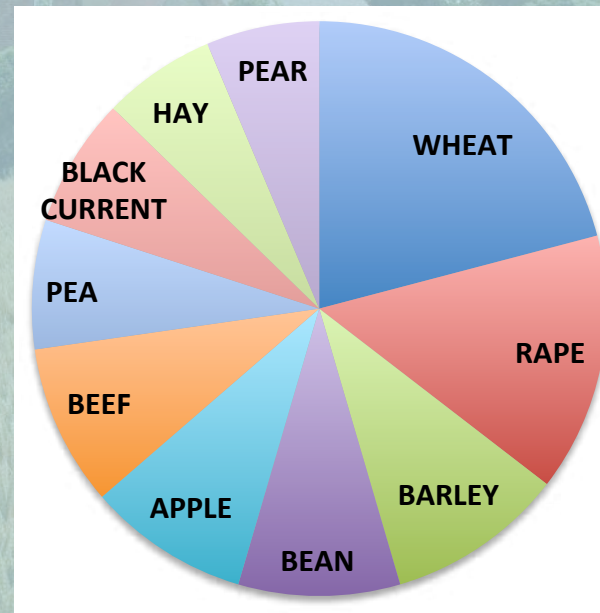
### 1965: No. FARMS PRODUCING

- **WHEAT** 19
- **SHEEP** 19
- **BARLEY** 17
- **APPLE** 15
- **DAIRY** 14



### 2015: No. FARMS PRODUCING

- **WHEAT** 23
- **RAPE** 16
- **BARLEY** 11
- **BEAN** 10
- **APPLE** 10



# Crops, Animals and other on-farm activities

## Field Crops (36 Categories)

- Wheat 23
- Rape Seed 16
- Barley 11
- Beans 12
- Peas 8
- Maize 6
- Hay & Grass 12
- Hops 3
- Potatoes 3
- Seed crops
- Nonfood crops

More common  
Less common

## Fruit (18 categories)

- Apples 10
- Pears 7
- Cherries 6
- Black Currents 8
- Strawberries 4
- Grapes and winery 2

## Livestock (16 categories)

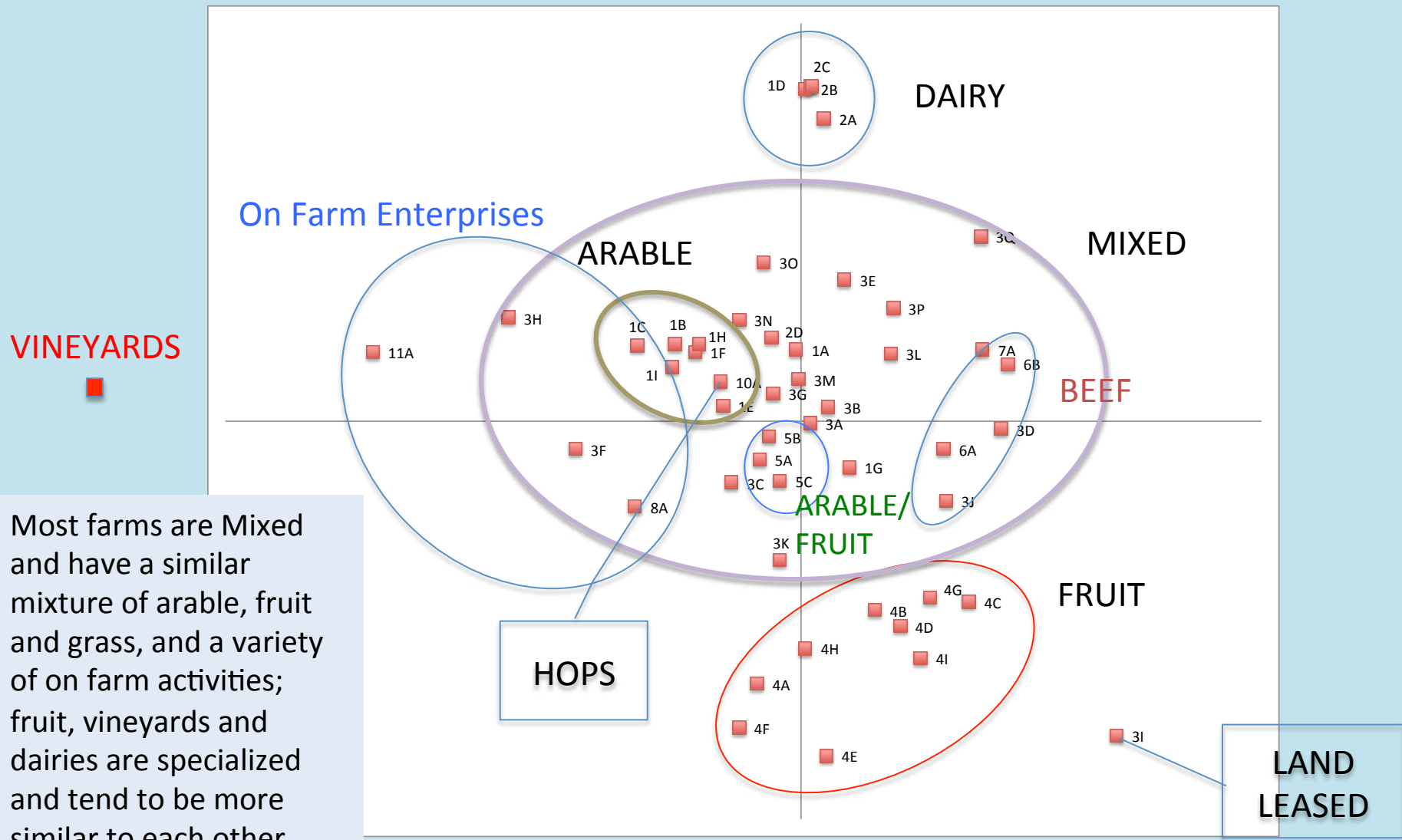
- Dairy 6
- Beef 10
- Sheep 7
- Pigs 3
- Breeding, fattening
- Cattery

- Contracting out 6
- Labour 4
- Building rental 4
- Land rental 3
- Packhouse & Storage
- Livery 2
- Farm shop 3; PYO 2
- Setaside & Conservation 5
- Forestry 2
- Game 1
- Solar 3 Biogas 1
- Housing estates
- B&B
- Enterprises
- Caravan Park
- Camping
- Airstrip and Hangar
- Trucking
- Grit
- Care home
- Nursery
- Butcher
- Café
- Film Set
- Dog Walking



# How similar are farms?

Comparison of crops, animals and other activities on the 50 Farms (red squares)





**Osier Farm, Teynham, site of the first commercial cherry planting in Kent, pictured in the 1980s when the cherry trees were still being cultivated.**



# What kinds of drivers of change are there?

External v. internal

(Markets, UK, EU v. decisions on the Farm)

Structural v. Individual

(political-economy, society or culture v. farmers, family, leaders or innovators)

Events v. Processes

(Disease outbreaks, inventions, regulations v. global warming, mechanization)

## Depression Era

Poverty, Land Abandonment, Migration

Verticillium wilt knocks out HOPS

## European Economic Community: CAP

F&M import control

Hurricane

## EU CAP Reforms Setaside

## EU CAP SFP, Poland

F&M

EU Bulg. & Rom.

## BREXIT

1920 1930 1940 1950 1965 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010 2015

Diesel Tractors

## WWII

Boom in Farming  
Market Gardening  
Mechanisation  
(Combine 1938)

GREEN REVOLUTION  
HYV Wheat  
Pesticides  
Fertilisers

BSE & vCJD  
Export Ban  
Slaughter  
Regulations  
Passports

Biotech crops:  
Roundup

Auto Revol  
Robots

E. Kent Goldings PDO

Important events in the recent history of Kent Farming



# Change Processes

**Mechanisation:** Horses to Tractors to Robots

**Labour:** Women & Children to Migrant labour & EU; or to less and less...what are the social consequences of this?

**Family sizes:** decreasing, out of farming, but not all!

**Farm sizes:** increasing; leasing; contracting; land values up

**Cropping:** shift to new seasonal, or year round production

**Bureaucratisation:** UK and EU regulations, Health & Safety, subsidies

**Urbanization:** movement to cities, attitudes to rural life shift

**Globalization:** mobility of people, technology, information, supermarkets, social media, global governance

**Weather:** drier, turmoil, extreme events, uncertainty

# Mechanization

"Whereas we used to have a whole lot of people hoeing potatoes and walking through corn stubbing out the thistles, now it's all done with a sprayer...That was a big step forward, but it also means you tended to meet less people."



# Labour

"The whole pattern of having local labour, predominantly female, coming out at half past eight or quarter to nine harvesting through until approximately three o'clock when they will go and pick up their children, that's all gone. It's become seven days a week, long hours - a labour-intensive site."

# Cropping changes

“We used to be pretty well all ‘spring cropping’, by that I mean sowing the crops in the spring to harvest that summer. Now probably about three quarters of the crops are sowed in the autumn, that’s come about with the benefit of chemical weed control. If you sow the crops in the autumn potentially there’s a lot more weeds growing, but we now have the ability to control those weeds and that’s contributed a lot to getting a higher yields at the end of the day, the crop’s just in the ground longer to grow. “



# Livestock

“Arable cropping certainly got easier as tractors got bigger and all the machinery got better for doing the job...Livestock, it had more and more demands ...more rules and regulations...there’s an awful lot of paperwork tied up with keeping animals nowadays, that’s certainly been a change in the last, especially the last 20 years.”

# Weather

“I seem to remember colder winters, more snow, frozen water pipes and all that, which we don't seem to have had for a long time now. Hotter drier summers, wetter milder winters...that's my impression of it. ...Hotter drier summers certainly – the grass stops growing in the summer when it gets hot and dry. Has that got worse? Seems to have done in my thinking, which is why we've tended to go more down the road of cropping rather than of livestock. Crops sown in the autumn, we still sow some in the spring, then it comes to the summer, once it's hot and dry, well they've virtually finished growing then and it just ripens them and we want it hot and dry for harvest.”



# Markets

"Supermarkets are bigger than the government, the way they control our lives, how they pay us, how they price us, their policy of going and getting produce from other countries before us...And we have to have them. We can't farm without them."

# Way of life v. a Business?

- "When I started at 18 there was a...sort of romantic idea of being outside in the open on the farm...and it was a way of life. But now it's much more a business...they are businesses with 8-10 million pound turnover and lots of complexity, lots of paperwork. Many growers probably preferred it the way it was 20 or 30 years ago."

# Dairy Farming

“I think there’s about 9000 something farmers left –dairy farmers - for the whole of the country and they’re leaving the industry 50 a month nowadays. Roughly 50 farmers a month are leaving the industry because the price is bad.”



# EU Subsidies

“If we didn’t get the payments, and this is no exaggeration, I think half the farmers in the country would either have to get out or would be bankrupted, it’s, it’s yeah, without it, I mean we’re in a position at the moment for example our monthly milk check is not covering our costs on the farm.”

# A future for dairy farming?



# Responses to Change

- Mobility: Leaving farm; migrant labour
- Exchange: Contracting, labour
- Pooling: Cooperatives, sharing machines,
- Intensification: Farm size, machines, automation
- Diversification: 101 options; Land leasing; Enterprises, energy production
- Innovation: New crops (GM?), new products
- Revitalization: Hops, Vineyards



# FUTURE FARMS

## small and smart

### SURVEY DRONES

Aerial drones survey the fields, mapping weeds, yield and soil variation. This enables precise application of inputs, mapping spread of pernicious weed blackgrass could increase Wheat yields by 2-5%.

### FLEET OF AGRIBOTS

A herd of specialised agribots tend to crops, weeding, fertilising and harvesting. Robots capable of microdot application of fertiliser reduce fertiliser cost by 99.9%.



### FARMING DATA

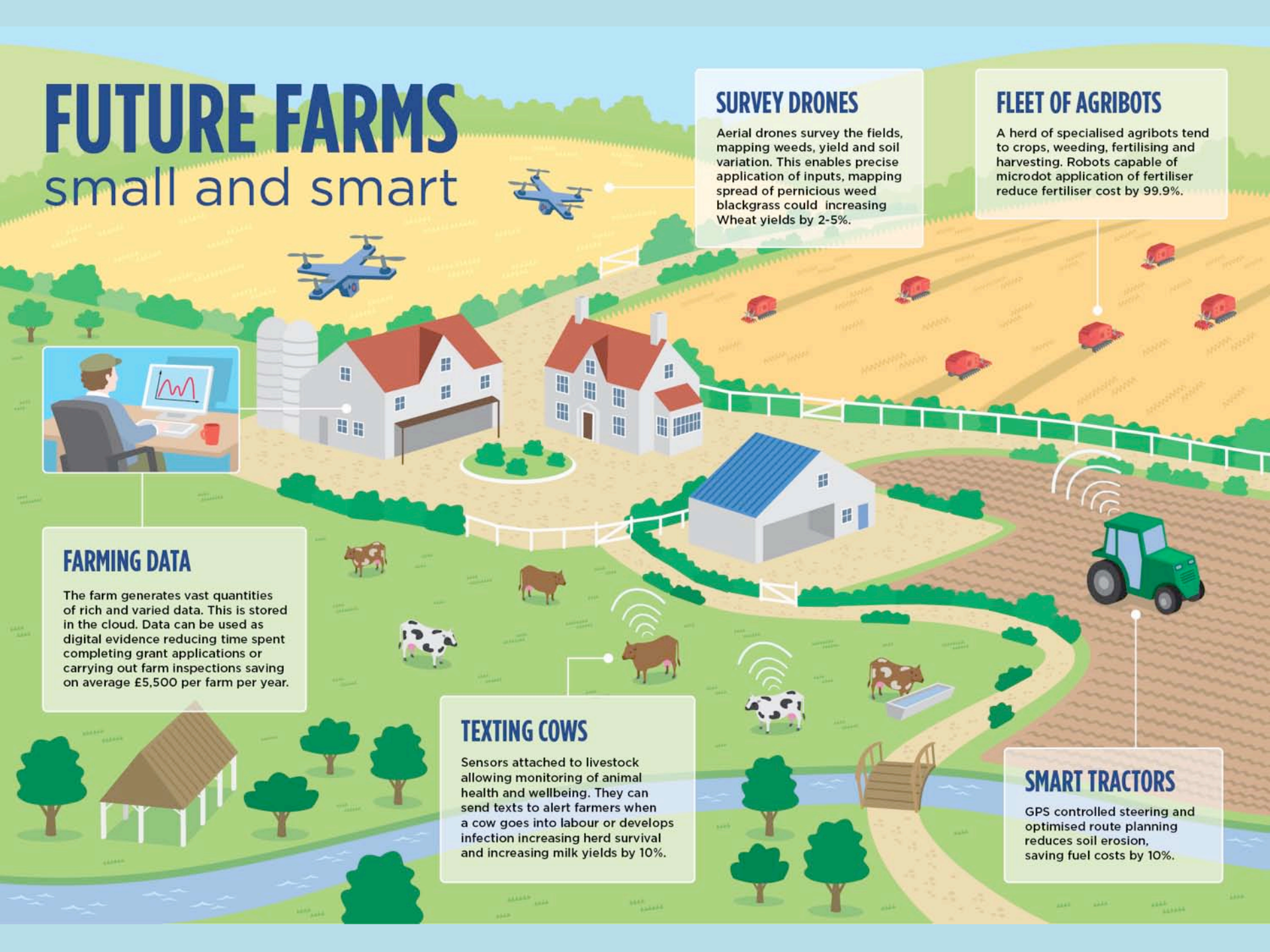
The farm generates vast quantities of rich and varied data. This is stored in the cloud. Data can be used as digital evidence reducing time spent completing grant applications or carrying out farm inspections saving on average £5,500 per farm per year.

### TEXTING COWS

Sensors attached to livestock allowing monitoring of animal health and wellbeing. They can send texts to alert farmers when a cow goes into labour or develops infection increasing herd survival and increasing milk yields by 10%.

### SMART TRACTORS

GPS controlled steering and optimised route planning reduces soil erosion, saving fuel costs by 10%.



# Change and Resilience

“Things just change and there’s nothing you can do about it. You know, if you don’t go with it you go down.”



# Please do explore this ARCHIVE!



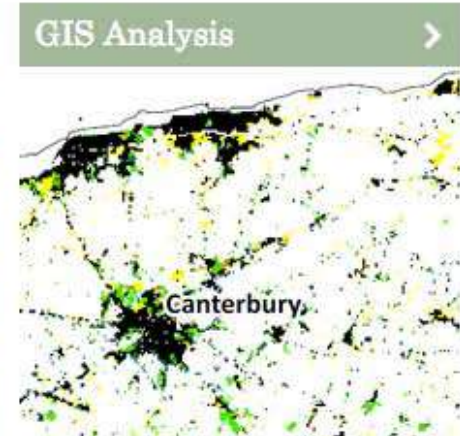
## THE RECENT HISTORY OF FARMS AND FARMING IN KENT

### 50 Farmers' Tales

University of Kent > Chronos > 50 Farmers Tales Archive

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- Resources
- Feedback/Contact us





FIND Farmers by clicking on the map or go to the Interview Archive and search there

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## Kent Map

This map shows the location of Kent farmers interviewed for this archive. Hover over a pin on the map to see that farmer's name, click on the map pin for direct links to interview transcripts, audio and video records.



Please do contact us if you have any questions or would like to leave a message for a farmer!

50 Farmers' Tales

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## Contact us



Contact form

(\*) required fields

Your name\*

Farmer (leave blank if not applicable)

Bob Akehurst



Your email\*

Message\*

Submit



# Many thanks to:

- All the farmers that participated, this is for you!
- The student research team, that designed and conducted the interviews
- Alan Bicker, for organising, teaching, advising, liaising with farmers
- Joe Spence, for film making, editing and interviewing
- Nick Mavity and James Kloda for designing and building the Archive and website
- NFU Canterbury and its members for publicity and participation
- Kent County Council for providing map data
- Kent Institute for Spatial Studies (KISS) for spatial analysis and maps
  
- University of Kent 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Fund
- School of Anthropology and Conservation for funds, logistics and support.
- Center for Biocultural Diversity (CBCD) for funds
- ESRC Festival of Social Science for funding the Archive Launch Event, Nov. 10, 2016.