Counter Revolution

Computers On The Farm
You may be surprised to discover that the computer is equally at home on the farm as in the office.

An enterprising software engineer has designed a program called 'Optimiser' that minimises the cost of pig feed. A typical pig farm uses 400 tons of feed a month but the mixture of cereals changes daily as the pigets are fattened for market. Using the computer, the farmer gives the daily needs of the pigs and the nutrient value of the available cereals in terms of protein, energy and vitamins. The program then determines the most economical mixture.

With cereal prices jumping seasonally from £135 to £200 a ton, this software has helped farmers calculate their feed mixes more efficiently. A few 'human' pig problems remain. The animals like a regular diet and will turn their noses up at any new meal that is drastically changed from the last. The program, though, has had worldwide success and is sold from Thailand to Mexico

The computer can save small businesses time and effort — and so boost their profits

The computer was born in military and university laboratories. The early machines were built to calculate how shells would fly when fired from a battleship in stormy sea and for forecasting the weather in mid ocean.

However, it didn't take long for the commercial applications of computers to be recognised. Initially only the largest of companies could afford the capital outlay for a business system. But the micro revolution of the late 1970's has at last made the power of the computer available to the small business.

How can a spin-off from military scientists help, say, the local newsagent? The computer can accept and store large amounts of data. It can rearrange the information that it is given haphazardly into useful forms. In the newspaper shop there are large stocks of pens and paper, sweets and chocolates, and of course a wide range of daily newspapers and periodicals.

Sales figures are entered into the newsagent's computer. A program is used that checks stock levels. Whenever the reserves of a particular item fall below the 'threshold' number a message is given reminding the newsagent to reorder. A standard reordering form can be called up from the memory. The newsagent then adds in the particular details of that item, and the computer prints