

# Agricola in the Keydom

KEY MARKET is the sixth title in Richard Breese's series. This new addition though is not the work of Breese himself, but one of his long-time playtesters. Which may well be why Number 6 fits in so perfectly with the rest of the Key family.

This time the theme is farming and herding in the Keydom, and once again estates play a role. Each player sends workers out to the fields to gather harvest and then take them to the market to sell. In this enterprise, there are several advantages to joining the numerous guilds. Whoever has the greatest prestige (in terms of victory points) after two years, wins.

Two years is twice four seasons, and each of these is divided into three phases. Strangely enough play starts in winter, when there's nothing to harvest. Nevertheless there's only one worker out in the fields anyway, ready to be activated. He can get to work anywhere in a landscape made up of three-by-three boards, each with a village in the middle, surrounded by the various sorts of land use, in differing arrangements. One such board is in

play for each player (with an extra mini-board for two players). Since these boards are printed on both sides, there are plenty of ways in which the playing landscape can be set up.

## I Out standing in their fields

By putting these boards together, we create fields, pastures, gardens or orchards of various sizes, but no matter how big, each such area can only be worked by one worker. The individual squares clearly yield different harvests, easily recognized from their appearance. Adverse weather can spoil any such harvest, with even sheep pasture and fish ponds affected. On the other hand, fruit, vegetables and grain can sometimes produce bumper harvests. These variations never quite take us by surprise, since



everyone can prepare for them in plenty of time.

Starting conditions are generally the same for everyone;

each player has a complete range of harvests and yields (animals included) at the beginning of the game, has one worker in place and has a farmhouse, as well as a little money. The farmhouse however is not free, since it has to be paid for with two goods. And there are our disparate starting conditions already.

At the start of each season, the first thing we must take care of is working the land. If needed, we send workers off to other fields – which costs money. We hire a new worker – which also costs money and costs dearer, the larger our workforce already is. And we gather harvests. Which, as mentioned, don't bring much to boast of in winter, when fauna and flora refuse to provide any harvest. A year later things may look different here, if we have arranged for the





relevant guilds to support us; we'll come to that later.

In spring, summer or fall, however, our workers bring home the harvest for that time of year. We'll

discuss later the other actions we might choose during the Farming phase. For now, enough to say that every player can carry out as many as six actions, in a prescribed sequence.

What do we do with our harvests? We bring them to market, of course! Market Day is the second phase in a season. Here everyone decides secretly what they will sell. Of course you know what the others have just harvested, but do you know what they still have in their barns and stores from previous seasons? Hardly, since this is all hidden behind screens.

After everyone has revealed their plans, the sales are made. But goods are only sold by type, and only two units can be sold of each type. You can only unload more than this by waiting for your turn to come round again. By which time, the prices may already be ruined. They are displayed on a market board which is straightforward in the extreme. The more wares of any particular type are already on the market, the less that market will pay for further sales of the same. If the price is low enough, it's even worthwhile actually buying on the market. This is a

guild action though, and you can only carry out one such in this phase. Thus it's worth considering whether a different guild action might not be more important. For instance, sponsoring a worker to become an



apprentice in a guild. Or promoting him once he's there, to craftsman or even master. This all costs though, and costs not money but goods. Which is why you can't simply sell all your harvest for money, but must set some of it by to be able to pay.

There are twelve guilds in all, although, depending on the number of players, only

five to seven of these are in play. Belonging to a guild results in various advantages, and lifts certain restrictions. The principle of first come, first served is

at work here, however, since the guilds can only accept a certain number of members. There isn't room for more than two apprentices, so that a new one can only join when one of these is promoted to craftsman. The rules booklet takes three pages to explain which guild brings which benefits at which level of membership. Anyone who has played KEY MARKET a few times has a clear edge over newbies in knowing which guilds are especially worthwhile. Some of them offer different advantages at different levels, while others have cumulative benefits. They have an enormous influence on the endgame.



### I Luxuries from the village

Not mentioned so far are the villages in the middle of each field board. It's not cheap to settle there, but luxury goods tempt you to do so. Luxuries can be traded at the market like other goods, but they are mostly used to replace other resources for payment in kind, since when used this way, luxuries count double.

It's not just the guilds who demand payment



### Almost a never-ending story

There were few good omens for the production of KEY MARKET. Since there are constant supply bottlenecks for wooden playing pieces, the producers, LudoFact, contracted a new supplier in Eastern Europe, which turned out however to be unreliable not just when it came to quality, but even to quantity. Thus not all the pre-orders could be delivered at SPIEL '10. It required no less than two months for all the missing material to be supplied. Richard Breese kept everybody who was waiting for their purchase constantly updated on a special Geeklist on boardgamegeek. At time of going to press for this edition of spielbox, there were a few copies remaining, but Breese says that there are currently no plans for new edition of the game from another publisher.

in kind. This is also used to upgrade the farmhouse, with which we began play, into a manor house. This doesn't just allow better sales at the market, it's also the precondition for retiring a worker.

Retired workers score victory points at the end of the game. The same holds for workers in guilds, whose victory points depend on the rank they have attained. Only workers in the fields gathering the harvest generate no victory points. Quite the opposite. At the end of each season they demand payment, which must be in cold hard cash.

Whoever has deployed their workers most effectively at the end of the two years, and collected the most victory points, wins.

KEY MARKET is a classic worker placement game. Classic here means that you shouldn't expect anything that you don't already know, in one form or another. But the details fit together perfectly, and every action demands careful consideration. Leaving aside the guild privileges for the moment, only one worker can be sent to the fields in every season, where there isn't much room anyway thanks to the restrictive, somewhat abstract placement rules. Each worker has an exclusion zone around him where no other workers of the same color can be deployed, meaning that it is rare indeed for anyone to be able to place more than four figures.

After the first year comes another unproductive winter, where many a worker will simply stand around in



the fields and cost money. You can remove your workers, for free, and thus save on paying

wages, but is this worth doing, or will it prove to be more expensive to hire him again afterwards, taking time into account as well?

### I Few random factors

Access to the guilds is also restricted to one apprentice per season. You can certainly gain promotion in the guilds up to twice in one year, but this is only worthwhile if there is no more important guild action to take, such as retiring a worker. So again we are faced with the dilemma of wanting to do more than we can, or at least than we can afford. And then there's another thing; do we sell our resources on the market, or keep hold of them in order to be able to pay? Whatever we choose, there's never enough – money, or resources.

There are few random factors in KEY MARKET, and those that there are, are flagged up in good time so that nobody is struck by a bolt from the blue. One of these is the initial set-up situation, the variable playing board. Another is the variable, seasonal harvest modifiers.

All the material has the tried and tested high quality that we have come to expect from Richard Breese. As well as the playing boards showing the countryside, there is another board showing the season progression, and one more for market prices, as always atmospherically illus-



trated by Richard's sister Juliet. At the end of the game you flip these boards over and can calculate victory points on the backs. The guild cards are made of the same sturdy

cardboard as the rest of the playing pieces and are printed on both sides (German and English). Only the wooden pieces for agricultural produce, ever since Agricola known as vegimeeples, can't match this quality. The fault here lies with the suppliers (see box text).

The rule book is also beyond reproach, being very detailed and leaving no questions open. Verdict: a very good game, which will come back to our table again and again, for preference with a full complement of four players. *KMW/sw*



Title: **Key Market**  
 Publisher: **R&D Games**  
 Designer: **David Brain**  
 Artist: **Juliet Breese**  
 Players: **2-4**  
 Age: **about 12 and up**  
 Duration: **about 90-150 minutes**  
 Price: **about 39 €**

Reviewer	Playing appeal
<b>KMW</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Stuart W. Dagger</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Oliver Grimm</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Alan How</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Christian Klein</b> .....	<b>6</b>

