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TENANT INCREASES 1880-1920

FARM TENANCY IN THE U. S.

The North Carolina Club at the University is making a study of home and farm ownership, and at its first meeting the facts about farm tenancy in the United States and its increase since 1880 were presented by Prof. S. H. Hobbs, Jr. We are here giving a summary of the facts brought out at this meeting.

During the last forty years farm tenancy has made staggering increases in the United States—in particular in the South, the Middle West, and the Lake Shore States. We have been moving rapidly as a nation out of a land of home and farm ownership into a land of home and farm tenancy. Forty years ago just one-fourth of all the farms in the United States were operated by tenants. Today 38.1 percent are operated by tenants. Every decade has ushered in an increased tenancy rate. During these forty years the number of farms operated by owners increased only 31.5 percent, while the farms operated by tenants increased 139.5 percent, or more than four times as fast. Every geographic area in the United States, except the New England States which long ago moved out of agriculture into manufacture, has increased in farm tenancy ratios. The increase has been from around one million farm tenants forty years ago to nearly two and a half million farmer tenants today.

Farm Tenant Increases

Farm tenancy has never been a problem in New England because her soils and crops are unsuited to tenant farming. Excepting Maine, it is not an important agricultural region and farm tenancy has remained static throughout the last forty years, standing still at 7.5 percent. The same is largely true of the Middle Atlantic states where tenant farmers have always cultivated about one-fifth of the farms. In the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain states, tenancy ratios have risen or fallen slightly as farming has been profitable or unprofitable. In the great agricultural region of the Middle West and the Great Lakes, farm tenancy has steadily increased, the rise being from one-fifth of all farms operated by tenants forty years ago to nearly one-third at the present time. In four of the Corn Belt states the tenancy ratios now run beyond two-fifths—in Kansas, Iowa, Illinois, and Nebraska.

Tenancy in the South

The farm tenant problem is a serious one in any state or county, and the increased ratios of tenancy are beginning at last to attract attention in America. If it is a serious problem elsewhere it is an alarming problem in the South, for it is in the South that tenancy has made most rapid increases both in the number of tenants and in the percent of farms operated by tenants. Forty years ago just a little more than one-third of all farms in the sixteen Southern states were cultivated by tenants. To-day exactly one-half of all the farms in the South are operated by tenants, and in cotton and tobacco counties nearly three-fourths of the farmers are tenants. The farms operated by tenants in the South number 1,591,059 and these landless farmers with their families number eight million souls.

American farm tenancy is largely a Southern problem for it is in the South that almost exactly two-thirds of all the tenants of the entire nation are concentrated. To be exact, 64.5 percent of all farm tenants in the United States are located in the sixteen Southern states. And the great bulk of these are massed in the eight hundred counties that produce cotton and tobacco, the two best tenant crops known to man anywhere on earth.

A White Man's Problem

Contrary to the prevailing notion, Southern farm tenancy is a white man's problem; not so for every Southern state, but so for the South as a whole. In the thirteen states that produce cotton as a cash crop, 61.5 percent of all tenants are white farmers and only 38.5 percent are negro farmers. If the other three states were included the white tenant ratios would be even higher. There are 154,348 more white than negro farm tenants

in the South, and with their families they outnumber the negro farm tenant population by 800,000 souls. In eleven of the sixteen Southern states there are more white than negro tenants. In the great cotton state of Texas nearly four-fifths of all the farm tenants are white.

The Facts in Carolina

In North Carolina farm tenancy is concentrated in the cotton and tobacco counties. It is mainly an eastern problem. But in North Carolina just as in the South as a whole it is a white man's problem. The white tenants outnumber the negro tenants by 10,000. Their families counted, the white farm tenant population is 50,000 greater than that of the negro. As the years pass, the ratio steadily works against the whites and in favor of the negroes, for throughout the South negroes are increasing in the ratios of farm ownership while the whites show a steady increase in farm tenancy. In other words, the negroes are moving into farm ownership, and the whites into farm tenancy. Thus the problem is increasingly a white man's problem. In Virginia more than three-fourths of all the negro farmers own their farms. In North Carolina more than a third of the negro farmers are owners, not tenants. During the last census period their gain in farm ownership was small, but it has been startling during the last forty years.

What the Decreases Mean

The fatal law seems to be that the more populous and prosperous an agricultural area is, the fewer are the farmers who own the land they cultivate. A decreasing tenant ratio means, it seems, so far in America, a dwindling agriculture. Tenancy thrives where land is rich and farming is profitable. It loses out elsewhere. Poor soil areas will produce neither crops nor tenants. The New England states have long been of decreasing importance in agriculture and so tenancy has been static. During the last ten years the tenant rate for the United States increased just a little over one percent, and people spread the good tidings that tenancy was solving itself. And so it is in some regions, for the farm tenants are moving off the farms and into towns, which accounts for the increased ratio of farm owners. For the first time in our history the farm population of the United States showed an actual loss of farmers during a census period. Between 1910 and 1920, twenty-four states lost in the number of farms and twenty-three states, exactly the same states with only three exceptions, lost in the number of farm tenants. The loss in the number of farms was due to the exodus of farm tenants. Just two southern states decreased in the ratio of farm tenants and they are the only states in the South that also decreased in the number of farms during the last ten-year period. An increase in tenancy means an increase in the importance of agriculture. A decrease in tenancy means a dwindling agriculture, fewer farms and less land in cultivation.

It is true in this state, for the great agricultural region of the east made a great gain in tenancy while in the piedmont and mountain regions tenancy declined. There the tenants in great swarms move off the farms and into the manufacturing towns and cities. They have changed their lot from farm tenants to wage earners in mill villages, and today the piedmont and mountain counties have fewer farms, and farming is not relatively as important as it was ten years ago. Absorbing farm tenants in manufacturing enterprises throughout the South, as in the western part of this state, seems to be one of the main solutions of the farm tenant problem. It has worked to wonderful advantage in the mid-state and western half of North Carolina. The South will decrease in farm tenancy when we move over into industrial development and our tenants become laborers in manufacturing establishments.

We need a better balance between agriculture and manufacture, so that our tenants can become a farm asset instead of a liability. Or we need fundamental changes in the social-economics of land tenure—in particular in the

A SACRED TRUST

Walter H. Page

The most sacred thing in the Commonwealth and to the Commonwealth is the child, whether it be your child or the child of the dull-faced mother of the hovel. The child of the dull-faced mother may, for all you know, be the most capable child in the state. At its worst, it is capable of good citizenship and a useful life, if its intelligence be quickened and trained.

Several of the strongest personalities that were ever born in North Carolina were men whose very fathers were unknown. We have all known two such, who held high places in church and state. President Eliot said a little while ago that the ablest man that he had known in his many years' connection with Harvard University was the son of a brick mason.

The child, whether it have poor parents or rich parents, is the most valuable undeveloped resource of the state.—Rebuilding Old Commonwealths.

principle of taxing land values.

Elsewhere in this issue we present farm tenancy ratios by states in 1880 and 1920.

FARM TENANCY IN CAROLINA

The problem of increasing farm tenancy in North Carolina was interestingly discussed Monday night in a report by A. M. Moser on The Landless Farmer in North Carolina, at a meeting of the North Carolina Club, which is this year making a study of farm and home ownership in the state and nation. Farm tenancy, it was shown by Mr. Moser, has been steadily on the increase, and this fact together with the social and economic consequences of tenancy makes this problem one of great concern.

Every census taken in North Carolina since 1880 has shown farm tenancy to be increasing in the state. The percentage of tenancy has steadily climbed until in 1920 nearly half or 43.5 percent of our farmers were tenants. In that year we had 16,038 more farms in the state than in 1910. Of this increase, 10,170 farms were operated by tenants, and only 6,056 farms were operated by owners. And the white farm tenants of North Carolina now outnumber the negro farm tenants by more than 10,000.

Farm tenancy is found mainly in the cotton and tobacco sections. It has been found that in proportion as a county produces cotton or tobacco, just in that proportion will it be a tenant area. In Scotland county, the leading cotton county of the state, size considered, four of every five farms are cultivated by tenants. Edgecombe county with 79.4 percent and Greene with 78.2 percent are close competitors.

The economic and social results of tenancy are worse than most people realize. Moving from place to place, as most of them do each year or every few years, tenant farmers are rarely ever able to accumulate property and to rise out of tenancy into ownership. It is true that they create considerable wealth, but from various causes it slips through their fingers, and when they approach old age most of them have very little more than when they started. People who are constantly on the move, who never stay at any one place long enough to form local affiliations, are little likely to take enough interest in schools and churches to receive much benefit from them. This is said to be responsible for much or most of the illiteracy in North Carolina. Tenancy and illiteracy go hand in hand. Tenancy breeds illiteracy, illiteracy breeds tenancy, and both breed poverty. We shall always have illiteracy and poverty in our country areas so long as we have croppers in swelling numbers. These and other social problems concern our white and black farm tenants in the main. With their families they now number more than 600,000 souls, and the white tenant outnumbers the negro tenant popu-

lation 50,000 or more in North Carolina. A table showing (1) the ratios of farm tenancy by counties in 1920, and (2) the increases or decreases during the census period 1910-20 was published in the University News Letter, Volume 7, No. 36.

What About Your County?

This table enables thoughtful people to know the extent of this evil in their home counties, to know how their counties rank in this particular, and to verify or correct the conclusions of Mr. Moser.

Are there fewer tenants in your county? If so, are there fewer farms, is there therefore less land in cultivation and a larger number of wilderness acres? Does decreasing tenancy mean a dwindling agriculture?

Does excessive tenancy mean (1) farms falling into waste in soil fertility, dwellings, out-houses, fences, and the like? Does it mean (2) small financial support by farm tenants for schools and churches, along with poor attendance, and therefore chronic illiteracy and decreasing church influence in white tenant areas? In other words, does it menace the country church and country school alike? (3) Does excessive negro tenancy mean the exodus of white farm families and increasing negro farm ownership in certain areas? Where, for instance? (4) Does excessive tenancy, white and black, mean instable and therefore irresponsible citizenship—reckless disregard for law and order, moonshine distilling and boot-legging, crimes of violence, manslaughter, lynching and the like? (5) It produces great volumes of crop wealth—high averages per acre, but low averages per worker. Does it also produce wealth that does not and cannot remain in any large part in the hands of the producers? Or even in the area in which it is produced—say, with the traders and bankers in the local towns? In other words, farm tenancy is a wealth-producing system, but is it also a wealth-retaining system? If not, why not? (6) Does excessive farm tenancy breed increasing social problems—illiteracy, poverty, ill health, feeble-mindedness, and the like, and lay increasing burdens on state and local treasuries for almshouses and outside poor relief, public health, and public hospital and nursing service, court, jail, and chain gang costs? And so on and on.

Mr. Moser will be glad to hear from anybody in the state who thinks clearly-headedly about the economic, social, and civic consequences of farm tenancy in North Carolina. Write him, if you will.—J. G. Gullick.

POOLING COTTON IN TEXAS

How demonstration work in cooperative cotton marketing is aiding farmers during the current season is illustrated by the story of a pool formed in Texas, as reported by the Bureau of Markets and Crop Estimates of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Three hundred bales of cotton were placed in this pool. Individually the growers had been offered from 3 to 7 cents a pound for the cotton on their local market. The entire lot was classed by representatives of the federal bureau and grade cards issued to the owners. The samples were then forwarded to Dallas and the cotton trade invited to bid. The lot was sold at 10.25 cents a pound average.

On the classification made by the Bureau's representative the pool averaged 75 points off Middling. The Middling spot price at Dallas on the day of the sale was 10.35 cents. The growers' accounts were settled on the basis of the grade cards issued for the individual bales, using the Dallas differences for the day.—Press Service, U. S. Dept. of Agriculture.

CHAPEL HILL CONFERENCE

You missed something if you failed to attend the town and county conference at the University of North Carolina the last of September, and in which the National Municipal League cooperated.

It was a regional conference. Matters of general interest were discussed from a local viewpoint. But the man from another state felt right at home, partly because of the mellow hospitality of the natives and partly because he recognized the troubles of North Carolina towns and counties as old acquaintances.

Those present came prepared to search deeply the soul of North Carolina and to act on the evidence disclosed. The state superintendent of public instruction, Dr. E. C. Brooks, unmercifully probed the financial methods of the counties. The conditions he disclosed were nothing to make a Tar Heel feel proud. They do feel determined, however, and at the last session of the conference completed an organization designed for immediate action through education and legislation. They intend to modernize North Carolina county government.

Mr. Arthur N. Pierson, author of the New Jersey finance acts, made two talks and submitted to long cross-examinations. The cities are in trouble and they are inclined to distrust their new, excellent finance act. Pierson's plea was, "Boys, don't let them repeat it." The only way out is through strict adherence to sound business practice.

We can expect progress from North Carolina. We shall be grievously disappointed if it is not forthcoming. Professor E. C. Branson has been the leading spirit through the North Carolina Club, which was organized seven years ago to study the home state. The club has turned out some excellent reports on local conditions. A weekly News Letter goes to more than 20,000 addresses. The new School of Public Welfare, under Professor H. W. Odum, will attend to the social problems of the towns and counties. There is a fine spirit of cooperation between the University and the public officials throughout the state.—Municipal Quarterly Review.

FARM TENANCY IN THE UNITED STATES

Showing Tenancy Ratios by States in 1880 and 1920

Based on the Reports of the Census Bureau

In 1880 the farms in the United States cultivated by tenants were 1,024,601; in 1920, the number of tenant farms was 2,454,746. In forty years the number was multiplied by nearly two and a half. During these forty years the ratio of tenant farms to all farms increased from 25.5 percent to 38.1 percent.

Department of Rural Social Science, University of North Carolina

Rank	State	Percent of farms operated by tenants		Rank	State	Percent of farms operated by tenants	
		1920	1880			1920	1880
1	Maine.....	4.2	4.3	25	Florida.....	25.3	30.9
2	New Hampshire..	6.7	8.1	26	North Dakota....	25.6	3.9
3	Massachusetts...	7.1	8.2	26	Virginia.....	25.6	29.5
4	Connecticut.....	8.5	10.2	28	Missouri.....	28.8	27.3
5	Nevada.....	9.4	9.7	29	Maryland.....	28.9	31.0
6	Utah.....	10.9	4.6	30	Ohio.....	29.5	19.3
7	Montana.....	11.3	5.3	31	Indiana.....	32.0	23.7
8	Vermont.....	11.6	13.4	32	Kentucky.....	33.4	26.4
9	New Mexico.....	12.2	8.1	33	South Dakota....	34.9	3.9
10	Wyoming.....	12.5	2.8	34	Delaware.....	39.3	42.4
11	Wisconsin.....	14.4	9.1	35	Kansas.....	40.4	16.3
12	Rhode Island...	15.5	19.9	36	Tennessee.....	41.1	34.5
13	Idaho.....	15.9	4.7	37	Iowa.....	41.7	23.8
14	W. Virginia.....	16.2	19.1	38	Illinois.....	42.7	21.4
15	Michigan.....	17.7	10.0	39	Nebraska.....	42.9	18.0
16	Arizona.....	18.1	13.2	40	North Carolina..	43.5	33.5
17	Washington.....	18.7	7.2	41	Oklahoma.....	51.0
18	Oregon.....	18.8	14.1	42	Arkansas.....	51.3	30.9
19	New York.....	19.2	16.5	43	Texas.....	53.3	37.6
20	California.....	21.4	19.8	44	Louisiana.....	57.1	35.2
21	Pennsylvania....	21.9	21.2	45	Alabama.....	57.9	46.8
22	New Jersey.....	23.0	24.6	46	Mississippi.....	60.1	43.8
22	Colorado.....	23.0	13.0	47	S. Carolina.....	64.5	50.3
24	Minnesota.....	24.7	9.2	48	Georgia.....	66.6	44.9