

Agriculture continues change

Editor's Note: This is the third in a series of four articles focusing on the changes in North Carolina farm structure since 1950.

There has been much change in North Carolina agriculture over the last three decades. Here are some of them:

- (1) The amount of land used for agricultural purposes has diminished.
- (2) The amount of labor has decreased.
- (3) There has been a shift to nonfarm-produced inputs such as powered machinery.

The amount of land in farms in North Carolina in 1950 was about 20 million acres. From 1950 to 1984, the amount of farmland declined slowly but steadily, resulting in approximately 11 million acres in production in 1984. This is a decrease of 45% over the period.

North Carolina is naturally separated into three geographic regions: Mountain, Piedmont and Coastal Plain. Some areas lend themselves to agricultural uses more easily than other areas. For example, about 60% of land has been taken out of agricultural uses in the mountains as compared to a withdrawal of 30% in the coastal plain region.

Over time, the importance of agriculture has decreased as service manufacturing industries have expanded. This has been more characteristic of the Piedmont than of the other regions of North Carolina.

Some land with a history in crop



Extension News
Willie Featherstone Jr.
County Extension
Chairman

or livestock production has been bought for industrial or residential use or has reverted to forested land. The increased demand for land for nonfarm uses is one factor that increases land prices.

Farm real estate values have increased substantially since 1950. In 1950 an average acre of farmland could have been purchased for about \$140.00 (1967 dollars). In the mid-1960's, this value had increased to \$265.00 per acre (1967 dollars). Land costs continued to rise through the 1970s and up to the present. Last year, farm real estate could be bought for an average of \$440.00 per acre.

Rising land prices have several effects upon agriculture. First, because of higher land values, full costs of production are increased. Second, fixed costs are higher and the demand for financing is increased. This results in more land rental and more combinations of ownership and rental as farms expand.

Farm labor wage rates also have increased production costs. As new industries and opportunities arrive in rural communities in North Carolina, better-paying jobs become available and some farm workers take advantage of these new opportunities. Because there are better opportunities for farm

workers, producers have to pay a higher wage to keep workers.

Therefore, as industries expand and more jobs become available, labor costs for farmers increase.

Increased labor costs have caused a shift away from labor to more technological means of production.

For example, there has been a shift in the tobacco industry, especially in flue-cured tobacco, from traditional stick barns to labor-saving bulk-curing barns. Also, with advanced technology, mechanical tobacco harvester have replaced hand harvesting, especially in the Coastal Plain where the land is flatter, fields larger, and the crop more even.

Another example of this shift away from labor to more capital-intensive operations is in hay production. In the past hay was loaded by pitchfork onto a horse-drawn wagon.

Later people turned to the square bale, making the loading and hauling of hay much easier.

For the last several years, however, the round bale has been gaining more importance in hay production. With this new procedure, one person can manage a hay enterprise.

The largest change in agriculture in this century was the emergence of the tractor. Forty years ago the horse and mule were the major sources of power on the North Carolina farm.

Today, however, true "horse" power was disappeared from the farm.



Changing colors

Leaves around Hoke County are beginning to show fall colors as temperatures begin to drop. This weekend is supposed to be the peak of the leaf

season in the mountain areas of the state, but local colors have a way to way.

Free trees offered for membership

Ten free flowering trees will be given to people who join the National Arbor Day Foundation during October.

The Foundation will give two White Dogwood, two American Redbud, two European Mountainash, two Washington Hawthorn and two Flowering Crab trees to members joining during October. The free trees are part of the Foundation's efforts to improve the quality of life in America by encouraging tree planting.

"The Foundation is encouraging more people to plant trees in the fall, which is an excellent time for tree planting," John Rosenow, the Foundation's executive director, said. "So we're giving these free flowering trees to people who make a \$10 membership contribution during October."

"These trees were selected because they will give a colorful flowering of pink, white, and red blossoms throughout the spring," Rosenow added. "The six to 12-inch trees will be sent postpaid

at the right time for planting between October 15 and December 10, with enclosed planting instructions. The trees are guaranteed to grow, or we will replace them free of charge."

To become a member of the Foundation and to receive the free trees, a \$10 membership contribution should be sent to FLOWERING TREES, National Arbor Day Foundation, 100 Arbor Avenue, Nebraska City, NE 68410, by October 31, 1985.

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