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# THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

## NEWS LETTER

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### NEGRO FARM OPERATORS IN 1920

#### TEN-YEAR GAINS AND LOSSES

It is an age old proverb that he who cultivates the land will some day own it. We have lived long enough to see the great baronial estates all over Europe pass largely into the hands of descendants of people who were once serfs, but whose progeny has remained with the soil. Today in France seventy-five percent of the farmers own their farms. In Denmark ninety percent of all farmers are farm owners while sixty years ago the same high percentages were tenants. And so to a lesser degree in nearly all northwestern and western Europe. The English tenant virtually owns the land he farms.

We are carrying in this issue of the News Letter a table showing how the counties of this state have increased and decreased in Negro farm operators during the last ten years. He who farms the land will some day own the soil. It is the verdict of history. A half century ago practically all Negroes were slaves. Today more than seventy-five percent of all Negro farmers in Virginia own the land they cultivate and in this state Negro farm owners are around thirty-five percent of all Negro farmers. The Negroes of the South today own nearly as much land, farm land, as is contained in the whole state of North Carolina—this after only half a century. The Negro farm ownership ratio is increasing in the whole South while at the same time white farm owners are a decreasing ratio. The ratio of land ownership in the South is in favor of the colored race. And why? Because Negro farmers are an increasing ratio of all farmers. During the last ten years the white population increased twice as fast as the Negro population but Negro farmers increased 16.2 percent while white farmers increased only 2.8 percent. Ten years ago 25.9 percent of all our farmers in this state were Negroes. Today they are 28.3 percent of all farmers. And remember, the white population gained twice as fast as the colored, but the white increase moved into towns and cities while the Negroes remained on the farm. And he who cultivates the soil will some day own it.

#### Where Mainly

The counties that gained in Negro farmers lie almost entirely in the Coastal Plains region where the cash crops, cotton and tobacco, are produced, and those counties of the Hill country along the Virginia border that grow tobacco. Every single county in the eastern half of the state except eight Tidewater counties which produce little cotton or tobacco has more Negro farmers than ten years ago.

#### Lenoir Leads

There are 71.6 percent more Negro farmers in Lenoir than ten years ago and she easily leads all the counties of the state in ten-year gains. Wilson is her nearest rival, the Negro farmers having increased 57.9 percent. Other leading counties are Pitt with a gain of 54.6 percent, Greene 50.6 percent, Pamlico 49.2 percent, Gates 48.1 percent, Scotland 47.5 percent, Edgecombe 47.1 percent, and Sampson 46.9 percent of gain. These are all cotton and tobacco areas, or are moving in that direction as in counties like Gates and Pamlico. The counties increased in Negro farmers almost in proportion as they are cotton and tobacco producers. Counties like Lenoir, Wilson, Pitt, Greene, Edgecombe, Scotland, and Sampson, that produce both cotton and tobacco, made the highest gains, while those where just one cash crop predominates show lower gains.

#### Paradoxes

To give some idea of the rapidity with which Negroes are supplanting whites as farmers, we are offering some facts. Ten years ago the Negroes in Lenoir were 44.9 percent of all people. Today they are 44.2 percent. But during this ten-year period Negro farmers increased 71.6 percent while white farmers increased only 9.6 percent. The Negro farmer gain was nine times the white gain.

Or again take Wilson, the great tobacco county. The Negro population ratio is almost exactly the same today

as it was ten years ago. But during the ten-year period Negro farmers increased 57.9 percent, while white farmers gained only 16.4 percent. In Pitt, another great tobacco county, the farms operated by white farmers increased 6.4 percent, while Negro farmers are 54.6 percent more than ten years ago. In Greene county, the Negro farmers increased five times as rapidly as white farmers. In Gates county the Negro farm operators increased seven times as rapidly as white. The white farmers of Scotland decreased 9.2 percent while Negro farmers increased 47.5 percent. There are today more than twice as many colored farmers in Scotland as white farmers. Edgecombe is a great farm county but the Negro farmers gained more than four times as rapidly as white farmers. In Washington county the white farmers gained 2.4 percent while the Negro gain was 46.1 percent, or about twenty times as great. Wayne is another great farm county and here the Negro gain in farm operators was 42.5 percent against 15.3 percent for whites.

#### A Decreasing Ratio

Negroes are a decreasing ratio of population in this state.

Ten years ago they composed 31.6 percent of our people. Today only 29.8 percent are negroes. But during this ten-year period in 48 counties, mainly in the great cotton and tobacco belt, Negro farm operators gained faster than whites. In nearly all the counties where Negroes dwell they remained on the farm to a larger extent than the white people. About four-fifths of all Negroes in the state live in these 48 counties. They are rapidly gaining as a ratio of all farmers. Already in eleven counties there are more Negro than white farmers. In Scotland county there are twice as many, and in Halifax county there are 3,303 Negro farmers against 1,868 white farmers. He who cultivates the soil will some day own it. In our great Coastal Plains, the important agricultural area of North Carolina, Negro farmers are an increasing ratio, and a rapidly increasing ratio. Although in 52 counties, mainly in the western half of the state the ratio of change was in favor of white farmers, the Negro gain in ratio in the other 48 counties was large enough to cause the ratio for the state at large to be decidedly in favor of the colored race. Negro farmers increased 16.2 percent against a gain of only 2.8 percent for white farmers.

#### The West Decreases

During the last census period 32 counties, all west of Greensboro except eight Tidewater counties, decreased in the number of Negro farmers. The eight Tidewater counties that decreased are not cash crop counties nor are they very important agricultural counties, with one exception. The 24 western counties that lost Negro farmers and eight mountain counties where there are no Negro farmers are manufacturing, or grain, hay and forage, and livestock counties and have no crop or agricultural system that is suited to Negro farm cultivators. The few Negroes who have moved to the western counties have discovered that their temperament is not suited to food-and-feed crop and livestock farming. They thrive best where cotton is grown, and they produce good crops of tobacco under proper supervision in some processes, especially curing.

The western half of our state will always be relatively free from Negroes. The eastern half, the cash crop area, has always been the center of Negro population. The agriculture of the east best suits them and the fact that they are so well adapted to the cash crop system largely explains why the eastern half of our state cannot free itself from this profitless system. And the eastern counties are gaining in Negro farmers at ratios that are appalling. This means that these counties will find it harder and harder to move into diversified agriculture.

We do not know what the future holds for the east. We can only present the changes that have taken place during the last ten years and state that they are typical of ratio changes for

### THE GOSPEL OF WORK

Labor is life. It is all thou hast to comfort eternity with. Work then like a star, unshining, yet un-resting.—Carlyle.

We are not sent into this world to do anything into which we cannot put our hearts. We have certain work to do for our bread and that is to be done strenuously; other work to do for our delight, and that is to be done heartily; neither is to be done by halves or shifts but with a will; and what is not worth this effort is not to be done at all.—Ruskin.

several decades; only the last ten years have shown an accelerated gain in favor of Negro farmers. We know that at present farming is not a profitable business, and our towns and cities are being populated by white people who are moving off the farms and who are leaving their home places to be operated by Negro farmers. Solving country life problems in such areas becomes increasingly hard. We cannot hope for the best social or economic conditions for the whites who remain on the farm if the farm ratio swells in favor of colored farmers. Cooperative marketing, cooperative credit facilities, and good rural schools and churches all depend on a relatively dense rural white population. The present population movements are very decidedly in favor of a Negro farm population for the eastern half of our state in a very few more years. And he who cultivates the soil will some day own it.—S. H. H., Jr.

### A NEW ERA IN COTTON

If the Government report on the cotton acreage issued July 1 is anywhere near correct it probably ushers in a new era in the history of the South and assures a permanently higher range of prices in the future.

This we say because the curtailment in acreage shows that through adversity the farmers have at last learned to cooperate in reducing the production and have thereby been made conscious of their power to control prices.

However small the next crop may be it is impossible to figure out a scarcity during the coming season but far-sighted men are now upon notice that the South is no longer under compulsion to grow cotton unless it is profitable. At just what price the farmer will consider that he is repaid for his labor and risk no one can say, but it is safe to assume that it will be well above the pre-war average and that an adequate supply of cotton hereafter will depend upon what can be obtained for it.—Theo. H. Price.

### A FARM COLONY

Location in North Carolina of a colony of 500 families, for agricultural purposes is a possibility, according to a statement issued by the Chamber of Commerce of Greensboro. The Record tells this story:

The local chamber is in touch with an eastern syndicate, the object of which is to colonize about 500 families for agricultural purposes. At the present time the syndicate has 300 families who are ready to go as soon as acreage has been secured. The syndicate would like to secure from 10,000 to 75,000 acres of land that could be used for agriculture, stock, and fruit purposes.

This syndicate proposes to establish a town site wherever the land is secured and to establish a bank, large cannery, commissary, school, church, creamery, and other enterprises that would go to make up a community.

While this syndicate is now considering locating in another state, if suitable land can be had in North Carolina the colony can be obtained. The Chamber of Commerce would like to hear from parties who have such a body of land to offer near Greensboro; if not near Greensboro, near the center of the state. Anybody who has anything along this line should communicate with the Secretary, C. W. Roberts, of the Chamber of Commerce, promptly.—Lexington Dispatch.

### TENANCY AND THE CENSUS

Farm tenancy is still increasing in the United States—it has done so since 1880, when statistics were first collected—but the rate is slowing. In the decade of agricultural depression, Populism, and free silver, 1890-1900, the percentage of tenancy rose from 28.4 to 35.3. In the next ten years it advanced to 37 percent. Census returns issued this week show that it is now 38.1 percent. A certain amount of tenancy may be healthful, for tenancy is the process by which landless men acquire money to buy farms, and by which men with a little land obtain the cultivation of a sufficient number of acres to employ their full energies. Nevertheless, tenancy can so easily become a social and agricultural evil that its growth has been watched with concern.

It is especially pleasing to find that where tenancy was highly excessive, in the South, it has not risen. In the East South Central States it was 50.7 percent a decade ago, and now is 49.7 percent. In the West South Central States it was 52.8 percent, and is now 52.9 percent. It has fallen in Alabama, Kentucky, Florida, Maryland, Oklahoma, West Virginia, and Virginia, and remained stationary in Mississippi and Tennessee. [Only a few of the 800 cash crop counties of the South, where tenancy gained rapidly, are in these border Southern states.] This suggests, in the first place, that the old tenant groups are more and more able to buy their land, a conclusion which investigations among the Negroes have prepared us to accept. In the second place, it shows that we were right in attributing the rapid increase of tenancy in the South after 1880 to the break-up of large farms into small holdings, and

that this process is approaching an end.

It has been believed that the peak of farm tenancy has been steadily moving from East to West. The last census indicates that this is true. In the New England and Middle Atlantic States the proportion of farms tilled by tenants has fallen markedly. In the North Central States east of the Mississippi it rose only 1.1 percent. In the North Central States west of the Mississippi it rose 3.3 percent. In the Mountain States it rose almost 5 percent. This is probably because in Illinois average farm values have risen more sharply than in New York, in Nebraska more sharply than in Illinois, making it harder for the tenant as he goes west, compared with ten years ago, to push into the farm-owner groups. Also, in the West Central and Mountain States a large part of the original pioneer generation has in the last decade retired from the farm. If tenancy must rise anywhere, it is better to find it rising in the newer sections. If it remains stationary in the older, we can trust that the day will come when it can be held stationary for the nation.

Very little land in the United States can now be obtained free; our farmers must get their holdings by inheritance or by purchase. The Government owes it to agriculture to help provide a credit system which will facilitate farm acquisition by the last-named means. As yet our Federal farm loan banks do not offer loans to tenants, and an extension of their service is much needed. For the rest, anything that increases the farmers' prosperity will increase ownership by the tiller.—New York Evening Post.

### NEGRO FARM OPERATORS IN NORTH CAROLINA IN 1920

#### Percents Increase or Decrease, 1910-20

Counties ranked from high to low. Based on Press Summaries of the 1920 Census. Farms Operated by Negroes Increased 16.2 percent. Farms Operated by Whites Increased 2.8 percent.

Rural Social Science Department, University of North Carolina.

INCREASES			INCREASES		
Rank	County	Percent increase	Rank	County	Percent increase
1	Lenoir	71.6	48	Chatham	6.1
2	Wilson	57.9	49	Hertford	5.8
3	Pitt	54.6	50	Rowan	4.4
4	Greene	50.6	51	Pender	3.5
5	Pamlico	49.2	52	Vance	2.2
6	Gates	48.1	53	Chowan	0.8
7	Scotland	47.5	54	Cherokee	0.0
8	Edgecombe	47.1	54	Clay	0.0
9	Sampson	46.9	54	Dare	0.0
10	Washington	46.1	54	Graham	0.0
11	Wayne	42.5	54	Haywood	0.0
12	Caswell	42.2	54	Madison	0.0
13	Person	30.9	54	Transylvania	0.0
14	Duplin	29.6	54	Yancey	0.0
15	Martin	26.4			
16	Franklin	25.8	62	Cabarrus	1.4
17	Orange	24.2	63	Columbus	1.6
18	Perquimans	22.8	64	Tyrrell	2.1
19	Anson	22.2	65	Forsyth	2.4
20	Harnett	21.6	66	Ashe	4.0
21	Warren	21.8	67	Mecklenburg	5.9
22	Wake	21.2	67	Yadkin	5.9
23	Onslow	20.9	69	Bladen	6.5
24	Beaufort	20.3	70	Cleveland	7.2
25	Nash	19.0	71	Jackson	8.2
26	Granville	17.8	72	Alleghany	8.5
27	Rockingham	17.7	73	Alexander	8.8
28	Moore	16.0	74	Union	12.3
29	Johnston	15.6	75	Catawba	13.1
30	Currituck	15.2	76	Hyde	15.8
31	Bertie	14.7	76	Randolph	15.8
32	Craven	14.3	78	Stanly	17.5
33	Halifax	13.9	79	Davie	17.6
34	Richmond	13.1	80	Swain	17.9
35	Alamance	13.0	81	Surry	18.6
36	Polk	11.9	82	Stokes	20.1
37	Camden	11.5	83	Gaston	22.2
38	Jones	11.5	84	Burke	23.3
39	Lee	11.0	85	Wilkes	32.1
40	Pasquotank	10.5	86	Lincoln	36.7
41	Northampton	10.0	87	Carteret	37.4
42	Davidson	9.4	88	Brunswick	37.7
43	Guilford	8.9	89	Henderson	38.3
44	Montgomery	8.5	90	McDowell	38.7
45	Iredell	7.8	91	New Hanover	43.7
46	Durham	7.0	92	Buncombe	48.3
47	Rutherford	6.8	93	Macon	50.3

Note: (1) Avery was formed in 1911 out of Watauga, Caldwell, and Mitchell, and does not appear in the 1910 Census. In the area occupied by these four counties the number of farms operated by Negroes decreased 46.1 percent between 1910 and 1921.

(2) Hoke was formed in 1911 out of Cumberland and Robeson. In the area occupied by these three counties the number of farms operated by Negroes increased 22.5 percent during the same period.

(3) Cleveland, Currituck, Dare, Durham, Gaston, Harnett, and Wake had their boundaries slightly changed during the last Census period, but the territory gained or lost was so small in each instance, that the figures for them in the above table are approximately correct.