

A GRAPHIC SUMMARY

FARM TRACTORS

The internal-combustion tractor was first used in farming in the United States shortly before 1910. The early tractors were heavy, crude machines compared with later models. For the most part they were used for performing heavy operations, such as threshing, silo filling, plowing, disking, and harrowing. In many cases they were used at first for belt work and to draw horse and mule implements already available on the farm.

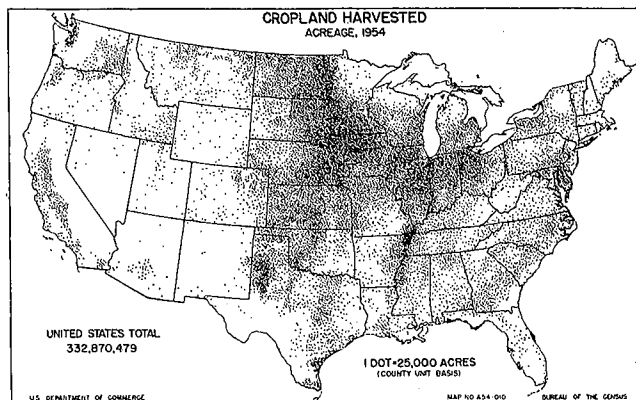
Gradually, tractor design and adaptability for farm jobs were improved. Following introduction of the general purpose tractor in the 1920's, and rubber-tired wheels in the 1930's, tractor numbers and uses increased widely. Old style horse-drawn implements were discarded for more suitable and efficient tractor machines and tools. Improvements in tractor design and in tractor-drawn and mounted machines for fitting land, cultivating and harvesting crops, lifting and moving farm materials and supplies, followed rapidly and continues even today. Recently, more powerful and versatile tractors with improved power take-off units, and tractor-machines have speeded up farmwork in the fields and service areas. Many farm families are now doing the work formerly done with the aid of one or more hired hands. Generally, all kinds of farmwork are being done better and more in season. In many cases the farmer has reduced the average length of many very long work days during rush seasons of the year; he has lessened materially the drudgery which at one time was so evident in farming.

NUMBER OF TRACTORS ON FARMS

There now are on farms of the United States approximately 4.7 million tractors of all types, sizes, and ages, compared with 246,000 on farms in 1920. And in addition, farmers now have between 150,000 and 200,000 self-propelled machines, most of which are harvest machines. In little more than a third of a century, and in the memory of many farmers of today, mechanical power has almost completely displaced animal power for farming purposes. This displacement has resulted in a decrease in horse and mule numbers on farms from 27 million head in 1918 to less than 4 million head at present. Many of the work animals remaining on farms are used little for farmwork.

Tractor numbers of all types on farms have almost doubled since the last year of World War II (1945). This large increase

has taken place even though the level of total agricultural production has increased only moderately. Thus, while total agricultural output has increased since the War by 17 percent, tractor numbers have doubled, increasing from about 2.4 million to 4.7 million. Only a small part of the increase in tractor numbers since 1945 has been caused by loss of work animals. The increase is a part of the general pattern of more fully mechanizing farming operations in the face of rising farm wages, higher value of farm products per acre, and in the general movement throughout all types of industry to reduce labor inputs and excessive drudgery.



The country distribution of number of tractors in 1954 follows closely the distribution of cropland harvested in 1954. Naturally, the greatest concentration of tractors is in areas where the greatest concentration of crops occurs, as, for example, in the Corn Belt, Lake States, Eastern fruit and vegetable areas, the important cotton areas, and the western irrigated and other crop-growing areas. Tractors are relatively less numerous in the eastern Appalachian region where much of the land is in trees and permanent pastures. In the Western States where mountain and arid acreages are large, and where much of the land is in forests and range pastures, tractor numbers per square mile are exceptionally low.

