

AUTOMOBILES ON FARMS

The first automobiles used on farms bore little resemblance to those of today. Relatively little horsepower was developed by the engines which were started manually with a crank. Tires consisted of a fabric body covered with a thin layer of rubber. They required frequent repair and had a short life. In many areas, especially in the Northern States, use of early automobiles was confined largely to the summer months because of bad roads and hard starting. Under most conditions, however, travel time was reduced greatly over travel by use of horses or mules.

By 1920, there were 2,146,000 automobiles on farms, or an average of 1 car for each 3 farms. Few farmers had trucks at that time and the automobile was used for hauling farm produce and supplies as well as for pleasure. Rural travel by automobile was largely over unsurfaced roads because in 1920 only 13 percent of the rural roads were hard-surfaced.

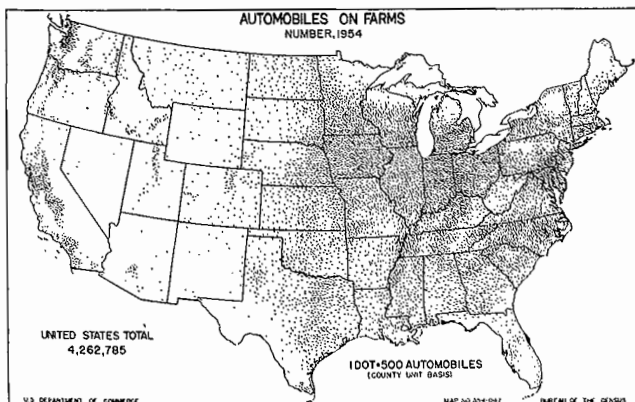
By 1930, many improvements had been made in automobiles and automobile tires. The mileage of improved roads had increased, and the number of automobiles on farms was nearly double the number reported in 1920.

From 1930 to 1954 the number of automobiles on farms increased only 128,000 making a total of 4,263,000 in November 1954. At that time, there was an average of one automobile for each 1.1 farms, but many farms had more than 1.

Although the increase in automobile numbers between 1930 and 1954 was small, it did occur while the number of farms was decreasing from 6.3 million to 4.8 million.

Rural highway improvement continued steadily and by 1954, 63 percent of the mileage was hard-surfaced. Truck numbers on farms have increased, but automobiles still are used to some extent to pull trailers and for hauling small amounts of produce and supplies.

The 4,263,000 automobiles on farms in 1954 were distributed over the country in varying degrees of concentration. Heavy concentrations were evident in States where a high percentage of the land was used for crop production and where farm homes were concentrated. Comparatively few automobiles were reported in much of the western Plains and Mountain regions where ranches and farms are large, and in localized eastern and southern areas where farm population is sparse.



The four Corn Belt States, Indiana, Iowa, Illinois, and Ohio, have a remarkably even distribution and a heavy concentration of automobiles. In Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico relatively few farm automobiles were reported in 1954.

FARMS REPORTING AUTOMOBILES

The number of farms in the United States reporting automobiles has increased and declined during several Census periods, due to several factors. The period 1920 to 1930 was the only period in which a really large increase occurred. Farm incomes were good in the latter half of the decade and the number of farms with automobiles increased rapidly. The low-income years in the first half of the decade between 1930 and 1940, along with some reduction in the number of farms caused a decline during that period in the number of farms with automobiles. With farm incomes rising after 1940, and despite some further reduction in the number of farms, number of farms with automobiles increased until in 1945 the number was about the same as in 1930. From 1945 to 1950, the decline in number of farms with automobiles was noteworthy. Contributing to this decline was a further marked reduction in the number of farms. The number of farms with automobiles reported in 1954 is substantially the same as the number reported in 1950.

Regional changes during the different periods followed the pattern of change for the United States, with the exception of the Corn Belt, where the number of farms reporting automobiles increased between 1930 and 1940. More than a fifth of all the farms reporting automobiles in the United States in 1954 were in this area.

The greatest reduction between 1945 and 1954 in the number of farms reporting automobiles occurred in the Northeast States where the decrease in the number of all farms was greater than in the remaining States. Farmers in the Appalachian, Southeast, and Delta States did not acquire automobiles as rapidly as those in other areas, but the trend in numbers has been upward since 1940. In the Northern and Southern Plains States, where consolidation of farms into larger units has been most pronounced, the trend by 10-year intervals in number of farms reporting automobiles has been downward since 1940.

Almost a third of the farms in the United States reported no automobiles in 1954. Farms with no automobiles are usually small, low-income places, and sometimes are located in rough places not readily accessible to improved roads. Some of them are operated by elderly folks who no longer drive an automobile. Some are farmers who use a pick-up truck for farm and family transportation. Such farms without automobiles were reported in all five areas shown on the map for 1954. They were especially numerous in the southern area, and considerable numbers were in the eastern area.

Of the farms reporting automobiles, more than 80 percent had 1, and the other farms had 2 or more. Farms reporting two or more automobiles are most numerous in the central area, and least numerous in the southern area.