

HORSES AND MULES

Horses were first brought to this country by early explorers of the 17th century. Their number in the United States increased rapidly and continuously with the growth of the new Nation until 1918 when the number of horses and mules on farms and in cities, mines, and elsewhere reached a peak of about 30 million head. In a way, the most important result of modern mechanization has been the displacement of about 85 percent of this vast number of horses and mules by mechanical power. The change from animal to mechanical power on farms and elsewhere, involving a decrease of more than 25 million head of horses and mules has diverted about 80 million acres of cropland and much pasture from production of horse and mule feed to the production of food and fiber for human use. Crop acreages thus released between 1918 and 1956 now produce a large share of the food and fiber used to feed and clothe our larger population. Eighty million acres is about a fourth of the total acres of crops harvested in recent years. Annual colt crops, which from 1910 to 1920 usually exceeded 2 million head, have declined to less than 100,000 head. This number is not sufficient to maintain present numbers of horses and mules on farms. However, there are only

about 4 million head now on farms, and we can no longer look to disappearance of horses and mules to supply many additional acres for food production.

When farming was done with animal power, horses were used primarily in the northern and western farming areas, and mules were used principally in the Southern States. The horse numbers were most dense in the Central and Lake States where large acreages were in corn and other row crops that required several cultivations during the growing season. The general pattern of horse and mule numbers changed markedly between 1920 and 1954. Density is much thinner throughout the country now than it was in 1920, although numbers of horses and mules still are relatively dense in the Southeastern States. In 1954, about 37 percent of all horses and mules in the United States were in the Appalachian and Southern areas, compared with only 14 percent in 1920. From April 1950 to November 1954, horse and mule numbers decreased throughout the country, although increases were reported in a few counties in Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona.

