

SERVICE EQUIPMENT

Farms in some rural areas have had telephone service for a long time. Now electricity on the farm is supplying the heat and energy long lacking for really modernizing the farm home. Electric toasters, irons, radios, refrigerators, space heaters, and washing machines are commonplace pieces of electrical equipment in many farm homes. Television sets, home freezers, and running water in the home are becoming more commonplace, although many farm homes still lack one or more of these items. The discussion in this section deals with four of these service items for which the Census obtains data. These items are telephones, television sets, home freezers, and piped running water.

TELEPHONES

Of all our early technological developments, the telephone was one of the most rapidly accepted and widely distributed on farms. The telephone was invented in 1876 and by 1920 almost 40 per cent of all farms had a telephone. Many of the early telephone lines were inexpensively constructed with the wires strung on fence posts, trees, and small poles. Frequently a dozen or more farms were on one "party line." Exchange service often was unsatisfactory. By 1930, farms with telephones had decreased from the number in 1920 (2,498,000) by more than a third of a million, and by 1940 another decrease of more than a half million had taken place. The depression of the 1930's contributed to the latter decrease. Another important factor, however, was the prevalence of automobiles and hard-surfaced roads which gave the farmer more mobility and greatly reduced his isolation. The radio also helped keep him in contact with the central markets, the weather reports, and other developments.

With the increase in commercial farming and in farm incomes after 1940, the percentage of farms with telephone service increased. By 1945, 32 percent of the farms had telephone service, and by 1950 about 38 percent had the service. In 1949 the Rural Electrification Administration was authorized by Congress to make loans to expand and improve telephone service in rural areas. By 1954 almost half of the farms had telephones.

The Northeastern area, with 77 percent of the farms reporting telephones in November 1954, topped all other farming regions in the proportion of farms with individual phone service. The Pacific area was close behind with 75 percent, and the Corn Belt was next with 71 percent of the farmers reporting telephones. In the Delta States, 17 percent of the farmers had telephones and in the Southeast, 20 percent. Iowa, with 168,000 farms reporting telephones, had more farms with telephones than any other State.

The number of farmers with telephone service increased from 1950 to 1954 by almost 13 percent. All 10 areas of the country shared in this increase. The Appalachian area with an increase of 54,000 farms reporting telephones, and the southeastern area with an increase of 49,000 farms reporting telephones lead other areas in the increase. For the Southeastern area, however, the increase amounted to 84 percent compared to an increase of 32 percent in the Appalachian area. Although more farms in all regions had telephones in 1954 than in 1950, some counties, especially in the New England States, had fewer farms with telephones at the end of the 5-year period. A large part of this decrease resulted from decrease in total number of farms rather than from the discontinuation of telephone service.

PERCENT OF FARMS REPORTING TELEPHONES, 1954
(COUNTY UNIT BASIS)

