

SUBUNITS IN MULTIPLE UNITS AS A PERCENT OF ALL FARMS, 1954
(COUNTY UNIT BASIS)

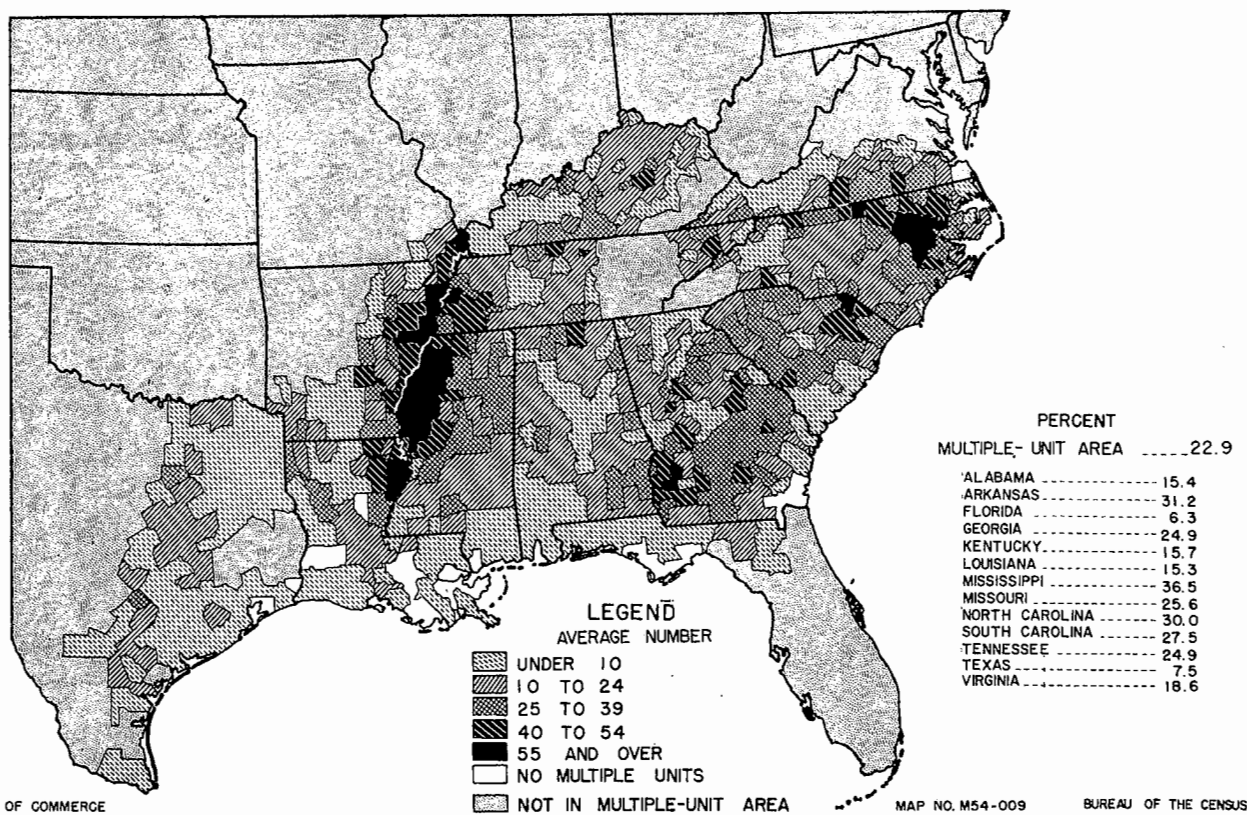


Figure 21.

MULTIPLE-UNIT OPERATIONS

The nature of multiple units.—A classification as broad as that set up by the Census Bureau definition of a farm necessarily includes many different types of agricultural units. Some of these types, because of their distinctive characteristics, are given separate treatment in the Census reports. Multiple-unit operations comprise one such special class.

Many landholdings, particularly in the Southern States, contain several farms, as farms are defined by the Census Bureau, but in reality these farms belong to one landlord, and in many instances they are managed as a single farm business unit. The listing of these farms only as individual farms gives an incomplete picture of the actual nature of farming in these areas and, for this reason, it has been considered desirable to present statistics for the overall management units as well as for the separate farms. Information has been collected pertaining to such characteristics as the number, size, relative importance, and major crops of certain types of multiple-unit operations.

To qualify as a multiple-unit operation, a landholding must consist of two or more farms, one of which may be the "home" farm, and all others must be operated by sharecroppers. Thus, the distinguishing feature of multiple-unit operations, as here defined, is that the landlord provides all of the work power for the farms in the unit. Statistics have been compiled for those counties in which multiple-unit operations form a significant part of the agriculture. In 1954, these counties numbered nearly 900, most of which were in the Southeast.

Distribution.—The concentration of multiple units was heaviest in the Mississippi Delta region, with pockets in eastern North Carolina and southwestern Georgia. In Mississippi, more than

35 percent of all farms were in multiple units and these units contained almost half of the cropland harvested in the State in 1954. In the multiple-unit area of Arkansas, the percentages for farms and cropland harvested were 31.2 and 38.6, respectively. At the other extreme, in the newer agricultural regions of the South—Texas and Florida—this type of farm organization is relatively insignificant. For the multiple-unit area as a whole, more than one-fifth of all farms were part of multiple-unit operations.

Cotton and tobacco.—The nature of multiple-unit operations becomes clearer when we consider the type of farming that is associated with them. Cotton and tobacco seem to be particularly well adapted to this type of operation. Nearly 35 percent of the total cotton acreage harvested was on multiple-unit farms. The percentage of cotton acreage in multiple-unit farms was 55.8 for Mississippi. The percentages of tobacco grown on multiple-unit farms were smaller. Both of these crops require large amounts of hand labor in planting, growing, and harvesting, and the cropper system provides this labor without large outlays of capital and at the time it is needed. In the production of cotton in particular, the multiple-unit organization permits concentration of managerial functions in the hands of the landlord, enables him to supervise closely his labor force, and makes unnecessary the risking of the cash outlay that the use of hired labor would involve.

Past and future.—The kinship of modern multiple-unit operations with pre-Civil War plantation organization is very clear. During the decades following the War, a number of circumstances combined to produce the cropper system as we know it today. Cotton and tobacco were even more the staples of the South than they are at present; landowners found themselves