

## GULF COASTAL AREA



Figure 19.

THE GULF COAST AREA  
(Economic Subregion 58)

The topography of the Gulf Coast area is level to slightly rolling. The soils range from sandy to loams and are rather deficient in organic matter. They respond readily to farmyard manures and commercial fertilizers when moisture conditions are right. Average annual rainfall of 40 to 44 inches is plentiful but its distribution throughout the year is irregular and periods of moisture deficiency occur during the long growing season.

The soil in the western part is the southern termination of the brown loam soil belt and is good farmland. This is probably the most desirable part of the area for general agriculture and around one-third of the land is in farms.

To the east are the clay hills and higher lands which become flat along the north shore of Lake Ponchartrain. Forests originally covered much of these two sections and much of the nonfarm land is still well forested.

South of Lake Ponchartrain the land is mostly swampy and marshy with very little woods. Only about one-seventh is in farms. A few dairy farms and cattle raising are the chief types of farming in this part.

Much of the area that lies in Mississippi and extending into southwestern Alabama is not very well suited for growing crops because of flooding, or soils that are too sandy to hold water, and some "gumbo" soils with impervious subsoils. One-third of the land is in farms and one-half of this is wooded. Dairying, livestock raising, and the growing of tung nuts, pecans, and cotton all contribute to the small agricultural output. Potatoes harvested for early northern markets are grown on some of the sandy soils.

Increase in milk cow numbers in Louisiana has been gradual since 1925 with only one or two exceptions. Since 1950, the increase has been more rapid. The growth of dairying is the result partly of increase in local population which was greater for Louisiana during the last 25 years than for the rest of the South, and partly of a consumer education program especially set up for younger people.<sup>4</sup> More jobs and better pay have provided a greater increase in expendable income for the area during this time than for the rest of the country. The greatest potential for increased use of milk is in the lower income group. It is in this group that the greatest relative increases have occurred. There is no reason to think aggregate consumption of dairy products will not increase during the next few decades.

The growth of shipbuilding and paper mills in Mobile and other seaport towns along with textile mills, food processing plants, lumber mills, chemical factories, and petroleum refineries in New Orleans, has boosted the urban population and increased the demand for all farm products. New Orleans still dominates as a seaport.

The standard of living over much of the area is low but has been increasing during the last 25 years. Almost one-half of the farms are classed as noncommercial; a large majority are on a subsistence level. Twenty percent of the 13,000 commercial farms are dairy farms and 26 percent are cotton farms. Some of the highest priced farmland of the State is in this area.

During the last 5 years there have been seasonal milk surpluses in this area. Surpluses appear in the spring and summer when pasture conditions are good, and no method has been devised to prevent these surpluses or to carry them over to the winter when seasonal milk production is low. Practically all of the milk from these dairymen is sold as whole milk.

These farms are not large when expressed in terms of acres of cropland or of capital invested. More cropland is used for pasture than for harvested crops. This is an economical way of producing feed for the dairy herd, especially if the pastured cropland is so handled as to produce its share of feed for the long growing season.

The cropping systems were variable among the economic classes. Corn harvested for either silage or grain was from less than one-fourth of the harvested cropland on the larger farms to one-half for the smaller farms. Hay acreage, however, was from one-fourth to one-fifth of the harvested cropland for every class. Other crops than grain constituted around one-third of the harvested cropland on most farms.

The livestock organization, on the other hand, was rather uniform when expressed in terms of the inventoried animals. The two groups of larger farms had slightly more cropland per cow than the smaller farms. In other words, the farms of these groups were less intensively operated than the smaller farms. All are much more heavily stocked than those of the Nashville Basin, having twice as many cows on less land. They have more livestock than the available cropland will support. Either the feed bills must be high or production per animal low. Fewer pigs and chickens are kept, but their decrease does not offset the larger number of cows.

The sale of dairy products accounts for nine-tenths of the total income of the dairy farms in comparison with only 66 percent from dairy farms in the Nashville Basin (Table 61). These figures again show the relatively small proportion of income received from other livestock than dairy. The larger farms were more diversified in both livestock and crop sales than the smaller farms. All had relatively large acreages of cash crops.

<sup>4</sup> Louisiana Rural Economist, Vol. 15, No. 1—February 1953. Department of Agriculture Economics, University Station, Baton Rouge, La.