

The average prices received by farmers for all farm products sold were at approximately the same level in both 1949 and 1954. The economic classifications based on farm sales in each of these years are comparable in terms of the physical volume of farm production represented. Changes in the number of farms by economic class between 1950 and 1954 indicate the substantial increase in farm production that took place. This alone would have been sufficient to cause many farms to fall in larger economic classes. But in addition, there was a reduction in the number of farms and this land was incorporated in the remaining farms giving them a larger acreage base. The shift to larger economic classes was a combination of the increase in production per acre and per animal unit and the larger acreage base per farm.

The increase in size of farm is a part of technological progress in agriculture. The greater use of farm machinery enables a smaller work force to tend more acres and more animal units and to harvest a larger production. The increase in farm size does not necessarily indicate a shift toward large-scale farms employing large numbers of hired workers. In fact all indications are that substantial growth took place on farms operated primarily with family labor. Many of these farms acquired additional land in order to utilize their machinery more efficiently.

SPECIALIZATION IN FARMING

Changing conditions have also had their impact upon the types of farming—the commodities produced, the number of producers, and the combination of farm enterprises. A question of current interest relates to specialization in agriculture; more specifically, whether or not recent developments have encouraged farmers to specialize in one or more enterprises rather than produce several different commodities in more diversified types of farming.

A conclusive answer to this question would require a more detailed analysis than is given in this report. However, some indication of probable trends may be drawn from changes in the number and proportion of farms that produced one or more of several major commodities during the 25-year period ending in 1954. These changes are shown in table 6.

The trend of the last 25 years indicates that most major commodities are now produced by fewer farms and by a smaller proportion of the farms. This trend is much more pronounced in the

production of some commodities than others. In the case of tobacco the trend is in the opposite direction.

In interpretation of these trends one must consider recent developments in methods of production, marketing and processing, changes in consumer demand, the time period under consideration, and the types of Government programs in effect.

One of the major pressures for greater specialization in agriculture has been the need for efficient utilization of machinery and other capital equipment. Investments in farm machinery and in improved housing and facilities for livestock and poultry have not been profitable unless the enterprise was carried on in sufficient volume. In order to gain the advantages from use of new technology, many farmers have found it necessary to concentrate on one or a few enterprises rather than several.

The small change in the proportion of farms producing wheat is owing largely to the time period. Mechanization in the production of small grains was well underway prior to 1929. The changes in production techniques of the last 25 years have not been so important as those that occurred during the preceding two decades. In contrast, mechanization of cotton production has been a more recent occurrence. Its impact on the number and proportion of farms producing cotton is apparent.

The increasing number and proportion of farms producing tobacco are attributable to the lack of progress in developing labor-saving equipment to perform certain crucial operations, and the lack of more profitable alternatives to tobacco for many farmers in the producing areas. Government programs—acreage allotments and price supports—may have also contributed to the trend.

The increase in the proportion of farms selling milk is in accord with the greater consumption of fluid milk by a growing population.

Production of broilers and eggs and of vegetables for sale show noticeable trends toward greater specialization. The sale of eggs and chickens from home flocks has been supplanted by modern efficient highly specialized operations. This change reflects improvements in disease control, feeding and housing, and other developments that enable fewer workers to care for a larger number of birds. Along with developments in transportation and processing, vegetable production, which used to be centered in environs of most of the larger cities, has shifted to areas having other natural advantages.

TABLE 6.—NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF FARMS HAVING PRODUCTION OR SALES OF SPECIFIED COMMODITIES, FOR THE UNITED STATES BY SPECIFIED YEARS: 1929 TO 1954

Item	1929		1939		1949		1954	
	Number of farms	Percent of all farms	Number of farms	Percent of all farms	Number of farms	Percent of all farms	Number of farms	Percent of all farms
Corn grown for all purposes.....	4,597,949	73.1	4,456,259	73.1	3,403,965	63.2	2,844,369	59.5
Wheat threshed.....	1,208,368	19.2	1,385,774	22.7	¹ 1,147,710	¹ 21.3	^{1 2} 1,004,607	^{1 2} 21.0
Cotton produced.....	1,986,726	31.6	1,589,723	26.1	1,110,876	20.6	864,138	18.1
Tobacco raised.....	432,975	6.9	498,348	8.2	³ 531,922	³ 9.9	³ 513,346	³ 10.7
Vegetables harvested for sale other than Irish potatoes and sweetpotatoes.....	627,452	10.0	462,552	7.6	346,528	6.4	279,606	5.8
Whole milk sold.....	893,431	14.2	953,898	15.6	1,096,650	20.4	934,143	19.5
Cream sold.....	(NA)	(NA)	1,460,383	24.0	862,128	16.0	540,566	11.3
Chickens sold.....	3,129,715	49.8	2,519,076	41.3	1,713,435	31.8	1,030,287	21.5
Eggs sold.....	3,872,482	61.6	(NA)	(NA)	2,420,718	45.0	1,684,531	35.2
Cattle sold.....	(NA)	(NA)	2,625,783	43.1	2,982,616	55.4	2,611,031	54.6
Hogs sold.....	(NA)	(NA)	1,842,704	30.2	2,097,807	39.0	1,423,943	29.8

NA Not available.

¹ Totals for States for which data are available.

² Includes some duplication of farms reporting different types of wheat.

³ Includes some duplication of farms reporting different types of tobacco.