

NORTHERN WOODS DAIRY AREA

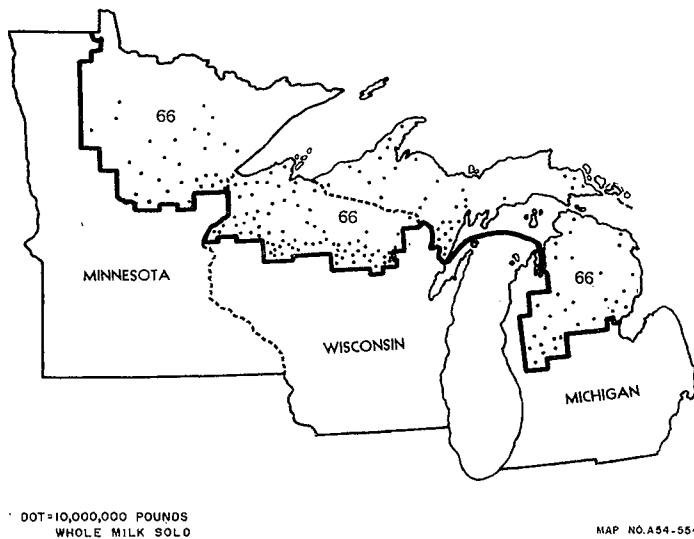


Figure 16.

THE NORTHERN WOODS REGION (Economic Subregion 66)

The whole Northern Woods Region, usually called the cut-over lands, has less agricultural development than any of the other dairy areas. Its varied and irregular topography, short cool growing seasons, and long cold winters call for hardy individuals as farmers. On most of the farms they must be willing to face many handicaps to agricultural production if they are to extract a living. Occasional openings of tillable land are found where one or more large farms have been established. Their operators are able to make good incomes and have fairly satisfactory living conditions. Most of the land has broken irregular terrain and a mixture of fairly heavy to light soils containing divers impediments to tillage such as boulders, stones, pot holes, knolls, and marshy spots. Such acreage must depend for its development on people who are willing to try to cultivate these rather isolated pieces of land.

The agricultural history of this region began after the removal of the forests, when land companies and other owners of large tracts offered various inducements to obtain settlers. Many settlers came and were sold small tracts of cleared or partially cleared land. One or more generations of families toiled and grubbed to expand cleared acres so as to grow enough for family needs.

After the initial influx of buyers the number of farms continued to increase until 1940. At that time, there were 91,740 farms in the region (Table 36). Since then, the number of farms decreased to 57,917 in 1954. The size of farms, on the other hand, has been increasing. The average farm now contains 186 acres with 57 acres of harvested crops and total cropland of 77 acres. Along with the decrease of 37 percent in the number of farms was a

decrease in numbers of milk cows from 486,371 to 415,518 in 1950, but this was followed by an increase during the next 4 years to 438,582. The net decrease in milk-cow numbers during the 14-year period was 10 percent. The herds became larger, however, showing an increase from 5.3 cows in 1940 per farm to 7.6 in 1954.

Even with these changes there are still very few large farms in the area and very many small farms. At present, fewer than 2 percent of all dairy farms are in Economic Classes I and II, and they have only 4 percent of the milk cows of the area. At the other extreme, in Economic Classes V and VI, are more than one-half the dairy farms and they have more than one-third of all the milk cows.

Hay and pastureland dominate the region. From one-half to nine-tenths of the tillable land in the different counties is used for this purpose. Growing seasons are too short and cool for corn to mature, except in the southernmost parts, so most of it is grown for silage or forage. Cereal crops like oats do well and some root crops are grown. A second growth of trees has started on land that was not kept cleared.

Table 36.—NUMBER OF FARMS AND NUMBER OF MILK COWS
IN THE NORTHERN WOODS REGION: 1930 TO 1954

| Year | Number of farms | Number of milk cows | Average number of cows per farm |
|------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1930 | 77,663 | 373,294 | 4.8 |
| 1940 | 91,740 | 486,371 | 5.3 |
| 1950 | 70,412 | 415,518 | 5.9 |
| 1954 | 57,917 | 438,582 | 7.6 |

The organization of the dairy farms follows the pattern in the Northern Lake Region. Whether the farms be large or small the basic cropping system consists of corn, small grains, and hay. The proportion of the different crops changes somewhat with the size of farm. The smaller farms grow relatively less corn and small grains and more hay than the larger farms. The crops grown suggest a 6-year rotation for the largest farms and a 7- or 8-year rotation for the smallest. There are 4 to 5 acres of harvested cropland per cow with no evident relation to size of farm. The same holds true for acres harvested and total animal units. The largest farms, Economic Class I, have 2.4 acres of harvested cropland per animal unit. The others average approximately 3 acres regardless of size.

The range in the amount of business done by the different economic classes of farms, like those of other areas, is so great as to be almost startling (Table 37). Why should the largest farms have livestock and crop sales of \$122 per acre of total cropland, while the small farms average \$19? And why should specified expenses range from \$42 to \$7 per acre (Table 38)? A partial answer has to do with the way in which resources are used. But why such a range in the use of resources when from two-thirds to three-fourths of the value of sales is from milk and equal opportunity is offered both small and large farmers to improve the dairy herd through a breeding program, as well as to obtain and learn to use most effectively a good quality of hay?