

FARM LABOR

Labor as a factor of production.—Labor remained the largest single factor of production in 1959 notwithstanding the extensive substitution of capital for labor in recent years. According to estimates of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, labor accounted for 29 percent of the inputs in farm production in 1959 compared with 22 percent for power and equipment and 15 percent for real estate.

Labor has several features which distinguish it from other factors of production and make it particularly important in farm tenure. Much of the farm labor is supplied directly by the farm operators in all tenure groups with the exception of manager farms. This direct relationship of labor to the farm operator frequently is a major consideration in establishing the leasing arrangements on a particular farm. Labor is a flow resource; that is, it cannot be stored. This can lead to surplus labor in certain seasons and a shortage of labor during other critical periods.

Changes in the use of farm labor.—One of the most significant changes in agricultural production has been the rapid decrease in the use of labor. Total man-hours of farm labor per year have decreased from 22.9 billion hours in 1930 to 10.8 billion hours in 1959. This reduction of over 50 percent was made possible through increased mechanization and other technological advances. The substitution of capital for labor has had two significant effects—greater output and decreased labor requirements. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates the index of output per man-hour has risen from 53 in 1930 to 195 in 1959 (1947-49=100). During the fifties this index increased about 10 points per year.

Farmworkers by tenure of farm operator.—During the week preceding the 1959 census enumeration 1,485,044 hired workers were employed on commercial farms. This week was near the peak period of employment for the year, and 54.6 percent of these hired workers were seasonal workers. In general, the number of hired farmworkers per farm was directly related to the average farm size of the major tenure groups. Of the commercial farms in the United States that reported hired workers, the full-owner farms reported an average of 2.5 workers; part-owner farms, 3.2 workers; manager farms, 11.1 workers; and tenant farms, 2.8 workers. The number of hired workers was smallest on farms in the North Central region and largest on farms in the West.

Only 12.5 percent of the commercial farms reported regular hired workers (employed 150 or more days). These farms employed 674,917 regular hired workers, or an average of 2.2 workers per farm. As expected, a greater proportion of manager farms reported regular hired workers than other tenure groups—58.3 percent compared with 17.6 percent of the part-owner farms, 11.4 percent of the full-owner farms, and 7.3 percent of the tenant farms. Manager farms, of course, also led all tenure groups in the average number of regular hired workers per farm. Of the commercial farms that reported regular hired workers, manager farms averaged 8.5 regular workers, part-owner farms 2.2, tenant farms 1.7, and full-owner farms 1.9 regular workers per farm.

NUMBER OF HIRED WORKERS PER COMMERCIAL FARM REPORTING, BY TENURE OF OPERATOR, FOR THE UNITED STATES AND REGIONS: 1959

