

A GRAPHIC SUMMARY

FARM PRODUCTION

From colonial times to about 1920, the major increases in farm production were attributable to the expanding acreage that was being used for agriculture. New farms were created on the frontier of settlement and virgin forests and grassland were cleared and plowed for crops. Later, farmers began to apply manures, rotate crops, put on lime, and carry out other practices in order to maintain production on established farms on which the inherent fertility of the virgin soils had been depleted. Yet the application of these practices was subordinate to the expansion of the total cropland acreage in bringing about increases in production on American farms.

About 1920, or following World War I, a remarkable shift in farming began to take place. The total cropland acreage was to become stabilized at acreages ranging from 480 million acres to about 460 million acres during the next 40 years. Yet during these 40 years the population of the United States increased from 106 million to 181 million people, who now enjoy a level of living superior to that available in 1920. How has agricultural production been increased during the past 40 years so that an additional 75 million persons could be fed better on about the same acreage of cropland? No major changes in farm imports have occurred during this period, except for increased per capita consumption of some foreign agricultural commodities such as coffee and bananas, which are not produced in the 48 original States.

The mechanization taking place on farms has played a significant role in expanding the farm output available for human consumption. About a fourth of the expanded output for human use was a result of the substitution of the tractor for horses and mules on the farms of this country. The other three-fourths of this increase was brought about by a remarkable increase in the per-acre productivity of the land used and also by the increased productivity of the livestock. The development of new techniques and materials through agricultural research and the application

of this technology in the farming operation have been highly significant in accounting for this major change.

The yields per harvested acre of some of the principal crops indicate how striking this increased productivity of the cropland has been. In the table below, yields of corn, wheat, cotton lint, and hay crops are shown for the 1920's and for the 1950's along with the percentage increases in those yields:

Item	Yield per harvested acre		
	1920	1950	Change (percent)
Corn.....bushels..	27	43	59
Wheat.....bushels..	14	20	43
Cotton (lint).....pounds..	162	363	124
Hay.....tons..	1.22	1.61	24

The increases in livestock production per breeding unit have also been very striking. This production per breeding unit increased by more than 50 percent between the decades of the 1920's and the 1950's. Milk production per cow increased by nearly 1,400 pounds, which amounts to an increase of one-third over the average for the 1920's. The average laying chicken produced 6 dozen more eggs in the 1950's than were produced per layer in the 1920's.

Striking increases in production also occurred for other crops and other types of livestock, as well as those cited briefly above.

The maps and graphs that follow depict the distribution of the major crop and livestock components of American agriculture and some of the changes that have taken place in recent years. Particularly in the captions that accompany the maps, attention has been given to a brief description of major changes in the distribution of the production of crops and livestock as well as to major changes in the total acreage of crops or number of livestock units which have occurred.

