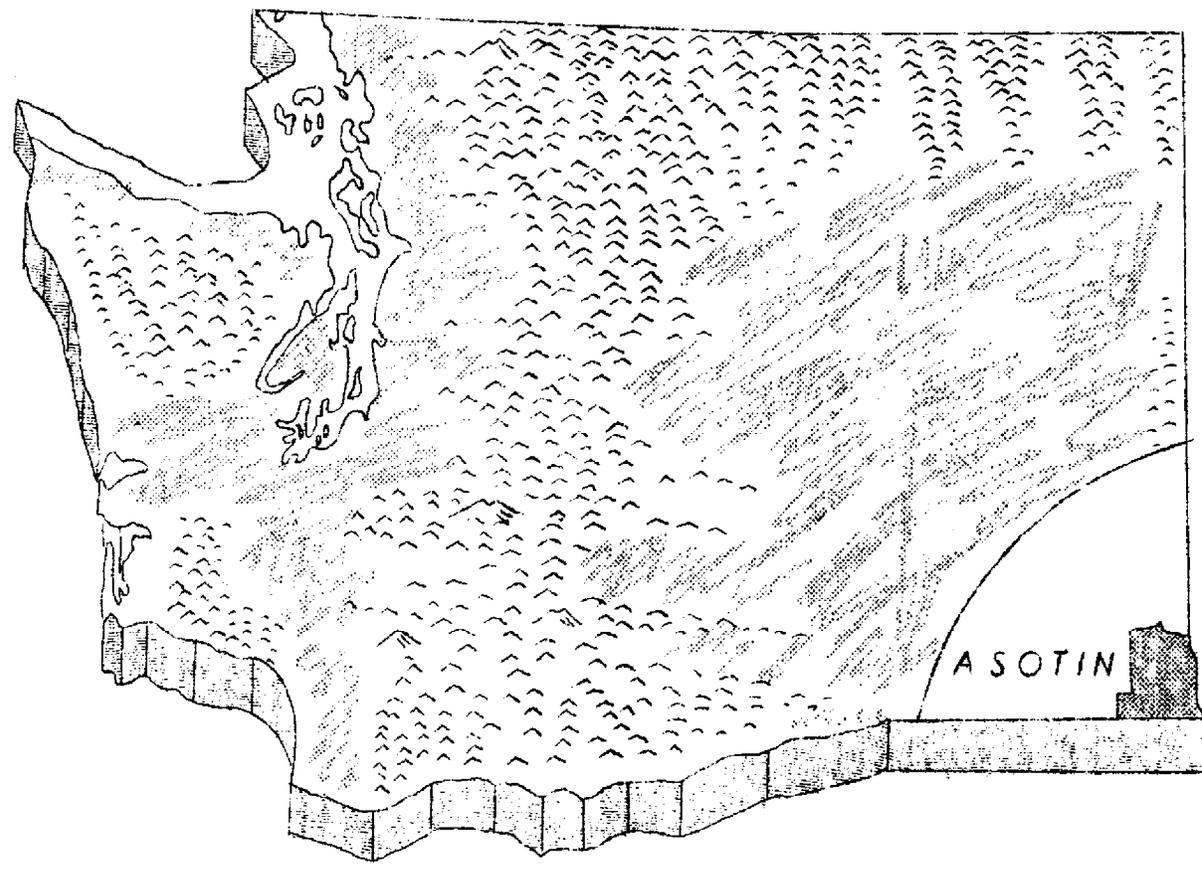


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ASOTIN COUNTY AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON

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COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES
1956



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
J. D. Dwyer, Director

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Agricultural Marketing Service
S. R. Newell

WASHINGTON CROP AND LIVESTOCK REPORTING SERVICE
348 Federal Office Building
Seattle 4, Washington

FOREWORD

This book on Asotin County is one of an original series being devoted to the history and present nature of agriculture in each of the thirty-nine counties of the State of Washington. This project was initiated in 1956 through funds made available by Sverre N. Omdahl, Director, Washington State Department of Agriculture, 1948-56. State funds were matched by moneys from the United States Department of Agriculture under the Research and Marketing Act of 1946.

County agricultural data books are intended to serve a variety of needs. Continually changing conditions in a dynamic state such as Washington require constant planning by groups and individuals both in private enterprise and public service. Comprehensive knowledge of land resources, population and agricultural-economic trends in a local area such as Asotin County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by vocational agriculture and social studies teachers in Asotin County schools. It has been devised also to inform adults interested in knowing more about their immediate area, as well as persons and enterprises concerned with agricultural production and marketing or prospective settlement and investment in the county.

Carefully selected geographic facts, agricultural history, population trends and statistical data are included to give an over all appreciation of Asotin County. The enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture since 1890 and recent estimates of the Washington State Census Board are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Asotin County in 1883. Facts on topography, soil, climate and forests which influence farming are integrated from surveys and reports of government agencies. Estimates of leading crops by years since 1939 by the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service provide a measure of the trend in the agriculture of the county farm industry.

Acknowledgment is accorded the professional work of several persons. Immediate direction was under Emery C. Wilcox, Agricultural Statistician in Charge, Estimates Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Supervision, research and cartographic illustration was performed by Dr. Woodrow R. Clevinger, Market Analyst, Washington State Department of Agriculture. Lloyd J. Mercer, student in Agricultural Economics, Washington State College, and resident of Addy, Stevens County, wrote the sections on pattern of agriculture, crops, livestock and marketing and collected much original information. Mr. Richard Perry, of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Leonard W. Orvold and D. W. Barrowman, Agricultural Statisticians, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture, gave valuable assistance. The clerical staff of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service prepared tabular material for the book.

J. D. Dwyer, Director
Washington State Department of Agriculture

Olympia, Washington
July 15, 1959

Funds for this bulletin provided by the Washington State Department of Agriculture were matched by the United States Department of Agriculture under the Research and Marketing Act of 1946.

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PART I

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History of Asotin County Agriculture

Introduction

Asotin County, a land of wheat fields, highland pastures and forested mountains, is located in the southeastern corner of Washington. With an area of 627 square miles (approximately 401,280 acres), Asotin is thirty-fifth in size among the thirty-nine Washington counties. The northern part of the county is in the Palouse Hills and its southern half is in the Blue Mountains.

Agriculture ranks third in Asotin County as a source of income and fourth in numbers employed. Arable land suited for crops is limited. The county's economic history has been characterized by a steady growth of lumber manufacturing supplemented by agriculture. Many Asotin County residents are employed by forest industry firms operating in Lewiston, Idaho.

Production of wheat and other small grains, along with an expanding beef cattle industry, placed Asotin County twenty-seventh among Washington counties in value of agricultural products marketed in 1954. The Census of Agriculture in 1954 found that Asotin County's 453 farms produced crops and livestock valued at almost \$3,000,000 in that year. Wheat alone accounted for about one-half of this total. Asotin County ranks twelfth among Washington counties in wheat production. The rural farm population of 1,175 people ranks thirty-sixth. Average farm income is above the general state and national average. Value of farm property approximated \$12,839,000 in 1954.

History 1/

Asotin County was created by Act of the Washington Territorial Legislature on October 27, 1883. It was organized from the southeastern part of Garfield County. The name "Asotin" is a Nez Perce Indian word meaning "Eel Creek". The town of Asotin became the first county seat.

Nez Perce Indians, now residing on Lapwai Reservation, Idaho, inhabited the area until the 1850's. These Indians usually encamped on Asotin Creek where the town of Asotin now stands. Their principal activities were hunting

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and fishing. They were friendly to early explorers, fur traders, missionaries and Oregon Trail immigrants.

Protestant missionaries of the Marcus Whitman group introduced agriculture to the region. Missionary Henry H. Spalding brought the first apple seeds to the county. Red Wolf, a chief of the Nez Perce tribe, planted apple seeds given him by Spalding at the mouth of Alpowa Creek in 1837. This is claimed to be the first apple orchard planted in Washington.

Joint claims to this region by the United States and Great Britain prior to 1846 and Indian hostility until about 1860 discouraged permanent settlement of the area. A treaty in 1857 established a provisional Indian reservation in a large area of southeastern Washington and northern Idaho including what is now Asotin County. This general area, later known as Umatilla Reservation, was closed for white entry. Parts of the area were opened later for homesteading and leasing of grazing lands.

Livestockmen started agricultural settlement in Asotin County in the 1860's. Jerry Maguire, a stockman, established a ranch on Asotin Creek above the present site of the town of Asotin in 1867. A year later, Thomas Broncho settled on land six miles up Asotin Creek. He cultivated vegetables which found a ready market in Lewiston. Several other stockmen located along Asotin Creek in the late 1860's and early 1870's.

The rush of settlers into what is now Asotin County began about 1877 and the flow of settlers continued throughout the 1880's. Wheat and livestock soon became the major agricultural enterprises of the county. There were about 22,000 acres of improved land in Asotin County in 1890. According to reports some of the grain growers and stockmen moved out after the dry year of 1889 and the population of the county was estimated at 1,580 persons in 1890.

Asotin County weathered the depression of 1893-96 comparatively well. Although grain prices were exceedingly low, livestock prices held up and the county's livestock production carried it through the hard times. An important milestone in agricultural history was reached in this period. This was completion of a private irrigation system to irrigate the flats in the vicinity of Clarkston. About 1895 the Lewiston Water and Power Company was organized. This company raised the necessary capital and succeeded where others had failed. A town named Vineland, later to become Clarkston, was platted by the

1/ This historical summary has been derived from four sources:

- (1) Washington, A Guide to the Evergreen State (American Guide Series) Writers' Program, Works Progress Administration. Published by Washington Historical Society.
- (2) Richard M. Perry. The Counties of Washington, State of Washington, Secretary of State. Olympia, Washington (mimeographed 1943).
- (3) Elgin V. Kuykendall. Historic Glimpses of Asotin County, Washington. Clarkston, Washington: Clarkston Herald, 1954.
- (4) An Illustrated History of Southeastern Washington including Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield and Asotin Counties, State of Washington, Western Historical Publishing Company, 1906.

company on the flats across the Snake River from Lewiston. Construction of the Vineland Canal carrying water from Asotin Creek to Vineland began in March 1896 and the first water was delivered to the area in July of that year. About 4,000 acres were included in the project. Over 1,500 people resided in the Vineland area by 1900 and the town of Clarkston was incorporated in 1902. Settlement in the new irrigation project swelled the county's population to 3,370 in 1900.

The county seat, the town of Asotin, showed 1,065 inhabitants in 1902. The town was and has remained principally an agricultural trade center. In earlier days, it was also a river freighting point.

Asotin County's population grew at its greatest pace in the decade of 1900 to 1910. Immigration was apparently especially large during the first two or three years of the decade and about 5,830 people resided in Asotin County by 1910. A large part of this increase can be attributed to the new irrigated lands around Clarkston. However, some of the increase was caused by the continued expansion of grain and livestock farming in the region. Over 20,000 acres of government land was filed on in 1900 and 1901. The improved acreage of the county totaled 33,000 acres in 1904 with 152,000 acres being assessed in that year. The county's wheat crop in 1904 was estimated at over 450,000 bushels. Fruit producers in the Clarkston area shipped over 230 carloads of fruit during that year.

After 1910 population growth continued as more farms were developed each year. Asotin County contained 578 farms in 1920 compared with 533 in 1900. The county's population totaled 6,540 in 1920. Wheat and livestock continued to be the mainstays of the county's agriculture. Over 36,000 acres of wheat were harvested in 1920. The Census of that year reported 58,000 bearing fruit trees in the county. Apples were the leading species (26,000) followed by peaches (14,000) and cherries (14,000). The value of all crops sold in 1920 amounted to \$2,300,000. Livestock numbers were high, with 10,000 beef cattle, 16,000 sheep and 5,200 horses reported.

Asotin County continued to grow during the 1920's, although the general trend in southeastern Washington was one of decreasing population and prosperity. Because of its strong livestock economy, Asotin County weathered the low wheat price years of the 1920's better than other southeastern Washington counties. The county's population was estimated at 8,136 in 1930, Clarkston alone having 2,870 residents. Livestock production increased and fruit production declined between 1920 and 1930. The depression years of the 1930's resulted in the abandonment of many small marginal wheat farms and these were later combined into large mechanized units.

During the 1940's and early 1950's Asotin County's population grew rapidly with most of the increase coming in the city of Clarkston. Farming became concentrated in fewer and larger mechanized units for the production of cash grains and livestock. Production of fruit and vegetables on the irrigated lands around Clarkston diminished as the city expanded. In 1955 Asotin County's population was estimated at 12,000 with Clarkston having 6,300 of this total. Most of the population growth of Asotin County in recent decades has been associated with the growth of Clarkston. Meat packing and processing plants and timber industries are the major types of manufacturing which have resulted in the growth of the city and county. The city's growth itself has employed

many people in construction. The agriculture of the county is now firmly established in large cash grain and livestock farms, although a number of small fruit, poultry and dairy farms still surround Clarkston. Wheat and livestock continue to be the major agricultural products of the county.

Agricultural development has been encouraged and guided by several public and private agencies. Numerous pioneer farmers and livestockmen too numerous to cite here played important roles in bringing in improved types of crops and fruit trees and higher quality breeds of cattle. Technical guidance in the improvement of grain growing was received from the State College of Washington Experiment Stations at Pullman and the Dry Land Experiment Station at Lind. Improved fruit trees and horticulture originated through research at the Tree Fruit Experiment Station at Wenatchee. County Agents of the Extension Service of the State College of Washington located at Asotin, and engineers and soil scientists of the U. S. Soil Conservation Service have been of valuable technical assistance.

Private groups of important influence on Asotin County agriculture have been such associations as the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, the Washington Crop Improvement Association, the Washington Grain Dealers Association, Washington Cattlemen's Association and the Washington Wool Growers Association.