

## PART IV

## The Pattern of Agriculture

Farms: Number and Size

Farms in Columbia County generally are large. The average size has increased as the number of farms has declined with farm land remaining virtually unchanged. Farm numbers have been decreasing steadily, numbering 356 farms in 1954 compared with 706 in 1910. In contrast to farm numbers, the average size in Columbia County has increased each Census period. In 1954 average farm size was 952 acres compared with 371 acres in 1900. (The average size for the state in 1954 was 270 acres per farm.) Columbia ranks eighth among Washington counties in average size of farm but thirty-fifth in total number.

Total area in farms has remained relatively constant since 1920. Acreage has fluctuated from 326,330 in 1920 to a high of 354,754 acres in 1940. In 1954 the figure was 338,964 acres, an increase of 12,634 from 1920. The decreasing number of farms is caused in part by the ability of farmers to handle larger acreages efficiently with mechanization. The result has been the purchase or lease of smaller farms and consolidation with larger units. By this method successful livestock and grain farmers have added more land in order to increase total returns.

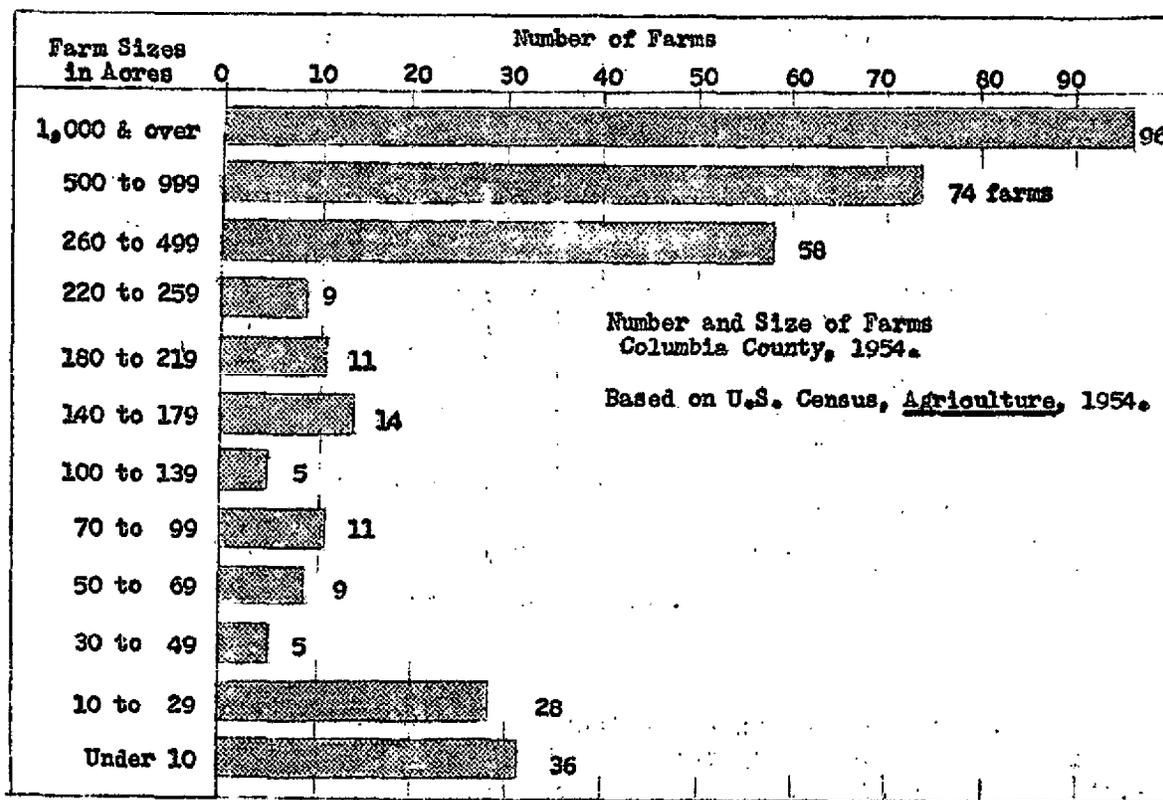


Figure 7.- Number and Size of Columbia County Farms, 1954.

Table 10.- Farms, Number and Average Size, Land in Farms  
Columbia County, 1900-1954

Year	Total Farms in County	Total County area in farms (acres)	Average size of farms in the county (acres)	Percent of County area in farms
1900	706	262,239	371.4	47.6
1910	703	314,557	447.4	57.1
1920	622	326,330	524.6	59.3
1925	565	321,774	569.5	58.5
1930	544	338,260	621.8	61.4
1940	525	354,754	675.7	64.4
1945	459	352,001	766.9	63.9
1950	402	339,837	845.4	61.7
1954	356	338,964	952.1	61.6

Source: U. S. Census, Agriculture

Columbia is a county of relatively large farms. In 1954, sixty-four percent of the farms averaged more than 260 acres. Of these, 75 percent contained over 500 acres of land. Ninety-six farms each with 1,000 acres or more contained nearly 70 percent of the harvested cropland in Columbia County and about 75 percent of the total land in farms. Small grains and livestock are the major enterprises on these large farms.

Table 11.- Large Farms: Number and General Land Use  
Columbia County, 1954

Land Utilization on Large Farms	Farms 1,000 to 4,999 acres	Farms 5,000 acres and over
Number of farms-----	87 farms	9 farms
Land in farms-----	157,423 acres	97,592 acres
Cropland harvested-----	52,326 acres	26,740 acres
Cropland used only for pasture--	3,144 acres	1,756 acres
Cropland not harvested and not pastured (idle, fallow land)--	40,370 acres	9,014 acres
Woodland pastured-----	6,654 acres	16,832 acres
Woodland not pastured-----	7,605 acres	---
Other pasture (not cropland and not woodland)-----	43,638 acres	42,754 acres

Source: U. S. Census, Agriculture

#### Farm Values

Farm values have shown great increases since 1900. Following 1900 total farm property in the county increased in value nearly seven times from \$5,149,080 to \$36,921,828 in 1954. However, both average value per farm and per acre declined during the depression years of the 1930's. Following World War II, farm property value increased greatly and in 1954 the average farm in Columbia was worth \$107,530 with average per-acre value of \$116. Value has been

added by the general rise in land prices, farm improvements and the additions of farm land, machinery and buildings. This increase in farm value is common in many of the other counties in Washington and in the United States as a whole but has been very great in this county.

Table 12.- Value of Farm Property  
Columbia County, 1900-1954

Year	Total Value All Farm Property in County	County Average Values	
		Per Farm (dollars)	Per Acre (dollars)
1900	\$ 5,149,080	\$ 7,290	\$ 20
1910	15,089,114	21,460	48
1920	29,754,806	43,430	83
1930	17,948,154	32,990	53
1940	13,280,553	25,300	37
1950	31,104,750	77,375	74
1954	36,921,828	107,530	117

Source: U. S. Census, Agriculture

### Farm Tenure

Tenancy (the renting and leasing of entire farms) is more common in Columbia County than in most areas of the state. Farms operated by tenants accounted for 32 percent of all farms in 1935, but since then have gone down to 23 percent. Farms run by managers are less common than in the 1930's. Full ownership of farms has become less common than in 1940, but it is still the leading type of tenure. Part-ownership (where a farmer owns land and rents additional land) has increased recently. About 33 percent of all farm units were operated on a part-ownership basis in 1954. This system is common in wheat farming where machinery makes large units more economical to run. Often-times elderly and retired people arrange to have parts of their farms operated by neighboring growers or livestock producers who have machinery and crews available.

Table 13.- Farm Tenancy, Number and Percent of Farms  
By Tenure of Operator, Columbia County  
1920-1954

Year	Number Farms in County	Full Owners		Part Owners		Managers		Tenants	
		number of farms	percent of all farms						
1920	622	284	45.6	118	19.0	14	2.3	206	33.1
1925	565	251	44.4	120	21.2	22	3.9	172	30.4
1930	544	229	42.1	138	25.4	8	1.5	169	31.1
1935	566	280	49.5	93	16.4	9	1.6	184	32.5
1940	525	264	50.3	116	22.1	2	.4	143	27.2
1945	459	213	46.4	124	27.0	5	1.1	117	25.5
1950	402	201	50.0	122	30.4	3	.7	76	18.9
1954	356	153	43.0	118	33.1	3	.8	82	23.0

Source: U. S. Census, Agriculture

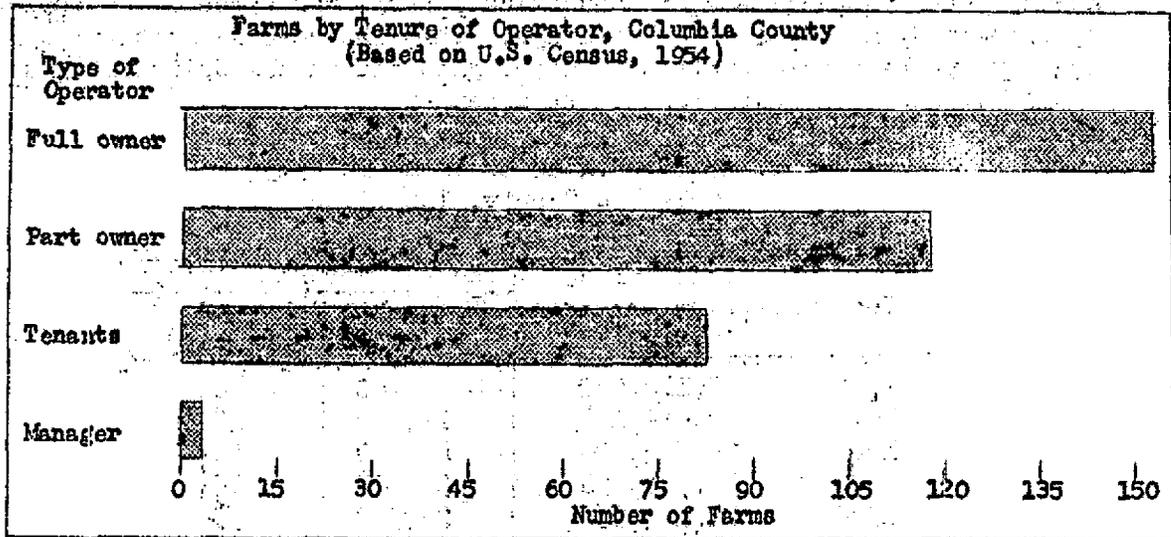


Figure 8.- Farms by Tenure of Operator, Columbia County, 1954

Farmland Utilization

In 1954 about 34 percent of the land in farms was harvested cropland. Second major use was rangeland pasture, amounting to 30 percent. Nearly one-fifth of farm cropland is generally idle as fallow land in order to accumulate soil moisture for grain crops. Because of the mountainous and rough nature of much of Columbia County, over 10 percent of farmland is in woodlands or woodland pastures.

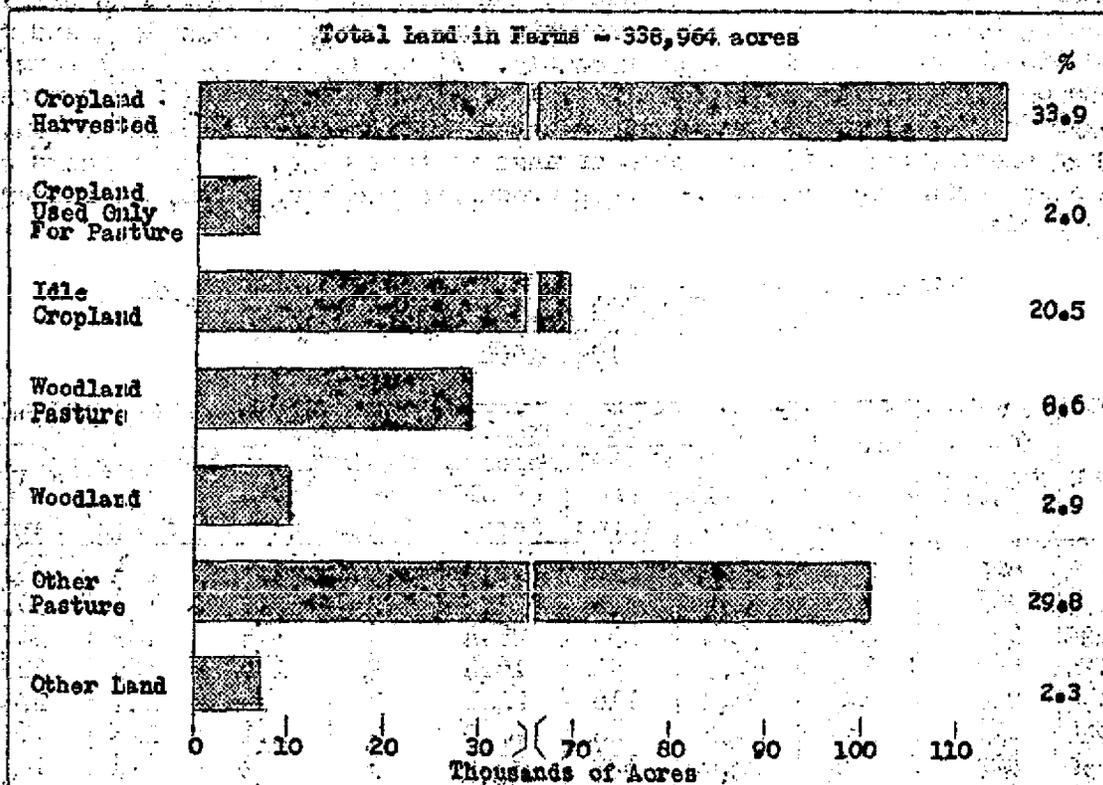


Figure 9.- Utilization of Farmland in Columbia County, 1954

Types of Farms

Farms growing grain crops of wheat, barley and oats dominate Columbia County agriculture, making up 70 percent of the total. Livestock farms (other than dairy and poultry) and fruit and nut farms are other important types in Columbia.

Table 14.- Types of Farms, Columbia County, 1954

Type of Farms	Number of Farms	Percent of all farms in the county
Total farms in county.....	351	
Field-crop farms.....	247	
Cash-grain.....	247	70.4
Other field-crop.....	0	
Vegetable farms.....	1	.3
Fruit-and-nut farms.....	10	2.8
Dairy farms.....	0	
Poultry farms.....	0	
Livestock farms other than dairy and poultry	39	11.1
General farms.....	12	
Primarily crop.....	0	
Primarily livestock.....	0	
Crop and livestock.....	12	3.4
Miscellaneous and unclassified farms.....	42	12.0

Source: U. S. Census, Agriculture

Farm Residence and Operation

Part-time farming is less common than over the state as a whole. A large majority of Columbia County farmers are full-time commercial farmers and do not depend on, or participate in, industrial or nonfarm employment. In 1954 only about one in three or 33 percent worked for wages away from the farm. This contrasts with the state average in which about 46 percent of farmers participate in industrial or other work to supplement their agricultural incomes.

A large majority of the farmers in Columbia County occupy residences on the farms they are operating. About 13 percent lived off their farms in towns or cities and 87 percent lived on their farms in 1954. Only a few wheat and livestock farmers lived in towns and commuted to their farming operations. However, away-from-farm residence is more common in Columbia County than in the state as a whole.

Farm Facilities

In 1954 Columbia County farm homes and farm operations were well equipped with household conveniences and labor saving devices. Rural electrical and telephone services were advanced. Capital investments by farmers in labor saving machinery have increased during the last decade. Wheat, barley and green pea growing and harvesting are mechanized to a high degree. About 58

percent of all farms have grain combines and over 85 percent have tractors and trucks. Nearly 88 percent of all farmers own automobiles. This agricultural region is above the state and national average in use of tractors, combines, trucks and other machinery.

Table 15.- Specified Facilities and Equipment on Farms  
Columbia County, 1954

Facility or Equipment Item	Number of Farms Using	Percent of All Farms in County Equipped
Telephone.....	330	92.7
Electricity.....	335	94.1
Television set.....	112	31.5
Piped running water.....	332	93.3
Home freezer.....	232	65.2
Electric pig brooder.....	17	4.8
Power feed grinder.....	76	21.3
Milking machine.....	12	3.4
Grain combines.....	207	58.1
Corn pickers.....	--	--
Pick-up balers.....	24	6.7
Field forage harvesters.....	25	7.0
Artificial ponds, reservoirs and earth tanks.....	37	10.4
Motortrucks.....	308	86.5
Tractors.....	309	86.8
Automobiles.....	313	87.9

Source: U. S. Census, Agriculture

### Irrigation and Facilities

Columbia County has only a minor amount of land under irrigation. In 1954 it had only 3,267 acres under ditch or sprinkler irrigation. This was divided among 70 farms. Private and local cooperative irrigation systems are used by diverting small streams and using ground water pumps and sprinklers. Peas, asparagus, hay and some grain crops are irrigated locally. About 2,600 acres of crops and 700 acres of pasture were under irrigation in 1954. The Tucannon and Touchet Rivers are principal sources of irrigation water.