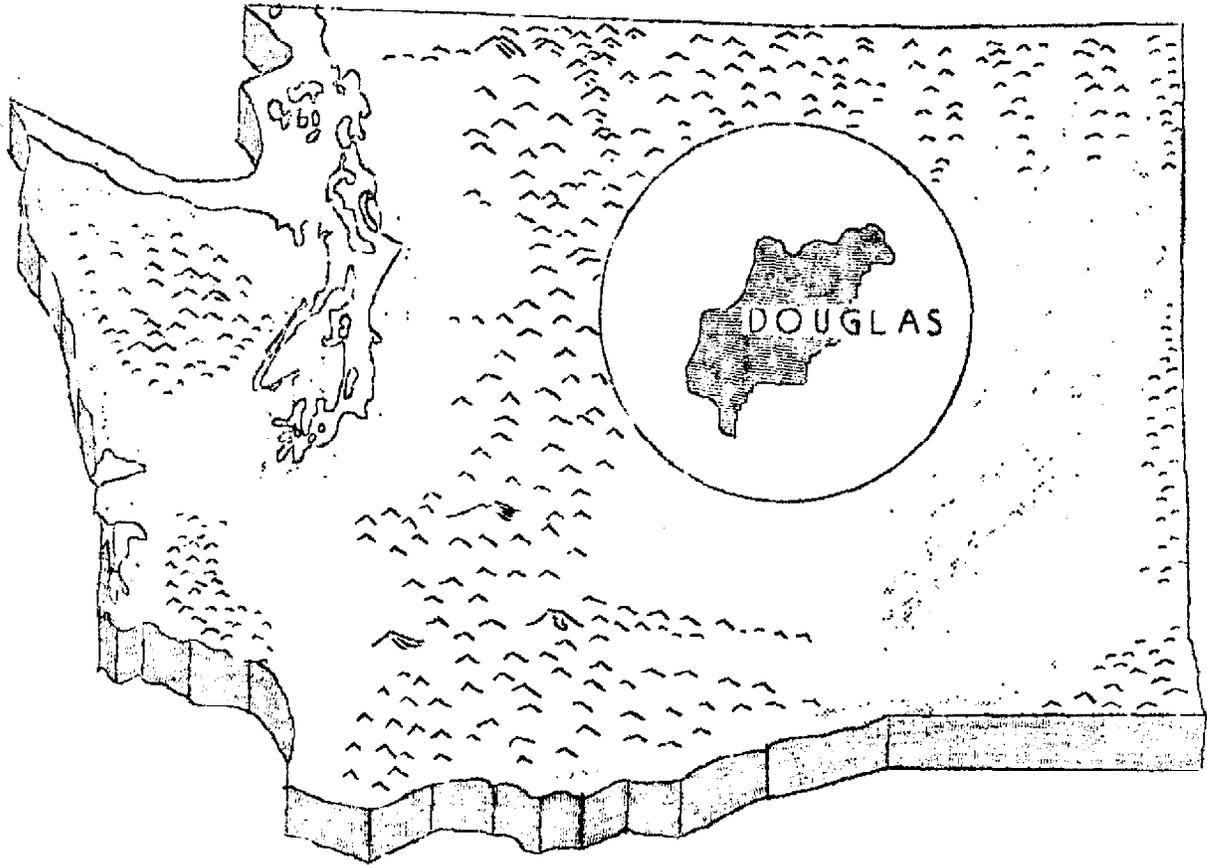


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# DOUGLAS COUNTY AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON

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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  
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WASHINGTON CROP AND LIVESTOCK REPORTING SERVICE  
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Seattle 4, Washington

## FOREWORD

This book on Douglas County is one of an original series being devoted to the nature 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 Douglas 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 Douglas 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 Douglas 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 Douglas 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, 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.

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## PART I

## History of Douglas County Agriculture

Introduction

Douglas County is located in north central Washington in a dry region generally termed "the Big Bend Country". Settled mainly since 1890 by livestockmen, wheat and fruit growers, Douglas County has grown in population and in importance in the production of wheat, tree fruits and cattle.

Douglas is one of the larger counties of Washington. In geographical area it ranks seventeenth among the thirty-nine Washington counties. Its land area of 1,178,240 acres or 1,841 square miles is larger than that of the State of Rhode Island.

Population density is small because of dry climate, large-sized farm holdings and wide areas of rough topography. In 1955 the population of Douglas County was 12,600, averaging only about 7 persons per square mile. The inhabitants are concentrated mostly in the towns located on the banks of the Columbia River and at trading centers on the plains of the interior plateau such as Waterville and Mansfield. Waterville (population 982) is the county seat and Bridgeport (population 1,176) is the largest incorporated place. The county population has tripled since 1900. Recent growth has come from development of the Columbia River for hydro-electric power and irrigation.

Economic history has been characterized by an early period of range livestock raising followed by dryland wheat and irrigated fruit growing. Since 1935, nonfarm activities such as construction work on Columbia River dams and service trades have brought in additional workers and their families.

Douglas County's economy is primarily dependent on agriculture. About two-fifths of all county income is from sale of farm products. In the most recent Census, Douglas County ranked tenth in Washington in value of farm products sold. Farmers sold products valued at \$16,815,200 in 1954. It ranked fifth in wheat and small grains and fourth in tree fruits. In the last census year, its wheat and grain crops were valued at over \$9,000,000 and its fruit crops at nearly \$6,000,000.

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History 1/

Before the arrival of white men, the present Douglas County area was occupied by semi-nomadic Indians using the Interior Salish and Sahaptin languages. Several tribal groups named the Okanogan, Nespalem, Wenatchi, Palouse and Nez Perce lived within or ranged over the area. There were Indian camps or villages on the bars of the Columbia River. Using horses, the Indians hunted and ranged over the grasslands of the Waterville Plateau. Chief Joseph, a Nez Perce, was one of the most famous Indians to live in Douglas County. The Indians practiced little or no agriculture, but they raised and traded horses. Wild horses were numerous over the grassland areas of the central Washington region.

White men, British fur traders and trappers attached to the Hudson Bay Company, were in the area as early as 1807. American fur traders were established on the Columbia River at Fort Okanogan in present Okanogan County as early as 1811. In an effort to compete with British fur trading companies, John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company established an American fort at the juncture of the Okanogan and Columbia Rivers.

American-British dispute over land jurisdiction and Indian hostility held back settlement by ranchers between 1825 and 1860. Great Britain held claim to east central Washington because of its fur trading operations. American land settlers were discouraged from entering to take up homesteads. By the Treaty of 1846 the 49th parallel was established as the United States-Canadian boundary. This permitted Americans to acquire lands under the homestead laws of the United States.

Indian hostility beginning with the Cayuse War of 1847-1855 prevented settlers from taking up lands in most of eastern Washington. Even after the Treaty of 1855 at Walla Walla between the United States and the Yakima Indian Confederacy, the Nez Perce and Okanogan Indians were not pacified. As late as 1875 Indian attacks were made on mining camps near Lake Chelan. The Nez Perce, led by Chief Joseph, did not recognize a peace treaty until about 1870. After 1870 most north central Washington Indians were peaceful and accepted residence on the large Colville Reservation in present Okanogan and Ferry Counties.

In the early 1880's there were enough cattlemen, sheepmen and homesteaders in the Big Bend Country to petition for a new county. On November 23, 1883

1/ This historical summary was derived from five sources:

- (1) The Wenatchee Daily World, Wenatchee, Washington, 50th Anniversary Edition, July 3, 1955.
- (2) Richard F. Steele, History of North Washington, Western Historical Publishing Company.
- (3) Bridgeport School District No. 75-cooperating with Douglas County Planning Commission. Bridgeport Area Study, 1955.
- (4) Washington Writers' Project, Washington, A Guide to the Evergreen State, 1941, Washington Historical Society. Binfords and Mort, Portland, Oregon.
- (5) Richard M. Perry, "The Counties of Washington", Secretary of State, State of Washington, Olympia 1963. (Miscographed). See section on Douglas County.

what is now Douglas and Grant Counties was created by the Territorial Legislature as Douglas County. It was named after Stephen A. Douglas, U. S. Senator and political leader of Illinois. Later, in 1909, Grant County was created from the southern part of Douglas County.

Early prominent pioneer farmers recorded by historians include those who introduced wheat growing and cattle ranching in the Big Bend Country. Notable were Silas A. Pearl in 1886 and Charles and Clint Ogle in 1887 who homesteaded near Waterville. They introduced wheat, potatoes and also brought in cattle and hogs. James B. Leahy and brothers also developed a large cattle ranch on the north part of Waterville Plateau. Along the Columbia River bars small fruit orchards and livestock ranches were established at a later date by numerous pioneers not recorded in published histories. The Bridgeport area was settled by some immigrants from Bridgeport, Connecticut. Land development companies at Wenatchee interested in attracting settlers into fruit growing were influential in getting settlers started in fruit growing at East Wenatchee, Orondo and Bridgeport. Land settlement and homesteading during 1880-1900 built the population of Douglas County to nearly 5,000 by 1900.

Wheat and grain growing were well established in the plateau area surrounding Waterville and Mansfield by 1900. A report in 1902 showed that 800,000 bushels of wheat and 200,000 bushels of oats and barley were raised for shipment from Waterville. Using new varieties of red winter wheat and summerfallow methods of dry farming together with better machinery suited for the Big Bend Country, wheat ranches were able to increase production in an area once considered too arid for grain growing.

Expanding commercial grain production caused railroads to build branch lines into Douglas County. Northern Pacific in 1903 built a branch line to Coulee City on the Douglas-Grant County line which provided transportation for wheat to Spokane. Great Northern put in a branch line from Wenatchee to Mansfield in 1909 which resulted in Mansfield becoming a grain shipment center. Stern wheeler steamer service was developed on the Columbia River between Wenatchee and Bridgeport and ferry service was established across the Columbia at Wenatchee, Orondo and Brewster as the remote Douglas County area produced commercial quantities of grain and fruit.

The period 1900-1920 was the one of greatest growth in Douglas County farming and population. The population nearly doubled in this period of rapid land purchasing and settlement. By 1910 and continuing on to 1920, population had doubled, reaching about 9,400. Most of the growth was based on land development and prosperous commercial growing of wheat and fruit for national and world markets.

The Big Bend region and general eastern Washington prosperity in wheat began to decline in the late 1920's. Douglas County agriculture suffered a recession as a result of low prices and world-wide surpluses of wheat which destroyed foreign markets. In 1919 Douglas County had produced a grain crop valued at \$4,000,000, but by 1929 the crop was valued at less than \$2,000,000. Wheat production went down from 1,773,000 bushels in 1919 to 1,185,000 in 1929. Douglas County wheat acreage in this period dropped from 223,000 acres to 143,000 acres.

The post-World War I recession in wheat had a big impact on Douglas County. Wheat and general farming abandonment caused the population to drop off by nearly 2,000 and by 1930 it was 7,561. Many farm families left the area for cities or other farm areas. Many smaller farms were abandoned and sold, or consolidated with others to form larger wheat and cash-grain farms.

In the mid-1930's a new population growth period started with the Federal government's hydroelectric and irrigation projects on the Columbia River. Construction work on Grand Coulee, Chief Joseph and Rock Island Dams and the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project brought in new families. Many farm families went into part-time farming work combined with construction employment.

Construction workers swelled the population of Bridgeport, Rock Island and East Wenatchee. Mainly as a result of the construction and operation of hydroelectric dams, Douglas County grew steadily from 1940 to 1955 and reached its present size of about 12,600 persons.

Cooperative fruit marketing has had a major influence on Douglas County agriculture over the last 25 years. Commercial orchards along the irrigated Lowlands bordering the Columbia River were expanded. Fruit growers in the East Wenatchee, Orondo, Beebe and Bridgeport areas joined fruit marketing cooperatives shipping out of Wenatchee, Shelan, Pateros and Brewster in Chelan and Okanogan Counties. Between 1949 and 1954, Douglas County fruit growers increased their fruit marketings from about \$790,000 per year to about \$1,319,000 largely through cooperative marketing.

The agricultural development of Douglas County has been encouraged and guided by several agencies and private enterprises. Technical guidance in the improvement of grain and fruit growing was received from the State College of Washington Experiment Stations—the Tree Fruit Experiment Station, Wenatchee, the Dry Land Experiment Station at Lind and the Irrigation Experiment Station at Prosser. Technical assistance in plant industry and animal husbandry also was received from County Extension Service Agents of the State College Extension Service with field offices at Waterville.

Private agencies which have influenced an expansion or improvement of farm commodity groups within the county include a number of local and state associations. Among these are the Washington Wheat Growers' Association, Washington Cattlemen's Association, Washington Crop Improvement Association, Washington Wool Growers Association and the Washington State Horticultural Association.