

PART IV

The Pattern of Agriculture

Farms: Number and Size

Small farms are characteristic of agriculture in Island County. Over half of all farms in the county are less than 50 acres in size. This region ranks 28th in the state in numbers of farms, having a total of 657 according to the 1954 Census.

Farm numbers have dropped by 153 since 1950, and 387 since 1940. Average size since 1940 has gained by nearly 18 acres. Some small farms have been consolidated with larger farms through purchase or lease. When the U. S. Navy acquired over 6,000 acres for a naval air station in the early 1940's a large number of farms were purchased. Residential development near the station took more land units out of agriculture. By 1954 there were fewer farms than in any census since 1910 and while the average farm size was up to 70 acres, it was considerably below the state average of 270 acres. All land in farms is 8,500 acres less than in 1940 because of the recent military use and the residential use of former agricultural land.

The present pattern of small farms has resulted from the subdivision and sale of larger Donation Land Act holdings of 640 and 320 acres which were common

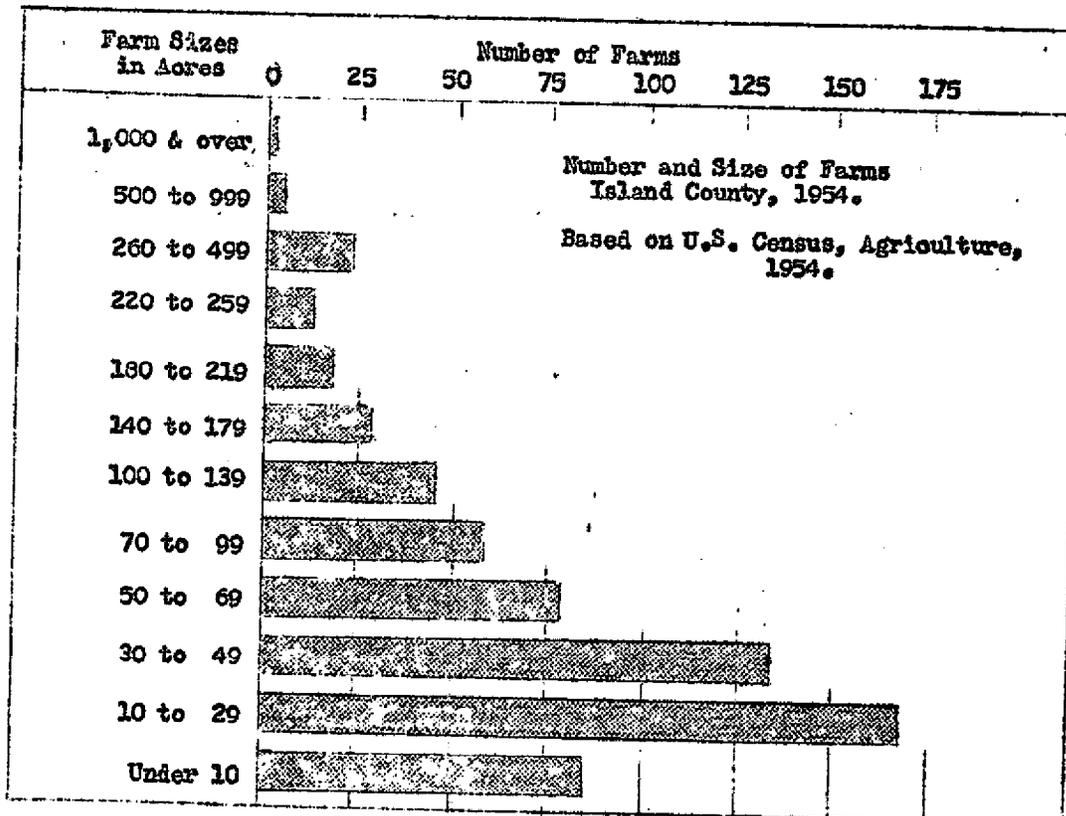


Figure 8.- Number and Size of Island County Farms, 1954.

before 1860. Land speculators, realty companies and lumber companies also sold many 20, 40 and 80 acre tracts between 1900 and 1930.

Table 9.- Farms, Number and Average Size, Land in Farms
Island County, 1900-1954

Year	Total Farms in the County	Total County area in farms (acres)	Average size of farms in the county (acres)	Percent of County area in farms
1900	254	30,705	120	23.3
1910	458	38,976	85	29.5
1920	763	51,932	68	39.4
1925	950	49,776	52	37.7
1930	877	48,877	56	37.0
1940	1,044	54,969	53	41.7
1950	681	44,064	65	33.4
1954	810	52,455	63	39.0
1954	657	46,328	70	35.1

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

Farm Values

Farm property has increased greatly since 1940. With the exception of the 1920-1930 decade, farm real estate values have gone up steadily with each Census. Values dropped considerably during the depression years. After 1940 increases were great as new populations came into the islands for military employment and as others sought homesites on the shorelines. Strong demand for both farm and nonfarm land developed starting about 1942. Land reached a new high of 228 dollars per acre as an average. An average farm with buildings went up from about \$4,300 in 1940 to about \$15,040 in 1954. Value to Island County land has been added by recent improvements of roads and bridges which give more rapid and easy access to the mainland.

Table 10.- Value of Farm Property
Island County, 1950-1954

Year	Total Value All Farm Property in County	County Average Values	
		Per Farm (dollars)	Per Acre (dollars)
1900	\$ 991,352	\$ 3,900	\$32
1910	3,248,232	7,092	83
1920	5,929,676	6,508	95
1930	5,153,585	5,876	105
1940	4,513,110	4,323	82
1950	9,741,870	12,027	203
1954	9,883,251	15,043	228

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

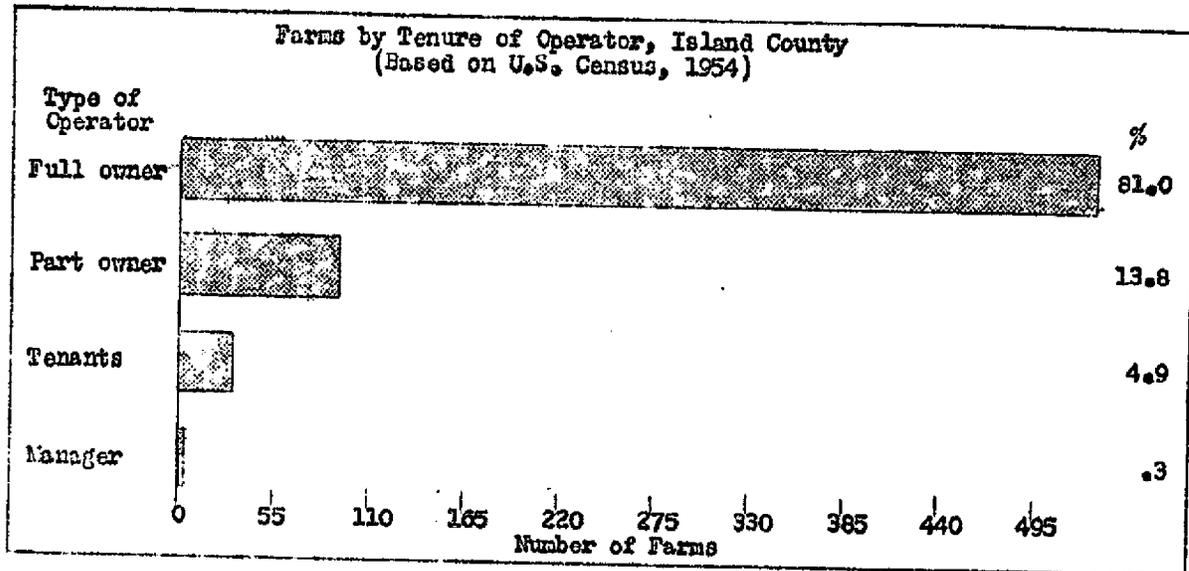


Figure 9.- Farms by Tenure of Operator, Island County, 1954.

Table 11.- Farm Tenancy, Number and Percent of Farms
By Tenure of Operator, Island County
1925-1954

Year	Number Farms in County	Full Owners		Part Owners		Managers		Tenants	
		number of farms	percent of all farms						
1925	950	819	86.2	58	6.1	2	.2	71	7.5
1930	877	725	82.7	67	7.6	3	.3	82	9.3
1935	1,063	847	79.7	89	8.4	3	.3	124	11.7
1940	1,044	825	79.0	87	8.3	3	.3	129	12.4
1945	681	552	81.1	101	14.8	2	.3	26	3.8
1950	810	672	83.0	95	11.7	4	.5	39	4.8
1954	657	532	81.0	91	13.8	2	.3	32	4.9

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

Farm Tenure

A large majority (81 out of each 100 farmers) own and operate their farms. Only 32 farms out of 657 were operated by tenants in 1954. Part-owned farms are more common than rented or leased farms. The part-ownership system has increased in recent years. This pattern is caused by elderly persons and part-time workers living on farms and maintaining ownership of farm residences while letting other farmers operate part of the land for a share of the crops used or sold. Farms operated by managers are rare and there were only 2 farms under this system in 1954.

Types of Farms

Farm types in Island County are fairly well diversified and over half are miscellaneous unclassified farms with varied systems of agriculture. Poultry

farms are the most common specialized farms, numbering 120. About one-fifth of all farms specialize in chickens or turkeys. Dairy farms are second with 75 and livestock farms keeping beef cattle or sheep are third. A majority of farms are of the general and miscellaneous type kept by part-time farmers.

Table 12.- Types of Farms, Island County, 1954

Types of Farms	Number of Farms	Percent of all farms in the county
Total farms in county.....	657	
Field-crop farms.....	5	.8
Cash-grain.....	5	
Other field-crop.....	0	
Vegetable farms.....	5	.8
Fruit-and-nut farms.....	5	.8
Dairy farms.....	75	11.4
Poultry farms.....	120	18.2
Livestock farms other than dairy and poultry	35	5.3
General farms.....	26	
Primarily crop.....	5	.8
Primarily livestock.....	10	1.5
Crop and livestock.....	11	1.7
Miscellaneous and unclassified farms.....	386	58.7

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

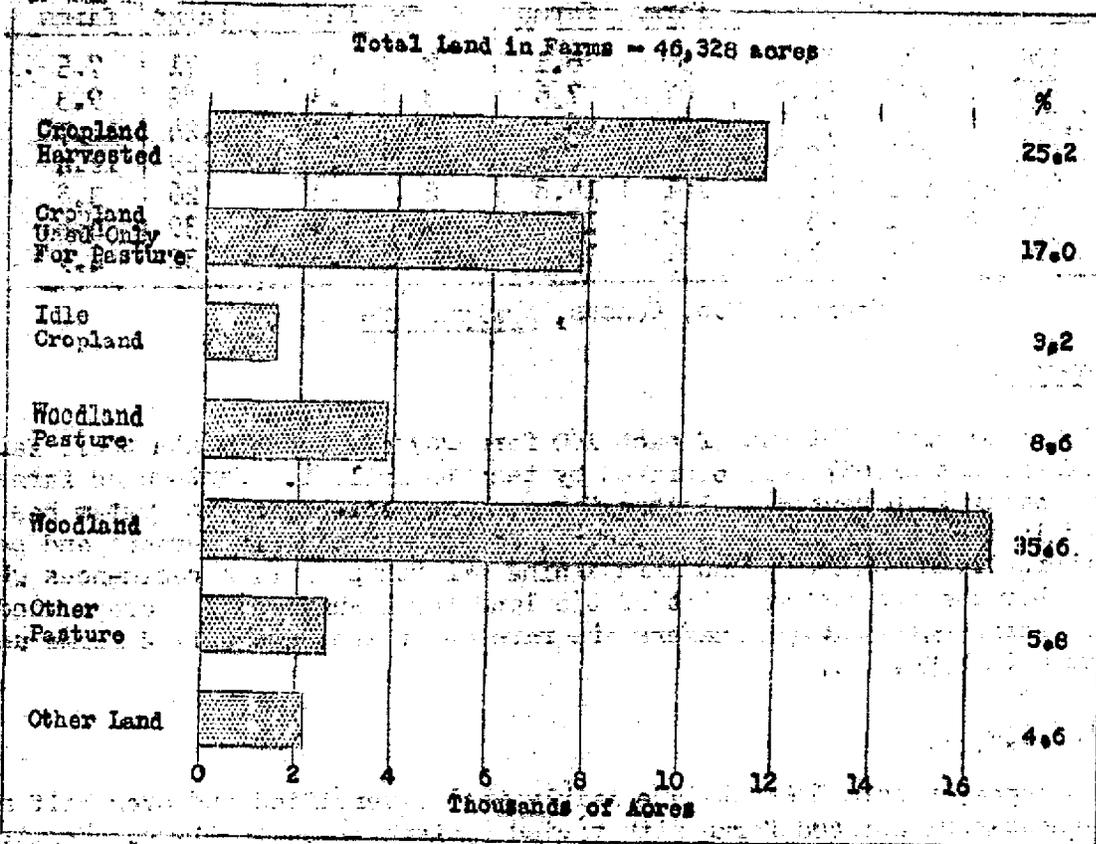


Figure 10.- Utilization of Farmland in Island County, 1954.

Farmland Utilization

Crops were harvested from only about one-fourth of the land in farms in 1954. The major use of land by farmers is woodland and woodland pasture. Over 44 percent of all farmland is wooded. A third major use is permanent and cultivated pastures. Large acreages in woodland is typical of the rougher poorer soils of western Washington. On this submarginal land Douglas fir forest vegetation tends to restock itself. Because of costs in labor and machinery to clear cut-over land, most farmers leave the poorer upland soils in woodland or woodland pastures. Pastured stumpland is common. Many farmers have started to practice forestry, leaving dense regrowth stands undisturbed to furnish timber for farm use or future commercial cutting.

Farm Residence and Operation

Part-time farming is a major characteristic of the area. Many persons reside on the land and divide their employment between farm work and wage earning in other industries. Nearby work at the Naval Air Station and in industrial areas at Everett, Anacortes and Mount Vernon afford farmers opportunities for wage earning to supplement their farming incomes. In 1954, 64 percent of the farmers were working off their farms part-time. Over half of Island County farmers were employed more than 100 days per year in other non-farm occupations. Island County part-time farming exceeds the state average of 46 percent but is about average for western Washington.

Irrigation Facilities

Because of dry summer climate and a tendency for coarse glacial soils to hold moisture poorly, more and more use is being made of irrigation facilities. Whidbey Island dairy farmers and vegetable and berry growers have increased their use of private irrigation systems to improve the yield of pastures and croplands. Since 1950 irrigation facilities and the acreage of land watered have more than doubled. The new facilities are individually owned sprinkler systems using ground water ponds. By 1954 there were 11 farms with irrigation systems and 230 acres of cropland and pasture were receiving water compared with only 59 acres in 1950.

Table 13.- Irrigated Farms: Number and Acreage
Island County, 1950 and 1954

Item	1950	1954
Number of irrigated farms.....	4	11
Land irrigated ^{1/}	59 acres	230 acres
Irrigated land in farms according to use:		
Farms irrigating crops.....	3	10
Farms irrigating pasture.....	1	6
Acres of crops irrigated.....	31 acres	125 acres
Acres of irrigated pasture.....	28 acres	105 acres

^{1/} Includes all land irrigated with sprinklers.

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

Farm Facilities

Island County farmers as a whole are well served by electrical and telephone service and are well equipped with conveniences and labor-saving equipment. Over 92 percent of farms are served with electrical power and 68 percent have telephones. Television is used by 65 percent. Most dairy farms are equipped with milking machines. Tractors are found on 69 percent of all farms and over half use motor trucks for hauling. Use of most standard farm facilities are well advanced over the situation revealed in the 1944 and 1949 Censuses.

**Table 14.- Specified Facilities and Equipment on Farms
Island County, 1954**

Facility or Equipment Item	Number of Farms Using	Percent of All Farms in County Equipped
Telephone	451	68.6
Electricity	606	92.2
Television set	430	65.4
Piped running water	586	89.2
Home freezer	230	35.0
Electric pig brooder		--
Power feed grinder	35	5.3
Milking machine	150	22.8
Grain combines	20	3.0
Corn pickers		--
Pick-up balers	40	6.1
Field forage harvesters	20	3.0
Artificial ponds, reservoirs and earth tanks	86	13.1
Motor trucks	346	52.7
Tractors	455	69.3
Automobiles	536	81.6

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture