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KING COUNTY

AGRICULTURE

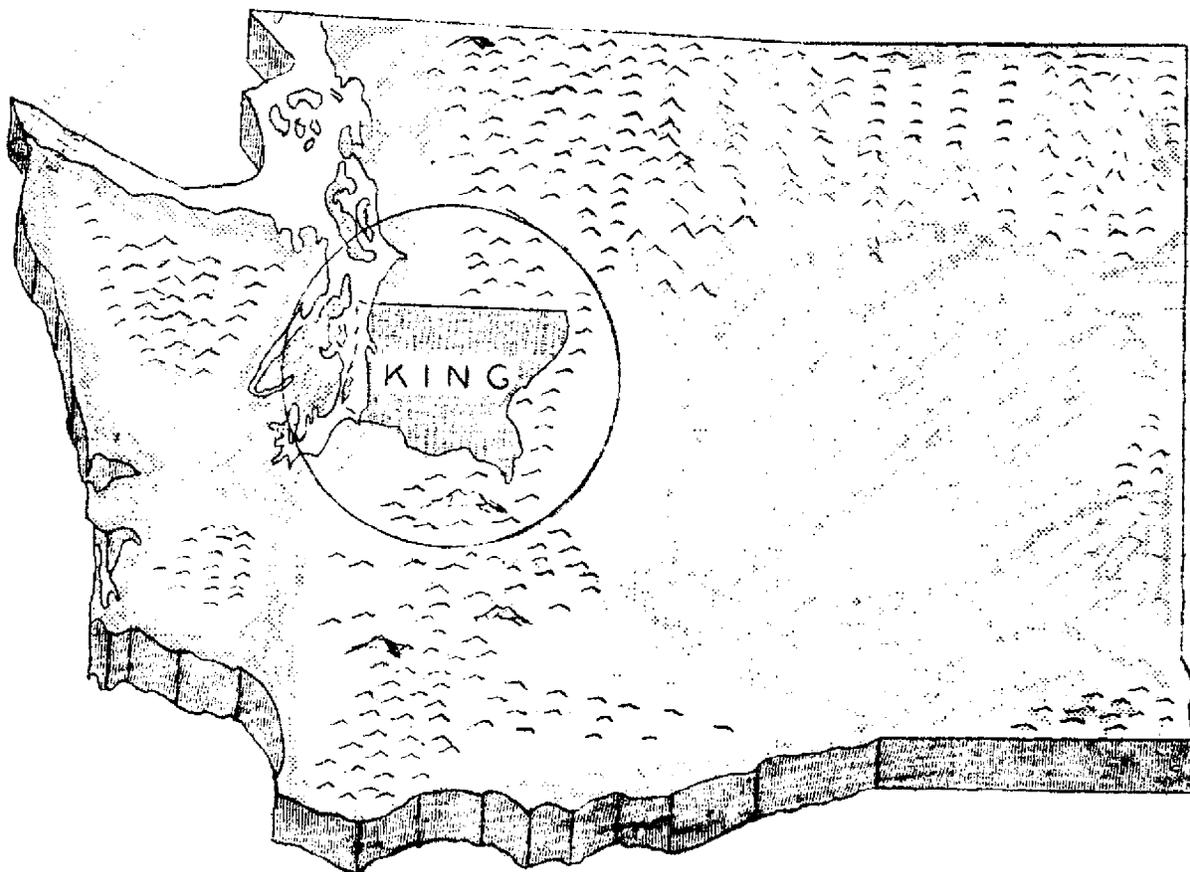
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COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES
1956



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Sverre N. Omdahl, 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 King 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.

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 King County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by social studies teachers in King 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 King County. The enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture since 1860 and recent estimates of the Washington State Census Board are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of King County in 1852. 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. Mr. Richard Perry, of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Bruce H. Graham, Robert McGregor, and Christian A. Stokstad, Agricultural Statisticians, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture, gave valuable assistance. Vladimir Kovalik, University of Washington graduate student in geography, compiled most of the statistical tables and graphs. The clerical staff of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, under supervision of Miss Phyllis C. Robinson, prepared tabular material for the book.

Olympia, Washington
July 1, 1956.

Sverre N. Omdahl, Director
Washington State Department of Agriculture

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PART I

History of King County Agriculture

Introduction

King County, a land of Puget Sound shores, lakes, valley lowlands and forested Cascade Mountains, is located in west central Washington. It has a land area of 2,136 square miles (approximately 1,365,760 acres) and is twelfth in size among the thirty-nine Washington counties. It is larger than the state of Rhode Island and is about the same size as Delaware. Seattle, the largest city in the state, is located in the northwestern part of the county.

While King is the major metropolitan and industrial county of the state, it also ranks high in agriculture. Several fertile valleys, together with the low hilly uplands and Vashon Island contain the second largest number of farms of any Washington county. It is the state's leading poultry county, the second county in dairying and is ninth in the total sales of farm products, according to the 1954 Census of Agriculture. King also ranks high in the nation in poultry products, commercial vegetables and berries. Farming has grown steadily, much of it on a part-time basis as the population and the industrial economy have expanded. Population has grown from only 302 in 1860 to an estimated 773,200 in 1955. The rural-farm population of 20,521, second highest among Washington counties, was located on 5,181 farms of all types and sizes in 1950.

History 1/

King County was created by the Oregon Territorial Legislature, December 22, 1852. It was formed from the northern portion of the older Thurston County and was named in honor of William R. King, Vice-President of the United States (1852-56). Boundaries were established to include the scattered settlements on Puget Sound at Elliott Bay, now Seattle, and some inland valley settlements at present-day Auburn, Renton, Fall City and Snoqualmie. A large wilderness inland area extending from Puget Sound to the crest of the Cascade Mountains was included as well as Vashon Island in the Sound. The county is about 55

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miles in its greatest east-west length and 42 miles between the White River, its southern boundary, and the Snohomish County line.

The history of western civilization in King County begins with the English expedition commanded by Captain George Vancouver in 1792. This sailing expedition explored the inland body of water which they named Puget's Sound after Lieutenant Peter Puget, an officer under Vancouver. Vashon Island was named after Captain James Vashon of the English Navy.

The British explorers made the first known white contacts with the Indians. The present King County area was inhabited by several closely related groups of Indians who used the Coast Salish language. The Duwamish and Muckleshoots lived in the Duwamish, Green and White River Valleys, the Snoqualmie dwelled in the Snoqualmie Valley, the Sammamish around Sammamish Lake and the Skokomish and Suquamish on the islands in the Sound.

Having acquired some Christianity from Catholic missionaries, and having traded with the Hudson's Bay Fur Company, the local Indians were friendly to the earliest British and American settlers. There was a brief period of Indian hostility between 1855 and 1858 when war parties of Yakima and Klickitat Indians came across the Cascades to attack Seattle and some outlying settlements. The white settlers on Elliott Bay named their village Seattle in honor of the friendly Chief Sealth of the Duwamish band of Indians. Local Puget Sound Indians worked for the first sawmill men at Seattle and were important as a source of farm labor between 1860 and 1910. The Indians of King County have decreased to only 1,269 according to the Census of 1950.

Settlement by Americans did not start until after the Treaty of 1846, which ended British claims in western Washington and established the present Canadian boundary. The first permanent settlers used the Oregon Land Law, or the Donation Land Act of 1850, which granted 320 acres to a single person or 640 acres to a married couple.

The first farm settlers in King County took up claims along the lower Duwamish River. These were L. M. Collins, Henry Van Asselt, Jacob and Samuel Maple, who arrived in September 1851. Another group, primarily interested in the lumber and timber industry, settled at Alki Point, part of Seattle today. They arrived in November of 1851 and included Arthur A. Denny, D. T. Denny, C. D. Boren, William N. Bell and Charles and Lee Terry. In 1852 H. L. Yesler

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

- (1) Washington: A Guide to the Evergreen State (American Guide Series). Writers' Program of the Works Project Administration, State of Washington. Sponsored by the Washington Historical Society, 1941.
- (2) Bagley, C. B. History of King County. Vol. I. Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1929.
- (3) Perry, Richard M., The Counties of Washington. Olympia, Secretary of State, State of Washington, 1943. (mimeographed).

built a sawmill around which the village of Seattle began to grow. These were followed by D. S. Maynard, Dexter Horton, and Thomas Mercer. Pioneers of the Duwamish Valley and Seattle were principally interested in livestock. Two of their number, C. D. Boren and D. T. Denny, journeyed to the Willamette Valley of Oregon in 1852 to get a foundation herd of cattle.

The isolated interior valleys and Vashon Island were settled later. Using small sternwheel steamers and other river craft, farm settlers moved into the forested wilderness. Henry H. Tobin, S. W. Russel and John Thomas filed on Donation Land Act claims in 1854 in the Green and Black River Valleys in the vicinities of present Renton and Kent. Early farm settlers in the Snoqualmie Valley were Jerry Borst and Josiah "Uncle Si" Merritt in 1875 on Snoqualmie Prairie, Alexander Adair in the vicinity of Fall City and Tolt in 1870. Vashon Island farming began in 1877 when the families of John Gilman, Daniel Price and Captain S. D. Sherman landed to take up farms.

Following the Indian War (1855-56) and up until 1880, agriculture made slow progress. The forested land was difficult to clear and the bottom lands required a large amount of drainage work. Farming was mainly the raising of crops for local use and livestock feed. Some oat grain, hay and potatoes were shipped by river boats to Seattle and other mill and logging settlements on the Sound. Beef cattle and hogs were driven overland from interior valleys to Seattle and Tacoma. Most farm settlers worked part-time in the sawmills and logging camps which were active along the river banks and on the Sound.

Starting about 1880 commercial agriculture grew rapidly with hops as a high-value cash crop. Jacob Meeker and his son Ezra Meeker successfully introduced hop growing into the Puyallup Valley in the 1870's. Ezra Meeker then interested farmers in the Green, Snoqualmie and Duwamish Valleys of King County in this valuable crop specialty. With yields of 1,000 to 3,000 pounds per acre and with prices ranging from 75 cents to over a dollar a pound, hops were rapidly adopted by valley farmers all over King County. A hop growers' association was formed and the crop was marketed in Seattle, Puyallup, San Francisco and overseas to England. Kent became a major hop-drying center. It was platted by Ezra Meeker in 1888 and named after Kent, a region of hop culture in England. Nearly 860,000 pounds of hops were sold from King County in 1888. The upper section of the Snoqualmie Valley around present North Bend and Snoqualmie was in one large company-owned hop farm of over 1,000 acres during the 1880's. The hop boom was over by 1890 and began to decline. Lower prices, reduced yields and hop aphid infestation were the factors chiefly responsible.

As hop growing declined, other opportunities in commercial agriculture, especially dairying and poultry raising developed. Railways and roads allowed for easier marketing of crops and animals. The growth of Seattle and other Puget Sound cities provided larger markets for truck crops and dairy and poultry products. The active lumber industry, coal mining and the busy commerce created by the Alaskan Gold Rush expanded King County's population to 110,000 by 1900 and to 284,000 by 1910.

Dairy farming interested most King County farmers after 1900 when the growing big city market on the Sound provided a real impetus. Several developments of great importance to the entire state dairy industry took place in the

valleys of King County. In 1889 one of the first plants to condense milk was operated by the Carnation Company and the Pacific Coast Condensed Milk Company at Kent. In 1909, E. A. Stuart established a large farm near Tolt (now Carnation) in the Snoqualmie Valley to raise registered Holstein-Friesian dairy cattle. This became Carnation Farms, one of the nation's largest Holstein farms. Here in 1936 a registered Holstein cow, Carnation Ormsby Butter King, set a world production record for milk and butterfat. In the next 20 years Carnation cows were to set many new records and the Carnation herd has helped to improve Holstein dairy cattle over much of the state. Another important development was the building of a Borden Company condensery at Auburn.

Numerous dairy farmer cooperatives operating creameries and other dairy products plants were established. The entire county became a part of the Seattle milk shed. As the demand and price for fluid milk increased, the condenseries, butter and cheese plants closed and moved to cheaper sources of whole milk and cream. Fluid milk distributors were purchasing most of the dairy farm production by 1940.

In recent decades more farms and acreage have been given to truck crops, berries, flowers, bulbs and poultry farming, replacing dairying. Truck crops and other specialties give a higher cash return per acre. The rise of both truck farming and poultry raising was closely related to the rapid industrialization and population growth of the western King County lowlands. The World War II period created a large demand for labor in the Boeing Aircraft plants and in shipyards and other factories. Population grew as new workers from many states came to Puget Sound. King County's population went up from 505,000 in 1940 to 733,000 in 1950.

The agriculture of King County has been encouraged, guided and promoted by many public agencies, private organizations and enterprises. The pattern and character of the farming today is the result of the dedicated work of leaders too numerous to cite in a brief history. Outstanding and noteworthy are the horticultural scientists and animal husbandmen attached to the Washington Agricultural Experiment Station and its field station, the Western Washington Experiment Station at Puyallup. Another help has been the work of the County Extension Service, started in 1915 with Floyd W. Rader as the first County Agent.

Several associations of growers, producers and marketing people have helped to guide the course of agriculture. These include the following Associations: Vegetable Growers, Berry Growers, Rhubarb Growers, King County Dairy-men, Dairy Herd Improvement, Nurserymen, Puget Sound Bulb Exchange and Washington Cooperative Farmers. Much of the quality, grade and volume of production of various crops and animal products has followed recommendations made by marketing experts and leaders in these associations.