

## PART IV

## The Pattern of Agriculture

Farms: Number and Size

Most of the agriculture in King County is on medium and small farms. There are more farms of the 1 to 29 acre sizes than in any other Washington county, according to the 1954 Census of Agriculture. There are 5,181 properties classified as farms, placing King second to Yakima in number of farms.

The number of farms has dropped in recent years. However, the average size has not changed greatly since 1925. The number of farms and land in farms has varied from Census period to Census period, largely because of changes in Census methods. King County farms are much smaller than the Washington State average of 270 acres. Although King ranked second in number of farms, the average size of the farms was second smallest among the thirty-nine counties.

The large number and small size of the farm properties results from land purchase methods, high land values, suburban living and intensive types of farming. During earlier settlement considerable logged-over land was sold in

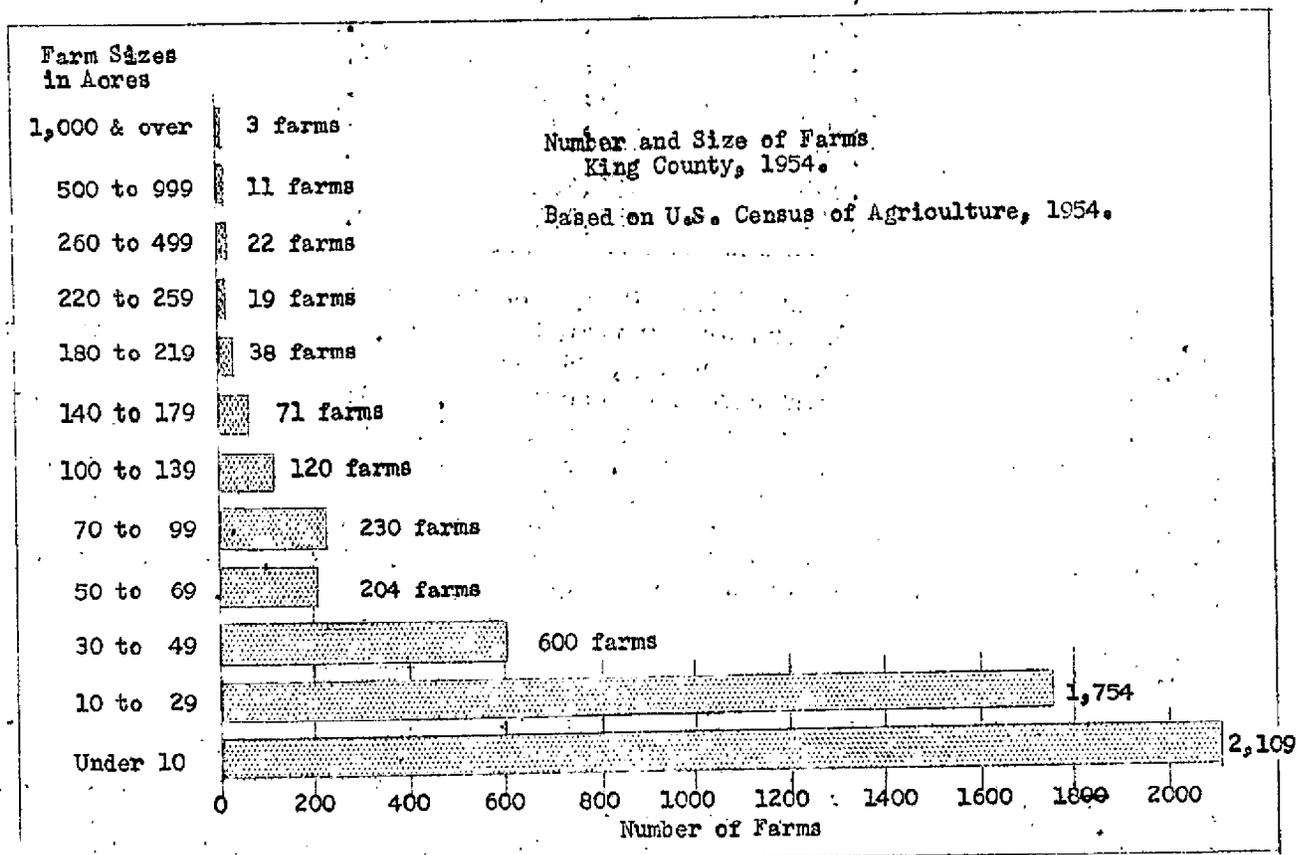


Figure 7.—Number and Size of King County Farms, 1954.

10, 20 and 40 acre plots to part-time farmers. Many of the original 160 acre homesteads were subdivided into smaller farms as population grew and land prices increased. Much suburban land for poultry, berry, vegetable, flowers and other intensive farming has been purchased for operation on a part-time basis. In the higher inland parts of the county, part-time farming combined with forest industry work has made small-farm ownership and residence quite common. Intensive farming in the Green, Sammamish, and Snoqualmie Valleys where land values are high also results in many small farms. Heavy costs of clearing stump and forest land have tended to discourage development of large holdings. These and other economic factors have created a present pattern in which 75 percent of the farms are less than 30 acres. Farms under 10 acres are the largest group, numbering 2,109. In the 1954 Census there were only 36 farms of 260 acres or larger.

Table 9.- King County Farms: Number, Total Land in Farms and Average Size of Farms 1910-1954.  
(Source: U.S. Censuses, Agriculture).

Census Year	Total Farms in the County	Total County area in farms (acres)	Average size of farms in the county (acres)
1910	3,287	148,417	45.1
1920	3,801	151,562	39.9
1925	5,125	140,332	27.9
1930	4,656	137,813	29.6
1940	5,760	152,770	26.5
1945	6,495	165,635	25.5
1950	5,496	153,301	27.9
1954	5,181	145,111	28.0

In 1954 the 5,181 farms of King County contained 145,111 acres or only 10.6 percent of the total land area within the county. Farm acreage grew from 148,417 acres in 1910 to a peak of 165,635 acres in 1945; since then the area in farms and number of farms have been decreasing. This indicates some abandonment of farming for other employment, and the increasing use of some land for residences and industrial purposes. In recent years considerable farmland in the Duwamish, Green and Sammamish Valleys has been taken out of agriculture. Nearly 20,000 acres have been changed to non-agricultural uses. This is a recent general trend in the Puget Sound area of King, Pierce, Snohomish and Kitsap Counties where population and industry have been growing.

#### Farm Values

Farms, land and farm building values have increased greatly since 1940. Values increased rapidly between 1900 and 1930, then lowered during the 1930's. From \$30,654,050 in 1940, farm property went up over three times to \$96,433,953 in 1954. An average farm in 1940 was worth about \$5,000 compared with \$18,000 in 1954. The rise in farm and land values has been caused by several factors. One is the general rise of prices of real estate and standing timber throughout the western United States. Value has been added by the large amount of labor

and capital for clearing, drainage and general improvements in the last thirty years. Another important factor has been increased demand for rural home and small-farm acreage related to population growth.

Table 10.- Value of Farm Land and Buildings  
King County, 1920-1954

Year	Total Value in County	County Average Values	
		Per Farm	Per Acre
	dollars	dollars	dollars
1920	\$45,605,158	\$10,291	\$258.09
1930	40,410,292	8,679	293.23
1940	30,654,050	5,322	200.65
1950	71,096,256	12,936	456.29
1954	96,433,953	18,613	720.00

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture.

### Farm Tenure

A large majority (about 85 out of each 100 farmers) own and operate their farms. Tenancy, or the renting and leasing of entire farms, is uncommon; only 365 out of 5,019 farms being operated by tenants in 1954. Many farms have remained in ownership of the pioneer families who established them. About 7 percent of farms were operated by part owners in 1954, showing an increase during the last 30 years. This pattern is caused mainly by many elderly persons and part-time workers maintaining ownership of their farms while letting other farmers operate part for a share of the crops sold or used. The farmers who rent from the elderly and the part-time farmers are classed as part-owners. Only about 7 percent of the farms were entirely operated by tenants on leases.

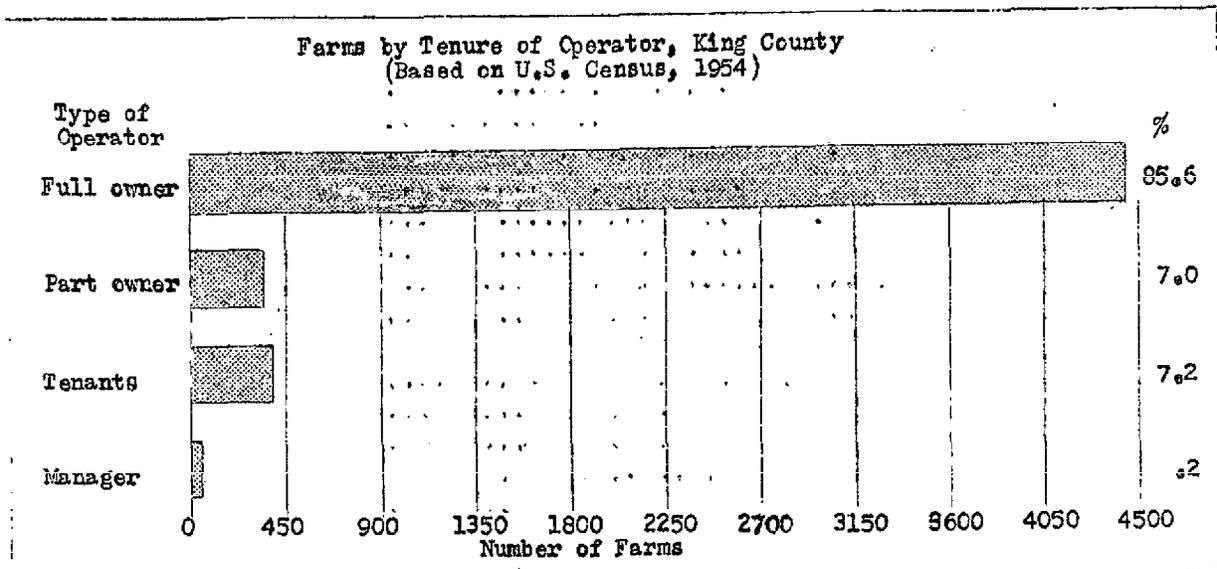


Figure 8.- Farms by Tenure of Operator, King County, 1954.

Table 11.- Farm Tenancy, Number and Percent of Farms  
By Tenure of Operator, King County  
1920-1954

Year	Number Farms in County	Full Owners		Part Owners		Managers		Tenants	
		number of farms	percent of all farms						
1920	5,125	4,172	81.4	121	2.4	53	1.0	779	15.2
1930	4,656	3,659	78.6	203	4.3	132	2.8	662	14.2
1935	5,781	4,435	76.7	231	4.0	62	1.1	1,053	18.2
1940	5,760	4,370	75.9	269	4.7	33	.6	1,088	18.9
1945	6,495	5,477	84.3	360	5.5	46	.7	612	9.4
1950	5,290	4,632	87.6	402	7.6	24	.4	438	8.3
1954	5,019	4,300	85.7	354	7.0	24	.2	365	7.3

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture.

### Types of Farms

Most of the farms are classified as miscellaneous, but with numerous dairy, poultry, vegetable and berry farms. Farm types classified by the Census show a high degree of specialization in dairy, poultry and vegetable farming. Dairy farms (686) and poultry (455) are the leading types of specialty farms. King County is fourth in the state in dairy farms but is first in the number of poultry raising operations. It is second to Yakima County in the number of farms raising commercial vegetables.

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

Type of Farm	Number of Farms
Total farms in county.....	5,178
Field-crop farms.....	5
Cash-grain.....	0
Other field-crop.....	5
Vegetable farms.....	175
Fruit-and-nut farms.....	140
Dairy farms.....	686
Poultry farms.....	455
Livestock farms other than dairy and poultry	146
General farms.....	15
Primarily crop.....	5
Primarily livestock.....	5
Crop and livestock.....	5
Miscellaneous and unclassified farms.....	3,566

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture.

Farm Residence and Operation

King County agriculture is characterized by a large amount of part-time farming. Many persons reside on farms and divide their employment between farm work and wage earning in other industries. The Puget Sound cities and the forested countryside provide a variety of seasonal or part-time jobs in manufacturing, construction, forest industries and government service. At some time of the year about two-thirds of all King County farmers worked off their farms during 1954. Of this group, 3,081 or more than half of all farm operators worked in non-farm industries more than 100 days during the year. These part-time farmers received more from off-farm payrolls than for selling crops, livestock and poultry.

Farmland Utilization

Crops were harvested from only about 23 percent of the land in farms in 1954. An additional 23 percent was in cropland used only for pasture and 3.5 percent was idle or fallow land. Typical of western Washington farmland utilization, woodlands make up the largest share of the acreage. About 9.8 percent of all farm land is in pastured woodland. Woodlands not being grazed amount to 22.2 percent. Altogether, the farm woodlands cover about 46,500 acres or approximately one-third of the land in farms. On the rough terrain in the foothills and the gravelly glacial soils of the lower plains timber grows well under natural conditions. Farmers have also found that clearing of Douglas fir

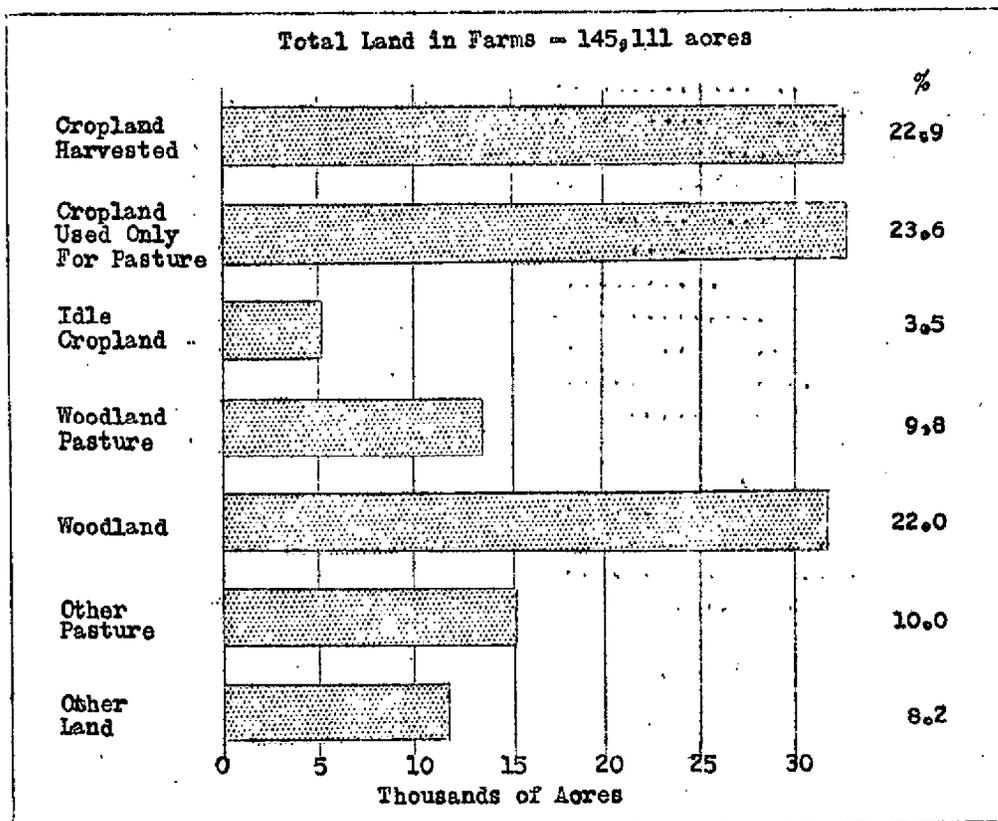


Figure 9.- Utilization of Farmland in King County, 1954.

cut-over land is expensive. Many have left such acreage in stumps and brush as woodland pasture. Others have left dense regrowth stands undisturbed to furnish timber for farm use and for future commercial cutting.

### Farm Facilities

In 1954 most of the farms in King County were above state averages in the use of facilities which save labor and make rural life easier. Farmers in this county enjoy an extensive rural electric service provided by both privately and publicly-owned utilities. Over 98 percent of farm homes and buildings were equipped with electricity. About 80 percent reported telephones. Washington State averages for these facilities on farms were 97 and 74 percent, respectively. The farming country is closely adjacent to Seattle and Tacoma and is within the reception zone of four television stations. A higher-than-average number of rural homes, about two-thirds, have television sets. Most of the farms also have piped running water and about one-third have home freezers. Rates for electric service are slightly above the statewide average. In 1950 the Census found that farm electric bills ranged between \$11.80 and \$7.00 monthly compared to the statewide average of \$10.00 to \$6.40.

Table 13.- Specified Facilities and Equipment on Farms  
King County, 1954.

Facility or Equipment Item	Number of Farms Using	Percent of All Farms in County Equipped
Telephone.....	4,183	80.7
Electricity.....	5,108	98.6
Television set.....	3,427	66.1
Piped running water.....	4,958	95.7
Home freezer.....	1,746	33.7
Electric pig brooder.....	51	1.0
Power feed grinder.....	112	2.2
Milking machine.....	815	15.7
Grain combines.....	15	.3
Corn pickers.....	--	--
Pick-up balers.....	111	2.1
Field forage harvesters.....	117	2.3
Artificial ponds, reservoirs and earth tanks.....	341	6.6
Motortrucks.....	2,667	51.5
Tractors.....	2,918	56.3
Automobiles.....	4,383	84.6

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture.

Farming is well advanced in the use of labor-saving mechanical equipment. Over one-half of the farms were using tractors in 1954 and King County was third in the state in numbers of farm tractors. Nearly all the specialized dairy farms use milking machines. There were 815 dairy farms equipped with milking machines in 1954, King ranking fourth among the counties in the state, in this respect. King County farmers use a large number of trucks to market

their products. About 50 percent of the farm operators owned trucks in 1954. Ownership of automobiles was also higher than the national farm family average.

### Irrigation and Facilities

Because of the dry summer climate and the farmers' needs for higher yields of truck crops and pasture grass, there has been an increasing interest in irrigation equipment. Dairymen find that sprinkler irrigation greatly increases the carrying capacity of pastures. The gravelly-glacial soils common in King County require considerable surface irrigation since the top horizon of the soil dries out severely in mid-summer.

Table 14.- Irrigation Farms: Number and Acreage  
King County, 1950 and 1954

Item	1950	1954
Number of irrigated farms.....	239	282
Land in irrigated farms.....	13,292 acres	15,287 acres
Land irrigated 1/ .....	4,847	5,503
Irrigated land in farms according to use:		
Farms irrigation crops.....	109	176
Farms irrigating pasture.....	74	83
Acres of crops irrigated.....	3,136	3,603
Acres of pasture irrigated.....	1,600	1,900

1/ Includes all land irrigated by sprinkler systems.

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture.

In 1954 there were 5,503 acres being irrigated, an increase of 656 acres since 1949 and 4,600 acres since 1944. The irrigation consists of about 280 individually or farm-owned systems, using mainly wells, pumps and sprinklers. There are also a few gravity systems. Most of the irrigation is on the commercial vegetable farms in the Green, Sammamish and Snoqualmie Valleys. About two-thirds of the irrigated land is in production of vegetable, berry and flower crops. The trend toward more irrigation in King County follows a general trend in other western Washington counties where farmers are specializing in high value commercial crops, and managing larger areas of grassland for feed. Hay and pasture shortages in recent years and increased costs of feeds purchased by dairymen are other factors causing the expansion of irrigation.

Table 15.- King County's Rank Compared With  
Other Washington Counties

Item Compared	Rank	Quantity	Year
<b>General</b>			
Land area.....	10	1,365,760 acres	1954
Number of farms.....	2	5,181 farms	1954
Land in farms--percent.....	34	10.6 percent	1954
Average size of farms.....	38	28 acres	1954
Cropland harvested.....	24	33,202 acres	1954
Rural farm population.....	2	20,521 persons	1950
Total county population.....	1	732,992 persons	1950
<b>Cash farm income</b>			
Value of all farm products sold..	9	17,735,289 dollars	1954
Value of livestock sold.....	3	12,014,745 dollars	1954
Value of crops sold.....	15	5,536,051 dollars	1954
<b>Livestock on farms</b>			
All cattle and calves.....	7	49,270	1954
Milk cows.....	3	22,000 head	1954
Hogs.....	5	6,086 head	1954
Chickens.....	1	583,364 birds	1954
Horses and mules.....	7	1,602 head	1954
Sheep and lambs.....	15	3,463 head	1954
<b>Dairy and poultry products sold</b>			
Value of dairy products sold.....	2	6,610,254 dollars	1954
Whole milk sold.....	2	161,398,000 pounds	1954
Value of poultry products sold.....	1	3,874,566 dollars	1954
Chickens sold.....	1	1,623,127 birds	1954
Eggs sold.....	2	5,963,002 dozen	1954
<b>Important crops harvested</b>			
Clover and timothy.....	7	8,950 acres	1954
Vegetables.....	5	5,332 acres	1954
Fruits.....	7	2,140 acres	1954

Sources: U. S. Census of Agriculture, 1954  
U. S. Census, Population, 1950.