

PART IV

The Pattern of Agriculture

Farms: Number and Size

Agriculture in Mason County is primarily on medium and small farms. According to the United States Census of Agriculture for 1954 there were 526 properties classified as farms. This was 44 less than reported in 1950 but the decline was due in part to a change in Census definition. The fluctuation in the number and average size of farms is due somewhat to economic factors. During the war period of 1940 to 1945 the number of farms reached a peak of 769 but the average size of farms was only 57.2 acres, the lowest in the period from 1900 to 1954. Consolidation of farms through purchase and lease has increased the average size from 57 acres in 1940 to 89 acres in 1954. This is much below the average for the State of Washington which was 270 acres in 1954. Mason County ranked twenty-ninth among the counties in the state in number of farms, but in size of farms was twenty-seventh.

The large number of smaller-sized farm properties results from land purchase methods, high land values and intensive types of farming. Much of the land suitable for agriculture is being developed for future harvesting of timber and other forest products such as Christmas trees and Evergreen brush which tends to reduce the land available for farming. During earlier settlement considerable logged-over land was sold in 10, 20 and 40 acre units to

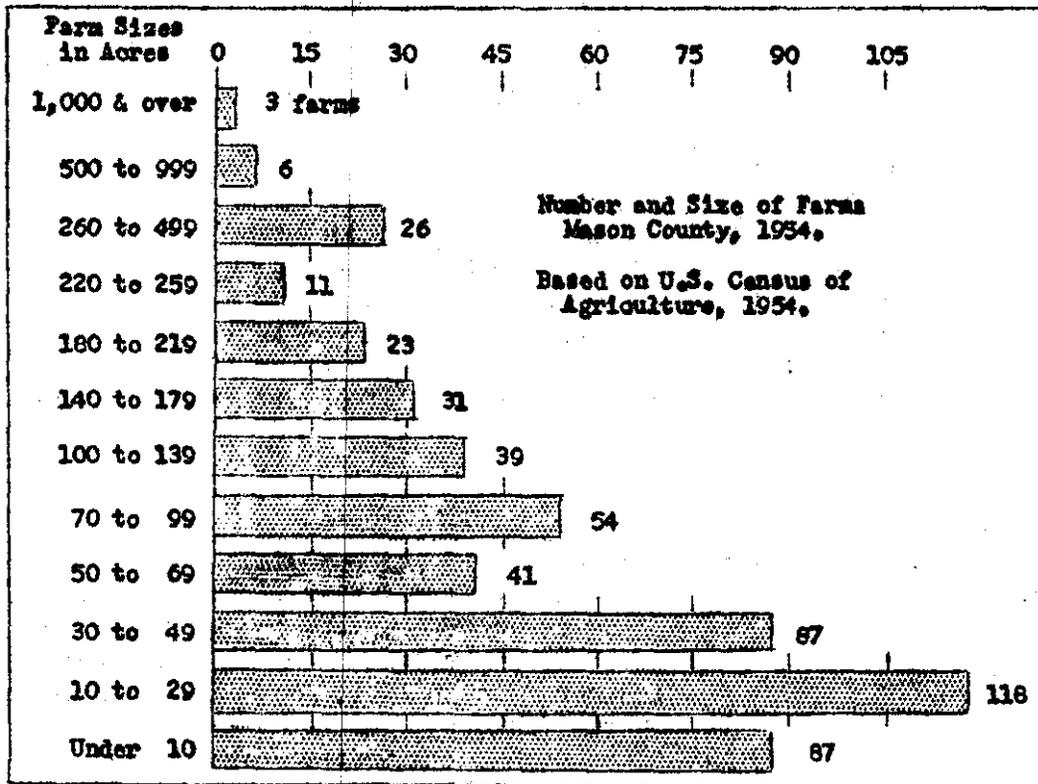


Figure 8.- Number and Size of Mason County Farms, 1954.

part-time farmers. Many of the original 160 acre homesteads were subdivided into smaller farms as population grew and land values increased. Suburban land for poultry, livestock, berry and miscellaneous farming has been purchased for operation on a part-time basis. Heavy costs of clearing stump and forest land have tended to discourage the development of large commercial farm holdings. These and other economic factors have created a pattern in which at present over 63 percent of the farms are less than 70 acres. Farms from 10-29 acres are the largest group, numbering 118. However, there are considerably more large farms in Mason County than in the nearby counties of Kitsap, King and Pierce. One reason for the greater number of large farms in Mason County is that many of the dairy farms contain large acreages of pasture and woodland.

Table 9.- Farms, Number and Average Size, Land in Farms
Mason 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	274	33,636	122.8	5.4
1910	385	42,928	111.5	6.9
1920	483	40,867	84.6	6.9
1925	544	41,667	76.6	6.7
1930	452	38,522	85.3	6.5
1940	769	43,995	57.2	7.1
1945	602	46,224	76.8	7.5
1950	570	56,130	98.5	9.1
1954	526	46,974	89.3	7.6

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

In 1954 the 526 farms of Mason County contained 46,974 acres or only 7.6 percent of the total land area within the county. The acreage in farms grew from 33,636 acres in 1900 to a peak of 56,130 acres in 1950. Since 1950 the area in farms and number of farms have been decreasing, denoting some abandonment of farming for other employment and a change in the use of some farmland for residential and industrial purposes. Much of the part-time farmland is being reverted back to the production of forest products thus reducing the available acreage for agriculture. This is true also of many other counties on the Olympic Peninsula.

Farm Values

Values of land, farms and farm buildings have increased greatly since 1940. Total value of all farm property has increased from \$717,059 in 1900 to \$6,322,520 in 1954. In 1940 the value of all farm property was only \$2,880,845, an average of \$3,746 per farm and \$66 per acre. Farmland and buildings per farm averaged \$12,020 and \$142 per acre in 1954. The rise in farm and land values has been caused by several factors. One has been the general rise in prices of real estate values throughout the western United States. Value has also been added by labor and capital. Mason County farmers have invested in land clearing, drainage and building improvements since 1920. Another reason for the rise in farm and land values has been the increase in population and

consequent stronger demand for small acreages for part-time farming. Increased value of standing timber for lumber and pulpwood is a fourth factor causing price rises of farms with woodlands.

Table 10.- Value of Farm Property
Mason County, 1920-1954

Year	Total Value All Farm Property in County	County Average Values	
		Per Farm (dollars)	Per Acre (dollars)
1920	\$2,853,135	\$ 4,875	\$ 58
1930	3,162,220.	6,996	82
1940	2,880,845	3,746	66
1950	5,304,990	9,307	120
1954	6,322,520..	12,020	142

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

Farm Tenure

A large majority (89 out of each 100 farmers) own and fully operate their farms. Tenancy, or renting and leasing of entire farms, is uncommon; only 30 out of 526 farms being operated by tenants in 1954. Tenancy has decreased since 1935 when about 12 percent of the farms were operated by tenants. Many farms have remained in ownership of the pioneer families who established them. About 6 percent of the farms were partly owned in 1954. The part-ownership type of farm tenure has become more common since 1940. This pattern is caused in part 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. No farms were reported in 1954 as having a manager-operated type of tenure.

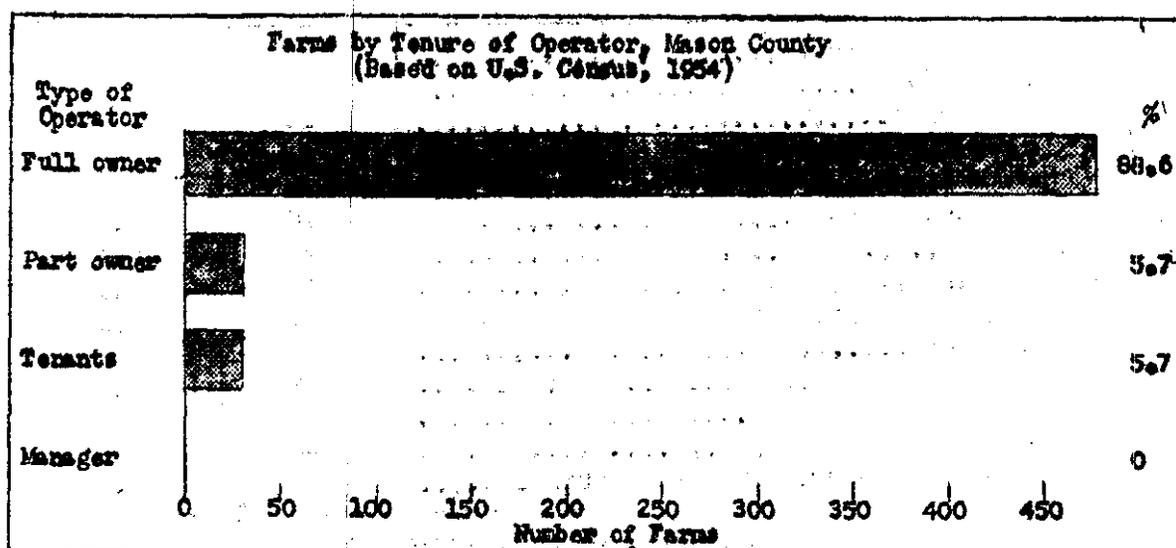


Figure 9.- Farms by Tenure of Operator, Mason County, 1954.

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

Year	Number Farms in County	Full Owners		Part Owners		Managers		Tenants	
		number of farms	percent of all farms						
1925	544	492	90.4	9	1.6	--	--	43	7.9
1930	452	380	84.1	21	4.6	7	1.5	44	9.7
1935	749	637	85.0	21	2.8	1	.1	90	12.0
1940	769	676	87.9	18	2.3	4	.5	71	9.2
1945	602	524	87.0	42	7.0	1	.2	35	5.8
1950	563	505	89.7	33	5.9	--	--	32	5.7
1954	526	466	88.6	30	5.7	--	--	30	5.7

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

Types of Farms

About 85 percent of the farms in Mason County are classified as miscellaneous, that is, the income comes from such a variety of sources that there is no real specialization. Farm types classified by the Census show diversification among a variety of specialties. Dairy (26) and livestock (21) are the leading types of specialty farms followed by fruit-and-nut (mostly grape and berry) and poultry.

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

Types of Farms	Number of Farms	Percent of all farms in the county
Total farms in county.....	508	
Field-crop farms.....	--	
Cash-grain.....	--	
Other field-crop.....	--	
Vegetable farms.....	--	
Fruit-and-nut farms.....	15	2.9
Dairy farms.....	26	5.1
Poultry farms.....	10	1.9
Livestock farms other than dairy and poultry	21	4.1
General farms.....	5	
Primarily crop.....	5	1.0
Primarily livestock.....	--	
Crop and livestock.....	--	
Miscellaneous and unclassified farms.....	431	84.8

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

Farm Residence and Operation

Mason County agriculture is characterized by the fact that a large proportion of workers reside on farms and divide their labor between agriculture

and off-farm work. In a forested region such as Mason County, farmers have numerous seasonal opportunities to work in nearby mills, in logging operations or for state and federal forest services. Most of the county might be classified as a region of part-time farming. At some time of the year nearly 78 percent of all Mason County farmers worked off their farms during 1954 according to the Census of Agriculture. Of this group, over 380 or 75 percent worked in non-farming industries more than 180 days of the year. These part-time farmers received more income from off-farm work than from sales of crops and livestock.

Farmland Utilization

Crops were harvested from only about 10 percent of the land in farms in 1954. An additional 9 percent was in cropland used only for pasture and just one-tenth of one percent lay idle or in fallow. Typical of western Washington farmland utilization, woodlands make up the largest share of the acreage with nearly 70 percent of all farmland in pastured woodland. Most of this farm woodland was uncleared, remaining in stump land, logged-over land or in re-growth timber. Such land owned by Mason County farmers amounted to over 32,000 acres in 1954. Several factors have resulted in this pattern of land use. Farmers have found that clearing out-over forest land is expensive and laborious. Many have left such acreage in stumps and brush as woodland pasture or for Christmas tree land. Woodland owners are beginning to practice farm forestry for the harvesting of Christmas trees and forest greens which are

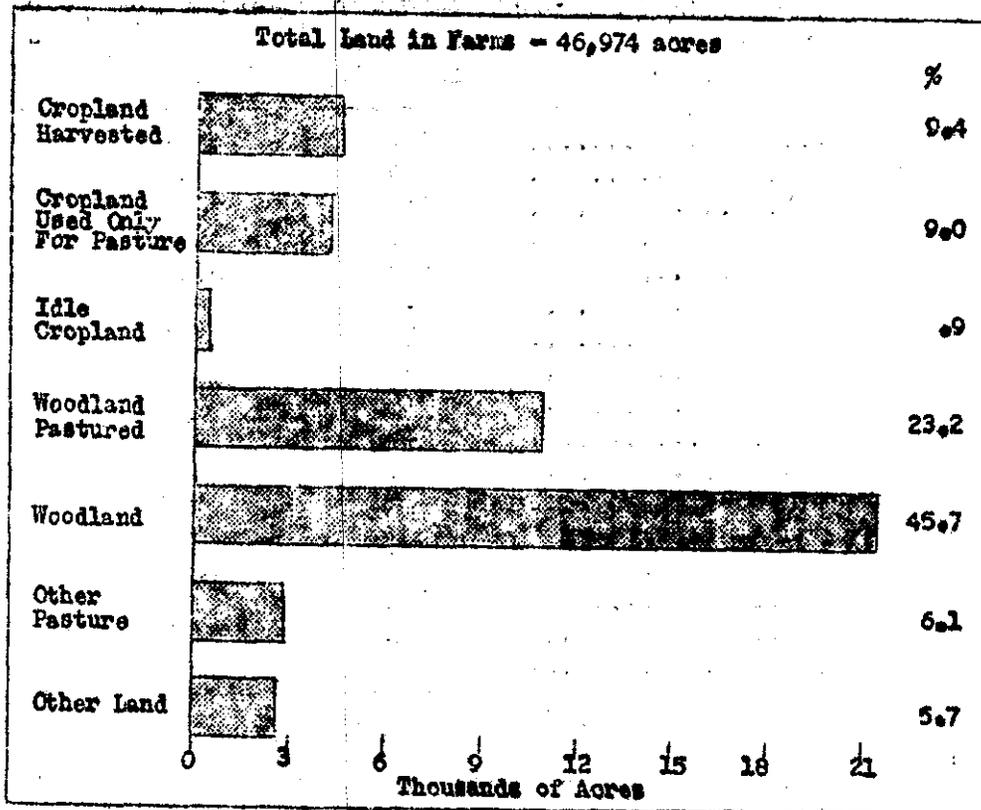


Figure 10.- Utilization of Farmland in Mason County, 1954

shipped to many markets in the United States. Others have left dense regrowth stands undisturbed to grow timber for farm use and for future commercial cutting.

Farm Facilities

In 1954 most farms in Mason County were above state average in the use of facilities which save labor and make rural life easier and more pleasant. Farmers in this county enjoy rural electric service provided by both privately and publicly-owned utility services. Nearly 98 percent of farm homes and buildings were equipped with electricity by 1954. Seventy-five percent reported having telephone service. Washington State averages for these facilities on farms were 97 and 74 percent, respectively. The farming county, being close to Tacoma, Olympia and the Puget Sound area, is within the reception zones of four television stations. A large number of rural homes (nearly two-thirds) have television sets. Most of the farms (97 percent) also have piped running water and nearly one-half have refrigeration in the form of home freezers. Rates for electric service are lower than in many other areas of Washington. In 1950 the Census found that the average farm monthly electric bill was \$7.34 compared with the state average of \$8.50.

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

Facility or Equipment Item	Number of Farms Using	Percent of All Farms in County Equipped
Telephone.....	382	75.2
Electricity.....	497	97.8
Television set.....	306	60.2
Piped running water.....	492	96.8
Home freezer.....	241	47.4
Electric pig brooder.....	--	--
Power feet grinder.....	16	3.1
Milking machine.....	16	3.1
Grain combines.....	5	1.0
Corn pickers.....	--	--
Pick-up balers.....	7	1.4
Field forage harvesters.....	6	1.2
Artificial ponds, reservoirs and earth tanks.....	61	12.0
Motortrucks.....	303	59.6
Tractors.....	323	63.6
Automobiles.....	418	82.3

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

Farming in Mason County is not mechanized as completely as in the more commercially developed farm counties of the state. Several conditions limit the use of labor-saving devices. The more important ones are the number of small-sized farms, the larger number of part-time farming operations on small fields and the tendency to raise crops and livestock which require little mechanized machinery. Heavily wooded and irregular terrain also limits the

use of wheeled equipment. Most of the specialized dairy farms used milking machines. Nearly 60 percent of the farmers used motor trucks to market their products. Tractors were used on the majority of the farms in 1954. Ownership of automobiles was higher than the national farm family average. Twelve percent of the farms had irrigation facilities in the form of artificial ponds, reservoirs, earth tanks and sprinkler systems.

Irrigation and Facilities

Because of the dry summer climate and the desire to get higher yields of berries, truck crops and pasture greens, there has been an increasing interest in irrigation. The gravelly and sandy glacial soils found in the Mason area require considerable irrigation since the top horizon of the soil dries out severely in mid-summer. The number of farms with some irrigation has more than tripled while the land irrigated has increased six and one-half times during the period 1950 to 1954. Dairymen find that sprinkler irrigation increases the cattle forage capacity of upland pastures.

Table 14.- Irrigated Farms: Number and Acreage
Mason County, 1950 and 1954

Item	1950	1954
Number of irrigated farms.....	14	45
Land in irrigated farms.....	1,806 acres	9,920 acres
Land irrigated ^{1/}	124 acres	829 acres
Irrigated land in farms according to use:		
Farms irrigating crops.....	11	27
Farms irrigating pasture.....	5	26
Acres of crops irrigated.....	13	358
Acres of pasture irrigated.....	44	471

^{1/} Includes land irrigated by canals, pipes and overhead sprinkler systems.

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

Irrigation in Mason County consists of 45 individually or farm-owned systems. Wells, streams, pumps and sprinklers are used but there are a few gravity systems. In 1954 there were 829 acres irrigated, with over one-half of this acreage (471) in pasture. The remaining 358 irrigated acres is in cropland used primarily for the production of grass silage and hay with a smaller proportion of the land in fruits and vineyards. The use of more irrigation follows a general trend in the other western Washington counties. Reasons for the large increase in irrigated farm land are, in part, the abundance of lakes, streams and ground water, a rise in value of land and management of larger areas of grassland for hay, silage and pasture. Hay and pasture shortages in recent years and increased costs of feeds purchased by dairymen are other factors causing an expansion of individual farm irrigation systems.

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

Item Compared	Rank	Quantity	Year
<u>General</u>			
Land area.....	29	618,880 acres	1954
Number of farms.....	29	526 farms	1954
Land in farms--percent.....	36	7.6 percent	1954
Average size of farms.....	27	89 acres	1954
Cropland harvested.....	38	4,404 acres	1954
Rural farm population.....	26	2,898 persons	1950
Total county population.....	24	15,022 persons	1950
<u>Cash farm income</u>			
Value of all farm products sold..	38	761,174 dollars	1954
Value of livestock sold.....	38	522,668 dollars	1954
Value of crops sold.....	37	81,085 dollars	1954
Value of forest products sold..	13	157,419 dollars	1954
<u>Livestock on farms</u>			
All cattle and calves.....	36	5,510 head	1954
Milk cows.....	29	1,400 head	1954
Hogs.....	37	239 head	1954
Chickens.....	34	15,212 birds	1954
Horses and mules.....	36	136 head	1954
Sheep and lambs.....	38	83 head	1954
<u>Dairy and poultry products sold</u>			
Value of dairy products sold.....	27	295,987 dollars	1954
Whole milk sold.....	27	289,626 pounds	1954
Value of poultry products sold..	30	76,816 dollars	1954
Chickens sold.....	24	23,471 birds	1954
Eggs sold.....	32	100,830 dozens	1954
<u>Important crops harvested</u>			
Clover and timothy.....	22	2,081 acres	1954
Grass silage.....	21	410 acres	1954
Grapes.....	4	98,000 vines	1954
Oat hay.....	34	288 acres	1954
Forest products.....	13	157,400 dollars	1954

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