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ALLA WALLA COUNTY AGRICULTURE

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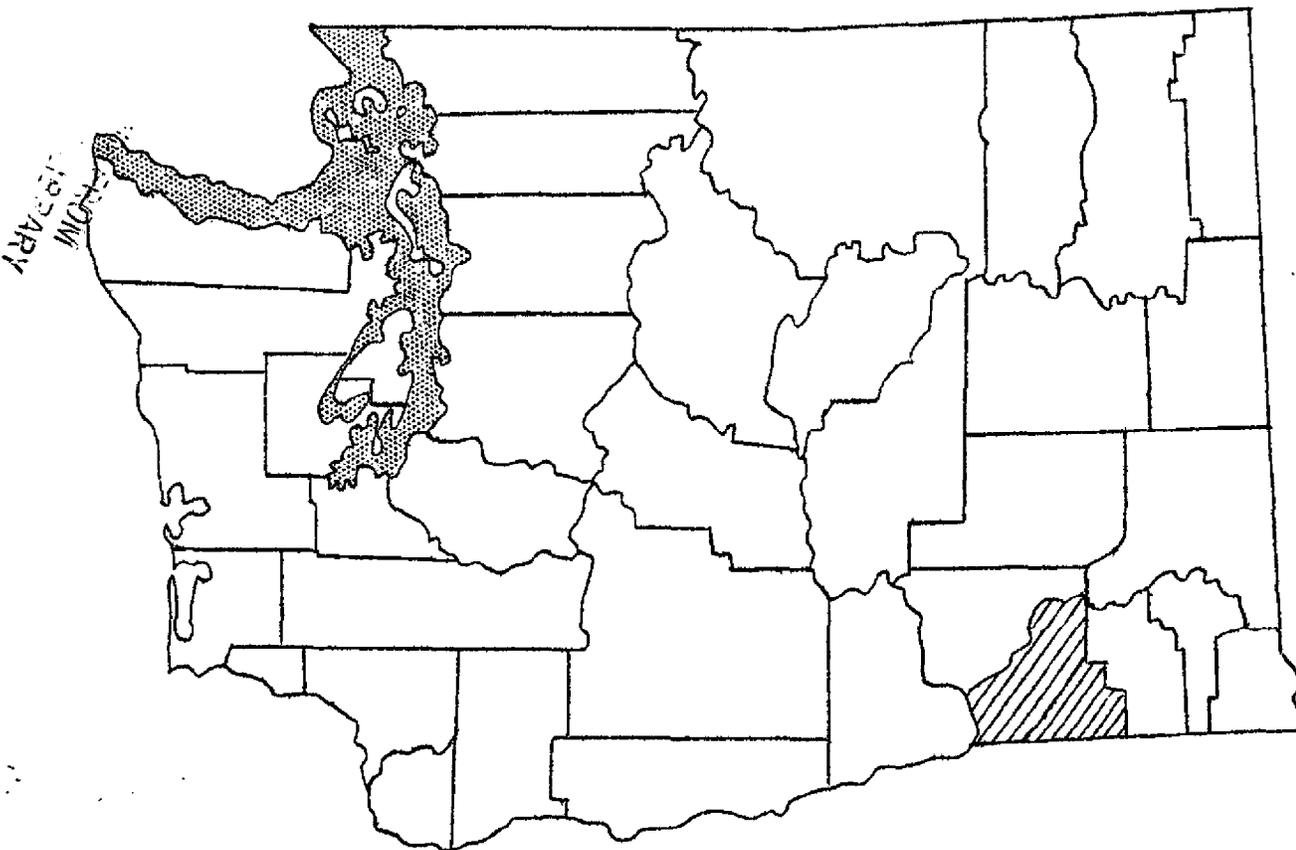
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COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES
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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Statistical Reporting Service
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FOREWORD

This bulletin on Walla Walla County is one of a second edition series devoted to presenting the history and present nature of agriculture in each of the thirty-nine counties of the State of Washington. The original series was initiated in 1956 by the Washington State Department of Agriculture. 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, especially in the field of marketing agricultural products. Knowledge of land resources, population and agricultural-economic trends in a local area such as Walla Walla County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by social studies teacher. It has been devised also to inform adults interested in knowing more about their immediate area.

Selected geographic facts, agricultural history, population trends and statistical data are included to give an overall appreciation of Walla Walla County. Enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Walla Walla County. Facts on topography, soil, climate and forest 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, Field Operations Division, Statistical Reporting Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Research involved in updating and revising the original information and the preparation of the manuscript of the second edition of the Walla Walla County bulletin were performed by George K. Saito, Research Analyst, Washington State Department of Agriculture. Editing of the first draft of the present bulletin was done by Emery C. Wilcox. Agricultural Statisticians of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service gave valuable assistance. Margaret B. Quiroga, Washington State Department of Agriculture, typed all of the textual and tabular material and prepared the graphs. The bulletins were reproduced and assembled by members of the clerical staff of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service.

Cameron Adams, Acting Director
Washington State Department of Agriculture

Olympia, Washington
March 1, 1965

Funds for this bulletin provided by the Washington State Department of Agriculture were matched by the United States Department of Agriculture under the Research and Marketing Act of 1946.

PART I

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HISTORY OF WALLA WALLA COUNTY AGRICULTURE

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Introduction

Walla Walla County is located in southeastern Washington bordering Oregon. The county's northern boundary follows the Snake River while the Columbia River forms the western border. It is bounded on the east by Columbia County. Walla Walla County lies within two distinct agricultural regions—the Palouse Hills and the Touchet-Walla Walla Valleys. The Palouse region, which covers the northern part of the county, is characterized by dryland farming while irrigated cropland occupies the valley bottomlands of the Touchet and Walla Walla River systems. Over the years, the county ranked high nationally in several farm products as well as having been developed into one of the leading agricultural areas of the state. The area supports an agricultural economy based largely on field crops, livestock and vegetables.

Walla Walla County's area of 1,299 square miles (approximately 831,360 acres) makes it twenty-sixth in area among the 39 counties of Washington. According to the 1959 Census of Agriculture, most of the county was in farms and about 33.6 percent, or 279,538 acres, was in harvested cropland. Walla Walla County was one of the earliest areas of the state to be settled by Americans. Since its creation, the county has been settled by immigrants from eastern United States and Europe who were attracted by its agricultural opportunities and the closely allied commercial and manufacturing activities which were developed in the city of Walla Walla and at Waitsburg. Walla Walla County has grown steadily in population and in agricultural production along with other economic activities.

History 1/

Before the arrival of white men, several groups of semi-nomadic Indian tribes speaking the Sahaptin tongue occupied what is now Walla Walla County. These included the Walla Walla, Cayuse, Umatilla, Nez Perce and Palouse Indians. They hunted and gathered food by traveling widely on horseback. The tribes were friendly to the early white fur traders, missionaries and settlers along the Columbia, Snake and Walla Walla Rivers. Missionaries taught the Indians the rudiments of agriculture. Indians became important herders of horses which were sold

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to settlers passing through the Walla Walla country enroute to Puget Sound and western Oregon.

As more and more white settlers came into the area during the early 1840's, animosity towards the white man developed among the local Indians. The feeling of ill will culminated in the massacre of Dr. Marcus Whitman and thirteen others at the Whitman Mission which was located at Waiilatpu on November 26, 1847. The Cayuse Indian War followed, retarding white settlement until Governor Isaac Stevens of the Washington Territory concluded treaties with the Cayuse and their allies in 1855. Widespread settlement, however, did not resume in the areas which were not under the protection of Fort Walla Walla until after 1858.

During territorial days, the Walla Walla Valley was the principal agricultural and populated area of eastern Washington. The original boundaries of Walla Walla County created in 1854 included all the present counties of Washington east of the Cascades. The city of Walla Walla was established as the county seat of all eastern Washington until 1858 when Spokane County was established. The present boundaries of the county were created in 1875 when Columbia County was established. The county name, Walla Walla, is from the Sahaptin Indian language used by the Nez Perce, Cayuse and Umatilla Indians meaning "a place of many waters". This name was given to the river which drains most of the area and to the first settlement before the county itself was created.

During the 1870's and 1880's, the Walla Walla Valley was still the principal agricultural area of eastern Washington. Cattle, sheep, horses and some hogs were raised and marketed down the Columbia River or overland to Union Pacific Railroad shipping points at Baker, La Grande and Pendleton, Oregon. The valley was the source of livestock for new herds and flocks which pioneer livestockmen developed in the Yakima and Kittitas Valleys, the Columbia Basin and the Palouse Hills. Stockmen moved herds northward into the range and grasslands of eastern Washington as more land in Walla Walla County was put into crops.

After 1880, the growing of wheat developed in the county for export over the transcontinental railways and by way of barges and ships on the lower Columbia River. New varieties of wheat suited to the low rainfall of western Walla Walla County were introduced and proved successful. The land boom and thriving trade in wheat export were major factors in population growth from 8,700 in 1880 to 31,900 in 1910. Commercial grain growing continued to expand and barley and rye became important secondary cash crops for the north Pacific Coast market. According to the Census of Agriculture in 1920, Walla Walla County had 197,500 acres devoted to wheat, 6,000 acres in barley and 6,800 acres of rye. In that year,

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

- (1) Meinig, Donald W., Settlement of Walla Walla Country, Ph.D. Dissertation in Geography, University of Washington, 1952.
- (2) Washington, A Guide to the Evergreen State, Work Projects Administration, Federal Works Agency. Published by Washington State Historical Society, 1941.
- (3) Perry, Richard M., The Counties of Washington, State of Washington, Secretary of State. Olympia, Washington. (Mimeographed 1943).
- (4) "Walla Walla Union Bulletin" (Progress Edition). Walla Walla, Washington, February 22, 1953.

growers produced 5,383,000 bushels of wheat. Walla Walla County's total grain production for 1920 was valued at \$12,126,500, third highest among the Washington counties.

Between 1890 and 1920 Walla Walla County farmers also developed important livestock, dairy and poultry industries and began to specialize in irrigated tree fruits. Individual farmers and cooperative groups developed several thousand acres of irrigated land. By 1920, the value of domestic animals in the county totaled over \$3,200,000 while more than \$3,600,000 worth of hay, vegetables and fruit were being grown.

Eastern Washington's prosperity from wheat began to decline during the 1920's. Agriculture suffered a recession as a result of a general world-wide wheat surplus which eliminated foreign markets and lowered prices. A sharp decrease in farm income from cash grain sales caused considerable change in the county's agriculture and population. Much dryland wheat farming was abandoned and some of the farm population moved to urban areas. Walla Walla County's population dropped from about 32,000 in 1910 to 28,400 in 1930. Increased mechanization also added to the surplus of farm labor. Many agricultural workers left for other parts of the Pacific Northwest to go into other fields of employment.

During the late 1920's, Walla Walla County agriculture became more diversified with the interest in raising vegetables for processing. In 1929, F. C. Sloan introduced peas with high success on lands which formerly grew spring wheat and barley. From an original planting of some 50 acres, green peas acreage has expanded to around 28,400 by 1963. Good local conditions for growing peas led several canning companies to establish plants at Walla Walla and Waitsburg and in Dayton located in adjacent Columbia County. Growers soon began to raise carrots, spinach and asparagus as well as peas for processing. By 1959, Walla Walla County farmers were producing vegetables for sale worth \$2,642,665. Also in 1959, Walla Walla County ranked third among all the counties in the nation in the acreage devoted to green peas harvested for sale.

Since 1940, Walla Walla County has continued to grow economically and to increase in population. New employment opportunities in manufacturing, commerce and nearby government projects as well as in those relating directly to agriculture have all been responsible for the growth. The value of all farm products sold from Walla Walla County farms has greatly increased from \$4,922,399 in 1940 to \$17,743,732 in 1949 and to \$24,186,300 in 1959.

The agriculture of Walla Walla County has developed with encouragement and guidance of several agencies and private organizations. Research beneficial to the area's agriculture has been carried out by the Washington State University Experiment Stations located at Pullman (Whitman County), Lind (Adams County) and at Prosser (Benton County). County Agents of the Washington State Extension Service located in Walla Walla have provided valuable assistance to local farmers. Among local and state associations active in farm betterment within the county are the Washington Wheat Growers Association, the Washington Crop Improvement Association, the Washington Cattlemen's Association, the Walla Walla Dairymen's Association and the Washington Pea Growers Association.

Table 1. Walla Walla County's Rank Compared With
Other Washington Counties

Item Compared	Rank	Quantity
<u>General</u>		
Land area	26	814,080 acres
Number of farms	18	981 farms
Land in farms-percent	2	101.1 percent
Average size of farms	10	838.7 acres
Cropland harvested	7	279,538 acres
Irrigated land in farms	8	37,296 acres
Rural farm population	17	3,600 persons ^{1/}
Total county population	15	42,195 persons ^{1/}
<u>Cash farm income</u>		
Value of all farm products sold	6	24,186,300 dollars
Value of livestock sold	16	4,228,801 dollars
Value of crops sold	6	19,957,499 dollars
<u>Livestock on farms</u>		
All cattle and calves	18	26,829 head
Milk cows	20	2,734 head
Hogs	7	7,238 head
Chickens	16	51,330 birds
Horses and mules	10	1,185 head
Sheep and lambs	5	23,263 head
<u>Dairy and poultry products sold</u>		
Value of dairy products sold	18	877,832 dollars
Whole milk sold	20	17,275,705 pounds
Value of poultry products sold	15	511,722 dollars
Chickens sold	14	233,371 birds
Eggs sold	17	498,310 dozen
<u>Important crops harvested</u>		
Winter wheat	4	152,893 acres
Barley	4	62,554 acres
Vegetables	2	21,027 acres
Alfalfa	11	11,085 acres
Spring wheat	7	8,575 acres
Rye	7	6,161 acres
Alfalfa seed	2	4,612 acres
Dry field and seed peas	4	4,234 acres
Sugar beets	3	4,214 acres
Oats	15	2,354 acres

^{1/} U. S. Census of Population, 1960.

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture, 1959.