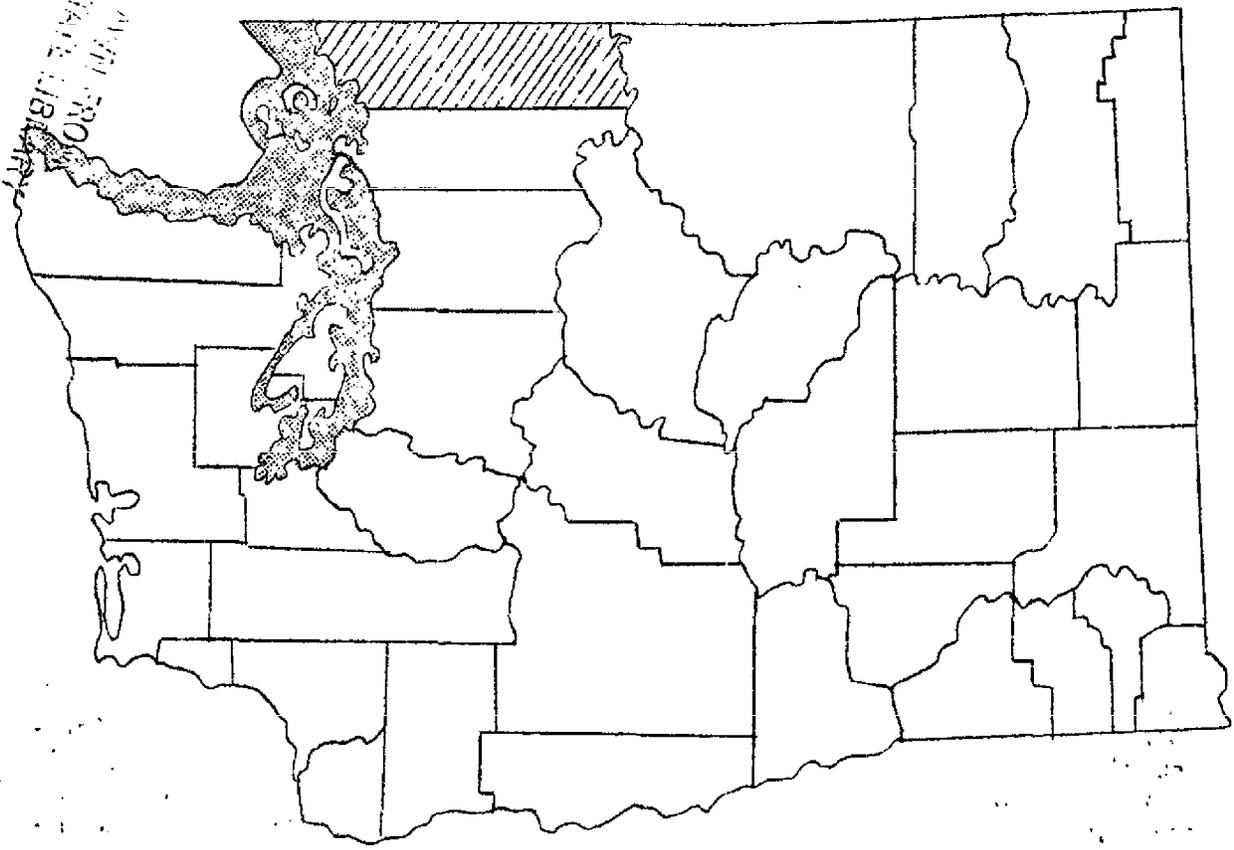


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COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES
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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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FOREWORD

This bulletin on Whatcom 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 Whatcom County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by social studies teachers. 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 Whatcom County. Enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Whatcom 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 up-dating and revising the original information and the preparation of the manuscript of the second edition of the Whatcom 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.

Olympia, Washington
November 15, 1965

Donald W. Moos, Director
Washington State Department of Agriculture

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

HISTORY OF WHATCOM COUNTY AGRICULTURE

Introduction

Whatcom County, which ranks high nationally as well as in the state in several farm products, is situated in northwestern Washington. The county forms a 24-mile-deep strip bounded on the north by Canada and extending from Puget Sound 95 miles eastward to the crest of the Cascade Range. Skagit County lies immediately to the south. Most of Whatcom's agricultural activity is located in the northwestern part of the county on the alluvial plains of the Nooksack River. The area supports an expanding agricultural economy based largely on dairy and poultry farming and the raising of feed crops, berries, vegetables and potatoes.

Whatcom County's area of 2,180 square miles (approximately 1,395,200 acres) makes it eleventh in areal size among the 39 Washington counties. According to the 1959 Census of Agriculture, over 13 percent of the county land area was in farms and about 5 percent, or 70,870 acres, was in harvested cropland. Some areas unsuited for crops because of existing forests and rugged topography, are still important as woodland pastures. Since its creation, Whatcom County has been settled by immigrants from eastern United States and Europe who were attracted by its climate and its rich resources of soils, minerals and timber. Typical of most counties on the Pacific Coast, Whatcom has grown steadily in population and in agricultural production along with other economic activities.

History 1/

Prior to the coming of the white man, the Indian was the sole claimant to the area now occupied by Whatcom County. The history of western civilization in Whatcom County begins with the explorations of the Spanish. In 1791, Captain Francisco Eliza and his crew sailed to the present site of Bellingham, explored the area and charted the off-shore waters. In the following year, a British expedition led by Captain George Vancouver was present in the area. Vancouver named some of the major features in the county such as Bellingham Bay and Mount Baker.

The first contact between the Indian and the white man in the area was made on the shores of Bellingham Bay. Five groups of Indians speaking the Coast Salish language inhabited the seashores and nearby forests. The Lummi group lived on the

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Island which bears their name and also on the mainland of western Whatcom County. The Nooksack lived along the river of the same name. Three other groups--the Samish, Sticks and Seamans--moved about the area in large cedar canoes. Fish was the principal food of the Indians. This was supplemented by berries and roots, especially roots of camas and wapato.

The area now within Whatcom County also was approached by land at an early date by fur traders and Catholic missionaries. The Indians were friendly and traded with Hudson's Bay Company traders based at Fort Langley on the Fraser River in British Columbia. Catholic missionaries taught the Indians the rudiments of agriculture. The Indians began to grow potatoes and other crops in order to supplement their traditional diet of fish, game and wild plants. During the 1850's, the Indians helped the earliest American settlers establish sawmills and farms. In 1855, when Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens negotiated the Treaty of Point Elliott with various Puget Sound tribes, the Lummi Reservation was established for western Whatcom County Indians.

American settlement in the area now occupied by Whatcom County did not occur until after the Treaty of 1846 which ended British territorial claims south of the 49th parallel by the establishment of the present Canadian boundary. The first Americans settled on Bellingham Bay under provisions provided by the Oregon Land Law and the Donation Land Act of 1850. Among the pioneer settlers were Captain Henry Roeder and Russell V. Peabody, who took up land claims in the present area of Bellingham and built a sawmill at the mouth of Whatcom Creek in 1853. Soon thereafter, lumber was being exported to San Francisco. Also in 1853, a coal mine was opened in the area. Edward Eldridge, a Scottish immigrant mill worker who took up a land claim at Bellingham, is believed to have been the area's first farmer. Fort Bellingham was built by the U. S. Army during the Indian uprisings of 1855-56 which involved large areas of the Pacific Northwest, especially east of the Cascades. The fort was under command of Captain George E. Pickett, who won fame later at Gettysburg during the War Between The States.

Whatcom County was created by the Washington Territorial Legislature on March 9, 1854. The name of the county is an Indian word meaning "Noisy Waters" which was earlier given to Whatcom Creek, the mouth of which marks the site of the first white settlement in the area. The original county was larger than at present, reaching from the Cascade crest to, and including, the San Juan Islands. Two other counties, San Juan and Skagit, were formed from Whatcom in 1873 and 1883. The shape of the county is long and narrow to include the Nooksack River Valley which runs from the Cascades into Puget Sound at Bellingham Bay.

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

- (1) Mrs. Lottie T. Roth, History of Whatcom County, Washington, 1926.
- (2) The Bellingham Herald, Bellingham, Washington. Centennial Edition, April 26, 1953.
- (3) The Lynden Tribune, Lynden, Washington, Centennial Year Harvest Edition, August 20, 1953.
- (4) Washington, A Guide to the Evergreen State. Writers' Program, Works Project Administration. Sponsored by Washington State Historical Society. Published 1941.
- (5) Richard M. Perry, The Counties of Washington, Published by Secretary of State, Bureau of Statistics, State of Washington, Olympia, 1943.

Around 1858, several thousand miners came to Bellingham Bay enroute to the gold fields along the Fraser River in Canada. The mining population encouraged the development of agriculture along the lower Nooksack Valley by providing a good market for farm products. One of the first farmers in the Nooksack Valley was Charles Roberts.

Permanent settlement, however, proceeded slowly through the 1860's and 1870's and in 1880 there were only 3,100 persons in the county. In the heavily forested Nooksack River Valley, settlement speeded up after 1877 when a large log jam was cleared from the river. Earlier, John A. Tennant and Thomas Wynn had begun farming at Ferndale in 1859; H. A. Judson had homesteaded at Lynden in 1870; Ever Everson settled at Everson in 1871; and R. A. Johnson took up land at Sumas in 1872. As logging operations cleared the timber from the valley lowlands, increasing numbers of loggers and newly-arrived land seekers from Europe and eastern United States took up farms on the cut-over stump land which was offered at low prices by the timber companies.

During the period from 1880 to 1910, an increasing number of settlers arrived from many states and counties. Although the area's primary attraction was its forest industries, many came with the sole purpose of acquiring farmlands. Most of the people combined forest industry work with part-time farming during this pioneer period. In the late 1890's, the Great Northern and Northern Pacific Railways extended lines from Seattle and Everett through Whatcom County to Canada. Railroads greatly increased the number of market outlets available for the county's lumber, shingles and farm products. Several hundred settlers from Holland as well as from Hollander communities in the mid-west took up farms in the Lynden area around the turn of the century. Their work and that of other settlers of Scandinavian and German ancestry was important in making the upper Nooksack Valley the productive farming area that it is today. In 1903, two neighboring communities on Bellingham Bay were incorporated into one city with a total population of 13,200. The new city was named Bellingham and was established as the county seat. Between 1880 and 1910, Whatcom County's population grew from 3,100 to 49,511 persons.

Since 1910, Whatcom County's population has continued to grow although at a slower rate. Employment opportunities in logging and lumbering declined but people found work in plywood manufacturing, paper making, fish and farm product processing, construction, boat building and oil refining. Growth of agriculture in the Nooksack Valley has continued along with industrial development in the Bellingham and Ferndale areas. Improved rail and truck transportation has tied the county into the general Puget Sound industrial and marketing area. In 1960, Whatcom County's population reached 70,317 persons.

During the 100 years or so of its agricultural history, Whatcom has grown to become the state's leading dairy county with specialized poultry, berry and vegetable farming. As specialization developed, more investments were made in the county by dairy product and food processing industries. The value of all farm products sold from Whatcom County farms has increased greatly since 1940, when it was worth \$4,986,316, to \$15,341,909 in 1949, and \$21,650,255 in 1959.

Whatcom County is an area of early and continuous cooperation by farmers to improve local agriculture. In 1885, the Northern Puget Sound Fair was organized and it continues today as the Northwestern Washington Fair at Lynden. The Whatcom County Horticultural Society, the Northwest Agricultural Society, the Whatcom County Egg Producers, and the Washington Cooperative Egg and Poultry Association

Whatcom County, Washington

have also been active in the county. Other associations improving their specialties have been the Whatcom County Dairymen, Potato Growers, Fruit and Vegetable Growers, and the Bee Keepers. Public agencies which have served in the development of Whatcom County agriculture have been the Northwestern Washington Experiment Station at Mount Vernon in Skagit County, the Extension Service by County Agents started in 1917, and the U. S. Plant Introduction Field Station and Bulb Garden Station at Marietta, near Bellingham (now a Washington State Department of Agriculture nursery).