

PART IV

THE PATTERN OF AGRICULTURE

Farms - Number and Size

Most farms in Whatcom County are of medium and small size. According to the Census of Agriculture, there were 3,151 farms in the county in 1959. This was 885 less than enumerated in 1954. The Census definition of a farm in 1959, however, was more restrictive than in 1954 and this accounted for part of the reduction in the number of farms between the two Census years. In Whatcom County, the decrease in number of farms which resulted from the change in farm definition from 1954 to 1959 was 315. Census data indicate that a peak number of farms was reached around 1945 when there were 4,854 farms. Farm numbers have steadily declined since then. In 1959, Whatcom County ranked second in the state in the number of farms.

The relative smallness of Whatcom farms in comparison to the state average is largely the result of (1) land purchase methods and (2) types of farming. Most of the farmland was originally sold by timber and lumber companies in small acreages to part-time farm settlers. Common were 20 and 40 acre units of logged-over land. Many of the original 160 and 320 acre homesteads have been subdivided among heirs or by resale as even smaller farms. General farming of the livestock, hay, and grain type has been replaced largely by intensive dairy, poultry, vegetable, seed, and berry farming. This latter type of farming, together with the high value of land, has tended to make the small farm most practicable in this area. On the fringes of Bellingham as well as in the mountainous sections of the county, the part-time farming system also has resulted in the establishment of numerous small farms. Over 56 percent of Whatcom farms were less than 50 acres in size in 1959. About 48 percent of the farms were between 10 to 49 acres.

Table 8. Farms, Number and Average Size, Land in Farms
Whatcom County, 1900-1959

Year	Total Farms in the County	Average size of farms in the County (acres)	Total County Area in Farms (acres)	Percent of County area in Farms
1900	1,262	95.0	119,434	8.6
1910	2,413	50.0	145,747	10.5
1920	3,369	52.8	177,742	12.8
1925	3,763	47.8	179,834	13.0
1930	4,282	42.8	183,147	13.3
1940	4,703	41.8	196,750	14.2
1945	4,854	42.6	206,781	14.9
1950	4,436	47.3	209,947	15.3
1954	4,036	49.1	197,984	14.4
1959	3,151	58.7	185,045	13.5

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

The number of small farms, especially units under 50 acres, decreased while those above 100 acres increased slightly between 1954 and 1959 in Whatcom County. This is indicative of the tendency to consolidate small, less efficient farms into larger units. It should also be noted that part of the decrease in number of

small farms resulted from the change in the 1959 Census definition of a farm.

Farmland in Whatcom County declined after 1950. Farm acreage amounted to 209,947 acres in 1950 compared with 197,984 in 1954 and 185,045 in 1959. This reduction resulted not only from the change in farm definition but because farm lands were shifted to other uses such as for highways, urban subdivisions, and tree farms. In 1959, 14 percent of the county area was in farms as compared with the peak Census figure of 15 percent in 1950.

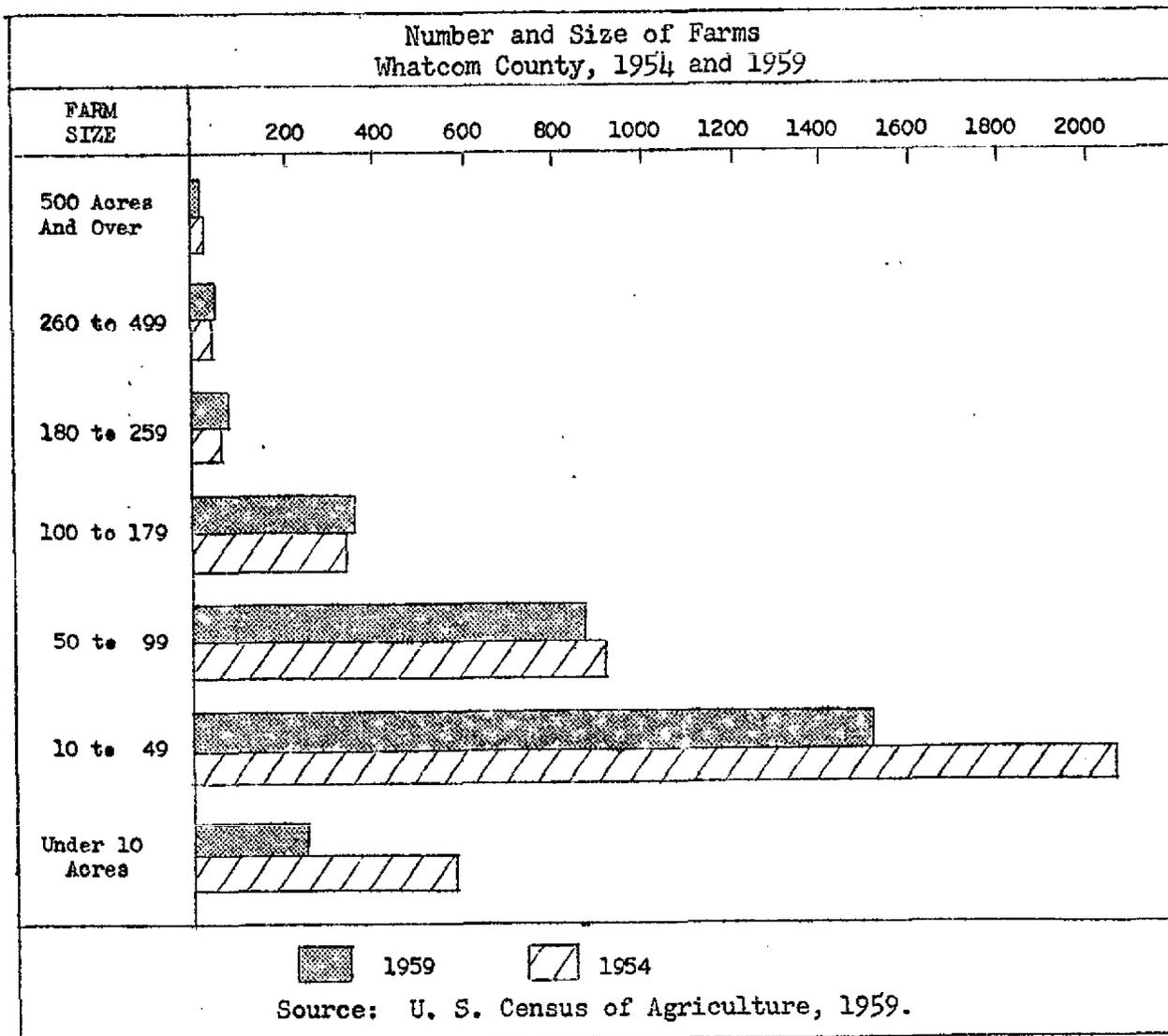


Figure 7. Number and Size of Whatcom County Farms, 1954 and 1959.

Types of Farms

Whatcom County has a variety of farm types, according to the Census of Agriculture. By far the most common type in the county is the dairy farm. In 1959, dairy farms comprised over 37 percent of all Whatcom farms. In the same year, Whatcom contained more dairy farms than any other Washington county, accounting for about one-fifth of the total number in the state.

Poultry farms ranked second in numbers in 1959, accounting for 8 percent of the total county farm figure. Livestock farms were third, followed by farms specializing in berry, fruit and nut, and vegetable production. Over 43 percent of the Whatcom farms were classified as miscellaneous by the Census. This category included farms raising nursery and greenhouse products, forest products, horses, colts, and ponies. Also included were all institutional lands and Indian reservations.

Table 9. Types of Farms, Whatcom County, 1959

Types of Farms	Estimated Number of Farms	Percent of all farms in the County	
		1954	1959
Total farms in county	3,130	100.0	100.0
Field crop farms	21	.003	.7
Cash-grain	10		.3
Other field-crop	11		.4
Vegetable farms	30	--	1.0
Fruit-and-nut farms	100	5.0	3.2
Poultry farms	257	7.5	8.2
Dairy farms	1,170	42.0	37.4
Livestock farms other than poultry and dairy	162	3.5	5.2
General farms	25	3.0	.8
Miscellaneous and unclassified farms	1,365	38.5	43.6

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

Three farm types increased in number between 1954 and 1959 while the others decreased. These were vegetable, livestock, and field crop farms, which increased by 20, 22, and 6, respectively. Dairy farms decreased by 600 between 1954 and 1959, more than any other farm type.

Farm Residence and Operation

Whatcom County agriculture is characterized by a large number of operators residing on farms and dividing their work between agriculture and off-farm work. This reflects the influence of a rural environment in an industrialized and forested region where a farmer is able to supplement his income from the farm by work in a nearby forest, sawmill, construction project, or city. In 1959, nearly 60 percent of the farm operators in Whatcom County worked off the farms. About 45 percent worked off farms more than 100 days that year. On an income basis, over one-half of the operators and their families gained more cash income from off-farm work than they received from products marketed from their own farms.

The majority of Whatcom County farmers live on the farms they operate. Over 2,930 farmers reported living on the farms they operated in 1959. Only 106 operators lived in nearby villages and towns.

Farmland Utilization

Crops were harvested from about 38 percent of the Whatcom County farmland in 1959. An additional 22 percent was in pastured cropland while 3 percent was idle or fallow. Thus, a total of 63 percent of the county's agricultural land was in

cropland in 1959. Typical of western Washington, over one-fourth of the farmland was in woodland pasture and woodland. Cut-over woodlands in foothill and mountain districts make up a substantial portion of the land in farms. Whatcom County farms included almost 48,000 acres of woodlands, according to the 1959 Census. About half of the woodland acreage was pastured. Prohibitive costs of clearing Douglas fir cut-over land often resulted in farmers leaving such acreage in stumps and brush, which was classified as woodland pasture. Areas too hilly for cultivation also were left as woodland or woodland pasture. Other pasture amounted to 5 percent of the county farmland in 1959. The remaining farmland, about 6 percent, was in house lots, roads, wasteland, etc.

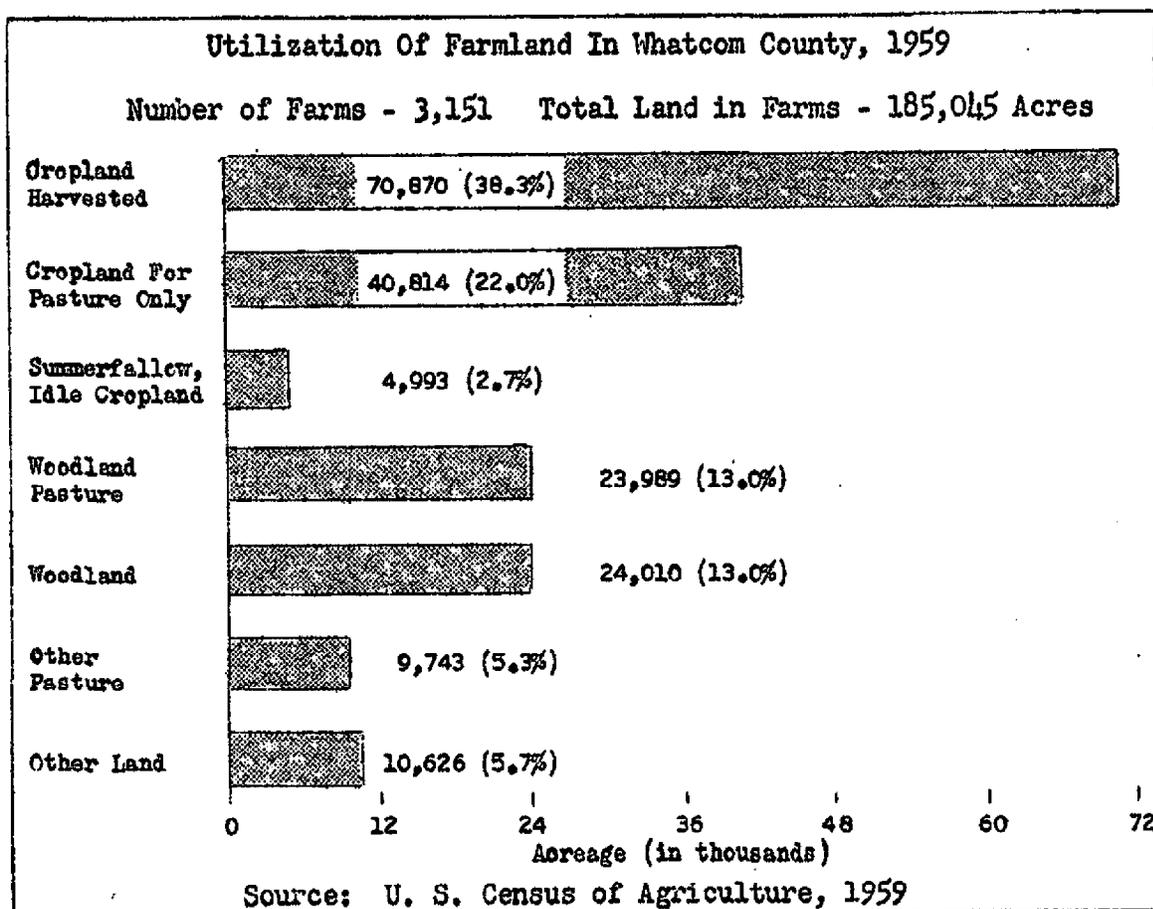


Figure 8. Utilization of Farmland in Whatcom County, 1959.

Farm Values

The value of farm lands and buildings in Whatcom County has increased greatly since 1900. Farm values increased from 1900 to the late 1920's but dropped during the depression years of the 1930's. Since 1940, however, the total value of farm property in the county has increased from about \$23,000,000 to over \$75,000,000 in 1959. According to the Census of Agriculture, the average value of land and buildings per farm increased from \$4,965 in 1940 to \$24,016 in 1959. Value of farmland per acre during the same period rose from \$119 to \$414.

The rise in farm and land values has been caused by several factors. First, there has been the general rise of prices in real estate throughout the western United States. Another factor has been the large amount of labor and capital Whatcom County farmers have invested in land clearing, drainage, and building

improvements. A third is the increase in population and the expansion of commercial farming which has increased the demands for farm acreages in the county.

Table 10. Value of Farm Land and Buildings
Whatcom County, 1900-1959

Year	County Average Values		Total Value of Farm Land and Buildings (dollars)
	Per Farm (dollars)	Per Acre (dollars)	
1900	\$ 2,218	\$ 23	\$ 2,799,350
1910	5,329	88	12,859,250
1920	7,405	140	24,947,470
1930	6,851	160	29,337,182
1940	4,965	119	23,351,635
1950	13,172	270	58,430,992
1954	16,046	327	64,761,656
1959	23,964	414	75,510,564

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

Farm Tenure

A large majority of the farmers in Whatcom County own the farm they operate. Many farms have remained in the families of the pioneers who established them originally. Full-owner farms in 1959 constituted almost 75 percent of all county farms, and these farms included over 62 percent of the county's farmland. About 17 percent of the farms were operated by part owners--farmers who own part of their land and rent land from others. This type of agricultural enterprise has increased in recent years while the number of farms operated by full owners has declined. Farms operated by part owners accounted for 28 percent of the county's farm acreage in 1959.

Tenancy--the renting and leasing of land--is not common in Whatcom County. Only about 8 percent of the county farms were operated by tenants in 1959. The percentage of tenant farms has declined over the years since the high of nearly 18 percent in 1940. In 1959, the tenant group operated only 9 percent of the county farmland. Manager-operated farms are a very insignificant part of Whatcom County

Table 11. Farm Tenancy, Number and Percent of Farms
by Tenure of Operator, Whatcom County, 1925-1959

Year	Number of Farms	Full Owners		Part Owners		Managers		Tenants	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1925	3,763	3,028	80.4	259	6.9	16	.5	460	12.2
1930	4,282	3,407	79.5	304	7.2	23	.6	548	12.7
1935	4,662	3,414	73.2	442	9.4	14	.4	792	17.0
1940	4,703	3,406	72.5	454	9.6	9	.1	834	17.8
1945	4,854	3,749	77.2	535	11.0	12	.3	558	11.5
1950	4,436	3,586	81.1	461	10.3	10	.2	379	8.4
1954	4,036	3,212	80.0	526	13.0	9	.4	289	7.2
1959	3,151	2,353	74.7	543	17.2	5	.2	250	7.9

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

agriculture. In 1959, only 0.2 percent of all farms were operated by individuals who managed land for others and were paid a wage or salary for their services. They operated less than one-half of one percent of Whatcom's total farmland during 1959.

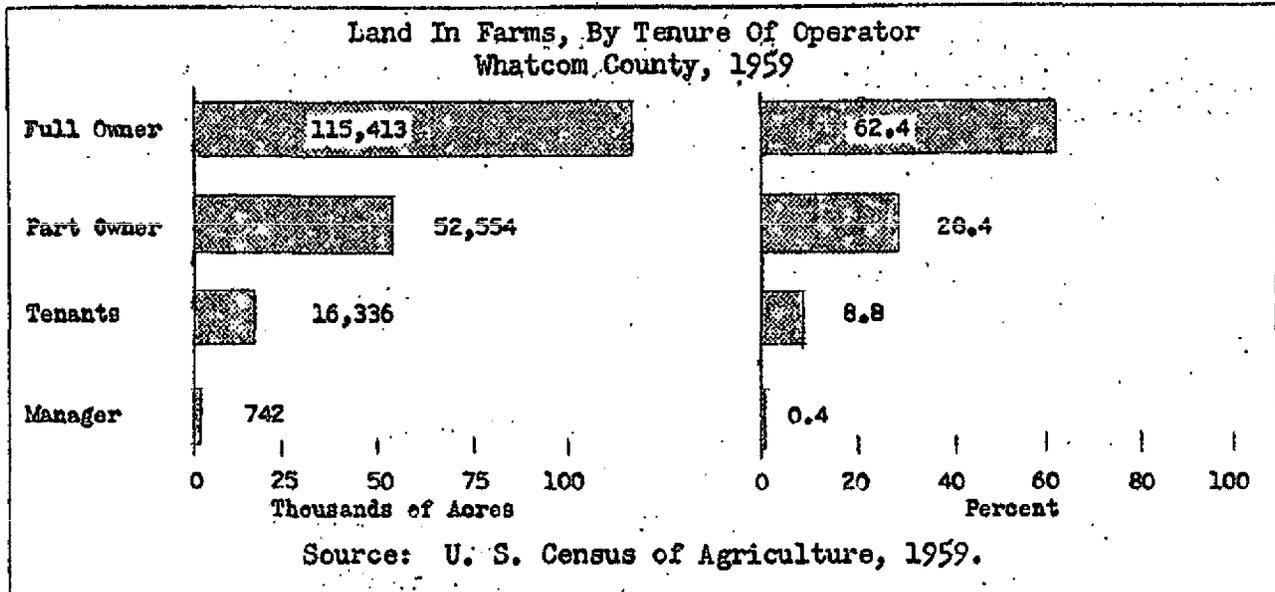


Figure 9. Land in Farms, By Tenure of Operator, Whatcom County, 1959.

Irrigation

The amount of irrigated cropland and pasture in Whatcom County has been steadily increasing. Irrigation becomes a valuable asset to dairymen and crop growers during summer dry periods. Most of the county's irrigation is accomplished with movable sprinklers, with the water originating from wells or streams.

Whatcom's irrigated acreage in 1959 amounted to 16,669 acres, or about 9 percent of the county's total farmland. About 54 percent of the irrigated acreage was in crops, mostly hay. Lesser acreages of potatoes, strawberries, vegetables, and small grains were under irrigation. The remaining 46 percent of the total irrigated land in 1959 was composed of irrigated cropland not harvested, and irrigated pasture or grazing land.

Table 12. Irrigated Farms: Number and Acreage
Whatcom County, 1950, 1954 and 1959

Item	1950	1954	1959
Number of irrigated farms	176	374	597
Land irrigated (acres).....	2,930	8,662	16,669
Irrigated land in farms according to use:			
Farms irrigating crops	144	305	442
Acres of crops irrigated	1,837	5,096	9,028
Acres of other land irrigated	1,093	3,566	7,641

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

Farm Facilities

The capacity of a farmer to produce is significantly related to the farm equipment and facilities at his disposal. Whatcom County farms are relatively well-equipped with modern farm machinery. Home conveniences such as telephones and home freezers are common. Tractors, motor trucks, and automobiles are found on a majority of Whatcom County farms. In 1959, nearly 80 percent of the farms reported 3,788 tractors, of which 163 were of the crawler type. The number of farms with automobiles was 2,874, which represented nearly 92 percent of the Whatcom County farms. A lesser number--about 55 percent of the farms--also had motor trucks in 1959.

The importance of dairying, hay, and silage crops is indicated by the relatively high frequency of hay harvesting machinery. Farms with hay balers numbered 561 in 1959. About 52 percent of the farms had milking machines while 37 percent had electric milk coolers.

Table 13. Specified Equipment and Facilities on Farms
Whatcom County, 1959

Facility or Equipment Item	Number of Farms Using	Percent of All Farms in County Equipped
Telephone	2,975	95.0
Home freezer	1,610	51.4
Milking machine	1,612	51.5
Electric milk cooler ...	1,147	36.6
Crop drier (for grain, forage or other crops)	5	.2
Power operated elevator, conveyor or blower ...	759	24.2
Grain combines	207	6.6
Corn pickers	5	.2
Pick-up baler	561	17.9
Field forage harvester .	346	11.1
Motortrucks	1,720	55.0
Tractors	2,495	79.7
Crawler tractors	152	4.8
Automobiles	2,874	91.8

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

Farm Roads

In recent years much progress has been made in providing all-weather roads for farm families. A large majority of the farms are easily accessible from the main highways in Whatcom County. In 1959, about 82 percent of the farms were located on hard-surfaced roads. Only 2 percent of the farmsteads required travel on dirt roads, while the remaining 16 percent was on improved roads of gravel, shell, or shale. All of the farms situated on dirt roads were located within 4 miles of a hard-surfaced road.