

PART IV

The Pattern of Agriculture

Farms: Number and Size

Small farms predominate in Benton County. Most of the small places are irrigated and produce a variety of crops. The number of farms has fluctuated somewhat more than might be expected and the acreage also has followed this pattern because of varied outside pressures. The peak number of farms was reached in 1925 while a low of 1,281 farms was recorded in 1945. Since 1945 the number of farms has increased slowly. Acreage reached its peak in 1950 but the trend has not been steady.

Despite the fact that the average size of farms is well above the state average (401 acres compared to 270) it is not a true indication of the average farm in Benton County. Over 82 percent of the farms in 1954 were 100 acres or smaller while 96 farms in the county had 1,000 or more acres. Large wheat and cattle ranches make the average somewhat high.

Changes in the number of farms and acreage can be accounted for by several factors. From 1930 to 1940 much land was brought into production by irrigation in the Lower Yakima Valley. Because of irrigation district regulations, each farm acreage was kept small, generally of the family-size type of farm holding.

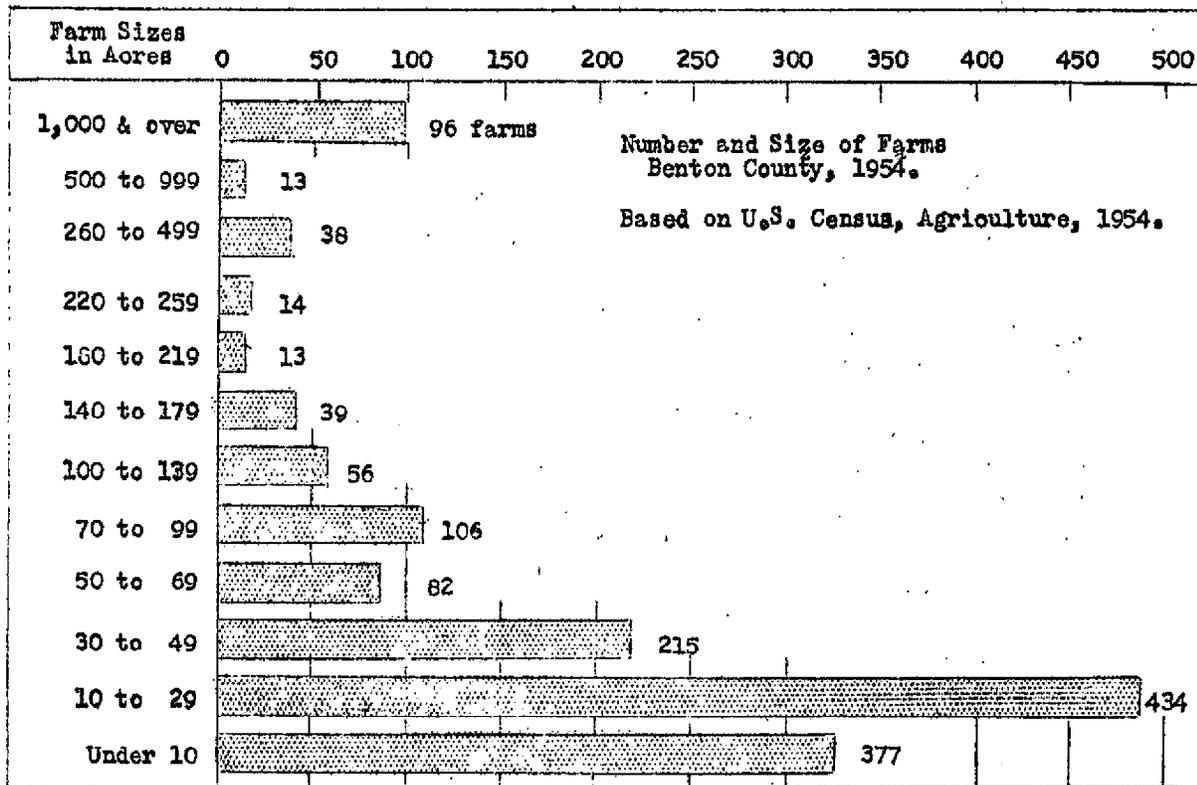


Figure 7.- Number and Size of Benton County Farms, 1954.

During the 1940-45 period, the decrease in farm acreage resulted from action on the part of the Federal Government. In this period, the Hanford Works U. S. Atomic Energy Commission Reservation was established. Almost all of the northern one-half of Benton County was reserved and taken out of farm production.

Acreage was increased again in the 1945-50 period because of high prices and large demands for wheat. There was considerable expansion in the Horse Heaven Hills area which was devoted to wheat raising. The latest acreage reduction may be attributed to two factors. The first has been the rapid suburban growth around Kennewick and Richland. The other factor has been the reduction of wheat acreage brought on by farm program controls.

Table 10.-- Farms, Number and Average Size, Land in Farms.
Benton County, 1910-1954

Census 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
1910	1,239	260,044	210	23.4
1920	1,519	371,811	245	33.4
1925	1,841	349,631	190	31.4
1930	1,668	320,805	192	28.8
1940	1,673	519,662	310	46.7
1945	1,281	477,371	373	42.9
1950	1,435	670,487	467	60.7
1954	1,483	595,186	401	53.5

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

Large Farms:

Most of the large farms in Benton County are located in the Horse Heaven Hills. Many of these farms specialize in growing wheat and have large acreages in production. High prices after World War II gave many ranchers incentive to switch from livestock operations to wheat farming. Farms with 5,000 acres or more of land are generally devoted to ranching.

In 1954, there were 96 farms in Benton County that exceeded 1,000 acres. Of this number, 23 had 5,000 or more acres under active management and the land in the large farms included 88 percent of all the land in farms within the county. The remaining 12 percent was devoted to small irrigated farms along the Yakima River. Cultivated cropland harvested on the large farms totaled 142,557 acres which included most of the cropland in the county in 1954.

Grouping farms by size shows 434 farms had 10 to 29 acres in 1954. This was the largest group. Next was the group with less than 10 acres each--377 farms. The 70 to 99 acre class was third, being made up of 106 farms. Fourth in rank was the group with 1,000 acres and over, totaling 96 farms. The rest of the groupings are considerably smaller and about the same number of farms appeared in each group.

Table 11.- Large Farms: Number and General Land Use
Benton County, 1954

Land Utilization on Large Farms	Farms 1,000 to 4,999 acres	Farms 5,000 acres and over
Number of farms-----	73 farms	23 farms
Land in farms-----	194,730 acres	329,748 acres
Cropland harvested-----	77,713 acres	64,884 acres
Cropland used only for pasture	828 acres	4,000 acres
Cropland not harvested and not pastured (idle, fallow land)---	77,355 acres	70,678 acres
Woodland pastured-----	3,160 acres	--
Woodland not pastured-----	--	--
Other pasture (not cropland and not woodland)-----	24,375 acres	181,951 acres

Source: U.S. Census, AgricultureTypes of Farms

No one type of farm predominated in Benton County according to the 1954 Census of Agriculture. Farms growing field crops such as wheat, potatoes, barley and alfalfa were most numerous. Nearly one-half of the farms were miscellaneous and unclassified as a result of the part-time farming system common in the Pasco-Kennewick-Richland industrial area and the lower Yakima Valley.

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

Type of Farms	Number of Farms	Percent of all farms in the county
Total farms in county.....	1,483	
Field-crop farms.....	281	
Cash-grain.....	116	7.8
Other field-crop.....	165	11.1
Vegetable farms.....	50	3.4
Fruit-and-nut farms.....	125	8.4
Dairy farms.....	155	10.5
Poultry farms.....	57	3.8
Livestock farms other than dairy and poultry	140	9.4
General farms.....	142	
Primarily crop.....	82	5.5
Primarily livestock.....	15	1.0
Crop and livestock.....	45	3.0
Miscellaneous and unclassified farms.....	667	44.9

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

Farm Values

The money or market value of land and farm buildings has increased since 1910. During the period 1910 to 1930 land values increased only slightly. The depression decade from 1930 to 1940 saw values of land decline considerably but there was a tremendous increase from the mid-1940's to the present time.

In 1954 the value of land and buildings reached its peak of \$42,650,255. Part of this increase may be attributed to increased demand for land and the increase in the average size of farms but also in part to the devaluation of the dollar that has taken place in recent years. The average 160-acre farm was valued at \$28,085 in 1954. On a per acre basis the county average was \$83.25--slightly below the state average.

Table 13.- Value of Farm Property
Benton County, 1910-1954

Year	Total Value All Farm Property in County	County Average Values	
		Per Farm (dollars)	Per Acre (dollars)
1910	\$14,316,556	\$11,155	\$55
1920	17,585,680	11,577	47
1930	10,545,670	6,322	33
1940	7,875,658	4,708	15
1950	32,740,960	22,816	45
1954	42,650,255	28,085	83

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture.

Farm Ownership and Tenure

Farm ownership has steadily increased from 63 percent full owners in 1920 to 75 percent in 1954, according to the United States Census of Agriculture.

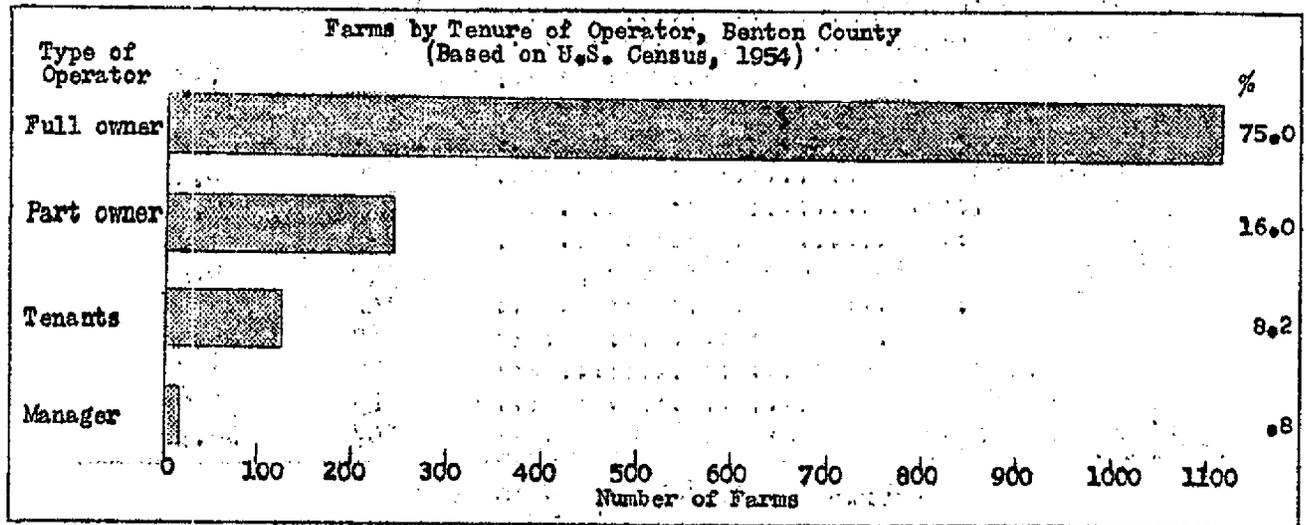


Figure 8.- Farms by Tenure of Operator, Benton County, 1954.

Table 14.- Farm Tenancy, Number and Percent of Farms
By Tenure of Operator, Benton County
1925-1954

Year	Number Farms in County	Full Owners		Part Owners		Managers		Tenants	
		number of farms	percent of all farms						
1925	1,841	1,163	63.2	264	14.3	102	5.5	312	16.9
1930	1,668	1,051	63.0	233	14.0	48	2.9	336	20.1
1935	1,882	1,159	61.6	216	11.5	41	2.2	466	24.8
1940	1,673	1,122	67.1	247	14.8	10	.6	294	17.6
1945	1,281	986	77.0	151	11.8	12	.9	132	10.3
1950	1,434	1,095	76.4	196	13.7	11	.8	133	9.3
1954	1,482	1,112	75.0	238	16.0	12	.8	121	8.2

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

Part ownership has remained practically constant at about 15 percent of the total number of farms. Managed farms and farms operated by tenants have decreased. Tenancy reached its peak in 1935 when one-fourth of all farms were occupied by tenants; it reached its low point in 1954, accounting for only 8 percent.

The upward trend of farm ownership has been caused mainly by increased irrigation activities. It has been possible for farmers to buy small irrigated farms and this has been more attractive than renting larger dryland acreages.

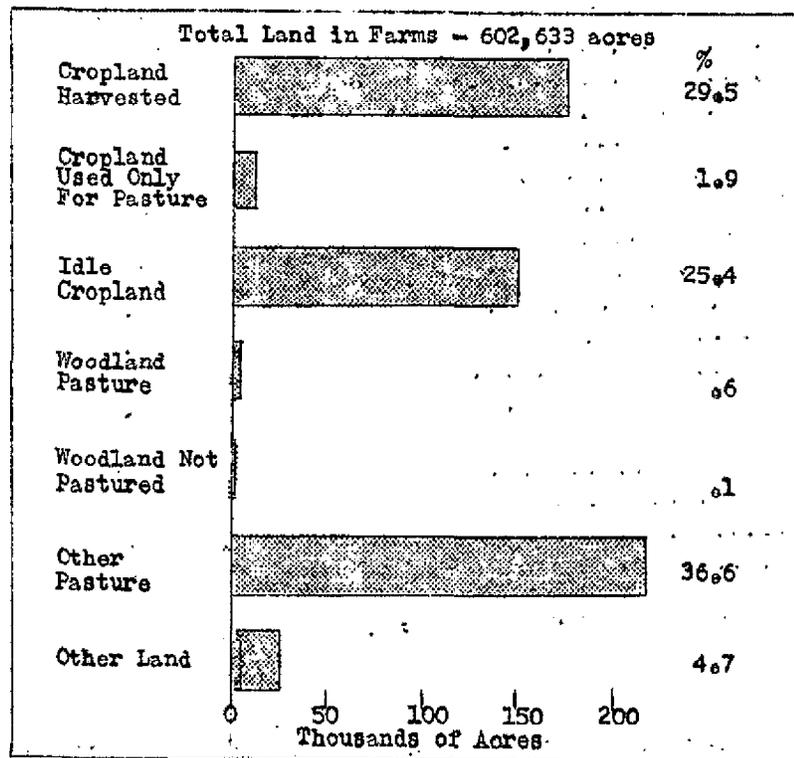


Figure 9.- Utilization of Farmland in Benton County, 1954

Farmland Utilization

Rangeland in Benton County amounts to over one-third of all the farmland in use. Cropland accounts for almost another one-third. Idle cropland amounted to one-fourth of the farmland which points out the practice of fallowing land which prevails among the wheat farmers. There is practically no woodland in the county because of the very low rainfall. Benton County ranked ninth in the state for cropland harvested in 1954. Irrigation and dryland cropping systems plus a balanced livestock program result in a well-diversified pattern of agriculture although the individual farms may not be diversified.

Farm Residence and Operation

Benton County is characterized by a large proportion of workers residing on farms and dividing their labor between agriculture and off-farm work. Work opportunities are presented by the county, state and federal government in highway maintenance, Atomic Energy Commission projects and other local jobs. In 1954 more than 50 percent of all Benton farmers had off-farm income exceeding the value of farm products sold. Farmers who worked off their farms numbered 1,068, and of these 849 worked off the farm 100 days or more, according to the 1954 Census of Agriculture.

Table 15.— Specified Facilities and Equipment on Farms
Benton County, 1954

Facility or Equipment Item	Number of Farms Using	Percent of All Farms in County Equipped
Telephone.....	951	64.1
Electricity.....	1,483	100.0
Television set.....	293	19.8
Piped running water.....	1,483	100.0
Home freezer.....	496	33.4
Electric pig brooder.....	60	4.0
Power feed grinder.....	117	7.9
Milking machine.....	205	13.8
Grain combines.....	175	11.8
Corn pickers.....	5	.3
Pick-up balers.....	112	7.6
Field forage harvesters.....	38	2.6
Artificial ponds, reservoirs and earthen tanks.....	81	5.5
Motortrucks.....	846	57.0
Tractors.....	1,207	81.4
Automobiles.....	1,413	95.3

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture

Farm Facilities

In 1954 Benton County agriculture as a whole was below the state average in use of machinery, facilities and utilities. However, it ranks high in items used to increase farm home living standards. Nearly all farm homes had electricity and piped running water. Telephone use in farm homes has lagged, however,

with only 64 percent of all homes having telephones in 1954.

Farm mechanization has been relatively slow in Benton County. Part of this may be explained by the large number of small farms on which it has not been economically feasible to have expensive equipment. In many cases it is more economical to hire the work done rather than own the machinery. Wheeled tractors are the most common, with 930 farmers using them. About three-fourths of the farm operators use trucks in their farm work. All of the large farms were well-equipped with combines and power feed grinders which are essential in large-scale grain and livestock farming.

Irrigation Facilities

Irrigated agriculture has increased steadily. Since 1950, 65 farmers have added irrigation facilities. Most new irrigation consists of ditches diverting Yakima River water but some newer facilities are individual farm installations of wells, pumps and sprinkler systems. Irrigated acreage rose from 30,979 acres in 1945 to 48,839 acres in 1954. In recent years more irrigation water has been applied to pastures. Irrigated pasture increased approximately 4,000 acres from 1950 to 1955. About 75 percent of the irrigated land is devoted to crop growing with potatoes, wheat, barley and alfalfa hay as leading irrigated crops.

Table 16.- Irrigated Farms: Number and Acreage
Benton County, 1950 and 1954

Item	1950	1954
Number of irrigated farms.....	1,226	1,291
Land irrigated.....	38,229 acres	48,839 acres
Irrigated land in farms according to use:		
Farms irrigating crops.....	1,121	1,081
Farms irrigating pasture.....	653	829
Acres of crops irrigated.....	28,596	37,580
Acres of pasture irrigated.....	7,627	11,259

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture