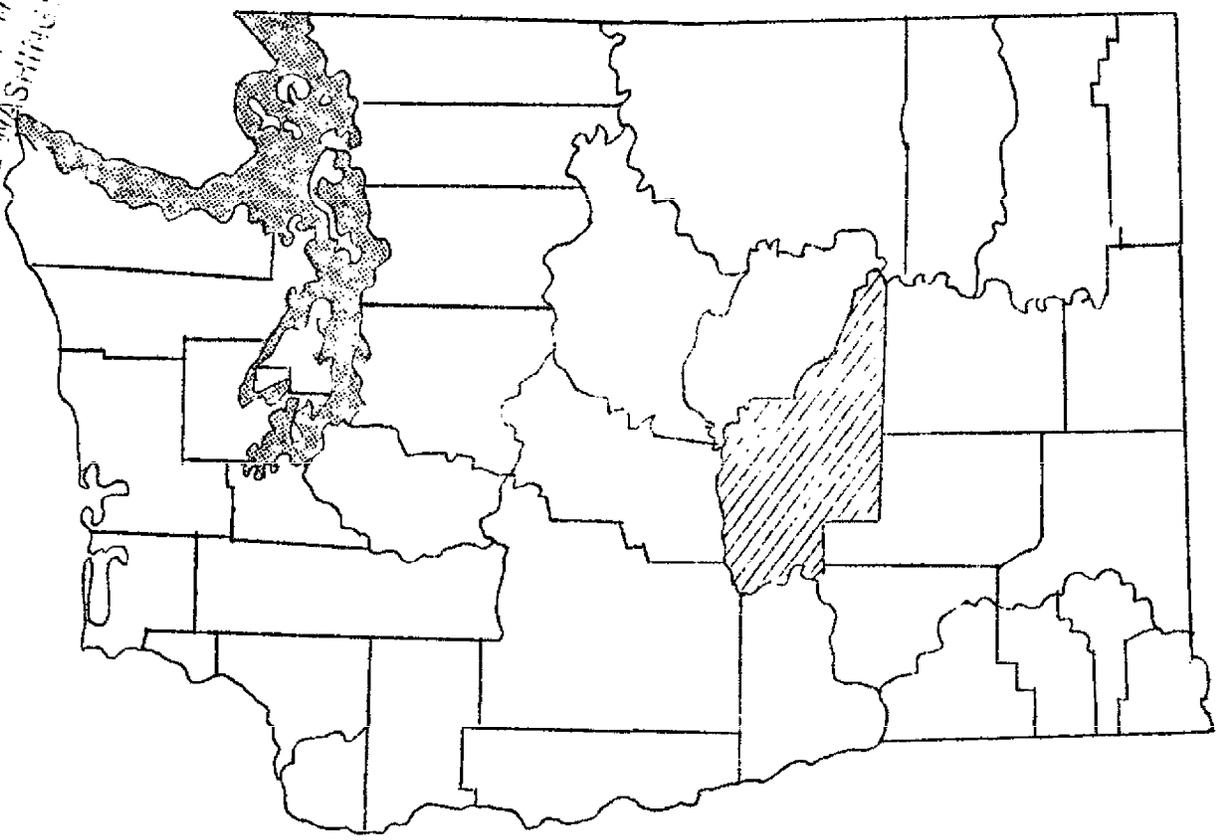


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GRANT COUNTY AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON

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COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES
1965



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Donald W. Moos, Director

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Statistical Reporting Service
Harry C. Trelogan

WASHINGTON CROP AND LIVESTOCK REPORTING SERVICE
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FOREWORD

This bulletin on Grant 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 Grant 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 Grant County. Enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Grant 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 Grant County bulletin were performed by Howard W. Chadwick, 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
December 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

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HISTORY OF GRANT COUNTY AGRICULTURE

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Introduction

Grant County, a land of irrigated plains, coulees, and dry uplands, is located in the Columbia Basin of central Washington. Its 2,807 square miles (about 1,722,240 acres) make it fourth in size among Washington's 39 counties, and larger than the state of Delaware. Moses Lake (population 11,299 in 1960) is the largest city and Ephrata (6,548) is the county seat.

The Columbia Basin Project, using irrigation water impounded by Grand Coulee Dam, has recently caused great changes in Grant County agriculture. The project was authorized by Act of Congress in 1943 to be developed by the Bureau of Reclamation of the United States Department of the Interior. Total land area involved amounts to about 2,500,000 acres, of which 1,029,000 acres are considered suitable for irrigation. Project lands lie within Grant, Adams, and Franklin Counties. By 1964, twelve years after irrigation water was first made available, irrigated land had expanded to nearly 400,000 acres, of which roughly 65 percent was in Grant County.

The Census of Agriculture showed that in 1959 Grant was first among Washington counties in harvested acreage of dry beans and Irish potatoes. It ranked second in irrigated farmland acreage, number of sheep and lambs on farms and harvested acreage of spring wheat, field corn, sugar beets, red clover seed and dry onions. The value of all farm products marketed rose from \$22,487,884 in 1954 to \$38,638,732 in 1959--a figure surpassed by only two other Washington counties. On a national basis, Grant County in 1959 ranked among the 100 leading U. S. counties in value of all farm products sold, production of wheat, Irish potatoes, sugar beets, number of pear and apple trees and grape production.

History 1/

A little-known Interior Salish Indian culture preceded the white man in Grant County. Bands known as the Wenatchi, Okanogan and Nespelem traveled on the Columbia River and established villages along its banks. Nomadic bands of Palus, Cayuse, and Flathead Indians visited the pothole lakes in the interior and other waterways. Horses were an important Indian trade item, and large herds roamed

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wild over the bunchgrass uplands. Most prominent among the Indians of the area was Chief Moses, for whom Moses Lake is named.

Fur trappers and traders, active in the Pacific Northwest for the first five decades of the 1800's, initiated white man's exploration and settlement of what is now Grant County. The Hudson's Bay Company of England and a few American traders boated furs and supplies on the Columbia River between trading posts at Forts Okanogan, Spokane, Colville, and Vancouver. Some of the present geographic names date back to early French-Canadian trappers. Examples are the Frenchman Hills, Lenore Lake, and Coulee--the French term for a dry box canyon.

Agricultural settlement was prevented during the 1840's and 1850's by the hostility of eastern Washington Indian tribes belonging to the Yakima Confederacy. Warfare ended with the Walla Walla Treaty in 1859, and interior Indians were moved to large reservations established in eastern Washington. This opened the Grant County area to stockmen, who built up large cattle and sheep ranches during the 1870's and 1880's.

A prominent early rancher was Lord Blyth, an Englishman who located south of Moses Lake and in the lower Crab Creek Valley. George and Tom Drumheller then bought him out and expanded the operation to cover much of present Grant and Adams Counties. Other important stockmen were Jack and Tom Edens and the Egbert brothers, who settled in the Ephrata and Quincy areas in the early 1880's. Stockmen drove their cattle, horses, and sheep to Columbia River loading points at Bridgeport, Crab Creek, and Wenatchee, or to railheads in the Spokane and Walla Walla Valleys.

As in other areas of the west, the Donation Land Law of 1850-1855 and the Homestead Act of 1862 helped open up the interior of Washington to farmers. The first homesteader in Grant County was James F. Bybee, who located near Wilson Creek in 1888. Frank Beasley planted a small orchard at Ephrata in 1890, thus becoming the first farmer there. Among the early "sod busters" in the Moses Lake area were C. W. Howe, F. K. Saunders, and Donald McDonald.

Railroad construction across Grant County resulted in an economic and population expansion between 1880 and 1910. Villages grew up along the route of the Great Northern Railroad between Spokane and Wenatchee. The Northern Pacific built a branch line from Cheney to Coulee City, opening up the Big Bend wheat lands. The railroads had been granted considerable land along their rights-of-way by the Federal Government, and much of this was sold to prospective wheat and livestock farmers.

Following completion of the transcontinental railroad across Quincy Basin and the subsequent population increase there, settlers in the Ephrata-Quincy area and along Crab Creek found the journey to the Douglas County seat at Waterville long and inconvenient. The stockmen and dryland farmers petitioned for a separate county government to be set up at Ephrata. The Washington State Legislature created Grant County from the eastern part of Douglas County on February 24, 1909. Named in honor of Ulysses S. Grant, President of the United States from 1868 to 1876, it was one of the last counties established in Washington.

The drought and depression period from 1920 to 1940 affected Grant County along with others in the dryland wheat belt of central Washington. Dryland grain farms in the Big Bend country, irrigated orchards in the Quincy Basin, and livestock ranches all suffered low yields and poor markets. Many farms were abandoned.

County population dropped from 8,700 in 1910 to 5,700 in 1930. Every town and village in the county lost population between 1920 and 1930. The number of occupied farms decreased from 1,607 in 1910 to 600 in 1940.

The turning point in Grant County agriculture came with the building of Grand Coulee Dam. Construction began in 1933, and by 1937 about 6,500 men were employed. This relieved many distressed farmers by providing employment and by increasing local markets for farm products. New cities, Grand Coulee and Electric City, were founded and Ephrata and Soap Lake gained in population.

Following authorization of the Columbia Basin Project in 1943, the farmers involved voted to establish three irrigation districts and to pay for part of the irrigation works over a 40-year period, at an average rate of about \$2.12 per acre per year. The Bureau of Reclamation established headquarters for the Columbia Basin Project at Ephrata.

Major irrigation works were constructed during the late 1940's and early 1950's. Grand Coulee was dammed near Dry Falls and water was pumped from Franklin D. Roosevelt Lake behind Grand Coulee Dam to form the Grand Coulee Equalizing Reservoir, covering about 43 square miles. A canal system was constructed to carry this water southward to the Quincy and East Districts for irrigation in the Quincy Basin and Moses Lake area. Construction of O'Sullivan Dam raised the level of Moses Lake and created another large lake called Potholes Reservoir. Water from the West Canal was turned onto thousands of acres surrounding Soap Lake, Ephrata, and Quincy in 1952, and the East Low Canal carried water to another large area north of Moses Lake and Wheeler.

Most of the newly irrigated land was in former dryland farms. Owners of vast dryland tracts signed a Bureau of Reclamation anti-speculation agreement prior to irrigation, and released land for government purchase at \$2.00 to \$9.50 an acre. The government then sold the lands at controlled low prices to qualified applicants selected by public drawings, with priority given to military service veterans.

New farmers, farm service industries, and other industries attracted by the irrigation project brought the county's population to 24,346 by 1950 and to 46,477 by 1960. The number of farms increased from 538 in 1950 to 1,497 in 1959 as veterans and other new land purchasers moved onto the irrigated tracts. Moses Lake mushroomed from a village of 326 in 1940 to 11,299 in 1960, partly because the dry, clear weather appealed to the aviation industry. Larson Air Force Base was constructed there during World War II and Boeing's Moses Lake Flight Center more recently.

The rapid rise of crop production and the prospect of a large future volume of commercial crops have attracted new food processing industries and produce buyers and handlers to Grant County. Some of these have caused recent changes in agricultural practices. A large national food freezing corporation built a freezing plant for vegetables at Quincy. A beet sugar corporation and a potato starch manufacturer constructed plants at Moses Lake. Other companies built facilities for handling and packaging beans, peas, potatoes, and grass seed, for feeding livestock, and for manufacturing feeds.

Farming in Grant County has been encouraged, guided, and promoted by several government agencies. In addition to the previously mentioned Columbia Basin Project of the Bureau of Reclamation are the Soil Conservation Service, the Grant County Agricultural Stabilization Committee, and the County Extension Service.

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