

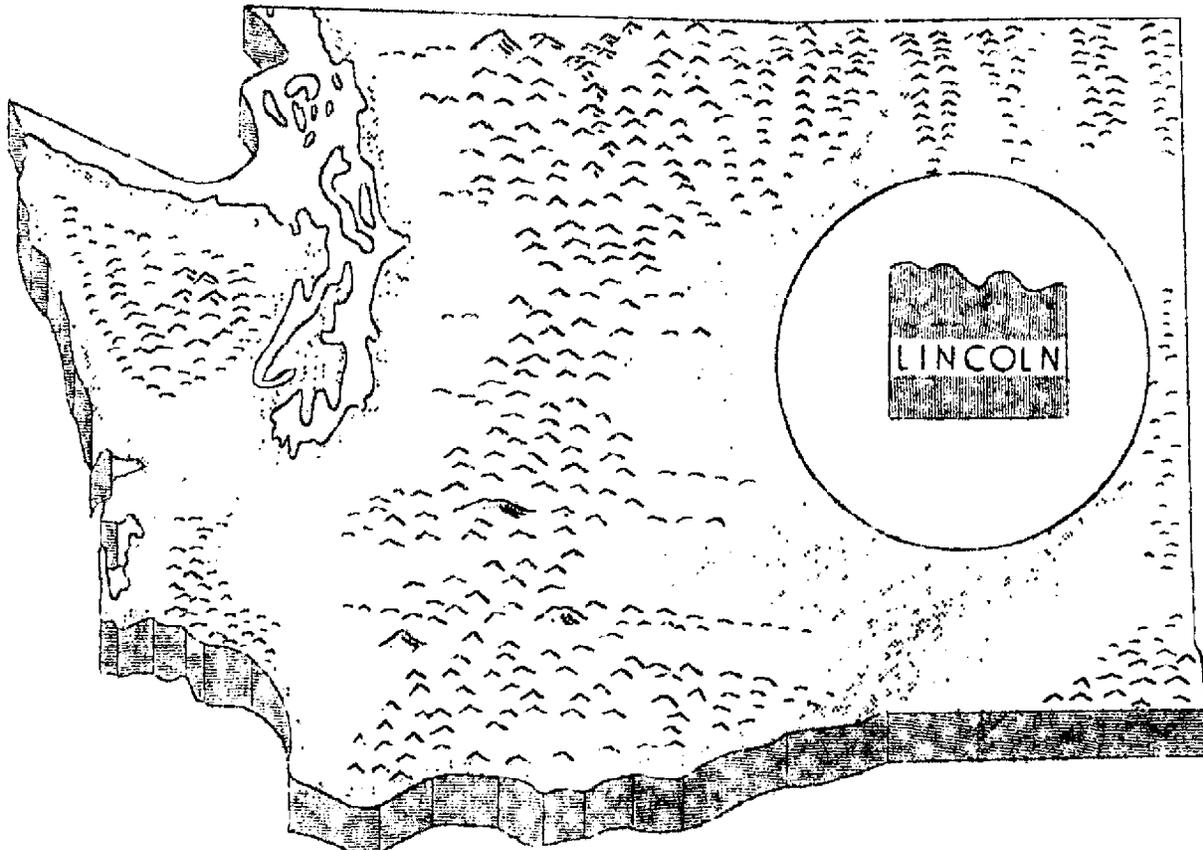
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# LINCOLN COUNTY AGRICULTURE

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## WASHINGTON

COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES  
1956



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
J. D. Dwyer, Director

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
S. R. Newell

WASHINGTON CROP AND LIVESTOCK REPORTING SERVICE  
348 Federal Office Building  
Seattle 4, Washington

## FOREWORD

This book on Lincoln County is one of an original series being devoted to the history and present nature of agriculture in each of the thirty-nine counties of the State of Washington. This project was initiated in 1956 through funds made available by Sverre N. Omdahl, Director, Washington State 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 both in private enterprise and public service. Comprehensive knowledge of land resources, population and agricultural-economic trends in a local area such as Lincoln County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by vocational agriculture and social studies teachers in Lincoln County schools. It has been devised also to inform adults interested in knowing more about their immediate area, as well as persons and enterprises concerned with agricultural production and marketing or prospective settlement and investment in the county.

Carefully selected geographic facts, agricultural history, population trends and statistical data are included to give an over-all appreciation of Lincoln County. The enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture since 1890 and recent estimates of the Washington State Census Board are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Lincoln County in 1883. Facts on topography, soil, climate and forests 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, Estimates Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Supervision, research and cartographic illustration was performed by Dr. Woodrow R. Clevinger, Market Analyst, Washington State Department of Agriculture. Lloyd J. Mercer, student in Agricultural Economics, Washington State College and resident of Addy, Stevens County, wrote the sections on pattern of agriculture, crops, livestock and marketing and collected much original information. Mr. Richard Perry, of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Leonard W. Orvold and D. W. Barrowman, Agricultural Statisticians, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture, gave valuable assistance. The clerical staff of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service prepared tabular material for the book.

J. D. Dwyer, Director  
Washington State Department of Agriculture

Olympia, Washington  
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## PART I

## History of Lincoln County Agriculture

Introduction

Lincoln County, a land of broad wheat fields, is located in the Big Bend region of northeastern Washington. With an area of 2,317 square miles (approximately 1,472,000 acres), Lincoln is eighth in size among the thirty-nine Washington counties. It is considerably larger than the State of Rhode Island and is slightly larger than the State of Delaware.

Lincoln is predominantly an agricultural county. For more than fifty years it has been a highly specialized commercial grain growing region with a secondary livestock and poultry industry. In recent years it has been the second ranking county of the state in wheat and barley production. In the Census of Agriculture, 1954, Lincoln County ranked second among all counties in the United States in wheat production with a harvest of 10,963,240 bushels.

Heavy production of wheat and barley, along with an expanding beef cattle industry, places Lincoln County third among Washington counties in value of agricultural products marketed. The Census of Agriculture in 1954 found that Lincoln County farms produced and sold over \$26,274,700 worth of crops and \$2,398,300 worth of livestock. Wheat sales alone accounted for over \$21,900,000. The farms are generally large and well-mechanized and most are commercial, high-income farms. Productivity per farmer is exceptionally high. Although agricultural product sales are the third highest in the state, the rural farm population of 4,117 is only twenty-second among Washington counties.

Based on successful dryland types of grain farming, land and farm values in Lincoln County recovered well from the low period of the 1930's. In the last Census, there were 1,051 farm properties. All farm land and buildings were valued at \$132,961,000. With many large farms, the average value of a typical farm operation in Lincoln County had reached \$126,500 by 1954, one of the highest average farm property values in the state.

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History 1/

Named in honor of President Abraham Lincoln, Lincoln County was created by the Washington Territorial Legislature November 24, 1883. It was organized from the western part of Spokane County at the same time Douglas County was established. Sprague was the first county seat, but in 1896 a popular election resulted in moving the county government to Davenport.

Lincoln County's present agricultural lands were settled relatively late in Washington history. Joint claim to the region by the United States and Great Britain prior to 1846 and Indian hostility up until about 1860 discouraged permanent settlement on the interior grasslands of eastern Washington. The plains of Lincoln County were frequented only occasionally by livestock herdsman. Indian bands of the Coeur d'Alene, Cayuse, Nez Perce, Palouse and Spokane tribes roved through it, grazing horses and camping along the Columbia River and ponds and springs of Crab Creek Coulee. French-Canadian fur traders and trappers of the Hudson Bay Company penetrated the area from Fort Spokane as early as 1810.

American jurisdiction over the area was established after the Treaty of 1846 which established the present Canadian border. Indian hostility, however, prevailed for about fifteen more years, keeping out homesteaders. Indian resistance to white settlement in northeastern Washington was eased by a treaty entered into at Latah Creek in present Spokane County September 23, 1858. This treaty was signed by Spokane Chiefs, Spokane Garry and Big Star, and by Colonel George Wright of the U. S. Army who, together with Colonel Steptoe, had concluded a military campaign in northeastern Washington which began at Fort Walla Walla. Later treaties and agreements established the Colville and Spokane Reservations and opened the plains areas of central and eastern Washington to American agricultural settlement. By 1860 the way was open for stockmen and land settlers called "soil busters" to move into the grasslands of the Big Bend region to the west of Spokane.

Livestockmen using the open range for cattle, sheep and horses, were the first farmers to occupy Lincoln County. The free public domain was rich in grass, but dry climate and lack of irrigation facilities impeded early attempts to grow crops. In later decades, the dry-fallow system of cultivating wheat was to be discovered and used with success in expanding the growing of crops.

Early cattlemen in the 1860's and 1870's used the brome bunch grasslands and water holes of Crab Creek Valley. The Urquhart Brothers were prominent

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

- (1) Washington, A Guide to the Evergreen State (American Guide Series) Writers' Program, Works Progress Administration, Published by Washington Historical Society, 1941. See pages 309-312, 325-328.
- (2) Richard F. Steele. The Story of Lincoln County. Spokane, Hughes and Coates, 1909.
- (3) Richard F. Steele. An Illustrated History of the Big Bend Country. Chicago, Western Historical Publishing Company, 1904.
- (4) Richard M. Perry. The Counties of Washington, State of Washington, Secretary of State, Olympia, Washington (mimeographed 1943).

cattlemen of the lower Crab Creek country, as was R. M. Bacon, who brought in cattle from the Colville Valley. Without any notorious conflicts over grazing lands, other men brought in sheep to graze the vast upland plains of the Big Bend country. Large flocks of sheep were driven in from the Spokane area. Early livestockmen formed the Stock Grazing and Protective Association. Officers of this group in the 1870's and early 1880's were Jack McElroy, John Graves and M. Parks. There was some conflict among livestockmen over grazing rights when transcontinental railways were constructed across the plains of Lincoln County in 1880-1892.

Homesteaders began coming into the area between 1875 and 1880. Some used the Homestead Act of 1862 to file on free public domain lands, the Act providing 160 acres free to a bona fide homesteader. Others arrived to buy railroad grant lands at low prices. Some early land settlers included the following: Samuel Wilbur Condin at Wilbur in 1875; A. D. Strout, Adam and Jacob Ludy at Davenport, 1879; Charles S. Irby at Irby in 1876; Peter Edwall at Edwall in 1881 and J. R. Whitaker at Harrington in 1881.

During the land settlement period of the 1880's, German and German-Ukrainian immigrants were a prominent group. Early arrivals from eastern Europe were Herman A. Knack, August Kron, August Woelke and C. V. Drazen. Northern Pacific Land Company employed C. V. Drazen as a land agent to promote immigration from Europe to the Big Bend country. Immigrants settled railroad grant lands on long term credit and many settled in the Odessa and Ritzville areas where they developed wheat farming. Several German speaking churches were organized in the towns of the Big Bend region.

Railroad construction and the interests of railroad companies in promoting land settlement and wheat export trade were important during the late 1880's and early 1890's. Northern Pacific Railway construction to connect Spokane with Puget Sound was pushed through southeastern Lincoln County in 1880-1881. It resulted in establishment of Sprague as an important town. The early Central Washington Railway was completed from Spokane to Coulee City in 1889-1890. It expanded settlement in the Davenport, Creston, Wilbur and Almira districts of northern Lincoln County. This line was later acquired by Northern Pacific as an important branch line hauling wheat and cattle. In 1892 Great Northern Railway constructed its transcontinental line toward Puget Sound across central Lincoln County. It brought a wave of settlers and a wheat land boom causing rapid development of a string of towns such as Edwall, Harrington, Mohler, Odessa and Krupp.

Local histories contain many references to early hardships and misfortunes of pioneer farmers. In 1882 and 1883 swarms of crickets devastated grain crops. A severe winter of blizzards and deep snow in 1889-1890 destroyed nearly all livestock in northern Lincoln County.

By 1897 the wheat industry was well established and prosperous. Techniques of dry farming and use of ground breaking and wheat harvesting implements drawn by large teams of horses and mules were providing increasing production of wheat. There was a bumper wheat crop in 1897 estimated at 6,500,000 bushels valued at \$4,500,000 according to a historical report. Many land settlers paid off mortgages. Davenport, Harrington, Wilbur and Odessa grew and prospered as wheat shipping and flour milling centers. Odessa was milling 1,500,000 bushels

of wheat per year. Land speculation and rapidly increasing values of wheat land characterized a boom period from 1895 to 1910. Lincoln County grew from 9,000 to a peak population of 17,540 between 1890-1910.

Between 1900 and 1910 there was strong interest in fruit and berry growing and raising horses and mules by farmers not specializing in wheat. An important fruit and berry growing district was developed in the Creston and Lincoln areas on Columbia River shore and bench lands. A district here was called Orchard Valley with a post office named Peach near the mouth of Hawk Creek. Orchard farmers such as Robert Neal and Henry Meisner made plantings of peaches. They also planted winter banana and Ben Davis varieties of apples. Strawberry berries were also grown. Another orchard area was near Sprague. Fruit growing declined after 1920 as the central Washington valleys such as Yakima, Wenatchee and Okanogan dominated the northwest market. Some of the early orchard lands were later flooded by the reservoir of Grand Coulee Dam. About 1910, Lincoln County claimed to have the only Shetland pony farm in the state, which was operated near Sprague by Mrs. E. C. Hamley. The raising of horses and mules was an important industry between 1900 and 1920. Over 27,000 horses and 2,700 mules were used for farm work power in Lincoln County. The area ranked third in the state in numbers raised and sold.

Lincoln County and eastern Washington prosperity in wheat began to decline in the late 1920's. World-wide surpluses of wheat causing low prices in domestic and foreign markets had a severe impact on Lincoln County. During World War I and up to 1920, wheat trade was active and the market averaged over \$2.00 per bushel. In 1919 Lincoln County produced over 5,844,000 bushels of wheat valued at about \$12,000,000. By 1929 wheat was bringing a little more than \$1.00 per bushel and the 1929 crop of 1,819,000 bushels in Lincoln County was valued at about \$5,000,000. Between 1919 and 1929 farm income in Lincoln County went down over 55 percent.

Depressed market conditions for wheat and low prices from about 1925 to 1943 caused farm abandonment and loss of population, which decreased from 15,140 in 1920 to a low of 10,970 in 1950. Wheat prices went back up to \$2.00 per bushel during World War II. Meanwhile, wheat farming became more mechanized with fewer farms. A labor surplus of farm youth and rural families moved to industrial cities of the Pacific Northwest between 1940 and 1950.

Industrial expansion in the Inland Empire has provided more seasonal and part-time work. Grand Coulee and Columbia Basin projects helped to diversify county economy. Industrialization in the Spokane area provided part-time and supplementary sources of income to the benefit of numerous farmers. These developments stimulated population growth at Davenport, Wilbur and Reardon and stabilized population of Lincoln County at about 11,000.

The agricultural development has been encouraged and guided by several public and private agencies. Technical guidance in the improvement of grain growing was received from the State College of Washington Agricultural Experiment Stations system at Pullman and the Dry Land Experiment Station at Lind. County Agents of the Extension Service located at Davenport, and engineers and soil scientists of the U. S. Soil Conservation Service have been of valuable technical assistance. Foremost among private agencies are the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, Washington Cattlemen's Association, Washington Crop Improvement Association, Washington Grain Dealers Association and the Agricultural Agents of the transcontinental railways.