

PART IV

The Pattern of Agriculture

Farms: Number and Size

Pierce County has medium and small-sized farms. According to the United States Census of Agriculture, 1954, there were 3,611 farms in the county. This is 692 farms less than reported in 1950. This decline is due in part to a change in Census methods, but does show a continuation of a general trend of declining farm numbers but an increasing size of individual farms. Consolidation of farms through purchase and lease has increased the average from 29.7 acres in 1925 to 41.5 acres in 1954. This is much below the average for the State of Washington which was 270 acres in 1954. Pierce County ranked sixth among the 39 counties of the state in number of farms, but in size of farms was thirty-seventh.

The small size of farms compared to the state average is largely the result of land-purchase methods, and types of farming. During earlier settlement much logged-over land was sold in 10, 20, and 40 acre plots to part-time farmers. Many of the original 160 acre homesteads near cities were subdivided into smaller farms as the population grew and land prices increased. Suburban farms

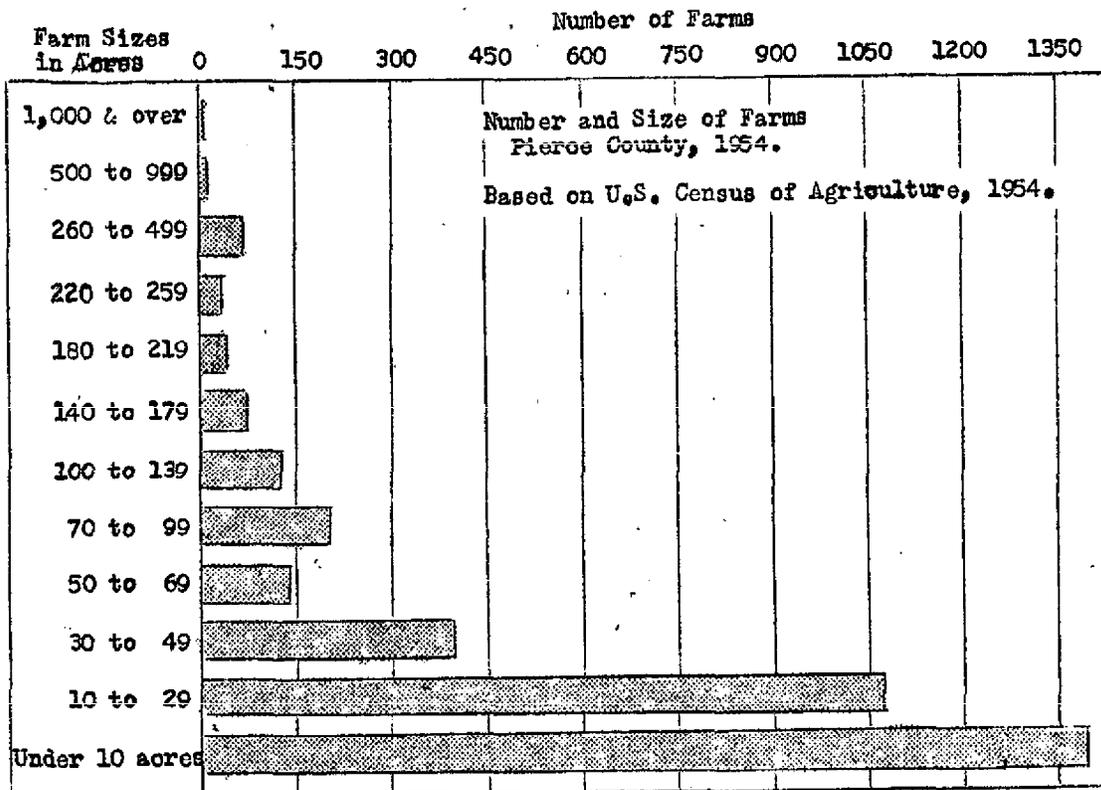


Figure 7.- Number and Size of Pierce County Farms, 1954.

for poultry, berry, and other specialties were purchased by many for operation on a part-time basis. In the higher inland part of the county part-time farming combined with forest industry has made small-farm ownership and residence quite common. Intensive farming in the Puyallup Valley where land values are high also results in many small farms. Heavy costs of clearing stump and forest land have tended to discourage development of large holdings. These and other economic factors have created a present pattern in which over 71 percent of the farms are less than 30 acres. Farms under 10 acres are the largest group, numbering 1,418. In the 1954 Census there were only 21 farms in Pierce County of 500 acres or larger size.

Table 9.- Pierce County Farms: Number, Total Land in Farms and Average Size of Farms 1900-1954.  
(Source: U.S. Censuses, Agriculture)

Census Year	Total Farms in the county	Total County area in farms (acres)	Average size of farms in the county (acres)
1900	1,455	146,050	100.0
1910	2,970	156,590	52.7
1920	3,159	118,754	37.6
1925	4,321	128,191	29.7
1930	4,696	139,678	29.7
1940	5,622	162,747	28.9
1945	5,564	170,082	30.6
1950	4,303	165,932	38.6
1954	3,611	149,816	41.5

In 1954 the 3,611 farms of Pierce County contained 149,816 acres or only 14 percent of the total land area within the county. The acreage in farms grew from 146,050 acres in 1900 to a peak of 170,000 acres in 1945. Since that year the area in farms and numbers of farms have been decreasing. This indicates some abandonment of farming for other employment and change of the use of some farmland for residences and industrial purposes. This is a general recent trend in the Puget Sound area of Pierce, King and Snohomish Counties.

#### Farm Values

The values of land, farms, and farm buildings have increased greatly since 1940. Values increased rapidly between 1900 and 1930, then lowered during the 1930's. From a figure of \$25,981,561 in 1945, farm property in Pierce County more than doubled in value by 1954. Value of farmland and buildings per farm averaged \$14,885 and \$363.66 per acre with buildings. The rise in farm and land values has been caused by several factors. One is the general rise of prices in real estate and standing timber throughout the western United States. Value has been added by the large amount of labor and capital for clearing and general improvements in the last thirty years. Another factor is the increased demand for rural home and small-farm acreage related to the general growth of industrial population.

Table 10.- Value of Farm Land and Buildings  
Pierce County, 1920-1954

Year	Total Value in County dollars	County Average Values	
		Per Farm dollars	Per Acre dollars
1920	\$21,042,890	\$ 6,661	\$133.91
1930	32,990,454	7,025	236.19
1940	25,981,561	4,621	159.64
1950	49,987,951	11,617	334.09
1954	53,641,405	14,855	363.66

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture.Farm Tenure

A large majority (about 87 out of each 100 farmers) own and fully operate their farms. Tenancy, or the renting and leasing of entire farms, is uncommon; only 174 out of 3,611 farms were operated by tenants in 1954. Many farms have remained in ownership of the pioneer families who established them. About 8 percent of farms were partly owned in 1954, showing an increase during the last 30 years. This pattern is caused in part by many elderly persons and part-time workers maintaining ownership of their farms while letting other farmers operate part for a share of the crops sold or used. Only about 5 percent of the farms were entirely operated by tenants on leases.

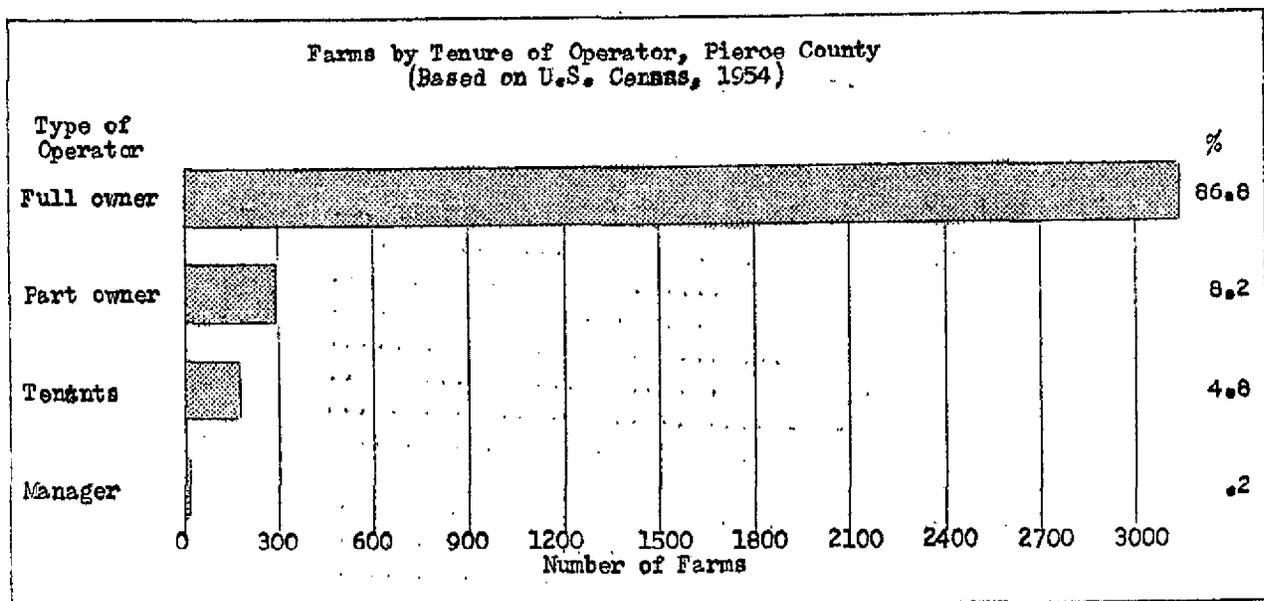


Figure 8.- Farms by Tenure of Operator, Pierce County, 1954.

Table 11.- Farm Tenancy, Number and Percent of Farms  
By Tenure of Operator, Pierce County  
1920-1954

Year	Number Farms in County	Full Owners		Part Owners		Managers		Tenants	
		number of farms	percent of all farms						
1920	3,159	2,547	80.6	110	3.4	25	.7	477	15.0
1925	4,321	3,831	88.6	111	2.5	18	.4	361	8.4
1930	4,696	3,974	84.6	204	4.3	75	1.5	443	9.4
1935	6,062	5,010	82.6	214	3.5	28	.4	810	13.3
1940	5,622	4,652	82.7	233	4.1	19	.3	718	12.8
1945	5,564	4,959	89.1	275	4.9	15	.2	315	5.7
1950	4,303	3,751	87.1	308	7.1	18	.4	226	5.2
1954	3,611	3,133	86.8	296	8.1	8	.2	174	4.8

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture.

#### Types of Farms

Most of the farms are classified as miscellaneous, with numerous berry, poultry, dairy and vegetable farms. Farm types classified by the Census show that agriculture is intensive and diversified among a variety of specialties. Fruit and nut farms (mainly berries) numbered 420 in 1954. Poultry (380) and dairy (377) were the next most common.

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

Type of Farm	Number of Farms
Total farms in county.....	3,611
Field-crop farms.....	5
Cash-grain.....	0
Other field-crop.....	5
Vegetable farms.....	105
Fruit-and-nut farms.....	420
Dairy farms.....	377
Poultry farms.....	380
Livestock farms other than dairy and poultry	181
General farms.....	50
Primarily crop.....	25
Primarily livestock.....	10
Crop and livestock.....	15
Miscellaneous and unclassified farms.....	2,102

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture.

Farm Residence and Operation

Pierce County agriculture is characterized by a large proportion of operators residing on farms and dividing their employment between work on and off the farm. Both the Tacoma and Seattle metropolitan areas and the forested countryside provide a variety of seasonal or part-time jobs in industries, in government forest and park service work and in construction. Most of the county might be classified as a region of part-time farming. At some time of the year about two-thirds of all Pierce County farmers worked off their farms during 1954, according to the Census of Agriculture. Out of this group about 2,000 or 55 percent of all Pierce farm operators worked in industries more than 100 days of the year. These part-time farmers received more income from off-farm work than for selling crops and livestock.

Farm Land Utilization

Crops were harvested from only about 17 percent of the land in farms in 1954. An additional 14 percent was in cropland used only for pasture and 3 percent was idle or fallow. Typical of western Washington farmland utilization, woodlands made up the largest share of the acreage. About 32 percent of all farmland was in pastured woodland. Woodlands which are not being grazed amounted to 19 percent. Altogether, the farm woodlands covered about 71,500 acres or

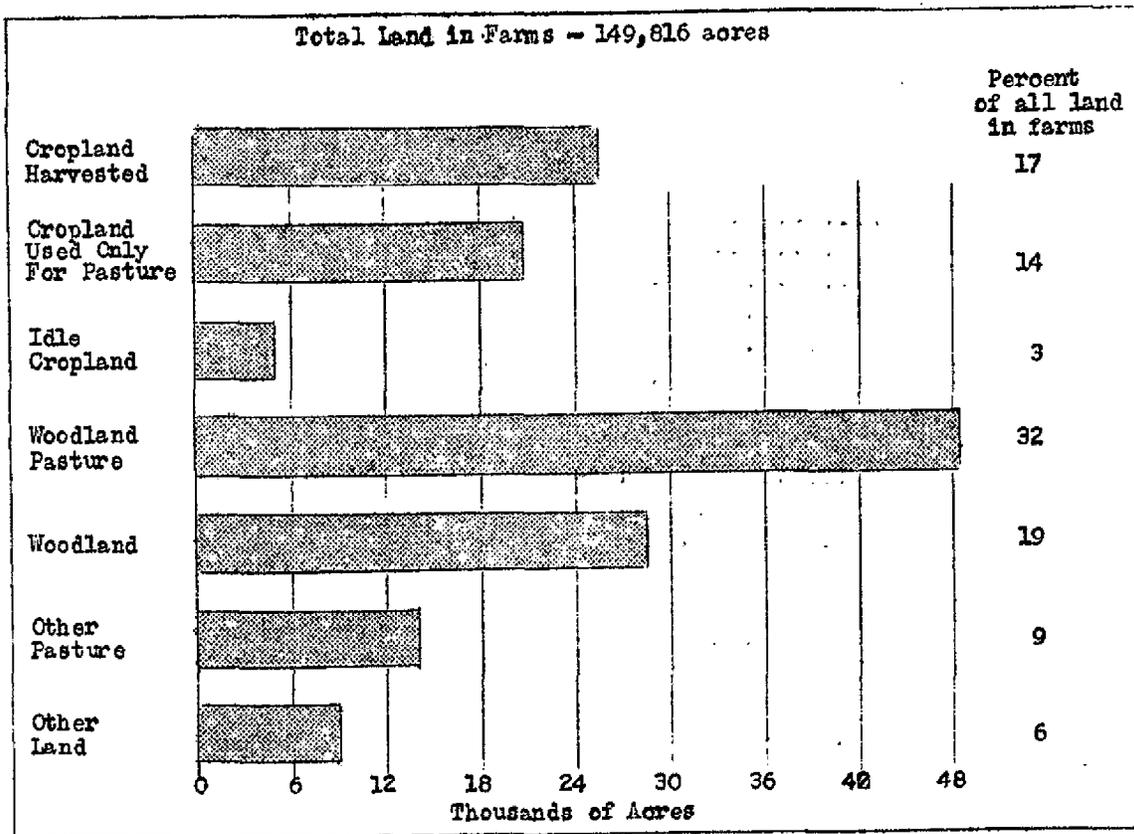


Figure 9.-- Utilization of Farmland in Pierce County, 1954.

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture.

approximately half of the land in farms. Rough terrain in the foothills and the gravelly soils of the lower plains grow timber well under natural conditions. Farmers have also found that the clearing of Douglas fir cut-over land is expensive. Many have left such acreage in stumps and brush as woodland pasture. Others have left dense regrowth stands undisturbed to grow timber for farm use and for future commercial cutting.

### Farm Facilities

In 1954 most of the farms in Pierce County were above state averages in the use of facilities which save labor and make rural life easier. Farmers in this county enjoy an extensive rural electric service provided by both privately and publicly-owned utility services. Ninety-nine percent of farm homes and buildings were equipped with electricity. Over 79 percent reported having telephones. Washington State averages for these facilities on farms were 97 and 74 percent, respectively. The farming country is closely adjacent to Seattle and Tacoma and is within the reception zone of four television stations. A higher than average number of rural homes, over two-thirds of them, have television sets. Most of the farms also have piped running water and about one-third have refrigeration in the form of home freezers. The rates for electric service are lower than in many other areas of Washington. In 1950 the Census found that the average farm monthly electric bill was \$7.40 compared to the state average of \$8.50.

Table 13.- Specified Facilities and Equipment on Farms  
Pierce County, 1954.

Facility or Equipment Item	Number of Farms Using	Percent of All Farms in County Equipped
Telephone.....	2,874	79.6
Electricity.....	3,575	99.0
Television set.....	2,338	64.7
Piped running water.....	3,470	96.1
Home freezer.....	1,244	34.4
Electric pig brooder.....	21	.6
Power feed grinder.....	122	3.4
Milking machine.....	418	11.6
Grain combines.....	40	1.1
Corn pickers.....	--	--
Pick-up balers.....	72	2.0
Field forage harvesters.....	47	1.3
Artificial ponds, reservoirs and earth tanks.....	141	4.0
Motortrucks.....	2,035	56.4
Tractors.....	2,135	59.1
Automobiles.....	3,015	83.5

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture.

Farming is well advanced in the use of mechanical labor-saving equipment. About three-fifths of the farms were using tractors in 1954. The use of horses for plowing and cultivation was limited to about 250 farms. Nearly all the

specialized dairy farms used milking machines. Pierce County farmers use a large number of motortrucks to market their products. In 1954 about 56 percent of the farms owned trucks used to haul vegetables, berries, and other perishable crops to markets. The ownership of automobiles was also higher than the national farm family average.

### Irrigation and Facilities

Because of the dry summer climate and the desire to get higher yields of truck crops and pasture grass, there has been an increasing interest in irrigation. The commercial vegetable farms are using more irrigation equipment than 10 years ago. Dairymen who depend on the upland pastures find that sprinkler irrigation increases their carrying capacity. The gravelly glacial soils common in Pierce County require considerable irrigation. The top horizon of the soil dries out severely in mid-summer.

Table 14.- Irrigated Farms: Number and Acreage  
Pierce County, 1950 and 1954

Item	1950	1954
Number of irrigated farms.....	246	247
Land in irrigated farms.....	17,066 acres	15,423 acres
Land irrigated 1/ .....	3,036 acres	3,201 acres
Irrigated land in farms according to use:		
Farms irrigating crops.....	209	213
Farms irrigating pasture.....	68	69
Acres of crops irrigated.....	2,023	2,148
Acres of pasture irrigated.....	865	1,053

1/ Includes land irrigated by canals, pipes and overhead sprinkler systems.

Source; U.S. Census, Agriculture.

Irrigation in this county consists of about 250 individually or farm-owned systems. They employ mainly pumps and sprinklers. There are also a few gravity systems. In 1954 there were 3,201 acres irrigated and about two-thirds of the irrigated land was in commercial vegetable, berry and flower crops.

There has been a marked trend of using more irrigation equipment since 1945. In 1945 there were only 87 farms using irrigation, but by 1954 there were 247 farms so equipped. The trend of using more irrigation in Pierce County follows a general trend in the other western Washington counties where farmers are specializing in vegetable crops, and managing larger areas of grassland for hay silage and pasture. Hay and pasture shortages in recent years and increased costs of feeds purchased by dairymen are other factors causing an expansion of individual farm irrigation systems.

Table 15.- Pierce County's Rank Compared With  
Other Washington Counties

Item Compared	Rank	Quantity	Year
<u>General</u>			
Land area.....	19	1,072,640 acres	1954
Number of farms.....	6	3,611 farms	1954
Land in farms--percent.....	28	14.0 percent	1954
Average size of farms.....	36	42 acres	1954
Cropland harvested.....	25	25,378 acres	1954
Rural farm population.....	5	15,113 persons	1950
Total county population.....	2	275,876 persons	1950
<u>Cash farm income</u>			
Value of all farm products sold.....	14	12,135,819 dollars	1954
Value of livestock and products sold.....	5	7,089,260 dollars	1954
Value of crops sold.....	17	4,891,753 dollars	1954
<u>Livestock on farms</u>			
All cattle and calves.....	15	29,480	1954
Milk cows.....	9	10,220 head	1954
Hogs.....	6	5,062 head	1954
Chickens.....	3	546,839 birds	1954
Horses and mules.....	11	1,196 head	1954
Sheep and lambs.....	23	1,567 head	1954
<u>Dairy and poultry products sold</u>			
Value of dairy products sold....	7	2,766,224 dollars	1954
Whole milk sold.....	7	62,171,000 pounds	1954
Value of poultry products sold....	3	3,464,648 dollars	1954
Chickens sold.....	2	1,302,341 birds	1954
Eggs sold.....	3	5,511,159 dozen	1954
<u>Important crops harvested</u>			
Clover and timothy.....	9	6,722 acres	1954
Vegetables.....	11	2,013 acres	1954
Rhubarb.....	1	600 acres	1954
Raspberries.....	2	1,164 acres	1954
Flowers, plants and shrubs.....	2	1,726,256 dollars	1954

Source: U.S. Census, Agriculture.