

PART IV

THE PATTERN OF AGRICULTURE

Farms - Number and Size

Farms in Skagit County are of medium and small size. According to the Census of Agriculture, there were 1,740 farms in the county in 1959. This was 612 less than enumerated in 1954. The Census definition of a farm in 1959 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 Skagit County, the decrease in the number of farms which resulted from the change in farm definition from 1954 to 1959 was 313. Census data indicate that a peak number of farms was reached around 1940 when there were 3,242 farms. The farm number has steadily declined since then. In 1959, Skagit County ranked eleventh in the state in the number of farms.

The relative smallness of Skagit 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 of logged-over land to part-time farm settlers--generally these were about 160 acres. Many of the original 160 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 largely replaced by intensive dairy, poultry, vegetable, seed and berry farming. This latter type of farming together with the high value of

Table 9. Farms, Number and Average Size, Land in Farms
Skagit 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	889	98.0	87,151	7.8
1910	1,897	62.2	118,118	10.6
1920	2,401	56.8	136,350	12.3
1925	2,858	48.2	137,681	12.4
1930	2,721	51.4	139,928	12.6
1940	3,242	47.1	152,758	13.8
1945	3,165	49.6	156,931	14.1
1950	2,756	58.5	161,163	14.5
1954	2,352	64.3	151,328	13.6
1959	1,740	81.5	141,770	12.8

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture

land has tended to make the small farm most practicable. In the upland and mountainous sections part-time farming with operators employed in forest industries also has resulted in the establishment of numerous small farms. Over 54 percent of Skagit farms were less than 50 acres in size in 1959. About 44 percent of the farms were between 10 to 49 acres.

The number of small farms has decreased while those above 50 acres increased slightly between 1954 and 1959 in Skagit 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 the number of small farms resulted from the change in the 1959 Census definition of a farm.

Farmland in Skagit County declined after 1950. Farm acreage amounted to 161,163 acres in 1950 compared with 151,328 in 1954 and 141,770 in 1959. This reduction resulted not only from the change in farm definition but from farm lands put into other land uses such as for freeways, highways and urban subdivisions. In 1959, 12.8 percent of the county area was in farms as compared with the peak Census figure of 14.5 percent in 1950.

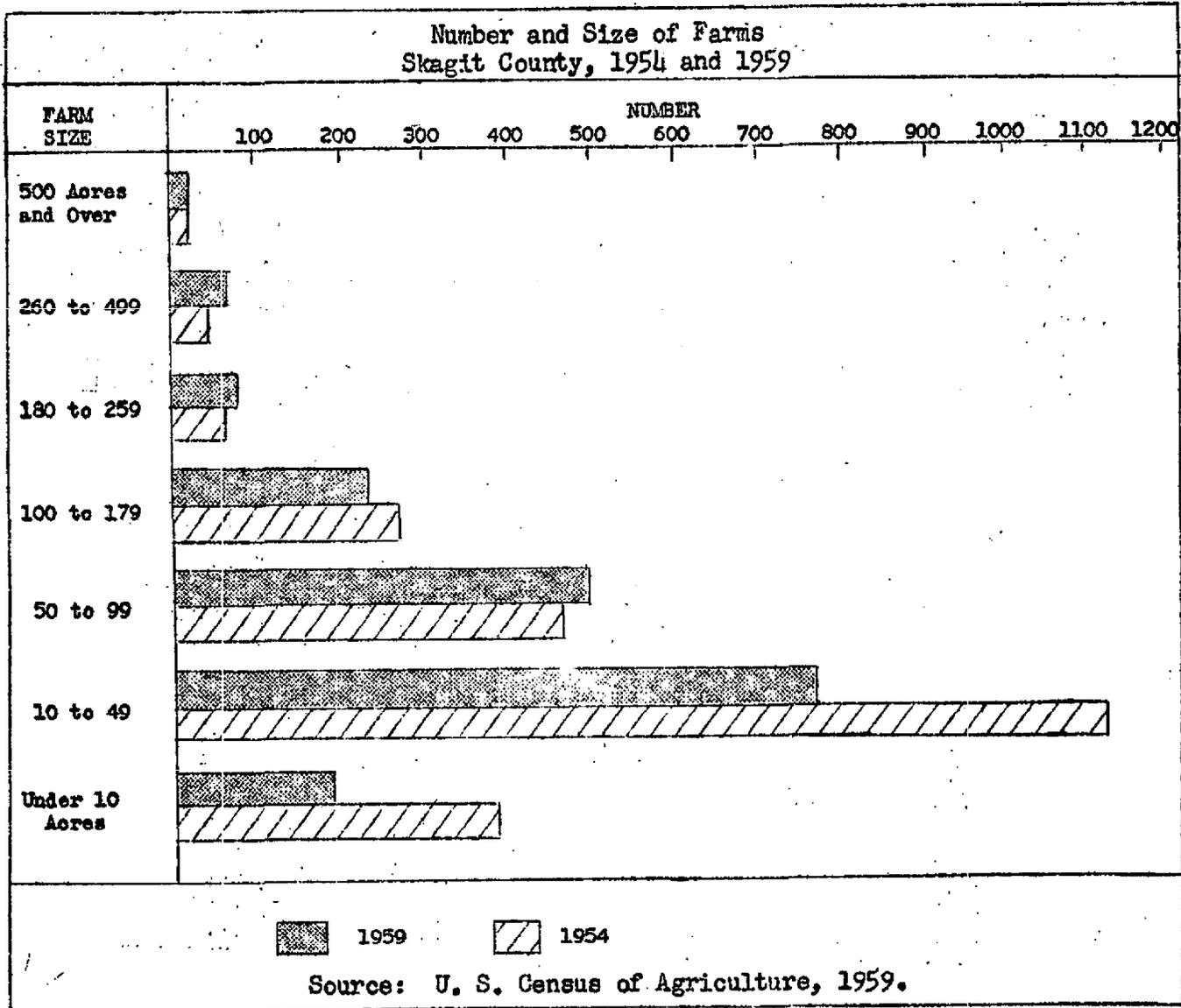


Figure 8. Number and Size of Skagit County Farms, 1954 and 1959.

Types of Farms

Skagit County has a wide variety of farm types, according to the Census of Agriculture. In 1959 the most common type was the dairy farms comprising nearly 26 percent of all Skagit farms. Next in numbers were vegetable farms which added up to 162 farm units or 9.1 percent of the total farm figure. Livestock farms were third followed closely by farms specializing in poultry and those in

berry, fruit and nut production. Over 46 percent of the Skagit farms were classified as miscellaneous by the Census. This category included farms raising nursery and greenhouse products, forest products, mules, horses, colts and ponies. Also included were all institutional farms and Indian reservations. All farm types decreased in numbers between 1954 and 1959 with the exception of vegetable and field crop farms. There were 37 more vegetable farms enumerated in 1959 than in 1954 while field crop farms increased only by 6 units over the same period.

Table 10. Types of Farms, Skagit County, 1959

Type of Farm	Estimated Number of Farms	Percent of all farms in the county	
		1954	1959
Total farms in county	1,775	100.0	100.0
Field crop farms	31	1.3	1.7
Cash-grain	20	.4	1.1
Other field-crop	11	.6	.6
Vegetable farms	162	5.3	9.1
Fruit-and-nut farms (includes berries)	71	4.5	4.0
Poultry farms	87	19.4	4.9
Dairy farms	457	34.9	25.7
Livestock farms other than poultry and dairy	88	3.8	4.9
General farms	51	3.9	2.9
Miscellaneous and unclassified farms	828	43.4	46.6

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

Farm Residence and Operation

Skagit 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 a forested and mountainous region where a farmer supplements his income from the farm by work in a nearby forest, sawmill or construction project. In 1959, nearly 60 percent of the farm operators worked off their farms. Almost 45 percent worked off the farms more than 100 days per year. On an income basis, 53 percent of the operators and their families gained more cash income from off-farm work than they received from farm products marketed from their own farms.

The majority of Skagit County farmers live on the farms they operate. Over 1,600 farmers reported living on the farms they operated in 1959. Only 90 operators lived in nearby villages and towns.

Farmland Utilization

Crops were harvested from about 41 percent of the land in farms in 1959. An additional 19.8 percent was in pastured cropland while 1.6 percent was idle or fallow. Typical of western Washington, nearly 30 percent of the farmland was in woodland pasture and woodland. Out-over woodlands in foothill and mountain districts make up a large portion of the land in farms. Skagit County farms included nearly 42,400 acres of woodlands, according to the 1959 Census. Most of the pasture land is partly wooded. High prohibiting 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.

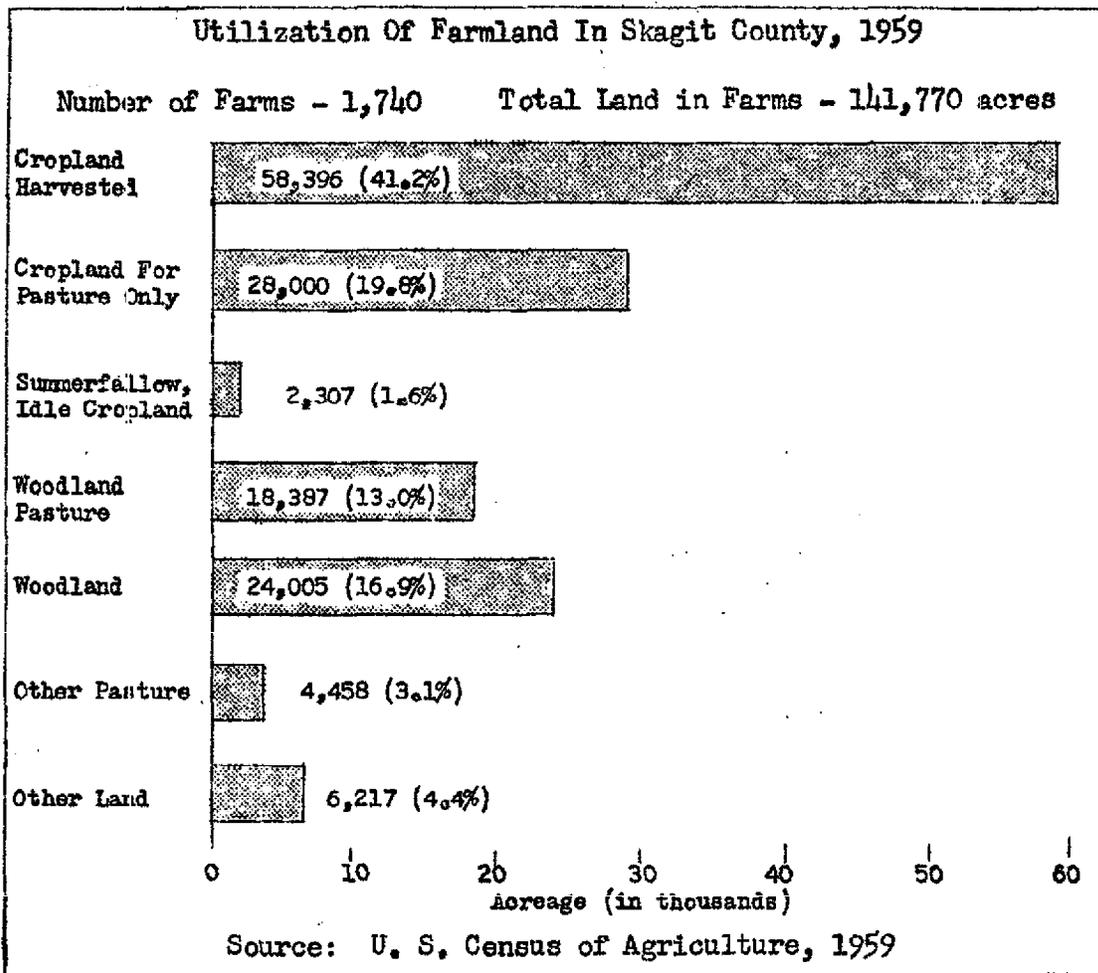


Figure 9. Utilization of Farmland in Skagit County, 1959.

Farm Values

The value of farm lands and buildings in Skagit County has greatly increased since 1920. After reaching a high point in 1920, farm values decreased during the depression years of the 1930's. Since 1940, however, the total value of farm property in the county has more than tripled, increasing from about \$20,000,000 to nearly \$64,000,000 in 1959. According to Census of Agriculture, the average value of land and buildings per farm increased from a low of \$6,219 in 1940 to \$36,562 in 1959. Value of farmland per acre during the same period rose from \$131.98 to \$455.93.

The rise in farm and land values has been caused by several factors. One 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 Skagit County farmers have invested in land clearing, drainage and building improvements since 1920. A third is the increase in population and the expansion of commercial farming in the county which has increased the demands for farm acreages.

Table 11. Value of Farm Land and Buildings
Skagit County, 1900-1959

Year	County Average Values		Total Value in County (Dollars)
	Per Farm (Dollars)	Per Acre (Dollars)	
1900	—	—	3,555,310
1910	—	—	15,939,720
1920	10,526	185.36	25,273,537
1930	9,175	178.41	24,964,199
1940	6,219	131.98	20,160,915
1950	15,780	264.66	43,489,680
1954	22,992	350.44	54,077,184
1959	36,562	455.93	63,617,880

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture

Farm Tenure

A large majority of the farmers in Skagit 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 66.3 percent of all county farms which comprised 48.9 percent of the county's farmland. About 23 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 been increasing over the years while the number of farms operated by full owners has declined since 1940. Farms operated by part owners accounted for 40.7 percent of the county's total farm acreage in 1959.

Table 12. Farm Tenancy, Number and Percent of Farms
by Tenure of Operator, Skagit County, 1925-1959

Year	Number of Farms	Full Owners		Part Owners		Managers		Tenants	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1925	2,858	2,218	77.6	181	6.3	10	.4	449	15.7
1930	2,721	2,028	74.5	274	10.1	17	.6	402	14.8
1935	3,155	2,277	72.2	325	10.3	17	.5	536	17.0
1940	3,242	2,463	76.0	287	8.8	6	.2	486	15.0
1945	3,165	2,455	77.6	367	11.6	7	.2	333	10.5
1950	2,752	2,155	78.3	364	13.2	5	.2	232	8.4
1954	2,347	1,753	74.7	389	16.6	6	.3	204	8.7
1959	1,740	1,177	66.3	409	23.0	5	.3	149	8.4

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

Tenancy--the renting and leasing of land--is not common in Skagit County. Only 149 farms in the county were operated by tenants in 1959. The percentage of tenant farms has declined over the years since the high of 17 percent in 1935. By 1959 the tenant group accounted for only 8.4 percent of all farms in the county and contained only 9.3 percent of the farmland. Manager-operated farms are a very insignificant part of Skagit agriculture. In 1959, only 0.3 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 only 1.2 percent of Skagit's total farmland during 1959.

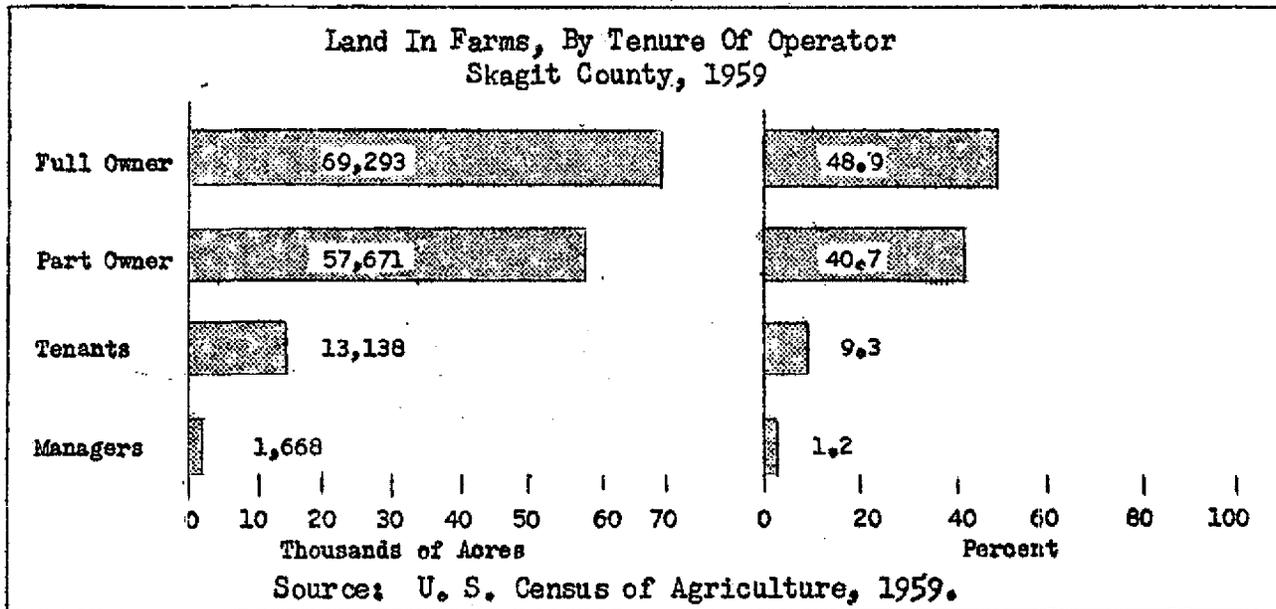


Figure 10. Land in Farms, By Tenure of Operator, Skagit County, 1959.

Irrigation

The amount of irrigated cropland and pasture in Skagit 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 in wells or streams.

Skagit's irrigated acreage in 1959 amounted to 5,577 acres or about 4 percent of the county's total farmland. Around 60 percent of the irrigated acreage was in crops, most of which was hay. Lesser acreages of strawberries, vegetables and field and seed beans were under irrigation. The remaining 40 percent of the total irrigated land in 1959 was composed of irrigated cropland not harvested and irrigated pasture or grazing land.

Table 13. Irrigated Farms: Number and Acreage
Skagit County, 1950, 1954 and 1959

Item	1959	1954	1950
Number of irrigated farms	148	110	42
Land irrigated (acres)	5,577	2,941	1,392
Irrigated land in farms according to use:			
Farms irrigating crops	104	73	32
Acres of crops irrigated	3,339	1,358	746
Acres of other land irrigated	2,238	1,583	628

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

Farm Facilities

The capacity of the farmer to produce is significantly related to the items of farm equipment and facilities at his disposal. The 1,740 farms of Skagit County are above state averages in most items of equipment by which observers judge standards of farm operation and levels of living. There is heavy use of modern farm machinery and a high percentage of farm homes enjoying the modern conveniences of telephones, home freezers and other facilities.

Tractors, motor trucks and automobiles are found on majority of Skagit farms to provide most of the power and transportation. In 1959, 80 percent of the farms reported 1,420 tractors of which 146 were of the crawler type. The number of farms with automobiles was 1,622 which represented 91.4 percent of the Skagit farms. Nearly 70 percent of the farms also had motor trucks in 1959.

The importance of dairying and hay and silage crops is indicated by the relatively high frequency of hay harvesting machinery. Farms with hay balers numbered 217 in 1959. Over 42 percent of the farms had milking machines while 26.4 percent had electric milk coolers.

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 located in easy access to the main highways in Skagit County. In 1959, nearly 80 percent of the farms were located on hard-surfaced roads. Only 1.4 percent of the farmsteads required traveling on dirt roads in order to reach them while the remaining 19 percent of the farms were on improved roads of gravel, shell or shale.

Table 14. Specified Facilities and Equipment on Farms
Skagit County, 1959

Facility or Equipment Item	Number of Farms Using	Percent of All Farms in County Equipped
Telephone	1,635	92.1
Home freezer	994	56.0
Milking machine	756	42.6
Electric milk cooler ...	468	26.4
Crop drier (for grain, forage or other crops.	33	1.8
Power operated elevator, conveyor or blower ...	370	20.8
Grain combines	200	11.3
Pick-up baler	217	12.2
Field forage harvester .	180	10.1
Motortrucks	1,229	69.2
Tractors	1,420	80.0
Crawler tractors	146	8.2
Automobiles	1,622	91.4

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

Table 15. Skagit County Agricultural Rankings Among
All United States Counties: 1954 and 1959

Item	Rank	
	1954	1959
Vegetables - acreage harvested for sale	36	33
Vegetables - value harvested for sale	74	40
Green peas - acreage harvested for sale	5	4
Sweet corn - acreage harvested for sale	55	61
Strawberries - acreage harvested for sale	14	15
Strawberries - quantity harvested for sale	10	9

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