

## PART IV

## THE PATTERN OF AGRICULTURE

Farms -- Number and Size

Yakima County is an area of medium and small-sized, specialty farms producing a wide variety of products. There are more farms here than in any other Washington county. A total of 6,010 farms was reported in the Census of Agriculture taken in 1959. This was 765 less than enumerated in 1954. The Census definition used for a farm in 1959 is more restrictive than that used in 1954 and part of the reduction in the number of farms from 1954 to 1959 resulted from the change in definition. The reduction in number of farms due to the definition change for Yakima County between 1954 and 1959 was 267. Census data indicate that a peak number of farms may have been reached in 1950 and that the numbers are now on the decrease.

Farm acreage has been increasing steadily in Yakima County. In 1920, the 5,755 farms contained 479,629 acres or only 14.8 percent of the total land area within the county. By 1959, 6,010 farms in Yakima were accounting for almost 70 percent of the county area. Farm acreage grew to an all-time high of 1,884,694 acres in 1959. In recent years, irrigation projects throughout the Yakima Valley have put thousands of additional acres of land into agriculture.

Table 8. Farms, Number and Average Size, Land in Farms  
Yakima 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	1,293	419.5	542,376	--
1910 <sup>1/</sup>	3,341	96.0	320,921	--
1920	5,755	83.3	479,629	14.8
1925	6,351	94.5	600,106	18.5
1930	6,806	87.9	598,366	18.5
1940	6,606	141.2	932,495	34.1
1945	6,721	163.5	1,099,000	40.2
1950	6,959	161.5	1,123,749	41.1
1954	6,775	167.2	1,133,102	41.4
1959	6,010	313.6	1,884,694	68.9

<sup>1/</sup> Part of Yakima County was taken to organize Benton County in 1905.

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

The county still has many small farms. This is the result of several conditions. Land values in irrigated areas are high per acre. When irrigated lands were opened for settlement there was a tendency for units of 10 to 20 acres to be sold. Specialization in intensive agriculture of high-value crops such as fruit, hops and vegetables has made small farms profitable. Many original 160 acre homesteads were divided into smaller farms in order to sell land at high

irrigation prices. As the total area in farms increased from 542,376 acres in 1900 to 1,123,749 in 1950, there was a general tendency for farms to increase in number.

A grouping of all farms by sizes from the last two agricultural censuses shows that the majority were in the two smallest groups ranging from under 10 to 49 acres. Farms between 10 and 49 acres in size are the single largest type, numbering 2,895, according to the 1959 Census of Agriculture. Farms under 10 acres are the second largest group, numbering 1,015. These two size groups dominate in the present county pattern in which 65 percent of the farms are less than 50 acres. There were only 180 farms out of the county total of 6,010 which were larger than 500 acres. Most of the large farms in Yakima County are located in the Horse Heaven Hills or the Rattlesnake Hills. Many of these large farms specialize in growing wheat and have large acreages in production. Farms with 5,000 acres or more of land are generally devoted to ranching. The number of small farms decreased between 1954 and 1959 while the larger farms of 180 acres and over increased in number.

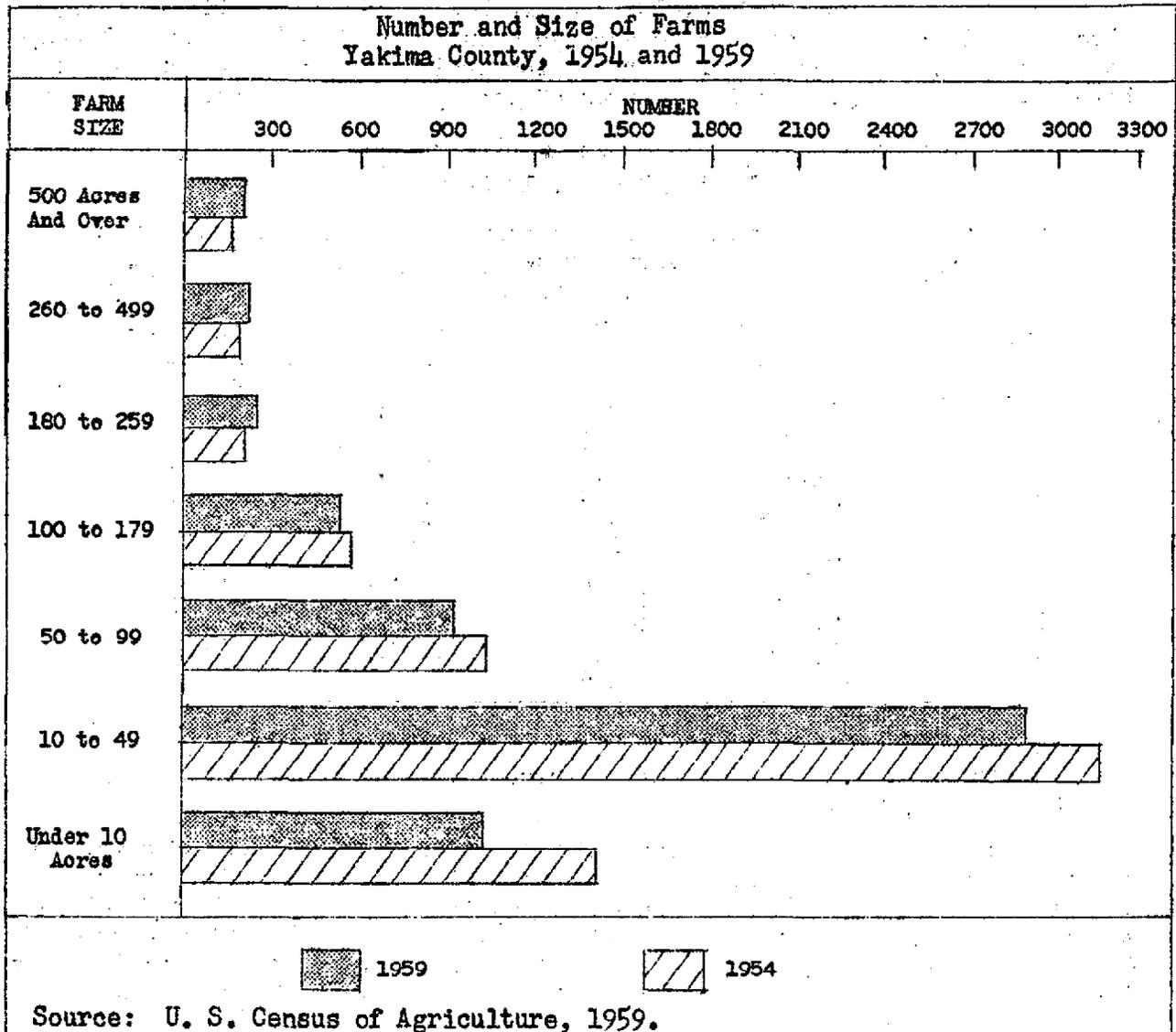


Figure 8. Number and Size of Yakima County Farms, 1954 and 1959.

Types of Farms

Yakima County shows a wide variety of farms classified as to products, according to the 1959 Census of Agriculture. The most common type are fruit farms growing apples, pears, peaches, cherries and apricots, comprising 29.7 percent of all Yakima farms. This indicates a high degree of tree fruit farming specialization in the county. Farms growing field crops such as wheat, barley, potatoes, hops, mint and alfalfa are the second most numerous and account for 13.4 percent of all the farms. Third in importance are livestock farms (8.6 percent) of cattle, sheep or hogs. Nearly one-third of the farms were miscellaneous and unclassified. The area is noted for its wide variety of farm types, crops and livestock. Nearly every crop or type of livestock or poultry that is raised in eastern Washington is produced in commercial quantities by Yakima County farmers.

Table 9. Types of Farms, Yakima County, 1959

Types of Farms	Number of Farms	Percent of all farms in the County	
		1954	1959
Total farms in county .....	6,010	100.0	100.0
Field crop farms .....	807	13.6	13.4
Cash-grain .....	243	2.4	4.0
Other field-crop .....	564	11.1	9.4
Vegetable farms .....	215	5.6	3.6
Fruit-and-nut farms .....	1,786	30.3	29.7
Poultry farms .....	64	1.9	1.1
Dairy farms .....	256	6.7	4.3
Livestock farms other than poultry and dairy	515	7.5	8.6
General farms .....	374	9.1	6.2
Miscellaneous and unclassified farms .....	1,974	25.2	32.9

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

Farm Residence and Operation

Yakima County agriculture is characterized by the fact that over one-half of its farmers do part-time work off their farms. Many persons reside on farms but divide their employment between farm work and other industries. Cash crops grown on most of the farms leave farmers idle time during parts of the year. Pruning, thinning and harvesting in the commercial orchards employ a large number of small-farm owners. There is also some seasonal work in the national forests and the lumber and mining industries. In most cases, seasonal work on other farms and various town jobs provide opportunities for off-farm work. During 1959, there were 3,295 farm operators who reported doing some off-farm work. Of this number, 2,176 or 36.6 percent of all the county's farmers worked more than 100 days per year on jobs away from their farms. Over one-third of the farmers earned more from outside work than they did from their own farms.

The Census of 1959 also showed that 406 of the county's farmers did not live on the farm that they operated. This was about 7 percent of the estimated total of farm operators. In many cases, farm operators live in town removed from the wheat or livestock farm which they operate in a remote county area.

### Farmland Utilization

Crops were harvested from only about 15 percent of the land in farms in 1959. An additional 2.1 percent was in cropland used only for pasture and 2.7 percent was idle or fallow land. Large sloping and dry areas, which generally are grass and sagebrush-covered range lands, too steep or porous for irrigation, are classified as "other pasture". These dry range pasture lands, comprising 1,036,774 acres, amount to 55 percent of all the land in farms and are used mainly for grazing cattle and sheep. Because Yakima is partly located on the mountainous eastern slope of the Cascades, about 21.9 percent of all farmland is in woodland and woodland pasture, amounting to 411,923 acres. Irrigation and dryland cropping systems plus a balanced livestock program result in a well-diversified pattern of agriculture although the individual farms themselves may not be diversified.

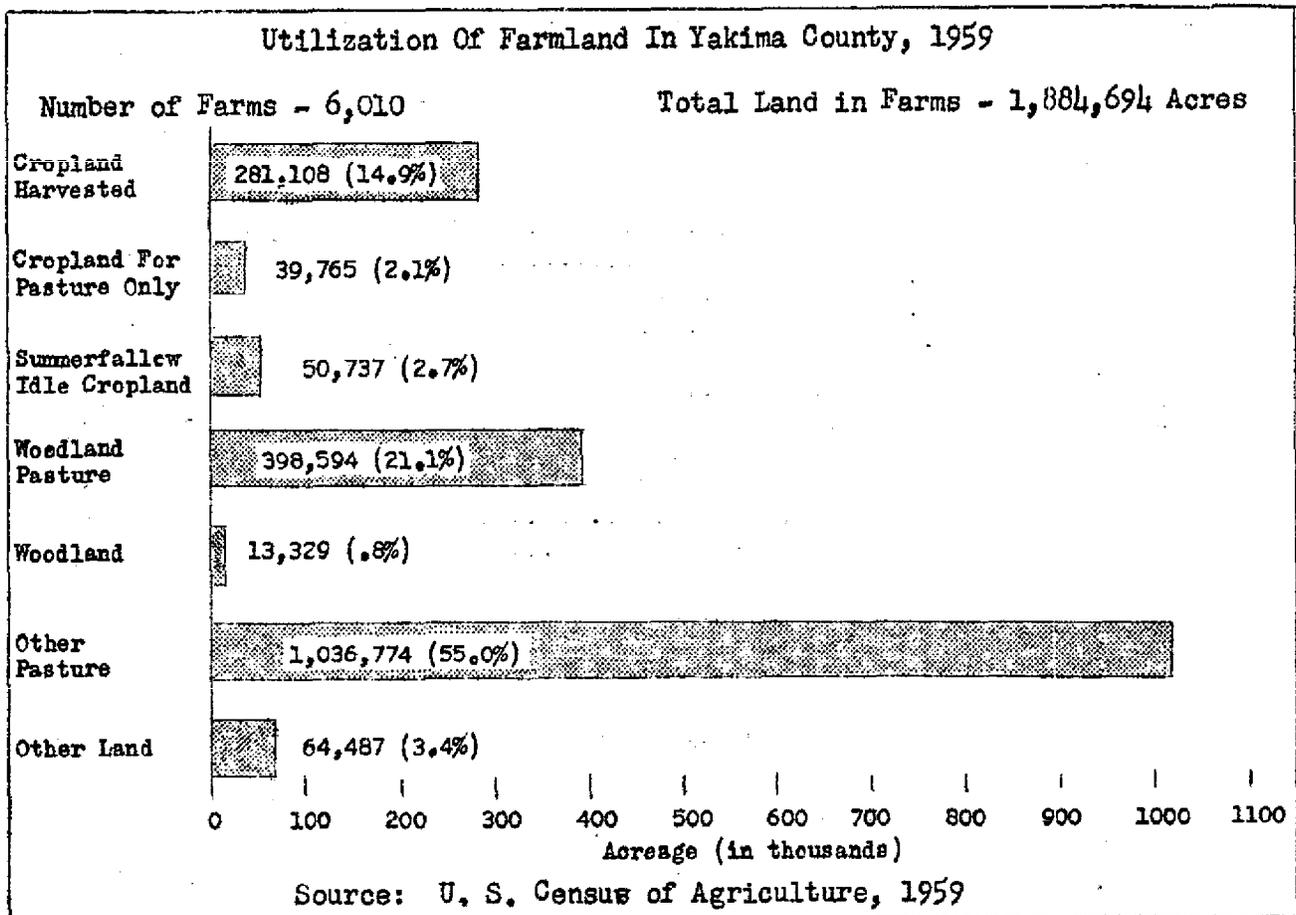


Figure 9. Utilization of Farmland in Yakima County, 1959.

### Farm Values

Value of farmland and farms has increased greatly since 1920. After reaching a high point in 1920, valuations of farms decreased to almost half during the 1930's. 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. By 1959, an average farm of about 160 acres was worth over \$40,000—slightly below the state average. On a per acre basis, the county average was \$312.94. The rise in farm and land values has been caused by several

factors. One has been 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 needed for clearing and improving the land during 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.

Actually, farm and land values vary considerably as to type of farm operation, to soil productivity and investment in improvements. High value in Yakima County relates to fruit land and investment in trees. The inclusion of large areas of low-value grazing land in the farmland totals conceals the fact that the croplands are among the highest valued in the county, especially those that are irrigated.

Table 10. Value of Farm Land and Buildings  
Yakima County, 1920-1959

Year	County Average Values	
	Per Farm	Per Acre
1920	\$13,801	\$165.60
1930	11,807	134.29
1940	7,193	50.95
1950	21,160	112.70
1954	29,798	186.66
1959	40,620	312.94

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

### Farm Tenure

A large majority of the farmers in Yakima County own the farm they operate. Many farms have remained in ownership of the pioneer families who established them. Full-owner farms in 1959 constituted 69.5 percent of all county farms, but contained only 10.1 percent of the farmland. In recent years, part-owner operations have become important in Yakima County agriculture. Although part-owners account for only 18.5 percent of all farms, they operate 35.5 percent of all the farmland.

Tenancy, or the renting and leasing of entire farms, is not prevalent. Only 656 farms in the county were operated by tenants in 1959. The percentage of tenant farms has declined rapidly since the high of 29 percent in 1935. By 1959, the tenant group accounted for only 10.9 percent of all farms in the county and contained only 5.9 percent of the farmland. Tenancy is common in the Yakima Indian Reservation, where white operators rent many acres of land.

Manager-operated farms contain a disproportionately large acreage of farmland. In 1959, only 1.2 percent of the farm operators were managers, but they operated 48.5 percent of the land. Manager farms tend to be large-scale operations with large acreages.

Table 11. Farm Tenancy, Number and Percent of Farms by Tenure of Operator, Yakima County, 1925-1959

Year	Number of Farms	Full Owners		Part Owners		Managers		Tenants	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1925	6,351	3,966	62.4	756	11.9	181	2.9	1,448	22.8
1930	6,806	4,165	61.2	720	10.6	251	3.6	1,670	24.6
1935	7,092	4,245	59.8	500	7.1	290	4.1	2,057	29.0
1940	6,606	4,063	61.5	649	9.8	182	2.8	1,712	25.9
1950	6,754	4,874	71.0	950	13.8	80	1.0	1,055	14.2
1954	6,775	4,947	73.1	930	13.7	71	1.0	827	12.2
1959	6,010	4,200	69.9	1,079	17.9	75	1.2	656	10.9

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture.

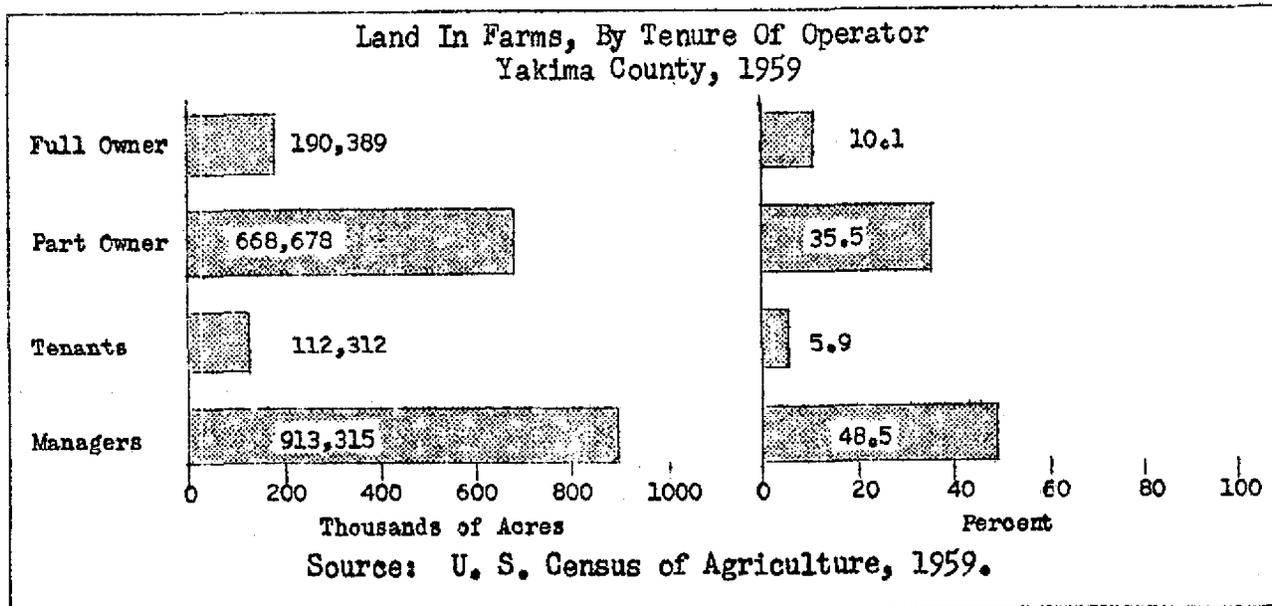


Figure 10. Land in Farms, By Tenure of Operator, Yakima County, 1959.

### Irrigation

Irrigation is vital to Yakima County's highly developed specialty crops and tree fruit farming. Because of the dry summer climate throughout the valley and the desire for better yields, there was early interest in major irrigation works. Interest continues with more and improved facilities for getting water on cropland during the growing season. Irrigation projects by the Bureau of Reclamation at Tieton, Roza, Wapato and Sunnyside have put thousands of acres of land under irrigation. Elaborate facilities for distributing and applying irrigation water on the farm are common. There has been an increasing investment by farmers in land leveling, distribution systems, wells, pumps and sprinklers.

The number of farms with irrigation in Yakima County in 1959 was large. A total of 5,804 farms reported some irrigation. This was 96.6 percent of all farms. In 1954, irrigated land was reported by 6,342 farms and in 1950 by 6,620 farms.

The number of irrigated farms decreased 12.3 percent between 1950 and 1959. The decline, however, was largely the result of the consolidation of farms into larger operating units.

Yakima contains the largest irrigated acreage of any county in the state. The acreage irrigated in 1959 was 296,793 acres, according to the Census of Agriculture. This was 9.6 percent greater than the 270,848 acres reported in 1954 and 11.4 percent greater than the 266,460 acres reported in 1950. Irrigated land makes up only 15.7 percent of the land in farms, but in some areas of the Yakima Valley over 40 percent of the farmland is irrigated. The trend toward more irrigation in Yakima County follows the general trend of other counties where farmers are specializing in high value commercial crops.

Of the total of 296,793 acres irrigated in 1959, 249,222 acres or 84.1 percent were irrigated by water received from irrigation organizations; 6,669 acres or 2.2 percent were irrigated from surface-water sources on the farm; 2,839 acres or less than 1 percent were irrigated from ground-water sources; and 36,682 acres or 12.8 percent were irrigated from combinations of the above sources. All of the major irrigation works draw water from the Naches-Yakima River system and their tributaries.

The importance of irrigation to crop production is illustrated by the fact that 86.2 percent of Yakima's harvested cropland received irrigation water in 1959. The acreage of irrigated crops was 242,117. Approximately 81.6 percent of the irrigated land is devoted to growing crops.

Table 12. Irrigated Farms: Number and Acreage  
Yakima County, 1950, 1954 and 1959

Item	1959	1954	1950
Number of irrigated farms .....	5,804	6,342	6,620
Land irrigated (acres) .....	296,793	270,848	266,460
Irrigated land in farms according to use:			
Farms irrigating crops .....	5,405	5,788	6,290
Acres of crops irrigated .....	242,117	213,798	205,701
Acres of other land irrigated .....	54,676	57,050	60,759

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 6,010 farmsteads of Yakima County are above state averages in most items of equipment and convenience by which observers judge standards of farm operation and levels of living. There is a 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 provide most of the power and transportation on Yakima farms. In 1959, 86.8 percent of the farms reported 9,653 tractors. About 73 percent of the farms had motor trucks. The number of farms using automobiles decreased from 5,835 in 1954 to 5,495 in 1959 for a decrease of

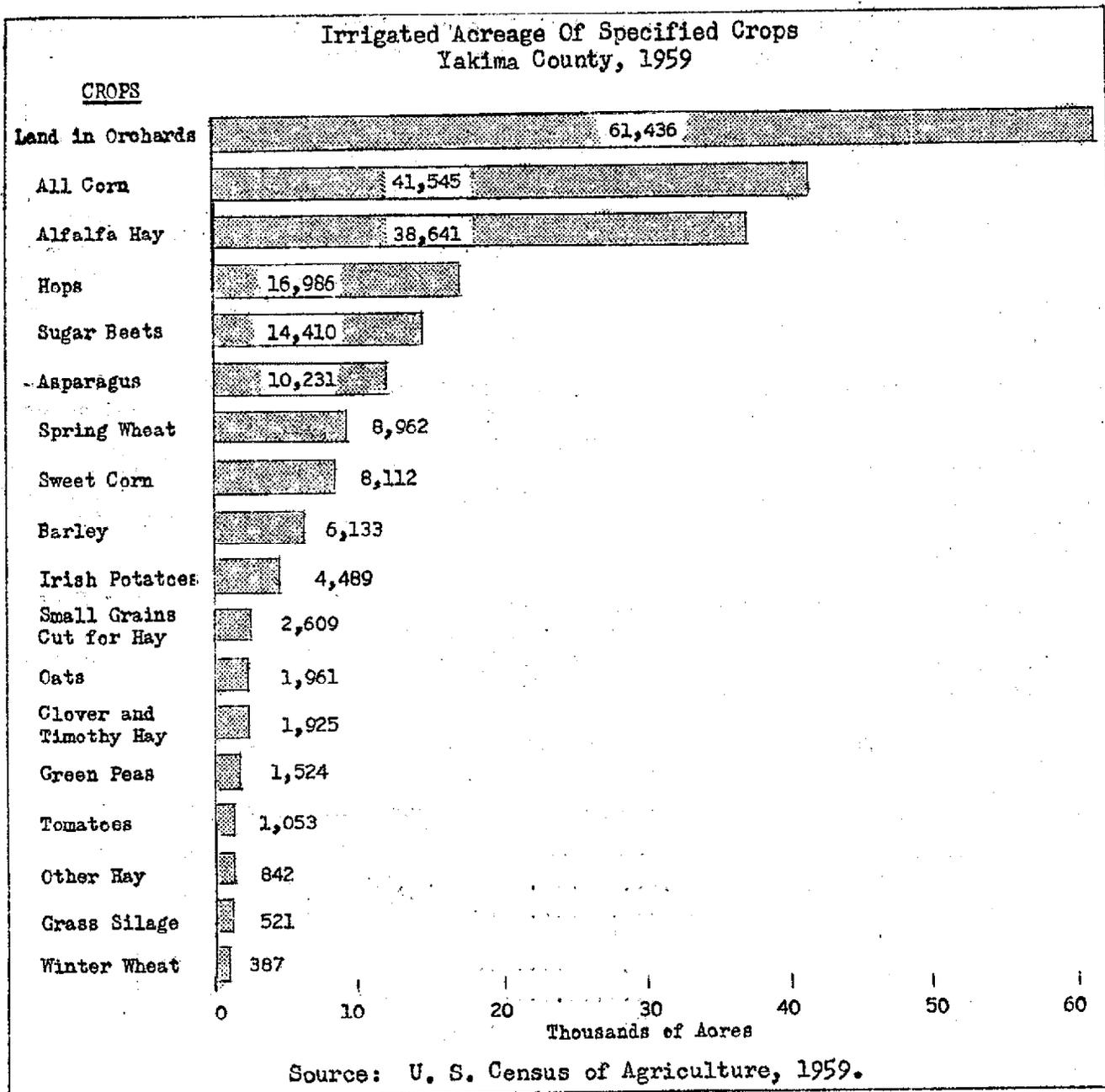


Figure 11. Irrigated Acreage of Specified Crops, Yakima County, 1959.

5.8 percent. More farm tractors, motor trucks and automobiles are used in Yakima than in any other county of Washington.

Yakima County is well-mechanized for harvesting field crops. The county ranks first in the state in number of corn pickers and field forage harvesters, and ranks second in number of pick-up balers. About 7 percent of the farms have grain combines. The proportion of farms with pick-up balers has doubled in the last 5 years, from 4.7 percent in 1954 to 10.0 percent in 1959. There was an increase of 115.1 percent in the number of pick-up balers and an increase of 117.5 percent in the number of corn pickers between 1954 and 1959. Field forage harvesters increased 51.6 percent and grain combines 20 percent during the same

5 year period.

Yakima County farms are well-equipped with chore equipment and home facilities. Yakima led all the counties in number of farms reporting crop driers for grain, forage and other crops in 1959 with 135. About eight out of every 10 farms had telephone service and over one-half had home freezers.

In recent years much progress has been made in providing all-weather roads for farm families. For example, in 1950 only 43.2 percent of the farms in Yakima were located on hard-surfaced roads. By 1959, this proportion had increased to 53.7 percent. Also, 36.7 percent of the Yakima farms were on improved roads (gravel, shell or shale) and the remaining 9.6 percent were on dirt roads in 1959.

Table 13. Specified Equipment and Facilities on Farms  
Yakima County, 1959

Facility or Equipment Item	Number of Farms Using	Percent of All Farms in County Equipped
Grain Combines .....	364	6.1
Corn pickers .....	163	2.7
Pick-up balers .....	602	10.0
Field forage harvesters	382	6.4
Motor trucks .....	4,366	72.6
Tractors .....	5,218	86.8
Automobiles .....	5,495	91.4
Telephone .....	5,065	84.3
Home freezer .....	3,524	58.6
Milking machine .....	659	11.0
Electric milk cooler ...	290	4.8
Crop drier .....	135	2.2
Power-operated elevator, conveyor or blower ...	635	10.6

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

Table 14. Yakima County Agricultural Rankings Among  
All United States Counties: 1954 and 1959

	Rank	
	1954	1959
Value of all farm products sold.....	8	11
Horses and mules on farms .....	60	41
Cattle and calves on farms .....	29	26
Cattle and calves sold alive .....	19	18
Sheep and lambs on farms .....	100	94
Sheep and lambs sold alive .....	39	31
Turkey hens kept for breeding .....	47	97
Irish potatoes harvested for home use or for sale .....	41	50
Sugar beets harvested for sugar .....	10	14
Vegetables harvested for sale .....	18	20
Green peas harvested for sale .....	37	46
Sweet corn harvested for sale .....	3	7
Tomatoes harvested for sale .....	70	73
Value of fruits, including berries and other small fruits and nuts sold ...	4	6
Apples - number of trees of all ages .	1	1
Apples - quantity harvested .....	1	1
Peaches - number of trees of all ages	11	12
Peaches - quantity harvested .....	8	11
Pears - number of trees of all ages ..	1	1
Pears - quantity harvested .....	1	3
Plums and Prunes - number of trees of all ages .....	13	16
Plums and Pruned - quantity harvested	15	8
Cherries - number of trees of all ages	18	15
Cherries - quantity harvested .....	1	9
Grapes - number of grapevines of all ages .....	19	19
Grapes - quantity harvested .....	18	20

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