

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY EXTENSION  
PLAN OF WORK

1961

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## I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

According to the 1959 Census, there are in Northampton County 370 farms. About 325 of these are classified as commercial truck farms and cropland acreages are from 50 to 500. There are very few having more than 500 acres. This is a V-shape county, ranging in widths from one to eight miles and its length is about 35 miles. It is between the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean and is attached to Accomack County on the north on an eight mile boundary. The land is quite level and most of it is well drained. Rainfall averages about 44 inches. Cropland elevation is nearly all between 20 and 40 feet above sea level. The predominate soil types are sassafras sandy loam and sassafras fine sandy loam, with scattered small areas of Keyport and Elkton soil types. Following is a list of truck crops grown, approximately in their order of importance: Irish potatoes, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, snapbeans, cucumbers, cabbage, broccoli, sweet corn, peppers, strawberries, lettuce, spinach, collard, kale, squash. This county also produces about 4,000 acres of soybeans. Corn acreage has been declining rapidly in the past few years and now is probably about 1,500.

Farmers generally follow good cultural practices. They use cover crops extensively and in almost every instance use adequate quantities of fertilizer. There is some evidence of excessive fertilization on some farms.

Though there has been some increase in livestock numbers in recent years, this enterprise is still of minor importance. There are very few herds of commercial hogs and a few beef cattle. Dairy cattle numbers are exceedingly low and have been slowly declining in recent years. There are about 60 small flocks of sheep.

## II. THE EVER CHANGING PICTURE

Early in 1961, there is evidence of changes evolving in the minds of the farmers of Northampton County. Many of these changes are motivated by influences originating beyond the boundaries of their farms.

- A. Farm operation is approaching a higher degree of "inter-gration". Farm plans are being influenced by those who lend money to farmers, those people to or through whom farm products will be sold, and by government programs.

- B. Because of public demand a higher percentage of total vegetable production is being processed each year. In addition to canning and freezing, this processing includes other means of preparing foods so that time may be saved by the consumer in purchasing and preparing them for the table. As a result of this condition, farmers must develop a closer and more harmonious relationship with processors.
- C. Probably because consumers have high incomes, there is demand in the market place for foods of the best possible quality and appearance ONLY.
- D. There is growing evidence that "community reputation" is a big influence in the market. For this reason, farmers are concerned that their neighbors produce and sell quality produce.
- E. Farm units continue to get larger and most of them are improving efficiency at the same time.
- F. Commodity specialization is becoming more popular. Most farmers continue to produce from 3 to 6 crops which is necessary to hedge against high financial loss, and to more efficiently use available resources. Over diversification reduces managerial efficiency and increases per unit cost of production.

### III. HOW THIS PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

This plan was developed by the County Agent in cooperation with the County Board of Agriculture, a Tomato committee, a Sweet Potato Committee, a Forestry Committee, 4-H County Council, and other organized groups of farmers. Also problems were discussed with farm leaders and dealers, individually.

### IV. GENERAL PROBLEMS

The largest general problem existing in Northampton County is that of spasmodic farm income due to rapid and severe fluctuations in the market prices of vegetables. Effort could profitably be spent toward balancing the program on individual farms by such things as including livestock and the use of adequate but not excessive crop diversification. It may be wise to make marketing arrangements before crop harvest time, possibly even before planting. Many farmers follow this practice but many do not. Consideration may also be given to the inclusion of an acreage of one

or more less hazardous crops such as soybeans and small grain. At the same time consideration should be given to such factors as: (1) changing market demands, (2) farm records, including costs accounting, (3) labor efficiency, (4) full utilization of available resources, (5) availability of credit.

#### V. SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

##### A. FARM PLANNING - FARM MANAGEMENT

Probably on no farms are all resources being used to the fullest possible extent. One of the biggest problems is that management and other resources are overloaded at certain seasons and are not fully utilized at other times.

It shall be Extension's responsibility to assist farmers in their efforts to make adjustments that will fully utilize all resources. To accomplish this, farmers will be encouraged to make definite plans for crop production and marketing as far in advance as possible. They will be encouraged to appraise their situation carefully before making definite plans. To accomplish this, they will need to improve their methods of record-keeping and to establish a good system of determining cost of production. A definite calendar of activities should be prepared in an effort to determine the advisability of combining various farm enterprises on any one farm. This schedule should show the time requirements of various enterprises for management, labor, chattels, etc. Diversification on every farm should be used to reduce financial hazard and to utilize all the resources to the maximum without overloading any one resource.

To accomplish the desired effect, the County Agent will present basic, factual information to all groups possible. The press and circular letters will also be used. Countywide meetings will be called from time to time to present outlook information and improved production and marketing practices. In this field of work, much work must be done through individual contacts.

The goal for this year will be to stimulate the thinking of all farmers in the direction indicated above.

##### B. SOIL PRODUCTIVITY

**SITUATION:** Though much of the crop land in this county has been producing crops continuously for 300 years or more, it is now more productive than ever. Adequate quantities of commercial fertilizer are used on all farms. The

soil's productive capacity has increased materially during the past 20 or 30 years. In recent years the use of winter cover crops has remained about constant with approximately 2/3 of the crop land so covered each year.

- EXTENSION METHODS 1. Acquaint farmers through public meetings, the press, circular letters, and individual contacts with the advantages of cover crops as indicated by Experiment Station's data. It may be advisable to explain that cover crops will utilize residual fertilizer and release it when the cover crops decompose; add much needed organic matter; and prevent or reduce wind and water erosion.
2. Encourage full utilization of the A.S.C. program of cost share for soil conserving practices.
  3. Show pictures, illustrating the effects of wind erosion at public meetings.
  4. Emphasize the importance of early fall seeding of cover crops. A comparison of early and late seeding can be observed in every community.
  5. Point out the advantage of soil sampling, for lime and fertilizer recommendations, at group meetings and through individual contacts.
  6. Rotations should be planned after determining crops to be grown on individual farms. Those that grow potatoes should follow a one year rotation for this crop. (Potatoes natural grass, winter cover). The remainder of the farm cropland should be limed to maintain a pH of about 6.0 and a three or four year rotation established for other vegetable crops on this land. The susceptibility of various crops to the same diseases must be considered in establishing this rotation. On some farms the production of some field crops, in the rotation, may be advisable as a means of reducing the danger of some diseases. This information can best be carried to farmers through individual contact and a public meeting on farm planning.

- GOALS: 1. To increase the use of cover crops to 85% of the crop land.
2. To seed cover crops immediately following the harvest of cash crops. In some instances, the cover crop can be

interplanted in the cash crop at the last cultivation.

3. Utilize the entire A.S.C. allocation.
4. Process 1,000 soil samples in 1961.
5. Assist twenty-five farmers in outlining definite crop rotations.

C. LIVESTOCK

SITUATION: The livestock numbers of all types is extremely low in Northampton County. The chief obstacle in getting production established on additional farms is the inclination of farm operators. A group of farm leaders with the assistance of an Extension specialist have concluded that hog production and steer feeding could be profitable on a number of the county's farms. Such an enterprise would also serve to more fully utilize farm resources. There are about 1200 sheep on 60 farms.

EXTENSION METHODS 1. At the request of many farmers that own sheep the County Agent will procure a professional shearer.

2. While visiting farmers with this shearer, the County Agent will point out the advantages of improved management practices.
3. While assisting some farmers with making long time farm plans, a subtle suggestion will be made to include steer feeding or hog production in their program.
4. A few farmers, who have cow and calf herds, will be encouraged to consider substitution of steer feeding.

- GOALS:
1. To change three farmers from cow and calf operators to steer feeders.
  2. To establish steer feeding on three additional farms that have a potential feed supply.
  3. To have some farmers begin the practice of regular worming of sheep on specified dates.
  4. To have the same farmers begin the practice of docking and castrating all lambs soon after birth.

5. To influence twenty farmers to tie wool fleeces individually with paper twine and to market wool cooperatively.

D. CROPS

1. IRISH POTATOES

SITUATION: Potatoes continue to be the largest single source of income for farmers of Northampton County. In the past few years the acreage has become stabilized between nine and eleven thousand. Per acre yields have been increasing. The Cobbler variety is still extensively used but other varieties are growing in popularity. Pungo will probably account for more than one-half of the acreage in 1961. Generally such varieties as Pungo and Katahdin produce larger yields and are preferred in the markets. Cobbler is popular because it is the earliest maturing variety.

Demands continue to increase for washed potatoes, and for potatoes packed in consumer size packages.

Many farmers use more nitrogen fertilizer than in recommended by the Experiment Stations. This practice evidently delays maturity and reduces quality of potatoes slightly.

EXTENSION METHODS 1. Conduct one countywide educational meeting with the help of specialist of Virginia Truck Experiment Station and Extension specialist. At this time recommendations will be made on fertilization, seed size, seed spacing, disease control, insect control, cultural methods, and harvesting procedures.

2. A countywide meeting for all potato growers and shippers will be held in January to discuss the 1961 outlook and other marketing factors.
3. Circular letters will be sent to all growers warning of late blight or other disease should disease threaten. Such warning will be advised by Experiment Station specialist.
4. Arrangements have been made to issue insect warnings on the basis of light trap catches at the Virginia Truck Experiment Station.
5. The warning services mentioned in 3 and 4 above will be passed to all dealers by telephone as soon as received.

7.

This group is in very close contact with all growers. Circular letters will also go to all farmers on anticipated insect and disease problems.

6. A varietal demonstration will be established at the Va. Truck Experiment Station at Painter and all farmers will be invited to observe this at harvest time.

GOALS: To influence all potato growers to efficiently produce potatoes of superior quality and appearance by:

1. A more judicious use of fertilizer and fungicides.
2. Establish three additional potato washing machines.
3. Increasing to 60% the acreage of the Pungo variety.
4. Increasing to 80% the number of growers applying soil insecticides before planting.
5. To generally improve the industry by handling potatoes so that bruising and overheating, while harvesting, packing, and loading, will be reduced to a minimum.

2. TOMATOES

SITUATION: Practically all tomatoes are grown for a dual purpose. The primary consideration of most growers is to produce fruit early and of desirable quality for fresh market consumption. The residue of the crop to be sold to canners to the extent possible. Tomato acreage has been declining for two or three years because the crop has not been profitable to most growers. A further acreage reduction can be expected in 1961.

Local canners, for the past few years, have had extreme difficulty to comply with purity regulations of State and Federal agencies. They now find it necessary to discontinue canning between August 1-10. Because of work done in 1960 by Experiment Stations and Extension people, this condition may improve to some extent.

Tomato yields in Virginia have not increased in recent years as they have in most of the nation. This is due, in part, to the fact that growers in this county are attempting to

produce fresh market and cannery tomatoes from the same acreage. No existing variety seems to be highly desirable for both purposes.

The tomato industry is and has been very important to the county's economy. It now appears that many adjustments must be made quickly if it is to be saved as a major source of income.

EXTENSION METHODS 1. Plants produced locally in plastic green houses have produced larger yields and better quality than plants shipped in from Florida and Georgia. Farmers will be made aware of this condition in public meetings and through the press. Work on definite planning of construction and management, will be done through individual contacts.

2. Varietal characteristics will be explained, by an Extension Specialist, in one countywide meeting. A demonstration planting will be established at the Virginia Truck Experiment Station of some old and many comparatively new varieties. Farmers, canners and other interested parties will be invited to visit these plantings during the growing and harvesting season for the purpose of making their own evaluation.

3. Fertilization methods, that will produce early fruit of the best quality and quantity, will also be discussed in at least one public meeting and in one news article.

4. Farmers, canners and brokers will be advised of the value of applying an insecticide in the fields, assembly points, and canning plants to control the drosophila fly infestation. This should prolong the canning season.

5. Demonstrate the value of plastic green houses for plant production.

GOALS: 1. To increase the county's per acre yield to 7 tons.

2. For canners and brokers to buy all tomatoes on basis of grade, thus giving farmers a financial incentive to produce and deliver superior quality fruit.

3. To increase to 20 the number of plastic green houses used for tomato plant production.

4. For all farmers to use adequate quantities, and at the right time, of fertilizers, insecticides, and fungicides. At the same time, excessive amounts or unnecessary applications be avoided.
5. That all imported plants be inspected by the State Department of Agriculture representatives to prevent the introduction of diseases.

3. SWEET POTATOES

SITUATION: Sweet potato yields, per acre, in Northampton County are near the top for the entire nation. Between 1950 and 1960 the acreage increased rapidly; per acre yields were increasing at the same time. Sweet potatoes for canning and for fresh market are harvested from the same acreage. In 1960, prices paid by canners were the lowest for many years. For this reason, a small reduction in acreage is expected for 1961.

The per capita consumption of fresh sweet potatoes has been declining quite rapidly for 20 or more years. This is probably due to increased competition from "convenience foods". The Commodity Committee feels that existing processing outlets should be expanded, if possible. They also think that sweet potato flake processing plants should be established.

An organization of Northampton and Accomack County farmers have for the past three years conducted a market promotional program for Nemagold sweet potatoes. This program will be continued and expanded in 1961. About 80% of the sweet potatoes grown in the two counties are of this variety. Funds raised by this organization have been supplemented by much service of the Market Promotional section of the Virginia Department of Agriculture. Extension has also cooperated with this group in every way possible.

For about ten years, Extension and other professional agencies have been advocating more extensive use of storage sweet potatoes for winter and spring sale. There is evidence also that it can be profitably expanded further.

EXTENSION METHODS 1. Conduct one countywide meeting at which time Extension and Experiment Station specialists will discuss all phases of efficient production, with emphasis on new experiment station findings.

2. To cooperate with the Accomack-Northampton Sweet Potato Improvement Association and its effort to advertise Virginia sweet potatoes and improve marketing methods and procedure.
3. Plan a field day at the Painter branch of the Virginia Truck Experiment Station at which time demonstrations will show:
  - a. A comparison of varieties and strains (new and old).
  - b. The effects of seed treatment and plant treatment for disease control.
  - c. A comparison of careful versus rough handling at harvest time.
4. Cooperate with the Northampton Marketing Cooperative in its efforts to sell more and better quality sweet potatoes to processors.
5. Promote the use of certified seed.
6. Encourage earlier harvesting to avoid oversize potatoes.
7. Investigate the possibility of additional processing outlets.
8. Assist some farmers with locating sources of certified seed.

- GOALS: 1. To increase the use of seed from vine cuttings from an estimated 75% to 90%.
2. To materially reduce harvest time bruising and skinning.
  3. To prevail on 10 or more farmers to set plants closer which in turn will reduce the average size and increase yield. (The market much prefers potatoes of 2" to 3" diameter).
  4. To see a 50% increase in sales of oversize and off shape potatoes to processors. These potatoes can be culled from fresh market potatoes at harvest time.
  5. To get 20 farmers to use some certified seed.
  6. To improve production methods and marketing efficiency to the point that Virginia sweet potatoes will sell on the markets at top prices. Louisiana, North Carolina and New Jersey have held this enviable position for several years.

4. OTHER CROPS

No organized program is planned for the several other crops grown in this county. Considerable work will be done in connection with their production, however. Should a particular disease or insect problem develop, all farmers will be contacted by a circular letter. The dealers will be advised of insecticide, fungicide, and fertilizer recommendations for most of these crops and farmers' questions will be answered individually. These crops include: snapbeans, cabbage, cucumbers, broccoli, sweet corn, lettuce, the winter greens, strawberries, and soybeans. Pastures, hay crops, and ornamentals will get some attention as demands arise.

D. CALENDAR OF ACTIVITYDECEMBER 1960

1. Farm Planning and Outlook Information
2. Annual meeting of Peninsula Horticultural Society

JANUARY 1961

1. Annual Outlook Meeting
2. Analysis of soil reports with individuals
3. Cooperate with the Soil Conservation District and the Soil Conservation Service on their program for farm drainage.
4. Farm Planning and Outlook Information
5. Emergency Planning Committee Meeting
6. Meeting on Beef Cattle Production
7. Tour of N. C. and La. to study sweet potato production and marketing practices.

FEBRUARY 1961

1. Annual Vegetable Production meeting
2. Analysis of soil reports
3. Individual farm planning
4. Arrange for sheep shearing
5. County-wide meeting to discuss all phases of sweet potato production.
6. Marketing Conferences (Potatoes, cabbage and sweet potatoes).
7. Meeting with salesmen and dealers in fertilizer, pesticides, seed, etc.
8. Prepare Plan of Work

MARCH 1961

1. National 4-H Week
2. Circular letter on alfalfa weevil control.
3. Circular letter on tomato recommendations.
4. Circular letter on sweet potato disease control.
5. Prepare sheep shearing schedule.

APRIL 1961

1. Sheep shearing
2. Watch for emergence of insects, especially flea beetle and red spider, and make recommendations accordingly to farmers and dealers.
3. Restudy vegetable diseases in anticipation of their occurrence, to be prepared to identify them and make recommendations.

MAY 1961

1. Watch for emergence of army worms and send circular letter if advisable.
2. Visit strawberry fields and auction market, and make harvesting and packing suggestions to individuals.
3. Answer individuals' questions about diseases and insects.
4. Work with cabbage growers and shippers in an effort to improve packing and marketing.

JUNE 1961

1. Circular letter on potato harvesting.
2. Circular letter on tomato harvesting.
3. 4-H Short Course
4. 4-H County Council

JULY 1961

1. 4-H Camp
2. 4-H Picnic
3. Field Day - Virginia Truck Experiment Station, Painter Potato Varieties

AUGUST 1961

1. Circular letter on sweet potato harvesting
2. Annual Extension Conference - Blacksburg
3. Clinical work on insects and diseases
4. Institute of Rural Affairs - Blacksburg

SEPTEMBER 1961

1. Reorganize 4-H Clubs in schools
2. Promotional program for winter cover crops
3. Cooperate with Accomack-Northampton Sweet Potato Improvement Association in its promotional effort.
4. Work with individuals on harvesting and packing sweet potatoes.
5. Circular letter on disease and insect control on snapbeans, cucumbers, and broccoli.

OCTOBER 1961

1. Field Day at Virginia Truck Experiment Station, Painter-Sweet Potato Varieties - Disease Control - Seed Selection-Handling Methods in Harvesting and Packing
2. Stress sweet potato "hill selection" for foundation seed.

NOVEMBER 1961

1. 4-H County Council meeting
2. 4-H Achievement Day
3. Farm planning for 1962 operations
4. Extension District Conference (Probable)
5. Begin to assemble outlook information
6. Arrange for A.S.C. elections
7. Prepare Annual Report

## 4-H CLUB WORK

Northampton County has 153 4-H boys and girls in 6 clubs. All clubs are joint clubs and hold two meetings per month in school except the older club which holds only one. Projects offered to the boys include: electricity, forestry, field crops, livestock, and automotive care and safety. There is wonderful cooperation by the school officials in the way of school time, space, teachers' time as leaders, and school buses when needed.

## A. PROJECT WORK

SITUATION: The project work in general is good but many members do not realize the importance of keeping good records.

GOAL: To increase project completion to 90% this year.

## EXTENSION METHODS:

1. Maintain an interesting, instructional program to attract and hold active young people.
2. Maintain project instructions through the use of demonstrations, lectures, and other means as required to best present the material.
3. Encourage adults and 4-H parents to participate in club functions and serve as club leaders.
4. Visit the homes of as many club members as possible.
5. Teach Parliamentary Procedure

## B. LEADERS

SITUATION: There are 5 adult leaders working with the 6 clubs.

GOAL: To increase number of leaders from 5 to 7 in 1961.

## C. SHORT COURSE

SITUATION: Northampton has but one 4-H club of 10 members who are old enough to attend Short Course. This club is mostly girls and for the last two years, two girls have attended Short Course. -

GOAL: To take at least two girls and one boy to Short Course in 1961.

EXTENSION METHODS: 1. Teach the value of Short Course

2. Prepare and encourage more 4-H members to participate in District Contests.
3. Have an interesting program that will hold 4-H members when they reach high school age.

D. RURAL LIFE SUNDAY

SITUATION: The participation in Rural Life Sunday has been very good in past several years. Every club takes a very active part by helping in the churches.

GOAL: To get every 4-H member to attend church and take part with their 4-H club function.

- EXTENSION METHODS: 1. Assign duties to different 4-H members.
2. Place material in the hands of the ministers of the county.
  3. Better publicize Rural Life Sunday.

E. NATIONAL 4-H WEEK

SITUATION: All 4-H Clubs observe National 4-H Week by having a window exhibit showing what they have accomplished in 4-H club work.

- GOAL: 1. To improve the quality of work put in the windows this year.
2. To increase publicity of 4-H work during 4-H Week.

EXTENSION METHODS: 1. Prepare news articles and pictures for the county papers, news articles to be written by club members.

2. Use the Radio Station to better inform the public on 4-H work.

F. 4-H CAMP

SITUATION: There is good interest in Jamestown 4-H Camp but less interest in Senior Camp.

- GOAL: 1. To increase the number attending Jamestown Camp to 45 in 1961.
2. To increase the number attending Senior Camp to five in 1961.

EXTENSION METHODS:

1. Inform club members of the opportunities of 4-H Camp early in the year.
2. Have reports made to the clubs by the members who have attended camp.
3. Give camp scholarships to members doing outstanding work.

G. COMMUNITY PROJECTS

SITUATION: All 4-H Clubs are carrying a community project this year.

GOAL: To have all clubs complete their community project by June 1961.

EXTENSION METHODS:

1. Use the press and radio to publicize successful community projects.
2. Encourage each 4-H member to share in the community project.

H. ACHIEVEMENT DAY

SITUATION: Too few members attend Achievement Day. Each club has an exhibit and the county contests are held with Achievement Day.

GOAL: To increase 4-H members attending Achievement Day to 100 in 1961.

EXTENSION METHODS:

1. Publicize Achievement Day.
2. Invite parents, county and state officials.
3. Have an attractive and inspiring program.

4. Give as much recognition as possible.

I. ELECTRIC CONGRESS

SITUATION: Northampton has had at least two delegates at Electric Congress since 1959. Interest is very high and many are working toward attending this year.

GOAL: Have at least two members attend Electric Congress in 1961.

EXTENSION METHODS:

1. Publicize Electric Congress.
2. Prepare members for Electric Congress by showing pictures of last year's congress.
3. Work with power suppliers in setting up the electric program.