



COUNTY AGENT'S NARRATIVE REPORT

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Tappahannock, Virginia

Essex County

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#### DESCRIPTION OF COUNTY

Essex County lies in the Coastal Plain on Virginia's Middle Peninsula with the Rappahannock River as its Northern boundary. In 1954, lands in farms totaled 107,888 acres, around 67% of the county's area of 160,000 acres. According to the 1954 Census of Agriculture, there were 613 farms averaging 176.0 acres in size and \$12,978 in value of land and buildings. Number of farms has dropped since 1945, but land in farms has shown little change.

The topography is low and flat, with elevations ranging from sea level to a little less than 200 feet. Temperatures average 37 degrees in January and 76 in July. The frost free growing season is about 193 days, extending from April 15 to October 25th. Annual precipitation averages 42 inches.

Agriculture is the leading industry. The value of farm products amounts to nearly one and one-half million dollars per year. Farm sales for 1954 were divided as follows: field crops 50.7 percent of the total; vegetables 2.6 percent; dairy products 4.6 percent; poultry 13.1 percent; livestock 25.1 percent; and forest products 3.6 percent. The most noticeable changes in recent years have been the increase in livestock sales and the decrease in vegetables. Soybeans is now the leading crop in acres planted, and supplies about 11 percent of the total cash farm income. However, wheat still has a larger cash value with nearly 19 percent of the county's total value of farm products sold. Cattle and calf sales now account for nearly 18 percent of the total, corn about 11 percent and hogs slightly over 6 percent.

Nearly sixty percent of all farms are classified as residential or part-time. Such farms are those with less than \$250 value of farm products sold, and those with sales value of \$250 to \$1,199 and the operator reporting 160 days or more off-farm work, or reporting other income exceeding the value of agricultural products sold. Many of these farms produce much of their food requirements.

1. CROPS - Production and Farm Marketing

- (1) Over 50 percent of the income of farmers in Essex County comes from the sale of crops such as soybeans, wheat, corn, and small grains. Commercial seed companies located in Richmond and Norfolk, Virginia, buy a large proportion of their seed stocks from Essex County farmers.

The trend towards quality grains has presented a problem on most farms. Many of the farmers are accustomed to saving some of their crop for next year's seed. Seed treatment and germination tests are not widely used. The time and amounts of seed used varies from farm to farm. Use of fertilizer to increase yields has not been widely accepted. Time and methods of harvesting varies considerably.

Storage facilities for grains are not adequate on the majority of farms.

- (2) Farmers were encouraged to learn the grades of grain as set up by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and administered at grain buying stations by official grain graders employed by the Virginia Division of Markets.

The practice of saving home grown grains for seed was discouraged unless the seed was tested for germination and treated for disease.

A recommended time of year and amount of seed to use for each crop was explained. Use of fertilizer at planting time and during the growing season to improve production was discussed and recommended for adoption. Harvesting methods and appropriate times for harvesting were discussed. Adequate storage facilities for at least one-half of the grain produced on the farm were explained, discussed and recommended.

- (3) (a) Community Meetings were held for interested farmers to discuss the problems which they had as producers of grain. The County Extension Agents, grain buyers, fertilizer dealers and farmer leaders helped to formulate recommendations for the solution of those problems with which the grain producers are faced.
- (b) Demonstrations were held to show examples of drying, storage and processing grains. These demonstrations were selected and put on by members of a local farm machinery dealer, power company employees, a local bottled gas company, Extension Agents and specialists from Virginia Polytechnic Institute.
- (c) Special Interest Letters were sent to grain producers at intervals during the crop season. These letters contained approved recommendations from the Extension Agronomist at VPI and suggestions from leading grain producers in the county.

(d) Other Agricultural Agencies were asked to include information pertaining to grain in their correspondence and meetings with their cooperators.

- (4) a. Farmers know the official grades of grain and how they are determined by the official graders at grain buying stations.
- b. Ten percent of the farmers who save their own seed now send it to be treated and tested before planting. Eighty percent of the seed sown is of the recommended variety and has been commercially treated for disease.
- c. 75% of the grain crop has been harvested during the normal season this year. 85% of the wheat has been seeded between October 25 and November 15, which is the recommended time for planting in this area.
- d. 25% of the grain producers are using some fertilizer at planting time. 60% of the producers are using fertilizer as a topdressing or sidedressing.
- e. 30% of the grain producers have either built or converted buildings for the storage of grain on the farm.
- (5) The following will be attempted in order to improve the County Extension Program in 1959:
- a. Involve more people in planning, problem discussions, and demonstrations.
- b. Keep grain producers informed of the latest technical advancements by means of meetings, letters, radio and TV.

11. LIVESTOCK - Production and Farm Marketing

1. The sale of livestock accounts for at least 25% of the income of landowners in Essex County. Processors and consumers of livestock products are demanding a better quality of livestock than is produced on the average farm. Two out of three farms in Essex County need additional livestock for efficiency and an additional source of income. Modern methods and technical advancements in the field of livestock production have not been adopted by the majority of livestock producers in Essex County.
2. Availability of a needed source of income was pointed out to producers of livestock. The advantage of buying purchased livestock for replacements and breeding stock was explained and discussed. Farmers having surplus grain and facilities for producing livestock were contacted and presented facts concerning livestock and marketing.

Modern methods and up-to-date technical information were presented to livestock producers.

3. a. Community meetings were held in the county to discuss the income which could be derived from the sale of livestock. Local feed dealers, livestock market operators and Extension Agents conducted these meetings.

- b. Special Purebred Livestock Sales were held in the county and in adjacent areas to encourage farmers to buy replacements and breeding stock of the recommended type which processors and consumers are requesting. These sales were organized and conducted by Purebred Livestock associations, and Livestock Producers Associations. County Extension Agents helped to organize, publicize and conduct these special sales.
- c. Special Interest Meetings were held to discuss the economic, nutritional, disease, parasite, and marketing problems of livestock producers. Local leaders, feed dealers, Extension agents and economic specialists helped conduct these meetings.
- d. Special Interest letters were sent to livestock producers whenever any pertinent information was available for livestock producers.
4. a. Ten percent more livestock has been marketed through local and area livestock markets than was marketed in 1957.
- b. The Virginia Purebred Swine Breeders Association Sale held on August 12, 1958 in Tappahannock had a gross receipt of \$8700.00 for 41 sows and 30 boars. This was the highest sale held by the Association in 1958. Six Essex County farmers bought five sows and two boars.
- c. The Tappahannock Feeder Pig Sale Association held its first sale of feeder pigs on October 28, 1958. 743 head of pigs were sold

for a gross receipt of \$13,195.00. 275 head of these pigs were bought by four Essex County farmers. 250 head of these pigs are being fed for market in three pig parlors.

- d. Five farmers are using phenothiazine to control internal parasites in their cattle as the result of a discussion meeting.
  - e. One farmer has put 109 head of cattle in the Virginia Beef Cattle Improvement program. This livestock producer has started a cow-herd pregnancy testing program to improve his herd. The county Extension agents have worked out these programs with this livestock producer. A breeding experiment using Hereford cows and a Charolais bull is now being conducted. Calves from this crossing will be born in January 1959.
  - f. Five livestock producers are fattening 200 head of cattle to be sold through local Fat Cattle Sales. These five livestock producers are feeding growth stimulating hormones. Three are using the hormone as an implant in the ears. Two are adding it to the feed. These producers are feeding a recommended ration using home-grown grains and purchasing their supplement from local feed dealers.
  - g. Completed a county wide Brucellosis Testing Program.
5. In 1959 the livestock program can be improved by continuing the present program using the latest practical technical information available.

### III. Planning and Management of the Farm Business

1. The narrow margin between operating costs and profit has forced farm operators to analyze their operations more closely.

Rapid changes in agriculture and the large amount of capital needed to operate a farm calls for long range planning and keeping up with future agricultural trends.

Locating and keeping farm labor becomes more difficult each year.

2. The importance of keeping accurate records on all farm operations was stressed throughout the year.

Future trends in agriculture as analyzed by State and Federal Agricultural agencies was presented for the farm operators' consideration.

Discussions were held to help determine the economical size of operations, capital needed, return expected and level of efficiency necessary to maintain a farm operation.

Labor sources, labor-saving equipment, work agreements, were discussed and pertinent information presented for farm employers and employees to consider.

3. a. Farm Record books were distributed to all farm families. Individual instruction was given whenever requested to set up farm records.

- b. Letters were sent to all families notifying them of group meetings to be held pertaining to the keeping of farm records.
  - c. Banks and other agricultural loan agencies were supplied with farm record books and asked to encourage their patrons to use them.
  - d. Copies of the Agricultural Outlook were sent to all farm families. An analysis and summary of the National Agriculture outlook was sent to each farm family.
  - e. Group discussions were held to determine the supply of labor available and methods of keeping our labor supply adequate for future needs.
  - f. Labor saving equipment information was given to farm operators who could not get the kind of labor needed for their operations.
  - g. Employees were encouraged to work out agreements with their employers which would be of mutual benefit.
4. a. 20% of the farm operators are keeping accurate records of their farm operations. 60% are keeping some records of their farm operations.
- b. Requests for Agricultural Outlook information has increased 10% over 1957.

- c. Attendance at meetings where economic discussions were held have increased 5% over 1957.
  - d. 10% of the farm operators have bought and put into use one or more labor saving pieces of farm equipment.
  - e. 3% of the farm operators are doing some custom work in order to justify the use of their farm equipment.
  - f. 85% of the farm operators have adequate labor for their farm operations. Working time and wages are in line with that in surrounding counties.
5. This program can be improved in 1959 by a more intensive project of individual contacts, using group meetings whenever possible.

#### IV. Marketing, Distribution, and Farm and Home Service Organizations

##### Results

- a. A survey of the fat cattle on feed in Essex County was made and sent to the Division of Markets for their expanding markets project.
- b. On the farm selection was done on three farms to determine the unofficial grade of beef cattle before they were consigned to special fatcattle sales.
- c. A meeting of all County Agents in a five-county area was held to discuss the services which the Tappanhook Livestock Market provides for farmers.

- d. A feeder pig sale association was organized to help farmers from nine counties sell their pigs.
- e. Ten livestock farmers sold their beef calves through an organized feeder calf sale association.

#### V. Farm Buildings and Mechanical Equipment

##### Results:

- a. Two farmers built grain storage bins and bought an electrical grinding and mixing mill.
- b. Ten farmers have bought one or more metal grain bins for farm storage.
- c. Fifteen farmers are using self-unloading metal wagons with motor driven augers to unload and load grain storage facilities. This equipment is also used to load trucks for marketing.
- d. Five farmers were assisted in planning the lay-out of their farm buildings.

#### VI. Soil and Water Conservation and Management, Forestry and Wildlife

##### Results:

- a. Drew up recommended soil and water conservation practices in cooperation with Soil Conservation Service personnel.
- b. Made a survey of 8 farms to determine needed soil and water conservation practices.
- c. Helped to organize a tour of recommended forestry practices.
- d. Surveyed three farms for possible wildlife habitat improvement.

## VII. General Activities

- a. Visited Maryland farms observing beef cattle feeding and poultry operations.
- b. Helped conduct an area meeting to discuss the future of poultry in Eastern Virginia.
- c. Helped arrange an area fertilizer meeting.
- d. Organized and conducted a corn drying demonstration and a tour of a pig parlor with a mix-mill operation.
- e. Publicized two farming operations by inviting a feature writer of the Richmond Times Dispatch to visit the farms and interview the owners.
- f. Held or attended 58 meetings with a total attendance of 2265 people.

### Marketing Feeder Pigs

Pigs have been sold in this area for years under the supply and demand law. Farmers producing pigs either sold them one or two at the time to neighbors for home use or loaded them in a truck and sold them at the local livestock market. The price these pigs brought depended upon how many were available for sale. During years of good farrowing weather and an abundance of sows, pigs could be bought for eight to ten dollars per head. Frequently these prices were too high because very little parasite control, vaccination for disease or castration of male pigs was being practiced.

With the introduction of the pig parlor method of confinement feeding came the problem of finding a steady supply of thrifty pigs. The trend away from the lard type hog also introduced the problem of the right type of pig.

Farmers who wanted to feed large quantities of pigs were willing to pay a premium above the regular market price for pigs which were uniform and of the best type. They required that these pigs be vaccinated for cholera, and other diseases, wormed, castrated and free from lice.

Farmers who had the facilities to raise pigs were willing to meet the requirements of the feeder if the premium was enough to offset the extra labor and effort.

Extension Agents in nine adjacent counties believed that these two groups of farmers could work out a program which would result in a profitable enterprise for both groups. A survey was made in each of the nine counties to determine the number of pigs available for sale. Regulations agreeable and beneficial to both producer and feeder were drawn up and adopted by both parties. Information and supervision was given by Extension Agents. Inspection and official grading was done by official State Department of Agriculture Graders.

Marketing facilities were provided by a local livestock market and the result was a highly successful sale of uniform, disease free, parasite free, meat type pigs. These pigs were sold for a considerable premium above the local market price. Feeders now have a dependable source of desirable pigs. Producers of pigs now have a market for all of their pigs with an incentive to produce good quality. The Extension agents are satisfied that both parties will benefit from their organization of a feeder pig sale.

VIII. 4-H Club Work

Essex County is a rural county of approximately 6000 people. There are 326 white farm families and 755 boys and girls between the ages of ten and twenty-one. There were 129 boys enrolled in 4-H Club work. There has been an increase in number of members enrolled between the ages of 14-16 during the past year.

An effort has been made to improve the quality of 4-H work during this year throughout the county. More and better project records have been kept. There is a need for much more improvement along these lines, however.

1. Organization

There are seven organized 4-H Clubs in Essex County, and a County Council. The 4-H Clubs meet once a month in the schools. Five clubs meet for one hour each, and two clubs meet for two hours. The 4-H County Council meets twice a year, or as the need for a meeting arises. Special 4-H project meetings are held in the communities during the summer months.

2. Goals

Long-time goals for the 4-H Club program were set up by a 4-H youth committee two years ago. The major objective of this committee was to develop local leadership and educate the

public as to the youth program which is now being carried on by the Extension Service.

The h-H County Council adopts goals on an annual basis depending on the current interests of h-H members. The 1958 Goals are:

1. Have county observance of national h-H events.
2. Encourage more members to participate in project contests.
3. Have at least two boys and two girls attend state h-H short course. Council pay expenses for an adult leader to attend.
4. Fill quota of members attending Jamestown h-H Club Camp.
5. Have at least one copy of NATIONAL h-H NEWS for each club and each club leader.
6. Have an average of 80% of members completing projects . Have an average of 80% of projects completed.
7. Have at least two council meetings per year - October and January, and others as needed.
8. Have each member have a place for h-H materials, news clippings, etc.
9. Agents, leaders and officers devote more time to presenting available projects to members.

10. Each club make a special effort to let parents know what we are doing in 4-H Club work.
11. Have a Yearbook.
12. Each club well represented at county council meetings.
13. Every member know the 4-H Motto and Pledge.
14. 50% of 4-H members attend county Achievement Day program.

3. Methods

In order to attain the annual and long time goals set up by the committee the following methods were used:

(a) Project Planning

In order to acquaint 4-H members with 4-H Club organization and purposes, the first 4-H meeting was used to acquaint the members with 4-H work. Each member was encouraged to choose a project which could be intergrated into the family enterprises, project requirements and plans were discussed in detail at this meeting.

(b) Farm and Home visits

Farm and home visits were made throughout the year in order to more fully acquaint

4-H members and their parents with the county 4-H program. Farm and home visits were also made to assist 4-H members with individual project work.

(c) Correspondence

Letters, bulletins, and meeting notices were mailed to 4-H club members and their parents to supplement information about various livestock and crop projects given by the county Extension agents during home visits.

(d) Publicity

Newspaper articles, radio broadcasts and exhibits were used to acquaint the public with progress and goals of the 4-H program in Essex County.

4. Results

At the present time the 1958 goals have been accomplished in the following manner:

(a) Have county observance of national 4-H events - All of the clubs observed 4-H Club Sunday in their respective communities. Leaders and committees from the clubs planned the programs and members participated in the services. The minister,

in each case, spoke especially to the  
4-H members. Approximately 275 people  
attended the services.

The Tappanbrook 4-H Clubs put up  
an exhibit entitled "Essex County's 4-H  
Club Scrapbook" for National 4-H Club Week.  
Members wrote news articles, and made two  
radio talks. Letters were sent to members,  
parents and leaders.

(b) Encourage more members to participate  
in project contests - seventeen boys and  
two girls were presented county medals at  
Achievement Day for outstanding agricultural  
projects in 1958. In addition boys competed  
in the District Contest for the first time in  
Livestock Judging, Tractor Operation, and  
Electric Demonstration. Two 4-H members entered  
ten fat hogs in the Fredericksburg Fat Stock  
Show. Essex County Clubs won a white award (\$10)  
at the Electric Congress and third place (\$7.50)  
with an educational exhibit at the Northern Neck  
Fair.

(c) Have at least two boys and two girls attend State  
4-H Short Course. Council pay expenses for

adult leader to attend - three boys attended State Short Course at VPI from Essex. The Council paid the expenses of one adult leader (girl's) to the Natural Bridge State Adult Leaders' Conference.

- (d) Fill quota of members attending Jamestown 4-H Club Camp - twenty- nine 4-H members (21 girls and 8 boys), 2 women adult leaders, and two agents (1 woman and 1 man) attended 4-H Camp for one week. Camp scholarships were given for those needing them by the Essex County Farm Bureau.
- (e) Have at least one copy of National 4-H Club News for each club and each club leader- the 4-H Council gave money for 20 subscriptions to the National 4-H News which was distributed to each club president, each school library and each club leader.
- (f) Have an average of 80% of members completing projects. Have an average of 80% of projects completed - there have been improvements in record keeping and agricultural project completions. Sixty-three (63) percent of the 1958 projects were completed.

- (g) Have at least two council meetings per year in October, January and others as needed - the county council met in October 1957 to elect 1958 county council officers and to train all new club officers. In January 1958 the council met to set up county goals and a score card to judge the outstanding 4-H Club. In October 1958, the council trained new officers, elected council officers for 1959, selected goals for 1959 and set up the score card points by which to judge the most outstanding 4-H Club in 1959.
- (h) Have each member have a place for 4-H materials, news clippings, etc. - some progress has been made in getting 4-H members to keep 4-H materials. This has been reflected by higher project completions.
- (i) Agents, leaders, and officers devote more time to presenting available projects to members - this was accomplished by making more project visits on the farm and personal contacts at the monthly meetings. Members participating in contests were able to acquire more knowledge about various projects.

(The livestock judging team went to the 1958 State Fair in Richmond to see the contests, exhibits, and demonstrations presented by 4-H members. These five boys were able to get other 4-H'ers interested in finding out more about various projects.)

- (j) Each club make a special effort to let parents know what we are doing in 4-H Club work - this was accomplished by materials given to members to show their parents, personal contacts, radio talks, and news articles. In addition, all parents are invited to Achievement Day, Rural Life Sunday, and encouraged to attend contests and the Northern Neck Fair.
  
- (k) Have a Yearbook - the county council president selected a 4-H Yearbook Committee to work with the Extension Agents on the 1958 yearbook. The 1959 Yearbook Committee met with the Extension Agents on November 11 th., to draw up the 1959 Yearbook for Essex County.
  
- (l) Each club well represented at county council meetings - each club is allowed five voting members on issues which come up before the

council and officers are encouraged to fill their quotas. Leaders and parents furnish transportation to the meetings.

- (m) Each member know the 4-H Motto and 4-H Pledge - this was accomplished at the first meeting of the school year. Mimeographed copies of the 4-H Motto and Pledge were given to each member. All members are required to know the Pledge and Motto by the second meeting.
- (n) 50% of 4-H members attend County Achievement Day Program - the 1958 achievement day will be held December 6th. Each of the seven clubs were encouraged to present talent for the Share the Fun Contest to be held in conjunction with the Achievement Day Program. There were three award winners in the 1957 County Share the Fun Contest.

Each year the most outstanding 4-H Club plaque is awarded at Achievement Day. The Center Cross Club has received the award the past three years.