

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT

**COUNTY
EXTENSION
WORK**

Virginia Agricultural Extension Service

L. C. HARRIS

Name

COUNTY

Agent

Title

A. T. FOOTE, JR.

Assistant Agent

Assistant Agent

Assistant Agent



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ENCLOSURE

County

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I. Description of Lancaster County

Lancaster County is located in that part of Tidewater, Virginia, known as the Northern Neck. It is a long, narrow county of 128 square miles. The land area is 90,867 acres. Twenty-eight percent or 26,730 acres was in farms in 1959. The 1954 census showed thirty-six percent or 33,376 acres in farms. The 1959 census lists 253 farms averaging 105.7 acres, a decline from 446 farms in 1954. The average size farm in 1954 was 74.8 acres. The average value of land and buildings, per farm, in 1959 is \$20,963 as compared to \$9,115 in 1954.

The climate is mild. Frost free period averages 212 days, or from April 5 until November 3, and the normal precipitation exceeds forty-five inches.

The 1959 census reports sixty cash grain, twenty poultry, ten livestock, five general and 151 unclassified farms.

II. The Situation (General)

The economy of Lancaster County has been built on agriculture, sea food and forest products. All of these endeavors have undergone great changes in recent years and the transition continues. As we go into the sixties all are in a critical stage of change. In the county these endeavors are tied rather closely together. Farmers are engaged in producing and harvesting forest products and many are engaged in some form of the sea food business. Many people engaged in the sea food business also own forest or farm land. The problems of one group affect the others.

Employment opportunities in the sea food industry and agriculture are declining and we do not have sufficient forest resources to take up the slack.

Lancaster farmers in recent years have been plagued by poor weather conditions at a time when prices of the products they sell are declining and at a time when the things they buy are increasing in price. Many farmers are in debt for land, fertilizer, machinery, homes and buildings. The sea food industry has problems of declining markets due to foreign competition, labor problems and marketing problems. The forest industry has the problem of depleted woodland and changes in production and marketing which require additional capital.

III. County Agricultural Problems, Needs and Opportunities

Low farm income is the main problem of Lancaster farm people. We think that this problem can be partially solved by changing some methods and attitudes, by acquiring some new skills and by applying improved farm management techniques. In general we think the changes suggested below will contribute to higher farm income.

1. The feeding of more cattle and hogs, the production of more feeder pigs and the establishment or enlargement of the laying hen enterprise offer possibilities in certain situations. We believe that these grain consuming enterprises are well suited to the cash grain and unclassified farms producing surplus grain.

We have in recent years established result demonstrations of these projects and we believe they are showing people that feeding hogs and cattle, producing feeder pigs and eggs can be profitable if new methods and management are employed. This is a slow process because farmers lack capital for making changes. Farmers who have been selling cash grain still prefer that way of farming and are slow to change their attitudes towards a larger investment and the many changes in fences, buildings, water supply and new management techniques necessary. The immediate outlook for fed cattle, hogs and eggs is not bright enough to cause anyone to jump at new feeding enterprises.

In spite of the difficulties we are making some progress in getting farmers to analyze the situation and many farmers who have not made changes are presently considering changes to grain production and feeding. Closely tied to this phase of our work are problems of marketing, which changes in products produced are bringing about. We are cooperating with existing organizations, the Division of Markets in the State Department of Agriculture, the feeder pig sales group, the calf sales group, commercial buyers of cattle, hogs and eggs to improve the markets available to Lancaster farmers.

2. Treatment of woodland as though it were a farm crop. With approximately fifty percent of Lancaster County in woods and with a rather high percentage of this land producing at a low percent of its potential it is rather evident that, over the long term, woodland development offers one of the

best means at our disposal to raise incomes of Lancaster people.

Lancaster County is represented on the Northern Neck Development Council. The leaders of this group have recognized that the development of our woodland offers one of the best opportunities for future development. The Lancaster Forestry Committee is working closely with this area forestry committee. While this effort is just getting started plans are being developed for a county-wide survey to determine more accurately the attitude of the people toward their woodland and to learn how we can be of most service in helping individual owners with their woodland.

3. Increasing of crop yields through more efficient production methods and the development of better farm storage facilities for grains are important means of increasing farm income.

The efficient use of fertilizer and lime and chemical weed control are important factors in raising income on cash grain farms. The census shows that Lancaster farmers have increased their use of fertilizers in recent years. In 1954 they reported using fertilizer on 7,873 acres, in 1959 they reported using fertilizer on 9,435 acres. In 1954 they reported liming 1,515 acres and in 1959 they reported liming 3,006 acres. We believe that our demonstrations, individual help given farmers in interpreting soil tests and the help of fertilizer and lime dealers in promoting the wise use of fertilizer and lime have brought about the change.

The development of better farm storage facilities for grain is closely tied in with the objective of feeding more livestock and poultry on Lancaster farms. Most Lancaster farmers are forced to sell grains at harvest time because they lack adequate storage facilities and drying equipment. Grain which is sold off the farm is rarely, if ever, bought back for feeding. Crises in marketing at harvest time are common resulting in depressed prices. We have this year concentrated on helping farmers select the best storage and drying facilities for their situations.

Several different types of drying and storage equipment have been installed this year. These will help show farmers, who are in the process of making up their minds, about the selection of storage and drying facilities best suited to their needs. All the farmers who put in equipment this year are enthused about storing and drying grain on the farm. A number of these farmers are now developing plans for mix mills and laborsaving equipment for feeding livestock.

4. We think certain farmers should develop specialties, particularly for products with local demand or for those which local demand may be developed.

One Lancaster farmer decided last year that he needed some specialty to increase his income. After a number of conferences with the agent the farmer developed plans for a small slaughter house and pork processing plant to be located on the farm. He decided that he could not compete with the large meat packers unless he put out a superior product. The agent secured help from the animal husbandry department, VPI, and from the State Department of Agriculture. This past spring the farmer started slaughtering about six or eight hogs a week from which he sold country type sausage and country cured meat. This business has grown so fast he cannot supply the demand. He now is employing two men full time and a number of part time workers. He originally planned to produce the hogs on his own farm to supply the business. He has long since found it necessary to go to other farmers for butcher hogs. He is improving and enlarging his facilities. He has plans for securing a federal permit and inspection service which would permit him to sell outside the state.

The fact that the large meat packers use "everything but the squeal" is not an insurmountable handicap. People are willing to pay more for a superior product, seasoned and flavored more to their taste than the products put out by large meat packers.

Other specialties have possibilities for raising incomes of our people, and increasing employment opportunities. The agent is working with other people on specialties such as producing vegetables and small fruits, the production of early plants and the production of ornamentals for sale.

5. We think many farmers need to make land use adjustments, clearing some land for crops, putting some land now in crops to pasture or woodland. The Virginia Experiment Station has recently completed a soil survey of Lancaster County. A study of the soil maps and of land use shows that adjustments are in order. The agent is making use of these soil maps when counseling with individuals on long time farm plans, as well as on immediate changes. Farmers are using this information to decide on the priority for clearing land for crops and pastures and in making decisions as to, if and where woodland improvement practices should go. While many of these changes are slow, it is believed that Lancaster farmers are becoming more aware of the importance of using their land according to its capabilities and that over a period of time all of the people of the county will benefit.

6. We believe farm income will increase as our farmers develop better farm management techniques including the keeping and analysis of records and the using of these records to make adjustments in their production and marketing programs.

The agents have been working with Lancaster farmers for years trying to help them keep better farm records, and to analyze these records, believing that such analysis would pay off in higher incomes. Due to the demands of banks or creditors, income tax, social security and withholding taxes on employees, farmers have been forced to keep better records. Many farmers are now keeping adequate records but they need help in analyzing and interpreting these records as well as help in keeping more detailed enterprise records.

We believe that the VPI electronic record program is well suited to the needs of our full time farmers. This year we started three farmers on this program and expect to start several more in 1961. We hope to secure specialists assistance in analyzing the 1960 records and believe that farmers and the agents will benefit from these analyses.

7. Many Lancaster farms are not large enough to be economical units under the farming system being followed. Many of these people need to enlarge their operations or find off farm employment, either full or part time. We believe our whole economy will benefit if more off farm employment can be found.

It is not practical for every small farmer to enlarge his operation. Some of the reasons are, no land available in the area, a lack of capital, and many middle-age farmers are unwilling to assume large risks so late in life.

Recognizing these facts the agent is ever alert to work with the groups which are dedicated to securing light industry for the area. These groups include the Kilmarnock Chamber of Commerce and the Northern Neck Development Council.

IV. Activities

A. Agronomy

In 1954 field crops contributed 33.3 percent of Lancaster farm income. The crops grown are soybeans, corn, wheat, barley, oats and pasture.

Our goal is to help farmers increase their crop yields through more efficient production methods. Other factors which will help farmers increase their incomes from field crops include some changes in land use, some adjustments in crops grown based on farm records and understanding current outlook.

Our efforts this year were directed towards helping farmers understand the importance of using fertilizer and lime in quantities required by the crop based on soil samples and to helping farmers to secure the best information available on the use of chemicals in crop production including their use in weed control, insect control and protecting the crop in storage, and in helping farmers making needed land use adjustments so that each acre might contribute the maximum in which it is capable in farm income.

Our continuing goal of trying to get farmers to use lime and fertilizer for crops based on soil tests and experiment station recommendations is going forward steadily. This

effort has been made over a number of years with the cooperation of professional workers and fertilizer dealers. Gradually more farmers are basing their fertilizer and lime orders on soil tests and experiment station recommendations. When results of soil tests are taken back to the farmer in person we have an excellent opportunity to discuss fertility problems. This conference enables us to help farmers differentiate between various fertilizer materials and prices. This type of information cannot be satisfactorily given on a mass basis. Helping individual farmers with their fertility problems is time consuming but we think it is justified when we find farmers using fertilizer and lime wisely. Many farmers are now approaching the point where they need only soil tests, experimental station recommendations and price lists from suppliers to decide how much and what kind and where they will buy their fertilizer and lime.

At the present time liquid nitrogen is the cheapest form of nitrogen available to our farmers. The use of liquid nitrogen is increasing each year. Chemical weed control in corn is an accepted practice on about seventy percent of our farms. Chemical weed control in soybeans is not an accepted practice but is being tried on a limited scale.

Helping farmers make land use adjustments is slow. The clearing of class one land is expensive and in a good many cases we find a good stand of timber on land that would be more profitable in a crop. This year because farmers have had little money to spend for clearing and fences, little of this work has been done. Some wet land, marginal as cropland, has been planted to pines or pasture. A number of farmers have long term plans for making adjustments in land use.

B. Livestock

Beef cattle, hogs and sheep contributed about fourteen percent of the total farm income in 1954. Comparable figures are not available for 1959 but cattle and calves on farms in 1954 totaled 1,914 and in 1959 had declined to 1,396. The 1954 census showed 3,332 hogs and pigs and the 1959 report showed 2,294. The 1954 report showed 281 sheep and lambs and the 1959 report showed 322. It is believed that the decline in cattle and calves was due in part to a

decline in home milk cows and to some cow-calf beef herds being liquidated. The decline in hogs and pigs is probably due to the decline in the number of people with pen hogs, as in 1954, 293 farms reported hogs and pigs and in 1959 only 144 reported any hogs and pigs. Our goal is to help farmers increase their incomes by marketing grain and roughages through livestock.

Our efforts this year were directed towards helping farmers to cut production costs of producing feeder pigs and market hogs through grinding, mixing and feeding balanced rations with laborsaving feeding devices; to helping cattlemen to increase their incomes by feeding more cattle and by improving feed efficiency through the use of balanced rations, ensilage and pastures, and to helping owners of livestock understand the losses they are incurring due to parasites, and providing information on their prevention.

In furthering these goals we have worked with individual farmers giving information directly. This method was supplemented by demonstrations, a tour to see automated grinding and feeding operations and a program on parasite prevention conducted chiefly on the radio, with farm visits to help those requesting assistance.

Two mix mills, with automatic feeding to pig parlors, are in the building stage and a number of others are being considered. Farmers making these installations went on the tour and we believe that was responsible for getting these two demonstrations started.

As indicated by the census figures an interest in beef cattle in Lancaster County is declining. Only two cattlemen are feeding out cattle this winter. Other cattlemen who previously fed cattle have placed their land in the soil bank or have quit the farm. It might be said that in general Lancaster farmers are not cattle minded. Two young farmers are making starts with beef cattle this year and we are working with these men and we think that they will eventually feed some cattle. The older cattlemen with two exceptions prefer cow-calf herds and sell the calves.

Helping livestock men understand the losses they incur due to parasites is difficult. Our hog producers in most

cases are still not fully aware of the losses they take due to round worms alone. More intensive work is needed on this phase of our livestock program.

We have continued to cooperate with the marketing groups handling fat cattle, feeder pigs, purebred sales, all of which are necessary to the development of our livestock program.

Sheep numbers in the county are small but on the increase. No major work was attempted in this line this fall.

All of the commercial livestock farmers have been visited by the agents during the year. Management problems have been discussed. We believe that farm visits are the most effective extension method when coupled with adequate demonstrations.

C. Forestry

About forty percent of Lancaster County is in woods. Practically every farm has some woodland. Most of this land is producing marketable timber at a rate of less than one half of its potential. Our goal is to eventually raise farm income by helping farmers and others use economical methods to increase the amount of marketable timber in their wood lots. Farmers and others must be made aware of the methods in use in the county.

Our efforts this year were directed towards helping farmers and others to recognize the potential which their woodland has as a source of income, and to help them make an actual start towards improving conditions for favored species by bulldozing, killing and planting. Many groups are participating in this program and we planned to inform owners of woodland about the services offered by the ASC, Virginia Forest Service, the local pulp mill and the work of private contractors, all of which offer help in getting the job done.

To carry out these objectives we worked through the forestry committee, we have cooperated with the forestry committee of the Northern Neck Development Council and worked with certain 4-H Clubs on forestry projects.

Continuing result demonstrations have been established. Newspaper and radio are used to attract attention of the general public.

No spectacular change in the attitude of people towards their woodland was made this year. However, attitudes are slowly changing as evidenced by the number of people who are starting some improvement practices in their woodland this year for the first time. The number of requests for ASC assistance in conducting forestry practices continues to increase yearly. We believe the soundness of the management practices (bulldozing, killing, planting and disking) are sound based on the fact that those people who started these practices some five to ten years ago are continuing to carry out additional practices each year.

Practically all of the three hundred 4-H Club members in the county are given some instruction in tree identification and are made aware of the woodland improvement work being done in their communities. This year about seventy-five of these boys and girls actually planted from one to five hundred loblolly pine seedlings. These seedlings were provided by the Virginia Division of Forestry. While little immediate gain from this tree planting is expected it will, in time, greatly accelerate the pace of the forestry program. It is believed that boys and girls will remember the year in which these seedlings were planted and will take great interest in how fast the trees actually grow. We rather expect that this 4-H phase of the program will eventually do more to change the attitudes of people toward their woodland than some other programs which show more immediate results.

We plan to continue this tree planting phase of our 4-H program.

- D. Poultry contributed 37.3 percent of total farm income in 1954. Comparable figures for 1959 are not available but the census report shows in 1954, 315 farms reported 42,930 chickens four months old and over. In 1959, 127 farms reported 28,479 chickens four months old or over.

Our goal is to help poultrymen increase their income from poultry through efficient production practices and by helping them market their products to best advantage.

Our efforts this year were directed towards assisting a local egg buyer to improve his facilities and to assist producers to lower the cost of production through labor saving devices and use of home grown grain.

We have helped a local egg buyer this year to improve his egg quality through better cooling and holding facilities. The facilities and problems of commercial poultrymen are very different and we have worked with them individually in trying to help solve their individual problems.

About four years ago the agent pointed out to a farm family that there was a lack of local eggs being produced in his community. This family owned a small farm and rented land in the neighborhood for a cash grain operation. During a later farm visit the family, who had previously kept about twenty-five hens, indicated that they would like to see some modern laying operations. The agent arranged trips and accompanied the man and wife on trips to see a number of operations. After these trips the family indicated that they were interested in going further with the idea of building a modern poultry house. The agent, with the permission of the family, called in feed men who presented plans for the type operation they each favored. The agent supplied plans from the engineering department of VPI and the poultry department. The family decided on a thousand capacity pole type, caged layer operation, advocated by one feed concern. The agent discussed various possible financial arrangements with the family and provided information to the local banks which was helpful in securing a loan. As the farmer had little building experience, the building was built by a contractor. The laying house was provided with automatic waterers, egg grading equipment, a bulk feed tank, and an electrical cooler. Pullets were bought and fed according to the directions of the feed manufacturer supplying the operation. The farmer and his wife have complete records covering all phases of the operation from the beginning until now.

During the past four years egg producers have come through some very hard times. In spite of that this family has net the payments on the original investment and has a satisfactory return per bird for their labor. A large part of the success of this enterprise has been due to the care the birds have received plus the fact that a large percentage of the eggs are sold at retail prices, at the farm, to consumers who appreciate high quality eggs. Eggs not sold at retail are sold to a local buyer on a graded basis. This year in an effort to cut costs the farmer has tried a feed using local grain. The agent is called upon for advice on such matters along with disease problems, fly control and marketing.

The family may enlarge the operation. They continued to appraise the situation, local demand, their capabilities and the national outlook for eggs.

E. Dairying

There are four grade A dairies in the county. The 1954 census showed 152 farms with 402 milk cows. The 1959 census showed 59 farms with 331 milk cows. The number of grade A dairies is the same. The decline in numbers of the home milk cows continues. We have worked with the dairymen on an individual basis trying to help them solve their own problems. The problems of production, management and record keeping received attention. The agent acts as county agent in charge of the Tidewater DHIA.

Dairymen of the county rank high in production as compared with other DHIA members in the state. At this time Lancaster DHIA members have herd averages of 12,602 pounds of milk, 511 pounds of butterfat and 10,497 pounds of milk with 477 pounds of butterfat. The other member of DHIA is well above 400 pounds of butterfat and the fourth dairyman is not a member of DHIA.

One dairyman has this year been assisted in installing a heated air, wagon drying, hay operation and in installing labor-saving devices for handling silage and hay. The department of agricultural engineering has helped with this installation as well as planning a mix mill and automatic grain feeding operation for the same farm. Similar installations for haying and grinding feed are in the planning stage on two other dairy farms.

F. Tree Fruits

There are three commercial orchards in the county with about 886 apple trees and 5000 peach trees. We work with these growers on an individual basis, using specialists help. We serve as host to the area fruit school held in the county each year.

G. Vegetables, Mostly Tomatoes

The decline in commercial vegetable production in the county continues. The 1954 census showed 399 acres of vegetables harvested for sale. The 1959 census showed 318 acres. Tomato acreage in 1954 was 332 acres. In 1959, 169 acres of tomatoes were reported. As prices of grains have declined, there seems to be more interest in vegetable crops other than tomatoes.

We have worked individually with farmers interested in the production and marketing of vegetable crops. This year we have helped put in the first commercial size, electrically heated hot bed for starting early plants ever used in the county. Another first this year was a plastic greenhouse for starting early plants. Both of these projects were moderately successful and we think a year's experience will be helpful to the operators next year. Demonstrations of this kind showing developments not in general use here, may stimulate interest in more vegetable production.

The marketing of vegetable crops from this area is a problem which will need to be solved before going very far on more production.

H. 4-H Clubs

In 1960, 151 boys were enrolled in fourteen 4-H Clubs. Monthly meetings were devoted to project work, demonstrations and similar activities. Forty-six members attended camp.

V. Farm and Home Development

We believe that most farmers will increase their incomes as they develop farm and home management skills. Records are a necessity when making sound adjustments in management. Many farmers are not keeping adequate records.

Our goal is to help farmers set up and keep adequate farm records, so that they will have good information on which to base management decisions.

This year we have tried to emphasize the importance of adequate records in all of our work. We enrolled three farmers in the VPI electronic record program. We plan to enroll more in the coming year. The farms now under the plan are pleased with the program.

We believe that the farm and home development approach is a sound method to use in helping farm people solve their problems. This year we have worked with three new families and have continued to work with families started in past years.

VI. Economic Problems and Public Policy

We recognize a responsibility here. Farmers are concerned about these policies and problems.

The agents make an effort to keep informed on these problems so that they may make intelligent observations when questions arise, while conducting other work. Other than discussing some phase of these matters on weekly radio, no organized work was conducted.

VII. Farm and Home Buildings

No special work conducted. Assistance was given individuals on problems of building and remodeling farm structures.

VIII. Cooperation With Other Agencies

The agents have continued to cooperate with and to do educational work for other agencies. The agent serves as secretary of the Northern Neck Soil Conservation District.

IX. Miscellaneous

The agent has supplied personal service and information to individuals and groups not included elsewhere in this report. Examples are assistance to a community group on a mosquito survey and the development of plans for controlling mosquitos in the community, and assistance to soybean growers whose crops were attacked by insects which required large scale spraying.

Individuals were assisted on problems of fly control, rat, mole and groundhog eradication, termite control, road building, land clearing, gardening and river bank erosion and many others.

X. Final Statement

Extension work in Lancaster County has been designed to meet the wants of the people. High on the list of wants are higher incomes, better living conditions, more attractive homes and farms. We have tried through demonstrations and other means to show how these needs can be satisfied.