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BEDFORD COUNTY AN AGRICULTURAL COUNTY

Bedford County lies at the foothills of the famous Peaks of Otter, in the lower Piedmont section of Virginia. The James River bounds the County on the North while the Staunton River in the boundary on the South, and the topography is mountainous in the North and the South and is gently rolling in between. The County lies at the edge of the City of Lynchburg on the East and within a few miles of the City of Roanoke on the West.

Bedford County is the fifth largest county of the State, containing 791 square miles and approximately 491,460 acres. According to the 1950 census there are 3,180 farms, 2,631 of which are white operators and 369 negro operators, comprising 336,399 acres in farmland. The farmland is divided into 32,422 acres of pastured woodland, 4,072 acres of miscellaneous land and 329,905 acres of tillable land.

The various enterprises making up the total agriculture of Bedford County are dairying, beef cattle, sheep, hogs, poultry, apples, peaches, corn, wheat, oats, barley, tomatoes (both processing and fresh market), trucking, four types of tobacco; including fire-cured, bright, burley and sun-cured, pulpwood and lumber make Bedford County agriculture one of the most diversified farming areas in Virginia. Bedford is also famous for its mining of feldspar which ranks second in the Country in the amount of feldspar mined. It also ranks very high in pulpwood production.

Other factors making Bedford County a desirable agricultural area is the ideal climatic conditions, excellent soil types, and convenient markets.

There are three major railroads passing through the County; the Virginian railway through the southern part, Norfolk and Western through the center, and the C. & O. through the northern part. U. S. Route 460, one of the major highways in Virginia, passes through the center of the county east and west. More than two-thirds of the secondary roads throughout the county are now hardtopped, making marketing direct from the farm more practical.

DAIRYING

Bedford County consists of more than 15,000 dairy animals which makes it a leading dairy area. In fact, the major source of income comes from dairying which includes 186 grade A dairies, approximately 1,250 manufactured milk producers and over 300 sour cream producers.

The major problem that confronts all farmers who are in the dairy industry today is the low production per animal unit on the farms. The low producing cow along with low prices for manufactured milk makes the economy of dairying very acute.

The average production per cow in the D. H. I. A., which includes the better dairymen and herds is only 650# which is still below a good economical producing level.

In order to help farmers realize their situation some work was done through a Dairy Committee representing the D. H. I. A. who sponsored a Field Day which dealt with topics of feed management, especially legumes and grasses and also quality production. The Artificial Breeding Association, working closely with Extension, has put on a very extensive program emphasizing the importance of using better sires in producing replacements.

The radio, newspapers and televisions also have been a means of trying to enlighten farmers as well as individual contacts. Dairy school meetings have been held in order that the average dairyman might realize that more production per cow would mean more dollars for the same efforts. This method of enlightening farmers to this situation has not proven the answer. Therefore, a County and Dairy Committee is being organized as a part of the County Board of Agriculture to make surveys and recommendations on how to better help the dairy farmer realize his present situation. In connection with the low production per cow, the average dairy farm in Bedford County also needs to improve on its feeding and management program. This phase of the dairy problem will be stressed through community demonstrations both experimental and result.

Fieldmen are the representative wholesale. Manufacturing and distributing plants are working with the Extension personnel in coordinating a program to help the dairyman improve his management and feeding program, which during 1955 has affected at least 300 dairymen in the County. It

is believed, however, that a continued program with the assistance of a working dairy committee, that the average income per cow in Bedford County will increase in the future.

LIVESTOCK

Livestock farming in Bedford County consists of beef cattle, both commercial and purebred, hogs and sheep which comprises the second largest source of income in the County. At the present time livestock farmers in the County find themselves in a situation of lower prices and average quality cattle which makes the profits from livestock farming considerable smaller than they should be. However, during 1955 working through the Feeder Calf Association, considerable improvement was noted in the quality of feeder calves which were marketed through the Feeder Calf Sale during the year. The reason for this improvement was due to the efforts on the part various committees of the Feeder Calf Association working on a county-wide basis contacting every breeder of beef cattle in the County, discussing the importance of improving the calf crop.

This Committee, after attending a livestock school, conducted by Extension Specialist, put on a drive to enlighten and encourage the beef cattle farmers to purchase better sires and pay more for the herd bull which is considered more than fifty percent of the herd. As results of this program in 1955, 153 more head of feeder calves were sold in the sale with a smaller percent of the calves being rejected by State graders, and 30 percent more of the calves going into the top grades of choice and fancy.

This method of contacting and helping livestock farmers has proven very successful, however, is not the answer to the complete program and in order to advance further in this problem of better sires and better quality livestock, a livestock committee is being organized county-wide to survey and evaluate the present situation and to help set up a program whereby more farmers in the County will be reached and a higher quality livestock program can really be put into operation.

In addition to beef cattle and swine program there are 36 sheep growers in the County who are working in a similar manner to improve their flocks. During 1955 more pounds of wool was sold off these 36 farms with approximately the same number of sheep than the previous year, and it is very evident that the management program both in feeding and care of sheep flocks has paid handsome dividends. During 1955 various types of literature was mailed to livestock farmers in the County and a pasture and beef cattle field day was held in early July for the first time in Bedford County which was very successful. In co-operation with the Extension office, Bedford Chamber of Commerce and Bedford County Agricultural Council has anticipated that a similar program will be continued in 1956.

AGRONOMY

During 1955 there was not a great deal of emphasis put on agronomy in Bedford County. However, various phases of agronomy was stressed during the year. The first most important problem in the agronomy field was to improve pastures. Considerable work was done along this line from the standpoint of encouraging farmers to seed and topdress pastures at the proper time with proper fertilizer recommendations, depending on the type of pasture, whether being permanent or supplemental.

The second phase of agronomy that some work was done was the use of improved hybrids. Four plots of a new variety of hybrid seed known as Va. 26 was grown in Bedford County and in all four cases the corn stood up better during the hurricane and produced more grain per acre than various other hybrids planted in the same conditions in the same field, and at the present it looks like we will have a great demand for this type hybrid in Bedford County in 1956 if seed is available.

The third factor in agronomy field receiving major attention was seeding of alfalfa. Farmers were contacted through letter, radio, television, local newspapers and encouraged to seed more alfalfa in accordance with the proper fertilizer and seeding recommendations which resulted into approximately 300 farmers seeding additional alfalfa during the year.

In addition to the above, farmers were encouraged to test their soils before liming and fertilizing their various crops which has resulted in an increase in the number of farmers taking soil samples on various fields before crop preparations are made.

During the year the amount of fertilizer used for top dressing pastures was increased over the previous years. Also some sections of the County was considerably dry during the year. More fertilizer of the 5-10-5 and 5-10-10 analysis was used this year in connection with seeding small grains and top dressing than has ever been used before. Farmers seem to be realizing the importance of using a high analysis fertilizer now more than they have in the past.

During the 1956 year it is anticipated that an Agronomy Committee will be organized as a part of the County Board of Agriculture to make surveys, recommendations and assist in carrying out important phases of agronomy in the County.

SOIL CONSERVATION

During 1955 considerable interest was given in connection to soil conservation and improvement practices carried out in the County. The best results seem to be obtained by working closely with the Soil Conservation Technician and the A.S.C. office manager and the County A.S.C. Committee and as a result the entire allotment of \$93,557.00 was used in carrying out soil improvement practices on the farms. The chief practices were pasture improvement, including new seedings, strip cropping, contour cultivation and establishment of soil waterways.

This method of getting better soil conservation practices put into the average farm operations still does not meet the needs in Bedford County and it is anticipated that a special committee will be organized as a part of the County Board of Agriculture to help emphasize and encourage farmers to adopt and carry out more complete soil conservation practices on their farm. At present there has been considerable thought and discussion on the probability of setting up a three year contest on soil conservation practices carried out on a farm basis and it is believed that this will be most effective approach to encouraging more complete soil conservation program in Bedford County.

HORTICULTURE

The horticulture program in Bedford County is confined largely to fruit growers consisting of largely apples and peaches.

During 1955 a committee composed of apple and peach growers in the County have worked together among the small number of such farmers in the county and have toured various orchards and in addition have had pruning demonstrations conducted by Extension Specialist which has been very practical to these farmers, and in order to assist these fruit growers better each of them receive the recommendations sent out by the Horticulture Department on spraying and culture practices of the orchard as timely as it can possibly be.

Several fruit growers in the County attended the Virginia Horticulture Society program held in Roanoke in January 1955.

During the year more than 2000 young apple trees were set in two new orchards here in the County and one of the largest orchards

in the County is in the process of being renovated with the addition of 3000 peach trees being set within the next two years.

During 1955 the marketing problem of apples did not occur as the cold weather curtailed the total peach crop completely and the apple crop about 95 percent.

POULTRY

During 1955 the poultry program among farmers in Bedford County did not receive any special attention due to the fact that there are only a small number of commercial poultry growers in the County and more than 95 percent of the poultry is confined to the family size poultry flock of 15 to 50 birds. However, during the year a survey was made in connection with a proposed federal egg grading market in the Roanoke area to determine the interest of poultry producers in the County and only five people indicated that they would be interested in shipping eggs to a market of this type.

There are only four commercial broiler operators in the County ranging from 15,000 bird capacity to 3,500, all of which are top commercial producers and the occasion has very seldom arisen to assist these commercial growers except in securing marketing outlook information so as to help determine the best time to fill their houses with baby chicks.

In order to assist the small farm flock owners culling demonstrations were held during the year and also some external and internal parasites control demonstrations were performed. A number of these producers received literature in various numbers during the year to help them do a better job with the small family flocks. It is anticipated in the future if interest seems to be sufficient a poultry committee will be organized to assist in promoting better farm flocks for the future.

FORESTRY

At the present time there are approximately 215,000 acres of privately owned forestry land in Bedford County with a majority of this receiving very little attention as far as management and good forestry is concerned.

During the year about 70,000 seedlings were set, 11,000 in area demonstrations of plots scattered in all sections of the county. These educational and demonstrational plots were set by 4-H club members, FFA boys for the purpose of demonstrating the proper method of planting seedlings and to determine the growth as time goes on. During the year about 35 farmers secured the services of foresters in cruising their timber before making sales and a few farmers had their timber cruised and marked for select cutting and thinning as one of the management practices in forestry work here in the County. During the year it was a pleasure for the County Agent to assist with the KVG (Keep Virginia Green) program in the County. More than 175 high school boys were trained in fire fighting, tree estimating and reforestation.

As a means to encourage better forestry in the County radio talks, television shows and forestry literature and posters were distributed throughout the County.

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4-H CLUB WORK

Bedford County 4-H Club program consists of 60 clubs and 1198 club members enrolled in 1955 with an increase of 6 clubs over the previous year, and also the 4-H Honor Club and All Star organization which makes up the total 4-H club program in the County.

At the present time there are more than 5400 boys and girls of club age in Bedford County and the solution to use to reach these boys and girls as far as 4-H Club program is concerned is still unsolved. However, the present method of organizing 4-H club programs on a classroom basis in the schools throughout the County at present offers the best approach to reaching the greatest number eligible boys and girls.

The present program being work in the schools through the cooperation of the school officials and principals throughout the County, at present is working nicely with the exception of where vocation agriculture is involved and in these cases a ruling has been set up by school principals to prohibit boys and girls from being enrolled both in 4-H and FFA or FEA which has had a tremendous effect on older boys and girls continuing in 4-H club. Even with this handicap we have the privilege of presenting interesting subject matter to respective age groups in our clubs.

During 1955 a club project of safety was required by all club members which was very effective because we were able to present a more concentrated subject matter approach to the boys and girls which proved to be very effective and one thing in particular was noted, and that was that the higher percentage of completed projects was obtained, which in my opinion was result of more than one-third of the club members giving demonstrations on various phases of safety at their club meetings. Also, the top demonstrations were presented on television which added glamor to the program. Due to the success of the safety club project a similar project on health is being carried by each club in the County.

Various other projects were carried by club members during the year, mainly, gardening, dairy cattle, farm and home electricity, beef cattle, tractor maintenance, swine, poultry and sheep, all of which received definite instructions through county group meetings, community demonstrations, community classes and individual contacts.

One of the most effective club activities held during the year was the 4-H Electric School which was conducted on a three-day basis through the cooperation of power suppliers affecting the County. More than 65 club members participated in this three-day county-wide program displaying a lot of interest and enthusiasm.

The second most effective county-wide project instruction program was the tractor maintenance school which was attended by more than 35 boys and involving 8 different classes followed by a County tractor operators' contest and a banquet sponsored by tractor dealers.

The third most effective activity which Bedford County 4-H members participated in was the Area District meeting. This seemed to stimulate a great deal of interest because it brought approximately 40 outstanding 4-H club members in contact with approximately 200 outstanding club members of the surrounding counties in the District and it is recommended by the 4-H County Council and the Extension agents that this type of activity be continued.

Another activity in which boys and girls displayed a lot of enthusiasm and participation was the Bedford County Fair and the Lynchburg Farm Show which are held within one week of each other in the Fall. During the year more than 70 4-H club members exhibited livestock, canning, sewing, garden products, farm crops and handiwork in the local Fair and Show, receiving more than \$1200.00 in premiums.

4-H'ers took their share of District and State awards during the year having a State winner in Soil Conservation who attended National 4-H Club Congress; also had the State Tractor champion operator who participated in the Eastern Regional contest coming out fifth place. There were twelve other club members who received scholarships to State Short Course, District awards which is the largest number ever received by 4-H club boys and girls in the County.

The total 4-H club program at present is receiving splendid support from Bedford Chamber of Commerce who awards a trophy to the outstanding boy and girl each year, Junior Chamber of Commerce who sponsors the County Fair and \$800.00 in premiums for exhibits, Farm Machinery dealers and many other business concerns in Bedford City and County.

In addition to cooperation of businesses and organizations, full cooperation is received from the local radio stations WBLT, Bedford; WSLR, Roanoke; and WLVA, Lynchburg; and TV stations, WSLR, Roanoke and WLVA, Lynchburg, which has added a lot of glamor and interest to club members in doing a better job in the county. During the year more than 300 club members had the privilege of taking part in radio and television programs which is a contributed asset to promoting a club program in Bedford County. Without cooperation of these facilities and our local papers the BEDFORD DEMOCRAT and the BEDFORD BULLETIN, the 4-H club program in Bedford County could not continue to increase and grow as it has.

During 1956 it is the proposed plan of the Extension workers to establish an adult advisory committee for 4-H club programs in Bedford County which will be working under the cooperation of the County Board of Agriculture and through this method it is planned to have at least 64 additional adult leaders working in the eight Magisterial Districts of the County which we believe will have a good sound effect on our total 4-H club program in the County.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

During 1955 there were three community improvement clubs in the County, one of which was organized in May and two the previous year.

These communities are located in the westside of Bedford County and participated in the Roanoke Area Improvement Contest which was sponsored by the Roanoke and Bedford Chambers of Commerce. These three organizations worked on their own initiative with the assistance of local extension agents and specialists from State Extension Office.

These community improvement clubs seem to have one thing in common, and that is something that cannot be seen, but a closer working relationship among neighbors and friends of the community, or what you might call, "getting to know one another better".

During the year one community has completed a community club building so that it is being used for their regular meetings. Other communities are working and raising funds for the same purpose and it is very evident that outstanding achievements such as improving farm buildings, landscaping, church improvements, mail box improvements, and many other things making these organizations worthwhile.

Other organizations in the County operating on a community basis is the Otter Grange and four Ruritan clubs, all of which add to the improvement of standards of living and good fellowship among neighbors and friends in Bedford County.

These type of organizations have a distinct advantage in the County because in the area where these organizations are in function local leaders are easy to be obtained in helping carry out extension work and projects in the community.

FARM AND HOME DEVELOPMENT

The farm and home development in Bedford County is being initiated in a very small way.

Extension personnel have selected families in which farm and home development has been carried on and the families selected have been more or less just an average family of moderate means and facilities in which they are making a livelihood.

The acceptance of such a program with these families has been overwhelming and it is anticipated that the program will gain more momentum in the future.

In order to get a more definite recommendation on assisting the farm development program in the County a special committee of the Board of Agriculture will be established and used in an advisory capacity in working with families under this phase of extension work.

The approach to farm and home development work has been very interesting because the families with whom this type of work has been carried have been very interested and cooperative and it is believed that they will help promote a program of this type in the county in the future.

