

1955 PLAN OF WORK

BATH COUNTY

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I. BACKGROUND

Bath County is located in the western part of Virginia. It is bounded on the east by Augusta county; on the south by Alleghany county; on the north by Highland county and on the west by West Virginia. It is situated between the Shenandoah and Alleghany mountains. The total area of the county is approximately 550 square miles. More than half is owned by the U. S. Forest Service and the Virginia State Conservation Commission. From the balance must be subtracted 17,000 acres owned by the Virginia Hot Springs Company, Incorporated and the 8000 acres operated by the Hidden Valley Farms. There are 50 privately owned hunt clubs operating in the county, also many private estates, some of which are operated as farms. This leaves only a small portion of the county controlled and operated by farmers who live on the land.

The topography is very rugged as the entire county is criss-crossed with mountain ridges and small valleys. There are three main farming areas; the Cowpasture River Valley in the east; the Warm Springs Valley in the central; and the Jackson River Valley in the western part of the county. The range in elevation is from 1100 feet on the lower end of the Cowpasture River to near 4000 feet on top of the Alleghany mountains.

Bath is a vacation county. The largest industry being the Virginia Hot Springs Company, Incorporated, operators of The Homestead Hotel and the Cascades Inn. The Hot Springs Company also operates the largest farm in the county, to supply Grade "A" milk to the Hotel Guests and employees. Lambs are also grown on the farm for Hotel use.

Almost the entire county is a hunting preserve. More than 3000 hunting license are sold in the county each year, with only one-third of these going to county residents. There are about 600 farmers in the county, but only approximately one-third of these are full time farmers.

II. PROBLEMS

A. Increasing the Income of Our Livestock Farmers

Most of our land is rough and suitable only for hay, pasture, or trees. Livestock is the main Enterprise in the county for the full time farmers. Our average beef cattle herd is 20 cows, but most farmers also have a small sheep flock. Our farmers depend on the income from these two projects for their livelihood.

In addition to the full time farmers who depend almost entirely on livestock, we have the part-time farmers who depend on livestock for their farm income. These part-time farmers are classified in this category because they either work for the Hot Springs Company during the season or cut pulp wood for the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company at Covington. Many of them would rather be full time farmers, but there is just not enough land to go around.

B. Adequate Financing

There is only one Bank in the county, and it is located at Hot Springs. This is a very strong small bank, but it does not cater to the farm borrowers. The closest office of the Farm Credit Administration is in Staunton, 60 miles from Warm Springs, and the nearest Farm Home Administration is in Lexington, 50 miles from Warm Springs.

Farmers on the Cowpasture, which is our main corn producing area, would feed a considerable number of cattle, hogs, and sheep if financing

arrangements could be made.

III. LIVESTOCK

A. Beef Cattle

Since beef cattle represent a greater portion of our income than any other enterprise, then major emphasis will be placed on this phase of our total agriculture. Our farmers have done a fairly decent job of producing and marketing their beef cattle. In fact most of our mountain farmers in Virginia are pretty good cow traders. However, this sometimes has its drawbacks, as they may be trading with a better cow trader.

The first calf sale for Bath county was started in 1953. This program, because of its background and known value was readily accepted by most of our farmers. In 1954 a yearling sale was started for the county, but since these sales had not gained much publicity ours was not accepted, very few farmers took part in it. An intensive program will be started in 1955 to acquaint those farmers who have not taken advantage of the newer marketing methods. In this way we will raise the income of our farmers. All farmers will be encouraged to do a better job of producing, feeding, and marketing of beef cattle.

B. Sheep

Our sheep population in Bath county exceeds that of beef cattle. We now have 9000 sheep in the county and could very profitably increase this by 30 to 50%. However, this will not be attempted until our income per-ewe is increased.

Our livestock committee felt that we had more chance of increasing our income by good sheep management practices than by any other method.

Therefore, major emphasis will be placed on the sheep production in 1955.

IV. AGRONOMY

A. Pasture

Bath county is in a natural blue-grass area. The elevation range is from 1500 to 3000 feet, with cool nights and pleasant days during most of the summer. The average rain fall is high and a drouth is a rarity. The excellent pasture growing conditions as is found in our soil, climate, and topography, tend to make farmers apathetic towards modern pasture improvements. In 1953, there was little if any ladino clover being used for pasture. There was one field grown here in the valley by the Virginia Hot Springs Company who had been mowing it for hay because they thought it would kill a cow to graze it.

Our pasture demonstrations in the past year have helped to improve this situation materially, however, additional demonstrations will be used in 1955 along with a pasture tour in this and adjoining counties.

B. Alfalfa

With our inadequate pasture program, our farmers still are able to graze many times the number of livestock than they are able to over-winter. Part of this may be due to the fact that we continue to stack hay in the field and feed it on the ground, and too, this hay crop is made up of native grasses without legumes.

Alfalfa has been tried by many farmers in past years without much success. The committee was not able to determine the cause of these failures in former years. However, they did realize that some people were growing alfalfa successfully in Bath county and farmers have begun to ask about its culture. Several demonstrational seedings will be put out in 1955, using

different varieties at different elevations. Alfalfa can increase our income by 25% if we are able to grow it successfully on every farm.

V. GARDEN

There is no concentration of the population in Bath county and consequently very few complete food stores and no Super Markets. Then it is imperative that most people in the county produce their own fresh vegetables.

An intensive garden program will be put on in the county during the spring and summer. At least three garden meetings will be held in the early spring and garden talks and garden writing will be done throughout the season. It was thought about having a garden demonstration in some central location in the county, but it was side tracked for the lack of complete information and facilities for putting on such a demonstration. Specialists from the college will be used on the garden program with the farmers, housewives and 4-H club members.

The garden project will be stressed in all 4-H club meetings and recommended to each 4-H club member.

VI. MARKETING

A. Calf Sale

In past years Bath county produced as good calves as any county in Virginia. However, they didn't get their calves in as nice a package as they should have, and consequently were not able to consign them to any of the Virginia Feeder Calf sales.

By temporary arrangement with Highland county in 1953 and 1954 we did take part in two such sales. In 1955 we will get our calves ready for the calf

sales and will plan ahead to dehorn, castrate and make them as good as we can. Again we will sell with Highland county farmers.

B. Lambs

Bath county farmers produce top lambs and the marketing by grade will be encouraged in 1955. To do this the farmer must dock and castrate his lambs and make them get to the top grades. The marketing problems will be discussed in at least two meetings. One in the summer and one in early fall, and taken to the farmers by letter and home visits throughout the year.

C. Wool

The wool clip of the county for the past several years has been divided in about five different marketing areas. Some of the wool goes to Alleghany-Bath Wool Pool, which was sold in 1954 for \$61.30 cwt. The balance of it is transported either to Staunton, Harrisonburg or Monterey to be added to the wool pools at these places or sold direct.

The farmers want and will cooperate with the program this year to gather all of our wool under one pool. This way the farmer will have more direct control over the wool pool and will have additional bargaining power because of the larger consignments.

A meeting with the VPI sheep specialist in attendance will be held in early April and a sheep sheering demonstration in May.

VII. FORAGE, STORING AND HARVESTING

Since our number one livestock problem is that of winter feed it is thought that more livestock could be kept in the county if our food storage was handled more efficiently. For instance, most of our hay is stacked in the field. Now this is a fairly economical method of storing hay even though a

lot of the nutritional value is lost by the air and sunlight. Then too, a lot of our hay goes to waste in the early summer from too much rain on it and cutting too late. We will try to aid the problems in 1954 by storing some of our crop in silos.

The demonstrational trench silos will be build in the county and records will be kept on the storing and feeding of the crops from these silos. Bailed hay racks and bailed hay storage facilities will be stressed and encouraged during the year.

This plan was developed from ideas given at two farmer meetings when planning livestock and pasture problems were discussed. We do not have a county Board of Agriculture, but do have livestock and Agronomy Committies.

(Please turn to next page for calendar)

APRIL

Pasture Demonstration
 Dehorning Demonstration
 Alfalfa Demonstration
 Wool Meeting
 Calf Sale Meeting
 4-H Judging School

MAY

Pasture Work
 Conservation Work
 Dehorning
 Garden Meeting
 Shearing School

JUNE

Pasture Tour
 Garden
 Wool Pool
 Pasture Specialist

JULY

Lamb Drenching
 Garden
 Institute of Rural Affairs

AUGUST

Agent's Conference
 Pasture Tour
 Silo Demonstration

SEPTEMBER

Grading for Calf Sale

OCTOBER

Calf Sales

DECEMBER

Report writing