

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT

**COUNTY
EXTENSION
WORK**

Virginia Agricultural Extension Service

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Dimiddie

County

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INTRODUCTION

In a report of this kind, a general introduction describing the location of the county and the situation as it exists today seems to be in order. However, the location remains the same and the situation changes but little from year to year.

Dimiddle County lies southwest and adjacent to the city of Petersburg. The Appomattox River forms part of the northern boundary and the Nottoway River forms the southwest boundary. About one-third of the county is in the upper Tidewater Section and the remainder is in the Piedmont Plateau. The dividing line between these two areas follows a general north-south direction.

The agricultural development in the county may not be impressive to a stranger or casual observer. Good farms are next door to poor farms; large farms are scattered among small farms; practically all farms are partly forested and large private ownership of forest land is scattered over the county in relatively small tracts. Most of the development is based on crop farming which does not require the large attractive buildings and pasture land that are found on dairy and livestock farms.

The topography of the land is generally level or slightly rolling. Elevations vary from 50 feet above sea level in the east to 400 feet in the west. About 90% of the area drains into the Nottoway River and the remainder into the Appomattox. Swampy areas are found in the eastern part of the county, otherwise it is well drained and the surface relief is favorable for crop production.

Being located between two rivers and on the dividing line between two regions, a wide variety of soils are found. The loam and clay soils of the Piedmont, the sandy soils of the Coastal Plains and mixtures of these are common. The light well drained soils are preferred for the important flue-cured tobacco and peanut crops. There is an abundance of this soil within the county. Much of the forested land is as valuable for agricultural use as the land now being formed. The addition of lime, fertilizer and organic matter is a requirement for profitable production. The Piedmont soils require more lime and less potash than the Coastal Plain soils.

Forestry is the most extensive land use. Almost 75% of the 507 square miles of land area is covered with some kind of timber growth. About 40% of the forest land is owned by companies and individuals for forest production purposes only.

According to the last census report, there are 1636 farms in the county, comprising 58.8% of the land area. The average size is 116.7 acres.

Agriculture is the county's leading industry. Flue-cured tobacco is the most important cash crop and peanut production ranks second. Dairy products, hogs, beef cattle and poultry supply a considerable income on many farms. Lumber and pulp wood are important in the county's economy.

A LOOK AT THE PAST

A backward look to see where we have been and a study of the present to see where we are, might help to determine where we may go in the future.

In looking back through narrative reports for previous years, some interesting events have been brought to memory. Mention was made of twelve plots of lespedeza being seeded on nine farms in 1930. This was probably the first seeded in the county. This crop grew in importance to become our leading hay and pasture crop for a while but has gradually been replaced by other crops which do a better job.

Blue mold first appeared in tobacco plant beds in 1932 and no satisfactory control was developed until Ferate was used in 1946. About 300 bushels of barley was planted on thirty different farms in 1932. This was the first planting of this crop, to any extent. It was noted that the average yield was about 30 bushels per acre with bearded variety yielding better than smooth.

About 600 growers planted 1580 acres of cotton in 1933. The cotton plow-up campaign was conducted that year in which 53 growers destroyed 117 acres for which they received \$1573.25 from the Government. A total of 252 preliminary agreements were signed by flue-cured tobacco growers that fall, representing an average of 2203 acres grown over the years 1931, 1932 and 1933. The average yield per acre over these years was 768 pounds. This was the beginning of the AAA program and the years between 1933 and 1938 were devoted almost entirely to it.

About 75 miles of REA lines were extended into the county in 1938, serving 228 customers. These lines were built through an area outlined by a map prepared by the agent from aerial photographs.

Dimiddle County was included in the Piedmont Soil Conservation District in 1941 upon petition submitted in 1940.

The army acquired about 14000 acres of land from the county in 1942 and 1943 for Camp Pickett. The county extension office was separated from FMA in 1942.

A few farmers grew a small acreage of hybrid corn in 1944.

Blackleg in cattle first identified in the county in 1946, and interest began to develop in farm fish ponds that year.

Ladino clover and orchard grass pasture demonstrations were started in 1947 with a 5 acre plot of Ky. 31 fescue seeded for the first in the county. Blackshank in flue-cured tobacco did its first serious damage that year and corn ear worms were found on soy beans.

Our first 100 bushel corn club was organized in 1949 with 102 members. The highest yield that year was 95.6 bushels. The highest yield the following year was 124.6 bushels.

A pasture club was organized in 1950 with 35 members and increased to 89 members the following year.

Flue-cured tobacco was irrigated on a few farms with one system in 1953 and M-H 30 was used for sucker control in 1955. Alfalfa weevil made their appearance that year.

The introduction of new crops such as lespedeza, barley, hybrid corn, ladino clover, pasture grasses and improved varieties of many others, has somewhat revolutionized farming. During the time diseases and insects, such as blue mold, blackleg, blackshank, corn ear worm and alfalfa weevil have arrived to take their toll. Cotton production has almost disappeared, flue-cured tobacco has increased in number of growers, acreage produced and yield per acre. New developments, such as REA, irrigation and chemicals for disease and insect control and to reduce labor, have provided better living. The use of tractors and power drawn or power driven equipment has reduced labor requirements.

We may look for new developments to take place faster in the future than they have in the past.

CHANGES INFLUENCING PROGRAM

Poultry production especially in laying flocks, is increasing rapidly in the county. Six houses were constructed last year and three more this year, providing space for 1200 to 1500 hens each.

Interest is increasing in forest improvement practices, especially planting seedlings on open land, cut over and bull dozed areas.

There is a keen interest in new crop varieties, especially peanuts, soy beans, tobacco and corn.

Disease and insect identification in various crops and recommendations for control, require more of the agents time each year.

Because the agent is able to do some drawing and assist with planning, more time has been devoted to various kinds of housing and farm buildings this year than ever before.

A survey conducted this year indicates that there are now more beef cattle in the county than dairy cattle.

ORGANIZATIONS

FARM BUREAU: From the standpoint of membership, Dinwiddie County Farm Bureau ranks high among similar organizations in the state. The membership varies some during the year depending on membership dues paid. The present membership is 803, compared to 753 at this time last year. This is a high percentage of white families in the county.

Our organization provides free income tax service to its members, carries group Blue Cross and Blue Shield insurance for 750 of its family membership, and offers auto, fire and life insurance through its organization.

The agent cooperates closely with the Farm Bureau by attending director's meetings and other activities sponsored. Assistance was given in the Policy Development Program this year. The agent served as chairman of their resolutions committee and nominating committee which functioned just before their annual meeting in October.

DAIRY HERD IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION: Our Dairy Herd Improvement Association has 19 members at present with 1162 cows on test. This compares to 20 members and 1104 cows at this time last year. There are 12 members located in the county now, where we only had 11 last year. Seven of the nineteen herds are on RDPH records, four of which are in the county.

A Dairy Herd Analysis meeting was held early this year with most of our members in attendance. Our supervisor won the Efficient Production Award for efficient achievement in DHIA work in the state this year. This award was made by the National Dairy Products, Inc.

ARTIFICIAL BREEDING ASSOCIATION: Our Artificial Breeding Association, with headquarters at Hottoway Court House, has expanded its service during the past year. An additional inseminator has been employed. Most of our dairymen and several other farmers are now using the service. Calls for service are received at the agents office and relayed to the breeding center each office day.

COMMITTEES: The extension program is planned and conducted through an Agronomy and Forestry committee. Programs of work have been developed in both of these fields. There is a need for a Livestock committee and some work has been done in this direction.

FIELD CROPS

Farmers are keenly interested in new varieties of various crops and are quick to change to those appearing on recommended lists. Variety recommendation were mailed to 525 farms this year. Some who did not receive copies and many of those who lost their copy before time to purchase seed, came by the office and picked up copies. Copies of recommendations were supplied to seed dealers in the county and the City of Petersburg.

While the agent does not take many soil samples himself, many farmers take their own samples and bring them to the office. Usually, soil record sheets have to be prepared and samples packed for mailing. Record sheets, on which analysis have been recorded, are returned to the agent from the testing laboratory, for fertilizer and lime recommendations.

A careful study is made of the cropping history of each field, the soil type and its intended use for the next three years.

Recommendations are made, based on these conditions and the laboratory report.

In an effort to be of greater service, a mimeographed sheet to both fine-cured tobacco and peanut growers in which broad recommendations were made, covering fertilizers, lime, varieties, disease and insect control and other things of general interest. Since most soil samples taken are either from tobacco or peanut fields, a copy of either one or both of these sheets is inclosed with the soil record sheet when returned to the farmer.

These sheets of suggestions are suitable for and are often used as a basis for discussion at meetings and are distributed in this manner.

PEANUTS: The introduction of Va. 56-R peanuts into the county has done more to improve the yield and quality of this crop than any other one thing. In the spring of 1957, 35 bags of this variety were obtained and distributed to four farmers. Two of these men certified their crop for two years. Practically all the crop produced on the four farms were retained for seed and distributed to other farmers for two years. As a result, many of our best farmers planted their entire crop with this variety this year. From many reports received, these peanuts are yielding from 200 to 400 pounds more per acre than peanuts which our farmers have been planting and are grading from one to two cents per pound higher when sold.

Stem rot is a serious problem in many of our peanut fields. This has been a bad year in this respect, during and immediately following the rainy weather in July. A special meeting for peanut growers was scheduled in February of this year with one of our Agronomy Specialists in attendance. Cultural practices which are known to reduce damage caused by stem rot were discussed at length. A leaflet outlining these practices was mailed to growers not attending the meeting.

Lime and fertilizer practices generally used in the county have not been in keeping with actual needs. From the many soil samples submitted from peanut fields, it is found that in most cases the pH is well with the range recommended that the phosphate contents is medium to high and potash is low. Calcium is usually medium to low, even when the pH is high.

It has been a general practice with our farmers to use 400 to 600 pounds of lime annually along with 2-12-12 or similar analysis

of fertilizer, regardless of their soil needs. Those who are now having their soil tested and applying lime, fertilizer and land plaster according to needs, are obtaining much better results and very often with less expense.

FLUE-CURED TOBACCO: Fertilization, disease and insect control, variety recommendations and chemical sucker control has been the program with tobacco growers this year.

As with peanut growers, our tobacco farmers are depending more on soil analysis as a basis of fertilization. Practically all farmers have gone from 3-9-6 to 3-9-9 fertilizer during the past three years. There is still a tendency for many of our growers to use more fertilizer per acre than they need to produce maximum yields.

Blackshank has been our most serious disease. It has appeared in one or more fields on at least one-third of our tobacco farms. At first, our growers were inclined to resort to the use of resistant varieties to overcome the problem. So far, no resistant variety developed will produce tobacco with equal quality and value per acre as will many of the old line non-resistant varieties.

The agent has stressed crop rotation in educational meetings, circular letters and leaflets distributed to growers. Most farms in this county have adequate land, suitable for the production of tobacco, to establish a three or four year rotation for their crop. One grower told the agent this week that he included twenty five rows of Hicks Tobacco, a non-resistant variety, in a field that was heavily infested with blackshank four years ago and did not loose the first plant.

Many of our growers who have had the disease to appear in one field have shifted to other land with a two or three year rotation and have lost no tobacco since then.

The resistance built up, on the part of some tobacco companies, to tobacco chemically treated for sucker control has resulted in the more careful use of this material. However, the general use of this material is increasing. The time and method of application has been stressed, along with recommended applications. Apparently there has been no discrimination on the market this year against tobacco treated for sucker control.

Some interest has developed in the county in the production of Aromatic tobacco. Two meetings were held during the spring at which our Turkish tobacco specialist presented slides and discussed the procedure in producing this type of tobacco.

Only one farmer attempted to produce this tobacco. He made the mistake of side dressing his tobacco after the plants had been set in the field, causing the growth to be too rank. The agent has had no report as to his final results. About 36 farmers attended the two meetings held and indicated a keen interest. It is expected that a few farmers may undertake to grow this tobacco during the next year.

BUILDINGS

As previously stated, more time has been devoted to planning and constructing various types of buildings this year than ever before.

To give some idea of what has been done, the following summary will indicate the scope of this project: four pole type feed and livestock barns, two machine sheds, two pig parlors, two smoke houses, one milking parlor, four tobacco curing barns, three poultry houses, four farm dwellings, one new church and Sunday School additions to two others and a two-doctor office and clinic building.

The amount of time given to the various projects has varied from simply furnishing prepared plans for the tobacco barns and three of the dwelling houses to drawing the plans, working out bills of material, laying out foundations and even some supervision in construction of others.

Detailed plans were drawn and a bill of material worked out for a combination cinder block and pole type dairy feed barn and tramp shed for one farm. The lumber, including the poles, was cut on the farm. The poles were sawed to eight inches square and hauled to a plant in Suffolk to be treated. All the lumber, including the framing was dressed. The farmer constructed the building with his own labor, with the assistance of a carpenter for a few days in framing. The building is 80 X 82 feet and is covered with composition shingles. The construction and appearance of this building would be a credit to any farm.

The three poultry houses, about 42 X 80 feet in size, are pole type structures, designed to house 1200 to 1500 hens each. Cages were installed in one of these.

The two hog feeding establishments are combination feed storage and feeding and bedding lots. Both of these were built in banks excavated for bedding space and concrete feeding floors below with feed storage space overhead. The feed storage rooms and bedding area underneath are approximately 24 X 60 feet with concrete feeding area extending on outside large enough to accommodate about 100 head of market pigs hogs. One of these is designed so that it may be used for a pig brooder house. Plans for both of these buildings were drawn by the agent.

When the agent came here in 1929, there were five doctors located within the county. Four of these have died since then and the fifth is no longer able to practice on account of his age and health. One young doctor located at McKenney, near the southwestern edge of the county, about ten years ago, but he was unable to serve the entire county.

The agent served on a doctor location committee appointed here about five years ago. We were able to get a young doctor to locate at the Court House, who stayed about three years. Our committee was reactivated and we were able to get another young doctor to locate here last year with the understanding that he would secure a partner.

One condition of his agreement to locate here was that we would assist in providing adequate office and clinic space. Our doctor had arranged for his partner to locate here this fall, upon his release from the service.

After several meetings in regard to permanent office space for them, arrangements were made for a local farmer to construct a building for them on a rental basis with a provision for purchase as the doctors became financially able.

In view of the agents experience in planning and supervising the structure of our Agricultural Office Building two years ago, he was asked to assist with the Doctor's Office Building. The agent went with the doctor one Sunday last spring to visit office buildings which had been recently constructed in two adjoining counties. From these, from suggestions from doctors occupying these buildings and from ideas which our doctor had, the agent designed floor plans for the building which was completed and occupied about

September 1. Our second doctor arrived just as the building was being completed. The building is of the same type structure as our Agricultural Office Building.

While this may not be strictly extension work, it is of great service to our people and a valuable asset to our county.

Some assistance has been given to the planning and construction of one rural Church. This building will be completed soon after the end of this year.

Plans have been drawn by the agent for Sunday School additions to two churches. One of these was put out on contract for almost \$14,000 and is over half completed. The other is a three room addition and the plans and specifications have just been completed.

LANDSCAPING

Landscape plans, including mostly grading, driveways and lawns, have been prepared for three new homes this year. In two cases where homes had been built on steep slopes, a considerable amount of grading and planning was necessary to provide a driveway and parking area.

With the large number of seeding mixtures available, many of which have been recommended by the agent, probably the best and most permanent results have been obtained by the use of Ky. 31 Fescue. While this grass is a little coarse bladed, it has many desirable characteristics. It stands dry weather well, remains green most of the year and if seeded thick, it makes a close tough sod that will last indefinitely.

Since this time last year considerable work has been done on the grounds around our office building. Cedar trees remaining on the area were pruned last spring, removing the dead branches. Honeysuckle and poison ivy has been removed from and around trees on the area. A considerable amount of shrubbery and some trees, all of which the agent had propagated and grown at home, was transplanted around our building. Our parking area has been enlarged and graveled. It will now accommodate about 30 cars.

A four acre tract of land belonging to the county and located behind and adjacent to our office building was growing up in weeds and bushes. With the permission of the Board of

Supervisors, this area was leased, without cost to a nearby farmer for hay production purposes. The land was cleaned off last spring, plowed, limed, fertilized and seeded with lespedeza. After the hay was removed, the area was prepared again and seeded to red clover and orchard grass. The farmers only obligation is to keep the area clipped and the vegetative growth removed.

What was once an eye sore in our village and to the passing public is now an attractive green area.

FORESTRY

Although a forestry committee has been organized and a program of work developed, little has been done yet to put the program into operation. The most that has been accomplished has been planting seedlings in open land, poisoned and cut over areas.

No accurate record has been kept but it is estimated that 150,000 seedlings were ordered for farmers last planting season. This does not include plantings in the county by commercial companies. About 45,000 seedlings have been ordered for planting during the coming season.

LIVESTOCK

From a survey conducted during the summer, it is indicated that we have 2503 dairy cattle and 2804 head of beef cattle over six months of age. This is the first time there has been more beef cattle than dairy cattle in the county.

The job of vaccinating hogs and cattle is no longer a time consuming problem. Most farmers are now doing their own vaccinating. However the agent does and probably should continue to do some of this work. By doing so, he makes contacts with people that would not be reached otherwise.

It is firmly believed that when the use of live cholera virus was discontinued in vaccinating hogs against cholera, that more was done to prevent the spread of this disease than any one thing. There has not been a serious outbreak of cholera in more than four years and the agent has not seen a single case during the past year. When cholera began to decline erysipelas began to appear and has caused more trouble than cholera for the past three years.

The agent now spends more time in visiting sick herds and diagnosing disease than he does in vaccinating.

Four farmers sold 80 head of calves through the Petersburg Feeder Calf sale this year. The job of getting calves entered, dehorned, castrated and vaccinated in time and selecting calves suitable for the sale, requires considerable attention.

Blackleg appeared on six farms this year. Five calves were lost on one farm before the agent was called on Sunday to diagnose the trouble. A neighbor vaccinated his herd the next day. Another calf died within the following week but no other losses have occurred. Only a few calves were involved on the other farms and the agent vaccinated these.

An attempt is being made to organize a feeder pig sale in Petersburg. This will involve five counties in the Petersburg area. At a meeting held this week, the organization was completed and plans made to apply for a charter. The first sale was scheduled for April 15.

4-H CLUB WORK

4-H Club work, so far as boys are concerned, has not been so outstanding during this year. Thirty six boys conducted 70 projects with about 75% completion.

There are six clubs organized with boys and girls enrolled in each. Each club has an organization leader with one or more project leaders.

The leaders and officers of each club form the county council which acts as a planning group. The council meets quarterly.

There are eleven members in the Honor Club, from two clubs. Eight new members were taken in at the annual achievement day program. This group has had two meetings during the year.

Dividie has a long list of members which have been taken into the 4-H All Star Chapter over the years. Sixteen of these reside within the county. They are called together once a year to consider recommendations for new members and may discuss other phases of club work at the same time. Seven of these members are active in some form of club work.

Our club members and leaders participated in the seven county program and parade held in Lawrenceville this year. The outstanding achievement was the production of the county section in the Journal contest, which won first place for the second consecutive year. Clubs from our county entered three floats in the parade.

Each club in the county participated in a vesper service in observation of Rural Life Sunday.

Six members and one leader attended the State Short Course. Four members and one leader attended Conservation Camp. A total of twelve boys, twenty girls and three leaders attended the District Camp at Jamestown.

Probably the most attractive project work conducted was the three baby beeves fed out and exhibited at Richmond and Petersburg show and sales. Only two calves are on feed for next years show and sale but one of these calves has already been exhibited at Blackstone Farmer's Day this fall at which it won second place soon after it was placed on feed.

One farmer club member, Angelica Simmons, who was to receive a degree in Home Economics at VPI last spring, was recommended for International Farm Youth Exchange delegate from this county. Her application was approved which required the raising of \$825.00 as the county's share of her expense.

A committee appointed for the purpose of raising funds had little difficulty in achieving their goal. A stand-by committee was appointed in Petersburg, in case of failure in the county, but it was not necessary to call on them for help. Miss Simmons left for Switzerland early in June, immediately after receiving her degree at VPI and has recently returned. She has not yet made a report in the county of her experience.

The county, in return, entertained a highly intelligent and pleasant young man from that country for six weeks during the summer. He lived with two host families during his stay here and endeared himself into their hearts.

CONCLUSION

This report has been an attempt to relate in simple form the activities and accomplishments during the year. All has

not been done that was planned, however, many things have been done that were not anticipated when the plan of work was developed.

Regardless of what may be planned in the future, interest in farming by the younger generation is declining and will continue to do so under the present economic conditions. There are many instances where farm boys are seeking and finding outside employment as they become old enough to take jobs. It is no longer the accepted custom for one boy to remain at home and take over the operation of the farm. This is particularly true of small operations. Some farms are being put in Conservation Reserve and others are being rented or leased to operators striving to increase the size of their operations to economical units.

There is always room for improvement over what has been done during the year. However the agent feels that progress has been made. Census reports and agricultural statistics will show that Dimwiddie County ranks high among other counties in this area, in both yields per acre and money received for commodities sold. This being the case, there cannot be so much wrong with the program as being conducted.