Farm Security Administration

United States Department of Agriculture

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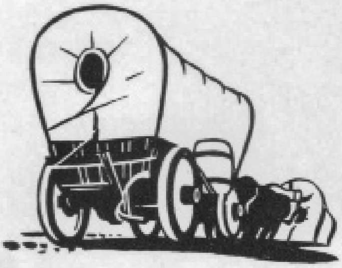
United States Department of Agriculture

May 1, 1941

The Farm Security Administration

The job of the Farm Security Administration is to help needy farm families to escape from the relief rolls and become permanently self-supporting. This leaflet outlines some of the reasons why more than two million farm families have been forced to seek relief since 1930, and the ways in which FSA has helped many of them to get back on their feet.

Why Many Farm People Are Poor



Old frontiers are closed . . .

Soil still is blowing . . .

The good farm land in this country is overcrowded. Too many people are trying to make a living by farming. Under present economic conditions and farming methods, many of them are bound to fail. There are several reasons for this overcrowding:

1. Growing Population

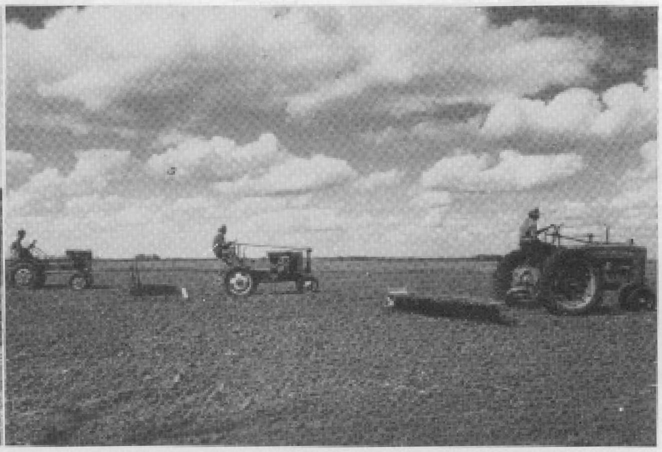
The farm population is growing much faster than the city population. Every year nearly half a million additional workers are trying to make a living off the land, as young farm people grow up and start looking for jobs. Moreover, this growth is fastest in the poorest, most overcrowded areas.

In the past, most of these young people went to the city and got factory jobs. For the last 10 years, however, this outlet for the surplus farm population has been choked off. The cities have had a big unemployment problem of their own, and could find no place for new workers from the country. Not even the national defense program has drawn many unskilled workers from the overcrowded farms.

2. Loss of Soil

These young people cannot go West and carve new homesteads out of the frontier, as their pioneer forefathers did, because almost all of the good farm land already has been settled. For more than a century our Government carried on a big relief program for poor farmers, by giving away vacant land on the frontier. Today, however, all this free land is gone; and the Government has had to find new ways to help needy farmers.

and washing away . . .



Labor-saving machines . . .

In fact, the amount of farm land available has been shrinking rapidly, as the result of soil erosion. Already 50 million acres of cropland have been ruined, and four times that many have been badly damaged. This means that an area as big as 6 farm States—Iowa, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Missouri—has been ruined for farming, or robbed of much of its fertility.

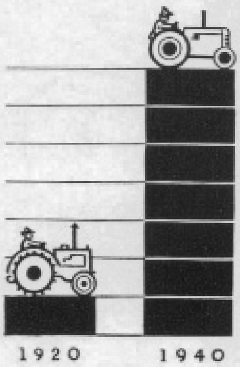
Erosion is still whittling away our cropland. Every day enough soil to make two hundred 40-acre farms washes or blows away.

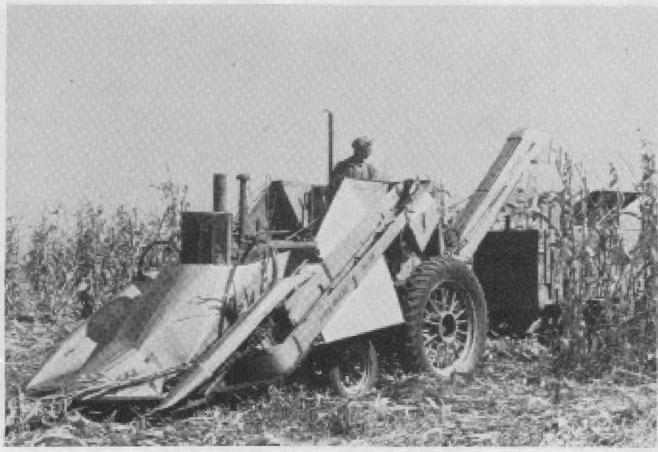
3. Loss of Foreign Markets

For the last 20 years, our shipments of farm products to other countries have been shrinking steadily—largely because many of our old customers were frantically increasing their own farm production, in order to be more self-sufficient in case of war. As a result, the average annual exports of American farm products in the years 1935 to 1937 were less than half of what they had been in the years 1925 to 1929. Since the outbreak of the Second World War our farm exports to Europe have been choked off almost entirely; and the prospect for regaining these lost markets remains highly uncertain. Consequently, many farm people who used to raise goods for foreign buyers find themselves out of work.

4. Labor-Saving Machinery

While the farm population has been growing, and the farm land and farm markets have been shrinking, still another factor has been making the overcrowding worse. That is labor-saving machinery, which is wiping out thousands of farm jobs. Dozens of such machines have come





replacing farm workers . . .

Primitive tools . . .

into use during the last decade. They range from corn pickers to potato diggers—but the most important is the cheap, all-purpose tractor.

Today there are more than 1,500,000 tractors in use—nearly six times as many as there were in 1920. Nearly every one of these tractors has pushed a few tenants, sharecroppers, or hired hands out of jobs. On one typical Mississippi Delta plantation, for example, the landlord recently bought 22 tractors. He turned off 130 of the 160 sharecropper families which used to work the land, keeping only 30 to handle the new machinery.

All this means that fewer people are needed to raise our farm products. One man can harvest as much grain with modern machinery as 30 men could a century ago. We can fill all the normal demands for farm products—both for home use and for export—with 1,600,000 fewer farm workers today than in 1930. Yet most of these surplus farm workers have not been able to find jobs elsewhere; they are still on the land, often with no work at all, or at best a few weeks in harvest time.

This overcrowding has resulted in extreme poverty for millions of farm people. Many of the squeezed-out families have become migrants, wandering from State to State in search of part-time harvest jobs on the big mechanized farms. Many more have moved onto poor land, which really is not fit for farming, and are hopelessly trying to scratch some kind of living out of worn-out soil and barren hillsides. The Southeastern States, for example, show plainly what has happened. They had less land in farms in 1930 than at the time of the Civil War. Yet their farm population had nearly doubled since that time.

handicap small farmers . . .

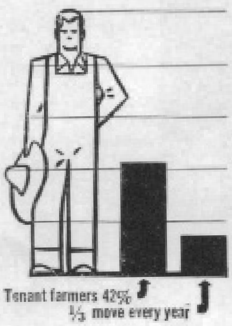
Two million migrants . . .

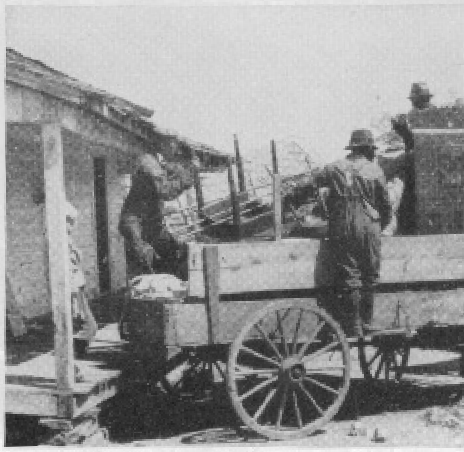
Small Farmers Hardest Hit

Moreover, these troubles have hit the little farmer hardest—especially the tenant and sharecropper. The little farmer gets squeezed out first, because he is finding it harder and harder to compete with the big, mechanized, commercial farms. Nearly 90 percent of all farm products going to market come from only 50 percent of the farms. The other half of our farmers—and these are the little fellows—are getting only about one-tenth of the market.

Often the little farmer simply is not able to farm efficiently. Many of them are using the same tools and methods their grandfathers did—a mule and a one-row plow. (Even if they knew how to use tractor and gang-plows, they could not afford them on their small acreages.) Often they raise a single cash crop—cotton, wheat, tobacco. These are the crops which wear out the soil fastest; and they make the farmer's life a gamble on the ups-and-downs of a highly uncertain market. Even with these old-fashioned practices, the small farmer was able to make some kind of living so long as farm prices were high and credit was abundant. During the last two decades, however, hard times at home and wars abroad have choked off many of our old markets and have forced down the prices of farm products.

Moreover, the credit on which so many small farmers depend has been drying up. Landlords who used to finance their tenants often have been so hard up that they had to cut off the credit. The "character loans" which country bankers used to make were stopped by the depression and changing banking practices. Then, too, many farmers piled up





Tenants pushed off the land . . .

Ill fed . . .

big debts during the prosperous years, which they have little prospect of paying off now; naturally they cannot get any additional credit.

Poor Tenure System

Finally, if he is a tenant, the small farmer is up against still more handicaps—and 42 percent of our farmers are tenants. While there are many well-financed and well-equipped tenants, most tenants fall in the bottom income group. Our tenure system itself is a patchwork of habit and tradition, and it is full of flaws. Most leases, for example, are not even written down—they are simply vague, oral understandings, covering one year's operations.

As a result, the typical tenant is always on the move from one farm to another. Every year, one-third of all our 2,800,000 tenant families move to a different place. This is an expensive habit, for the tenant, the landlord, and the Nation. When a farmer is continually on the move, he has little chance to put down roots in any community. He cannot become the best kind of citizen, because he is seldom in one place long enough to take part in community affairs, or even to join the neighborhood church. His children find their education interrupted every year, right in the middle of the school season.

The cost of this moving alone totals more than $50,000,000 a year. More costly still is the destruction of soil which results from a poor tenure system. The average tenant has little reason to protect the land, or keep up the farm property. His only interest is to mine the soil for the greatest possible cash return this year. Why not? He will be somewhere else next season.

Ill housed . . .

Poorly educated . . .

All of these things are the real roots of poverty among farm people—overcrowded land, worn-out soil, poor farming methods, growing competition from the big commercial farms, heavy debts, a shortage of credit, low farm prices, and a bad tenure system. The depression did not create them. They have been growing for many years, and the depression merely made them worse.

The Results of Rural Poverty

In 1936 there were nearly 1,700,000 farm families trying to live on an average income of less than $500 a year—and that $500 included all the food and other products which they raised for their own use. In other words, more than 8,000,000 farm people were trying to exist on an average income of about $2 a week per person or less.

This means poor diet and bad health for a large part of our farm population. Such families can rarely afford window screens, and as a result many of them have malaria and other diseases carried by mosquitoes and flies. Thousands of them do not even have an outdoor privy, which means that they are very likely to get hookworm infection. (In one rural Southern county, about 60 percent of the school children in 1936 were found to have hookworm.) These diseases make it hard for their victims to do a good day's work, and lead to still deeper poverty. Many farm people who have been called "shiftless" are merely sick.

Low incomes mean poor education, because many rural counties cannot support good schools. Since one child out of every ten comes from the 3,000,000 farm families in the lowest income group, the menace of poor education and bad health to the manpower of the next generation is all too plain.

Low incomes also mean bad housing. Even in 1929, about 1,500,000 tenant families were living in houses valued at less than $475; and in the South half of all farm *owners* had houses worth less than $560.

Worst of all, rural poverty means a heavy drag on our entire national economy. People who are trying to live on $2 a week cannot afford to buy much of the goods made by our factories; and consequently their low incomes lead to unemployment in the cities. These needy farm people represent a huge untapped market. If they could climb up to the average American standard of living, their increased consumption would go a long way toward putting industry back on its feet. Meanwhile, they are a heavy burden to the taxpayer—more than 2,000,000 farm families have been on the relief rolls at one time or another since 1932.

A Brake on National Defense

These conditions are particularly alarming at a time when every effort is being made to build up the national defense. The damaged health of our needy farm people is a threat to the Nation's manpower. One man out of every three who tried to enlist in the first half of 1940 was rejected because of bad health; and by far the largest share of these volunteers came from farm areas.

Moreover, this is exactly the kind of hungry, disheartened people to whom the Fifth Columnists and spreaders of discontent can appeal most easily. These farm people would have a lot more interest in the defense of America if they had more of a stake in the country.

Healthy, prosperous people, owning the land they farm, are a strong protection for any Nation. Morale can be high only when people feel they have a stake in the land, the society, and the way of life they are called upon to defend.

Helping Farmers to Help Themselves

There is no single, simple remedy for rural poverty. Because there are more people than there is opportunity on American farm land, many people probably will eventually have to stop being full-time farmers. Employment will have to be found for them in other lines. But even our present land is not supporting nearly as many families as it could. Millions of farm people who are clinging to the outside fringe of our economic system can get back on their feet if somebody gives them a boost to start with.

In many different ways, the Government has been working to give our farm people this needed boost. For example, Government research has developed new methods to protect the soil from erosion, and Government has made soil conservation payments and provided the services of technicians and CCC camps to help put these methods into effect. Through payments, crop loans, new ways of using up surplus crops, and marketing agreements, the Government has helped farmers raise prices and incomes far above the depression level. Working together through the Extension Service, the State and Federal Governments for many years have been teaching more efficient farming methods.

The work of the Farm Security Administration fits in closely with the rest of the national farm program carried on by the U. S. Department of Agriculture and cooperating agencies. The Farm Security Administration's job is to help the neediest, most handicapped farm families get a new start toward self-support. The methods it uses have been developed cautiously, out of the experience of half a dozen earlier agencies, State and Federal.

In the early days of the depression, State relief administrations were making grants of food or money to more than a million needy farm families, just as they did to the city unemployed. It was plain, however, that this kind of relief did little permanent good. It did not help the farmer to lick his troubles and get back on his own feet.

Then, with the financial aid of the Federal Government, a few States tried a new experiment. Instead of handing out a dole to bankrupt farmers, they began to lend them the tools and livestock they needed to make a living for themselves. This was far better than relief for two reasons: (1) It costs less; (2) it helped the farmer to help himself, instead of remaining dependent indefinitely on the Government. As a result, the idea was quickly adopted for other States, and developed into a Nation-wide rehabilitation program.

Then in 1935 the Resettlement Administration was set up to handle a number of different programs for low-income farm people, which had been developed piecemeal by various agencies. It continued to expand this idea for helping the farmer to help himself.

In 1937 the Farm Security Administration, an agency of the Department of Agriculture, took over this part of the Resettlement Administration's work and developed the rehabilitation program into a major weapon for fighting rural poverty. By 1941 nearly a million needy farm families had a new start with FSA help.

Rehabilitation Instead of Relief

This is the way rehabilitation works:

When a farmer who is losing out comes to the Department's local Farm Security Administration office for help, the first step is to find out the causes of his trouble. The FSA county supervisor visits the farmer's place, and together they carefully study all of the farming operations. They look especially for the weak spots. Does the farmer have a satisfactory long-term lease? Is he protecting his soil properly? Is he going broke through one-crop farming? Does he have the tools and livestock he needs? Is the family keeping down expenses by raising its own food? Does the farmer's wife can enough vegetables to feed the family through the winter? Is some neglected illness—malaria, perhaps, or a hernia—keeping the farmer from doing his best work? Does he need more acreage in order to make a living? Is he making the best possible use of the land he has?

When they have found the answers to these questions, the farmer, his wife, and the FSA farm and home supervisors sit down together and work out a plan to solve the family's special problem. This is a home-made plan for sound farm and home management; no two of them are alike, because every low-income family has a different set of troubles.

Then the Farm Security Administration makes a small loan to the farmer to enable him to put the plan in operation. This loan is just large enough to make the plan work—usually from $100 to $800. It goes to pay for the seed, fertilizer, livestock, and equipment which the family needs to get started on a sound, permanent, operating basis. The loan carries 5 percent interest, and usually is repayable over a 5-year period. The character and ability of the borrower must be vouched for by a committee of local farmers and businessmen.

For security, the Government takes a mortgage on the borrower's chattels. As an additional protection for its investment, FSA provides technical advice on good farming methods to every borrower. From time to time throughout the year, the county supervisor visits the farmer to check up on the progress he is making with his new farm plan. Together they work out proper crop rotations, lay out terraces and check dams to protect the soil, and set up a system of accounts and records. If the farmer wants expert advice on the purchase of a purebred bull, or the culling of his poultry flock, he can always turn to the supervisor for help. The farmer's wife gets similar help from the FSA home management supervisor in gardening, canning, making clothes, and dozens of little household economics. This guidance in modern farming methods is the best possible guarantee that the family will become permanently self-supporting, and that the Government's investment will be repaid.

Planning to Make a Living on a Small Farm

The kind of farm and home management which the FSA supervisors teach is specially designed to meet the problems of the small farmer. Every farm plan has three basic points. It calls for:

1. The production at home of most of the family's food and livestock feed. This often is called "live-at-home" farming.
2. Cash income from at least two sources; no more one-crop farming.
3. Methods that will build up the fertility of the soil and put every foot of ground to the best possible use.

In these three ways, the farm plan guards the chief causes of failure. If the plan is carried out the family will have plenty to eat and to feed its livestock, whether or not it has much cash income. By raising several cash crops the farmer cuts down the risk of weather hazards and poor markets. Through careful land use he protects his most important asset, the soil.

Moreover, this kind of farming goes a long way toward solving one of the little farmer's chief problems—the overcrowding of the land. Diversified, live-at-home farming makes it possible for the same amount of land to support more people. One of its goals is "bigger acres"—better use of the resources the family has at hand. At the same time, by checking erosion, it halts the destruction of the limited amount of land which is available for farming.

This effort to increase production does not mean that the FSA borrower is adding to the agricultural surpluses. On the contrary, he usually takes a good many acres out of the cash crops, such as wheat and cotton, which have been piling up in the warehouses because foreign markets have dwindled. He uses these acres to raise things that his own family has never had enough of, such as milk, eggs, and fresh vegetables. Little or none of these new products goes to market—they are used right on the farm where they are raised, to give the family a better food supply.

The kind of farm planning encouraged by FSA aims to solve four other problems which often plague the small farmer—poor tenure arrangements, overburdening debt, bad health, and competition from the big, mechanized farms.

Better Tenure

One of the first efforts of the FSA supervisor is to help the rehabilitation borrower work out better tenure arrangements, if he is a tenant—and 70 percent of all rehabilitation families are tenants. Usually the supervisor goes with the tenant to his landlord and helps them to draw up a long-term, written lease. This means that the tenant knows he will be on the same place for several years. He can plan 3- or 5-year crop rotations to build up the soil; he can afford to repair the barn and keep up the fences, because he knows he will get some use out of these improvements and that is good business for both landlord and tenant. Often the lease goes even further in encouraging permanent improvements, by providing that the landlord will pay part of the cost of an expensive improvement, such as terracing, if the tenant moves before he gets the full use out of it.

In many cases FSA borrowers and their landlords use model lease forms, which have been prepared by the Department of Agriculture to fit different farming conditions and the laws of each State. The model leases have done much to check the useless, wasteful shifting from farm to farm, which has been one of the worst evils of our tenancy system.

Debt Adjustment

Many a small farmer is on the verge of bankruptcy because he piled up big debts to buy land or equipment years ago when farm prices were higher. Under present agricultural conditions he has little chance of paying off all these obligations.

Therefore, FSA has set up voluntary Farm Debt Adjustment Committees in almost every farming county. They have no legal authority to compel adjustments; but by bringing the farmer and his creditors together for a friendly talk, they usually can arrange a scale-down of the debts, reduced interest rates, or an extension of the time of payment. Such adjustments often save the farmer from foreclosure, and at the same time enable the creditors to get substantial payments on what otherwise might have been bad debts. These debt adjustments often are necessary before the FSA can work out a farm plan for a new start on a sound basis.

This service is available free to all farmers, whether or not they are FSA borrowers. Altogether, debt reductions totaling $99,536,000 have been worked out for 145,500 overburdened farmers since 1935. This represents a scale-down of nearly 23 percent, on debts which originally amounted to $445,109,000. As a direct result of these adjustments, more than $5,376,000 in back taxes has been paid to local governmental agencies.

In addition, reductions amounting to $15,063,000, or 66 percent, have been negotiated in the debts owed by irrigation and drainage districts, and similar farm groups. More than 15,000 farmers who were members of these groups benefited from the adjustments.

Better Health

The Farm Security Administration found that many of the farmers who came to it for help were in trouble simply because they were too sick to do a good day's work. Often they had suffered for years from malaria, hookworm, pellagra, or some other disease because they could not afford to pay for medical treatment. In other cases, the farmers had used up all their capital and gone heavily in debt in order to pay hospital bills for some member of their families. It was plain that one of the most important steps toward rehabilitation for these families would be good medical care at prices they could afford.

In cooperation with the State medical associations and local medical societies, FSA worked out a special Medical Care program for its borrowers. Details of the health plans vary from county to county, according to local needs, but in general they work like this:

FSA borrowers within the county organize a health association, with the help of the local physicians. Each family agrees to pay a fixed sum—usually about $24 a year—for medical care. These payments are turned over to a trustee, who divides all of the money into twelve equal parts, one for each month in the year. Then if a member of the family becomes ill, he may go for treatment to any doctor in the county who is taking part in the plan.

At the end of every month all of the doctors turn in their bills to the trustee. If the amount of money set aside for that month is large enough, all of the bills are paid in full. If there is some money left over, it is carried over to the next month. If the amount available is not large enough to pay all bills in full, they are all reduced proportionately, and each physician is paid his share.

As a result, all the members of the association get good medical care from physicians of their own choice, at a cost which they can afford. The doctors, in turn, are sure of getting a substantial payment for their services; payments to physicians have averaged, the country over, about 60 percent of the bills. Many doctors report that this is a higher percentage of payment than they get from their ordinary practice, and much higher than they formerly got from low-income farm families.

The Medical Care program has proved so popular with both physicians and FSA borrowers that health associations have been organized in 634 counties in 31 States during the last 3 years. About 80,000 families, or 300,000 people, now are getting medical care through these associations.

In many cases, FSA includes enough money in its rehabilitation loan for the borrower family to make the first annual payment to the county health association. This has resulted both in swifter progress toward rehabilitation and in larger repayments on the loan, as the family's health and ability to support itself improve.

Cooperatives For the Small Farmer

Most small farmers cannot compete on even terms with the big commercial farms, because they cannot afford to use modern, costly equipment. If a farmer has only 40 acres, he usually cannot afford to buy a tractor or a lime-spreader, because he would use such equipment for only a short period each year. If he owns only two or three milk cows, it ordinarily would not pay him to try to improve his herd by buying a purebred bull.

If ten small farmers get together, however, they can buy purebred sires, or farm equipment which all of them can use. Moreover, they often can pool their money and buy seed, fertilizer, and other farm and household supplies in large quantities—thus getting better quality at lower prices. They may find it is good business to sell their pigs and chickens and truck crops cooperatively, instead of peddling them separately, a wagon-load at a time.

The Farm Security Administration has encouraged its borrowers to work together, in these ways and many others, through small cooperatives. It often includes in a rehabilitation loan enough money for the borrower to pay his share of the cost of a combine, feed mill, terracing equipment, or other equipment which he can use cooperatively with his neighbors. Occasionally the loan includes a small sum to enable the borrower to join a large, long-established co-op engaged in marketing or processing farm products.

Through such cooperative activities, which help him to cut his operating costs and adopt more efficient methods, the little farmer often can make more rapid progress toward rehabilitation. More than 300,000 low-income farm families are now taking part in about 16,000 small co-ops started with FSA help.

The Results of Rehabilitation

Since the Rehabilitation program was started in 1935, the Farm Security Administration has loaned more than $516,000,000 to 870,000 needy farm families—many of which were once on relief. Judged by normal standards these families were the worst possible credit risks, since none of them could get adequate credit anywhere else.

Already, however, they have repaid about $182,000,000 into the Federal treasury, although much of the money will not be due for several years. It is estimated that approximately 80 percent of the funds loaned will be repaid eventually with interest. The losses are largely concentrated in areas of the Great Plains which have suffered several years of severe drought.

The annual cost of the Rehabilitation Loan program including all losses, the cost of supervision, and every other item of expense—amounts to less than $75 for each family aided. This is the lowest cost to the taxpayer of any kind of help for needy families. Work relief, for example, costs from $350 to $800 per year.

Moreover, rehabilitation is fundamentally different from all other types of aid, because its whole purpose is to help needy families escape the relief rolls and become self-supporting. It has proved highly successful in achieving this goal. More than 120,000 families already have paid off their loans in full.

The remaining families have made rapid gains in their net worth, standards of living, and ability to support themselves. At the end of the 1939 crop year a survey was made to determine the progress of 360,015 regular rehabilitation borrowers then on the FSA rolls. This study disclosed that they had increased their net worth—over and above all debts, including their obligations to the Government—by a total of $82,954,656 since they first obtained loans. This was an average increase of $230.42 per family. Their average net incomes rose from $375 in the year before they sought FSA help, to $538 in 1939—an increase of 43 percent. This means that they brought $58,000,000 in new purchasing power into their communities in a single year.

At the same time, these borrowers greatly increased their production of food for home consumption. The average family increased the amount of fruit and vegetables which it canned from 51 quarts annually to 242 quarts; and its production of milk for home use rose from 99 gallons a year to 448 gallons. Similar gains were reported in the production of meat and eggs for home use.

These gains in living standards and purchasing power naturally have resulted in greater prosperity for the communities in which FSA borrowers live. Local merchants, bankers, and businessmen have recognized this fact, and generally have given the Rehabilitation program vigorous support. In some cases, they voluntarily have dug into their own pockets for money to hire extra help for the local FSA office, when the county supervisor was loaded down with more work than he could handle.

Work Grants

In areas stricken by drought, flood, and similar disasters, rehabilitation loans sometimes prove impractical. It would be useless, for example, to loan a farmer money to plant wheat, when the ground is so dry that it would be impossible to make a crop. Under such circumstances, FSA makes small grants to families in acute distress, to enable them to fill their most urgent needs for food, clothing, and fuel. These grants vary in size according to the number in the family; but they average less than $20 a month. As soon as weather conditions permit, grant payments are halted and the family is helped to start farming again with a rehabilitatic.. loan.

Grants sometimes prove necessary even outside of drought and flood areas. A family may be so handicapped by a long illness, or a fire, for instance, that it needs immediate aid. Moreover, some farmers—especially in the Appalachian

Mountain country—are so poor and have such small unproductive farms that they could not borrow enough money to meet even their most urgent needs, with much hope of paying it all back. In such cases, FSA sometimes supplements its rehabilitation loans with small grants. The grant money usually is used to buy food and clothes, dig a well, build a sanitary privy, or pay for badly-needed medical care.

In all cases, families which receive grants are required to do some kind of useful work in return. Often they plant trees or dam up gullies on public land. If this is not practicable, they may do soil conservation work on their own land, such as building terraces, or perform some job which will contribute to their own rehabilitation—like building a food storage cellar or digging a trench silo.

FSA has found that nearly all farm families which get grants appreciate the chance to do useful work in return; they dislike the idea of accepting "charity" from the Government or anybody else.

Counting loans, grants, debt adjustments, and all other types of help, nearly a million and a half farm families have received some kind of aid under the Rehabilitation program of the Farm Security Administration.

Helping Farmers to Help

Every FSA loan is accompanied by advice on sound farm management, to make sure that every dollar is put to the best possible use. Such loans have helped more than 870,000 handicapped farm families to get a new start.

Trained farm specialists help Farm Security borrowers plan crop rotations, pick the best seed, fight insect pests, get the most out of their land.

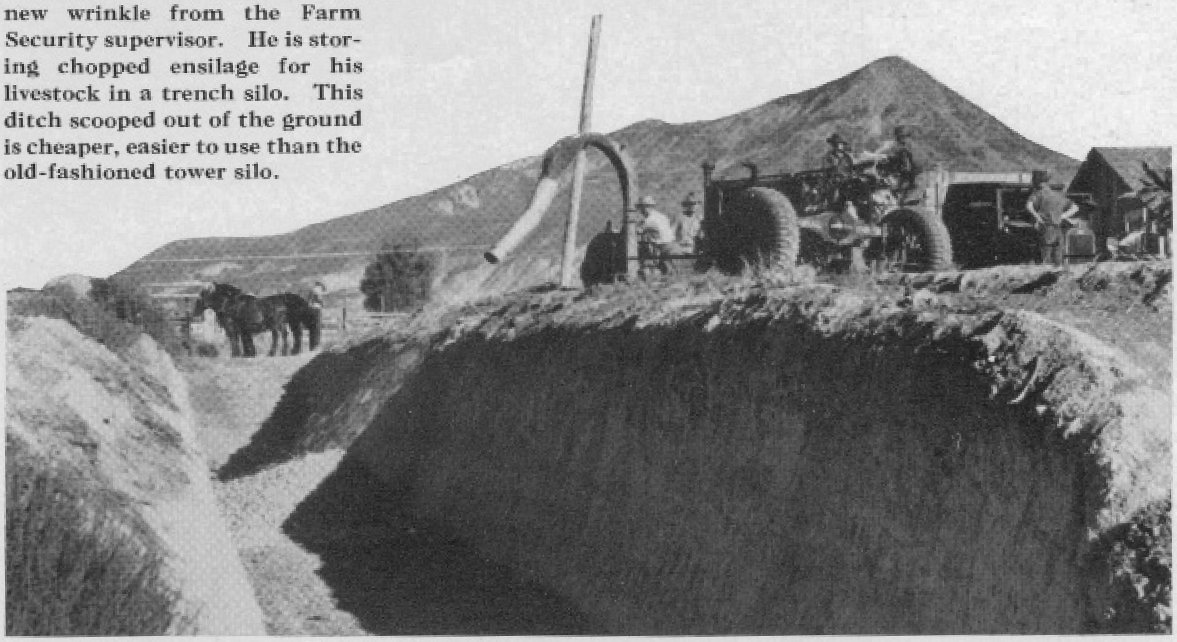
Themselves

With the help of Soil Conservation Service experts, FSA borrowers learn to protect their land by terracing, strip-cropping, planning to use every acre in the best way.

With FSA loans, groups of low-income farmers often buy or rent modern equipment for building terraces, to protect their land from erosion.

Home management specialists teach FSA families to raise their own food supplies, can plenty to tide them through the winter. The typical family now cans five times as much fruit and vegetables for home use as it did before coming to Farm Security for help.

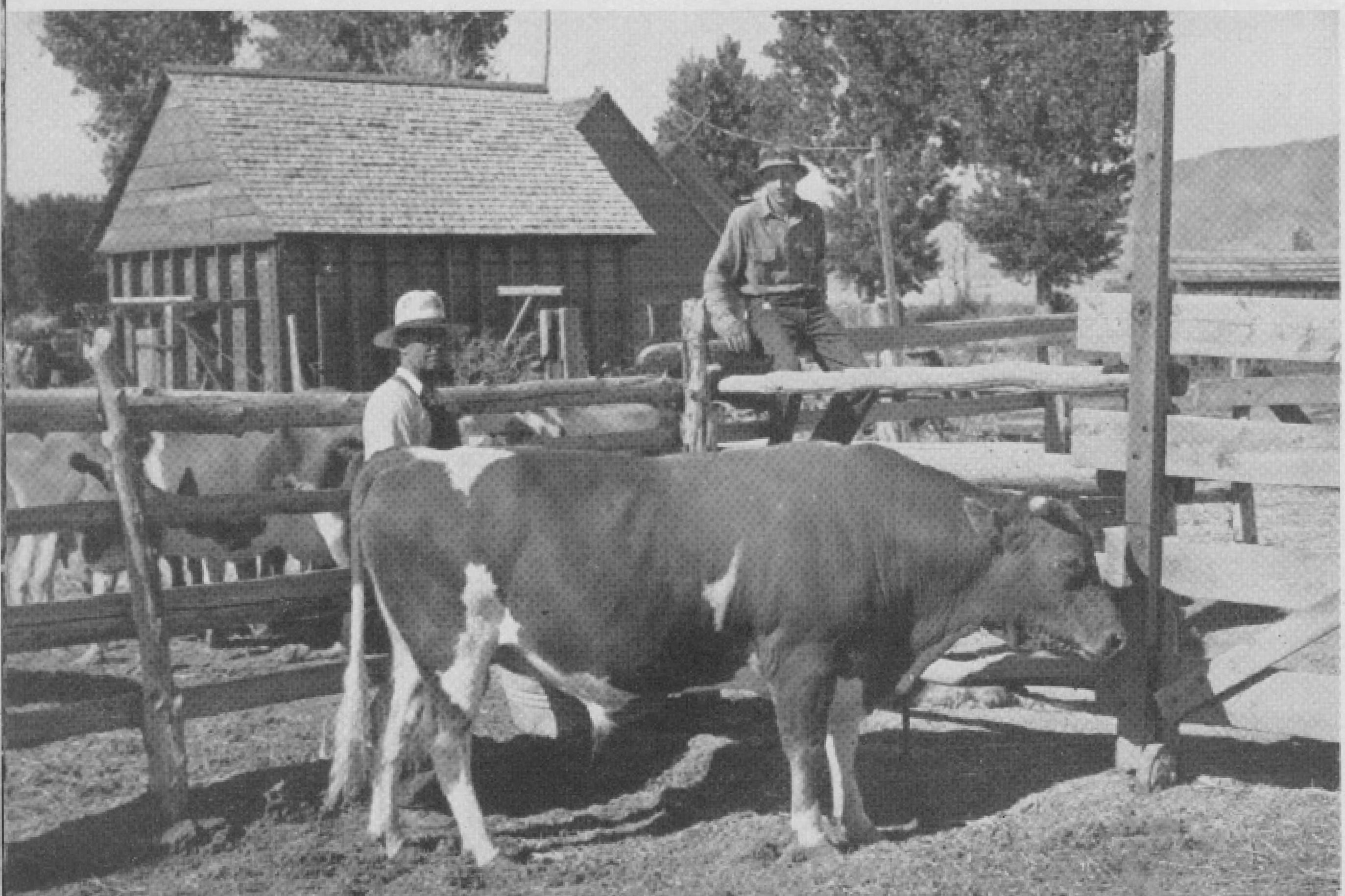
This Colorado farmer learns a new wrinkle from the Farm Security supervisor. He is storing chopped ensilage for his livestock in a trench silo. This ditch scooped out of the ground is cheaper, easier to use than the old-fashioned tower silo.



Farm wives learn how to add to their earnings by home handicraft. Many now weave high-quality textiles, which find a ready sale. Before the War, the hand-woven textile market was supplied largely by imports from Norway, Denmark, Holland.

FSA encourages its borrowers to get together in small, informal cooperatives to buy heavy equipment which no one of them could afford by himself. These Utah farmers pooled their money to buy a hay chopper, which all of them use. More than 16,000 small co-ops like this, started with FSA help, now serve about 300,000 low-income farm families.

A farmer with a few cows cannot afford to own a purebred bull; but if six or eight small farmers get together they can get a first-class sire to serve all their herds. This is a "co-op bull" bought by FSA families in Box Elder County, Utah.



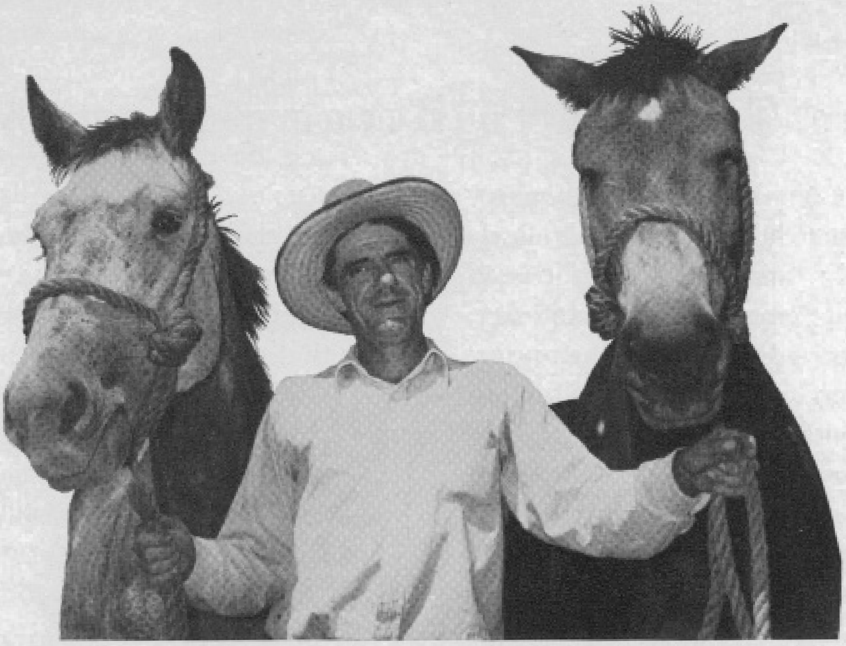
Farm Security borrowers learn to keep careful records, run their own farms and their cooperatives in a businesslike way.

A group of Farm Security families at Fairfield Bench, Montana, started a cooperative veterinary service. They now have an expert vet to care for all their livestock at moderate cost.

These farmers are building a model sanitary privy, with the help of low-cost plans designed by FSA. Like thousands of other Farm Security borrowers, they are trying to cut down the cost of illness by better sanitation, screening windows to keep out flies and mosquitoes, protecting their water supply.

Best measure of rehabilitation is higher incomes, better living standards. Average rehabilitation borrower has increased his net income 43 percent since coming to FSA for help.

Bad health, lack of proper medical care have been the chief handicaps for thousands of low-income farm families. In co-operation with local physicians, FSA has developed group health associations which provide medical care for more than 80,000 families at a cost within their ability to pay.



This Colorado farmer is well along the road to rehabilitation; and, like the great majority of FSA borrowers, he is rapidly paying back his loan from the Government. Out of $516,000,000 loaned since 1935, more than $182,000,000 already has been repaid, although most of the money is not yet due. More than 120,000 borrowers already have paid off their loans in full.

Helping Tenants to Become Farm Owners

In 1937, Congress decided to carry one step further the Government's efforts to help needy farm people. It passed the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, which authorized the Farm Security Administration to make loans to a limited number of worthy tenants, sharecroppers, and farm laborers to enable them to buy farms of their own.

This Act was based largely on the report that year of the President's Committee on Farm Tenancy. This Committee pointed out that the rapid increase in the number of tenants was threatening to destroy the traditional American system of independent, family-type farms, owned by the people who tilled them. It reported that nearly half of the Nation's farms were operated by tenants; and that the army of tenants was growing at the rate of about 40,000 families a year. It warned that this alarming growth of tenancy was hastening soil erosion, forcing down living standards and "sapping the resources of the entire social order."

Consequently, the Committee recommended vigorous measures to check the increase in tenancy, and to improve our existing systems of tenure. It also warned that this would be a long task, which might not be finished for generations.

"Abuses in our system of land tenure . . . have been developing for two centuries," the report said. "A long period of continuous and consistent effort confronts us . . . Most civilized nations have set their hands to a similar undertaking, and some of them have been engaged in it for many years. It is high time that this Nation begin the task."

Loans to Tenants to Buy Farms

Congress decided to make a cautious, experimental start in the new program for helping tenants to become farm owners. It appropriated $10,000,000 for loans during the first fiscal year ending June 30, 1938; $25,000,000 for the second year; and $40,000,000 for the third. For the fourth year, ending June 30, 1941, Congress provided for $50,000,000 in loan funds to be advanced by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, instead of coming from direct appropriations as in the past. Administrative expenses are limited by law to 5 percent of the sums loaned.

These loans are made only to families which cannot get money to buy a homestead anywhere else. They are just large enough to cover the cost of a family-type farm and the expense of repairing old farm buildings or putting up new ones. Loans are made only to American citizens, and preference is given to those who can make a down payment, or who own the livestock and equipment to operate a farm.

Borrowers are selected by committees of three local farmers in each county where the program is in operation.

The loans may be repaid over a period of 40 years, although the borrower may, of course, pay off the entire loan more rapidly if he wishes. They carry 3 percent interest.

Often the annual payments, plus taxes and insurance, amount to no more than the tenant formerly paid in rent.

Because of the limited funds available, and the necessity of keeping administrative costs as low as possible, loans are made only in certain designated counties. These counties are recommended to the Secretary of Agriculture by State Farm Security Advisory Committees, which base their choice on the degree of need in each locality and the availability of good land at reasonable prices. The advisory committees are composed of farm leaders in each State, usually including the Extension Director, editors of farm magazines, and members of major farm organizations.

Any farm tenant, sharecropper, or farm laborer may apply for a loan. In general, nearly 25 applications have been received for every loan that can be made with available funds.

During the first year, loans averaging $4,999 each were approved for 1,840 tenant families. During the second year, 4,340 loans were approved, and in the third year, ending June 30, 1940, about 6,200 were approved. Thus, nearly 12,300 tenant families had loans approved averaging $5,738 each, for the purchase of their own land during the first 3 years of the program. About 9,000 loans can be made in the fourth year.

Homesteads

In addition to the Rehabilitation and Tenant Purchase programs, the Farm Security Administration has a third job. It manages 151 homesteads projects which were started by the Resettlement Administration, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, and other earlier agencies.

These projects were an outgrowth of the earliest efforts to rehabilitate needy farm families. It was soon discovered that rehabilitation loans were not much help for some families, simply because they were living on land which was too worn-out to support them under any system of farming. What they really needed was a new start on better land; but they seldom had enough money to make the move.

Therefore, the Government bought the worn-out land, and turned it into forests, parks, and game preserves. At the same time, it set up resettlement projects on good land nearby, to help the displaced families get started on a sounder basis.

Some of these projects consist merely of a number of individual farms scattered over two or three counties. Others are small communities, where the farm homes are clustered together with their own school, store, and sometimes other community facilities, such as a cotton gin. In most of these communities each family makes its own living by full-time farming. In others, the farms are small and provide only a part of the family's livelihood. Various trades and industries, either on the project or in nearby cities, furnish the rest.

Usually the homesteads are being sold to the individual residents for small annual payments spread over a long period of years; although in some instances an entire community has been purchased by an association of homesteaders, which then rents or sells the individual units to the residents.

About 15,000 families, or nearly 75,000 people, have been provided with new homes and a chance to make a decent living through these homesteads projects.

A few of the projects have an additional purpose. They are cooperative farms, which were established as experiments to find out whether it would be possible to combine the advantages of the traditional family-type farm with the efficiency of large-scale, mechanized operations. These cooperative enterprises were started in areas where the family-type farms were being forced out of existence by giant commercial farms—"outdoor food factories," which often are owned by corporations, and are operated with highly specialized machinery and armies of wandering seasonal laborers.

The co-op projects were designed to compete with these big commercial farms on even terms, and yet to preserve the values of independent farm ownership. Usually each family on such a project has its own house and garden plot; but all of the cash crop acreage is farmed as a single unit with modern machinery, and other enterprises such as dairying and marketing are handled on a cooperative basis.

It is too early to reach any final conclusion about these experiments; but so far most of the cooperative farms have operated successfully. If this success continues, they may serve as a model which can be followed by thousands of hard-pressed small farmers in future years.

One outgrowth of the homesteads projects already has proved to be of considerable value. In erecting the homes on these projects, FSA developed new methods of precutting and prefabrication which have enabled it to build modest but substantial houses at the lowest costs ever achieved in this country. On one project, for example, 100 homes were completed in 100 days, at an average cost of about $1,200 each.

The house plans and precutting methods developed by FSA have been widely adopted by private builders. Most of the homes now being built on farms purchased with Bankhead-Jones tenant loans are put up by private contractors using FSA designs. Costs range from an average of less than $1,400 each in the South, to about $2,500 in the North—including payment of prevailing wages for labor, and normal profits for contractors and material suppliers.

This experimental cotton house, in Coffee County, Alabama, has walls covered with heavy fabric bedded in a special cement. Such walls are fire-resistant, airtight, watertight, and provide good insulation. Cost of the house was approximately $1,300, about the same as frame construction. If maintenance costs and "livability" prove satisfactory, this kind of house may provide a new outlet for some of the South's surplus cotton.

Helping Tenants To Become Farm Owners

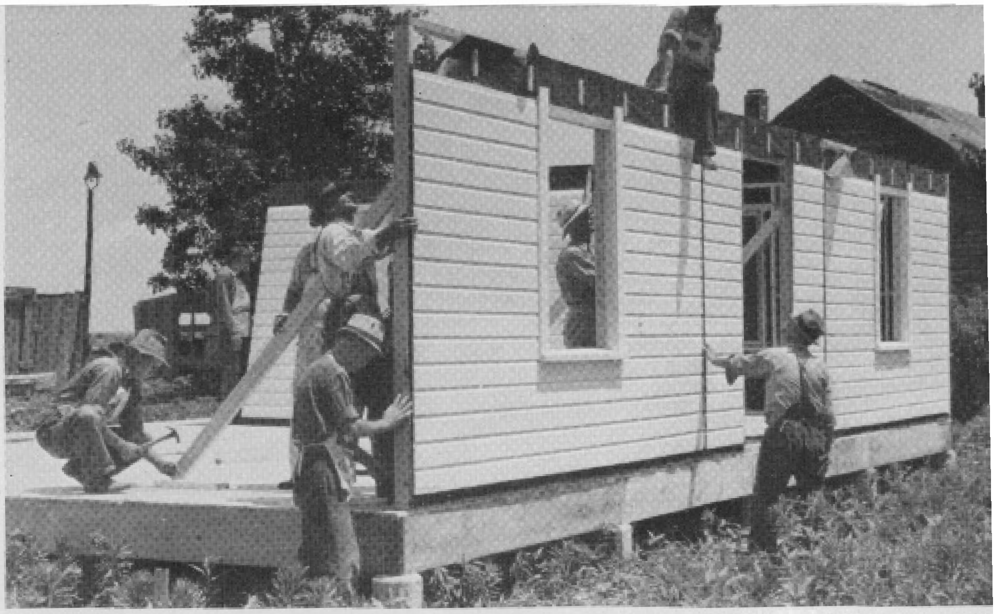
Farm Security has built or repaired nearly 30,000 low-cost homes for farm families. Most of its housing work now is done under private contract as part of the Tenant Purchase program. Designs are simple, highly practical; new houses cost an average of about $1,500.

Prefabrication was used to cut building costs on some FSA homesteads projects, where 50 or more homes were put up at one time within a radius of about 20 miles. This picture and the five which follow show steps used in the prefabrication process at LaForge Farms, Mo., where 100 houses were built in 100 days, at an average cost of less than $1,200. These workers are casting concrete foundation piers.

The man in the foreground is using precut lumber to build a wall panel. Panels are built on a template to insure accuracy. A completed panel is being moved from a template to the storage and painting racks.

Panels are carried by truck to the house site, where the erection crew will assemble them within a single day. Much of the construction work on this project was done by the farmers who later occupied the new homes.

Concrete foundation piers are already in place, and footings and flooring have been built upon them. The wall panels are fitted together with sealed joints, so that the house is strong and "tight."



Prefabricated gable is hoisted into place with a portable derrick. On the right are stacked roof trusses, which can be erected without the help of a scaffolding.

The completed house has three bedrooms, two porches, a combination kitchen-living room, but no bath or plumbing. This is "minimum" housing; but it is far better than most of these farm families have ever had before.

This is Johnny LaRue, the son of a sharecropper on a plantation which Farm Security bought as part of the land for the LaForge Farms project. This picture was taken in May 1938, shortly before the LaRue family moved into its new prefabricated home, like those shown on the preceding page.

This picture of Johnny LaRue was taken in August 1940, after his family had been operating its new homestead for about two years. Like the picture above, it was not posed.

The 100 families at the LaForge Farms all are former sharecroppers, who were living on the same land before the project was started. At that time, all their possessions—including farm tools, livestock, clothes, and the food in the pantry—were worth an average of only $28 per family.

Two years later, they had increased their average worth to $1,474 per family; and they were paying off their debt to the Government on schedule. They had simply learned to farm the same land, where they had once failed, in a new and better way.

Camps For Migrant Farm Families

The overcrowding of our available cropland, drought, soil erosion, and the growing use of labor-saving machinery, have forced hundreds of thousands of small farmers off the land in recent years. Through its Rehabilitation, Tenant Purchase, and Homesteads programs, the Farm Security Administration has made considerable headway in checking this forced migration at its source, by helping needy farm people to keep their foothold on the land.

However, there are many thousands of families which FSA was not able to help in time. Some of these have gone to the cities in search of work or temporary relief. Others have taken to the highways in a desperate effort to make some kind of living as migrant farm laborers, following the harvests from one State to another.

These migrant families probably have the lowest living standards of any group in the United States. Their incomes usually range from $200 to $450 a year. Many of them travel as far as 3,000 miles a year in their rickety automobiles, packed with their only possessions—a tent, a couple of blankets, and a few pots and pans. Their only homes are temporary roadside camps, which seldom have any kind of sanitary facilities or even a decent water supply. Their children have little chance for education, adequate medical care, or normal community life. Malnutrition and disease are common among both adults and children.

These migrant workers are essential to some of the Nation's most important farm areas, under their present system of agriculture. In these areas the family-type farm has almost disappeared, and agriculture has become a big industry. A single farm may cover thousands of acres and require several hundred workers for a few weeks during harvest season, although it can be operated by a handful of men during the rest of the year.

This kind of farming is most common in the specialty crop regions of California. It is also widespread, however, in the lettuce, cotton, and vegetable fields of Arizona; the fruit, berry, and hop regions of the Pacific Northwest; the beet and potato country of Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Colorado; the cotton and citrus areas of Texas; and parts of Florida and New Jersey.

In 1936, the Farm Security Administration set out to help the States meet some of the most urgent health and housing problems caused by this great wave of migration. Primarily as a sanitary measure, FSA has built 49 camps, where migrant families can live as they follow the crops. These provide shelter and sanitary facilities for more than 10,000 families at any one time. Since the migrants continually flow in and out of the camps, as the demand for labor changes in each area, as many as 40,000 families or nearly 200,000 people may use the camps in a year.

A typical camp consists of rows of

wooden tent platforms, on which the migrant families can pitch their own tents, or of simple one-room wooden or metal shelters. Ordinarily it has accommodations for about 200 to 350 families. There also are several sanitation buildings, equipped with shower baths, toilets, and laundry tubs; a children's clinic; and a modest community building for church services and other meetings. Each camp is democratically governed by a council elected by its own residents, which works with the FSA camp manager.

Since most migrants have a hard time earning enough money for food and clothing, they usually are not charged anything for living in an FSA camp. Each family is asked, however, to contribute about 10 cents a day to a camp welfare fund, which is used for minor improvements and sometimes to help out families which are particularly hard up. In addition, each family is expected to work at least 2 hours a week, cleaning up the grounds and sanitary buildings, and making minor repairs.

So far, 40 of these permanent camps have been built in 8 States—California, Arizona, Oregon, Idaho, Washington, Texas, Missouri, and Florida, and several more camps have been proposed.

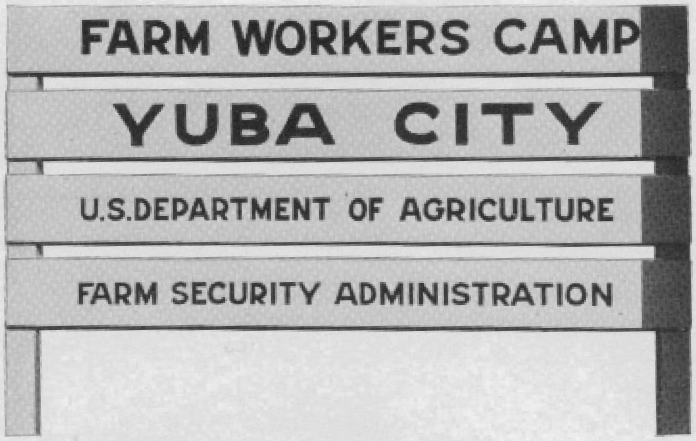
In addition, FSA has built 9 portable camps, which move from place to place as the migrants follow the crops. These are designed especially for use in areas with short harvest seasons, where it would not pay to build permanent camps which could be used for only a few weeks a year. A typical portable camp has about 200 tent platforms, which can easily be moved by truck; a first-aid clinic built in a trailer; a specially-built trailer containing 24 shower baths and 18 washtubs.

To enable at least part of the migrants to get settled in permanent homes, FSA has built a number of small cottages—known as "labor homes"—near some of its permanent camps. Each cottage has a small garden plot. These houses are rented for about $8 a month to families which are able to find year-round work on nearby farms.

The Farm Security Administration does not consider its camps a permanent solution of the migrant problem. They merely offer temporary shelter and a minimum of decent living facilities. It feels that the real answer lies in more vigorous efforts to stop unnecessary migration at its source.

In the last 5 years it has made a long step in this direction, by anchoring low-income farm families to the land in their home States.

The problem is by no means entirely solved. There are hundreds of thousands of families in need of rehabilitation which FSA has not yet been able to help. Moreover, years of patient effort must still be devoted to some knotty special problems—for example, the improvement of our tenure system, and development of new farming methods which will enable more people to make a living from the land. The job ahead is a big one; but a sound start has been made, and in this task the Nation cannot afford to fail.



Migrant camp at Yuba City, California. Row houses in foreground provide homes for families who can find year-round work on nearby farms; one-room shelters in background are for migrants who flood into the area during peak labor seasons. Both sections are served by community buildings located between them.

Camps For Migrant Farm Families

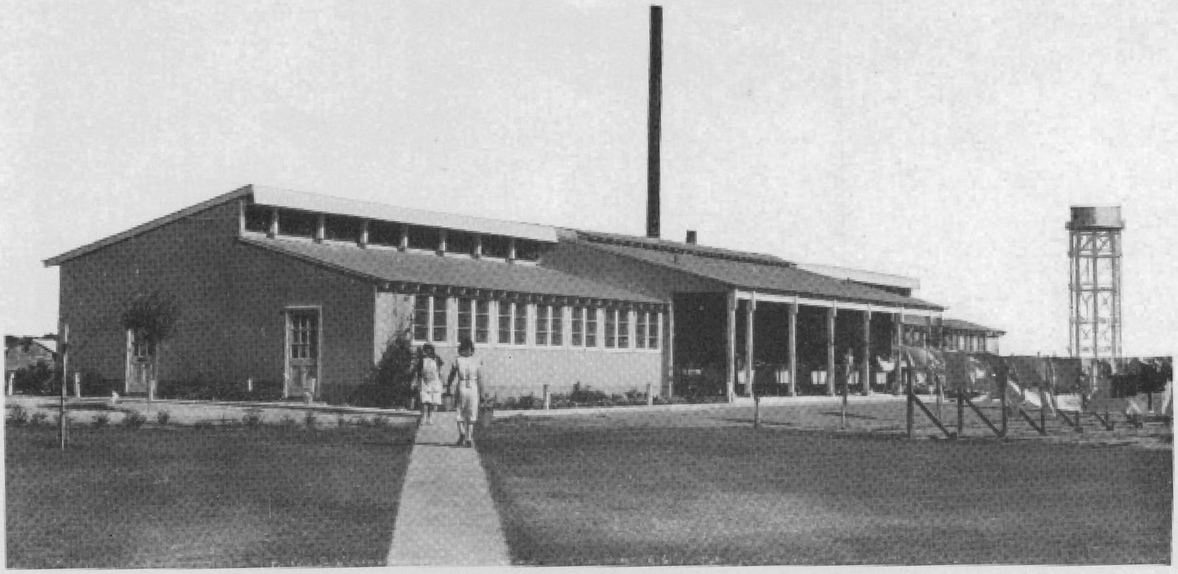
In the newer camps, like this one at Visalia, California, one-room steel shelters take the place of tents.

In the FSA camp at Shafter, California, migrant families pitch their own tents on wooden platforms. Large buildings in background are sanitary units, housing washtubs, toilets, shower baths.

Circular tubs in the Florida camps provide baths for youngsters, a place for grown-up workers to wash up when they come in from the fields.

Sanitary garbage disposal units help keep camps clean, prevent disease. This camp was built for Negro migrants near Belle Glade, Florida.

Community buildings in every camp provide a place for dances, church services, and meetings. Campers provide their own music, conduct their own meetings, govern the camp through their own elected council.



Sanitation building at the Agua Fria, Arizona, camp. Laundry tubs are under the porch; the building also houses hot water heater, showers, and toilets.

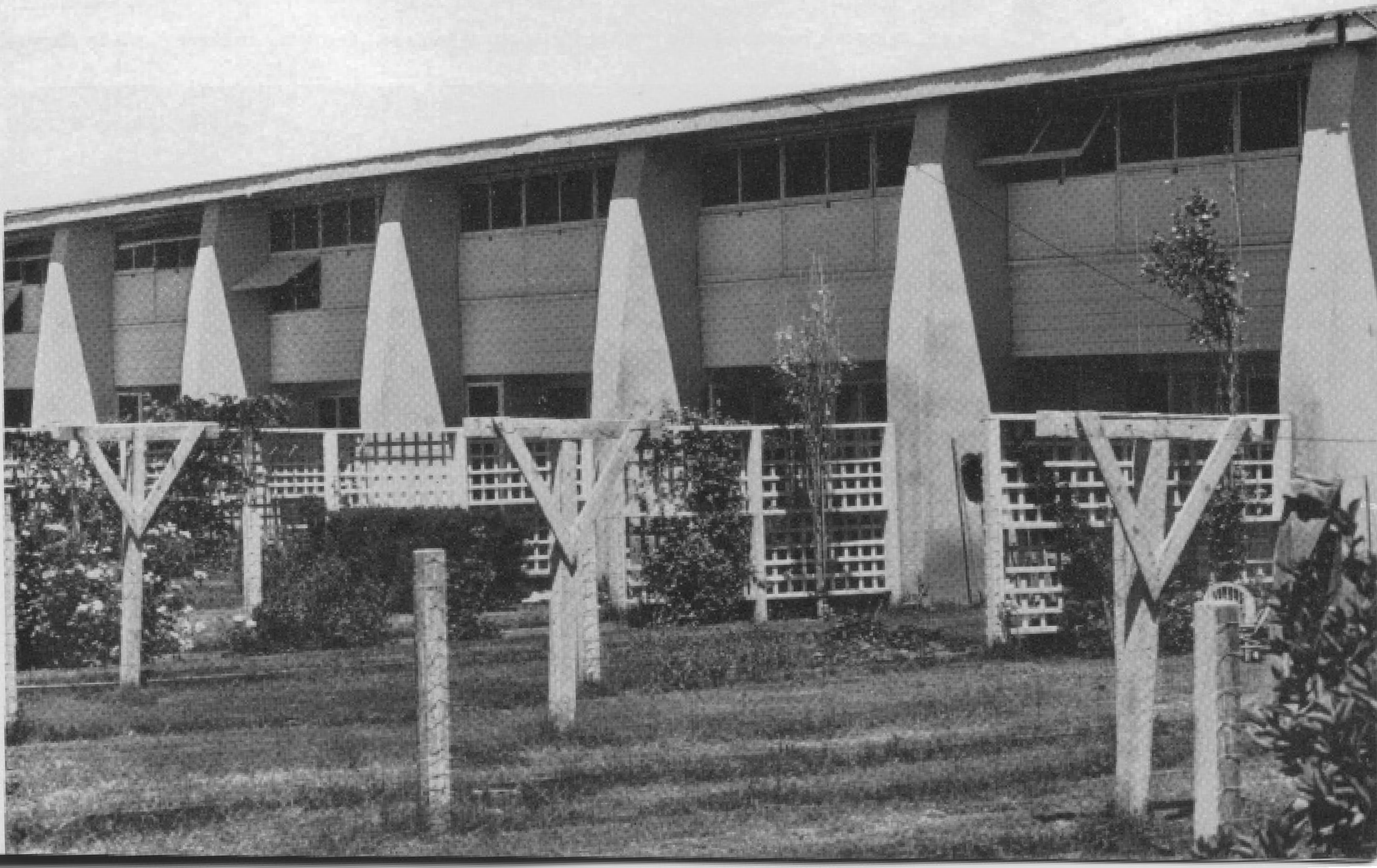
School building at the Shafter, California, camp. Migrant children get little chance to go to the ordinary local schools, since their families always are on the move from one crop area to another.

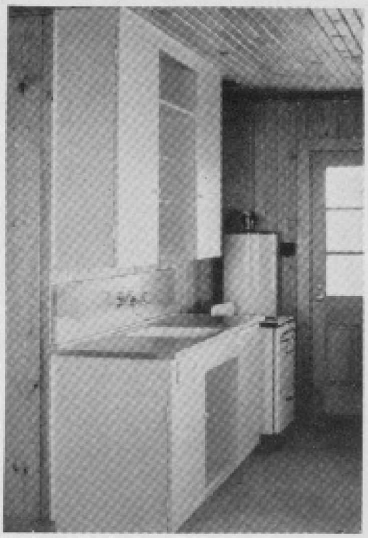
In areas where the work season is short, Farm Security operates mobile camps which "follow the harvest." One of the trailers in the foreground is a health clinic; the other is home and office for the camp manager.

This baby is getting emergency treatment in a trailer clinic at the FSA mobile camp at Merrill, Oregon.

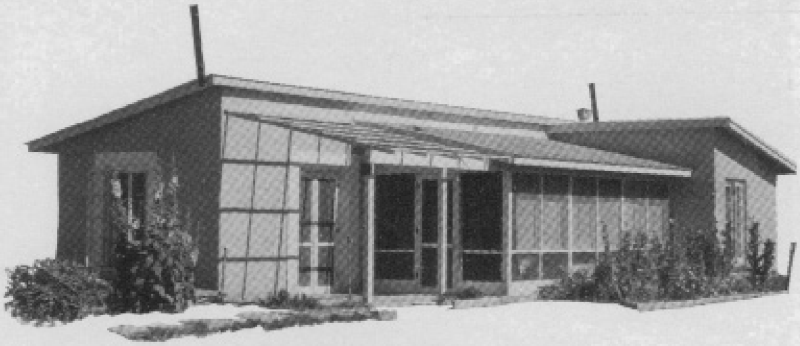
These migrant women are washing their clothes in the portable laundry tubs of a mobile camp.

These adobe apartment buildings at the Arizona Part-time Farms project, Maricopa County, house families who once were migrants. Now they have settled down in permanent homes; each family raises most of its food in its own garden, earns its cash income by work during peak seasons on large-scale commercial farms nearby.





Kitchen in a labor home at the Robstown, Texas, migrant camp. Each camp has a few permanent homes for families who are able to get full-time work on nearby farms. They rent for about $8 a month.



Adobe home built for a former migrant family which has "settled down" at the Casa Grande Farms project, Pinal County, Arizona.

Sleeping porch in one of the homes for former migrant families at Casa Grande Farms.

The photographs in this publication on pages 1, 16 (bottom) and 17 (top) were furnished by the Soil Conservation Service; all others are by the Farm Security Administration.

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