

"The Drought of 1930"

Carroll County Times article for 29 August 1999

By Jay A. Graybeal

The current drought conditions, as bad as they are, apparently are not as severe as those of the summer of 1930. A brief article in the August 15th issue of this newspaper provided an overview of the impact on agriculture:

"DAMAGE TO FARM CROPS

College Park, Md., Aug. 13—The Maryland agricultural and live-stock situation brought on by the drought of almost two months' duration, is daily becoming more critical. A report issued by Dr. T. B. Symons, director of extension, University of Maryland, shows that every money crop and every section of the State has been hard hit.

Further deterioration of crops resulted, owing to continuation of the hot and dry weather. The crop situation is the worst known. All growing crops are very poor; they are either drying up or have dried up. Streams, wells and springs are very low. In some localities water is hauled for miles for use of home and stock. The ground is too hard and dry to plow. Work in fields is at a stand still. Stock is being fed, owing to lack of pastures.

Field and sugar corn are mostly dried up. They are being cut down for filling silos.

Hay, corn and alfalfa, the staff of life for live stock, have been critically damaged by the lack of water. The situation is particularly acute in the dairy and live-stock sections of the State."

The same newspaper also carried reports from several Carroll County communities, including one from the Dennings correspondent:

"We are glad to say we are having much cooler weather; more clothing has to be worn and more cover at night to be comfortable. One mother put up a tent while it was so warm to sleep in at night; but since the change in the weather she was glad to take the children in to sleep.

The sudden change has made it much more comfortable for man and beast.

The farmers have been trying to plow, but it has been a hard task and the men say it is enough to make one sick to plow. The dust covers man and horses; until night. Water is badly needed. We are very thankful we have enough water to take a bath. We regret to say we have had no rain for a long time, although the south winds have been blowing it has failed to bring rain and all other signs have failed. However, we are still trusting it will come right.

They say in some cities they have raised the price of milk. It does not seem right, as the farmer who buys more feed on account of drought does not realize any more for milk, we think the price of feed should come down and not put the price up on the consumer.

The dry weather has caused some people to say they suppose it is dry enough for the prohibition people, but while the cellars are wet it cannot be called dry."

The editors of this paper wrote in the August 29 issue of the paper, "We are not calamity howlers, but the seriousness of the situation cannot be exaggerated." in an article that reported conditions throughout the state:

"STATE DROUTH LOSS PLACED AT \$38,000,000

At a conference held August 22 of representatives of Maryland's agricultural, industrial and banking interests, named by Governor Ritchie to consider measures to relieve distress growing out of the drought in Maryland, it was stated that the estimated crop loss in the state would be \$38,000,000.

The figures were based on three surveys made by Dr. Thomas B. Symons, director of the University of Maryland Extension Service, the last one compiled on August 20. The estimated loss in crops was given by counties. Frederick county loss is placed at \$3,971,698, the largest of any of the counties; Carroll county's loss is estimated at \$3,002,481. These estimates of loss are for crops only and do not include the loss of wages to labor, which will amount to millions more, the loss that merchants and transportation companies will suffer.

The seriousness of the situation and the many interests it will effect cannot at this time be fully realized, but as the months of the fall and winter come the full extent of the calamity will be known.

\$38,000,000 loss in the value of farm products in Maryland means not only a loss for the farmers but the wage earners and business interests of every kind, will directly or indirectly be seriously effected, and especially the canners.

\$3,002,481 less money paid to the farmers of Carroll county will result in a serious situation for them, work a great hardship for the laboring people of the county, reduce the sales of merchants in every line, no new farm implements will be bought, collections difficult, decreased bank deposits and the blighting result will be seen and felt by all. It will inevitably mean higher prices for many foods and this will add an additional hardship for the wage earners and those of little means. The demand for manufacturing products of all kinds will decrease, and this will mean the manufacturer will require fewer employees, many will be laid off and the wages of those retained reduced.

We are not calamity howlers, but the seriousness of the situation cannot be exaggerated.

The Government and the state may be able to help some, but at best neither the Government nor State can provide much relief.

We are inclined to believe Mr. Symons' estimated loss in Maryland is too low. The figures given on sweet corn cannot be right. He gives the normal value of the sweet corn crop in Maryland \$819,691, while the value of the sweet corn crop in Carroll county alone, when there is a normal crop is worth that much or more."

Editors H. P. Gorsuch and John Mitten correctly understood the broad impact of the drought in a region where agriculture dominated the economy. Everyone from the farm laborer to the banker felt the pinch. The drought of 1930 was made somewhat more unpleasant by the fact that it happened during the early months of the Great Depression. History, however, shows that most local families survived the economic crisis brought on by the drought of 1930 and later ones that visited our region.

The writer would like to thank Del. Joe Getty for suggesting the subject of this column.

Photo caption: Carroll County farms, such as the Kiser-Valentine Farm near Taneytown photographed in c 1960, suffered from a severe drought in 1930. Historical Society of Carroll County, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles J. Trout, 1991.