

4-D — THE CHARLOTTE (N. C.) NEWS — TUESDAY, MAY 24, 1949

Another Success Story Of The Soil

One-Fifth Of Mecklenburg County Farmers Are Negro

About a fifth of the persons engaged in Mecklenburg farming are Negroes, the great majority of whom work either as tenants or hired hands. However, of the between 700 and 800 working on the soil, some 107 now own farms ranging from 20 to 125 acres.

And each year, more and more Negroes are buying their own land. W. B. Harrison, Negro County agent, said in citing the advances made in the nine years he has been in the local office.

This will be Mr. Harrison's nineteenth year in agriculture. Before coming here, he was for many years superintendent of the farms at A&T College in Greensboro.

Typical of the strides being made in the county, Mr. Harrison said, was that of John D. Conner, whose farm is about eighteen miles northwest of Charlotte on the Beatty's Ford Road, in the Caldwell section. Conner was a tenant farmer who had gone to the first four grades of school before quitting to work in the fields. He had seen his father struggle on someone else's land a lifetime with little to show for his efforts. That wasn't going to happen to him if there was any way to avoid it.

Conner's break came in the midst of the depression. With a little money he had saved, he was able to make a down payment on a farm. Each year he met the payments, until one day



W. B. Harrison, Negro county agent, and John Connor of Caldwell community discuss strip crop farming. Farmer Connor (right) has planted one terrace in wheat, another in cotton.

he owned 100 acres of good Mecklenburg dirt.

OPPORTUNITIES

Now he is making sure that his

family of eight boys and four girls have opportunities that he didn't. His youngest boy is this year finishing high school as have all his children. One of his girls is a graduate of Johnson C. Smith University.

The Conner farm has some of the outstanding examples of strip farming and terracing in that section. Perhaps the biggest crop is cotton. Around 35 of his acres are planted in cotton and during the picking season the entire family comes together to pick, with the result being usually around a bale a day.

He also raises the usual wheat and corn, and he has a registered Jersey bull in a herd which is being constantly improved. He milks eight of his cows. He also owns a truck and five mules. At the moment, he is working on improved pasture lands of about twenty acres.

Farmer Conner is just one of a number of former tenants who have bought their own lands. Mr. Harrison pointed out, "The trend is back to the land, but the land that you yourself own."

ARTIFICIAL BREEDING

Every Mecklenburg County cow owner is offered the services of sires proved for production with no strings attached. The county has a laboratory equipped with over \$1,000 worth of equipment. W. A. Abernethy, the technician, has proved to be one of the best in the state with a conception rate of consistently around 60 per cent. Over 800 cows were bred in this manner last year.

Farmers are being taught to dehorn cattle with caustic potash.

Farms Aid Many Folk

Two impressive farm projects in the county benefit more than the immediate workers. These are the acres maintained by the County Home and those of the Thompson Orphanage.

The taxpayer is one of the most direct beneficiaries of the 300 acres now under cultivation at the County Home. John Miller, for the past sixteen years overseer, raises between \$25,000 and \$30,000 worth of crops and cattle turned mostly into food used at the County Home. Over \$1,000 worth of milk too goes from the farm to the Tuberculosis Sanatorium at Huntersville.

The youngsters at Thompson Orphanage perhaps are the greatest beneficiaries from the over 200 acres actively maintained of the institution. They have fresh, rich food from the fields, the best cuts of meat as well as living a healthy, invigorating life and learning an occupation. M. D. Whisnant, the director, said that around \$16,000 is saved in food bills alone by raising their own.

In both instances, meals are kept at top quality in the face of rising food and other living costs, something quite impossible at many institutions.

The County Farm has grown in acreage with the years. When Mr. Miller first took over, there were but 75 acres available for cultivation. He has quadrupled the land by clearing and filling. All produce not immediately eaten goes either in the ice house or is canned at the farm cannery, insuring a year-around supply.

Around 200 laying hens take care of the egg situation, and over 60 cows, the milk supply. On top of this, there are over 100 head of beef cattle on hand and around 80 hogs to take care of meat shortages.

Feed for the animals is also raised on the land. About 35 acres, however, is used exclusively for truck garden products.

When Mr. Whisnant took over at Thompson Orphanage in 1940, there was nothing under cultivation, not even a small garden. Today, the Orphanage operates two farms with a total of 224 acres. "We couldn't even begin to give the children a balanced diet without our farms," he pointed out.

In 1945, the Orphanage bought Cedarbrook Farm which brought 169 acres into the fold. Now around 75 hogs occupy the land.

In 1944 when a new kitchen and a walk-in cooler were built at the institution, it was possible to store and can a year-around wide variety of meat and vegetables.

All of the 79 children have some part in the farming activity. Many of the youths are members of the 4-H Club. The farm has won first prize every year but the first with its chickens as well as picking up numerous other awards for its dairy cows.

About ten acres are devoted to vegetables, about four to silage corn, the rest to pastures and feed. Milk is the only item sold outside. No cash crops are raised.

The projects are an example of how intelligent use of land has aided in one instance a public institution; in the other, a private institution, both in actual and intangible ways.

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