

THE AGRICULTURAL LIFE OF GREENVILLE COUNTY, 1850 - 1950

*Emory V. Jones**

As an experienced agriculture extension worker and educator trained in horticulture, I quickly find myself over my head in conducting historical research. I have been most intrigued and challenged in trying to look at the history of Greenville County agriculture in a brief 100 year period. The Bible speaks of such time periods as just a blink in history. However, more change and development occurred than in all previous times combined.

Historians have said that up until the 1800's a farmer in the generation of Moses would not have felt terribly out of place if he had suddenly been transplanted into our rural society.

Let us set out on a somewhat chronological travel by an amateur historian from the year 1850 to 1950. Dr. George Aull, former head of Clemson University Agriculture Economics Department, used this statement once in a talk that "it has been facetiously reported that history is something that didn't happen written by someone who wasn't there."

Prior to 1850 Vardry McBee had begun industrializing Greenville as he used the water power of the Reedy River to power flour mills, textile mills, a tannery, and lumber mills. Gold mines had been worked up until 1849 with one of the region's best being seven miles northwest of Greer. McBee had recognized the potential of Greenville because of its water power, its location as cattle drovers and traders moved through and its appeal to Lowcountry plantation owners as a summer resort.

A significant invention of the mid-1800's was the first reaper by Cyrus McCormick in 1835. Listed in the ads in the 'Patriot and Mountaineer' was a 'Little Giant Corn and Cob Mill' requires one horse and grinds 10 bushels corn/hour - \$55. Significant also in the ads of local newspapers were slaves and their descriptions.

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It seems that about one third of the population of the county were slaves. About 30% of the heads of households owned slaves. One half of these owned fewer than six. Over 50% of the farms cultivated less than 100 acres. About one-half the farms produced only one bale of cotton a year. During 1857 corn sold for 75 cents/bushel. A cow and calf sold for \$7.00.

A diary of one Piedmont farmer that owned ten slaves lists the following farm activities and events in the 1850's:

clearing new ground	hog killing
hoeing & thinning	splitting rails
breaking oxen	ditching
hauling out manure	stacking hay
threshing	robbed bees
using sythes	cradling wheat
laying by	pulling fodder
killed wild turkeys	cutting tops
squirrel hunting	cutting poles for ditches
fox hunting	chickens died of chlorea
attend traditional sale	attend agriculture show in
1st Monday in	Laurens
Village squares	make brandy from peaches

The 1860's were the time of Civil War. Almost every white man served in the war. After the Civil War, farmers returned to burned out buildings and torn down fences. Livestock and farm tools were scarce. There were many widows and fatherless children. Freed slaves had a hard life because they owned nothing. Many farmers lost their farms. Dispossessed farmers and ex-slaves became tenant farmers. During the war corn prices were 50 cents/bushel (1859) to \$25.00/bushel (1865).

During the 1800's the Block House in N.E. Greenville County was a popular stop over for drovers on their way from Tennessee and North Carolina to Spartanburg and Columbia. When the railroad was completed in 1878 it reduced the number of drovers moving cattle on foot.

Cotton was generally unprofitable from 1873-1900 selling

for 5 cents/pound. About two-thirds of farmers were tenants. Farm life was very hard with long hours for the farmer and wife. Many children died of typhoid, diphtheria and pneumonia.

The Grange Movement came to South Carolina in 1869 to provide instruction and recreation to farm families. It peaked in 1875 and was instrumental in securing the office of State Railroad Commission and South Carolina Department of Agriculture.

Clemson College was established in 1893. In 1898 a representative from Clemson College met the farmers of Greenville County to explain the necessity of forming an auxiliary experiment club. A committee was appointed with Dr. W. H. Austin, Chairman. Research findings and improved technology began to move to the farmers during the late 1800's.

Clemson's first Experiment Station bulletin was published in the 1890's on commercial fertilizers. The second was on cotton experiments that had been conducted in Spartanburg and Darlington. It reported the best variety in the Spartanburg experiment averaged 373 pounds lint per acre. Other publications released in the late 1800's were on tomatoes, dairy products, sweet potatoes, hog cholera, 'Founder', and fungicides.

Values of Farm Land and Building 1899 - 1949 Greenville County

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Value</u>	<u>Average Value</u>	<u>Average Land Value/acre</u>
1899	\$ 6 million	\$1013.00	\$ 15.12
1909	16.4 "	2486.00	39.67
1919	40 "	6041.00	111.51
1924	27 "	3626.00	84.40
1929	23 "	3285.00	68.76
1934	16 "	2217.00	44.01
1939	16 "	2932.00	56.09
1944	26 "	6457.00	79.04
1949	37 "	6428.00	120.51

No. Farms & Cotton Acreage – Greenville County

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. Farms</u>	<u>Cotton Acreage</u>	
		<u>Year</u>	<u>Acres</u>
1935	7539	1941	44,500
1940	5607	1944	37,800
1945	7341	1947	35,300
1950	5756	1950	21,200

The first commercial peach orchard in upper South Carolina was established by Verne Smith in Greer in 1898.

Greer was once called the Peach Center of the world by the Greer Chamber of Commerce.

First commercial peaches were hauled to Greenville in wagons and sold on Main Street.

The Peach Festival brought national attention to Greer in the 1940's and 1950's.

Dobson Peach Farms, started in 1925, peddled peaches over Greenville street by street.

Palmer Dillard started in the peach business in 1926 after working for Mr. Verne Smith and learning the business.

Palmer Dillard said Verne Smith, Sr. shipped the first peaches from Greer. Dillard packed their first peaches in 1926.

Senator Verne Smith interviewed in "Clingstone"* says shipping was risky, growers did not know what they brought for a month or so.

By 1913 nearly every South Carolina county had one or more demonstration farms in a USDA program under Seamon Knapp's direction. Farms were guaranteed against loss. Participants had to use USDA approved methods. They invited neighbors in to see results.

In 1913 the Smith Lever Act was enacted establishing the Cooperative Extension Service. In 1915 A. H. Chapman was appointed the first Greenville County Agent. First Extension pro-

* Historical booklet compiled by students at Greer High School in the late 1970's.

grams in the county were:

- 1) Home mixing of fertilizers (saved \$4/ton)
- 2) Using legumes
- 3) Increased cotton yields on 2800 demonstration acres - increased 189% above state average
- 4) Buying fertilizer cooperatively
- 5) Treated hogs for cholera
- 6) Silo building

T. E. Jones of Fountain Inn fed 30 head of cattle in 1916. Fountain Inn Jersey Bull Association formed 1916 with 24 members. Started boll weevil program in 1920. Greenville agent did not get his reports in as well as others 1916-1920.

A 1922 South Carolina Experiment Station Bulletin on Farm Organization and Cost of Production listed five principal problems of farmers.

- 1) Farm organizations
- 2) Boll weevil
- 3) Labor conditions
- 4) Tenure, and
- 5) Farm - city balance

Cotton averaged 20 cents/lb

Corn averaged 1.45/bu

At this time 52% of crop land was in cotton. The average farm income per farm was \$378.00.

The USDA was providing new technology with bulletins such as:

- a) How to bale hay
- b) How to cap hay stacks
- c) Mule production

Incidentally, in 1917 there were more mules than horses. A good mule sold for \$150 - \$400.

1917 - Smith Hughes Act was enacted to teach vocational agriculture in public schools. Farmers enjoyed great prosperity during World War I. In 1918 cotton was 40 cents/lb. Most highly used fertilizer in 1920 was 3-10-3 analysis.

Twenty years of agricultural depression occurred in 1921-1941.

1921 - The boll weevil arrives.

1922 - W. R. Gray became county agent

1924 - Greenville County agent reported good farm practices, more important under boll weevil conditions; averaged bale/Ac on 300 acres of demonstration acreage.

Began to use dusting for boll weevils ; first soybeans grown in Greenville County.

1929 - Great depression began

In 1933 South Carolina farm wages were 50 cents/day with board.

SC Crop Production

1913 - \$166,000,000

1918 - \$466,000,000

1932 - \$ 63,000,000

1940 - \$119,000,000

In 1935 - USDA Soil Conservation Service put assistants in 14 Piedmont counties to supervise erosion control.

In 1935 Extension begins to show motion pictures at education meetings.

In 1937 Rural Electrification was taught with topics such as "How To Obtain Power Lines."

The Greenville County Soil and Water Conservation District was formed in 1939 by a state law that created conservation districts.

1940 - S.C. Yields Corn average 14.7 bushels, U.S. Yields Corn average 32 bushels, S.C. purchased 686,000 tons fertilization, Iowa purchased 16,000 tons fertilization

1941 - The Livestock and Better Living Train* was used over South Carolina to teach rural folks.

WWII - A Food For Victory promotion was presented over the state to grow more food for the war effort.

Significant in the pages of the *Greenville News* during the

* This train was operated by the Clemson Extension Service. It contained educational exhibits designed to teach better farming methods.

late 1940's were these farm related topics.

"Wholesale Farmers Market Opens" 6-1-49

Cotton prices received same bold type as stock price today

"Machine Planting of Kudzu"

"Dairy Producers Paid 58 cents/gallon"

"City Curb Market Planned" - 1949

"Livestock and Grassland Farming getting Started"

"Greenville Farmer Won State Corn Contest with a Yield on
162 bu/a."

Classified ads bold type vegetable plants

As we closed out the 1940's gasoline power was beginning
to come on strong in Greenville County. Most rural roads were
dirt, electric power was reaching most rural areas.