

The Status of Alabama Agriculture

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ALABAMA is largely a rural state with approximately one-half the population living on farms. There are about 273,000 farms in the State, according to the 1935 census. To get a reasonably clear picture of the agriculture that is practiced on this large number of farms, the total land available for productive use should be considered. Since Alabama is one of the poorest agricultural states, it is compared with Iowa, one of the wealthiest states to show the difference in amount and in use of the available farm land. The average Iowa farmer uses nearly four times as much land as the average Alabama farmer. In Table I will be found a statement of the available farm land by land-use classification.

TABLE 1.—Classification of Alabama and Iowa Crop Land as to Use (1935 Census)

| | Alabama (acres) | | Iowa (acres) | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|------------|
| | Per farm | Total | Per farm | Total |
| Cropland harvested | 26 | 7,238,606 | 85 | 18,925,893 |
| Plowable pastures ¹ | 5 | 1,363,326 | 26 | 5,769,836 |
| Idle land ² | 4 | 1,041,480 | 5 | 1,177,811 |
| Crop failures | .3 | 76,099 | 5 | 1,110,571 |
| All land available for farm crops | 35.3 | 9,719,511 | 121 | 26,984,111 |
| Number of farms | | 273,000 | | 222,000 |

¹ Land that can be plowed without clearing, draining, or irrigation.

² Cropland lying idle in 1934, or in summer fallow; not in crops or pasture.

In the foregoing table it is indicated that there are about seven and one-fourth million acres of harvested crop land in Alabama. To show some of the details as to how farmers use this land, Table 2 is presented. An inspection of this table reveals the fact that corn, cotton, hay, and peanuts occupy more than seven million of those acres.

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**TABLE 2.—Acreage Devoted to Various Crops in Alabama
(1935 Census)**

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Corn | 3,648,657 |
| Cotton | 2,130,062 |
| Hay | 906,286 |
| Peanuts — alone | 350,585 |
| Sweet potatoes | 110,749 |
| Oats | 105,212 |
| Sorghum, broom corn, buckwheat, hemp, hops, etc. | 99,908 |
| Nuts, orchards, fruits, vineyards | 95,379 |
| Irish potatoes | 33,583 |
| Sugar cane | 26,653 |
| Watermelons | 16,540 |
| Wheat | 9,075 |
| Sweet corn | 6,797 |
| Strawberries | 5,491 |
| Tomatoes | 3,195 |
| Cabbage | 3,409 |
| All other vegetables (commercial) | 12,239 |
| Sorghum, grain | 2,680 |
| Miscellaneous | 1,500 |

Alabama farmers received an average of \$131,769,000 cash from the sale of all crops, livestock, and forest products for the twelve years 1924-1935. This amounts to an average of \$479 per farm family. It is important to know the sources from which this income was derived. The details of this cash income are given in Table 3.

**TABLE 3.—Cash Income Received by Alabama Farmers
12-Year Average, 1924-1935**

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|
| Cotton and seed | \$90,240,000 |
| All livestock and products | 16,739,000 |
| Forest products | 6,471,000 |
| Peanuts | 4,192,000 |
| Sweet potatoes | 3,126,000 |
| Irish potatoes | 2,519,000 |
| Truck crops | 1,631,000 |
| Corn | 1,480,000 |
| Strawberries | 915,000 |
| Hay | 802,000 |
| Apples | 642,000 |
| Peaches | 552,000 |
| Pecans | 416,000 |
| Syrup — cane | 395,000 |
| Syrup — sorghum | 363,000 |
| Cowpeas | 332,000 |
| Miscellaneous | 954,000 |
| Total | \$131,769,000 |

The income from cotton overshadowed that from all other sources. Livestock ranked second and was followed in order by forest products, peanuts, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, truck crops, and corn. No other crop brought in as much as one million dollars, or the equivalent of about \$4.00 per farm.

INCOME FROM LIVESTOCK AND LIVESTOCK PRODUCTS

Livestock and livestock products brought cash sales of about \$17,000,000 as a 12-year average, from 1924-1935. When these sales are broken down into 5-year periods, it is apparent that there is a tendency toward increased sales of livestock. In Table 4 these details are presented.

TABLE 4.—Receipts from Sale of Livestock and Livestock Products

| | | |
|-----------|----------------|--------------|
| 1924-1928 | 5-year average | \$18,371,200 |
| 1929-1933 | 5-year average | 14,674,600 |
| 1934-1938 | 5-year average | 23,280,400 |
| 1939 | | 29,593,000 |

The foregoing figures are for all kinds of livestock. They support the statement that the trend in livestock production and sales is upward, since the 1939 sales are about \$11,222,000 above those of the 1924-1928 period.

It is now of interest to analyze livestock sales to determine the income obtained from various kinds of livestock. This is done in the next few paragraphs.

Hogs.—Cash returns received from hog sales by Alabama farmers are detailed in Table 5.

TABLE 5.—Receipts from Hog Sales by Periods Indicated

| | | |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1924-1935 | 12-year average | \$4,455,167 |
| 1934 | | 2,159,000 |
| 1935 | | 3,279,000 |
| 1936 | | 5,381,000 |
| 1937 | | 7,638,000 |
| 1938 | | 8,233,000 |
| 1939 | | 8,157,000 |

It is apparent that there has been a material increase in hog sales by Alabama farmers in recent years. Cash returns from hogs increased by \$5,998,000 from 1934 to 1939. For the time being, the trend in hog production is definitely upward. There has been no similar rapid increase in cash returns from any other form of livestock in recent years as will be shown in the following paragraphs and tables.

Dairy Products.—From 1934 through 1939 the sale of dairy products increased from \$6,054,000 to \$7,689,000. The increase amounted to \$1,635,000. The annual figures are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6.—Cash Sales of Dairy Products for Years Indicated

| | |
|------|-------------|
| 1934 | \$6,054,000 |
| 1935 | 6,890,000 |
| 1936 | 7,715,000 |
| 1937 | 7,574,000 |
| 1938 | 7,805,000 |
| 1939 | 7,689,000 |

In Table 7 the number of dairy cattle in Alabama are presented by 5-year periods for 25 years. For comparison, the numbers of dairy cattle in Mississippi are also given.

TABLE 7.—Cows and Heifers Two Years Old and Over Kept for Milk

| | 1916-1920 | 1921-1925 | 1926-1930 | 1931-1935 | 1936-1940 |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Alabama | 404,200 | 383,000 | 363,000 | 435,800 | 421,600 |
| Mississippi | 466,000 | 438,400 | 419,400 | 540,800 | 565,400 |

During this 25-year period, Alabama gained 17,400 dairy cows while Mississippi was gaining 99,400. There appears little hope for a material increase in dairy production until a program of production is followed that will enable farmers to produce milk cheap enough to sell to processing plants.

Cattle and Calves.—Cash sales of cattle and calves are shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8.—Cash Sales of Cattle and Calves for Years Indicated

| | | |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1924-1935 | 12-year average | \$3,904,750 |
| 1934 | | 2,955,000 |
| 1935 | | 6,287,000 |
| 1936 | | 5,640,000 |
| 1937 | | 5,855,000 |
| 1938 | | 5,753,000 |
| 1939 | | 6,648,000 |

From 1924 to 1935 the average annual cash sales amounted to nearly \$4,000,000. Between 1934 and 1939, cattle and calf sales increased \$3,693,000. Apparently there is a definite upward trend in the sales from this kind of livestock.

Poultry.—On many farms, and on the small farms in particular, chickens and eggs should be a very important source of cash income. From this source, Alabama farmers received an average of a little more than \$6,000,000 for the 12-year period 1924-1935. The figures in Table 9 indicate but little increase in sales from this source during the last fifteen years. However, the increase from 1934 to 1939 amounted to \$2,194,000. This is more in the nature of a recovery than a definite increase, since cash sales in recent years are little larger than those of 15 years ago.

TABLE 9.—Cash Sales of Chickens and Eggs for Years Indicated

| | | |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1924-1935 | 12-year average | \$6,160,000 |
| 1934 | | 4,368,000 |
| 1935 | | 4,946,000 |
| 1936 | | 5,951,000 |
| 1937 | | 6,511,000 |
| 1938 | | 5,786,000 |
| 1939 | | 6,562,000 |

FEED PRODUCTION

The data presented in Tables 4 to 9, inclusive, show that there is a gradual trend toward increased production of livestock and livestock products for sale by farmers. These data are quite understandable in the light of the feed production figures shown in Table 10.

TABLE 10.—Tonnage of Specified Feeds Produced in Alabama by Periods Indicated

| Year | Period | Corn (tons) | Oats (tons) | Unpicked peanuts (tons) | Velvet beans (tons) | Hay (tons) |
|-----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| 1924-1928 | 5-year average | 1,000,000 | 26,189 | 40,837 | 115,775 | 464,800 |
| 1929-1933 | 5-year average | 1,035,384 | 30,675 | 39,745 | 138,440 | 424,600 |
| 1934-1938 | 5-year average | 1,271,221 | 35,373 | 57,864 | 229,251 | 606,600 |
| 1939 | | 932,773 | 45,408 | 60,562 | 179,700 | 630,000 |

It is apparent that there has been a slight upward trend in the production of feeds during the past 15 years, but the total production has never been much more than was needed to supply the needs of farm workstock and labor. This statement is supported by the fact that much feed was bought by farmers recently, as a result of the short crop of 1939. It takes only a simple calculation to show from the above figures that the production of corn and hay amounts to 166 bushels and 2.2 tons, respectively, for each of the 273,000 farms in Alabama. These figures explain why there are so little livestock for sale, and why the increase in livestock production is so slow.

INCOME FROM VEGETABLES AND FRUITS

Vegetables grown on a commercial scale make a very important item in cash sales from several sections of Alabama. Irish potatoes from Baldwin County and strawberries from Cullman County are good examples. Distribution of sales of vegetables, berries, and fruits is shown in Table 11.

TABLE 11.—Cash Sales of Vegetables, Fruits and Berries, for Years Indicated

| | 1936 | 1937 | 1938 | 1939 |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| All vegetables | \$4,781,000 | \$4,215,000 | \$4,166,000 | \$5,013,000 |
| Berries and Fruits | 1,891,000 | 1,699,000 | 1,834,000 | 2,061,000 |

Cash sales from these sources amount to six or seven millions of dollars annually. The small fluctuation in sales from 1936 to 1939 may not be significant. However, there is a definite trend toward increased production of Irish potatoes. It is highly important to try to extend production of all such perishable crops

since they have a high cash value per acre. It is not likely, however, that there ever will be a large acreage devoted to these kinds of crops in Alabama.

INCOME FROM COTTON

The value of the Alabama cotton crop amounted to more than eighty-six millions of dollars for the 5-year period of 1910-1914. When the value figures are considered by 5-year periods, it becomes quite obvious that the returns from cotton are definitely declining. This is due to a reduction in both acreage planted and price received for cotton in recent years. Thirty years ago Alabama farmers planted more than three and one-half million acres of cotton, but during the last five or six years the acreage devoted to this crop has dropped to two and one-fourth millions. In 1939 there were only a little more than two million acres planted to cotton and the cash value of the crop dropped to less than thirty-eight million dollars. In the meantime, Alabama farmers have become more efficient cotton growers and have very materially increased the average yields per acre. Had it not been for this increased acre yield of cotton, cash income would have been much lower than it has been in recent years. Nevertheless, the value of the cotton crop is much lower than it was twenty or thirty years ago. **As a matter of fact, the value of both cotton and livestock in 1939 was less than the average value of the cotton crop alone for the twelve years of 1924-1935.** In Table 12 may be found the average cash value and average acreage of cotton by 5-year periods for thirty years.

TABLE 12. Value and Acreage of Cotton and Cottonseed Sold by 5-Year Periods

| | | Value | Acreage |
|-----------|----------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1910-1914 | 5-year average | \$ 86,388,400 | 3,633,800 |
| 1915-1919 | 5-year average | 93,241,200 | 2,568,000 |
| 1920-1924 | 5-year average | 85,841,200 | 2,643,400 |
| 1925-1929 | 5-year average | 127,581,400 | 3,384,600 |
| 1930-1934 | 5-year average | 56,415,000 | 2,864,600 |
| 1935-1939 | 5-year average | 64,320,600 | 2,270,600 |
| 1939 | | 37,590,000 | 2,037,000 |

An inspection of this table reveals the fact that there are now about 1,500,000 acres less cotton than were planted 30 years ago. The acres taken out of cotton were usually the poorest, which is as it should be. But there has not been developed a farm program for the use of these released acres to produce another source of cash income. This is one of the reasons why both the livestock and cotton sales of 1939 are less than the sales of cotton alone some twenty-five or thirty years ago.

INCOME FROM FORESTS

The preceding discussion dealt with the problems arising from the use of nine and two-thirds millions of acres of crop land. The status of Alabama agriculture cannot be fully comprehended without a careful consideration of the nearly nineteen million acres of forest land in this state. During the past forty years forest products and operations in forest enterprises have brought annual returns to Alabama amounting to between 50 and 60 millions of dollars. This high average annual return has been made possible by drawing on our reserve supplies of virgin timber. This reserve supply is about exhausted and the second-growth stands of the more valuable species are being cut faster than they are growing. Based on the timber growth in Alabama for 1936, the total drain on pines in the state for a year of average consumption would exceed growth by approximately 600 million board feet per year. Figures like these explain why our supplies are disappearing so rapidly. If all cut-over land were again growing good stands of desirable kinds of timber, the picture would not be bad. Unfortunately, the picture is bad, because the average acre of second-growth forest land carries only 43 per cent of the volume of timber that it should. And where the stand is thin, the resulting trees are limby and rough. Approximately 53 per cent of the second-growth pine stands falls in this undesirable class. To make the outlook for the future timber supply still less promising, it is pointed out that in young stands of timber hardwoods constitute almost two-thirds of the total volume. In other words, when good pine is cut off the land, poor quality hardwoods replace them in a majority of cases; and when pine does come back, the stand is usually too thin to produce high quality trees. Nature gave to Alabama a forest reserve from which many millions of dollars have been obtained. But the original stand is rapidly being used up. Forest industries have supported as many as 62,000 people annually, and in certain years have brought into the state as much as \$80,000,000. The evidence available definitely indicates that a better forest program must be practiced in the future if the 18 or 19 million acres of forest land are to continue to be a source of real and lasting wealth, as well as a means of a livelihood to many thousands of people. The acreage is so vast and the potential values so great that Alabama's forest problems take first rank among those that need immediate attention and vigorous attack.

SUMMARY

The status of Alabama Agriculture as of 1939 may be fairly well summarized by the use of a few figures. Cotton produced on just a little more than two million acres of land brought in \$37,590,000. From the remaining seven million odd acres of available crop land, there were sold \$29,593,000 worth of livestock and livestock products, about \$7,000,000 worth of vegetables, fruits,

berries, and about \$8,000,000 worth of peanuts, corn, and miscellaneous crops. About two million acres in cotton produced \$37,590,000 in sales, while the remaining seven million odd acres in all other enterprises produced about \$44,000,000 in cash income. During the last ten years the Alabama farm income from the sales of all kinds of farm commodities has been materially lower than it was for a twenty-year period from 1910 to 1929. Apparently there must be a restricted cotton acreage for many years. This leaves open to the rank and file of farmers only livestock, livestock products, and forest products as possible sources of increased cash income. Increases in these lines cannot be had as long as the yields of grain, feed, forage, and pasture crops remain as low as they now are and as long as forest lands are given little care and attention. **The status of Alabama Agriculture cannot be materially changed, therefore, until there are good yields of crops or trees on millions of acres of land that now produce little or no cash income.**

This brief statement sets forth the status of Alabama Agriculture and indicates problems that must be solved before that status may be very much improved. The solution of these problems challenges the best that is in all of the several agencies that have been set up to serve the farmers of Alabama.