

## LAND-USE ASSOCIATIONS IN THE ORCHARD ECONOMY OF SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

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Commercial orchards of peaches and apples are significant in the agricultural economy of six areas in southern Illinois. The accompanying map (fig. 1) shows these two orchard crops are concentrated near (1) Metropolis and (2) Villa Ridge, the most southerly orchard districts in the state and two of the smallest in southern Illinois, (3) Anna-Cobden, the most important in southern Illinois, (4) New Burnside, which ranks third, and last the two most northerly in southern Illinois, (5) Centralia, number two in importance, and (6) the Sesser district, the smallest of all.

Orchard farmers who derive their primary income from peaches and apples also devote some energy, land, and capital to other cash crops. The wide fluctuations in production and sale prices of peaches and apples are all too characteristic of southern Illinois orcharding. When the markets are good they often have no crop, orchardists say, and when they have a good crop, there is no market. It is only good insurance, if not good horticultural practice, for an orchardist to spread his sources of income and to attempt to combine other land uses which will fit in with his fruit business.

The six districts mentioned differ from each other, not only in the relative importance of peaches or apples, but also in the type of land

use associated with orcharding (fig. 1). Each orchard area has its own land use associations as well as its orcharding character.

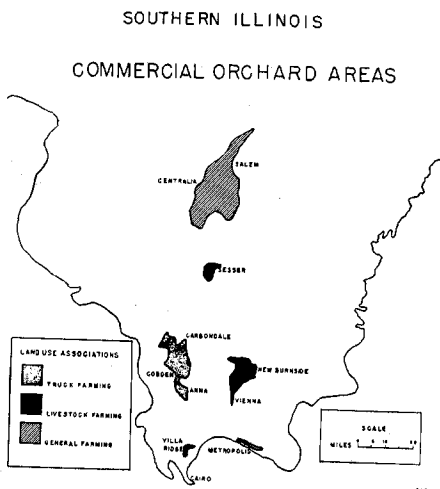


FIG. 1.

The Metropolis and Villa Ridge districts comprise only about 70 square miles together. However, the orchard farms of the Metropolis area, usually called orchard companies, consist of large individual holdings and, as a result, can expand their crops from peaches, the dominant crop. Removal of peach blocks because of age and winter killing has made land available for other crops.

Wheat and cattle have become the chief land uses associated with orcharding here. Villa Ridge growers are giving much attention to truck gardening and small fruit. On some farms they are even more important than peaches. Orchard farms are relatively small in the Villa Ridge area and emphasis has been given to crops which give high yields and high returns per acre. Truck crops meet those requirements. In addition, the Illinois Central Railroad and highways give ready access to markets, another important factor in combining truck farming with orcharding.

The Anna-Cobden area is the most intensely used commercial orchard land in southern Illinois. It is also the oldest and apparently the most prosperous orchard region. Yet the

individual growers of the area as a whole combine other cash crops, mainly early vegetables and strawberries, with their apples and peaches. Such crops grow to advantage on the small patches of lower ground which orchardists generally do not use for their peaches and apples.

For various reasons truck farming combines most successfully with orcharding, and this is the combination most highly developed in the Anna-Cobden region (fig. 2). Truck gardens are terminal one-season ventures which can be quickly planted, especially if the orchard prospect looks slim. Much of the same machinery, labor, packing sheds, and marketing facilities can be used for both. There is a definite relationship each year between the amount of



Fig. 2.—Tomatoes in the foreground, peach orchards in the distance. Near Alto Pass.

truck farming and the character of the crop of peaches and apples. When there are good fruit prospects the orchardists do not grow as many vegetables as they do when the prospects are poor. Their first love is orcharding and they are only buying some form of casualty insurance which takes the form of other cash crops.

The high percentage of generally rough to rugged terrain imposes limitations to clean tilled crops such as corn or other vegetables. However, the rugged land is suitable for beef cattle. Dairy cows require constant and daily attention, just as much during the rush of orchard spraying or harvesting times as throughout the year. Most growers prefer more freedom than dairying permits so they can attend professional meetings or take a vacation in Florida—providing they have had a good fruit year.

The New Burnside area, some 25 miles directly east from the Anna-Cobden area, is undergoing some basic and far-reaching changes in its orchard economy, especially with reference to land use associations on individual orchard farms. This region is turning toward livestock, especially beef cattle. Orchard after orchard has been removed and the land put into improved pasture for beef cattle. This is more nearly possible in this region because the orchard farms are large, with a high proportion of steep rough land which can be placed best into permanent pasture. Grower after grower is converting to this combination. Most of the growers favor beef cattle over other types of associated land uses because beef interferes less with the labor requirements of fruit and de-

mands less constant attention. The grower can leave the hired hand in charge of his herd while he attends horticulture meetings or takes off for a few days.

The Centralia-Alma orchard area, some 75 miles north of the other districts, has an entirely different land use association. Here general farming with emphasis on wheat, soy beans, and livestock is commonly combined with orcharding. The nature of the land, the larger size of the farms, and the general discouragement among orchard growers all have influenced the trend toward diversification. Some farmers have abandoned orcharding completely. The land is more gently sloping, even astonishingly level in the orchard areas. This allows more cultivated field crops to be grown without as serious loss of soil from erosion as is true in the Ozark orchard country. Farms are large so that individual farms have room for both orchards and other crops. Finally the growers are in the mood to shift their enterprise toward greater diversification to avoid the disappointing failures they have had in recent years with peaches and apples. Some of the orchardists were only part-time fruit growers in the first place, had only small orchard plantings, and weren't bonafide commercial growers. It has been relatively easy for them to convert to general farming and either give orcharding second place or abandon it altogether.

#### SUMMARY

There is a tendency in the orchard economy of southern Illinois to combine other land uses for supplementary cash income. The economic

risks of orcharding make it important to combine other sources of income with deciduous fruit in order to give the grower a firmer financial base. The nature of the land, the size of individual holdings, the availability of land for diversified crops, types of transportation and marketing facilities, all help the farmer decide which type of land use he can combine with his orchards. Yet orchardists in a given region generally choose other land uses that the non-orchardists in the same area stress (see fig. 1). So the orchardists in the Villa Ridge and Anna-Cobden areas emphasize truck farming, small fruits and livestock, their neighbors' major crops. In the New Burnside

and Sesser areas, they combine orchards and livestock, the economy of other nearby farmers. Centralia and Metropolis orchardists combine orchards with general farming and livestock, the type of farming that dominates the scene around and about them.

Orcharding is a highly technical, highly skilled, full-time farm operation, and the fact that southern Illinois orchardists divide their time and land is evidence of the precariousness of orcharding in the region. Southern Illinois orchardists have found from bitter experience that they dare not "put all of their eggs into one basket."