

POPULATION CHANGES IN RURAL LIFE

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The farm areas in the United States lost 16.8 percent of their population from 1940 to 1945. The major movement was due to wartime expansion in non-agricultural employment. This drain of population from rural areas reduced the number of people living on farms to slightly over 25 million, the smallest number of farm residents in the last 35 years, the period for which farm population estimates are available.²

All counties in Illinois, except ten which were located in or near war industries or military camps, lost in population from 1940 to 1943. More than a fourth of the counties, on the other hand, lost 15 percent or more of their population in this period; most of these were rural counties in poor-land areas not containing any form of wartime industry. The highest decreases were for Pope, Johnson, Pulaski, Alexander, Gallatin, Fayette, Scott, and Brown Counties, each of which lost 20 percent or more in population from 1940 to 1943.³

The number of farms decreased, moreover, in three-fourths of the counties from 1940 to 1945. Five of the six counties having had an increase of 100 or more farms in this period also had increases in population;⁴ four counties, on the other hand, in which there was a decrease of 15 percent or more in the population had decreases of from 10 to 87 farms per county from 1940 to 1945.⁵ Perry County with a decrease in population had a decrease of 308 in number of farms in these war years. The general trend over the

state, therefore, was toward decrease in numbers and increase in size of farms. This trend may be expected to continue unless employment sluffs off in the urban areas and people begin to return to the farms again as they did in the last depression period.

Current reports made during the last four months of 1945 on a national sample of 71 counties indicated that a substantial return of migration to farms started in many parts of the country after Japan was defeated. "The most important and most widespread change in farm population which took place after the end of the war was the return of demobilized veterans."⁶ A fourth to a half of those who had entered the armed forces had returned home by Christmas. Some in war industries were returning; and many non-farm jobs to which farmers had been commuting were cut off.

Return migration to farms was light in counties of the Wheat Belt and Range-Livestock Regions, and also in Dairy Belt counties. There was heavy return of wartime migrants to the poorer, self-sufficing counties of the Southern Appalachians. In the Corn Belt no serious reemployment problems of persons returning to farms had yet developed by the first of the year 1946. In the Dairy Belt there was considerable shifting from one non-farm job to another by residents after the war ended, but no serious problems of unemployment. There was still a shortage of labor on dairy farms.

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² "Farm Population Estimates," BAE, USDA, July 1945.

³ "Illinois Resources," Illinois Postwar Planning Commission, Chicago, Nov. 44, p. 157.

⁴ Lake, DuPage, Kaneakee, Champaign, and Rock Island.

⁵ Pulaski, Saline, Scott and Henderson.

⁶ "Farm Population Adjustments Following the End of the War." Summarized by Margaret Jarman Hagood, BAE, USDA, Feb. 1946.

The general trend over a long period of years has been for a net migration from rural to urban areas. Although the migration that developed during the depression decade of the 1930's was altered by the war, what happened then and in the 1920's can be a guide in planning for the next ten or twenty years. During the decade of the 1920's—a period of general urban prosperity—net movement of population away from farms was about 630,000 per year. In the 30's when depression time came, the average for the first five years was only 195,000 net movement per year; in 1932 there was a net migration to farms of 325,000. During the last half of the decade net migration from farms increased to about 550,000 per year. Then there was a rapid increase in the rate of migration for 1941, 1942, and 1943; but by 1944 the rate again began to decrease and continued to decrease in 1945.

In spite of the net migration away from farms, the farm population in 1940 was about the same as in 1930, 30,269,000, but in 1945 the farm population had dropped to 25,190,000. A larger than proportionate amount of this wartime loss was from farms of the South, where great underemployment of farm workers existed before the war—areas that needed to lose people. Nevertheless, in 1945 the South had 52 percent of the total farm population with a much smaller proportion of the nation's agricultural production or productive resources other than labor. The same situation is reflected in the State of Illinois. The poor-land areas, where farms are relatively small, contributed larger numbers, proportionately, to the out-farm migration; yet, these areas still have a relatively large proportion of the rural-farm population of the state with a much smaller proportion of the state's agricultural

production or productive resources other than labor.

The fastest growing population in America has been the rural non-farm population—the people not engaged in farming who live in small towns and villages and in the open country. Most of the increases in this element of the population has been near cities and industrial centers; people have moved out along the highways, railroad and bus lines so as to be able to go back and forth to their jobs in the cities. There has been somewhat of a trend for small industries to move into the smaller communities. The result has been a movement of people not only from the crowded cities to live in the less congested smaller places, but also for those not wishing to continue to farm to move into or near these centers.

The only two elements in the total population which over a period of years have reproduced themselves have been the rural-farm and the rural-non-farm populations. It is anticipated that the rural-farm population will not only continue to produce more children than can profitably remain on farms, but also that the pressure will be accelerated by the trend toward fewer and larger farms. It may be, also, that the movement from cities to rural-non-farm areas will continue, especially if the movement toward placing small industries in rural communities continues. There should be increased concern—more planning done—it would seem, to provide increased employment opportunities and better school, health, library, recreation, and social welfare services for the smaller communities of the state and nation in view of the fact that they are evidently destined to become an important residence and resource of our population.