

Rich Soil Amazes

Oregon Farms Produce Bountiful Yields of Widest Diversity

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The most amazing thing about Oregon's agriculture is its breathtaking variety. To look at the whole picture is almost like seeing a fascinating fairy tale come to life. We produce commercially just about everything you can imagine except that which requires a really hot climate.

Our livestock duplicates this feat. But the diversity at which people marvel today was probably not in the minds of the crew from the ship Ruby when these men planted the first gardens in Oregon coastal soils back in February, 1795.

One may presume the only concern of these seafaring men, as they firmed the soil over vegetable seeds, potatoes and peach stones, was relief from salted pork and dried beans.

Trapper Plowed First Furrow

The honor of plowing the first farm furrow in Oregon goes not to sailors but to fur trappers. And one may presume that they, too, did not foresee the tremendous diversity which would one day set the lands of Oregon apart from those of most other states.

Oregon farming was born in the rich soils of French Prairie, west of the present town of Woodburn. That much is clear. Some sources say the first farmer was Etienne Lucier, a Hudson's Bay trapper, and set the date of that first plowing in 1828. But others go back to 1811 — almost a half century before Oregon became a state — and say that four trapper families started Oregon farming in that year.

For more than a hundred years — until World War II boomed timber to our No. 1 basic industry — agriculture was Oregon's top ranking natural resource, economically speaking. Today, timber including some primary processing, accounts for \$1 billion of Oregon's income; agriculture, \$400 million at the farm gate; our tourist industry, \$150 million; with mining and commercial fishing down the line at \$42 million and \$15 million respectively.

Wheat Is King Crop

The primary crops of our first farms were grains and potatoes; then, as today, the king of the crops was wheat. In those early days, wheat was the big crop in the Willamette valley; today most of our wheat is grown in eastern Oregon in the Columbia river counties.

Now we raise in the neighborhood of a hundred different crops on roughly five million acres of crop lands. We grow the apple and we grow the zucchini.

In between this alphabetical range are all the staples of the early day, plus many and varied seed crops undreamed of then: bulbs and flowers and a long list of nursery ornamentals and shrubs; flower seeds and vegetable seeds; strawberries and canberries; hops and peppermint; watermelons and cantaloupes and other melons; blueberries and sugarbeets; walnuts and filberts; apricots and pears and apples and cherries and peaches and prunes and grapes; sugar beet seed.

And we raise dry edible beans and dry field peas, asparagus, green lima beans, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, celery, cucumbers, garlic, kale, lettuce, green peppers, spinach, tomatoes, carrots, parsnips, not to mention our really sizable production of snap beans, green peas, onions, sweet corn, broccoli, carrots, beets, cauliflower and pumpkins or squash.

Oregon Leads the Nation

Last year Oregon ranked first in the United States in the production of peppermint for oil, several seed crops, snap beans, sweet cherries, tame blackberries, black raspberries and filberts; second in pears and strawberries, prunes and English walnuts; and high in green peas for processing.

We produce some dill for oil and some drug crops — but probably the most unusual crop of all is teasels though like some of the rarer specialties, this is extremely limited. And now, who knows that another small specialty crop may not be on the horizon; since the first of this year a New York firm has queried the state department of agriculture to know if any of our Oregon people would be interested in growing catnip commercially!

On the livestock, our predominant production is beef cattle, dairy cattle and sheep, hogs, turkeys and chickens. The thousands of horses of the earlier day have long since

given way to the motor age, but the interest in the pleasurehorse continues to grow and in spite of Mr. Ford's invention we still have a few thousand horses on farms.

Bees Here Since 1844

Specialties in the livestock category include bees, which have been with us since 1844, rabbits, goats, geese, ducks and a very lively mink industry. Most recent ventures with fur-bearing animals are chinchilla and nutria, but to date pelt sales have not been encouraging.

Our varied agriculture production goes hand in hand with the diversity of soils, climate and topography. Rainfall runs the gamut of heavy to light as one progresses from the coastal region to the vast highlands east of the Cascades. Snowfall is in reverse.

Elevations range from scarcely more than sea level to towering Mt. Hood's 11,225 feet. Many farms in eastern Oregon are at elevations 4000 feet and above.

Matching the contrasts in our crops, our climate and our landscape are the sizes of our farms. They range from small tracts to thousands of acres. In fruit-growing Hood River county, for example, the average farm contains only 30 acres; in cattle-raising Wheeler county, the average farm approaches 5,000 acres, not including uses of public grazing lands, of which Oregon has more than 20 million acres.

From our principal crops alone, last year, Oregon produced more than 5.3 million tons (not our record year) divided like this: field crops which includes the grains and hay and potatoes, 4.4 million tons; seed crops, 72,000 tons; tree fruits and nuts, 262,090 tons; berries, 58,000 tons; and vegetables, 436,000 tons.

Division of Farm Income

No breakdown is yet available on cash farm income from 1958 agricultural commodity groups, but here's what the returns at the farm gate divided into for the year 1957:

Livestock — Cattle and calves, \$63,422,000; dairy products, \$47,040,000; eggs, \$18,839,000; sheep, lambs and wool, \$14,023,000; hogs, \$9,362,000 broilers, \$5,345,000; farm chickens and other poultry, \$3,417,000; all other livestock, including mink as the largest single item, \$6,095,000.

Crops — Field crops, including principal seeds and vegetables, \$150,318,000; fruits, berries and nuts, \$54,283,000; greenhouse and nursery products, \$11,664,000; and farm forestry items, \$7,337,000.

Agriculture on Oregon's 54,442 farms (1954 U. S. census figure which will drop some on the next 5-year tally because Oregon undoubtedly is following the national trend) shows wide differences in various sections of the state.

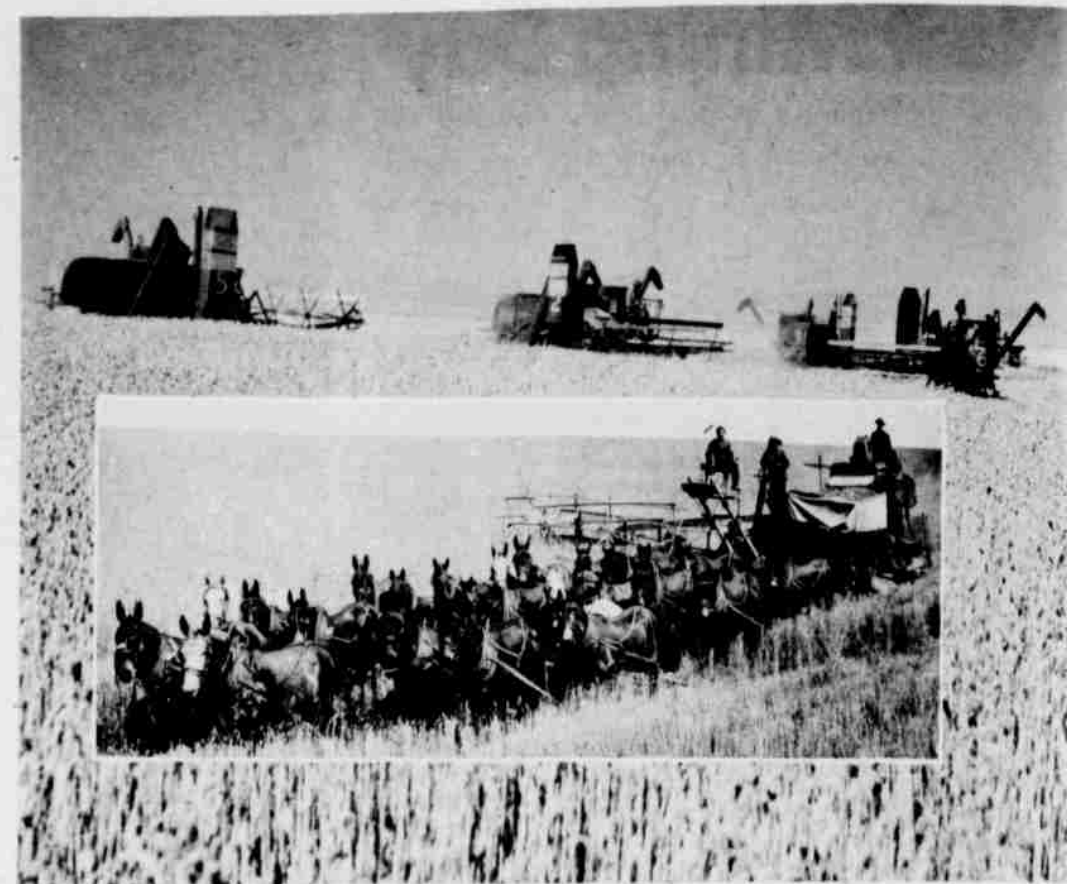
Mountains Divide State

The 18 counties west of the Cascades — western Oregon — have 40,022 farms containing 4,546,946 acres; the 18 counties east of the Cascades — eastern Oregon — have 14,410 farms containing 16,315,394 acres.

So if you don't already know you will guess from these figures that our specialty crops and animals are raised mostly in western Oregon; and that our vast rolling wheat fields, cattle ranches and hay fields belong to the wide open lands of eastern Oregon.

This is a general statement which does not completely hold water, because we have surprising contradictions on either side of the dividing mountains. East of the Cascades you will find grown under irrigation specialty seed crops, virtually all of our commercial potato production, melons, onions, legume and pasture seeds. Hops and peppermint, long considered a western Oregon product, are grown successfully in some eastern Oregon areas.

Conversely, the western third of the state has farms of 1000 acres or more, grows considerable wheat and other grains, is raising more



THE OLD AND THE NEW IN THE GRAIN FIELDS. Multitude of horses in inset picture are shown cutting the wheat in an Oregon field as it was done before modern machinery, shown at the top, invaded the farm area and made the harvesting process much simpler, faster and less expensive.

and more beef cattle — and more than a decade ago robbed eastern Oregon of the title of having the No. 1 sheep county in the state. (Sheep were once primarily a ranging operation in eastern Oregon; now the industry is divided fairly evenly between eastern and western Oregon.)

Water Is Important

So much for generalities about our agriculture, except for another mention of irrigation. Water played an important part in the early settlement in Oregon; that is why most of the Century Farms "discovered" by the Oregon Historical Society and the State Department of Agriculture last year lie in valleys along rivers and streams.

The first water diversion for agricultural irrigation in Oregon occurred in Jackson county in 1852 when Jacob Wagner diverted the waters of Wagner creek to irrigate a vegetable garden on his donation land claim. Farm irrigation has grown slowly from 500,000 acres in 1900 in a rather consistently stepped-up tempo since.

Today irrigated lands approximate 1.5 million acres on nearly 20,000 farms scattered throughout the state. Klamath, major potato growing area, has more than 277,000 acres under irrigation on over 1000 farms; Malheur has over 200,000 irrigated acres on more than 2300 farms. Long irrigation ditches and huge conduits that glitter in the sun are familiar sights in eastern Oregon's irrigated areas. Irrigation is gaining momentum on farms and acreages in western Oregon; crops that not too many years ago were considered strictly "dry land" are now aided to higher production by irrigation, usually from a farm portable sprinkler system. Even the Willamette valley, often likened to the Valley of the Nile, has approximately 141,000 acres under irrigation — about half of which has come in the last five or six years.

We have talked about eastern Oregon and western Oregon as two rather distinct farming regions. In describing the agriculture of Oregon, these broad regions are each sub-divided into three sections which have individual characteristics.

Six Farming Areas

Thus we talk, in finer terms, about six farming areas: Coastal and lower Columbia; Willamette valley; southern Oregon; Columbia basin; south central counties; and the Snake River counties. The first and last named lie on the western and eastern borders of the state, as the map outlines.

Let's look briefly at each area. The Willamette Valley — Stretching along the Willamette river basin 140 miles from Portland and east and west from 30 to 60 miles

between the Coast and Cascade mountains, this is the center of our first farming and today the heart of Oregon's diversification.

Here you'll find everything from wheat and beef cattle, drug crops and nuts to berries and teasels and pansy seed. You'll have to look for the teasels, though, because this is a Clackamas county exclusive specialty item. The bur of the teasel is valuable to produce the soft nap finish on fine fabrics, particularly woollens. Growing the teasels and preparing them for market is a tedious process, but the Oregon climate is excellent and at least one man has specialized in production of teasels. You've probably seen wild teasels without recognizing them as such; but the commercial product is a special variety native to southern Europe.

Home of Holly

In addition to all the crops we've mentioned to this point — except sugar beets — the valley is the home of Oregon's holly industry, and growers here have made money from cane for sorghum, golden seal, sunflowers, sage, pyrethrum, mushrooms, Jerusalem artichokes and fibre flax. Production of fibre flax hit a peak during the last world war but has since dwindled to a comparatively small operation in the Jefferson area of Marion county.

This valley is seat of the strawberry and canberries — Loganberries, Boysenberries, blackberries, red and black raspberries, gooseberries and currants, as well as small vegetable production. These crops, along with the tree fruits, explain why the major share of our canneries and freezing plants are located here.

Poultry and turkeys center here, too; and dairying is a big enterprise. Travel along the major roads and you'll see farm flock

after farm flock of sheep, hamsters, muskrats, skunks, game birds and Shetland ponies are raised on minor key. A large share of the bee and mink population is here.

Most farmers in this valley diversify their production to avoid the calamity which sometimes falls when all the eggs are put into one basket. Incidentally, not all counties emphasize the same crops. Linn county, for example, has long been Oregon's No. 1 production center for forage seeds.

Dairying Moves East

Coastal and Lower Columbia Counties — A generous rainfall and lush pastures contribute to emphasis on dairying, particularly in Tillamook and Coos counties. Until the last four or five years, Tillamook was the undisputed dairy queen of Oregon; Malheur forged ahead by a few cows on the last census.

The coast, especially Coos and Clatsop, has the cranberry field — or we should say bogs — all to itself. Early daffodils reach far markets from the Brookings area of Curry county — which is all

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