

AGRICULTURE

By Bernard F. Ramsburg

The agriculture of the area of what is now Hunterdon County has undergone many changes during the past 250 years. Agriculture started here as pioneer farms hewn out of the virgin wilderness. These farms furnished the entire living of the family, but in the beginning there was little or no surplus to sell or trade. Eventually, they developed into family farms that produced for sale grain, dairy products, meat or meat animals.

When the first pioneers settled in the county it was almost all solid forest. The early settlers did not usually acquire large acreage. For example, the farms sold from one part of "the Field tract" averaged only 103 acres. As the land could not be worked profitably with slave labor and as there was a scarcity of labor for hire, conditions did not lend themselves to the development of large estates. On the other hand, it was not difficult to acquire land for a family farm. According to people of that time only those who did not have much ambition were unable to become farm owners, even though they started as tenants. An occasional man acquired several farms, but few ever left all of their property to one heir. They generally acquired the farms so they could leave each child a farm.

Pioneer farmers were wasteful in the use of land. Peter Kalm, a visitor from Sweden, criticized New Jersey land care practices as early as 1748. Farmers wore out the land of one farm and moved to another. Some did not even bother to haul manure from the barns to the fields. But better practices were gradually adopted. Wood ashes were early used for fertilizer. Later they were shipped into the county by rail.

While the farmers of the county were slow to adopt the use of lime, this later became a common practice. Calcined lime was considered by many to be a fertilizer and a cure-all for all soil ailments. Farmers across the Delaware River in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, used lime before Hunterdon County farms did. By the 1790's, lime from kilns in Bucks County was hauled across the river from Pennsylvania, and many were built in the northern part of the county to "burn" limestone quarried nearby.

According to an article in the "Cultivator," a farm magazine, in 1839 farmers were using from 50 to 100 bushels of lime to the acre. The smaller amounts were used on the poor land and the larger amounts were used on the better fields. As a general rule lime was slacked with water before it was spread on the land, but too often the soil was damaged by incompletely slacked lime. A particularly bad practice was that of putting the unslacked lime in small piles in the field to be "air slackened" before spreading. Early in the 20th century ground limestone gradually began to replace slacked lime. During the late 1930's the use of lime on Hunterdon's farms was stimulated by payments through programs of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

Pulverized gypsum, known as plaster of Paris or "land plaster", was first recorded as being used in 1739. It was imported from Nova Scotia and from the Hudson River Valley. After 1770 it came into general use with quantities up to a bushel per acre being applied. It was considered especially necessary if clover were sown with the wheat. It was crushed at mills within the county.

After railroads were built greens and marl was imported from Monmouth County. However, since such large quantities of this fertilizer were required per acre it never received widespread use in Hunterdon County. With the coming of commercial fertilizers, marl fell into disuse. It was seldom advertised after 1875. Another fertilizer which came into use about the middle 1800's was guano. This was the droppings of the sea birds that inhabited the arid islands off the west coast of South America. However, it was too expensive to be used except for special purposes. The use of green manure crops that were plowed under was adopted by a few in the early 1800's.

In the later 1800's use of commercial fertilizer as it is now known became common. As more has been learned about the testing of the soils to determine their fertility, the use of lime and fertilizer has become more specialized. Many farmers today not only purchase fertilizer, but have the dealer spread it, using the amount needed according to the soil test.

Soil erosion was a serious problem almost from the earliest days. Some early farmers followed definite practices to control it, but most did little about it until fairly recent times. The use of cover crops was started only in the late 1800's. During the early 1940's the Extension Service advocated sowing of rye grass during the last corn cultivation. Since rye grass provides a good cover during the winter it helps greatly in checking erosion. Today the practice is a common one.

In 1935 the Soil Conservation Service started to work in the Ringoes area, where it did demonstration work on 150 farms. This involved 10, 896 acres in the Neshanic River Watershed. In addition, demonstration work was done on 119 farms, comprising 12, 682 acres, in the Clinton area. The demonstration work included the laying out of contours, the building of terraces and drainage ways, and the planting of trees and shrubbery. A CCC camp was set up at Clinton Point. Much of the labor used in the soil erosion project was furnished by the boys in this camp. A soil Conservation District which included Hunterdon County was set up in the 1940's and as a result of the program, many farmers have adopted soil erosion control measures.

The early Hunterdon County settlers built log houses, adapted from those of the Swedes of South Jersey. These were made of squared and notched oak logs of a size to make a wall about 10 inches thick. As soon as saw mills came

into use and lumber was available, frame houses were built. The log houses were then used as stables or as other farm buildings.

Some stone houses were built quite early, and many of these are still standing. Only a few brick houses were built, as other materials were handier. A brick home built in 1760 by John Reading the younger near Flemington Junction is still standing and is still used as a home. The bricks were made from clay nearby.

Homes were frequently modest in size, with additions being added as the family grew and finances permitted. Basement cellars were common. Sometimes they were used for kitchens, but mostly for food storage. Many of the early houses had an outside kitchen adjoining the house.

Some early observers noted that many Hunterdon farmers preferred having large, well-constructed barns to having substantial homes. After lumber had become easily available, the early barns had frames made of large hand-hewn white oak timbers. These were covered with sawed weather boarding. Many of these old barns are still standing, but they have been remodeled to serve modern conditions. Carpenters who have remodeled these old barns attest to the strength and hardness of these old white oak frames. As log out-buildings disappeared they were succeeded by corn cribs, wagon houses, smoke houses and other buildings that were more or less standard for the area.

Most farms had barracks, adopted from Dutch settlers. A barrack was in essence a roof which could be adjusted in height to that of the hay stored beneath it.

When poultry keeping became common as a commercial enterprise in the early 1900's multiple unit poultry houses were built on most farms, and the necessary number of brooder houses were also built. Brooder houses were generally 8 feet by 10 feet or 10 feet by 12 feet, and were built as single units because of the danger of fire. Multiple story poultry houses began to be built before World War II. After the war, many large poultry houses were built, often holding thousands of laying birds. Most of these houses were built with automatic equipment and were constructed so that they could be cleaned with tractors. Houses in which the laying birds were kept in individual cages were first tried in the early 1930's, without much success. In later years, this had become a more common practice. With every practice mechanized one man often takes care of thousands of birds.

When farmers first started dairying on a commercial scale, the old barns were easily remodeled to accommodate the small herds which were kept. When it became necessary to have rather expensive equipment in order to handle the milk produced according to city Board of Health regulations, it became economically necessary to have larger herds. Additions were built on many of

the old barns, and some farmers built entirely new dairy barns. In some cases, buildings were constructed which house the milking herd in large open pens, with a modern "milking parlor" were also used by some dairymen with conventional barns. More recently milking parlors are so equipped that the milk drawn from the cows goes directly into the milk house through a pipeline and is there cooled and stored in a large bulk tank. Some dairymen also use pipeline milkers in their regular barns.

Silos were in use on a few dairy farms before 1900. As the herds increased their advantages became greater. Most commercial dairymen now use silos to store grass silage as well as corn silage. A recent practice on some farms is the ensiling of partly cured hay as "haylage".

The earliest fences were "worm fences" made of rails. Chestnut was the most common wood used for this kind of fence, as the wood was easily split and very durable. When wood for rails became more scarce in a locality, post and rail fences came into use. These took more labor to build, but required fewer rails. Some farmers, for appearance's sake, built post and rail fences along roads and used the old worm fences around the back fields. Few stone fences were built, as there was so much labor involved.

Hedge fences were tried fairly early. The first plants used were the English and American white hawthorn. In the mid-19th century, Osage orange, became popular. Many of these hedge fences are still in existence. Wire fences were first tried in the 1850's but did not become common until after the 1880's, when barbed wire came into general use. Fences of barbed wire were opposed by many people at first because of injuries that occurred to animals, particularly horses, but they grew in popularity because of the ease of construction. Woven wire fences were also used chiefly for poultry. Electric fences for cattle came into use in the latter 1930's. They were especially used around temporary pastures.

Farm implements changed slowly. For more than a century, plows were of wood with metal joints, but eventually iron moldboards came into use. The Deats plow was invented in 1828 by John Deats of Stockton. This had a moldboard that its proponents said made it scour better than others. This was manufactured by John Deats and his descendants. Other farm tools that were invented by county residents included a cultivator invented by Oliver Kugler of Three Bridges in 1837, and one by Reuben K. Niece of Frenchtown, in 1878.

Much farm work was done by hand until after 1850. Corn planters and grain drills did not come into much use until after that date. Mowing machines were tried out before 1820 but did not prove practical until the 1840's. The early grain reapers could be used as mowers by removing the grain platform and changing the sickle. The reaper came into rather general use during the 1850's and 1860's. After 1870 mowing machines distinct from the reaper came into general use. In the later 1880's binders replaced the old reapers. In the 1930's,

small combines were perfected and soon made the binder obsolete. Self-propelled combines are now replacing those pulled by tractors.

Hay rakes were evolved from rather crude machines. The self-dumping "flip-flop" rake of the early 1800's was replaced by the sulkey rake, and that in turn gave way to the side delivery rake. The hay tedder was introduced about 1870. Hay loaders and portable hay balers were developed about 1890. Corn binders did not come into common use in the county until about 1920, and then because greater amounts of ensilage were being made. Corn shellers for both hand and power equipment developed in the last half of the 19th Century. The Deats corn sheller was very popular.

Threshing machines powered by horses were introduced after 1830. Some were powered by horses on the end of a sweep, and others were run by treat power. Portable threshers using power from portable steam engines or steam tractors came into use about 1890. Commercially built lime spreaders appeared after 1850, and the first commercially built manure spreaders appeared after 1880. Incubators also came into use in the 1880's, and were soon widely adopted despite a rumor that the chicks would never lose the smell from the kerosene lamps.

Portable steam engines were first used about 1850, and portable gasoline engines came into use about 1900. Gasoline tractors began to replace the horse during World War I. Portable electrical plants were also acquired by some farmers at about this same time. These furnished electricity almost entirely for lighting. High-line electricity came in the 1920's and 1930's, bringing some of the biggest changes on the farm and in the farm home. Milking machines were first used about the time of World War I, but did not come into general use until about the time of World War II.

Corn was one of the first crops grown by the pioneers after the land was partially cleared, with remaining trees killed by girdling. Later small grains, particularly wheat, oats, and rye were grown. Rye was sometimes sown in cornfields in the fall. Crude methods of growing corn in hills were developed early, with the corn being planted by hand. This method made it possible to cultivate the corn hills on all sides. In pioneer days, small grains and hay were harvested with a sickle. Later a scythe was used, and by the time of the Revolution the grain cradle was in general use. Until the first thresher, most grain was threshed with a flail.

With exception of buckwheat, the grains grown by present day Hunterdon farmers are almost the same as those grown in Colonial days. The varieties have been much improved, and with improved cultural practices much larger yields are obtained. Much of this increase has been due to farm tests conducted by the Agricultural Extension Service to determine the best varieties for

conditions found in Hunterdon County. Hybrid corn was introduced here by such farm tests.

The first hay grown was a native grass, but timothy and clover were introduced by the early settlers, often grown together in the same field. Alfalfa was first tried in the county about 1795 but was not successful. Its culture was promoted during the early 1900's by the County Board of Agriculture and the Experiment Station of Rutgers University. It proved successful on many farms and was grown rather extensively at the time of World War I.

Timothy hay was grown on many farms and sold to hay presses located in different places in the county during the late 1800's and early 1900's. This hay was shipped to the cities for use as horse feed. After the horse was replaced by the truck and automobile, this market disappeared.

Soy beans were introduced in the late 1800's, but did not really catch on until the Agricultural Adjustment Administration promoted the crop for soil building.

Potatoes were first grown as a garden crop, but became a commercial crop during the 19th century. Business Review of Hunterdon, Morris and Somerset counties for 1891 said that potatoes ranked next to peaches in importance in Hunterdon County. After World War I, they dropped rapidly in popularity as a crop.

Tomatoes, were once scorned as poisonous, but after 1850 became an important vegetable. Canneries in Lambertville, Pennington, Hopewell, Titusville, Ringoes, Stockton and Bloomsbury were established during the later decades of the 19th century. Market tomatoes were also raised in the Quakertown, Cherryville and Pittstown area starting about 1900, mostly for the New York market. Starting in the late 1930's, many farmers contracted with Campbell Soup Co. for can-house tomatoes. Some also tried peas and lima beans for canneries. These did not prove as successful as tomatoes. The tomato as a field crop has declined in Hunterdon since the last war.

Apples and peaches have been the fruits grown on the largest scale in the county. Practically every early farm had an apple orchard in early days. The fruit was produced for family use, and the surplus was sold to distilleries. During later years the number of commercial orchards greatly declined. This was largely due to the increase in the number of insect pests and diseases.

Peach production started on a large scale during the 1850's around Sergeantsville when Dr. George Larison, planted an orchard of 3,000 trees. Within a few years, peaches were being sent to New York by rail. Soon a special train was sent during harvest season from Flemington to Lambertville, to Bordentown, to South Amboy, from which place the peaches were sent by boat

to New York City. After 1863 special peach trains were sent from Flemington via the South Branch of the New Jersey Central. Many peaches were also sent over the main line of this railroad from Whitehouse. The Lehigh Valley Railroad after 1875 also hauled peaches. On one day in 1882, 64 carloads of peaches were shipped from the county- 21 on the South Branch, 33 on the Lehigh Valley, and 10 on the Belvidere Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Peach growing stimulated other industries such as nurseries and basket factories. It also gave employment to hundreds of orchard laborers.

In 1889 there were two million peach trees in Hunterdon County, and nearly one million baskets of peaches were sold. In 1899 there were about one million trees. About this time, the San Jose scale made its appearance in Hunterdon. Sprays that would give good control were unknown, and the industry declined so that by 1919 there were only 180,255 peach trees in the county. By 1959, there were only 14,927.

Early livestock consisted mainly of cattle, horses, swine and sheep. Cattle were kept for meat and milk and as oxen for draft animals. Horses were mainly work animals. Swine were kept for meat, and pork was the principal meat used. Sheep were raised primarily for wool, although some were slaughtered for meat. The animals in the early years were nondescript. They were allowed to roam the woods, and selective breeding was almost unknown. Crop land was fenced to keep animals out. In the fall, swine were allowed to fatten "on mast" (acorns and other nuts). Crude brands were used to denote ownership of animals. As more land was cleared more pasture was available, and more attention was given to the improvement of livestock. Keeping animals in fenced pasture made it possible to use selective breeding practices through the use of better sires.

The "common" hogs of early days were the result of indiscriminate mixing of strains brought in from many countries. English breeds of swine such as the Berkshire and Yorkshire were imported. Also fairly early, the "Jersey Red," was a breed developed within the state. American breeds such as the Poland China and Chester Whites became rather common after the 1840's. Size was stressed in the early animals, and the best hog was a fat hog. Later, quality of the carcass became more important.

Efforts were made in the early 1800's to improve the "common" sheep of the county by importing English breeds such as the Improved Leicester and Southdown. Purebred rams were used after 1820. The interest in the improvement of sheep was due to the ready market of wool. Sheep raising declined greatly around the turn of the century. Since World War II, the number of sheep has increased appreciably, especially among newcomers who have bought country homes. Sheep products marketed are "Easter lambs," fat lambs, and wool. The Hunterdon County Sheep Association which was organized in the early 1950's has an annual cooperative fat lamb sale.

Early efforts were made to encourage farmers to improve their horses by use of better stallions. By 1800 the owners of good stallions received large breeding fees. Much of the early emphasis was on fast road horses. However, the first Flemington Fair in 1956 offered prizes for the best work horses. Soon after the Civil War, it became more economical to import horses from the Midwest than to raise them. The animals were usually sold at auction. Horses brought good prices until tractors became numerous in the 1920's. There has been a growing interest in riding horses in recent years. In 1959 there were 516 horses reported in Hunterdon County.

Cattle were allowed to shift for themselves to a great extent during early years. Many farmers did not stable their animals during the winter, and little grain was fed except to the ones being fattened. The main interest was in the production of a home supply or to neighbors. Butter was a by-product of most farms, and a relatively few farms made cheese for sale. The Capners of Flemington sold cheese to Martha Washington when Philadelphia was the nation's capital.

As the market for dairy products was limited, there was more incentive to keep beef cattle. Shorthorn bulls were imported from England, and this breed was popular for many years. After 1871, when beef from the mid-West was shipped to the East in refrigerator cars, the market for eastern beef declined.

Although fluid milk was sometimes sold in the towns of the county, the daily delivery of milk was begun in Flemington only in 1867. About the same time a few farmers near Flemington began to ship milk by rail to the New York market. Creameries were established in the county starting with one in Sergeantsville in 1881 which made butter, cream and cheese. Skimmed milk and whey were returned free to the farmers to feed their pigs. During that same year, creameries were built at Locktown, Little York and Oak Summit, and during the next 20 years creameries were built in 24 other communities of the county. The local creameries revolutionized the dairy industry, though some farmers continued to make butter for sale in the village stores.

Fluid milk shipments from Flemington increased, and about 1878 shipments were also being made from Whitehouse. Soon the creameries were being hurt by the new competition. After 1900, the creameries and the one or two small milk condenseries of the county gradually went out of business, the last one in the early 1930's. Two small cheese factories, one at Lebanon and one at Little York were in business until recent years.

There had been cooperative peach auctions during the time when peaches were so important in the county. Now the idea of cooperation was applied to the sale of milk.

Some farmers in the county became members of the "Five State Milk Producers' Association", which tried to raise farm prices in 1899, but little was accomplished at that time. A county unit of the Dairymen's League was organized in 1918, and it still has a considerable membership here. The League generally served as a bargaining agent, but for a time took over some milk plants, processed the milk and sold it in the city. These plants were later discontinued.

The County Milk Producers' Association was organized in 1933. This was a division of the United Milk Producers Association, a statewide organization. The United Milk Producers served as a bargaining agent for those selling to independent dealers not selling in the Philadelphia area. Some farmers in the county joined the Consumers' Cooperative Association at Belle Mead that sold the milk through a consumers' cooperative in New York City. Those dairy farmers in the southern part of the county whose milk went to the Philadelphia area were members of the Interstate Milk Producers Association. Most of this milk has gone to Trenton for a number of years.

With the growth of dairying as a commercial enterprise, more interest was developed in improving milk production and the butterfat content of milk produced by the individual cows. Dairy breeds, therefore attracted increasing attention. The Agricultural Society which ran the Flemington Fair added one dairy breed after another to its premium list and gradually eliminated beef breeds.

Jerseys were popular with many farmers during the period when milk was sold to creameries. Other breeds adopted by individual farmers were the Guernsey, Ayreshire, and Brown Swiss. But it was the Holstein which won out in the race. The first Holsteins in the county were imported by John T. Ellis in 1871. The Holstein breeders of the county formed a joint association with the Somerset County breeders at the time of World War I. Later they formed their own association. This association became dormant in the 1920's, and was not reorganized until 1959. However, it now has a very active program, including the holding of a large County Holstein Show annually. Many of the members are and have been active in the State Holstein Association. William W. Phillips, of Milford, served as president of the State Association for several years. The Jersey, Guernsey, Ayrshire and Brown Swiss breeders of the county have been active in their state associations, but no county association of these breeds have been organized. Lloyd B. Wescott of Rosemont has served as President of the New Jersey Guernsey Breeder Association.

The first dairy herd improvement association, then called, a Cow Testing Association, was organized in 1919 at Ringoes with Fred Totten as secretary. Other associations were organized in the vicinity of Flemington and Pittstown. At the present time there are five DHIA associations in the county. These associations enable the farmer to have complete records of his individual cows, and also give him feeding recommendations through a computer service

arrangement made available through the Agriculture Extension Service and the Dairy Department at Rutgers University.

Two purebred Holstein bull associations were organized in the early 1930's. These enabled the members to have the use of excellent bulls after they were proved. In 1939, at the suggestion of E.J. Perry, Extension Dairy Specialist of Rutgers University, the first Cooperative Artificial Breeding Association in the United States was organized. While its members included farmers from Warren and Somerset Counties as well as Hunterdon, it was sponsored by the Hunterdon County Board of Agriculture. A veterinarian from Denmark, trained the veterinarian who was employed by the new association. The plan was very successful from the beginning. This idea has spread to all parts of the United States where dairying is important. The success of this project was due in great measure not only to the leadership of Mr. Perry, but also to the leadership of the County Board of Agriculture, particularly the president, C.E. Snyder, and to the leadership of Dwight M. Babbitt, County Agricultural Agent

The Association at first used only Holstein bulls but later acquired those of other breeds. It is now part of a state-wide cooperative artificial breeding association. There are also at least two national private artificial breeding organizations whose representative s artificially breed cattle in the county. The majority of the cattle in the county are now bred artificially.

Beef cattle and later dairy cattle were in the early days brought into the county in droves, driven from the mid-West. After the building of the railroad they were shipped in by rail and now by truck. Lack of feed and pasture on which to raise heifers has to a considerable extent helped create a market for milk cows brought in by dealers.

Though Hunterdon has been one of the leading poultry counties of New Jersey and of the United States for most of the 20th century, the farm poultry flock in the early days was a very small sideline of the individual farmer. The birds were left to forage for themselves to a great extent. The poultry shows held at county fairs were devoted to fancy birds rather than birds kept for utility. With the development of good markets for poultry products, the situation changed rapidly. This coincided with two inventions, the incubator and the brooders, which have contributed much to the modernizing of the industry.

A Hunterdon hatcheryman, Joseph Wilson, of Stockton was the first man to ship day-old baby chicks. The poultry industry grew rapidly thereafter, and hatcheries developed in the county until millions of chicks were produced annually. White leghorns were raised for eggs, Barred Plymouth Rocks, Rhode Island Reds, New Hampshire Reds were grown for meat and eggs. Later, cross breeds were developed. Since most of the eggs from the county went to New York City and its vicinity, where white eggs were preferred, the emphasis was on

the production of white eggs. An important development was that of separating male from female chicks before sale.

The Hunterdon Poultry Association was organized in 1912. This organization became particularly active after the first County Agricultural Agent started working in the county in 1927. It sponsored the Hunterdon Egg Laying Contest, the headquarters of which was located just outside of Flemington. This was operated by the Poultry Department of Rutgers University, and helped to improve the breeding of many poultry flocks. The County Poultry Association also cooperated with the Extension Service and Experiment Station in all efforts for the betterment of the poultry industry.

During the 1920's at the suggestion of Theodore Dilts, Vice President of the County Board of Agriculture, the State Police and the College of Agriculture developed a system of tattooing poultry and registration of tattoo numbers. This made possible the identification of stolen birds, and in a large measure was responsible for the decrease in the number of poultry stolen.

The Flemington Cooperative Auction Market was organized in 1930 by some of the leading poultrymen of the county. At its first auction, 60 cases of eggs were sold. The Market was successful from the first, and soon added the sale of poultry. Several years later a livestock sale was also added. The Market soon outgrew its temporary quarters in the center of Flemington and bought a large building on Park Avenue, formerly used by the Empire Cut Glass factory. Other buildings have since been built on this property. The Market has changed its method of selling eggs in recent years. In 1960 a "candle and carton" program was started. Approximately 3,000 cases of eggs each week are being handled under this program at the present time. Auction sales are no longer held, but about 3,000 cases of other eggs are sold wholesale each week.

Of the 300 egg producer members of the Market in 1963, 32 were bringing in half of the eggs sold. Just after World War II, there were more than 1200 egg producer members. Poultry sales of the Market have decreased greatly in volume, due to the saving in time and handling for the owners of large flocks to sell their old hens or cull birds on the farm. The livestock sale has also decreased in volume. This is probably due to a considerable extent to the decrease in the number of farms in the county.

The County Board of Agriculture was organized in the 1880's when legislation was passed setting up such organization in each county. In this early period, the Board, with the aid of the College of Agriculture, sponsored educational meetings such as Farmer's Institutes. It became dormant in the early 1900's, but was reorganized in 1920 with C.E. Snyder, as president, and R.S. Schomp as secretary. These two served in these offices for 33 years and to a great deal were responsible for the success of this organization. The County Board of Agriculture led a fight for years to establish an Agricultural Extension

Service in the County. It was successful in 1927 when E.A. Gauntt was appointed the first County Agricultural Agent. Mr. Gauntt served until July 1, 1934, when he resigned to become State Extension Dairy Specialist. He was succeeded by Dwight M. Babbitt who served until July 1, 1959.

A district 4-H Club agent with headquarters in the County Extension office as appointed in 1930. He supervised 4-H programs in Hunterdon, Somerset counties, and later in Warren County. Brandon Wright was the first district Club Agent. He was succeeded on October 1, 1935 by Bernard F. Ramsburg, who was appointed full-time Country Club Agent of Hunterdon County on February 1, 1936. He served in this office until July 1, 1960. Hunterdon County has had a full-time Home Demonstration Agent since 1938.

The County Board of Agriculture's Executive Committee was expanded in the late 1930's to include representatives of all farm and rural organizations in the County. This organization had sponsored many movements for the betterment of the County. Its aid in establishing an artificial breeding unit has been mentioned. Its sponsorship led to the writing of an agricultural history of the County, "Rural Hunterdon" by Hubert G. Schmidt. It purchased and gave to the County the land on which is now located the building in which the Extension Service and other agricultural agencies are housed. This building was opened for use in October 1963. Of its many accomplishments, perhaps, the most outstanding was the backing the Board of Agriculture gave in the establishment of the Hunterdon Medical Center, which opened its doors in 1953 with a group of eight specialists and 121 bed capacity. The Center has added a diagnostic center and the staff of specialists has increased to 24. The first Board of Trustees of the Medical Center appointed by the County Board was as follows: Clifford E. Snyder, President; George r. Hanks, Vice President; Lloyd B. Wescott, Secretary; James C. Weisel, Treasurer; also Samuel L. Bodine, Rev. Edward J. Dalton, Rev. Edward C. Dunbar, Dr. Raymond J. Germain, J. Seward Johnson, Mrs. William F. Leicester, Waldo R. McNutt, Joseph E. Moskowitz, Herbert D. Stem, Mrs. Charles E. Wagg. The first director of the Medical Center was Ray E. Trussell.

The County Board of Agriculture not only sponsored the Extension Service but also helped in many ways to make the different phases of the Extension program successful. The Executive Committee of the Board at its monthly meetings has heard reports of the various agents and has given advice and suggestions. Ringoes Grange #12, organized in 1873, was the first Grange organized in Hunterdon County. This grange sponsored many ideas. A number of other granges were organized in succeeding years and a Pomona or County Grange was organized in 1875. The early granges were strictly farmer organizations. The grange served as purchasing agent for its members in buying supplies of various kinds. About 1915 most of the granges discontinued such store activities. At the present time, the following granges are active in Hunterdon County: Ringoes, Locktown, Sergeantsville, Kingwood, Oak Grove,

Spring Mills, Grand View, Riverside, Hickory, Stanton, Whitehouse, Mt. Lebanon, Sidney.

The Flemington Fair was organized in the 1850's and did much to aid in the betterment of the agriculture of the county by its exhibits. After an interruption of some years in holding annual fairs, in 1910 the Association reorganized to become again active with Major E.B. Allen, the manager of the Fair. He served from then until his death in 1947. Largely through his efforts the Fair was kept alive and growing. He worked with the agricultural interests of the county, in fostering progressive programs through displays, demonstrations and competitive exhibitions in connection with products of the farm.

Starting in 1929 the only dairy cattle exhibited at the Fair were 4-H animals. The 4-H Dairy Show at first consisted only of animals from Hunterdon and nearby counties. In 1947 the State 4-H Dairy Show was moved to Flemington Fair, and it has been held there each year since.

Other 4-H exhibits were developed after 1930. Now in addition to the 4-H Dairy Show, which consists of about 250 animals, the state 4-H Sheep Show, the state 4-H Quality Lamb Show and Sale, the State 4-H Horse Show and the district 4-H Goat Show are held at Flemington Fair. The county 4-H food and clothing exhibits, the county 4-H Sheep Show and the county 4-H Club booth exhibits and the State 4-H Tractor Driving Contest are also held there.

The agricultural exhibits and Grange displays, farm machinery exhibits, flower show, Farmer's Day demonstrations and other activities and the 4-H Department all help to make Flemington Fair the outstanding agricultural fair in New Jersey.

The Farmer's Alliance became active in the 1880's. With the decline of the Populist movement the Farmer's Alliance unites in the County merged with the different Granges. Among other farm organizations serving the agricultural community of the county are the Farmer's Union and the Master Dairy Farmers' Guild, and the Delaware Valley Farmers Cooperative.

THE CHANGING FACE OF AGRICULTURE (1989)

Updated by George Conard

During the past quarter century there have been tremendous changes in agriculture as it was known in preceding years manifested not only on the farm but throughout the entire infrastructure which supports the county's agricultural industry.

In 1964 dairy and poultry farms represented the predominant agricultural enterprises in the county. Dairy farms have declined in number from over 300 in 1964 to 45 in 1989, although average herd size has increased from 40 to 85 milking cows during the same period.

The many community milk processing plants evident in the earliest period have been reduced to two large scale processors. Both firms rely principally on milk brought into the county and on retail distribution of milk and other products through convenience stores which have supplanted doorstep retail delivery routes. Today there is not a single dealer for any major farm equipment manufacturer in the county. Community dairy feed dealers have dwindled to two stores for which farm business is on the decline, while servicing residential demands has increased.

Additional changes are evident; the Flemington Auction Market, once a dominant sales place for farm livestock and eggs, closed in early 1970 and its buildings have been converted to office space. In the early 1960's the Monday morning traffic on Main Street, Flemington consisted primarily of dairy farmers bringing their livestock to this market. Today, cars of shoppers and business people throng the thoroughfare.

Poultry farms were a major enterprise in 1964, their numbers increasing in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Many poultry houses, built during this period, have been abandoned or torn down and today only a few small part time egg farms remain in the county. Comparative economics and the environmental concerns of new neighbors moving into the areas where these farms were located proved to be the dominant forces and consequently the industry has almost ceased to exist along with its related feed suppliers and the aforementioned Flemington Auction Market.

When dairy and poultry farms were going out of business in the mid-1960's, farmland assessment taxation came into being. This allowed farmland to be taxed based upon its use rather than its higher development value. Land had to be farmed to qualify for this preferential assessment, which spurred an emerging type of "cash crop" farmer, who would own only a small portion of the total acres he farmed, and rent the remainder from other landowners. This type of farming was encouraged by new equipment technology that provided for a crop to be grown, harvested, stored, and marketed with a minimum of labor. The

majority of these “cash grain” farmers produced corn, soybeans and wheat on an average combined acreage of 800-1,000 acres. This type of farming activity frequently resulted in the separation of farm ownership from farm operations.

Another contribution to this type of farming was a massive purchase of land by a major speculator during the late 1960’s in anticipation of a fourth major jetport. This was to be located in Readington Township. Local opposition to the jetport proposal and changes in the airline industry plus a recession economy terminated the jetport proposal and resulted in decreased farmland value. Much of the land acquired by the speculator was sold in the mid-1970’s at reduced price to “cash grain” farmers who had benefited from favorable prices during this period. Subsequently, in the 1980’s, as lower world prices impacted severely on these farm operations, the farm operation have been either diversified or discontinued.

However, in the mid-1980’s, demand for farmland to be converted to residential and industrial use in some sections of the county resulted in a sharp escalation in the land values throughout the county. This condition spurred changes in agriculture resulting in a more “intensive” use of the acreage. The intensive agricultural operations which began to dot Hunterdon County’s rural landscape during the 1980’s reflected a wide variety of farm operations. These farms are often referred to as “specialty” farms, reflecting the type of items, which were mostly sold direct to customers. The increase in residential units in the county during this period provided an increased local market for this production. Examples of these specialty farms are fruit, berry, vegetable, nursery and vineyard/winery units, many offering pick-your-own options to customers. A common thread among specialty farms is that they quite often sell recreation in addition to the crop for which the customer pays directly. These recreational units may be a wine and cheese tasting party or a farm tour. Some of these “boutique” farms offer specialty meat, organic produce or flowers or farm-produced grain . Some of these farmers currently take their produce directly to their customers using “green markets” or direct retailing markets in New York City or other nearby population centers. (A practice also common in the 19th century). Other examples of intensive land use are the wholesale nursery, sod and greenhouse operations that have been proliferating throughout the county during the past ten years. This growth mirrors the demands of an expanding commercial, industrial and residential market.

There have always been horses in the county, though their numbers dwindled substantially as tractors supplanted draft animals. Horse farms began to grow rapidly in number during the mid-1960’s with strong growth in Thoroughbred and Standardbred breeding farms along with recreational horse farms. The latter range from several acres to several hundred acres with the larger units having commercial boarding and training facilities which typically offer indoor riding arenas that provide customers with the ability to ride without regard to daylight hours or weather conditions. Clubs such as the Amwell Valley

Hunt for fox hunting and the Amwell Valley Polo Club provide competitive equine sporting events. The New Jersey Sire Stakes program has fostered growth of the equine industry. Since the Tax Reform Act of 1986 removed many of the tax shelter benefits which stimulated investments in horse breeding, there has been a general slowdown in the origination of new horse farms. However, horse farming continues to be one of the major agricultural land uses in Hunterdon County.

The remaining conventional farming units such as dairy and cash grain operations have become more and more dependent on government subsidies to remain economically viable. Non-farm income has become a necessity for many farm families expecting to enjoy a normal lifestyle. The agricultural industry is necessarily supported by credit and the need for agricultural financing has remained fairly strong throughout the past decade as a result of new types of operations and higher prices paid for all farm inputs and land. Farm business management and consulting services provided by various financial institutions have become a necessity and an integral part of farm operations. Part time farming for recreational purposes or supplemental income generation has increased dramatically during the past twenty-five years as large farms have been fragmented into smaller units. This trend is counter to events in other agricultural areas in the nation. Hunterdon County has experienced an actual growth in farm numbers; however, most of these smaller farm units are actually supported by a healthy source of non-farm income.

During the early 1980's there developed an increased sense of concern over retention of agricultural land. Legislation was passed creating the State Agriculture Development Committee and County Agriculture Development boards. These entities were charged with the responsibility of delineating prime agricultural lands and establishing areas which should be preserved as agricultural open space. Funding was made available by the State to assist the County and municipalities in purchasing development rights on selected properties. This program has been actively pursued and the benefits will assure the availability of land for the continuation of agricultural activities.

In summary, the traditional types of farming that existed in 1964 have diminished dramatically and been replaced with new types of farm operations that require limited land and are competitive in today's economic environment. These farms serve the consumer directly whenever possible, to secure the greatest financial return. The operators are keenly aware of their quality conscious customers and accordingly provide the quality they demand. Hunterdon County agriculture in 1989 is more customer-driven than at any time in the recent past. Today's Hunterdon county farmers have great assurance that there will be an affordable land base from which to operate in the future due to the efforts of county and municipal leaders to preserve agricultural land as an integral part of the County's open space program.