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## Basic Trends of Social Change in South Dakota: II. Rural Life Adjustments

W. F. Kumlien

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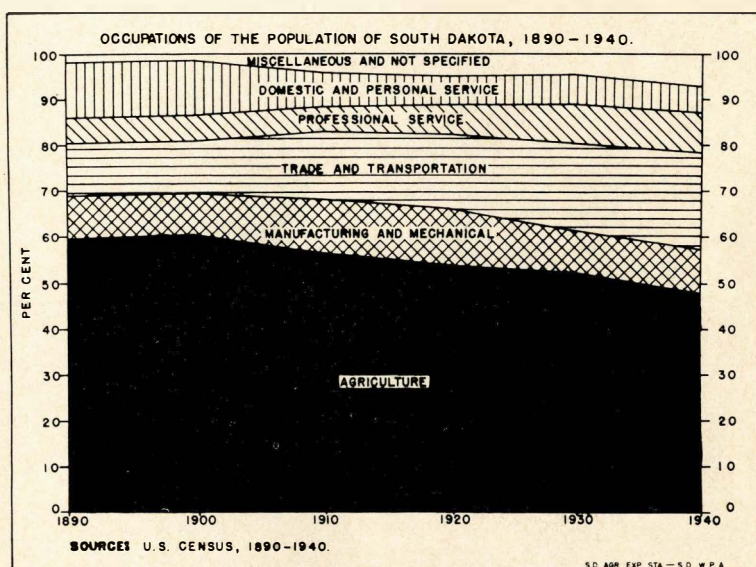
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# Basic Trends of Social Change in South Dakota

## *II. Rural Life Adjustments*

W. F. Kumlien



The greatest change in the occupational distribution of the population of South Dakota has been the reduction in the proportion of gainfully employed persons engaged in agriculture. The largest increase has been in the proportion engaged in trade and transportation. These changes reflect a declining farm population and increasing urbanization of the state.

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## Explanatory Note

This is the seventh publication in a projected series of 10 bulletins carrying the general title of "Basic Trends of Social Change in South Dakota." Appropriate subtitles for each field covered will appear as follows:

- (1) Population Tendencies (Bulletin 327)
- (2) Rural Life Adjustments (This bulletin)
- (3) Community Organization (Bulletin 356)
- (4) Family Relationships
- (5) Public Health Facilities (Bulletin 334)
- (6) Education in Transition (Bulletin 338)
- (7) Local Government (Bulletin 347)
- (8) Religious Organization (Bulletin 348)
- (9) Recreation Activities
- (10) Social Welfare Service

The timeliness of the study is occasioned particularly by the fact that the recent extended period of drouth and depression has made the people of the state increasingly conscious of the need for economic and social planning in the future.

In such planning it is imperative that what has happened in the past be carefully scrutinized. This series of bulletins, which will be published during a period of several years, is being prepared so that federal, state, county and local planning agencies, as well as individuals, operating in the state may obtain a clearer view of the direction and implications of the more definite trends of social change in each of the fields listed above.

Whenever possible, data were obtained for the years 1890 to 1940, although in a few cases data were not available for as early a year as 1890.

Only those aspects of rural life which affect social institutions will be treated in this bulletin.



# Basic Trends of Social Change in South Dakota

## *II. Rural Life Adjustments*

By W. F. Kumlien<sup>1</sup>

### **I. Introduction**

**The Problem.** The rural people of South Dakota have had to make continual adjustments to the physical and social environments of the state. Among the factors which have forced adjustments the most important have been fluctuations in rainfall and changes in transportation facilities and in farm technology.

A period of above normal rainfall coupled with good prices for agricultural products between 1900 and 1920 caused a great expansion of farming in the state. After the war boom in prices broke in 1921, an agricultural depression resulted. When an acute rainfall shortage began in 1930, the people found that land had been over-cropped in many areas and in parts of the ranching region much land had been over-grazed. This was conducive to wind erosion, which did much damage to the soil, in addition to the crop failures and consequent lack of money. It was not until this time that the maladjustments were forcibly brought to people's attention, and attempts to remedy them were begun on a large scale. The present study deals with the changes which the people have made in rural life and corresponding changes in their social institutions.

Certain pertinent questions arise in connection with rural life:

- (1) What has happened to farm population?
- (2) What adjustments have been made in land use?
- (3) What happened to the income of farmers in the 1920's and what have been the consequences?
- (4) What has resulted from the establishment of government-assisted agricultural programs?

**Purpose.** The purpose of this study is to portray as simply as possible the basic trends in rural life in South Dakota. Rural life as used in this bulletin refers to the economic life of the rural people and its interrelationships with the social institutions of South Dakota.

**Scope and Method.** This study attempts to cover the main phases of rural life emphasizing particularly changes in population, in land use, in farm income and wealth and their effects upon the social institutions of the state.

State-wide data have been secured from the Federal Census of Agriculture for the period from 1890 to 1940 and from the reports of several departments of the state government.

1. Acknowledgments. This study was made possible by the cooperation of the State and Federal Work Projects Administration (formerly Works Progress Administration), and the Division of State and Local Planning, BAE, U.S.D.A. with the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station. The original WPA project was designated as No. 665-74-3-143, and the official name has been "Basic Trends of Social Change in South Dakota." The WPA furnished clerical helpers, while the Experiment Station provided the general project supervision and bore the cost of publishing the manuscript. The author gratefully acknowledges the faithful assistance rendered by all those working on the study. Particular mention is made of the valuable contribution given by Vera Petheram Woolbert, analyst.

## II. Adjustments in Rural Life

Changes in farm life represent a series of socio-economic adjustments to physical and social environment. Adjustments to physical environment have revolved mainly around land use, tenure, mechanization, farm practices and land values. Adjustments to social environment have been made with respect to the rural farm and non-farm ratio of population, farm living conditions, income and wealth and farm leadership.

**1. Declining farm population and its decreasing proportion to non-farm groups in the total population.** For the past 50 years the proportion of rural people<sup>2</sup> in South Dakota has been steadily declining and the proportion of urban population increasing.<sup>3</sup> In 1940, 24.6 percent of the total population resided in urban areas. Although the total population increased each decade until 1930, the rate of growth became slower with each passing decade. Between 1930 and 1940, however, there was a net loss of 49,888 persons.

The rural population was first divided into rural-farm and rural-nonfarm in the 1920 census. Between 1920 and 1930 the farm population decreased from 56.9 to 56.2 percent of the total. By 1940 it had dropped to 47.8 percent. In other words more people now live in the villages, towns and cities of South Dakota than on farms.

Estimates made by the United States Department of Agriculture show the following changes in farm population between January 1, 1937, and January 1, 1940.

1937	327,800
1938	311,700
1939	307,900
1940	306,800

The estimate for 1940 is within 400 persons of the figure issued by the Bureau of the Census, an indication of the accuracy of the Department's figures. These data show a decreasing rate of migration from farms.

The great loss of population in South Dakota during the last 10 years was largely caused by the severe drouth of 1933-37. Some of the people who left farms moved into the villages, towns and cities of the state. Many left the state. It is estimated that 117,000 persons migrated between 1930 and 1940<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 1).

A close relationship exists between rainfall and loss in population. Only six states, five of which were in the Great Plains area,<sup>5</sup> lost population between 1930 and 1940. Of these five states only Oklahoma had over 90 percent of its normal rainfall during that period.

2. Rural population includes all persons living on farms or in villages and towns of less than 2,500 persons.

3. Urban population includes all persons living in towns of 2,500 or more.

4. Kumlien, W. F. and Howard M. Sauer—"Population Migration to and From South Dakota, 1930-1940,"

South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station Rural Sociology Pamphlet No. 2, Sept., 1940, p. 3, footnote 1. The method used was as follows: The natural increase of 67,303—number of births minus number of deaths—was added to the population of 1930—692,849. The total figure of 760,152 would have been the population for 1940 had there been no migration. The population figure for 1940 was 642,961. Thus it would appear that there must have been a net movement of 117,191 persons from the state during the period.

5. North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma.



Other influences upon population growth include a declining birth rate, a slightly increasing death rate, cessation of foreign immigration and greatly reduced migration from other states.<sup>6</sup>

Since 1910 the proportion of gainfully employed persons who were engaged in agriculture has decreased rapidly, although over 50 percent of the gainfully employed persons in South Dakota were farming in 1930. (See cover page.) By 1940 the proportion of agricultural workers had dropped to 48 percent.<sup>7</sup> One cause for this decline is that over 50 percent of the population now lives in the towns and cities. Another cause for the reduction in the proportion of the population engaged in agriculture is the displacement of farm labor by more general use of large-scale farm machinery.

Table 1. Total, Rural and Urban Population in South Dakota, 1890-1940.

Year	Total	Total		Rural				Urban	
		Number	Percent	Rural-farm		Rural non-farm		Number	Percent
				Number	Percent	Number	Percent		
1890	348,600	320,045	91.8					28,555	8.2
1900	401,570	360,634	89.8					40,936	10.2
1910	583,888	507,215	86.9					76,673	13.1
1920	636,547	534,675	84.0	361,886	56.9	172,789	27.1	101,872	16.0
1930	692,849	561,942	81.1	389,431	56.2	172,511	24.9	130,907	18.9
1940	642,961	484,874	75.4	307,142	47.8	177,732	27.6	158,087	24.6

Source: U. S. Census 1890-1940.

**2. Increasing average size of farms.** The land of the state has been put into more extensive use since the early days of settlement. The term "more extensive" refers to a decrease in the number of farms, an increase in the size of farms and an increase in the proportion of land in farms. (Fig. 2).

Since 1930 the proportion of land in farms has increased but the number of farms and the amount of tillable land have decreased. As a result there was an appreciable increase in the average size of farms.

Both population and the social institutions of the state have had to make many adjustments to the changes in the cultivation of the land. Fewer and larger farms have inevitably led to a reduced farm population. Since a few areas have more farms now than previously, there undoubtedly has been considerable population redistribution. The school, the church and local government are affected by this redistribution.<sup>8</sup> In many areas, declining population has made the services of these social institutions expensive and difficult to maintain.

Although the long-time effects of this trend probably will be beneficial, there are lags in adjustments which must be corrected before maximum service can be obtained.

6. For a more complete discussion of the factors which affect population growth see Kumlien, W. F., "Basic Trends of Social Change in South Dakota: Population Tendencies," S. D. Agr. Exp. Sta. Bul. 327, April, 1939.

7. This proportion is based on persons 14 years of age and over while the proportion in earlier years was based on 10 years of age and over. Very few persons between 10 and 14 years of age are gainfully employed.

8. For a more complete discussion of the effects upon these institutions see S. D. Agr. Exp. Sta. Bul. 338, 347 and 348.

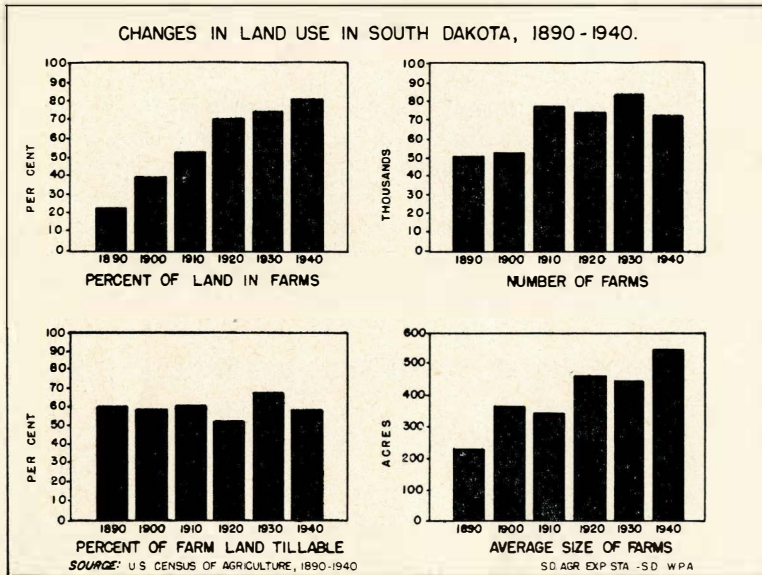


Fig. 2. Selected changes in Land Use in South Dakota, 1890-1940.

3. **Shifting emphasis in agricultural production.** The process of adjustment to the physical environment is reflected in fluctuations in the amount and type of livestock and crops produced.

Table 2. Number of Specified Kinds of Livestock on Farms in South Dakota, 1890-1940.

Livestock	1890 <sup>1</sup>	1900 <sup>1</sup>	1910 <sup>2</sup>	1920 <sup>3</sup>	1930 <sup>3</sup>	1940 <sup>3</sup>
Milk cows	210,240	270,634	369,764	546,258	493,534	393,156
Other cattle	455,183	1,276,166	1,165,512	1,801,899	1,480,506	1,103,105
Swine	590,465	823,120	1,009,721	1,953,826	2,637,188	552,546
Horses & mules	257,857	487,572	681,786	832,151	640,511	342,076
Chickens	2,292,866	3,028,700	5,251,348 <sup>4</sup>	6,641,572	8,545,755	6,233,291
Sheep	238,448	775,236	611,264	843,696	1,150,346	1,370,201

1. Figures are as of June 1.

2. Figures are as of April 15.

3. Figures are as of January 1.

4. Includes all poultry—chickens not listed separately.

Source: U. S. Census, 1890-1940.

Table 2 shows the number of specified kinds of livestock in the state from 1890 to 1940. Milk cows, other cattle, and horses and mules increased in number until 1920, after which they began to decline. Horses and mules have decreased almost 50 percent in the past 20 years. During approximately the same period tractors have increased four-fold (Table 4). The number of swine and poultry increased each decade until 1930, but have declined since that time. Swine decreased from approximately two and a half million to a little over half a million during the 10 years, with poultry showing an approximate drop of 25 percent. Sheep were the only livestock to show a continued gain.



The general decline in livestock production between 1930 and 1940 reflects dry years with consequent lack of feed crops, low prices for animals, and the efforts of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration to adjust production.

In the case of harvested grains there has been an increase in corn and forage crops, and since 1900 an almost continuous decrease in the number of harvested wheat acres. The greatest increase in corn occurred between 1920 and 1930. During the past 10 years, however, the production of corn dropped to only a little over its 1930 level (Table 3). Although the number of harvested acres of corn decreased by almost 50 percent between 1930 and 1940, the number of acres of corn cut for silage increased from 56,691 to 105,451, while the sorghums cut for grain increased from 386 to 150,924 acres and those cut for silage, hay or fodder increased from 15,269 to 920,971 acres. This represents what is probably the most important adjustment in crop production to rainfall shortage in South Dakota. (See Fig. 3.)

Table 3. Total Number of Harvested Acres of Specified Crops in South Dakota, 1890-1940.

Crop	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Corn	753,309	1,196,381	2,037,658	2,756,234	3,493,279	1,964,554
Wheat	2,259,846	3,984,659	3,217,255	3,891,468	3,539,320	2,062,563
Oats	580,289	691,167	1,558,643	1,839,089	2,271,899	1,598,402
Barley	97,370	299,510	1,114,531	754,929	2,061,136	1,393,594
Rye	9,229	39,253	13,778	463,132	229,753	615,665
Flax	354,951	302,010	518,566	159,234	669,319	146,863
Corn & Sorghum for Forage	730	30,960	32,427	515,108	1,616,799	1,640,583
Tame & Wild Hay	1,554,913	2,229,844	3,378,820	4,442,755	3,487,953	2,443,456

Source: U. S. Census, 1890-1940.

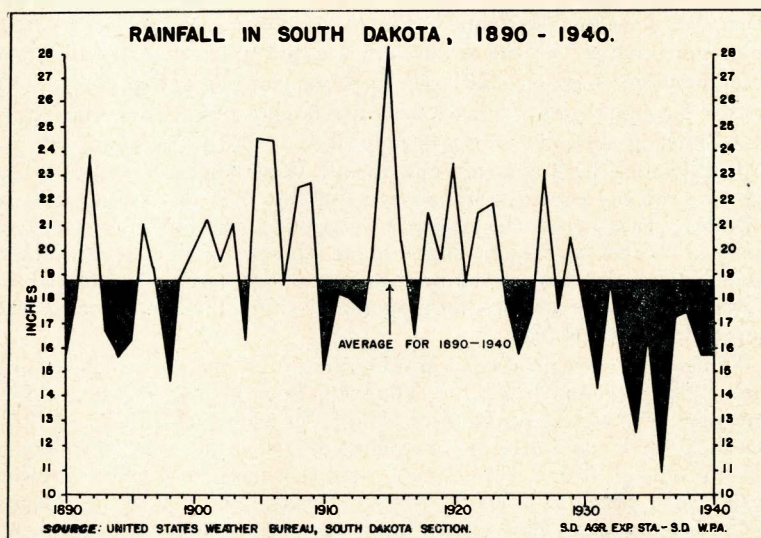


Fig. 3. Variations in rainfall in South Dakota by years, 1890-1940.

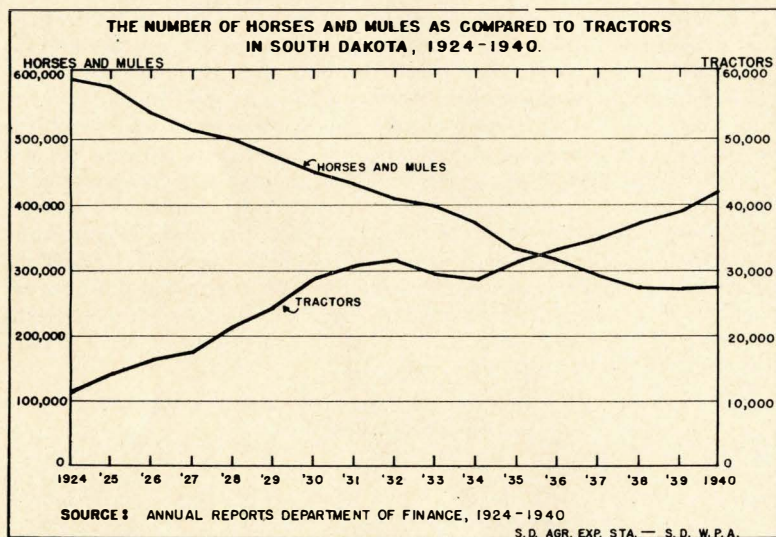


Fig. 4. A comparison of the number of horses and mules with tractors in South Dakota, 1924-1940.

Gradual adjustment to the physical environment of the state has resulted in the development of different types of farming in various parts of the state. Although social institutions do not differ basically in their structure from area to area, they have made certain adjustments peculiar to each type of farming region. For instance, the size of family is decreasing in all parts of the state, but families remain appreciably larger in the ranching areas than in the more intensive farming regions.<sup>9</sup> Since it takes much more land to support a family in the ranching area, the density of population is much less than in the intensified livestock feeding area. Consequently, these latter eastern South Dakota areas can support more schools and churches than the country west of the Missouri River where the principal occupation is ranching. As the size of farms and ranches has become larger, many schools and churches have been abandoned and the areas served by those remaining have been enlarged. In the areas between the intensive farming and ranching, these trends have been modified to fit the situation.

4. **Increased mechanization of farming.** South Dakota farms are becoming increasingly mechanized (Fig. 4). The value of farm implements and machinery per farm increased from \$166.90 to \$1,506.06 between 1890 and 1920. After 1920 there was a decrease in value and by 1940 the average value per farm was only \$827. 69. This does not mean that mechanization of farming has decreased since 1920. Values were unusually high at that time; many types of large-scale machinery were just coming into general use, and there-

9. It is to be expected that these families would be larger since it is a strictly open-country ranch area.



fore, they were more expensive. Also, less new machinery was bought during the prolonged agricultural depression.

Another indication of increased mechanization is the growth in the number of steam and gas tractors as shown in the following table.

Table 4. Number of Tractors, Threshing Machines and Combines in South Dakota, 1915-1940.

Year	Steam or Gas Traction Engines Number	Threshing machine Separators Number	Combines Number
1915	3,983	3,002	-----
1920	*	*	*
1925	14,629	6,147	-----
1930	29,147	7,826	-----
1935	31,674	7,535	1,966
1940	41,805	7,378	2,779

\* Data for 1920 not available.

Source: Annual Reports of the Department of Finance.

The introduction of large-scale machinery aided materially in the expansion of farming in South Dakota. Grain seeders, harrows, self-binders and threshers were all introduced into general use about 1880 or 1890. Combines were not generally used until about 1926, and then were confined to the large farms in the spring grain area of the state. The check-row corn planter was first used about 1885 to 1890, one-row cultivators quite early in the history of the state, two-row cultivators probably not until the World War, and the four-row cultivators not until 1927. Corn binders came into general use about 1900, and the development of corn pickers began about 1910. Machinery for haying probably developed earlier than did other machinery. The mower probably was used before the self-binder, the dump rake in the late '70's, while the hay loader seems to have been a development of the late '90's.

The development of the tractor between 1910 and 1920 has modified the type of farm organization in South Dakota by making possible the farming of larger acreages with less labor. The development of large-scale machinery and labor-saving devices has made it more profitable to operate larger farms. In this way it has contributed toward a worthwhile adjustment to the physical conditions of the state.<sup>10</sup>

5. **Marketing of agricultural products within the state is increasing.** The present system of marketing agricultural products has developed as a result of the more complete settlement of the state, and the consequent demand for better marketing facilities than had been available. Developments in transportation and communication have also greatly aided in the process.

The history of agricultural marketing gives an insight into the problems solved by rural people. When the first settlements were established there were no railroads and the farmer was practically on a self-sufficient basis. Much of what he raised was used on the farm and he bartered extra grain for store goods. This stage lasted until nearly 1878.

The year 1878 marked the beginning of rapid railroad expansion. Land was quickly settled. Railroads made it possible for agricultural products to be

10. Data on introduction of machinery obtained from correspondence with the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering, U. S. Department of Agriculture.



# Loss of Population in South Dakota Townships, 1930-1940

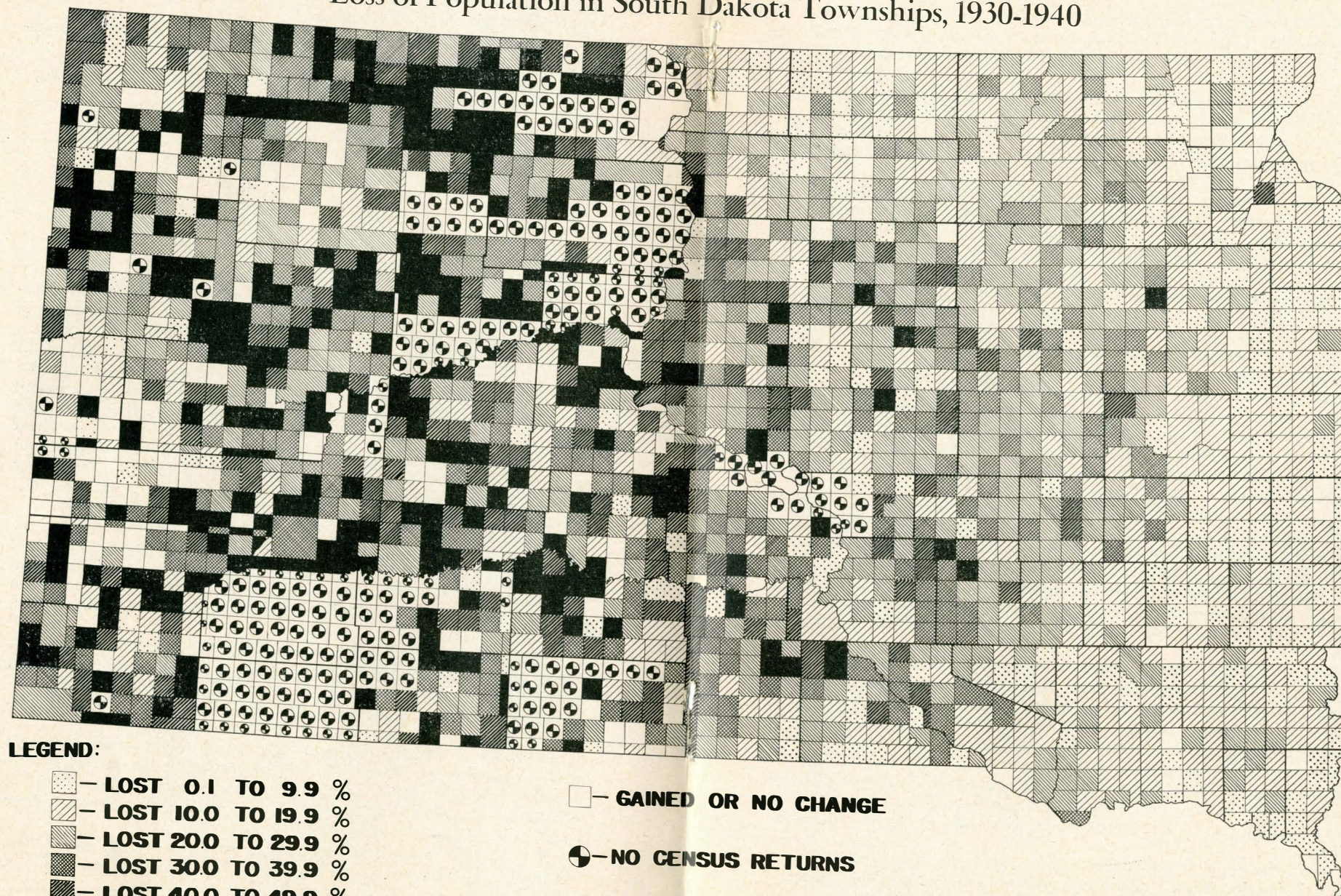


Fig. 1. Percentage of population decrease in South Dakota townships, 1930-1940.



shipped out of the state to terminal markets. Cash selling was substituted for barter. Although most farmers sold their products to local, privately-owned grain elevators and livestock dealers, some farmers shipped direct to terminal markets.

It soon became evident that there were many phases of agricultural marketing in which great improvements could be made. Various farm organizations, such as the Grange, did much to get fair railroad rates established. Later some of these organizations were helpful in establishing cooperative marketing associations.

Gradually the farmers established local cooperative elevators and livestock shipping associations. Eventually farmers realized that, despite their local cooperative buying, they were still at a disadvantage in selling at terminal markets. Consequently state grain and livestock associations were formed to organize cooperative sales agencies at the terminal markets through which they might operate. The local cooperative livestock shipping associations have largely disappeared since 1925, due to a change in the policies of the meat packing companies. Branch meat packing plants have been established in several cities of the state, and most of the livestock is now trucked directly to the packing plants.

Many of these trends have occurred in the marketing of other products. At first cream and poultry were sold to private local concerns or shipped to central markets. Later private and still later, cooperative creameries and produce houses were established. At the present time private companies with buying stations, locally owned creameries and produce houses, and cooperatives are furnishing a market for cream, eggs, and poultry.

A still more recent development has been the formation of regional or national associations through which state associations sell their products. An example of this is the South Dakota Wool Grower's Association which ships its wool to the national pool at Boston where it is then sold.

**6. Part-time farming is increasing slightly.** Part-time farming has increased in many parts of the United States. There has been some increase in South Dakota, but this increase is not as great as indicated by 1935 census figures.

Between 1929 and 1934 the proportion of farm operators reporting part-time employment off the farms increased from 18.9 percent to 60.1 percent.<sup>11</sup> A great part of this increase was, no doubt, due to the large number of persons employed on temporary emergency work. During 1934 both the Civil Works Administration and the Emergency Relief Administration gave employment to farmers, and this employment was reported in the 1935 census of agriculture as part-time employment off the farm. However, by 1939 only 21.3 percent of the farmers in the state reported part-time employment off the farm, indicating that the increase has been only slight during the 10 year period.

Another indication that part-time farming may have increased somewhat during the last decade is the gain in the number of farms of less than 50 acres (Table 5). It is probable that most of the operators of these small farms are

11. United States Census of Agriculture, 1935, Vol. III, Chapter IV, Table 20, p. 220-221.

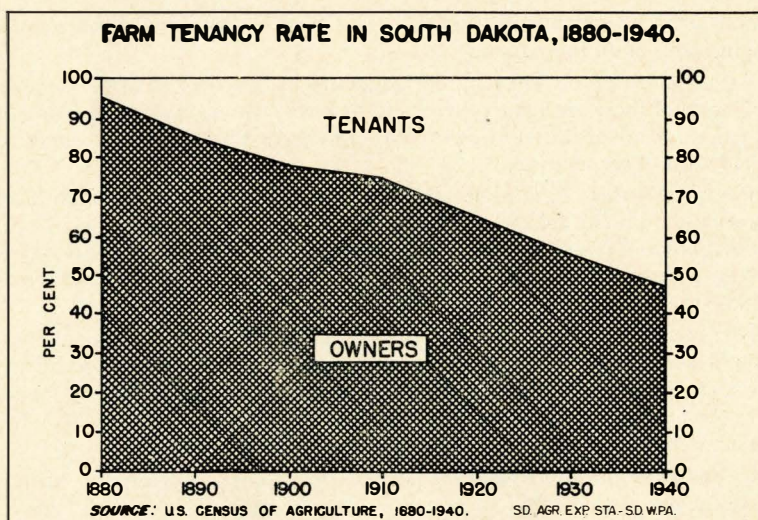


Fig. 5. Proportion of owners and tenants on farms in South Dakota, 1890-1940.

people who live near a town and work for wages in some town occupation. A few people, who have no other source of income, move on to these small farms and attempt to eke out a living. Most of the people living on such farms, however, either have a job in town or have some other supplementary occupation.

Table 5. Farms in South Dakota by Size, 1910-1940.

Size of Farms	1910		1920		1930		1940	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	77,644	100.0	74,637	100.0	83,157	100.0	72,454	100.0
Under 3 acres	99	.1	64	.1	189	.2	130	.1
3 to 9 acres	341	.4	361	.5	787	.9	1,139	1.6
10 to 19 acres	368	.5	341	.4	650	.8	745	1.0
20 to 49 acres	1,121	1.4	993	1.3	1,537	1.8	1,659	2.3
50 to 99 acres	2,406	3.1	2,381	3.2	3,038	3.7	2,670	3.7
100 to 499 acres	61,437	79.2	53,806	72.1	58,332	70.2	47,576	65.7
500 to 999 acres	9,698	12.5	11,641	15.6	13,401	16.1	11,380	15.7
1000 acres or over	2,174	2.8	5,050	6.8	5,223	6.3	7,155	9.9

Source: 1910-20-30—U. S. Census of Agriculture, 1935, South Dakota, Statistics by Counties, Second Series, Table 3, p. 8.  
1940—16th Census of the United States, Agriculture.

7. **Farm tenancy rate is increasing.** Farm tenancy has increased rapidly (Fig. 5). In 1880, 96 percent of the farmers owned the farms they operated. By 1940 less than half, 47 percent, were owners or managers.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, the proportion of tenants had risen and comprised over half the farmers of the state.

The rapid increase in farm tenancy was a natural result of more complete settlement and of adverse economic conditions. As more land was settled it was inevitable that more people would have to rent their farms. The original

12. The proportion of managers was less than one percent.



homesteaders retired but did not sell their land. In addition, businessmen bought farms as an investment.

After 1920 the foreclosure of mortgages accelerated the rise in the tenancy rate. Many of these mortgages were held by banks, insurance and investment companies. Some of this land was resold to farmers, but much of it remained in the hands of corporations.

Presumably there have been harmful effects resulting from the high farm tenancy rate in South Dakota. It has frequently been conducive to poor farming methods and to soil mining. This was especially true where tenants stayed only for a short time on the farm. In such cases there was little incentive to build up the soil or to use the best farm practices.

Farm tenancy has probably resulted in greater mobility of the farm population. Renters do not generally move great distances, but there has been much movement between neighborhoods and communities, and from one school district to another. This has had an injurious effect upon the rural school, the rural church, local government and community life in general.

**8. Farm income and wealth are lower.** The income and wealth of farmers has decreased considerably in recent years, although earlier years showed an increase.

Table 6 shows the fluctuations in farm income between 1924 and 1940. There was a general increase until 1929, after which income declined until it reached a low point in 1932. Since that time farm income has gradually increased, partly due to government benefit payments, and partly because of better prices.

Table 6. Receipts From the Sale of Principal Farm Products and Government Payments in South Dakota.

Year	Crops Dollars (000)	Livestock and Livestock Products Dollars (000)	Government Payments Dollars (000)	Total Dollars (000)
1924	95,442	122,294		217,736
1925	70,522	156,138		226,660
1926	26,166	158,465		184,631
1927	103,411	123,184		226,595
1928	59,687	143,069		202,756
1929	69,222	161,607		230,829
1930	50,145	142,375		192,520
1931	13,712	117,341		131,053
1932	11,086	45,567		56,654
1933	11,727	56,051	4,182	71,960
1934	6,779	44,688	27,251	78,718
1935	21,969	53,641	17,300	92,910
1936	16,700	94,974	9,786	121,460
1937	18,540	71,836	15,015	105,391
1938	18,474	72,465	17,532	108,471
1939	24,783	83,715	23,052	131,550
1940	31,342	97,196	20,016	148,554

Sources: Summarized by the Agricultural Economics Department, South Dakota State College Extension Service, from data published by the USDA, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Division of Crops and Livestock Estimates, and the South Dakota Cooperative Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

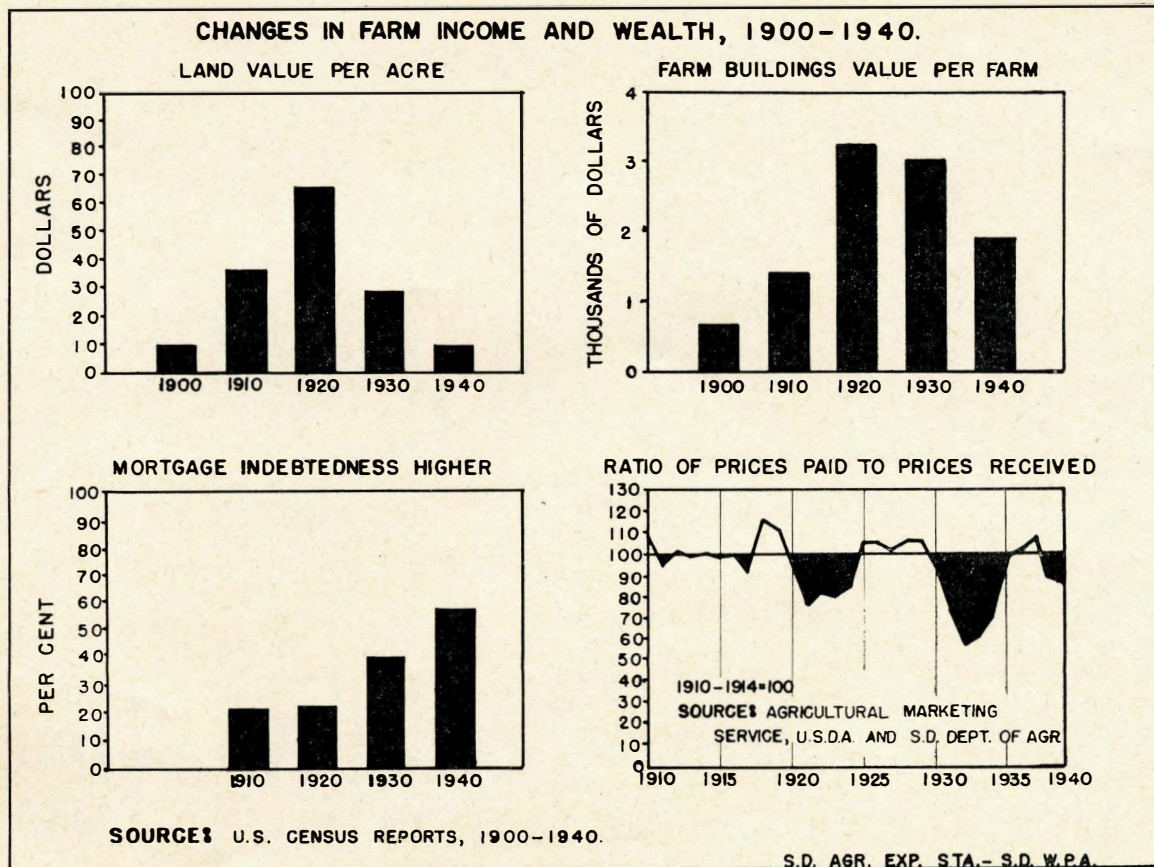


Fig. 6. Fluctuations in the amount of farm income and wealth, 1900-1940.



Fig. 6 shows that in only seven years between 1915 and 1939, did the prices received by South Dakota farmers show a margin over prices paid.<sup>13</sup>

The data indicate that the income of farmers leaves much to be desired. Fluctuations in land values, mortgage indebtedness and foreclosures indicate the same conclusion.

South Dakota had a higher average value of all farm products per farm in 1929 and a higher net value of farm products per farm than did the southeastern states. It had lower values than many of the northern states, especially those in the Corn Belt and in the west. Farm values have also fluctuated (Fig. 6). The value of farm land per acre reached a peak of \$64.42 in 1920. By 1940, however, the average value of farm land had dropped to \$9.42 per acre, which was lower than the value in 1900. The value of buildings per farm increased rapidly until 1920, and then decreased. Between 1930 and 1940 there was a very abrupt decline.

The great decrease in the value of buildings between 1930 and 1940 resulted from the years of depression and drouth of the 1920's and 1930's. Needed repairs and replacements were not made and as a consequence there was a rapid depreciation in value. The amount of mortgages on farms increased between 1910 and 1940 in all parts of the state (Fig. 6). This increase was largely due to over-expansion during the land boom following the World War and the resulting depression.

These changes in farm income and values have tended to decrease the amount of money available for certain social institutions, as well as to lower the standard of living of farm families. In spite of these conditions, however, many families have managed to secure conveniences which they did not previously have.

**9. Rural working conditions improving.** There is little reason to doubt that farm people have better working conditions and, in certain respects, higher levels of living now than formerly.

Better means of transportation and communication have contributed to this change. Table 7 shows the increase in highway and railroad mileage up to 1930. In recent years railroad mileage has declined slightly, but this decline has been more than offset by a rapid increase in improved highway mileage.

In 1940 there were fewer graded earth roads than formerly, but the mileage of graveled, oiled, and concrete roads was much greater. The development of good roads and an increasing number of automobiles has increased the number of contacts between people in different parts of the state and also between town and country people.

Improved communication facilities have also lessened isolation and brought people into closer relationship. Telephones are more numerous than in 1900, although the number has declined since 1930. In 1930, 53.6 percent of the farms had telephones, but by 1940 only 34.3 percent of the farms reported a telephone.<sup>14</sup> During the 1920's the radio came into widespread use,

13. Prices between 1910 and 1914 were used as 100 in working out these index numbers.

14. Preliminary report of the U. S. Census of Agriculture, 1940.



and has greatly broadened the average person's knowledge of the world. Farm people are better acquainted now with events of the world than they were formerly with events in their own state. It has also helped to break down town and country prejudice.

Table 7. Changes in Railroad and Highway Mileages, 1890-1940.

Year	Railroad Mileage	Graded Earth	Graveled	Oiled	Concrete
1890	2486				
1900	2850				
1910	3948				
1920	4276				
1930	4238	1143	3678.0	9.85	21.64
1940	3991.33	663.33*	2941.99	2033.04	311.86

\*Includes unimproved miles.

Source: South Dakota State Highway and Railroad Commission Reports.

There has also been a great increase in farm labor-saving machinery and home conveniences. Electric lights were found on 17.7 percent of the farms in 1940 as compared with 10.9 percent in 1930.<sup>15</sup> However, these home conveniences have not been uniformly distributed throughout the state. According to an index of the standard of living, based upon home conveniences and income, the southeastern counties had the highest index in the state, while the west river counties had the lowest.

Although farm labor-saving machinery and home conveniences have been greatly increased, this does not necessarily mean that the hours of work have been shortened. In many instances it has meant that the farm man or woman has merely been enabled to do a more thorough job, rather than taking more leisure time for reading and recreation. This conclusion was reached by Brunner and Kolb in their study of rural social trends in the United States,<sup>16</sup> after summarizing a number of studies on the use of time by farm men and women.

After 1930, depression and drouth caused such widespread distress among the farmers of the nation that the federal government passed several different legislative measures in an attempt to alleviate this distress. During the worst of the drouth farmers were given relief work. Later they were given loans and direct grants of money through the Rehabilitation Corporation, later changed to the Resettlement Administration, and still later to the Farm Security Administration. The first Agricultural Adjustment Act was passed in 1933 with the primary purpose of regulating production, and consequently prices. This was declared unconstitutional. The second act was passed in 1938, and provides that payments will be made to farmers who conform to certain soil conservation practices. These payments, as well as the direct relief measures, have been of material benefit to South Dakota. They have enabled many farmers to maintain a minimum level of living which would otherwise have been impossible.

**10. More farmers are participating as leaders today in the government assisted agricultural programs.** The government agricultural programs, which

15. Preliminary Report of the U. S. Census of Agriculture, 1940.

16. E. de S. Brunner and J. H. Kolb, "Rural Social Trends."

have been developed in the last ten years, have been making greater use of the voluntary leadership of farmers participating in the programs.

Various agencies, particularly those which are administered by the Department of Agriculture, have been developing their programs so that as far as possible they may be planned and administered by the farmers themselves. This is particularly true of the agricultural conservation programs in which community and county conservation committees, elected by the farmers, have helped in adapting the national program to local conditions.

In 1938, through the Mount Weather agreement, the land-grant colleges and the Department of Agriculture agreed to cooperate in helping farmers establish program planning procedures. Community and county agricultural planning committees were to be set up in each county. These committees, who were to be composed largely of farm men and women, were to study local farm problems, and in the light of their findings develop land use programs. These would unify all national programs into one which would be best suited to the particular needs of their communities. These local committees were assisted by technicians of the Department of Agriculture, and the land-grant colleges.

Certain other agricultural services of the federal government have been set up on a cooperative basis. Examples of this are the farm loan agencies and the Rural Electrification Cooperatives. In these cases the farmers have formed a cooperative to take care of their business, which has been subsidized by the government.

### Conclusions

1. The declining farm population and redistribution of population within the state has brought about maladjustments in the social institutions, particularly in the case of the church, the school and the local government. Although the adjustment in population is a beneficial one these lags must be adjusted before the best results can be secured.
2. The decrease in farm population has made possible an increase in the size and a reduction in the number of farms. This is an important development toward a farm system which will provide an adequate living for individual farm families. The shift from cash-grain to more livestock has also resulted in a more stable income.
3. The increased mechanization of farming has not only made it possible to operate much larger tracts of land, but it has also reduced the demand for farm labor and has greatly increased the capital investment necessary to start farming. In addition the farm tenancy rate has increased, which has also had definite ill effects upon open-country social institutions.
4. The severe agricultural depression of the past twenty years and the prolonged drouth during the 1930's have combined to reduce greatly the income and wealth of the farmers of the state and to increase the rate of farm tenancy. This has reduced the level of living of many of the farm families of the state and has also lessened the support available for social institutions.
5. Despite the great reduction in income and wealth there have been certain improvements in the conditions under which rural people work. Inventions



and mass production have made it possible for people to have many conveniences even though income has dropped. Automobiles have become less expensive both to obtain and to operate. Certain home conveniences and labor-saving machinery have become so much less expensive that many families have been able to buy them.

### III. Implications

Below are listed the more significant trends in rural life in South Dakota between the early days of settlement and 1940. Following each trend are the factors believed to be responsible for it and the probable results.

#### 1. Declining farm population and its decreasing proportion to non-farm groups in the total population.

##### a. Factors responsible for this trend.

- (1) Because of the great increase in town and city population, the proportion of the total population who live on farms has decreased. In 1890 only 23.5 percent of the population lived in the cities and incorporated towns of the state. By 1940 this proportion had risen to 46.7 percent.
- (2) During the last ten years there has been much migration of farm population out of the state, as well as to other towns and cities within the state. Several factors have been responsible for this migration, the main one being the drouth and depression of the last ten years. The use of largescale machinery and the establishment of larger farms have

also reduced the need for so many farmers.

- (3) The birth rate of the farm population is declining rapidly, although it is still higher than the birth rate of the non-farm population.

##### b. Probable results of this trend.

- (1) There may be a better living for those farmers who remain.
- (2) Size of farms may become larger.
- (3) Unemployment may increase unless greater opportunities for industry can be developed in the towns of the state. There is some indication that town population may decline somewhat because of better employment opportunities in other states.
- (4) There will be an increasing tendency toward centering social institutions in town if there are fewer farm families.

#### 2. Increasing average size of farms.

##### a. Factors responsible for this trend.

- (1) The normally small amount of rainfall in most parts of the state and the drouth during the 1930's have brought about an increase in the size of farms in many parts of the state.
- (2) The topography of the state has permitted farming by power equipment.
- (3) The process of settlement has greatly increased the amount of land cultivated.
- (4) Larger farms are more profitable in most parts of the state.

##### b. Probable results of this trend.

- (1) As the number of farms decreases and the size of farms grows larger, the farm population will necessarily decline.

- (2) Although the long-time effect of this trend will, no doubt, be very beneficial, there is at the present time a number of instances of serious lags or maladjustments in social institutions which will have to be adjusted before the greatest benefits can be secured. Some instances of these lags are:

a. Fewer families with a smaller number of children. As a consequence, the per pupil cost of rural schools will increase rapidly.

b. Local governmental units in some areas which have lost heavily in population, will soon have a difficult time to secure enough money to operate on the present basis.

c. Decreased farm population and improv-

ed transportation facilities will make it increasingly difficult, and in many cases impossible for open-country churches to survive.

d. Where the increased size of farm has been accompanied by displacement of farm families, the relief burden may be increased temporarily.

### 3. Shifting emphasis in agricultural production.

#### a. Factors responsible for this trend.

- (1) There has been a shift away from strictly cash-grain farming to more diversified farming and livestock production. During the early 1900's it was found that spring wheat would no longer grow well in the southeastern section of the state, and farmers there began to raise and feed livestock and to shift to diversified crops.
- (2) In more recent years, it has become increasingly evident that many areas in the state are better suited for livestock production than for cash-grain. Livestock production has not increased in all areas of the state, however. It was found during the drouth that in the strictly ranching counties the range had been overgrazed and

could not support larger herds of cattle.

- (3) The shorter growing season has made it impossible to raise certain crops and has made necessary the development of quickly maturing strains.

#### b. Probable results of this trend.

- (1) Larger farms and ranches may result.
- (2) Farming may become a year-round rather than seasonal occupation.
- (3) A more stable cash income may result, where so much now depends on one crop. This will affect the family and other social institutions. It may help to raise the family's standard of living and other social institutions may get more adequate support.

### 4. Increased mechanization of farming.

#### a. Factors responsible for this trend.

- (1) Perhaps the most important reason for mechanization was that large-scale machinery was developed to the point where it was efficient.
- (2) The large areas of level land in the state, particularly east of the Missouri River, are well adapted to the use of farm machinery of all types.
- (3) As less intensive types of farming now seem necessary in most parts, farmers have desired to cultivate large tracts of land. They have found large-scale machinery the most practical means of doing so.
- (4) The expansion of farming during the World War, when there was a shortage of farm laborers, demonstrated the value of a greater use of machinery.
- (5) After the beginning of the agricul-

tural depression, farmers found it increasingly difficult to pay the wages demanded by farm labor.

#### b. Probable results of this trend.

- (1) There may be larger farm units.
- (2) The employment of farm laborers may be increased per operating unit.
- (3) The work of the farmer may be lightened. If he does not attempt to farm more land than previously, it should allow him more leisure time.
- (4) Greater efficiency in farming should be developed.
- (5) A declining farm population has resulted in part since fewer people are required to produce enough food to feed the rest of the nation. Several social institutions such as the school, the church, the family and government, will be affected by this decline in population.

### 5. Marketing of agricultural products within the state is increasing.

#### a. Factors responsible for this trend.

- (1) The shift from cash-grain farming to livestock production has made it much more convenient to have markets near at hand.
- (2) The increase in good roads and

trucks has made it possible to quickly and easily transport products to nearby markets.

- (3) As South Dakota has become more completely settled there has been a greater demand for home markets.



b. Probable results of this trend.

- (1) Non-farm occupations will be increased.
- (2) The convenience of marketing agri-

cultural products will be improved greatly.

- (3) More cooperative marketing companies will likely be fostered.

## **6. Part-time farming is increasing slightly.**

a. Factors responsible for this trend.

- (1) The recent drouth and depression have made it necessary for many families, both town workers and farmers, to supplement their earnings.
- (2) An increasing number of persons have moved to small towns where they can raise part of their living to supplement wages received for a job in town.
- (3) Many farmers have taken on outside jobs for additional money. Some of them run school busses or do repair

work of various kinds. During the worst of the drouth period, much of the work done off the farms was emergency relief work.

b. Probable results of this trend.

- (1) The number of very small farms will be increased.
- (2) Some families may gain a much better living than they would if they were either farming exclusively or merely receiving wages.
- (3) A group of people will become more self-sufficient than they were before.

## **7. Farm tenancy rate is increasing.**

a. Factors responsible for this trend.

- (1) Many people bought farms during the great boom in land prices immediately following the World War. When agricultural prices slumped, many of these same people were forced to become tenants.
- (2) Between 1930 and 1940, the drouth and depression made it impossible for many people to keep up payments or pay off mortgages on their farms and the mortgages were foreclosed. Most of these people either moved to town or became tenant farmers.
- (3) As the state has become more completely settled, it has become more difficult for young people to secure enough capital to buy a farm. Farm tenancy is rapidly becoming a life-long tenure status rather than a first step up the agricultural ladder toward farm ownership.

b. Probable results of this trend.

- (1) If tenancy is a step to farm owner-

ship, it is not a disadvantage. This is true especially when it gives a man a chance to try out farming and a particular farm.

- (2) Poorer farming methods may be used, and greater soil impoverishment may result.
- (3) Further increase in farm tenancy is likely to result in more social stratification; that is, children of tenants remain tenants with a low income and a low standard of living in many cases.
- (4) Further increases in farm tenancy will likely result in even greater mobility of the farm population which in turn will continue its ill effects upon social institutions. It will make rural school enrollments even more unpredictable. It will not be conducive to church and Sunday school attendance and membership. Community consciousness is harder to awaken where people are moving in and out of the community every year or two.

## **8. Farm income and wealth are lower.**

a. Factors responsible for this trend.

- (1) The drouth and general agricultural depression have lowered farm income greatly. They have also tended to reduce the value of farm land to a large extent.
- (2) Because of lowered income farmers

have not been able to keep their buildings in repair and their value has declined.

b. Probable results of this trend.

- (1) Farm population will probably decrease further if it is at all possible to secure jobs elsewhere.

**9. Rural working conditions improving.****a. Factors responsible for this trend.**

- (1) There has been a breakdown of social isolation resulting from the increase in means of transportation and communication.
- (2) There has been a great increase in labor-saving farm machinery and home conveniences.
- (3) The widespread use of the radio has broadened people's knowledge of the world.

**b. Probable results of this trend.**

- (1) There will be less town-country friction.
- (2) There will be more leisure time that may be used for recreation and personal advancement.
- (3) The use of faster means of transportation and the knowledge of world events which come from the widespread use of newspapers and radios will give the people a much broader outlook than formerly.

**10. More farmers are participating as leaders today in government-assisted agricultural programs.****a. Factors responsible for this trend.**

- (1) There has been a great increase in federal legislation designed to assist farmers to help themselves.
- (2) Generally speaking South Dakota farmers are suspicious of super-imposed programs and prefer to participate in the management of their own affairs.
- (3) The government has recognized the desirability of farmer participation and has designed the more recent

agricultural programs accordingly.

- (4) Farmers have remained individualistic and fear centralization of too much authority.

**b. Probable results of this trend.**

- (1) Prejudice against nationally centralized programs should decrease in the future.
- (2) There will be more effective aid to agriculture if the programs are developed in cooperation with the farmers themselves.

**South Dakota Among the States<sup>17</sup>****1. Population**

- 37th in total population
- 41st in density of population
- 4th in percentage of rural population
- 5th in percentage of farm population

**2. Land Use**

- 28th in number of farms
- 7th in average size of farms

**3. Farm Values**

- 43rd in average value of farm land per acre
- 25th in average value of buildings per farm
- 13th in average value of implements and machinery per farm

**4. Miscellaneous**

- 8th in percentage of tenancy.
- 21st in number of persons working off the farm for pay (1935)

<sup>17</sup>. Ranked from the highest. All items except the last are for the year 1940.