



Boys Club at Clifton, Virginia (1925). T893, Roll 17.

Extension Service annual reports

If your relatives lived on farms in the first half of the twentieth century, you'll want to read Extension Service annual reports. Those for the early 1900s to the mid-1940s for all fifty states, plus the District of Columbia, have been microfilmed. Reports for the mid-1940s and later are available for research as original textual records at the National Archives (NARA) at College Park, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD. Microfilm may also be purchased.

"Annual reports" may sound exceedingly dull but, trust me, you won't fall asleep reading them. You might find your relatives mentioned by name and you might even find a photograph. But first, some background....

The Cooperative Extension Service system arose from Congress's concern for practical education of the average citizen. The Morrill Act (1862) provided for each state to have an institution for agricultural and mechanical education. The Hatch Act (1887) enabled the establishment of agricultural experiment stations to conduct research. The Smith Lever Act (1914) established the Cooperative Extension Service. As a result, probably every U.S. county has an extension office

today to "extend" information developed at agricultural research facilities to the average citizen. In the early days there was one agricultural agent (a man) plus one home demonstration agent (a woman). One or both of them worked with 4-H programs in which children participated, or the county might have its own 4-H agent. This program continues today in the U.S. Department of Agriculture as the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service.

To learn more about these records, we'll take a closer look at reports from Fairfax County, Virginia, and Lake County, Ohio.

Virginia reports have been reproduced in NARA Microfilm Publication T893, *Extension Service Annual Reports: Virginia, 1908-1944* (82 rolls). Fairfax County had a huge dairy industry from the 1920s to the 1950s. For each year, there are state reports followed by county reports in alphabetical order. (Sometimes adjacent counties shared one agent; in that case the shared counties might be reported together in one report.) The reports include both narrative statements and statistical tables. We'll take a look at Fairfax County's 1916, 1925, and 1935 reports.



Robert Wrenn had splendid success with Fairfax County White Corn. His best field will yield at least 80 bushels per acre. (1925) T893, Roll 17.

Fairfax County's earliest report is for 1916 and is forty-seven pages. County agricultural extension agent C. L. Fowler wrote that the dairy farmers had a hard year: "The better balanced ration feed was a success so far as increase in milk but the extreme high price of feed and the price paid for milk did not make it a success with very many." Beef producers likewise "have not been able to make much profit the last year or so." Hogs were "raised for home consumption principally." Farmers realized more profit "by selling their pigs at six weeks old" than by fattening them up and then selling them. Ten percent of farmers owned autos and "good roads [were] being made every day." It was a "church going" county with "all denominations."

Fairfax County's 1925 report is 112 pages with twenty-seven pages devoted to photographs. County extension agent H. B. Derr had been working since 1919 to help farms improve their corn yield by using a selection of seed called

"Fairfax County White Corn" that had been derived from "Boone County White Corn." In five years, on the Wisman farm, the yield had doubled so that in 1925 a six-acre field yielded ninety bushels per acre. On the Wrenn farm, an eight-acre field averaged eighty bushels per acre, which was double the forty bushel per acre averaged by most farmers. Because of "the increased cost of harvesting corn," almost half of the 1925 corn crop was still in the field on 1 December. Derr also worked with various farmers demonstrating improved varieties of wheat, oats, alfalfa, soy beans, various clovers, potatoes, and fruit. He also worked with them on matters relating to cows, pigs, sheep, and poultry. The details are in his report.

The agent faced the task of convincing farmers to buy better quality but more expensive seed in order to get better results. "Last year Mr. Pfalsgraf, a dairy farmer, wanted to sow an alfalfa field and was asked to buy a good quality of seed. He [bought] the Grimm variety costing him nearly 50 cents per pound. The crops passed thru the winter without the loss of a single plant and produced excellent crops this year."

The agent also had to convince farmers to try new things. "The soy bean as a hay crop has completely revolutionized the hay industry in Fairfax county. Prior to 1917...many of the hay fields were composed of ox daisy and timothy, the clover having been crowded out due to acidity. On many farms it could not be grown. ...The first real demonstration with soy beans was begun in 1920 and the results have been beyond expectations. During the past season over 3,000 acres were grown for seed and hay" with yields over 2 tons of fine hay reported.

In 1925, the Home Demonstration Agent, Lucy Steptoe, worked with adults and children. There were girls enrolled in clothing, canning, bread-making, and cooking clubs all over the county. The 152 girls in ten clothing clubs sewed 442 new garments and mended 252 others. "Many of these girls who had never sewed before are now making the greater part of their clothes and also a great many for others in their homes."

Fairfax County's 1935 report is 105 pages. Derr was still the agricultural agent. Alice E.

Crutchfield was the home demonstration agent. Derr reported that "several years ago" C. T. Rice, "one of our most successful dairymen, gave a very interesting talk over WJSV [radio] on his twenty years experience with temporary pasture crops. Owing to the fact that many of our small farmers depend upon such for caring for their stock, we had the talk mimeographed and mailed a copy to every dairyman and small farmer that we could reach. In this county the influence of this talk has had good results. The first season nearly a thousand acres of these crops were planted" as demonstrations for other farmers. Derr then described Rice's crop plan and said this demonstration project "had more lasting effect than any we have put on with the exception of dairy herd improvement work." In 1935, four of the five herds with the highest buttermilk production (by weight) were Herndon farmers named T. Harrison, Ben Middleton and Son, Marvin Perkins, and Mason F. Smith. In June, the highest producing Fairfax County herds were owned by R. T. Harrison and C. T. Rice. The highest producing individual cows were owned by R. T. Harrison and R. R. Farr of Fairfax.

On 8 January 1935, the Fairfax County Branch of the Federal Land Bank elected F. W. Huddleson, E. E. Huff, J. H. Armfield, W. B. Doak, B. F. Nevitt, H. B. Derr, R. B. Nickol, John Kerns, and Franklin Williams as directors, and elected these officers: Huddleson, president; Derr, vice president; John W. Rust, secretary-treasurer; Kern [sic], Armfield, and Nickol as Appraisal Committee; and Nevitt and Doak as alternates.

Crutchfield's report includes a map of Fairfax County showing the location of all 4-H clubs and all Home Demonstration Clubs. Their activities are described. The major project for the 486 girls involved in 4-H clubs was called "Breakfast, Dinner, and Supper." They prepared 12,302 dishes for demonstration, planned and helped prepare and serve 912 meals at home, and 312 girls tried to pack well-balanced school lunches.



Horse drawn machinery is still in the majority in Fairfax County and where the horses are well taken care of the results are not so bad. L. L. Demory, the owner, gets splendid results from his team and farm. (1925). T893, Roll 17.

"Each girl kept a better foods score for three weeks to check her food habits," and 325 reported improved health habits. Crutchfield singled out one girl's story: "Louise Melliner of Burke Club has been a 4 H Club Girl for six years, this year she brought her weight up to normal, learned to eat eight new foods. She says her study of foods has helped her to correct headaches, colds, fatigue, and constipation. She won second place in county health contest. She also won first place in the Montgomery Ward contest."

Crutchfield's report also included several newspaper clippings relating to home demonstration work as well as the program from the Fairfax County Home Demonstration Club Achievement Day event held 19 October 1935.

Now let's travel a few hundred miles to the northwest, to Lake County, Ohio, on the shore of Lake Erie just east of Cleveland. Ohio reports are reproduced in NARA Microfilm Publication T880, *Extension Service Annual Reports: Ohio, 1915-1944* (98 rolls). Lake County was in transition in the 1920s to 1940s, from being the land of the descendants of transplanted New Englanders and New Yorkers to a mixed land that included rich men's large estates and "foreigners." In 1921, farmers were still "general" farmers; crop specialization had not yet taken hold. Agent J. J. Riggle's 1921 report reported that "all the farm products except milk, grapes, and berries are taken into [down-town Cleveland] by each individual farmer in his own truck. One such truck stopped on the road had eleven different farm products on it. ... There is definite need of more specialization in a few



Walter Hennecker in his strawberry field in Harrison Township, Henry County, Ohio, on 1 August 1931. The plants were set in March in sandy soil in rows four feet apart and planted twenty inches apart in the row. Runners were sent out profusely, resulting in heavily matted rows that should yield a large crop next spring. The plants will be mulched with wheat straw in winter. From Henry County, Ohio, 1931 Report, T880, Roll 35.



Dan Heyman living room, Lyme Township, Huron County, Ohio, 1931. In 1931, the Huron County, Ohio, home demonstration agent, Mabel G. Fernald, helped people design "livable living rooms" to achieve a better grouping of furniture and accessories. "Before" and "after" photographs were made of the Dan Heyman home in Lyme Township. In this "before" photograph, chairs were in a circle in the center of the room and the view of the fireplace was blocked by a rocking chair. The mantle was cluttered with photographs. The mirror above the fireplace was hung at an angle so that people entering the room saw their feet! Some of the clutter was removed and the furniture rearranged for a more pleasing and welcoming effect. From Huron County 1931 Report, T880, Roll 35.

marketable products." By 1931, the agent reported that the "farmers are becoming more and more specialized."

In 1921, the agent worked with and supported the goals and activities of each township's Farm Bureau organization. For example, the Willoughby Township Farm Bureau had these committees and committee chairmen: School, Mrs. Nichols; Boys' & Girls' Club Work, Jerry Palmer and Mrs. P. Ellsworth; Roads, George Nichols; Landscape, Charles Brichford; Fruit, Evan Riggins; Butter & Cream, Walter Hach and Joe Ziegler; Poultry, I. R. Hadlock; Soils & Crops, George Bierman; Home Clothing, Mrs. Nichols; and Home Management, Mrs. Palmer. Their goals included such items as paving Chardon Road and laying gravel on Maple Grove Road; providing hot lunches at Willobee, Schram, and Maple Grove Schools; and demonstrating better flock and fruit management practices. In 1924, the new agent, L. H. Barnes, thought the county's Farm Bureau organization was rather weak with only 169 paid members. By 1931, the agent was still helping with county Farm Bureau programs but didn't get too much support in return; the Farm Bureau did "not assume much responsibility in the success of extension projects or meetings."

Experimentation with various crops continued over the years. In 1940, agent F. G. Haskins reported data on grape berry moth counts from

these farmers: Mark Woodworth, D. L. Dugan, J. F. Jensen, Charles Manchester, P. L. Peterson, Walter L. Green, O. S. Ingram, Norman Pratt, Roy Woodworth, and A. H. Mitchell. He also reported the average number of eggs laid per chicken of these farmers for the year ending 1 October 1940: James Bavetz, 461 birds averaging 179.9 eggs; J. F. Jensen, 225 birds averaging 177.2 eggs; O. L. Neville, 296 birds averaging 144 eggs; South Farm, 162 birds averaging 123.33 eggs; A. R. Tanswell, 225 birds averaging 145.31 eggs; and Charles R. Wood, 254 birds averaging 139.67 eggs. The average profit earned by these farmers was \$743.52.

Dee Maier, home demonstration agent, reported extensively in 1924 on the millinery clubs in which more than 130 women participated. What kinds of hats or clothing the women made was not reported, but their leaders in each township were named: Painesville: Mrs. Fred Brainard, Mrs. Mary Few, Mrs. Belle Brewster, Mrs. Ida Byrns, Mrs. Ida Jolliffe, and Mrs. Iva Cochran; Mentor: Mrs. J. Henrice, Mrs. Harold Warner, Mrs. W. S. Robison, Mrs. Gertrude Loudon, and Mrs. Vern French; Kirtland: Miss Melzine Russell, Mrs. F. M. Barber, and Mrs. M. L. Morse; Leroy: Mrs. Esther Bates and Mrs. J. H. Harrison; Concord: Mrs. Emily Dunwell and Mrs. Martha Chamberlin; Willoughby: Mrs. George Chambers, Mrs. Karl Norton, Mrs. C. Z. Thorton, Mrs. K. E. Reinhart, and Mrs. George M. Nichols; Unionville: Mrs. A. P. Johnson and Mrs. Margaret Olden; Madison: Mrs. Henry Prael, Mrs. Bessie W. Chafee, and Mrs. Josephine Kibler; and North Madison: Mrs. G. Milliman and Mrs. Mary E. Coville. "One leader, Melzine Russell of Kirtland, is already starting her third group after having started two groups of twelve each. Many of the leaders report that they have never enjoyed any of the extension work more than this."

Providing milk and hot lunches to school children was a hot issue. The school hot lunch program had been started in the county in 1922, so that by 1924 the northern two-thirds of the county schools had hot lunches available. However, ten one-room schools in Willoughby, Concord, and Leroy Townships, which had "from six to eight grades," still did not have hot lunches

and it was probably not feasible to do so. By 1931, there was just one one-room school remaining in the county, and the mothers took turns in cooking all the kids' hot lunches.

In 1940, home demonstration agent Rossie B. Greer's projects included promotion of kitchen improvement. Twelve kitchens were remodeled including that of Mrs. Burton McCormick. An unnamed woman's kitchen was extensively remodeled with enthusiastic support by her husband and carpenter; drawings and photographs of the "old" and "new" floor plans are included in the report.

I hope these small vignettes will encourage you to take a closer look at Extension Service Annual Reports if you had any relatives living on farms in the early twentieth century. Every county had its own issues and concerns, and each agent's report reflects his or her personality, so you never know what you will find until you look. 🌳

For more information

Use "Order Online" at <<https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline/start.swe?SWECmd=Start>> to learn more about Extension Service microfilm publications. You do not need to register, sign in, or buy anything. Click on the "microfilm" tab to get started.

"Records of the Extension Service," online at <<http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/033.html>>.

Brown, D. Clayton. "Prosperous Farms and Happier Homes: Arkansas Agricultural Extension Service, 1911–1966." *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives and Records Administration*, 30 (Summer 1998): 136–145.

"Cooperative Extension Service," online at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cooperative_extension_service>. Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, online at <<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/>>.

Claire Prechtel-Klusens, a microfilm projects archivist at NARA, Washington, D.C., served as NGS registrar (1996–98) and director (1998–2000). She can be reached at <cklusens@yahoo.com>. *Opinions expressed are her own and do not necessarily reflect the policies of NARA.*