

Teacher Resource Information:

Farming

Agriculture has historically been an important part of Cache Valley economy and life. During the frontier and pioneer period of Cache Valley's history (1860's—1890's), farms were basically subsistence farms (that is, they produced only enough food for a family or possibly a community). By 1917, farms were still diversified (growing a variety of crops), but they also grew surplus crops to be sold in the commodities market for a profit. Today most large farms concentrate on one commodity: grain, hay, milk, beets, etc. At the turn of the century, planting only one crop was considered a dangerous method of farming because if that one crop failed, the majority of the farmer's profit was gone. Farms in Cache Valley, such as the Jensen Historical Farm, would have grown a variety of crops to provide for their family and would sell the surplus for profit.

By the turn of the century, the potential for profits in farming increased because of rapidly expanding markets for agricultural products and heightened farm productivity as a result of technological advances. Farmers in Cache Valley moved away from tight knit communities and moved to farms lying outside of the town center (such as the Wyatt farm in proximity to Wellsville). The introduction and development of the railroad was instrumental in making Cache Valley farmers' crops available to wider markets across the U.S. and world markets. In Cache Valley, the main commodities produced were milk, alfalfa hay, a variety of small grains (wheat, barley), and sugar beets. Cache Valley was Utah's leading grain producer by 1917.

Farms remained self-sustaining even though they were no longer strictly subsistence farms. A typical farm had chickens for eggs and meat, gardens and orchards for fruit and vegetables, cows for milk and meat, sheep for wool and meat, and pigs for meat. Even the buildings on the farm served a self-sufficient purpose. The farm shop demonstrates this self-sustaining aspect of farm life. Many farmers had a farm shop where they could do repairs and maintain equipment, tack, and even household items. The sparse population and seasonally poor roads made special trips to town for mechanical repairs unfeasible. The farm shop thus made the farmer independent and self-sufficient as he didn't have to wait for the blacksmith or supplies to come in from other sources. In the spring, the farm shop was the place where the farmer could prepare equipment for spring work.

Even with increased technology, horses were still one of the major sources of power for agriculture and draft horses were common on Cache Valley farms. The use of steam power in farming also had a great impact on farming in Cache Valley, especially during threshing season. Other innovations in farm equipment made it easier to farm the land, such as steel plows (developed in the mid 1800's), riding plows and other equipment in the late 1800's. Listed below are types of machines/equipment used on the farm at the turn of the century:

- Plows
- Cultivators
- Disk Harrows
- Hay Rakes
- Hay Loader
- Threshing Machine

Haying

Typically, a farmer would plant alfalfa hay. Alfalfa is a perennial plant, meaning it grows each year. A farmer could generally cut three crops of hay per year. After about five years, native grasses would take over the alfalfa, so the field would have to be plowed and re-planted. Once the alfalfa was cut, it would lie in the field until it was dry. At that time, it was then put into rows with a hay rake and then the hay was pitched onto a wagon with a pitch fork or by means of a hay loader. The wagon was parked outside of the barn and the Jackson fork was used to stack the hay in the barn.

Dairying

The number of cows in Cache Valley quadrupled from 4,000 in 1880 to 16,000 in 1910, as many private dairies turned out milk and cheese for Utah's growing population. The Wyatt family had bottomland pasture and became a part of the dairy industry in Cache Valley. Great strides were being made in understanding dairy cow nutrition and greater demands were being placed upon the cows for production and length of lactation. With the condensed milk factories in the valley, it was necessary for cows to produce milk all year long and one of the greatest benefits to milk production came with the introduction of alfalfa to the region.

Threshing

Threshing is the process of getting oats, wheat, or other grains out of their straw. This is a three step process: first, the grain is knocked out of the plant heads; second, the grain is separated from the straw; and third, the chaff, dust, and other foreign materials are removed from the grain. This process, known as winnowing, had been done by hand up until the late eighteenth century. In 1844, the first threshing machine that performed all three steps was developed, and by 1900, the threshing machine was in its final form. The threshing machine was powered by a steam engine.

The grain would be harvested in the field, bundled, and left to stand in shocks in the field to dry. These shocks were then loaded onto the wagon and taken to the threshing location. Each farm did not typically own their own threshing machine; rather they would wait until the custom thresherman would come to the farm with his machine. At that time, the threshing crew (friends, family, and neighbors of the farmer) would work all day to get the grain threshed. They would break for a mid-day threshing meal. After the meal, they would get back to work and commence until all the work was done, or it was time for the workers to get back to their own evening chores.

The threshing meal was an important part of the day for the women of the family. As threshing crews could be quite large and the work was hard, large meals had to be prepared. This was a time that women could showcase their cooking and their preserves, so they would often set aside some of their best preserves from the year to share at the threshing meal. The threshing meal was carefully planned in advance and everyone had responsibilities regarding the meal. Children were responsible for taking water to the fields and setting of table and other pre meal chores. The threshing meal was also an opportunity for socializing.

WWI and the Farm

The United States entered WWI (known as the “Great War” at the time) in 1917. Farmers were encouraged to help the cause of WWI by conserving food and resources. The Extension Division advocated the following sentiments through a leaflet (June 23, 1917):

America is launched upon a war for righteousness. Every resource of the nation will be drawn upon in the prosecution of relentless measures. The farmer particularly will be a soldier of the Republic, because he will supply the one great indispensable—food—without which armies perish and the nation will be defeated.

The Extension Division further told the farmer that it was his *solemn duty to our Nation to conserve everything that can be conserved, conserve and economize in food products, in clothing, in money and also in time and energy by doing our work in the latest and most approved and economical method...Farming is not an easy task. It is worthwhile. It is worthy of a man. It combines physical labor with thought, so that it calls for an all-round development... When something seems drudgery, think of the trenches.*

Families were asked to grow and conserve food. By preserving food a family grew themselves, the commercially prepared food was available to be sent overseas to the soldiers. Farmers were encouraged to plant more wheat, but use less of it so that it could be sent to the soldiers. Families were especially encouraged to use less meat, fat and sugar.

The Extension Division published the following in a leaflet (June 23, 1917):
It behooves us now to preserve wisely...It is the patriotic duty of every American citizen to help in every way possible in the production and conservation of our food products. One of the very best ways of doing this is to economize in food waste. To waste anything is a crime.

Farming Facts

- Abraham Lincoln created the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1862. At that time about 90 out of every 100 Americans were farmers. Today, that number has shrunk to just 2 out of every 100 Americans.

- Cache Valley was also home to the Utah Agriculture College (now Utah State University). The college's technology, innovation, and experiments in farming made Cache Valley a progressive place to farm.

Order of Crop Work

This schedule comes from a Utah Agricultural Experiment Station bulletin issued in 1920.

April 1-10	Planting sugar beets
April 2-20	Planting spring wheat
April 5-15	Planting early potatoes
April 10-20	Planting spring oats
April 20-30	Planting corn
May 20-30	Planting commercial potatoes
May 20-30	Thinning sugar beets
June 15	Irrigating sugar beets begins
June 20	Cutting first crop of alfalfa
July 1	Cutting timothy and clover begins
July 6	Digging early potatoes begins (grown for home use only)
July 15	Harvesting winter wheat begins
July 15-30	Harvesting winter wheat, general
August 1-10	Cutting second crop of alfalfa
August 5-30	Harvesting spring oats
August 10-September 15	Harvesting spring wheat
September 15	Seeding winter wheat begins
September 25	Pulling sugar beets begins
October 6	Digging commercial potatoes begins

With a variety of crops, you can see that the farmer in Cache Valley in 1917 was extremely busy.

Source: Volunteer Manual and Research Files—American West Heritage Center

Quick Facts: Cache Valley Population (Then and Now)

1916: 30,000

2006: 98,662

Sources: American West Heritage Center Research Files and US Census Bureau