THE GROWTH OF AGRICULTURE

Although the agricultural story has been somewhat interwoven into the preceding chapters, a brief summary of this aspect of the Shasta County picture will be presented separately.

Farming was one of the first occupations practiced by the white man in Shasta County. It was begun by Pierson B. Reading on the "Buena Ventura" in 1844. By 1855 the county had almost 6,500 acres under cultivation, and county farmers possessed cattle valued at $5,680. Wheat and barley were the leading grain crops, each amounting to something near 3,000 acres within the county. In addition, peaches led the way in fruit production, followed by apples and quince, according to the 1855 report prepared by County Surveyor, A. H. Stout. Three years later a Shasta *Courier* article entitled "Agriculture and Farm Lane" declared:

> Farmers have met with unvarying success. Stock raising has generally proved the most profitable branch of farming in this portion of the country–breeding of hogs, sheep, cattle, horses, etc., being all very remunerative. Gardening and the raising of fruit, grain, etc., also pays very well . . . The good land is still not all taken. Shasta County land is still public with the exception of Major Reading's six leagues . . . Titles may be obtained from the state or federal governments ... land ranges from $1.00 - $2.50 per acre.

In 1861, P. B. Reading's assessed property included fifty tons of hay, eighty bushels of wheat, six hundred calves, one hundred fifty beef cattle, and one hundred hogs.

During the 1860's there were approximately 6,000 acres under cultivation in Shasta County, and the County Surveyor asserted that three branches of industry thrived in the region: agriculture, mercantile and mining. Cattle production was strong, with mules, milk cows, sheep and hogs leading the way. Wheat and barley were still the chief grain crops, as were apples and peaches along the fruit line.

In 1875 a traveler through northern California commented that Reading's grant, now partially subdivided, "contained some rich bottom land . . . but, is mostly adapted for grazing and grape growing." During the 70's Shasta County acreage under cultivation had decreased slightly, although the approximate population had increased by 800 from 5,200 to 6,000. Cattle, both beef and dairy, as well as sheep raising, had increased considerably during this decade, however.

In the period before 1900, grain and fruit culture remained stable in the county. In 1880 an advertisement for land within the "Buena Ventura" listed figs, grapes, peaches, prunes, walnuts, almonds and oranges as fruit raised without irrigation, while alfalfa, corn and other cereals were also produced. This era witnessed the rise of the large fruit farm. East of Anderson on the Shade Farm were ninety to one hundred acres of Bartlett pears. The Shasta Fruit Company had one hundred and fifty acres of a variety of fruit trees near Anderson, while in Happy Valley, Samuel Alexander had one hundred and fifty acres under fruit cultivation, mainly olives. In the Battle Creek and Balls' Ferry area several large ranches produced a variety of agricultural commodities. These included alfalfa, timothy, vegetables, and fruit crops of apples, prunes, almonds, chestnuts and walnuts.

By 1900 new fruit farms had been added, with 1,637 acres under fruit cultivation in the Anderson area. In addition to the Shade Farm and the Shasta Fruit Company, the Aloha Fruit Company, the Ludwig Fruit Farm, and the Shanahan Brothers' Farm all possessed orchards of two hundred acres or over. Between 1900 and 1910 there was a 21.6 per cent increase in the total number of farms in Shasta County. Of the 1,010 farms, 839 were owner operated, 154 were tenant farms, and seventeen were under farm managers. A total of 262,136 fruit trees were growing in Shasta County. Of these, peach trees were the most abundant, followed closely by plum and prune. The number of nut trees, particularly almond and walnut, had also increased considerably by this time. By 1910, 63.3 per cent of the farms in Shasta County were irrigated, and the average agricultural plot contained 385 acres. Nevertheless, this period which led up to the first world war was one of much dry farming. Anderson was now the center of a productive fruit district which in a single season produced 2,200 tons of cured prunes and 500 tons of dried peaches. Anderson pears were reported, in 1911, to contain a greater percentage of sugar than any others in the state. Alfalfa raising around Anderson was in its infancy, and olives were also bringing

recognition to the region. In 1915 the Panama-Pacific Exposition at San Francisco had awarded Happy Valley olives the highest award in their field, and the Ehrman Olive Company of Happy Valley was reported to be spending $50,000 annually to develop its orchards.

Thus during its first era in agriculture, Shasta County was principally a fruit producing center, concentrating on prunes, peaches, pears, plums, and similar produce. From the red, loamy soil of Happy Valley to the dark, rich bottom land along Cow Creek and the Sacramento River, and in the mountain valleys of the Fall River area, this region had proven itself productive under dry farming conditions.

With the development of agriculture in the area, three types of soil and crops adaptable to each were evident in the southern reaches of the county. The valley floor, that lay principally along the Sacramento River, had proven useful to cultivation of a variety of fruit crops, alfalfa, dairying, and truck gardening. This land in 1915 was selling for $50 - $100 per acre. The next discernible area was the gravelly bench land and lower foothill region such as Happy Valley. This section had served for olive, grape, peach, and strawberry culture and sold for $100 - $125 per acre. Finally, the foothill area such as the Bald Hills section, which sold for $2.50 - $10 per acre, was used mainly as grazing land. In the northeastern reaches of the county, the fertile mountain valley land along the rivers and streams had proven productive in the raising of grasses, particularly wild hay and alfalfa, grains, some fruit, and for grazing of beef and dairy cattle.

Of major importance to the agricultural growth of the area was the formation of the Anderson-Cottonwood Irrigation District in the period just before World War I. Started in 1914, this irrigation system tapped the water supply of the Sacramento River at a point just north of the city of Redding, and by a detailed system of canals and ditches, carried the water throughout the Anderson and Cottonwood areas. The first unit of the A-CID was completed in 1916 at a cost of $480,000. In 1917, $525,000 more in bond indebtedness was authorized for further development. The first water from the new system was used in 1917, and by 1918-19 fifteen per cent of the acreage of the area was using this supply.

This system almost immediately brought about important changes. Land leveling on a major scale began to make the terrain useable for irrigation. Irrigated crops, such as alfalfa and ladino clover were planted, and much land previously barren was placed under permanent pasture.

Certain complications accompanied the new water system. Frequent problems of drainage and sewerage occurred, and the mosquitoes which came with the added water were unwelcomed sources of malaria and other discomfort. Questions of drainage and sewerage were gradually alleviated by the efforts of individual farmers and farm organizations, plus aid and advice from the county and state. The mosquito problem was met by the formation of a Mosquito Abatement District in 1919, which has continued under county sponsorship to the present time.

The World War I period and the era immediately following the war saw the effort of Happy Valley citizens to set up a better water system in their area. The old Happy Valley Land and Water Company, organized in 1907, was not supplying the area's irrigation needs by 1918 and, therefore, water bonds totaling $615,000 were passed to build a reservoir. The dam was completed in 1919, but a tunnel needed to finish the project remained uncompleted until 1921 when a second bond issue for $150,000 was passed. By 1924, seventy-six per cent of the water district's acreage was delinquent in its tax debt and the following year saw the dissolution of the Happy Valley Water District. With a $60 bond indebtedness per acre, the management of the district, as well as the payment of operating costs, was assumed by the bondholders.

To obtain water in the Fall River Valley area was completely an individual matter during this time. A combined federal and state report of the Pit River Basin in 1915 reported some ten pumping plants in Fall River Valley, with similar facilities available in the adjacent mountain valley areas. Wild hay and alfalfa were the major crops watered by these systems.

The coming of the irrigation systems helped bring other changes in the farming picture. By the 1930's alfalfa had largely replaced prunes and other fruit crops as the area's leading agriculture product. In 1923 a survey within the A-CID pointed out that the district's leading acreage product was alfalfa, while prunes were now second with about 1,000 acres. During the latter part of the 20's and into the Depression period of the 30's, the fruit industry was mainly replaced by pasture crops useable in dairying. In fact, the 15th census of 1930 reported 490,693 out of the

607,833 farm acres in Shasta County in pasture land. This change also came about because of a series of adverse winters devastating to the fruit crops and as a result of fluctuating fruit prices. The distance of Shasta County from urban markets was also a problem to fruit growers. The temporary answer to this had been dried fruit which proved to be less popular than the fresh varieties. In addition, orchards to the south were producing fruit in marked volume as compared to the Shasta County varieties. Although the southern fruit was not as succulent as the local product, it produced up to fifty per cent more to the acre. Of some importance in the decline of southern Shasta County fruit culture were the smelter fumes from the Keswick and other mining areas, which had a detrimental affect on fruit raising, especially in the Happy Valley area.

By 1927 Cottonwood could claim county leadership as a livestock shipping center. Statistics by B. F. Stroup, County Horticultural Commissioner, indicated that in 1926, $1,500,000 worth of livestock and $25,000 in bee products had left the town. The livestock figures included 39,000 hogs, 7,260 head of cattle, 35,200 sheep, plus 19 carloads of horses.

During this period the growth of the dairy industry was shown when in 1929 the leading local creamery located at Cottonwood was receiving three hundred gallons of cream per day, which came from seven hundred local cows. In the same year the total county milk output was 2,294,205 gallons.

With the Depression period came the near end of southern Shasta County's position as a leading fruit area. In 1930 the price of prunes was down to $.08 per pound; in 1932 this product sold for as low as $10 per ton, and even the best prune prices did not pay for the costs of harvesting. By 1932 the A-CID listed sudan grass and grain as its leading crop, with alfalfa and permanent pasture next in amounts of acreage under cultivation. Orchard products had dropped to sixth place in district acreage. During this period the average size of Shasta County farms had grown to 501 acres, with the above mentioned growth in alfalfa and the noticeable diminishing in fruit production. The growing of cattle had dropped only slightly from the previous decade.

Both southern county irrigation systems were threatened by the Depression. In March, 1933, the financial crisis facing the A-CID caused its Board of Directors to declare a moratorium on all bills incurred by the district after March 14, 1932. At the same time, laborers' wages were reduced from $2.50 to $2.00 per day, and directors' mileage from $.10 to $.05 per mile. The A-CID, which had been refused a Reconstruction Finance Corporation loan in 1935, was granted $282,000 for refinancing in July, 1936.

During the same period, the Happy Valley system began liquidation with a change of management in their district. By 1935 mining dragline dredgers in the upper Happy Valley and Igo section brought the first profitable sale of water to the foothill area. With the increased sale of water, plus a subsidy from gold royalties, the irrigation plant was extended to the full capacity of its water supply.

In 1936 farm prices were on the rise. Dairying had continued to prosper. During June, 1939, an Anderson milk concern, the Tomales Bay Cheese Company, went on double shift in order to accommodate 11,000 pounds of milk daily. Fruits, grain, livestock, dairying, bees, grapes, and sheep raising were all part of the local agricultural picture as the area braced itself for participation in a world war.

According to the 1940 Census, there were 1,229 Shasta County farms with an average acreage of 435. The average value of each farm amounted to $9,045. Seventy-two per cent of the total agricultural agreage was now under irrigation. Alfalfa, wheat, and grain hay were still the major commodities. By this time (1940) most of the Shasta County farm homes were less than ten years old, one-half had running water, seventy-five per cent had a radio, twenty-one per cent a telephone, and ninety per cent still used wood heat.

Under the stimulus of wartime economy, the price of farm crops increased rapidly. There was a twelve per cent national increase in food prices in 1941. Feeder hogs were up to a top price of $18.25, and barley was bringing $1.67 per hundred as the government delivered an urgent appeal to farmers to raise more crops. In 1944 the Carnation Milk Company purchased the former Tomales Bay Cheese Company plant in Anderson, and as the war came to an end, farm prosperity continued to rise.

In the post-war period, agriculture has taken a secondary place to the booming lumber industry of Shasta County. However, farming has continued to grow steadily. In Happy Valley the water system has had problems. Inflated costs, uneconomic sales of water rights to the new, small parcels of land, failure to cover mounting cost by rate raises, and the end of subsidies from local timber sales, by 1951 placed the district in an insolvent financial condition comparable to its plight in 1933. During the 60's this problem was solved by the creation of a new district operating on Trinity water from Whiskeytown Dam.

The A-CID, which had gone through bankruptcy in 1939, was carried through 1947 by the RFC loan mentioned previously. At that time a second refunding for $275,000 took place. This series of bonds terminated in 1968. By 1958 the district contained approximately 33,000 acres which in that year had been irrigated by 195,816 acre feet of water diverted from the Sacramento River. Although the boundaries of the A-CID were not the same as the area under focus in this study, A-CID statistics present a fairly accurate picture of agriculture in the southern portion of the county. In 1958 the district contained 17,780 acres of irrigated pasture, while alfalfa with 2,350, corn with 1,750, hay and grain and sudan with 250 acres followed. Grapes and walnuts each involved sixty irrigated acres. Dry farming crops of 1,100 acres were also part of the A-CID.

By the 1950's there were 1,108 Shasta County farms with an average size of 635 acres. Beef cattle and dairy products led the livestock industry in total value, while wheat, alfalfa, hay, and barley were the leading field crops. Apples and olives led the category of fruits, nuts, and berries, followed closely by berries, especially strawberries, and persimmons. The total value of Shasta County crops in 1951 amounted to nearly $7,000,000.

In the annual crop report of 1960, C. Bruce Wade, County Agricultural Commissioner, reported a total county value of $5,631,286 in livestock, $1,576,320 in livestock and dairy products, $153,185 in tree crops, and $3,047,472 in field crops. A most significant trend was the obvious resurrection of the walnut industry. Alfalfa had led all field crops by a wide margin, followed by grass hay, grain hay, and barley.

Thus by the end of the 50's, agriculture in Shasta County emphasized the raising of livestock. Out of an average yearly agricultural value of $6,000,000 in Shasta County in the late 50's, livestock accounted for $4,900,000. Of 46,500 irrigated acres in 1955, 43,400 were devoted to pasture crops, and of the remaining acreage, 1,300 were in field crops used for stock. Statistics by the California Department of Agriculture indicated county agriculture production had actually not increased appreciably since the 1920's.

Although agriculture had been pushed from its position as the leading means of livelihood by the era of the 60's, it was still a prominent part of the local scene. Not only cattle raising, but dairying and grain production, market gardening, fruit and berries, especially the raising of the strawberry plant, have maintained this region's importance as a food supply center for the north valley.