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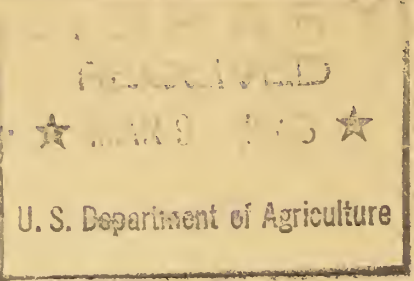
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U.S. Farm security administration.

COFFEE COUNTY, ALABAMA



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Down in the south end of Alabama, in the pine forest country near the Florida line, several hundred farmers and their wives and children now are having enough to eat, sleeping in houses screened against flies and malaria-carrying mosquitoes, getting up in the morning with enough energy to carry them through the day's work. For years, these bare living requirements were mostly outside their world.

Until recently, farming for most people in Coffee County, especially in the poor land section in the north half, was one of the most hopeless ways of earning a living to be found in this country. Many of the poorest farm families had nothing but debts and failing health to show for their efforts year after year. Their houses were falling to pieces, their children got little schooling, they had little part in community or church affairs. They could see there was nothing ahead.

But, beginning in 1935, the era of discouragement in Coffee County's history tapered off. Concerted planning was the first step in changing a tragic story to one of hope.

As 1941 ended, Coffee County's farmers were no longer sinking deeper into the red each year, nor were they going hungry. Many were out of debt for the first time since 1930. Some, of course, had gained more economic security than others, but all were making progress. Their children's future promised more than a losing struggle against unfavorable agricultural patterns. The battle against hookworm disease, pellagra, malnutrition and a high rate of infant mortality had made headway and was still being fought.

The county was better prepared to withstand the impact of war than it otherwise would have been.

Case History of a Sick County

The picture of Coffee County, up to 1935, was even more depressing than the picture of many other Southern districts. It showed cash-cropping and soil erosion, bad health and poor education, uncertain tenure and dependence on relief, submarginal land and migration born of desperation. Nearly everybody in the county was on or near relief, almost every farm family owed money to the local banks and "furnish merchants," and most banks and merchants themselves were bankrupt or almost so.

When settlers first came into South Alabama, swamps and pine woods covered the territory that is now Coffee County. Very little of the area seemed good enough for settlement. Poor farmers bought land along the river banks, paid the Government 12 cents an acre for it, and raised sheep and cattle. They did not push back into the wooded regions.

Just before the turn of the century, the back lands, opened up by lumbering and turpentine interests, were found to be well suited for cotton and corn. Hundreds

of farmers moved to the cut-over regions and depended on cotton for all their income. Young couples set up their homes, and for a while made a good living. But on small farms, cash-crop farming did not often yield a profit. Erosion and other effects of continuous cash-cropping wore out the larger units. Soon men were losing ownership of their land, and became tenants.

Then, early in 1917, came the boll weevil. It invaded Southern Alabama from New Mexico and Texas, destroyed half the year's cotton crop in Coffee County, and the next year finished the job.

Prospects looked about as black as they could when a merchant in Enterprise, who had failed to collect debts from cotton farmers, obtained some seed peanuts and made a contract with one of his debtors to plant them. He promised a fancy price for the peanuts, and it is reported the farmer cleared \$2,000 on his first crop. The same merchant then started a mill in Enterprise and offered to buy all the peanuts growers could produce.

Peanuts brought quick prosperity, and Enterprise has received publicity as the town which erected a monument to the boll weevil because it directed the people's efforts away from cotton. The monument stands at a principal street intersection in Enterprise today, it is true, and its bronze plaque informs visitors that it was erected "in profound appreciation of the boll weevil and what it has done as the herald of prosperity." But, in spite of the to-do about the monument, tenancy increased to 76% by 1935.

The peanut era was profitable while it lasted. The record for 1920 showed 50,000 acres of peanuts were harvested near Enterprise. The crop brought about five million dollars into an area where cotton had sold for only a million in previous years. A large part of the peanut crop was fed to hogs, and a thriving pork industry resulted.

But although the smell of fresh peanuts still pervades Enterprise in late summer, the one-crop system of agriculture was unsound. Digging peanuts from the sandy soil quickly robs the ground of its fertility, unless extra attention is given to scientific soil conservation. Hogs fed solely on peanuts do not have quite the quality of corn-fed pork. And besides, in the early 1930's, hog prices dropped with the advancing agricultural depression.

Coffee County, by 1935, had struck a new low. Three out of four farmers were tenants. A third of all white farmers were sharecroppers, getting only a small part of whatever money the crops brought. About 60,000 acres of land had been foreclosed by the New Orleans Land Bank.

In that year the Resettlement Administration, predecessor of the Farm Security Administration, was created to help low-income farmers to become self-supporting. The 60,000 acres of foreclosed land, which had been bought by the Alabama Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, were turned over to Resettlement, and became the nucleus of the Coffee County homesteads.

Later, 19 of the 282 tracts were sold to the Pea River Project of the State

Forestry Department and three tracts were returned to the Federal Land Bank. In 1941, the Government owned 260 tracts or 55,936 acres.

The Government Sizes Up Its Problem

Coffee County is 30 miles long and 24 miles wide, with much better farming land on the South side than on the North. It has two county seats and two courthouses--at Elba and Enterprise--and U. S. Highway 84 goes through both towns. There are two other incorporated towns, New Brockton and Kinston, and the population of all towns is about 8,500. The entire county has about 35,000 persons, about one-fifth of whom are Negroes.

The several public agencies interested in the people and the land in critical 1935 saw at once the need for a coordinated program. Local people, as well as workers in various Federal agencies, stood ready with the Resettlement Administration to find ways for the people to help themselves. Local school, health, and welfare officers were anxious to cooperate. Town and county commissioners saw the need for immediate action. State experts on health, education and agriculture offered their services. And from the Federal Government, representatives of the Soil Conservation Service, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the Extension Service and the Experiment Stations of the Department of Agriculture were sent to the county.

The first step was to map out the problems and plan the solutions. This meant a thorough survey of the entire county. Soil experts went over every foot of land and found that many thousands of acres, including 37,000 of the 60,000 acres then held by the Government, were marginal or submarginal land and should be used only for pasture or forest. The soils, mostly light, sandy loams, were found to be fairly productive but easily eroded. Many farms had been drained of their natural fertility by farmers who knew nothing about crop rotation and were pressed for cash to pay their debts.

Farm management experts studied agricultural habits and discovered that most of the poverty-stricken farmers made no attempt to grow food for themselves. Nor did they have enough livestock. What they did have was of poor quality.

A survey of human resources brought into stronger relief the need for quick action. Meals were scanty, unbalanced, and poorly cooked. Hundreds of houses were unscreened and badly in need of repair. Hundreds of farms had no sanitary toilets. Malaria and pellagra were prevalent, and two-thirds of all the school children had hookworm disease, according to the Health Department's survey. Most residents had been born in the county or nearby, had traveled little, and did not want to move away from home soil. Nevertheless, there had been considerable emigration during the hard times. The average person had gone to school only long enough to complete three and a half grades of elementary school; high school training was almost unknown. In one-fourth of the farm homes, one or both parents could not read and write. Most people were married and took on home responsibilities at an early age. By the time they reached their thirties, many looked middle-aged.

Planning for County Rehabilitation

Clearly, Coffee County was a place where all Government agencies had to pitch in. No one of them alone could do the job. Accordingly, W. L. McArthur, county project manager for the Resettlement Administration (now the Farm Security Administration), began the huge job of "area planning" by calling a meeting of field representatives of the various interested agencies.

Out of this meeting grew the Coffee County Workers Council. Agencies represented include the Agricultural Extension Service, Vocational Agriculture and Home Economics Service, County Department of Public Welfare, County Educational Department, County Recreational Unit, County Health Unit, and County FSA Unit.

The Council still meets once a month, acts as a coordinating agency, advises and recommends steps to be taken by agencies that can carry them out. Through discussion, members fit their partial programs into a broad, informal plan with which the Council as a whole agrees.

The work of each agency thus goes on in its customary fashion, with its regular workers, and is made more effective by the help of other agencies working in the same direction.

FSA Loans for Rehabilitation

The heart of the Coffee County plan lies in the rehabilitation program, conducted first by the Resettlement Administration, and since 1937, by the Farm Security Administration. Only farm families of low income, who have no other way to get credit, are eligible for FSA loans. Each borrower family makes careful plans to improve farm and home operations, and has the guidance of farm and home management supervisors.

More than 600 families in the county have obtained rehabilitation loans, and many of them have moved from tumble-down shacks to new or repaired dwellings built by FSA on Government-owned land. The first 258 of these houses cost an average of only \$1,505 each. Each unit includes a barn, smokehouse, poultry house, sanitary privy, and sometimes other buildings, as well as a water supply system, improvements to the land, and a fenced-in garden. Cost of the 258 units, including land, averaged \$5,455. Additional construction brought the number of units to 281 by 1941.

From July, 1935, through September, 1941, Coffee County farmers had borrowed \$378,349.18 in rehabilitation loans. Each farmer, in friendly consultation with the farm management supervisor, makes a yearly plan to produce on his farm most of the food his family needs, and still make enough cash for necessities and payment of his loan. His wife makes a similar plan for the home, agreeing to raise, can, and store enough food for the year.

At the end of their first crop year, many farmers had increased their net worth, improved their facilities for making a second crop, and had even paid off the first installments on their loans. But in numerous cases they had no cash left

to buy seed and fertilizer to carry them over until the next harvest and needed supplemental loans from Farm Security.

There are also "project borrowers"--that is, families who moved from poor land to FSA homesteads. From the beginning of the project to the end of September, 1941, loans totaling \$419,575.63 had been made to homestead settlers.

In the 1941 season, 255 loans were made to rural rehabilitation borrowers farming privately owned lands, and 296 "project loans" were made to farmers living on the homesteads. Fewer rehabilitation loans were needed than in previous years and most of those who did borrow asked for smaller sums. But in the spring of 1941, the United States Department of Agriculture began its drive to increase production of pigs, cows, chickens, milk and eggs, and the FSA offered a new kind of credit in the Southeastern States--the "Food for Freedom" loan. In Coffee County, 497 farmers borrowed an average of \$117 each, and used the money to step up their production of poultry and livestock.

Farmers who never before had raised chickens bought 44,299 baby chicks in the spring of 1941 and raised them in brooders. They lost only 12 in each 100. Families formed a cooperative for marketing, and by late summer had a contract with the Craig Field Division of the Southeastern Air Corps Training Center at Selma, Alabama, for 8,000 pounds of dressed chicken per month. By fall the report was: chicks sold cooperatively, 9,947, or 22,128 pounds; chicks sold locally, 1,036, or 2,010 pounds; chicks traded for merchandise or consumed on the farms, 10,203; pullets kept by families for use as laying hens, 17,717. The average net price to the producers was a little less than 18 cents a pound.

FSA families also bought 308 cows, which produced 266 calves. Cream sales in 1941 netted families \$274. They bought 135 brood sows and 378 other hogs.

A survey of the activities of 385 Coffee County FSA families in the fall of 1941 showed that 344 families were selling \$898 worth of eggs per month; 43 families were making \$97 a month by selling cream; and 68 families were selling butter for \$126 per month. As a result of the Food for Freedom loan program, in the 1941 season 90 families marketed fruit, vegetables and truck crops for \$2,241; 148 families sold hogs for \$17,599; and 55 families sold cows, calves and steers for \$3,518.

The work with poultry and livestock was carried forward in the 1942 Food for Freedom program. Fifty thousand more chicks were purchased and pullets from these flocks, added to the hens of the 1941 flocks, meant an average of 60 hens per family flock. As many additional cows and hogs were obtained as the individual farms could support.

"Our people have found out," said the project manager, "that besides adding to the stores of food produced by the Nation for use in the fight against Hitler, they are defending a concept of better living standards for themselves."

Only 22 families on the FSA program owned their farms in 1941. For the renters of private land, better leases, soil improvement, and better use of land were

being sought. Both landlords and tenants benefit by longer leases, carefully arranged. The tenant who moves every season becomes poorer with each move and has no incentive to conserve and build the soil. The landlord gets smaller and smaller returns from his investment and, in turn, has no incentive to keep the buildings in good repair.

For the occupants of Government-owned units, a system of "share-rent" based on a percentage of profit from a season's crop, was being worked out in 1941. A fixed yearly rental actually was unfair to the farmer. With the right kind of "share-rent," he would pay more in good years, less in bad.

Conservation of the Soil

Conservation plans, calling for the use of erosion-control measures and improved cropping systems, had been developed for 100 farms of the Coffee County project by the end of 1941, through the Soil Conservation Service. In the spring of 1940, farmers of Coffee County and five adjoining counties organized the Wiregrass Soil Conservation District, and an Enterprise man was made chairman of the district board of supervisors. Eventually, conservation plans will be set up for all farms on the FSA project.

Two conservationists of the SCS, work closely with the FSA farm management men to develop well rounded plans for erosion control. These soil scientists first go over the land and make inventories which show the extent and degree of erosion, type of soil, slope of the land, and use being made of the land. Thus the farmers get a clear picture of their land problems and understand better why they need to make changes.

Meadow outlets, terraces, and other devices for handling run-off water are being built on land suited to crops. Crop rotations that provide for greater use of soil-building legumes are set up. Winter cover crops, to follow cotton and peanuts, protect the land when heavy rains occur. Farmers are encouraged to put more land in pasture and hay crops.

Many farmers in the county, both those on the FSA program and others, have also found the program of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration helpful in making the shift from one-crop farming to a balanced type of agriculture. In 1941, the AAA provided the funds for the following improvements:

1. Application of 245 tons of superphosphate to 2,000 acres of cover and green manure crops or pastures.
2. Application of about 1,500 tons of ground limestone to about 3,000 acres of cropland.
3. Planting of more than 1,000 acres of winter legumes.
4. Establishment of about 500 acres of perennial cover, such as kudzu and improved pastures.

5. Growing and turning under of about 14,000 acres of green manure and cover crops.

6. Construction of more than 100 miles of terraces.

In addition, more than 1,100 families received assistance in growing home gardens, and about 1,000 families received assistance for the production and conservation of essential foodstuffs. AAA payments in connection with allotment crops in Coffee County in 1941 amounted to almost \$300,000. The record for earlier years is much the same. AAA allotments, marketing quotas and loans have resulted in increased prices for commodities and a consequent increase in farmers' incomes.

Better Farm and Home Management

Most of the homestead farms are two-horse units of about 60 tillable acres each. A few are one-horse or about 35 acres, and a few are three-horse farms of 90 acres suited to crop production.

Farmers who receive FSA loans agree to follow approved farming practices. Each prepares a plan of operation at the beginning of each year. He sets aside a certain acreage for garden vegetables, another for feed crops for the livestock and poultry, and another for pasturage. He has a field in cash crops for the market and another in a cover crop. He also agrees to keep a simple record of costs and expenditures so he will know at the end of the year how the farm plan worked out.

Diversified farming does not mean that cash crops are out of the picture. Cotton and peanuts are still the dominant cash crops, with about a third of the peanut crop "hogged off" for pork production. Recently, peanuts have been increased to every possible acre to make oil needed for the war. Corn, oats, hay, peas, soybeans, cane, sweet potatoes, and winter legumes have also gained a place in local agriculture.

When they joined the Department of Agriculture's campaign for greater food production in 1941, Coffee County FSA families pledged themselves to increase their laying hens to an average of 60; to develop permanent and temporary pastures and feed production; to increase the number of cows to provide enough milk for every family and a surplus for sale; and to produce sufficient meat and lard for home needs.

They agreed to plant oats on every farm and to plant temporary grazing crops, especially for poultry, twice a year; to plant wheat, rice, more potatoes, cane and other food crops for home use; to increase plantings of winter legumes; to cut down their cotton production, combining units according to soil conservation plans, and to plant more peanuts for hogs in the poor-land areas. They agreed to save seed in case shortages might develop.

Along with the farm plan, the home plan is carried out by the farmer's wife. The women agree to preserve enough fruits and vegetables grown on the farm to

provide adequate, well balanced meals winter and summer. Farm Security advisers encourage them to buy pressure cookers, either individually or cooperatively, so that they can preserve a greater variety of foods.

Family progress reports for 1941 show that families on rehabilitation loans canned an average of 334 quarts of fruit and vegetables, as compared with 71 quarts before coming on the FSA program; produced 602 pounds of meat, as compared with 167 pounds before acceptance; and produced 494 gallons of milk, as compared with 202 gallons before acceptance. All families had their own pressure cookers.

Five community canning plants also have been set up in the county and during one season 18,000 quarts of vegetables and fruit were canned at the five locations.

Challenged with the problem of "living at home" and spending cash income only for things which cannot be produced or made at home, the women learned to use their hands cleverly. They make children's clothes, build kitchen cabinets and shelves, design and make quilts and bedspreads. They often meet at each other's homes to exchange ideas and learn new homemaking skills. FSA home supervisors usually attend the meetings, to which women from all neighborhood homes are invited, whether borrowers or not.

The county is divided into six areas and each one has a farm supervisor and a home supervisor who visit the homes regularly. In the poorer, northern part of the county, two "50-family areas" were mapped out, and one farm management expert and one home economist were assigned to work intensively in each area. Each of the other supervisors works with about 125 families.

Education of a County

Neither the children nor their parents had had much opportunity for education in Coffee County. The development of a new educational program since 1935 has been an object lesson in cooperation.

Until then, all the vocational education for families was carried on by six persons: one county agricultural agent, one home demonstration agent, two vocational agricultural workers and two vocational home economics workers. This staff was enlarged. Assistants were employed for the county agent and home demonstration agent. Six more teachers of vocational agriculture and six more teachers of vocational home economics were added to the staff, including one Negro agricultural expert and one Negro home economist. Half the new teachers were assigned to duties in the schools and the others began working in the field, making house-to-house visits to talk over each family's individual problems.

In 1935, the county had only about 50 rural schools, and the State Department of Education had already decided that the existing county schools should be improved. However, when the cooperative attack on the county's problems was begun, plans were altered. The school authorities discussed their problems with representatives of Federal agencies. They studied maps prepared by the Soil Conserva-

tion Service, which made it clear that expensive school buildings had been planned in areas where the land was actually submarginal. Many of these families, it developed, would have a chance under the new program to move away from the poor-land areas into districts where they could have family-type farms on good land. Thus by informal discussions, based on an actual survey of county resources, costly improvements were avoided in areas soon to be depopulated.

In rural communities of scattered population, school buildings also serve as community centers. Designed to meet both purposes, the Farm Security Administration built three new schools and rebuilt a fourth in the districts where new farms and homes were set up. When completed, the schools were turned over to the county authorities.

In the new school buildings the boys have their workshops where they learn to repair plow shares, work with iron, make tools and build furniture. The girls learn the art of homemaking in fully equipped home economics classrooms. The children's interest in these subjects is reflected by the high attendance figures.

Emphasis in school lessons is placed on practical problems to train boys and girls for their future work. In arithmetic classes, children do not work with abstract figures, but are given down-to-earth problems such as the following:

"Mr. Smith killed a yearling calf and canned it for the family use. He had 20 quarts of soup mixture and 60 quarts of meat. How many quarts of food did he can?"

"We are serving cocoa for the school lunch. If one-half pound of cocoa serves 60 children, how many pounds will be needed to serve 240 children?"

"Seven bushels of seed sweet potatoes are required to produce enough plants from the first pulling to set 1 acre. If Mr. Brown wants to plant 4 acres, how many bushels of seed sweet potatoes will it take?"

This kind of teaching has aroused surprising interest among the pupils. Every month, a list of ten questions about actual problems of daily living is compiled by the vocational farm and home workers, the county health officer, the sanitary engineer and the three nurses. The list is given to the superintendent of schools, who edits the questions and mimeographs them for the seventh grade teachers all over the county.

Building Health for the Day's Work

Before the county council began its activities, there was one public health nurse to serve the entire county. But after 1935, health was recognized as a responsibility of every rural worker and teacher. The first step was to hire two more nurses, one employed by Farm Security. The next was to work out a co-operative health program. Now, school authorities help the nurses and doctors by checking up on the health of school-age children and providing for clinics in

school buildings as part of the regular educational machinery. Information on sanitation, hygiene, housing, diet, and clothing is distributed by schools, vocational teachers, and extension workers. Community meetings are held in the school building to discuss local health problems.

The job of curing physical ills of the people was a gigantic task for a small group of men and women, but they attacked it with determination. In 1938 alone, the county health units gave 5,208 inoculations for typhoid fever, 1,256 for diphtheria, and 4,719 treatments for venereal diseases. A general physical examination was made of all school children and 400 of them were treated for hookworm disease. Nine hundred persons were vaccinated for smallpox. More than 5,000 examinations and X-rays were made to discover possible cases of tuberculosis, but the county proved to be practically free of this disease.

With the cooperation of the county medical society, a group health plan was put into operation in January, 1938. The county's 15 doctors were anxious to make it a model association and it has been notably successful. The first year this medical group, called the Coffee County Health Association, had a membership of 307 families, or 1,653 persons. In 1941, 568 of the 570 eligible families--those on the FSA program--belonged to the association, or about 3,000 persons.

Member families pay dues averaging \$27.15 a year. A family of two pays \$18. All the dues are put into a common fund and divided into 12 equal parts, one for each month. Each family selects its own doctor and, at the end of the month, each physician bills the association for the services he has given to the members. If the monthly allotment is sufficient, all bills are paid in full. If not, each doctor receives a pro rata share. A family may change its doctor at the end of any month by giving notice five days in advance.

During the first year, dues totalling \$8,334 paid for 918 home visits by doctors; 1,717 visits of members to doctors' offices; medical service to 913 persons; and hospital care or surgery, or both, for 78 members. Surgical and hospital bills were paid in full, and county doctors, who formerly considered themselves fortunate if they collected 25 cents on the dollar, received 74 percent payment on their bills.

Two years later, in 1940, dues totaled \$14,910, and paid for 3,066 home visits by doctors; 5,708 office calls; and hospitalization or surgery, or both, for 295 persons. Because of the great increase in services given, physicians received only 41 percent payment on their bills, and 82 percent of all hospital and surgical charges were paid. However, the physicians were serving families who formerly obtained little or no medical attention and, previously, could pay them nothing.

After a few years of group medical care and intensive effort by the State Department of Health, infant mortality in the county dropped from 55 to 19 deaths per 1,000 live births, and deaths of mothers at childbirth from 10.4 to 6.6 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Since 1935, more than 500 sanitary toilets have been built on privately owned and project farms in the county. An intensive health campaign was started in one

of the 50-family, poor-land areas in 1941. All residents in the section were given physical examinations and funds were set up to provide every family a pure water supply, fine mesh screens and other means of mosquito proofing, and a sanitary toilet.

To build up the strength of school children, the county council encouraged establishment of a school lunch program. In 1940-41, hot lunches were served in seven county schools, and plans were made to double the number next year.

Back to Community Life

During many years of insecurity, the farming people of Coffee County had fallen away from community contacts and lived much to themselves. As the families planned their way out of poverty, they began to recover the habit of getting together with their neighbors.

Marketing, purchasing, medical care groups, and many other cooperatives have brought them together, and the development of fuller social life has been encouraged through use of schools as community meeting places. Grounds have been cleared for picnics and barbecues. Neighboring families gather for folk games, square dances, horseshoe pitching and quoits. The women have their quilting bees, sewing circles and canning meetings. More people now go to church and some are Sunday school teachers.

The schools started extra-curricular activities and the children have teams for sports. Occasionally they put on amateur plays.

That interest in community activities is growing, is shown by a paragraph from the project manager's report: "The boys and girls are taking an active interest in 4-H Club work and school attendance has improved. There is a spirit of co-operation among the vocational agencies in the county, and meetings are being held and schools conducted for both men and women. As a result, the adults are taking an active interest in church and social affairs."

Costs and Values

How does the Coffee County balance sheet look? Development and operation of the project up to June, 1941, when construction of 282 homes and four community buildings was finished, cost \$2,090,591.89, or nearly \$300,000 each year since the beginning of the program. Nearly \$800,000 had been loaned to families by the fall of 1941. Much of the construction and operating costs, of course, will not have to be incurred in future years, and loans are being repaid. Renters of project farms have an excellent record for prompt rental payments. Nevertheless, the project has cost money. What has become of it?

Part of the return can be measured in terms of money. Figures published in 1939 showed that families who had been on the project for one year had increased their net worth by an average of \$245 each. The comparable figure for families who had been on the project for two years was \$356. The families who had been on the project three years, from 1936 to 1939, had increased their average net worth fr

\$502 to \$1,070, an increase of \$568, or 113 percent. The project families increased the value of their home produce from an average of \$87 before receiving FSA loans to about \$200 in 1939, an increase of 230 percent.

There was an increase for all project families of one-third in value of feed and seed. In 1938 alone, 40 families sold hogs for the first time in their lives. In the same year, the project families had three times as much food on hand for home use, and eight times as much cash as they had before they borrowed from FSA.

But even the most detailed statistics could not tell the whole story of Coffee County's asset column. If the people who live there were "dollar folks," they could go to the banks and borrow money. The real story is not one of finance, of debits and credits and principal and interest. The important story is what the people have done with the help they needed.

When visitors drive over the back roads and into the remote areas of the county, they receive vivid impressions of what the people have accomplished. One visitor wrote:

"After driving around over many back roads, I could soon tell an FSA farm at a great distance. A house in good repair, a garden near the road with some vegetables green, even in January, mounds marking the buried treasure of potatoes and other tubers, recent and convincing looking terraces on the land--these were almost unmistakable signs. Where the house was fairly new and painted, the sign was unfailing."

Some farmers, of course, have never borrowed from Federal funds, but all the farming people have learned by example how to overcome some of the disadvantages of Coffee County farm life.

Here are the stories of five typical borrower families who live in Coffee County:

They Couldn't Make Cotton

Before 1938, the old farm place "didn't make cotton" for a 41-year-old farmer, his wife, his elderly father, and three children in their teens. They got a \$400 loan from the Farm Security Administration that year, and each year through 1941 they borrowed smaller amounts. Including a little money for furniture, and \$50 borrowed in the spring of 1941 to take part in the increased food production campaign, the total was more than \$900. But they made regular repayments each season, and by the end of the 1941 season they had paid off their loan and had funds in the bank to run the farm and home for 1942. And because of their efforts, they had a chance to move from a poor sandy-land farm to a better, two-horse farm.

Besides several acres of cotton and peanuts, they had in 1941, half a hundred hogs, 12,000 stalks of sugarcane, 40 pullets and hens, 2 cows and 3 heifers, and a vegetable garden. The wife went out at daybreak to work in the field

during cotton-picking time, but she found time to put away for the winter, 330 jars of beans, corn, tomatoes, soups, pickles, peaches, jellies and preserved berries.

The family owned a used car and the younger boy had a bicycle to take him to school in town. They had a pressure cooker and a home-made shower bath, a couple of dogs, a neat yard with climbing cypress on the wire fence. They had a home.

The Children Will Have a Better Chance

A young couple worked as sharecroppers, "farming on halves" until 1939, when they moved into a repaired project house nine miles from their former home. Prospects for their boy, then 6, and the small girls, 5 and 3 years old, were not encouraging, for the family possessed nothing but a few pieces of worn-out furniture, and the father had a serious case of hookworm disease and could do little work. The mother and children had milder cases of the disease. The father did not read or write, though the mother had a little education.

They borrowed about \$800 from the Farm Security Administration in 1939, including more than \$100 for furniture they needed. They pay \$65 a year in rent. Because of the great handicaps they faced, a five-year repayment plan was arranged by the FSA supervisor, and by 1941 they had overpaid the maturities on their loans.

Responding to opportunity, the family cooperated with the nurse and home supervisor and took treatments for hookworm disease. All have improved in health. Teachers found the children bright in school but the two older ones could not see to read until the home supervisor took them to town to have their eyes tested and glasses fitted.

Two years after agreeing to follow the live-at-home plan, this man and his wife owned two cows, six dozen chickens and a few hogs. They were raising peanuts, corn, cotton and velvet beans. The wife had her pear trees, garden flowers, 400 quarts of canned vegetables, and smoked meat. Though she had never been handy at making things, she learned mattress-making at the county demonstration, and made two mattresses and a quilt for the bedroom set they bought.

In 1941, this family still had few of the ordinary necessities of life, and the wife had to work in the fields during the growing season, but their pride in accomplishment promised much for the future.

"Furnish Merchant" Praises

A Negro family farmed as sharecroppers up to 1939. Crops had not been so good and they had fallen almost \$500 in debt to a "furnish merchant." The farmer was 47 years old, his wife 45, they had eight children. They had worked many years and all they had to show for it was debt.

They asked for a loan from the Farm Security Administration in 1939, and began

a new plan with Government help. The next two years they lived on an FSA home-stead farm and cultivated another two-horse farm that they rented from a private owner. In January, 1941, the family moved to another FSA unit. Two other families had tried to farm this land, which was badly infested with Bermuda grass, but gave up the job as too difficult. Hence the Negro farmer was charged a low rent, provided he would do the things necessary to bring the land to good condition.

By autumn of 1941, the family had sold ten tons of peanuts, ten bales of cotton, 25 hogs, and had improved the farm. Their supervisor said that two or three years of the same kind of effort would make their farm one of the most desirable in the county. They had reduced their debt and had money for 1942. The furnish merchant, who in the meantime had lost out financially and had to quit business, met the farmer in town one day and told him he had "done better to go with FSA" than stay with him.

Their sand floor smokehouse was filled with jars of home-preserved food, including meat and butter. The farmer's wife recalled that two years before she had owned only 100 jars "and they weren't filled." Their oldest boy quit school long ago, but five of the younger children were going a mile and a half to school every day, and one had reached the sixth grade. The older boys, whose growing years had been the lean years, wondered whether they could pass examinations for the Army, but the four children still under 16 were healthy.

Cream and Eggs Bring in Cash

One-crop farming yielded no profit for a young white farmer, so he changed to diversified endeavor. He borrowed money for cows and chickens. He also bought a cream separator and established local sales outlets for cream, which brought him \$20 a month. Every night he delivered fresh eggs to a cafe in Enterprise.

In 1940, he and his wife paid back all they had borrowed, and were renting one of the best project farms in the county. When their new baby was born in 1941, they had no worry, for the group medical care fee covered expenses, and the mother felt that, with careful planning, the three older children and the baby would have warm clothes and enough to eat.

His Grandfather Had Prospered

One of the first men in the county who obtained a rehabilitation loan was the grandson of a pioneer who once owned a sawmill and gin, and built a substantial home near Enterprise, but had lost everything during bad times.

In 1936, the younger man and his wife and three children were sharecropping. They lived in a shack that got cold in winter. The baby had pneumonia. They had withdrawn entirely from community life.

Their first loan money was used to buy fertilizer and pay old debts on an adjusted basis. They remember Christmas Day, 1936, as the date they moved into a small house with a ceiling and better floors. By the end of 1938, they had

repaid their notes and, since then, have not borrowed again. In 1941, they were renting the grandfather's old home, repaired by the Farm Security Administration, and had 70 cultivated acres. They needed no Food for Freedom loan because they required no more stock and poultry to increase production.

The farmer supplements the family income by using his thresher to help neighboring farmers with their peanut crops. The wife milks three cows and has regular customers for butter and eggs. She became an expert at canning, demonstrates her methods at club meetings, and is vitally interested in nutrition. Both of these people support church activities.

Coffee County's Future

Neither the farm families nor those whom the Government employs to assist them, were complacent in 1941 about Coffee County's future. In spite of the changed way of living, and the new hope and ambition, they knew that the job was not finished. But after a few years of concerted effort to relieve immediate burdens of the people, the county was well prepared to tackle more of its fundamental problems and to cope with wartime emergencies.

Probably the most important problem arises from inefficient land use--poor farmers trying to make a living on poor land. An ultimate solution may be to vacate the areas unsuited for agriculture, and put the poor land back into forest. Government agencies were cooperating in an analysis of every acre of Government-owned land in the county. In 1941, the Soil Conservation Service and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Development directed the setting out of more than a million seedling pine trees, and recommended that 751,000 additional pines be set in 1942 on the same tracts.

Eventually, more people will move from the eroded lands on the north side of the county. Perhaps half of those living on poor land in 1941 would make a better living under a plan of combined forestry and subsistence farming. The mapping of the two "50-family areas" in 1941 was primarily an experiment in adequate supervision, and does not mean that the families there will continue indefinitely to cultivate the inferior land.

For the future, it is certain that the people will borrow less money, that they will go ahead more confidently on their own efforts. Their experience in cooperative marketing in the 1941 Food for Freedom program, demonstrated what they could do by working together.

The value of the experience in county and area planning cannot be overlooked. To the extent that the Coffee County Workers Council has coordinated the efforts of many workers, it has aided the development of similar projects and has shown the need and results of planning for human welfare.

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