

Farmers Continue to Cut Cash-Crop Acreage

Farmers in Sixth District states have made striking changes in the use of their farm land in recent years. The acreage of principal crops harvested in District states dropped from a prewar average of over 34 million acres to about 25 million acres in 1954. Declines in harvested acreage of corn, cotton, sorghums, hay, and peanuts amounted to more than 11 million acres, but an increase of about one million acres in rice, soybeans, and tobacco offset some of the decline. Although precise data on changes in the number of acres used for pasture are not available, agricultural authorities generally agree

placed corn as a source of energy for planting and cultivating crops and has consequently eliminated many of the acres formerly planted in corn for mule feed. Pastures and close-growing crops have proved more adaptable to mechanized operations, and that too has influenced farmers to reduce row-crop acreage.

Judging from announced acreage allotments and the annual spring report of farmers' planting intentions recently released by the United States Department of Agriculture, trends in the use of District farm land will continue in the direction started in the last few years. The District cotton allotment is about 17 percent below last year's allotment; rice plantings are reduced 18 percent from last year's planted acreage; and the allotment of all tobacco acreage for District states is reduced about one percent. The picked and threshed peanut allotment,

HARVESTED ACREAGE OF PRINCIPAL CROPS Sixth District States

Crop	Acres Harvested (In Thousands)			Percent Change 1933-42 Average to			
	1933-42 Average	1943-52	1953	1954	1943-52 Avg.	1953	1954
59 Principal Crops	34,465	28,936	26,549	24,842	-16	-23	-28
Corn	15,655	11,880	9,518	9,716	-24	-39	-38
Cotton	8,946	6,857	7,456	5,506	-23	-17	-39
Sorghums	302	214	188	237	-29	-38	-22
All Hay	5,140	5,145	4,249	3,813	+0	-17	-26
Peanuts ¹	1,041	1,453	816	704	+40	-22	-32
Tobacco	207	233	233	234	+13	+13	+13
Rice	485	592	604	652	+22	+25	+34
Soybeans	122	428	591	915	+251	+384	+650

¹Acreage picked and threshed only.

that much of the acreage removed from crop production has been shifted to pasture.

Most of the shifts in the use of District farm land were made because of changes in markets for agricultural products and in farm production costs. Cotton acreage, for example, was reduced because of a shrinking cotton market and because improved production techniques have enabled farmers to produce more cotton on each acre. As a result, fewer acres are required to supply the market at prevailing prices.

Price-support programs, of course, have been instrumental in reducing acreage, but even without such programs District farmers would have either reduced their cotton acreage or received lower prices for their crop. Acreage of peanuts picked and threshed for edible uses was reduced in response to smaller consumption. Increases in the acreage of rice and soybeans reflect in part substantial increases in war and postwar markets for those commodities and in part efforts of farmers to replace income lost because of reductions in other crop acreages.

Another important factor influencing farmers to make a substantial reduction in the harvested acreage of principal crops has been the trend toward the increased use of mechanical equipment on District farms. Much like the problem of determining which came first, the chicken or the egg, it is difficult to determine whether the movement of labor from District farms caused farmers to mechanize or whether farmers' efforts to mechanize pushed labor from farms. But the fact remains that District farmers are now using more mechanical equipment in their farm operations. Gasoline and tractor fuel has re-

ALLOTTED ACREAGE OF PRINCIPAL CROPS Sixth District States

Crop	Allotted Acres (In Thousands)		Percent Change 1954-1955
	1954	1955	
Cotton	6,090	5,082	-17
Rice	740 ¹	608	-18
Tobacco	234	233	-1
Peanuts picked and threshed	811	872	+8

¹ Planted acreage; no restriction on 1954 crop.

however, is up nearly 8 percent. The decrease in acreage of allotment crops will total over one million acres, most of which will be cotton acreage.

District farmers, however, have expressed an intention to increase acreages planted to other crops. A substantial rise in acreage of oats, sorghums, and soybeans will offset

PLANTED ACREAGE OF PRINCIPAL CROPS Sixth District States

Crop	Planted Acres (In Thousands)		Percent Change 1954-1955
	1954	1955 Est.	
Corn	10,156	9,927	-2
Peanuts (all purposes)	1,092	1,087	-0
Soybeans (all purposes)	1,457	1,473	+1
Barley	104	110	+6
Oats	2,859	3,290	+15
Sorghums	245	298	+22

some allotment crop acreage lost and will substitute in part for planned reductions in acreages of corn. Little change in the acreage of peanuts for all purposes is indicated.

Apparently District farmers will emphasize feed and forage production again this year in an attempt to replace cash income losses from allotment crops. Also, they will likely make more intensive use of their allotment crop land by using heavy fertilizer applications and the best cultural practices. Success with these efforts, which depends largely on favorable weather, will help offset some of the anticipated reduction in District farm income.

JOHN T. HARRIS