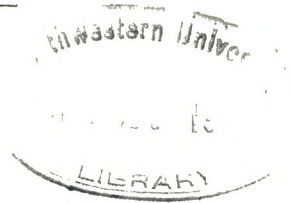


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WPA STUDY FINDS EMPLOYMENT DECLINE IN AGRICULTURE IN SPITE OF INCREASED PRODUCTION

In spite of a 27 percent increase in the volume of production over the last 25 years, American farming today employs ten percent fewer people than it did formerly, it is revealed in a study entitled, "Trends in Employment in Agriculture, 1909-36," conducted by the National Research Project of the Works Progress Administration and released for publication today by Administrator Harry L. Hopkins.

Mechanization of many farming operations that formerly were done with human or animal labor is the principal cause of this change in productivity, Cerrington Gill, Assistant Administrator in charge of research, states in his letter of transmittal. "Although the average fertility of the soil certainly has not increased, and although efforts toward a higher quality of agricultural products have tended to increase labor requirements, the improved techniques of production nonetheless have cut the total number of persons working in agriculture in spite of an increased output."

Mr. Gill cited, as one outstanding example of the effect of mechanization, that since 1920 the combined harvester-thresher has

displaced most of the 100,000 to 200,000 migratory harvest hands who used to find employment every summer in the wheat belts of the Great Plains and the Pacific Northwest.

The report states that average total employment on farms declined from 12,209,000 in 1909 to 10,997,000 in 1936, a drop of approximately ten percent. "The number of hired workers has declined, particularly during the last few years. In 1909 an average of 2,868,000 persons were working in agriculture for wages, while in 1936 this number had been reduced to 2,494,000. This decline, however, did not occur uniformly throughout the period. . . . In terms of the statistics presented . . . it was the hired workers who felt the greatest effect of the depression. Where possible, their places were taken by the farmers' children as they grew up and stayed home, or by those who came home from the cities to work in return for shelter and food. . . ."

In 1936, more than 3/4 of all farm labor was performed without wages by members of the farm operators' families, the report points out. A great deal of the work on the cotton crop is done by sharecroppers and their families, and the heaviest concentration of unpaid family workers was found in the South. The ability of the cotton crop to utilize the labor of women is similarly responsible for the high concentration of female farm labor in the South.

The report is published in a booklet of 163 pages with numerous charts and tables. It was prepared by Eldon E. Shaw and John A. Hopkins as one of the reports of the National Research Project on Reemployment Opportunities and Recent Changes in Industrial Techniques for the WPA, directed by David Weintraub.