

Life on the Farm: Records, Reports, and More

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Farmers were our first settlers. They created the first towns, invented implements that touched other industries, & established a unique approach to life in general.

In other countries, farms were maintained by groups within the community; in the new country, farms were maintained by individual families, making America a country of individualists (as opposed to the collectivist cultures of “back home”).

RESEARCH TOOLS TO LEARN ABOUT FARMING ANCESTORS

- Plat maps of the community
- Deeds
- Court records
- Wills and inventories
- Tax lists
- Extension Service Annual Reports (microfilms through NARA)
- Federal and state censuses
- Agricultural censuses (1850, 1860, 1870, 1880)
 - Often two pages of information – don’t neglect second page!
- City directories
- History books/websites for the region

FARMING TERMINOLOGY

- Farmer = rents or owns (OA – “own account”)
- Farm laborer = works on a farm, but may not be his/her family’s
- “works on farm” = may be a sharecropper or working a neighbor’s farm as a paid laborer
- In 1880 (US Census), supposed to be listed as “owner,” “tenant,” or “sharecropper”

ENEMIES OF THE FARMER

- Bad weather
 - Tornadoes
 - Flooding/torrential rain
 - Drought
 - Hail
 - Devastating winter
 - Dust storms
- Insects
- Unscrupulous/unsympathetic bankers

Short list of Resources (additional bibliographies provided on some of these references)
(Websites current as of 15 January 2024)

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FamilySearch WIKI – search for "farmer" and other descriptors to narrow topic, https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page .

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"Historical Timeline," *Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture*, 2014, online at <http://www.agclassroom.org/gan/timeline/> .

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National Farm Worker Ministry, "Timeline of Agricultural Labor," *Farm Workers and Immigration*, June 2020, online at <https://pvarts.org/dev/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Yaya-Timeline-of-Agricultural-Labor-USA.pdf> .

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