

Small Farm Homes

problems of part-time suburban farmers with full-time city jobs

Richard W. Palmer

Small farms—of an acre or less—are homes and a part-time occupation for a rapidly increasing number of California residents. It is estimated that in Los Angeles County only, there are some 10,000 families living on such farms.

These small farms are homes first and—in a minor way—sources of cash revenue.

Many of the owners are from other sections of the United States and are unfamiliar with California agriculture. Some of them are former city people totally unaware of the fundamentals of agriculture.

Each type of plant and animal the small farm home owner raises requires a special technical knowledge but he cannot be a specialist in all of the crops he grows. The need of the small farm owner for technical information is directly related to the commercial grower. If the part-time farmer does not have enough information regarding pest control, for example, the pests on his property may spread and infest nearby commercial farms.

Problem Studied

In January, 1946, a study of the small farm home problem was started in Los Angeles County by the University of California Agricultural Extension Service. The study has indicated that the problems of the small farm home fall into a typical pattern.

The usual small farm home is about one half to one acre in size. A larger area requires too much labor and equipment for the average owner who also has a full time job elsewhere. There are larger small farms—of two to five acres—which usually are owned by retired business or professional people. These farms often have commercial plantings such as Boysenberries or permanent pasture.

The average small farm home has an orchard of 20 to 30 fruit trees, a small berry patch, a few grape vines and a vegetable garden. There may be a few rabbits and perhaps 10 to 20 laying hens.

Many factors have affected the development of the small farm areas.

During the depression of the 1930's many people turned to their one half and one acre lots and raised fruit, vegetables and small animals. To them, the small farm home is a safeguard against another depression.

Modern automobiles, wide boulevards and systems of high-speed freeways enable city workers to live at great distances from their jobs. They like living in the country and eating home grown food. Such rural life offers their children an education in work with plants and animals.

Industries have recognized the development of the small farm home idea and have begun to build modern factories in rural areas rather than in congested cities.

Large department stores are establishing branch stores in outlying districts and shopping centers are developing around them. The growth of California cities is being paralleled by increasing small farm home areas.

Marketing of Products

The average small farm home owner often makes from \$50 to \$100 a year from his surplus products. This amount probably will take care of most of his taxes and is about all of the cash returns he can expect.

His main returns are in the form of the fresh fruit and vegetables, the eggs, chickens and rabbits on the family table. Dried, canned or frozen home grown food can be stored for future use.

Marketing surplus products often presents a difficult problem to the small farm home owner, and it should be considered before much surplus is produced.

It is not always easy to sell the surplus commodities. This applies especially to the larger type of small farm with one or two acres of citrus or walnuts. Most commercial packing houses do not like to handle such small amounts.

Some owners trade their surpluses to neighbors for commodities they do not have. Others take their products to their jobs and sell to fellow workers.

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Selection of varieties for good yields in a particular area is necessary for successful part-time farming where owner seeks to produce much of his own food.



HOMES

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A neighborhood store may buy surplus fruit and vegetables. A roadside stand is an excellent outlet but most small farm home owners do not live on highways carrying heavy traffic where stands can be operated profitably.

The problem of plant varieties is important. The correct variety must be chosen for a given location.

Many fruit varieties grown in the north can not be grown successfully in most parts of southern California because of delayed foliation. The mild winters cause a delaying and irregular appearance of foliage and bloom in the spring and result in poor crop yield.

There are some types of fruits that are more economically purchased than grown. For instance, San Fernando Valley owners find apples and pears are not too well adapted to that area. Other owners are located in areas where citrus or avocados can not be grown successfully.

A study of fruit varieties best adapted for different districts and the small farm home orchard is being made.

Fig varieties are being tested in six different small farms in Los Angeles County by the University of California Experiment Station at Riverside and the Agricultural Extension Service.

Promising seedling fruit varieties found in home orchards are being watched closely for possible commercial and small farm use. Some of the best commercial fruit varieties had their origin in a home orchard.

The cutting of irrigation pipelines in subdividing orchards constitutes a difficulty in some areas.

Another big problem for the small farm home owner is pest control.

Miscellaneous or one- to two-acre specialized orchards are too small for a commercial type of spray rig and too large for a hand or back-type sprayer.

Some owners hire a local pest control organization to spray for the most difficult pests and do their own spraying for those more easily controlled.

As an assistance to the small farm home owner and as a safeguard to commercial agriculture, the University of California Agricultural Extension Service has conducted a series of field meetings in various small farm home areas.

One method of getting information to small farm home owners has been to form groups which meet from time to time under the direction of a farm advisor. Three such groups now are functioning in Los Angeles County. Demonstrations have been given in proper pruning methods, pest control practices, application of fertilizers, soil problems, and in time and labor saving practices such as the use of oil sprays to control weeds.

Further studies in management practices and cultural methods particularly adaptable to the small farm home are planned.

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BRUCellosis

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hood vaccination on the seven beef herds. Little or no infection has been present in most herds, with the exception of a herd on one ranch.

This particular herd had 15.3% positive reactors to the blood test in 1941.

This figure dropped to 9.7% in 1944, and 3.6% in 1947. Strain 19 vaccination and natural recovery from virulent infection probably are responsible jointly for this decline. The percentage of blood test reactors for all cooperating herds dropped from 4% in 1941 to 0.9% in 1947.

The above report summarizes results of a cooperative project of the University of California, College of Agriculture, Agricultural Extension Service, the Monterey County livestock inspector, and cooperating dairymen and cattlemen.

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REDWOOD

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The comparison among the top, middle and bottom sections also is shown, the latter being definitely inferior to the others. Termites and fungi apparently had very little effect above the ground line on the middle sections. Weakness usually developed a few inches below the ground surface and on the lower section. The upper half of each specimen seemed to suffer no appreciable weakening.

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The above progress report is based upon Research Project No. 396-1.



NEW PUBLICATIONS

A copy of the publications listed here may be obtained without charge from the local office of the Farm Advisor or by addressing a request to Publications Office, College of Agriculture, University of California, Berkeley 4, California.

CALIFORNIA EARLY POTATOES—SITUATION AND OUTLOOK, 1948, by Ivan M. Lee, Cir. 390, November, 1948.

California's early potato industry has expanded rapidly over the past ten years. This state is far out in front of other late spring states in acreage. Farm prices have been favorable, relative to those in other states in recent years. Major fluctuations in production have been accompanied by fluctuations in farm prices in the opposite direction. If production continues at the 1948 level, farm prices here will probably fall in comparison with the price of other products which can be produced on the same land.

RIDDING THE GARDEN OF COMMON PESTS, by A. E. Michelbacher and E. O. Essig. Cir. 146, October, 1948.

Insects and related pests invade the garden from planting of seed to harvesting of crops. Many of them can be controlled easily, but the gardener must be able to identify the pests, use common sense in his cultural practices and have a basic knowledge of the insecticides and what they will do. This circular helps the gardener in all three phases of his pest control problem.

ROSE CULTURE IN CALIFORNIA, by H. M. Butterfield, Cir. 148, November, 1948.

Whether one grows roses for enjoyment, or to exhibit them, this circular answers the growers' questions. These include, "What are the popular varieties? What roses will grow in any climate? What is the best way to plant a rose bush? What insects must be controlled? How are different types of roses pruned? How are roses grown and appraised for exhibition?"

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LOS ANGELES

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