

# What the Future Holds For Virginia Farmers

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**W**HAT does the future hold for Virginia agriculture? To predict the future for agriculture is about as hazardous as long-range weather forecasting. Government policies are subject to rapid change and these changes profoundly affect agriculture. Foreign trade relations are at the bottom of many of our present difficulties. Are we to regain in the future our foreign markets for agricultural products? Agriculture is dependent on the general industrial situation, for without healthy industrial progress and development the number of customers for agricultural products is greatly reduced.

An economics of scarcity may temporarily aid agriculture, but when applied generally to all production, it will prove ruinous to commercial agriculture. Agriculture, however, must be placed on a parity with other industries or else we shall be driven to a subsistence type of farming.

From 1880 to 1930 the number of farms in Virginia increased 44 per cent. From 1900 to 1930 the farmers in Virginia voluntarily abandoned about 3,000,000 acres of farm land. About 3,000,000 acres more should be abandoned.

#### Grains Decline

According to studies made by the Department of Agricultural Economics at

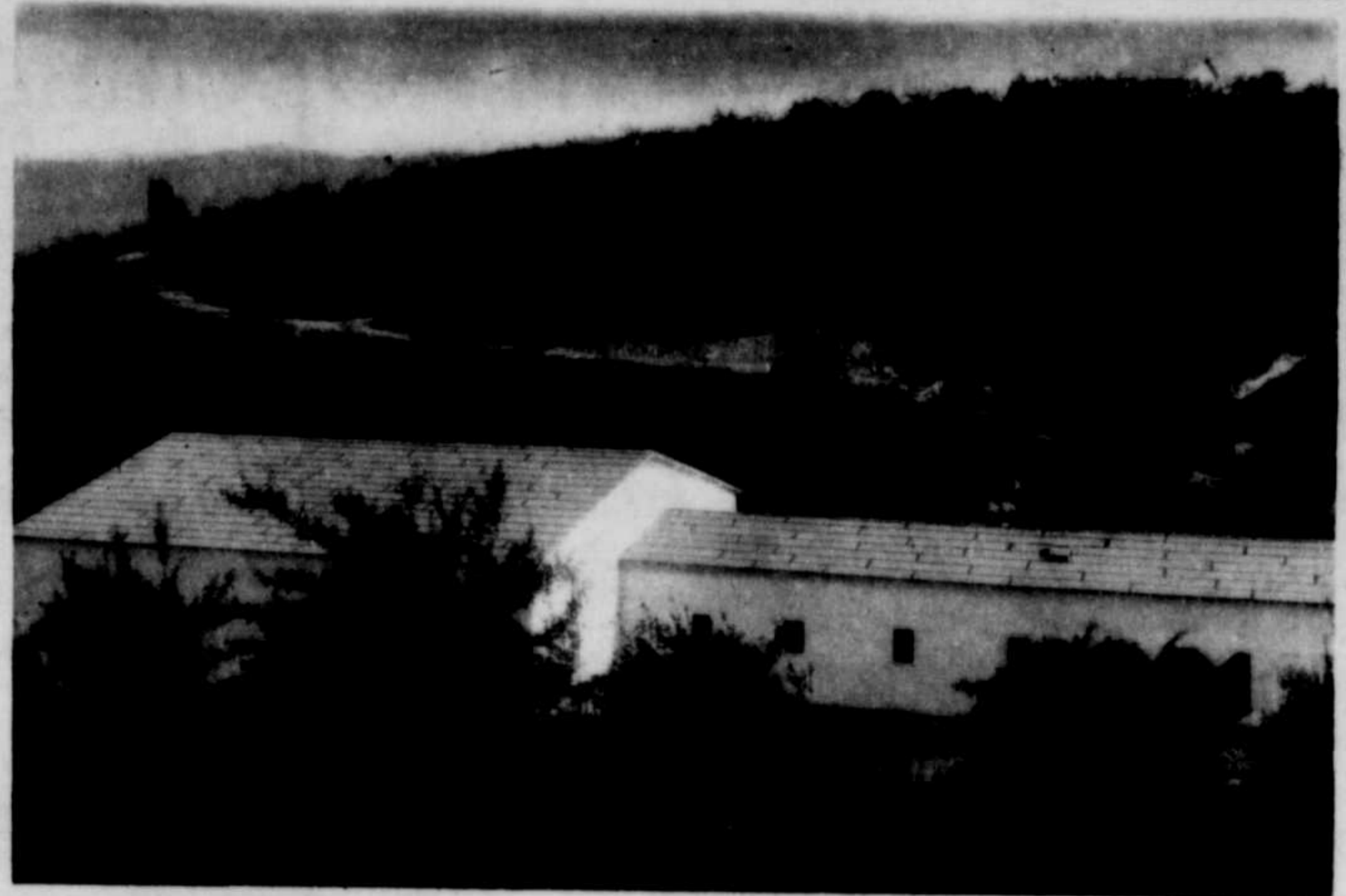
V. P. I., there has been a steady decline in land devoted to corn in Virginia and it seems likely this decline will continue. The general trend of wheat for the last 30 years, with the exception of the war period, has been downward. The same trend may be noticed for oats. Barley has replaced some of the acreage formerly devoted to wheat, while rye has remained stationary.

At present there is a general shift from grain crops to hay. There is every reason to believe that this trend will continue.

For 50 years tobacco growing of Piedmont Virginia has moved south and there has been a decrease in acreage. Eventually only the best tobacco soils of Piedmont will be utilized for tobacco; and the sun-cured and dark-cured regions will move eastward into the southern coastal plain counties.

In recent years, Burley tobacco growing in the extreme southwestern portion of the state has developed. It is impossible to predict the future trend for cotton. Peanuts which increased from 1890 to 1900, have remained practically stationary since 1900. Potatoes also increased nearly three-fold from 1890 to 1930; since then, it seems, the crop has become stabilized. The sweet potato crop is now on the decline.

Beef cattle have steadily declined since



Virginia orchards, on good soil, properly managed will continue to be profitable.

1890; but dairy cows have more than doubled since 1880. Beef cattle, however, have remained stationary in the valley counties and in southwestern Virginia. We may expect beef cattle to continue to decline except in those areas that have good natural pastures. There may be some slow increase in beef and mutton production as a result of the emphasis placed on forage and soil building crops.

#### New Markets Needed

If this policy of land conservation is developed, there will also be an immediate need for more extensive outlets for dairy products.

During the last five years there has been an increase in Virginia in cows and heifers over two years of age of about 15 per cent.

Virginia produces all of the fluid milk needed for home consumption and supplies a substantial part of the Washington supply. There will be a slow increase in the production of fluid milk as city population increases.

About 12 to 20 per cent of the butter consumed and 95 per cent of the cheese consumed is brought into the state. The production of these two products will not be likely to increase.

It is more likely that increases in dairy production will be absorbed largely in sale of cream for city markets, for ice cream and the production of condensed milk.

Hog production declined with the corn crop. In the peanut and cotton sections, there has been a marked increase in swine numbers. There has been a decrease in sheep growing everywhere except on the limestone soils and blue grass pastures of the valleys of the southwestern portion of the state where there has been a general increase.

The future of the apple industry in Virginia is problematical. From 1890 to 1930 the number of bearing apple trees nearly doubled. The methods of caring for the crops greatly improved. Planting is now stationary.

#### Market Loss Serious

Everything looked rosy until we were suddenly confronted with the loss of our foreign markets. As Virginia exports 45 per cent of her crop to foreign countries, this threat is a serious blow. Through reciprocal trade agreements we may expect this situation to be somewhat eased; but we have by no means regained our position and it does not seem likely that we will soon do so.

In this situation, the orchard industry

There is a general decrease in tobacco acreage.



The dairy business will slowly increase.



Beef production will hold its own in the valley and southwest.



Sheep raising has increased in limestone areas.

will decline rapidly unless we can make up the loss of foreign trade by securing a larger domestic consumption, by standardizing our product and by following this with a campaign of advertising.

In case fruit growers are forced to reduce their apple acreage, we may expect them to turn their attention to peaches and possibly to grapes and small fruits. Peach planting could easily be overdone.

There has been plenty of time since 1607 for Virginia agriculture to become, by the "trial or error" method, fairly well adjusted to her soil, climatic conditions and market demands. New developments elsewhere may, however, upset conditions and call for further adjustments. There are some adjustments which should be made by the farmer himself. The state can and should aid by inducing the farmer to take the poorer types of land out of farming.

The state may also aid in the work of soil building. If the farmer will concentrate on his best acres, he can maintain soil fertility by reasonably cheap methods; and under such practices, we can safely expand our system of commercialized agriculture.

#### Too Much Aid Feared

In my opinion, there is far greater danger in the government attempting too much than in doing too little. Notwithstanding this fact, we need a government that is sincerely determined to protect the farmer from exploitation. If this much is accomplished for him, he will in the future, as in the past, work out a far better planned economy than can be expected of any governmental agency.

Modern farming calls for intelligent management and the application of the latest scientific information. According to the best authority, the following formula is necessary for a successful agriculture in Virginia.

1. The intelligent use of plant food for all farm crops.
2. The prevention of loss of plant food through erosion and leaching.
3. The building up of soils and the maintenance of soil fertility through the use of cover crops and proper rotation.

If this formula is followed by our land owners, there is every reason to believe that Virginia agriculture will enter upon an era that may well prove to be its best period since the war between the states.