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THE FARM LABOR SITUATION IN SOUTH DAKOTA as of October 17, 1942

Walter L. Slocum
Gabriel Lundy

This report is based principally on returns from 1101 farmers located in 28 South Dakota counties.^{1/} (Figure 1). The survey was conducted in an attempt to secure a representative^{2/} and objective picture of the 1942 farm labor situation, the probable 1943 farm labor situation and the influence of present and probable labor and machinery shortages on farm production plans for 1943. The reports from the 1101 farmers cover only their own farms.^{2/}

I. The 1942 Labor Situation

Some of the 1942 Crop will be wasted because of Labor Shortage:

The reports from the 1101 farmers indicate that there was a rather serious labor shortage during the harvest and threshing season. This was especially true in the north central part of the state (Figure 2) where almost four of each ten reporting farmers reported crop wastage because of lack of labor. Two hundred seventy-six or 25% of the 1101 farmers who reported said that some of their 1942 crop has been wasted, or will be wasted, because of lack of labor. In this connection it should be recalled that the weather conditions during the late summer were such that the problems of saving the crop were greatly aggravated.

- 1/ Questionnaires were sent to every sixth farm operator whose name appeared on a list of farm operators in each of the 28 counties. Five thousand double post-card questionnaires were sent out on October 17, 1942.
- 2/ Reports were received from disproportionately high numbers of larger-than-average operators and farmers hiring farm laborers by the month. This does not necessarily invalidate the findings but must be kept in mind in interpreting them. With respect to the question of 1943 production it means that the returns probably over estimate the proportion of farmers who face really critical labor and machinery problems. This follows from the fact that the tendency to reply to the questionnaire seems to have been affected by the degree of self-interest on the part of the operator.
- 3/ This procedure was followed in order to keep the data as objective as possible. Presumably each farm operator should not only be able to give an objective report about his 1942 labor situation but should also be able to make a reasonable estimate concerning the 1943 labor situation and its effect on his production plans.

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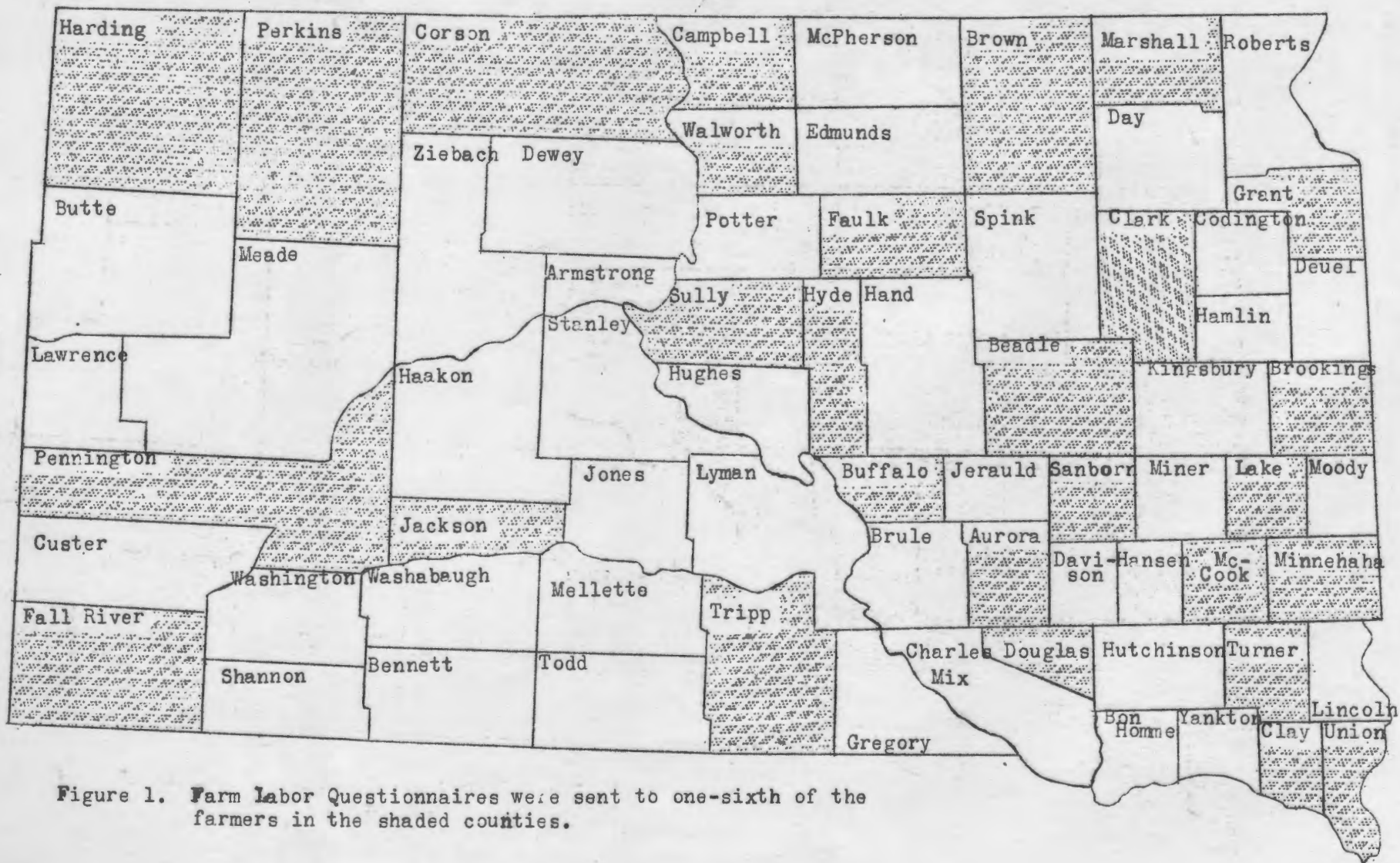
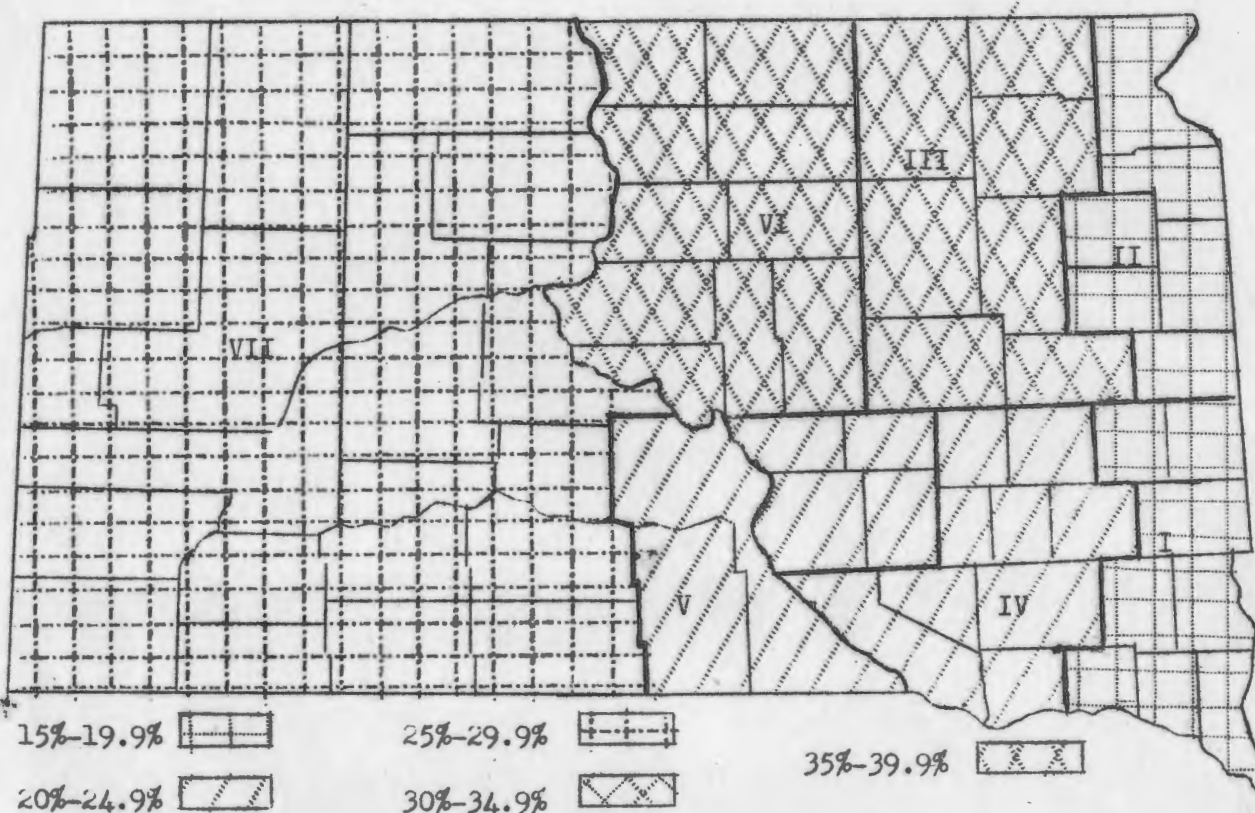


Figure 1. Farm Labor Questionnaires were sent to one-sixth of the farmers in the shaded counties.

Figure 2. Percent of Reporting Farmers Who Stated that Some of 1942 Crop has been or will be wasted because of lack of labor, by areas.



Regular Farm Workers:

Thirty-one percent of the 1101 farmers who replied had at least one hired man, who was employed for five months or more, during the calendar year of 1942. One out of each eight farmers reporting (12.2%) said that they paid wages to one or more family members during five months or more in 1942. Almost half of the farmers (48.0%) reported that they had at least one unpaid family worker in addition to themselves. Of the 1101 farms 386 or 35.0% had no regular worker other than the operator himself in 1942.

There is a remarkable amount of similarity between areas (Table 1) with respect to the proportions of farmers who reported workers of different types although there are, of course, some differences. In Areas IV and V the proportion reporting a hired man is somewhat lower than in the other areas. In Area VII the proportion reporting paid family workers is somewhat higher than elsewhere. The data in the last column of Table 1 suggest that the "one-man farm" may be relatively more frequent in Areas I and II.

Table 1. Percent of Farmers Reporting Various Types of Steady Workers by Areas

Area	Total Farms Reporting	Types of Workers			
		Hired Men	Paid Family Workers*	Unpaid Family Workers*	No Regular Worker*
All Areas	1101	30.8	12.2	48.0	35.0
I	302	32.1	11.3	43.0	43.3
II	137	32.8	11.7	43.8	41.6
III	216	31.5	11.1	47.2	31.0
IV	116	22.4	11.2	48.2	35.3
V	84	22.6	11.9	48.8	35.7
VI	81	32.1	11.1	59.3	19.8
VII	165	35.2	17.0	55.8	26.7

*Excluding operator.

These data tend to bear out the conclusion of a previous study of the farm labor situation in South Dakota that most of the labor on the typical South Dakota farm is supplied by the operator himself and by members of his immediate family.^{4/}

In 1939, according to the United States Census, only 14.3% of South Dakota's farmers hired labor by the month. The percentage noted in the present study (43.0%) means that a disproportionate number of those keeping hired men replied to the questionnaire although with better crops and prices it may also reflect a temporary rise in the proportion of farmers keeping a regular hired worker; possibly during 1942 many farmers hired replacements for former family workers.

Seasonal Hired Help:

Men between the ages of 18 and 45 constituted the principal source of seasonal hired help during the 1942 crop year. Nearly six out of each ten farmers (56.8%) reported having such workers.

Men over 45 years of age and boys between the ages of 14 and 18 were used to some extent, the proportions of farmers employing them being 29.5% and 21.1% respectively. Women were hired for seasonal farm work by 12.6% of the 1101 farmers. How many of these women actually worked in the fields it is impossible to state.

^{4/} Walter L. Slocum, Wartime Mobilization of Farm Labor in South Dakota, S. D. Agricultural Experiment Station, Rural Sociology Pamphlet No. 98, May 1942.

Almost three out of each ten farmers (28.8%) reported that they hired no seasonal labor whatever during the 1942 crop year.

Four hundred and ninety-five farmers reported on the daily wage rate paid during harvest. For these operators the average daily wage paid was \$4.28. Three out of four (75.4%) paid between \$4.00 and \$6.00. A few paid as much as \$7.00 per day. The rates per acre paid for shocking grain by three out of each four (72.8%) of 162 farmers ranged between 40¢ and 60¢. For the 398 farmers who paid their harvest help by the hour, 50¢ was the prevailing rate; more than six out of each ten (64.6%) of those reporting on this question paid this rate.

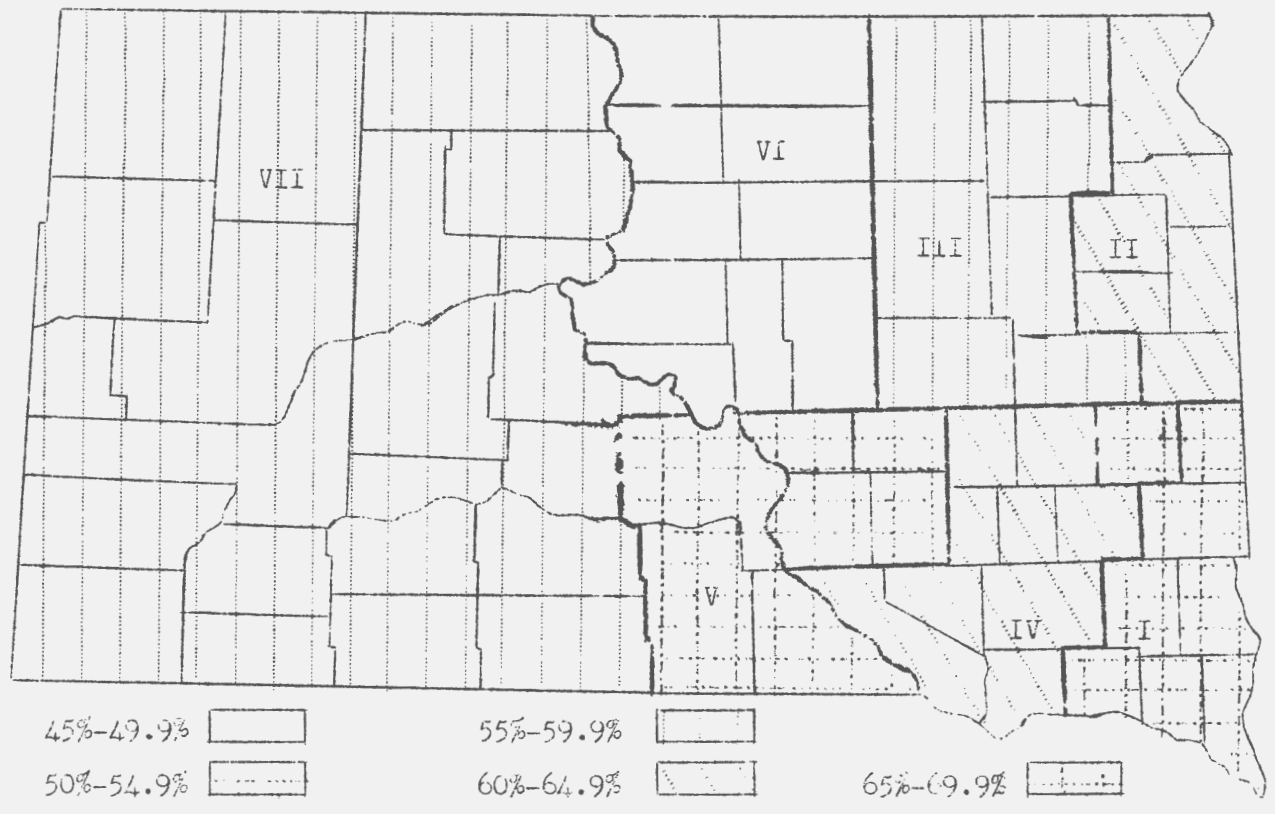
II. The Probable 1943 Labor Situation

Almost seven out of ten (68.2%) of the 1101 reporting farm operators viewed the prospect with apprehension and listed farm labor as one of the major obstacles to 1943 production. Many farmers wrote letters to explain their views more fully than was possible on the postcard questionnaire. There undoubtedly are quite a large number of farmers whose operations will have to be rather materially curtailed next year unless experienced and competent farm help is made available to replace sons or hired men who have left the farms to enter the armed forces or to take jobs in industry.

Only 15.6% of the 1101 farmers expect to be able to get hired men in 1943 as compared with the 31% who kept a steady hired man in 1942. Only 6.0% expect to have paid family workers next year as compared with 12.2% during the current year. Only 28.8% report that they expect to have unpaid family workers in addition to the operator in 1943 compared with 48.0% reporting such workers during the current year. Six out of each ten operators (60.0%) stated that they do not expect to have any steady help of any kind in 1943; the comparable proportion for 1942 was 35.0%. The situation evidently will be most acute in Areas I and V and least pronounced in Area VI (Figure 3).

Thirty-nine percent of the farmers listed machinery as one of the major obstacles to 1943 production on their farms. Many farmers listed specific types of machinery

Figure 3. Percent of Reporting Farmers Who Expect to Have no Steady Help Whatever in 1943, by Areas.



needed by them. The machinery listed most frequently was as follows: grain binder, listed by 52 farmers; threshing machine or combine, by 46; corn picker, by 40; tractor, by 31; haying equipment, by 20; disc, by 11; and cultivator, by 10.

Transportation was listed as a major obstacle to production by 26.9% of the 1101 farmers.

The interpretation to be placed on these data, in view of the impressive 1943 production plans of farmers, to be discussed in detail later, is that South Dakota farmers are planning to do an "all-out" job of war production by sacrificing personal comforts and working even longer hours than usual. It is evident that the farm operator, who has always been the major labor force on most South Dakota farms, will now constitute almost the whole of that labor force on six out of ten farms. Evidently we must depend upon the "one-man farm" for most of our wartime food production in this state.

It is imperative that machinery needs, especially for repairs be met, and that provisions be made to supply additional help during harvest and threshing periods.

III. Influence on 1943 Farm Production Plans

The acid test of the criticalness of the farm labor and machinery situation would appear to be the degree of its influence in reducing 1943 crop acreages and animal numbers below those of 1942. Judged by this yardstick the farm labor situation probably will not be exceedingly acute on more than 10 to 15 percent of South Dakota farms. This is indicated by the data presented in Table 2^{5/}.

Table 2. Percentage of 1101 South Dakota Farmers Planning to Increase, Decrease or Make no Changes in 1943 Production.

Item	Percent of Farms Reporting		
	Greater than 1942	Same as 1942	Less than 1942
Total acres in farm	9	81	10
Acres cropped	17	70	13
Number of cows milked	38	47	15
Number of other cattle	49	32	19
Number of sheep and lambs	47	27	26
Number of hogs and pigs	65	19	16
Number of chickens	44	46	10

On 85% to 90% of our farms, however, production in 1943 will evidently be just as great if not greater than it was in 1942 with respect to both crops and livestock. (Assuming, of course, that weather conditions are comparable and no epidemics of livestock diseases occur.)

Data concerning 1942 production and 1943 production plans is presented in another form by Table 3. This table shows that there will be only a slight decrease in size of farm^{6/} and in the number of acres cropped.

The numbers of cows milked and the numbers of other cattle may increase slightly. Number of sheep and lambs will probably show a slight decrease.

^{5/} It should be noted, however, that production of all types of animals and poultry will be decreased simultaneously on only .8% of the reporting farms. In addition, the fact that larger-than-average farms and farmers hiring labor by the month are over-represented in the sample probably means that the true proportion with reference to all South Dakota farms is considerably less than that indicated above.

^{6/} The average size of farm in 1940 according to the U.S. Census was 544.8 acres. The higher average reported here is due to the fact that a higher portion of larger-than-average operators replied to the questionnaire.

Table 3. Comparison of 1942 Production and
1943 Production Plans on a Per Farm Basis*

Item	Number Per Farm		Percent Change
	1942	1943	
Total acres in farm unit	731.0	720.0	- 1.5
Acres cropped	280.2	275.0	- 1.9
Number of cows milked	8.4	8.9	+ 6.0
Number of other cattle	39.2	41.2	+ 5.2
Number of sheep and lambs	139.5	135.2	- 3.1
Number of hogs and pigs	60.0	72.1	+20.1
Number of chickens	256.9	285.3	+11.0

*1101 farms.

Rather large increases in the number of hogs and pigs and in the number of chickens are indicated. In this connection it may be of interest to note that a supplementary tabulation shows that on 4.5% of the 1101 farms the number of milk cows is being decreased while on the same farms the number of hogs is being increased.

Probable 1943 Production Changes by Areas:

Inspection of the area data presented in Table 4 and Figure 4 shows that with respect to most items of production there is a remarkable amount of consistency in the 1943 production plans of the average farmer regardless of what area he may live in.

The average number of acres in the farm units of the reporting farmers will decline slightly in 1943 in all areas except in Area V where it will increase somewhat.

The average number of acres devoted to crops will decline slightly in every area except area VII where it is expected to increase slightly. (Figure 4).

The average number of cows milked will increase in every area--increases ranging up to 10% are indicated for farmers in Area III. (Figure 4).

There is considerable variation from area to area in plans affecting other cattle. Reporting farmers in Area II plan to decrease the average number of such animals while increases, ranging up to 20% in Area V, are indicated for the other areas. (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Comparison of 1942 Production and 1943 Production Plans by Areas (1101 Farms)

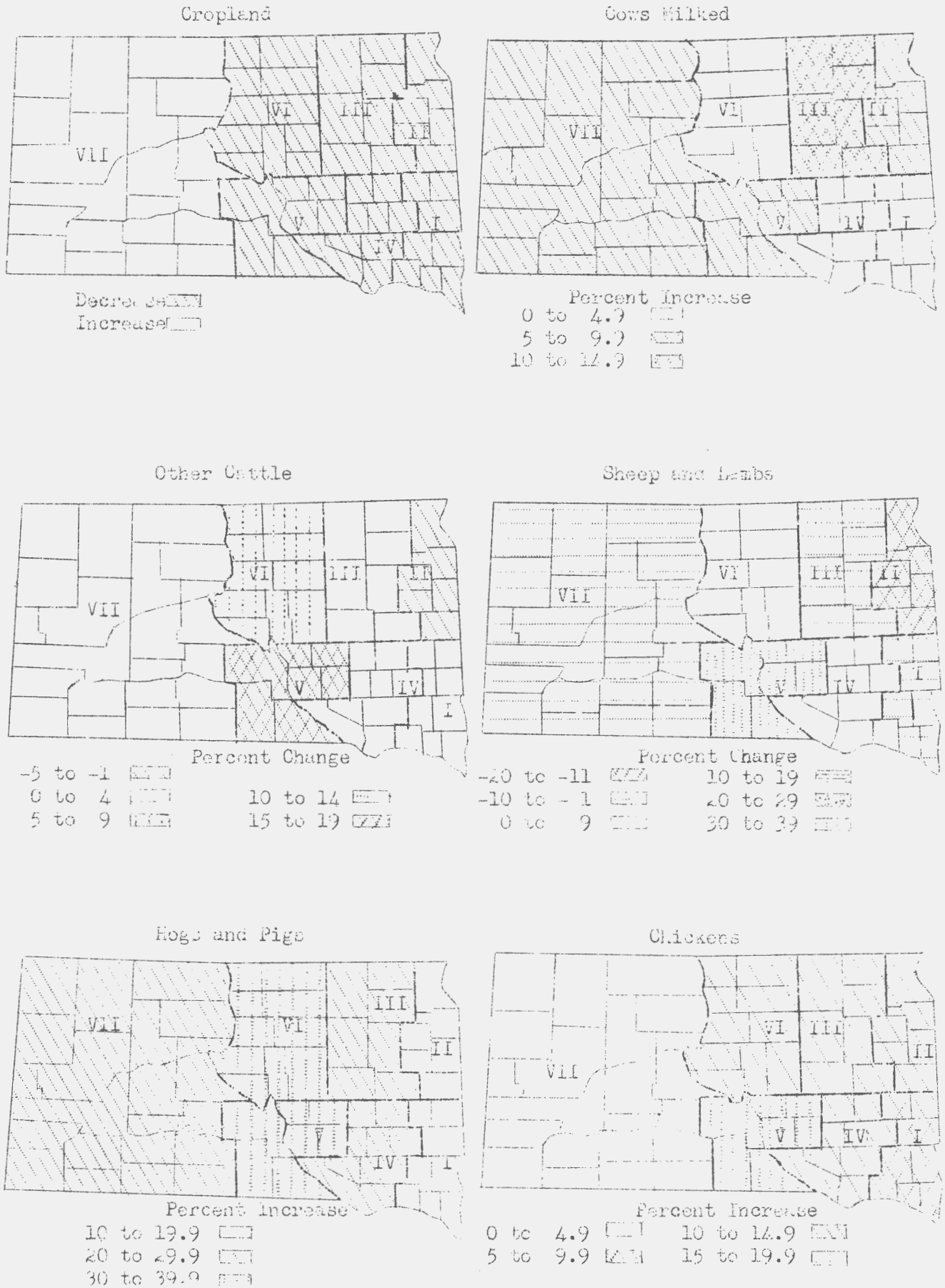


Table 4. Comparison of 1942 Production and 1943
Production Plans, by Type of Farming Area

: Difference between 1942 and 1943 plans as % of 1942 production							
Area :	Acres in :	Acres :	Cows :	Other :	Sheep :	Hogs :	:
:	Farm :	Cropped :	Milked :	Cattle :	and Lambs :	and Pigs :	Chickens
I :	- 1.9 :	- 1.6 :	+ .6 :	+ 4.0 :	- 1.4 :	+14.5 :	+ 6.9
II :	- 1.8 :	- 2.0 :	+ 8.8 :	- 3.4 :	-12.0 :	+15.7 :	+14.5
III :	- 4.3 :	- 2.8 :	+10.0 :	+ 3.1 :	- 3.5 :	+21.4 :	+13.0
IV :	- 5.0 :	- 3.7 :	+ 1.2 :	+ .5 :	+ 8.3 :	+20.6 :	+10.8
V :	+10.2 :	- 4.8 :	+ 6.3 :	+17.9 :	+36.2 :	+37.2 :	+17.2
VI :	- 6.9 :	- 1.4 :	+ 1.9 :	+ 7.2 :	+ 4.3 :	+34.1 :	+14.1
VII :	- .3 :	+ 3.7 :	+ 7.0 :	+ 2.0 :	- 5.8 :	+28.6 :	+ 3.8

The greatest fluctuations from area to area affect sheep numbers. The average number per farm will be decreased in Areas I, II, III and VII and will increase in the other areas--Area V shows the greatest increase. (Figure 4).

The average number of hogs and pigs per farm will be increased in every area (Figure 4) with the greatest percentage increases coming in Areas V and VI.

The average number of chickens per farm is also scheduled to be increased in all areas with the greatest increase indicated for Area V. (Figure 4).

Probable 1943 Changes in Production, by Size of Farm:

Farmers operating 260 acres or more plan to decrease slightly the acreage cropped (Table 5) while those operating smaller farms plan to increase their crop acreages somewhat. Farmers operating 700 acres or more plan to reduce the number of sheep and lambs on their farms but farmers in some of the smaller size groups also plan to reduce sheep numbers.

Table 5. Comparison of 1942 Production and 1943
Production Plans by Size of Farm

: Difference between 1942 and 1943 Plans as % of 1943 Production							
Size of :	Acres :	Cows :	Other :	Sheep :	Hogs :	:	:
Farm :	Cropped :	Milked :	Cattle :	and Lambs :	and Pigs :	Chickens	
Acres							
0-139 :	+ 9.0 :	+15.4 :	+ 3.7 :	- 4.9 :	+18.4 :	+22.2 :	
140-179 :	+ 5.8 :	+ 9.4 :	+16.9 :	- 1.9 :	+19.2 :	+16.2 :	
180-219 * :	+ 2.3 :	+ 9.3 :	+16.1 :	+ 1.5 :	+24.1 :	+ 3.7 :	
220-259 :	+ 6.5 :	+ 8.7 :	+ 2.6 :	+32.5 :	+ 9.4 :	+ 7.3 :	
260-379 :	- .2 :	+ 8.0 :	+11.7 :	- 4.7 :	-17.0 :	+19.4 :	
380-499 :	- 4.5 :	+ 5.0 :	- .6 :	+ 5.0 :	+23.1 :	+ 8.6 :	
500-699 :	- 4.5 :	+ 4.0 :	+ 2.6 :	+ 5.3 :	+15.4 :	+ 9.4 :	
700-999 :	- 2.0 :	+ 2.7 :	+ 1.0 :	- 5.9 :	+32.0 :	+ 3.9 :	
1000 & over:	- 3.0 :	+ .6 :	+ 4.5 :	- 5.4 :	+24.6 :	+ 2.1 :	

The distribution according to size of farm presented by Table 5 is chiefly significant in that it shows similarity in planning for 1943 production regardless of size of farm with the single exception of the acreage cropped and even there the differences are not very great.

IV. Conclusions

The great majority of farmers who reported view the 1943 farm labor situation with apprehension. Six out of ten state that they believe that they themselves will be the only regular worker on their farm. Yet in spite of this, their reports indicate that most of them are planning to maintain their farm operations at the 1942 level or to increase them. Certainly our farmers deserve a great deal of commendation for thus courageously facing a year of farm production in which the only certainty is that they will have to work much harder and longer than usual if they are to meet the goals that they have set up.

Not more than 10 to 26 percent of the reporting farmers are planning to reduce production with respect to one item of production and less than 1% are planning to reduce production on all items included in the survey.

Some farmers will be obliged to cut their 1943 production because of labor difficulties unless special steps are taken to furnish them with experienced and competent help or unless they can place their land under the management of competent farm operators who have sufficient labor and machinery resources to operate it.

The margin of labor supply is so narrow on most farms that unfavorable weather conditions or other factors may create emergencies in some localities during the coming year and it may be necessary to initiate special labor mobilization measures to save essential farm products.