

Economic Study of Farming in the Plant City Area, Hillsborough County, Florida

INTRODUCTION

The agriculture of the Plant City area is characterized by small but intensively operated farms growing crops that require large amounts of hand labor. Most of the labor is furnished by the operator and his family, so the acreage of crops grown is to a large extent determined by what the family can harvest. Strawberries are the main cash crop, but most operators also grow a number of other truck crops, such as peppers, Southern peas, and tomatoes. Much of the cultivated acreage is usually double-cropped to one or more intensive truck crops.

As a result of the intensive farming practiced, inter- and double-cropping of land over many consecutive years, insufficient cover crops, and other soil-depleting practices, "mineral deficiencies are developing, insect populations are building up, and fungus, bacteria and pathological diseases are increasing."¹ An increasing population in the area also raises the question of whether many additional people can obtain a satisfactory living from farming the land resources available.

Some of the problems of the Plant City area were minimized or postponed by the war and immediate postwar period, which provided high prices for crops and off-farm employment for many of the people. The decline in net farm income now taking place emphasizes the need for more efficient methods of producing and marketing farm products. Unless the farmers can meet the problems of intensive land use and organize their units on a more efficient basis, many will be faced with difficult economic problems. Some may be forced out of farming altogether. Drawing upon the experience and knowledge of farmers and those who work with farmers, this study provides information that may suggest to the people in the area ways and means by which they may improve their system of farming and increase their incomes.

METHOD OF PROCEDURE

This report presents data on the organization and incomes of farms in the Plant City area. It shows some of the adjustments made in farm organization and operation during the past

¹ Annual Report of County Agricultural Agent, Hillsborough County Agricultural Department, 1948, p. 32.