

# Migration of North Dakota Farmers

by  
PERRY V. HEMPHILL<sup>1</sup>

Each year a number of North Dakota farmers leave the farm or move to another farm. In order to determine how much migration there has been during the recent period of high agricultural income, a study has been made of the records secured in connection with a recent survey of land tenure trends. This survey, made by the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station in cooperation with the Division of Land Economics, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, was a sample survey of the land tenure situation in selected townships in five representative North Dakota counties. From the data thus secured the number of farmers who moved to another farm or who quit farming following each of the crop years of 1941-42, 1942-43 and 1943-44 has been determined. The data also reveals the number that retired, the number that entered other employment or business and the number that entered the armed services.

The results obtained have been expressed in percentages of the total number of farmers in the sample and in percentages of the number of farmers in each of the three tenure classifications of full owner, part owner and tenant. The data is based on 15 townships, three in each of the counties of Cass, Stark, Stutsman, Ward and Towner.

Earlier comparable data of the amount of migration in North Dakota is not available but a study of census data would seem to indicate that the amount of migration has increased rather than decreased. According to the 1940 census, 8.3 percent of the North Dakota farmers, on January 1, 1940, had been on the farm they were occupying less than one year. This means that a similar percentage had migrated from those farms. In 1930 the percentage of farmers who had been on the farm they were then occupying less than one year was 10.1 percent. The same figure for 1920, according to the census for that year, was 9.1 percent.

The percentage of farm operators who moved to another farm or quit farming following each of the crop seasons of 1941-42, 1942-43 and 1943-44 are given in Table 1. The

amount of migration following 1941-42 was 13.3 percent, of which 5.4 percent moved to another farm and 7.9 percent quit farming. The next year the amount of migration increased to 15.6 percent with 6.0 percent moving to another farm and 9.6 percent leaving the farm. Following the crop season of 1943-44, the amount of migration was higher than either of the two previous years, being 17.3 percent. The percentage of those that moved was 10.5 percent while the percentage of those that quit farming was 6.8 percent.

Included in the group of farmers that moved from one farm to another were only those farmers that made a complete change in their farming unit. There were a number of other farmers that made some changes in their farming unit and undoubtedly some of these

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Agricultural Economist, North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station.

**TABLE 1—Percent of farmers who quit farming or moved to another farm<sup>1</sup> after each of the crop seasons of 1941-1942, 1942-1943 and 1943-1944<sup>2</sup>**

Unit		Total	1941-1942		
			Full Owners	Part Owners	Tenants
Total who quit or moved	Percent	13.3	9.4	5.3	18.6
Moved to another farm <sup>1</sup>	Percent	5.4	1.8	3.2	7.9
Quit farming	Percent	7.9	7.6	2.1	10.7
Total farmers in sample	Number	759	170	186	403
1942-1943					
Total who quit or moved	Percent	15.6	12.2	9.9	21.4
Moved to another farm <sup>1</sup>	Percent	6.0	2.6	4.5	8.9
Quit farming	Percent	9.6	9.6	5.4	12.5
Total farmers in sample	Number	748	189	222	337
1943-1944					
Total who quit or moved	Percent	17.3	12.6	6.3	28.2
Moved to another farm <sup>1</sup>	Percent	10.5	2.1	2.5	21.4
Quit farming	Percent	6.8	10.5	3.8	6.8
Total farmers in sample	Number	751	191	238	322

Compiled from County AAA records.

<sup>1</sup>Includes only those farmers who made a complete change in their farming units.

<sup>2</sup>Based on 15 North Dakota townships in Cass, Stark, Stutsman, Towner and Ward counties.

moved from one farmstead to another but were not considered as having moved as the records gave no information as to the location of the farmsteads.

As might be expected, the greatest amount of migration occurred among tenants. Following the 1941-42 season, 18.6 percent of the tenants migrated with 7.9 percent moving to another farm and 10.7 percent discontinuing farming. Following the 1942-43 season, 21.4 percent of the tenants moved to another farm or quit farming with 8.9 percent in the first group and 12.5 percent in the latter group. Following 1943-44, the third crop year of which we have record, 28.2 percent of the tenants migrated. By far the greater number of these moved to another farm as this percentage was 21.4 percent while the percentage of those quitting farming had decreased somewhat from that of the previous year to 6.8 percent.

There was considerable variation in the percentage of migration in the five counties included in the sample when considered in-

dividually. The low, following the 1941-42 season, was 9.5 percent for Cass county and the high was 25.0 percent for Stark county. Following the 1943-44 season, the low was 15.8 percent for Stark county and the high was 41.0 percent for Stutsman county. In the three sample townships in Stutsman county, 29.5 percent moved to another farm and 11.5 percent quit farming in 1943-44.

Among the full owner operators in the 15 townships of the five counties, the amount of migration these three years was 9.4 percent, 12.2 percent and 12.6 percent, respectively. The percentage of full owners that moved to another farm was comparatively small being 1.8 percent, 2.6 percent and 2.1 percent for these three years which indicates that the full owners that migrated were mostly those that quit farming. The percentage of full owners that quit farming following the 1941-42 season was 7.6 percent, the next year it was 9.6 percent and the last of the three years, it had reached 10.5 percent. The part owner operators show the least

amount of migration with 5.3 percent migrating following 1941-42, 9.9 percent following 1942-43 and 6.3 percent following 1943-44. For each of these three years the distribution of these percentages between those that moved to another farm and those that quit farming was fairly well equalized.

While the data secured in connection with the land tenure survey may not give all of the basic reasons for the migrations nor the reasons why certain operators quit farming, it is possible to determine the number that retired from farming, the number that went into other lines of endeavor and the number that entered the armed forces. This information, expressed as percentages of the total number

of farmers in the sample, is given in Table 2.

This table considers only the farm operators who quit farming in the 15 townships located in the counties of Cass, Stutsman, Stark, Ward and Towner. Following the 1941-42 season, 1.8 percent retired, 2.1 percent entered other employment or business, and 1.1 percent entered the armed forces. The remaining 2.9 percent quit farming for miscellaneous reasons. Three quit because of foreclosures and seven died during the year. There were also a few who were listed as having moved away but no information was obtained as to where they went. In a few instances some of these may have continued farming in other communities. Of the

**TABLE 2—Reasons for quitting farming by tenure of operator,<sup>1</sup> North Dakota, 1941-1942, 1942-1943 and 1943-1944**

Reasons	Unit	Total	1941-1942		Tenants
			Full Owners	Part Owners	
Total who quit farming	Percent	7.9	7.6	2.1	10.7
Retired	Percent	1.8	4.7	0.5	1.2
Other employment or business	Percent	2.1	0.0	0.5	3.7
Enter armed forces	Percent	1.1	1.1	0.0	1.4
Miscellaneous (Foreclosure, deceased, unknown)	Percent	2.9	1.8	1.1	4.2
Total farmers in sample	Number	759	170	186	403
1942-1943					
Total who quit farming	Percent	9.6	9.6	5.4	12.5
Retired	Percent	3.7	8.0	3.1	1.8
Other employment or business	Percent	2.7	0.5	0.5	5.3
Enter armed forces	Percent	1.6	0.0	0.9	3.0
Miscellaneous (Foreclosure, deceased, unknown)	Percent	1.6	1.1	0.9	2.4
Total farmers in sample	Number	748	189	222	337
1943-1944					
Total who quit farming	Percent	6.8	10.5	3.8	6.8
Retired	Percent	4.0	7.3	2.1	3.4
Other employment or business	Percent	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.3
Enter armed forces	Percent	0.4	0.0	0.9	0.3
Miscellaneous (Deceased, unknown)	Percent	2.2	3.2	0.4	2.8
Total farmers in sample	Number	751	191	238	322

Compiled from County AAA records.

<sup>1</sup>Based on 15 townships in Cass, Stark, Stutsman, Towner and Ward counties.

farm operators that quit farming following the 1942-43 season, 3.7 percent retired, 2.7 percent went into other employment or business, 1.6 percent entered the armed forces and 1.6 percent quit farming for miscellaneous reasons. The majority of the 6.6 percent who quit farming following the 1943-44 season retired, as the percentage that retired was exactly 4.0 percent. Considerably less than 1.0 percent entered other employment or business, or entered the armed forces. 2.2 percent quit farming for miscellaneous reasons. Among the full owner operators that quit farming during the three years under discussion, the principal reason for quitting was retirement as 4.7 percent retired in 1941-42, 8.0 percent retired in 1942-43 and 7.3 percent retired in 1943-44. In two out of three of these years none of the full owner operators entered other employment or business.

Among the tenants that quit farming, the situation was almost the opposite of that of the full owners during the first two years as only 1.2 percent retired following 1941-42 and 1.8 percent following 1942-43, whereas the percentage of those that entered other employment or business was 3.7 percent the first year and 5.3 percent the second year. Following the 1943-44 season, 3.4 percent of the

tenants retired and only 0.3 percent went into other business or employment. As stated before, the amount of migration among part owner operators was comparatively light. The principal reason given for the part owners that quit farming was retirement.

The data thus presented clearly indicates that a period of high agricultural income during a war period is not necessarily conducive to the stability of the farm family. Land becomes more attractive and the rate of sales increases causing the displacement of many families. Operators who themselves are not subject to military service are hampered because members of the family may be called into service. This, coupled with shortages of machinery and available labor supply, causes many to move to a smaller farm or to quit farming. High prices and wages make other businesses or employment more attractive than farming. Because of good crops and higher prices for farm commodities, some farmers are now financially able to retire. Other farmers, for the same reasons, are now able to buy a farm of their own. This may require moving which also displaces some farm families. Such a period of high agricultural income may, however, eventually result in a more stable agriculture.

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**The Chinese Agriculture News Letter** advises that "The Szechwan Provincial Institute for Agricultural Improvement has sent agents to different parts of the province to direct and supervise the extension of improved wheat to farmers. An agreement for financial assistance has been reached with the Farmers' Bank of China. Three kinds of improved wheat are to be distributed." (H.L.W.)

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**Perennial sow thistle seed** which was 5 years old has shown a germination of 53 percent. Properly ripened seed will germinate from 90 to 100 percent. (M. K. Bellue in Voume XXXIV, Number 1, State of California, Department of Agriculture Bulletin.)