



A social and economic survey of Sanders county farms
by Maurice J McKay

A THESIS Submitted to the Graduate Committee in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Science in Agricultural Economics
Montana State University
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Abstract:

Sanders County is an area of variable climatic and topographic features, The narrow, wooded Clarks Fork Valley and the Cabinet Range form the western part of the county. The eastern part opens, the steep mountains recede, and untimbered hills rise from the valley floor. The county is divided into two natural regions with unlike features.

The western District is a cut-over region in which logging has been, until recently, the chief source of livelihood. This region has a precipitation ranging from 20 to 55 inches, the major proportion of which falls during the winter months. The frost-free season is short. Farms are poorly developed; the timber resources have nearly disappeared; the majority of farms will not sustain the families living on them; and the relief load is heavy. The data show a positive correlation between the number of acres cleared on the farms and the gross income from them. Public assistance is the main source of income for 44.4 per cent of the farm families. Over one-half of the families have a gross cash income of \$400 or less. Nearly three-fourths of the farms have less than 51 acres of cleared land; 79.6 per cent produce less than 50 tons of hay, and over two-thirds of them have less than five milk cows, calves, or other cattle. A high proportion of farm families do not have the minimum equipment needed to clear and work the land. Most of the farm families participate in no social or economic organizations. The majority of farm families are without hope, demoralized, and bitter. A rural slum is rapidly developing in the region.

The Eastern District of Sanders County is a region of sparse vegetation. The precipitation varies from nine to 15 inches; the major part of which falls between April 1 to September 1. The frost-free season, 115 days, is nearly a month longer than in the western part of the county. About two-thirds of the farm income comes from livestock and dairy products. The majority of the farms are irrigated and diversified farming is practiced.

The relief load in this area is light (5.8 per cent of the farm families). The average gross cash income per farm family is \$1425, however 19.5 per cent of these families have incomes of \$400 or under. Farm problems in this region consist mainly of drought, dry weather, insufficient irrigation water, and poor markets. There is more widespread and active participation of farm people in organizations and social activity here than in the western District.

A program to relieve the distressed economic and social conditions in Sanders County should include an increase of cleared land; a soil analysis; the zoning and return of submarginal land to forests; long-term loans accessible to farmers for equipment and stock; the development of marketing agencies; the development of a potential cash crop; the development of supplementary sources of income; and agricultural education in the high schools.

A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SURVEY OF
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MAURICE J. MCKAY

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A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SURVEY OF SANDERS COUNTY FARMS

ABSTRACT

Sanders County is an area of variable climatic and topographic features. The narrow, wooded Clarks Fork Valley and the Cabinet Range form the western part of the county. The eastern part opens, the steep mountains recede, and untimbered hills rise from the valley floor. The county is divided into two natural regions with unlike features.

The Western District is a cut-over region in which logging has been, until recently, the chief source of livelihood. This region has a precipitation ranging from 20 to 35 inches, the major proportion of which falls during the winter months. The frost-free season is short. Farms are poorly developed; the timber resources have nearly disappeared; the majority of farms will not sustain the families living on them; and the relief load is heavy. The data show a positive correlation between the number of acres cleared on the farms and the gross income from them. Public assistance is the main source of income for 44.4 per cent of the farm families. Over one-half of the families have a gross cash income of \$400 or less. Nearly three-fourths of the farms have less than 51 acres of cleared land; 79.6 per cent produce less than 30 tons of hay, and over two-thirds of them have less than five milk cows, calves, or other cattle. A high proportion of farm families do not have the minimum equipment needed to clear and work the land. Most of the farm families participate in no social or economic organizations. The majority of farm families are without hope, demoralized, and bitter. A rural slum is rapidly developing in the region.

The Eastern District of Sanders County is a region of sparse vegetation. The precipitation varies from nine to 15 inches; the major part of which falls between April 1 to September 1. The frost-free season, 113 days, is nearly a month longer than in the western part of the county. About two-thirds of the farm income comes from livestock and dairy products. The majority of the farms are irrigated and diversified farming is practiced. The relief load in this area is light (5.8 per cent of the farm families). The average gross cash income per farm family is \$1425, however, 19.3 per cent of these families have incomes of \$400 or under. Farm problems in this region consist mainly of crickets, dry weather, insufficient irrigation water, and poor markets. There is more widespread and active participation of farm people in organizations and social activity here than in the Western District.

A program to relieve the distressed economic and social conditions in Sanders County should include: an increase of cleared land; a soil analysis; the zoning and return of submarginal land to forests; long-term loans accessible to farmers for equipment and stock; the development of marketing agencies; the development of a potential cash crop; the development of supplementary sources of income; and agricultural education in the high schools.

PART I. INTRODUCTION

The traveler passing through the Clarks Fork Valley in Sanders County, Montana, is struck by the varied beauty of the scenery. The Clarks Fork River, with its numerous tributary streams, appeals strongly to the sportsman. Whether it is spring, when the clear streams run full, or autumn with its brilliant colors, the beauty of the valley brings praise from all who visit the region.

A case worker is oblivious to these natural beauties. His mind is occupied by the vision of impoverished families, ill-clad children, and mothers who complain their relief allotment is insufficient for their needs, that a child needs glasses, or perhaps that an ill member of the family needs medical attention.

Throughout this project, the impressions of the traveler and the visions of the case worker are in sharp contrast. The traveler's impressions represented the prevailing motives that stimulate settlement in the county. The social and economic conditions are represented by the case worker's vision. The first situation explains why people are attracted to Sanders County. The second situation is representative of the social and economic conditions that prevail in the western part of the county.

Objectives of This Study

This project was set up to determine the social and economic conditions in Sanders County; an analysis of the factors contributing

