

Chapter 11

Agriculture

11.1 Agriculture in Canada

Climate, soil conditions and geography have combined to form several distinct farming regions in Canada. A harsh northern climate restricts most agriculture to the southern portion of the country and nearly all farms in Canada lie within 300 miles of the southern border. In the Atlantic provinces and central Canada farming is limited to coastal regions and river valleys, and soils vary in depth and fertility. In the Prairie region soil is fertile but rain is light. Farming is limited to high plateaus and river valleys in the mountainous region of the far west.

Nevertheless farming is an important business in Canada. About 265,000 sq miles in 10 provinces are cultivated; 169,000 sq miles are improved land. Farm income exceeds \$5 billion annually and in 1973 agricultural exports exceeded \$3 billion for the first time. Mechanization and education are increasing the efficiency of farms constantly; a trend toward fewer and larger farms has become evident in the 1961 and 1971 censuses of agriculture.

Farms in Canada can be divided into four main types. Livestock farms include those specializing in feedlot finishing of cattle, large-scale feeding of hogs bought as weanlings, dairying, poultry production for meat and eggs and other aspects of breeding and raising livestock. Grain farms produce crops like wheat, oats, flax and rapeseed. Special crop farms produce vegetables, fruits, potatoes or other root crops, tobacco or forest products. Other farms combine livestock and grain production. Although each of the regions has its specialties none is limited to one type of farming.

11.1.1 Crops and livestock

The Atlantic region. This area includes Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and the Gaspé district of Quebec. It is a hilly region, with a general covering of relatively fertile soil developed under forest cover. The climate is modified by the sea but it is also affected by cold currents from the coast of Labrador and winds from the north. Precipitation averages 30 to 55 inches annually. Mixed farming is general and forage crops support a healthy livestock industry. It is not unusual to find the small farmers combining fishing or lumbering with farming.

In Nova Scotia the main agricultural areas surround the Bay of Fundy and Northumberland Strait, where they are protected from the Atlantic gales. Dairying and poultry farms are common and beef farming is increasing. The Annapolis Valley is famous for its fruit, particularly apples. New Brunswick produces potatoes and livestock in the Saint John River valley and there is mixed farming in the northwest. More than a third of the commercial farms in the province are classed as dairy farms.

Farming is the principal occupation on Prince Edward Island. Potatoes are the leading crop but the fertile land also supports mixed grains, dairying and other livestock enterprises. Small fruits and vegetables are also produced.

In Newfoundland agriculture is of only local importance because of rough terrain. Bogland offers some potential for reclaiming and vegetable farming.

The central region. This lowland area bordering the St. Lawrence River, includes the farms of the Ottawa Valley and extends through southern Ontario to Lake Huron. Fertile soils, mostly formed by glacial drift and lake sediment developed under deciduous forest cover, and a mild climate modified by the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River account for varied farming. Precipitation averages 30 to 45 inches a year. It is the most densely populated part of the country, providing large markets for farm produce.

Well over half the commercial farms of Quebec are now classified as dairy farms, a change from the traditional small mixed farming operations of old Quebec. Sizable butter and cheese industries rely on these farms. Livestock farms, specializing in beef cattle, hogs or sheep, and mixed farms are also common and poultry and egg production is increasing. Forage is the largest cultivated crop in the province although oats and corn for feed are also produced. Fruits and vegetables, particularly apples, are becoming prime crops. Sugar beets and flue-cured tobacco are grown and processed in the province.