

Utah Agriculture 1896

The following historical insert offers a glimpse of Utah agriculture in the year 1896. It is followed by statistical information on crop prices paid then, and during the past 100 years.

Life on the farm in 1896 was for the most part enjoyable and fruitful. Steam-powered tractors and threshers increased production and changed the face of agriculture across the country. One out of every three jobs in Utah was agriculture-related and the state's growing economy reflected agriculture's presence.

Farming continued to be the predominant way of life during Utah's first year of statehood as 62 percent of the population was rural. By 1896 the inhospitable soil encountered by the Mormon pioneers five decades earlier was well irrigated and made to blossom.

The values learned from nurturing life-giving crops from the stubborn soil remain in many Utahns today.

A Slice of Utah History

In 1896 Utah's population stood at 276,000. The average-sized family was five. There were 19,000 farms (13,000 in 1996). Most people owned their farm, and most farms were no larger than 50 acres in size (850 acres in 1996). Agriculture was the state's largest employer at 34 percent of total jobs.

The chief crops in 1896 were: oats selling for 39 cents a bushel (compared with \$2.64/bushel in spring 1996); barley sold for 42 cents a bushel (\$3.84 in spring 1996); and, wheat sold for 68 cents a bushel (\$5.57 in spring 1996). Hay and grass were also important crops for Utah's livestock industry(see pages 5-23 for more crop and price comparisons).

Commercialization

Utah farmers changed the types of crops they grew during the years leading to statehood. Instead of focusing on self-sufficiency -- merely raising crops for family use -- farmers began raising crops for commercial markets. Farmers were seeking the better life offered by commercial enterprise.

Change was apparent in the products that were raised as it was natural and normal for Utah farmers to become involved in the expanding agricultural movements of the area and move on to become a part of our nation's great agricultural economy.

Utah farm life at the turn of the century is described in this diary recorded by Henry Lyman Marble III of Box Elder county.

My Story

By: Henry Lyman Marble III

"I learned to ride horses and to bring the cows home at night to be milked and take them back to the pasture in the morning. I learned to drive horses and to take care of them, even to nail shoes on their feet. At the age of eight years I drove six head of horses on a gang plow. I harnessed them, hooked them up and plowed all day down in the bend by the river about a mile from home. I also helped with milking cows and fixing machinery."





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The industrial revolution produced steam-powered threshers and tractors that helped increase production and moved agriculture throughout the United States into the 20th century. In Utah a few wealthier families owned such equipment and either shared or leased the machines to their neighbors.

Population growth, improved irrigation and well drilling, and dry farming techniques helped increase the number of acres farmed in Utah threefold, from 1.3 million acres to 4.1 million acres (today Utahns farm 11 million acres).

Ranching in Utah also grew in productivity during the years leading to statehood. The number of sheep increased from 230,000 in 1880 to about four million by 1896. The number of cattle increased from 91,000 in 1880 to more than 300,000 by 1896.

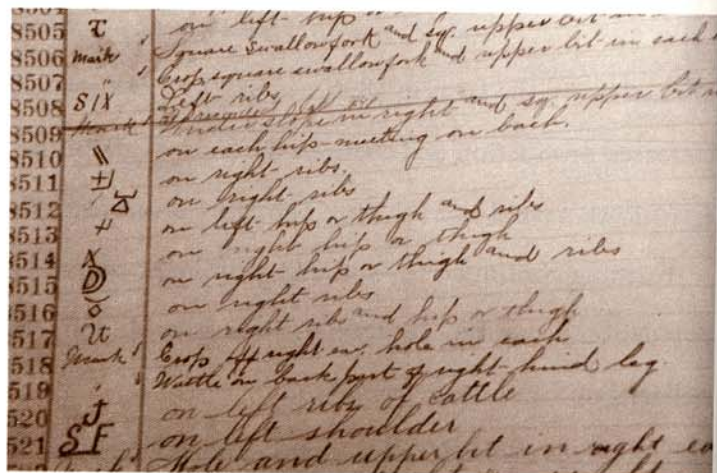
Roots

The Utah Department of Agriculture (UDA) traces its roots to the year of statehood when the 1896 Legislature formed the State Board of Horticulture. The board was responsible for organizing and promoting agriculture in the state and reporting the industry's progress to the governor.

The following are excerpts from the first report of the State Board of Horticulture submitted to Gov. Heber M. Wells in 1896.

"Sir:—I hereby submit to you my first annual report as President of the State Board of Horticulture under the provisions of the Horticultural Law, approved April 5th, 1896.

"Because of the decision in one of the lower courts of Utah Territory holding the former spraying law unconstitutional, and on account of the late date of the passage of the present law, few of the farmers in the State were prepared to properly comply with the provisions of the new law. The situation was still further complicated by delayed action upon the part of various Boards of County Commissioners in the matter of appointing county Inspectors as provided by the law. On account of these delays, the work of orchard disinfection was begun fully four weeks late than advisable and after numerous insects had grown beyond the effect of insecticides used. To further detract from the efficacy of the work, the frequent



Utah livestock brands. By 1896 cattle and sheep owners were moving away from using their initials as brands. Instead they began using the more traditional insignia brands. The brands above were recorded in July of 1896.

rains during the earlier spraying season rendered the work very difficult. Again, the unusual and disastrous windstorm of September 18th, 1896, destroyed practically all the Winter apples and pears, and made it impossible to estimate the real result of the year's work in ridding the fruit of insect pests.

"The insects and diseases known to exist in Utah at present are properly divided into three classes:

1st. Leaf eating or gnawing insects, such as the codlin moth or apple worm; the tent caterpillar; the canker worm; the pear slug; the cut worms and the various borers.

2nd. The suctorial, or sap sucking insects, such as the woolly aphis and the various species of green aphis which attack nearly every class of fruit and shade trees.

3rd. The fungus disease in its various forms of mildew, must, apple scab, pear blight and leaf spot.

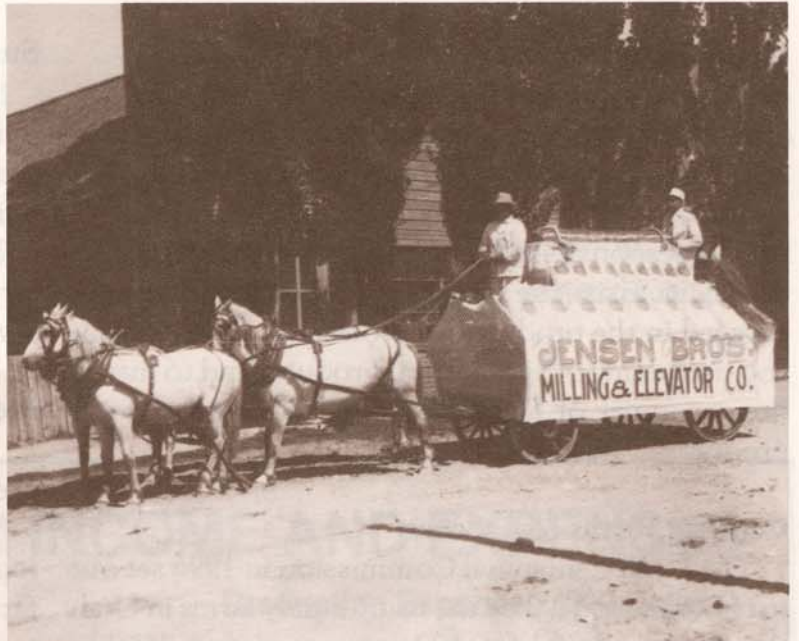
"For each of these pests and diseases most effective insecticides and fungicides have been recommended and where properly used, have done much toward extermination of the pests."



Even before 1896, Utahns recognized the value of an organized agriculture program. The Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society was formed to promote agriculture. The Society sponsored numerous territorial fairs before the first Utah State Fair took place in 1896.

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Utah's pioneers planted the state's first crops in July of 1847. Even before their thoughts turned to building houses and stores, they turned a few dozen acres of fertile soil in what is now downtown Salt Lake City into Utah's first agricultural area. The seeds used to plant those potatoes, beans, corn, oats and buckwheat were carried with the pioneers on their overland trek to Utah.



Above: An early day parade float displays an agriculture theme. *Left:* Harvest time in the field. Family and friends turn out to bundle wheat stocks in this early 20th century picture. *Below:* Milking time. Children as well as adults bring their raw milk in for processing at this creamery.

❖ Livestock also played an important roll in Utah agriculture history. Captain Howard Stansbury reported that in the area west of the Jordan River, a hardy grass called "bunch-grass" grew in sufficient quantity to afford "excellent pasture to numerous head of cattle."

In the years leading to statehood the number of Utah farm towns increased to 400. Streams and creeks along the Wasatch mountains and in high country plateaus were diverted for irrigation, giving Utah geography a north-south axis that contrasted to the east-west thrust of the nation.



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Utah Department of Agriculture

In 1921 the Utah Legislature created the Department of Agriculture, consolidating the State Board of Horticulture and other agencies established years earlier to promote Utah agriculture.

The responsibility of the Department of Agriculture is to assist the private sector of our economy engaged in the production, processing, distribution, and marketing of agricultural products and to insure the consumer of high-quality and wholesome food products.

Century Farms & Ranches

The Utah Centennial Commission in 1996 set out to recognize and honor the many family farms in Utah that have endured for 100 years or more. Within weeks of the first public notice of the project hundreds of landowners responded with applications and phone calls to project cosponsors, the Utah Department of Agriculture and the Utah Farm Bureau Federation. A total of 433 family farms were identified as being 100 years old or older.

Landowners were to be honored with a special certificate and permanent sign to be erected on the property designating it a "Century Farm". The Centennial Commission also was to recognize each Century Farm landowner during a special awards ceremony at the 1996 State Fair.

The Century Farms & Ranches program will continue beyond the Centennial year. Landowners are encouraged to contact the Utah Department of Agriculture or the Utah Farm Bureau for information.

Historical information sources: U.S. Census Bureau; Utah Division of History; Utah State Historical Society; Utah History Encyclopedia; Utah the Right Place, The Official Centennial History; Utah Department of Agriculture; Utah State University; and, Utah Data Center.

Summary

In 1896 Utah farms and ranches were expanding in number and size. The volume of acres farmed in Utah swelled to more than four million as farmers adjusted to new markets and opportunities.

Today Utah farmers and ranchers, and their counterparts across the country, face the challenge of survival as urban sprawl threatens their industry.

Meeting the Challenge

The Utah Department of Agriculture is meeting the challenge of urban sprawl in a number of ways:

Commissioner Peterson lead the community dialogue on preserving open space by working with farmers/ranchers and community leaders to find ways to protect vital farmland.

Governor Mike Leavitt along with the UDA planned and communicated open space values during an unprecedented Growth Summit. Later the Governor picked Commissioner Peterson to join his Open Lands Committee.

The UDA helped draft legislation to help local planning departments identify prime agricultural land as Utah communities cope with growth.

This is one of the first mechanized methods of cutting wheat and moving it onto wagons in Utah. Picture taken in late 1890's.

