

County Administration Has Been Working With and for Farmers for Nearly 30 Years

Employed First Agent in 1911; Progress Noted

(Editor's Note—The facts in this article were obtained from the report of County Farm Agent W. B. Pace and his assistant, J. A. Sutton, for the year 1939, and in parts the language of the report has been followed verbatim).

The county commissioner's rural improvement program is centering attention more than ever before on the county's efforts to assist the farmer, but in reality the county administration for nearly 30 years has been working with and for the farmers through the farm extension program.

In 1911, when farm extension work in the United States was in its infancy, the Durham county board of commissioners employed its first county farm agent, J. D. Fletcher, of Oak Grove township.

This action was the result of a discussion with C. R. Hudson, who was in charge of extension work throughout the state. Fletcher was selected because he was rated the best corn grower in the county, and at that time the commissioners considered the greatest need of local farmers was to improve corn yields. Fletcher served as farm agent until 1914, when he went to Fayetteville to teach the farmers in that section how to grow tobacco, being employed by the Fayetteville chamber of commerce.

He was succeeded by James M. Gray, a State college graduate, who finished out the year 1914, and who was followed by J. T. Hicks. Hicks also was a State college graduate and was a successful farmer in this county at the time. He held the post for several months.

In 1915, M. R. McGirt, another State college graduate, was appointed farm agent. During his period of service in the county, from 1915 to 1918, the extension program flourished and expanded, several new activities being added.

In McGirt's first year the county employed its first home demonstration agent, Mrs. Beulah Arey Eubanks. Prior to this time the only branch of the farm program for women consisted of a few tomato clubs, and out of these grew the need of an organized program with the women and girls.

Until 1917 the county had no extension work for Negroes, but in that year Mattie N. Days was employed as county Negro home demonstration agent, a post which she held through 1919.

The next farm agent was H. T. Prosser, a graduate of Clemson college, who served the first half of the year 1919. Following him came O. H. Stanrard, a graduate of the University of West Virginia, who remained as farm agent until 1923.

From 1923 until 1926 the county was without a farm agent, but in the latter year W. I. Smith was appointed to the post, which he held through 1933.

The Farmers Mutual Exchange was organized during this time. It has grown steadily and last year more than half a million dollars' worth of business was done.

During this period, also, the program for Negroes really became organized and integrated into the extension work. In 1932 T. A. Hamme was appointed Negro farm agent and in 1934 Estelle T. Nixon was named Negro home agent. Both still are serving in those capacities.

Smith was succeeded by W. B. Pace, the present farm agent. His first year, 1934, was the first under the old AAA, and the greater part of his time was taken up with this work, as more than 95 percent of the county's tobacco and cotton farmers signed up.

After the supreme court invalidated the triple A program, the soil conservation and domestic allotment acts were passed by congress in 1936, and the majority of farmers have been cooperating with these.

Soil building practices, such as the use of ground limestone and the growing of lespedeza, have been encouraged by Pace, and Durham county farmers are now paying more attention than ever to soil conditions.

Terracing also has been adopted by many farmers as a means of combating erosion. In 1935 the county commissioners purchased a terracing machine and the state extension service supplied the county with its first assistant farm agent, C. M. Salley, who was in charge of the terracing work. In 1937 Salley resigned and was succeeded by J. A. Sutton, a graduate of State college, who in addition to supervising terracing operations has been in charge of the boys 4-H clubs.

The terracing work is directed by a committee of farmers, and the farmers themselves also handle most of the work of administering the federal farm program, leaving the farm agent more time for extension work.

In the spring of 1939 land-use committees were set up in each community, and recently the state had begun its land-use program in this county. This consists of determining the nature of the soil in each section of the county and the best farm use it can be put to, so that the farmer will know what crop will grow best and at the same time do least to destroy the value of his soil.

The county commissioners now are planning to have Pace devote most of his time to a farm to farm survey of the county, to find just what are the needs of each farmer and advise him how to meet those needs, as a part of the county's farm betterment program. If this

is done, another assistant probably will be added to take care of Pace's normal duties.

Similar progress has been noted in the work with the women in the county.

Mrs. Beulah Arey Eubanks was appointed the first home demonstration agent in 1915. In 1916 she was succeeded by Miss Elizabeth Gainey, and from 1917 to 1919 the post was held by Miss Helen Summers.

In 1919, Miss Anna Rowe was appointed home agent, and under her leadership the county council of home demonstration clubs was organized, the home demonstration curb market was set up, and the

organization of the girls 4-H clubs was much improved.

In 1923, Mrs. Gertrude Alexander assumed the post, which she relinquished in 1924 to Mrs. Cora Evans, now superintendent of the Wright refuge. Mrs. Evans began the practice of observing an achievement day for the girls 4-H clubs, a day which has become an annual occasion in the life of every 4-H girl.

In 1928, Rose Ellwood Bryan succeeded Mrs. Evans. Her term as home agent, which lasted until she was appointed home demonstration agent for the state at large in 1938, might well be termed the "Golden Age" of home demonstration work in this county. The girls 4-H club council was organized during this time, many new home demonstration clubs were organized, the curb market was reorganized, a curb market committee was appointed, and sales increased steadily.

Miss Bryan's work has been carried on ably by Mrs. Verna Stanton, the present home agent. The work of the women's clubs has grown, and 19 adult 4-H leaders have been appointed, and they now hold community group meetings monthly. In 1938, a joint 4-H club council was organized and this has created much more interest in club work.

With the steady growth of the home demonstration program in the past 10 years, it became necessary last year to add an assistant, as the home agent alone could no longer fill the requests of all the people. On July 1, 1939, Miss Kathleen Capps was appointed by the county commissioners, and since that time the girls 4-H clubs with large enrollments have been divided into smaller groups, making it possible to conduct better project work.