

Agriculture

The first clearing of land to establish a base for lumbering and to provide some agricultural necessities in Otsego County occurred about 1869. Throughout the early history of the county, agricultural activities were closely associated with lumbering and lumbering activities. Many residents worked in lumbering camps during the winter and put up hay and other crops during the summer months.

With the decline of lumbering, families turned to their farms as a sole source of income. With the loss of the ready market provided by the lumbering camps, many farms in the county were abandoned.

In 1880, there were about 250 active farms in Otsego County. There was a steady increase until about 1900, when the county had nearly 600 farms. This decreased to about 500 during the 1920's and increased again to 600 farms in 1935. There was a steady decline in numbers of farms from 1935 on. In 1975 there are again about 250 farms in Otsego County.

Major agricultural enterprises in Otsego County included livestock and potato production. At one point, Otsego County farmers had well over 3,000 acres planted to potatoes. This high point occurred around 1940-44. The acreage declined drastically from 1945 to 1975, however; current acreage is devoted almost entirely to high value Foundation and Certified Seed Production.

Most livestock production centered around cattle. Dairy herds changed from the typical one to five family cowherds of the 1900's to herds of 60-130 cows in 1975. Other enterprises such as swine, sheep, corn, wheat, oats and barley have been important over the years but to a lesser degree.

Early settlers in Otsego County were concerned with buying or homesteading land on which to raise a family and make a living. In 1877, Andrew Kelso moved his family to Otsego County to become one of the first "family farmers" in the County. It was necessary to clear the land by hand of the timber which covered it in order to plant crops. In the fall of 1878, as many early family men did, Andrew Kelso hired on with a logger until spring. He continued to work this way for many years, planting in the spring and working at the lumber camp during the winter.

Andrew Kelso is reported to be the first farmer in Otsego County to purchase a grain binder.

About 1878, Frank Kassuba, his wife and two children- Frank, Jr. and a sister, came to Otsego County from Germany. Frank, Jr., who would later become the second generation on the farm, was two or three years old.

In the beginning, the family kept one or two cows

and raised potatoes and a few other produce for their own needs. Most effort was directed toward clearing the land of logs and selling them to a local mill, probably Salling and Hansen. At the site of the farm home (on Kassuba Road), there were white pine trees measuring six or seven feet on the stump with over 6,000 board feet of lumber per tree.

The original homestead included 160 acres. Frank Kassuba, Sr., cleared 80 acres of this.

Later on, Frank Kassuba, Jr. raised oats, corn, rye, wheat, hay and potatoes. His major crop was potatoes with eight - twelve acres per year. During the winter months, Frank Kassuba and his older sons took one of the two teams of horses they owned with them to work in lumber camp. When they came home each weekend, Mrs. Kassuba made them undress and leave their clothes outdoors so the lice, from the lumber camp, would freeze.

In 1937, upon the death of his father, Frank, Albert Kassuba became the third generation to farm the land. He was 17 years old.

Like his father, Albert raised corn, oats and other crops. In 1940, he began raising certified seed potatoes. In 1941, Al bought his first tractor and plow. He still had a team of horses for lighter work.

Albert and Ann Kassuba still operate the homestead, primarily as a dairy farm. Perhaps their son will be the fourth generation of Kassubas on the land.

Agriculture has been very important in Otsego County both from an economic standpoint and as a way of life. Before the turn of the century, large numbers of county residents lived on farms.

As times changed, what had been a way of life also changed. So did a lot of other things. The town of Hallock was a farm community located near the center of Elmira Township. In its heyday, Hallock had a railroad depot, a general store, a hardware store, a clothing store, a post office, a Gleaners Hall and another building called the Parker House used for church meetings. Very little evidence of the town remains.

In 1900 a typical potato farmer used a \$500 team of horses for power. His harnesses cost \$50 each, perhaps \$75 if custom made. A farm wagon cost \$25 to \$50. A harrow or drag might cost \$25, a potato digger - \$135. A riding two bottom plow could be purchased for under \$75 and a horse drawn sprayer for \$25 to \$50 depending on the size. As the cost of machinery and other inputs increased, farms were enlarged and production increased to help pay the costs.

In 1975, an Otsego County potato farmer works his land with a tractor costing \$16,000 to \$30,000. He uses