

Miscellaneous Series #48

86

COLORADO EXPERIMENT STATION
Colorado State College
Fort Collins, Colorado

in cooperation with
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

COLORADO FARM AND RANCH POPULATION
CHANGES IN 1937

August, 1938

COLORADO FARM AND RANCH POPULATION
CHANGES IN 1937

By

Olaf F. Larson^{1/}

During 1937 the decrease in Colorado's farm and ranch population which has occurred since 1930 was practically checked according to estimates made by the Colorado Experiment Station in cooperation with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture. The number of people living on farms and ranches on January 1, 1938, was estimated at 265,200 as compared to 265,600 one year earlier. The present number is less than it has been at any time since 1920 and represents a decrease of 5.6 per cent since 1930 and 4.0 per cent since 1935.

It is estimated that during 1937, 6,000 babies were born and 2,400 persons died on Colorado farms and ranches. About 22 babies were born for each 1000 of the total farm population, which is a birth rate higher than for the city and town population of Colorado. About 9 persons died of each 1,000 of the farm population, which is a death rate lower than for the city and town population of the state. If there had been no migration during the year, the population would have increased 3,600 persons. Such a natural increase of births over deaths is typical of the farm population of the nation.

However, 21,000 people moved from farms to villages, towns, and cities, while at the same time only 17,000 people moved back to the farms. This net loss of 4,000 people to towns and cities more than offset the natural increase of 3,600 and accounted for the small decrease of 400 people during the year.

^{1/} Collaborator, U. S. Department of Agriculture and Associate in Sociology, Colorado Agricultural Experiment Station. Acknowledgements are due R. W. Roberts, Assistant Supervisor of Rural Research, whose assistance in making this study was provided through the cooperation of the Federal Works Progress Administration, Division of Social Research, Rural Section.

People are moving from farm to farm as well as between rural and urban areas. During 1937, 30,000 people arrived at farms from other farms, and the same number left farms for other farms. This would indicate that the movement out of Colorado to farms in other states was either almost stopped during 1937 or that the movement out was offset by the movement of farm migrants back into the state and by new persons coming onto farms from other states.

These estimates are based on reports furnished by 522 farm women and school officials for 2,916 farms and ranches in all parts of the state. In making these reports, no distinctions were made between farm and ranch. The following table summarizes the changes during 1937:

Population living on farms January 1, 1937.....	265,600
Number of babies born on farms.....	6,000
Number of deaths on farms.....	2,400
Excess of births over deaths.....	3,600
Number of persons moving <u>onto</u> farms from cities, towns, and villages.....	17,000
Number of persons moving <u>off</u> farms to cities, towns, and villages.....	21,000
Net loss of farm population to cities, towns, and villages.....	4,000
Number of persons moving <u>onto</u> farms from other farms.....	30,000
Number of persons moving <u>off</u> farms to other farms....	30,000
Population living on farms January 1, 1938.....	265,200

Changes Not Uniform Within State--Although the report for the state as a whole shows only a small change in population numbers during 1937, some counties lost and others gained in population. In general, the southwestern counties as far north as Mesa and as far east as Costilla, thus including the San Luis valley, reported considerable increase in numbers. Counties with losses were somewhat scattered, but the greatest decreases were in the eastern tier of counties and in Las Animas. Not all the eastern counties, however, reported a decline, but the data do not permit reliable estimates on an individual county basis. Most of the counties in the rest of the state reported no marked gains or losses, although it is possible to have sharp changes within various parts of a county and yet have no net gain or loss for the county as a whole.

Farm Population Changes in the United States--The Bureau of Agricultural Economics found that during 1937, for the fifth consecutive year, the farm population of the United States remained practically unchanged. The number on January 1, 1938 was 31,819,000 as compared

with 31,729,000 a year earlier. During 1937, 719,000 babies were born and 341,000 farm persons died, giving a natural increase of 378,000 persons. Just as in Colorado, more people left the farms for the cities than moved back to the farms; movement to the cities was 1,160,000 persons and back to the farm was 872,000, a net loss by migration to the city of 288,000 persons. During the year 1937 there was an increase over 1936 in the number of persons who moved back to the farms; the business recession is held partly responsible for this.

The mountain states region, composed of Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, Montana, and Idaho, was one of two regions to show a decrease in farm population. This region had a loss of 12,000 people, or about 1 per cent, during the year; but the change was not uniform from state to state. The other region to lose in numbers was the West North Central, including the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas and states adjoining them on the east; this territory, which has been severely affected by droughts since 1930, lost 2 per cent of its farm people during 1937.

Significance of Changes in Colorado--This survey again demonstrates the high mobility of an important section of Colorado's farm population^{1/}. High mobility raises problems of adjustment for individuals, families, communities, and units of government. The rapid transfer of population in large numbers from one section of the state to another is creating problems for schools, public welfare agencies, and other social institutions and services. For example, one school district in a Western Slope county reports its enrollment jumped from 175 to 517, while its valuation for tax purposes was cut in half. In the same county an official claims that a high proportion of the "newcomers" will be permanent relief clients because they have no resources and the county has no real place for them. Areas of depopulation and farm abandonment also have serious problems, according to the reports of cooperators in this survey, in terms of neglected land, diminished tax base, and changed community patterns. Knowledge of the nature and location of farm population changes should be an aid to the solution of some of these problems.

^{1/} For discussion of previous findings about Colorado farm population mobility, see Olaf F. Larson, Rural Households and Dependency, Colorado Experiment Station Bulletin 444.