

Farming and Agriculture in North Carolina: A History of Working in the Field

How do you get your food? From a grocery store or farmers market? Have you ever grown your own veggies? Have you visited a farm? Most people in the U.S. get their food at grocery stores. Often that food is grown and packaged in other parts of the country or even across the world. It wasn't always that way.

For centuries, people lived off what they could grow, fish, hunt, or gather. The region's Indians hunted and raised crops. You'll recognize many of them -- corn, squash, sunflowers, pumpkins, and beans. Colonial settlers adopted these along with

Indians' good farming practices. Until the 1870s, when industry began to develop, most people lived off the land. Even kids had to help plant, harvest and preserve food. People farmed by hand with wooden tools, unless they were lucky enough to own a horse, mule, or ox to pull a plow. Farming was hard and uncertain. What things might have made it that way?

By the 1850s, farms were struggling. People had left to move west or south. And soils were damaged by crops like cotton. By the 20th century, government, science, technology, and education had improved farming practices. Inventions increased efficiency and harvests. Have you heard of John Deere or Cyrus McCormick? John Deere invented the steel plow in 1837. Cyrus McCormick invented the mechanical harvester in the 1830s. Horses pulled the new machines. By 1900, the combustion engine had been invented. From there machines could run on gas. But even into the 1940s, for many farmers "horsepower" still meant farming with horse-drawn plows. Today North Carolina is still considered an agricultural state. And farming is a big part of the state's economy. Do you know some of the state's most important crops?

Take a look at the historical photograph above and the drawing below. The photograph was taken in Yancey, County, North Carolina sometime in the 1920s to 1930s. How are they similar or different? What can you tell about the time period and farming practices from them? Are you surprised by the equipment the farmer in the photo is using? Why or why not?



Find this activity sheet in NCpedia: www.ncpedia.org/sites/default/files/print_pdf/ncpedia_activity_sheet_farming.pdf

Read the full article on N.C. farming in NCpedia: www.ncpedia.org/history-farming-north-carolina-k-8

Harvest time coloring page credit: <http://www.supercoloring.com/coloring-pages/it-is-harvest-time-the-farmer-is-harvesting-the-crops>

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Photograph of "Spring Plowing," Higgins, N.C., ca. 1926-1939, NC Postcards UNC-Chapel Hill, <https://unc.live/2SI4V4z>