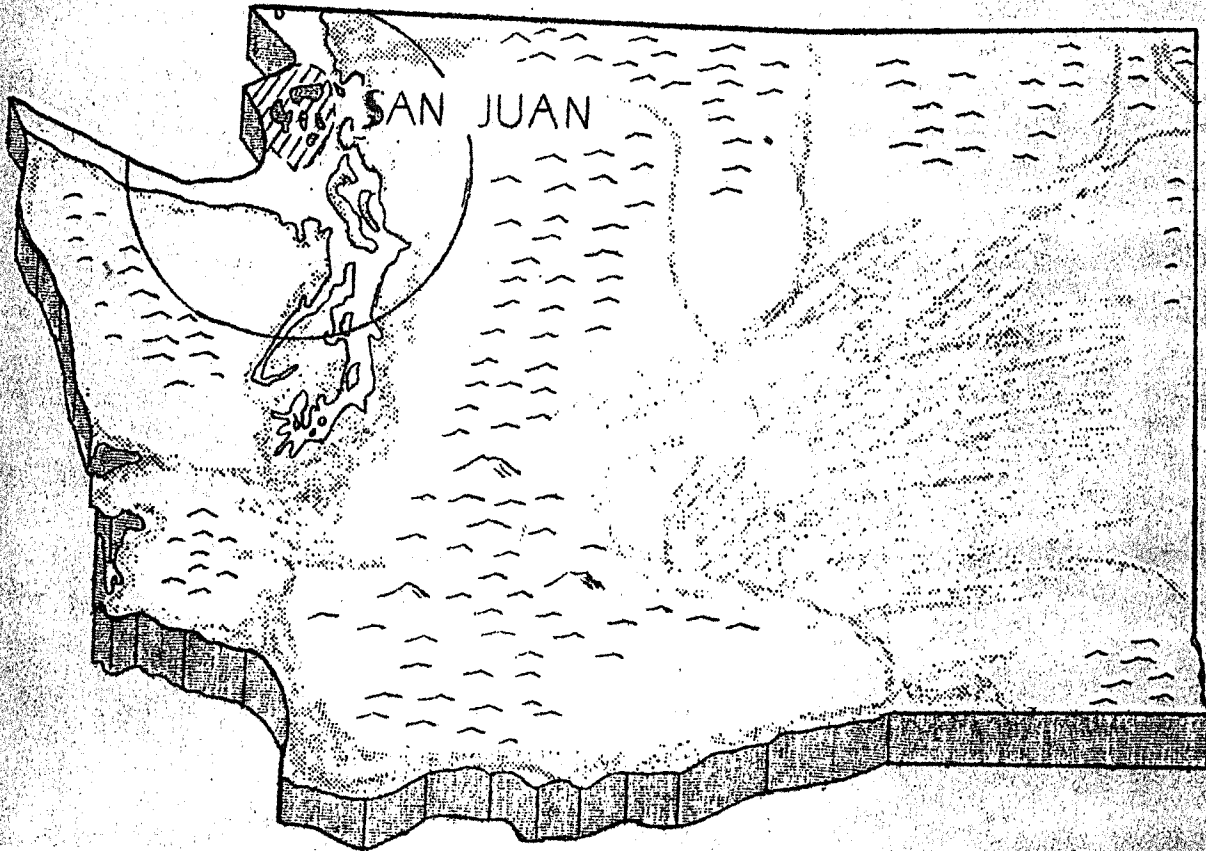


# SAN JUAN COUNTY AGRICULTURE

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## PART I

Introduction

San Juan County consists of an archipelago of 172 islands in the maritime waters of northwestern Washington. In total land and inland water area (265 square miles) San Juan is the largest of four counties in America consisting of islands located in offshore waters. The other three insular counties are Island, also of Washington, and Dukes and Nantucket Counties in the Atlantic Ocean off Massachusetts. San Juan not only exceeds these other counties in total land-water area but has the largest number of islands and islets. It is, however, smaller in population than Island County, Washington. San Juan is tied with Garfield County as Washington State's smallest populated county, each having 3,200 persons in 1955.

Settled early in Pacific Northwest history by British and American citizens, the San Juan Islands were disputed and militarily occupied jointly by the two powers until a treaty in 1872 awarded them to the United States. The six larger islands were settled slowly in the late Nineteenth Century by persons employed in agriculture, fishing, lumbering, rock quarrying and shipping. Early agriculture was based largely upon sheep raising with some fruit, hay, grain and food crops grown mainly for local use. There was a limited export trade to the mainland and with visiting small craft and ships. In the Twentieth Century the islands were opened to scheduled ferry service and also attracted increased boat traffic, stimulating growth of a tourist and resort industry.

In terms of persons fully or partly employed, agriculture was the most important segment of the island area's economy in 1954, employing about 28 percent of the labor force. Mainly located on the three larger islands--San Juan, Orcas and Lopez--there were 327 farm units of which 127 were on a commercial basis in 1954. These commercial farms sold livestock and crops valued at over \$641,000. Leading farm products ranked in order of importance are cattle and calves, eggs, chickens, sheep, lambs and wool, hogs, milk, cream and forest products. The islands are particularly noted for sheep raising, ranking first among western Washington counties and ninth among all counties in the state.

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History 1/

Before the settlement of white men, the present county was inhabited by seafaring Indian tribes. Using large cedar canoes for traveling, these Indians camped on the San Juan archipelago shores and lived by fishing, hunting, root and berry gathering. Little or no agriculture was recorded during the period of Indian history. The islands were rich in fisheries and deer for sustaining a primitive culture.

The San Juan Island group was explored and charted by the Spanish and British during 1791 and 1792. A Spanish expedition under Francisco Elize entered the Straits of Juan de Fuca in 1790 and Manuel Quimper of that expedition explored the San Juan Islands. The Spanish gave names to features of the area still used such as Rosario Strait, Haro Strait, Lopez Island, San Juan Island, Patos, Orcas and Sucia Islands. In 1792, the British Expedition under Captain George Vancouver charted the same waters and made territorial claims for his government. Vancouver's charts gave names retained today, such as Georgia Straits, Bellingham Straits and Stuart Island.

Under a joint occupation treaty between the United States and Great Britain in 1819 which applied to all of the Oregon Territory north of the Columbia River, the San Juan Islands received a scattering of settlers from both nations. British interests were dominant north of the Columbia River and were administered by a chartered fur trading company--the Hudson's Bay Company. The Company generally discouraged Americans from settling in the Puget Sound region, but under treaty rights Americans came into the present Washington area in numbers ample enough to give Americans a political majority by 1845.

Increasing jurisdictional dispute over this settlement frontier started about 1825 and a treaty was concluded in 1846 which established the 49th parallel as a boundary between the United States and Canada. This treaty line, however, was not defined clearly at the time to separate the off-shore islands in the Straits of Juan de Fuca and Georgia. The Hudson Bay Company assumed that Rosario Strait was the boundary and that the San Juans were part of the chain of islands included with Vancouver Island. A scattering of American

1/ This historical summary has been derived from six sources:

- (1) Washington, A Guide to the Evergreen State (American Guide Series). Writers Program of the Works Progress Administration, State of Wash. 1943 Edition sponsored by Washington Historical Society. See pages 116, 624-631.
- (2) Richard M. Perry. The Counties of Washington. Published by Secretary of State, Olympia, Washington (mimeographed). San Juan County section.
- (3) Lucile McDonald. "Lopez: Agricultural Island of San Juan Archipelago." Seattle Times, Sunday Magazine, Oct. 19, 1958, pp. 2-3.
- (4) Lucile McDonald. "Shaw Island." Seattle Times, Sunday Magazine, Nov. 23, 1958, p. 2.
- (5) Lucile McDonald. "Under Two Flags." Seattle Times, Sunday Magazine, Nov. 16, 1958, pp. 1-2.
- (6) Lucile McDonald. "San Juan Island's Pig War." Seattle Times, Sunday Magazine, Nov. 2, 1958, pp. 2-3.

settlers in the San Juans disputed British authority during the 1850's. Tension in the area ended in a local incident called the Pig War, in which an American settler, Lyman Cutler, shot a pig belonging to a Hudson's Bay Company farm. The American settler was charged with illegal entry. About 20 American settlers on the island supported Cutler in resisting arrest and they petitioned for United States government military support to prevent their eviction from the islands.

In 1859 San Juan Island was occupied by both American and British troops to maintain order. British marines from Esquimalt on Vancouver Island commanded by Captain George Bazalgette, established a garrison at Roche Harbor. American troops under Captain George Pickett established Fort San Juan at the south end of San Juan Island. Joint military occupation under various American and British commands continued without incident until 1872 when the disputed region was arbitrated by Emperor William I of Germany and awarded to the United States. The San Juan archipelago then became part of Whatcom County of Washington Territory.

The Hudson Bay Company developed the first commercial agriculture in the islands, and strongly disputed American farm settlement in the area. In 1853 this company landed 1,300 sheep on San Juan Island and founded Bellevue Farm, a large holding, for sheep raising, with Charles J. Griffin as manager. British interests expanded sheep raising and other agriculture to affirm their occupation rights. At this time there were some American squatters on small holdings in the islands who had come from the Frazer River placer gold diggings. Most noted was Lyman A. Cutler who had settled on land near Bellevue Farm to raise potatoes and cattle. Cutler's dispute with the manager, Mr. Griffin, led to the "Pig War" incident in 1859 that culminated in military occupation and arbitration of the San Juan Islands dispute.

Records of the earliest settlers on all the islands are obscure. Many of these settlers were temporary and followed a variety of occupations. On Lopez Island, settlement began as early as 1852 by Indian traders and deerskin hunters. Deerskins were one of the earliest commodities shipped from Lopez. Among the first settlers on Lopez were Hiram F. Hutchinson, Sam Hinton, Sampson Chadwick and Edmund Cochran.

John Keddy was a prominent pioneer sheep raiser on San Juan Island. He sold mutton to American and British troop garrisons during the Pig War occupation and sold breeding stock to settlers on neighboring islands. Robert Firth, the last manager for Hudson's Bay Company on San Juan Island, became an American citizen and filed a homestead on part of Bellevue Farm after it was made American territory. These men were prominent in pioneering the sheep industry.

Shaw Island was settled first by Will Shaw and Henry Hudson, who developed fruit growing. Hudson planted a sizeable fruit orchard and early steamboats stopped at Hudson Bay landing to load fruit. George Griswold, another early settler on Shaw Island, raised fruit and operated a prune dryer. Several prune dryers were in operation before 1880 and this semi-perishable fruit found a good market outlet with ships visiting Puget Sound.

Waldron Island was settled in the 1860's by John E. Brown, Sinclair A. McDonald and three German families, those of Fred Krumdiak, Ernest Rehorst and

Ferdinand Baatz. The early Waldron settlers lived by fishing, selling fuel-wood to lime kilns and quarrying sandstone on Waldron and Stuart Islands. Dogfish oil, which found a market in Victoria, Canada, as a lubricant, was a cash product of the Waldron Island settlers. Limited pioneer agriculture on Waldron Island was based on sheep raising and home fruit and vegetable raising. Sheep raising has remained as its major activity.

San Juan County was officially established as a separate county by act of the Washington Territorial Legislature October 31, 1873. Prior to this it had been part of Whatcom County. Friday Harbor, main town on the island of San Juan, was established as the county seat. The name of Friday Harbor was derived from a Hawaiian native called Friday, who was employed by the Hudson Bay Company as a sheep herdsman in this vicinity in the 1850's.

Early settlement was slow and by 1880 the Census showed only 948 persons residing in the various islands of the San Juan archipelago. Most of the settlers were on the islands of San Juan and Lopez where terrain and lighter forest cover were more permissive to agriculture. Land titles were not well established and there was limited public domain open for homesteaders under the Homestead Act of 1862. Most settlers were compelled to purchase land from previous land title owners or from timber and other land holding companies.

Early industrial activity in commercial fishing, sandstone and limestone quarrying and logging began to attract more workers after 1880. Many of these took up small farms along the shores to supplement seasonal work. Sheep and cattle raising and subsistence agriculture were generally adopted as the most practical form of agriculture. Semi-perishable products which could be shipped out from farms included live sheep, wool, hides, butter, winter apples, potatoes and dried prunes. Important raw materials shipped out included sandstone from Waldron and Stuart Islands, limestone and lime from Roche Harbor and steamer cordwood, sawlogs and rough lumber and timbers from Orcas and other wooded islands.

On an economic base of limestone quarrying, extractive industries, live-stock, dairy and poultry farming, tourist-resort and some local food processing, population in the islands reached a peak of 3,605 by 1920. Ferry service was established and commercial agriculture had opportunity to participate in supplying a growing Puget Sound regional market. A vegetable canning industry, a fish canning industry and a cooperative dairy plant were established at Friday Harbor. In 1920 the dairy industry was stimulated by founding of the San Juan Cooperative Creamery Company at Friday Harbor and the Richardson Creamery at Richardson, on Lopez Island.

Agricultural history has been influenced by several private and public agencies. An important early influence was that of the Hudson's Bay Company which pioneered sheep and livestock raising. The shepp industry has continued through the decades. Pioneer dairymen who formed the San Juan Dairy Cooperative made significant contribution to the economy. Valuable technical guidance was provided by the Extension Service and the Mount Vernon and Puyallup Agricultural Experiment Stations of Washington State University. County Agents located at Friday Harbor were influential in many ways in the progress of farming and rural life. Work of the Soil Conservation Service and Agricultural Stabilization Committees has also been important in guiding the course of groups and individual farmers in a changing pattern of agriculture.

Table 9.- San Juan County's Rank Compared With  
Other Washington Counties

Item Compared	Rank	Quantity	Year
<u>General</u>			
Land area.....	38	110,080 acres	1954
Number of farms.....	38	295 farms	1954
Land in farms--percent.....	19	41.3 percent	1954
Average size of farms.....	20	154 acres	1954
Cropland harvested.....	34	7,108 acres	1954
Rural farm population.....	38	998 persons	1950
Total county population.....	38	3,245 persons	1950
<u>Cash farm income</u>			
Value of all farm products sold..	39	641,242 dollars	1954
Value of livestock sold.....	37	547,772 dollars	1954
Value of crops sold.....	38	55,205 dollars	1954
<u>Livestock on farms</u>			
All cattle and calves.....	37	3,970	1954
Milk cows.....	31	917 head	1954
Hogs.....	27	1,028 head	1954
Chickens.....	27	24,285 birds	1954
Horses and mules.....	38	85 head	1954
Sheep and lambs.....	9	8,620 head	1954
<u>Dairy and poultry products sold</u>			
Value of dairy products sold.....	34	72,848 dollars	1954
Whole milk sold.....	34	951,000 pounds	1954
Value of poultry products sold...	24	157,944 dollars	1954
Chickens sold.....	15	76,247 birds	1954
Eggs sold.....	24	232,590 dozen	1954
<u>Important crops harvested</u>			
Clover-Timothy Hay.....	23	2,050 acres	1954
Alfalfa Hay.....	27	1,050 acres	1954
Grass Silage.....	13	1,018 acres	1954
Barley.....	22	880 acres	1954
Oats.....	26	820 acres	1954

Sources: U. S. Census, Agriculture, 1954.  
USDA, AMS, Agricultural Estimates Divn.

## PART IV

## Pattern of Agriculture

Farms: Number and Size

The 1954 Census of Agriculture reported 295 properties classified as farms. Farms in San Juan County have been decreasing in number. From a total of 338 farms in 1900 the number of farms reached a peak of 566 in 1925. Since then, farm numbers decreased to 327 farms in 1954. This indicates some farms have been abandoned or changed into resort, residential and other types of nonfarm use. Total area in farms has been decreasing since World War II. In 1954 the area in farms totaled 45,499 acres compared with 68,017 acres in 1940. Approximately 41 percent of the land in San Juan County was farmland in 1954.

Most of the agriculture in San Juan County is on medium-sized farms of 100 to 200 acres. Average size of farms has fluctuated from a high of 157 acres in 1945 to a low of 118 acres in 1925. The average farm size in 1954 was 154 acres, the largest in western Washington. In the state, San Juan County ranks twentieth in average size per farm but thirty-eighth in total number of farms.

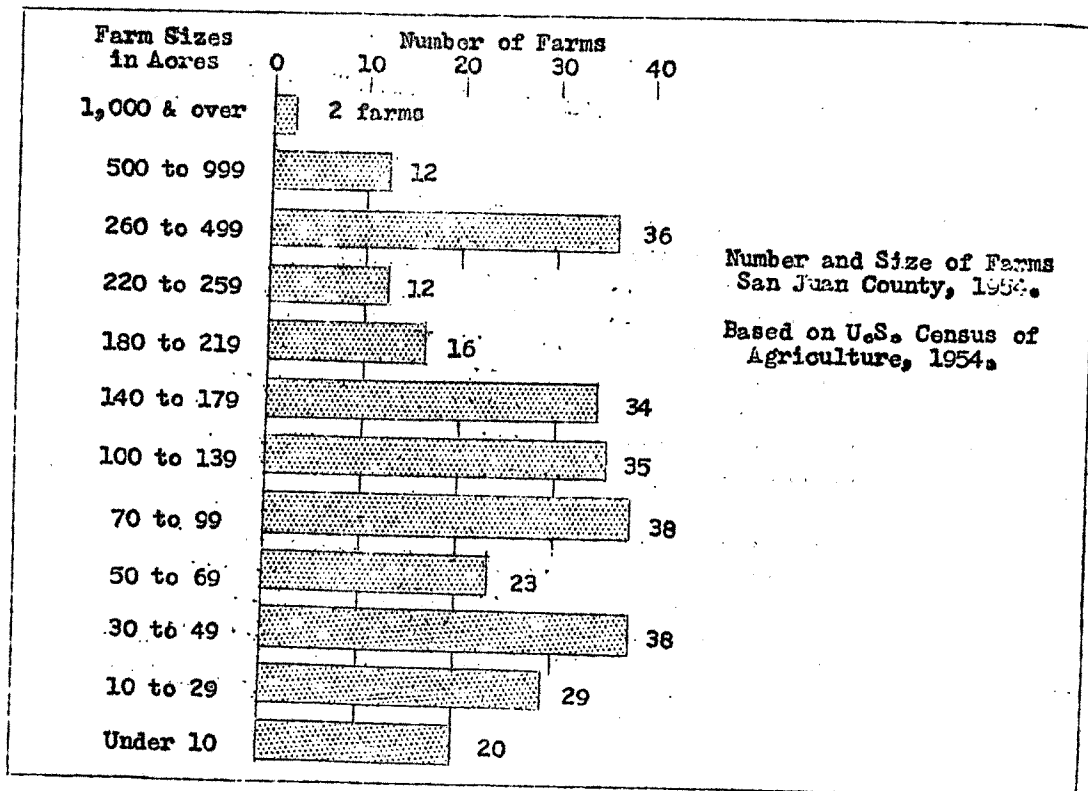


Figure 6.-- Number and Size of San Juan County Farms, 1954.



Table 10.- Farms, Number and Average Size, Land in Farms  
San Juan County, 1900-1954

Year	Total Farms in County	Total County area in farms (acres)	Average size of farms in the county (acres)	Percent of County area in farms
1900	338	50,981	150.8	46.3
1910	483	66,612	137.9	60.5
1920	535	68,513	128.1	62.2
1925	566	67,042	118.4	60.9
1930	472	63,795	135.2	56.0
1940	497	68,017	136.9	61.8
1945	376	59,173	157.4	53.7
1950	388	56,716	146.2	51.0
1954	327	45,499	154.2	41.3

Source: U. S. Census, Agriculture

#### Types of Farms

San Juan County farms are of varied types but more than sixty-three percent are classified as miscellaneous. Main types of specialized farms are livestock, dairy, poultry and fruit. The miscellaneous type farms are generally operated on a diversified basis of growing crops and raising livestock as a part-time activity, or are primarily residential, noncommercial farms.

Table 11.- Types of Farms, San Juan County, 1954

Type of Farms	Number of Farms	Percent of all farms in the county
Total farms in county.....	327	
Field-crop farms.....	5	
Cash-grain.....	5	1.5
Other field-crop.....	0	
Vegetable farms.....	0	
Fruit-and-nut farms.....	5	1.5
Dairy farms.....	30	9.2
Poultry farms.....	10	3.1
Livestock farms other than dairy and poultry	67	20.5
General farms.....	5	
Primarily crop.....	0	
Primarily livestock.....	0	
Crop and livestock.....	5	1.5
Miscellaneous and unclassified farms.....	205	62.7

Source: U. S. Census, Agriculture

#### Farm Values

The values of land, farms and farm buildings in San Juan County have increased greatly since 1920. Farm property was at a low value of \$3,000,000



in 1940. However, by 1954 this figure more than doubled to a value of \$6,591,775. In 1954 the average value per farm was \$22,345 and per acre value was \$148.14. Demands for land by investors and real estate firms for residential sites, resorts and seashore homes have been important factors raising farm property values. An increasing tourist, summer residence and retirement home trend has raised property values. Value of farm land has also been increased by the large amount of labor and capital invested in land clearing and general improvement during the last thirty years. Another factor is the improved accessibility of the islands by ferries and private boats and yachts from the mainland.

Table 12.- Value of Farm Property  
San Juan County, 1900-1954

Year	Total Value All Farm Property in County	County Average Values	
		Per Farm (dollars)	Per Acre (dollars)
1900	\$1,104,923	\$ 3,270	\$ 22
1910	3,120,947	6,460	47
1920	4,738,069	7,470	58
1930	3,471,375	7,355	54
1940	2,987,889	6,000	44
1950	5,602,332	14,440	101
1954	6,591,775	22,345	148

Source: U. S. Census, Agriculture

#### Farm Residence and Operation

Part-time farming is a major characteristic of the area. About three-fifths of farmers divide their employment between farm work and wage earning in other occupations and industries. Seasonal work in fishing, lumbering, resort and tourist industries, construction and government services afford many farm owners opportunities to supplement their incomes. In 1954, 60 percent of farmers were working off their farms part-time. About 43 percent were employed away from their farms 100 days or more per year and 55 percent of all farm operators were earning more from their outside work than from sales of farm products. San Juan part-time farming exceeds the state average of 46 percent but is about average for western Washington.

#### Farm Facilities

San Juan County farmers as a whole are below the state farm average in use of certain standard household conveniences and labor saving facilities. Many farms in the better agricultural areas of Lopez, San Juan and Orcas Islands are equipped to an average standard, but some farms on smaller islands and in isolated and less productive districts have less facilities. Electrical and telephone service are nearly up to state average, but use of television, farm machinery, trucks and automobiles are considerably below average. Since less than half of all farms are commercial operations, exceeding annual sales of \$250 per year, there is not wide ownership of machinery and investment in other facilities. Many farms without machinery have farm work done on a custom basis by those farmers owning equipment.