

# **Farming and Farms**

Early Indiana farmers, just like today's Hoosier farmers, relied on technology and new ideas to make a profit. Farmers must consider many issues. They must decide which crops to plant, which livestock to raise, and whether to use new farming inventions. Indiana farmers have always looked for new and better ways to raise crops and animals.

In the early 1800's, travelers of the United States realized the agricultural potential of America. Land was fertile and plentiful. With the addition of new territories, Americans took advantage of the land. Probably as important as the desire for land, was the American attitude towards it. Pioneers and settlers moving West found acres of land perfect for growing crops, along with many natural resources available for use. They believed that the land and resources were limitless.

## **LAND AND AGRICULTURE**

The fertile land of the West offered opportunities for people to make money and become successful farmers. David Baillie Warden, a French-Irish author, wrote about the United States in 1819. He noted this about Indiana:

The common depth of the soil is from two to three feet; but along the Wabash, in forming wells, it was found to be 22 feet, and underneath a stratum of fine white sand was discovered.... The state is watered by the rivers Ohio and Wabash, and their numerous branches...The soil is well adapted to maize, wheat, oats, rye, hemp, and tobacco. On the best lands the average produce of Indian corn is said to be from fifty to sixty bushels per acre; that of wheat about fifty, the bushel weighing fifty-eight pounds. In many places, the land is too rich for this grain, which, though it does not become smutty, is not so good as in the state of New York...The country is admirably fitted for rearing cattle and swine, having great abundance of acorns and roots on which they feed. (Lindley, Indiana as Seen by Early Travelers, pp. 216-218,230)

## **STARTING A FARM**

A variety of factors affected where people started their farms. They thought about how good the soil was, how close it was to water, the amount of available wood, and how close other people lived. In the earliest years, land could be gained by living on it, called "squatting". To make sure that the land belonged to them, farmers registered at a government office. Land could also be bought from the government. Later, it was bought from others who were selling their land.

The first thing a settler did was clear trees from his land and plant his first crops. The first shelter would be something very simple and quick to build such as a lean to. Later would come a house for his family and a barn for the animals. Eventually the farmer made improvements to the house. He might make it bigger, put in a wood floor, or whitewash

(paint) the walls. The farmer might also build a fence around his land. His tools and furniture were very basic. Early settlers did not have very many extra things.

Most of the early Indiana settlers were farmers. In Hamilton County in 1840, about 92% of families farmed. Some also made goods or traded. The average farm in Hamilton County in the 1830s was eighty acres. It had corn, wheat, and other crops such as potatoes or hay planted on it.

## **CROPS**

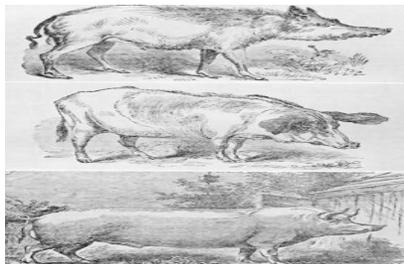
Indiana's land was fertile and very good for growing crops.

Like today, early Indiana farmers were known for growing corn. It was easy to grow and provided food for people and animals. If a farmer was willing to work hard, his farm could produce 50 bushels of corn per acre. Potatoes were also a common crop. Farmers could eat the potatoes, sell them at the market, and feed their hogs with them. Flax, which is used to make linen cloth, was an important crop. Maple trees were also important because their sap could be boiled down to sugar. Hay was grown in order to feed the farm animals.

After feeding their families and animals, farmers could sell their extra crops. These crops were sold to the people of Madison, Lawrenceburg, Cincinnati, and Louisville on the Ohio River. Sometimes people sent their crops downriver in flatboats to faraway places like New Orleans.

## **LIVESTOCK**

The most valuable kind of farm animal, or livestock, was the hog. Hogs, also called swine, are still Indiana's most valuable livestock today. They were inexpensive to raise and provided the farmer with meat, lard, and manure. Farmers also raised cattle for their milk and sold them for their beef. Often farmers trained their oxen to work in their fields because they were stronger than horses and they ate less grain. Farmers kept horses for transportation and chores. As roads got better, more and more farmers used horses to pull buggies and wagons. Indiana farmers also raised sheep for their wool. The wool from the sheep could be used to make clothing for the family. Farmers also kept chickens, ducks, and turkeys for their eggs, feathers, and meat.



## FARM TOOLS

Tools used on Indiana farms were often hand-made by the local carpenter, blacksmith, or the farmer himself. However, by the 1830s, farmers could buy tools at the local store. Plows were probably the most important tool for farmers. There were many different kinds of plows and they were used for different types of land. Plows cut up the land so that seeds could be planted. Farmers also used reapers to cut down the crops at harvest. Major improvements in farm equipment were introduced in the mid to late 1830s. The steel plow was available in 1837. The reaper, for gathering crops, was available in 1840. Soon, planters, threshing machines, and fanning mills were available for farmers to grow and process wheat.

## AGRICULTURAL REFORM

During the 1830s, American agricultural practices were affected by the "reform" movement. People were trying out new ideas to improve farming. Magazines like *The American Farmer*, the *Farmer's Register*, and the *Indiana Farmer* helped farmers make their farms better. The magazines included articles about animals and soil and advertised new tools. Indiana was slow to change. Indiana farming did not improve until 1840 when agricultural groups went out to visit farms and teach farmers new ideas. Book editors tried to convince farmers to try out the new ideas, but it took a long time for Indiana farmers to respect the "scientific" approach of books.

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### Recommended Readings

Bidwell, Percy Wells and Falconer, John I. *History of Agriculture in the Northern United States, 1620-1860*. New York: Peter Smith, 1941.

Bogue, Allan G. *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.

Buley, R. Carlyle. *The Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1815-1840*. 2 vols. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1950.

Conner, John B. *Agricultural Resources and Development of the State: The Struggles of Pioneer Life Compared with Present Conditions*. Indianapolis: W.B. Buford, Printer and Binder, 1893.

Danhof, Clarence H. *Change in Agriculture: The Northern United States, 1820-1870*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Ellsworth, William Henry. *Valley of the Upper Wabash, Indiana...* New York: Pratt, Robinson, and Co., 1838.