

American Farmers Pile Up The Records

U. S. agriculture stacked up more records last year. Farmers not only turned out the greatest volume of products in history, but they also established alltime highs for crop production per acre, farm productivity, labor productivity, and acres harvested for export.

In its annual report Changes in Farm Production and Efficiency, the USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) said farm output

in 1972 rose 1 percent from a year earlier and 11 percent from 1967. Both crop and livestock production posted gains of 1 percent, reaching new peaks.

Increase uneven. However, the increase in crop output was not evenly distributed among crops. Feed grain production dropped 4 percent; per acre yields advanced 7 percent but acres harvested declined 11 percent. Food grain production was off by

nearly 5 percent and fruits and nuts by 10 percent due to unfavorable growing conditions for most crops. Hay and forage production just missed equaling the 1971 record.

Oil crops continued the uptrend of the past 2 decades. Cotton made the biggest leap among all crops, 27 percent, reflecting stepped-up acreage harvested and better yields. All other crop groups exceeded the 1971 output.

Regionally, farm production records were set in the Northern and Southern Plains, Appalachia, Delta States, and the Mountain and Pacific regions. The Lake States, Corn Belt, and Southeast regions narrowly missed the 1971 highs. In contrast, output in the Northeast plunged 10 percent as a result of exceptionally poor growing conditions.

Best yields. Crop production per acre, up 2 percent, surpassed the previous record of 1971. Alltime highs were established for corn, grain sorghum, peanuts, all hay, sugarbeets, and many other crops. Yields of wheat, barley, and rice were the second highest on record, and cotton reached a 5-year high.

All told, the volume of farm inputs used to produce the record 1972 production showed no change from the previous year. Thus, the farm productivity index—output per unit of input—notched up by 1 percent despite difficult harvesting conditions.

Productive Plainsmen. Productivity gained 12 percent in the Southern Plains, 4 percent in the Delta States, and in most other regions by 2 percent or less. Productivity declined in three regions—the Northeast by 10 percent, the Southeast by 3 percent, and the Corn Belt by 1 percent. Hurricane Agnes was responsible for most of the drop in the Northeast and Southeast.

Though the volume of inputs did not change last year, there were significant shifts in the

input mix. Farmers continued to purchase increasing amounts of inputs from the nonfarm economy. Purchased inputs rose 2 percent above the 1971 level, whereas nonpurchased inputs fell 1 percent in continuation of a steady 21-year decline.

The input group showing the most change was the miscellaneous category, which climbed 7 percent. Pesticides and cotton ginning accounted for the bulk of this increase.

Farmers used fewer hours of labor in 1972 than ever before. About 6.2 billion hours were needed, down from 6.4 billion in 1971. Planting, cultivating, and harvesting crops required 3.2 billion hours, and 2.1 billion were spent caring for livestock. The residual 0.9 billion went for overhead jobs and miscellaneous tasks.

Labor used in all group production declined in each group except sugar crops, cotton, tobacco, and oil crops. These four required more labor because of increased acreage and

production. Hours of labor continued to fall for all classes of livestock, with decreases ranging from 7 percent for poultry to 5 percent for meat animals.

Most per hour. With the labor input at a record low and farm production at a record high, output per hour scaled to new heights. Labor productivity advanced 6 percent from 1971—6 percent for livestock and 3 percent for crops. Poultry scored the largest gain in the livestock group, 11 percent, followed by milk cows at 9 percent and meat animals at 6 percent. Among crops, cotton led with a 13-percent increase. Food grains, on the other hand, registered a 4-percent decrease because of smaller production. Fruits and nuts were also down, by 1 percent.

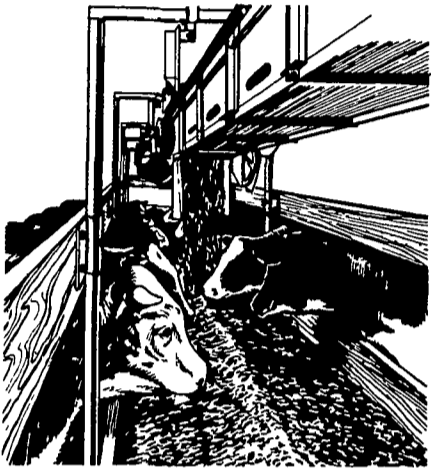
The volume of farm products exported last year required the equivalent of 85 million acres, topping the 1963 record by 8 million. Acreage of wheat for export went from 19 million acres in 1971 to 35 million in 1972; corn, from 8 to 11 million; soybeans, from 20 to 22 million; and cotton, from 4 to 5 million. Dairy products dipped from less than 3 million acres to only 1 million. Other livestock products remained near the 1971 level.

Cropland used for crops totaled 336 million acres in 1972, or 4 million less than in 1971. The largest acreage changes were in the Corn Belt, down 3 million acres, and in the Northern Plains, down 1 million.

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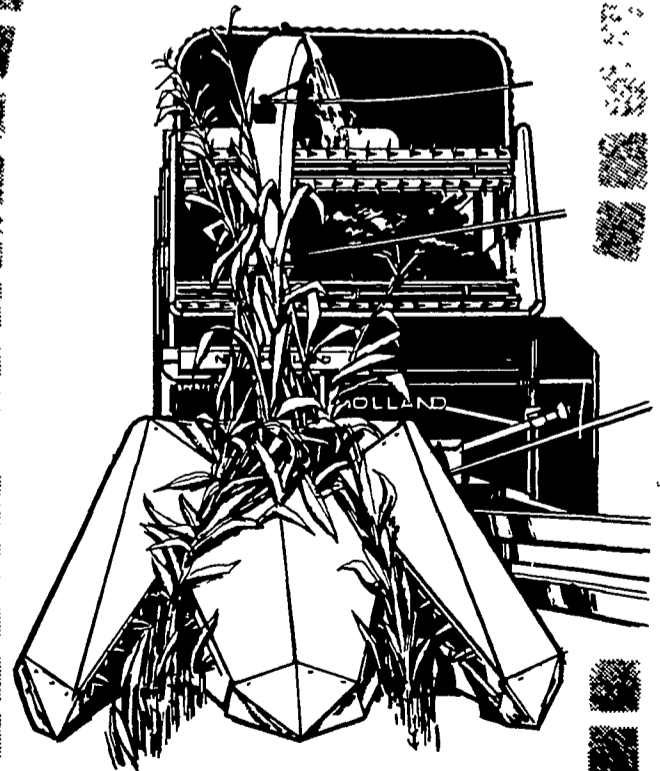
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