FARM TENANCY IN OKLAHOMA

1925-1935

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by

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PREFACE

The amount of farm land rented at any time is a result of conditions in what we may call the rent market. In this thesis, the author has made an effort to explain why land has been offered and is still being offered so extensively in this market and why men, either through necessity or from preference, are willing to rent land for the purpose of farming it.

That farm tenancy in Oklahoma has undoubtedly increased to an extent that is not conducive to the greatest net well-being of farmers and of Oklahoma, is a conclusion that the author has made from this study of the farm tenancy situation. This increase of tenancy among Oklahoma farmers has been viewed with alarm by many and there has been a tendency to attribute in an indiscriminate manner to the institution of tenancy nearly all the economic and social ills that manifest themselves in rural communities of Oklahoma.

Endeavoring to approach the subject of farm tenancy in Oklahoma with an open mind, let us take stock of the extent and relative importance of land tenure and tenancy as an agricultural, economic, and social institution. It is with this view in mind that this investigation was made.

The author wishes to express his indebtedness to Dr. T. H. Reynolds, Head of the Department of History, for the inspiration, helpful suggestion, and kindly advice received in the preparation of this thesis.

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CHAPTER I

HISTORIC AND ECONOMIC CAUSES UNDERLYING FARM TENANCY IN OKLAHOMA

The prevalence of tenancy and its rapid growth in Oklahoma occasions many queries as to how and why the situation arose. The answers lie in a complex of conditions surrounding our economic and social systems, and, in many instances, are directly traceable to institutions established to govern the relationship of man to the land.[1]

Farm tenancy in the South is largely an outgrowth of the breaking up of the plantations after the Civil War, and it has followed closely the widening boundaries of the profitable cotton growing area, which, in recent years, has come to include the greater part of Oklahoma.[2] Cotton growing was introduced into Oklahoma prior to the Civil War, but it expanded slowly for many years. By 1880, a few towns, notably Ardmore, McAlester, and Muskogee, had acquired some importance as local cotton markets, although the total production in that year was under 20,000 bales. Between 1880 and 1890 the size of the cotton crop within the limits of what is now Oklahoma increased more than tenfold, but it was still relatively unimportant in the country's total production. Thereafter, however, a period of extremely rapid expansion set

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1 Report of the President's Committee, Farm Tenancy, Feb. 1937, p. 39.

2 Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, Economic Survey of Oklahoma, 1929, p. 146.

in, production increased almost fourfold between 1900 and 1910, and Oklahoma took rank as one of the leading cotton producing states.[3]

Cotton farming is notoriously favorable to a high degree of farm tenancy and its expansion into Oklahoma was marked by an invasion of tenant farmers from other parts of the cotton belt. A large number of tenants migrated to Oklahoma because it is mainly outside the area seriously affected by the cotton boll weevil and where it has been possible to extend the cotton area.[4] In 1900 79.6 per cent of the white population of Oklahoma were born elsewhere in the United States. The 1930 census showed that this percentage had decreased to 51.9. This decrease was due to the high proportion of young children in the population. Homesteading opportunities were the first incentives for the heavy migration into Oklahoma from 1890 to 1910.[5] At noon, April 22, 1889, 2,000,000 acres of land were thrown open to 50,000 settlers by a proclamation of President Harrison. The total population of Oklahoma increased 205.6 per cent during the decade, 1890 to 1900; 109.7 per cent, 1900 to 1910; and 22.4 per cent, 1910 to 1920. The factor of homesteading is listed as an important cause that has contributed to the high percentage of farm tenancy at present.[6] Part of the farm tenancy in Oklahoma during the latter part of the nineteenth century resulted from the failure of the original homesteaders or purchasers of

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3 Ibid., p. 147.

4 Leon E. Truesdell, "Farm Tenancy Moves West," Journal of Farm Economics, Vol. VIII, Oct., 1936, p. 443.

5 O. D. Duncan, "Population Trends in Oklahoma," Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College Experiment Station Bulletin, 224, March, 1936, p. 10.

6 Truesdell, op. cit., p. 146.

farm lands. Most of the settlers coming into Oklahoma brought with them little wealth, and those who could not master the new conditions were unable to retain their farms and thus they sank to the position of tenants or drifted away to other sections of the country. Their land was sold relatively cheap and it was commonly acquired by persons who had no intention of farming it themselves.[7]

The tenant system has come to Oklahoma with slight alterations from pre-war plantations on which slave labor was utilized in the production of cotton. The collapse of legal sanctions for slavery following the Civil War introduced serious problems for Oklahoma agriculture. Attitudes, habits, and practices of generations could not be changed as swiftly as laws. I shall quote briefly from a recent report of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration:

> On the plantations that had withstood the reconstruction period following the Civil War, the cropper and tenant displaced the old slave system. For a satisfactory share of the harvest, the landlord would agree to furnish the cropper while he cultivated the crop. The furnish consisted of living quarters, foodstuffs, and equipment. The cropper and his family furnished the labor, and the family with a large number of workers was always more satisfactory as a tenant. After the harvest, the cropper-tenant would be paid for his portion of the crop less the value of his furnish. . . . . While the cropper system offered ample opportunity for the landlord to be fair, and some croppers may have profited under the system, in general, the cropper's independence was only nominal. Obviously, the system was merely a variation of the old slave relationship and kept the cropper on the margin of economic existence. This marginal existence, with its pseudo-economic freedom along with the owner's spirit of the landed aristocracy, emphasized whatever deficiencies appeared in the cropper class, fostered an attitude of dependence and suppressed initiative. Farm tenancy in Oklahoma is largely derived from these beginnings.[8]

Of American institutional arrangements which have furthered the

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[7] Ibid., p. 148.

[8] Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Six Rural Problem Areas, Monograph I, 1936, p. 21.

growth of tenancy, probably the most important is the holding of land as private property in fee simple absolute. In an unmodified form, this system of tenure in rural areas has permitted, and now permits, the accumulation and transfer of real property with little or no restriction as to its use or disposition. The ancestors of our early settlers struggled for centuries to free themselves from the restraints of the feudal system of land tenure. In their zeal to avoid renewed developments of such restraints in our land, our forefathers went too far in the other direction. Not only did they turn public lands into private property with great rapidity, but they enacted laws which placed property in land more nearly on the same level with personal property than ever before.[9]

Entails and primogeniture were abolished early in the history of our country in order to discourage retention of large tracts of land in the hands of one family for generations and to impede development in America of a landed aristocracy similar to that of Europe. On the other hand, laws were enacted which made land freely salable and easy to mortgage, and which gave the owner practically complete control over the use of the land.

Part and parcel of the system of land ownership in Oklahoma in fee simple absolute is our system of real property inheritance. This system allows property owners wide freedom of bequest; in the absence of a will the laws of Oklahoma provide for division of the property among the several heirs upon the decease of the owner. The death of a farmer who owns his land, therefore, may result in the disposition of

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9 United States Department of Agriculture, A Graphic Summary of Farm Tenure, Bulletin 261, 1936, p. 15.

his farm to heirs who have no other alternative, at least for a time, than to rent the property to one of their number or to an outsider. A primary purpose of the early settlers' innovations in land tenure was to develop a nation in which farms would be operated mainly by owners. A primary result as indicated by statistics,[10] was not to maintain ownership of land predominantly by those who operate it, but to promote widespread ownership by non-farmers and operation by non-owners. Adoption of fee-simple ownership as the basis of private property in land, coupled with adoption of policies for the conversion of public domain into private property, facilitated extensive acquisition of farm land by individuals or corporations not interested in direct farm operation.[11]

The existence of large amounts of school land and Indian land is a contributing cause to the high per cent of tenancy in Oklahoma. In the Indian Territory area in 1910, the tenancy rate was 72 per cent, while in the Oklahoma Territory area, it was 39 per cent. The high percentage in Indian Territory area was due to restrictions on the sale of Indian lands to white men. Later, white tenants who had rented Indian lands bought farms in this area and the tenancy rate declined. The tenancy situation is particularly bad at the present time in the eastern part of the State. Here much of the land was bought from the Indians at low prices and is being held for oil prospects or other speculative purposes, meanwhile being rented out to tenants. During the time that Oklahoma Territory was a possession of the United States Government, provision was made for the use of land as an aid to edu-

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10 Ibid., p. 17.

11 Ibid.

cational development. This policy with regard to land yet unallotted for settlement was established by the Organic Act in 1890, granting, for the benefit of the common schools, sections sixteen and thirty-six in every township in Oklahoma Territory, with certain restrictions on such sections in Indian, military, and national reservations. These lands were open to settlement and were generally occupied by tenants, and the rental income was used for furthering education in the State.

A certain amount of farm real estate in Oklahoma is held by corporations whose agricultural activities are incidental to their operations, as in the case of real estate corporations, money lending corporations, oil companies and refineries. There are numerous corporations having a temporary tenure relationship to particular areas of farm land. To utilize their land these land owners must rent out their acres to farmers who are without their own land. Many individuals who live in town and cities invest their surplus savings in land with the intention of renting these lands to tenants. Other land holders rent their land because they wish to retire from farming, or because of illness or for business reasons.

Another important cause for so much farm tenancy in Oklahoma is that farm owners lose their farms through foreclosure of mortgages. The loss of ownership from bankruptcy and foreclosure sales has been especially important in causing an increase in tenancy in Oklahoma during recent years. When many existing owners are losing their farms through foreclosure, when others are having to be refinanced in order to maintain their equities, when income from farming is so low that it will hardly cover cash operating costs, it is obvious that tenants can not accumulate savings with which to purchase farms. Following is a

table showing the estimated number of farms changing ownership by various methods per one thousand of all farms in Oklahoma immediately following the nation wide depression.[12] Data are not available to show how many of the farms transferred by reason of financial pressure were operated by their owners prior to the transfer, but it is well known that many present tenants were formerly owner-operators. The long agricultural depression which followed the boom period of the World War has been an important factor in the recent increase in tenant farming in Oklahoma.

In periods of prosperity, or when there is a more balanced relationship between farm income and outgo than exists during depressions, there are many young men who work as tenants until they accumulate a supply of farming equipment and funds with which to make a down payment on a farm.

Recurring economic depressions rank high in any list of forces stimulating the growth of farm tenancy. Such depressions have important effects on the distribution of wealth, including wealth represented by property in hand. Students of agricultural economics have pointed out that a serious decline in the general level of prices reacts more unfavorably on agriculture than on most other lines of economic activity. Farm prices are usually among the first to decrease and drop farther and faster during depressions than do prices of industrial commodities in general.[13] At the same time, taxes, interest, and similar charges, which make up a large proportion of the farmer's

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12 United States Department of Agriculture, The Farm Real Estate Situation, Circular 417, 1936, p. 26.

13 United States Department of Agriculture, loc. cit.

TABLE I

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF FARMS CHANGING OWNERSHIP BY VARIOUS METHODS PER ONE THOUSAND OF ALL FARMS

Year	Voluntary Sales and Trades	Delinquent Taxes	Foreclosure of Mortgages Bankruptcy Etc.	Inheritance And Gift	Administrators' and Executors' Sales	Misc. and Unclassified	Total of all Classes
1933	17.6	19.6	44.7	9.5	5.4	3.1	99.9
1934	16.4	7.8	23.7	9.6	5.2	2.0	64.7
1935	15.2	4.0	16.4	7.8	4.5	1.7	49.6

cash expenses, are virtually fixed or decline slowly. Census figures show that the growth of tenancy has been greatest in Oklahoma during the periods of 1890 and 1900 and from 1920 to 1935,--- periods of economic depression in agriculture.[14]

> During a depression a number of forces operate to increase farm tenancy. Among the most important of these are: (a) Loss of farms by operating owners through bankruptcy, mortgage foreclosure, and voluntary transfer of heavily encumbered farms to creditors; (b) inability of laborers and tenants to accumulate operating equipment and funds for making a down payment on a farm; (c) widespread fear on the part of practically all classes, which both destroys the incentive for long-term investment and seriously disrupts ordinary channels of credit; and (d) increase in the farm population through accumulation on farms of rural young people who would ordinarily find employment in the city, and through an augmented movement of city dwellers back to the land.[15]

Depressions tend to keep families who can not make a down payment on a farm tenants longer than they would be otherwise, and some who are indebted for livestock and equipment at the beginning of the depression find it so difficult to make payments that they drop back to the status of cropper or perhaps laborer. Closely related to the inability of laborers and tenants to accumulate funds for making the first payment on a farm during a depression is the further fact that few people want to invest their savings in land during periods of declining prices. When tenants see farm owners losing their homes and when they know from experience that farming operations are unprofitable, few of them desire to become owners of farms. If they have savings which could be used for purchasing farms, they want to keep them in liquid form rather than invest them in land which may decrease in value, or which can not yield an income sufficient to cover their fixed charges and opera-

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14 Ibid.

15 Report of the President's Committee, op. cit., p. 44.

ting costs. Just as tenants are loath to invest their savings in land, so other investors and credit agencies are afraid to make long-time loans. During the depths of a severe depression it is very difficult to obtain funds for the purchase of land, regardless of the apparent security of the loan. During the later stages of a depression, however, when recovery has set in and there are good prospects for rising prices, business and professional men are frequent buyers of farms. They are activated by the hope of a speculative gain from a rise in land values and by the fear that inflation may lessen the purchasing power of investments in bonds and similar fixed income obligations. Their bids for farms are in competition with those of persons who plan to operate their holdings, and their purchases increase the number of absentee owners with farms for rent.[16]

Lands that pass into the hands of creditors during periods of agricultural depression may be held for sale at a more favorable time or there may be a period of redemption for the original owner, during which time he is classed as a tenant. The farmers have lost their land and the more enterprising tenants find it difficult to acquire ownership. This is due to the wide fluctuations in the production of cotton, the depressions, the period of acquiring the farm's being too short, and in other cases high installment payments become due during the developmental period of the farm. While some farmers remain tenants deliberately even though they have sufficient capital to purchase a farm, a great majority become tenants because they do not command sufficiant capital and credit to purchase a farm and provide the req-

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16 Ibid., p. 45.

uisite operating capital. When the value of land rises, particularly relative to the rate of income on land, it becomes more difficult for tenants to become owners. Under these conditions the would-be farm owner may use such capital as he has for farm operations by renting the land from others with the hope that he may accumulate enough extra capital for land purchase. Farm tenancy is closely connected with the valuation of farm real estate. It has sometimes been said that tenancy and high farm real estate valuation go together with the suggestion that the latter is largely responsible for the former. The case of Oklahoma offers an interesting exception. For instance in 1920 the value of Oklahoma farms ranged from $25,000 to $20,000 and the percentage of farms operated by tenants was 51, while in Iowa where the average value of farms was $39,941, the percentage of farms operated by tenant farmers was 41.7.[17] In Oklahoma the phenomenon of rising land values was a thing to be expected especially between 1890 and 1910. There were several reasons for this. First, there was the fact that bare sites were being improved very rapidly by the erection of buildings, fences, and other additions. Second, there was an unprecedented growth of population due to immigration from other states. Third, due to the exhaustion of free tillable land, the value of land rose, not only in Oklahoma but generally throughout the country. Fourth, the discovery of vast quantities of oil in Oklahoma affected an abrupt rise in land values. Fifth, after the beginning of the twentieth century the prices of agricultural products rose greatly. Near the latter part of the second decade of the century land values in Okla-

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17 United States Department of Agriculture, Year Book, 1923, pp. 513 and 540.

homa, as elsewhere, were further inflated by the influence of the World War boom period upon commodity prices and the supply of credit as well as by the extension of the petroleum industry.[18]

Following is a table to show the value of farm real estate per acre in Oklahoma since 1912, based upon an index of one-hundred per cent.[19]

1912---98	1924--125
1913--101	1925--131
1914--101	1926--130
1915---95	1927--128
1916--104	1928--127
1917--114	1929--127
1918--130	1930--127
1919--140	1931--116
1920--166	1932---94
1921--160	1933---76
1922--139	1934---83
1923--133	1935---86

Credit conditions unfavorable to the purchase of farms by their operators have also contributed to tenancy in Oklahoma. The need for farm credit at reasonable rates became increasingly apparent during the early part of the present century. Free homesteads were no longer to be had and a rapid rise in farm values was making it increasingly difficult for farmers to secure land. The exaction of invariable pay-

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18 Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station, Current Farm Economics, Vol. IX, Dec., 1937, p. 137.

19 Report of the President's Committee, op. cit., p. 6.

ment of principal and interest in traditional land mortgage arrangements has been as serious as high interest rates, short term mortgages, and high requirements for initial payments in retarding farm acquisition by tenants or laborers.[20] Many farmers have been further hampered in purchasing farms by the necessity of resorting to expensive credit for production purposes. The tenure development which characterizes the east side of the State grew in a large measure out of the credit situation. Encouraged by the ease with which credit could be secured and the good prices prevailing for farm products, the farmers overobligated themselves between 1910 and 1920. Since the latter date some farmers have found it necessary to abandon attempts to pay for farms that had been purchased at inflated values, and credit agencies simultaneously became unwilling landlords to a great extent, because of their own lack of wisdom in extending credit during the boom period in war days.[21]

The passing of the cattle industry beginning about 1886 and the breaking-up of ranches in Oklahoma are factors that are of historic interest and economic importance in relation to the growth of farm tenancy in the State. As the production of cattle became less important from a financial standpoint and the farming industry became increasingly important, the extensive ranch lands were broken up into farms upon which tenants were placed.

Heavy urban unemployment is another depression phenomenon which tends to increase farm tenancy. During depressions the movement of

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20 Ibid., p. 7.

21 Peter Nelson, "Land Tenure in Oklahoma," Current Farm Economics, Vol. X, August, 1937, p. 74.

farm youth to the cities decreases and young persons, in an unusually large proportion of cases, find it necessary to remain in rural communities to become laborers, croppers, or tenants. At the same time there is a movement away from the cities to rural communities on the part of persons who are unable to find industrial employment. The combination of these two forces results in an increased rural population, many of whom are unable to buy farms and hence are added to the ranks of farm laborer and tenant groups.

> It is believed that the excess tenancy in Oklahoma is traceable mainly to a faulty economic condition and not in main to the incompetence and worthlessness of Oklahoma tenants. Also much of the growth of tenancy in Oklahoma is due to the greatly depressed conditions of agriculture in the State during the past decade.[22]

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> The tenant farmer situation in Oklahoma is largely a problem of the absorption of young farmers into agriculture. It is not a problem of overpopulation of the tenant class by natural increase.[23]

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> A careful study of tenant farmers as a class will reveal that a large proportion, perhaps the majority of them in some areas of the State, are using tenancy as a means of acquiring sufficient capital to make a down payment on a farm and to procure the necessary seed, feed, livestock, machinery, and family supplies for getting started on a farm of their own. Other tenants like to farm on a large scale and prefer to put the money that would go to pay mortgages, depreciation charges, taxes, and interest into farm equipment and thereby shift the responsibility for the heavy fixed cost of land ownership onto the shoulders of someone else.[24]

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Two more recent and virile forces for the encouragement of

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22 T. J. Sanders, "Oklahoma Has Too Much Farm Tenancy," Current Farm Economics, Vol. IX, April, 1936, p. 56.

23 Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station, Report, 1926-30, p. 198.

24 O. D. Duncan, "Some Social Aspects of Farm Tenancy in Oklahoma," Current Farm Economics, Vol. V, Oct., 1932, p. 76.

> farm tenancy were introduced into Oklahoma with the introduction of the cotton program into the State by depriving the cotton tenant and especially the cropper of his equitable share of the government payment under the cotton program.[25]

One of these forces is the tendency toward over-capitalization of land values, the other is the perpetuation of the poverty of the tenants through an underpayment which prevents them from accumulating the necessary purchase price of land. If owners of land get more than their just share of government payments, this additional income to land ownership is likely to be capitalized into higher land values. Overcapitalized land value in the past has been one of the most important encouragements to the growth of farm tenancy. Over-capitalization of land has made it financially more attractive to rent and operate than to own and operate a farm. Men with much greater wealth or stronger financial backing than the average tenant had willingly bid more for farm land than its current earning power justified. Thus the value of land was constantly above its current earning power. The tenant found it difficult to "dig" the purchase price out of the land.[26]

Many fathers, as they approach old age, if they have sons or sons-in-law who farm, rent the old home farm to the heir and retire to the nearby city or village for their declining years. Sometimes a farmer who has gone into some other business such as the buying of livestock, banking, or merchandising will keep his farm and rent it to a relative. In Oklahoma in 1930 there were 18,614 relative tenants on farms. In fact, one tenant out of every six is related to the owner of the land

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25 T. J. Sanders, "Tenancy and Our Cotton Programs," Current Farm Economics, IX, April, 1936, p. 56.

26 Ibid., p. 57.

he farms.[27]

The greatest single condition fostering extensive farm tenancy in Oklahoma is the widespread existence of a simple one-crop commercialized agriculture. Wherever one or two crops are produced over a large area by relatively extensive and uniform methods, such crops are produced very largely by tenants. If the crop is of a nature that it can be produced over a large area by extensive methods of cultivation which are relatively easy to understand and follow, and the crop can be stored and marketed safely, landowners will lease their farms to tenants for cultivation. From one-half to two-thirds of the tenancy in Oklahoma rests upon this condition.[28] A simple extensive one-crop commercial agriculture is not the cause of farm tenancy but only the favorable condition for non-owner operation of fertile farm lands. Other factors must be present before extensive tenancy will prevail. One of the factors which will cause much tenancy under these circumstances is the presence in large number of a submerged population. The Negro race is the classic example of such a population in Oklahoma. The Negro has always been submerged. Held in slavery for centuries, he has been grudgingly given only a partial freedom, which he does not yet know how to use very effectively.[29]

> Without wealth, education, initiative, experience, credit, or political power, the great majority of Negroes have no choice but to rent land for simple commercial crops at the landlord's own terms. Many of the Negro tenants are inefficient, ignorant, and not industrious. The landlord takes great chances of losing even

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27 Morris M. Blair, "What Causes Farm Tenancy," Farm and Ranch, April 15, 1936, p. 4.

28 Ibid., p. 7.

29 Ibid.

with the best security he can get and a high rate of interest.

> The competition of the poor whites with the Negroes for the land during the past fifty years has driven them down to the same level in large measure in many localities.[30]

> There are 1,700,000 farm tenants in the South and three out of five are white farmers, many of them little better off than their colored neighbors. This combination of a large submerged farm population in a climate suited to the production of cotton is the major cause of so much tenancy in the South. These factors operate at full force in both Texas and Oklahoma.[31]

The tragedy of the situation is that while the presence of a large submerged population operates to produce more tenancy, the greater tenancy in turn works to further submerge a greater portion of the population.

The third major factor producing tenancy is an excessive speculation in good agricultural lands. Wherever there are large bodies of superior farm lands, urban bankers, merchants, professional men, corporations, and other groups and individuals with large incomes or credit facilities tend to invest their surpluses in these fertile farms. The slow and regular growth of a city tends to reduce tenancy in the vicinity of the city, but the rapid and speculative growth of a city based on coal, petroleum or other mineral or real estate speculation tends to retard the ownership of farm lands by the operator farmer. The speculative price of the land is too high for the farmer to pay for agricultural purposes. The increase in farm tenancy and the general decay of agriculture in the coal and oil areas of Oklahoma are partially explained by the large amount of speculation in farm lands in these areas.[32]

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30 Ibid., p. 7.

31 Ibid.

The factors which contribute most to producing a large degree of non-ownership among farmers may be summarized as follows:

1. A simple extensive one-crop type of agriculture which produces a staple for the general market, á crop that can be stored and marketed easily, such as cotton, corn, wheat, or tobacco.

2. A submerged population lacking wealth, credit, initiative, education, and political power, such as the Negroes and poor whites of the South.

3. A large amount of speculation in agricultural lands by the non-agricultural classes of the population, such as the city bankers, merchants, professional men, and the real estate speculator.[33]

No one of these factors alone will produce a large amount of agricultural tenancy, but wherever in the United States these three factors meet in force, a very large degree of the non-owner operations of farm lands has resulted.[34]

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[32] Ibid., p. 26.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

CHAPTER II

GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION OF FARM TENANCY IN OKLAHOMA 1925 to 1935

That tenancy of Oklahoma farms has undoubtedly increased to an extent that is not conducive to the greatest net well-being of farmers and of Oklahoma, is an opinion based on years of study of the tenancy situation in Oklahoma as well as the general facts derived from the study made by J. T. Sanders, formerly of the Agricultural Economics Department of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College.[1] In 1920, 51 per cent of all the farms in the state were operated by tenants; by 1925 this percentage had increased to 58 per cent; and by 1930, to 61.5 per cent.[2] The rapid growth of farm tenancy in Oklahoma, strange to say, was checked somewhat during the last five years of the depression. In 1935 the percentage of farm tenancy in Oklahoma had decreased slightly, to 61.2.[3] This strange reduction in tenancy, in spite of unprecedented foreclosures, is traceable in part to increases in number of small subsistence farmers who were formerly in other occupations in towns and cities but who retreated to small farm tracts when they lost their jobs in town. It is also caused in part by a marked reduction of croppers in some sections. This reduction of croppers was caused in part by inability of landlords to finance croppers and in part by a displacement of croppers by the A. A. A. program.[4] Since

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1 J. T. Sanders, "Oklahoma Has Too Much Farm Tenancy," Current Farm Economics, V, October, 1932, p. 79.

2 Ibid.

3 Report of the President's Committee, op. cit., p. 96.

4 Ibid.

tenants, as a rule, operate smaller farms than owners, they do not have their proportion of all farm acreage. Approximately one-half of the land value of the state is in tenant farms.[5]

Table I shows the growth of farm tenancy in number of farms operated by tenants and in per cent of all farmers of the State from 1925 to 1935.[6]

TABLE I

Year	Number of Farms Operated by Tenants	Per Cent Of Tenancy
1925	115,498	58.0
1930	125,329	61.5
1935	130,661	61.2

By examination of Table I we see that in 1935 there were 130,661 farms operated by tenants. There was, in the same year, a total of 213,325 farmers in the State, making a percentage of 58. The definition of farm tenancy as used in this report is that of the federal farm census:

> "Farm tenants are farmers who, as tenants, renters, or croppers, operate hired land only."

The term "tenant" in this report, unless otherwise specified, includes share croppers, share tenants, and renters; that is, all farmers except owners and wage hands. The share cropper is a farmer who supplies the man labor necessary in working and harvesting the crop, bears none or a small part of other production costs, and usually receives half of the crop as his share. In various sections of Oklahoma, the

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5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 89.

share cropper is called by other names, such as "half cropper", "half tenant", "half hand". There is no difference in principle among the several forms of share renting, including croppers. The difference is in the relative contributions made by landlord and tenant and the proportionate share of the crop taken by each.

The share tenant in Oklahoma is a farmer who contributes the labor necessary in working and harvesting the crop as well as operating capital such as work stock, farm implements, seed, and sometimes part of other production costs and usually pays one-fourth of his cotton and one-third of his corn as rent. He is sometimes called a "third and fourth renter", or a "third and fourth tenant".

The renter is the highest type of tenant. He contributes all operating capital in addition to the labor necessary for making and harvesting the crop and all the operating expenses, has all of his crop and pays a fixed amount of the crop or cash as rent. The landlord does not assume any of the risk of farm operation and usually undertakes no responsibility for management except such supervision as may be necessary to see that the land and improvements are not abused.[7] Obviously this system may prove advantageous to the landlord who, for any reason, can not give much attention to the business of farming, and it may be preferred by the tenant who has sufficient capital and experience to operate without assistance from the landlord and who does not wish to share the profits of superior management with another.

Table II shows the growth of farm tenancy for nine crop reporting

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[7] United States Department of Agriculture, "The Farm Lease Contract," Farmers' Bulletin 1164, 1931, p. 4.

TABLE II

PERCENTAGE OF ALL FARMS OPERATED BY TENANTS

Year	Crop Reporting Districts of Oklahoma									
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	State
1925	34	44	57	48	57	66	62	68	65	59
1930	34	46	58	55	64	70	63	70	69	62
1935	38	49	59	52	63	69	60	71	68	61

districts of the State from 1925 to 1935.[8]

An examination of data on tenancy for the various parts of the State reveals the fact that the greatest growth of tenancy in the past decade has been in those areas where the smallest amount of tenancy prevailed at the beginning of the period. For example, since 1925 tenancy has increased from 34 to 38 per cent in the five northwestern counties, from 44 to 49 per cent in the eight north central counties, and from 57 to 63 per cent in the thirteen central counties, sections where the lowest amounts of tenancy prevailed. (Table II.)[9] In all other sections of the State from 60 to 70 per cent of the farms were operated by tenants from 1925 to 1935, these sections averaging slightly more than two tenant farms out of each three farms.

Not only have farms passed from owners to tenants at a rapid rate during the period of 1925 to 1935, but mortgage indebtedness of owners has also increased at a disconcerting rate between 1925 and 1935, especially in areas where ownership constitutes a high proportion of all farms.[10]

Table III shows the percentage of value of all farm property that was not net equity of the farmer operating the farm.[11] (page 24.) For example, although only 34 per cent of all farms were run by tenants in the five counties of northwestern Oklahoma in 1930, 66 per cent of all farm value was owned by men who did not operate these farms. (Table

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8 J. T. Sanders, "The Battle Against Farm Tenancy in Oklahoma Has Started," Current Farm Economics, VIII, Dec., 1935, p. 123.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

TABLE III

PERCENTAGE OF ALL FARM PROPERTY NOT EQUITY OF OPERATOR

Year	Crop Reporting Districts of Oklahoma									
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	State
1925	61	64	66	62	64	74	70	77	70	69
1930	66	67	72	67	71	77	72	79	75	71
1935	(Data on this item not available for 1935)									

III.) In eight counties of south central Oklahoma, only two dollars of equity out of each ten of value were owned by farm operators. A desirable society cannot thrive under such absentee ownership and non-owning operation of land resources.

A survey to determine the extent and distribution of farm tenancy in Oklahoma was made in 1931 by J. T. Sanders of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College. The results of showing the extent of farm tenancy in the State at that time, are shown in Table IV.[12]

TABLE IV

PER CENT OF ALL FARMS IN OKLAHOMA OPERATED BY TENANTS, 1930, BASED ON DISTRIBUTION

Percent of Farm Tenancy	Number of Counties
39 and below	7
40-49	13
50-59	14
60-69	23
70 and above	20
State Average: 61.5	Total: 77 Counties

The survey showed also that the distribution of farm tenancy in Oklahoma in 1930 bore a close relationship to that of the soil areas of the State. The lowest tenancy area where less than 40 per cent of all farms were operated by tenants was found in what is called the high plains of the Panhandle. Texas County had least tenancy in the State with 27 per cent.[13] The counties with from 40 to 60 per cent

12 J. T. Sanders, "Farm Tenancy in Oklahoma," Current Farm Economics, V, Oct., 1932, p. 73.

of tenancy lay mostly in the north central wheat belt or western prairie area. The counties with from 60 to 70 per cent of tenancy are mostly cotton growing counties and are situated in the southern half of the western prairie and southern Ozarks area. The twenty counties with 70 per cent or more of farm tenancy occupy what is known as the cross-timbers area of southeastern and central Oklahoma. McIntosh had the highest percentage of tenancy of any county in the State with 79 per cent.[14]

The close association between the amount of tenancy and the soil areas suggests that types of farming in Oklahoma bear a direct relationship to the amount of farm tenancy in different sections of the State. A detailed examination of the change in tenancy from 1930 to 1935 as related to the types of farming in Oklahoma reveals that relatively large increases in tenancy took place in that period, first in the agriculturally diversified counties east of Bartlesville and Tulsa and north of Muskogee where tenancy increased about 20 per cent; second, in the cotton-producing counties along the Red River lying east of Cotton county and to the Arkansas line where there was an increase of 17 per cent; and third, in the wheat-producing counties lying west of Woods and Woodward counties where the increase of tenants averaged above 15 per cent. A slight increase in tenancy took place in the twenty counties lying between Oklahoma City and Tulsa and extending north to the Kansas line and east to the Arkansas line. The counties in the main are sandy land, post oak, poor, eroded soil areas, where

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13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

aside from the specialized agriculture around the cities, self-sufficiency agriculture is emphasized.[15]

The crop acreage in farms operated by owners is more uniformly distributed over the State than in farms operated by tenants and croppers. One reason is that in hilly sections and on poor soils, types of farming are followed--- dairying, general, and self-sufficiency, for example, which do not lend themselves readily to tenant operation. Another reason is that in better areas where most of the land can be put into crops, the grains or cotton tend to be grown extensively and these crops lend themselves to types of farming adapted to tenancy. In the area of twenty-seven counties bounded by a line from Kay County on the north to Garvin and Cotton Counties in the south and a line from Alfalfa County on the north to Roger Mills and Harmon Counties in the southwest, there was an actual small decline in farm tenancy from 1930 to 1935. These counties constitute the best agricultural area of the State where wheat predominates in the north and cotton in the southeast. It is particularly desirable that in this, the best agricultural area in the State, a decline in tenancy is noted. However, this decline is not entirely a rosy picture, for the largest displacement of croppers in the State took place in this area. In these counties, from 40 to more than 50 per cent of all croppers disappeared as farmers by the end of the five-year period 1930-35. The mortality of the cropper tenure was here very severe. Farm tenure tends to increase with the commercialization of agriculture. Free land and democratic rural institutions of Oklahoma have retarded the segregation

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15 J. T. Sanders, op. cit., p. 124.

of labor from capital in agriculture as contrasted with industry; but the trend toward such segregation is clear. Increasing proportions of the farmers are becoming tenants in the regions where commercial agriculture is dominant. This trend is profoundly affecting both the present and future welfare of the rural people.

The appearance of urban industries tends in some degree to reduce the relative amount of tenant farming in areas immediately surrounding the cities where these industries are located. For example, in 1930, 77 per cent of the farms in Wagoner County were operated by tenants; in Tulsa County the percentage was only 47.7; in Lincoln County 65.2 per cent of the farmers were tenants, while in Oklahoma County only 48.5 per cent were tenants.[16] Industrial employment, in the past, has been the primary agency for absorbing the surplus farm labor. Nearly always, the first people to migrate to a city are those who live the shortest distance from it. In other words, where tenancy is the highest in the State, a greater proportion of the population is employed in agriculture than where it is the lowest.

It is shown that in 1925, 54 per cent of all the land that was being farmed in Oklahoma was being farmed by non-owners; in 1930, 61 per cent was being farmed by non-owners; and in 1935, 60 per cent was being farmed by non-owners.[17] The greatest per cent of farm land being operated by non-owners in 1935 was in South Dakota with 62 per cent. Oklahoma ranked second with 60 per cent after only fifty years since settlement. The increase of land being farmed by non-owners in

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16 O. D. Duncan, op. cit., p. 78.

17 United States Department of Agriculture, loc. cit.

Oklahoma is accounted for partially by the fact that the pioneer farmers have been passing away, while many of their children have gone to the city to live and rented the farms.

Both degree and character of farm tenancy varies widely over the State. The prevalence of tenancy in 1935 was much below the State average throughout the wheat-growing sections of Oklahoma. Less than one-third of the farms in the Panhandle were operated by tenants, and there the average tenant has a substantial investment in livestock and farm equipment and may have a purchasing power greater than that of the majority of farm owners in some other parts of the State. On the other hand more than two-thirds of the farms farther east in Oklahoma were occupied by tenants in 1935,[18] and there the tenant farmer is typically poor. Over much of the cotton belt of the State there is a considerable number of croppers who are hardly to be regarded as high class tenants, for the land owner determines what crops shall be planted and when they shall be planted and harvested, purchases the seed and fertilizer, furnishes the livestock and work animals, and markets the crop. The economic status of most croppers is below that of hired help on most northern farms.[19]

To this point in the study of farm tenancy, the term "tenant" has been used to include all farm operators except owners. In order to make the study more intensive in scope, the tenants shall be designated by the class of tenure to which they belong. Table V shall be used to show the number and percentage of farms by color and ten-

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18 Ibid., (map), p. 14.

19 Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, Economic Survey of Oklahoma, 1929, p. 147.

TABLE V

WHITE FARM OPERATORS

Tenure Class	Number		% Change	% in Each Class	
	1930	1935	1930-1935	1930	1935
All farm operators:	180,929	195,501	+8.1	100.0	100.0
Owners:	69,380	75,121	+8.3	38.3	38.4
Full owners:	47,097	53,226	+13.0	26.0	27.2
Part owners:	22,283	21,907	-1.7	12.3	11.2
Managers:	779	759	-2.6	0.4	0.4
All tenants:	110,770	119,615	+8.0	61.5	61.2
Croppers	16,495	10,959	-33.6	9.1	5.6
COLORED FARM OPERATORS					
All Farm Operators:	22,937	17,824	-22.3	100.0	100.0
Owners:	8,334	6,762	-18.9	36.4	38.0
Full owners:	6,550	5,770	-15.0	28.6	31.3
Part owners:	1,784	1,192	-33.2	7.8	6.7
Managers:	44	16	-73.6	.2	.1
All tenants:	14,559	11,046	-24.1	63.5	62.0
Croppers:	4,560	2,681	-41.2	19.9	15.0

ure of operator in Oklahoma in 1930 and 1935.[20]

The number of farms in the State or in any area of the State operated by owners or part owners is influenced not only by the percentage of farms so operated but also by size of farms and proportions of land area in farms. Cotton is especially well suited to production by tenants and especially by Negro tenants. Since Oklahoma has grown to be one of the leading cotton producing states and because the Negro has become so well accustomed to a condition of economic dependency, we find very few Negro owners or part owners of farms in Oklahoma. (Table V.) Of course, the factors of population must be taken into consideration as a determining factor in Negro tenancy. In 1930, of a total population of 2,396,040, in Oklahoma, there were 172,198 Negroes.[21] The densest distribution of Negro tenants is in the southern part of the State where cotton is the most important crop. The decrease in Negro farm operators from 1930 to 1935 is principally due to the work of the Federal Government during the years of agricultural depression. Many of the former Negro operators left the farm and moved to the urban sections where they could secure work provided by the Relief Administration. A quotation selected from the report of the Emergency Relief Administration of Oklahoma for the year 1935 for District V is as follows:

> This area includes those counties comprising the extreme southern tier, all of which border on the Red River. Those west of Love County are normally among the heaviest cotton producers in the State. Previous to 1929 it was customary to import colored labor for the fall picking from points all over Oklahoma and the northern half of Texas. .....Usually enough money

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20 Report of President's Committee, op. cit., p. 99.

21 United States Census, 1930, Vol. II, p. 35.

> could be made by the cotton raisers in a good season to carry them without further assistance for the rest of the year. But today these families are as definitely stranded as are the miners of eastern and northeastern Oklahoma. .....Drouth, low prices, and the boll weevil have capsized their industry.[22]

The cotton-control or reduction program has resulted in the unemployment or displacement of tenants, croppers, and wage hands. It is very logical to think that the acreage devoted to cotton could not be reduced to one-third (as in 1933) without an accompanying decrease in the laborers engaged in its production. A study was made in 1935 of the influence of the A. A. A. cotton program upon the tenant cropper and laborer in Caddo County, Oklahoma.[23] In 1930 in that county, which was taken as representative of the cotton-growing section of Cklahoma, there were 2837 tenants including Negro and white tenants.[24] In 1935 this number had increased 172 or 6.1 per cent. At the same time (1930) there were 1077 croppers, including both Negro and white croppers in the county. By 1935 that number had decreased 566 or 52.5 per cent. During the five-year period, 1930-1935, there was an increase of 174 white tenants or 6.3 per cent, but there was a decrease of 2 Negro tenants, or 2.1 per cent. There was a decrease of 503 or 51.3 per cent of white croppers and a decrease of 63 or 64.9 per cent of Negro croppers.[25] A careful analysis of the factors involved in the completion of the study makes it appear likely that the census

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22 Federal Emergency Relief Administration, "Program in Oklahoma," Report, 1935, p. 31.

23 Fred C. Frey and T. Lynn Smith, "The Influence of the A. A. A. Cotton Program upon the Tenant, Cropper, and Laborer," Rural Sociology, I, 1936, p. 483.

24 Ibid., p. 495.

25 Ibid., p. 498.

data should be fairly indicative of the extent to which displacement of tenants and croppers has occurred or failed to occur during the cotton-control program. If one takes a relatively small unit, and if one confines the investigation to those regions in which the growing of cotton is almost the sole support of the population, it would seem logical that any decrease in the number of tenants and croppers occurring between 1930 and 1935 would be fairly attributed to the control program which began in 1933.

Cotton farming in Oklahoma, as in other cotton states is closely related to the high percentage of non-owner farmers. Rural social problems in Oklahoma are intimately tied up in the cotton situation. An investigation was made in 1926 by O. D. Duncan and T. J. Sanders of the Department of Agricultural Economics of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, into the question of how the economic status of various classes of cotton farmers in Oklahoma is related to their social behavior. This survey was in reality a preliminary one intended primarily to give a picture of farm life in typical cotton-producing counties of Oklahoma, but it showed the distribution and extent of farm tenancy in the section of the State studied. (See Table II, Ch. III). Eleven counties were included in the survey, most of them being in the southwestern part of the State; Carter, Greer, Jefferson, Kiowa, Love, McIntosh, Stephens, Tillman, Jackson, Bryan, and Pottawatomie. The investigation found that certain tenure classifications are closely associated with the economic status of farmers. In 1925 tenure composition of Oklahoma cotton farmers as shown by the census for the counties surveyed was: full owners, 26.4 per cent; part owners, 7.5 per cent; share and cash tenants, including

farm managers, 57.7 per cent; and croppers, 8.4 per cent. For the farmers' survey, the distribution was: full owners, 29.7 per cent; part owners, 7.4 per cent; share and cash tenants, 54.0 per cent; and croppers, 8.9 per cent. (See Table II, Chapter III.)[26]

Morris M. Blair of the Economics Department of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College has made studies of the tenancy situation in Oklahoma and Texas and has released interesting information relative to the tenancy problem. He says in part:

> In Texas and Oklahoma today, three farms out of every five are owned by someone other than the family which farms the land. Tenancy in these two states is largely a cotton problem, as cotton accounts for over half of all the tenancy in these two great states. The rich black lands of Texas have the highest percentage of tenancy in all the southwest, ranging from 60 to over 70 per cent. Next comes the sandy cotton lands of East Texas and eastern Oklahoma with only slightly less tenancy. The new cotton lands of southwestern Oklahoma and West Texas range from 50 to 60 per cent of non-operators. Wherever cotton grows, tenancy flourishes.[27]

Following are figures in a tabulated form which shows the growth of farm tenancy in Oklahoma from 1925 to 1935 in five-year periods:

1925----- 115,498 farm tenants

1930----- 125,329 farm tenants

1935----- 130,661 farm tenants

The figures were taken from the census of those years.[28]

> In the wheat areas of the Texas Panhandle and North and West Oklahoma, tenancy ranges from 30 to 50 per cent, and has increased from 5 to 10 per cent during the past five years. There are only six counties in Texas with 25 per cent or less of tenancy, and

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26 Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 211, April, 1933, p. 4.

27 Morris M. Blair, "A Picture of Farm Tenancy in Texas and Oklahoma," Farm and Ranch, April 1, 1936, p. 3.

28 Ibid.

there are none in Oklahoma with less than 30 per cent.....The total picture of the present battle of the tiller of the soil to own the land he farms is dark, but on one corner of the cloud there is a silver lining. There has been an increase of home owners among farmers to the extent of 25,000 in the past five years. Twenty thousand Texas farmers and five thousand Oklahoma farmers have bought farms since 1930. This is an increase of 12.5 per cent in farm home ownership in Oklahoma in five years. At first thought this seems a great gain, but the location of the majority of these newcomers reveals the fact that most of them are in the poorer sections where the land is cheap, and the majority of them are on small and inexpensive farms.[29]

Table VI shows the percentage of farms operated by tenants in Oklahoma from 1925 to 1935, also the percentage of acres being operated by tenants, and the value of real and personal property by percentage owned by non-owner operator farmers:[30]

TABLE VI

Census Year	Farms	Acres	Value Of Real Estate	Personal
1925	59	45	48	69
1930	61.5	48	49	71
1935	61.2	49.1	52	73

The tendency toward an increase of tenancy is indicated also by the increase of the percentage of all farm value that is not owned as equity by the man operating the farm. In other words, the total value of tenant property plus the amount of mortgages on owner-operated farms, as related to all farm real estate value, indicates the proportion of ownership free of encumbrance which farmers who are tending the land have in the land they operate. In 1925, 69 per cent of

29 Ibid.

30 Oklahoma State Planning Board, Preliminary Report on State Planning, 1936, p. 219.

the value of farm property in Oklahoma was owned this way. By 1930 this percentage had increased to 71 per cent and in 1935 to 73 per cent (Table VI).[31] An examination of the growth of tenancy in the various sections of the State reveals a wide variation in the amount of tenancy but a much narrower variation in the net equity of the farmers operating the farms.[32]

It will be seen from Figure III and Table I[33] that if the extent of retrogression toward tenancy is measured by the equity which farmers have in the land they operate, there is no district in the State which does not have $2 out of every $3 owned by non-operating farmers. This is the property right claim on the farm land of the State by men who are not operating Oklahoma farms. The equity of the man who is doing the farm work of Oklahoma varies between $34 out of every $100 in the northwest district to as low as $21 out of each $100 of farm property in the south central crop reporting district of Oklahoma. Although the number of tenants in Oklahoma varies from only 34 tenants out of each 100 farmers in the northwestern group of counties to 70 tenants out of each 100 farmers in the south central group of counties, the actual retrogression toward tenancy within the last decade has gone on in the former group to where $66 out of each $100 of farm property was owned in 1935 by some one other than the farm operator and to $79 in the latter mentioned group of counties.[34]

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31 J. T. Sanders, op. cit., p. 80.

32 Ibid., p. 81.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

In other words, northwestern Oklahoma does not have a very high percentage of actual tenancy, but measured in terms of the amount of equity farmers hold in the land they operate, nearly two-thirds of the land values are held by people other than the man who tends the land. This is not far short of the situation prevailing in districts where there is the highest proportion of tenancy. Furthermore, by far the most rapid decline of equity of farmers in the farms they operate has taken place in the districts where there has been the least amount of tenancy.[35]

> It would require only thirty-four more years for all farm equity in northwestern Oklahoma to pass completely out of the hands of farmers, were it to continue slipping from their hands at the same rate of decline that has occurred in the last decade.[36]

This alarming rate of decline toward excess tenancy should challenge the citizens of Oklahoma, since we already have far more tenancy than is desirable from the standpoint of the welfare of our farmers and the State. Much of this growth of tenancy is due to the greatly depressed condition of Oklahoma agriculture during the past decade.

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35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p. 82.

CHAPTER III

ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF FARM TENANCY

Tenancy, as a system of farming practiced in Oklahoma, is extremely complex. It has good in it as well as bad. The good comes from the fact that tenancy is a ladder by which the young farmer may climb to ownership. Without doubt, the climb has been too difficult even for the deserving young farmer during the decade 1925 to 1935, and in this fact lies much of the evil of farm tenancy in Oklahoma from an economic, and, to a large extent, social point of view during that decade. Facts lead us to believe that the excess tenancy in Oklahoma during the period of 1925 to 1935 is traceable mainly to a faulty economic condition and not to incompetence and worthlessness of Oklahoma tenants.

The high percentage of farm tenancy in Oklahoma has an economic significance. First, tenancy may be regarded as a part of the process of inheritance of land. A large number of tenants are sons or sons-in-law of the land owners on whose farms they live and will ultimately become owners themselves through inheritance. Second, it is a means by which a young man or a man with reversed fortunes, may accumulate the money for making the initial payment on a farm. Third, it furnishes an opportunity for the man who is able to buy land, to investigate, experiment, wait over a period of unstable prices or a time of inflation and finally exercise his best judgment before permanently attaching himself to any particular farm, type of farming, or set of geographical or social conditions. Fourth, tenancy affords a kind of supervision and employment for a portion of our population not

fitted by temperament or ability to the responsibilities of land ownership.[1]

From the standpoint of the tenant, renting is a means of securing the use of capital. Rent is paid in lieu of interest and may be in terms of dollars or a share of the product. Likewise, from the standpoint of the landlord, renting partakes of the nature of a loan of capital, more specifically the annual use of a capital investment. The practice of renting land may also be looked upon as a partnership in which one party, the landlord, contributes the annual use of the major portion of the investment and the other party, the tenant, contributes the labor and other operating expenses in producing crops and livestock. It shall be the purpose of this chapter to present the economic aspects of the tenant situation in Oklahoma from 1925 to 1935 as revealed from a study of statistics and facts.

"Nearly two-thirds of Oklahoma farm operators are tenants." This is a statement that has been made so often that it has almost become trite. That the farm tenure situation is largely responsible for the vanishing fertility of Oklahoma farms is a statement that has been made with perhaps equal frequency. The first statement, while a statistical fact, in itself conveys little meaning. The second, though doubtless true, needs verification to learn how farm tenure retards rebuilding or maintaining of the land, and if possible to find the most practical corrective measures.[2]

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1 O. D. Duncan, "Some Social Aspects of Tenancy and Moving in Oklahoma," Current Farm Economics, December, 1929, p. 6.

2 Peter Nelson, "The Land Tenure Problem in Oklahoma," Current Farm Economics, August, 1937, p. 74.

> The curse of farm tenancy is that it is self-perpetuating instead of being self-eliminating. Two of the most severely eroded areas in the United States are the eastern half of Texas and the eastern half of Oklahoma. The area which appears so black on the tenancy map is equally dark on the erosion map. For two generations farm tenants shifting from farm to farm every few years have sought less eroded farm land rather than trying to stop the erosion of the land they have farmed. No permanency of tenure has meant no permanent interest in the soil of any particular farm.[3]

After a tenant has permitted one farm to become washed and gullied beyond use, he merely moves to another to repeat the process. There can be no permanent solution to the grave problem of soil conservation without a solution to the tenancy problem first. If all of Oklahoma were now terraced to perfection, the terraces would soon wash away, neglected and left in ruin by transient tenants. The tenant who let the land wash away in the first place would let the terrace go in like manner, because he has no special interest in any particular piece of land. The United States can easily waste a billion dollars in terracing land unless at the same time it changes the attitude of the tenant toward the soil by giving him a deep permanent interest in the special tract of land he farms. This can be done only by ownership.[4]

Mobility of tenants is so great in Oklahoma that almost half of all tenants move in some years; thus they have little or no interest in the betterment of school, church, and community. With a highly transitory status, it is entirely out of the question to expect them to have an abiding or constructive interest in maintenance or im-

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[3] Morris M. Blair, "A Picture of Farm Tenancy in Texas and Oklahoma," Farm and Ranch, April 1, 1936, p. 3.

[4] Ibid.

provement of soil fertility or in planning a sound farm management program where more than a year's time is needed to carry out the program. The blame for this deplorable situation rests squarely with the public that permits probably one of the most unsatisfactory tenure systems of any country in the world, and not to any large extent does the blame rest with tenants.[5]

> Furthermore, the great mass of our tenants, contrary to the views of some, are capable of successful ownership. Probably not over fifteen per cent of them are lacking in ability to attain ownership and remain owners under a system conducive to ownership.[6]

Quoting from Dr. L. C. Gray, Assistant Administrator of Resettlement Administration, and Mr. D. P. Trent, Regional Director of the Resettlement Administration at Dallas, Texas in a radio interview January 4, 1937:

> Trent: Then you are not actually opposed to all forms of tenancy?
>
> Gray: Not at all. As you suggest, tenancy in itself is not bad. But there are some things about our present kind of farm tenancy that are very bad indeed.
>
> Trent: Yes, anyone who has worked among farmers and farm communities knows that. Tenants move around so frequently that they never really develop an interest in the land they cultivate, or the farms on which they live.
>
> Gray: That is one of the biggest troubles. Figures from the census show that the average tenant farmer moves every three to four years. During that time, he, of course, tries to get as much out of the land as he can and put as little back into it. He lets the soil wash away or blow away if he lives in the dry land country, and leaves the buildings worse off than they were before he came.
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> Trent: Here in the South we have a terrible problem of soil

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5 J. T. Sanders, "An Effective Homestead Exemption Will Reduce Farm Tenancy," Current Farm Economics, February, 1936, p. 16.

6 Ibid.

erosion. If our soil keeps washing away at the present rate, it will threaten our whole cotton industry and undermine all the commerce that depends upon it. There is no doubt that the high percentage of tenancy in the South has a lot to do with the erosion of our soil.

Gray: Of course it is not only the tenant who loses by the wearing of his soil. The landlord loses just as much, for each time he gets a new tenant he is apt to find his farm in a worse condition.

Trent: And of course the nation as a whole suffers through the loss of its basic natural resource---- the soil. That is something which should make everyone stop and think.

Gray: Just to show how it works--- the other day I read a letter from a tenant farmer who wrote in to tell the President's Committee his troubles. He told how he had rented a farm, and then gone to work to dig a well and make other improvements on it. When the end of the year came around, the landlord said, "Now that this farm has a well and those other improvements on it you made, I can charge a higher rent. So take your choice--- either pay me fifty dollars more rent, or find another farm." Naturally the man was pretty grieved at that. "Why should I spend my money and labor on improving the farm, if all I get is a higher rent bill?" he wrote. Now, when that man gets another farm, he is not going to raise a finger to improve it, but just work it for all it's worth.[7]

Much of the fertile top soil of farms in eastern Oklahoma has been washed away. This is a tremendous loss to owners and to the State as a whole, and can be overcome only with difficulty through the investment of much labor and money in an extensive soil building program. Consequently, the natural wealth of the state is impaired because the production per farm family under the present tenant system is low, present production on such farms barely affording an existence. This condition, instead of adding to the economic wealth of the state, actually reduces it. Although soil building will be difficult of attainment, the present nature and extent of farm tenancy

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[7] L. C. Gray and D. P. Trent, "Radio Interview at the President's Tenancy Committee Hearing," January 4, 1937, p. 216.

in Oklahoma must be changed if the State is to properly conserve its resources and improve the social and economic position of the farm population.

TABLE I

SOIL EROSION CONDITIONS IN OKLAHOMA, 1935, ACREAGE WITHIN WHICH MORE THAN 25 PER CENT OF THE LAND AREA HAS BEEN AFFECTED[8]

Erosion Condition	Acres	Per Cent
Total Land Area*	44,586,881	100.0
Areas With Little or No Erosion	9,174,366	20.6
Total Area Affected by Sheet Erosion	28,102,194	63.0
25-75% of Topsoil Lost	8,313,484	18.6
Over 75% Topsoil Lost	19,788,710	44.4
Total Area Affected by Wind Erosion	7,014,990	15.7
Moderate Wind Erosion	320,439	.7
Severe Wind Erosion	4,736,046	10.6
Destroyed by Wind Erosion	1,958,505	4.4
Total Area Affected by Gullying	25,225,815	56.6
Occasional gullies	12,647,230	28.0
Severe gullying	12,754,599	28.6
Destroyed by gullies	3,896	----

*Exclusive of large cities.

Oklahoma is regarded by the United States Soil Conservation Service as one of the most seriously eroded states in the Union. This conclusion is based on the fact that, although Oklahoma is one of the

8 Oklahoma State Planning Board, "Preliminary Report," 1936, p. 216.

most recently settled states, the soil losses have been tremendous. According to a late survey made by the United States Soil Conservation Service, approximately 45 per cent of the State has suffered a loss of more than three-fourths of its topsoil, and in some instances there has been a loss of subsoil. It is estimated that 63 per cent of the area of the state has been affected in some degree by erosion. (Table I.)[9] It is estimated that the damage to soils from erosion in Oklahoma amounts each year to at least 25 million dollars. Such a loss through erosion presents one of the most serious land use problems.

> Rapid soil erosion in Oklahoma has been due to the fact that the State is made up, especially in the western part, of raw or immature soils which are highly erosive. Notwithstanding this, the settlers employed the same agricultural practices they had learned in the states from which they came, which were wholly unsuited to Oklahoma soils and consequently erosion losses became critical within a short time. The results have been most unfortunate. The situation is further aggravated by the high percentage of tenant farmers, most of whom have little incentive to employ soil conservation methods.[10]

Although it is a deplorable fact that 62 per cent of the farms in Oklahoma were tenant operated in 1935, farm equity presents a still more serious problem. In the State as a whole, the average man who operated a farm owned only an equity of 29 out of each 100 dollars invested in farm real estate under his operation. The other 71 dollars were vested in owners who did not tend the land. This off-the-farm ownership is making it increasingly difficult for the ambitious young farmer to acquire farm property through tenancy, which in times past was the stepping stone to ownership.[11]

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[9] Ibid., p. 34.

[10] Ibid.

Even the casual observer of farming in Oklahoma has seen that there is much moving from one farm to another by tenants. Recently the United States Department of Agriculture in cooperation with the Department of Agricultural Economics of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College made a calculation showing the total amount of farm moving that took place in any one year, using the average of a number of years to make the estimation. The results of the calculation show that 51 per cent of all the tenants in the State move yearly. In the southeastern part of the state there is an area covering about twenty counties where nearly two-thirds of all farm tenants move yearly. In an area in the northwestern part of the State including about twenty counties, an average of from one-third to one-fourth of all farm tenants move yearly. In the remaining counties of the State lying in a broad belt diagonally from the southwest to the northeast corners of the State about one-half of all farm tenants move yearly. The full magnitude of this vast migration can be better grasped by means of comparison. In round numbers, 60,000 farm tenants join this vast moving throng. If the tenants' families are average sized farm families, over 275,000 men, women and children are involved in the moving of tenants. There are probably a hundred thousand or more school children involved. A fourth of all land in the State is in the hands of new farmers yearly as a result of this migration and, roughly speaking, 258 million dollars worth of the State's most valuable and precious natural resource, our farm land, changes caretakers each year as a result of this moving.

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[11] Ibid.

> Nearly 300 million dollars worth of Oklahoma farm land each year changes hands by moving. If the system takes fifty years to ruin the land, the cost is six million dollars per year. There are now (1927) hundreds of thousands of acres in the State that were formerly producing good crops that have been made unprofitable by our landlord system and our exploitative ownership type of farming.[12]

The direct cost of moving is estimated to be about two million dollars per year for Oklahoma farmers. It causes a tremendous amount of loss to all concerned.

> A conservative estimate of the direct cost of the average tenant move in Oklahoma is about $25.00. But the direct cost of moving is only a small portion of the real cost of useless moving. Useless moving is a destroyer of opportunity for financial advance in that it prevents many men from organizing their farms for long-time efficient yielding production. For example, an investigation among several hundred tenants in the State revealed the fact that those who had averaged a move every two years were operating farms that averaged $5652 in value, while those whose average stay was six years or over had farms worth, on the average, $12,288.[13]

The incessant mover can not get large and valuable farms. Furthermore, census figures for 1925 for all counties reveal the fact that:

> .....for each one per cent decline in the amount of moving by all farmers, the average value of livestock and machinery increased $30. Incessant moving is antagonistic to the accumulation of large amounts of farming machinery and livestock; and first-class profitable farming demands an ample supply of these. The most frequent moving group of tenants referred to above had only $726 worth of equipment, while those averaging a stay of six years or over had $1247 worth of machinery and livestock.[14]

There are evidences that excessive moving and poverty are close friends. Taken as a whole, the studies that have been made on tenancy in Oklahoma indicate that tenants whose stay was about twenty-

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12 Ibid., p. 40.

13 J. T. Sanders, "Landlords, Think Over That Proposed Move--- It May Not Pay," Current Farm Economics, December, 1929, p. 5.

14 Ibid.

five per cent longer than the most frequent movers, had accumulated wealth on an average from two to five times as fast as the frequent movers.[15] Landlords, also, seemingly get a direct economic advantage from the stability of their tenants. Out of 151 cotton tenants studied in 1929[16] the group that had moved more frequently than the average paid the owners of the rented farms an average gross income of 9.3 per cent on the invested capital in land and buildings; while the group that had moved less frequently than the average paid the landlords a return of 13.3 per cent or a return that was over one-third greater than that received by the landlords renting to the frequent movers. Regardless of how much of the results of increased earning power or increased income to the landlord is traceable to greater stability of tenants, both the tenant and landlord should think long and hard before making a change.

Nearly all farmers who move often do not have sheds to protect their machinery from the weather. This extra rusting away costs the moving farmers more than half a million of their thirty-seven million dollars of machinery value each year. This is half as much as all revenue receipts collected by the state in 1924.[17] If half of this nine million was a useless expenditure and the State could have saved it and applied it to taxes, taxes for State purposes and from all sources except oil and automobile could have been reduced by a fourth. And yet the State would have been far better off, for this direct

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15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., p. 6.

17 Proceedings of the Oklahoma Academy of Science, Vol. 7, 1927, p. 212.

cost is undoubtedly only a small part of the total cost of tenant moving.[18]

> During the first three months of an average year approximately one-third of the farms in Oklahoma will change operators. Taking five persons as the average size of the farmer's family, this will mean that about 325,000 people will move from one farm to another. Of this number, almost 50,000 are children of school age, under ten years old, who will change their neighborhood environments, for better or for worse. In most of these cases, the school term will be interrupted by a move in the middle or a late start at the beginning of the semester. The loss of even one day's schooling of 50,000 pupils is the equivalent loss of 250 school years of 180 days for one child. Suppose that the combined expense, paid by the State, school district, and parents, is fifty cents per day per school child, we would have an educational loss to society of $25,000 in operating expense alone for each day these children are out of school. At pre-war figures, each day of school was considered as worth $10 to the child. If this is a fair estimate of worth of a school day, then Oklahoma school children under ten years of age will lose $500,000, so that the net social loss becomes $525,000 per day for each day these children are kept out of school.[19]

The enormity of these figures is such that what they would amount to in the period of 1925 to 1935 in Oklahoma virtually forbids calculation.

Moving has its advantages and disadvantages to tenants. The young developing farmer can make economic progress in two ways. He can advance his tenure status by gaining greater percentage of ownership and control of the capital he uses in his farming; or he can expand the size of his farm business or develop a more efficient business organization. In either case a move where better arrangements can be made may be a good business step and result in a more efficient business. Some phases of profitable farming often require years to develop. Because of this, moving seriously disrupts certain

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[18] Ibid.

[19] O. D. Duncan, op. cit., p. 7.

long time phases of paying farm organizations.

A survey was made during the summer of 1934 by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in six rural high relief rate areas, in which twenty-six counties of Oklahoma were included. Quoting from the report:

> In the period following the World War the acreage under cultivation increased at a rapid rate in response to a high market price and to physiographic conditions of the western part of this area (the western cotton area) which were favorable to cotton growing but unfavorable to the boll weevil. The increase continued up to 1929 and during this development over nine million acres were opened to cotton cultivation in Texas and Oklahoma. Although this increase represented only four per cent of the total acreage, it was 17 per cent of all land under cultivation in 1930 and over 40 per cent of the acreage devoted to cotton in 1930.
>
> Such an expansion of one crop agricultural systems created its own labor problems as its seasonal work demanded heavy peak loads of labor. As a consequence, there are large tenant, cropper, and farm laboring groups with extremely low annual incomes. In some cases the laborers have been described as being under a more intolerable slave system than that which existed in the eastern cotton belt before the Civil War. Approximately half (49 per cent) of the heads of families on relief in this area were either tenants, croppers, or farm laborers.
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> .....In spite of the relatively low relief rate, the cotton areas are definitely problem areas because of the precarious economic position of a large proportion of their families under the one crop, share cropper system of farm tenure.[20]

O. D. Duncan and J. T. Sanders of the Department of Agricultural Economics of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College conducted in 1933 an investigation to inquire into the question of how the economic status of various classes of cotton farmers in Oklahoma is related to their social behavior. To this end, two broad and general economic classifications were adopted for the farm families included in the study,--- tenure status and net wealth status. Certain

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20 Federal Emergency Relief Administration, "Monograph I," Report, 1935, p. 23.

tenure classifications are closely associated with economic status of farmers as shown by the following table:

TABLE II

TENURE OF FARMERS IN ELEVEN COTTON COUNTIES OF OKLAHOMA AS SHOWN BY THE SAMPLE FOR THIS SURVEY AND BY THE CENSUS OF 1925[21]

Tenure Group	Sample		Census	
	Total No. Surveyed	Percent of Sample	Total for 11 C'nties	Percent of Total
TOTAL	1,362	100.0	31,390	100.0
Full owners	405	29.7	8,306	26.4
Part owners	101	7.4	2,352	7.5
Share and cash tenants	735	54.0	18,099	57.7
Croppers	121	8.9	2,633	8.4

With regard to the representativeness of the sample of farmers interviewed for this study, a comparison of the tenure of interviewed farmers with the tenure given by the census shows the discrepancies in percentages for the various tenure groups in the sample and the counties surveyed as shown by the census are very small and the differences are no greater than to be expected in a random statistical sample. (Table II.)

The second general basis of classification for the purpose of conducting the investigation was net wealth. This figure was derived for each farmer by deducting all outstanding indebtedness against him from the sum total of all assets which he owned. From

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21 O. D. Duncan and J. T. Sanders, "A Study of Certain Economic Factors in Relation to Social Life Among Oklahoma Cotton Farmers," Oklahoma Experiment Station Bulletin 211, April, 1933, p. 4.

this figure also was deducted any amount of wealth the farmer had received from gifts, marriage, or inheritance. The final results obtained was an approximation of the amount of net wealth accumulated by the personal efforts of the farmer and his family.[22]

The sociological value of wealth does not rest in the total amount consumed but more especially in how it is consumed. The farmer, like the urban wage earner, usually has an annual income which must be wisely handled if all his obligations are met. For the farmer there are two important classes of expenditures which must be met before other expenses can be paid. These are the cost of operating his business, and the family and personal expense of physiological necessities such as food, clothing, and housing. Satisfaction of his cultural and social wants must be postponed until after all other expenses are paid, if the farm business is to keep going.[23]

To simplify the analysis of the data collected during the survey a careful check was made of the total expenditures and total spendable incomes of all farmers and it was found that in most cases spendable incomes and expenditures approximately balanced.[24] In keeping with the general conditions relating to income and wealth, the total family expenditures run lower, on the average, for tenants and croppers than for full owners and part owners, with croppers ranking lower than any other tenure group.[25] It can be noted from a study of

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22 Ibid., p. 5.

23 Ibid., p. 7.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid. (Table II.)

data of the survey that there is no significant difference between expenditures of owners and part owners, but that there is an appreciable difference between the expenditures of both and that of tenants and especially between them and the croppers.[26]

The tenure status of farmers and their total average expenditures generally rise together or vice versa, so that whatever conclusions apply to differences in total family expenditures in general are applicable to tenure as well. From data of the survey it may be observed that as tenure status and total family expense rise:

1. The relative costs of food decline, but the absolute amount rises.
2. The costs of household operation tend to rise both absolutely and relatively.
3. The relative costs of clothing decrease, although the absolute costs increase.
4. The relative costs of health maintenance remain approximately the same, being slightly higher for the lower tenure and expenditure groups while the absolute costs rise sharply.
5. The costs of advancement rise both relatively and absolutely.
6. Investment expenditures show a slight rise relatively and a distinct absolute rise.
7. Expenditures for automobiles tend to rise both relatively and absolutely.
8. Personal and miscellaneous expenditures show an upward relative and absolute trend.

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26 Ibid.

9. Farm business expenditures, accounting for about one-half of all costs, rise both relatively and absolutely.[27]

A general observation which seems to be justified is that those expenditures which are most governed by definite laws are those connected with physiological needs and those related to farm business. Automobile, personal, investment, and advancement expenditures show a tendency to rise with tenure and economic status, but their rise is somewhat erratic in most cases. These are too closely related to such objective influences as personal tastes and desires, customs, and other factors to be determined entirely by economic conditions of the family.

In 1935, a study on the amount of credits a farm can afford to use, based on farm account records from Garfield County, Oklahoma, 1929 to 1933, showed that on the basis of the average income, it would require fifty years to pay for a farm from the farm earnings. In other words, a farmer who began to buy a farm at the age of twenty-five years would be the owner of it at the age of seventy-five if his income would average as high as it did on these farms that year.[28] A continuation of this same study in 1937 showed that on the basis of the seven-year average farm income about 20 per cent of the farmers could begin as hired hands at the age of sixteen, pass through the tenant stage, and become unencumbered owners at the age of forty-nine. On the average, the whole group would be eighty years of age before accomplishing the same thing with care and frugality. At least twenty

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27 Ibid., p. 10.

28 Peter Nelson, "How Much Credit Can A Farmer Afford to Use?" Current Farm Economics, April, 1935, p. 38.

per cent of these farmers would never be able to leave the tenant stage.[29] Therefore, the ownership route as a solution to the problems of the security of tenure seems inadequate.

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29 Desmond Anker, "How Much Credit Can A Farmer Afford to Use in Buying Land?" Stillwater, 1937, p. 29.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF FARM TENANCY IN OKLAHOMA, 1925 to 1935

The social consequences of farm tenancy are difficult to appraise because the condition is, as are many of our economic and social conditions, one which defies accurate appraisal. In many popular lectures and meetings, almost every known social ill that ails agriculture has been associated with the problem of farm tenancy. A belief which is frequently expressed is that if tenancy could be abolished, rural social institutions would acquire new vigor and take on new life and that farm life would be greatly enriched. There are certain social conditions in Oklahoma that are closely related to tenancy. It shall be the purpose of this chapter to bring out facts regarding these conditions, but the writer does not attempt to show to what extent these conditions are due to farm tenancy or vice versa.

There is no doubt that there are many social disadvantages to the whole system of farm tenancy. But there are undesirable features about almost every social situation. It avails little to condemn outright anything simply because it has faults. Facts that have been discovered so far in the research on the tenancy problem in Oklahoma from 1925 to 1935 reveal that, regardless of faults, the tenant system is probably the best solution to the problem of placing young farmers on the land and allowing them to accumulate resources before starting to buy land. Many have been the numbers of farmers who have tried to buy land before they were able. With very high taxes, rates of interest exorbitant, and without credit or outside resources, the

story of such farmers' undertakings has too often come to a tragic climax. Such farmers probably would have fared much better if they had never attempted to buy land at all.[1]

There are obvious advantages that accrue from tenancy to both tenants and landowners. (Chapter III.) For the tenant himself, it is a means by which he may proceed gradually and at his convenience toward the ownership of land. It gives him time to acquire equipment and capital before assuming the doubly heavy obligation of buying both land and capital without the ability to pay at once for either. Also, it enables the tenant to make an extensive use of land without having to carry the charges for interest, taxation, depreciation, and mortgage payments. At the same time, tenancy affords the landowner an opportunity to have his land cultivated and a means of shifting a large portion, sometimes nearly all, of the current costs of farm operation to someone else. When crops are good and prices are reasonably high, tenancy, thus, is mutually advantageous to both the landlord and the tenant. Under no system of agricultural organization is it possible to find only fault with its social aspects when the economic factors involved are beneficial to both parties to the contract. If tenancy is a means of affording economic security to large numbers of people who would otherwise be dependent upon daily wages at unskilled labor, there is some extenuation for the shortcomings of the system in regard to what may be called its purely social aspects. It is very difficult to separate definitely the economic and social aspects of farm tenancy. Fortunately, the fact that a man

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[1] O. D. Duncan, op. cit., p. 78.

may be a tenant farmer in no wise necessarily militates against his status in the community. It is the man himself, and not the fact that he is a party of the second part in relation to his position on the land that makes or mars his social standing in the community where he resides.[2]

Tenancy is associated positively with illiteracy among the farm population of Oklahoma.[3] As the percentage of farm tenancy increases as one goes from county to county, there is also a marked tendency for the percentage of illiteracy among farmers to rise. In spite of this general truth it is a known fact that farm tenancy in Oklahoma increased during the decade of 1925 to 1935, while the illiteracy among the farm population decreased. The United States Census of 1930 shows that in 1925 58.6 per cent of all Oklahoma farmers were on rented farms. By 1930 this percentage had risen to 61.5. During the same five-year period illiteracy decreased from 4.5 per cent to 3.7 per cent among the rural population of the State.[4] Total illiteracy for the entire state in 1930 was 2.8 per cent. The geographic distribution of illiteracy within the State is such that the high rates tend to follow the rugged forest areas and submarginal agricultural lands, and low rates seem to accompany plains areas and lands of good quality.[5] The geographic distribution of illiteracy and that of high tenancy in the State correspond very closely. (See Chapter II.)

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2 Ibid., p. 79.

3 Ibid., p. 76.

4 Ibid.

5 Oklahoma State Planning Board, Compendium of Maps and Charts Pertaining to State Planning in Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, April, 1936, p. 112.

It is rather probable that in the actual relationship between tenancy and illiteracy, there are selective processes in operation through which illiterate farmers tend to settle on rented farms. Furthermore, they are probably less able to rise to ownership than farmers who can read and write. Thus, tenancy is simply one method of taking care of a class of farmers who would otherwise be compelled to work for wages or would be driven off the land entirely. No doubt they are less likely to become public charges on the farm than they would elsewhere. With tenancy increasing in the State as a whole and illiteracy decreasing from 1925 to 1935 there can certainly be no cause-effect relationship between the two conditions, but through the interaction of other social and economic factors tenancy and illiteracy become closely related without one actually producing the other.

Educational advancement is an index which shows that an individual has attempted to cultivate the esthetic and cultural phases of life as well as to fit himself better for the struggle for existence. Since ownership of a farm represents a higher tenure accomplishment, it is logical that higher educational accomplishments would characterize ownership of farm lands rather than tenancy. A distribution of farmers by tenure and educational classes in eleven counties of Oklahoma is shown in the accompanying table.[6] The general tendencies which these data suggest are: first, in the lower (0-5 yr.) educational group, there is an inverse relation to tenure status; that is, higher proportions of farmers are in each tenure class as we step down the agricultural ladder. Second, in the middle (6-8 yr.) educa-

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[6] O. D. Duncan and J. T. Sanders, op. cit., p. 23.

TABLE I

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FARMERS BY NUMBERS OF YEARS SPENT OR GRADES FINISHED IN SCHOOL

Tenure Classes	Number of Operators	0-5 yr.	6-8 yr.	9 and Over
All counties	1,233	32.4	53.7	13.9
Full owners	360	23.6	53.8	22.5
Part owners	96	34.6	49.0	16.6
Share and Cash Tenants	674	35.0	55.7	9.3
Croppers	103	43.7	44.7	11.6

tional group, the relation of education to tenure status is indefinite. This is probably due to the inability of many high grade farmers to finish more than the grade school because of lack of opportunity, while low grade farmers with better chances in their youth received an equal grade of education. In other words, this represents the meeting place of all grades of farmers, from which point they are sifted out, some rising and some going down on the tenure ladder. Third, in the group of farmers who reached or went beyond high school, the tendency is for the grade of education to vary inversely with the tenure status. There is some irregularity in this group of farmers because of the obvious fact that higher education and better judgment and managerial ability on the farm are not always, or necessarily, closely associated. However, the full owner group of farmers have a higher percentage of high school students and graduates than any other tenure class,[7] and the irregularity is confined to the lower tenure

[7] Ibid., p. 22.

classes. Perhaps this is due to the presence of many young farmers among the tenants and croppers who simply lack capital or resources, but who will later become full owners. The percentage distribution of 1,549 Oklahoma farm children of eleven counties who have ended school life by educational groups according to tenure status of parent, is given in the accompanying table:

TABLE II[8]

Tenure Status	Total No. Children	Percentage Distribution of Children by Years Spent in School or Grades Finished		
		0-8 yr.	9-12 yr.	13 yr. & up
All counties	1,549	67.6	27.0	5.4
Full owners	621	57.2	33.2	9.6
Part owners	339	67.2	29.0	3.8
Share & cash tenants	516	78.7	19.6	1.7
Croppers	74	79.7	18.9	1.4

It is apparent that there is a tendency for lower farm tenure to be associated with lower educational achievement and for ownership to be related to higher education accomplishments. Carrying the analysis further than is shown in the table it was found that of the cropper class of children 79.7 per cent received an average of 5.6 years of schooling and only 1.4 per cent received as much as one year of college education. In the full owner class, 57.2 per cent of the children received an average of 7.3 years of schooling, and 9.6 per cent received an average of three years or more of college education. In other words, in both the lower and the upper educational groups,

8 Ibid., p. 24.

the lower tenure classes are not able to give their children as much schooling or the children are not able or inclined to get as much as is the case with full owner children or even the part-owner's child. Furthermore, large numbers of children have to be satisfied with the minimum educational achievement in the lower tenure groups. In different geographical sections of the cotton growing areas of Oklahoma the same tendency holds true. Everywhere the croppers' and the tenant farmer's children are unable financially or otherwise to get their respective shares of the educational opportunities which the State offers to its people.

The selection of occupation is one of the primary means of social climbing, especially in Western societies. Thus it is that the children of farmers in choosing occupations outside of agriculture may pass from one social plane to another that is different. This social climbing up or down as the case may be is an attempt on the part of those leaving the farm to find new spheres of activity, new economic opportunities that look more attractive than agriculture, new fields that seem to fit the ability or inclination of the individual, or new liberties which are not to be had in agriculture. Table III shows the percentage distribution of Oklahoma farmers' children regardless of sex who have chosen occupations in various occupational groups, according to tenure status of parents.[9] From a study of Table III it is significant to note that the children of tenants and croppers remain on the farm in greater proportion than children of owners. Also, of those children who leave the farm,

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[9] O. D. Duncan and J. T. Sanders, op. cit., p. 29.

TABLE III

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN IN OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

Tenure Class	Total Children	Agriculture	Trades and Industries	Professions
All counties	1,157	57.6	34.0	8.4
Full owners	496	54.6	33.3	12.1
Part owners	117	45.3	42.7	12.0
Share and cash tenants	490	63.3	32.4	4.3
Croppers	54	59.2	35.2	5.6

greater proportions of the children of owners rather than of tenants and croppers enter the professional classes. This can be explained in a large measure by the fact that owners' children attain higher achievements in education for the most part than the children of tenants and croppers. (Table I.)

There is also a definite relation between the number of years which children remain in school and occupational classes in which they have become identified. Table IV shows the occupational distribution of farm children, regardless of sex, who have chosen occupations, according to the amount of education they received.[10]

Table IV shows that the majority of all children studied became attached to agriculture but that there is a pronounced tendency for those with high school and college training to go into business or industry and into the professions. This certainly shows an inverse relation between the amount of education received and the proportion of

[10] Ibid., p. 34.

TABLE IV

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN
BY OCCUPATIONAL CLASSES

Period of Education (Years or Grade Finished in School)	Total Number of Children	Agriculture	Trade And Industry	Professions
All counties	1,057	57.5	34.6	6.9
0-8 years	699	64.1	32.0	3.9
9-12 years	302	48.3	39.4	12.3
13 and up	56	25.0	41.1	33.9

children who stayed on farms. In both the business and professional groups the relation is direct. As the amount of education increases, the percentage of children going into the urban occupations increases; but the proportions entering the professions increases more rapidly than the proportions going into trade and industry. In different sections of the State the percentages of the children who stay on the farms vary somewhat, but this occurs without destroying the general tendency of an inverse relation between educational advancement and the occupational stability of farming.[11]

Farm tenancy is usually pictured as being at its worst in the region of cotton farming. Oklahoma ranks fourth among the states in cotton production, and in 1925 was exceeded in rate of tenancy by only six other southern and southwestern states.[12] These were South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. What-

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11 Ibid.

12 T. C. McCormick and Ellen Barney, "Farm Tenancy and Social Factors---a Study in Oklahoma," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 37, February, 1932, p. 588.

ever evil effects tenancy may have on social life and organization, therefore, should be found in Oklahoma. Also, the situation in Oklahoma is simplified by the fact that 90 per cent of the tenants are whites, most of them of native parentage.

Thomas C. McCormick of the University of Arkansas and Ellen Barney of Ada, Oklahoma, in 1932 made an exploratory study of the relationship between farm tenancy and other social factors in Oklahoma, when they were connected with the East Central State Teachers' College. The territory covered in their exploratory study included the sixty-three counties in Oklahoma which in 1919 grew an appreciable amount of cotton. The central motive of the study was:

> ....to obtain a preliminary statistical test of a prevalent conviction that farm tenancy constitutes a serious handicap to the efficient functioning of the public-school system in the cotton growing sections of Oklahoma..[13]

From a number of possible ways of measuring school attendance for the purpose of comparing farm owners' and tenants' children in this respect, it was decided to select the percentage of children sixteen and seventeen years of age attending in order to test whether owners' children continue school at the high school age to a greater extent than tenants' children. The study showed that as the percentage of tenants increases in a county, the percentage of children sixteen and seventeen years of age attending school decreases sharply. Much of this relationship turns out to be misleading, however, because the study made covered only the leading cotton producing counties. This relation depends upon the association between percentage of tenancy and percentage of improved farm acreage planted to cotton. The fac-

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[13] Ibid., p. 591.

tor of percentage population in counties that are largely urban is also eliminated in the study.

> Nevertheless, according to this result, the older children of farm tenants in the cotton growing counties of Oklahoma probably do attend school to a slightly less extent than do the children of corresponding age of farm owners.[14]

Another available barometer of educational status in the counties of greatest cotton acreage of Oklahoma is the percentage of illiteracy.[15] The study indicates that there is a small but probably significant excess of illiterates among farm tenants as compared with farm owners in Oklahoma. We may, therefore, venture the interpretation from close examination of the results of the study that there is probably a genuine but low positive relationship between farm tenancy and illiteracy in Oklahoma.

> Results of the study deny that the cotton growing regions of Oklahoma counties with a large percentage of farm tenants are less able to support the public schools than are counties with a small percentage of tenants, and there is no evidence that counties with many farm tenants make less effort than do counties with few tenants to support the rural public schools, and that the chief factor affecting the efficiency of the public school system in Oklahoma is not necessarily farm tenancy, but more the percentage of population, urban in a given county.[16]

> .....This preliminary analysis of data by the statistical method of partial correlation indicates that farm tenancy in Oklahoma is so closely associated with cotton farming that when the percentage of cotton acreage is held constant, the correlation between tenancy and most of the factors here examined, which are generally supposed to be adversely affected by tenancy, is greatly reduced or entirely removed. There is, however, a slight unfavorable relationship between farm tenancy and school attendance and between farm tenancy and illiteracy. The implication is that many of the social deficiencies in the rural regions of the cotton

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14 Ibid., p. 592.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., p. 593.

belt are due less to farm tenancy than to the economic conditions growing out of the traditional system of cotton production.[17]

It is thought by many that all social institutions in the rural community suffer in a manner similar to the way education suffers from a shifting population engendered by a high per cent of tenancy. No doubt there is much truth in this, but other factors such as religion and government can scarcely be estimated in monetary terms. (See Chapter III.) From the standpoint of social science, membership in this or that church or religious denomination is entirely a personal matter. What is scientifically important is that active membership in any church indicates a desire on the part of a person to cultivate the finer interests of life, to find peace of mind and surcease from the drudgery of being incessantly driven by the material problems connected with earning a living.

A survey was made in 1925 of 855 farm families in eight cotton producing counties of Oklahoma in an attempt to determine in a general way if there is any definite relation between membership in some church organization and the positions which farmers of Oklahoma occupy on the agricultural and economic ladder.[18] The field work was done by W. W. Fetrow, formerly of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College. No effort was made to make any distinctions between denominations.

The sample contained 1572 male and female heads of families and unmarried operators. Of this number, 51.5 per cent were men and 48.5

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17 Ibid., p. 594.

18 O. D. Duncan, "Relation of Tenure and Economic Status of Farmers to Church Membership," Social Forces, Vol. XI, 1933, p. 541.

per cent were women, most of whom were wives of the male operators. No separate analysis was made for unmarried operators, either male or female, or for widowed and divorced operators. These persons were first classified on a basis of tenure status in order that a comparison could be made with the farm population of the state as a whole. The proportions of farmers in tenure groups included in the sample did not vary significantly from the respective percentages of the different tenure classes in the total farm population of the state.

TABLE V

DESCRIPTION OF OKLAHOMA FARMERS BY TENURE STATUS[19]

Tenure Classes of Operators	No. of Cases in Sample—— Both Sexes	Per Cent In Each Class Sample	Per Cent in Each Class State
All Classes	1,572	100.0	100.0
Full owners	442	28.1	30.9
Part owners	155	9.9	10.4
Share and cash tenants	851	54.1	52.0
Croppers	124	7.9	6.7

The table shows the degree of similarity between the percentage distribution of the farm operators of the state on a tenure basis and that of the sample. There is no significant variation in any tenure group.

The study showed the percentage of operators and wives in the group studied who were church members, based on tenure status of farm

19 Ibid., p. 542.

operators. (See Table VI).

The study showed that while there was an excess of males over females in each tenure class, the greatest difference was found in the cropper group. There was also a majority of church members over non-church members in all classes, but the study revealed that there was a tendency for the proportion of church members to increase as farmers rise on the tenure ladder. However, the majorities of church members over non-members are very small for the renting and especially for the cropper operators. (Table VII).

In any study of religious life consideration must be given to the sex factor. Among Oklahoma cotton farmers there is a higher proportion of female than of male church members in all tenure classes of operators. However, the female excess over male operators is least for the owner group and greatest for croppers, according to the study. Yet, the percentage of all male church members was 0.9 per cent below the percentage of male operators in the sample, and that of all female church members was 26.2 per cent above the percentage of females in the total population of the sample. The data that have been presented show that the percentage in church membership in both sexes increases with the advancement in both tenure and economic status. (Tables VII and VIII).

In the case of both males and females the percentage of church membership varies directly with the tenure status, while the ratio of males and females in each tenure class tends to vary inversely with height on the agricultural ladder. However, the percentage of females in the lower tenure brackets who were church members was considerably higher than the percentage of male church members among

TABLE VI[20]

PERCENTAGE OF OPERATORS AND WIVES IN GROUP STUDIED WHO WERE CHURCH MEMBERS---BASED ON TENURE STATUS OF FARM OPERATORS

Tenure Classes of Operators	Total Number of Both Sexes	Percent of Sample Who Were Operators	Percent of Sample Who Were Wives	% of Both Sexes Who Were Church Members	% of Operators Church Members	% of Wives Church Members	Excess Percentage of Female Over % of Male Church Members
All classes	1,572	51.5	48.5	62.3	50.6	74.7	24.1
Full owners	442	51.4	48.6	70.8	60.8	81.4	19.6
Part owners	115	51.0	49.0	74.2	60.8	88.2	27.4
Share & cash tenants	851	51.5	48.5	57.3	45.3	70.0	24.7
Croppers	124	54.0	46.0	50.8	38.8	64.9	26.1

20 Ibid., p. 543.

the upper tenure classes. For example, 64.9 per cent of the wives of the cropper group were members against 60.8 per cent of the male operators in the full owner class. Results of study indicate that apparently the economic factors of all sorts play a more important role in the cultural lives of males than of females, because the variation in church membership between different groups seems to be greater for men than for women. Approximately the same spread obtains between the proportion of male and female church members throughout all tenure groups.

TABLE VII[21]

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF BOTH SEXES AMONG TOTAL CHURCH MEMBERS ACCORDING TO TENURE STATUS OF OPERATORS (ON BASIS OF TOTAL NUMBER OF CHURCH MEMBERS)

Tenure of Classes	Total Church Members	% of Church Members Who Were Operators	% of Church Members Who Were Wives	Excess of Females over Males Per 100 Church Members
TOTAL	979	41.9	58.1	16.2
Full owners	313	44.1	55.9	11.8
Part owners	115	41.7	58.3	16.6
Share and cash tenants	448	40.6	59.4	18.8
Croppers	63	41.3	58.7	17.4

As is shown in Table VII there is a predominance of females among church members just as there was in the percentage of the general population of the sample. (Table V). However, when only the number of church members was considered, the difference in favor of fe-

21 Ibid., p. 544.

males was found to be somewhat smaller than in the total sample. Nevertheless, approximately one-sixth more of the church membership is made up of females than of males.

It is difficult to decide whether church membership and rise in the tenure status are causally interdependent. From the result of studies made there would doubtless be a degree of truth in such an assumption. On the other hand, numerous social and other economic conditions may exercise overshadowing influences to make the results of such a study variable. Table VIII[22] shows the sex distribution of church members among operators and wives by net wealth status of operators.

TABLE VIII

SEX DISTRIBUTION OF CHURCH MEMBERS BY NET WEALTH STATUS
(ON BASIS OF TOTAL NUMBER OF CHURCH MEMBERS)

Net Wealth Group of Operators	Total Church Members	% of Church Members Who Were Operators	% of Church Members Who Were Wives	Excess of Females over Males Per 100 Church Members
ALL CLASSES	897	41.5	58.5	17.0
Up to $999	297	41.8	58.2	16.4
$1,000-$4,999	318	39.3	60.7	21.4
$5,000 and over	282	43.6	56.4	12.8

It is significant that in both tables VII and VIII in the lower brackets of both tenure and economic status, the percentages of church members who were males were greater than the corresponding proportions of males in the upper brackets. Whatever interdependence

22 Ibid.

there may be between tenure and church membership, it is probable that the ability of a farm family to maintain membership in religious organizations is more dependent upon economic prosperity than is prosperity dependent upon church membership. At any rate, conclusions as to which is cause and which is effect in such cases should be drawn advisedly. Whatever significance may be apparent from the study, it must be remembered that improved tenure and economic status are simply associated with a rise in the percentage of church membership in each advanced group and are not to be taken as cause and effect relationship.

In a special study made later by O. D. Duncan of the Agricultural Economics Department of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, he found that church membership in Oklahoma is affected adversely by farm tenancy. His study showed that, among full owner farmers and their wives, approximately 71 per cent were church members; for part owners, 74 per cent; for share and cash tenants, 57 per cent; and for croppers, 51 per cent were actually affiliated with churches.[23] According to Mr. Duncan's conclusion:

> Tenant farmers do not maintain membership in churches to as great an extent as owner farmers. This is possibly due to the fact that church membership involves some financial responsibility which the tenant is often not as able to incur as the farm owner. It is also possible that the church itself exercises other selective influences which tend to draw into them more owners than tenants. Age is one of these factors. Since youth, tenancy, and small wealth are associated closely, as a rule, it is often difficult for young farmers to make substantial financial contributions to church budgets, and for that reason they may be reluctant to join a church when they otherwise would. This probably is a causal factor in keeping church membership among tenant farmers relatively low. Owner farmers are generally somewhat older and are more able financially to support church activities

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23 O. D. Duncan, op. cit., p. 76.

> on an average than tenant farmers. Permanent residence in the community is a factor which, no doubt, affects church membership. As a rule, owner farmers live on the same farm many times longer than tenant farmers and even in the same community a great deal longer. The factor would tend to operate adversely for the tenant in relation to membership in churches.[24]

It seems that whatever economic and social conditions facilitate a rise toward ownership also contribute an inclination toward at least nominal membership in some church organization.

The age of farm population is significant in judging the social importance of farm tenancy in Oklahoma. In those counties which have over 60 per cent of tenants among their farmers, only a little more than 16 per cent of their farm population is over forty-five years of age. In contrast with this, in the counties in which tenants make up 45 per cent or less of the total farmers, almost 22 per cent of the farm population is over that age.[25] This may come about in several ways: (1) in the counties of high tenancy relatively fewer young people leave the farms. In a study made by O. D. Duncan, in collaboration with J. T. Sanders, formerly of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, it was found that about 65 per cent of the children of tenants remain on farms as compared with 53 per cent of the children of full-owner farmers in the high tenure areas of Oklahoma. (2) Probably the greater proportion of migrants from cities to farms are comparatively young people, and (3) among the more inert types of tenant farmers, who are generally found in greatest proportions in the areas of greatest tenancy, the number of children per family is somewhat greater than in low tenancy areas. It also seems

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[24] Ibid., p. 77.

[25] Ibid.

to be true that in the low tenancy areas, farm owners stay on their farms somewhat longer than in areas where the proportions of tenancy are highest.[26] Reasoning from this, it appears that excessively high tenancy is no doubt responsible in some degree for the instability of social institutions in the high tenancy areas of the State.

O. D. Duncan, of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, made a study in 1932 to test the truth of the belief that the greatest increase in farm population comes from the lower class of tenants. The data in Table IX summarizes in a rough way the findings of this study. Although these figures show only the gross fertility of the total number of families in each tenure group, they give one an idea of the comparative importance of each tenure class in the production of farm population for the coming generation. The data collected by Mr. Duncan in his study indicate that the owning classes have a higher fecundity than the tenant classes. Rather than creating a surplus of population, the tenant classes are to some extent being recruited from the owning classes themselves. Of course, tenancy for the children of farm owners is only a temporary condition. But, so it is for a large percentage of the children of renting farmers also. In spite of the fact that the majority of all farmers in Oklahoma are renters of one sort or another, there is a high degree of social climbing among them, so that by the time old age is reached tenant farmers are considerably in the minority. Mr. Duncan says concerning the results of his study:

> On the whole, when we use tenure status as a rough index of socio-economic advancement among farmers, the data used in this

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26 Ibid.

TABLE IX[27]

INCREASE IN FARM POPULATION, TABULATED BY TENURE CLASSES
(NOT STANDARDIZED FOR AGE AND DURATION OF MARRIAGE FACTORS)

Tenure Classes	Total Families	Per Cent of Total Families	Total Children	Per Cent of Total Children	Percentage Ratio of Actual to Expected Fertility
All Classes	1,259	100.0	3,592	100.0	100.0
All Owners	472	37.5	1,501	41.8	111.5
All tenants	787	62.5	2,091	58.2	93.1
Full owners	376	29.9	1,102	30.7	102.7
Part owners	96	7.6	399	11.1	146.4
Share and cash tenants	684	54.3	1,805	50.2	92.4
Croppers	103	8.2	286	8.0	97.6

27 O. D. Duncan, "Population Increase According to Farm Status," Sociology and Social Research, Jan.-Feb., 1932, XVI, p. 247.

> study indicate, with admitted variations, that the owning classes are considerably more fertile than renters in the production of human offspring, if proportions are considered. However, this does not imply that there is a progressive and uniformly positive correlation between tenure status and fertility. Tenure status is not susceptible to a sufficiently nice definition to enable it to fluctuate freely without dependence upon a great number of factors, each of which may have as significant an influence as the birth rate.[28]

The data on the study as to the relation between farm tenure status and population increase furnish an example of how exceptions may take place in any general law. However, according to Mr. Duncan, the fact that an exception has been found does not nullify the general principle relating to vital processes, but it should, in this case, cause those who contend that tenant farmers are the principal sources of increase in the farm population to re-examine their premises and determine whether or not such fears are based upon the supposed evil of tenancy as a phase of our agricultural system or upon the relative numerical importance of different tenure groups.

Morris M. Blair, Associate Professor of Economics, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, says in part:

> The financial status of tenants in Oklahoma ranges all the way from the large operators of extensive and fertile well-improved farms with considerable incomes to the squalor and poverty of large families in one or two room shacks on lands where they are not even given space for a garden or pasture for a cow. Farm tenants can not be characterized as a class, for there are many classes of tenants. The lowest class in the financial scale is the cropper. Croppers are tenants with little or no property and no credit. They have to rent on the terms of the landlord, who must furnish them all supplies and take a mortgage on their crop and other small property. Often the total rate of interest charges is from 20 to 50 per cent. Even at this rate the landlords sometimes lose money because of the inefficiency and lack of interest on the part of the cropper.[29]

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28 Ibid., p. 249.

29 Morris M. Blair, loc. cit.

The average amount of farm tools and property of Oklahoma colored croppers is $72.[30] Farmers in such abject poverty are at the mercy of any landlord or credit merchant who may supply them with food and clothing. They are fortunate indeed if at the end of the year they are not deeper in debt than at the beginning. White croppers in Oklahoma are only slightly better off than their colored neighbors. They have only an average of $196 worth of tools and farm property.

The full picture of the poverty of the cropper tenant is not shown until we look at the house in which he lives. The average value of Oklahoma farms, land and buildings, is $6,000, but the farms of croppers are worth only $2,000. When we consider that croppers are often, if not usually, found on good land, it becomes evident that the $2,000 value of the cropper's farm is all in the land. The farm he works is a small patch of from 30 to 50 acres of land valued at from $30 to $50 an acre. The buildings on such farms are old, rickety shacks of one or two rooms, in most cases unfit for human habitation.[31]

A survey made by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in 1935 in which thirty-four counties of Oklahoma were included, showed in the area surveyed, that 70 per cent of the families in the area were receiving federal relief of some kind in 1934. Only 16 per cent of this group owned their homes. Fifty-five per cent of the white and 60 per cent of the Negro families receiving Federal relief were renters. Twenty-nine and twenty-three per cent, respectively, were

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30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

squatters.[32]

> Such an expansion of a one-crop agricultural system created its own labor problems as its seasonal work demanded heavy peak loads of labor. As a consequence there are large tenant, cropper, and farm laboring groups with extremely low annual incomes. In some cases the laborers have been described as being under a more intolerable slave system than that which existed in the Eastern Cotton Belt before the Civil War. Approximately half of the heads of families on relief in this area were either tenants, croppers, or farm laborers.[33]

With no tools or livestock, with scarcely any house furniture, and only a hut in which to live, with no credit, and with only a large but often inefficient labor supply, the possibilities of the typical cotton cropper of Oklahoma rising to home ownership are about zero. Under present conditions not one in a thousand of them can ever be better off financially than he is at present.

Much could be said of the general decay of rural communities and rural institutions. Morris M. Blair describes:

> ....weatherbeaten churches falling into decay, now unfrequented except by the bats and owls and passing hoboes, stand by the roadside of every county in the nation, mute and portentous monuments of a general rural decay. Oklahoma has her share. In many sections the schools are only somewhat less dilapidated. Transient tenants have only a passing interest in any particular local social institution. His children attend school in one district for a year or so, and then in another. Successful social institutions are the result of persistent, long-continued efforts, and until our system of transient tenancy is changed, most rural social institutions will continue to decay.[34]

The decline of democracy itself is closely linked with increasing tenancy. Tenants with little or no property have little or no understanding or sympathy with questions of taxation or the general econom-

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32 Federal Emergency Relief Administration, op. cit., p. 83.

33 Ibid., p. 23.

34 Morris M. Blair, loc. cit.

ic welfare. It is not the tenant's fault. It is the condition into which he has been forced. Any of us, if long forced to occupy his condition, would find ourselves in his attitudes. With all of his shortcomings and weaknesses, we must not blame the tenant. He is largely the victim of circumstances, over which he has no control. Oftentimes he has been born into tenancy, with all of its limitations, and has never been able to get out or even see out. Forces beyond his knowledge and control, social, economic and political hold him as in a vice. Often he wants to be free but he doesn't know where or how to begin.

This problem vitally affects the cities because no city reproduces itself biologically or in leadership. The rural areas constantly feed the urban centers. Many if not most of the leading bankers, merchants, physicians, lawyers, and teachers which guide our present cities came from the rural village or even from the open country.

If our soil is to be conserved successfully, if our rural institutions are to be revived, if rural democracy--- yes, if national democracy is to survive, if our national culture is to continue on the upward trend of the past century, the farm tenancy problem must be solved. Oklahoma has her full share of this vexing question, but if the citizens of Oklahoma will consciously and honestly apply the intelligence and energy which have built the great State during the past half-century, they can do much toward solving it during the next generation.

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