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FEDERAL LAND-USE POLICY AND RESETTLEMENT IN THE GREAT
PLAINS: AN EXPERIMENT IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DURING THE
NEW DEAL YEARS, 1933-1941

by

Theresa A. Glanz

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FEDERAL LAND-USE POLICY AND RESETTLEMENT IN THE GREAT
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University of Nebraska, 2020

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In 1933, the United States federal government authorized the National Industrial Recovery Act to help the country recover from the Great Depression. Section 208, Title II of the National Industrial Recovery Act authorized the creation of subsistence homesteads to aid in the recovery of destitute rural families and the urban unemployed. Between 1933 and 1941, the United States federal government authorized the construction of 207 rural and urban resettlement communities to house impoverished farm families and unemployed urban workers. The projects were located throughout the United States, including in the territories of Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The resettlement communities were designed as small-scale farmsteads that allowed the residents space to grow produce and raise livestock for family consumption with the goal of keeping the settlers off government relief rolls. The Division of Subsistence Homesteads, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and the Resettlement Administration were the primary federal agencies with administrative oversight of the various projects. Despite

the support of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt for the resettlement communities, they never did receive congressional support and as a result the Resettlement Administration was defunded in 1937 by the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act. This dissertation examines the federal agencies involved in the resettlement projects' creation and describes the communities built within the United States with an emphasis on the communities built in Nebraska.

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List of Government Agency Acronyms

Division of Subsistence Homesteads (DSH)

Farm Security Administration (FSA)

Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA)

Land Utilization Program (LUP)

National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA)

Nebraska Emergency Relief Administration (NERA)

Public Works Administration (PWA)

Resettlement Administration (RA)

Rural Rehabilitation Corporation (RRC)

State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA)

Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The basic purposes of economic life do not change. The desire for security, stability, a rising standard of living, increased leisure, self-expression and creative work, remain fairly constant. It is the ideas concerning ways and means by which these objectives may be achieved that must be subject to revision.

-The Future of the Great Plains: Report of the Great Plains Committee, 1936, p. 63.

Between the years 1933 and 1941 the United States federal government enacted dozens of programs aimed at rectifying the environmental and economic problems created, in part, from ill-suited land policies and a lack of land-use planning. Until the 1930s the federal government's attempts at land-use planning had been the enactment of various land settlement policies and the Land Ordinance Act of 1785 which provided for the surveying of land based on the township-and-range system.

Prior to the 1930s much of the settlement across the United States had occurred with little regard to the climate found in the different regions. The prevailing theory of settlement had been that what worked for the areas east of the 98th meridian would work for areas west of it. Few believed that farming practices successful in the eastern United States or Europe would fail in the American West. Time would reveal the fallacy of this thinking as thousands of

farm families could not sustain themselves on land that was ill suited for cash-crop cultivation.

In the 1930s, it was estimated that 10 million acres in the United States needed to be repurchased by the federal government in order to remove families from submarginal lands and to adjust the land to uses other than crop cultivation. To aid in removing destitute families from submarginal lands, multiple federal, state, and local government agencies worked together to create resettlement communities that would be used to help relocate some of the families to more sustainable lands.

The resettlement projects of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and the Resettlement Administration are not the same as the public housing projects that were approved and funded under the Wagner Steagall Act of 1937 (aka United States Housing Act of 1937). The Wagner Steagall Act emphasized the removal of urban slums and the construction of new affordable housing units; however, the approved formula for calculating the number of new homes to build was based on nothing more than a one for one ratio: for each substandard housing unit that was demolished, one new housing unit would be constructed. While the Wagner Steagall Act was created to help improve housing standards for low-income urban populations it did not work to increase the supply of affordable housing nor did it promote

low-income homeownership. The New Deal resettlement programs also worked to remove people from poverty-stricken areas and to raise housing standards, but they differed from the 1937 Wagner Steagall Act because they were designed to encourage homeownership among low-income households. In addition, the resettlement programs promoted a subsistence lifestyle (a combination of farming and industrial work) that was intended to keep people off government relief rolls.

Statement of Purpose

While there is considerable research regarding the origins, implementation, and outcomes of the Wagner-Steagall Act of 1937 (Clement, 2012; Radford, 2000), there is limited research on the resettlement communities developed during the years 1933-1941. Furthermore, due to the short time frame in which the projects were carried out, and the shifting of responsibility to and between various federal departments, there is confusion as to which agencies planned, built, and managed the various resettlement communities. The resettlement programs also appear to have suffered from a lack of understanding about what the goals of the programs were. Were the communities for the unemployed or was employment a prerequisite for selected families? Were the homes meant to be temporary rental units or were they intended to be

permanent owner-occupied residences? Were the communities for demonstrating how farming and industrial work could be combined to create a subsistence lifestyle that could keep people off the government relief rolls or were they models for creating future government housing projects?

This dissertation examines the geography of public policy and its effect on land and life. It will examine the role of the federal government in rectifying the environmental and economic losses suffered by rural residents by creating, funding, and administering programs with the intent of reclaiming submarginal lands and resettling destitute farm families on more productive lands during the New Deal administration years from 1933-1941. This dissertation will add to the limited research on the origins and outcomes of the resettlement communities by discussing the federal land policies that contributed to the need for them, the federal agencies that were involved with the creation of the communities, the projects that were approved and completed in the United States, and the remaining evidence of the communities on the Nebraska landscape in the early 21st century.

Literature Review

Much of the research on the resettlement communities was written during the 1930s while the projects were being planned and built. These documents

were often written by federal employees (Wilson, 1934; Landis, 1935; Gray 1936 and 1939; Cronin, 1939; Tugwell, 1959) or agencies (United States Department of Interior, 1935; Resettlement Administration, 1936; Federal Works Agency, 1942). The limited written research beyond the 1930s may be due to the unpopularity of the program, the rapidity at which the program evolved and shifted between different agencies (Saloutos, 1969), poor record keeping by the federal government (Clawson, 1978, pp. 2-3), or that within a 13-year time span, from 1933 to 1945, the United States shifted from dealing with the Great Depression to World War II and then into post-World War II urban planning. In addition, Maher (2000) stated that while many Plains scholars have focused on the Dust Bowl region, many have neglected researching the impact the New Deal programs had on it, which includes the development of the resettlement communities.

The research for this dissertation focused, in part, on developing an understanding of why these communities were considered a possible solution to the economic and environmental problems many areas of the United States were experiencing in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. This meant that I needed to understand what events occurred that would eventually prompt the federal government to create a program that aimed to relocate thousands of impoverished families to resettlement communities. I also needed to understand

what the purpose of these communities were and how they differed from traditional community development.

Research into the resettlement communities began with the review of several published papers that focused on the land conservation efforts undertaken in the 1920s and 1930s. The research focused on the growing concern that settled land had been misused, which left thousands of farm families in poverty, unable to move from their farms, but also unable to survive if they stayed. The establishment of resettlement communities by the federal government was a national endeavor meant to help destitute farm families; however, discussions regarding the communities often appear only as brief passages in some of the scholarly papers reviewed. For example, Gray's 1936 article about the implications of various federal land policies discussed the scope of the land reclamation effort, the agencies involved in acquiring land, and the number of families that would need to be relocated from federally purchased land. However, there is barely a paragraph explaining the subsistence homesteads. The brevity of the passages on the resettlement communities neglects the scope and importance of the projects that were scattered throughout the United States.

Much of the published literature about the resettlement communities has focused on the federal government's Resettlement Administration and the Farm

Security Administration as the primary administrative units. This neglects the significant roles the Division of Subsistence Homesteads and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration played in bringing the projects to fruition. It also places a false emphasis on the role of the Farm Security Administration in the creation of the communities. For example, Cannon (1996) stated that the work of the rural resettlement projects was directed by the Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration, which omits the role other agencies played in the development of these communities prior to the authorization of the Resettlement Administration in 1935. Rex Tugwell (1959), who was the Resettlement Administration director, discussed the objectives and criticisms of the Resettlement Administration in his article titled "*The Resettlement Idea*", but he also neglected to discuss the roles of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in the creation of the communities. The focus on just one or two federal agencies is not unique to Cannon and Tugwell, which may be due to the fact that the resettlement agencies did not operate in isolation, but rather in cooperation with other federal agencies such as the Soil Conservation Agency, the Public Works Administration, and the Federal Housing Administration. This may have contributed to the difficulty in understanding which agency completed which projects. Recognition of the

various agencies involved with resettlement is important in understanding the goals of the resettlement programs and who they intended to help.

One overriding theme in several of the reviewed papers is the role that land settlement policies had in contributing to the large-scale farm failures that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s. Landis (1935), Gray (1936), Richardson (1937), Cronin (1939), McDean (1984), and Libecap & Hansen (2002) all argue that an overreliance on small farms, as dictated by the settlement policies of the federal government, and a lack of information about the climate in the Great Plains, were the two major elements that contributed to the systemic failure that had occurred. It became clear that research into the resettlement communities could not be properly written without an understanding of the land policies the United States had pursued to settle and populate western lands.

Few scholarly writings have offered a complete picture of what the resettlement projects were, how they were implemented, and what the outcomes of the program were. Robert Carriker and C.K. Roberts both have detailed narratives of the communities in the western and southeastern regions of the United States, but do not examine the projects beyond their state or region of focus. Robert Carriker (2010) wrote about the implementation, building, and management of the subsistence projects in Arizona in his book titled *Urban Farming in the West: A New Deal Experiment in Subsistence Homesteads*. In 2013,

C.K. Roberts described the implementation process and perceived outcomes of the five resettlement projects constructed in Alabama. His article titled "*New Community – Building in the South: The Subsistence Homesteads around Birmingham, Alabama*" is one of the few that discusses how residents viewed the communities. Roberts is also one of the few authors that recognized the difference in community types. He states that the Alabama program was of the industrial type, which meant the communities were designed specifically for those who worked in the nearby industries. While research exists on specific communities in specific locations (i.e., Arizona and Alabama) there appears to be little to no research into the dozens of other communities, including those built in Nebraska.

When explaining the distinction between rational and romantic agrarianism, David B. Danbom (1991) wrote about the appeal of romantic agrarianism which linked rural life to a morally and spiritually beneficial life that could not be found in urban centers and how the subsistence homesteads program aligned with those beliefs. He noted that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's support of rural living and subsistence homesteads was an indication of a desire to promote an agrarian lifestyle. However, Danbom stated that the communities were criticized "by conservatives for its utopianism" (Danbom, 1991, p. 7) and they may have been better received by men than by women, who tended to have a negative view of rural life. Contrary to other researchers who

focused on the land conservation efforts and impoverished farm families, Danbom wrote that the subsistence homesteads program rewarded the large commercial farmers through the advancement of technology, efficiency, and market-oriented production (Danbom, 1991, p.8). While there may be support for his view there is no prior published research which states the subsistence program was directed towards anyone other than destitute families living on submarginal lands or in the industrial city centers characterized by high unemployment.

Cronin (1939) discussed the problems with the early land policies and the impact they had on settlement. He believed that adequate information about the Great Plains environment was missing, which prevented the settlers and the federal government from making appropriate decisions about where people should settle and how they should farm the land. Cronin believed the government needed to take responsibility for the disaster of the 1930s and provide aid to destitute farmers. He believed the government needed to focus on eliminating rural slums, but he understood that suitable locations for resettlement projects would be difficult to find. However, Cronin expressed concern that moving rural families to the fringes of towns might not improve their plight, but rather leave them trapped in a cycle of unsustainable living. Cronin also stated that it was unfortunate that there were not studies planned to



Figure 1.1. Henry Holt was an African American farmer who the Resettlement Administration moved off submarginal land near Black River Falls, Wisconsin. (United States Resettlement Administration, 1937)



Figure 1.2. Part of family of ten to be resettled from the Ross-Hocking Land Utilization Project area near Chillicothe, Ohio. (United States Resettlement Administration, 1936).

find out the status of the rural families that had been moved and resettled elsewhere, and whether the move was to a location of one's own choosing or to a location chosen by the government. Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show people who were selected for removal from submarginal land. Figure 1.1 shows Henry Holt who was moved off the submarginal land he was farming in Wisconsin, but it does not indicate where he moved to. Figure 1.2 shows a family that was selected for resettlement so the Ross-Hocking Land Utilization Project¹ could be completed. There is also no indication of where this family moved to. A survey would have provided valuable information regarding the outcomes of resettlement, but no formal survey of the resettlement families has been found that would have addressed Cronin's concerns.

McMurry (1936) wrote that a problem with the land-use studies conducted during the 1920s and 1930s was the lack of geographical orientation. He stated that much of the land-use research was driven by groups with a narrow focus on topics such as economics, forestry, sociology, botany, and political science. The narrowness of their research often excluded information at

¹ The Tar Hollow region, in south-central Ohio, was purchased by the federal government for the Ross-Hocking Land Utilization Project. One of the goals of the project was to move people from submarginal land to more productive areas that would enable them to create a more self-sufficient life. According to the Tar Hollow State Park website, many of the removed residents chose to stay in the area resettling on submarginal land that surrounded the project area (www.tarhollowstatepark.com website). The acquired project land was used for recreational purposes. In 1939, ownership of it was transferred to the state of Ohio.

the regional scale that combined topographical detail with economic, human, and agricultural data. McMurray believed that the land readjustment policies of the 1930s demonstrated a bias that was reflected in the chosen procedures and objectives that had “been narrowed to fit the use concepts of the particular bureau or organization in charge, and most other phases of the problem have been ignored” (McMurry, 1936, p. 93). This meant that one aspect of the human, economic, political, or natural environment was often emphasized without consideration of the impact on the other spheres of influence. While the resettlement communities did not operate at a regional scale², the communities were planned to simultaneously improve the physical, human, and economic environments of the resettlement participants.

Methodology

Multiple sources were used to gather information on the resettlement communities. Much of the information came directly from United States federal government reports written during the 1930s that were found in the National Archives, the Library of Congress, HathiTrust.org, and the University of Nebraska – Lincoln library system. In addition to web-based research, an in-

² The resettlement programs were approved and funded at the national level, but the implementation of the programs was carried out at the state and local levels.

person search was conducted at the National Archives in Kansas City Missouri which provided information on the projects in the Resettlement Administration's Region VII³ area (North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas).

Information for the state of Nebraska resettlement communities was found in the National Archives and in the Nebraska State Historical Society. Between 2014 and 2019, site visits were conducted in the state of Nebraska to see the present-day condition of several of the communities in the state. Additional, non-governmental reports and research documents were found through the University of Nebraska – Lincoln library system.

One of the major problems encountered early in the research process was the conflicting use of terminology. Several of the non-governmental documents use the term 'subsistence homesteads' to refer to the resettlement communities, and while the term is correct, it doesn't distinguish between the different types of communities that were created. The problem with limiting the search terminology to 'subsistence homesteads' was that it restricted accessibility to relevant research documents. It was discovered later that the federal government often used the term 'resettlement communities' as a blanket title to

³ In 1935, the Resettlement Administration organized its administrative functions into eleven regional units across the United States. Each region administered the projects within its boundaries and reported directly to officials in Washington D.C. Appendix A lists the administrative regions.

represent the different types of communities that were created. For the state of Nebraska, the communities were referred to as subsistence *farmsteads* or *cooperatives*, so a careful search of the various names used for these communities was required.

Finding the location of some of the communities also presented challenges. Just as there could be several names used for a project type there could also be several locational names used as well. For instance, a homestead project completed near Birmingham, Alabama had three names associated with it: Slagheap Village, Cahaba (the official name of the location), and Trussville Homesteads. This issue was also encountered while searching for a Nebraska community that was located between Omaha and Fremont. The most common name associated with this community was Two Rivers, but it has also been referred to as Douglas County, Saunders County, Douglas and Saunders County, Venice Nebraska, and Waterloo Nebraska.

Another issue that was discovered was the destruction of records related to the Subsistence Homesteads. In 1982, a request was filed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to destroy selected records. It is unknown what information was contained in those records or why these were chosen for elimination. At this time no additional "request for records disposition authority" filings (Standard Form 115) have been discovered, but it is assumed

that additional records related to the resettlement communities have also been destroyed. With that said, there remained ample information available to conduct research into the resettlement communities.

This dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter 2 is an overview of the early land policies that affected the settlement of the United States, with particular emphasis on the Great Plains. This chapter provides the background for understanding why the federal government believed the resettlement communities were an important component of the national recovery from the Great Depression. Chapter 3 explicates the rise and fall of the programs authorized by the United States federal government to relocate destitute and stranded populations. Chapter 4 describes the resettlement communities established during the New Deal years from 1933-1941. It details at the national scale where the communities were located, who the target populations were, and how they were designed to accommodate the subsistence lifestyle. Chapter 5 focuses on the communities built in the state of Nebraska by describing the physical location of these communities. This chapter also provides further analysis about the land acquisition process and the information gathered to track the progress of the communities' residents. Finally, Chapter 6 provides an overview of the issues that helped bring about the termination of the resettlement program.

CHAPTER 2 – SETTLEMENT AND FEDERAL LAND POLICIES

The causes of such rural distress are varied: Some can be traced back to our early history, others are of more recent origin. When soil was depleted because of overfarming or overgrazing, during the settlement of the Continent, it was easy to move westward to new land; when forest land was cut over in one region new forest land could be obtained in another. There was no need for careful land planning, there was no need for conservation. America was huge. Our philosophy was colored by the fact that there was plenty of farm land, plenty of forest land, plenty of everything.

-Resettlement Administration, First Annual Report 1936 (p. 1)

The December 1934 report from the National Resources Board stated that changes needed to occur with the management and use planning of private and public lands within the United States. The changes being recommended were the result of decades of poor management of the natural resources, either through improper farming techniques, lack of consideration of the effects that damaged land had on life, or the one-size-fits-all settlement policies of the United States federal government. In the report, the National Resources Board recommended that the federal government purchase 75,000,000 acres of farmland and move many of the families living in these areas to more suitable locations. The board believed that the acquisition process would take five years to complete. It was determined that the federal government should purchase

15,000,000 acres each year for five years. Eventually the total number of acres that were to be acquired was revised down to 10,000,000 acres.

The acquisition of land that had already been settled was a major undertaking by the federal government. The process began with a classification system that placed the land within the United States into one of six regions: Eastern Highlands region, Southeastern Hilly Cotton and Tobacco region, Cut-Over region, Arid and Semi-arid region, Miscellaneous Agriculture region, and the Non-problem Regions Containing Little Agriculture region. Figure 2.1 shows how the classification system was distributed across the country. Nearly the entire country was considered to be in a state of distress except for the Rocky Mountain area which was labeled as “Non-problem regions containing little agriculture” (region 6) on the map. The Eastern Highlands (regions 1a and 1b) covered much of the northeastern United States from Maine, south to Alabama and into eastern Oklahoma. The Southeastern Hilly Cotton and Tobacco region (area 2 on the map) included the states of Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia. The Cut-Over region (areas 3a, 3b, and 3c on map) included the state of Florida, the east coast of Georgia through North Carolina, the Upper Midwest states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and western California, Oregon, and Washington. The Arid and Semi-arid region (areas 4a-4d on map) encompassed much of the region west of the 100th

meridian. The land that remained was classified as the Miscellaneous Agricultural region (areas 5a-5g on the map) and included large expanses of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and the eastern third of the Dakotas. This category of land was also found in nearly every state east of the Great Plains except Florida. Within these regions the identification of land for federal acquisition and the number of families needing removal would begin.

The National Resources Board (1934) had estimated there were 454,000 farms within the 75,345,200 acres of land that had been originally proposed for retirement. Table 2.1 lists the number of farms and acres proposed for retirement by area (the regions listed on Table 2.1 can be identified on the map in Figure 2.1). The greatest number of farms proposed for retirement were in the Southern Highlands (1b on Figure 2.1 map) of West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, eastern Oklahoma, and Missouri; the hilly areas of southern Ohio, southern Indiana; and the hilly and grassland areas of southern Illinois (National Resources Board, 1934, p. 157). The number of farms proposed for retirement in this region was 125,500 and the number of acres was 9,085,700. These figures represented 27.6% of the total number of farms and 12% of the land to be retired. However, the greatest number of acres to be retired were located in the Western Great Plains (4a on Figure 2.1 map), which included areas in eastern Montana, Wyoming, Colorado,

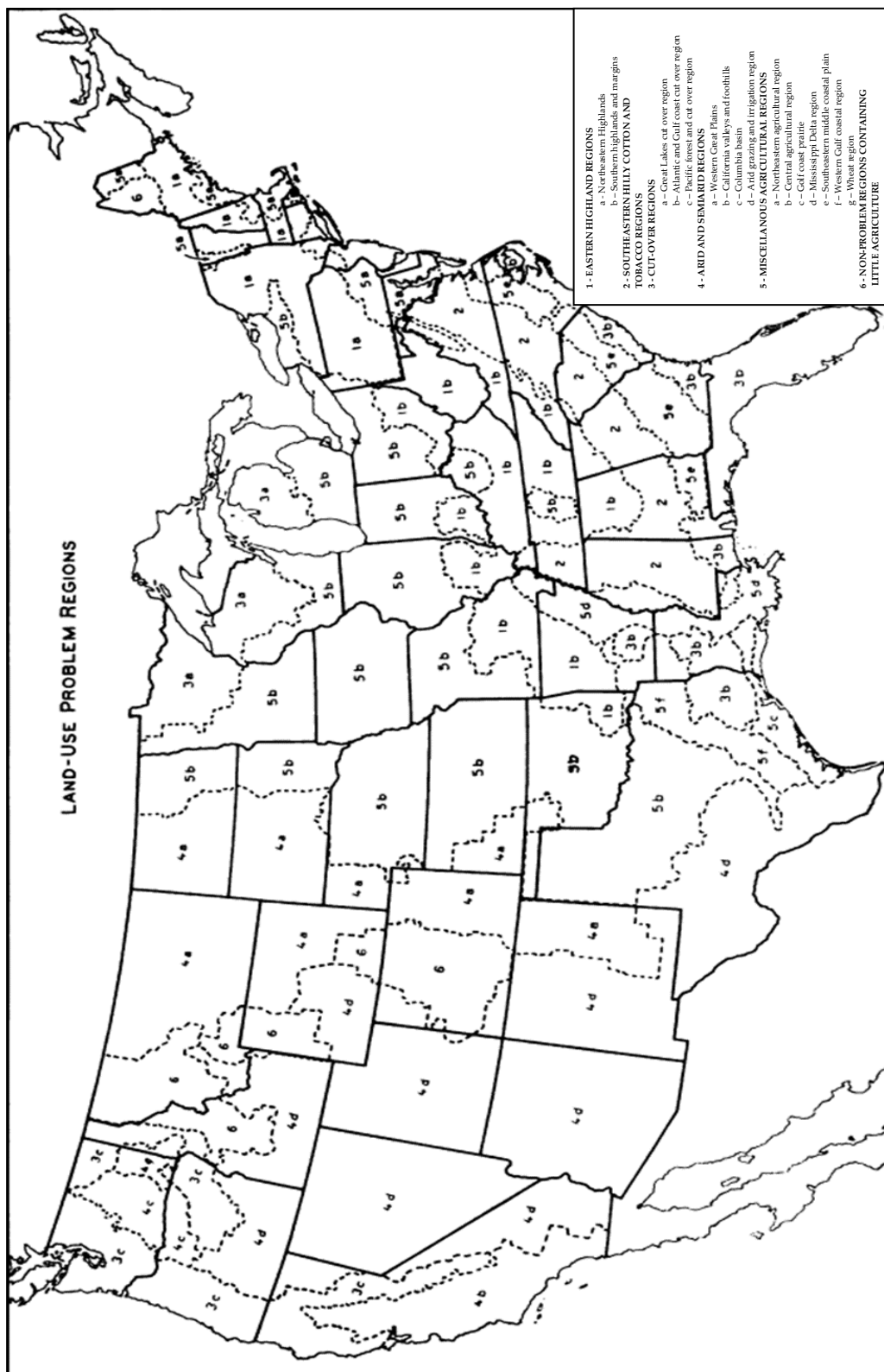


Figure 2.1. The federal government placed all land within the United States into one of six categories. These were used to identify areas with similar agricultural land-use problems. (National Resources Board, 1934, p. 156).

Table 2.1

Number and area of farms, acreage of crop land, pasture, and other land, and value of real estate on farms proposed to be retired from arable farming

	Region	Number of Farms	Total Acres	Acres crop land	Acres pasture	Acres woodland, farmsteads, etc.	Estimated value, real estate as of 1934
1a	Northeastern highlands	50,300	6,534,500	1,658,300	1,909,500	2,966,700	\$108,176,000
1b	Southern highlands and their margins	125,500	9,085,700	1,815,200	2,404,800	4,865,700	\$90,857,000
2	Southeastern hilly cotton and tobacco	122,700	10,368,000	2,957,000	874,100	6,536,900	\$62,208,000
3a	Greal Lakes cut-over	27,500	3,437,500	1,100,000	550,000	1,787,500	\$51,563,000
3b	Atlantic and Gulf coast cut-over	30,500	1,828,100	548,400	274,200	1,005,500	\$9,141,000
3c	Pacific forest and cut-over	13,300	3,039,000	332,700	1,702,600	1,003,700	\$24,312,000
4a	Western Great Plains	26,000	28,365,900	7,306,700	20,739,400	319,800	\$170,195,000
4b	California valleys and foothills	9,500	3,203,000	698,700	2,369,200	135,100	\$64,060,000
4c	Columbia Basin	2,800	3,244,000	1,543,000	1,604,400	96,600	\$32,440,000
4d	Arid grazing and irrigated	7,300	2,512,400	728,800	1,472,500	311,100	\$10,050,600
5a,b	Northeast and central agricultural	15,400	1,634,300	666,100	460,300	507,900	\$32,686,000
5c,d	Gulf coast prairie and Mississippi Delta	16,600	1,431,600	509,800	493,600	428,200	\$21,474,000
5e	Middle coastal plain	6,800	661,200	298,700	28,900	333,600	\$4,628,000
	Total	454,200	75,345,200	20,163,400	34,883,500	20,298,300	\$681,790,600

This table was reproduced from the National Resources Board, December 1 1934 report. The table is located on page 181. For the Estimated Value, Real Estate as of 1934 column the actual report shows a total of \$682,090,000. Multiple checks of the this column show the total is actually \$681,790,600.

Note that the regions listed on this table can be identified on the map in Figure 2.1. Use the numbers in the far-left column to locate specific areas on the map.

and New Mexico; the western two-thirds of North Dakota, South Dakota; the panhandle of Nebraska; the southwestern corner of Kansas; and a small area in northern Oklahoma. The report suggested the retirement of 28,365,900 acres in this region, which comprised 37.6% of the total land area proposed for retirement. Within this area there were an estimated 26,000 farms to be removed, which represented 5.7% of the total number of farms. In addition to the retirement of land, the National Resources Board also encouraged adjustment in farm sizes where the land was still arable, but where farms were considered too small to be economically viable.

The 1934 National Resources Board identified several areas (figure 2.2) within the United States where it was believed an increase in farm size could allow some families to stay where they were because the land was productive; however, due to small farm sizes it was not economically sustainable for them to stay unless an adjustment was made. The areas identified by the National Resources Board were grouped into six categories: The Wheat Producing Region of the Great Plains States; The Erosive Areas of the Southern and Western Corn Belt; General Farming Regions of the Ohio Valley, Southern Illinois, and Southern Missouri; The Cotton Belt; Irrigated Areas; and Miscellaneous Areas (National Resources Board, 1934, pp. 159-160).

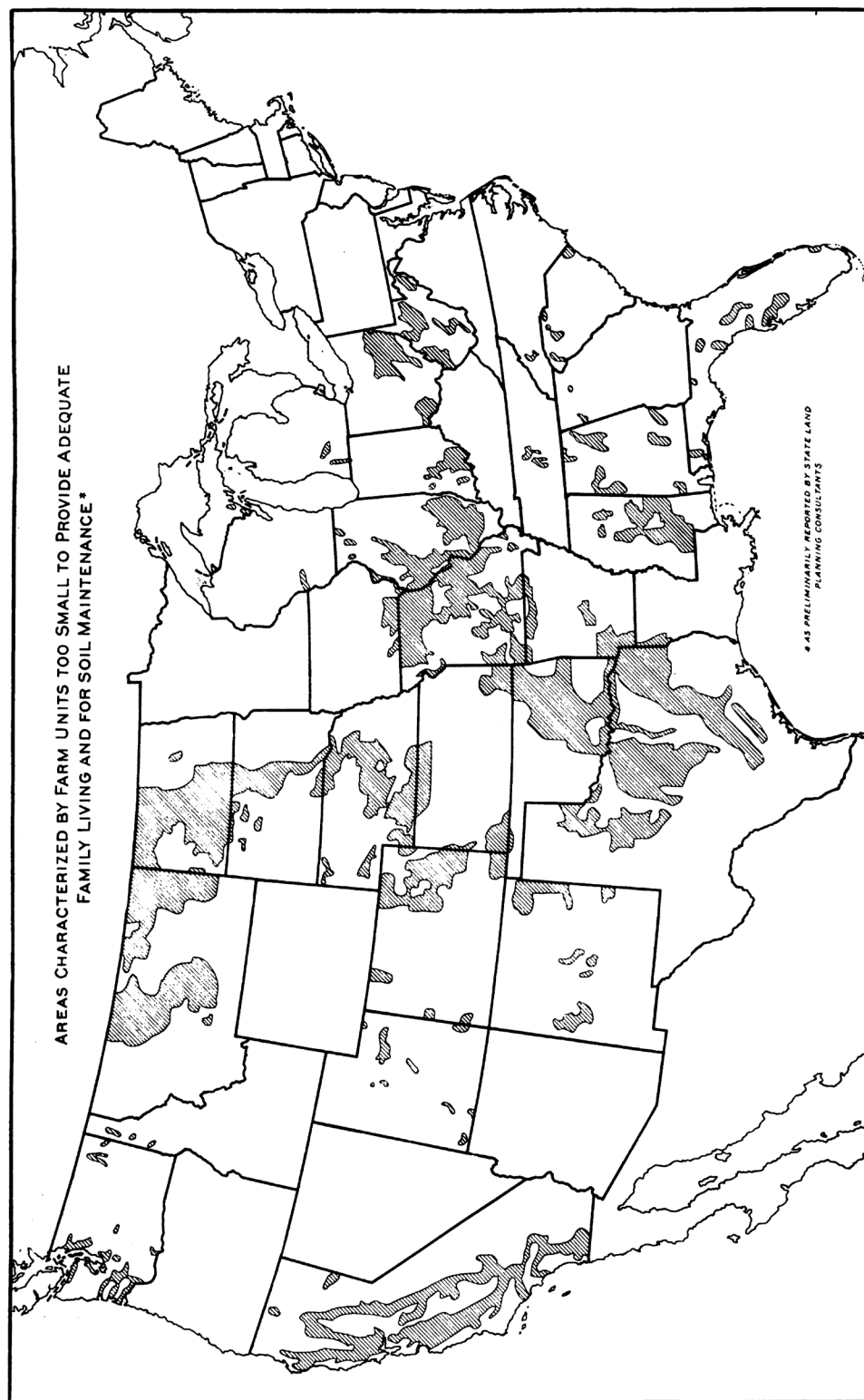


Figure 2.2. Map showing areas where farms were considered too small to provide an adequate income. An increase in farm size was recommended in these areas that would allow some families to remain on their land. (National Resources Board, 1934, p. 158).

The wheat producing region extended from central Nebraska to northern North Dakota and westward through eastern and northern Montana.

Homestead laws and inexperience with the arid western lands were viewed as the primary causes for inadequate farm sizes. This region included approximately 32 million acres of land that was considered ill-suited to agricultural use and where 46,000 farm families lived. Readjustments in this region would potentially displace 16,000 farm families.

In the southern and western corn belt, which ran “along the eastern edge of the sand hills, the dissected plains of southern Nebraska and Northern Kansas, and the hilly area of southern Iowa, northern Missouri, and western Illinois” (National Resources Board, 1934, p. 160) overproduction and competition between farmers had decreased the productivity of the land. The affected area covered “36 million acres of farm land, including 20 million acres of crop land, now divided into 188,000 farms” (National Resources Board, 1934, p. 160). Adjustments in this area would displace 19,000 families

The general farming regions of the Ohio Valley, southern Illinois, and southern Mississippi included 21 million acres of land that needed adjustment in farm sizes. Within this area approximately 195,000 farms resided, and of those about 48,000 farm families would be displaced.

The cotton belt ran from “central Texas east to South Carolina” (National Resources Board, 1934, p. 160). There were 50 million acres and 417,000 farm families included in this region. Excessive agricultural use leading to soil erosion was considered a primary problem, but this area also had large areas of idle land included in it. It appears that the National Resources Board believed that due to the large amount of idle land an adjustment in use would be required, but an adjustment in population size may not have been necessary; rather, a redistribution of population within the area might have been enough to remediate the land-use problem.

The irrigated areas described in the National Resources Board 1934 report do not give an indication of where this land was located. The report stated that too many farms clustered in small areas had led to the reduction in local water tables and loss of economically viable farms. The report does not mention the number of acres affected, nor the number of families residing in the areas.

The final area identified in the 1934 National Resources Board report were the miscellaneous areas that were found in the Pacific Northwest and in the state of Michigan. The lands included in these areas were considered timber-cutover land where the overproduction of forests had led to a decline in the economic viability of these regions. There is no mention of the number of acres or families affected in these areas.

The small size of the homesteads and a general lack of understanding about regional climates are the two major elements that are cited as being the causes of the extensive farm failures that had occurred during the 1920s and 1930s, especially in the Great Plains region. Hansen & Libecap (2002) argued that a lack of relevant information about the weather on the Great Plains as a major contributor to farm failures, which led “the Great Plains to be settled too densely in farms that were later found to be too small, undercapitalized, and insufficiently diversified to be sustainable” (Libecap & Hansen, 2002, p. 87). However, Richardson (1937) had expressed concern that even if information had been available, those who actively recruited (i.e. railroads, speculators) settlers to the Great Plains region would not have provided the information, as it would have impaired the goal of increasing the population of the western states for political and economic reasons.

Prior to the 1930s there had been limited concern regarding the use of submarginal lands or of farm size on these lands. What forces encouraged the settlement of submarginal lands, particularly in the arid West? Landis (1935), Cronin (1939), and Hansen & Libecap (2004) have argued that the early settlement policies were ill-suited for the lands west of 98th meridian. The next two sections discuss the land policies of the United States and the role they had in submarginal land settlement.

Ideology of Early Federal Land Policies

Prior to the 1930s the federal government held a consistent ideology regarding how and why various land acts were needed for settlement of land west of the Missouri River. Several federal land policies (i.e., The Preemption Act of 1841, The Homestead Act of 1862, and The Timber Culture Act of 1873) specifically stated that homesteads were to be of 160 acres or less (Edwards, 2009; Ganoe, 1937; Hansen & Libecap, 2004; Reynolds, 1949; and “U.S. Government Land Laws”, 1998).

Beyond the fact that there were physical and technological limits to how much land a person could reasonably work there were several other reasons for the rigidity in the size of the homesteads. These reasons date back to the eighteenth century. Thomas Jefferson, as one of the founders of the United States federal government, had a belief in the establishment of an agrarian society and in the territorial expansion of the country. He believed that everyone should be able to own their own land, and he envisioned an agrarian society of small, subsistence farmsteads. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 helped fulfill Jefferson’s dream of expansion, and much of this territory became known as the Great Plains.

In 1862, the Homestead Act opened the territory of the Louisiana Purchase for settlement mainly by people of Euro-American descent. The settlement

process not only displaced the native Plains peoples from, and within, the region, but it also created a landscape that was divided by artificial geometric boundaries. The Land Ordinance Act of 1785 established the township-and-range system of land surveys (Shelley, Archer, Davidson, & Brunn, 1996, p. 22) which provided for the division of land into rectangular parcels for easier identification. These artificial boundaries were further accentuated by the installation of fences, section roads, and railroad tracks. These boundaries did not consider regional climate variations, which were eventually shown to impact the profitability of certain areas, especially those areas located in semi-arid regions of the country.

Upon opening of the Great Plains for settlement the federal government held fast to the idea of small acreages, but for reasons different than Thomas Jefferson's. It was believed that rapidly populating the area would facilitate economic and political development in the Great Plains and the nation. Since the land contained in the Louisiana Purchase had been classified as territories by the federal government, it meant the residents of the territories had limited rights to vote and while there was no minimum population threshold for a territory, there was a minimum population threshold for statehood. According to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, a free population of 60,000 was necessary for consideration for statehood. For men seeking to rise in political positions

statehood was essential. It was also believed that getting as much land as possible into private hands would increase the tax revenues of the local and state governments. Economic development would also be spurred on by increasing land values, making it possible for private citizens to capitalize on land holdings (Edwards, 2009; Hansen & Libecap, 2004). Potentially the most important reason why the federal government held on to the ideology of the small acreage was that there was no evidence that larger farms would produce a more productive and sustainable homestead (Hansen & Libecap, 2004, p. 107).

In 1878, John Wesley Powell issued a report to Congress, titled *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States*, critiquing the implications of the small homesteads on the semi-arid Plains. Powell was concerned that irrigation companies could potentially control the water through the acquisition of water rights or from the overuse of a water source, thereby creating a “monopoly of water rights [that would be] an intolerable burden to the people” (Powell, 1878, p. 40). He recommended settlers should have access to water so as not to make their lands worthless. In addition, Powell recommended homesteads be increased to 2,560 acres as he believed that 160 acres were far from sustainable in a semi-arid climate; however, Congress was not inclined to believe that substantial portions of the unsettled land in the West were too arid for profitable cultivation (Hansen & Libecap, 2004, Reynolds, 1949). This view by Congress

was largely due to the 160-acre homestead being a land-use pattern of the semi-humid regions of the east coast and of the Midwest (land east of the 98th meridian). In the semi-humid regions of the United States, the 160-acre homestead was productive and sustainable, but few people realized it was not suitable for the semi-arid conditions found in the Great Plains (Edwards, 2009; Hansen & Libecap, 2004; Reynolds, 1949). Rather Congress focused its concern on the impact larger homestead sizes would have on the settlement population of the Great Plains. An increase in homestead size could hinder the ability to increase the population density of the region, which would be counterproductive to the goal of fully settling the land (Hansen & Libecap, 2004).

Eventually some land acts did allow filing of larger land holdings. The Desert Land Act of 1877 allowed the acquisition of 640 acres in the New Mexico, Wyoming, Montana, and Dakota territories (Wishart, 2004). The Kinkaid Act of 1904 allowed 640 acres for settlement in the semi-arid lands of western Nebraska, which included “all of the Sand Hills, the Pine Ridge country to the north, all of the Panhandle, and the southwest corner of the state” (Archer et al., 2017, p. 63). The Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 allowed up to 320 acres in the “States of Colorado, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming and the Territories of Arizona and New Mexico” (Sixtieth Congress, Session II, p. 639). And the 1916 Stock Raising Homestead Act allowed for homesteads of 640 acres

of non-irrigable land on western lands (Hansen & Libecap, 2004; Reynolds, 1949).

The increase in homestead size was due to the gradual recognition that some of the lands in the West were not suitable for cultivation, making the standard 160-acre claim unprofitable for the small farmer. However, Richardson (1937) contended that under the federal land system:

a great part of the choicest lands of the Plains were appropriated to other purposes, and the homesteader who did not have money to purchase land was obliged either to take up inferior land or go far into the semi-arid country where the climate worked against him. This system tended to drive the poorest people onto the poorest land (Richardson, 1937, p. 7).

In addition to ill-suited land-settlement policies, capitalism also contributed to the exploitation and overuse of the region. Donald Worster wrote extensively about the role capitalism played in the settlement of the Great Plains in his book *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*. He stated that “the widespread drive in American farming to maximize profits from the land and increasing use of machinery” (Worster, 2004, p. 58) were major contributors to the problems in the Great Plains. He noted that while the majority of farms in the Plains region were not corporate owned like many found in California, the Plains farmers did compete with each other to increase individual profits. This led to the plow-up of more land and increased indebtedness of farmers, especially where diversification of cash-crops was lacking. For example, Worster

stated that Haskell county Kansas relied extensively on the planting of wheat which created financial hardships when the crop failed.

The increase in indebtedness was reflected in the 1940 Census of Agriculture¹. According to the 1940 Census, the average debt per farm² had risen from \$1,224 in 1890 to \$4,004 in 1925 which reflects a 227% increase in debt levels. By 1940, total mortgage farm debt³ in the U.S. was \$7,645,091,000. Iowa (\$809,432,000), Texas (554,874,000), California (\$497,148,000), Illinois (\$471,188,000), and Nebraska (\$448,294,000) were the states with the highest farm mortgage debt. Their debt represented 36.3% of the total in 1940.

Figures 2.3 and 2.4 are examples of the sights that could be seen in the Great Plains region during the 1930s. The pictures represent the extent farmers went to increase the amount of land under cultivation and the financial investment in machinery to help increase crop production. Figure 2.3 shows “power farming” that occurred in Childress County, Texas. The landowner used every available foot of land for cultivation purposes by plowing up to the house. This type of farming may have displaced tenants from their homes. Figure 2.4 shows the heavy investment a farmer made in machinery in Box Butte County

¹ The 1940 Census of Agriculture reported debt levels for the country as a whole between the years 1890 and 1939. It did not report the levels by state until 1940.

² Information found in Chapter IV, Table 6, page 251 of the 1940 Census of Agriculture

³ Information found in Chapter IV, Table 33, page 310 of the 1940 Census of Agriculture



Figure 2.3. A lone house sits in the middle of a field in Childress County, Texas. Plowing up of all available land for cultivation was considered “power farming”. This led to the displacement of tenants in the western dry cotton area. (Lange, 1938).



Figure 2.4. This farmer in Box Butte County, Nebraska, invested heavily in farm machinery. The house is located on the far-right in the picture. (Rothstein, 1936).

Nebraska. As wheat prices declined, farmers cultivated larger areas of wheat in an attempt to make enough money to cover their debt and living expenses. They may have purchased machinery that would enable them to plow up and harvest greater areas of land. The heavy investment in machinery added to the unsustainability of farming in the Great Plains by often increasing the indebtedness of the farmers.

Further complicating the adjustment of farming methods to the Great Plains region were two dominating climate theories that in the late 1800s and early 1900s gave false hope to those settling on the arid western lands, the “rain follows the plow” theory and the dry-farming doctrine (Libecap & Hansen, 2002). Both theories encouraged excess migration to the semi-arid and arid western land, and they offered “a handy delusion for settlers, who desperately wanted to believe that it was true” (Wishart, 2013, p. 21). The “rain follows the plow” theory asserted that the breaking of the prairie sod along with continued crop cultivation and tree planting would result in an increase in precipitation, thereby permanently changing the arid environment of the west into one similar to that found in the semi-humid regions of eastern United States. The dry farming theory (aka dryland farming) also proposed that the arid western lands could be cultivated in such a way that would enable conservation of ground moisture so that crops would continue to grow when there was little rainfall.

These theories were promoted by many speculators and land promoters, including the railroads who had an interest in the successful settling of the west, which they believed could be achieved, in part, by the altering of the climate (Wishart, 2013; Worster, 2004). Adaption of farming methods to the Great Plains occurred slowly as farmers gained experience with the region's climate.

There appeared to be little concern by the United States federal government regarding the settlement of marginal and submarginal lands until the simultaneous events of the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression put a spotlight on the dire situation that was occurring in the Great Plains region. The following section examines the response of the federal government to the environmental and economic disaster brought on by a mix of climatic changes and land policies ill-suited to the environs of the Great Plains.

A Shifting Ideology

The Great Plains region is replete with stories of individuals and families who tried to settle the area, only to succumb to the harsh environment, but in the 1930s the Great Plains experienced a systematic failure that would alter its economic and environmental landscape. The Great Plains and the Dust Bowl are presumed to be synonymous in American folklore, but the Dust Bowl covered only a portion of the region. While the region as a whole was affected by

drought there were differences between the southern and northern plains. In the southern plains dust storms became a common occurrence largely due to the intensive plow-up of the ground which allowed the dry, powder fine soil to be carried by the winds. In the northern plains dust storms still occurred but with less frequency as much of the topsoil of the region remained in place. The land was still overused, as in the south, but the overuse stemmed more from overgrazing than from cultivation. Figure 2.5 illustrates how the drought and dust storms affected the Great Plains region. The core of the Dust Bowl was in the southern Great Plains region, which included areas in southwestern Kansas, southeastern Colorado, northeastern New Mexico and the panhandles of Oklahoma and Texas. However, the effects of the drought and dust storms were experienced throughout the Great Plains region.

In April 1934, in a speech he made after a visit to a subsistence homestead exhibition, President Roosevelt spoke about the need for land-use planning and helping people restart their lives. He stated that a lack of planning across the United States had produced a country that appeared as if “it had grown up like Topsy without any particular planning. People over a period of three hundred years had been wandering around from one section to another, opening up new territory, starting new industries, haphazardly” (Roosevelt, 1934, p. 2). Franklin

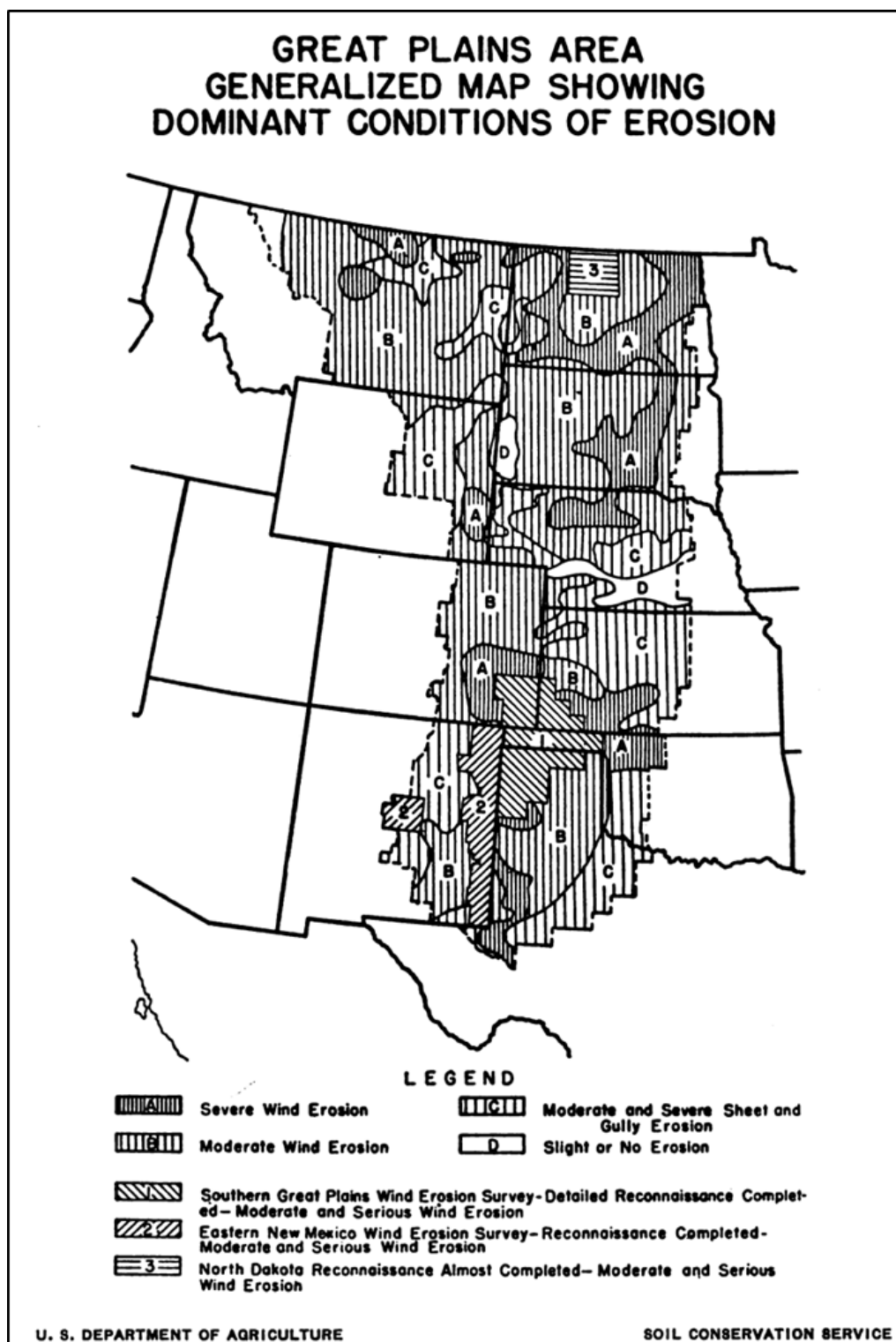


Figure 2.5. This map shows the areas affected by 1930s drought. It illustrates the different degrees of erosion experienced in the Great Plains region. (United States. Great Plains Committee, 1936, p. 134).

D. Roosevelt believed the lack of land-use planning had created environmental and economic catastrophes across the country that needed to be rectified.

In 1936, President Roosevelt established the Great Plains Committee to assess the condition of the region. Letters to the appointees of the committee read, in part:

“We have supposed that the modes of settlement and of development which have been prevalent represented the ordinary course of civilization. But perhaps in the area of relatively little rain, practices brought from the more humid part of the country are not most suitable under the prevailing natural conditions. At any rate, circumstances make it obvious that relief activities are not sufficient and that a competent study and recommendations are desirable.” (Roosevelt, 1936, para. 2)

In their report, the Committee “recommended unprecedented measures to reduce the number of farms and farmers through resettlement programs and to increase farm size and diversification through consolidation and a shift to livestock and other crops. Past land-settlement policies were castigated for encouraging excessive migration to the Great Plains” (Libecap and Hansen, 2002, p. 87). The committee’s recommendation was based on the common ideology at the federal level that much of the failure in the Plains region (both southern and northern) was largely due to farmers who did not possess the skills, equipment, or capital necessary to work the land for financial gain.

Table 2.2*New Deal Programs for Agriculture and Rural Areas*

<u>Year Implemented</u>	<u>Program</u>
1933	Agricultural Adjustment Act
1933	Soil Conservation Service
1933	Farm Credit Act
1933	Subsistence Homesteads
1934	Land Utilization Program
1934	Rural Rehabilitation Program
1935	Resettlement Program
1935	Soil Conservation & Domestic Allotment Act
1936	Rural Electrification Act
1937	Farm Tenancy Act

(Living New Deal. New Deal Programs).

According to the Living New Deal website, between 1933 and 1939 the New Deal administration created 35 new programs which focused on rectifying the economic and environmental problems in the United States. Table 2.2 identifies ten programs that focused on agriculture and rural areas.

The resulting New Deal farm programs were divided into two categories: immediate relief and long-range reform. Immediate relief included programs to purchase cattle, provide direct relief with the shipment of food, and seed to stricken areas. Long range reform programs included the purchase of submarginal land, resettlement, land-use readjustments, shelterbelt plantings, soil conservation and crop insurance (Saloutos, 1969, p. 346). Several agencies

and programs were involved in the removal of submarginal lands from production and providing relief to the destitute farmers. Three of the New Deal programs that were created to address the issues of helping impoverished rural families and to deal with land reclamation were the Division of Subsistence Homesteads (DSH), Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), and the Resettlement Administration (RA).

Federal land management was not new in the 1930s. Beginning in the 1920s the government had growing concerns regarding the misuse of land and had been attempting to remove submarginal land from cultivation. The 1920s removal process began with the establishment of a classification system that placed land into one of several categories: good, poor, marginal, or submarginal. It was the submarginal land that the federal government had in its sight. The term “‘submarginal’ referred to land low in productivity, unsuited for the production of farm crops, or incapable of profitable cultivation” (Cunfer, 2001, p. 199). Land categorized as submarginal would provide the government with a reason for removing destitute farm families living on these lands. Once the families were removed from the submarginal lands the government could work to readjust the lands for uses other than cultivation (Cunfer, 2001, p. 204).

Until the 1930s there was not much congressional support for the removal of submarginal lands from crop production. The drought and dust storms on the

southern plains would become the justification several of the federal agencies (i.e., the Soil Conservation Service and the United States Department of Agriculture) used to acquire funding for land acquisitions. In 1932, the National Land-Use Planning Committee reported that large areas of the Great Plains were considered unsuitable for crop production and as a consequence “6.5 million acres in the Great Plains needed to be returned to grass and that some 16,000 farmers should be relocated” (Hurt, 1986, p. 95).

Federal Land Utilization Program

In 1934, the federal government established The Land Utilization Program (LUP) for the purchasing and reclamation of privately owned submarginal lands. The LUP had three main objectives: 1) to reduce the amount of cultivated land, 2) to move failing farmers to town where opportunities for employment existed, and 3) to allow farmers who were succeeding to stay on their land. To accomplish these objectives the federal government purchased 11 million acres of privately-owned farm land throughout the United States with funds appropriated to the LUP (Cunfer, 2001, p. 193). In May 1935, the land utilization program was moved to the Resettlement Administration and was renamed the Division of Land Utilization.

The land utilization program's purchase of land was not entirely true to its objective of reducing the amount of cultivated land. Cunfer (2001, p. 195) asserts the program actually purchased very little cropland and instead concentrated on land that had remained in native grasses. He stated that in the Northern Plains, where much of the land was used for grazing, the role wheat farming played in the degradation of the Badlands had been overly exaggerated by federal administrators. Figure 2.6 shows the areas the 1932 Land-Use committee identified as being problematic and in need of reclamation.

It is interesting to note that while the map in Figure 2.6 shows a vast span of land in the Dakotas and Montana as being problematic, research by Geoff Cunfer (2001, p. 197) indicated the counties of Billings, Golden Valley, and Slope in southwestern North Dakota used much of the land for grazing. The three North Dakota counties contained approximately 2.1 million acres of land and only 20% of the land in those counties had been used for crop production. At least for these counties the story of federal exaggeration was evident. The exaggeration of land use problems in some areas had been intentional, as it was understood that submarginal land that was used for crop production had been the target of the federal reclamation effort. Consequently, the federal government purchased large expanses of land in the Northern Plains that were

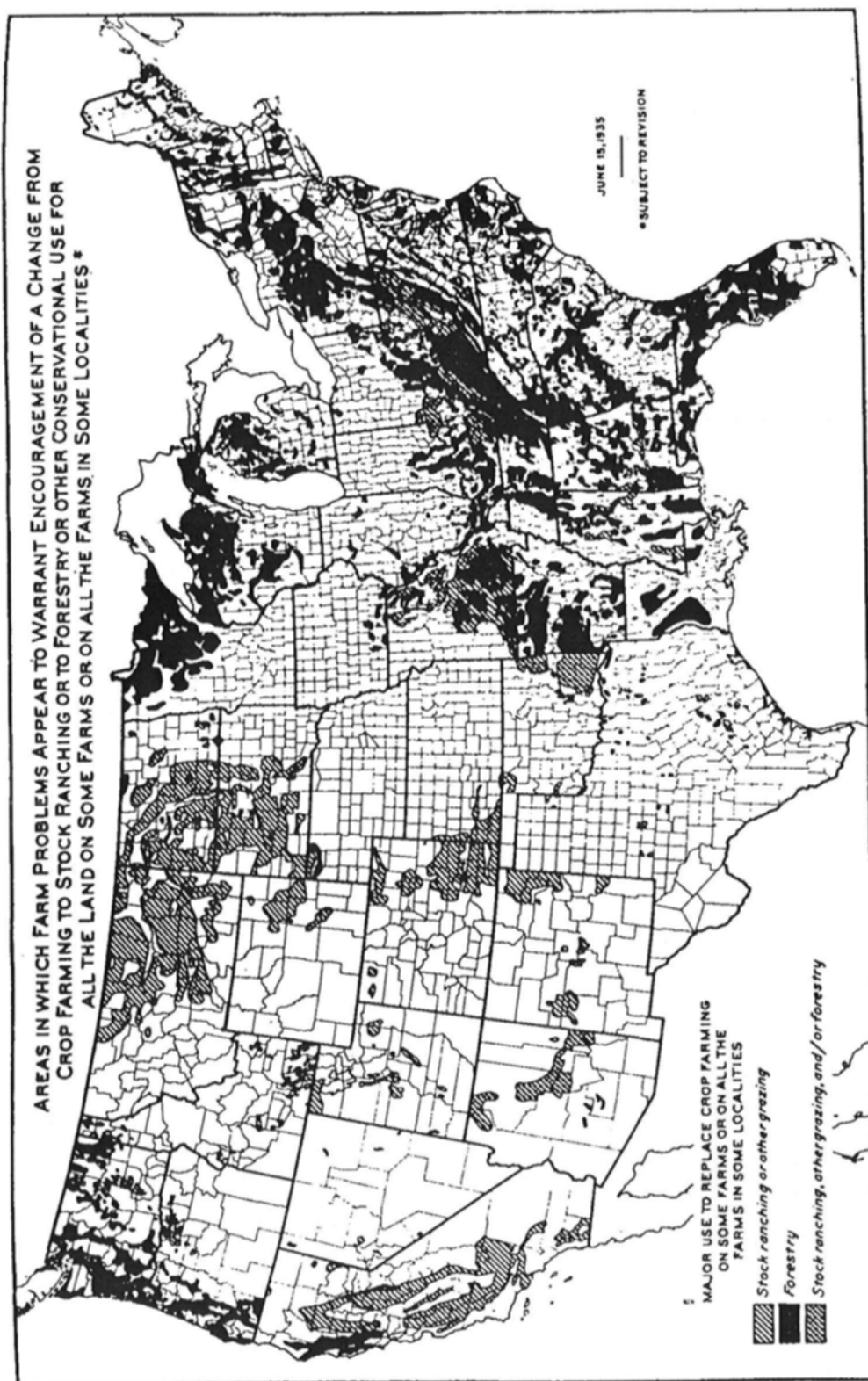


Figure 2.6. Map shows the location of land to be removed from crop cultivation and readjusted to other uses. (United States Department of Agriculture, 1965, p. 9).



Figures 2.7. A view of the land that was purchased by federal government for extension of grazing in South Dakota. (Rothstein, 1936).



Figure 2.8. A view of the land that was purchased by federal government for extension of the Badlands National Park. (Rothstein, 1936).

already being used for activities (i.e., livestock grazing) other than crop production. Figures 2.7 and 2.8 are examples of land that was purchased by the federal government in South Dakota that had not previously been used for crop production. Figure 2.7 shows land that was purchased in South Dakota for livestock grazing. Figure 2.8 provides a view of the land that was purchased for the extension of the Badlands National Park. It is unknown how much of the land in these pictures had been previously used for crop production.

The work of removing submarginal lands from production was conducted extensively throughout the United States. In 1934, the National Resources Board had estimated that 75 million acres of farmland should be classified as submarginal (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1965, p. 15). They proposed that the federal government purchase and readjust submarginal land for uses other than crop production. Instead the federal government allocated \$45,643,124 for acquisition of 10 million acres within the country. As of January 31, 1939, the federal government had spent an estimated \$35,656,519 for the acquisition of 8,365,124 acres.

For the Northern Great Plains, the federal government had allocated \$15,712,076 for the purchase of 4,539,492 acres. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 1965 report titled *"The Land Utilization Program 1934-1964"*, the final tally of acres purchased in the Northern Plains was

approximately 5,620,000. The states included in the Northern Plains were North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Montana, Wyoming and Colorado.

The total number of families displaced by the land utilization program throughout the United States was 24,148 (United States Department of Agriculture. Agriculture Economic Report No. 85, 1965, p. 20). Within the Northern Plains states there were 2,419 families that were located on lands purchased by the federal government (Cronin, 1939, p. 52). Figure 2.9 shows the location of the land that was acquired for the land utilization projects as of November 1940. Caution should be taken when viewing the map as it only depicts land acquired by the Land Utilization Program and does not include land that may have been acquired by other land conservation programs.

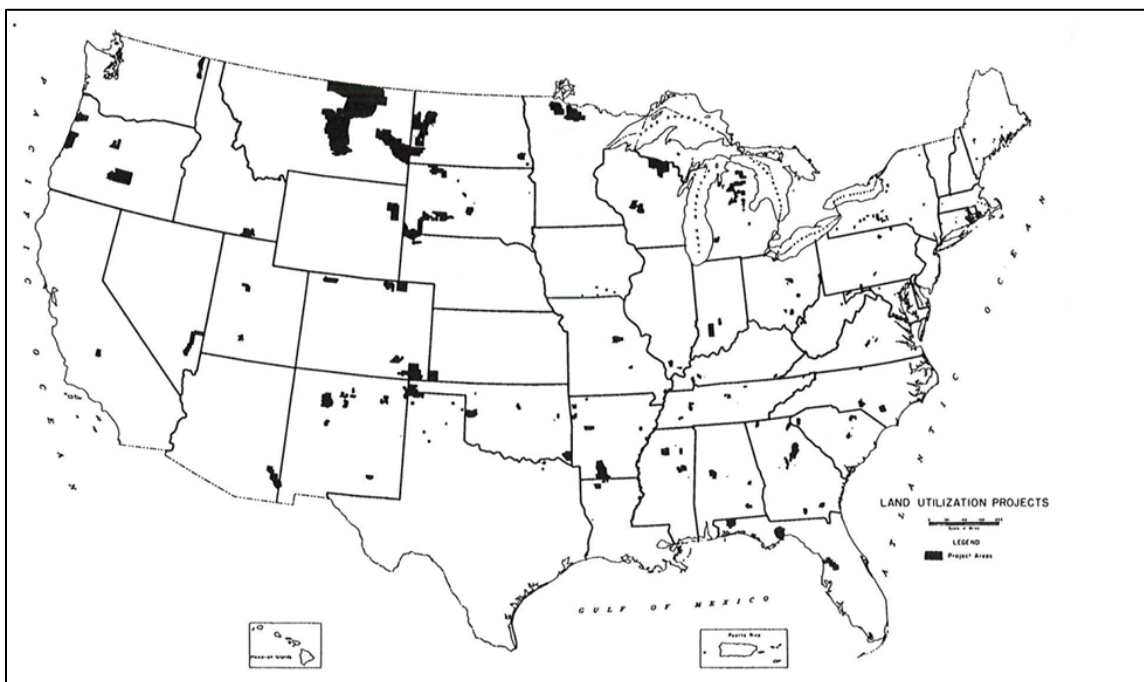


Figure 2.9. Areas purchased for land utilization projects as of November 1940 (Hurt, 1986, p. 15).

Land Acquisition and Displacement

The land utilization program was more than land acquisition, however, as the acquisition of privately-owned property would necessitate the displacement of farm families (Basmajian & Rongerude, 2012; Perkins, 2007). The federal government understood that the most difficult part of the land utilization program would be moving thousands of farm families. During the settlement of the Great Plains the government had a goal of establishing a dense population base, but with the intended acquisition of thousands of family farms there came a growing concern that “heavy migration from the Great Plains would deplete the region of a population base needed for the development of modern community services” (McDean, 1983, p. 23). Another concern of the federal government was how to help those families who were being displaced. The fear was that some families would move from submarginal lands to other locations that were equally unsustainable, and the cycle of economic and social deprivation would continue. In August 1936, Joseph L. Daily, of the Resettlement Administration, wrote the following to Cal. A. Ward, the Regional Director of Region VII:

Many farm families in this area have abandoned all hope of success in their present locations and have decided to set forth, without a definite place to go, and with only such meager resources as they may possess, in search of more favorable opportunities. Most of them will finally attempt to settle on unsuitable land or in poor communities elsewhere, or will go

to places where farming is so different that they cannot adapt themselves to new methods of operation, or will become a part of an already large unabsorbed migratory population, unwelcome in communities already staggering under heavy relief loads. Most of these families will be worse, or not any better off than if they had remained in their present locations.

Information relative to opportunities in other parts of the country, including types of farming, capital necessary to make a start, opportunities for part-time employment for farm families, economic sized units, and the like, is to be issued in readily understandable form as rapidly as possible.

It is believed that realistic information with respect to opportunities for resettlement in other areas will have the effect of preventing the worst effects of migrations such as have occurred in recent years. (Letter from J.L. Dailey, 1936)

In order to mitigate displacement, the federal government worked to resettle the affected families onto land that was capable of sustaining a decent living through the establishment of various resettlement projects such as subsistence homesteads, greenbelt towns, and urban community development projects. The resettlement movement was designed to aid the industrial unemployed, the stranded mining and timber workers, and the farmers living on submarginal lands. The first attempt at relocating impoverished families was carried out through the Subsistence Homesteads Program.

CHAPTER 3 – THE FEDERAL RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMS

The work of the Resettlement Administration is a rebuilding of that which was unwisely destroyed for decades – our land and the life it produced.

-Resettlement Administration, First Annual Report 1936 (p 5)

By January 1933 the United States had been under the grip of the Great Depression for a little over three years. Prior to that time aid to those in need was largely the responsibility of family members and private charities. If help could not be acquired from those sources, then local governments (city and county level) could administer relief, but this was on a highly limited and voluntary basis. Legislation regarding relief for those in need was deemed a state function, but the implementation, including the raising of funds, was a local responsibility. States did not generally compel local governments to comply with the state legislation regarding relief (Federal Works Agency, 1947, p. 1).

Prior to the Great Depression much of the government aid that was available was directed to “unemployables” which was the term used in the *Final Report on the WPA Program* to categorize “the needy aged, the crippled, the insane, and orphans” (Federal Works Agency, 1947, p. 1). The unemployed could also receive relief but it did not vary from what the “unemployables” could receive, which was considered barely enough to meet basic needs. Despite

the ability to receive some government assistance, many local governments were not financially burdened by requests for relief because relief for the poor was considered primarily a family and/or local charities responsibility. However, this would change with the onset of the Great Depression. The steep increase in the number of unemployed persons, coupled with decreasing tax revenues, left many local and state governments unable to provide relief on the scale that was required.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt believed that greater federal involvement would be necessary to move the country out of the Great Depression and that the focus had to be on more than just economic recovery. His travels throughout the United States, during his presidential campaign, had illustrated to him the diverse needs of the population. Due to the effects of unemployment in the urban centers and the overproduction of large areas of farmland, President Roosevelt had determined that the federal government needed to participate in the recovery of the United States by helping people find long-term relief from economic disparity.

Beginning in 1933 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt authorized a series of programs aimed at rectifying the economic and environmental issues facing the United States. These programs were attempts to control the loss of resources, both natural and human. Three of these programs worked on resettling rural



Figure 3.1. The family of a submarginal farmer located in Pennington County, South Dakota. It appears that tarpaper was used to cover the sides of the house. (Rothstein, 1936).

destitute families and the urban unemployed through the creation of subsistence homesteads.

The idea of subsistence homesteads was not new to President Roosevelt or the United States. M.L. Wilson, director of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads (DSH) from 1933-1934, noted that there had been previous experimentation with subsistence living in the United States. He noted that previously built subsistence communities were typically of two types: “cooperative colonies” (Wilson, 1934, p. 5) and privately developed

communities¹. Many of the early cooperative communities were religious based communal organizations which Wilson believed had been more successful than those of non-religious based organizations. However, Wilson (1934, p.5) noted that many of the religious based communities did not last more than a couple of years. Lawrence Westbrook (1935), an administrator with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), also wrote about previously built farm villages in New England, Pennsylvania, and Utah which he considered successful models of sustainable communities “where industry and agriculture are reasonably well balanced” (Westbrook, 1935, p. 98).

Prior to becoming President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor had promoted the concept of subsistence homesteads as a means of providing economic opportunities for the stranded rural poor. President Roosevelt spoke of subsistence farms in 1932 while he was governor of New York. He encouraged the state of New York to use idle land to create a subsistence farms program for families that could not earn a wage sufficient to provide for basic needs. He believed the subsistence farms would reduce “the huge cost of relief while it placed dependent families in a position at least to

¹ Wilson does not state what type of communities the privately built ones were. It is speculated that the communities he is referring to are the industrial housing developments that were built in the early twentieth century. These include Goodyear Heights in Akron, Ohio and Eclipse Park in Beloit, Wisconsin.

partially support themselves in healthy surroundings, of which many of them are now deprived" (Roosevelt, 1932, p. 592). Roosevelt carried the idea of subsistence homesteads into his presidency by incorporating authorization language into the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA).

Between 1933 and 1937, the federal government provided funding for dozens of subsistence communities throughout the United States. The projects were administered by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, FERA, and the Resettlement Administration. Each program had variations in architectural design, community lay-out, and target population, but they all sought to improve life for many who had been living in substandard housing with limited incomes, either in urban or rural locations. However, all of the communities, regardless of oversight agency, were considered experimental, which may have hampered the legitimacy² of the projects. The lack of legitimacy may have contributed to the dismal congressional support of the programs.

None of the resettlement programs were considered relief programs; instead they all focused primarily on improving the economic, spiritual, and environmental situation of the industrial unemployed found in urban centers

²Legitimacy, in public policy, is the belief that the proposed course of action is acceptable and falls within the range of norms established for government action. It is "an important factor in developing public support and acceptance for both government and the policies it adopts" (Anderson, 2011, p. 126).

and impoverished rural families. The subsistence homesteads program used the 1920s back-to-the-land movement as a model. The movement was based on a belief that access to rural life could improve the spiritual and financial well-being of poor families by providing relief from the squalor and poverty found within urban centers (Gwin, 1934; Kollmorgen, 1979; Roberts, 2013; Wilson, 1934).

While the back-to-the-land movement was promoting the relocation of people to semi-rural or rural areas, the federal government was contending with the realization that large swaths of land had been rendered unproductive due to overuse and improper farming techniques. They had proposed taking submarginal lands out of crop production and returning it to forests, creating national parks, establishing wildlife refuges, or designating the lands for grazing. With the known failures of thousands of farm families living on submarginal land how could a program designed to return families to a part-time farming existence succeed when full-time farm families were failing?

J. Blaine Gwin noted this contradiction in his 1934 article on subsistence homesteads. He stated that the subsistence homesteads program maintained that relief from urban unemployment and overcrowding could be found by moving people to rural areas; but once there, paradoxically, “they must not do any farming for we already have an overproduction and too many farmers” (Gwin, 1934, p. 523).

The aim of the resettlement programs had been to discover if it was possible to create households that were financially resilient during economic downturns and to encourage social growth by providing adequate housing, land for subsistence food production, and monitoring the social involvement (i.e. attendance at social gatherings, school attendance of the children) of all who lived in the communities. It should be noted that subsistence homesteads and resettlement communities are often used interchangeably in published documents due to similarities in design, target population, and policy goals. For this dissertation, resettlement communities will be the term used most often.

The Division of Subsistence Homesteads, FERA, and the Resettlement Administration concentrated mainly on the establishment of semi-rural communities that would enable residents to work in nearby industries while also allowing them to produce subsistence crops that would be used for household consumption. The belief was that the produce grown from part-time farming would supplement household incomes enough to keep the families off the government relief rolls when incomes fluctuated because of unreliable industrial work. In addition, some of the resettlement communities were permitted to establish cooperatives that would allow them to sell excess produce (referred to as truck crops) for profit, but they were not allowed to compete with large-scale operations that produced commodities such as wheat, corn, or cotton. There

were two reasons for the non-competitive status of the cooperatives: 1) they could not be allowed to impact the economic earnings of the existing profitable full-time farming operations, and 2) they could not add to the problem of surplus commercial agriculture and associated falling crop prices (Wilson, 1934, p. 10). The following sections examine the three main federal administrative units that were involved in the development of the rural resettlement communities.

The Division of Subsistence Homesteads

In June 1933 the first major piece of legislation passed by Congress, under the New Deal administration, was the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA). The NIRA was a wide reaching program that had a mission to “encourage national industrial recovery, to foster fair competition, and to provide for the construction of certain useful public works, and for other purposes” (Transcript of National Industrial Recovery Act, 1933). One of its most controversial parts was Title II, Section 208, which was inserted into the bill by President Roosevelt to allow for funding of subsistence homesteads. Title II, Section 208 stated:

To provide for aiding the redistribution of the overbalance of population in industrial centers \$25,000,000 is hereby made available to the President, to be used by him through such agencies as he may establish and under such regulations as he may make, for making loans for and otherwise aiding in the purchase of subsistence homesteads. The moneys collected

as repayment of said loans shall constitute a revolving fund to be administered as directed by the President for the purposes of this section” (United States Department of Interior, Circular No. 1, 1933, p. 1).

President Roosevelt knew that congressional support for subsistence homesteads was very limited, as evidenced by the defeat of two previously submitted bills by Senator John H. Bankhead; that may have been why the authorization and funding language for the program was inserted into the National Industrial Recovery Act³ (McDean, 1992, p. 57). However, Congress never favored the subsistence homesteads program, and as a result it was moved from the Department of Interior (1933-1935) to the Resettlement Administration (1935-1937), and then in 1937 the Resettlement Administration was divided and moved to the Farm Security Administration and the Federal Housing Administration⁴. In 1937 Congress defunded it altogether.

All three levels of government, federal, state, and local, participated in the subsistence homesteads program. States were expected but not required to participate, but local participation was required. M.L. Wilson (1934, p. 10) stated that citizen buy-in would be strongest if the projects were a bottom-up endeavor.

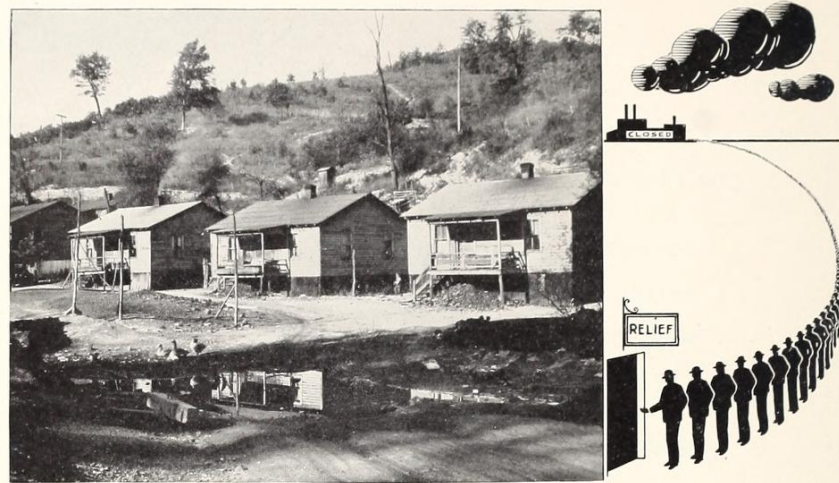
³ According to McDean (1992), President Roosevelt quietly had Title II, Section 208 authorizing the Subsistence Homesteads added to the NIRA bill. Apparently, few people noticed the addition to the NIRA and it proceeded to passage without a debate (McDean, 1992, p. 19).

⁴ Some documents indicate the projects were transferred to the FHA (Federal Housing Authority) while others indicate they went to the FmHA (Farmers Home Administration). It is not clear which is correct.

Despite the bottom-up participation encouraged by Wilson, the federal government maintained control of the program and its projects. This meant that many of the final decisions were approved by the federal government.

M.L. Wilson, who was the first director of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads (DSH), saw the program as a step toward land-use and regional planning which he believed had been lacking in the United States. He was also a proponent of decentralization of industries and people (Wilson, 1934, p. 8), which was a focus of this program. Others saw the program as a housing program, moving low-income households out of substandard housing and into new affordable housing. The movement from substandard housing was seen as a path for promoting homeownership for low-income households that could not otherwise afford a decent home. Figure 3.2 illustrates how the federal government promoted the improvement in housing standards through the subsistence homesteads program. A family, who was selected for inclusion into the program, would go from being on relief and living in a substandard home to having money and a decent home.

The DSH was established with revolving funds, which meant that all monies provided to the states were to be repaid so that funds would be available for the development of future subsistence communities. Participants were required to repay the loans they received for the homesteads. Interest rates were



FROM THIS

TO THIS



[4]

Figure 3.2. An illustration from the Division of Subsistence Homesteads that shows people would go from living in a substandard house to a modernized home (United States Department of the Interior, 1935, p. 4).

typically between 3-4% and the terms ranged from 15-30 years. The repayment schedules were based on individual households in the projects. Despite the program's emphasis on helping stranded and destitute populations whose sources of income may have vanished, there was typically an income requirement of less than \$1,200 annually for selected participants. While there was a cap on how much a household could earn, there was also a minimum level of income required as the program was designed to help those who could not afford a home on their own, but for which government assistance would be beneficial towards achieving homeownership (U.S. Department of Interior, 1935). It is believed that the minimum income levels were established on a project-by-project basis.

The program was at its core a population redistribution program with the intent of moving families from areas in which full-time employment was not achievable. The persons initially targeted for inclusion into the subsistence resettlement projects were those living in rural areas and/or those who were considered stranded. The federal government defined stranded populations as those persons living in a single industry community (i.e., mining or timber industries) where employment was no longer available and prospects for future employment opportunities was deemed improbable. Westbrook stated in 1935 that "technological development in industry, depletion of natural resources,

obsolescence of industries and regulated production of agricultural commodities have all contributed to make workers stranded” (Westbrook, 1935, p. 95).

However, the program’s primary focus would be on encouraging an urban to semi-rural resettlement with limited focus on stranded and rural populations.

The mission of the DSH was to create demonstration projects to test the viability of supplementing household incomes with subsistence garden communities. The primary intent of these communities was to provide enough land for residents to grow subsistence gardens to counter the effect of variable incomes, thereby reducing their dependence on relief programs. Figure 3.3 illustrates how living on a subsistence homestead could impact a family receiving an annual income of \$800. Based on the diagram the homesteader would be able to reduce the amount of money spent on food and increase the amount of money spent on other necessities such as clothing, transportation, and medical care. The estimated reduction in food costs for the homesteader was substantial, as the diagram illustrates a potential 37.5% reduction (\$120) in money spent on food.

Another objective of the subsistence communities was to promote social growth among the residents. Resident activities were monitored and recorded, including children’s access to and participation in public education, and participation of the adults in community organizations. If successful, the federal

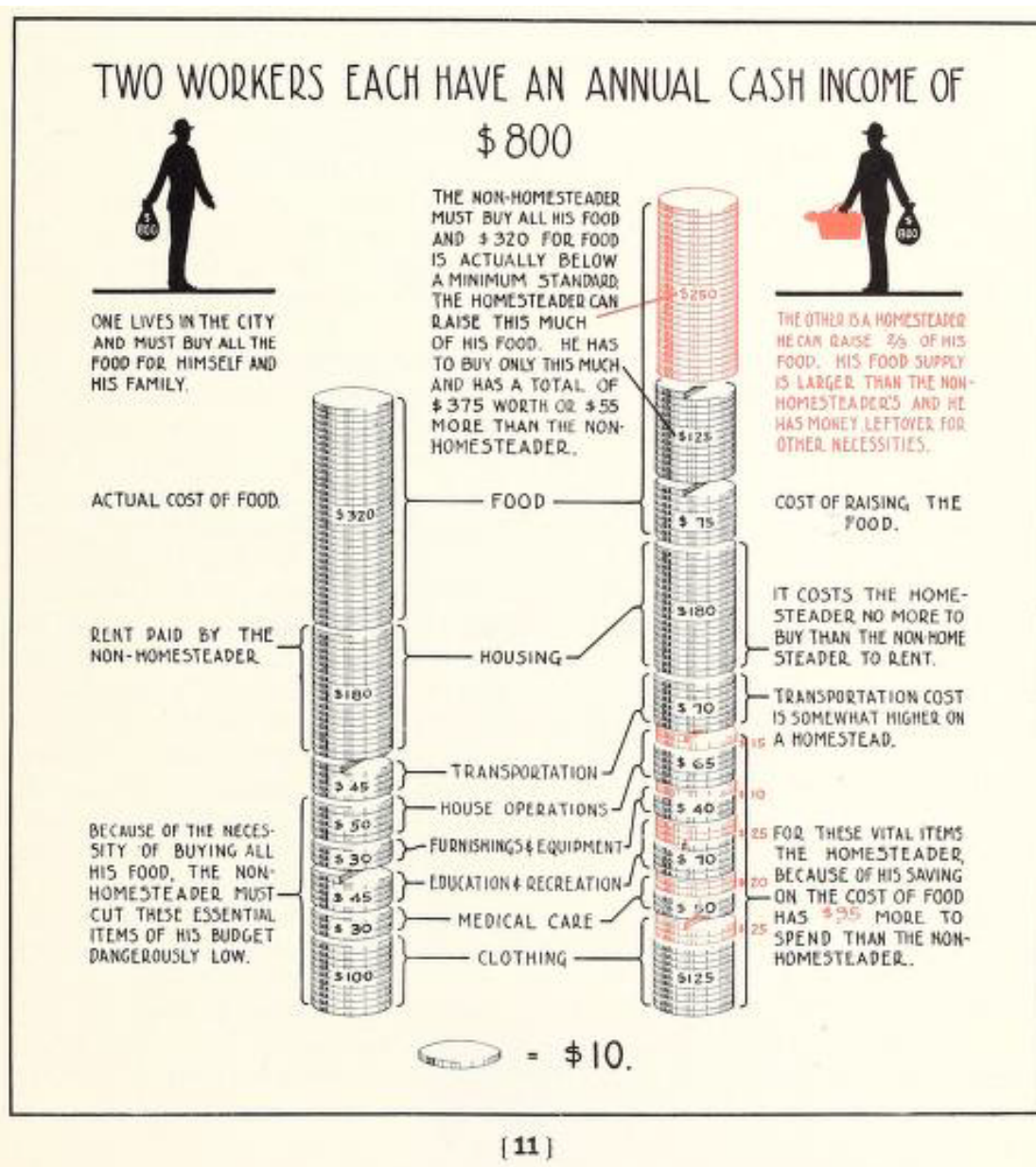


Figure 3.3. Division of Subsistence Homesteads diagram showing how subsistence farming could offset household expenses. It was expected that the residents would be able to use a greater portion of their income for necessities other than food. (United States Department of the Interior, 1935, p. 11).

government anticipated the subsistence homestead communities would serve as a model for local communities, industries building company towns, and other government units about how careful planning would benefit local economies and lives. The locations of the demonstration projects were to be determined by local needs, and locational suitability was based on the overall ability of the selected site to fulfill the mission of the Subsistence Homesteads program.

The program contained criteria for site selection, family selection, and for the economic development of the project. The criteria for the physical location had to demonstrate sustainability of land for small-scale crop production, availability of infrastructure (i.e., roads, water, and electricity), and access to public services such as public schools. Since the projects were intended to show how a specific type of socioeconomic development could enable families to support themselves on limited incomes, all applicants were extensively screened for “fit”. To promote local economic development, some of the projects were required to be close to industry, to be supportive of industry, and to encourage decentralization of industries. It was believed that being in close proximity to local industries would provide resettlement residents with an opportunity for paid employment.

M.L. Wilson began the process of planning and building these communities in 1933. Because participants were required to have a source of

income Wilson had anticipated that these communities would attract employment opportunities from the manufacturing sector. Industries such as Ford Motor Company and B.F. Goodrich were encouraged to relocate from urban areas to suburban locations or to small industrial towns. The prevailing theory was that reduced costs due to proximity to natural resources and relocation to areas with lower taxes would be enticing to industries (McDean, 1983, p. 23). To facilitate the movement of industries to the Great Plains the federal government devised a plan to create new rural communities in federally selected locations. M.L. Wilson shared the same pessimism held by many Americans that the prospects of immediate full-time employment was unlikely (McDean, 1992, p. 16). Part-time work was more likely, and families could supplement their incomes and needs through the farming of small plots of land. This was perceived as a win-win situation: manufacturing had a readily available base of employees and employees did not need to rely wholly on full-time paychecks for subsistence.

McDean (1983) explained that, "By early 1934, Wilson had selected fourteen rural community sites in the Great Plains and the selection of settlers was under way by midyear. Wilson soon found, however, that his appeal for industries to decentralize into these locales fell on deaf ears (McDean, 1983, p. 23)". The assumption that manufacturers would be willing to relocate was

overly optimistic given the state of the economy in the early 1930s. McDean (1983) stated, “The result was that when completion of the construction and settlement of the communities was reached in 1934 and 1935, not one industry had agreed to relocate” (McDean, 1983 p. 23). In 1935 the DSH was dissolved and oversight of the community projects was transferred to The Resettlement Administration.

Federal Emergency Relief Administration

On May 12, 1933 the Federal Emergency Relief Administration was authorized for two years (1933 – 1935), and on April 8, 1935, President Roosevelt approved its extension until June 30, 1936. Congress initially approved \$500,000,000 in funding from the federal government’s Reconstruction Finance Corporation for FERA. The primary purpose of FERA was to provide loans to states to provide financial assistance to those whose income was insufficient to meet basic needs. The relief funds were not automatically distributed to the states; rather, each state’s governor had to apply for funding (the application process was ongoing, and governors could apply for additional funding on a quarterly basis). Once funding was approved and received by the governor, the funds were then distributed to each state’s emergency relief administration (SERA). Through the SERAs, funds were allocated to local emergency relief

agencies for final distribution. Allocation to private organizations was prohibited.

As part of the initial funding release of \$250,000,000⁵, FERA required participating state and local agencies to provide matching funds. This requirement meant that there would be a significant investment by state and local governments. The formula for determining matching funds was:

“\$1 of Federal funds to \$3 matching from public local, State, and Federal funds expended for relief during preceding quarter of the year. Relief in this instance is defined as expenditures for (1) family relief within the home; (2) wages in cash or in kind for work relief; (3) care of homeless and transient persons outside of institutions” (Carothers, 1937, p. 2-3).

Throughout the life of FERA, contributions by state and local public agencies remained a criterion for receipt of most FERA funds, but by mid-1933 the first grant not requiring matching funds was issued.

FERA created general regulations for use of funds but did not oversee any projects or distribution processes at the state and local levels. While the states were the means for distribution of the funds, the federal government had authorized the federal administrator to take charge of any state relief

⁵ The initial amount of funding appropriated to FERA was \$500,000,000 however in 1933 only half of the funds were released to FERA for spending. The second half of the funds would be released at a later date.

administrations that were deemed uncooperative with the federal government, or when the states were not efficiently using the relief funds. By 1935 the federal government had acquired control of the emergency relief agencies from six states and four territories: Georgia, Louisiana, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The federal government would retain control over the aforementioned state administrative units, except for North Dakota and Oklahoma, which would have authority over their emergency relief administrations returned to state control (Federal Works Agency, 1942, p. 7).

The relief funds were to be used for eligible applicants and their dependents regardless of whether the applicant was a resident of the state in which they were applying or a transient. The initial funds provided were for general relief only, but this would change as the federal government realized the diversity of needs that existed in the United States and its territories. While the funding provided by FERA covered a substantial portion of the distributions to participants it was not the only source. A stipulation of FERA was that state and local governments would contribute a portion of their own funding to the general relief fund. Unfortunately, relief for the poor from state and local public agencies prior to 1929 had not been adequate for even providing the basic necessities. With the rapid increase in unemployment in the 1930s, coupled with

decreasing tax revenues, many agencies were unable to handle the increased demand.

General relief (also described as direct relief) for accepted applicants was allocated by state and local public agencies, which adopted their own formulas for determining how much aid was to be given to each participant. The relief could be in the form of cash or in-kind grants (vouchers). In-kind grants were typically used to address the following categories of need: food, housing, clothing, medical, utilities (gas, electric, and water), fuel, and essential household supplies (Carothers, 1937, p. 7). However, not all persons needing direct relief were eligible for FERA funds. The federal government explicitly stated that direct relief could not be given to widows and their dependent children, the elderly, veterans, or to those who needed hospital or institutional care. Per federal regulations, state and local public agencies were required to spend their own funds for the above listed categories of persons in-need. Federal relief for many of those not eligible for FERA funding was not available until passage of the Social Security Act, in 1936.

As part of the requirements for receiving FERA funds, the states had to submit monthly statistical reports on the number of recipients and “the amount of obligations incurred from Federal, state, and local public funds” (Federal Works Agency, 1942, p. 10). These reports served a dual purpose: first, to aid

the federal government in determining how much aid each state should receive; and second, tracking how federal, state, and local funds were expended for general (direct) relief and the various FERA projects. Until 1933 there had been no previous requirements for submission of statistical data to the federal government and no formal method of submission; however, many states were able to submit reports for periods starting in early 1933. The initial report (January – April 1933) was used to establish the amount states were eligible to receive. Only seven states (Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, and Texas) received funding during the first quarter of the FERA program. After submission of the first quarterly report, monthly reporting was required to demonstrate the amount of obligated funding and the number of persons receiving relief. The statistics for monthly reporting was often collected on a county level. Reporting to the federal government would continue even after the FERA program was dissolved.

While FERA dispersed funding to the states, the State Emergency Relief Administrations (SERA) of participating states were tasked with determining who was eligible for relief, the amount of assistance to give, and what form the assistance would take. Due to eligibility variations within and between participating states, relief assistance also varied from community to community. With that said, FERA did define certain language that provided a bare bones

framework on which the states and local agencies could base eligibility. In July 1933, FERA “stated that relief should be extended to any persons whose employment or available resources were inadequate to provide the necessities of life for themselves and their dependents” (Federal Works Agency, 1942, p. 15).

In determining eligibility, FERA required that all applicants who applied for relief be thoroughly investigated. All sources of potential income of an applicant had to be accounted for, which meant that bank accounts, real estate holdings, and all sources of income had to be disclosed. In addition, the investigation included “an interview with at least one recent employer; and a determination of the ability of relatives, friends, and churches and other organizations to assist” (Federal Works Agency, 1942, p. 15). The federal government was determined not to keep people on the relief rolls longer than needed, so the investigations continued on a monthly basis until participants were deemed no longer eligible and released from the program(s), or else left voluntarily.

The investigative work was a massive undertaking for state and local agencies as the number of monthly applications for FERA relief (direct and special projects) fluctuated significantly. Table 3.1 shows the range of applications during a 22-month period between February 1934 and November

Table 3.1

Estimated Number of Applications Received and Accepted for FERA Relief

February 1934 - November 1935

For Continental United States only

Year	Month	Received^a	Accepted^b	Percentage Accepted
1934	February	910,064	736,803	81.0%
	March	1,294,979	1,016,494	78.5%
	April	1,818,819	1,682,915	92.5%
	May	954,668	834,500	87.4%
	June	810,270	645,760	79.7%
	July	866,023	665,494	76.8%
	August	967,504	758,729	78.4%
	September	843,838	658,638	78.1%
	October	850,789	641,677	75.4%
	November	828,288	635,248	76.7%
	December	845,859	660,441	78.1%
1935	January	845,537	638,711	75.5%
	February	632,523	487,097	77.0%
	March	615,326	443,155	72.0%
	April	599,413	444,588	74.2%
	May	581,183	384,027	66.1%
	June	533,262	334,301	62.7%
	July	572,156	363,194	63.5%
	August	561,798	379,185	67.5%
	September	467,251	298,693	63.9%
	October	566,155	370,737	65.5%
	November	626,320	423,573	67.6%
		17,592,025	13,503,960	76.8%

^aapplications received include those for general relief, emergency education, and rural rehabilitation

^bapplications accepted include those for general relief and rural rehabilitation

Recreated from table on page 16 of 1942 Federal Works Agency report.

1935. Application activity ranged from a high of 1,818,819 applications received in April 1934 to a low of 467,251 applications received in September 1935. Of the total number of estimated applications received, approximately 77% were accepted for FERA relief. Caution is needed when viewing the FERA application numbers since these numbers were estimated and did not include Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The numbers also do not appear to include information regarding the transient relief program, the college aid program, and the full breadth of the rural relief program (which included the resettlement communities). Another factor that complicated the collection of accurate application numbers was that relief recipients moved on and off the relief rolls of FERA. Some people were removed because of fluctuations in monthly income that may have put them above the income limitations. Due to income fluctuations, some people may have reapplied on a monthly basis since there was not a cap on how many times one could apply for aid. Others were moved from program to program as funding sources changed and as programs were implemented and/or terminated (i.e., from FERA relief rolls to Civil Works relief rolls and then back to FERA when Civil Works was terminated).

Shortly after the start of FERA it was determined that financial assistance alone could not adequately address the needs of the country's poor and stranded

populations. As a result, FERA authorized the creation of four special projects: the Emergency Education Program (August 1933), the College Student Aid Program (February 1934), the Rural Rehabilitation Program (March 1934), and Transient Relief Program (July 1933). In addition to general relief and the special projects, FERA included funding for camps for unemployed women and girls, cattle and disaster relief, subsistence gardens, school lunches, building and conservation projects, and self-help cooperatives.

Unlike the National Industrial Recovery Act, which contained specific funding and language for subsistence homesteads, FERA had no such specific language in the original authorization. Instead, FERA allowed the states to propose projects to the local emergency relief committees for approval. The resettlement communities built with FERA funds were administered as part of FERA's special project program for rural rehabilitation.

On January 19, 1934 the first mention of subsistence gardens was posted in the *Chronology of The Federal Emergency Relief Administration* book. Approval of these gardens required the submission of plans to the State Department of Agriculture or the United States Department of Agriculture Extension office. While project approval came from the state or federal government, the initial funding had to come from state appropriations received from FERA.

In February 1934 the White House issued a press release that announced there would be a collaborative effort with the Division of Subsistence Homesteads to try to remediate the subsistence/relief issues of distressed families in rural areas. By April 1934 the federal government had issued a directive of preferred projects which included subsistence homesteads, planning boards, land acquisition projects, housing, and self-help projects. The preferential designation was due to the belief that the projects were of a national scope and “because of their relationship to the relief organizations and the immediate or prospective contribution that they can make to the reduction of the relief load” (Carothers, 1937, p. 54). In September 1934, the state emergency relief administrators were instructed to coordinate the purchase of submarginal lands and the purchase of land sufficient for resettlement purposes. The community development projects of FERA and DSH were administered separately but simultaneously until they were consolidated into the Resettlement Administration in 1935.

Table 3.2 shows the breakdown of the funding provided by FERA from January 1933 through June 1941. The FERA resettlement communities fell under the category of “special relief activities” for which a total \$324,114,104 had been obligated by the end of June 1941. Of the special relief activities funding, the resettlement communities had received \$53,383,568 which was 16.47% of the

Table 3.2.

Table 36—Total Amount of Obligations Incurred from FERA Funds Granted to the States and Territories			
CUMULATIVE THROUGH JUNE 30, 1941			
Activity	Amount	Activity	Amount
Total	▲ \$3,091,475,804	Special relief activities—Continued.	
General relief and special emergency relief programs	■ 2,767,361,699	National Reemployment Service	\$1, 556, 474
Special relief activities—Total	324, 114, 105	Rural school continuation	21, 985, 880
Civil Works program	35, 742, 022	Self-help cooperatives	3, 775, 977
Surplus commodities	146, 241, 262	Rural rehabilitation community projects and balances trans- ferred to Resettlement Ad- ministration	53, 383, 568
Cattle and drought contracts	41, 877, 231	Miscellaneous emergency ac- tivities	19, 551, 691

(Federal Works Agency, 1942, p. 104).

total. However, the funding for the resettlement projects was a small fraction (1.7%) of overall funding provided by FERA. The FERA resettlement projects were undertaken in 1934 and 1935.

It is noted that FERA's rural rehabilitation program was focused on either in-place aid or resettlement of destitute farm families. The majority of the rural rehabilitation work was focused on helping farmers redevelop a sustainable economic and environmental life in their present location. This was done through loans, distribution of products, and education of farmers. A smaller portion of the work focused on relocation of families to resettlement

communities in attempt to help them gain permanent financial independence from the government relief rolls.

Similar to the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, FERA was an experimental program. Administrative techniques, program formulas, and scope of programs paid with FERA funds shifted dramatically over the life of the program. The experimentation with FERA programs helped establish the groundwork for more permanent programs such as Social Security and the Works Progress Administration (Division of Research, WPA Research Monograph XXIV, page XIII).

The Resettlement Administration.

On May 1, 1935, President Roosevelt issued two executive orders regarding the resettlement projects. Executive Order 7027 established the Resettlement Administration and Executive Order 7028 authorized the transfer of the FERA projects to the Resettlement Administration (RA). Executive Order 7027, "Establishing the Resettlement Administration" authorized the creation of a new agency for the administering of the "approved projects involving resettlement of destitute or low-income families from rural and urban areas, including the establishment, maintenance, and operation, in such connection, of communities in rural and suburban areas" (The American Presidency Project,

2015, section a). In addition to the funds transferred from FERA, the RA received \$250,000⁶ in initial funding. Additional funding beyond the \$250,000 was to be determined on a project by project basis.

Executive Order 7028, "Transferring the Land Program of F.E.R.A to the Resettlement Administration", authorized the transfer of "all the real and personal property or any interest therein, together with all contracts, options, rights and interests, books, papers, memoranda, records, etc." of the FERA resettlement projects to the Resettlement Administration. The projects that were started under FERA were allowed to be finished before being transferred to the RA, but after May 1935 there were no new FERA projects undertaken.

On May 15, 1935 the projects of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads were transferred to the Resettlement Administration through Executive Order 7041. As with Executive Order 7027, the transfer of the DSH also included all funds, property, and rights to the Resettlement Administration. All of the resettlement projects, regardless of origin, would remain with the RA until it was dissolved in 1937, at which time the oversight of the projects were divided between the Farm Security Administration and the Federal Housing Authority.

⁶ Considering that the DSH received initial federal funding of \$25,000,000 and FERA received \$500,000,000 the very small amount of funding the RA received appears as if the program was being phased out at the time of the DSH and FERA transfers to the RA. Another explanation for the RA to only have received \$250,000 was that the remaining funds held by the DSH and FERA were transferred to the RA and the total of those funds may have been deemed sufficient to complete the work.

The RA was headed by Rexford Tugwell who, like M.L. Wilson, believed that the chronically poor farmer must be resettled, and manufacturing employment was probably the best fit for the resettled farmer. The difference between Tugwell and Wilson was that Wilson believed the displaced farm families should stay close to their current rural communities. This is why Wilson desired to bring manufacturing jobs to the Great Plains. Tugwell, on the other hand, did not believe manufacturers would be willing to relocate to the Great Plains and believed that displaced farm families should relocate considerable distances for full-time employment opportunities (McDean, 1983, p24).

Tugwell's solution to encourage farm families to move was to build homes in suburban locations that would allow the farmers to gain easy access to employment opportunities that already existed in urban centers.

While the RA did continue building the resettlement communities it is best known for the planning and building of three suburban projects which were known as greenbelt towns. These were the towns of Greenbelt Maryland, Greenhills Ohio, and Greendale Wisconsin. Unfortunately, the homes built in the suburban areas were criticized as being too expensive for a farmer to afford. The resettlement program was terminated in July 1937 by the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act. The 1937 legislation provided funding for the completion and administration of existing resettlement communities but denied funding for the

construction of additional new projects. Many of the DSH, FERA, and RA projects were transferred to the FSA in 1937 for administrative oversight.

The resettlement program may have ceased in 1937 but it left a wide footprint on the United States as the majority of states had at least one community created and settled within their borders. The following two chapters will discuss the location, design, and selection of residents for the resettlement projects in the United States and in the state of Nebraska.

CHAPTER 4 – MOVING FORWARD WITH PLANS AND HOPE

The full force of the Federal Government, in cooperation with State, municipal, and private agencies, is mobilized to improve housing. We are working toward the ultimate objective of making it possible for American families to live as Americans should.

- United States Information Service, 1935, p. 1.

Between 1934 and 1941, the United States federal government, with the cooperation of state and local agencies, undertook the building of approximately 207 rural and urban resettlement communities throughout the United States, including in the territories of Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. During this time five federal agencies were primarily involved in the resettlement projects: The Division of Subsistence Homesteads (DSH), the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), the Resettlement Administration (RA), the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and the Public Works Administration (PWA).

Together the DSH, FERA and the RA undertook the creation of 152 communities for stranded, rural, and urban populations. The DSH completed 34 communities. Six types were planned and constructed: stranded communities, co-operative industrial farms, resettlement communities, industrial communities, and garden cities. FERA provided funding for 28 communities of which there

were five types: stranded communities, farm villages, farm communities, farm and rural industrial, and industrial. The RA completed an additional 37 communities including the following types: garden city, small garden city, forest homesteads, co-operative farms, co-operative plantations, and farm communities and 53 infiltration projects. The TVA created four industrial communities to house people who were employed on their projects. The PWA's Housing Division worked with state and local communities to clear urban slums and to create 51 model multi-unit housing projects in selected urban areas.

The process of developing the resettlement communities involved the establishment of criteria for the selection of program participants, determining which type of communities to build, identifying where the communities were to be located, land-use recommendations, and the creation of architectural standards.

Selection of Program Participants

Because the intent of the resettlement communities was to move families from areas in which full-time employment was not achievable, or from farms that were not sustainable, the federal government realized this would require the redistribution of population for all projects regardless of location. The flow of population for the rural projects went in one of three directions: urban centers to

semi-rural areas; submarginal/marginal rural farms to semi-rural developments; and submarginal/marginal rural farms to rural developments.

One of the goals of the resettlement program was to provide a higher standard of living for the program participants which in many of the targeted areas had been deemed inadequate. The plan had been to have the resettlement families participate in part-time farming activities in an effort to produce enough fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meat products to sustain households when incomes fluctuated. In order to make the endeavor successful the federal government determined that the ideal candidate would have a farming background. It was believed that enough urban residents had a farming background (loosely defined as either a person who had lived on a farm as a child or had farmed at some point in their adult life) that the transition to part-time farming would be minimal.

Each of the resettlement programs focused on a specific segment of the population. The DSH initially targeted rural and stranded industrial population but later focused more on urban populations. FERA concentrated on rural populations and the RA worked with both rural and urban populations. The PWA worked only with urban populations. The difference between the PWA and the other agencies is that the PWA was exclusive to urban environments

while the other projects were typically created outside of or along the periphery of urban areas.

Four main groups of people were the target of the resettlement programs: stranded populations, the unemployed or underemployed industrial populations (underemployed refers to persons whose income was considered less than full-time and variable), “over-aged workers”, and impoverished rural families.

The stranded population category included those persons who had worked in extractive services such as mining and timber where the natural resources had been depleted. A lack of proper management of forested areas resulted in areas being stripped of timber. These areas were classified as cut-over land and had been targeted for land-use readjustment by the federal government. Persons working in the timber industry or living on cut-over land would have been forced to move away or to endure the hardships of limited employment opportunities (or none), particularly if there was no other major industry in the area. In addition to the effects on employment, the destruction of forests meant the loss of resources for fuel and building materials for those living in these areas (United States Farm Security Administration, 1936, p. 2). Figure 4.1 is an example of cut-over land in South Dakota where the destruction of trees had left little available for harvesting.



Figure 4.1. Cut-over land purchased by the Resettlement Administration. This area would be rededicated to forest for the Custer State Park in South Dakota (Rothstein, 1936).

The other group of people that were considered stranded were those who lived where manufacturing facilities had been permanently closed or the prospect of reopening was quite slim. The federal government had hoped that many of the stranded households would be able to relocate using their own resources or find a way to re-tool their employment skills so as to be able to work in other nearby industries. However, the government understood that not all households had the necessary resources or skills to move on with their lives.

Those persons deemed as being “over-aged” were also a focus of the resettlement programs. The definition of an over-aged worker varied slightly between extractive services and industrial employment. A person was considered aged-out of mining services after reaching the age of 35 and was nearly unemployable in this work once they passed 45 years of age. For a person working in the manufacturing, 45 to 50 years of age was the point at which a person may have been considered over-aged and forced into retirement (United States Department of Interior, Division of Subsistence Homesteads, 1933, p. 3). Focusing on acquiring full-time employment for these people was not a goal of the resettlement programs; rather it was believed that part-time gardening could supplement any part-time work they may have found after aging-out.

The use of subsistence homesteads was seen as a partial remedy for the financial hardships caused by employment variability created by advances in technology that resulted in a reduction in the number of hours or days a person worked in a week, cyclical unemployment due to variations in business cycles, seasonal agricultural work, and the decentralization of industries from city centers to suburban areas. While the subsistence program was not considered a panacea for the unemployment problems faced by the country’s population in the 1930s it was considered a testing ground for the development of communities that offered a different type of lifestyle from one that relied wholly on either

commercial employment or full-time farming. Gwin (1934) stated that M.L. Wilson summed up his belief in the program by stating “the way out is to develop a type of worker who is neither a farmer nor a factory worker but something of both of these” (Gwin, 1934, p. 524). These communities were believed to be the path forward.

In addition to focusing on specific categories of the population, the DSH required applicants to meet certain criteria in order to be selected for participation in resettlement programs. Simply proving that an applicant was unemployed or destitute was not sufficient to warrant inclusion in one of the programs. There were several requirements for participation which often excluded single people, households with incomes and assets (i.e., savings or property holdings) that may have been sufficient for them to purchase a home without government assistance (typically an income above \$1,200 a year), and non-whites. All selected participants were required to be United States citizens, which applied to both the husband and wife. In addition, both the husband and wife must have been of legal age since they each had to sign the purchase agreement. The couple was required to have children or were to be expecting children. If the homesteaders were over the age of 45 then their children had to be old enough to take over the homestead if one or both parents were unable to meet the obligations of the unit (United States Department of the Interior,

Division of Subsistence Homesteads, Federal Subsistence Homesteads Corporation, 1935, pp. 15-16).

All participants were screened for their ability to manage their money and to participate in community life. This meant that they needed to show evidence of “acceptable initiative and resourcefulness, ...promise of ability to enter into community life and profit from guidance, ...a reputation for paying their debts and meeting their responsibilities, [and] ...sufficient stability of residence” (Federal Register, 1941, p. 20). The 1941 Federal Register stated that families could be accepted into the program if all members of the family desired the opportunity to participate. This criterion was important because a lack of buy-in from any member of the family could jeopardize the success of the family or the project. Approved couples were typically selected from the area to which they were relocating.

In addition to the successful management of personal finances and a cooperative attitude, the homesteaders had to be physically capable of gardening or light farm work. All selected rural project participants (husband, wife, and children) were required to submit to a medical examination. All family members were to be “free of infectious diseases and disabilities that are likely to obstruct the fulfilment of obligations” (Federal Register, 1941, p. 20). The



Figure 4.2. Wife and children of family to be relocated to Wabash Farms, Indiana (Rothstein, 1938).

medical examinations were paid with funds from the family selection budget of each project.

Segregation

While the federal government stated that discrimination was not to be practiced in the participant selection process it also did not stop it from happening. The January 3, 1941 *Federal Register* stated that “consideration will be given to the homogeneity required for successful community life” (National Archives and Records Administration, *Federal Register*, 1941, p. 20). The lack of

inclusion of black rural families was evident in Edith Wood's 1936 report *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States*. The report stated that black families had not been included in a sample study of rural housing in 11 states by E. L. Kirkpatrick and as a result the percentage of homes in substandard condition was underestimated. The lack of interest in the housing conditions of African-Americans and the outcry over using taxpayer dollars to build communities for them (St. John Erickson, 2018) meant they were almost completely shut-out of the resettlement programs. As a result, only one community, Newport News Homesteads (aka Aberdeen Gardens) in Virginia, was completed for African Americans. The project was proposed in 1934 by the Hampton Institute (now known as the Hampton University) and was completed in 1937. It was situated on 440 acres, four miles north of the Newport News business district. The federal government provided \$245,000 for the construction of 158 single family homes.

A unique aspect of the Newport News Homesteads is that it was planned, designed, and built by African Americans for African Americans. Hilyard Robinson, the head of Howard University's architecture department in Washington D.C., was the lead architect of the development. William R. Walker Jr. was the community's manager and William C. McNeill was the chief engineer for the project (University of Virginia, n.d.). The construction of the Newport



Figure 4.3. Serving lunch to the workers during the construction of the Newport News Homesteads (United States Resettlement Administration, 1936).



Figure 4.4. One of the completed homes in the Newport News Homesteads community (Rothstein, 1937).

News Homesteads was considered a community effort. Figure 4.3 illustrates a lunch that was provided by the women of Newport News Homesteads for the workers and the prospective tenants of the project. Figure 4.4 is an example of the housing that was constructed in the Newport News community. The architectural style has been identified as a combination of “old Tidewater and new Colonial Revival” (St. John Erickson, 2018).

The Jersey Homesteads located near Hightstown, New Jersey was also a community developed for a specific segment of the population. The March 10, 1935 press release from the Division of Subsistence Homesteads stated that while the project is open to all who apply:

“The project was undertaken to solve a definite economic problem affecting workers in the garment industry. Applicants for homesteads have, as a result, been almost 100 percent Jewish, and the project’s sponsorship has come chiefly from leaders of the Jewish community in New York City”.

Among the project’s sponsors were Benjamin Brown, who, in 1929 advised the Soviet government on the benefits of cooperative farming and Dr. Albert Einstein, who served as a chief sponsor for the Hightstown resettlement project.

While the press release explains the purpose and function of the Hightstown resettlement community, it took a decidedly biased tone when it attempted to explain who the Jewish people are. The press release states:

It is popularly thought to be unusual for Jewish people to engage in a rural or semi-rural undertaking. The Jewish people are known as a gregarious race who have been highly urbanized for the past two thousand years, in large measure as the result of European laws which prohibited them from owning land. What is not so well known, is that some 120,000 Jews are on farms in the country today. Attempts by other countries to settle Jewish families on the land have failed largely because they neglected the social side of life which is so important to the Jew. The Jew is a sociable citizen. He sets great store by family, friends, and community. He flees from isolation. The Jersey Homestead plan promises him a semi-rural or suburban life, but one in which neighbors and the community are strongly emphasized.

In such a community the advantages of subsistence homesteading are to be enjoyed with no loss of those fine social activities which go to make up the well-rounded life which the Jewish family demands" (United States Division of Subsistence Homesteads, Memorandum for the Press, 1935, p. 6-7).

According to Donna R. Causey (2016), by November 1935 the Hightstown project was in trouble. The resettlement community had started under the DSH but by May 1935 it had moved to the RA and was under the administrative oversight of Rex Tugwell. The project stalled early in the planning process because David Dubinsky, head of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union had opposed the moving of any garment jobs from New York City to the resettlement



Figure 4.5. Workers in the garment factory in the Hightstown, New Jersey resettlement project (United States Resettlement Administration, 1936).



Figure 4.6. The canning facility under construction in Hightstown, New Jersey (United States Resettlement Administration, 1936).

project. This was troublesome to the community's planners because it was the garment jobs that were expected to provide the economic base for the Hightstown project. Eventually Dubinsky agreed to allow a garment factory (Figure 4.5) to be built in Hightstown (Causey, 2016). It was not the only industry that was permitted for the community. A canning factory was also approved and built. Figure 4.6 shows the canning facility, which is significantly larger than those built in the state of Nebraska. Another concern that surfaced during the construction phase was a rumor that the Jewish settlers might be excluded from the project despite it being proposed as a Jewish community. Despite the troubles in the planning and building phases, the project was completed in 1937.

The inclusion of Native Americans was not much better, as only six communities had been proposed:

- Great Falls Homesteads (Cascade County, Montana)
- Burns Subsistence Homesteads (Harney County, Oregon)
- Chilocco Homesteads (Kay County, Oklahoma)
- White Earth Homesteads (Becker County, Minnesota)
- Devil's Lake Homesteads (Ramsey County, North Dakota)
- Lake County Homesteads (Lake County, California)

(National Archives and Records Administration, Federal Register, 1937)

None of the Native American communities are included in the lists of projects that were completed by the DSH, FERA, or the RA. These projects were originally overseen by the Department of Agriculture, until February 1937 when they were transferred in their entirety to the Department of the Interior. It is unknown how many of the communities were completed.

Types of Resettlement Projects

The DSH identified 5 types of resettlement projects that were to be pursued. In their 1933 publication *“General Information Concerning the Purposes and Policies of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads”* the following types of projects were identified: 1) workers’ garden homesteads to be located near small industries that were outside of urban centers; 2) workers’ garden homesteads near heavy industries where decentralization or movement from present location was not expected; 3) communities aimed at the rehabilitation of stranded industrial workers; 4) rural communities for destitute rural families who were removed from submarginal land; and 5) infiltration projects where farm families were to be moved to existing farms that still had the potential to provide an income but whose current owners wanted to leave or retire from farming (United States Department of Interior, Circular No 1, p. 7-8). The 1933 publication noted

that the first two types of projects (workers' garden homesteads) were not just for industrial or trade workers but also included office workers.

By 1935, the DSH had begun deemphasizing rural projects. Instead they concentrated on resettlement communities that benefitted industrial workers, the industrially handicapped (who were described as persons who were capable of "life on a homestead, [but] are denied employment because of some physical injury or incapacity") (U.S. Department of Interior, *A Homestead and Hope*, 1933, p. 12), and persons working to manage the country's natural resources (i.e., national park employees, fire prevention workers, and lumber harvesting on national lands). Of the 34 communities the DSH built, 24 were industrial communities and only three were farm communities.

The projects funded through FERA were aimed at rural families. Many of these projects were full-time farming communities where the residents were expected to grow produce for household consumption, and where co-operatives were established to allow the selling of excess produce for profit (but not at a scale that would compete with large farming operations). Of the 28 communities completed by FERA, only two were of the industrial type, two were a farm and industrial combination, and 22 were farm communities.

The RA continued the community development projects after the DSH and FERA were consolidated into the agency in 1935. Much like the DSH, the

RA categorized their projects as 1) garden farms where the families were expected to supplement their incomes with produce grown on their farm; 2) full-time farming projects where the residents would live in close proximity to each other so as to form a rural community; and 3) infiltration projects where farm families would be moved to existing farms that were part of an existing community. An important difference between the infiltration projects and the other types of resettlement projects is that infiltration resettlement occurred on scattered individual farms, whereas the other types of projects were where farms or acreages were adjoined to other units, which was designed to form a new community. Despite the listing of three different categories of resettlement communities the RA focused almost exclusively on rural areas - 31 of the 37 projects completed were farming communities. However, the RA did pursue a type of development that had not been proposed in either the DSH or the FERA programs, the greenbelt towns. These projects were planned and administered by the Suburban Resettlement division of the RA.

Originally federal funding had been provided for five greenbelt towns but only three were completed. Those that were completed were located in Greenbelt Maryland (1,300-unit community), Greenhills Ohio (1,000-unit community), and Greendale Wisconsin (750-unit community). The Greenbrook New Jersey community (in Somerset County, New Jersey) was planned to

accommodate 5,000 families but only 750 units were to be built at the beginning of the project. In 1936 the Greenbrook project was declared unconstitutional by the United States Court of Appeals in Washington D.C. (United States Resettlement Administration, 1936). As a result, it was never built. A community for St. Louis, Missouri (in Jackson county) had also been considered, but by June 1936 the project was abandoned before it had even reached the planning stage.

Figure 4.7 illustrates how the greenbelt towns were to be in close proximity to nearby towns and industries. All of the RA's greenbelt towns were designed to include a perimeter that was to be used for farming or gardening purposes. The "greenbelt" was also intended to keep undesirable industries from locating too close to the new communities and to control the outward expansion of the communities.

The center of the towns were reserved for businesses and for public service facilities such as a post office and a school, and a movie theater. Street design did not follow the usual grid system, instead street construction was minimized which created "unusually large residential blocks, five or six times as large as an ordinary city square" (United States Farm Security Administration, 1936, p. 17). Figure 4.8 shows the town plan for Greenbelt Maryland. The community design conformed to the diagram depicted for Figure 4.7. The

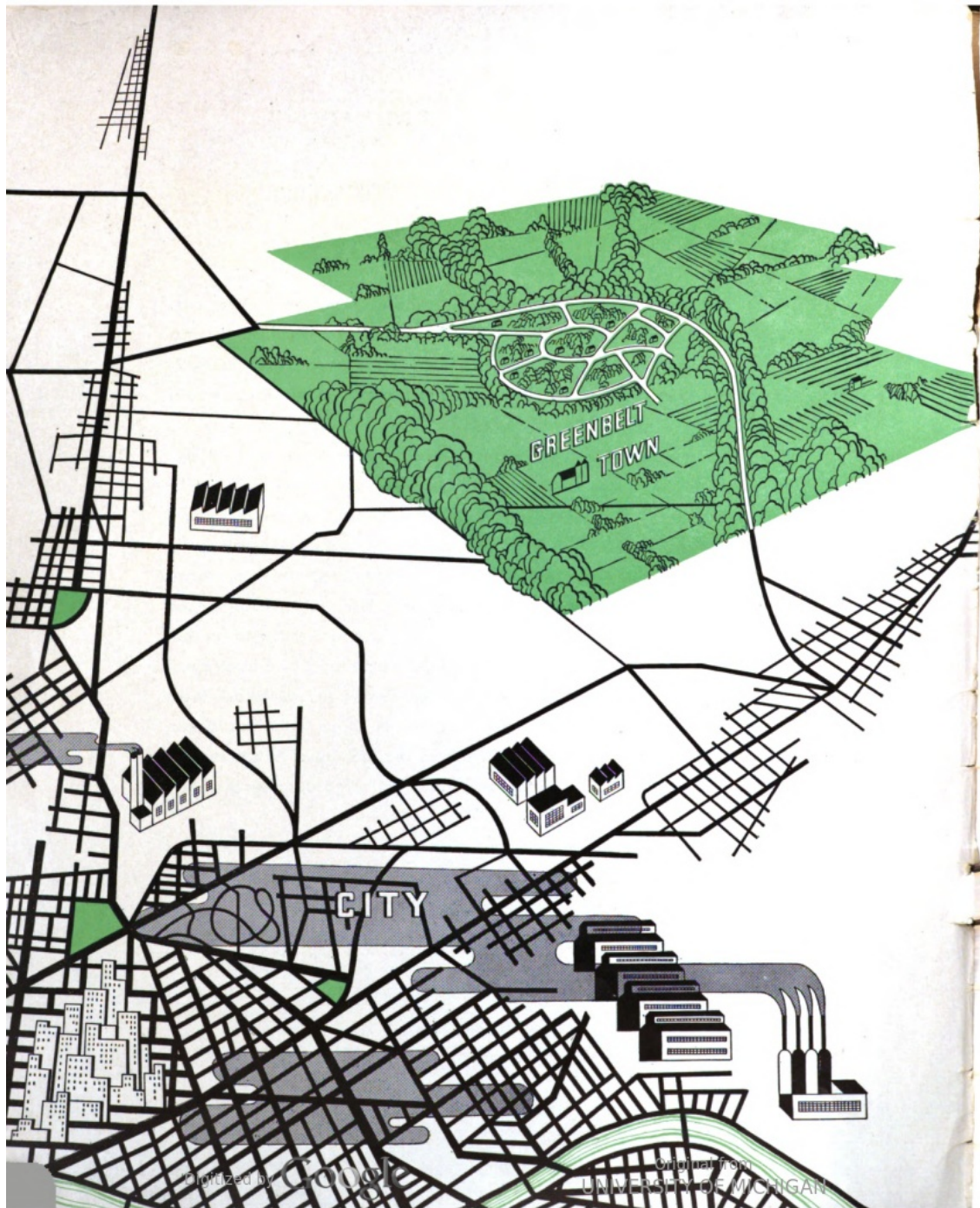


Figure 4.7. Illustration showing the intended proximity of greenbelt towns to nearby cities. The location of the greenbelt towns would allow residents easy access to employment opportunities while the farmland surrounding the community would keep the surrounding urban growth from encroaching on the greenbelt town (United States Resettlement Administration, 1936, p. 3).

residential areas are the sections labeled A, B, C, D, and E, with the community buildings located in the center of the horseshoe. The areas designed for farm use are located at the bottom of the picture. Land to be used for gardens partially surrounds the perimeter of the residential areas.

The intent of these communities was to accommodate low-income families in low-rent housing units. Interestingly, the sites selected for the greenbelt towns could not be near any areas “destined for high-class residential development” (United States Farm Security Administration, 1936, p. 18). It is possible that this was required because even in the 1930s there was a negative stigma attached to public housing which many of the resettlement communities were considered to be.

These communities had been part of Rex Tugwell’s solution to encourage farm families to move to suburban locations that would allow farmers easier access to employment opportunities in urban areas. Unfortunately, the homes built in the suburban areas were criticized as being too expensive for a farmer to afford, and no further greenbelt towns were proposed or built.

Between the DSH, FERA, and RA, the federal government spent over \$107,049,640.55 to build 10,788 units in 99 communities across 33 states. Tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 identify the communities that were completed by the three agencies listed above but it should be noted that it is believed these lists are

Table 4.1

Resettlement Projects Completed by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads

Name	Location	State	Community Type	Units	Total Cost	Cost Per Unit
Trussville Homesteads	Near Birmingham	AL	Small garden city	287	\$ 2,760,610.70	\$ 9,619
Bankhead Farms	Jasper	AL	Industrial	100	\$ 1,046,420.80	\$ 10,464
Greenwood Homesteads	Near Birmingham	AL	Industrial	83	\$ 827,835.27	\$ 9,974
Mount Olive Homesteads	Near Birmingham	AL	Industrial	75	\$ 618,162.84	\$ 8,242
Palmerdale Homesteads	Near Birmingham	AL	Industrial	102	\$ 938,865.08	\$ 9,205
Phoenix Homesteads	Phoenix	AZ	Industrial	25	\$ 104,859.28	\$ 4,194
El Monte Homesteads	El Monte	CA	Industrial	100	\$ 292,476.81	\$ 2,925
San Fernando Homesteads	Reseda	CA	Industrial	40	\$ 102,065.23	\$ 2,552
Piedmont Homesteads	Jasper County	GA	Farm	50	NA	\$ 12,993
Granger Homesteads	Granger	IA	Industrial	50	\$ 216,189.87	\$ 4,324
Lake County Homesteads	Chicago	IL	Industrial	53	\$ 554,745.53	\$ 10,469
Decatur Homesteads	Decatur	IN	Industrial	48	\$ 157,279.94	\$ 3,277
Austin Homesteads	Austin	MN	Industrial	44	\$ 213,227.87	\$ 4,864
Duluth Homesteads	Duluth	MN	Industrial	84	\$ 983,984.30	\$ 11,714
Richton Homesteads	Richton	MS	Farm	26	\$ 216,468.82	\$ 8,626
Hattiesburg Homesteads	Hattiesburg	MS	Industrial	24	\$ 75,648.78	\$ 3,152
McComb Homesteads	McComb	MS	Industrial	20	\$ 91,452.52	\$ 4,573
Tupelo Homesteads	Tupelo	MS	Industrial	35	\$ 13,247.12	\$ 3,978
Magnolia Homesteads	Meridian	MS	Industrial	25	\$ 73,556.46	\$ 2,942
Penderlea Homesteads	Pender County	NC	Farm	195	\$ 2,277,685.60	\$ 11,680
Jersey Homesteads	Highstown	NJ	Co-operative Industrial	206	\$ 3,402,382.27	\$ 16,516
Dayton Homesteads	Dayton	OH	Industrial	35	NA	NA
Westmoreland Homesteads	Greensburg	PA	Stranded	255	\$ 2,516,469.81	\$ 9,869
Cumberland Homesteads	Crossville	TN	Stranded	262	\$ 3,267,345.10	\$ 12,471
Beauxart Gardens	Beaumont	TX	Industrial	50	\$ 1,430,217.62	\$ 2,861
Dalworthington Gardens	Arlington	TX	Industrial	79	\$ 325,712.35	\$ 4,123
Houston Gardens	Houston	TX	Industrial	100	\$ 283,568.10	\$ 2,836
Three Rivers Gardens	Three Rivers	TX	Industrial	50	\$ 162,943.43	\$ 3,259
Wichita Gardens	Wichita Falls	TX	Industrial	62	\$ 187,527.85	\$ 3,025
Shenandoah Homesteads	Five counties	VA	Resettlement (7)	160	\$ 1,060,125.49	\$ 6,626
Aberdeen Gardens	Newport News	VA	Garden city	159	\$ 1,353,896.29	\$ 8,515
Longview Homesteads	Longview	WA	Industrial	60	\$ 194,097.52	\$ 3,235
Arthurdale	Reedsville	WV	Stranded	165	\$ 2,744,724.09	\$ 16,635
Tygart Valley Homesteads	Elkins	WV	Stranded	195	\$ 2,080,213.99	\$ 10,668
*NA denotes missing information				Total:	3304	\$ 30,574,006.73
				Average cost per unit:		\$7,285.03

(The Living New Deal Website)

Table 4.2

Resettlement Projects Completed by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA)

Name	Location	State	Type of Community	Units	Total Cost	Cost Per Unit
Dyess Colony	Mississippi County	AR	Farm Community	275	\$ 2,306,210.00	\$ 8,386
Chicot Farms	Chicot and Drew Counties	AR	Farm Community	85	\$ 578,338.60	\$ 6,804
Skyline Farms	Jackson County	AR	Farm Community	181	\$ 1,230,333.06	\$ 6,797
St. Francis River Farms	Poinsett County	AR	Farm Community	86	\$ 546,767.43	\$ 6,358
Arizona Part-time Farms	Phoenix	AZ	Industrial	91	\$ 564,013.05	\$ 6,198
Cherry Lake Farms	Near Madison	FL	Farm and Rural Industrial	132	\$ 1,913,811.00	\$ 14,499
Pine Mountain Valley	Harris County	GA	Farm and Rural Industrial	205	\$ 2,207,572.00	\$ 10,769
Irwinville	Irwin County	GA	Farm Community	105	\$ 899,815.34	\$ 8,571
Wolf Creek	Grady County	GA	Farm Community	24	\$ 233,351.21	\$ 9,723
Albert Lea Homesteads	Albert Lea	MN	Industrial	14	\$ 38,160.68	\$ 2,726
Roanoke Farms	Halifax County	NC	Farm Community	294	\$ 2,191,568.39	\$ 7,454
Scuppernong Farms	Tyrrell and Washington Counties	NC	Farm Community	127	\$ 779,327.49	\$ 6,136
Burlington Project	Burlington	ND	Stranded Community	35	\$ 213,172.15	\$ 6,091
Fairbury Farmsteads	Jefferson County	NE	Farm Village	11	\$ 67,895.87	\$ 6,198
Fall City Farmsteads	Richardson County	NE	Farm Village	10	\$ 102,755.42	\$ 10,276
Grand Island Farmsteads	Hall County	NE	Farm Village	10	\$ 68,126.52	\$ 6,813
Kearney Homesteads	Buffalo County	NE	Farm Village	10	\$ 98,238.96	\$ 9,824
Loup City Farmsteads	Sherman County	NE	Farm Village	11	\$ 101,281.82	\$ 9,207
Scottsbluff Farmsteads	Scotts Bluff County	NE	Farm Village	23	\$ 231,520.02	\$ 10,276
South Sioux Falls Farms	Dakota County	NE	Farm Village	22	\$ 115,395.98	\$ 5,245
Two Rivers Farmsteads	Douglas and Saunders Counties	NE	Farm Village	40	\$ 547,746.49	\$ 13,694
Bosque Farms	Valencia County	NM	Farm Community	42	\$ 677,725.45	\$ 16,136
Ashwood Plantation	Lee County	SC	Farm Community	161	\$ 1,874,268.56	\$ 11,641
Sioux Falls Farms	Minnehaha County	SD	Farm Village	14	\$ 218,660.71	\$ 15,619
Woodlake Community	Wood County	TX	Farm Village	101	\$ 648,255.81	\$ 6,418
Ropesville Farms	Hockley County	TX	Farm Community	76	\$ 667,489.03	\$ 8,783
Wichita Valley Farms	Wichita County	TX	Farm Community	91	\$ 931,086.53	\$ 10,243
Red House	Red House	WV	Stranded Community	NA	NA	\$ 10,769
*NA denotes missing information				Total:	2276	\$ 20,052,887.57
				Average cost per unit:		\$ 8,988

(The Living New Deal Website)

Table 4.3

Resettlement Communities created by the Resettlement Administration

Name	Location	State	Type of Community	Units	Total Cost	Cost Per Unit
Lakeview Farms	Lee and Phillips Counties	AK	Farm Community	141	\$ 899,652.21	\$ 6,381
Lonoke Farms	Lonoke County	AK	Farm Community	57	\$ 254,484.84	\$ 4,465
Truman Farms	Poinsett County	AK	Farm Community	57	\$ 278,937.13	\$ 4,894
Gee's Bend Farms	Wilcox County	AL	Farm Community	100	\$ 418,105.30	\$ 4,185
Lake Dick	Jefferson and Arkansas Counties	AR	Co-operative Farm	97	\$ 663,810.81	\$ 6,844
Biscoe Farms	Prairie County	AR	Farm Community	77	\$ 373,224.39	\$ 4,847
Clover Bend Farms	Lawrence County	AR	Farm Community	91	\$ 483,534.82	\$ 5,817
Desha Farms	Desha and Drew Counties	AR	Farm Community	88	\$ 511,872.94	\$ 5,817
Plum Bayou	Jefferson County	AR	Farm Community	200	\$ 1,634,921.84	\$ 8,175
Tiverton Farms	Sumter County	AR	Farm Community	29	\$ 117,987.93	\$ 4,069
Townes Farms	Crittenden County	AR	Farm Community	37	\$ 163,733.93	\$ 4,425
Casa Grande Valley Farms	Pinal County	AZ	Co-operative Farm	60	\$ 817,548.17	\$ 11,959
Escambia Farms	Okaloosa County	FL	Farm Community	81	\$ 585,818.99	\$ 7,232
Flint River Farms	Macon County	GA	Farm Community	146	\$ 727,611.42	\$ 4,984
Praire Farms	Macon County	GA	Farm Community	34	\$ 201,683.79	\$ 5,932
Sublimity Farms	Laurel County	KY	Forest Homesteads	66	\$ 419,824.85	\$ 6,361
Christian-Trigg Farms	Christian County	KY	Farm Community	106	\$ 971,424.99	\$ 9,164
Terrebonne	Terrebonne Parish	LA	Co-operative Plantation	73	\$ 514,104.21	\$ 7,048
Mounds Farms	Madison and East Carroll parishes	LA	Farm Community	149	\$ 803,616.30	\$ 5,393
Transylvania Farms	East Carroll Parish	LA	Farm Community	163	\$ 847,640.34	\$ 5,200
Greenbelt	Berwyn (near Washington DC)	MD	Garden City	890	\$ 13,701,817.17	\$ 15,395
Ironwood Homesteads	Ironwood	MI	Small Garden City	132	\$ 1,373,138.48	\$ 10,403
Saginaw Valley Farms	Saginaw County	MI	Farm Community	33	\$ 365,958.14	\$ 11,090
La Forge Farms	New Madrid County	MO	Farm Community	101	\$ 769,534.69	\$ 7,619
Osage Farms	Pettis County	MO	Farm Community	86	\$ 976,055.87	\$ 11,349
Hinds Farms	Hinds County	MS	Farm Community	81	\$ 294,484.96	\$ 3,636
Lucedale Farms	George and Greene Counties	MS	Farm Community	93	\$ 449,945.75	\$ 4,838
Milestone Farms	Holmes County	MS	Farm Community	110	\$ 744,721.40	\$ 6,770
Kinsey Flats	Custer County	MT	Farm Community	80	\$ 874,741.08	\$ 10,934
Pembroke Farms	Robeson County	NC	Farm Community	75	\$ 613,267.98	\$ 8,177
Greenhills	Cincinnati	OH	Garden City	737	\$ 11,860,627.53	\$ 16,093
Orangeburg Farms	Orangeburg and Calhoun Counties	SC	Farm Community	80	\$ 535,518.55	\$ 6,694
McLennan Farms	McLennan County	TX	Farm Community	20	\$ 244,101.17	\$ 12,203
Sabine Farms	Harrison County	TX	Farm Community	80	\$ 436,674.00	\$ 5,458
Sam Houston Farms	Harris County	TX	Farm Community	86	\$ 607,777.78	\$ 7,067
Greendale	Milwaukee	WI	Garden City	640	\$ 10,638,465.62	\$ 16,623
Drummond Project	Bayfield County	WI	Forest Homesteads	32	\$ 246,376.88	\$ 7,699
Total:				5208	\$ 56,422,746.25	
Average cost per unit:						\$ 7,746

(The Living New Deal Website)

Table 4.4

Urban Resettlement Projects Completed by the Public Works Administration

Name	Location	State	Units
Techwood Homes	Atlanta	GA	604
University Homes	Atlanta	GA	675
Stanley S. Holmes Village	Atlantic City	NJ	277
Smithfield Court	Birmingham	AL	544
Old Harbor Village	Boston	MA	1016
Kenfield	Buffalo	NY	658
New Towne Court	Cambridge	MA	294
Westfield Acres	Camden	NJ	515
Cooper River Court	Charleston	NC	212
Jane Addams Houses	Chicago	IL	1027
Julia C. Lathrop Homes	Chicago	IL	925
Trumbull Park Homes	Chicago	IL	462
Laurel Homes	Cincinnati	OH	1039
Cedar-Central Apartments	Cleveland	OH	650
Lakeview Terrace	Cleveland	OH	620
Outhwaite Homes	Cleveland	OH	579
University Terrace	Columbia	SC	122
Cedar Springs Place	Dallas	TX	181
Brewster	Detroit	MI	701
Parkside	Detroit	MI	785
Cherokee Terrace	Enid	OK	80
Lincoln Gardens	Evansville	IN	191
Lockefield Garden Apartments	Indianapolis	IN	748
Durkeeville	Jacksonville	FL	215
Baker Homes	Lackawanna	NY	276
Aspendale Blue Grass Park	Lexington	KY	286
College Court	Louisville	KY	125
LaSalle Place	Louisville	KY	210
Dixie Homes	Memphis	TN	633
Lauderdales Courts	Memphis	TN	449
Liberty Square	Miami	FL	243
Parklawn	Milwaukee	WI	518
Sumner Field Homes	Minneapolis	MN	464
Riverside Heights	Montgomery	AL	100
Wm. B. Paterson Courts	Montgomery	AL	156
Andrew Jackson Courts	Nashville	TN	398
Cheatham Place	Nashville	TN	314
Harlem Rivers Houses	New York	NY	574
Williamsburg Houses	New York	NY	1622
Will Rogers Courts	Oklahoma City	OK	354
Logan Fontenelle Homes	Omaha	NE	284
Hill Creek	Philadelphia	PA	258
Caserio La Granja	Caguas	Puerto Rico	75
Caserio Mirapalmeras	San Juan	Puerto Rico	131
Schonowee Village	Schenectady	NY	219
Fairfield Court	Stamford	CT	146
Brand Whitlock Homes	Toledo	OH	264
Bassin Triangle	Christiansted, St. Croix Island	Virgin Islands	30
Marley Homes	Frederiksted, St. Croix Island	Virgin Islands	38
H.H. Berg Homes	St. Thomas, St. Thomas Island	Virgin Islands	58
Langston	Washington DC		274
Highland Homes	Wayne	PA	50
			21,669

(United States Housing Authority, 1937, p. 16)

incomplete. The infiltration projects are not listed, as well as some of the resettlement projects. For example, there was a short-lived resettlement community built in Millington Tennessee that in 1942 was converted into a naval training base for use during World War II. Another project that is not listed in the tables was located in the Matanuska Valley in Alaska, the Palmer Homesteads. This community contained 203 families that were relocated from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan in 1935 (Arthurdale Heritage, Inc., 2019, para. 6).

While the urban projects are not a part of this dissertation, table 4.4 shows the location of the PWA projects. This table was included to show the diversity of locations that was chosen for the urban projects. Just as the DSH, FERA, and RA projects cast a wide footprint in the United States, so too did the projects completed by the PWA.

Land Selection and Use

The federal government had received numerous proposals for community projects from across the United States, including from its territories of Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. These proposals came from a variety of sources, from cities to individuals. Bruce L. Melvin, the former Chief of Research Section of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, estimated that by January 1934, the DSH had received proposals for communities that totaled

\$4,000,000,000 (Melvin, 1936, p. 623) which far exceeded the \$25,000,000 that had been originally allotted by the federal government. However not every state received approval and funding for construction. For example, in the state of Utah, nine community projects were proposed: Price River, Green River, Elberta, Blue Bench, Ashley Valley, LaSal, Ivin's Bench, Price, and Midvale (Archives West). None were built. The map in figure 4.9 shows where the various resettlement communities (not including urban projects) were located as of June 30, 1936. Caution needs to be used when viewing the map. It is not a definitive map of all the project locations. For example, the map shows the presence of a resettlement community in Utah, but it does not give an indication of which type it was (i.e., small garden homes, full-time farmsteads). Research shows that it may have been one of the infiltration projects that had been pursued to resettle rural farm families. In addition, there was also an irrigation¹ project built in Nebraska, but it does not appear on the map as it was built in the 1940s.

Despite the lack of clarity as to which type of community was built where, the map does show how the projects were dispersed across the country. The largest concentration of communities were in the states of Arkansas and Texas, which each had eleven projects. Nebraska and Minnesota each had eight

¹ The irrigation projects are not the same as the infiltration projects. The irrigation projects are not listed as resettlement communities in the federal records, but research indicates the irrigation projects were created for the resettlement of rural families.

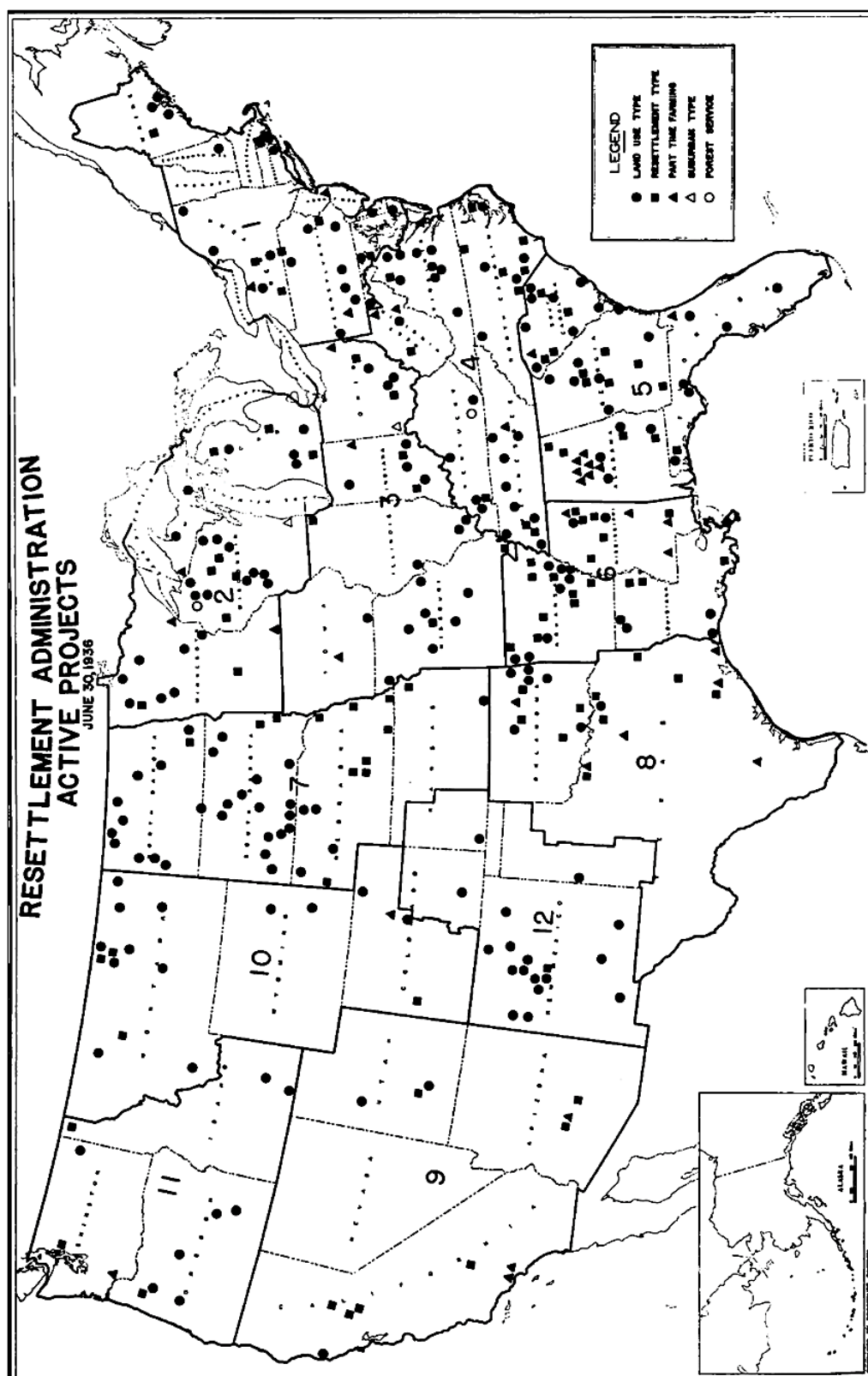


Figure 4.9. Location of the Resettlement Communities as of June 1936. (United States Department of Agriculture, 1965, p. 11)

communities completed, and Alabama and Georgia each had six communities built. Based on tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, 50% of the completed projects were located in the South and in the Great Plains regions. It is unknown why most of the above listed states contained the greatest number of resettlement communities, but Roberts (2013) speculated that Senator John H. Bankhead Jr.'s influence may have been the reason why Alabama received funding for six communities.

Of the communities completed, 23 were industrial projects, 56 were rural/farm projects, and 2 were a combination of farm and industrial. Clearly the emphasis was on creating communities that serviced rural populations, whether that was for people already there or for urban people moving to rural locations. The RA believed there were two important elements essential to the resettlement communities' success: good quality land, and farms of sufficient size to allow the occupants the opportunity to grow enough produce for personal consumption. The size of the farms was not a one-size-fits-all proposition. The size depended on where the communities were located as well as how much land a resettlement family wanted to work or was capable of working.

The specific project locations were selected based on the availability of nearby infrastructure (i.e., electricity, roads, emergency services), along with

accessibility to potable water, and soils suitable for small scale crop production.

The communities also needed to be:

“within reach of schools, churches, and shopping, and recreational centers. The project must have the endorsement of local officials and of local civic, agricultural, and labor groups. Local sponsors of the project must produce some assurance that there are within the community and its vicinity a sufficient number of qualified homestead applicants” (U.S. Department of Interior, Bulletin Number One, 1935, p. 13).

The amount of land required for the homesteads varied according to the type of community that was to be established. For industrial type projects each homestead needed between 1 and 5 acres, for the stranded projects each unit required between 5 and 15 acres, and for the rural projects the amount of land needed per unit ranged from 15 to 60 acres (United States Department of the Interior, Division of Subsistence Homesteads, 1935, p. 18). In determining how much land was needed, the federal government calculated how much a specific activity would require. For example, three-fourths of an acre was estimated to be the necessary amount needed to grow vegetables and fruits for a family of five (note that a family of five was the standard size that appeared in many of the federal government documents). Two acres of pastureland would be required for a cow, and, if the farmer wanted to raise hay and grain for the cow, then 3 more acres would be needed. The calculations weren't just to determine how

much land was required for specific activities, but they were also used to determine how many cows, pigs, and chickens were ideal for a family of five. The DSH estimated that one cow could produce enough milk and butter to meet the needs of a family, two to three pigs could produce enough meat and cooking oil, and 25 hens could produce enough eggs and meat for a year's worth of supply. The homesteaders were encouraged to use their resources carefully. For example, chicken manure could be used as fertilizer, thereby saving the families some money. Cost savings was important because the homesteaders had to purchase supplies for growing their gardens and raising livestock.

The DSH understood that topography and soil quality varied from location to location, and as a result it emphasized that the homesteads must be adapted to the land on which they were being located. In order to make the best use of land the DSH devised land-use plans based on location and the use that was intended at each community. Many of these plans were designed with the cooperation of various agencies such as "State Agriculture Colleges, Experiment Stations, and the Agricultural Extension Service" (United States Department of Interior. *Homestead Houses*, 1934, p. 66).

The plans included information about which type of produce was best suited for which region and estimates regarding how much of each type of

IN THE NORTHERN STATES

Crop	Variety	50-foot rows	Succession crop	Distance between rows
		<i>Number</i>		<i>Inches</i>
Radishes.....	Scarlet Globe.....	1	Fall spinach.....	18
Lettuce.....	New York and Simpson.....	1	do.....	
Onions.....	Japanese.....	2	do.....	
Beets.....	Detroit Dark Red.....	1		
Carrots.....	Chantenay.....	2		
Swiss Chard.....	Lucullus.....	1		
Parsnips.....	Hollow Crown.....	1		
Salsify.....	Sandwich Island.....	1		
	Alaska.....	1	Late beans.....	
Peas.....	Little Marvel.....	1	do.....	
	Thos. Laxton.....	1	do.....	30
	Telephone.....	2	do.....	
	Early Bountiful.....	1	Late cabbage.....	
Snap beans.....	Tendergreen.....	1	do.....	
	Currie Rust-Proof Wax.....	1	do.....	
	Stringless Green Pod.....	1	do.....	
	Henderson Bush.....	2		
Lima beans.....	Fordhook Bush.....	2		
Early cabbage.....	Jersey Wakefield.....	2		
Broccoli.....	Italian Sprouting.....	1		
Early potatoes.....	Irish Cobbler or Triumph.....	8	Late cabbage.....	48
Snap beans (2d and 3d planting).....	(Stringless Green Pod.....	2		
	(Early Bountiful.....	2		
Tomatoes (early, staked).....	Pritchard.....	2		
Tomatoes (not staked).....	Marglobe.....	4		
Early sweet corn.....	Golden Cross Bantam.....	5	Kale.....	
Medium sweet corn.....	Country Gentleman.....	5	Turnips.....	
Late sweet corn.....	Stowell Evergreen.....	5		
Pole beans.....	Kentucky Wonder.....	1		
	Pole lima.....	1		

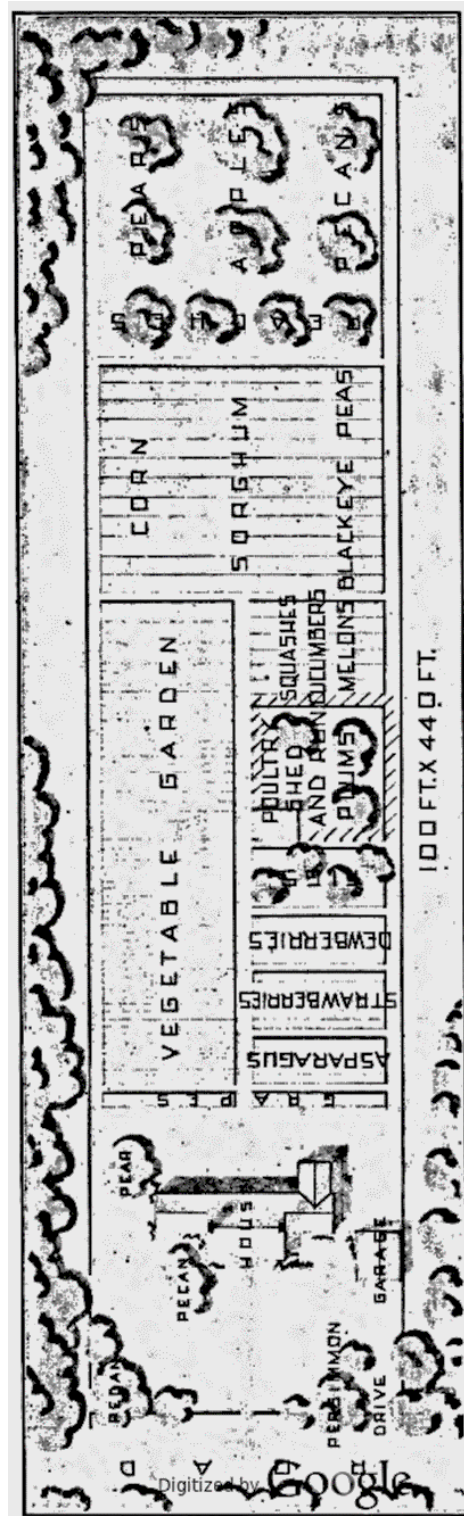
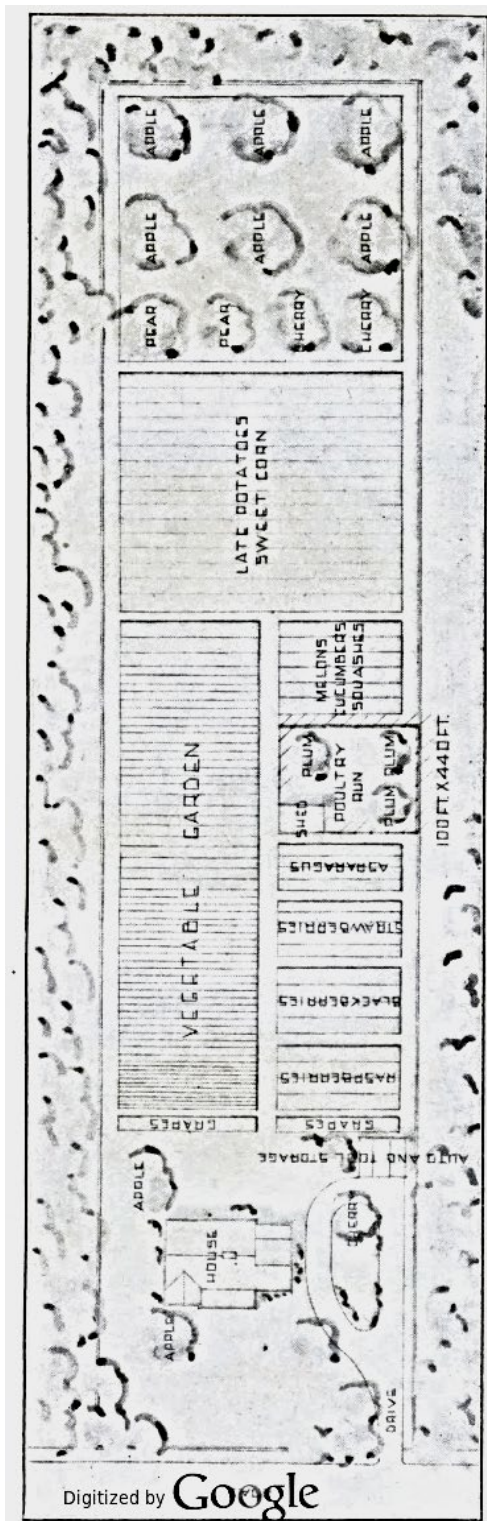
IN THE OLD COTTON BELT

Spinach.....	Savoy.....	5	Swiss Chard.....	18
Radishes.....	(Scarlet Globe.....	1	Carrots.....	
	(White Icicle.....	1		
Lettuce.....	(White Boston.....	1	Beets.....	
Onions (sets).....	(Curled Simpson.....	1		
Onions (plants).....	Valencia.....	2	Fall lettuce.....	
Beets.....	(Early Eclipse.....	1		
Carrots.....	(Detroit Dark Red.....	1	Spinach.....	
Early turnips.....	Chantenay.....	3	do.....	
Mustard.....		4	do.....	
Early cabbage.....	Southern Curled.....	3	do.....	36
	Charleston Wakefield.....	3	Late beans.....	
Snap beans.....	(Early Bountiful.....	2	do.....	
	Stringless Black Valentine.....	2	do.....	
	Rustproof.....	2	do.....	
Lima beans.....	Small bush.....	3		
Broccoli.....	Italian Sprouting.....	2		
Collards.....	Georgia.....	4		
Tomatoes (staked).....	Marglobe.....	5		
Tomatoes (not staked).....	do.....	4		
Early potatoes.....	Irish Cobbler or Triumph.....	5	Late turnips (broadcast).....	36
Black Eye peas.....		4		42
Sweetpotatoes.....		17		42
Okra.....	Perkins Mammoth.....	2		36
Pole beans.....	Kentucky Wonder.....	2		42

Figure 4.10. Above is a sample of the suggested types and amounts of vegetables to plant in the Northern states and in the southern Cotton belt regions. These suggestions were intended to help families with little farming experience to become successful in a shorter period of time (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Bulletin No. 1733, 1934, p. 6).

vegetable or fruit should be planted. The U.S. Department of Agriculture *Farmer's Bulletin No. 1733* illustrates the detail that went into the land-use planning of these acreages. Figure 4.10 shows a sampling of the types of produce that could be grown, the number of 50-foot rows that should be planted, and the distance between each row. The estimates in Figure 4.10 are based on the anticipated needs of a family of five and shows some of the variation in recommendations between the northern states and the cotton belt. The bulletin also detailed which species of plant was best suited for the different regions in the United States. For example, the bulletin describes the type of strawberry best suited for various locations. The Klondike and Missionary varieties of strawberries were best suited for southern climates, the Premier and Howard 17 were best for northern climates, and the Dunlap and Progressive strawberries thrived best in the northern Great Plains. It also stated that 50 strawberry plants per family member should be planted and how they should be planted. By being so specific the hope was that even an inexperienced farmer could achieve success with patience and time.

In addition to determining which type of produce should be planted, the land-use plans illustrated how acreages could be laid-out to maximize the productivity of the unit. Figures 4.11 and 4.12 illustrate how a 1-acre lot could be configured. Both designs have the vegetable garden nearest the house with the



Figures 4.11 and 4.12. The diagram on the left is for a homestead in the north. The diagram on the right is for a homestead in south. Both are 1-acre lots. Variations appear to be limited to types of vegetable and fruit trees grown (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Bulletin No. 1733, 1934, pp. 4-5).

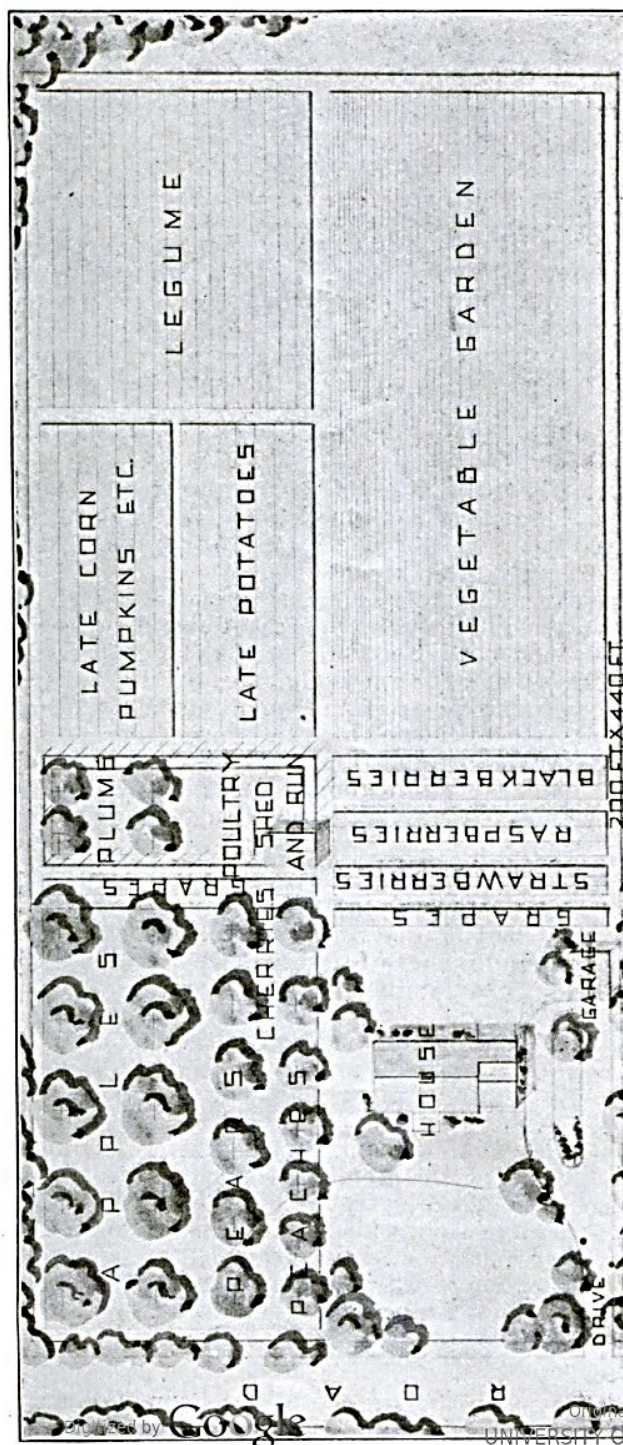


FIGURE 3.—A SUGGESTED PLAN FOR A 2-ACRE SUBSISTENCE HOMESTEAD.

Cultivation with horse or tractor power requires wider rows and a larger garden. It also makes it possible to cure for a larger acreage. Alternate uses of the space allotted for an orchard and for the rotation of crops are: as pasture for a cow, pasture for milk goats, or pasture for pigs, or for the growing of feed grains for poultry.

Figure 4.13. This diagram is for a 2-acre homestead. Similar to the 1-acre lots there is space for chickens but no space to raise a cow or pigs (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Bulletin No. 1733, 1934, p. 13).

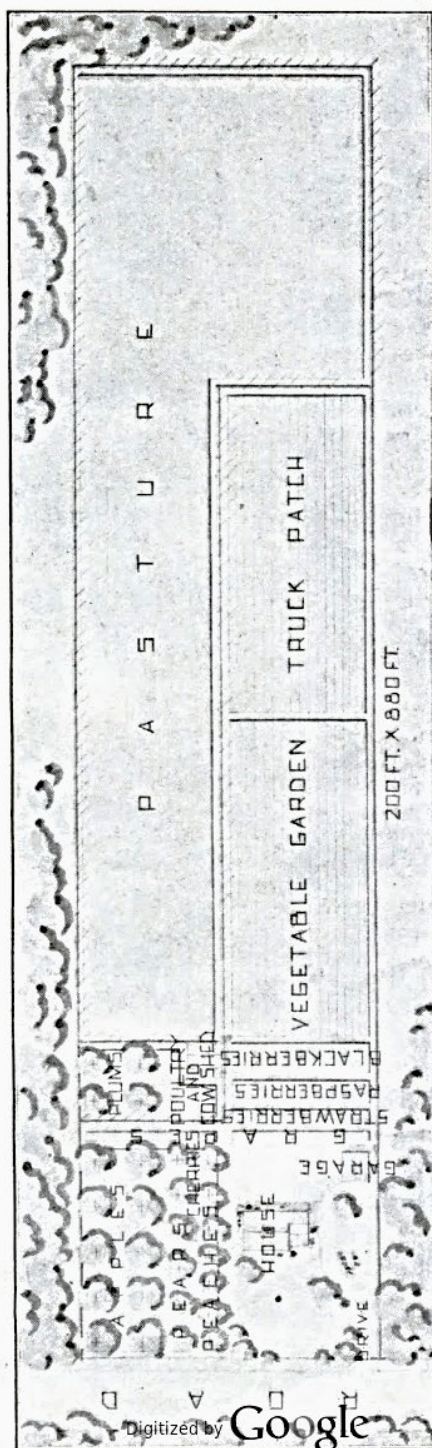


Figure 4.14. This diagram is for a 4-acre homestead. An acreage of this size allowed space for a cow to help meet the dietary needs of the resettlement family (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farmers' Bulletin No. 1733, 1934, p. 15).

fruit trees farthest from it. The reason for the configurations in figures 4.11 and 4.12 was for ease of access to the vegetable gardens, which would require more attention from the homesteader than the fruit trees. These small acreages did allow for chickens but were not intended to accommodate any livestock. The family living on these homesteads would still need to buy dairy and meat from outside sources.

The 2-acre plan, in figure 4.13, flipped the location of the vegetable garden and fruit trees so that the orchard was closest to the house. The vegetable garden is much larger in this design and may have allowed for the homesteader to sell excess produce. The *Farmers' Bulletin No. 1733* mentions that some of the land in the 2-acre lots could have been converted to pasture for a cow or a pen for pigs. It was also determined that a 2-acre lot or larger would require the use of a tractor or horse to plow the land. Because many of the homesteaders did not have the money to purchase a tractor or the necessary space or funds to care for a horse it was believed that the community should own the tractor or horse and share the cost and use of them.

The 4-acre lot in figure 4.14 illustrates how a larger homestead could be configured. There is considerable land devoted to pasture for a cow, and the gardens have been divided into two types of spaces. The vegetable garden was for produce to be consumed by the homeowner, and the second area marked as

“truck patch” could be crops intended for sale either on an individual basis or through a community cooperative.

The *Farmers’ Bulletin No. 1733* (1934) also stated that the design of the homesteads was about more than maximizing productivity; it was also about the wife. There was concern that if the wife could not be happy and productive then the homestead could fail. The bulletin stated:

Although the chief object in securing a small acreage may be economy – beauty or sightliness should not be overlooked when planning the buildings, garden, and tree plantings. Success in changing from a city to a country type of living will depend on the wife – on her ability and willingness to adapt herself to the new conditions and responsibilities – than on any other member of the family. Careful arrangement of the buildings and plantings will do much to make country living attractive to the family.” (U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Farmers Bulletin No. 1733*, 1934, p. 4).

While the actual configuration of the acreages could vary (adherence to the land-use designs was not required) it was anticipated that all homesteads would be based on the needs of the family and their ability to work the land. After all these homesteads were not intended for leisure activities, but to help families find a way to alleviate (but not necessarily eliminate) economic hardships. Just as there were land use plans, there were also architectural standards for the resettlement houses.

Architectural Standards

The architectural unit of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads provided a booklet with 32 renderings and floorplans that could be used in the resettlement communities (United States Department of Interior. *Homestead Houses*, 1934). The intent was to blend new construction with current regional architecture so as not to stand out from existing homes. There was great concern that residents living near the resettlement communities would be resentful of the resettlement residents for living in homes that may have been better (in condition, available space, and amenities) than the current stock of housing non-resettlement residents lived in. In addition to architectural restrictions, the resettlement homes were generally small in size to control costs. For example, separate dining rooms were not part of the design, as it was felt the inclusion of a room that was seldom used was not an effective use of space or materials. By limiting the size and designs of the homes the participating agencies had hoped that these houses could have been built as cheaply as possible. In addition to limiting the initial size and appearance of the homes, they were constructed so that the owner could easily build-on to the existing unit without losing the original design integrity of the house.

The architectural renderings indicate the homes were measured in cubic feet, which does not translate easily into square feet using a cubic foot to square

feet calculator. In order to get a rough estimate of the size of the subsistence homes the square feet of each room in a particular design were calculated and totaled. A few of the plans provided a scale (measurement used to show how a drawing relates to actual size) that was used to calculate the size of the home. This gave a rough, if not completely accurate, idea of the size of the homes. Based on the square feet calculations of several of the designs it appears the homes ranged in size from approximately 500 square feet to 1,100 square feet, not including porches and fuel/coal rooms.

Based on the architectural drawings booklet titled *Homestead Homes*, the majority (21 of 32) homes had indoor laundry rooms; all but one house had an indoor bathroom; only one house had a basement, and seven had an attached garage. Many of the homes were designed with a specific location in mind. For instance, house plan #614 (Figure 4.15) was designed for a hilly site and plan # 501 (Figure 4.16) was intended for northern regions. House plan # 404 (Figure 4.17) was inspired by existing cabins in the Deep South. The kitchen of #404 was not part of the main house but was a separate room connected to the house by a porch. The separation of the kitchen helped control the heat in the main house. The Phoenix house plan (Figure 4.18) included a sleeping porch and adobe walls for the desert conditions of Arizona.



HOUSE PLAN 614
14,941 Cubic Feet

New England farm house of Cape Cod type. The side porch is open on three sides and is designed for a hilly site. Planned by the Architectural Unit of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, from plans prepared by Eric Gugler.

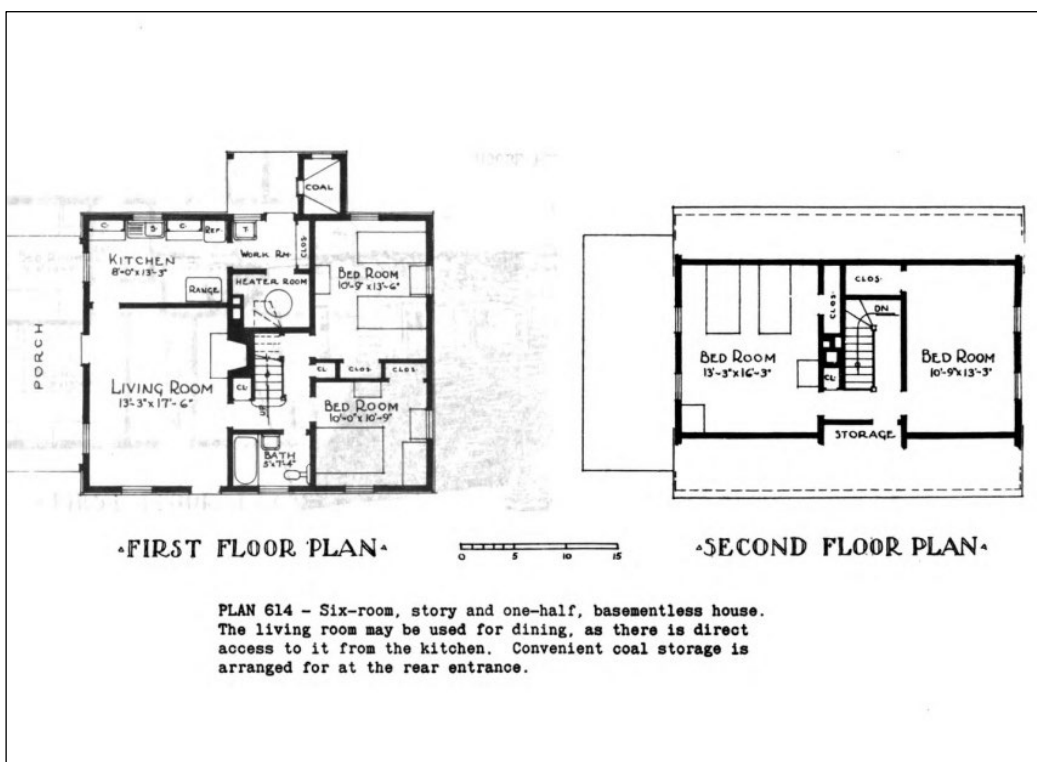


Figure 4.15. House Plan #614 (Division of Subsistence Homesteads. *Homestead Houses*, 1934, pp. 7-8).

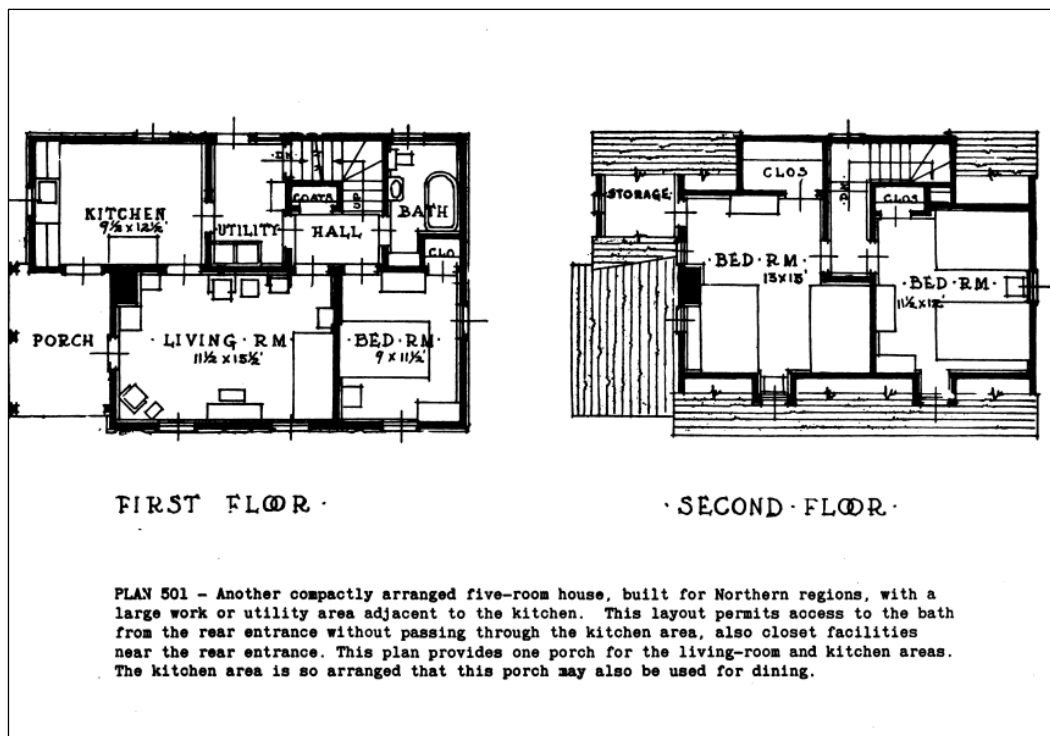


Figure 4.16. House Plan #501 (Division of Subsistence Homesteads. *Homestead Houses*, 1934, pp. 25-26).

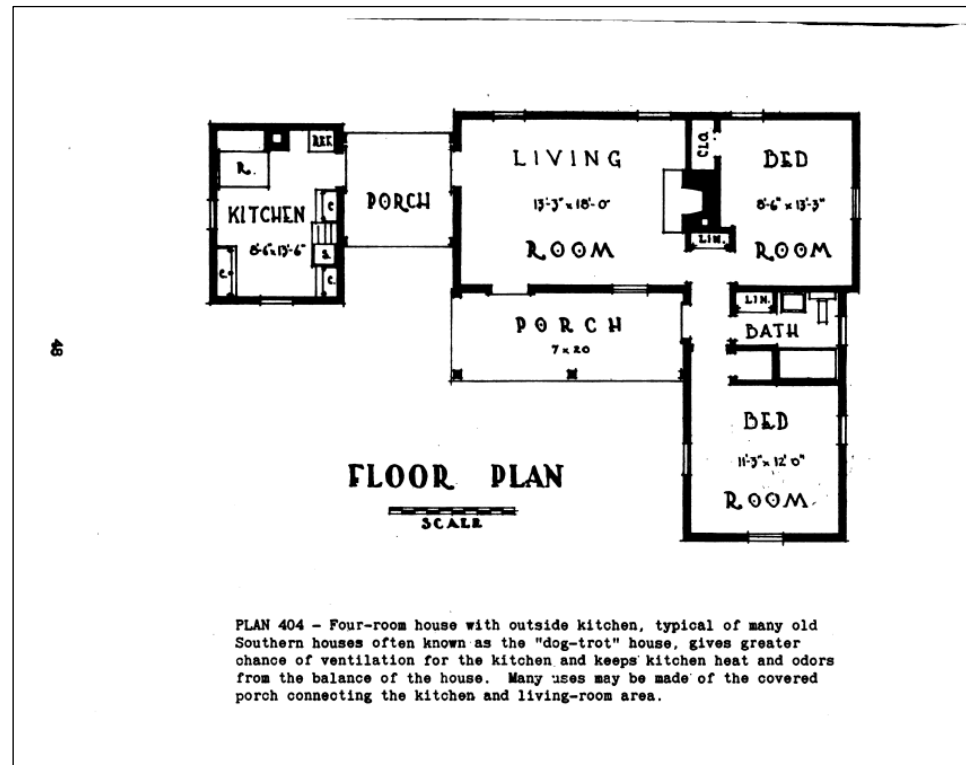
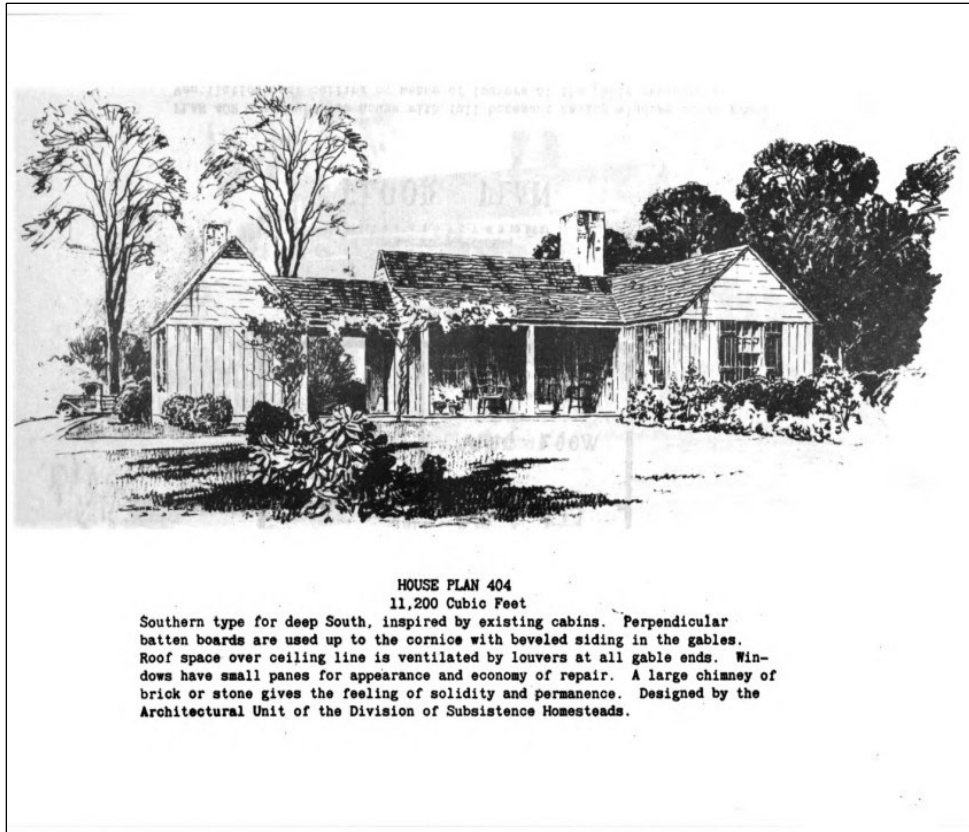


Figure 4.17. House Plan # 404 (Division of Subsistence Homesteads. *Homestead Houses*, 1934, pp. 47-48).

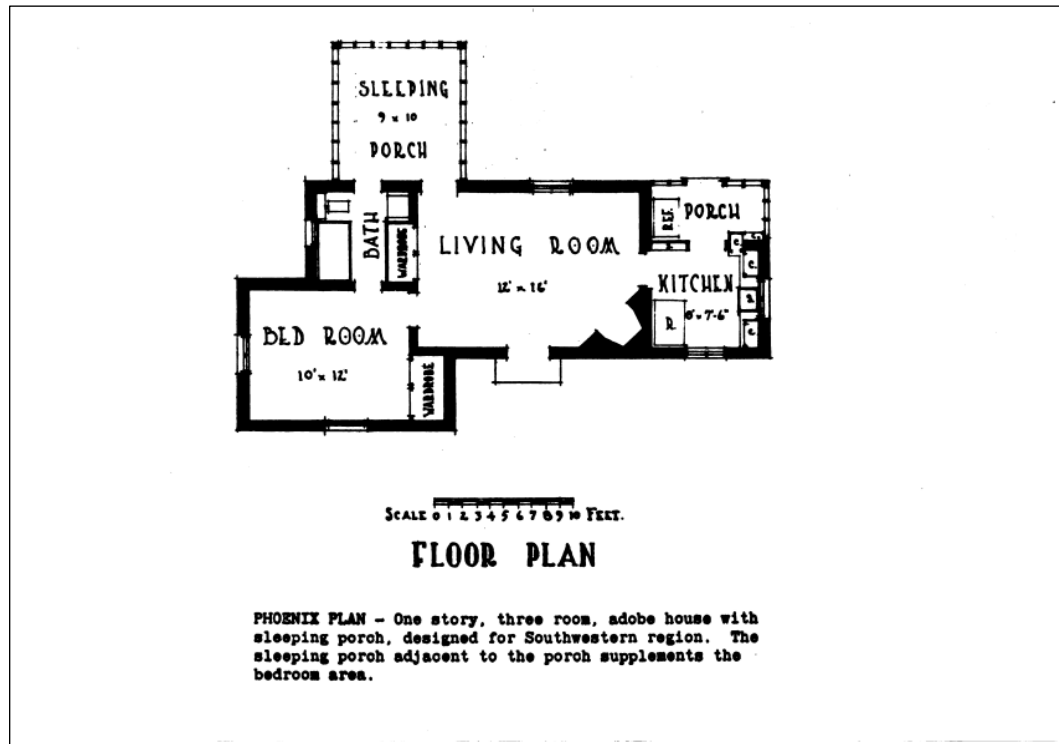
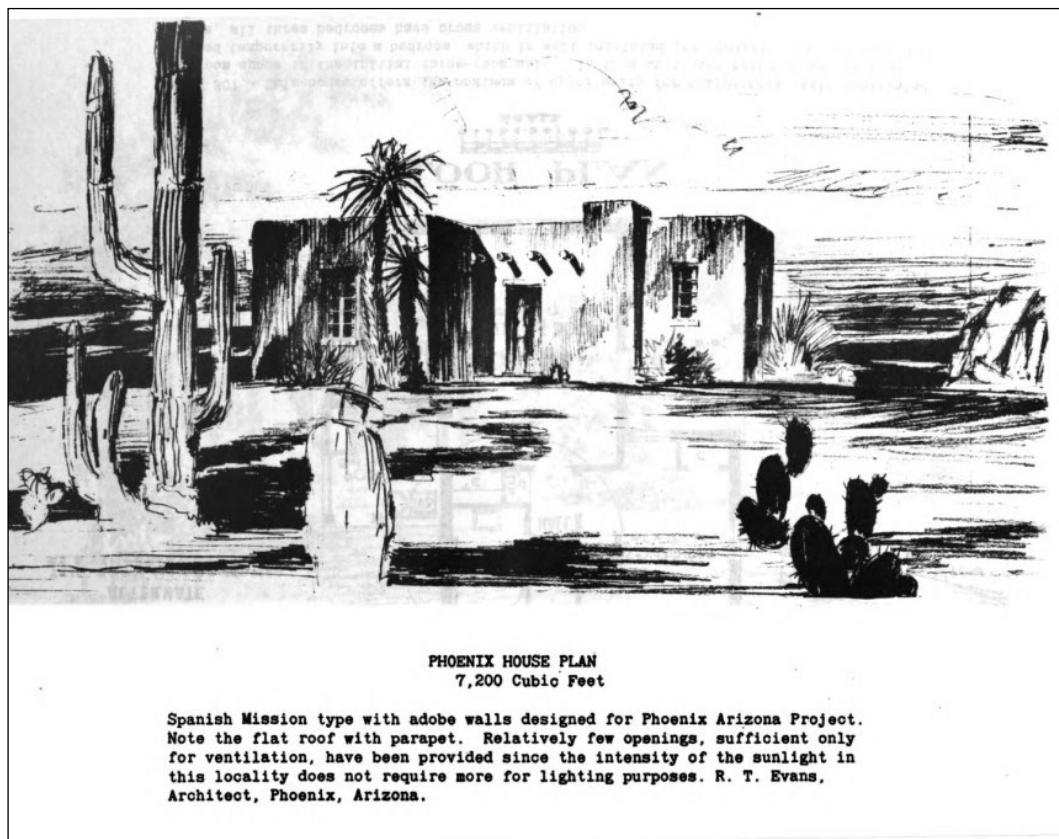


Figure 4.18. House Plan for Phoenix Arizona project (Division of Subsistence Homesteads. *Homestead Houses*, 1934, pp. 63-64).

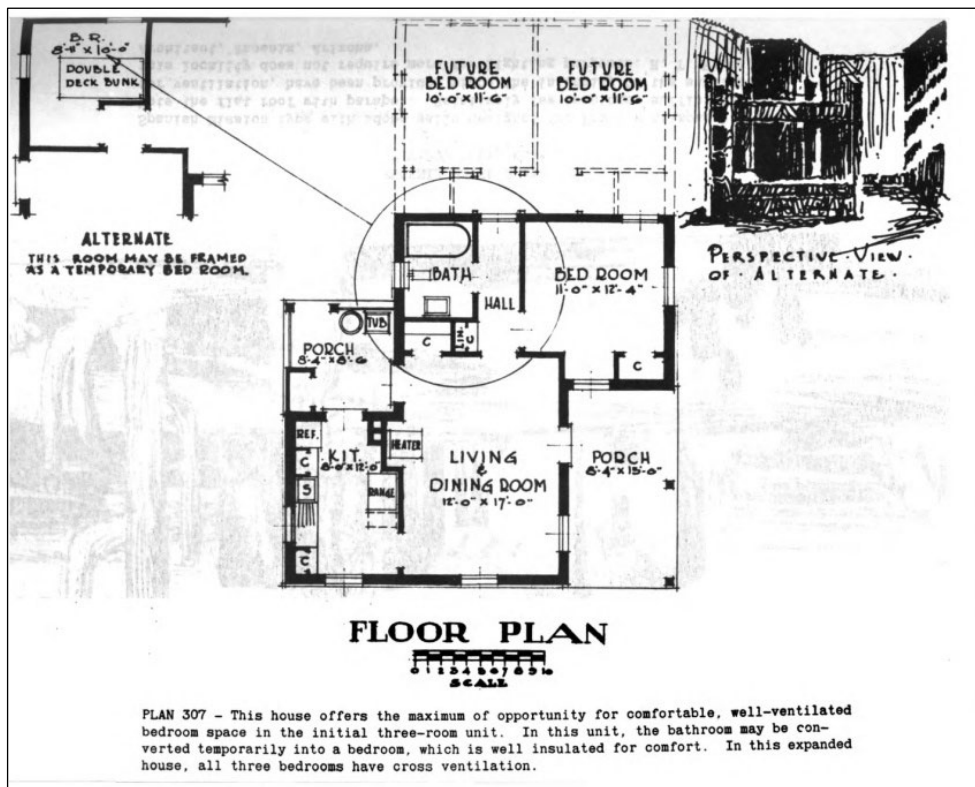


Figure 4.19. House Plan #307. (Division of Subsistence Homesteads. *Homestead Houses*, 1934, pp. 61-62).

Plan 307 (Figure 4.19) shows how a home could be adapted to the needs of the occupants. In this plan there is a designated space that can be used as either a small bedroom or bathroom. However, if the space is used as a bedroom then the home is constructed without an interior bathroom. Plan 307 also shows how additional bedrooms could be added to the original structure. Many of the homes in the *Homestead Houses* booklet are variations of the English Cape Cod, as seen for plans #614 and 501.

The homes were to be built with local materials and the use of local labor was strongly encouraged, which could help lower the cost of the homes. Generally, it was determined that the cost of the houses would be based on a per cubic foot basis. The cost also depended on whether the location was in the southern states or the northern states. Per the 1934 *Homestead Houses* booklet the base cost of the homes were determined as follows: in the southern states the lowest cost per cubic foot was 15 cents and the maximum was 17.5 cents; for the northern states the lowest cost per cubic foot was 18 cents and the maximum was 22 cents. Based on these prices the base cost for a 500 square-foot home in the northern states would have been between \$1,296 and \$1,584.

The resettlement agencies also encouraged the connection to utilities (water, gas, and electricity) during the construction of the homes. There were three main reasons for including utility hookups. The first reason was that the

addition of utilities could be used as a form of incentive for young people to stay in rural areas, since not all rural areas had yet been connected to these services. Second, the provision of utilities, especially water, would promote sanitation practices and aid in improving the health of the residents. Third, it was believed that if the homes in the resettlement communities were connected to utilities at the same time and were run from a central location (i.e., well head location) then the cost and maintenance of the services would be affordable to the residents. Despite the federal government's push to include utilities, not all locations included them in the construction phase. For example, in the state of Nebraska, electricity and indoor plumbing were not included in many of the new homes, as there was a desire to make sure that resettlement housing did not have amenities that were not already part of nearby existing housing. However, the resettlement housing in Nebraska was constructed in a way that would allow the owners/occupants to have utilities added at a later time using their personal funds.

Furniture was often included with the homes, because it was believed that since many of these families were coming from submarginal areas they would not have the means to move what furniture they may have had, or the families may not have had any furniture at all. The items supplied by the resettlement programs included furniture for the living room, dining room, bedroom

including mattresses and box springs, kitchen tables and chairs, stoves, refrigerators, window shades, rugs, lamps, and pressure cookers (Memo from Grace E. Falke, March 1, 1937).

The success of the resettlement programs rested on the ability of the federal government to acquire productivity lands, provide cost-effective housing, and the selection of people who could adapt to a cooperative type of lifestyle. While the preceding two chapters examined the programs as a whole, the information was limited when it came to individual states or communities. To take this analysis further, the following chapter will detail the eight communities built in the state of Nebraska, including the evidence that remains on the landscape now.

CHAPTER 5 – NEBRASKA RESETTLEMENT PROJECTS

Tugwell's goals went beyond the rehabilitation of the clients. It was a period of ideas. He was looking for solutions that might solve the causes of rural poverty in general.

– Hans Hoiberg, Head of Family Selection for the Northern Plains (Kraft, D.C, 2000 dvd)

The state of Nebraska had eight resettlement projects that were completed in the 1930s and one that was proposed in the 1930s but not started until the 1940s. The eight FERA funded communities were the smallest of all those created in the continental United States. Four of the projects were located in eastern Nebraska, three were located in central Nebraska, and one was located in the panhandle. The eight projects started under FERA were later transferred to the RA when it was established in 1935. They were then transferred to the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in 1937.

The ninth project, Mirage Flats, was proposed under FERA but was built by the FSA in the 1940s as an irrigation project. The project contained 110 farms located in the northwestern corner of Sheridan County. Similar to the DSH, FERA, and the RA resettlement programs, the project at Mirage Flats was intended for the resettlement of farm families. However, the funding for the project came from the Case-Wheeler Act that was implemented in 1940 (Kristjanson, 1951, p. 8). Despite the similarities with the resettlement projects

built in the 1930s, Mirage Flats is not part of this dissertation because federal documents indicate that it was not considered a resettlement community since it was built after the termination of the Resettlement Administration. However, it is questionable if the federal categorization is correct since the Mirage Flats community appears to have been designed for the resettlement of families. It is unknown why this project was not considered a resettlement community. Was this a matter of semantics simply because the RA had been defunded in 1937 and the federal government was not to build any new resettlement communities?

FERA was a federal agency that provided funding for relief work throughout the United States; however, states were to determine how to use the funding they received. This meant they had the power to decide which projects to pursue and who to help. In the state of Nebraska, the Nebraska Emergency Relief Administration (NERA) and the Rural Rehabilitation Corporation (RRC) were the primary state agencies with the oversight of the FERA funded rehabilitation/resettlement programs. The RRC first attempted to help farmers remain in place, but it was soon discovered that this was not enough. Robert Hardie, the project manager for the Kearney Farmsteads, wrote that the rural rehabilitation program:

In the beginning was a shallow proposition, through which families actually on relief were furnished with perhaps a cow, possibly a few chickens and maybe a hog, and, if possible, were set up as hired hands on

the farm and told, as it were, to go forward with the rising sun and live and laugh again. In addition, the program was limited to relief clients residing outside of the corporate limits of a town 5,000 or over. Such a program was indeed disheartening when agents were constantly confronted with the fact that those farmers possessing the most native ability, when forced to sell out, moved immediately to more urban centers where their chances of securing day labor were far better, while those families with less native ability were satisfied simply to move into the closer small towns. In other words, those farm families able to make the most of any loans furnished them under the program were in reality not in a position to take advantage of such.

We do not mean to make light of the early program for the rehabilitation of farm families in Nebraska, but our reasoning was, in all frankness, in accordance with: (1) That Nebraska is primarily an agricultural state. (2) That the greater majority of people in Nebraska are fundamentally farmers. (3) That Nebraskans would consequently revive only through stimulation making for advancement of agriculture conditions.

It was while attempting to rehabilitate a relief family on a small acreage...that the possibility of purchasing this land for subdivision into small acre tracts to be used for the rehabilitation of relief clients was considered. Clients were to show an agricultural background and were to become self-supporting through the production of either vegetables, fruits, poultry, or dairy products.

The agents wrote up a suggested program for a farmstead project and submitted the program to the State Administration of the FERA through

the...Kearney Chamber of Commerce. [This] local idea concerning such a project was built totally through theory and hypothetical reasoning. Most of the plan met with approval...before long land upon which to place the project was purchased and operation got under way (Hardie, date unknown, p. 29-30).

By April 1936, it was recognized that families being displaced because of the land utilization purchase program needed additional aid. It was at that time that these families were to be considered for placement into one of the resettlement communities of the Rural Resettlement Division of the RA. Surveys of the families needing placement were to be conducted to discover the level of aid that would be required. Placement into the resettlement communities would be on a case-by-case basis.

While the resettlement programs encouraged the selection of families from the surrounding project areas, not all families remained in their original location. A letter dated October 21, 1936 from Walter Duffy, the Regional Director of Region XI, requested that Cal Ward, Regional Director of Region VII, send six families, who each had no less than \$400 cash on hand, to Vale, Oregon for resettlement on land available in the Vale-Owyhee irrigation project. Duffy stated that the land available in the Region XI area was irrigable, but no homes had been built on any of the tracts. The letter requested the families arrive no later than November 1 to allow the time necessary to construct a home before the

winter weather arrived, sometime between December 15 and January 1. The letter goes on to say that arrival in Oregon was not a guarantee of receiving resettlement land. Each family would need to go through a formal assessment once they arrived. The request is remarkable given that the selected families would be leaving for an area that was probably unfamiliar to them and with no guarantee of securing a home. Fortunately, it appears that many, if not all, of the selected families for the Nebraska projects came from within the state.

Nebraska Land Acquisition Instructions

The last of the FERA projects built in Nebraska was the Two Rivers community in Douglas County. In January 1936 the federal government was notified of the land acquisition proposal for it and four other resettlement projects located in White River, South Dakota; eastern South Dakota; Yellowstone, North Dakota; and McKenzie, North Dakota (Cal A. Ward memo, dated January 17, 1936). Per a Resettlement Division's inter-office communication memo dated March 5, 1936, the costs involved in obtaining the titles and abstracts for options and purchase contracts were to be paid by the federal government. However, if the land had a lien against it, the owner would be responsible for paying the money owed to clear the title.

Based on the March 5, 1936 instructions there appears to have been confusion regarding when and how an agreement to purchase was considered legally binding. An option to purchase was not considered binding, as it appears some were a verbal agreement between the federal government and the landowner. A recording was to be made of all options, but even the recording of it was not considered binding unless State laws stated otherwise. An option coupled with an acceptance were together considered a legal binding contract and could have been used in place of a contract to purchase. The federal government also explained when a legally binding contract was preferable to an option in the initial phase of land acquisition activities. If it appeared that a landowner had other options to sell their land (to an entity other than the government) that was of good quality, then a legally binding contract was preferred. However, land that was of low quality and the prospect of the owner being able to sell the land was also low, then the recording of an option or the pursuit of a purchase agreement was not encouraged. Based on the instructions it is no wonder why there was confusion regarding the methods for acquiring land. The federal government wanted the ability to purchase land but did not necessarily want to commit themselves to actually purchasing it.

Accommodating Displaced Families

By August 1936, the Resettlement Division had issued a memo to Cal A. Ward, Regional Director of Region VII, explaining the policy of displacing families from purchased lands. The federal government was clear that families who wanted to continue farming in the area and that were already on good productive land should not be moved, as this could have been counterproductive to the results the resettlement programs were seeking. This risk of moving families from good land was that they could end up on submarginal land, thereby putting them into a position of no longer being able to support themselves. The policy also stated that care needed to be rendered when determining how to use newly acquired lands. Since some families were being displaced for the creation of these communities, the government understood that care needed to be taken to avoid the perception of a land grab that would displace a poor family for the benefit of a family with a higher socioeconomic status. As a result, the purchased land would need to accommodate multiple families or the land would need to be used for purposes other than farming (i.e., wildlife refuge, parks).

In February 1940, a policy memo put forth by the Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service offered greater clarity regarding the status of families that were to be displaced from federally purchased lands. The

policy restricted where resettlement projects could be developed. It also appears to have limited who was eligible for a subsistence homestead. Prior to the transfer of the FERA resettlement communities to the FSA in 1937, the resettlement projects accepted applications from interested persons regardless of their current location. Under the 1940 policy, eligible resettlement applicants were limited to those families whose lands were being purchased by the federal government. Families not affected by the buy-outs were only accepted if there were vacancies in the resettlement communities which no displaced families were willing to fill, and if their labor was beneficial to the maintenance and operations of the projects.

Once the purchase agreement had been signed the displaced families were expected to vacate their lands immediately, but provisions were made for families that were “physically or mentally infirm”, for whom continued public support would be required. For families with a medical condition, annual permits were granted that allowed them to continue living in the resettlement area for an indefinite period of time. Four criteria would need to be met in order to issue the permit: 1) better care could not be achieved outside of the project area; 2) the families could not interfere with the operation or maintenance of the project; 3) “the continued occupancy does not create or perpetuate a relief problem which the Federal Government is morally or in fact obligated to

handle”; and 4) it was in the public interest to leave the families where they currently were living (Field Memorandum SCS #886, 1940, p. 3).

Provisions were also made for families who were willing to move but needed extra time to secure a new residence. Temporary housing agreements, once signed, were effective for five years. For those who signed the agreement, the federal government could place the families in temporary housing if the land purchase agreement required them to be displaced from their current home for the construction of a resettlement project. If temporary housing was accepted, the agreement stipulated that the federal government would not complete any maintenance or repairs to the property; this would be responsibility of the tenant. Families who did not sign a temporary agreement, who violated the terms of the agreement, or who stayed beyond the end of the agreement, were evicted and removed.

Much like the policy of the 1930s, the 1940 FSA policy statement stipulated that all projects must be close to non-farm labor sources. However, unlike the policies of the 1930s, the 1940 FSA policy stated that all households were required to have income that was derived partly from the sale of farm products and partly from outside employment. No households could be solely dependent on government aid.

Nebraska Resettlement Communities

Fairbury, Falls City, Grand Island, Kearney, Loup City, Scottsbluff, South Sioux City, and Venice (Two Rivers) are the locations of the eight communities that were created in Nebraska during the 1930s. All of the Nebraska resettlement homes consisted of four rooms (kitchen, living room, and 2 bedrooms) except for Two Rivers which had four-, five-, and six-room homes available for occupancy. The design for the homes in the Nebraska communities was based on the standardized plans provided by the federal government for the Subsistence Homesteads programs. The outbuildings were designed by the University of Nebraska's Department of Agriculture. Figure 5.1 illustrates the elevation and interior plan used for many of the four-room homes. In the smaller homes no space for a bathroom was included, but in the larger floor plan (Figure 5.2) space was allocated for it.

All of the Nebraska resettlement projects consisted of individual farmsteads that were to be farmed by the individual households. The resettlement communities also had a cooperative component that required all households to participate in the growing of produce or raising of livestock that could be sold for the benefit of the community as a whole. This meant that in addition to caring for their individual farmsteads they had to participate in the farm activities of the cooperative. In Nebraska, the cooperative products were

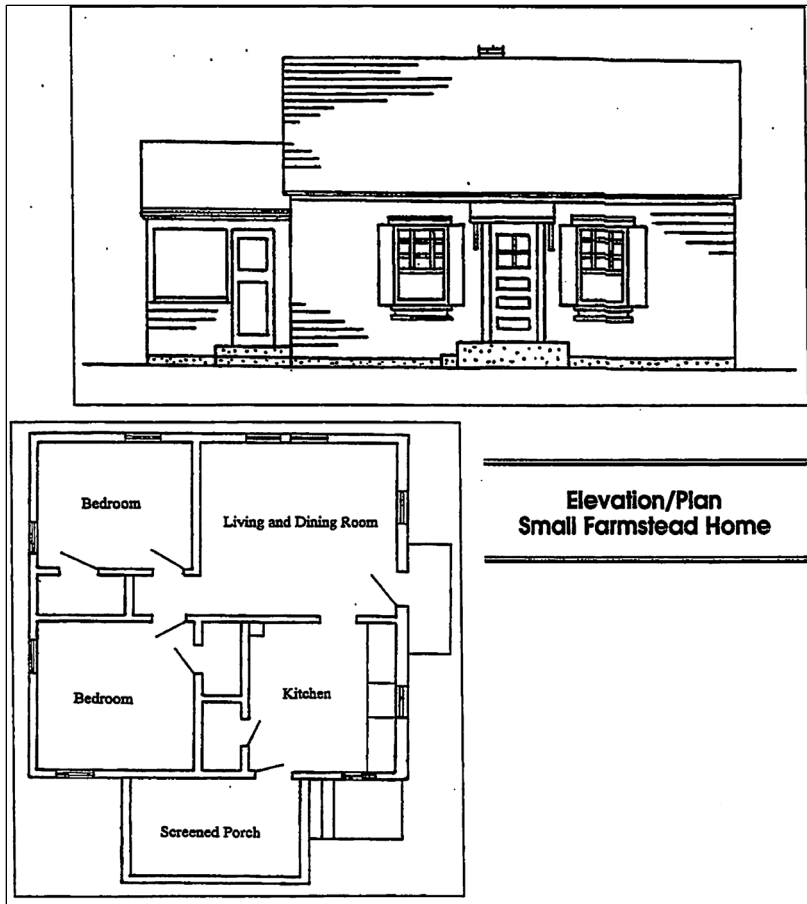


Figure 5.1. Small Farmstead Home (U.S. West Research Inc., 1995, p. 63).

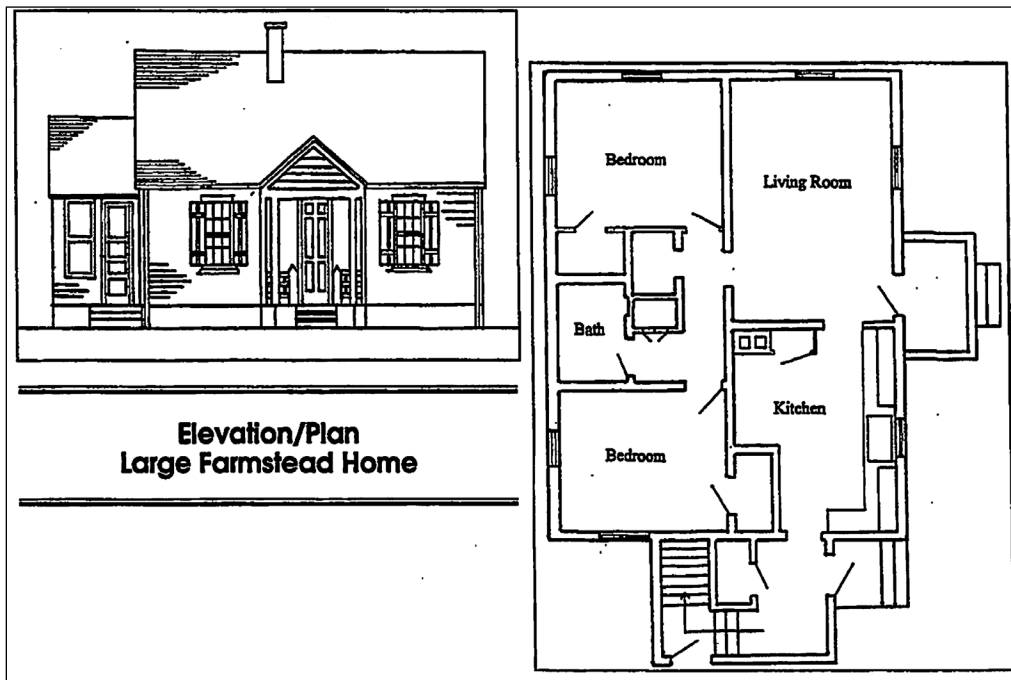


Figure 5.2. Large Farmstead Home (U.S. West Research Inc., 1995, p. 64).

grown and prepared (i.e., canning of fruits and vegetables) by the resettlement residents in a building designated for community activities. This building was to be the hub for social activities as well. One of the ideas behind the cooperative component was that it could help make the people living in the resettlement communities better citizens by forcing a sense of community among its residents.

The families accepted for occupancy were given one-year leases at the beginning of their occupancy. Each farmstead unit was also provided with a home-farm plan that was tailored to each family to help maximize their chance of success. If the family was able to abide by the plans set forth then they would become eligible to purchase the farmstead after the first year. Table 5.1 shows the number of units, total cost of each project, and the average unit cost of each community for the state of Nebraska. Note that the table is assumed to represent the final number of units constructed. This is important to remember when reviewing the historical documents surrounding the resettlement projects. Some documents, such as those related to Kearney, Nebraska indicated that nine units were constructed, but other documents indicate that eight units were completed. Loup City was another location where there had been discussions of adding new homesteads to the project. It is unknown how many were actually created at Loup City. It is possible the discrepancy is due to ongoing changes made to projects as they evolved over time.

Table 5.1*Nebraska Resettlement Communities*

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Units Built</u>	<u>Project Cost</u>	<u>Unit Cost</u>
Fairbury Farmsteads	Jefferson County	11	\$ 67,896	\$ 6,198
Falls City Farmsteads	Richardson County	10	\$ 102,755	\$ 10,276
Grand Island Farmsteads	Hall County	10	\$ 66,127	\$ 6,813
Kearney Farmsteads	Buffalo County	10	\$ 98,239	\$ 9,824
Loup City Farmsteads	Sherman County	11	\$ 101,282	\$ 9,207
Scottsbluff Farmsteads	Scottsbluff County	23	\$ 231,520	\$ 10,276
South Sioux City Farmsteads	Dakota County	22	\$ 115,396	\$ 5,245
Two Rivers Cooperative	Douglas County	40	\$ 547,746	\$ 13,694

List of Nebraska communities showing the units built, projected cost of the community, and the cost per unit (it is believed this cost includes the house and outbuildings).

The creation of the Nebraska resettlement communities began with the process of land selection. In order for an area to be approved for resettlement, four criteria were selected for analysis in determining where to locate the new communities. The areas selected had to have 1) a history of agriculture and a large number of families eligible for relief; 2) an adequate water supply had be available for crop production, whether this was from sufficient rainfall or from irrigation; 3) the farmsteads had to have access to markets for their produce; and 4) the soils had to be of high enough quality to support crop production (U.S. West Research, 1995, p. 57). By 1935, the state of Nebraska had spent \$149,764.80

to acquire 1,568 acres for the resettlement communities. Several University of Nebraska units participated in the land selection process. The participants included were the College of Agriculture, Extension Service, Agronomy and Soil Survey, and Water Conservation (U.S. West Research, 1995, p. 62).

The following sections provide information about the eight resettlement projects based on the documents that are available in the National Archives in Kansas City Missouri, and on-line documents from local, state, and federal organizations. The information regarding the individual resettlement projects is not consistent across the documents that have been found. Some documents contain greater detail than others, and discrepancies between documents exist. The National Archives in College Park Maryland has confirmed they have additional documents related to the Nebraska resettlement projects, but they have not been reviewed for this dissertation due to travel funding constraints.

Fairbury farmsteads.

The Fairbury project was initiated under FERA in September 1934. It is located southeast of Fairbury between Highway 8 and the Little Blue River. The close proximity to the river met the criteria for selecting sites that were near usable water sources. The resettlement community is accessible via a road named Farmstead Avenue. A total of ten houses were built, each with a chicken coop and a garage. The project contained 162 acres, with each farmstead situated on eight acres, and a cooperative farm with 75 acres. No homes had indoor plumbing. While there was no electricity provided to the homes, each was wired for it so each owner could have it connected at a later time. None of the homes



Figure 5.3. Fairbury Farmsteads, 1934. View of homes (center and left) and community buildings under construction (Nebraska State Historical Society, 1934).

had basements. Figure 5.3 shows two of the homes and the community buildings that were being constructed for this project. Fairbury is one of the communities that was visited to see how it looked after 80 years of existence.

Prior to visiting the site, Google Earth® was used to find the location of the Fairbury homesteads. The results are displayed in Figure 5.4. The initial aerial view provided by Google Earth shows there is a homestead still standing at the end of Farmstead Avenue. However, when the location was visited in May 2017 the homestead at the end of the road (red circle) was no longer there. Instead a pile of debris was visible. To find out when that farmstead had been removed, a search of the Jefferson County website was conducted, and while it is not possible to determine when the farmstead buildings were removed it is possible to see what the house had looked like before its removal (Figure 5.5). In addition to the house, the picture contains two small buildings in the lower right corner. The larger of the two structures might be the chicken coop.

The visit to the Fairbury Nebraska farmsteads site revealed that several homes remain occupied, some have been removed, and others appear to be vacant. Access to the site requires driving down a dirt road that passes by the city's water treatment plant and over a double set of railroad tracks. Immediately after passing over the railroad tracks the road narrows and



Figure 5.4. Aerial view of Fairbury Farmsteads as of June 10, 2014. This is one of the last images of the farmstead (red circle) located at the end of Farmstead Avenue. Image provided by Google Earth, © 2017 Google.



Figure 5.5. Abandoned home located at the end of Farmstead Avenue. The imagery date was March 22, 2016. Image provided by Jefferson County GIS Mapping System, gWorks.

eventually ends short of the Little Blue River. According to the Jefferson County GIS map the community is mostly located within a floodplain.

Upon entering the settlement area there are three homes visible, although one is surrounded by piles of junk (cars, appliances, etc.) that partially obscure the visibility of the house. After passing the initial three homes there is a grove of trees on the west side of the road. Hidden within the trees is another structure that appears to be a house; however, the overgrowth made viewing it

difficult. In an attempt to view what was there the Jefferson County GIS map was again utilized. The GIS map revealed that multiple buildings were hidden by the overgrowth. Figure 5.6 shows the structures hidden in the area. They appear to be the remains of the cooperative buildings shown in Figure 5.3. The house in the center-right of the picture is of the same design as the one in Figure 5.7 (it is not possible to determine if they are the same house). The house in the upper right corner of the picture is the one shown in Figure 5.8 and it is also the house in the center of Figure 5.3. The house was in need of paint but the grounds surrounding it were clean and cared for. This house still had its garage and chicken coop structures intact.

Farther down the road there are two more homes. Both of these are in good condition. One home appears to be newer in physical appearance and may not be part of the original settlement. The other home was also in good condition, but it was not possible to tell if it was part of the original settlement, or if it was a newer building. The lack of original structures is not surprising owing to the fact the community sits in a flood plain adjacent to the Little Blue River, which may have prompted the removal of some of the structures.



Figure 5.6. Fairbury Farmsteads cooperative buildings and homes. The cooperative buildings in the center of the picture are no longer visible from road. Image date was March 22, 2016. Image provided by Jefferson County GIS Mapping System, gWorks.



Figure 5.7. Fairbury Farmsteads, 1934. House under construction (Nebraska State Historical Society).



Figure 5.8. Fairbury Farmsteads site visit in May 2017. A resettlement house that appears to have no additions or significant alterations (Glanz, 2017).

Falls City farmsteads.

The Falls City farmsteads were located in Richardson County in southeastern Nebraska about four miles north of Falls City. The project was started in September 1934 in the middle of a corn field. Nine homes, chicken coops, and vegetable caves were constructed. The community sat on a tract of land that contained a total of 237 acres. Each farmstead had an average 6.5 acres, with the remaining acres dedicated to community farming activities. None of the homes had indoor toilets or electricity, but similar to other Nebraska communities, each house was wired for electricity so that tenants could have it connected as their incomes allowed. This project also contained a community building with a kitchen that could be used for community meetings and social functions. Figure 5.9 shows the completed community. Similar to the other Nebraska communities that have been found, Google Earth was used to try to find the location of this community. A possible location of the farmsteads was located. Although a site visit to the location in December 2019 revealed that there are two homes situated on this property it was not possible to conclude that they had been part of the resettlement project.



Figure 5.9. Falls City Farmsteads, July 1935. According the Nebraska State Historical Society it is believed that this picture includes the entire development (Nebraska State Historical Society).

Grand Island farmsteads.

The Grand Island Farmsteads project is located in south-central Nebraska in Hall County. It sits at the southwest corner of Highway 34 and Stuhr Road intersection. The land that was purchased for this project had an existing farm on it. Figures 5.10 and 5.11 show the existing buildings prior to the construction of the resettlement project. It is unknown if the buildings were removed or if they were incorporated into the project.

The project had ten houses that occupied 159 acres in total. Approximately 80 acres were used for community farming activities that also included a canning facility. Figure 5.12 shows how the community was



Figure 5.10. Grand Island Farmsteads, 1935. New construction (house, chicken coop, and garage/cow barn) is in the foreground. Existing buildings in the background were purchased with the land. View is from Highway #2 looking northeast (Nebraska State Historical Society).



Figure 5.11. Grand Island Farmsteads, 1934. Existing house that was on land purchased for Grand Island project in October 1934 (Nebraska State Historical Society).

originally platted, but does not show the location of outbuildings, gardens, or the canning facility. Google Earth was used to provide an aerial of the community as it stood in April 2017. Figure 5.13 shows that the lay-out of the community remains largely as it was constructed, except that the entrance on Highway 34 has shifted to the west of the original location. A visit to the location in 2014 revealed that several of the community homes have retained much of their original exterior design, although some have been altered through the addition of extra living space.

Based on Figure 5.12 it is possible to locate the existing homes. Home “H” is the first house visible upon entering the settlement. It is shown in Figure 5.14. It appeared in 2017 to be vacant, but still had its garage and chicken coop structures intact. The chicken coop is visible in the picture. The garage is to the right and is just out of view in the picture. Figure 5.15 shows how the house may have looked when it was constructed. A comparison of the two pictures shows the porch has been converted to indoor space and the fireplace chimney is gone but the rest of the structure remains as it must have looked in the 1930s.

The federal directives for the design of the resettlement homes stated that they should blend with the surrounding architectural styles of any selected location. A comparison of the home in Figure 5.11 to the house in Figure 5.15

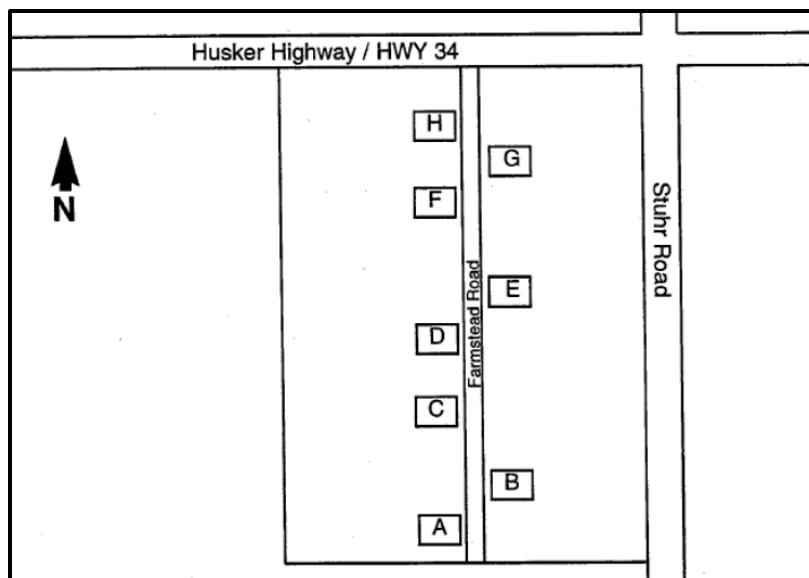


Figure 5.12. Diagram of Grand Island Farmsteads. (U.S. West Research Inc., 1995, p. 54)

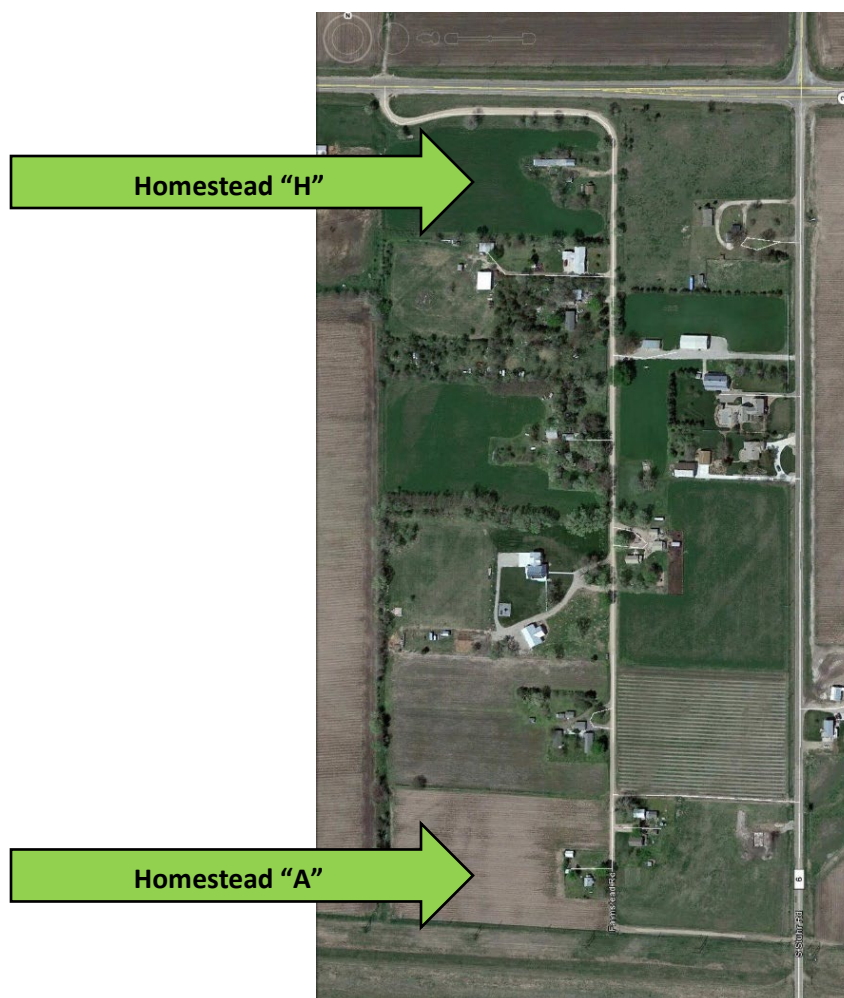


Figure 5.13. Aerial view of Grand Island Farmsteads on April 21, 2016. Image provided by Google Earth.



Figure 5.14. Grand Island Farmsteads. This is Homestead “H” as it appeared during a site visit in 2014. The small structure to the right of the house appeared to be a chicken coop (Glanz, 2014).



Figure 5.15. Grand Island Farmsteads, 1935. House is under construction. The structure in the center left of the picture is a garage/cow barn of another subsistence farmstead (Nebraska State Historical Society).

shows similarities in the exterior appearances of the two houses that seem to support the adherence to the federal government's instructions, at least for the Grand Island resettlement community.

Kearney farmsteads.

The Kearney Nebraska resettlement community is located in Buffalo County in south-central Nebraska within the city limits of Kearney. Work on the project started in July 1934 and was completed in January 1935. Labor was provided by those on the government relief rolls, and the building materials were requisitioned from the Kearney area to keep costs low. Irrigation was provided for the project.

The community contained 112 acres that were split between nine homes of eight acres each and a community farm with 40 acres. Figure 5.16 shows how the land was subdivided for the Kearney project. Four houses were located along East 39th Street, three were to the north of East 34th Street, and one was located along Grand Avenue. Each farmstead contained a house, garage/barn building, chicken coop, space for a garden, a pasture, and a small orchard. None of the homes were constructed with indoor toilets. However, each house did have electricity and telephone service. Figure 5.17 shows four of the homes visible from the road. Figure 5.18 shows how one of the farmsteads looked upon



Figure 5.17. Kearney Farmsteads, 1935. View of the four houses along East 39th Street (Nebraska State Historical Society).



Figure 5.18. Kearney Farmsteads, 1935. Picture of House, garage/barn, and chicken coop (Nebraska State Historical Society).

completion. The house and outbuildings were located close together for convenience.

The selection process for the Kearney resettlement community was documented in an undated survey conducted by Roger Hardie. The report is the only one that has been found that explained the selection process for any of the projects in Nebraska. The process started with four social workers who provided services for the area. It appears the participants were chosen from the Kearney area because the resettlement community had been intended to be part of the town of Kearney. Each social worker provided the names and narratives of 15 families they felt would be suitable for the farmstead project. The list of 60 families was then narrowed down to 24 by the County Relief Director who then submitted the shortened list and the narratives to a local committee that was made up of local citizens, and they further narrowed the list down to 15 families. The final decision of selecting the starting eight families rested with Henry Dole, who was the acting Director of the Farmstead Program. It was believed that having Mr. Dole make the final decision would relieve the local committee of responsibility for the decision.

The Kearney Project was completed on November 15, 1934 and the selected families were expected to move in immediately. There was much publicity surrounding the occupation of the project, which included a drawing to

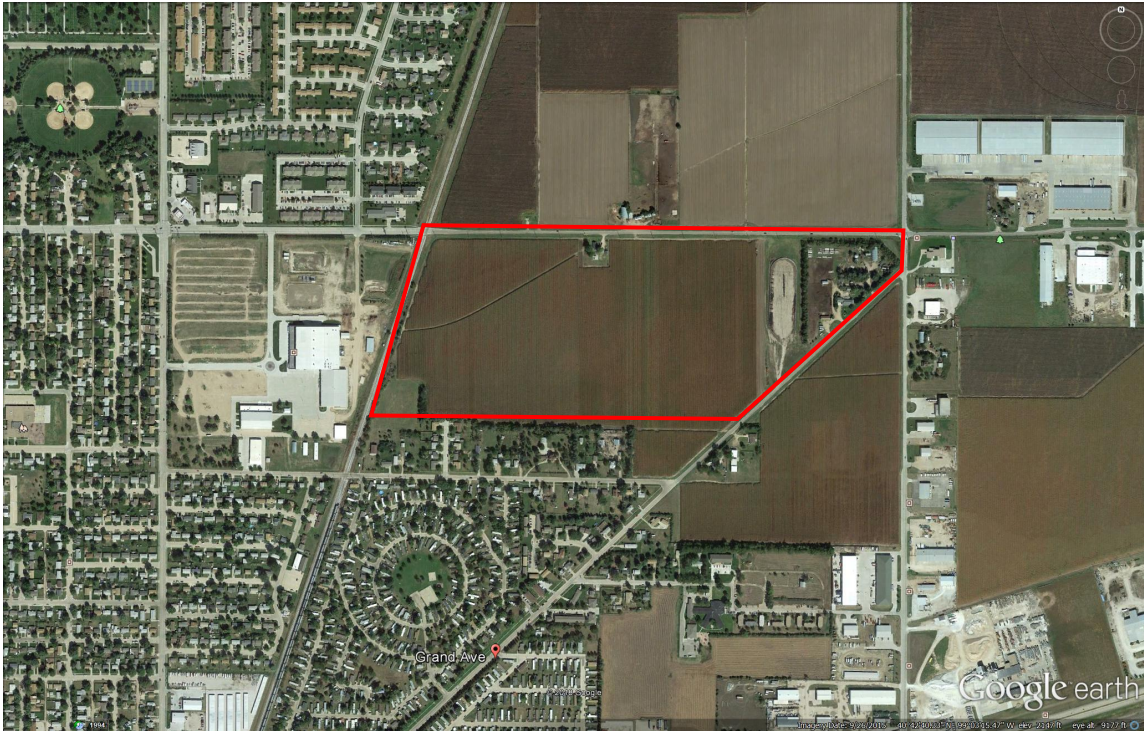


Figure 5.19. Location of the Kearney Farmsteads. The image dated September 26, 2015 shows only two farmsteads on the project site. Image provided by Google Earth, © Google Earth.

determine which family would receive which farmstead. Eight families were initially chosen to resettle in the Kearney Project. Similar to other Nebraska resettlement projects, the farmsteads changed occupants during its first few years. By September 1941 only two of the original eight families had remained on the project.

The Kearney Nebraska project has not survived as intact as those at Fairbury, Grand Island, and Two Rivers. However, by using Google Earth it was possible to find the location of the Kearney resettlement project. In Figure 5.19, the red polygon shows the location of the project. All that exists of the project

are two farmsteads. The majority of the land is currently being used for growing crops, but it is also undergoing significant change because there is a housing development being built on the southern half of the land. Figure 5.20 shows one of the existing farmsteads that is located in the upper middle of the polygon. The right side of the house is the original structure. The building on the left side of the picture appears to be the original garage. The other farmstead is located on Grand Avenue. The house and several of the original outbuildings remain on the property. The owner of the Grand Avenue farmstead confirmed that the building in Figure 5.21 was used for canning and a separate smaller building was used to sell the products. Had the community survived it would have been part of the city of Kearney, as had been intended during the planning phase.



Figure 5.20. Kearney Farmsteads. The remaining house along 39th Street as it appeared during a site visit on October 25, 2019 (Glanz, 2019).



Figure 5.21. Kearney Farmsteads. This was the canning building for the Kearney Cooperative. The site visit occurred on October 25, 2019 (Glanz, 2019).

Loup City farmsteads.

The Loup City farmsteads were located in Sherman county about four miles northeast of Loup City. The community included ten homes, each with a multi-purpose outbuilding designed to shelter a cow and a car, a chicken coop, and vegetable cave. The project was started in December 1934 and consisted of individual farmsteads and a cooperative farm. The number of acres in the project totaled 332, with each farm averaging four acres. The cooperative farm used 292 acres for its activities. Similar to the other communities, these homes

did not have bathrooms. They also did not have electricity since no power lines ran to the project site, despite each house having been wired for it. None of the homes had basements and all used coal stoves for heating. Currently there is little information or pictures that have been discovered regarding the Loup City farmsteads. It is unknown if the information does not exist, has been destroyed, or is located outside of the Nebraska/Kansas area. A Google Earth search also does not reveal a location for this project.

Scotts Bluff farmsteads.

Located in Scottsbluff County in northwestern Nebraska, the resettlement project at Scotts Bluff, Nebraska was located on 356 acres approximately two miles west of the town of Scotts Bluff. Figure 5.22 shows how the community was laid-out. It was located to the south of the nearby railroad tracks and of Highway 26. It is assumed that each letter represents a house, but it is difficult to determine what all of the squares represent since some letters (i.e., I, K, and R) represent two squares. It is also unknown if the letter V is a farmstead or a community building.

The project was started in March 1935 and contained 22 houses that each occupied about seven acres of land. There was a cooperative farm that had an additional 200 acres. Each house was constructed with a basement, attic

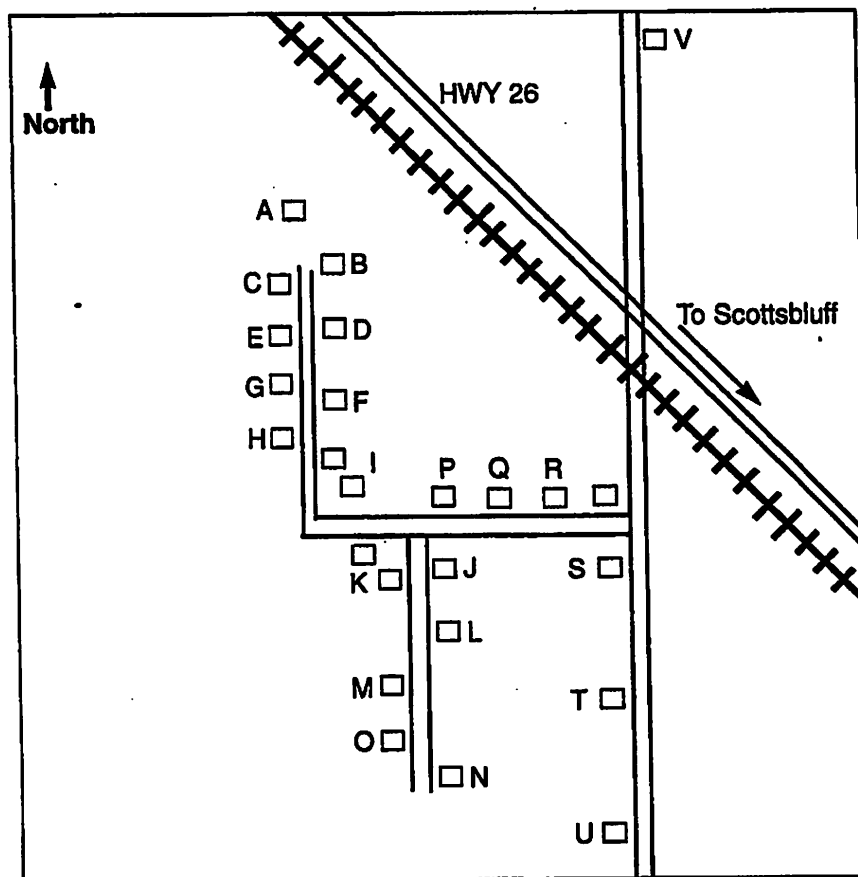


Figure 5.22. Diagram of Scotts Bluff Farmsteads. (U.S. West Research, Inc., 1995, p. 69).

space, a furnace for heating, and a screened-in back porch. No indoor bathrooms were constructed; instead outdoor facilities were constructed for community use.

Many of the original homes still exist at the Scottsbluff resettlement site.

Google Earth offers an opportunity for a virtual drive through of the entire community by utilizing the street view of the software package. This allows viewing of each house from the street. Some are well-kept and others are needing repair. Figure 5.23 is one of the houses in the community that was

viewed by using Google Earth. It is believed this is house “F” on the map in Figure 5.22. This house has had extra footage added to the structure at the back of the house, leaving the original façade intact.



Figure 5.23. Scottsbluff Farmstead as of April 2012. Image provided by Google Earth, © 2020 Google.

South Sioux City farmsteads.

The South Sioux City farmsteads is located one mile east of Jackson, Nebraska in Dakota County. Jackson is in northeast Nebraska. Figure 5.24 shows the community is bordered by Highway 20 on the north side and a double set of railroad tracks on the south side. The project contained 22 houses, and each included a combination garage/cow barn, chicken coop, and cellar for

storage of vegetables. The project consisted of 305 acres. Each farmstead averaged 6.5 acres. All homes constructed had four rooms (kitchen, living room, and two bedrooms) and none of them had bathrooms or basements. Similar to Loup City, limited information has been found regarding this community.



Figure 5.24. Aerial view of the South Sioux City Farmsteads on May 11, 2017. Image provided by Google Earth, © 2018 Google.

Two Rivers farmsteads.

The Two Rivers Non-Stock Cooperative was the largest of the Nebraska resettlement projects. It was located in Douglas County in eastern Nebraska, about one mile east of the Platte River and 22 miles west of Omaha.

Construction on the community began in 1934. Approximately 40 homes with outbuildings were constructed, along with several community buildings.

Individual farmsteads had 4 acres each and the cooperative farm had 1,380 acres.

While no diagram has been found showing the layout of Two Rivers, Figure 5.25 provides an aerial view of how the community was laid-out. Many of the individual farmsteads remain visible.

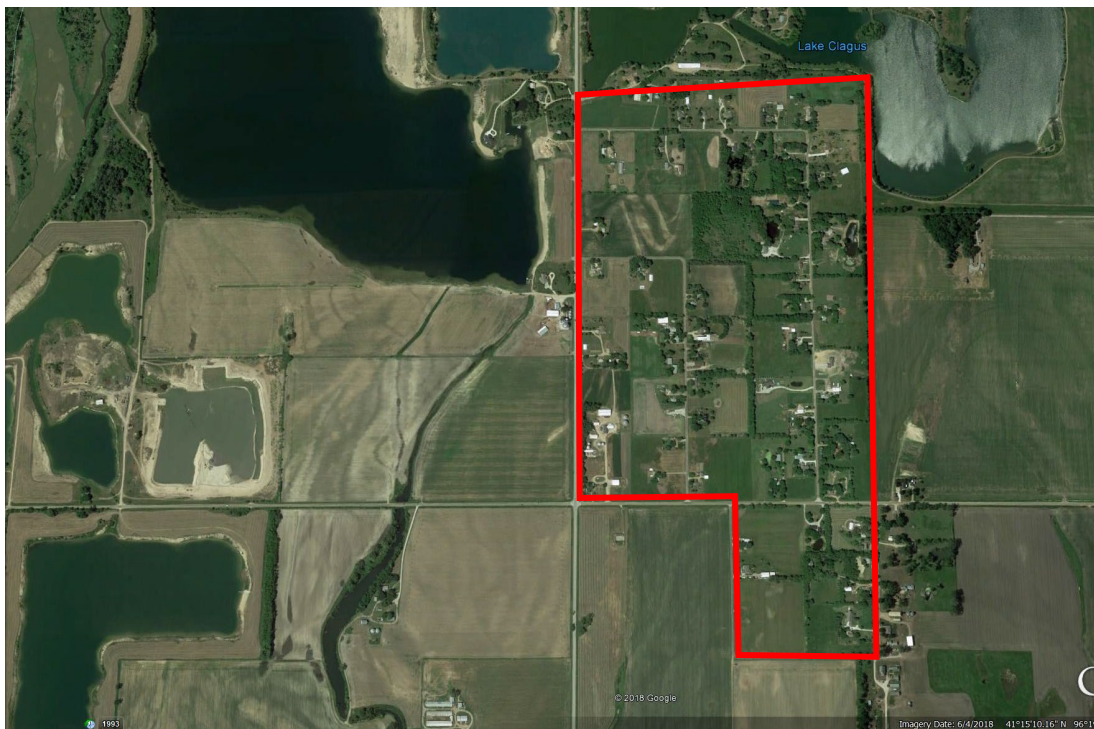


Figure 5.25. Aerial view of the Two Rivers Cooperative resettlement project on June 4, 2018. Image provide by Google Earth, © 2018 Google.

All the homes were wired for electricity. Indoor plumbing was also available due to the creation of septic tanks for each unit. The houses that were constructed in Two Rivers project varied in size. They consisted of 1, 1-½, and two-story frame homes with either four, five, or six rooms. A careful examination of Figure 5.28 shows the variations in home design that were used. The homes included basements, which were dug by hand (Figure 5.26). Prefabricated walls were built on-site (Figure 5.27) which was designed to speed-up the construction process. In addition to the construction of buildings, the project also included road improvement around the community, installation of an irrigation system, and the digging of wells for each homestead.



Figure 5.26. Two Rivers Farmsteads, 1935. They were digging a basement for a house by hand (Nebraska State Historical Society).



Figure 5.27. Two Rivers Farmsteads, 1935. "Prefabricated materials for more than 50 structures are stacked together in this farmyard" (Nebraska State Historical Society).



Figure 5.28. Two Rivers Farmsteads, 1941. The description for this picture lists the location as Waterloo, Nebraska (Wolcott, 1941).



Figure 5.29. The barns and chicken coops are part of the cooperative buildings at the Two Rivers Farmsteads. The house at the end of the road (center) is the cooperative's community building (Wolcott, 1941).

Similar to the other Nebraska resettlement projects, Two Rivers was developed with the idea that it would market its products to the surrounding towns. However, unlike the other communities Two Rivers had easy access to a large market, namely Omaha. This made Two Rivers unique in Nebraska. The community worked to sell dairy products, eggs, and produce, but efforts to sell their products were hampered by the surrounding towns. There was concern by non-resettlement residents that the projects' settlers would create additional economic hardships on the existing farmers by interfering in the sale of crops and produce. Eventually the Two Rivers dairies were limited to the sale of milk for processing only (Kraft et. al, 1980).

In addition to local concerns, Two Rivers had issues with marketing their products. According to Hans Hoiberg, in the *Farmsteads: The Dream vs. The Reality* video (2000), Two Rivers was unable to make the necessary marketing connections for disposal of their products. Despite the efforts of surrounding towns to curtail the resettlement's activities and problems with marketing their products, the Two Rivers community was considered more successful at selling their products than the other Nebraska resettlement communities.

Based on comparative information gathered about the eight resettlement communities in Nebraska, the Two Rivers community appears to be one that is most intact; it does not appear to have been affected by the extensive flooding that occurred in early 2019. A site visit to the location in October 2019 revealed that at least half of the homes still exist, many in their original form. Figure 5.30 shows one of the original homes, which appears to be relatively unaltered and in very good condition. This home is indicative of the other remaining homes in the community. Several community buildings also exist, including the barn and community hall (not pictured). Figure 5.31 shows the condition of the original barn and one of the community buildings, which may now be part of the Clover family farm. According to the *Farmsteads: The Dream vs. The Reality* video the Clover family (who were part of the Two Rivers resettlement community) purchased one of the farmsteads. In October 2019, Google Maps indicated that

the Clover family farm consisted of land surrounding the southern edge of the community and it may include the barn and various outbuilding.



Figure 5.30. Two Rivers Farmsteads. One of several remaining homes viewed during a site visit in October 2019 (Glanz, 2019).



Figure 5.31. Two Rivers Farmsteads site visit in October 2019. Both barns appear to be part of the original cooperative buildings (Glanz, 2019).

Design Standards to Maximize Functionality

The Nebraska resettlement communities typically followed a specific design for the exterior of the homes and outbuildings. The control over the design also extended to the use of exterior and interior spaces. To aid in designing the farmsteads, and to keep building costs low, a report describing the *Standards for Farmhouses Planned for Resettlement Projects* was prepared. The detail that was provided included information on the size of yards, where children's play areas should be located (within sight of the kitchen window), the location of clothes drying lines, and the distance the house should be from road.



Figure 5.32. Constructing kitchen cabinets for a Kearney Farmsteads home, 1934. (Nebraska State Historical Society).

The *Standards* stated that dining rooms are not to be included; instead a space for eating should be included in the kitchen (for a family of six) or in the living room (for a family of four). The homes were to be restricted to either a four-room house that included a kitchen, living room, and two bedrooms, or a five-room house that included three bedrooms. The level of detail regarding what to include in the homes was remarkable. For example, space for doing laundry is mentioned; the Standards advised that “the best ironing arrangement is a portable board, thus permitting its use in kitchen, living room, bedroom, or porch. The homemaker often irons in the afternoon or evening and uses the board in connection with her sewing” (Standards for Farmhouses, no date, p. 3). There is also information regarding storage of specific items that needed to be considered when designing these homes. Space for canning, storing of cleaning supplies, space for storage of work clothes (including availability of hooks and shelves), space to store children’s toys, and storage of kitchen dishes, utensils, and supplies are all mentioned. The following list provides a summary of the items that were deemed necessary for the effective and efficient use of various spaces within a resettlement home. The list is from the *Standards for Farmhouse Planning for Resettlement Project* report.

Living rooms should include:

- Stove unless house has central heat
- Couch

- Table
- Sewing machine
- Chest of drawers
- Two lounging chairs
- Lights or plugs providing for reading at couch and table.

Parents' Bedroom should include:

- Double bed, accessible from both sides
- Child's bed
- Chest of drawers
- Mirror
- Chair
- Lights convenient for mirror; bed head

Other Bedrooms should include:

- One or two beds
- Chest of drawers
- Mirror
- Chair
- Lights convenient for mirror and bed head

Kitchen should include:

- Meal table or movable work table
- Sink and adjacent work counters
- Cook stove or stoves (coal or wood, and kerosene, electricity, or gas)
- Table space adjacent to stove, for handling hot kettles (may be part of stove, or second stove)
- Refrigerator
- Pastry and cutting boards
- Shelf space for: dishes, packaged groceries
- Hanging spaces (preferable) or shelves for: skillets and other utensils with handles, saucepans, dishpans.
- Shelf space for: mixing bowls, kettles that cannot be hung, electrical appliances, [school] lunch kits
- Slots or [rack] for: lids, muffin tins
- Bins or platform space for: flour, meal, sugar, metal cans.
- Ventilated drawers for cabinets for: bread, cake

- Drawers for: table cutlery and small utensils, dish towels, hand towels, table linen and clean rags and for business records and recipes.
- Ventilated storage for vegetables and for perishable foods when refrigerator is not operated.
- Fuel box.
- Kitchen stool, two chairs (at all times)
- Lights convenient for: meal table, sink, stove

Laundry area should include:

- Space to use tubs and machine
- Means of heating water
- Space to store equipment when not in use
- Place to dry clothes in bad weather
- Lights over tubs

Food Storage area – other than in kitchen.

- Items to be stored may require:
 - Shelves for: home canned foods and for perishables
 - Bins or floor space for: apples, potatoes, cabbage, kraut, vinegar, pickles, salted meat, salted vegetables, nuts, dried fruits, beans, peanuts
 - Hanging space for cured meats
 - Place to care for milk and eggs. Items may include:
 - Place for separator
 - Place to keep milk utensils between periods of use
 - Place to keep cream till marketed
 - Place to pack eggs
 - Place to keep eggs until marketed

Bathroom should include:

- Tub, lavatory, toilet
- Baby table
- Mirror, towel rods, wardrobe hoods (high and low)
- Storage for toilet articles; towels (unless linen closet is near)
- Light over mirror

Bedding closet should include:

- Shelves
- Space for toys and game tables below shelves
- Light over door

Clothes closets:

- Low shelves
- High shelves
- Rod
- Low and high wardrobe hooks
- Light over door

Broom closet:

- Hanging space for broom, tow mops, dustpan, cloths
- Floor space for table leaves, ironing board, mop pail
- Shelf space for lamps, supplies, etc.

Chore coats; school wraps

- Space for garments on hangers
- Wardrobe hooks (low and high)
- Shelves for caps, mittens, etc.
- Platform for boots, rubbers (a boot that fits over the shoe)

Fuel storage areas

- Fuel for heating stove or furnace
- Fuel for kitchen stove
- Kerosene, oil

Yard should include:

- Drive
- Place for visitors to park cars
- Walks from [drive] to both entrances
- Approach for wagon or truck with fuel or food to be put into basement
- Place to wash vegetables
- Drying lines
- Child's play area
- "Outdoor living room"
- Flower garden

- Storage for tools use by homemaker

(Standards for Farmhouses, no date, p. 17-20)

The list is extensive and shows the level of detail that went into planning these homes. The thought that went into the development of these communities also extended to the personal development of the residents. The federal government required the tracking of all resettlement families' health issues, social development, and financial status. The next section will discuss the extent of such oversight that occurred in the Nebraska resettlement communities.

Tracking Resettlement Families

Similar to the other resettlement communities created, the Nebraska projects required careful screening of all applicants. Once accepted the Community Managers were required to classify each of the families (husband and wife) according the level of supervision needed to ensure the success of each household. There were four general categories, each denoted with a letter, A-D. Category A was for those households that needed very little, to no, supervision. Category B indicated that the household needed some supervision. Category C represented a household that needed "fairly close supervision", and category D indicated a household that needed "continuous and minute supervision" (Raub

Snyder memo, dated December 22, 1939). To aid in determining the category to be assigned to a family, it was suggested that the following eight criteria be applied to each the husband and wife to create a composite score of the couple.

1. Attitude: Cooperative; conscientious effort to prepare and carry out farm and home plans; social community participation and progressive outlook; welcomes suggestions; take lively interest in improving farm and home and level of living.
2. Character: Honest; trustworthy; emotionally stable; sense of responsibility; courageous; fearless attempt; pioneering spirit; determination; pride in work; dependable; sincere.
3. Judgement: Balance; self-control; decisive; makes satisfactory decision with waste of time; wise choice based on sound background and experience; spends money wisely; plans ahead and budgets; properly directs activities of children.
4. Practical Knowledge and Experience: Improved farm and home management practices adopted; increased native initiative; skills, and resourcefulness; background of farm work.
5. Industry: Physically able to work; ambitious; desires farming and homemaking as a profession (willing to stay at home and develop maximum capabilities); keeps home clean and orderly; good planning and management of work; take initiative; enthusiastic; thorough.
6. Family Relationship: Family unity; appreciation of individual aspirations and abilities; understands; proper goal for activities.
7. General Appearance of Farm and Home: Properly cared for family members (cleanliness, dress, appearance); keeping buildings, premises, fences, machinery and home equipment in proper condition; livestock

properly fed and housed; yard arrangement and beautification; house clean and orderly.

8. Adequate Progress: Conscientious application of current yearly plans; record books properly kept and used; production and preservation of family food needs; farm production of feed, seed, fertilizer and livestock replacements; correct balance and condition of crops and livestock; adequate land resources; sufficient power and equipment; full use of available labor. (Raub Snyder memo, dated December 22, 1939).

The above criteria indicate the concern the federal government had regarding some of the resettlement families, who they believed may not have known how to care for themselves, their children, and the homestead properly. The Nebraska farmsteads completed a *Monthly Report on Progress of Family Selection* report. The June 30, 1942 report for the Loup City project indicated that application list had been closed since February 1, 1942. The June report indicates that a total of 62 applications had been received. Of those applications six families were in acceptance status, 20 families had withdrawn after acceptance (three families withdrew prior to occupancy, 13 voluntarily left after occupancy, and four families had been evicted). An additional 36 families had been rejected. The total population of the Loup City project was 28 (this was down from a recorded high population of 40 on June 30, 1941). The June 1942 report also notes that all the dwellings were occupied; however, five of the buildings were being

used by persons other than accepted resettlement families. Some reports indicate some of the housing units may have been occupied by government officials who were charged with community oversight.

The final monthly progress report for Loup City (found in the National Archives in Kansas City, Missouri) shows a decline in the settlement of the project. The March 31, 1943 report indicates that only four families were in acceptance status and the total population of the project had declined to 16 people. There were now four vacancies, which was attributed to a “lack of tires and gas to make driving to and from work practicable” (Monthly Report on Progress, Loup City, 1943).

Because the primary goal of the resettlement programs had been to improve the quality of life for the resettlement participants, the federal agencies involved (DSH, FERA, and RA) believed that the selected families needed oversight to ensure the success of the communities. In addition to classifying families according to level of oversight needed to help ensure the success of each family, the programs also required the careful tracking of all resettlement families regarding their health, finances, and social development. The following sections will provide a summary of the stories the case workers recorded for the Nebraska communities.

Health.

The RA understood that in order to improve the standard of living for the resettlement participants this meant that a focus on health conditions would be required. Using sanitation engineers, the plans for the communities would incorporate features that helped curtail conditions that lead to poor health. This meant that proper drainage of sewage, access to potable water, and electricity for refrigeration would be required. But this also meant the resettlement participants would need access to medical personnel and medical facilities.

While sanitation was part of the planning from the beginning, the concern over health conditions appears to have been late to the process, because the Public Health section of the RA was not established until January 2, 1936. The Public Health section relied heavily on the participation of local and state agencies to assist in the evaluation of the needs and the correction of problems that were found during site surveys. The site surveys focused on the physical condition of the communities and homes as well as the health conditions of the resettlement families. State and local health personnel were expected to be knowledgeable about sanitation and health standards. However, it appears that RA employees did not need expertise in this area. Instead the RA offered to provide education to their employees that would allow them to have a functional knowledge base for use in community evaluations.

The RA understood that the provision of healthcare could be costly. The agency stated, “The most urgent and perplexing problem confronting the Resettlement Administration is that of providing adequate medical, dental, and hospital care for fees that people can afford to pay” (United States Resettlement Administration, *First Annual Report*, 1936, p. 93). The RA had suggested that new projects could incorporate a small facility that was accessible to the residents and that existing projects could either construct a new facility or repurpose an existing building for medical use. The staffing of the medical facility would depend on the local “conditions, needs, and desires” (United States Resettlement Administration, *First Annual Report*, 1936, p. 93). However, this may have been less about community desire and more about availability of medical personnel in a specific location. These were all issues that were expected to be addressed by local and state agency personnel. In the Resettlement Administration’s First Annual Report (1936), they acknowledged the role of local and state officials by stating:

The State departments of health especially have rendered valuable and practical assistance in reviewing plans for water supply, sewage disposal, and malaria control, and in making suggestions which will enhance the value of these health-protecting devices. In many instances, immunization against smallpox, diphtheria, and typhoid fever has been provided to homesteaders without cost. Numerous inspections of

Resettlement projects have been made by sanitary engineers, physicians, nurses, and other specialists attached to State departments of health, and appropriate recommendations have been made for the correction of undesirable conditions. Without the understanding assistance of the State health departments, the progress of the Resettlement Administration in the field of public health could not have been as intelligently directed.

(United States Resettlement Administration, *First Annual Report*, 1936, p. 94)

The role these state employees played in the Nebraska resettlement projects was evident in the reports that were filed by the case workers assigned to the different communities.

A letter dated May 11, 1937 to Cal. A. Ward, Regional Director of the Resettlement Administration located in Lincoln Nebraska, included a copy of a speech given by Dr. F. D. Mott, Assistant to the Medical Director, regarding health and rural housing. The speech provided information about what he thought was necessary to create housing that would improve the lives of inhabitants. Dr. Motts stated that the most cost-effective method for providing healthcare would be the incorporation of medical personnel and a medical facility into the resettlement communities. The reason for this was he believed the communities had bargaining power which could translate to greater affordability of medical services. Dr. Mott also promoted the addition of sewage disposal, drinkable water, and provision of electricity but he believed the process

of selecting some of the resettlement sites was flawed. According to his speech testing water for contaminants or planning for sewage disposal was being conducted after the communities were built. He stated that to improve living conditions the testing needed to occur prior to the purchasing of resettlement lands. In addition, the RA believed that education was the key to proper hygiene and improved health for the resettlement families: "If we can, let us pipe water into homes, install bathtubs, and educate the people to use them" (Letter from John O. Walker, May 11, 1937).

Despite the directive by the RA to make the improvements in health and sanitation for resettlement families a priority, there was concern that access to healthcare remained lacking. L.L. Scranton, the Assistant Regional Director of Rehabilitation, wrote in August 1937 that while physicians were issuing statements to the Medical Director that resettlement clients were getting proper care there was concern that this was not entirely true. To discover the actual level of care being rendered the RA issued a statement requesting county offices to gather information about the project clients. This was to include the names, dates, and a summary of the "facts of specific cases that are illustrative of the lack or need for more adequate medical care" (Letter from L.L. Scranton, August 20, 1937).

The letters Mr. Scranton received in response to the information request showed extensive variation in need. Lloyd C. Way, the Lancaster County Rural Rehabilitation Supervisor, wrote on September 2, 1937, that all medical needs had been attended to and that only a few outstanding dental bills needed to be paid. On September 4, 1937, H.L. Bierman, the District #3 Supervisor (Kearney Nebraska) informed Scranton of two families that needed medical attention. The report was brief but illustrated the needs of the two families. The first case mentioned was the John Harms family of Phelps County:

This is the case of the John Harms' family in Phelps County. From information gained at the office, they have a four-year-old daughter who has partial neck paralysis, which causes the child to hold her head far over to one side. This family had been contacted by the County Home Supervisor with the idea of helping them with this medical need, to have the child sent to an Orthopedic Hospital for a while. Mrs. Harms was willing to have something done, but Mr. Harms, at that time, would not listen to it. It is my plan to contact this family again, in cooperation with Mrs. Perry, the Assistant Director, and see if Mr. Harms will not change his attitude. The case was brought to the attention of a County Resettlement Home Supervisor who has already made an effort to give this family adequate medical care (Memo from H.L. Bierman, dated August 23, 1937).

The second case was the Ben Favinger family in Lincoln County, who had a young boy with tonsillitis. The county supervisor was making “arrangements to have enough money released from the sale of wheat to take care of this boy, as soon as his present condition is improved enough to have his tonsils removed” (Memo from H.L. Bierman, dated August 23, 1937).

A letter dated September 5, 1937 from John M. Stahl, the District Rural Rehabilitation Supervisor in Minot, North Dakota illustrated a more extensive need for medical care. He stated that in his district there had been 3,479 requests for medical care. He believed that “several years of drought and resultant crop failures, with little or no income at all, has been the cause for many of our clients to [postpone] medical attention at the proper time” (Letter from J. M. Stahl, dated September 5, 1937). The letter was followed with a sample of the cases for which medical care had been rendered. The 61 cases listed in the letter were for standard loan clients and for grant clients requested between November 1936 and December 1937. Appendicitis was the most commonly listed ailment, with 10 cases listed. A sampling of the other requests show that medical care was requested for the treatment of mumps, blood poisoning, fractures, burns, a gunshot wound, and a miscarriage.

Financial Standing.

While the resettlement programs promoted home ownership, based on information found in the National Archives in Kansas City, Missouri it appears that at least in the state of Nebraska selected families were not immediately granted purchase agreements. A recorded interview in 1980 with Frances Persinger (one of the South Sioux City resettlement residents) provides evidence regarding the lack of purchase agreement between the government and the resettlement residents. Mr. Persinger discussed that the settlers each paid about \$25.00 a month in rent, and after one year they were to have been given the opportunity to purchase their farmsteads. The sale price was approximately \$2,500; however, some homesteaders were never offered a purchase agreement and as a result some of the families eventually moved off the resettlement projects. Many of the projects remained rental units. By October 1939 there was a growing concern regarding the lack of issuing purchase agreements. A memo written to Cal A. Ward on October 20, 1939 stated that:

“from the standpoint of morale of the homesteaders, and also in the interest of public relations, it is desirable for us to begin to get those families who have demonstrated their ability to handle the land on a sales contract basis as promptly as possible. Of course, we should be very careful in selecting the families who will be given this opportunity, but I am strongly of the opinion that starting an appropriate number of families on the road to ownership will go a long way towards allaying existing

uncertainty, not only among these families, but also among their neighbors who may not be given a purchase contract at this time” (Letter from Will Alexander dated October 20, 1939).

The finances of the Nebraska projects, along with the occupants’ finances, were tracked throughout the first few years of the communities’ existence. Annual financial reports were filed, even though many resettlement residents saw little to no income from the sale of products. For all communities, form FSA-MA 37 was completed. The document provided information about the collection of debts owed by the occupants. Loup City Farmsteads showed that in May 1942 the project had previously collected \$2,336.05 in lease receipts and had received \$96.28 for the month of May. The form also indicates they had previously collected \$1,612.57 for “T.L.A.’s” (there is no indication what this category is) and \$433.20 in miscellaneous receipts for a total collection of \$4,478.60. All the money received by the project was deposited in various accounts. The form indicates how the funds were dispersed: \$96.78 was allocated for Special Deposits, \$121.08 was paid to Bankhead funds, \$15.91 to miscellaneous accounts, and \$4,244.83 to the Corporation Bank or Trust Fund. A copy of the FSA-MA 37 form also exists for July 1942. Interestingly, the project had not received any additional debt receipts for June or July 1942. It is also unclear how the debt was paid since the early residents were discouraged from working off the resettlement project.

Were the residents allowed to find outside employment in the later years of the projects?

The resettlement residents were expected to work only on the resettlement projects. This became problematic for some, since the homesteaders often received little cash for their efforts. For many of the Nebraska resettlement residents the only source of income was a monthly \$25.00 grant that they received from the federal government. Unfortunately, this monthly stipend did not cover expenses, and as a result many residents ended up signing promissory notes for all their purchases (i.e., food, seed, building materials). Again, as a result, some of them worked in nearby towns before being told to stop and only work on the resettlement farms. For some resettlers this was too much, and they left the communities.

Social Participation.

The resettlement programs were not created for the improvement of housing standards alone. Rather they were directed at improving the quality of life for many of the families who found themselves in financial ruin with no pathway forward. In order to improve the odds of the community succeeding, education and cooperation with neighbors were strongly promoted. The process of inhabiting the communities began with the family selection process. Hans

Hoiberg, the head of the family selection section for the Northern Plains (Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota) provided an overview of the process in his 1980 interview in the *Farmsteads: The Dream vs. The Reality* video. Hoiberg believed the selection process was difficult because they were looking for people who could succeed in a cooperative environment and not someone who was strongly individualistic. He also indicated that there was a strong division of labor based on gender. Men were to be physically capable of farm work and the women were to be capable of food preservation.

Because the success of the communities was important to the mission of the program, the families were carefully tracked by state and federal officials. Reports were generated to track the educational and social participation of the residents. Federal form FSA-RP 118 tracked six categories of activities: primary school enrollment and attendance, membership in adult education classes and clubs, involvement in social organizations, access to a library, services offered from federal agencies other than the FSA, and cooperative activities. Despite the reports requesting statistical information about community participation (i.e. how many children were attending school, how many adults participated in a social organization), there are questions about what the recorded numbers represent or if the numbers were recorded accurately. For example, the FSA-RP 118 report for the Kearney Farmsteads for the period ending in June 30, 1940,

indicates that there were six children residing in the resettlement group. They were listed as being in grades 1 through 12. However, the report then indicates that there are 516 children enrolled in grades one through twelve. The report does not explain how either number was arrived at. Given the small size of the Kearney resettlement project it is extremely unlikely that there were 516 children living there. Do the 516 children represent the number in the Kearney school district? Despite the lack of clarity, the report is important from a historical perspective because it shows what types of participation was expected from the resettlement residents.

Supervision from local, state, and federal officials was prevalent throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. Both men and women were subject to visits from government officials. Figure 5.33 shows a Fairbury housewife talking with a home supervisor. Frances Persinger, from the South Sioux City farmsteads described the supervision as being intrusive and said that it was a point of contention with the residents. He described how the federal officials would ask about everything, including how many neckties he had and how many pairs of underwear he had. He recalled that answering the question about how many neckties he had was easy because he had none! In his opinion the federal officials offered little help with the actual farmstead work and gave the



Figure 5.33. Fairbury Farmsteads, 1936. "Home supervisor and farm wife discuss home problems" (Rothstein, 1936).

impression that everything the resettlers were doing was wrong. As a result, Persinger eventually stopped talking to them.

Persinger's view contradicts that held by Hans Hoiberg, who considered some of the residents to have been too independent, which he thought was the cause of some of the problems within the communities. Despite the cancellation of the resettlement programs Hoiberg believed that they had improved rural life by providing access to new housing that was considered a major improvement

over what some of the residents had lived in prior to participation in the program. Hoiberg stated, in his 1980 interview in the *Farmsteads: The Dream vs. The Reality* video, that the program had not been a worthless endeavor and that they (government officials) had learned some things from the program (but he did not elaborate as to what those things were). He believed that the greatest contribution of the resettlement program to the state of Nebraska was that it kept “Nebraskans from migrating as much as Oklahomans”.

CHAPTER 6 – PROGRAM TERMINATION

There is a place for the promotion of subsistence homesteads; the movement conforms to the trends of the times. The movement did not fail; it was never tried.

- Bruce L. Melvin, 1936, p. 631

The resettlement programs may have provided relief for destitute families, but they also created concerns for local governments and for the residents of the nearby communities. Part of the problem stemmed from the fact that many of the resettlement communities were not stand-alone towns because they often did not provide public services such as schools and emergency services. Rather, they relied on nearby towns to provide these services. Another problem with the communities was that the policy regarding the subsistence homesteads had been hastily written and included almost no guidance about how to proceed with the implementation of the projects. This contributed to the confusion surrounding how these communities were to be administered and provided for.

The rapidity at which the communities came to life left several issues to be remediated as the projects unfolded. Several of the issues that were not resolved prior to the program implementation dealt with taxes, the government's role in housing, community disposition, and paternalism. Unfortunately, the resolutions

for some of these issues were not always to the benefit of those the government sought to help, or to those locations where the projects were being built.

Taxes

One of the major concerns regarding these communities was the financial impact they would have on local and state governments. Because the land the projects were located on had been purchased by the federal government, they were then exempt from state and local taxes. According to a transcript of a June 1936 hearing held before the Committee on Ways and Means, the assistant administrators of the Resettlement Administration stated that local governments indicated they would not be willing to provide services to residents who were residing on properties for which they could not collect local taxes (United States, Committee on Ways and Means, 1936, p 38-39). Interestingly, the Public Works Administration's urban resettlement projects did have a mechanism for the distribution of payments in lieu of taxes, but the rural resettlement projects did not. The PWA housing projects had 5 percent of gross rental revenues earmarked to be returned to local governments to help cover lost tax revenues, but it doesn't appear that any mechanism was ever created for the rural communities. Instead the local and state governments would have to wait until corporations were setup for each community as it was believed that the

corporation could “collect rents, pay State and local taxes, and manage the repayment of the investment to the Government” (United States Resettlement Administration, *First Annual Report*, 1936. P. 5). However, by 1935 the corporations had been declared unconstitutional, which meant that local governments would have to wait until the units were sold to individuals to be able to start the tax collection process again.

Another problem with tax collection was that delinquencies in tax payments were common during the Great Depression. During the February 1940 USDA Land Management Conference, held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, it was determined that in the Great Plains region there were “fifty to one hundred million acres in an indeterminate status where taxes are either in the early stages of delinquency, or where title has already been acquired by the county” (National Archives, 1940, p. 3). Lands that were delinquent in tax payments or that had their titles assigned to the county or federal government meant that local, county, and state governments were not receiving required payments necessary for the provision of civil services such as for schools, police services, and roads. This also meant that taxes were increasing on those land holders who were still paying taxes.

The problem of taxes is mentioned in the transcript of the 1935 *Hearings before a Special Committee on Survey of Land and Water Policies of the United States*,

Rex Tugwell, the administrator of the RA, testified that “there are some counties, notably in Montana, where approximately one-third of all the taxable property has been turned over on options” (United States. Congress. Senate. 1935, 10) to the federal government. Tugwell continued in his discussion by stating “the problem of keeping up social services in the county is a grave one, because they cost more to maintain than is yielded in taxes, and we are relieving the community of the obligation” (United States. Congress. Senate. 1935, 10).

However, it’s not clear that the removal of delinquent properties really helped local governments as they were still required to provide access to public services for its residents. The benefit to local governments may have been limited to counties where services could be consolidated or removed.

Delinquencies did not impact only state and local governments, but they also affected local businesses. Local businesses would have to find ways to adjust to a smaller customer base due to people moving out. For those people that did stay, their ability to support local businesses may have been very limited as they may have had little to no money to spend for products and services. It would take federal money to rebuild structures that were livable, and it would take time to allow destitute families to regain their financial footing.

Interference in the Free-Market

Many of the resettlement residents approved of the communities but congress never did because there was concern that the government would be interfering in the private housing market and community development. There was a fear that federal involvement in these activities would impinge on the free market, but at the same time it was acknowledged that the free market had left lower income families out of the homeownership category.

There was also worry about the costs of the projects and the repayments expected from the leasing or selling of the homes. The original authorization for the DSH stated that all monies paid back to the federal government were to be used to create additional communities. The problem was that the federal government did not enforce any policies that required lease payments or loan payments to be of a sufficient amount to cover the actual cost of construction; instead the projects were granted the authority to set payments according to the ability of the family to pay, which meant, in some cases, the payments were not enough to cover the cost of the project.

In addition, there was concern regarding the ownership of the federally purchased lands. Were these lands to be held in perpetuity by the federal government or would they return to local and state jurisdiction? In the case of the resettlement projects the federal government did not intent to own the land

in perpetuity but rather they would eventually sell the homesteads to individuals. The temporary holding of these properties by the federal government was a “substantial consideration against classifying such structures as ‘public buildings’” (United States. Department of the Interior, 1934. P. 581). However, for some of the submarginal lands that were purchased for non-resettlement purposes the intent was for the federal government to own it in perpetuity: these were often lands reclaimed for federal parks or grazing lands.

Disposition of the Finished Homesteads

Just as there was concern over government ownership of once privately held lands, there were also questions regarding who actually ended up owning the individual homesteads. The resettlement programs, especially the DSH, emphasized the desire to help lower income households achieve homeownership, but selection into the project was not a guarantee of ownership. In 1935, Lawrence Westbrook, assistant administrator with FERA, stated that participants should be leased homesteads first, then once they proved their ability to pay, they would be given the option to buy. It is unknown how many of the homesteads were leased prior to purchase and how many of the resettlement participants acquired title to their properties. According to several sources, some of the resettlement projects were sold to people outside of the



Figure 6.1. Houses at the Lake Dick Arkansas Resettlement Project in the 1930s (Encyclopedia of Arkansas, 2019).

resettlement community or they were transferred to the Federal Housing Authority for inclusion into the public housing inventory.

For example, according to the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program website, Lake Dick in Altheimer Arkansas (Figure 6.1) was the site of a resettlement community where “80 houses, six community buildings, and several farm support structures” (Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, 1974, p. 3) had been constructed to house 80 white families. The land and many of the buildings were eventually sold to Mr. Ben J. Altheimer of Elm Farms, Inc. in 1946. Some of the homes were moved from the property, but several were

retained and used to house the employees of the enterprise that purchased the land. In September 1974, the remaining structures of the resettlement project were nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

Other communities appeared to have withstood the test of time. Newport News Homesteads is one of the communities that has remained relatively intact despite an attempt in 1937 by the Virginia Peninsula Association of Commerce to convert the project to an all-white settlement. The conversion from a black community to a white community did not happen. The Newport News community was eventually renamed Aberdeen Gardens. The new name was based on the main road, Aberdeen Road, that ran through the project (University of Virginia, n.d.). It was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in May 1994 and currently uses one of the original homes as a museum about the community. Yet other communities, such as the Loup City farmsteads in Nebraska, appear to have vanished with little trace that they ever existed.

Social Planning and Paternalism

The concerns about the resettlement communities were not limited to land-use and ownership issues; there was also deep distrust about the objective of these communities. While the participation in the resettlement programs was strictly voluntary, there was apprehension that the federal government was

attempting to control people through the oversight that was given to all that lived in the communities. The 1935 booklet titled “A Homestead and Hope” described these experimental communities as a way of “humaniz[ing] living conditions” where “residence on a subsistence homestead is no mark of mendicancy. Rather, it is a sign that the homesteader has met and passed rigid inquiry into his ability and his dependability” (U.S. Department of Interior, *Bulletin Number One: A Homestead and Hope*, 1935, p. 10). The RA reiterated this sentiment in its First Annual Report, published in 1936, by stating “supervision does not mean discouragement of individualism or of initiative” (First Annual Report, 1936, p. 38). The RA explained that supervision of a farmer who lacked the necessary skills to be successful would actually increase his independence. The federal government had viewed these programs as a way to improve the social well-being of those living in these communities. This was done by tracking the economic, social, and educational successes and failures of each household (adults and children). Some believed this went too far and interfered with an individual’s right of self-determination.

The federal government had been clear about the mission of the resettlement programs. It was a pathway forward for thousands who did not have the means or the skills to move where jobs were located. Since Congress had never approved of the programs, the administrators of these programs knew

that success was imperative, which would mean that educational and administrative services would be needed to ensure that everyone met their financial and community obligations. The Resettlement Administration understood that others could have perceived these projects to be too paternalistic and sought to demonstrate how supervision could lead to greater financial freedom for the program participants. It is doubtful that the government succeeded in helping the general population understand the public value of these communities. As a consequence, these communities were never able to garner enough support in Congress or with the general public to keep the programs going, and in 1937 the resettlement program was defunded.

World War II and the End of an Experiment

After the dissolution of the Resettlement Administration by the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937, the administration of the existing communities was placed with either the Farm Security Administration or the Federal Housing Authority. The communities under the Farm Security Administration continued to be monitored and were utilized to help supply food during the World War II years. While limited information has been found regarding the use of the communities during World War II, a survey titled "Relation of RP Projects to War Program" for the Scottsbluff farmsteads was discovered. The survey is

undated, but it is assumed that it was conducted in 1942. This assumption is based on a survey question that asks if all 1942 farm plans have been reviewed for the potential to increase land-usage.

The survey sought information regarding how the project were going to be used to help supply foodstuffs. Section IV of the survey was titled “Expansion of food production for War Program”. It asked about the cooperative association goals and the individual family goals. The Scottsbluff farmsteads cooperative had expected to increase the production of milk, hogs, and potatoes (beef cattle were also mentioned, but the increase was limited to 2 cows). The cooperative’s dairy output was expected to increase from the 26,285 gallons to 30,200 gallons. The number of hogs raised was to increase from 40 to 75 and the number of bushels of potatoes was to grow from 4,000 to 8,500.

The expectation of increasing the production of foodstuffs was not limited to the cooperatives, but the individual families living in the resettlement community were also expected to increase their outputs. Similar to the Scottsbluff cooperative that expected to increase the output of milk, hogs, and potatoes, the individual families also increased their production of those products, plus they were expected to increase their egg and garden produce output for the war effort.

The survey also inquired into the availability of individual housing units that could be used to house defense workers. The survey noted that no defense plants were in the area, so they could not fill the three vacant houses with defense workers, but they would allow one vacant house to be used for a displaced defense worker's family. The other two vacant homes could be used for local families that would work on the farmsteads. Beyond the survey for Scottsbluff no additional information has been found that would increase the understanding of how these communities contributed to the war effort. Shortly after World War II, government research about the resettlement projects stopped, and limited information has been produced since the 1940s.

There has been no fixed date discovered that could define when the projects were abandoned by the federal government. There is also limited information regarding the disposition of many of the projects. It is speculated that many of the resettlement communities, especially the houses, still exist in one form or another. However, as per a conversation with an owner of a Kearney farmstead revealed, the current owners of these properties may have limited information about the property's past. The owner of the Kearney farmstead knew that her father-in-law had difficulty in acquiring the title to several parcels of land within the Kearney project (personal communication, October 19, 2019). This is understandable given the number of agencies involved

in the projects. The government may have had trouble figuring out which agency had the title to which parcel. The owner also indicated that the three houses located on the southern edge of the property had been used as migrant housing, but she did not know the land and houses had been part of the federal government's resettlement efforts in the 1930s.

The New Deal resettlement communities were often mass produced, as evidenced by the pictures for the Two Rivers project in Nebraska. The homes have been considered an early version of suburban mono-architecture because of the similarities in the homes' construction. While the experiment of subsistence housing provided an avenue for the federal government to discover if federal involvement in housing could increase homeownership, and if it was possible to keep low-income households off government assistance, the program was too short lived and did not carry enough public and congressional support to make an accurate determination as to the viability of the resettlement communities.

The United States Information Service's 1935 report stated that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt summed up the effort by the federal government: "We are working toward the ultimate objective of making it possible for American families to live as Americans should" (United States Information Service, 1935, p. 1).

CHAPTER 7 – SUMMARY

This dissertation examined the resettlement programs implemented by the United States federal government to aid in the recovery from the economic and environmental disasters that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s. The efforts by the Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration included the purchasing of submarginal lands and the resettlement of poor rural and urban families to land that was capable of growing produce and/or raising livestock (i.e. cows, pigs, and chickens) to supplement a household's food requirements. The resettlement programs were based on the back-to-the-land movement that had been popular in the 1920s. However, the movement coincided with a growing concern at the federal level that some of the land that had been settled in the American West was not suitable for small scale crop-production and that many rural families had become stranded on submarginal lands because they did not have the resources necessary to relocate to better land or to a location near employment opportunities.

Between 1933 and 1937, the federal government had operated the resettlement programs under three different federal agencies, the Subsistence Homesteads Division, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and the Resettlement Administration. All three agencies focused on the purchasing of

submarginal lands for removal from crop cultivation and they also coordinated the purchasing of land for the resettlement projects, and the construction of subsistence homesteads/farmsteads in rural or semi-rural areas. The communities ranged from small farming communities of 10 homes (Falls City Farmsteads, Grand Island Farmsteads, and Kearney Farmsteads in Nebraska) to larger suburban communities that contained 890 homes (Greenbelt, Maryland).

The resettlement programs succeeded in building over 200 resettlement communities for rural and urban residents. The projects included the construction of approximately 10,788 housing units in rural and semi-rural locations for a cost of \$107,049,641. The PWA built an additional 21,669 units in urban locations. The major difference between the rural and urban projects was how the units were constructed. In rural areas, the units were stand-alone homes typically situated on at least one-acre lots while in the urban areas the units were part of multi-family housing projects (i.e., apartments, townhomes etc.) which may have been centered around a central courtyard much like the Logan Fontenelle Homes¹ in Omaha Nebraska.

¹ The original name for the PWA housing project in Omaha Nebraska was “Northside Village Public Housing”. The name was later changed to “Logan Fontenelle” who was a famous Omaha tribal chief. The name changed again in the 1970s to “Little Vietnam”. In 1995-1996 the housing project was completely demolished (Sasse, 2015).



Figure 7.1. Logan Fontenelle Homes in Omaha, Nebraska, 1939. (The Living New Deal)

The success of the programs focused on the ability to keep the resettlement families off the federal government relief rolls. There had been a belief that if families could be provided enough space on productive land that they could grow a substantial portion of their own food which would free up household income to be used for other necessities such as housing, car repairs, and medical care. Unfortunately, documents describing the financial success of the residents that resided in the community were limited in scope. For example, the federal documents for the Nebraska resettlement included information that

was obtained through interviews of the resettlement families. The information in the “confidential reports” included family background, family size, family opinions regarding the resettlement project, and a listing of the family’s assets and liabilities. Other documents such as the “Withdrawals from Homes, Farms, etc.” (Federal form RA-MA 113) listed the name of the family, the original occupancy date, the withdrawal date, and whether the withdrawal from the project was voluntary or involuntary. The documents help create a picture of who the resettlement families were, but they do not provide a clear understanding about the successes or failures of the resettlement communities. Additional on-site research at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, or the library on the Montana State University² campus may provide additional information about the outcomes of the resettlement projects.

The enactment of the 1930s resettlement programs was an attempt by the federal government at community planning and the construction of affordable housing. It was, however, not the first attempt by the federal government at housing construction. The 1917 Shipping Act had authorized the federal government to create housing for the war industries workers. The housing

² The Montana State University is the home of documents related to the work of M.L. Wilson who was the director of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads.

created during the World War I years was not an attempt at rectifying any economic or environmental problems but rather the housing was created to “increase labor productivity and to ensure social stability in the volatile wartime atmosphere” (Karolak, 2000, p. 61). After World War I, the federal government would not attempt to create housing until the 1930s.

The resettlement programs were different from the housing created during the 1910s. The housing that was created under the 1917 Shipping Act was limited to the areas where the industries that supported the war effort were located. The resettlement programs of the 1930s was focused on helping Americans recovery from the effects of the Great Depression and as a result the communities were distributed across the United States including in the territories of Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

Despite the fact the federal resettlement programs were defunded in the late 1930s, federal involvement in housing did not stop. Similar to the effort to create housing that would help shelter the war industry workers of World War I there was a similar effort to find housing for war industry workers during World War II. However, unlike the resettlement program that had a national focus, the World War II housing effort was aimed directly at specific localities that would benefit the nation as a whole in its war effort. This meant that typically the focus of the 1940s was directed at the west and east coasts of the United States. After

World War II, the focus of the federal involvement in housing shifted again, this time to urban renewal and public housing projects. The public housing projects of post-World War II were not the same of the resettlement projects of the 1930s when two of the goals of the federal government had been to increase the opportunities for home ownership among middle- and lower-income families, and to make them self-sufficient to keep them off government relief rolls. Instead the post-World War II housing projects focused on housing low-income families in highly concentrated, large-scale multi-family projects. The projects built after the 1950s often became associated with high rates of poverty and crime.

Extensive studies about the outcomes of the 1930s federal resettlement programs is not readily available. The lack of research into the resettlement programs may be due, in part, because of the need to shift from economic recovery in the 1930s to the involvement in World War II in the 1940s. The resettlement programs appear to have been deemed inconsequential in the study of federal housing. It is unfortunate because the programs seemed to have tapped into the ideal of a decent home for every American but what constituted a decent home can be interpreted differently by various individuals. The rural resettlement communities consisted of single-family homes whereas the urban

communities were multi-family buildings which seems to be the pattern the federal government copied after World War II to house low-income families.

Little is known about the outcomes of the resettlement communities. The most apparent outcome of the resettlement programs was the innovation in building techniques (i.e., mass production that was done for the Two Rivers project in Nebraska) that allowed for quick construction of architecturally similar homes to be built at an affordable cost. What is lacking is a study about the differences in outcomes between the rural resettlement communities with single family homes and urban resettlement communities with multi-family buildings. It is unknown if one design was more likely to achieve the federal government's goal of creating independent, self-sufficient families. Research conducted at the time could have provided valuable information about the types of housing, location, and amenities that would have best helped families become self-sufficient.

Future research into the resettlement communities will need to focus on finding evidence that can show the successes or failures of this type of community development. What did they do right? What was done wrong? What could have been done better? Additional research should also look at the socioeconomic changes that the resettlement communities experienced over time, from their construction to their demolition. Geographic changes to the

surrounding landscapes should also be examined to determine if they had any impact on the outcomes of the resettlement communities. These communities are an important part in the history of the federal government's work in developing public housing. Lessons learned over 85 years ago could provide insights into making modern public housing better, not just for the individuals that live in them, but for the communities that they are a part of.

APPENDIX A

List of Resettlement Regions

REGIONAL DIRECTORS OF THE RESETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION	
<p>REGION I</p> <p>MRS. DOROTHY M. BECK</p> <p><i>Headquarters:</i> New Haven, Conn.</p> <p><i>States:</i> Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Rhode Island.</p>	<p>REGION VII</p> <p>CAL A. WARD</p> <p><i>Headquarters:</i> Lincoln, Nebr.</p> <p><i>States:</i> North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas.</p>
<p>REGION II</p> <p>R. I. NOWELL</p> <p><i>Headquarters:</i> Milwaukee, Wis.</p> <p><i>States:</i> Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan.</p>	<p>REGION VIII</p> <p>D. P. TRENT</p> <p><i>Headquarters:</i> Dallas, Tex.</p> <p><i>States:</i> Texas, Oklahoma.</p>
<p>REGION III</p> <p>R. C. SMITH</p> <p><i>Headquarters:</i> Champaign, Ill.</p> <p><i>States:</i> Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri.</p>	<p>REGION IX</p> <p>JONATHAN GARST</p> <p><i>Headquarters:</i> Berkeley, Calif.</p> <p><i>States:</i> California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona.</p>
<p>REGION IV</p> <p>HOMER H. B. MASK</p> <p><i>Headquarters:</i> Raleigh, N. C.</p> <p><i>States:</i> Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina.</p>	<p>REGION X</p> <p>E. A. STARCH</p> <p><i>Headquarters:</i> Denver, Colo.</p> <p><i>States:</i> Montana, Wyoming, Colorado.</p>
<p>REGION V</p> <p>ROBERT W. HUDGENS</p> <p><i>Headquarters:</i> Montgomery, Ala.</p> <p><i>States:</i> South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida.</p>	<p>REGION XI</p> <p>WALTER DUFFY</p> <p><i>Headquarters:</i> Portland, Oreg.</p> <p><i>States:</i> Washington, Oregon, Idaho.</p>
<p>REGION VI</p> <p>T. ROY REID</p> <p><i>Headquarters:</i> Little Rock, Ark.</p> <p><i>States:</i> Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas.</p>	<p>REGION XII</p> <p>L. H. HAUTER</p> <p><i>Headquarters:</i> Amarillo, Tex.</p> <p><i>States:</i> New Mexico, and certain counties of Colorado, Kansas, and Texas.</p>

From the *First Annual Report. The Resettlement Administration* (United States Resettlement Administration, 1936, p. vi).

APPENDIX B

Agencies that assisted the Division of Suburban Resettlement

Government Agencies

Department of Commerce agencies

National Bureau of Standards

United States Patent Office

National Committee on Wood Utilization

Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce

Department of Agriculture

Forest Products Laboratory

Bureau of Public Roads

Bureau of Agricultural Engineering

Bureau of Chemistry and Soils

Bureau of Home Economics

Department of Interior

Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works

Bureau of Reclamation

Bureau of Mines

Works Progress Administration

Department of Treasury

Procurement

Supervising Architect

Public Health Service

Federal Specification Board

Department of War

Quartermaster

Department of Navy

Bureau of Construction and Repair

Bureau of Engineering

Bureau of Yards and Docks

Tennessee Valley Authority

Congressional Library

Federal Housing Administration

Home Owners Loan Administration

Federal Power Commission

Department of State

Rural Electrification Administration

Universities

Texas A&M College
 University of Pennsylvania
 Massachusetts of Institute of Technology
 University of California
 University of Illinois
 Ohio State University
 State College of Washington
 Iowa State College
 Purdue University

General

American Federation of Labor, through its National Housing Committee
 Labor Housing Conference and its affiliated local committee
 National Public Housing Conference
 Regional and State Planning Commissions and Councils
 State Housing Authorities
 Better Housing Leagues
 County Commissions
 State and County School Boards
 State and County Boards of Health
 Local Labor Bodies
 Pennsylvania State Highway Department
 New York State Highway Department
 New Jersey State

This list was obtained from the *First Annual Report. The Resettlement Administration*
 (United States Resettlement Administration, 1936, p. 50-51).

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