

Share Crop Farming In Early Geneva County

Land owners with more land than their family could cultivate often let others farm the land using a plan called "farming on halves, the old way." This meant the owner furnished the land, paid half the fertilizer cost and received half the crops. The tenant paid half the fertilizer cost and provided all of the labor to plant, cultivate, and gather the crops. The farm implements and the mule to pull the plows, were sometimes furnished by the tenant or the owner. The rental agreement was always worked out before January first each year.

Crops usually planted in Geneva County were cotton, corn, and peanuts. Equipment needed was a steel beam to break the ground and lay out rows, a middle buster to lay off cotton rows, a job down with numerous scooters and scrapes to plow the crops to keep down the grass and weeds. A guano distributor to fertilize the rows, and a planter with different plates for each kind of seed planted. A Joe Harrow was used to break the crust after the peanut seed began to come up. Usually two Joe Harrows were pulled by one animal, requiring two men to handle the plows.

After the cotton began to sprout, it was barred off using the steel beam with a defender to prevent covering the small cotton plants, then the cotton had to be chopped, thinning out the plants, and removing any grass from the rows. This was done with a long handled, goose-necked hoe. The tenant needed his wife or larger children to help with this. Later, he attached a scooter and scrape to the job down to plow beside each row to remove other grass from the middles. Crops were usually plowed several times before they were laid by.

Cotton was generally gathered first. Cotton began to bloom and produce boles in July and the boles broke open in August. To harvest the cotton, a large sack was made with a strap to go over the shoulder, and it was dragged on the ground. The cotton was picked by hand and placed in the sack as they moved between two rows. The full sack was carried to a central location, weighed, then emptied in a wagon. A good picker could gather two or three hundred pounds each day. Fifteen hundred pounds was a bale, which was then carried to a cotton gin.

Here the wagon was moved under a suction pipe to draw the cotton into the gin, which separated the lint from the seeds. A good bale would usually produce 500 pounds of lint and 1000 pounds of seed. The lint was baled and strapped with steel bands and sold to local cotton merchants. Some of the seed was kept for next year's planting, some was kept for animal feed and some was sold.

Peanut harvest usually started in September. A mule drawn, steel beam plow with a peanut point was run down each side of the rows to loosen them from the ground. Vines were lifted by hand, the dirt shook off and they were placed on poles which stood in the ground with cross pieces attached to keep the peanuts up off the ground. These stacks would be eight to ten feet tall, with a cap of peanuts on the top to act as an umbrella in case of rain. If the weather was hot and dry the peanuts were soon ready to be picked. Usually some farmer owned a peanut picker and traveled from field to field. When the picker was located, the tenant would take a two mule dolly and haul each stack to the picker. A crew of three or four men traveled with the picker to operate the machinery. The peanut vines were fed into a chute which separated the peanuts from the vines. The peanuts came out into a basket, and, were poured into a wagon to be transported to market. The vines came out of the back of the picker and a crew member placed them in a hay baler which compacted the vines into bales about four feet long by two feet square which was tied by two strands of hay wire. These bales were hauled to the barns for feed. After the crew was finished the tenant either paid the crew chief or gave them peanuts and hay.

Field corn was usually ready for harvest in October or November when the corn was mature and dry. The ears of corn were pulled from the stalk by hand and put into a short sack, slung over the shoulder. When the sacks were filled they were emptied in piles along the rows.

The tenant would drive a two-mule wagon down the rows and pick up the corn. When the wagon was full it was transported to the storage barn, one load into the land owners barn and one load into the tenant's barn, equally divided.

Sometimes velvet beans were planted with the corn to provide more feed for the livestock. After all the crops were gathered, the animals were turned into the fields to graze on the remnants left in the field.

In summary, 40 acres of land was called a one-horse farm. The crops outlined were planted and harvested from each 40 acre section of land.

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