

The Immigrant On the Farm

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There is a popular notion that immigrants are poor farmers. On this notion Felix Cohen, in his study of immigration and its effect on American life, throws some light in the following figures. Group A consists of the ten states with the highest percentage of foreign-born population; Group B the ten states with the lowest percentage of foreign-born population, as indicated by the 1930 Federal Census.

State	% Foreign-Born Pop.	Value Per Acre	Annual Production Per Farm
Group A.			
New York	25.9	\$73.19	\$2,502
Massachusetts	25.1	130.26	3,061
Rhode Island	25.0	123.52	3,133
Connecticut	23.9	151.38	3,196
New Jersey	21.0	169.99	3,773
California	18.9	112.33	4,841
New Hampshire	17.8	39.47	1,972
Michigan	17.6	67.80	1,647
Nevada	16.6	15.71	6,095
Illinois	16.3	108.68	2,467
Average	20.8	\$99.23	\$3,269
Group B.			
South Carolina	0.3	\$36.48	\$935
North Carolina	0.3	46.75	1,040
Mississippi	0.4	32.79	910
Georgia	0.5	26.15	1,011
Tennessee	0.5	41.28	945
Alabama	0.6	28.62	856
Arkansas	0.6	34.13	988
Kentucky	0.8	43.73	1,004
Virginia	1.0	51.16	1,252
Oklahoma	1.3	36.78	1,615
Average	0.6	\$37.79	\$1,056

As far as fertility of soil and climate are concerned Group B would seem to have the advantage. Notice, however, that the Value of Farms Per Acre in Group A is more

than twice that of the Value of Farms Per Acre in Group B, and that the Value of the Annual Production Per Farm in Group A is three times that of the Value of the Annual Production Per Farm in Group B.

These figures must be considered in the light of several influencing factors. One is that succeeding waves of immigration have introduced new crops. Although a large part of our present crops is traceable to the American Indian, we owe much to the newcomers. The Spanish introduced the cultivation of citrus fruits in Florida and California. Intensive market-gardening in that state was developed by Orientals, Armenians and Italians. German and Swiss settlers established the cheese industry in the west. Immigrants from Mediterranean areas brought with them skills in olive culture, viniculture and the cultivation of dates and figs.

Another factor is that as new uses for agricultural products and improved methods of preservation, processing and marketing were developed, the immigrant, because of his knowledge of Old World methods of intensive cultivation and conservative use of the soil, was in a position to take advantage of the new modes of production.

J. L. Coulter in "The Influence of Immigration on Agricultural Development" writes: "The United States has been spending millions of dollars in introducing new plants, animals, and methods of farming from other countries. At the same time little

groups of foreigners such as the Swiss of Wisconsin or later the Italians in some southern districts, formerly thought of as the least desirable immigrants, have settled in our midst and put into practice their home training which has resulted in the establishment of great industries."

Although these two factors have a definite bearing on agricultural conditions, they do not satisfactorily explain the disparity between the two groups of states.

Malcolm Keir gives us the answer in his "Manufacturing Industries in America." After pointing out that the history of American agriculture is closely tied up with the history of immigration, he shows that the Dutch of New York, Swedes of the Delaware River and Germans and Quakers of Pennsylvania all were better, more careful farmers than the Pilgrims or Puritans.

As in colonial times, so it is today. In the states which comprise Group A, the immigrant was freer to settle. Finding fewer prejudices to overcome and a more equal opportunity to use the land, he soon became an integral part of the community. The result would have been the same had the influx of population been from any other source, such as a higher birth rate or a lower death rate.

New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey and California all have thickly populated areas within their limits. It is this population itself, through the creation of a market, that gives the farms their value. As always, the greater the population, the greater the wealth of the community—if access to the land is possible.