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U. S. Department of Agriculture

**New  
Settlement  
in the  
Mississippi  
Delta**

**United States Department of Agriculture**

**Issued June 1941**

**MISCELLANEOUS PUBLICATION NO. 442**



## Prefatory Note

THIS PUBLICATION seeks to call attention to the many serious problems, as well as opportunities, that face present and future settlers in the undeveloped cut-over parts of the Mississippi River Delta. Most of the information given here has been taken from recent studies of settlement conditions in the delta of northeastern Louisiana, but some of the conditions disclosed are common to many of the cut-over areas throughout the lower Mississippi River Valley.

A digest of the information obtained by these studies is furnished here in nontechnical form. New settlers who have already located in the Delta cut-over areas may find this helpful when studying their present problems and arriving at solutions for them. Farmers who are thinking about moving into these areas should find the publication a useful source of facts and guidance. The conditions and problems outlined will undoubtedly be of interest to local and State land use planning committees in the Delta and neighboring areas, especially insofar as the operations and policies of Federal and other public agencies are involved in the new settlement picture. The United States Department of Agriculture, through an Interbureau Coordinating Committee, has been examining the new-settlement question throughout the Mississippi Delta area, and is interested in contributing in every way possible to a solution of settlement problems.

The studies upon which this publication is based were made under the following titles: Recent Migration Into and Within the Mississippi Delta of Louisiana, by Homer L. Hitt, Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture; New Ground Farmers in the Mississippi Delta—A Social Study of 500 Tenants and Croppers, by Harold Hoffsommer, Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture; New Settlement Problems in the Northeastern Louisiana Delta, by Phillip E. Jones, John E. Mason, and Joseph T. Elvove, Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture; Economic and Physical Factors Affecting New Ground Farmers in Madison Parish, Louisiana, by Troy Mullins and B. M. Gile, Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station; and An Economic and Sociological Analysis of Land Settlement in Old and New Delta Areas of Northeastern Louisiana, by H. G. Porter and R. J. Saville, Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station.

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# New Settlement in the Mississippi Delta

Prepared in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics

WITHIN THE LAST 10 years thousands of new settlers have taken up small tracts of land in the undeveloped cut-over areas of the Mississippi Delta—the poorly drained wooded lowlands of Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Missouri. Here the settlers, most of them cotton farmers from the worn-out hill lands nearby or from the sharecropper cabins of Delta plantations, are clearing the new ground and trying to establish family-size cotton farms. Hungry for land, and lacking opportunities elsewhere, they believe the undeveloped Delta areas offer the opportunities and the fresh start they are seeking.

More than 20,000 of these families—about 100,000 men, women, and children—have moved onto the Delta cut-over land in the last few years. Nearly all of them are living under primitive conditions, in crude pioneer dwellings. They are putting forth great effort, but are earning low incomes, and are harried by debts and the fear of mortgage foreclosure. Almost all are having an uphill fight against great odds. Many are being forced out of the fight, to become relief cases, or burdens upon relatives, or they are simply taking to the highways as homeless drifters—new recruits to the army of migratory workers in agriculture.

But the movement of new settlers into the undeveloped areas keeps on; apparently growing a little each year, in spite of the suffering involved. And a frank look at future prospects indicates that more and more new settlers will attempt to locate in these areas.

Two underlying conditions contribute to this prospect. The first is that the undeveloped Delta cut-over areas contain millions of acres of potentially good farm land, although almost all of this land would need drainage. This potentially good land, threading throughout the Mississippi Delta, is so intermingled with poor land that it is very easy for a settler to make a bad choice of farms.

Some of the present cut-over areas were farmed before the Civil War, but were abandoned after the wholesale exodus of freed slaves at the end of the war. A further cause for abandonment was that the levees and flood-control works on the lower Mississippi River deteriorated during and after the war. Most of the land has never been farmed at all, however. Much of the soil is fertile and, if properly drained, cleared, and managed, would be suitable for farming, provided present conditions of settlement were improved. In effect, therefore, the settlers of today have discovered and are developing, alongside one of our oldest and most populous farming lands, a new agricultural frontier—one of the last land frontiers in the United States. It is estimated that the portion of the undeveloped areas that could be made suitable for agriculture, under

proper conditions of development, would supply 80-acre farms for about 62,500 new settler families, or 40-acre farms for about 125,000 families.

The new settlement possibilities in the Delta are of recent origin. Most of the undeveloped land was subject to frequent floods until the new dams, floodways, and levee works of the Federal Government reduced the flood dangers. Many areas that formerly were flooded every year now have year-round flood protection. Moreover, the marketable timber now has been cut off, and lumber companies and other owners are trying to dispose of the land. The first underlying condition favorable to settlement, therefore, is that the Delta contains a great extent of undeveloped land, much of it protected from flooding, which the present owners wish to sell. It is stump land, covered with brush and trees, and adequate drainage is a primary problem.

The second key condition underlying the settlement outlook is that the undeveloped areas are next-door neighbors to the most densely populated areas in the agricultural Southeast. Agricultural population in the Southeast is greater, in proportion to resources and opportunities, than in any other rural region of the Nation. The result is that many disadvantaged or ambitious farmers who live near the undeveloped areas are leaving worn-out land and overcrowded communities, to move to the lowlands. Farmers tired of hillside farming, tenants and sharecroppers "tractored off" the Delta plantations, and young people who lack opportunities in the older areas, are reaching out for new farms in the undeveloped areas. To many of these, the Delta cut-over appears a last chance at security and permanence in agriculture.

Much of the undeveloped land does offer opportunities, but something is happening to destroy their attractiveness. One settler in seven is losing or abandoning his farm after the first year or two of work, and many others are threatened with such losses. Certain forces appear to be undermining settler opportunities and at the same time weakening the system of family-size farming in the new-ground areas. Unless these forces are checked, the new small farms seem destined to be swallowed up into large farms, bringing new-ground settlers into the old plantation system in the role of tenants and croppers.

The settlers are trying to find out the nature of these forces, so they can make plans for dealing with them. Farmers who are planning to move to the new settlement areas, but who are familiar with present conditions of settlement, also are thinking of these difficulties. Local, State, and Federal agencies are concerned, because a number of public problems are involved, or are likely to become involved as settlement proceeds. The problems include providing roads and schools for new farming communities, providing relief to the many unsuccessful farmers, discouraging the extensive growth of farm tenancy in the new-ground areas, and a number of others. Local and State land use planning committees in Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Missouri—the

States where the new settlement area is located and whose people supply most of the new settlers,—are particularly interested.

To understand the nature and origin of the difficulties besetting the new-ground farmers—the first step necessary in deciding how to attack the settlement problems—the circumstances surrounding present settlement must be examined. This examination has been made in an intensive way in a sample area of nine parishes in northeastern Louisiana, by technicians of the Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station, and the United States Department of Agriculture. Their five studies, listed in the foreword of this publication, show many of the reasons for the hardships of present settlers, and make it possible to form some judgments as to the type of adjustments that may be necessary to improve the opportunities of both present and future settlers on this undeveloped land.

Interviews with recent settlers in northeastern Louisiana disclose that, as a rule, farmers moving into the Delta cut-over would avoid many later misfortunes and hardships by carefully investigating beforehand the advantages and disadvantages of the land upon which they locate. Thorough investigation of the drainage possibilities, types of soil, flood protection, crop adaptations, and other factors affecting successful farm operations, is always necessary if the farm purchaser is to have a reasonable assurance of success.

### Selecting a Farm.

For almost all the land being cleared and settled in northeastern Louisiana, as for the other land of the Delta cut-over, drainage is an important problem. Frequently, it has been found, settlers have lacked advance information about the problems of drainage and floods affecting their farms. It is true that much of the undeveloped land can be drained economically and is reasonably free from flooding, but this is not true of every tract. All the undeveloped areas in the Delta are lowlands; some are subject to flooding; and nearly all require some drainage if the land is to be used for farming. Many of the very low tracts cannot be drained at all, except at great cost.

The experience of present settlers shows that the land purchaser or renter should realize early that the land is unfit for occupancy unless it can be drained at reasonable expense and is free from severe flooding. Many of the settlers who have left their farms and moved away have done so largely because of one or both of these difficulties. The land was fertile enough, perhaps, but a satisfactory living could not be obtained from it when it stood under water 3 or 4 months of each year.

### Investigation of Soils.

Soil types, if learned by the settler before he locates upon a farm in an undeveloped area, can be useful guides when he is selecting a farm. Not all of the soils in these areas are fertile, and not all are suitable for growing cotton, corn, alfalfa, legumes, winter grains, and the other crops

# FOR SALE FARM LANDS

*IN THE HEART OF RICHLAND PARISH  
WILL PRODUCE BALE OF COTTON TO ACRE.*

**NO CASH - LONG TERMS**

*DRIVE NORTH ON GRAVEL ROAD AND SEE OUR DEVELOPMENT*

SHOWN ABOVE IS ONE OF THE MANY SIGNBOARDS  
ERECTED IN THE DELTA AND NEARBY TO ATTRACT  
SETTLERS TO NEW-GROUND FARMS. BELOW ARE  
NEW FAMILIES MOVING INTO THE CUT-OVER AREAS.



and products that are necessary for successful farm operation. Besides, much of the land is a heavy clay, which a farmer who has little mechanical equipment finds hard to cultivate. Investigation of the soil types and soil characteristics of land being considered for purchase will often enable the farmer to avoid permanent and serious difficulties.

Surveys in East Carroll and West Carroll Parishes of Louisiana, where settlement is proceeding rapidly, indicate that the soils generally are fertile, but that other soil characteristics affecting productivity are not uniform. General fertility is shown by the fact that the average yields are relatively high. Information obtained from 100 new-ground farmers in East Carroll Parish showed that settlers had average cotton yields of 340 pounds per acre their first year, 365 the second year, and 405 the third year. In Madison Parish, 46 new-ground farmers had average cotton yields of 276 pounds per acre their first year, but the average yield obtained by the 43 farmers who remained on the land the next year was 524 pounds per acre. These yields are obtained without using fertilizer. The data obtained show that cotton yields in these areas continue to rise for several years after the land is first cultivated, although they may begin to decline after 6 or 8 years, unless the land is carefully managed and planted frequently to legumes.

Continued use of land without special cropping practices depletes the supply of available nitrogen in the soil and increases the unsatisfactory moisture condition and difficulties of cultivation. Absorption of water and internal drainage on the heavy-textured soils are slow. Wet conditions during the early part of the growing season limit cotton and alfalfa yields, and dry weather later in the year affects corn adversely. New settlers are usually not aware of these problems because unsatisfactory soil and moisture conditions on the heavy-textured soils are less noticeable in the virgin areas than on soils that have been cultivated for a few years. The heavy-textured soils must be planted to legumes regularly and plowed deeply to prevent the crop yields from sinking to unprofitable levels. This naturally presents many management difficulties after the virgin qualities of the soils are lost.

#### **Accessibility to Roads and Schools.**

The importance of choosing farm sites that are accessible to roads and schools, and fairly close to the neighboring farms, has been repeatedly demonstrated, not only by the experience of settlers in northeastern Louisiana, but also by that of settlers elsewhere. The ease with which a settler can communicate with his neighbors, send his products to market, get his children to school, and take part in the general life of the community determines to a large degree whether he will be successful or unsuccessful on his farm. The accessibility of a farm site to roads and schools affects very materially the future sale or loan value of the land, a consideration which can be very important to the farmer.

The public also has some concern as to where new farms are located, for if they are not accessible to roads and schools, they may create the necessity for extra public costs in providing the services needed.

### Acquiring a Farm.

The new settlers in the Delta, unlike the pioneers of earlier times, must rent or buy land if they wish to occupy it. Most of them are trying to buy small tracts for family-sized farms, usually about 40 acres. The terms of purchase that generally apply are difficult to meet, however, and offer little safety to the buyer.

The undeveloped land usually is owned by nonresident corporations or individuals—principally lumber companies and other holders of large tracts. Lumber companies in northeastern Louisiana, it appears, are selling cut-over woodland at prices ranging from \$10 to \$75 per acre, although most of the new settlers are agreeing to pay \$25 to \$40 per acre. White settlers who can make down payments on the purchase price are attempting to buy on an average about 55 acres of land at an average price of \$22.33 per acre. White farmers who have lease contracts with purchase options are agreeing to pay an average price of \$29.32 per acre on farms of about 43 acres. Colored farmers appear to be paying about the same prices as white farmers, but often are getting somewhat less desirable land.

The purchase prices to be paid by many of the Louisiana settlers seem to have little relation to the economic value of the land. The high prices in some cases undoubtedly create a major difficulty, if not the principal one, facing new settlers. An analysis of the value of the cut-over woodland for a part of the northeastern Louisiana Delta, determined from actual appraisals of approximately 600 tracts, shows that the economic value of most of the land is less than \$8 per acre. Thousands of acres were appraised at \$4 per acre. Available information indicates that much of this land, if bought in large blocks for cash, could be had at \$4 to \$10 per acre.

Most settlers are obtaining land through lease-purchase contracts, although some have made down payments of about 10 percent and agreed to make fixed annual payments thereafter. The lease-purchase contract usually allows the settler "free" use of the land for 2 or 3 years, then calls for the full debt, plus interest, to be paid off in equal annual installments over a 10-year period. "Free use" is a misnomer, however, for the settlers have to build houses and barns at their own expense during the rental period in addition to clearing land. Settlers with this type of contract are trying to acquire tracts averaging 44 acres, at prices of about \$27.77 per acre. The average payment period for both white and colored settlers is 10 years.

Under the lease-purchase arrangement, the settler agrees to pay off at 6 percent interest, within 10 years, an average purchase debt of about \$1,200. Principal and interest payments must be made, in addition to

building a house and barn, constructing fences, clearing land, paying taxes and insurance, and meeting the other necessary costs of making crops and maintaining his family. In most cases, the land is the only place from which the family can get the money, and it undertakes the lease-purchase contract, intending to do this.

In view of the income possibilities on most of the new-ground farms in northeastern Louisiana, it is plainly impossible for the settlers to earn the required sums from their farms within the period allowed. Many settlers have indicated they did not understand, at least for the first year or two, the extent of the burden they were taking on. As payments begin to become due, however, and their debts for principal and interest start piling up, settlers frequently feel forced to move away from what they believe a hopeless situation. Because of the initial prices agreed upon in some cases, it seems doubtful whether the settlers could ever pay for their farms from farm earnings. In most instances this probably cannot be done in less than 20 or 25 years, even under the best circumstances.

Adjustments in purchase prices and in terms of payment, to provide longer periods of payment, will probably be required if the new settlers are to remain on the land and eventually acquire full ownership.

The commonly used lease-purchase contract is probably the most liberal arrangement now being offered. These contracts, although differing in details, usually contain about the same basic provisions.

In addition to describing the land and setting up inflexible terms and principal payments, the contract requires the settler to pay the taxes, the insurance, and the interest on the purchase price. The landowner usually advances the settler enough low-grade lumber to build a primitive house and barn, taking interest-bearing notes as security and charging prices somewhat higher than the market.

All improvements, permanent and otherwise, are made at the expense of the settler, who must reimburse the landowner, with interest, for any expenses incurred for improvements. The new-ground settler must clear a specified extent of new land each year—usually at least 5 acres. Then if he moves away, as many do after they are dispossessed or become discouraged, the improvements that have been made become the property of the landowner, almost without cost to him. In this type of contract the landowner generally retains title to all or part of the mineral rights in the land and places other restrictions upon the use of land and timber. Violation of any provision of the agreement is cause for its cancellation.

In practice, the landowner does not often insist upon letter-perfect adherence to all the provisions of the contract. Nevertheless many of the contracts are definitely one-sided. In addition, scores of contracts call for settlers to undertake operations that are almost certain to be disadvantageous for the farmers but that cannot fail to be at least moderately advantageous for the landowners.

Since these contracts specifically provide that the settler who moves off his place shall receive no compensation for his expenses and labor in

NEW HOMES  
BEING  
BUILT



NEW LAND  
BEING  
FARMED



building up the new farm, the clearing and building done by the settler who abandons his place become the property of the landowner. Such farms may then be sold to other settlers at higher prices, or on better terms. The settler who stays on his farm, but falls behind in his payments, usually can be induced to move away whenever the landowner wishes. In a few cases, when agreeable to the landowner, settlers who abandon their farms may obtain small cash payments by selling their equities to new settlers moving in, but this is an exception. Never does the equity payment approach the outlay made by the first settler.

The combination of high prices for land and unfavorable terms of occupancy and purchase contributes a great deal to the present difficulties of settlers. This combination probably presents the greatest single obstacle to freehold ownership of land by the settler, and is a principal danger to be faced in maintaining and strengthening the system of small-home ownership in the undeveloped areas. The exploitation and insecurity of many of the present purchasers is laying a ground work for future tenancy and sharecropping, instead of home ownership.

### **Credit Needs.**

The lack of adequate credit to finance new-ground operations is a primary ill on these new farms. Most of the settlers do not have enough financial resources to give reasonable assurance of success. Frequently they lack even the necessary work-stock and tools, and usually cannot pay for family maintenance out of current income. Immediately on arrival such settlers must find credit not only for buying the land, but also for many other purposes. To a large extent, the landowner is the only source of credit available to the settler in the first year. After the first year or two, however, the settlers usually can and do obtain credit from the Farm Security Administration for "furnish" expenses and for buying work stock, and tools, and other supplies. The lack of credit for financing operations in the first 2 years is especially noticeable, and the credit available in later years is inadequate.

In northeastern Louisiana, the settlers are agreeing to pay interest on their notes for land and lumber at an average rate of 6 percent, although rates are often higher. The interest rate for long-time credit is higher than that charged by the Farm Security Administration for short-time credit. The settlers with lease-purchase contracts, since they make no down payments on the principal of their debts, pay interest rates about 1 percent higher than do farmers with purchase contracts who make down payments. As has been noted, the settlers generally pay interest on their unpaid taxes and insurance, items that are advanced by the landowner. Interest rates on short-term credit, or "furnish," often run as high as 25 to 50 percent on 6- or 7-month loans.

The high prices for land, the short-payment periods, and the high interest rates, reflect the inadequacy of present credit facilities in the area. Apparently some system of long-time credit is needed that

will enable settlers to buy land at reasonable prices, and yet allow them a sufficient number of years in which to discharge the purchase debt. Provision of adequate short-time credit is needed even more perhaps, at least from the immediate view. More ample credit is essential, to enable the farmers to buy the proper tools and materials, and maintain their families between harvests.

The provision of adequate credit, if it is to be upon a basis that assures repayment of loans, would probably call for an organized procedure of supervisory guidance by the lender. Supervision and guidance in deciding on farm practices and in developing farm and home plans, particularly in the growing of food and feed crops for home use, would be helpful to the settlers for several years after going to new-ground farms, and would make loans to them more feasible. This type of supervision and advice, similar to that which the Farm Security Administration gives its clients and to that supplied in a general way by the Extension Service, could probably establish a firmer basis for credit in these undeveloped areas. It appears doubtful, however, whether any of the established agencies, either private or public, could furnish, under present policies, the full amount of credit and guidance needed.

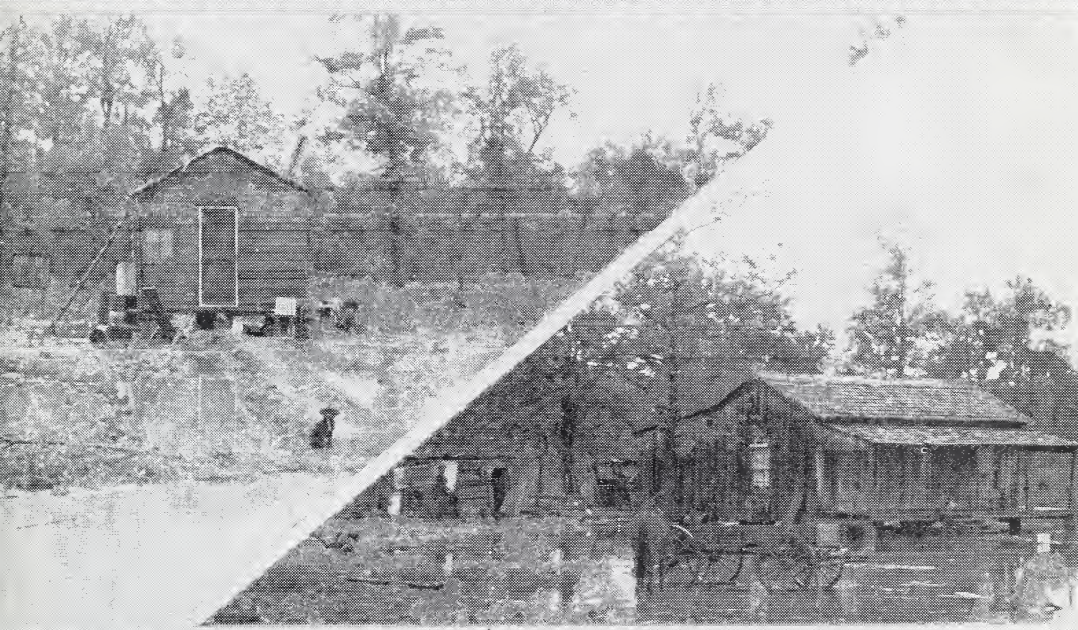
Establishment of adequate and sound credit for the settlers, both in the purchase of farms and in financing later operations of the farms, would probably entail first of all the guidance of settlers in their choice of farms, as well as guidance as to prices to be paid and the terms of payment. Longer periods of payment, smaller payments, lower interest rates, and a system of flexible payments could be arranged under conditions of well-guided settlement. A large part of the needed guidance could be furnished, perhaps, through the cooperative land use planning process and the studies made by local and State land use planning committees, in which farmers and public agencies are participating.

### **Income of Present Settlers.**

Figures on the income of new settlers show the impossibility of new-ground farmers paying off debts of \$1,000 to \$1,500 each, plus interest, in the short time allowed under many of the present contracts. The white farmers interviewed in one area recently reported total annual cash incomes of \$465 per farm, out of which had to come their expenses for living and for clearing and farming the new land, as well as for making debt payments. Cash incomes were even lower among colored farmers—only \$266 per year.

The disparity of nearly \$200 between the average incomes of white and colored farmers is largely accounted for by the difference in the extent of cleared land possessed by farmers in the two groups. A survey indicates that white farmers have an average of 25 cleared acres, whereas the colored farmers have an average of only 18. Of the additional 7 acres cleared by white farmers, 2 are in cotton and 5 in corn, thus giving the white farmers larger cotton incomes and the opportunity to earn larger AAA payments.

CUTOVER, POORLY DRAINED LAND



The white farmers also receive considerably more nonfarm income than the colored. White farmers apparently get somewhat better yields per acre, partly because of better managerial ability, and partly because their farms are on better drained land. The nonfarm employment received by farmers here is generally quite limited, and is usually work done on other farms in their own neighborhoods. There is a definite need for development of sources of nonfarm income in these areas, possibly through establishing local industries, or through rural public works programs.

### **Size of Farms.**

The size of the farm sharply affects the amount of income received. Farms of less than 30 acres had farm receipts of \$155 above expenses, whereas farms of more than 70 acres had receipts above expenses amounting to \$515. This difference lies in the fact that the larger farms have an average of 19 acres in cotton, compared with only 7 acres of cotton on the small tracts, though studies disclose that the cash expenses on both types of farms are almost identical.

It appears therefore that a new-ground settler should buy as large a block of land as he is able to farm with a minimum of outside labor. For most settlers who undertake farming based on cotton as the cash crop, the desirable minimum unit necessary for successful operation is one that will provide 30 or 35 acres of cropland. Analyses show that the 20-acre farms now being bought are too small for economical operation, and that 60-acre tracts are too large for the cotton farmers to handle without outside labor, except by use of considerable machinery.

### **Dependence Upon Cotton.**

Present settlers on the undeveloped Delta lands, like the farmers in the more established Delta areas, are almost entirely dependent upon cotton for their cash income. Unquestionably, most of the well-drained, fertile land in the new ground is adapted to cotton production. At present, no other crop or combination of crops is known that can produce as large a net cash income in the Delta as cotton. This is particularly unfortunate in view of the gloomy world outlook for cotton, but it is a dynamic reality under present conditions.

The fact that most of the settlers were cotton farmers before moving to their new farms, and that cotton is the crop they want to grow, gives further impetus to cotton production. The settlers usually plant cotton and corn as soon as their land is free of underbrush, often without waiting to remove the trees. Even when grown on rough land like this, the cotton in good years may total a bale or more to the acre.

A large majority of Delta farmers, both old and new, rely upon money from the sale of cotton and from AAA payments. To the new settlers, this situation has serious draw-backs. In a bad cotton year, for example, settlers often have no financial reserves to call upon, and must undergo severe hardships. Frequently they fail to meet the payments due that

year on their land and have great difficulty in providing the necessary food and clothing for their families.

### **Food and Feed Crops.**

The growing of more feed and food crops for home use would aid new settlers very substantially in withstanding years of poor cotton crops or low prices for cotton. Recent studies of the new farms show that more emphasis could well be placed upon this type of production, for a great deal of the Delta soil can produce abundant crops of corn, truck crops, and alfalfa. Some of the heavy clay soils, however, will not grow garden crops. Oats do well, but are not grown to any great extent, principally because the new-ground land is too rough, and small-scale farming does not permit the use of this crop for cash income. The Extension Service of Louisiana is encouraging settlers to grow oats for farm consumption and is suggesting the use of cooperatively owned machinery in their production.

The settlers usually have enough land and available time for growing ample supplies of truck crops, hogs, chickens, and other products for home use. There is a need for greater production of crops for home consumption.

### **Farm Organization.**

The average acreage distribution of crops on a Louisiana new-ground farm is about 9 acres of cotton, 10 of corn, 1½ of feed crops, 1 of truck crops, with a total of 24 crop acres. However, the farmers who came in 1939 had less than 5 acres in cotton their first year. In spite of the need for greater production of crops for home consumption, a survey in 1939 showed that about the only change the settlers themselves wished to make in their crops was to increase their cotton acreage.

The livestock organization of the Louisiana new-ground farms also needs improvement. Many settlers have one cow, two hogs for meat, and a few chickens, but not enough to supply home needs. Many have none of these. Very few settlers, for example, have a brood sow, a sufficient number of chickens, or a year-round supply of milk. The livestock organization should be expanded to provide the settlers with an ample supply of meat, eggs, milk, and butter for home use. At present, livestock provides less than 1 percent of the total cash income of the farmers interviewed.

As established cotton farmers have materially reduced their acreages devoted to cotton, and as an expansion in total cotton acreage at this time is not warranted, the expansion of livestock production would apparently offer an alternative source of some cash income for these new farmers, provided this expansion fits into the national farm programs. The new settlers, of course, are producing some of the food and feed now used at home. Most of them grow a considerable quantity, for the value

of 1938 farm products used at home was equal to nearly two-thirds of the net farm income (farm receipts minus farm expenses). The settlers who had the largest farms raised the largest quantities of products for home use. This condition appears to be common to the new-ground farmers, for usually the farmers on larger acreages devote more time and effort to crops other than cotton than do the farmers on smaller tracts.

### Farm Management.

All these facts show a need for more scientific management by the new settlers, both white and colored. Uncertain and rather low cotton yields, insufficient feed and food crops for home use, and absence of supplementary sources of income are present among white farmers to a noticeable degree, but are particularly prevalent among colored farmers. As many of the settlers never owned land before going into these areas, and therefore have had little managerial experience, perhaps the lack of good management is to be expected.

Some system of supervisory guidance by persons trained in farm management, cotton production, and "live-at-home farming" could greatly help the settlers. The system probably should include the development of farm-and-home plans through cooperative work with the settlers, and supervisory help in carrying out the plans, together with advisory assistance of various kinds. The development of cooperative marketing and purchasing, and the cooperative ownership and use of machinery, would promote settler welfare.

In some cases new-farm cotton allotments, determined under the agricultural programs, are smaller than the operators wish; they request allotments larger than are generally established for comparable old farms in the same area, taking into consideration all the factors with respect to the production of cotton. Studies show that the percentage of tilled land allotted to cotton in the previous year for new farms, on the average, was about the same as for old farms in the parishes of northeastern Louisiana; also the average allotment per new farm was substantially the same as the average allotment per producer on old farms in these parishes. Therefore, a new farmer may have had about the same size allotment as the typical cotton producer on an old farm, since in almost every case only one cotton producer operated each new cotton farm.

Under the agricultural adjustment program, cotton allotments for each parish and county remain at about the same level from year to year; any increase in acreage allotted to new farms must eventually decrease allotments for old farms. The greater the extent of new-ground farming in the county or parish, therefore, the greater must be the reduction in cotton allotments for established farms. As a consequence, to obtain comparable allotments between new and old farms and to protect allotments for old farms for later years, it is necessary in the establishment of allotments to take into consideration all factors affecting the cotton-producing capacity of a new farm.

**PROBLEMS**



**ROADS**



**SCHOOLS**



**DRAINAGE**



**FAMILY  
LIVING  
CONDITIONS**

Because of these facts, plus the need to prevent larger accumulations of cotton surpluses, further restrictions have been made in limiting cotton-acreage allotments for new farms in 1941. Each new producer should consult members of the county and community committees of the Agricultural Conservation Association, as to the provisions for determining farm cotton-acreage allotments, so that he may plan his farming operations accordingly.

### **Trends in Public Services.**

The white families in the newly settled parts of northeastern Louisiana live an average distance of 3 miles from a grade school, and almost 9 from a high school. They are served by school busses that, on an average, come within about half a mile of their homes. The number of schools is adequate, but several families live as far as 5 miles from the bus route: they probably will have to be served by additional bus routes or schools. The colored families, although generally less than 2 miles from a grade school and slightly more than 9 from a high school, are not provided with school busses: thus it is difficult for colored children to obtain more than a grade-school education. Additional schools for colored people are definitely needed.

Settlement occurring thus far has followed the roads. Except in a few instances, therefore, the settlers have not themselves created the need for new roads, although their use of the roads naturally calls for larger expense of road maintenance. But as settlement continues, a growing need for additional roads and schools can be expected. The future usefulness and economy of road and school systems probably will be increased greatly if the people now living in areas available for new settlement can work out coordinated plans for the development of new land, new roads, and new schools, well in advance of additional new settlement.

In the northeastern Louisiana Delta, settlement thus far has presented no serious problems in local taxation and local government finance. As a result of homestead exemptions, of the postponement of reclassifying land brought into agriculture, and of State-wide systems of financing local public services, the settlers are relieved almost entirely of property-tax payments. The established farm operators and planters are feeling no unusual property-tax burdens because of the new settlers, and the parish financial structures are fairly well protected against any severe impact due to the demand of new settlers for additional public services. The State is experiencing a slowly growing demand upon its tax resources for homestead exemptions and education, however, and in the future may be called upon for greater expenditures for roads and public-welfare activities in the new settlement areas.

The State- and Federal-aid highways offer no financial problems to the new areas, but their future locations will probably be influenced materially by pressures arising from the new settlement. Parish<sup>1</sup> roads,

<sup>1</sup> In Louisiana the parish is equivalent to the county in other States.

on the other hand, are financed out of parish revenues, and the increase of new settlement may eventually call for new roads and new expenses. Rural schools in Louisiana are supported jointly by local and State taxation, and any increase in these services would be problems of both the local and State governments.

Public-welfare activities in the Delta, although nominally administered by local boards, are financed and controlled by the Federal and State Governments, acting jointly through the State Department of Public Welfare. These activities are designed to assist "unemployables," whereas work relief is extended to "employables" largely through locally sponsored WPA projects. But as local contributions to WPA projects frequently consist only of supervision and materials, it may be said that the bulk of the relief load is borne by the Federal Government. The distress of settlers who fail to obtain adequate incomes on their new farms is, of course, frequently shown in the relief load within the settlement areas.

Health conditions in these areas, affected by inadequate screening of houses and insufficient mosquito-control work, need great improvement. The lowlands are infested with mosquitoes, and malaria is a problem.

#### **Flood Control and Drainage.**

The cost of the new major flood-control projects (except for easements, rights-of-way, and damages) is now borne by the Federal Government. The only costs borne by the levee districts in the Delta are those of maintaining the levees, payment of bonded debt contracted in the past years on non-Federal projects, and carrying on certain local projects. In the new-settlement areas reasonably good protection against flood is supplied by the existing system of levees, cut-offs, and floodways. Levee districts, therefore, are not unlikely to be materially affected by demands arising from the new settlement.

Existing drainage districts, on the other hand, do not adequately meet the needs of settlers in areas of new settlement. Because drainage is a major problem affecting new-ground farming, the reorganization or expansion of drainage districts, so as to serve the settlers who move into the Delta, is of increasing importance.

Apparently no serious difficulties arising from new settlement in the northeastern Louisiana Delta materially affect local government at the present time, but the outlines of future problems can already be seen. Unless future settlement is so directed and planned as to insure new farmers a reasonable degree of success, the local governments will have increasing difficulty in meeting the needs for new roads and schools; and State and Federal agencies will be called on for larger contributions for education and roads, and for other assistance. Drainage districts, unless properly planned and administered with the long-time interests of the area in view, will probably have difficulties as settlement goes forward.

**Other Important Considerations.**

A wide variety of other questions invite attention. For example, drainage district taxes may often be a major hazard to successful farm operations in certain areas. Occasionally it is found that several drainage districts overlap at some points, and that the land involved has assessments three or four times above normal. Investigation on this point by prospective purchasers of land may often save them much trouble in later years.

The soundness of land titles is another question with which settlers must be concerned, for sometimes the cut-over areas have been bought for taxes, and the titles may be so clouded as to prevent later financing. In Arkansas and Mississippi, in particular, large acreages are owned by the States and, although the land may sometimes be obtained by settlers at very low prices, much expense may be required to clear the titles.

Health conditions will require attention. The housing problem, inseparable from health, is very important, involving proper sanitation as well as shelter.

**Coordinated Planning and Action.**

A coordinated program of planning and action designed to insure the sound development of the cut-over Delta area—a program participated in by the new settlers, the people of the Delta and adjoining areas, and by the public agencies whose operations affect the settlers—is probably the best means of assuring successful settlement, both present and future. A planning program of this type, designed for flexible operations adjusted to fit local needs and attitudes, is already being undertaken through the present land use planning process in the Delta. The need for this kind of planning and action is emphasized by the variety and scope of the activities that seem called for.

A large-scale coordinated program of credit, debt adjustment, farm supervision, public health work, and other assistance is needed. Moreover, a unified drainage system for the Delta cut-over areas is essential if conflicts in drainage plans and needless expenses are to be avoided. Federal and State aid may often be necessary in working out such plans. It may often be necessary to set up a single drainage district to serve all farmers in a large drainage basin, or to consolidate existing districts, or to form new ones, in order to develop the best drainage system. Cooperative planning will be of first importance in undertaking work of this character.

Location of the future roads and schools in these areas should be planned as early as possible, so as to encourage settlement on the better land and avoid future costs growing out of haphazard settlement upon isolated farms and poor soil, or on land where flood and drainage risks are too great. Roads in the Delta must be constructed with wide ditches at either side, which act as drainage ditches, and the road plans should be

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made a part of the drainage-district plans insofar as possible, to avoid additional expenses. The planned location of roads and schools can encourage settlement where it is most likely to be successful, and discourage it where the outlook is unfavorable. The local governing bodies already have authority to plan the location of roads and schools, and the preparation of such plans could begin at once.

An adequate planning program would call for the collection of full information about the soils, drainage needs, and flood protection of each segment of the new-settlement areas, through the cooperation of local land use planning committees. Information of this nature would then provide a basis for conclusions as to the suitability of various areas for settlement or other uses. Attention should be paid to the possibilities of developing forests in the parts of the cut-over areas that are not suitable for cultivation, as a means of creating forest industries or other sources of nonfarm income to the people living nearby.

Local land use planning committees can render great assistance by studying and developing recommendations for action on problems connected with settlement in the undeveloped Delta areas, with the aim of providing information and guidance to future settlers who may wish to go there. All information possible should be made available to farmers and public agencies in the Delta and immediately adjoining areas, so additional new settlers will profit from the experience of those already on the land.

The settlement problem as a whole concerns all the people of the lower Mississippi Valley and adjacent areas. It is a big problem and, to be dealt with properly, must be met with cooperative action by everyone concerned. The most effective type of action would undoubtedly flow from a coordinated program of planning and settler guidance and assistance, reaching all the way from the original home of the settler to his new home in the Delta.



