

Agricultural Reports

Soon after the Agriculture Section of the Patent Office was established, it began to gather information on crops in the various states. Sources such as agricultural publications, newspapers, and first-hand observations were used. The reports were usually very meager and lacked uniformity.

In 1842 the Patent Office, in its report, noted that the fertile sections of the Territory of Iowa promised much for the future. Wheat production had increased, and the Iowa corn crop was as good or even better than usual. The next year more ground was being brought under cultivation in Iowa because of the "influx of population from abroad." However, the winter wheat crop was estimated to be 20 per cent less "owing to the freezing out." Spring wheat was average; oats were less than average; and corn production made a slight advance.

By the end of the 1840's an attempt was being made to bring uniformity into the agricultural reports. Circulars with many questions were sent to farmers to be used as a guide. These were the forerunners of the many questionnaires and forms distributed to farmers by the Federal Government in the 125 years since then.

A circular sent by Charles Mason in 1855 was typical of the pre-Civil War questionnaires used by the Patent Office. The instructions for completing the report noted that "we seek no information that is not strictly reliable." Therefore,

if . . . you can communicate explicit and undoubted information on any of the topics under investigation, you will confer a favor by so doing. . . . It is hoped that the interest you feel in agricultural subjects will induce you to cooperate as far as you may find it convenient and agreeable. Accurate statistics are desired as far as it is practicable to obtain them; but all that we can reasonably expect, in most cases, is the nearest approach to truth to which your experience and judgment will lead you.

These instructions were followed by specific questions which were . . .

mainly intended to direct your attention to certain points on which information is desired. It is hoped, therefore, that the mention of these will not exclude any matters of general interest that may suggest themselves.

The 1855 circular included the following questions:

Domestic Animals

What classes of animals can be raised to the best advantages in your section? Cost of rearing, and value at various ages? Cost of transporting each to the Atlantic or Gulf markets, alive, by canal, railroad, or on foot? What breeds are the most serviceable for labor, milk, flesh, or wool? Have you any imported or blood animals in your vicinity? If so, state the number, breed, history,

and pedigree, if known, and the effects of crossing, if any, on your common stock, together with your mode of feeding and management.

Manures

What manures are most in use with you, and, which the most valuable for special crops? If guano, bone-dust, poudrette, super-phosphate, lime, gypsum, charcoal, ashes, fish, muck, or any other valuable fertilizers are employed in your vicinity, state the cost, modes of application, and their effects upon the respective crops to which they have been applied. The result of any accurate experiments would be desirable, especially as connected with any of our great leading staples—cotton, tobacco, hemp, flax, wheat, oats, rye, barley, rice, potatoes, or Indian corn.

Agricultural Products

What crops can be cultivated to the best advantage in your section? The best modes of cultivation? The maximum and average yield of each, and the smallest yield that will pay expenses? Have you any established rotation of crops? What plants are cultivated for the purpose of ploughing under as a manure? Have you any remedies against the diseases and insects which infest your crops? What are your best modes of harvesting, storing, and preparation for market? What is the cost of production and market value, in your vicinity, of the various kinds of grains, roots, hay and fodder, cotton, hemp, flax, hops, sugar, tobacco, &c.? What the cost per hundred pounds or per bushel of transporting each product, by canal, railroad, or otherwise, to the Atlantic or Gulf markets?

Special interest is felt at the present time in those plants which are employed in the manufacture of cordage, clothing, &c., such as cotton, hemp, and flax. Are any of these crops profitably cultivated by you? If so, have you any im-

proved variety, new modes of cultivation, harvesting, or preparation for market?

Market and Kitchen Gardening

Please to give the names of the best varieties of garden vegetables, the usual time of sowing, periods of maturity, yield on a given space of ground, and their market values. What vegetables are brought into your vicinity from the North, South, East, West, or from beyond the seas, at what seasons, and at what prices?

Fruits, Wines, Etc.

What varieties of summer, fall, and winter fruits are cultivated with the best success in your section? What kinds are attacked by blight, mildew, or insects, particularly injurious to their perfect growth? If any, what remedies have you against their attacks? Have you any improved modes of cultivating fruit, harvesting, storing, and preparing it for market? What is the cost per bushel or barrel of transporting those kinds not perishable, to the Atlantic and Gulf markets, by canal, railroad, or otherwise? What is the current value per bushel or barrel of each kind in your vicinity? Is the grape cultivated with you for table use, or with the object of making wine? If for either, can you communicate any information relative to its name, history, cultivation, preservation, or the manufacture, cost, and market value of American wine? What fruits are sold in your vicinity grown at the North, South, East, or West; at what seasons, and at what prices?

Live Fences

What trees or shrubs form the best live hedges in your vicinity? How long have such hedges, if any, been established? Are they seriously affected by frost or drought? What was the cost per rod, the annual expense of trimming, and your mode of management?