

The Past

mixtures were the leading hay crops at the time.

American Hampshire hogs were summer pastured and fattened in the fall on locally grown barley, wheat and peas.

The number of farms in the Tanana Valley in 1939 was smaller than in 1909 and the acreage of abandoned farm fields were greater than that of the cultivated farms.

Reasoning for the decrease of farmers includes the following remark made by George Gasser:

"The decrease in agricultural activity in Interior Alaska is due not to farm failures but to the passing on of many gold rush stampedeers who homesteaded in the area around the turn of the century. Most of these pioneers had no families to carry on. Younger people coming into the area are attracted by the payroll of industries, chiefly gold mining rather than farming."

By 1945 there were about 35 farmers in the Tanana Valley. They had 1,000 acres of hay and grain under cultivation, produced 1,000 tons of potatoes and owned 150 head of dairy cattle, 500 hogs, and 8,000 chickens. There were about 400 gardens in the Fairbanks area in 1945.

In 1923, milk production in the Tanana Valley was only 37 per cent less than in Anchorage and the Matanuska Valley. By 1961 the Matanuska Valley produced twenty-one percent more milk and by 1967, the Matanuska Valley produced 92.4 percent more milk. In 1972 the Matanuska Valley produced ninety-five percent more milk than did dairies in the Tanana Valley.

During the 1950's agricultural activity in the Tanana Valley began to pick up momentum. During one period of the fifties, there were fourteen dairies in the Tanana Valley. Marketing problems that developed during that period, however, forced most of the dairy operation out of business.

Although George Gasser's statement quoted in the opening paragraphs of this article was made thirty years ago. The food production versus food consumption status in Alaska has not improved with time.

Agricultural technology has advanced beyond recognition of those early methods used by the gold-stampedeers who became farmers. Crop yields have increased many fold, modern farm equipment has taken much of the back-breaking and time consuming labor away from the daily chores of farming, and food demands of the Alaska population has increased substantially since the turn of the century, but Interior Alaska's agricultural potential still awaits its big break.