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# RURAL LIFE IN OLD DOMINION

## Virginia Farmers Realize Big Increase in Crops.

### USE OF IMPROVED METHODS

Report of John B. Pierce Shows Results Obtained Through the Co-operation of Farm Demonstration Agents Under the States Relation Service. Great Interest Taken in Corn Clubs.

By WILLIAM ANTHONY AERY.

Some 5,000 farmers of Virginia, under the leadership of John B. Pierce, who is a Tuskegee-Hampton product, were influenced in the single calendar year of 1916 to improve their methods of work and secure crop yields far beyond the expectations of the most hopeful advocates of the farm demonstration idea. Eighteen local farm demonstration agents working in twenty-two counties of Virginia under the States Relations Service South—the fruition itself of the epoch making work of Seaman A. Knapp—have brought to the Negro farmers not only new ideas and better methods of tilling the soil and caring for farm products, but also a new vision of farm life, a clearer insight into farming as a business rather than as a mere occupation and a deeper sense of responsibility for the all around education of their boys and girls.

Let facts tell the story of organization's gift to Virginia, for whatever helps the Negro farmer to increase his earning power also helps the white people to make genuine progress. During 1916, so Mr. Pierce reports to Bradford Knapp, chief of the States Relations Service, South, 449 Negro corn demonstrators in Virginia, cultivating 2,150 acres under improved methods, secured an average yield of thirty-three bushels per acre. This was an increased yield of 9.9 bushels on demonstration plots over plots cultivated by ordinary methods. In addition, 1,001 co-operators reported a yield of twenty-four bushels per acre on 1,952 acres.

Granting that a similar result could be obtained by all those who raise corn if only education could be carried on broadly, Virginia in a single year would add \$10,000,000 to the value of her output of corn. Who dares to be skeptical or cynical of the Negroes' interest in better methods of farming in the light of these facts?

Corresponding results have been secured in the small grains demonstrations. The average yield of oats per acre on demonstration plots was 18.9 bushels, representing an increased yield of 5.7 bushels and of wheat 16.1 bushels, representing an increased yield of 5.5 bushels. Today over 1,000 Negro farmers are using better methods of growing small grains on account of the government's interest in them.

Does all this pay in dollars and cents, in increased interest in farming, in better homes? To ask the question is to answer it—certainly!

Hay, forage, cover crops! These words commonly mean little. To the Negro farmer of Virginia they now spell success on the land. The local demonstration agents have worked night and day to make farmers understand the importance of making the land produce (without wearing it out) more food for man and beast and this story of awakening life on the farm.

"Community development along all good lines!" This is the object of the 134 Negro farmers' clubs which were organized in 1916 throughout Virginia through the co-operation of John B. Pierce and sixteen local demonstration agents working under the States Relations Service and the extension division of the Virginia Polytechnic institute at Blacksburg. The total membership of the clubs was 1,838 and represented a progressive, farsighted group of farmers in the Old Dominion. These clubs made a good beginning in co-operation by buying 2,234 tons of lime. Five of the local agents also kept a bulletin board, listing goods for sale and goods wanted.

What do the local demonstration agents do besides helping the farmers till their land and grow better crops? Here is a partial list, based on Mr. Pierce's 1916 report of the farm and farmstead improvements which the farmers of Virginia have made with the advice and assistance of the agents:

Buildings erected, 130; farm buildings painted or whitewashed, 532; sanitary conditions (farm and home) improved, 933; homes screened against flies, 837; farmers furnished with plans and induced to adopt a systematic rotation, 136; total acreage put under rotation, 1,695; drainage system established, 39; home water systems installed or improved, 55; home grounds improved, 394; home gardens planted or improved, 1,198; farmers induced to save surplus farm products for winter use, 1,578.

Can there be any question that the work of the local agent is limited merely to helping the farmer grow more crops so that he can secure more money to raise more crops? We think not.

That increased earning power is an important and basal factor must be evident to the careful observer of rural conditions. That better living is a worthy goal for the hardworking farmer and his family is recognized by those who are engaged in carrying to the Negro farmers of Virginia a gospel of hope which is based upon intelligent work and Christian good will.

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