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Agriculture in the Fredericksburg area

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AGRICULTURE IN THE FREDERICKSBURG AREA, 1800 TO 1840

BY

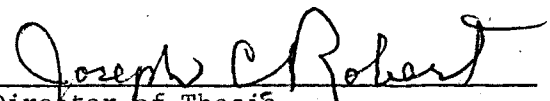
HAROLD J. MUDDIMAN, JR.

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
IN CANDIDACY
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY


JUNE 1969

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PREFACE

I would like to express my appreciation for the invaluable advice of Dr. Joseph C. Robert in the preparation of this paper. Thanks also to my wife, Jane, for her help in gathering information from various county tax records.

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CHAPTER I

AGRICULTURAL CONDITIONS

This paper is a study of agriculture and rural conditions in the Virginia counties of Caroline, Culpeper, Orange, Spotsylvania, and Stafford from 1800 to 1840. These counties are located in the north-central section of the state. The easternmost of the counties, Caroline, is located on the edge of the Tidewater section; Orange and Culpeper, in the Piedmont, extend to the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The land is generally flat in the east, becomes more rolling as it approaches the mountains. Soils range from sandy loams in Caroline County to the sandy and clay loams with underlying crystalline rock formations in the Piedmont. The soils vary in productivity depending upon the topography, rainfall, texture, and underlying rock formation. Although not as rich as the limestone soils of the valley region, generally the soils of the Fredericksburg area are of moderate fertility.¹

The most important town in the vicinity was Fredericksburg which was on the Rappahannock River about 150 miles from the Chesapeake Bay.²

¹"Soils of Virginia," Agricultural Extension Service, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Bulletin 203 (Blacksburg, 1965), pp. 14-23.

²Population of Fredericksburg, 1810-1830 (Census, Spotsylvania County, 1810, 1820, 1830). Virginia State Library. (Fn. cont. on next page.)

Because of its location on the falls of the Rappahannock, Fredericksburg was a natural site for a port; as such the town was vitally important to the counties to the west which were dependent upon its market and port facilities. In a petition to the state legislature the residents of Stafford, Culpeper, Fauquier, and Spotsylvania claimed "That the towns of Falmouth and Fredericksburg are the markets to which they bring their agricultural products."³ In another petition some citizens of Orange County referred to Fredericksburg as ". . . their market town."⁴ At the beginning of the nineteenth century many ships came to Fredericksburg from both American and foreign ports.⁵ Although today it is difficult to imagine ocean-going vessels on the narrow Rappahannock, one visitor to the city in 1816 reported seeing fourteen or fifteen ships in port at one time.⁶ Another traveler in 1826 noted that the Rappahannock was capable of handling ships up to 130 tons.⁷ The trade of the town

	<u>1810</u>	<u>1820</u>	<u>1830</u>
Whites	1260	1549	1797
Slaves	900	1160	1124
Free Negroes	<u>349</u>	<u>367</u>	<u>387</u>
Total	2509	3067	3308

³Legislative Petition, Spotsylvania County, December 12, 1822. Virginia State Library.

⁴Legislative Petition, Orange County, December 16, 1805.

⁵Legislative Petition, Spotsylvania County, December 11, 1827.

⁶"A Frenchman Visits Norfolk, Fredericksburg, and Orange County 1816," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LIII (1945), 115.

⁷Anne Royal, Sketches of History, Life, and Manners in the United States (New Haven, 1826), p. 118.

suffered because of the Embargo, the War of 1812, and several serious fires.⁸ An 1827 petition claimed that ". . . but little or no foreign commerce is carried on from this section of Virginia; our trade is almost exclusively coasture."⁹

Other important ports in the Fredericksburg area were Falmouth and Port Royal. Falmouth, located in Stafford County a short distance up the Rappahannock, was a busy milling center and port.¹⁰ Port Royal, also on the Rappahannock River in Caroline County, was capable of handling ships with up to an eleven foot draft during the 1830's.¹¹

Agricultural practices of early nineteenth century America had advanced little since the middle ages. The farmer depended upon the horse, or even slower oxen, pulling a wooden plow which barely scratched the surface of the soil. The Virginia farmer raised one main crop, usually tobacco. What small amount of fertilizer was available was devoted to the tobacco fields. The remainder of the land underwent the harsh three-shift rotation system. A field would be used for corn, wheat, and grazing in consecutive years.

After clearing and burning woods seven crops of tobacco were taken in as many years, in some instances ten crops of maize

⁸Oscar H. Darter, Colonial Fredericksburg in Perspective (New York, 1957), pp. 64-82.

⁹Legislative Petition, Spotsylvania County, December 11, 1827.

¹⁰Legislative Petition, Stafford County, December 18, 1813.

¹¹Joseph Martin, A New and Comprehensive Gazetteer of Virginia (Charlottesville, 1836), p. 143.

and wheat alternately in ten years. After twenty-one years the land refused to yield any more grain.¹²

When the yield had declined to a subsistence level, the farmer was forced to improve his land or move to another location. Generally it was less expensive to choose the latter alternative, and the old land was abandoned to scrub pine and gullies. The evils of one-crop agriculture had left their mark on rural Virginia. According to William Strickland, an Englishman who traveled extensively in the United States during the last decade of the eighteenth century, Virginia's farmers and soil had reached a low state.¹³

Much of the blame for Virginia's problems was placed on tobacco which many farmers believed exhausted the soil. Others pointed out that tobacco was no more harmful than other crops, but it was very time consuming and required either fresh or heavily manured land. Nevertheless, tobacco was ideally suited to slave labor, since it kept the workers busy year round and required no expensive or complicated machinery.

Tobacco cultivation required constant, tedious labor and supervision to be successful. The process often began before Christmas when plant beds were burned and raked.¹⁴ Newly cleared land was preferred but heavily manured land was also used. One method of manuring was to pen sheep over the selected area.¹⁵ During February the tobacco seeds,

¹²William Strickland, Observations on the Agriculture in the United States (London, 1801), p. 145.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴American Farmer, III (1821-1822), 281.

¹⁵Ibid., I (1819-1820), 395.

sometimes mixed with plaster of paris and ashes, were sewn in the beds.¹⁶
 The plant beds were then covered with brush to protect the tobacco plants
 from frost.¹⁷

The tobacco fields were then ploughed or hoed and hills were made
 three feet apart for the tobacco plants.¹⁸ From May 10 to June 15 the
 plants were transplanted from the beds to the fields.¹⁹ The plants had
 to be strong enough to bear the rigors and a rainy day was preferred
 since it made the soil softer.²⁰ The plants were carried to the field
 and one was placed by each hill; another worker would then place the
 tobacco plant in the ground by hand.²¹ The field was left alone for
 several days and then the dead plants were replaced.²² The fields had
 to be constantly weeded, either by hand or by plough, until the plant was
 ready to be cut.²³ Another problem was insects, particularly the horn
 worm and ground worm, which damaged the plant. Insects had to be removed
 by hand which was a time consuming process. Some farmers placed flocks of

¹⁶Ibid., III (1821-1822), 281.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸William Tatham, An Historical and Practical Essay on the Cul-
 ture and Commerce of Tobacco (London, 1800), pp. 12-13.

¹⁹American Farmer, III (1821-1822), 281.

²⁰Tatham, An Historical and Practical Essay, pp. 15-16.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., pp. 17-18.

turkeys in the fields to combat insects.²⁴ The plants also had to be "primed" by removing the bottom leaves which had been damaged by cropping or ploughing.²⁵ After the plants had been in the field for several weeks the leading stem or sprout had to be removed in a process called "topping." This was done by pinching off the stem before it developed a flower which would have deprived the rest of the plant of nutrition.²⁶ Often after "topping" small buds, called suckers, would appear between the leaves and the stem. These suckers had to be removed or they would damage the quality of the tobacco.²⁷ The tobacco plant was usually left with nine or ten leaves.²⁸

In late summer the plant was ready to be cut when the leaves began to thicken and lighten in color.²⁹ An experienced laborer with a sharp knife would then cut the plant close to the ground. It was then left in the sun for several hours until it became pliable and was then carried to a tobacco house for curing. The two most common methods of curing were by sun and by fire.³⁰ Fire curing was most desirable since it made the tobacco easier to pack.³¹ However, this type of curing required eight

²⁴American Farmer, III (1821-1822), 282.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Tatham, An Historical and Practical Essay, p. 18.

²⁷Ibid., p. 19.

²⁸American Farmer, III (1821-1822), 282.

²⁹Tatham, An Historical and Practical Essay, p. 24.

³⁰Ibid., p. 36.

³¹American Farmer, II (1820-1821), 382.

or ten wagon loads of wood to cure tobacco in a fifty by twenty-four foot tobacco barn.³² After curing, the leaves were stripped from the stalk, sorted according to quality, and packed into hogsheads. A hogshead was a barrel approximately thirty-six inches in diameter and four and a half feet in height. Most farmers attempted to press 1500 pounds of tobacco in each but usually got around 1350 pounds per hogshead.³³

The tobacco in the Fredericksburg area was then carried by wagon to a tobacco inspection warehouse. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there were two warehouses in Spotsylvania, two in Stafford, and one in Caroline.³⁴ All tobacco shipped from Virginia had to be inspected and approved by a state appointed inspector. The tobacco which passed inspection was weighed, stamped, and the farmer given a receipt.³⁵

The British had protected and encouraged tobacco production, and after independence it was difficult for the Virginia farmer to change. Yet the planter found the British West Indies closed to trade and his tobacco subject to import duties in many European countries.³⁶ The Napoleonic Wars, the Embargo, and the War of 1812 all had an adverse effect on tobacco production.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., III, 284.

³⁴ Collection of All Such Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia of a Public and Permanent Nature as Are Now in Force (Richmond, 1802), 253, State Library.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 258.

³⁶ Lewis C. Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860 (Washington, 1933), II, 602-603.

Throughout the period tobacco prices were generally low. From 1800 to 1818 the price of tobacco was only 3½ to 7d per pound.³⁷ The price remained low from 1818 to 1836, averaging only 4½¢ per pound from 1827 to 1833.³⁸ No one was more aware of these low prices than the Virginia farmer. One farmer complained to David Allason of Falmouth in 1800 that the price of tobacco was so low he could hardly pay the cost of his insurance.³⁹

At the beginning of the nineteenth century tobacco was the most important crop in the Fredericksburg area, but by the end of the first decade there was a shift away from tobacco production. A traveler in the early years of the century noted that some ". . . business continues to be done here in tobacco; but that trade is much on the decline."⁴⁰ From 1800 to 1801 the inspection warehouse in Fredericksburg and Falmouth shipped 3778 hogsheads. (See Table I - Tobacco Shipped.) During the first decade Dixon's Warehouse in Falmouth sent 11,394 hogsheads, while the two Fredericksburg warehouses shipped a total of 16,005 hogsheads. Because of the War of 1812 the tobacco trade was almost halted with only four hogsheads shipped from the area from October, 1813, to October, 1814. From 1814 to 1824 the number of hogsheads sent from Falmouth had declined

³⁷ Richmond Enquirer, April 20, 1819.

³⁸ Gray, History of Agriculture, II, 767.

³⁹ Letter to David Allason from Walter Colquhoun, January, 1800, Allason Papers. Virginia State Library.

⁴⁰ Robert Sutcliff, Travels in North America, 1804, 1805, 1806 (Philadelphia, 1812), pp. 93-94.

TABLE I

TOBACCO SHIPPED FROM FREDERICKSBURG AND FALMOUTH WAREHOUSES, 1800-1824

H O G S H E A D S S H I P P E D			
	Dixon's - Falmouth	Royston's - Fredericksburg	Fredericks- burg
1800-1801	1820	1320	656
1801-1802	1349	934	526
1802-1803	2057	1147	729
1803-1804	450	761	471
1804-1805	1152	1127	830
1805-1806	1006	1201	933
1806-1807	1001	925	731
1807-1808	549	338	462
1808-1809	692	660	723
1809-1810	1318	1306	1243
1810-1811	532	375	366
1811-1812	-	91	78
1812-1813	-	48	106
1813-1814	-	-	4
1814-1815	487		603
1815-1816	303		275
1816-1817	458		937
1817-1818	456		709
1818-1819	307		420
1819-1820	210		503
1820-1821	58		337
1821-1822	275		329
1822-1823	56		150
1823-1824	151		235

Compiled from Papers of Inspectors of Flour and Tobacco, Boxes 3, 7, 12.

to 2761 and dropped to 4491 shipped from Fredericksburg. Between October, 1823, and October, 1824, there were only 386 hogsheads shipped from the area warehouses.⁴¹

A state-wide study of tobacco inspection warehouses also indicated a trend away from tobacco in the Fredericksburg area. In 1810 there were fifty-four warehouses in the state, but seventy percent of all tobacco was inspected in the Richmond, Petersburg, and Lynchburg areas. By 1816 over ninety percent of all tobacco was inspected in the three previously mentioned areas.⁴² Only ten percent of the tobacco in the state was being inspected at all other warehouses which included Fredericksburg and Falmouth.

In 1811 William Wallace, proprietor of Dixon's Warehouse in Falmouth, in a petition to the General Assembly stated that only a small quantity of tobacco was sent to his warehouse ". . . since the great decline of the tobacco trade (and which is not likely to revive to its former extent) . . ." He asked for permission to sell part of his warehouse land.⁴³

In 1813 the owners of Royston's Warehouse, in a petition to the General Assembly, stated that ". . . for some years back the cultivation of tobacco has almost entirely discontinued in the adjacent country."

⁴¹Papers of Inspectors of Flour and Tobacco, Boxes 3, 7, 12, Virginia State Library:

⁴²Joseph C. Robert, The Tobacco Kingdom (Durham, 1938), p. 77.

⁴³Legislative Petition, Stafford County, December 7, 1811.

Since the rents and fees collected at the warehouse for the past several years had been insufficient to pay the £ 175 annual salary of the inspector, the proprietors wanted permission to close their Fredericksburg establishment. In the period from October, 1812, to October, 1813, only £ 18 in fees had been collected which created a deficit of £ 157.⁴⁴ The tobacco inspection law stated that if a warehouse ". . . shall not for the space of three succeeding years receive a sufficient quantity of tobacco to pay the inspectors salaries and rents of the warehouse" the inspection of tobacco should be discontinued.⁴⁵

The 1839 tobacco crop in the five counties totaled 1,605,899 pounds which would have been packed into 1000 to 1500 hogsheads.⁴⁶ This crop was three to four times the amount of tobacco shipped from Fredericksburg during 1823-1824.⁴⁷ However, it has been pointed out that due to expected high prices during planting season farmers set out extra acres in tobacco, then a summer of good weather resulted in one of the largest crops ever produced in ante-bellum Virginia.⁴⁸ The 1839 crop in Virginia was 40% greater than the average between 1830-1838.⁴⁹ Tobacco was still being raised in the Fredericksburg area, but it had decreased in

⁴⁴ Legislative Petition, Spotsylvania County, December 11, 1813.

⁴⁵ Collection of All Such Acts of the General Assembly (1802), p. 271.

⁴⁶ United States Census, 1840, Agriculture and Industry, Caroline, Culpeper, Orange, Spotsylvania, and Stafford, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

⁴⁷ Papers of Inspectors of Flour and Tobacco, Boxes 3, 7, 12.

⁴⁸ Robert, Tobacco Kingdom, p. 146.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

importance over the forty years of the nineteenth century.

With the decline in production of tobacco, wheat became the most important money crop in the Fredericksburg area. Much of the change could be attributed to the Napoleonic Wars which greatly increased demand for American wheat. During the first decade of the nineteenth century, when much of Europe was engaged in war, the United States shipped large quantities of wheat to Britain, the Spanish peninsula and the West Indies.⁵⁰ Much of the wheat came from Virginia, and Fredericksburg and Falmouth became active in the wheat trade. There were 125,000 bushels of wheat shipped from Falmouth in 1813.⁵¹ In 1830 there were 150,000 bushels of wheat exported from Fredericksburg.⁵²

Fredericksburg merchants were active in trying to buy wheat from local farmers. One, Horace Marshall, was the agent for a Mr. Mark Smith of Philadelphia. In 1824 Marshall bought and shipped over 24,000 bushels of wheat to Philadelphia from Fredericksburg.⁵³ In a letter to Smith Marshall wrote that ". . . I went through the market and to Falmouth, and I find that there is not as much wheat in the market as will load one vessel."⁵⁴ He went on to say that the farmers who had wheat were not

⁵⁰W. F. Galpin, "The American Grain Trade to the Spanish Peninsula, 1800-1814," American Historical Review, XXVIII (1922-1923), 24.

⁵¹Legislative Petition, Stafford County, December 18, 1813.

⁵²Martin, New Gazeteer, p. 283.

⁵³Letters to Mark Smith from Horace Marshall, September and October, 1824, Horace Marshall Letterbook, Virginia State Library.

⁵⁴Ibid., Marshall to Smith, September 22, 1824.

selling, since they expected the price to rise as it had done in New York. At that time Fredericksburg prices were 86 cents a bushel and \$1.05 in New York. The farmers were correct, for five days later he bought 7500 bushels of wheat for 93-95 cents a bushel.⁵⁵ In October he wrote that he had loaded 712 bushels on "Sailor's Fancy" and that the ship would ". . . drop down this evening" for the balance of its 239½ bushel cargo.⁵⁶ Interestingly, in 1827 Marshall was forced to sell his business in order to pay his debts.⁵⁷

Prices of Virginia wheat varied between a low of 72 cents per bushel in 1820 to a high of \$2.03 in 1816.⁵⁸ During the first decade of the nineteenth century prices were fairly high, averaging \$1.15 per bushel.⁵⁹ However, during the War of 1812 prices had dropped to 85 cents by 1814.⁶⁰ From 1816 to 1818 prices were quite high due to crop failure in the United States and Europe, but the depression of 1819 forced prices down to their lowest level between 1801 and 1893.⁶¹ Prices remained low throughout the 1820's, averaging only 92 cents from 1821 to 1830.⁶²

⁵⁵ Ibid., September 28, 1824.

⁵⁶ Ibid., October 2, 1824.

⁵⁷ Ibid., May 15, 1827.

⁵⁸ Gray, History of Agriculture, II, 1039.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Arthur G. Peterson, "Historical Study of Prices Received by Producers of Farm Products in Virginia," 1801-1927 (Blacksburg, 1929), pp. 22-26.

⁶² Gray, History of Agriculture, II, 1039.

During the third decade prices began to rise due to inflation and speculation and averaged \$1.18 per bushel for the ten years.⁶³ Wheat prices averaged \$1.13⁶⁴ during the first forty years of the nineteenth century.

The most serious problem faced by the farmer was the Hessian fly which often destroyed entire wheat crops.⁶⁵ In 1817 Philip Slaughter of Culpeper had seeded 300 bushels of wheat but did not expect more than two or three bushels for each seeded; he blamed the fly for his poor crop.⁶⁶ In 1822 James Madison wrote Monroe that "the fly has commenced its ravages in a very threatening manner."⁶⁷ Another farmer wrote that the "irresistible pest" had caused him to get only 500 bushels from 100 acres.⁶⁸ Farmers tried various methods to combat the fly. One farmer soaked his seeds in copper sulphate and water, then the seeds were rolled in plaster of paris before being sewn.⁶⁹ Other methods used were boiling the seeds or soaking them in brine.⁷⁰ However, none of these was

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ The Hessian fly was an insect which was thought to have been brought to the United States by the mercenary Hessian soldiers. The fly would lay its eggs on the wheat plant. After the eggs hatched the larvae crawled down to the base of the plant and injected a toxic substance. In the spring the straw would break over. Encyclopaedia Britannica, XXIII (Chicago, 1964), 563.

⁶⁶ Diary of Philip Slaughter, July 2, 1817, University of Virginia.

⁶⁷ Gaillard Hunt, ed., The Writings of James Madison, IX (New York, 1910), 94.

⁶⁸ Farmers' Register, III (1835-1836), 475.

⁶⁹ American Farmer, VI (1824-1825), 227.

⁷⁰ Gray, History of Agriculture, II, 818-819.

successful since new reports of the fly appeared from year to year.

Throughout the period wheat remained the most important market crop in the Fredericksburg area with 499,027 bushels raised in 1840.⁷¹ This would have sold for approximately \$500,000 making it the most valuable crop in the five counties under consideration.

Closely connected with wheat was the milling and selling of flour. Fredericksburg and Falmouth developed into busy milling centers.⁷² The state legislature had passed a law in 1792 requiring that all flour exported from the state had to be inspected for quality.⁷³ Fredericksburg, Falmouth and Port Royal were designated as sites for flour inspections.⁷⁴

Area merchants were also engaged in the flour business. Daniel Grinnan of Murray, Grinnan and Mundell was primarily involved in buying flour in Fredericksburg and shipping it to his partner Mundell in Norfolk. From Norfolk the flour would often be sent to foreign ports. In 1802 Grinnan made an agreement with a Culpeper miller to sell his wheat in Fredericksburg or Norfolk for a commission of 2½ cents per barrel.⁷⁵ According to the company accounts a total of 9721 barrels of flour were

⁷¹Census, Agriculture and Industry, 1840.

⁷²Farmer's Register, V (1837-1838), 767.

Total barrels of flour inspected:	1820	1830	1835	1836	1837
Fredericksburg	81,478	96,096	52,222	26,810	20,000*
Falmouth	30,000*	46,406	48,000	25,000	17,000*

⁷³Collection of All Such Acts of the General Assembly (1802), p. 228.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Grinnan Papers, March 6, 1802, University of Virginia.

shipped from Fredericksburg during 1810.⁷⁶ However, business was halted by the War of 1812, and it never seemed as active after the war.

In 1813 Falmouth had five flour mills, several capable of producing 15,000 barrels of flour annually.⁷⁷ In the first decade of the nineteenth century it was estimated that 17,000 barrels of flour were shipped from Falmouth each year.⁷⁸ In 1831, 125,536 barrels were inspected in Falmouth and Fredericksburg, which would have made the area third in the state in flour inspections, following Richmond and Alexandria.⁷⁹ By 1840 flour production had declined in the Fredericksburg area. There were fifteen flour mills, in the five counties under consideration, producing 55,006 barrels of flour.⁸⁰ Eleven of the fifteen were located in Orange and Culpeper Counties.⁸¹

During the period there were several comments regarding the poor quality of flour in the Fredericksburg area. In 1803 George Murray, in a letter to his partner Daniel Grinnan, complained that "Falmouth flour is all bad."⁸² In 1824 the merchants and farmers of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania replied to a complaint of Culpeper and Orange County millers

⁷⁶ Ibid., January, 1811.

⁷⁷ Legislative Petition, Stafford County, December 18, 1813.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Inspections of wheat flour, 1831: Richmond - 183,768 barrels; Alexandria - 133,735 barrels; Fredericksburg - 74,227 barrels; Falmouth - 51,309 barrels. Farmer's Register, I (1833-1834), 219.

⁸⁰ Census of Agriculture and Industry, 1840.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Grinnan Papers, August 23, 1803.

that Fredericksburg flour inspections were too rigorous. They claimed that the present inspector was attempting to raise the quality of Fredericksburg flour, but it was still inferior to Richmond flour.⁸³

One of the most widely grown crops in Virginia was Indian corn. According to one historian ". . . corn was the South's staff of life. In its homely way corn was as important to the South as cotton, probably more so."⁸⁴ John Taylor thought that corn was more important than wheat since it provided food for man, animals, and the land. He believed that "Indian corn may be correctly called meal, meadow, and manure."⁸⁵ In 1836 James Garnett, president of the Fredericksburg Agricultural Society, mentioned that each year he was more convinced that corn was replacing wheat as the main crop in Tidewater Virginia.⁸⁶

Between 1800 and 1840 corn prices varied from a high of \$1.46 a bushel in 1816 to a low of 34 cents in 1823. The price of corn was less than wheat and averaged 66 cents during the forty years under consideration. Corn prices were generally good for the first twenty years of the nineteenth century but averaged only 48 cents from 1823 to 1829. Due to inflation and speculation prices in the 1830's were high and averaged 74 cents during the decade.⁸⁷

⁸³ Legislative Petition, Spotsylvania County, December 16, 1824.

⁸⁴ Donald Kemmerer, "The Pre-Civil War South's Leading Crop, Corn," Agricultural History, XXIII (1949), 238.

⁸⁵ John Taylor, Arator (Petersburg, 1818), p. 150.

⁸⁶ Farmer's Register, IV (1836-1837), 541.

⁸⁷ Gray, History of Agriculture, II, 1039.

Although 500,000 bushels of corn were estimated to have been exported from Fredericksburg, it never became as important a market crop as wheat.⁸⁸ According to Peterson's study the number of bushels of wheat sold in Virginia was 62.4% greater than corn.⁸⁹ In 1840 there were 1,830,421 bushels of corn raised in the five counties, which was a greater quantity than all other grains combined.⁹⁰

Since a heavy bushel of corn was difficult to get to market over poor roads, many farmers converted their corn to whiskey which was less difficult to transport. Whiskey was an important product in Virginia and was included in all farm price indexes in the Virginia-Herald. It was especially in demand by owners of large plantations, who gave it to their slaves and workers during harvest time.

Cotton was a minor crop in the Fredericksburg area, but with the decline of tobacco and the uncertainties of wheat many area farmers experimented with cotton production. In 1824 James Garnett remarked that some people in the area were beginning to raise cotton, but he warned them not to be very optimistic about the results.⁹¹ Francis Taliaferro grew the high-priced Sea Island cotton on his farm near Fredericksburg.⁹² James Duval raised cotton on his Caroline County land as early as 1799.⁹³

⁸⁸ Martin, New Gazeteer, p. 283.

⁸⁹ Peterson, Historical Study of Prices, p. 22.

⁹⁰ Census, Agriculture and Industry, 1840.

⁹¹ Virginia-Herald, November 13, 1824.

⁹² American Farmer, IX (1827-1828), 260.

⁹³ Diary, James Duval, April 19, 1799, Virginia State Library.

In 1802 he set out several thousand cotton plants and another time sold 600 pounds of seed cotton.⁹⁴ For a short time during the 1820's cotton was listed in the farm price index in the Virginia-Herald. In 1840 there were 42,976 pounds of cotton grown in the Fredericksburg vicinity.⁹⁵ Most of the cotton was grown in the eastern section with all but 1000 pounds grown in Caroline and Spotsylvania.⁹⁶ However, because of uncertain prices and a short growing season, cotton was never grown extensively in the northern part of the state.

There was enough cotton raised in the area to support a factory in Stafford County which manufactured cotton thread. In 1840 the establishment had 3000 spindles and employed forty-five persons.⁹⁷

Two other crops which were grown to some extent in the Fredericksburg area were hemp and flax. Both were important enough to be listed in the Virginia-Herald price indexes. In 1792 the state legislature passed a law requiring the inspection of all hemp shipped from the state; Fredericksburg was designated as a site for an inspection warehouse.⁹⁸ Philip Slaughter raised hemp and flax on his Culpeper County plantation. He once paid a worker for breaking sixty-four pounds of flax, and in 1822 bought six bushels of flax seed for \$5.00.⁹⁹ During the spring of 1827 he

⁹⁴ Ibid., May 6, 1802; November 21, 1799.

⁹⁵ Census, Agriculture and Industry, 1840.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Collection of All Such Acts of the General Assembly (1802), p. 52.

⁹⁹ Slaughter Diary, November 2, 1817; April 4, 1822.

planted two and a quarter bushels of flax seed and a bushel of hemp seed.¹⁰⁰ There was \$1900 worth of manufactured flax produced in Culpeper in 1840.¹⁰¹ Also in the same year thirty-one tons of flax and hemp were grown in the Fredericksburg area; all but 6000 pounds was grown in Culpeper and Orange Counties.¹⁰²

A Virginia farm had a variety of livestock including horses, hogs, cattle, sheep, and oxen. Although attempts were made to improve the quality of livestock, it appears that very few advances were made in this area. Little attention was given farm animals, which were often to find their own forage, even during winter months.

The state's archaic enclosure laws which had been enacted in the colonial period were a factor which hindered improvements. These laws did not require the owner of livestock to build fences to confine his animals, so the farmer had to construct fences around his crops to keep them from being destroyed by roaming cattle and hogs.¹⁰³ However, the law did hold the owner of livestock responsible if his animals broke through a fence and destroyed property. On the second offense the livestock-owner was required to pay double damages. On the third trespass by the same animals the farmer had the option of again suing for damages or destroying the animals on his property.¹⁰⁴ The laws were harmful

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., May 7, 1827; April 13, 1827.

¹⁰¹ Census, Agriculture and Industry, 1840.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Farmer's Register, I (1833-1834), 451.

¹⁰⁴ Collection of All Such Acts of the General Assembly (1802), p. 273.

because farmers generally neglected their livestock. Also, in many areas of the Tidewater trees were becoming scarce making it more difficult and expensive to find material to construct fences.¹⁰⁵ Throughout the period various individuals and organizations sought to have the laws repealed. Yet it was not until after the Civil War that these grazing laws were abandoned in Virginia.¹⁰⁶

Horses were the most valuable farm animals, sometimes costing several hundred dollars for a highly prized animal. In 1828 Philip Lightfoot paid \$220.00 for a horse.¹⁰⁷ James Duval in 1801 purchased a horse for \$80.00 while a team of oxen could be bought for \$35.00.¹⁰⁸ In 1817 Philip Slaughter owned nineteen horses and six mules valued at \$2490.¹⁰⁹ Horse racing was a very popular sport and numerous racing advertisements appeared in the Virginia-Herald.

Hogs were the most important source of meat in the area. Every December the farmers would butcher most of their hogs. In 1819 Philip Slaughter killed eighty-two hogs weighing a total of 9378 pounds.¹¹⁰ Overseers also received part of their wages in pork, usually 400 or 500 pounds per year. Bacon was one of the mainstays of the slave diet, and bacon was important enough to be listed in the farm price indexes.

¹⁰⁵ Farmer's Register, I (1833-1834), 397.

¹⁰⁶ Clement Eaton, A History of the Old South (New York, 1949), p. 207.

¹⁰⁷ Lightfoot Journal, June 1, 1828, University of Virginia.

¹⁰⁸ Duval Diary, August 26, 1801.

¹⁰⁹ Slaughter Diary, December 30, 1817.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., December 15, 1819.

There was also interest in sheep and they were raised by many farmers. In 1822 Philip Slaughter had 130 sheep and two years earlier had sold seven bags of wool weighing a total of 205 pounds.¹¹¹ John Taylor of Caroline had experimented with sheep over a sixteen year period and had flocks which varied between 100 and 400 head. However, he felt sheep consumed too much food and were liable to die of diseases. He concluded that sheep could not be profitably raised in that section of the country.¹¹² Yet in 1840 there were 48,156 in the Fredericksburg area which produced 86,297 pounds of wool.¹¹³

Due to poor transportation and no large cities in the area, there appears to have been no commercial dairy farming in the Fredericksburg vicinity. Apparently each family attempted to provide for itself, but Edmund Ruffin noted that each year the state had to import butter, cheese, and salted meat.¹¹⁴

The Fredericksburg Agricultural Society attempted to increase interest in livestock by awarding prizes for outstanding animals at the annual fairs. In 1823 awards were given for horses, cattle, sheep and hogs. The most intense competition was in the horse category with thirty-three animals entered for the four awards. However, many of the awards, including best bull, ram, ewe, and hog, were awarded even though

¹¹¹Ibid., January 1, 1822; August 1, 1820.

¹¹²Taylor, Arator, p. 189.

¹¹³Census, Agriculture and Industry, 1840.

¹¹⁴Farmer's Register, II (1834-1835), 611.

there was only one entrant for each prize.¹¹⁵

As interest in agriculture increased many farmers tried to improve their stock. One practice which was criticized by many farmers was that of allowing animals to graze in fields which were not in use. This harmed the land and often provided scant forage for the livestock. John Taylor believed that arable lands should be fenced off and that animals should have their own pasturage.¹¹⁶ This method he felt would save the land and also provide better quality livestock. Overall, however, during the first four decades of the nineteenth century there were few improvements made in livestock management or breeds of livestock.

A study of landholding in Caroline County from 1800 to 1840 revealed many of the same conclusions as Owsley's study of other sections of the ante-bellum South. Throughout the period approximately 50% of the taxpayers owned less than 200 acres of land.¹¹⁷ The most significant trend was an increase in the ownership of less than 100 acres. In 1800 24% of the landowners held less than 100 acres; by 1830 this had increased to 34%. However, there was slight decline in ownership of land between 100 and 200 acres. A substantial percentage of landholders were in the 200-500 acre category which varied from 27% to 33% of the total in the county. Throughout the forty year period approximately 80% of the people held less than 500 acres. There were no significant changes in

¹¹⁵Virginia-Herald, November 26, 1823.

¹¹⁶Taylor, Arator, p. 189.

¹¹⁷Frank Owsley, Plain Folk of the Old South (Baton Rouge, 1949), pp. 8-9.

ownership between 500 and 1000 acres, which varied between 12% and 15%. In 1800 there were around 100 persons who owned between 500 and 1000 acres; by 1840 this had increased to 160. The owner of more than 1000 acres was the exception and there was a trend away from the ownership of such large amounts of land. Throughout the period there were less than fifty people who owned 1000 or more acres except 1820 when the number jumped to almost 100. Other samples taken during the same period in Culpeper, Orange and Spotsylvania counties are very similar to the results in Caroline. The one exception might be Culpeper which did increase in ownership of more than 500 acres. Perhaps it could be explained by the fact that Rappahannock County was formed from Culpeper in 1833 and might have included more small landowners. In conclusion, a majority of the people were small landholders, and the large many-thousand-acre plantation was the exception.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸Land Books, Caroline County, 1800, 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840.
Virginia State Library.

TABLE II
 LAND HOLDINGS CAROLINE COUNTY, 1800 TO 1840
 PERCENTAGE AND ACTUAL NUMBER OF LANDOWNERS IN EACH CATEGORY

Acres	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840
1-100	23.1% (180)	23.8% (169)	26.8% (344)	33.7% (427)	31.3% (331)
101-200	25.0% (203)	26.4% (188)	22.5% (289)	21.8% (247)	21.6% (229)
201-300	14.8% (115)	15.0% (108)	11.8% (152)	14.1% (159)	13.4% (142)
301-400	8.9% (69)	11.0% (79)	9.5% (123)	8.4% (96)	9.1% (96)
401-500	7.1% (56)	6.2% (48)	6.7% (86)	5.3% (61)	5.2% (56)
501-600	4.7% (37)	3.6% (26)	5.3% (69)	4.3% (49)	5.1% (54)
601-700	3.5% (28)	2.6% (19)	4.5% (59)	3.7% (42)	3.6% (39)
701-800	2.3% (18)	2.1% (15)	2.7% (29)	1.2% (14)	2.7% (29)
801-900	1.6% (13)	1.5% (11)	1.7% (23)	1.5% (17)	2.1% (23)
901-1000	.8% (7)	1.4% (10)	1.4% (18)	1.1% (11)	1.3% (14)
1000 up	6.8% (53)	5.3% (38)	7.1% (91)	4.0% (47)	4.1% (45)
Total	779	711	1283	1130	1058

Compiled from Caroline County Land Books, 1800, 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840.

CHAPTER II

PROBLEMS FOR THE FARMER

The Virginia farmer of the early nineteenth century was faced with numerous difficulties. Many of the problems were not directly related to agriculture and most were beyond his control. Perhaps the most perplexing, and one with no apparent solution, was slavery. Slaves were used rather extensively in the Fredericksburg area and comprised a large percentage of the population. From 1800 to 1840 Caroline, Spotsylvania, and Orange counties all had more than 50% slave populations. (See Table III) In 1820 in the five counties under consideration there were 40,277 slaves (53%) out of a total population of 75,636. By 1840 56% of the total population was slave, or 34,474 out of 60,809.¹

A study of Caroline County Personal Property Books revealed that most taxpayers owned fewer than five slaves during the period from 1800 to 1840. Further, there was an increase each decade in the percentage owning no slaves. In 1810 25% of the taxpayers owned no slaves; by 1840 53% were not slave-holders. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century most individuals owned from one to five slaves but this category had declined considerably by 1840. In 1810 44% of the taxpayers owned

¹Census, Culpeper, Caroline, Orange, Spotsylvania, and Stafford, 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840.

TABLE III

SLAVE-HOLDINGS IN CAROLINE COUNTY, 1800 TO 1840
 PERCENTAGES AND ACTUAL NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN EACH CATEGORY

No. of Slaves	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840
0	33.5% (390)	25.0% (277)	40.8% (542)	47.8% (542)	53.0% (816)
1- 5	40.6% (466)	44.6% (494)	29.0% (385)	21.3% (334)	17.0% (264)
6-10	14.1% (164)	16.6% (185)	11.9% (158)	11.1% (185)	10.4% (160)
11-15	6.3% (74)	7.6% (85)	6.8% (91)	5.5% (87)	6.3% (97)
16-20	2.7% (32)	2.4% (27)	3.6% (49)	5.0% (79)	4.0% (63)
21-25	.8% (10)	1.1% (12)	2.8% (38)	2.6% (41)	3.2% (50)
26-30	1.0% (12)	.6% (7)	1.4% (19)	1.5% (24)	1.8% (29)
31-35	.7% (9)	.5% (5)	1.2% (16)	1.0% (17)	.6% (10)
36-40	.2% (3)	.5% (5)	.5% (7)	.9% (15)	.9% (14)
41-45		.4% (4)	.1% (2)	.3% (6)	.2% (4)
46-50		.4% (4)	.3% (4)	.3% (6)	.2% (4)
51-55		(1)	(2)	.3% (6)	(1)
56-60	.1% (2)	(1)	(4)	(2)	(4)
61-65		(1)	(2)	(1)	(1)
66-70			(1)	(5)	(2)
71-75	.08% (1)	(1)	(2)	(4)	(3)
76-80		(1)		(1)	(3)
81-85			(1)	(2)	
86-90			(1)		(1)
91-95					(1)
96-100					(3)
100 up			(2)	(6)	(6)

Compiled from the Caroline County Personal Property Books.

from one to five slaves but by 1840 only 17% were in this category. The percentage of ownership between eleven and fifteen slaves remained generally constant but there was a definite increase in slave-holding between sixteen and thirty slaves. In 1810 only 4.5% of the taxpayers owned from sixteen to thirty but this had increased to 10% by the beginning of the fourth decade. The ownership of from thirty to fifty blacks varied slightly from year to year but made no significant changes over the forty year period. However, there was a significant increase in larger slave-holdings. In 1800 only three individuals had more than fifty slaves with the largest owning only seventy-five. By 1830 there were twenty-seven persons with more than fifty slaves. Six slave-holders had more than 100 with the largest owner having 148 slaves. So although the larger slave-holders were on the increase, they were a definite minority. In 1840 out of 1500 taxpayers only 25 owned more than fifty Negroes while 816 owned no slaves.²

Slaves during this period were very valuable property. Young males in their late teens or early twenties were worth several hundred dollars, but they were only slightly more valuable than young women. Samuel Alsop of Spotsylvania held slaves valued at \$356 each.³ A Stafford County resident, Thomas Seddon, had fifteen male slaves valued at \$333.66 each and a carpenter worth \$500.⁴ In 1824 Philip Slaughter owned

² Personal Property Books, Caroline County, 1800, 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840. Virginia State Library

³ Will Books, Spotsylvania County, I-J, 273. Virginia State Library.

⁴ Will Books, Stafford County, AA, 184.

sixty-five slaves with a total value of \$15,900. Included were twenty-four men valued at \$400 each, twelve women worth \$250, four girls priced at \$200, and twenty-five boys and girls at \$100 each.⁵ Two years later he valued a twenty-two year old male at \$450, a twenty-two year old female at \$350, a girl six years old at \$150, and an older fifty-two year old woman at \$100.⁶ Even the slave-holder with only a few slaves still had a considerable sum of money invested.

Some felt that one of Virginia agriculture's main problems was slavery. Many people pointed out that the slave was expensive, inefficient, and needed constant supervision. Generally slaves were thought to be practical only with one crop agriculture, but farmers of the Fredericksburg area seem to have been able to adapt their labor system to diversified farming. Philip Slaughter and James Duval serve as good examples. Duval was able to use his slaves year round in various activities. Of course, they were engaged in the normal farm routine of ploughing, planting, and harvesting; but they were also used effectively in the winter months. His men were employed in clearing new land which he must have used for his tobacco.⁷ His slaves also constructed numerous buildings including a workshop, a stable, a weaving-house, and a corn-house.⁸ Also, during the winter months he mentioned making bricks and

⁵ Slaughter Diary, December 28, 1824.

⁶ Ibid., December 31, 1826.

⁷ Duval Diary, February 12, 1800.

⁸ Ibid., October 7, 1800; February 19, 1800.

building new fences.⁹ Females were used in cloth-weaving and shoemaking.¹⁰ Duval rarely gave his slaves a holiday. Philip Slaughter during the winter months butchered hogs and cattle, repaired tools and buildings, and began manuring fields for spring planting.¹¹ He also used many of his men to get the sixty wagon loads of ice needed for his ice-house.¹²

According to Kenneth Stamp:

Not that slavery failed as a practical labor system. In that narrow sense it was a success. In terms of its broad social consequences for the South as a whole, however, slavery must be adjudged a failure.¹³

It was a common practice for people to hire slaves especially during harvest time. The prices paid by modern standards seem extremely low. Philip Lightfoot hired four slaves to work eight and one-half days for \$8.50 and in 1817 he hired a Negro woman for \$30 a year.¹⁴ Philip Slaughter hired out his two carpenters for twelve days at little more than a dollar a day.¹⁵ This seems to have been another way to utilize slaves during the winter months, as well as earn extra income.

Many Negroes were taught a trade and skilled slaves were more valuable than field hands. In 1824 Philip Slaughter owned two carpenters,

⁹Ibid., August 24, 1802; March 14, 1800.

¹⁰Ibid., November 18, 1799; February 12, 1800.

¹¹Slaughter Diary, December 15, 1819; February 11, 1822.

¹²Ibid., January 13, 1821.

¹³Kenneth Stamp, The Peculiar Institution (New York, 1956), p. 6.

¹⁴Lightfoot Journal, July 7, 1824; January 20, 1817.

¹⁵Slaughter Diary, December 31, 1818.

two blacksmiths, and two shoemakers.¹⁶ The widespread use of Negroes as skilled craftsmen was evidenced by a petition sent to the General Assembly by the citizens of Culpeper County. They wanted the legislature to pass a law to forbid any slave, free Negro, or mulatto from learning a trade. According to the petition, because of the competition from Negroes a number of white tradesmen were leaving the area. They wrote that the blacksmith trade was almost completely dominated by blacks and that there were a number of slaves in the trades of stonemason, plasterer, painter, bricklayer, miller, carpenter, cooper, tanner, and shoemaker.¹⁷

Immediately following the Revolutionary War there was a fairly active movement throughout much of the South in favor of the abolition of slavery, and many prominent Virginians including Jefferson, Washington, and Madison were opposed to slavery. John Taylor of Caroline realized the evils of slavery, but very prophetically he wondered how the Negro could be freed ". . . and yet kept from property and equal civil rights."¹⁸ Abolition sentiment had become so strong that in 1832 the General Assembly was considering abolishing slavery in the state.¹⁹ However, even before this time sentiment had begun to harden against abolition. One Virginian claimed to have been an abolitionist but felt that the "extravagant and impractical schemes" of the Northern abolitionists had united the people

¹⁶Ibid., December 28, 1824.

¹⁷Legislative Petition, Culpeper County, December 9, 1831.

¹⁸Taylor, Arator, p. 133.

¹⁹Joseph Robert, The Road From Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832 (Durham, 1941), p. 29.

against their ideas.²⁰ Another factor was the increased value of the slave caused by the close of the foreign slave trade in 1807 and the opening of cotton plantations in the deep south after the War of 1812. According to an article in the Farmer's Register, slaves could be sold to southern slave traders, and it was estimated that 6000 slaves were sold annually from Virginia in the early 1830's.²¹ One planter from Louisiana came to a plantation near Fredericksburg and purchased 155 slaves for \$75,000.²² Sometimes the southern planter would hire a factor to come north to purchase slaves.²³ However, the final blow to the abolition movement was the Nat Turner rebellion. This Southampton County revolt, which took place in 1831, frightened the entire South into a much harsher and more uncompromising attitude toward slavery.

Another problem faced by the Virginia farmer was the overseers who were used fairly extensively in the Fredericksburg area. Many of the larger slave and land owners, who spent time away from their farms, found that the overseer was a necessity. Many of the progressive farmers, including Edmund Ruffin, blamed the overseer for some of Virginia's agricultural difficulties.²⁴ They were particularly critical of the custom

²⁰E. A. Andrews, Slavery and the Domestic Slave Trade (Boston, 1836), p. 157.

²¹Farmer's Register, I (1833-1834), 39.

²²Andrews, Slavery and the Domestic Slave Trade, p. 171.

²³Ibid., p. 174.

²⁴Avery Craven, Edmund Ruffin, Southerner; A Study in Secession (New York, 1932), p. 19.

of paying the overseer a percentage of the crop. This practice encouraged the overseer to obtain as large a crop as possible, regardless of the methods used to raise it. After the land began to produce smaller crops, the overseer would move to another plantation and the process would repeat itself. According to John Taylor:

This necessary class of men are bribed by Agriculturist, not to improve but to impoverish their land, by a share of the crop for one year.²⁵

There is evidence of this practice on the plantation of John Slaughter who in 1799 paid his manager an eighth part of the crops of wheat, corn, rye, oats, flax; a sixth part of the tobacco plus 500 pounds of pork, 100 pounds of beef, and a milk cow.²⁶ However, many farmers realizing the weakness of this system abandoned it in favor of an annual wage. In 1801 James Duval noted that his cousin George Dillard ". . . began to act in the capacity of overseer" for 30 annually.²⁷ Philip Lightfoot of Caroline employed two overseers on his widespread landholdings; he paid one \$166.66 annually and the other \$300.²⁸ A George Simes was the overseer for Philip Slaughter from 1818 to 1821. For the year beginning in August, 1819, Simes was paid \$200 plus 450 pounds of pork, 100 pounds of beef, fifteen barrels of corn, two barrels of flour and two wagon loads of shucks and straw.²⁹ In 1822 Slaughter

²⁵Taylor, Arator, p. 76.

²⁶Slaughter Diary, December 2, 1799.

²⁷Duval Diary, January 7, 1801.

²⁸Lightfoot Journals, January 10, 1825.

²⁹Slaughter Diary, August 9, 1819.

hired George Benson ". . . to manage my business agreeable to my own direction, whenever I think proper to direct."³⁰

With the type of farming done in ante-bellum Virginia the overseer was a necessary evil. Judging by the brief time spent by overseers at various farms, the overseers appear to have been a rather undependable lot and perhaps deserve some of the complaints against them.

Another inconvenience and hardship for the Virginia farmer was the lack of internal improvements. Virginia was fortunate to have several navigable rivers, but beyond the fall-line it was very difficult to get produce to market.

Farmers in the Fredericksburg area carried their produce to market by wagon. Both James Duval of Caroline County and Philip Slaughter of Culpeper mentioned sending wheat by wagon to Fredericksburg. The roads at this time were extremely poor by present day standards. In 1816 a traveler between Fredericksburg and Aquia Creek, a major north-south route, feared his stage coach would turn over because of the poor road.³¹ It took this same person three and a half hours to make the eighteen mile journey.³² Even for the farmer who lived relatively close to town, a trip to Fredericksburg would have been a difficult and time-consuming undertaking.

There was a continuous flow of petitions to the General Assembly

³⁰ Ibid., December 31, 1822.

³¹ "A Frenchman Visits Norfolk, Fredericksburg and Orange in 1816," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LIII (1945), 114.

³² Ibid.

from the counties around Fredericksburg asking for new or improved turnpikes. In 1805 some citizens of Orange County asked that the road between Orange Court House and Fredericksburg be improved ". . . in consequence of the badness of the road, occasioned by the great number of carriages which pass upon it."³³ In 1806 the state legislature had formed the Swift Run Gap Turnpike Company to construct a road from Fredericksburg to the Blue Ridge. After twenty years only thirty-six miles had been completed and the company was out of money.³⁴ In 1822 another petition asked that a road be constructed from Falmouth to Fauquier and Culpeper Counties.³⁵ Nevertheless, Virginia's roads and turnpikes remained inadequate throughout the period.

As in many other areas of the country, the residents of the Fredericksburg area became interested in the construction of a canal to connect the town with the mountains to the west. Work was begun on the project in 1829.³⁶ But financial problems and natural disasters such as floods seriously hampered construction and by the fall of 1848 only thirty miles of the canal had been completed.³⁷ The remaining twenty-one miles were in operation by the summer of 1849, but the entire system was

³³Legislative Petition, Orange County, December 16, 1805.

³⁴Legislative Petition, Spotsylvania County, December 6, 1826.

³⁵Legislative Petition, Spotsylvania County, December 12, 1822.

³⁶Donald S. Callahan, "The Rappahannock Canal" (Master's Thesis, American University, 1967), p. 29.

³⁷Ibid., p. 62.

not in use until an undetermined date in 1853.³⁸ By the time the canal was completed it had to compete with the newly completed Orange and Alexandria Railroad Company which had sixty miles of track open by 1851.³⁹

The Richmond, Fredericksburg and Petersburg Railroad began construction between Richmond and Fredericksburg in 1835 and was supposed to be completed in three years.⁴⁰ By 1840 sixty-one miles had been completed at a cost of \$1.1 million.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the railroad had little effect during the forty year period under consideration.

Many of Virginia's leaders, including James Garnett and John Taylor, blamed part of Virginia's agricultural problems on the protective tariff. Industry in the United States had grown considerably as a result of the Embargo Act and the War of 1812. To protect American industry from cheaper foreign products, Congress passed the first protective tariff in 1816 and increased it several times in the next few years. At first most Southerners supported it and President Madison had urged Congress to enact the first protective duty in 1816. Soon Southern opposition to the tariff began to develop. In speeches, newspaper articles, and petitions to Congress they voiced disapproval of any type of protective duty. Since many farmers depended upon foreign trade, they felt their commerce was impeded by the tariff and that it raised the prices of goods that had to be purchased. To John Taylor, who had an inherent

³⁸ Ibid., p. 84.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁰ Farmer's Register, II (1834-1835), 124.

⁴¹ Ibid., VIII (1840-1841), 543.

distrust of industry, the tariff was partly to blame for emigration and decreasing land values in Virginia.⁴² James Garnett, president of the Fredericksburg Agricultural Society, questioned whether Congress had the authority to pass such a bill and thought it the most alarming attack upon agriculture since the government had begun.⁴³ In 1820 the farmers and merchants of Fredericksburg sent a petition to Congress against the tariff, claiming that it was ". . . the mode resorted to for imposing burdens on a great majority of nations, to foster some exclusive interest."⁴⁴

Emigration was a matter of concern to the leaders of Virginia even before the nineteenth century. After the War of 1812, the Spanish influence, and British intrigues in the Northwest had been eliminated, many people began leaving the older districts for the fresh lands of the West and South. This movement not only affected the poorer folk but also well-to-do planters. Often planters would sell their land and move south with their slaves to start new plantations in the cotton lands of the deep south.⁴⁵

Virginia's leaders blamed the problem on the state's agricultural practices which they claimed were exhausting the soil, and that unless improvements were made Virginia would cease to be an important state.

⁴²Taylor, Arator, p. 37.

⁴³Virginia-Herald, May 27, 1820.

⁴⁴A Memorial of the Agriculturist and Merchants of Fredericksburg and Vicinity (Washington, 1820), p. 5.

⁴⁵Andrews, Slavery and the Domestic Slave Trade, p. 117.

According to the Farmer's Register:

. . . wild deer are encroaching on Eastern Virginia. Thousands of her population are going to fill up the west. Middle Virginia is much exhausted. Unless something is done our glory as a state has departed never to return.⁴⁶

Although the causes of emigration were far more complex than just soil exhaustion, there is evidence that many Virginians were abandoning their native state. During the 1830's the population of the United States increased 32%; Virginia's increased by 4%.⁴⁷ Many counties in Eastern Virginia actually declined in population during this period. In the Fredericksburg vicinity the counties either declined or made slight gains from 1800 to 1840. In 1810 the total populations of Caroline, Culpeper, Spotsylvania, and Stafford Counties was 59,644; by 1820 this had increased by 3079, or 5%. During the same decade the population of the state increased by 9%. In 1820 the total of all five counties under consideration was 75,636; by 1830 this had increased by 6.5% to 81,020. At the same time the population of the state had increased by 13%. Stafford County was the only county which declined in population at each census. In 1810 the Stafford population was 9830; by 1840 it had dropped to 8434. From 1820 to 1830 Caroline County also declined by several hundred. The five counties under consideration appear to have grown more slowly than the rest of the state.⁴⁸

There are a number of specific instances mentioning individuals

⁴⁶Farmer's Register, I (1833-1834), 749.

⁴⁷Paul Gates, The Farmer's Age (New York, 1960), p. 106.

⁴⁸Census, Carolina, Culpeper, Orange, Spotsylvania, Stafford, 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840

leaving the Fredericksburg area. In September, 1799, James Duval sadly noted in his diary:

. . . the time at last arrived when the Father & family set off for Kentucky today about 10 oclock they left their old habitation regretted by all his neighbors and acquaintances--I must say no more for the loss I sustain is great & the very idea of their leaving fills my heart with sorrow.⁴⁹

In 1807 a William Wallace of Stafford planned to emigrate to Kentucky and wanted to sell his 700 acre farm near Falmouth.⁵⁰ In another instance, Horace Marshall, a Fredericksburg merchant, saw little chance of collecting a debt, since the man and his family were soon leaving by wagon for Kentucky.⁵¹ In another letter Marshall mentioned that one individual was ". . . going next week to the Alabama."⁵² Philip Slaughter, who owned land in western Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio, had a married daughter living in Kentucky. After a visit to his plantation in 1820, his daughter returned with several other county residents joining them.⁵³ In 1831 some residents of Culpeper complained that "there has been a greater emigration . . . from this vicinity than for the last ten years."⁵⁴

The loss of population, often the young and energetic, was a severe loss to the state. The opening of new lands further reduced land

⁴⁹Duval Diary, September 22, 1799.

⁵⁰Virginia-Herald, February 27, 1807.

⁵¹Letter from Marshall to William Howison, July 13, 1825, Horace Marshall Letterbook.

⁵²Ibid., September 6, 1825.

⁵³Slaughter Diary, May 4, 1821.

⁵⁴Legislative Petition, Culpeper County, December 9, 1831.

values in Virginia. Also the farm products from fertile western lands were beginning to complete, while Virginia's were getting smaller and smaller yields per acre. Many thoughtful people realized that the farmers of the state would have to improve their methods of farming to halt this flow of people away from Virginia.

TABLE IV

POPULATIONS: CAROLINE, CULPEPER, ORANGE, SPOTSYLVANIA,
STAFFORD, 1810 TO 1840¹

Caroline County				
Year	Whites	Slaves	Free Negroes	Total
1810	*	10,764	316	17,562
1820	6,506	10,999	486	18,008
1830	6,482	10,764	520	17,776
1840	6,601	11,495	771	18,876

Culpeper County ²				
Year	Whites	Slaves	Free Negroes	Total
1810	10,386	8,312	264	18,962
1820	11,136	9,468	338	20,944
1830	*	*	*	24,027
1840	4,933	6,069	184	9,187

Orange County ³				
Year	Whites	Slaves	Free Negroes	Total
1810	No record available			
1820	5,219	7,518	143	12,913
1830	*	*	*	14,637
1840	3,575	5,364	186	9,125

TABLE IV (Cont.)

Spotsylvania County ⁴				
Year	Whites	Slaves	Free Negroes	Total
1810	5,596	7,135	565	13,296
1820	5,939	7,924	591	14,254
1830	6,482	8,049	705	15,236
1840	6,549	7,950	785	15,284

Stafford County				
Year	Whites	Slaves	Free Negroes	Total
1810	5,219	4,695	316	9,830
1820	4,788	4,368	361	9,517
1830	4,653	4,164	485	9,362
1840	4,489	3,596	396	8,434

*Unable to determine from records.

¹Compiled from Census records, Virginia State Library.

²Rappahannock County formed from Culpeper in 1833.

³Greene County formed from Orange in 1838.

⁴Spotsylvania records include the town of Fredericksburg.

CHAPTER III

AGRICULTURAL REFORM

In the late eighteenth century some Virginians had become aware of the need for agricultural improvements. The two most famous were Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. Both men experimented with different crops, livestock, crop rotations, and corresponded with other agriculturists regarding their activities. It is interesting to note that neither man was successful in making his plantation profitable.¹

In the nineteenth century the problem had become more acute because of low prices, emigration to the west, and soil exhaustion. Perhaps the most influential of the early agricultural reformers was John Taylor of Caroline. Taylor, trained as a lawyer, had served during the Revolutionary War and was a member of the Virginia legislature and the United States Senate.² Taylor was opposed to the strengthening of the central government and felt that local democracy was being threatened by the Federalist Party.³ He also feared that the industrial North was trying to reduce the farmer to a position similar to a European serf.⁴

¹Clement Eaton, A History of the Old South, p. 216.

²Edmund Pendleton, "Sketches of the Life of John Taylor of Caroline," (Photostat of pamphlet), Virginia State Library.

³Avery Craven, "John Taylor and Southern Agriculture," Journal of Southern History, IV (1938), 140.

⁴Ibid., p. 142.

Taylor retired from public life and began to spend his time attempting to improve agriculture and writing of the glories of rural life. In 1803 he began a series of articles in a Georgetown, D. C., newspaper. In 1814 these were compiled and published under the title Arator.⁵

As a wealthy planter who owned over 2000 acres of land and fifty slaves, Taylor could see how the present system was exhausting the land and the people.⁶ Taylor notes this problem in Arator:

Our land has diminished in fertility and the decay of the culture of tobacco is testimony of this unwelcomed fact. It is deserted because the lands are exhausted. . . . Whole counties comprising large districts of country, which once grew tobacco in great quantities are now too sterile to grow any of the moment; and the wheat crops substituted for tobacco have already sunk to an average below profit.⁷

Taylor offered numerous suggestions for the improvement of agriculture but his basic ideas were: (1) the abandonment of tobacco in favor of wheat or meat products (Taylor claimed tobacco brought a small profit while starving the farmer by producing nothing to eat);⁸ (2) increased use of all types of manures to restore the soil to its original fertility;⁹

⁵Ibid., p. 142.

⁶Land holding and slaves of John Taylor of Caroline. Compiled from Caroline County Land Books and Personal Property Books:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Slaves*</u>
1795	1926	1790	54
1800	2245	1800	58
1810	2818	1810	54
1820	2154	1820	65

*Slaves under twelve years of age not taxed.

⁷Taylor, Arator, p. 14.

⁸Ibid., p. 268.

⁹Ibid., p. 80.

(3) adoption of the four shift rotation in place of the three shift system¹⁰ (He also felt very strongly that lands not in use should be enclosed and not used for pasture)¹¹; (4) improved and deeper ploughing.¹² If this system were used Taylor claimed that ". . . a farm in ten years may be made to double its produce and in twenty years to quadruple it."¹³

Although many farmers attempted the reforms of John Taylor, his ideas often did not prove successful in other sections of the state. His efforts ". . . served barely to stay something of the progress of general improvement."¹⁴ But Taylor did draw attention to the problems and was the forerunner of such reformers as Edmund Ruffin, who credited Taylor with awakening the spirit of improvement in Virginia.¹⁵

One of the most significant agricultural improvements was a shift from one crop to diversified or general farming. This process had begun in Virginia after the Revolutionary War. It was caused by changes in land-holding, growth of internal trade and population, and the emigration of Northern and European farmers to Virginia.¹⁶

One example is James Duval of Caroline County who was practicing

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 117.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 189.

¹² Ibid., p. 86.

¹³ Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁴ Southern Planter, XII (1847), 262.

¹⁵ Farmer's Register, V (1837-1838), 305.

¹⁶ Gray, History of Agriculture, II, 613-614.

diversified, self-sufficient farming by 1799. His money crops were tobacco and wheat, although the tobacco occupied a much greater amount of his time. In 1800 he put out more than 21,000 tobacco plants.¹⁷ Earlier the same year he carried three hogsheads of tobacco to Page's Warehouse, Hanover, and noted that "all passed with credit."¹⁸ His wheat crop was also important and in 1801 he mentioned getting 193 bushels.¹⁹ In 1802 he sold thirty-eight bushels of wheat in Fredericksburg and once carried 120 bushels to Port Royal.²⁰ He raised corn and once sold fifty barrels for \$98.²¹ He also raised cotton, buckwheat, rye, oats and hay. In his gardens he raised a variety of crops including potatoes, sweet potatoes, cabbage, lettuce, carrots, turnips, and watermelons. Duval had orchards and one spring set out fifty new apple trees and sixty new peach trees.²² He made cider from his fruit and once after an abundant harvest of fruit and watermelon, he remarked that he was "enjoying the good things of life. . . ."²³ On his farm were a variety of livestock including cattle, hogs, and horses. He once mentioned shearing his sheep.²⁴ It appeared

¹⁷ Duval Diary, May 16, 1800.

¹⁸ Ibid., April 24, 1800.

¹⁹ Ibid., August 27, 1801.

²⁰ Ibid., August 11, 1802; November 19, 1799.

²¹ Ibid., April 6, 1799.

²² Ibid., March 18-19, 1800.

²³ Ibid., August 6, 1799.

²⁴ Ibid., June 10, 1799.

that Duval attempted to be as self-sufficient as possible, purchasing only whiskey, fish, coffee and sugar. This type of farming must have been profitable since Duval increased the size of his landholding from 290 acres in 1800 to 728 acres in 1820.²⁵

Another progressive farmer, who kept accurate accounts of his farm activities, was John Slaughter of Culpeper County. Slaughter was wealthy, influential and a friend of James Madison. He lived a life typical of the well-to-do Virginia planter of the period. He bought numerous books, vacationed at Warm Springs, sent his sons to college and took business trips to Philadelphia and New York. He was appointed by the General Assembly to be a member of the Commission of Public Works. Slaughter, however, devoted most of his time to managing his extensive and wide-spread landholdings and up to sixty-five slaves.²⁶ In 1825 he estimated his total wealth at \$82,000. He owned 2200 acres in Culpeper plus 2500 more acres in western Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky. His main plantation was "Springfield," 1440 acres, in Culpeper.²⁷

At the turn of the nineteenth century Slaughter was raising tobacco, but by 1817 he had completely abandoned it in favor of wheat. Wheat was his money crop. In 1819 he harvested more than 2225 bushels but by 1826 production dropped to 1500 bushels; this decline could be attributed more to his nearly seventy years of age than to soil exhaustion.²⁸ Slaughter

²⁵ Land Books, Caroline County, 1800-1820.

²⁶ Slaughter Diary, December 28, 1824.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., December 9, 1819; July 6, 1826.

sometimes carried his wheat by wagon to Fredericksburg, and in 1819 he sold a wagon load of wheat for \$1.04 per bushel.²⁹ At other times he would sell it to millers in the Culpeper area. In 1823 he sold 859 bushels of wheat to a miller, Simon Wyland, 149 bushels to Racoon Ford Mills, ninety-eight went to Germana Mill, and 332 to Silas Wood of Fredericksburg.³⁰ Corn was also an important crop which he would sell occasionally. In 1822 Slaughter sold 100 barrels of corn for \$2.00 per barrel to a Lawrence Taliaferro.³¹ However, in 1820 a drought had ruined his corn crop and he was forced to buy 150 barrels of corn to feed his livestock.³² He also kept hay for his animals and in 1818 had eleven large stacks of hay and fourteen stacks of fodder; the next year he had nine stacks of hay and twelve of fodder.³³ He also grew rye but commented that wheat generally yielded more per acre on his land.³⁴ In addition Slaughter planted oats, hemp, flax, potatoes, turnips, and had orchards of peach and apple trees. Slaughter also had a variety of livestock which at one time included thirty-one horses and mules, ten work oxen, sixty-three cattle, 130 sheep and a large number of hogs.³⁵

²⁹ Ibid., August 31, 1819.

³⁰ Ibid., December 28, 1823.

³¹ Ibid., February 5, 1822.

³² Ibid., January 31, 1820.

³³ Ibid., February 4, 1818; January 20, 1819.

³⁴ Ibid., August 12, 1829.

³⁵ Ibid.

From the sources available it would appear that diversified farming had become widespread in the counties under consideration by 1840. The United States Census of 1840 listed numerous types of crops, livestock, and products on farms in the area. (See Table V) Considerable amounts of corn, wheat, tobacco, cotton, hemp and flax were raised. But there were other grains grown including over 500,000 bushels of oats and around 41,500 bushels of rye. On the farms there were 48,156 sheep and nearly 42,000 head of cattle; poultry was valued at \$37,641. The area farmers were also seeking other ways to supplement their incomes because orchard products were valued at \$25,786 and home manufactures were worth almost \$125,000.³⁶ The farmers in the Fredericksburg area had been forced to abandon one crop agriculture by the beginning of the fourth decade of the nineteenth century.

A significant factor indicating increased interest in agriculture was the establishment of numerous agricultural societies in the state during the early 1820's. Although most of these organizations ceased to exist after a few years, several remained active through the 1830's. Many people criticized the early agricultural societies for performing impractical experiments and being little more than social gatherings.³⁷ However, the early agricultural societies did focus attention and increase interest in farm problems and they were examples for similar organizations founded later in the century.

³⁶ United States Census, Agriculture and Industry, 1840.

³⁷ Farmer's Register, I (1833-1834), 149.

TABLE V

UNITED STATES CENSUS, AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY, 1840

	Spotsylvania	Stafford	Culpeper
<u>Livestock</u>			
1. Horses & mules	1. 2,485	1. 1,749	1. 3,430
2. Neat cattle	2. 7,971	2. 5,357	2. 10,588
3. Sheep	3. 7,670	3. 5,195	3. 15,234
4. Swine	4. 12,455	4. 9,086	4. 19,980
5. Poultry (value)	5. \$7,799	5. \$4,209	5. \$7,285
<u>Cereal Grain</u>			
6. No. of bu. of wheat	6. 58,450	6. 30,516	6. 122,376
7. No. of bu. of barley	7. 0	7. 0	7. 0
8. No. of bu. of oats	8. 101,774	8. 68,166	8. 128,136
9. No. of bu. of rye	9. 1,995	9. 4,281	9. 13,739
10. No. of bu. of buckwheat	10. 49	10. 256	10. 1,709
11. No. of bu. of Indian corn	11. 302,889	11. 212,183	11. 389,880
<u>Various Crops</u>			
12. Pounds of wool	12. 14,001	12. 9,006	12. 27,691
13. Pounds of Hops	13. 25	13. 105	13. 7
14. Pounds of wax	14. 465	14. 149	14. 468
15. Bushels of potatoes	15. 9,787	15. 11,548	15. 20,964
16. Tons of hay	16. 1,606	16. 2,083	16. 5,524
17. Tons of hemp, flax	17. 1	17. 2	17. 20,855 <u>lbs.</u> 10 <u>tons</u>
18. Pounds of tobacco	18. 353,147	18. 34,031	18. 28,591
19. Pounds of rice	19. 0	19. 0	19. 0
<u>Cotton, Sugar, Silk</u>			
20. Pounds of cotton gathered	20. 17,825	20. 3,988	20. 957
21. Pounds of silk cocoons	21. 0	21. 184	21. 198½
22. Pounds of sugar made	22. 0	22. 0	22. 0
23. Cords of wood sold	23. 3,776	23. 4,514	23. 455
24. Value of dairy products	24. \$6,757	24. \$12,229	24. \$27,830
25. Value of orchard pro- ducts	25. \$3,063	25. \$3,583	25. \$2,260
26. Gallons of wine made	26. 75	26. 0	26. 122
27. Value of homemade or family goods	27. \$22,508	27. \$8,720	27. \$30,911

TABLE V (Cont.)

	Orange	Caroline
<u>Livestock</u>		
1. Horses & mules	1. 2,410	1. 3,051
2. Neat cattle	2. 7,399	2. 10,359
3. Sheep	3. 10,708	3. 9,349
4. Swine	4. 15,026	4. 19,372
5. Poultry (value)	5. \$7,662	5. \$10,686
<u>Cereal Grain</u>		
6. No. of bu. of wheat	6. 97,747	6. 89,938
7. No. of bu. of barley	7. 0	7. 0
8. No. of bu. of oats	8. 91,676	8. 119,986
9. No. of bu. of rye	9. 8,412	9. 13,117
10. No. of bu. of buckwheat	10. 114	10. 60
11. No. of bu. of Indian corn	11. 349,784	11. 575,685
<u>Various Crops</u>		
12. Pounds of wool	12. 20,076	12. 15,514
13. Pounds of Hops	13. 940	13. 0
14. Pounds of wax	14. 1,100	14. 46
15. Bushels of potatoes	15. 20,897	15. 18,766
16. Tons of hay	16. 2,684	16. 297½
17. Tons of hemp, flax	17. 18	17. 0
18. Pounds of tobacco	18. 416,385	18. 773,745
19. Pounds of rice	19. 0	19. 0
<u>Cotton, Sugar, Silk</u>		
20. Pounds of cotton gathered	20. 201	20. 20,005'
21. Pounds of silk cocoons	21. 166	21. 20
22. Pounds of sugar made	22. 0	22. 0
23. Cords of wood sold	23. 1,871	23. 1,050
24. Value of dairy products	24. \$36,278	24. \$5,096
25. Value of orchard products	25. \$8,989	25. \$7,973
26. Gallons of wine made	26. 367	26. 622
27. Value of homemade or family goods	27. \$33,852	27. \$28,419½

The first society in the state was the Virginia Society for the Promotion of Agriculture founded in 1811.³⁸ The society had 220 members and John Taylor of Caroline was the first president.³⁹ Other members were James Garnett, John Marshall, and John Adams. The society was re-organized in 1816 and was supposed to act as a ". . . clearing house for all local societies."⁴⁰ They were also active in opposition to the tariff. During the late 1820's the society declined in membership and in the 1830's was reorganized under the name Virginia Central Society.⁴¹

The Agricultural Society of Albemarle, founded in Charlottesville in 1817, was the most influential organization in the state since it boasted such illustrious members as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe.⁴² James Madison was the first president of the society.⁴³

An important agricultural society in the area under consideration was the Virginia Agricultural Society of Fredericksburg founded October 28, 1818, at the Farmer's Hotel in Fredericksburg.⁴⁴ James Garnett of Essex County was elected president, an office which he held for the next twenty years.⁴⁵ Garnett was one of the leading agricultural

³⁸Charles W. Turner, "Virginia Agricultural Reform," Agricultural History, XXVI (1952), 83.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²American Farmer, I (1819-1820), 274.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Virginia-Herald, November 7, 1818.

⁴⁵Turner, "Virginia Agricultural Reform," p. 81.

reformers in the state and was later elected president of the Agricultural Society of the United States.⁴⁶ In his first speech as president, Garnett criticized the farmers of the area for neglecting to improve their agricultural practices.⁴⁷ Part of the blame could be placed upon the farmers' attachment to old customs and a lack of communication among farmers, but he seemed to feel that ". . . a new era seems at last to have commenced." Although it would take much effort to equal the improvements of Europe and other sections of the United States, Garnett felt it could be accomplished by ". . . skill, perseverance and industry."⁴⁸

Before the semi-annual meeting held in May the society had been incorporated by the General Assembly and appeared to have public support.⁴⁹ However, by November, 1819, much of the original enthusiasm had already waned, and caused Garnett to complain ". . . I fear that the zeal and spirit which gave it birth must already have sustained considerable abatement."⁵⁰

By 1822 the society had again become more active, and at the spring meeting it was decided that an agricultural fair should be held in November.⁵¹ It was hoped that this would increase interest among the

⁴⁶ Farmer's Register, X (1842-1843), 19.

⁴⁷ Virginia-Herald, November 7, 1818.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., May 29, 1819.

⁵⁰ Ibid., December 4, 1819.

⁵¹ Ibid., June 1, 1822.

farmers of the area. Also the fair would bring more business to Fredericksburg, increase communication among those interested in agriculture, and lead to less expensive and improved agricultural machinery.⁵²

According to the Virginia-Herald the fair

will probably be very interesting as it is understood there will be an exhibition of fine horses--a number of fat cattle, sheep and hogs--together with farming implements and some articles of domestic manufacture.⁵³

The fair was held in Fredericksburg on November 13 and 14, 1822. The first day a crowd estimated at 1000 attended an exhibition of livestock.⁵⁴ The second day there was a display of agricultural implements, a trial of the various ploughs, and the awarding of the prizes. Everyone seemed to agree since it was the first attempt everything had gone fairly well. Although only half of the prizes had been awarded, the fair "far exceeded expectation."⁵⁵ The society claimed it would have been more successful if their "incredulous brethren" would have believed that a fair could be gotten up in the state.⁵⁶

The fair aroused the interest of the people in the community. At the annual meeting, held prior to the second fair in November, 1823, seventy-four new members joined the society. It was reported that "scarcely a farmer of any standing" was not a member.⁵⁷ After several

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., November 9, 1822.

⁵⁴ Ibid., November 23, 1822.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., November 26, 1823.

years of apathy it now appeared that the society was becoming permanently established.

The Second Virginia Agricultural Show was the most successful one sponsored by the Agricultural Society of Fredericksburg. According to the Virginia-Herald the

. . . occasion drew together a large concourse of spectators and produced the most enlivened hum of business through our streets that we have witnessed for some time.⁵⁸

The number of livestock entered far surpassed the first effort, with various prizes given for horses, cattle, sheep, and hogs.⁵⁹ On the second day, in addition to the display of agricultural implements, there was an exhibit of domestic manufactures in the town hall. Among the things shown were various types of cloth, clothing, rugs, butter, and cheese.⁶⁰ The crowd was so large at the town hall that many people did not get in to see the display. Garnett jubilantly reported that the ". . . spirit of improvement has at last been effectively awakened."⁶¹

The third annual fair was held in November, 1824, but the society did not report it and no mention was made of it in the local paper.

During the next year the society went into a decline. It was reported at the November meeting that measures were being taken to collect back dues and a resolution was passed which prohibited members from withdrawing from the society until all financial obligations had been

⁵⁸ Ibid., November 15, 1823.

⁵⁹ Ibid., November 26, 1823.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

satisfied.⁶²

The fair held in November, 1825, was the least successful of any sponsored by the society. Due to a lack of funds the list of premiums was printed too late to arouse any real competition or interest. Also, there were horse-races in the area and the Agricultural Society of Albemarle was sponsoring an agricultural fair the same week.⁶³

The situation became worse and at the semi-annual meeting held in May, 1826, the members were supposed to discuss the ". . . usefulness, perhaps the very existence of the society."⁶⁴ This meeting was never held, nor was the fair in 1826. The society appeared doomed, but in November, 1827, a meeting was held by the society attempting to ". . . rescue our society from its present languishing . . . disreputable condition."⁶⁵

Through the efforts of its leaders the society was able to survive and hold the Fifth Show and Fair of the Fredericksburg Agricultural Society in November, 1828.⁶⁶ Although the fair did not equal ones of the past, the members were still pleased to renew the exhibitions.⁶⁷

The society, claiming to be the oldest in the state, continued to hold fairs and meetings until at least 1837, although they were never

⁶² Ibid., November 13, 1824.

⁶³ American Farmer, VI (1824-1825), 283.

⁶⁴ Virginia-Herald, May 20, 1826.

⁶⁵ Ibid., November 14, 1827.

⁶⁶ Ibid., November 5, 1828.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

able to arouse the enthusiasm of the early 1820's.

The society made numerous suggestions and actions to improve and promote agriculture. Through the annual fair and speeches concerning agricultural practices, the society encouraged the local farmer to improve his farming methods. In 1822 the society approved a resolution of James Madison, president of the Agricultural Society of Albemarle, calling for the establishment of a professorship of agriculture at the University of Virginia.⁶⁸ The Fredericksburg Society also wanted to establish a board of agriculture, an agricultural school, a state agricultural society, and an agricultural survey of the state.⁶⁹ Virtually of these proposals were adopted later in the century. In 1835 the society called for a state agricultural convention which met on January 11, 1836.⁷⁰

The society did go through difficult and inactive times and if it had not been for the efforts of the officers, it probably would have collapsed. Incidentally, the officers remained virtually unchanged for twenty years, indicating no great interest among local farmers. Despite its weaknesses, it remained an active force in promoting agricultural

⁶⁸Ibid., December 4, 1819.

⁶⁹Ibid., September 11, 1824.

⁷⁰The Convention met on January 11, 1836. Most of the delegates were from the Fredericksburg and Albemarle societies. James Barbour was chosen president and Edmund Ruffin, secretary. A memorial was drawn up and sent to the state legislature calling for: (1) a professor of agriculture at the University of Virginia with a salary of \$1500 annually; (2) an experimental farm for the use of the professor and his students; (3) establishment of a state agricultural society or board of agriculture; (4) appoint people to make an agricultural survey of the best cultivated parts of the Atlantic states. Farmer's Register, III (1835-1836), 620-625.

reform in the state. According to Garnett in 1833, Virginia farmers were "... . awakening to a sense of their own deficiencies, and of the best means to improve them."⁷¹

With the creation of agricultural societies there was a need for increased communication among farmers of the state. This lack of communication and isolation was a factor in making agricultural improvements more difficult. The first agricultural paper in the United States was the Agricultural Museum, which was published in Georgetown from 1810 to 1812.⁷² A more important journal was the American Farmer, which was printed under that name in Baltimore from 1819 to 1834. The purpose of the paper was to "... collect information from every source, on every branch of husbandry, thus to enable the reader to study the various systems which experience has proved to be best."⁷³ Although published in Maryland there were a number of articles concerning Virginia agriculture. In 1822 the editor, John S. Skinner, was thanked by the members of the Fredericksburg Agricultural Society for the attention and interest he had given to their society.⁷⁴

The most influential farm journal published in Virginia during this period was Edmund Ruffin's Farmer's Register, which was published from 1833 to 1842. The purpose of the paper was to improve communications among the farmers of the state. The Farmer's Register contained

⁷¹Virginia-Herald, November 23, 1833.

⁷²Gray, History of Agriculture, II, 788.

⁷³American Farmer, I (1819-1820), 6.

⁷⁴Virginia-Herald, November 23, 1823.

articles by Ruffin, letters from farmers, and articles from other magazines and journals which would have been of interest to the Virginia agriculturist.

It is not possible to determine how widely these journals were read, but it would have taken a very dedicated agriculturist to have read one of Edmund Ruffin's lengthy articles on some obscure aspect of agriculture.

Another indication of interest in agricultural improvement was the increased use of manures. Before the nineteenth century what manures were saved were devoted to tobacco beds. However, as interest in improved farming became more widespread every progressive farmer realized that the use of fertilizers was necessary. Farmers experimented with such things as sea-weed, swamp mud, ashes, blood and other materials to restore their lands.⁷⁵

John Taylor of Caroline thought that fertilizing the land was one of the primary objectives of agriculture, and he was one of the state's earliest proponents in favor of increased use of manures.⁷⁶ Taylor wrote that the best system of fertilizing was the one which provided the most abundant supply of manure; this he believed to be the atmosphere, particularly rain.⁷⁷ Taylor claimed that vegetables (plants) were necessary to absorb these "atmospherical manures."⁷⁸ Other types of

⁷⁵American Farmer, I (1819-1820), 85; Southern Planter, III (1843), 41.

⁷⁶Taylor, Arator, p. 80.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 79.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 90.

fertilizers such as gypsum, straw, and barn-yard manures were important but only because they increased the growth of vegetables.⁷⁹ Inclosing, keeping livestock off land not in use, was also a vital part of his system.⁸⁰ Taylor was skeptical of all types of minerals used as manures, and he doubted whether something found below the ground could enrich its surface.⁸¹ Taylor thought that the lands of Virginia had nearly been ruined but ". . . by the help of inclosing, gypsum, and vegetables" it could be improved.⁸²

However, the most credit goes to Edmund Ruffin whose "Essay on Calcerous Manures" had an impact throughout the state. Ruffin had inherited a worn-out plantation in Prince Georges County and had set out to improve his farm. After several years of study Ruffin came to the conclusion that soil had to have calcerous soil in order to neutralize vegetable acids. Unless these vegetable acids were neutralized it was useless to add other types of manures. Ruffin advocated the use of marl, decomposed oyster shell, which he claimed would neutralize vegetable acids in the soil.⁸³ Ruffin's ideas were used, or at least discussed, by numerous farmers throughout Virginia.

It is difficult to determine how widespread the use of manures was but there appears to have been at least some interest in the Fredericksburg

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 95, 122.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 82.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 81.

⁸² Ibid., p. 31.

⁸³ American Farmer, III (1821-1822), 313.

area. One John Dickinson wrote to James Garnett that improvements were being made in Eastern Virginia because of the use of manures.⁸⁴ John Slaughter of Woodville in Culpeper, in a letter to the Farmer's Register stated that ". . . considerable improvements have been made in this country" because of the use of clover and plaster of paris.⁸⁵ James Duval in October, 1801, had his slaves ". . . carting manure where I intend to sow early wheat."⁸⁶ The following year Duval borrowed fourteen and a half bushels of oyster shells from another farmer.⁸⁷ These shells were probably used as manure. Philip Slaughter of Culpeper spread animal manure on his wheat fields in preparation for planting.⁸⁸ Also, in 1820 he put plaster of paris on his wheat fields and in 1827 used plaster in his orchard which already had a fine crop of clover.⁸⁹

There were also some negative voices at the same time. One farmer on the Rappahannock reported that ". . . by the use of clover and plaster, and a slight nibbling at a marl bank, I have put a new face upon the land." But he went on to say that had he been required to live only on the earnings of his farm, he would have been ". . . reduced to the most rigid parsimony."⁹⁰ Another farmer in the area claimed to have been

⁸⁴ Ibid., II (1820-1821), 14.

⁸⁵ Farmer's Register, I (1833-1834), 265.

⁸⁶ Duval Diary, October 14, 1801.

⁸⁷ Ibid., November 9, 1801.

⁸⁸ Slaughter Diary, February 11, 1822.

⁸⁹ Ibid., April 14, 1820; April 10, 1827.

⁹⁰ Farmer's Register, III (1835-1836), 475.

using marl on his land, but he did not know of another farmer in twenty miles who was doing the same.⁹¹ A Caroline farmer reported, in a letter to the Farmer's Register, that he had followed all the progressive ideas concerning farming, including the use of manures, but that his farm still would not support him.⁹² Ruffin replied that some land was so poor that nothing would help it.⁹³ A particular problem, as stated by an Orange County citizen, was the expense of transporting manures for long distances was too costly for the ordinary farmer.⁹⁴ However, it would appear that many farmers in the Fredericksburg area were becoming aware of, and were using, various types of fertilizers.⁹⁵

Another improvement in the management of land was increased interest in crop rotation. At the turn of the century most Virginia farmers practiced no rotation at all. After several crops of tobacco, the land was used for wheat or corn until there was no profit; then it was abandoned.

As decreasing yields and shortages of fresh land forced farmers to improve their methods, many began using the three-shift system. This

⁹¹Ibid., I (1833-1834), 555.

⁹²Ibid., II (1834-1835), 612-614.

⁹³Ibid., p. 614.

⁹⁴Southern Planter, XIII (1852), 65.

⁹⁵From September, 1849, to September, 1850, the following fertilizers were transported on the Rappahannock Canal: 1700 tons of plaster, 1015 bushels of clover seed, 174,539 pounds of guano (Guano was bird dung from South America which was being experimented with in the 1840's). Callahan, "The Rappahannock Canal," p. 85.

system was usually one year of wheat, one year of corn, and the third for grazing. This rotation was hard on the land since it was constantly in use and received little manure. According to John Taylor this rotation ". . . promises to kill our land; in practice it fulfills its promise."⁹⁶

Some farmers began looking for more suitable rotations. The one most commonly adopted was the four-shift or four-field system. Taylor used this system which consisted of corn, wheat, and two years of rest with no grazing.⁹⁷ Other farmers generally used a more harsh system of two years of wheat, one year of corn or oats, and one year of clover.⁹⁸ This system, used in conjunction with manures such as lime or plaster of paris, usually increased yields.⁹⁹ However, for poorer lands the three crops in four years did not prove successful. Ruffin felt the four-shift system was harsh and could be used only on land with "depth and constitution."¹⁰⁰ One Tidewater farmer had switched back to the three-shift system since he felt it was more suitable for corn, which was his main crop.¹⁰¹ Other farmers tried five, six, and even seven-shift rotations.¹⁰² But as reported to the Agricultural Society of Albemarle there was no

⁹⁶Taylor, Arator, pp. 117-118.

⁹⁷Gray, History of Agriculture, II, 809.

⁹⁸Farmer's Register, I (1833-1834), 323; X (1842-1843), 275; IV (1836-1837), 287.

⁹⁹Ibid., X (1842-1843), 263.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., V *1837-1838), 185.

¹⁰¹Ibid., I (1833-1834), 569.

¹⁰²American Farmer, IX (1828-1829), 49.

rotation suitable for all types of soil, so the farmer had to experiment to find the best rotation.¹⁰³

Another result of increased interest in agriculture was the appearance of more numerous and improved agricultural implements. The Fredericksburg Agricultural Society was interested in this and made numerous efforts to promote better farm machinery and equipment. In 1819 James Garnett suggested that a tour be made through the "best cultivated parts" of Northern states to collect drawings of farm implements. Drawings and models were to be collected "preparatory to the establishment of a manufactory thereof."¹⁰⁴ In 1824 it was reported that a farm equipment factory was to be established in the Fredericksburg area, but it is not known whether it was ever started.¹⁰⁵ The society also gave premiums at its fairs for outstanding agricultural implements.

The most significant improvements were made in ploughs and methods of ploughing. According to Ruffin at the beginning of the eighteenth century only one-horse ploughs were used which ploughed about three inches deep, but by 1840 there were two, three, and even four-horse ploughs of good construction available.¹⁰⁶ Stephen McCormick of Fauquier County made a plough which won several awards at the Fredericksburg Agricultural Fairs. In 1825 he won a premium for a self-sharpening model.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³Ibid., II (1820-1821), 92.

¹⁰⁴Virginia-Herald, December 4, 1819.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., September 11, 1824.

¹⁰⁶Farmer's Register, X (1842-1843), 264.

¹⁰⁷Virginia-Herald, November 19, 1825.

Since there was little contour ploughing in the state before the nineteenth century, many areas had become marred by gullies. Philip Slaughter in 1825 mentioned filling in a "great wash" with bushes, stone, and gravel.¹⁰⁸ Credit for improving this condition goes to Thomas Mann Randolph, Jefferson's son-in-law, who developed a horizontal plough which helped prevent erosion.¹⁰⁹

Another improvement was the threshing machine which was in use by the last decade of the eighteenth century. The General Assembly voted a premium to a John Hodby for the invention of such a machine, which was later improved by William Thornton of Culpeper who adapted it to water power.¹¹⁰ In the early years of the nineteenth century, Ruffin reported that "thrashing machines were not on half a dozen farms on the James River and perhaps not thrice as many in all eastern Virginia."¹¹¹ A visitor to James Madison's Orange County Plantation in 1816 wrote of watching two Negroes operating a threshing machine which could do 200 bushels a day.¹¹² James Barbour of Orange County reported in 1826 that he had been using a threshing machine for over twenty years and that anyone who grew over fifty bushels a year needed one. He had five machines on his estate which were operated by mules. Because of them he

¹⁰⁸ Slaughter Diary, November 3, 1825.

¹⁰⁹ Avery Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Maryland and Virginia, 1606-1860 (Urbana, 1826), pp. 90-91.

¹¹⁰ Gray, A History of Agriculture, II, 799.

¹¹¹ Farmer's Register, X (1842-1843), 263.

¹¹² "A Frenchman Visits Norfolk, Fredericksburg, and Orange County, 1816," p. 208.

was able to grow one third more wheat.¹¹³ One advantage reported was that it enabled a farmer to get his grain to market more rapidly, thus obtaining a higher price.

The most common method of cutting grain was with sickle or scythe. In 1820 Philip Slaughter mentioned that he had begun harvesting his wheat with three scythes, and in 1822 he wrote that during the harvest he was using eight cradles.¹¹⁴ Two reapers were patented during the 1830's, one by Obed Hussey and the other by Cyrus McCormick. McCormick's sold for \$100 and Hussey's for \$160.¹¹⁵ One farmer claimed he could cut fifteen to twenty acres a day with McCormick's, while another farmer with the same machine was able to cut twelve acres in eight and a half hours.¹¹⁶ There were numerous letters and advertisements proclaiming the merits of each machine, but it seemed to have been a matter of opinion. However, the reaper was not used widely in Virginia before the 1840's.

By 1821 there were corn-shellors, straw cutters, hemp and flax breakers, and corn and cob grinders also available to the Virginia farmer.¹¹⁷ However, as late as 1841 the editor of the Southern Planter complained that the Virginia farmers would have to overcome their objections to machinery.¹¹⁸ Although improvements were made, one historian has

¹¹³American Farmer, VII (1825-1826), 60.

¹¹⁴Slaughter Diary, July 28, 1820; June 24, 1822.

¹¹⁵Southern Planter, III (1843), 784.

¹¹⁶Farmer's Register, X (1842-1843), 504; Southern Planter, I (1841), 217.

¹¹⁷Gray, History of Agriculture, II, 762.

¹¹⁸Southern Planter, I (1841), 91.

pointed out that the dependence upon slave labor made it impractical to use expensive equipment.¹¹⁹

It is very difficult to determine how widespread improvements were because most farmers were more interested in surviving than writing about their farm activities. Generally the reform movement was led by the well-to-do and educated, and it is not known whether the majority of the farmers could afford or were even interested in change. To their dismay many found that the ideas and practices of the reformers did not work on their farms. With varying soils and conditions throughout the state it was necessary for the farmer to experiment to see what was most suitable for his land. Experiments were both expensive and time consuming and many found it easier and more practical to abandon their old land.

¹¹⁹Gates, Farmer's Age, p. 294.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

During the forty year period a number of changes took place in the agriculture of Caroline, Culpeper, Spotsylvania, Orange, and Stafford counties. Among the most significant were the abandonment of tobacco as the major money-crop and a shift toward diversified farming. Equally important was the trend to smaller landholdings and an increase in the number of individuals who owned no slaves. Nevertheless, in 1840 nearly 20% of the land owners held over 500 acres of land and throughout the period there was an increase in ownership of more than fifty slaves. But the majority of the farmers in the Fredericksburg area by 1840 owned less than 200 acres and had no slaves.

Because of low prices, soil exhaustion, and competition from newly opened lands, the farmer was forced to improve his agriculture or emigrate. During the period numerous individuals, organizations, and agricultural journals pointed out many areas for improvement in the state's agricultural practices. Advances were made in the use of all types of manures, better crop rotations, and improved agricultural implements.

It would be wrong to assume that the Fredericksburg area had undergone radical change in agricultural practices, but the foundations had been laid for more significant reforms which were to take place later in the century.

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VITA

Harold J. Muddiman, Jr., was born in Washington, D. C., on December 14, 1942. He attended Fairfax County, Virginia, public schools and graduated from Herndon High School in 1961. The writer received his Bachelor's degree from the University of Richmond in 1965. Since September, 1966, he has been employed by the Stafford County public schools.