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FARM EMPLOYMENT IN VIRGINIA

1954

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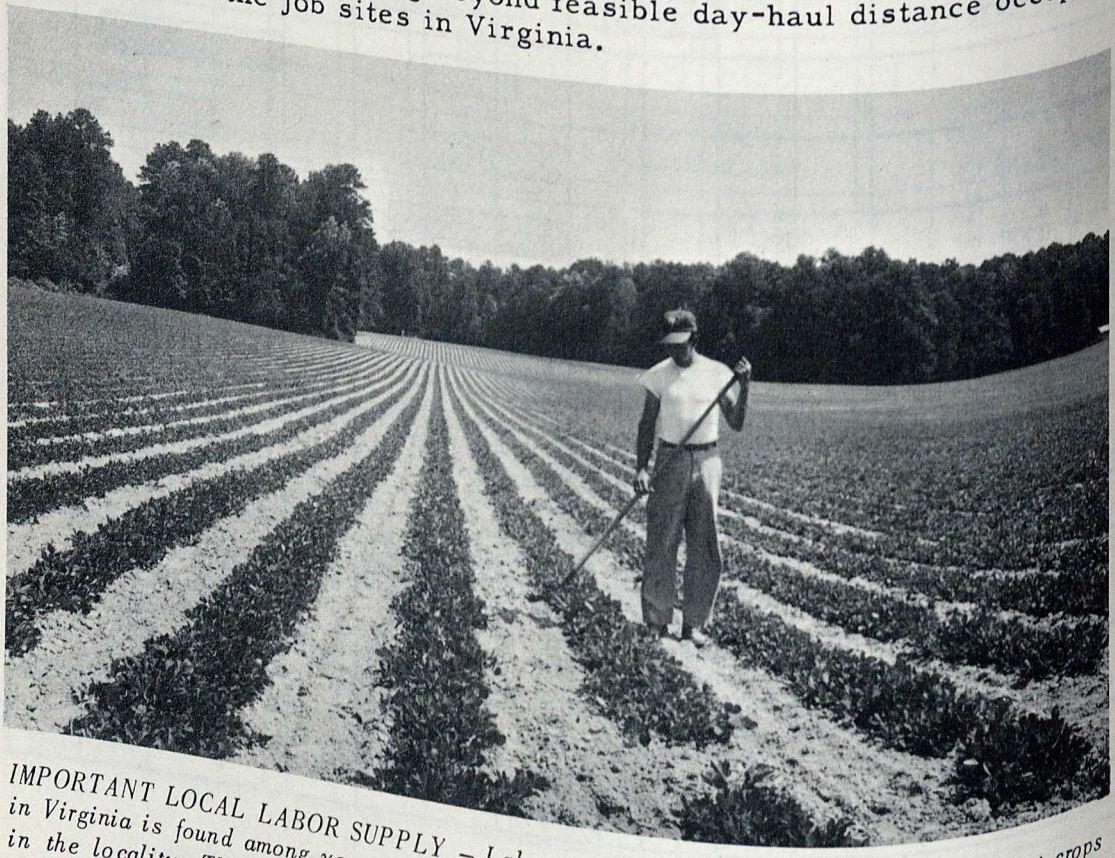
Unemployment Compensation Commission
VIRGINIA STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Recruitment and Labor Supply

LOCAL RECRUITMENT

Pre-season information indicated a probable need for 9,000 to 11,000 workers in addition to normal local supplies. It was decided to expand day-haul operations within the state, and it appeared that the southeastern section was the most promising for this purpose. Two farm placement supervisors were assigned to Princess Anne and Norfolk counties, working as far west as Franklin and Smithfield. They contacted all crew leaders used in the previous year, and made a successful effort to locate additional workers and leaders. They arranged meetings between growers and leaders, at which time the period of employment and rate of pay was agreed to. After this work was completed, it was evident that still more workers would be needed to handle the strawberry and other early spring crops. It was therefore arranged, through channels, for these representatives to go into designated sections of North Carolina for the purpose of securing additional help. Seven local offices of the North Carolina Employment Security Division were visited. About 2,500 workers were obtained as a result of these recruitment efforts. Those living beyond feasible day-haul distance occupied quarters near the job sites in Virginia.



IMPORTANT LOCAL LABOR SUPPLY – Labor required in planting and cultivating most crops in Virginia is found among year-around farm workers or in seasonally-hired personnel recruited in the locality. The cultivation of peanuts in Southside Virginia, as shown above, expands needs seasonally, but local sources meet the demand. In fruit packing the situation holds. Local residents – homemakers and others not normally holding jobs – are recruited each year. Typical is the young woman, shown packing fancy quality apples (opposite page) in a Northern Shenandoah Valley plant.

MIGRATORY AND OFFSHORE LABOR

The customary recruitment visit was made to Florida. All Atlantic Seaboard states, from New York and New Jersey to Florida, participated in the joint recruitment effort for the first time. Seventeen Florida towns and two labor camps were visited by all the recruiters, including those from Virginia, and crew leaders representing about 14,000 workers were interviewed. Virginia proved to be the second largest user of Florida labor, entering into agreements with some 6,000 workers, a figure exceeded only by New York. Prior to these meetings, a letter had been sent to all crew leaders with previous satisfactory service in Virginia, advising them of the scheduled meetings and inviting them to be present for interviews. The response was encouraging. However, many crews who had worked in Virginia in former years came to the state later of their own volition.

As before, northern recruitment trips were undertaken in the late summer and fall. The Frederick County Fruit Growers Association again requested screening of Bahamian workers while in Minnesota, and this was done. Two men were sent to Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York. One Employment Service office in each of the first two states mentioned was visited, and a list left of crew leaders who desired employment in the Virginia fall bean harvest, and were acceptable to Virginia employers. The offices then made contact with these leaders, and followed through with necessary arrangements for their southward journey. A list of leaders whom the Virginia representatives desired to see in Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey had been sent to the agencies of these states prior to the time of the visit. The leaders were subsequently interviewed in three different local offices in New Jersey, one in Pennsylvania and ten in New York. While in New York the Virginia team was joined by two representatives from Florida, and a joint recruitment effort was undertaken. About 3,300 people worked in Virginia as a result of these northern recruitment trips. Another thousand could have been secured if suitable housing had been available for vegetable workers.

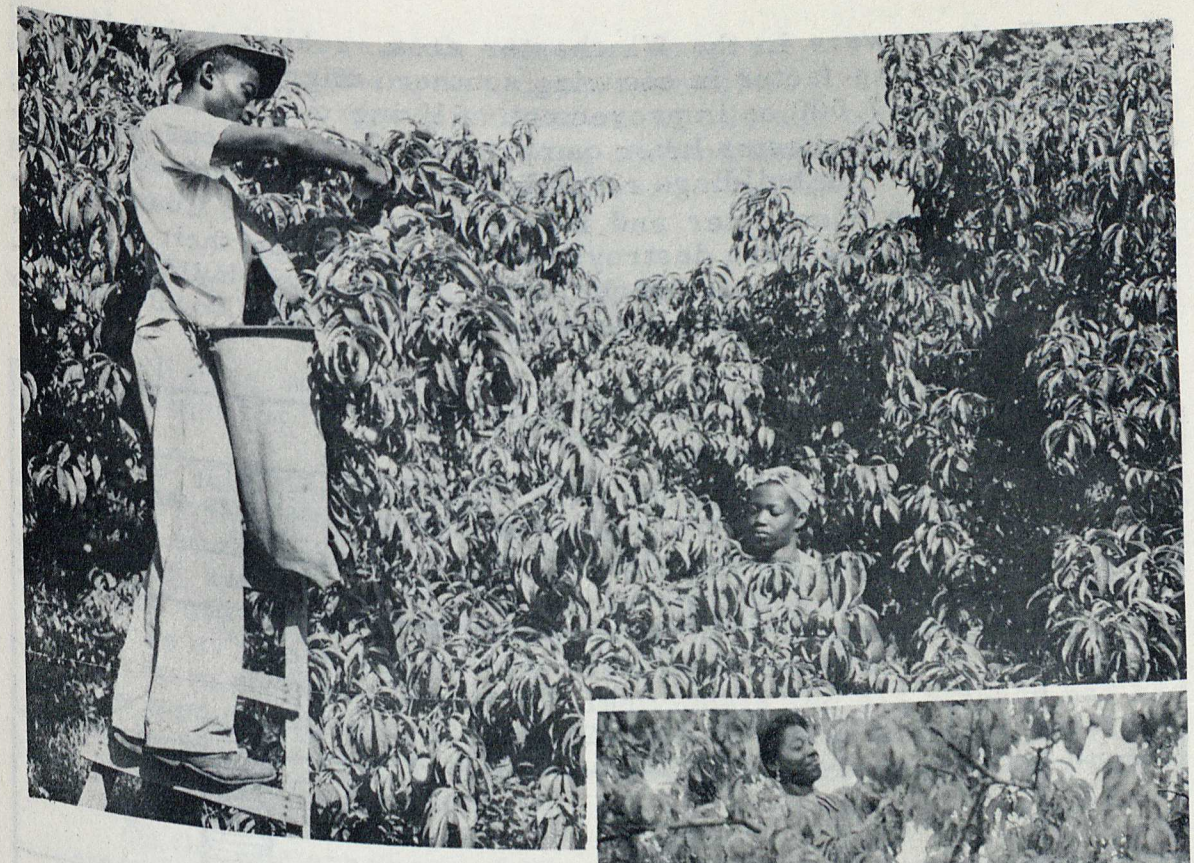
After analyzing all sources of workers, it was found that a shortage of help for the apple harvest would exist in the Winchester area. A clearance opening for 581 pickers was then circulated, but without result. Certification for the use of foreign workers was requested and secured, and 546 Bahamians were transferred from Minnesota. These men had just completed work for growers in that state, and were later to be employed in the Florida citrus crop. All had prior fruit experience, and some had been in Virginia in prior years. The first arrivals, 271 in number, came about September 10, and other groups arrived September 15 and 25. About 30 left late in October, and the remainder transferred to Florida by November 15, except 45 who returned home to Nassau on the 14th. While in Virginia the Bahamians picked 1,563,000 bushels of apples, and were again found to be satisfactory workers.

INFORMATION STATION

As noted previously, the Information Station for migrant workers at Little Creek was operated from April 23 through August 6. The staff of three placement representatives and a typist interviewed and aided approximately 24,000 migrants together with their crewleaders on their northern journey. The migrants, traveling in 1,154 separate groups, were composed of 13,100 men, 7,100 women, and 3,800 children under 14 years. As to destination, some 12,800 crew members indicated Virginia as the first place of employment; 5,600 were going to Maryland; 1,260 to New Jersey; 2,300 to New York; and 2,040 to other northern states. For transportation, the migrants traveled in 1,280 trucks, 76 busses and 1,250 automobiles, averaging nine persons to the vehicle.

CANADIAN BORDER CROSSINGS

Again in 1954, eleven of the Virginia local offices cooperated in recruiting Virginia tobacco curers to assist with the handling of the Ontario, Canada, tobacco crop. A total of 322 Canadian border crossing permits were issued during the 1954 season, as compared with 329 in the previous year. The majority of the workers were furnished by three Virginia offices, Danville, Farmville, and South Boston.

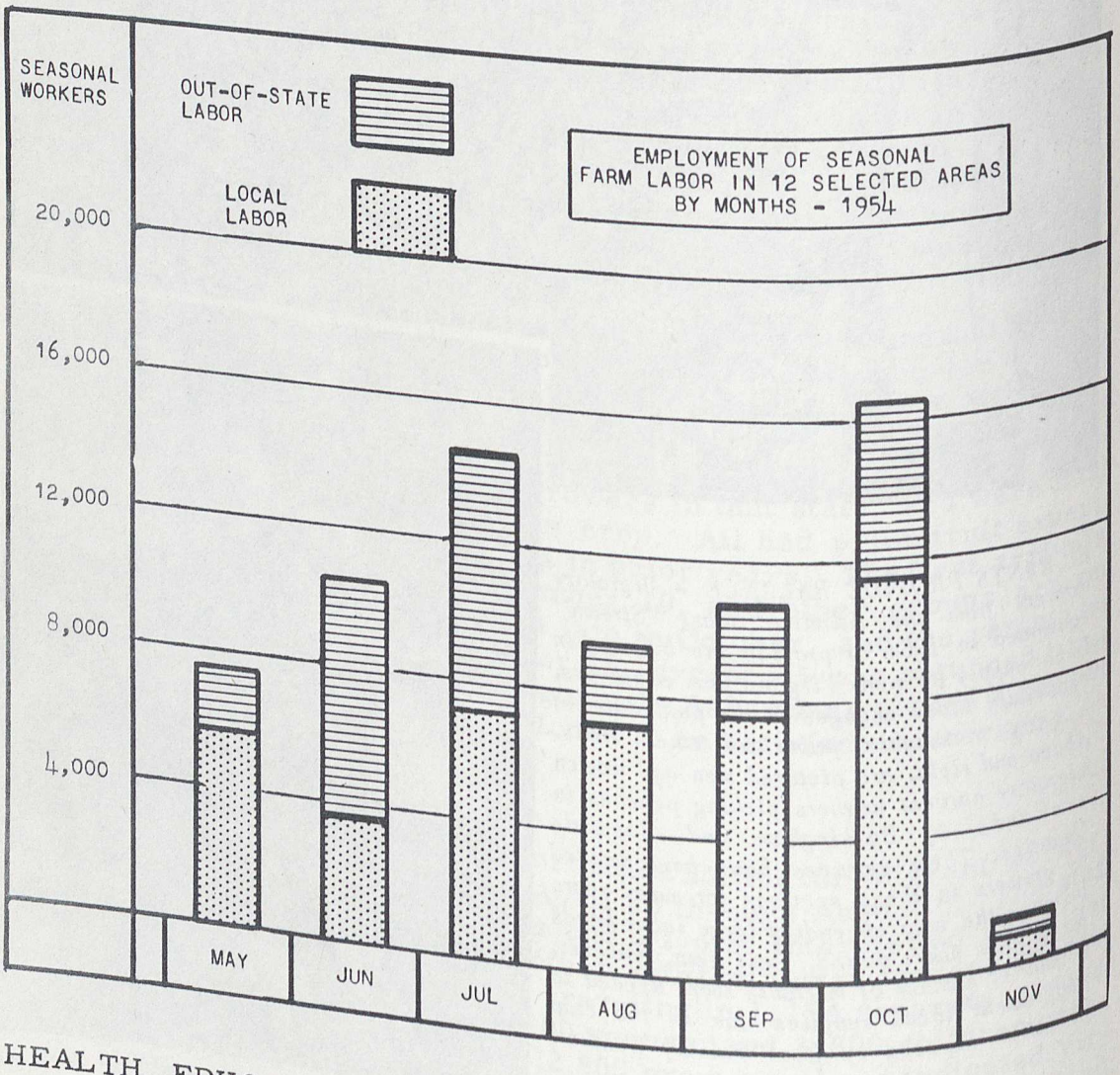


MIGRANTS PROVIDE BALANCE – Migratory workers from the Atlantic Coast "Stream" continued in 1954 to provide the balance in Labor supply for many Virginia farm employers, especially those engaged in the production of highly perishable fruit and truck crops. Above and right, are pictured men and women migratory harvest workers picking peaches in orchards of Buckingham and Albemarle Counties. Their services have been needed by growers in these sections for many years because the crop engenders large labor needs for a very short period. Last year, however, a smaller number of migrants were needed to supplement local supplies due to the crop reduction imposed by frost and dry weather.

RECRUITMENT PROBLEMS

Lack of housing for out-of-area workers on the Eastern Shore has been mentioned as limiting labor supply for the fall bean crop. Much of the housing available in Shore counties is owned by growers who customarily do not plant fall beans. Representatives of the Farm Placement Service were instrumental in getting several such farmers to share their housing facilities with neighbors. However, the quantity made available under such arrangements was insufficient to meet the total need.

Fruit growers in the Winchester area, realizing that housing would be a limiting factor in securing southern migrant labor, decided to spend some $17,000 on improvement of living quarters and bathing facilities at the Winchester labor camp. A modern bathhouse was constructed, and existing buildings reconditioned for permanent use. There were fires in the Winchester and Pungo (Princess Anne County) labor camps. Six buildings were destroyed at Winchester, but their occupants were cared for in other available quarters. At Pungo, 24 buildings burned, and it was necessary to locate other houses in the countryside to shelter the workers.

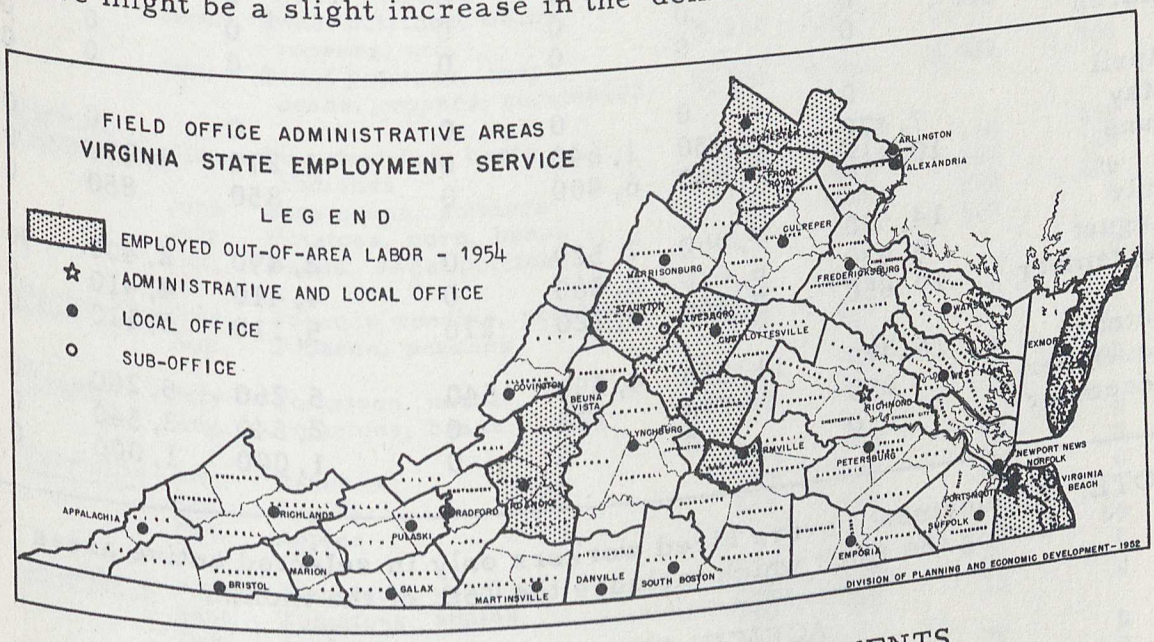


HEALTH, EDUCATION, WELFARE

Facilities for a health clinic were provided in the Winchester camp by the Frederick County Fruit Growers' Association. A full-time nurse was in charge, with a doctor on call. The child care center at the Cheriton camp on the Eastern Shore was again operated, both as a day nursery and an educational facility. The staff included a clergyman, who was in charge, two nurses and a cook. It was supported by the women of the Virginia Council of Churches, the Home Missions Council of the National Council of Churches, and the parents whose children were cared for. The minister, a representative of the Virginia Council of

Forecast - 1955 Season

Best information now indicates that there will be a reduction in the planting of some vegetable crops in 1955, probably snap beans, tomatoes and white potatoes. Farmers throughout the vegetable areas in 1954 sustained a considerable loss by planting the above named crops. This condition was brought about first by the drought, and second, by unsatisfactory prices. The acreage formerly planted to these crops in all probability will be converted to corn, small grain or soy beans. This may result in a lower demand for migrant workers. No reduction of labor is anticipated in fruit growing areas. Past experience suggests there might be a slight increase in the demand for apple pickers.



FRUIT HARVESTING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Migrants and Bahamians - 1954

Section	Bushels Picked		Picked By		Total Bushels
	Apples	Peaches	Migrants (Bushels)	Bahamians (Bushels)	Apples and Peaches
Winchester	2,645,173	88,350	1,081,928	1,563,245	2,733,523
Front Royal	147,550		147,550		147,550
Crozet	35,000	5,000	40,000		40,000
Staunton	172,000		172,000		172,000
Roanoke	577,817	27,000	604,817		604,817
Farmville	----	6,500	6,500		6,500
Total	3,571,540	126,850	2,052,795	1,563,245	3,704,390

*Includes 115 tons of cherries picked by migrants in the Winchester area.

PART II - Statistical Supplement

EMPLOYMENT OF SEASONAL HIRED WORKERS IN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PROCESSING BY MONTH, 1954

MONTH	Agricultural Employment				Food Processing Employment		
		Domestic					
	Total	Local	Non-Local	Foreign	Total	Local	Non Loca
January	0						0
February	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
March	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
April		0	0	0	0		
May	0						0
June	7,470	0	0	0	0	0	0
July	10,440	5,830	1,640	0	1,270	1,270	0
August		3,640	6,800	0	850	850	
September	14,580						90
October	9,430	7,060	7,520	0	2,490	2,400	0
November	10,850	6,870	2,560	0	4,410	4,410	0
December		7,460	3,120	270	5,110	5,110	
	16,470						0
	890	11,380	4,550	540	5,260	5,260	0
	0	770	120	0	2,540	2,540	0
		0	0	0	1,000	1,000	

NOTE: Employment covers hired workers only in selected active areas during the week which includes the 15th of the month.

AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES STATE SUMMARY BY MONTHS 1954

Month	Referrals	Placements			Agricultural Employer Visits
	Total	Total	Clearance	Individual Basis	
January	117,369	121,232*	12,016	2,687	4,524
February	66	35	0	35	51
March	91	53	13	40	59
April	85	47	0	47	230
May	1,020	991	0	84	218
June	18,835	18,620	2,738	81	501
July	22,820	22,731	2,978	175	617
August	21,010	20,571	1,142	172	799
September	9,829	9,529	121	177	539
October	17,705	18,286	1,036	836	637
November	22,851	27,284	3,987	914	560
December	2,929	2,990	0	100	210
	128	95	1	26	103

*Placements exceed referrals as in some instances placements were the result of referrals made by other states.

SEASONAL FARM EMPLOYMENT IN MAJOR AREAS

1954

Area and Month	Principal Crops	Agriculture			Processing
		Total	Local	Out of Area	
Exmore - May	Strawberries, broccoli, asparagus, cabbage	3,550	2,050	1,500	620
June	Potatoes, snap beans, mixed vegetables	8,690	2,050	6,640	720
July	Tomatoes, potatoes, snap beans	11,530	4,500	7,030	1,400
Aug.	Limas, snaps, tomatoes, sweet potatoes	5,200	3,000	2,200	1,900
Sept.	Sweet potatoes, beans, peppers, etc.	5,210	3,200	2,010	2,000
Oct.	Sweet potatoes, snap beans, peppers, cucumbers	7,320	4,000	3,320	1,700
Norfolk-Portsmouth May	Strawberries, beets, radishes	3,920	3,780	140	650
June	Snap beans, potatoes	810	650	160	160
July	Potatoes, corn, beans	650	380	270	220
Oct.	Beans, sweet potatoes	360	250	110	0
Farmville - July	Tobacco weeding, peaches	275	275	0	0
Aug.	Tobacco, peaches	430	410	20	0
Warsaw - July	Tomatoes, beans	790	790	0	930
Aug.	Tomatoes, beans	900	900	0	1,800
Char'ville - Aug.	Peaches	350	310	40	0
Sept.	Apples	500	450	50	0
Oct.	Apples	500	450	50	0
Lynchburg - Aug.	Tomatoes, peaches	280	280	0	60
Sept.	Tomatoes, apples	190	170	20	0
Oct.	Apples	560	550	10	0
Roanoke - Aug.	Peaches	820	750	70	0
Sept.	Apples	890	620	270	0
Oct.	Apples	1,310	960	350	0
Staunton - Sept.	Apples	330	200	130	50
Oct.	Apples	800	670	130	60
Harr'burg - Aug.	Beans, tomatoes, peaches	430	430	0	440
Sept.	Apples, tomatoes, beans	850	850	0	440
Oct.	Apples, beans	750	750	0	250
Front Royal Sept.	Apples	380	280	100	600
Oct.	Apples	400	300	100	700
Winchester - July	Apple thinning	400	180	220	0
Aug.	Peaches, apples	450	200	250	180
Sept.	Apples	2,200	1,390	540	2,000
Oct.	Apples	3,320	2,290	1,030	2,540
Nov.	Apples	580	500	80	2,300
Suffolk-Petersburg - July	Peanut grassing, potatoes	850	850	0	0
Aug.	Tobacco, snap beans	950	950	0	0
Sept.	Tobacco, corn	270	270	0	0
Oct.	Peanuts	1,200	1,200	0	0