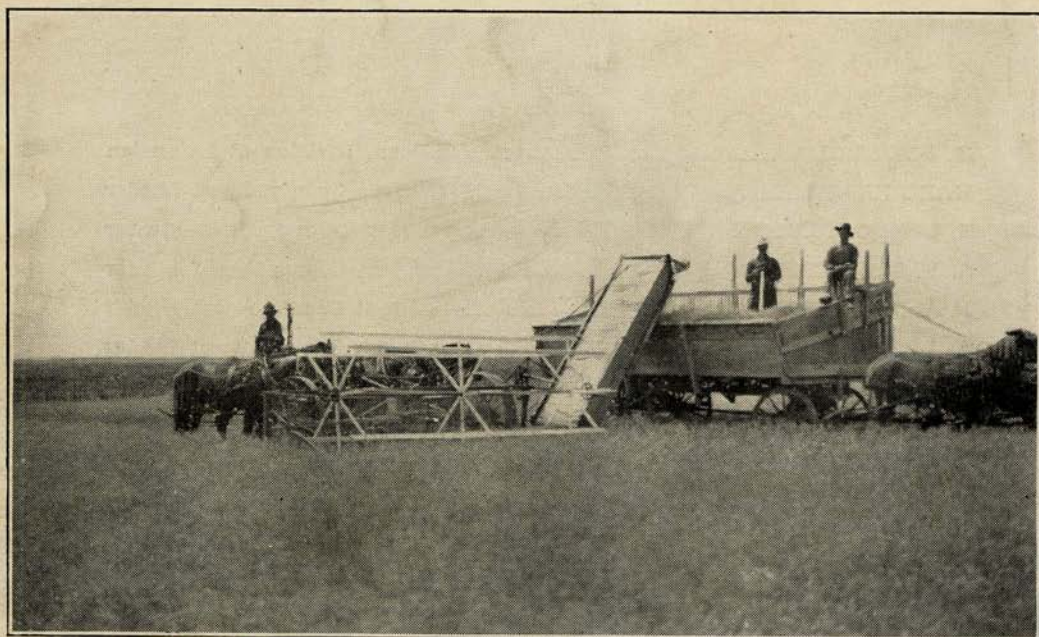


9-35
KANSAS STATE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

EXTENSION SERVICE

Kansas Handbook of Harvest Labor



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**SOCIALIST - LABOR
COLLECTION**

MANHATTAN, KANSAS

Co-operative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics.
Kansas State Agricultural college and U. S. Department of Agriculture.
Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914.
H. UMBERGER, Director.

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COUNTY AGENTS

County.	Agent.	Postoffice.
Allen	James A. Milham	Iola
Anderson	F. S. Turner	Garnett
Atchison	H. F. Tagge	Effingham
Barton	Ward R. Miles	Great Bend
Bourbon	A. C. Maloney	Fort Scott
Chase	J. A. Hendriks	Cottonwood Falls
Cherokee	Roy E. Gwin	Columbus
Cheyenne	A. I. Gilkinson	St. Francis
Clark	F. M. Pickrell	Ashland
Clay	Robt. E. Curtis	Clay Center
Cloud	Chas. J. Boyle	Concordia
Coffey	J. H. McAdams	Burlington
Comanche	E. L. Garrett	Coldwater
Doniphan	F. H. Dillenback	Troy
Douglas	R. O. Smith	Lawrence (Watkins Bk. Bldg.)
Ellis	Carl L. Howard	Hays
Franklin	F. Joe Robbins	Ottawa
Finney	Chas. E. Cassell	Garden City
Ford	Harry C. Baird	Dodge City
Gray	H. J. Adams	Cimarron
Greenwood	F. J. Peters	Eureka
Harvey	A. B. Kimball	Newton
Hodgeman	Theo. F. Yost	Jetmore
Jackson	E. H. Leker	Holton
Jefferson	Joe M. Goodwin	Oskaloosa
Jewell	W. W. Houghton	Mankato
Johnson	C. E. Graves	Olathe
Kingman	H. L. Hildwein	Kingman
Labette	R. F. Olinger	Altamont
Leavenworth	I. N. Chapman	Leavenworth
Lyon	C. L. McFadden	Emporia
McPherson	V. M. Emmert	McPherson
Marion	A. L. Myers	Marion
Marshall	O. T. Bonnett	Blue Rapids
Meade	C. V. Maloney	Meade
Miami	W. H. Brooks	Paola
Montgomery	Hayes M. Coe	Independence
Morris	Paul B. Gwin	Council Grove
Nemaha	E. L. McIntosh	Seneca
Neosho	C. D. Thompson	Erie
Ness	J. M. Dodrill	Ness City
Osage	H. S. Wise	Lyndon
Pawnee	R. P. Schnacke	Larned
Pratt	V. S. Crippen	Pratt
Rawlins	E. I. Maris	Atwood
Reno	Sam. J. Smith	Hutchinson (Court House)
Rooks	K. D. Thompson	Stockton
Rush	Carl Carlson	LaCrosse
Sedgwick	E. J. Macy	Wichita (Butts Bldg.)
Shawnee	F. D. Blecha	Topeka (Court House)
Sumner	W. A. Boys	Wellington
Washington	John V. Hepler	Washington
Wichita-Greeley	J. F. Eggerman	Leoti
Wilson	C. O. Grandfield	Fredonia
Wyandotte	C. A. Patterson	Kansas City (Chamber Commerce)

The Kansas State Free Employment Bureau, co-operating with the United States Employment Service, Department of Labor, has established permanent offices at Topeka, Wichita, Hutchinson, Salina, Kansas City, Kansas, and Parsons. These offices serve as district headquarters during the harvest season.

Temporary offices are established at several points in the wheat belt and continue during the harvest period.

Handbook of Harvest Labor in Kansas

Less than two per cent of the farmers in central and western Kansas in 1919 produced more than sixteen per cent of the national winter wheat crop.

The concentration of so great an amount of wheat in so small an area has given rise to acute labor problems. The short season during which the wheat crop must be harvested makes the number of men required to seed and care for the wheat entirely inadequate for harvesting. A great number of men must be distributed each year to a large number of individual employers. Those men must be moved and placed at exactly the right date, which varies from year to year. They work for a very short time in the state and their departure for other harvest fields is almost as sudden as their arrival. These conditions require the payment of very high wages during the harvest season.

THE TIME AND DURATION OF HARVEST

The header harvest generally starts in the southern part of the wheat belt about July first. The beginning date varies with crop and weather conditions, and may come a week earlier or a week later. Some binders usually start in southwestern Kansas by June fifteenth. Cutting is generally a week later. Binders start at Wichita, in the edge of the big wheat belt, about June 25 and are followed by the header harvest, beginning about one week later, when the grain is more mature.

The length of the time each harvest hand works in the state, and the length of each job on which he works, varies greatly. On the farms where wheat is cut with binders, the work seldom lasts much more than a week for each job. Following that, the hands can frequently get but a few days of harvest in the same community. In the header counties, the acreage is larger and the jobs last longer. Cutting with binders during the first few days when the wheat is not ripe enough to head, combined with heading a large acreage, frequently provides employment for men for as long as three weeks on one farm.

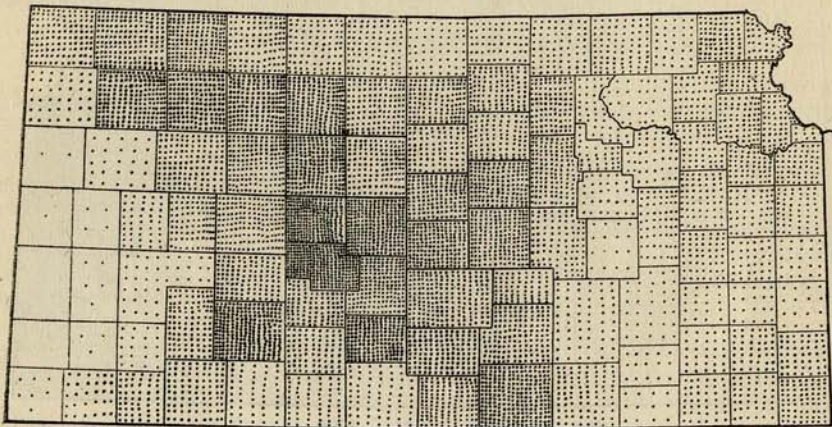
HOW MEN FIND JOBS

Prospective harvest hands usually get their first information from newspapers, where they learn of the general condition of the crop and get some notes on wages offered. The experienced hands pay less attention to the wages offered and more to how much wheat is being produced and where the crops are best. Many harvest hands write to farmers in the wheat belt where they have worked in other years, and are hired in advance of the harvest. The farmers keep them thus advised as to the day they should come in order to lose the least time. Those who have not previously done harvest work, and those who are not acquainted with farmers in the wheat belt, very

seldom make satisfactory arrangements in advance. They must take the chance the first year of finding work when they get to the wheat fields. There are a great many strangers who write every year asking to be placed directly in touch with some farmer wishing to hire harvest help.

Laborers in the cities find it the best policy to see the public labor bureaus in those various cities and get complete information from them on the harvest. In some cases the bureaus hesitate to encourage men to leave their own state, but they can always give information to the men on the location of public labor bureaus in the wheat belt.

Many harvest hands write each year to the labor bureaus, agricultural colleges, commercial clubs and other public bodies in the wheat belt, asking for definite, up-to-date information. They are seldom individually placed or guaranteed work in that way.



WHEAT HARVESTED IN 1920

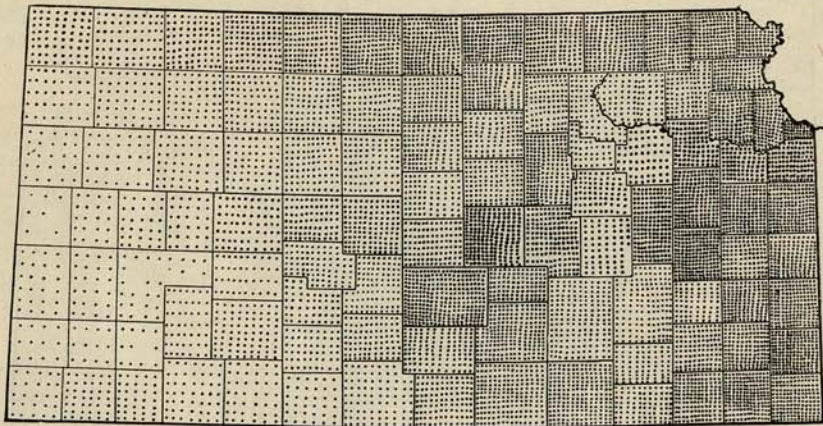
1 DOT - 1000 ACRES HARVESTED

After getting all possible information the harvest hand must come to the wheat belt at his own risk, and almost always at his own expense. Experienced men usually start with enough money to get them into the heart of the wheat belt and to pay their own expenses for a week or more, if necessary, before the harvest begins. Others, who do not take this precaution, find inconvenience in delays due to weather and other unforeseen conditions. The men find it easier to travel with very little luggage, and they find that a man in working clothes is more readily hired by farmers than is a man who is "dressed up." Many experienced men, therefore, wear overalls and jacket and carry a very small roll of extra clothing. Men traveling through cities on the way to the harvest find it wise

to stop, if convenient, in each of the leading cities and get information at the public labor bureaus on the exact location of the day's labor demands. It is the policy of all labor bureaus to take little responsibility in the way of advising a man where to go unless there are definite calls for definite numbers of men from certain localities. For that reason, men frequently go from one labor bureau to another, and still to a third, before they are finally placed on direct order with some farmer or county agent.

Men who do not wait for orders to be received at the labor bureau frequently find that they have spent a lot of railroad fare for nothing. On the contrary, their chance of getting a long job is greater if they are on the ground early.

No public labor bureau can guarantee employment to men applying, but can go only so far as to tell the prospective harvest hands that a certain man in a certain county, or at a cer-



NUMBER OF FARMS 1920 (CENSUS FIGURES)

EACH DOT REPRESENTS 15 FARMS OR APPROXIMATELY ENOUGH RESIDENT FARM
LABOR TO HARVEST 1000 ACRES OF WHEAT

tain town, has advised that so many harvest hands were needed. Inasmuch as the farmers are not organized, their orders are scattered—there is no one who can order help and absolutely guarantee employment to them. The local labor bureau can only report that they consider a certain number of men needed and that the men can expect work unless men come in from some place else to take up the jobs. As a rule no one along the line can guarantee employment.

Harvest hands follow the advice of the labor bureau, or the most experienced harvest hands in the crowd, and try to get into the harvest field just a little in advance of the harvest. In that way they have time to find a satisfactory job, even if it requires a little more money to pay expenses before harvest begins. Very frequently great numbers of men come much too early and many of them become dissatisfied and think the jobs

are all taken. Many men go home for that reason and later hear that a shortage developed within a few days at the point which they left.

County agents are in general the most responsible local labor agents, and give the most accurate information on how much labor will be needed and when work will begin. They are not only in touch with their own county, but through the central organization, are in touch with all other agents and know labor conditions in the state. They receive daily bulletins on the condition of the harvest and demands for labor, and are always able to give harvest hands the most recent information.

The advice of the public bureaus is almost always more accurate and more recent than the information published in the newspapers, and harvest hands save much money by considering the bulletins from those bureaus.

PREPAID RAILROAD FARES

It has seldom been found practical in Kansas for farmers to prepay the fare of harvest hands. The wage is usually high enough to attract enough men without the necessity of paying railroad fares in addition. Some farmers prepay the fares of harvest hands who have worked for them before, but it is only in exceptional cases that they prepay the fares of strangers whom they have never seen. In a few cases a promise of refund of railroad fare is made in addition to the regular wage, providing the man stays through the harvest season.

In 1919 there was such a demand for help that the farmers in several counties prepaid the fares of a large number of harvest hands with fair satisfaction. It was a last resort to save wheat which otherwise would have been lost. In some of these cases bankers or public organizations prepaid the fares of the men and charged a fee of each farmer who took help from the shipment.

That brought on criticism in some cases that the individual or organization was making a profit from the practice. A number of cases resulted in a loss to the organization taking the risk. In other cases the farmers deposited in advance an amount sufficient to cover the railroad fare and additional expenses of transportation. They sent representatives to the city to hire men to be sent out on this prepaid transportation.

HARVEST WAGES

The price of wheat has some effect on wages. When wheat is low the farmers will take the risk of hiring less labor to care for it and, therefore, will be able to get help cheaper. Industrial wages have more effect on the harvest wage than does the price of wheat. The harvest wage in general is set at the price required to attract men away from the city employment and pay for their railroad and other expenses to and from the

wheat belt. In times of labor surplus in the cities this wage may be low, but in normal times the harvest wage is higher than the wage for general unskilled labor. Board is almost always furnished in addition to the cash wage, and, therefore, raises the harvest wage farther above the industrial wage.

When wheat production, price and industrial wages remain fairly constant for a number of years, as they did from 1910 to 1914, the harvest wage is constant and fairly well established on the basis of so many dollars per day in each community. During and following the war, the increased wheat acreage and industrial conditions caused a rapid change in harvest wages, and so changed the conditions that the wage became what the man could get out of the farmer, or what the farmer could induce the man to take. There was no market price on labor. Hearsay reports of exceedingly high wages frequently caused a stampede of men to the point from which

CHEYENNE	RAWLINS	DECATUR	NORTON	PHILLIPS	SMITH	JEWELL	REPUBLIC	WASHINGTON	WASHBURN	NEOHO	BROWN	OSAGE
5	4	5	4	4½	4	4½	3½	4	3½	4	4½	3½
HERKULES	THOMAS	CHERRY	GRAHAM	BOOKER	OSBORN	MITCHELL	CLOUD	CLATSOP	WATSON	JACKSON	ATCHISON	JEFFERSON
4½	4	4½	4	4	4½	4½	4	4½	4½	3½	3½	4
WALLACE	LOGAN	LOVE	REGO	ELLIS	RUSSELL	LINCOLN	OTTAWA	WAGONER	BARNEZ	CHANDLER	DOUGLAS	JOHNSON
4	4	4	4½	5	4½	4½	4½	4½	4	4	4	4
GREELEY	WICHITA	SCOTT	LANE	DESS	IRISH	BARTON	ELSWORTH	SALINE	GEARY	MORRIS	OSAGE	HASKIN
4	4	4	5	4	5	5	4½	4½	4	4	4	4
HAMILTON	KLAWNS	PINNEY	HOOGES	PARSONS	STAFFORD	RENO	HARVEY	BUTLER	GREENWOOD	WAGONER	ANDERSON	LYNN
3½	3½	3½	5	5	5	4½	4½	4	3½	3	3½	3
STANTON	GRANT	HASKELL	WHEELER	RIORA	PRATT	KINGMAN	WAGONER	WAGONER	WAGONER	WAGONER	WAGONER	WAGONER
5	4½	4½	5	5	4½	4½	4	4	3½	3½	3½	3½
MORTON	WYOMING	SEWARD	WHEELER	CLARK	COMANCHE	HARPER	WAGONER	WAGONER	WAGONER	WAGONER	WAGONER	WAGONER
4½	4	4	4½	4½	5	4½	4½	4	4½	3½	4	3½

HARVEST WAGE 1918 DOLLARS PER DAY

AS REPORTED BY LOCAL COOPERATORS TO THE BUREAU OF CROP ESTIMATES

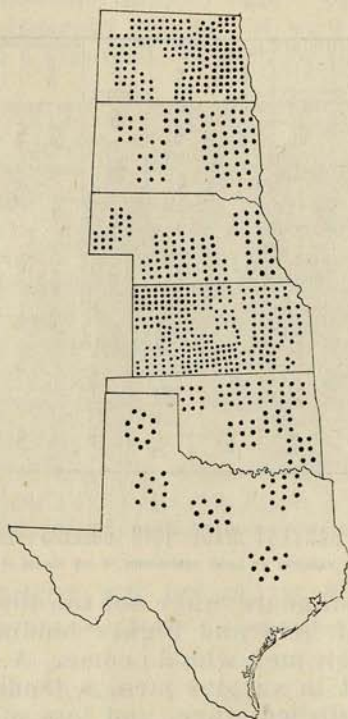
the report came, leaving a shortage where there had been enough men. This caused a congestion of laborers which could not all be hired at the new point. The harvest and harvest labor demands move and change so rapidly that a few such reports followed by the men result in great loss of time and money.

In an effort to prevent the evil of wage fluctuation and labor congestion, the farmers of Kansas for the years of 1918, 1919 and 1920, held public meetings at which wages were discussed and a standard wage recommended for the state. This wage standard was of great help in stabilizing the wage and insuring the proper distribution of labor. Minor difficulties showed up in the set wage system. In 1919 a compromise wage was set at fifty cents per hour for the entire state.

from the outside. The common criticism of that section for paying less than other wheat producing sections is therefore unfair.

LIVING CONDITIONS OF HARVEST HANDS

There are comfortable quarters for almost all of the men. In a few cases large crews are assembled where the house is too small to furnish beds for all of them, but very comfortable quarters are arranged in some of the other farm buildings or in tents. Meals are of good, clean, wholesome food in great quantities. The days are very hot and the sun intensely bright, but the evenings and nights are cool and comfortable. There is excellent water throughout most of the region. Where men are well treated and like the work and food, they frequently



THE WHEAT BELT

EACH DOT REPRESENTS 50000 ACRES OF WHEAT
HARVESTED IN 1919

come back to the same farms for several years to help in the harvest.

Where harvest hands congregate in great crowds in some of the cities and junction points, there are some professional gamblers who do very little or no work in the harvest fields, but make it their business to win money gambling. There are not many of them and they are usually found in crowds about

towns. There are a very few cases of holdups and robberies each year.

MACHINES USED

More than half of the Kansas wheat is cut with headers, which require a crew of six or seven men working together. Binders require a driver and one or two men shocking. They are more commonly used in the eastern part of the wheat belt. Binders are started earlier in the harvest, when the grain is yet too green to cut with headers. Tractors are used to some extent in the harvest, where they are almost always run by the farmer himself, or by some tractor operator with whom he is acquainted. They are, however, seldom used with binders, as they generally require two men, one on the engine and one on the binder. They are sometimes used on headers to draw the header and barge with the same engine. The large sizes are more generally used with the large barges and with standing grain threshers.

The standing grain threshers used in Kansas counties cut a twelve-foot swath, thresh the grain, dump the straw behind the cylinder and run the grain into a wagon which is drawn along side. They cover the ground as rapidly as the headers and put the grain in the bin with somewhat less man labor than is usually required to put it in a header stack. They are great labor savers. In the years 1919 and 1920, fifteen hundred were sold in Kansas. Their greatest drawback is the high initial cost of the machine, which can be safely used only for ten or twelve days each year and cannot be depended upon to cut more than three hundred acres per year on an average farm.

HOW FARMERS GET HELP

A day or two before starting the header, farmers make inquiries in towns or at local labor bureaus for harvest help. They seldom list their needs in advance because they do not know when they will need the men or exactly how many they will need. They may be expecting some help that they will not get, or they may have an opportunity to get help which they have not expected. A few farmers write to men who have worked for them in the past or to old acquaintances in the corn belt and hire them early. Other farmers make a practice of hiring when the first few men come into town. The men are frequently willing to work for the usual farm wage so that they will be on the farm when harvest begins. Sometimes when there is little farm work, the men are willing to go out and do chores for their board, preceding the harvest. There is an increasing tendency among farmers to take men out early so that they will not be bothered when the rush of work comes. In localities where farmers do not take men out early they frequently see a congestion of labor followed by a shortage when harvest really begins. This is caused by a stampede to other localities where conditions seem more promising to the men.

County agent offices are headquarters for farm labor. In farm bureau counties the county agents have a reputation, both among the laborers and farmers, of having the most complete and accurate information. Laborers applying at the public labor bureaus frequently inquire for counties having county agents.

Farmers wanting help telephone the county agent, who places them on the list, and help is supplied to them in order. In case of a labor surplus the county agent telephones various farmers throughout the country and finds for sure whether there is any more need for men before directing them to neighboring counties.

The county agents each year make a preliminary survey of labor needs and inform the state office. During harvest they keep the state headquarters informed daily as to labor conditions in the country and get help from government and state bureaus, or any other place that they can. In some cases the individual county advertises its labor needs in advance of the harvest. This sometimes attracts more men to one county than are needed there.

AMOUNT OF LABOR USED

The number of harvest hands coming from other states varies widely from year to year. A small increase in acreage makes a great increase in the number of men needed. Where there is a normal shortage of help, every additional fifty acres will require one additional man, or every additional million acres will require 20,000 additional men. In many counties the working male population is more than doubled during the harvest season each year. The following formula has been used by the counties in the wheat belt to determine the additional number of men needed:

Total acreage to be harvested in the county =	Total number of men needed for the harvest —	No. of farms in the county × 1.5 (average = number of men per farm)	No. of men to be imported.
Divided by 50			

It is estimated that a crew of six harvests about three hundred acres, or about fifty acres per man for the season. All small grains should be included in the formula if they conflict in date with the wheat harvest. If other farm work, with crops or live stock, must be done during the harvest season, more men must be allowed for that purpose in the formula. The amount of straw to be moved has a material effect on the amount of labor required. When grain all ripens about the same time more labor is required to handle all of the fields just at the opportune date. When the wheat ripens less evenly, binders can be used on a larger acreage and the same crew may be able to cut several fields in succession without hiring more men. Help may sometimes be used in one part of the state and later

in another part. It is quite common for some laborers to finish harvesting in southern Kansas in time to get into another run in the northwestern corner of the state. In some years, however, the wheat all ripens at nearly the same date throughout the state and neighboring states, and it is not possible for a man to work in two parts of Kansas. Kansas has been, during some years, in competition with Oklahoma and Nebraska on the same date.

SOURCES AND CLASSES OF LABOR

Harvest hands come to Kansas from every state in the Union. The territory from which they come depends somewhat on the publicity and advertising work which precedes the harvest. When advertised in advance, men come from great distances and a great number come from different states. When the surplus is found inadequate at harvest time a greater number of men are drawn from the nearby cities through higher wage offers. It usually requires a material increase in wages to induce them to leave their city employment on short notice.

CLASSES OF HARVEST LABOR

1. **Farmers and farm laborers** from southeastern Kansas, southern Missouri and Arkansas come in great numbers and are the best help. Most of them are experienced in all kinds of farm and harvest work and can do any part of the work required.

2. **Itinerant laborers** are men who have no homes and who make a general practice of going from one place to another, following the best wages. They are in general a versatile class of men, and men who have a habit of giving an honest day's work for their money. They are philosophical about delays and other inconveniences of the harvest and have a peculiar ability to find the best opportunity.

3. **City laborers** of many trades, from those who work in building trades to clerks and stenographers, come in considerable numbers from cities nearby to spend a few days out of doors during their vacation and get a week or two of high wages. They are not as good help as the two preceding classes.

4. **Homesteaders** from Colorado harvest in western Kansas counties each year. They are good help, comparable to the farmers from south Missouri, but they come in smaller numbers.

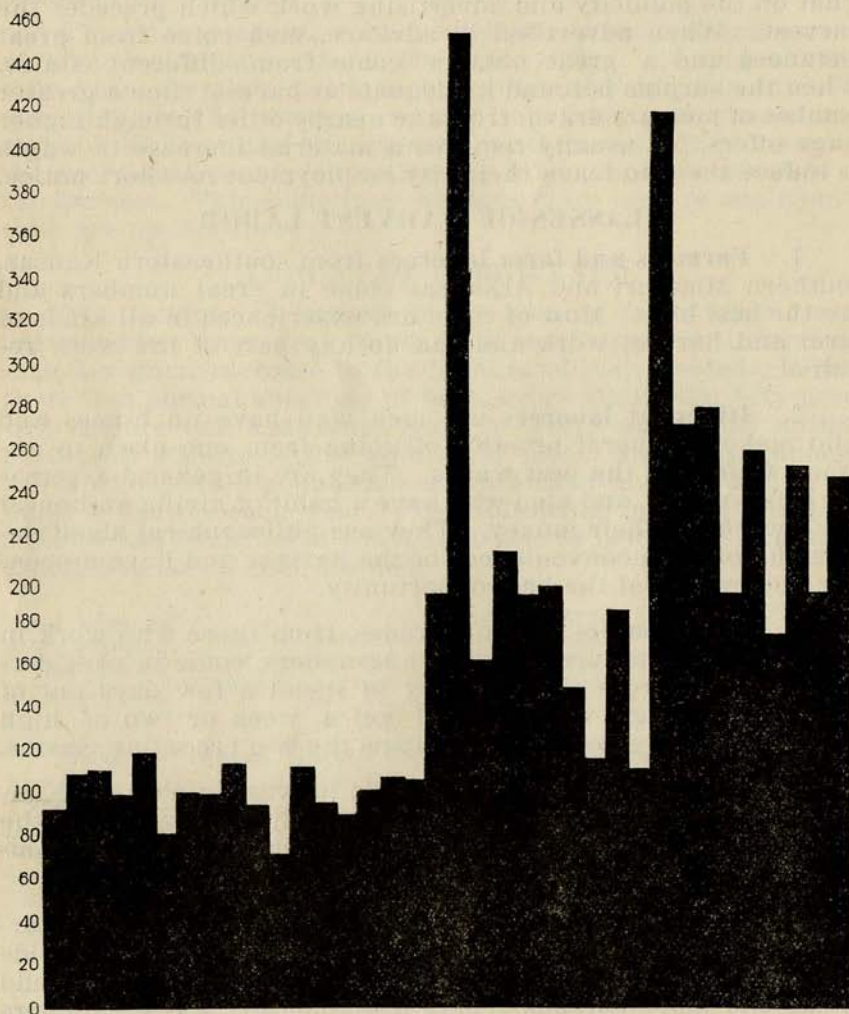
5. **Drifters** who work a day now and then in an indifferent manner, constitute a small per cent of the total outside labor, but are noticeable because they spend much time around towns and labor bureaus. There are generally a few gamblers among the drifters who work a little while early in the season, but later spend most of their time gambling about stockyards and other loafing places.

DISTRIBUTION OF MAN LABOR ON A WHEAT FARM

MCPHERSON COUNTY, KANSAS, 1920

TOTAL MAN LABOR

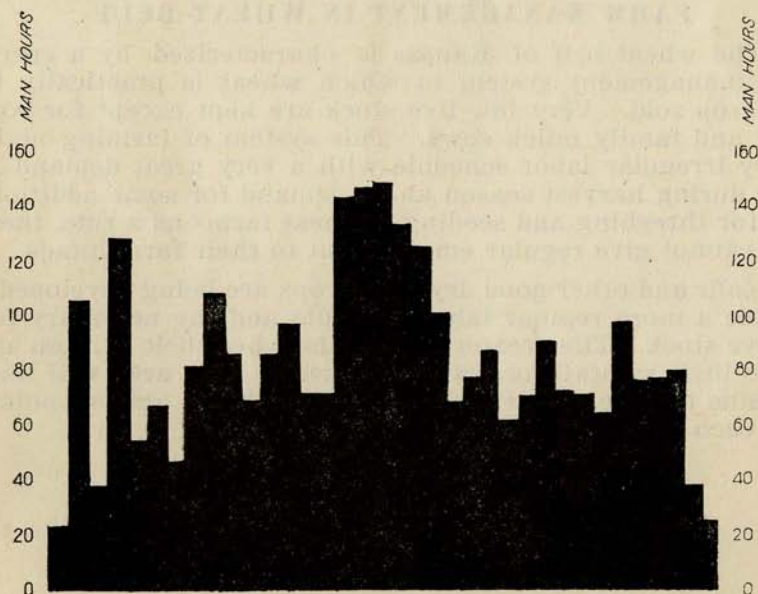
JAN. FEB. MAR. APR. MAY JUNE JULY AUG. SEPT. OCT. NOV. DEC.



DISTRIBUTION OF MAN LABOR BY 10-DAY PERIODS ON A DIVERSIFIED FARM

TOTAL MAN LABOR

JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUNE JULY AUG SEPT OCT NOV DEC



6. **College students** come in limited numbers. They are usually inexperienced but they try hard and learn rapidly. Farmers show a decided preference for that class of help, as they find them more satisfactory to board and room in their homes.

WORK FOLLOWING THE HARVEST

The threshing season follows the harvest season after an interval of a week or ten days, which is used to clean up after the harvest work and get the machinery ready. It lasts much longer than the harvest season, but it does not require so many men, as farmers trade work, and a large crew takes its time threshing a large acreage.

The Nebraska harvest begins a week or ten days later than Kansas harvest. Men finish the harvest in southern Kansas and are sometimes in time for the beginning of the wheat harvest about Hastings, Nebraska. Some of the men finishing work in central and northern Kansas can find work in the extreme western Nebraska harvest about Sidney.

South Dakota harvest begins one to two weeks after the harvest is over in central Kansas. Quite commonly, great numbers of laborers wait in Sioux City for the South Dakota harvest to begin. North Dakota and Canada employ many men for harvest work, but relatively few men who work in Kansas, go that far north.

FARM MANAGEMENT IN WHEAT BELT

The wheat belt of Kansas is characterized by a special farm management system in which wheat is practically the only crop sold. Very few live stock are kept except for work stock and family milch cows. This system of farming makes a very irregular labor schedule with a very great demand for labor during harvest season and a demand for some additional help for threshing and seeding. Wheat farms as a rule, therefore, cannot give regular employment to their farm hands.

Kafir and other good dry land crops are being developed to provide a more regular labor schedule and the necessary feed for live stock. The greater part of the wheat belt is in an area of too little rainfall for corn to be used. This area will likely continue to specialize in wheat and will be in need of outside help each year.