

NWCP Annual Meeting  
Foodshed II  
April 3, 2009

Historical Perspective of Yampa Valley Agriculture

Personal History

Geographics

Moffat County is 4751 square miles, Routt County is 2368 square miles

Over 99% is land mass, less than 1% is water

Over 50% is government owned, but much is leased for private agriculture and recreation

Elevations range from 4760 feet (west Moffat) to 12180 feet (Mt Zirkel)

Routt County: growing season is 59 days in Steamboat, 74 in Hayden

average rainfall = 32.47 inches, average snowfall = 168 inches

average temperature = 39.3 degree

Moffat County: growing season is between 75 and 85 days

Average moisture is around 15 inches

**Ag History (White man History)**

**Cattle/Sheep**

George Baggs brought the first cattle (Texas Longhorns) into the area in 1871

By 1880 thousands of cattle were trailed into the area for summer grazing

Early 1890 = sheepmen discovered the area and starting bringing large flocks in

1890-1895 = range wars between the sheep and cattlemen

Railroad: 1988 – Wolcott (Opened up the stage and freight routes from State Bridge to Hahn's)

1908 – Yampa and Steamboat Springs

1910 – Hayden

1913 – Craig

By 1913 more cattle were shipped from the Steamboat railyard than any other single point in the US

During the 1930s Hayden was the largest rail shipping center for lambs than any where else

**Small Grains**

1880 = Hitchens Brothers were among the first to try dry-land farming

hauled their grain to Rawlins WY for shipment

1890 = Yampa Valley Milling and Elevator Co opened

developed a local market for the farmers

provided wheat, barley and oats for local retail

1900 – they started producing Joe Dandy cereal

1912 = The Farmers Elevator in Steamboat Springs opened

1917 = The Hayden Elevator opened

by 1922, Routt County led all other counties in the state in dryland yield production of wheat, barley, oats  
by 1985 over 85,000 acres were in small grain production

Reason for demise of grains:

- Cost of production –vs- prices received for their crops
- Dryland can only produce limited yields
- Government Programs
- Age of the farmers

## Vegetables

1910 = Routt County Strawberry Company was formed  
1911 = 528 crates were loaded on a train

1911 = Routt County Produce Assn was formed  
Potatoes: South Routt produced 300 – 100# sacks on 2 acres = 7.5 Tons/Acre  
Cow Creek produced 1400 - 100# sacks on ten acres = 7.0 Tons/Acre  
Peas: during 1920s-30s more than 500 acres of peas were planted  
1923 = Yampa Valley Head Lettuce Assn was formed  
Lettuce and Spinach: more than 2000 acres were under cultivation –  
1926 = 720 train car loads of head lettuce were shipped to CA  
Cabbage, Cauliflower, Celery, Carrots, Turnips, Rutabagas and Artichokes

Reasons for demise:

- Labor costs and availability of labor when needed
- Overhead costs: seeds could not readily be raised in this valley  
Everything had to be shipped and out of the Valley
- Depletion of the soils
- Weather: Growing Seasons  
Freezes and Droughts  
Cost of keeping the rail-lines and roads open year round
- Depression

## Hay/Alfalfa

Hay originally harvested to feed cattle, hay and horses that resided in the Valley during the winter  
1 cutting per year for hay, 1-2 cuttings per summer for alfalfa

## Dairy Cattle

Almost every ranch/farm had a small herd (1-10 head) of milk cows  
At different times during the 40s, 50s and 60's there were 5-6 medium size dairies  
Milk and Cream was shipped via the train to Denver in 5 or 10 gallon cans  
Prices varied depending on butterfat content and sweetness of the product  
Dairy processing and delivery in Steamboat Springs until the late 60s  
At one time: Powdered Malted Milk Factory in Steamboat Springs

**Current:** per the 2007 ag census

	Routt	Moffat	Total
Total Ag Sales	\$34,115,000	\$28,303,000	\$62,418,000
Wheat/Barley/Oats	344,000	D	
Hay/Alfalfa	4,102,000	D	
Nursery Crops	131,000	0	
Livestock	28,911,000	24,318,000	53,229,000
Number of Ranches/Farms	610	503	1113
Cattle	37,204	43,426	80,630
Milk Cows	7	51	58
Pigs	92	415	507
Chickens	452	982	1434
Sheep/Goats	3,501	61,095	64,596
Horses	3,501	2,259	5,760

2007 Ag Sales were up from the 2002 census by 37% because:  
drought  
grasshopper epidemic  
low national commodity prices

Agriculture is a wonderful way of life and those of us who are involved are eternally grateful for the opportunity to raise our children in the environment. We are hardy folks who are willing to invest our personal resources into the natural resources that we are entrusted to care for. We will build a barn to care for our animals and crops before we build a house. We develop a spring for additional water before we take a vacation and we take great pride in our “brand” and our operation. We are grateful when we have a good banker that will extend our credit one more year and don’t get too upset when the stock market crashes because we go through a market crash about once every four years. We are independent and yet trust our lives and livelihood to God everyday. I am proud to be involved with agriculture and to represent the agricultural community.

For those of you who are considering agriculture, we wish to welcome you. May you be successful with your endeavors.