MARGINAL SOIL AND FARM ABANDONMENT IN
CAMPBELL COUNTY, WYOMING

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DURING the summer of 1935 the Agronomy Department of the University of Wyoming, in cooperation with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, started a soil survey of Campbell County, Wyoming, collecting at the same time information in each township as to cultivated areas, abandoned farms, vegetation, and kinds of crops. Such data were collected in 21 townships and a soil map completed during the past summer. This paper attempts to report progress and some of the findings and observations so far obtained.

SETTLEMENT

The area lies 60 miles west of the Black Hills with an annual average rainfall of 16 inches. This has been sufficient some years to encourage dry farming. Communities of farms have developed all over the county, separated by long stretches of unbroken sod pasture land used only for grazing.

The total cultivated area has reached a maximum of 15 to 16%. Dry years have tended to discourage farming and during the past summer nearly one-third of the area once cultivated has been abandoned or bears no crops but weeds. Eighty-five per cent of the total area of the 21 townships surveyed is covered with short grass vegetation. When spring rains are frequent, good grass is obtained in valleys, swales, and bottomlands. The wild hay is cut and stacked every summer and fall for winter use.

OWNERSHIP

County records show that the land has passed almost completely into private ownership. Of 1,035 parcels of land or farms, only 41 are now classed as public land. Of the 994 farms, less than half, or 462, are partly cultivated. The rest are owned by investors, homesteaders, speculators, real estate firms, and future bona fide farmers who have as yet made no attempt to break the sod, improve the land, or develop it into farms. Each of the 462 parcels which are farmed averaged 124 acres of cultivated land during the past year.

CROPS

In 5 of the 21 townships a map was constructed showing the location and kind of crop on all of the cultivated land found in these townships. Wheat was the crop which first attracted dry farming during the war.

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