

Agriculture

As long ago as 1000 BC the inhabitants of New Mexico were cultivating corn, beans and squash. These foods have retained their popularity right down to the present day. The Spanish settlers with Juan de Oñate in 1598 introduced livestock, cereal grains, vegetables, fruits, chile, melons, wine grapes and the acequia madre system of irrigation. Agriculture in New Mexico as in Mesopotamia and Egypt is concentrated along the banks of the big river. Immigrants from the eastern U. S. in the 1880's were encouraged by a succession of lucky wet years to attempt dry farming away from the river, but most of these efforts failed when the climate returned to normal.

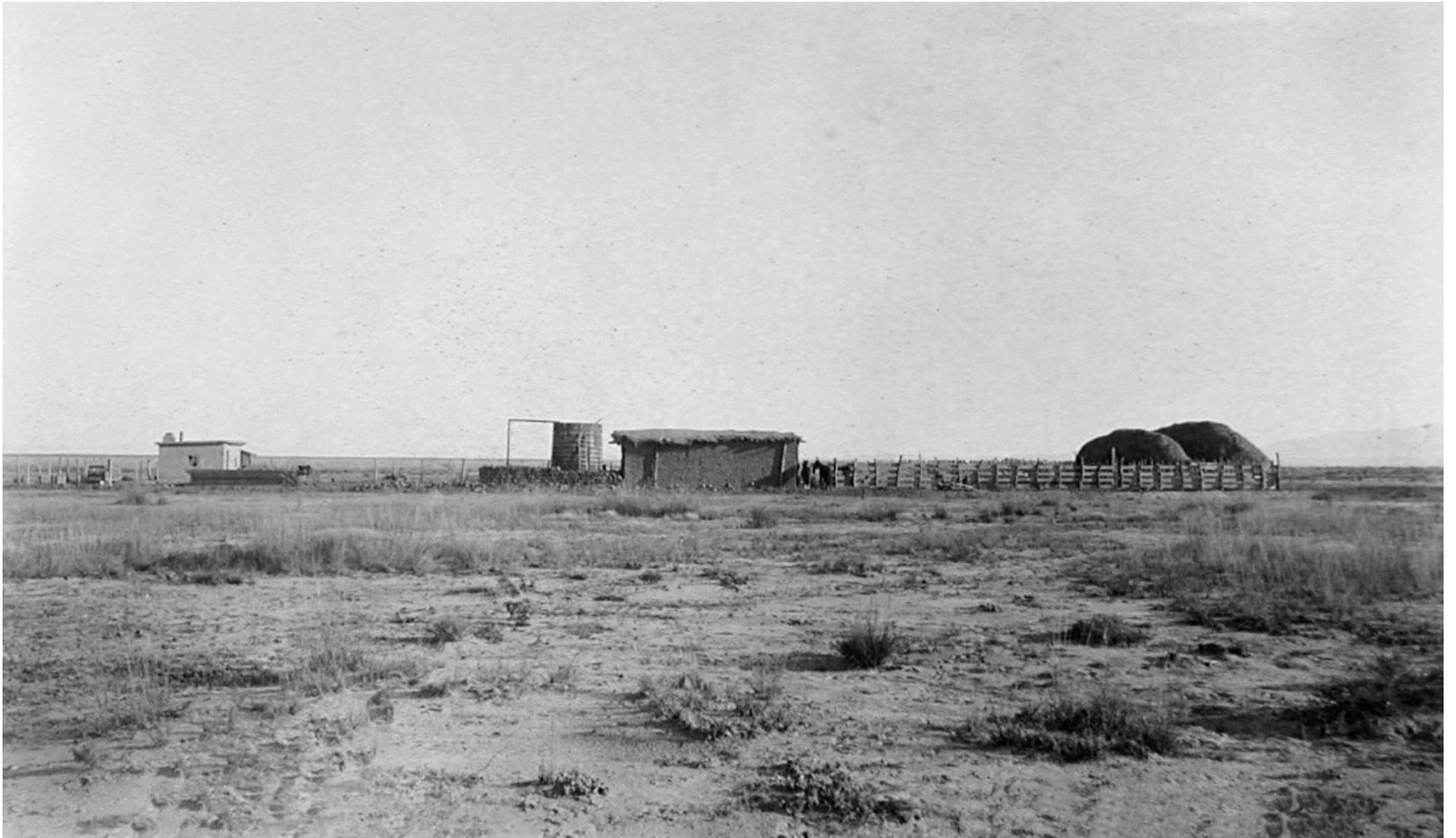
At the present time, livestock accounts for about 70% of the agricultural production of New Mexico. Feed crops outweigh vegetables and all other categories of farm output. Among the important crops are hay, chile, pecans and greenhouse vegetables. The availability of agricultural statistics by county is very limited, but hay and chile are leading crops in Socorro County. As recently as the 1950's the County produced long staple cotton which was delivered to a cotton gin in Lemitar. The abandoned gin building still stands.

An important agricultural feature in the Socorro area was the W. H. Byerts orchard on the Evergreen Ranch. According to an interview of Clarence Hammel by Helen Sickles, the orchard had 100,000 trees and 2,000-3,000 grapevines. Grapes, peaches, pears, strawberries and cantaloupes were shipped by rail to Chicago, Denver and Los Angeles. The orchard was watered by a spring near but separate from Socorro Spring. Byerts died without heirs ca. 1935, and the property was given to the Salvation Army, but nothing was done to develop it. It was eventually sold to the city for \$8,000.

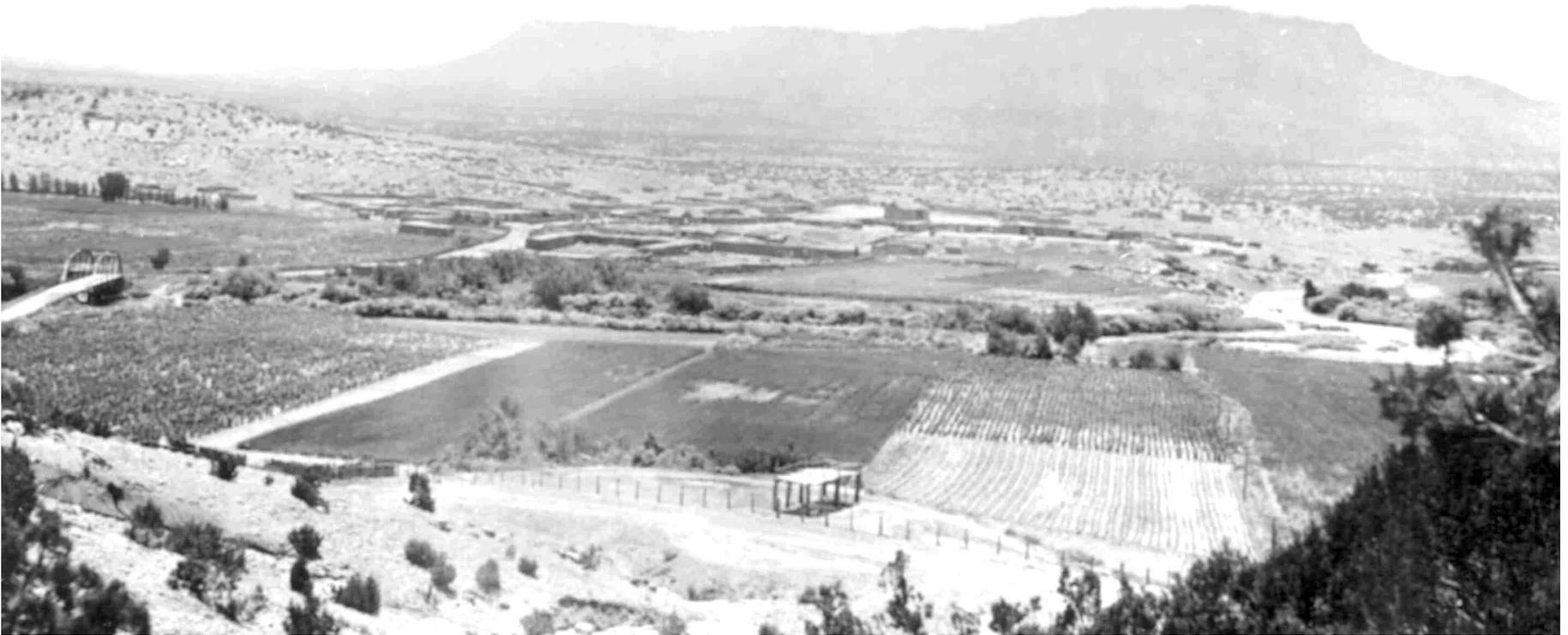
Clarence Hammel, who owned the ice plant (formerly the Illinois Brewing Co.), recalls that he furnished ice for shipment of agricultural products by rail. Peas and cantaloupes were the leading exported crops.



A setting described as Coon's orchard



Remote farm and farmhouse, location unknown



Rio Grande Valley farmlands



Making hay east of School of Mines



Another view of hayfield, Now Sunset Housing Division



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Farm Scene, unknown location



Horses on west bank of the Rio Grande, San Acacia