

lesson 13 Agriculture

LIFE ON A FAMILY FARM

OVERVIEW

This lesson introduces students to on a family farm. You can view or print most single images directly as a JPEG file. *In Lesson 13, students use the Sacramento History Online database at <http://www.sacramentohistory.org>.*

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

1. Describe how life on a farm without electricity and refrigeration differs from modern farm or city life.
2. Identify how farm families obtained their food and how they preserved it.
3. Use the SHO database to find specific historical information.

CALIFORNIA HISTORY STANDARDS

- 4.1 Physical and human geographic features that define places and regions in California**
- 4.4 California's rise as an agricultural and industrial power**

BACKGROUND ARTICLE 13

Life on a Family Farm (*pages 13-5 through 13-7*)

STUDENT ACTIVITY SHEET 13 AND KEY

Life on a Family Farm (*pages 13-9 and 13-10*)

DOCUMENTS TO DISCUSS

The documents below are related to life on a family farm.



1. Buildings on the G.F. Simpson Ranch

[ca. 1950]
Buildings on the G.F.Simpson Ranch in Natomas District No. 1000. There are two adults and a teenage boy, presumably the Simpsons. A windmill and truck are shown.



2. Prize calf and children in alfalfa field

[ca. 1924]
F.W. Kiesel Ranch. The photo shows F.W. Kiesel's son and two daughters along with a prize-winning calf in a field of mown alfalfa.



3. Our turkeys

[ca. 1893]
McFarland ranch in Galt, flock of turkeys being tended by 3 women and 3 children.



4. Pump on McFarland Ranch

[ca. 1893]
Galt, CA. View of McFarland ranch barns, corrals and outbuildings. Pump in foreground is labeled "Fulton#1."



5. Wiseman family ranch [ca. 1900]
Dairy farm corral with cows on Wiseman family ranch in Sacramento. Also shows barn, milk cans, and Wiseman family members.



6. Boy driving tractor [ca. 1925]
Taking peaches to market.



7. Seed catalog [1891]
Catalog contains the description of the W.R. Strong Company's inventory, prices, and ordering information for seeds, trees, and nursery stock. Also illustrates fruits, vegetables, and growing regions.



8. Home garden headquarters [ca.1925]
John Swanson's garden. Jim Olson standing in cabbage patch. Farm house in the background, unidentified child in the foreground.



9. Picking corn [1910]
Colorful fruit crate label advertising pears grown in the Sacramento Valley and shipped via steamer on the Sacramento River.



10. School garden [ca. 1915-16]
View of teenage boys and girls working in a flower and vegetable garden in Highland Park, Sacramento.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Print any of the images and PDF files shown above that you will use in your discussion, as well as **Student Activity Sheet 13 and Key**. (Label the documents by their number to identify them in the instructions).
2. Read **Background Article 13**. You may wish to read it to your students or have them read it by themselves. Discuss any questions that they may have.
3. Show and discuss **Document 1, Buildings on the G.F. Simpson Ranch**. Ask students to describe what they think it might have been like to live in this farmhouse. Do they think the family had electricity? If not, what things would they have had to do differently in preparing and preserving food?
4. **Document 2, Prize calf and children in alfalfa field**. Ask students what they think daily life would have been like for children on this ranch? What kinds of activities would the children in the photograph have enjoyed? Has anyone in the class had a livestock animal as a pet or responsibility?

5. **Document 3, Our turkeys** and **Document 4, Pump on McFarland Ranch**. The McFarland Ranch was established by John McFarland, the founder of Galt and is being developed as a living history center. The SHO database includes several photos of this ranch that were taken in the 1880s.

6. **Document 5, Wiseman family ranch** and **Document 6, Boy driving tractor**. Children had many chores on a farm. Discuss what some of these chores might have been. Ask students why they think that the boy was allowed to drive the tractor.

7. **Document 7, Seed catalog**. Examine the catalog to see what kinds of things could have been planted in an 1891 garden. Are there any fruits or vegetables that the children have never heard of? (*e.g. salsify*) If so, find out what type of plant it was and how it was used. (*for example, a root vegetable that was boiled and mashed*)

8. **Document 8, Home Garden Headquarters** and **Document 9, Picking corn**. Ask children what is being grown in these gardens. (*cabbages and corn*) Can they find the child in the cabbage patch?

9. **Document 10, School garden**. Some schools had their own gardens. Other gardens were sponsored by industrial and 4-H clubs. During World War I, some children grew and canned food for the war effort. To learn more about Victory Gardens in World War II, you can see a film on this site about the Sacramento gardens, which were celebrated in Harvest Festivals. *To download and play the film clips, you must have a current QuickTime Player (6.0 or higher).*

10. Give students **Activity Sheet 13: Life on a Family Farm** (page 13-9). After they have completed the activity, discuss their answers as a group. (*More information on Levi Painter and John Sutter's Hock Farm is available in Lesson 11*).

FOLLOW-UP

1. **Imagine that the year is 1900** and that you live on a farm in the Sacramento Valley. Write a letter to a friend in the city and tell them about your daily life.

2. **Draw a map** for a vegetable garden using plants from the 1891 *Strong Catalog*. Calculate the cost of the garden. Compare the *Strong Catalog* to a modern catalog, in terms of text and graphic style, plants offered, and prices.

3. **Create a menu** for a meal that you would serve in 1900 if you lived on a farm. Which ingredients could you grow, and which would you buy at a store?

4. **Interview someone in your community** who lived on a farm as a child at least 70 years ago. How was their childhood different from yours? How was it different from that of their own parents or grandparents? Make a book that illustrates your interviewee's life on the farm.

5. **Make your own butter**, with the help of an adult.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- Christian, E. and Roth-Singer, L. *Let's make butter*. Mankato, MN: Yellow Umbrella Books, 2000. (young juvenile)
- Gunderson, M. *Pioneer farm cooking: Exploring history through simple recipes*. Mankato, MN: Blue Earth Books, 2000. (juvenile)
- Gunderson, M. *Oregon Trail cooking: Exploring history through simple recipes*. Mankato, MN: Blue Earth Books, 2000. (juvenile)
- Kalman, B. *Food for the Settler*. Toronto, New York: Crabtree Publishing Co., 1992. (juvenile)
- Kalman, B. *Hooray for dairy farming!* New York: Crabtree Publishing Co., 1998. (juvenile)
- Kalman, B. and Hale, L. *Pioneer recipes*. New York: Crabtree Publishing Co., 2000. (juvenile)
- King, D.C. *Pioneer days: Discover the past with fun projects, games, activities, and recipes*. New York: Wiley, 1997. (juvenile)
- Luchetti, C. *Children of the West: Family life on the frontier*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001. (juvenile)
- Peavy, L.S. and Smith, U. *Pioneer children*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.
- Peavy, L.S. and Smith, U. *Pioneer women: the lives of women on the frontier*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.
- Saunders-Smith G. *Fall harvest*. Mankato, MN: Pebble Books, 1998. (juvenile)

RELATED LINKS

Ardenwood Historic Farm, Fremont, CA

(<http://www.ebparks.org/parks/arden.htm>)

Discovery Museum, Sacramento, CA

agricultural exhibits, including a 1928 kitchen and crate label collection

(http://www.thediscovery.org/technology/tec_agr.html)

Heidrick Ag History Center, Woodland, CA

(<http://www.aghistory.org/>)

Yolo Land and Cattle Company, a working ranch offering guided tours

(<http://yololandandcattle.com/>)

Country Kitchens (Springfield-Greene County Library)

(<http://thelibrary.springfield.missouri.org/lohist/periodicals/bittersweet/sp75l.htm>)

The Daily Routine of a Kansas Farm Wife in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century

(<http://www.kckpl.lib.ks.us/kscoll/lohist/exhibits/farmwife.htm>)

Explore the History and Making of Butter, Online Exhibit

(<http://webexhibits.org/butter/index.html>)

History Corner 12- 23-99, Memories of Milking Cows

(<http://home.ctcweb.net/~jcpeart/19991223.htm>)

Milking and Making Butter in the 1800s

(<http://www.geocities.com/Nashville/6000/butter.html>)

background 13 LIFE ON A FAMILY FARM



After the Gold Rush, large landowners dominated California agriculture, but many people lived on small family farms or in rural areas where they raised much of their own food. Although mechanical inventions made some tasks easier, life on a farm did not change very much between the 1870s and the 1920s. In fact, except in cities, electricity was not widely available until the late 1930s, under a government program called the Rural Electrification Administration.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, a typical family farm had several buildings besides the main house, including one or more barns, a smokehouse, and a poultry or henhouse. A visitor might also have noticed a windmill, water well, cistern, water pump, and even an icehouse. Of course, indoor plumbing was rare, so almost everyone had an outhouse.

Work on the Farm. Everyone on a farm helped with the work, and there was a lot to do. Men usually worked in the fields or orchards, repaired buildings and farm equipment, chopped wood, and managed livestock. Women did most of the household tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, sewing, and laundry.

A woman's day usually began early in the morning when she had to get up to build a fire in the cast-iron cooking stove and start to prepare breakfast. If she had light, it was often from only a kerosene lamp. It took about half an hour for the stove to heat up enough for cooking. Wood was the common fuel, although dried corncobs or cow dung could be used in areas where wood was scarce. Hot water was heated on the stove. After breakfast, it was time to clean up and start preparing the next meal, which was usually the largest meal of the day, called dinner. A lighter evening meal was called supper. Jobs such as washing clothes might only be done once a week, but it could take all day to do them.

Farm children also had their own chores. They might take care of younger children, carry water to the house, hoe weeds in the garden, milk cows, gather eggs from the henhouse, help with a harvest, collect wood for the fire, and empty ashes from the stove. Children also helped with cooking chores such as peeling potatoes and churning butter.

Water. A hand pump or bucket was used to draw drinking water from a well. Some people had windmills to pump water from the well into a cistern (a holding reservoir or tank, often built out of rocks and concrete). Some cisterns collected rainwater or stored water that was carried from a stream. Cistern water was often used for bathing or washing dishes. Sinks with drains were very rare. Although a few people developed systems to pump water all the way into the house, most farmers had to carry water into the house in buckets and carry it out again when it was dirty. Hot water for bathing was heated on the stove. Water was not wasted, so dirty water was commonly recycled to water the garden.

Food. Many family farms had a vegetable garden, chickens for eggs, and at least one dairy cow for milk, butter, and cheese. For meat, farmers might butcher cattle, hogs, chickens, and turkeys. In some places, people took advantage of native foods by catching fish or picking wild berries. Some people raised and ground their own wheat or took it to a mill for grinding. If you did not grow your own wheat, you could buy flour in town, along with other staples such as sugar, coffee, and tea.

Baked Goods. Although baked goods were sold in some stores, most women made their own. Families were often large, so it was not unusual to make six or eight loaves of bread each week. Women also baked the family's biscuits, rolls, pies, cakes, and cookies.

Meat. It was difficult to keep fresh meat from spoiling in the summer, so people ate meat that had been preserved. To preserve meat, many farmers had a smokehouse to make ham, bacon, and sausage, after butchering hogs in the fall. The smokehouse had a dirt floor where a fire would slowly cure and dry meat. Women also canned, dried, and salted meat to preserve it.

Milk. Most cows had to be milked twice a day. Milking was a tricky job that required balancing on a stool and avoiding having the cow slap you with her tail or knock over the milk pail. Fresh milk was strained to remove any dust or hairs by pouring it through a metal strainer into a milk can or through a cloth into a crock or jar.

Butter. Even though margarine was available in stores at the turn of the century, farm wives with a milk cow usually made their own butter. Making butter requires cream. Raw milk is warm when it comes from the cow. As the milk cools, the cream separates and rises to the top. Mechanical cream separators were introduced in the 1880s, to speed the separation process. Fresh milk was poured into the separator, which had a crank handle and two spouts, and, after much turning of the crank, milk came out one spout and cream out of the other.

Cream separators were so difficult to clean that many women continued to use older methods. Instead of using the separator, they would pour raw milk into a crock or shallow pan and leave it overnight. The cream was then skimmed off the top, leaving behind what is called skimmed milk. When the cream was slightly sour, it was poured into a butter churn. Churns came in many shapes, sizes, and materials, including wood and glass, but all had a container and a paddle or dasher to agitate the cream. One common style was a stoneware crock and a wooden lid with a hole in the center for the handle of the dasher (sometimes called a *plunger* or a *stomper*). The dasher was pumped up and down until the cream started to set into butter. The leftover liquid is called buttermilk. The butter was rinsed and placed in a wooden bowl, where it was worked with wooden paddles to add salt and remove any remaining liquid. Finished butter was placed in a crock or jar or molded into decorative shapes with a butter mold.

Refrigeration. Before electricity, keeping dairy products cool on the farm was a challenge, and imaginative solutions were often found. Cooling methods varied according to the location of the farm. In some areas, food was stored outside in the winter. Where winters were cold enough, blocks of ice could also be cut from a pond and hauled to an icehouse for storage. However, by the turn of the century, many sources of ice were polluted, so good ice was sometimes difficult to find. If you lived close enough to town, an iceman might deliver your ice by wagon, but ice delivery was not available in many rural areas. If your property had a spring, you could build a springhouse over it, a small building with no floor where food could be placed on shelves or directly into the spring to let the cold water flow around it. Some people lowered milk or butter into their cistern or well to partially submerge it in the water. Others kept food in cool cellars, under buildings.

Although they became available around 1915, electric refrigerators were not widely used until the 1930s. However, before that, people who were lucky enough to have a supply of ice could use iceboxes to cool their food. Typical iceboxes were insulated wooden cabinets lined with metal. Blocks of ice were placed at the top of the icebox, which would stay cool for several days until the ice melted. Water from the melted ice drained into a pan that had to be emptied often.

Fruit and Vegetables. Most families had a vegetable garden, sometimes called a kitchen garden, regardless of what crops they grew for sale to others. A wide variety of vegetable seeds and plants were available from catalogs and nurseries. California gardens might include corn, beans, carrots, potatoes, peas, broccoli, celery, spinach, cabbage, eggplant, onions, peppers, lettuce, squash, and melons. Root crops such as beets, turnips, parsnips, rutabagas, and salsify (vegetable oyster) were also popular.

Most farms had several fruit trees such as apples, pears, plums, peaches, and cherries. Women spent much of their time in the summer and fall cooking, canning, and drying fruit and vegetables. They used apples to make cider, applesauce, dried apples, and apple butter. They made cucumbers into pickles. Vegetables such as potatoes, onions, winter squash, and root vegetables could be stored in a cool basement room called a *root cellar*.

On farms where specialized crops were raised and sold, such as wheat, almonds, or fruit, harvest time often meant cooking great quantities of food to feed extra workers. Wheat threshing could take several days, and almond harvesting could last several weeks. Children often helped in the harvests, hulling almonds, picking fruit, or even driving wagons.

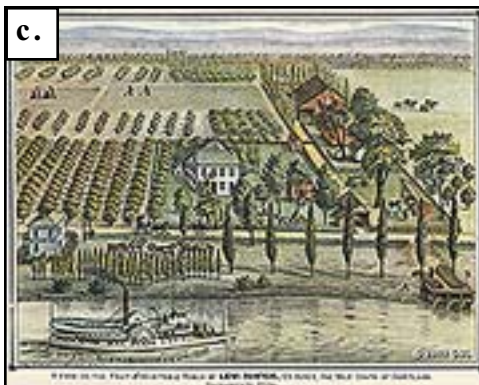
Victory Gardens. During World War I and World War II, even people who did not live on farms planted vegetable gardens. Around 1917, during World War I, some Americans were concerned about food shortages and planted gardens, sometimes as a school project. In the 1940s, the United States government asked Americans to plant Victory Gardens, because of a shortage of canned food in World War II.

activity sheet 13 Agriculture
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<http://www.sacramentohistory.org>

I. Find the Farm:

Place the correct letter by each number to match the image to its description.
 Put the date of the image beside the name of each farm.



_____ 1. John McFarland Ranch

Date _____

_____ 2. Sutter's Hock Farm

Date _____

_____ 3. Levi Painter Ranch

Date _____

_____ 4. Home of F.L. Azevedo

Date _____

Choose A Farm

Circle one of the four images to show which farm you would choose as a home.
 Explain your choice. Where was your farm located? How would life there have been different than on the other farms and from your life today?

activity sheet 13 Agriculture
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KEY

I. Find the Farm:

Place the correct letter by each number to match the image to its description.
Put the date of the image beside the name of each farm.



 d 1. John McFarland Ranch

Date 1893

 b 2. Sutter's Hock Farm

Date 1849

 c 3. Levi Painter Ranch

Date 1880

 a 4. Home of F.L. Azevedo

Date ca. 1924

Choose A Farm

Circle one of the four images to show which farm you would choose as a home.
Explain your choice. Where was your farm located? How would life there have been different than on the other farms and from your life today?

(answers will vary)