

Collecting Data from the Howell Living History Farm website

In this lesson you will do some research and collect some data about the farm on which the Charles Fish Barn was built and used. This barn was the center of production on the farm and was used to process and store some of the crops, house some of the animals, and store some of the tools and equipment. It was a place that Charles and Andrew Fish, the owners of the farm, went to and used every day for most of the years of their farming life. To find the data you need for this assignment go to the Internet and www.howellfarm.org and follow the links to the Fish family and farm and then find the pages for the years 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1873.

In the years 1850, 1860, and 1870 the United States government did a census, or count, of all the people living in the United States. At the same time, the government also collected information about every farm in the United States. For many states, including New Jersey, this information was saved and preserved along with the information on people. When using the agricultural (farming) information you need to know the following things.

The number of animals given is the number the farmer had on the day the census was taken. During the year, at any given time the farmer may have had more or fewer animals. During a farming year animals are born on the farm or are purchased to add to the number on the farm while others are sold, usually to be slaughtered for food.

The amounts given for crops are the amount grown on the farm in the year before to the census. The same is true for the amount of products, such as butter. These figures tell about the farming year rather than just one day of the year.

Some questions were the same in each of the years the agricultural census was taken, while other questions were not asked each time. Some questions about farms were not asked in any of the three census years we are looking at, for example about poultry. Therefore, just because these documents do not show the Fish family raising poultry in 1850, 1860, and 1870 this does not mean that they didn't. They very likely did raise chickens for eggs and meat, but the government did not feel it was important to collect this information. Likewise, information about wages paid to farm workers was not asked about in 1850 and 1860 so there is no data. This does not mean that workers were not hired.

The information given on the website does not show every question that was asked in the agricultural census. Only items that relate to the Fish family farm are reported. For example, oxen were counted in these census years but the Fish family did not have any, so that item is not included.

In getting information from the 1873 inventory of the farm you should note that the numbers of animals is not always given but the value of each type of animal is. The inventory also lists each tool and machine used in farming while the census just gives a total value of tools and farm machinery. The values of the items in the list are the opinion of the three people who made the inventory. If each item was put up for sale or auction, the actual price it sold for might be different. Note that in 1873 the Fish family owned more than one farm. They had their main farm and then a smaller one in Pennington. Quantities of things in the inventory are the amount on the farm the day the inventory was made. The amounts of grain, hay, etc. do not necessarily represent a full year's crop, but just what was on the farm on May 22, 1873.

Glossary

To help you understand the information in the agricultural census, make sure you know the definitions of the following terms.

Improved Acres - Acres that have been cleared and can be used to grow crops, pasture animals, etc.

Unimproved Acres - Acres that are still covered with trees or cannot be used for farming. These acres are important because large amounts of wood were needed for building and for firewood.

Milch cows - The cows that produce milk. The milk can be used or sold as milk or converted into butter or cheese for sale.

Other cattle - These are cattle that are not currently producing milk. They may be cows that are being raised for sale as meat or that are too young to produce milk yet, etc. It would not include oxen, as they were a separate category.

Poultry - On the Fish farm this would most likely refer to chickens being raised for eggs and meat.

Indian Corn - Today we simply use the word corn. In Europe before the discovery of America, corn was the word for the group of grain crops such as wheat, barley, rye, oats, etc. When Europeans came to America they found a crop they had not seen before being grown by the Native Americans. They recognized it was similar in many ways to other forms of grain they called corn, so they called it Indian corn or maize (the Native American term for it).

Irish Potatoes - This term distinguished the white potato from the sweet potato. Both types were first grown by the Native Americans but the white potatoes had become an important food source in Ireland and were identified with the Irish during the 19th century.

Hay - Hay refers to grass family plants grown as feed for animals, such as Timothy. Both the stalk and seed pod are harvested and kept together. (Note that straw is different from hay. Straw is the stalks of grain plants, such as wheat and rye, that is used for animal bedding. The nutrient value of straw is removed when the seeds of the plant are removed to be ground into flour for making bread, etc. The straw that is left is good for animal bedding where it is mixed with manure and spread back on fields as fertilizer.)

Data Collection Chart

Charles and Andrew Fish Farm in Hopewell Township, Mercer County, New Jersey

	1850	1860	1870	1873
Improved Acres				
Unimproved Acres				
Cash value of farm				
Value of implements & machinery				
Wages paid to farm workers				
Horses				
Milch cows				
Other cattle				
Sheep				
Swine				
Poultry				
Value of Livestock				
Bushels of Wheat				
Bushels of Rye				
Bushels of Indian Corn				
Bushels of Oats				
Bushels of Peas and Beans				
Bushels of Irish Potatoes				
Bushels of Buckwheat				
Bushels of Clover Seed				
Bushels of other Grass Seed				
Tons of Hay				
Pounds of Butter				
Pounds of Wool				
Value of Livestock Slaughtered				
Value of Orchard Products				

Analyze the Data you collected on the Charles and Andrew Fish farm

1. Look at the crops grown on the Fish farm. Which ones were grown –

To feed their animals

To feed themselves

To sell

Which crops did they grow the most of

2. Looking at the animals raised on the Fish farm. Which ones were –

Used to help them work the farm

Raised to provide a product that could be sold (without killing the animal)

Raised and then sold to be slaughtered for food (or slaughtered on the farm to feed the Fish family)

5. In looking at the information on your chart, what questions about this farm would you like to know the answers to?

What kind of documents would you need to find your answers?

6. Think about the differences in the information you got from the agricultural census and from the inventory. What kinds of things could you learn from the agricultural census that you could not learn from the inventory?

What kinds of things could you learn from the inventory that you could not learn from the agricultural census?

What does this tell you about the need for saving as many records and documents as possible?
