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# PART - TIME FARMING IN MICHIGAN

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EXTENSION SERVICE  
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EAST LANSING

## *Locating in the Country*

*This bulletin is one of a series of three on the subject of locating in the country. The first of the series, Extension Bulletin E-267, "Do I Want a Farm?," is a guide for service men, industrial workers and others considering farming as a vocation. The second, Extension Folder F-89, "How to Choose a Home Site," is a guide to choosing a land site, possibly a garden farm, on the outskirts of town.*

*This third publication, Extension Bulletin E-278, "Part-Time Farming," is the last of the series. It is a guide for those interested in combining their city job with a home and part-time farming in the country.*

*Copies of these publications may be obtained free at your county extension office or from the Michigan State College, Department of Public Relations, Bulletin Office, East Lansing.*

## Summary

1. Part-time farming is a mode of life which allows the family many of the advantages of country living while earning a living in the city.
2. The principal attractions of part-time farming are:
  - Satisfaction of the desire to live in the country.
  - The country provides many advantages for growing children.
  - The part-time farm reasonably free of debt, helps to provide security during periods of reduced employment and retirement.
  - It is possible to reduce the cost of living, particularly in the food budget.
  - If one is employed only part-time at a job, a part-time farm may supplement the income.
3. The principal disadvantages of part-time farming are:
  - If inexperienced in farming, the amount of farm products produced may be less than expected and the work and expenses more than anticipated.
  - Higher transportation costs resulting from driving greater distances to and from work.
  - Family will be confined at home during the day unless two cars are available or home is near a bus line.
  - Doctors and health service may not be so readily available as in the city.
  - Some part-time farming neighborhoods may become undesirable because of lack of building restrictions and sanitary provisions.
4. A prospective part-time farmer **should**:
  - Locate on good soil.
  - Locate in a desirable neighborhood where there are good churches; schools; and if possible where telephone, and transportation services are available.
5. A part-time farmer **should not**:
  - Try to work eight hours on his regular job and eight hours on the farm. (Plan the farm to fit the labor available for farming.)
  - Pay too much for the farm.
  - Assume more debt than his outside income will justify.



# *Part-Time Farming in Michigan*

BY E. B. HILL AND L. H. BROWN

**M**ANY inquiries are received by the Michigan State College from persons interested in locating on small acreages of land. Because of such requests, this bulletin has been prepared. It presents some of the advantages and disadvantages of part-time farming, and suggests procedures for making a success of such an undertaking.

In obtaining the information used in this report, visits were made to many part-time farmers in central Michigan. In addition, liberal use was made of information obtained from a study of part-time farms made by the Farm Management Department in cooperation with federal agencies.

Most of the persons visited in central Michigan liked their part-time farms. They did not believe the part-time farm was a place to make money or even to increase savings. In their opinion, however, it was a decidedly better place to live than where they had formerly lived in the city.

Visits with many part-time farmers reveal that the most successful ones had previous farm experience, knew how much work was involved in running the farm, knew how to do farm work and were not too heavily in debt. Persons without farm experience generally had more difficulty in producing much of their own food supply than did experienced operators.

## **WHY PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE IN THE COUNTRY**

Individuals give many and varied reasons for wanting a part-time farm for a home. Most of these can be classified under the following four headings:

1. A desire for country life,
2. A good place to bring up children,
3. Security during periods of reduced employment and retirement, and
4. Lower living costs.

Living in the country is sufficiently attractive to make some persons want a part-time farm. City visitors often tell farmers about the quiet, peaceful beauty of the country. Yet the regular farmer sometimes overlooks these things because he is so accustomed to them. The charm of the

rooster's crow at dawn may wear off if one listens to it every day in the year. A family should be sure that their love for mother nature is not a passing fancy when they are confronted with confining chores, insects, weeds, mud, cold weather, blizzards, and drought. Much of the apparent beauty on the farm, such as lawn, shrubbery, and garden requires a lot of hard work.

Most persons agree that country life, plenty of space, fresh air, sunlight and the responsibility of a few productive chores provide a good environment for growing children. It is an advantage which cannot be overlooked in considering a place in the country.

If the family owns their part-time farm reasonably free of debt, it helps to provide security by supplying a portion of the family living requirements. During prolonged periods of unemployment or reduced employment, such as was experienced between 1930 and 1940, many part-time farmers are able to live economically and have a satisfying avocation for their leisure time. If debt-free, it is possible for one to live for short periods at least on a minimum of cash income, provided the family can get along with a minimum of new clothes, do only essential driving, stay in good health, and confine their menu as much as possible to home-produced food.

On first thought, all of the foregoing reasons for becoming a part-time farmer are very convincing to many city dwellers. Many part-time farmers, however, indicated that the actual results are sometimes less satisfactory than anticipated. For example, to what extent are living costs lower in the country than in the city? To what extent do part-time farms provide more security than homes in the city?

### LOWER LIVING COSTS?

Just how much saving in family living costs can be made when the city dweller moves to a part-time farm? Table 1 shows the typical living costs for middle-income, urban families in normal times. In the right-hand column are shown the items which will probably change on moving to the country.

The possible savings in living costs on the part-time farm as compared with living in a city seem rather substantial until one does some careful figuring. The principal saving is made in the food budget. If one lives in

a comparable kind of a house with the same conveniences other costs are about as high in the country as in the city. Transportation costs may be somewhat higher. The following discussion considers separately each item of the family living budget on a part-time farm.

TABLE 1 — *Pre-war costs of living for urban families in middle-income group (\$1,000 to \$1,249) 1935-1936.*<sup>1</sup>

Items	Annual cost		Probable change in cost on a part-time farm
	Dollars	Percent of total	
Food.....	\$414	37	20 to 60% less <sup>3</sup>
Housing <sup>2</sup> .....	192	17	Same or less
Household operation, fuel, etc.....	138	12	Same
Household furnishings and equipment.....	41	4	Same
Clothing.....	100	9	Same
Auto and other transportation.....	77	7	30 to 50% more
Medical care.....	47	4	Same
Personal care.....	26	2	Same
Gifts, welfare, selected taxes.....	25	2	Same
Recreational, reading, educational, tobacco, and other items.....	73	6	Same
TOTAL.....	\$1133	100	.....

<sup>1</sup> National Resources Planning Board, *Family Expenditures in the United States*, 209 pp., June 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Expenditures for rent, or taxes, interest on mortgage, and repairs on owned homes.

<sup>3</sup> This represents possible reduction in cash paid out for food. It must be kept in mind that there are costs involved in producing the food on the part-time farm which partially offset the saving in the food budget.

**Food Costs** — The most important cash saving which can be made is in food. It is estimated that a family on a part-time farm, if they have the "know-how" and willingness to work, can produce up to 60 per cent of their food supply in the form of meat, milk, butter, eggs, garden and fruit. This is particularly true if the products are properly canned and preserved for year-around use. Unfortunately, however, not every one does a good job of saving the food that is produced.

It must be remembered, however, that the production of up to 60 per cent of the family food supply *does not mean net savings*. Even if the labor is not charged against the production it will still be necessary to buy seed, fertilizer, equipment for the garden, and much of the grain for livestock to produce milk, meat and eggs. With good production efficiency about half the cost of producing eggs or milk is for feed. For pork production, feed costs run about 80 per cent of total costs (see Table 2).

TABLE 2 — *Feed requirements, feed as a percentage of total costs, and production for selected livestock enterprises.*

Item	Dairy	Poultry	Pork
	One cow	30 hens	Weanling pig to 200 pounds without pasture
Feed — Amount needed . . . . .	Grain 1500 pounds to 2000 pounds Hay 2½ to 3 ton Pasture 2 acres	Mash grain 1200 pounds to 1300 pounds Scratch grain 1200 pounds to 1300 pounds	Corn about 14 bushel Protein supplement 75 pounds
Percent feed is of total cost . . . . .	40 to 50%	50 to 60%	75 to 85%
Production . . . . .	2500 to 3500 quarts of milk a year	8 to 12 dozen eggs per hen a year	Hams, roasting cuts, chops, spare ribs, etc. . . . 83 pounds Bacon . . . 19 pounds Sausage . 16 pounds Lard . . . 20 pounds Head, feet and hocks . 18 pounds Total dressed pork . 156 pounds

The balance of production costs includes the charges for labor, the use of buildings and equipment, depreciation on the livestock and interest on the investment. The charge for labor is not considered as a cost item by some part-time farmers since it is only a use for leisure time. Many part-time farmers, however, tend to put more value on leisure time after they have had a few years experience with a farming program. Prospective part-time farmers should keep in mind that their labor efficiency will be much lower than most full-time farmers because they cannot afford to own labor-saving equipment because of their small volume of business. The charge for the use of buildings is often rather high for the small amount of livestock kept on the part-time farm. For example, many full-time farmers are able to house their cows and the roughage to feed them for an investment of from \$100 to \$150 a cow. It would be difficult to furnish adequate housing for only one cow and roughage for less than \$300 to \$400. A similar comparison could be made for the laying flock.

**Housing Costs** — Some persons are able to build and maintain homes in the country cheaper than they could in the city. Usually there



are no building restrictions so they can build what they want and do all the work themselves as they have time. This, however, may become a disadvantage as well as an advantage. Your neighbor can do likewise. Many persons build "cellar homes", thus saving rent money which can be applied against the cost of completing the house when labor and material become available.

Interest on a mortgage, insurance, repairs and maintenance are as expensive in the country as in the city. Real estate taxes may be lower in the country than in the city. It is well, however, to examine this item rather carefully. In the first place what services do urban dwellers pay for when they pay taxes? Schools, street and sidewalk maintenance, parks, sewage disposal, water, police and fire protection are some of the more important ones. The part-time farmer either pays for these services or does without them. For instance, he too must support schools and roads. He furnishes his own sewage disposal system by installing and maintaining a septic tank. He pays the well driller for a well and pays the cost of pumping water in his electric bill. He pays for fire protection either in higher insurance or in support of a local fire engine company. There are some services which a city government can perform cheaper than individuals can perform the same services for themselves.

**Transportation** — Part-time farmers say "avoid going too far out in the country". The cost of transportation for the part-time farmer from the farm to the job is sometimes rather high. In addition, unless there is an opportunity to share rides with a neighbor or take a bus to work it is necessary for the family to stay close to home during the day. Some families find it necessary to have two cars and this makes considerable extra expense.

**Other Living Cost Items** — Most of the other items of living cost, such as household operation, household furnishings, medical care, recreation, education and so-forth, are about the same in either the city or the country. It may well be that with the saving in food budget some of these items can be increased for the enjoyment and well-being of the family. These items, which do not usually change on moving to the country, make up about 30 to 50 per cent of the family living expenditures.

### SOME "DO'S AND DON'TS" FOR PART-TIME FARMERS

**Select Good Land** — Good land is a prime essential in any kind of a farming venture. Many part-time farmers make their first mistake in

selecting land not well adapted to part-time farming. The soil should be well drained, loamy in texture, and reasonably level and free from stones. Soils that are too sandy tend to dry out quickly and require expensive irrigation to insure against crop failure. Soils that are too heavy, like some red and yellow clay soils, become very hard when they dry out and are difficult to work. The loamy soils will produce any crops adapted to the local climate and can be worked satisfactorily under quite varied moisture conditions. If a purchaser is not sure about the quality of soil on a prospective site he should see his county agricultural agent who is located at the county seat in most of the counties of Michigan.

**Select a Good Location**—Some of the major considerations in selecting a location for the part-time farm are: (1) nearness to work, (2) kind of roads, (3) available transportation facilities, (4) markets available, (5) availability of electricity, and (6) the neighborhood.

An extra 10 miles of driving every day will amount to as much as 2,000 to 3,000 miles of extra driving in a year. This not only increases the actual cost of living on a part-time farm, but it also takes time which could otherwise be devoted to farm work and recreation.

A part-time farm should be located on an all-weather road. Dirt roads often become impassable for two or three weeks during the spring, are dusty in the summer, and are not kept free from snow in the winter. The loss of time and extra effort required to get in and out generally more than offset the extra cost of locating on a good road.

Transportation facilities are especially important when the family car must be driven to work each day. It is often necessary for members of the family to meet doctor and dental appointments and go shopping during the day when the car is gone. Distance to the bus line, therefore, may be an important consideration in locating the part-time farm.

Since one of the important considerations in part-time farming is the pleasure of living outside of the city it is important to consider the neighborhood in selecting a location. Most rural areas are unrestricted. This means that anyone can locate a junk yard, tavern, gas station or any other kind of a business establishment on land adjoining a farm home. It is worthwhile to consider these possibilities in selecting a location. Also farmers generally associate with their immediate neighbors more than do city folks. Be sure your neighbors are people with whom you like to associate.

***Don't Pay Too Much*** — During the war period farm land prices have risen 50 to 70 per cent in different parts of Michigan. Prices of part-time farms near industrial cities have risen even more in many cases because of the heavy demand resulting from relatively high income of industrial workers.

Land in part-time farms is necessarily priced higher per acre than the full-time family sized farm. It usually is frontage property and derives part of its value from this location feature. If a person chooses to buy, let us say, 5 acres of good land on a good road in the vicinity of a city in southern Michigan it will probably cost him from \$200 to \$300 per acre. If he is able to build a house for \$3,000 to \$4,000 his investment will be between \$4,000 and \$5,500. The agricultural value of a part-time farm is very small — it is the location features for which the part-time farmer is paying.

***Keep Debts Low*** — A part-time farmer is not generally justified in taking on any more debt on his farm than he would on a home in the city. Usually it is his income as a wage earner which must retire the debt.

While one or more members of the family were working under wartime conditions a debt of several thousand dollars could be paid off rather easily. Such debts, however, become a burden when one is out of work either temporarily or for longer periods. Some part-time farmers reason that as outside work hours are reduced they will be able to produce cash income on the farm to make up the difference. Anyone with this idea should be reminded that wartime prices for farm products were double prewar prices. There is reason to expect that post-war prices are likely to swing back toward the prewar level. It took over three times as many strawberries and twice as many eggs for instance, to pay a debt in 1932 and 1933 as it did in 1943 and 1944.

Many part-time farmers avoid debt by following a pay-as-you-go policy. They put down a well, build a garage, or basement for living quarters and add on as money becomes available. This method of getting started requires much sacrifice and hardship for the family, but it is conservative from the standpoint of financial security.

***Don't Try to Farm Too Much*** — Part-time farmers say a person cannot do justice to two full-time jobs at the same time — eight hours as a wage earner and eight hours on the farm. One should not plan to follow

such an ambitious program. Many who have attempted to do it in the past have lost their health and that is an irreplaceable asset. The part-time farm should require only a part of the operator's leisure — particularly if the regular job requires much physical labor. Most part-time farms in Michigan are three acres or less in size.

For example, one part-time farm family decided to buy a 35-acre farm as a means of supplementing the income. The father was a tool and die maker. They bought a small tractor and equipment to go with it, kept some hens, and 4 or 5 pigs. They devoted all their leisure time to the farm for a period of three years when the father's health began to fail as a result of working about 12 to 16 hours a day. They also discovered that the net income from the farm was not more than \$100 a year after deducting cash expenses, depreciation, and interest on the investment in land, buildings and equipment.

There is some possibility of owning a sizable acreage as security against reduced employment or retirement but not attempting to farm intensively while working steadily. For example, the owner of a 26-acre plot works in an industrial plant as a foreman. The farm was bought in the early thirties. The family built a garage which was used as a home during the depression. During those years the husband worked four or five days a week and sometimes was laid off for several weeks at a time. Farming operations included a 3-acre garden, raspberries, strawberries, 3 cows and 200 hens. The family marketed as much as \$1,500 worth of produce annually from their little farm. This amount was not all profit, but it contributed much toward the family living requirements. In the late thirties and during the war, factory work has been more steady. The farm has been seeded down to alfalfa and a neighbor has taken off the hay on shares. The owner continues to keep a home garden, one cow and a few hens. In the near future the operator plans to retire from factory work. If and when this is done, he will again operate his part-time farm to capacity. He knows his income will be small, but he also knows that he can get by and he likes farm work.

It has been pointed out that since part-time farms are small, labor is generally used with comparatively low efficiency. Since this is the case, one is using poor judgment to take on so much farming that he must take time off from his regular job. It is poor economy to leave a job paying \$1 an hour to hoe in a garden at 25c an hour. If part-time farming takes one

away from his regular work he might better let the land grow grass, buy his food, and spend his leisure time sitting in the shade.

### WHAT SHOULD THE PART-TIME FARMER PRODUCE?

The extent of farming operations on the part-time farms depend, to a large degree, on (1) the nature and extent of outside employment, (2) the amount of farm experience of the family, (3) the amount of family labor available, (4) the extent to which the operator and his family are willing to use their leisure time to do the farm work, (5) the likes and dislikes of the husband and wife for certain types of farm work and (6) the size of farm. In the following discussion an attempt is made to suggest the amount of farming which could be properly cared for with varying amounts of labor and capital available. These suggestions are made with the assumption that part-time farmers need some leisure to enjoy the advantages of living in the country.

*Perhaps Just a Good Garden* — The factory worker with little or no farm experience, and a wife whose household duties and small children permit little time for outside work will wish to keep their farming activities at a minimum, perhaps just a small garden. A well kept garden of one-quarter to three-quarters of an acre, depending on the size of the family, will readily absorb the few hours each week that are available for farm work. If one hires the garden plowed and fitted and does the planting, cultivating and weeding with hand tools the family garden will make a greater contribution to the family food supply than any other single enterprise available to the part-time farmer. No buildings are needed and the expenses other than labor are at a minimum.

The garden farmer may want to make provisions for watering the garden to insure against extended periods of dry weather. Probably the ordinary garden hose is the most economical equipment for this job. Anyone who attempts to irrigate a garden should keep in mind that it takes about 33,000 gallons of water to put the equivalent of one inch of rainfall on an acre. Irrigation takes a good well or stream and an efficient pumping system. Unless garden crops are quite high in price, the electric or water bill may exceed the value of crops produced.

*Add Laying Hens Next* — If one wishes to go further than the family garden, the next enterprise to consider is a small flock of 20 to 30 hens for production of the home egg supply. This enterprise will require

some cash outlay as well as labor. The investment in a poultry house should not exceed \$2 to \$3 a hen. Pullets can be raised from baby chicks, but most small flock producers find it to their advantage to buy pullets for the laying flock. Part-time farmers say there is no money in keeping many hens when all of the feed has to be purchased.

Part-time farms of 1 to 5 acres with a garden and possibly some laying hens are the most numerous. There are hundreds of them on the outskirts of Michigan cities. They require the minimum of "know-how", labor and capital investment, and at the same time allow their owners the advantages of country living.

**Perhaps Add a Cow** — As the part-time farmer adds livestock to his farm he becomes more self-sufficient but he also will find his farm work more confining. Chickens and cows must be cared for two or three times a day with a certain degree of regularity. To add to the complexity of operating the farm, livestock sometimes get sick and require additional care. If cows or chickens are to be added, however, the wife should like to care for them because it is quite likely she will not only have an opportunity but will find it necessary to do such work on some occasions.

A dairy cow can be expected to produce from 2,500 to 3,500 quarts of milk during a 9 to 11-month period under usual part-time farming conditions. Such a cow will consume 1,500 to 2,000 pounds of grain,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  tons of hay and require 1 to 2 acres of good pasture (see Table 2).

There is a tendency for inexperienced part-time farmers to overestimate the annual returns from a cow and arrive at a gross figure of \$350 to \$400 ( $12 \text{ cents} \times 3,000 \text{ quarts} = \$360$ ). As a matter of fact, only milk used for drinking and cooking purposes can be figured at this price. If 100 pounds of milk containing 4.0 per cent butterfat is made into butter it will yield roughly 5 pounds of butter and 90 pounds of skim milk. At 50 cents a pound, the butter is worth \$2.50. The skim milk is worth 40 to 50 cents when fed to chickens or livestock, using 1945 feed prices. Thus, the milk used for these purposes is worth \$3 per hundred or about 6 cents per quart. A hundred pounds of skim milk will make 12 to 15 pounds of cottage cheese, but there is a limit to the amount of this product the family can consume.

**Maybe Fatten a Hog** — Starting with a 6-week-old pig, weighing 20-30 pounds, one should be able to produce a 200-pound butcher hog in

6 to 7 months. If the hog is kept in a small pen it will require 50 to 75 pounds of protein supplement (preferably tankage and soybean oil meal mixed half and half) and 13 to 15 bushels of corn or its equivalent during the 6 to 7-month period. If not produced efficiently, the value of a fat hog may exceed by \$3 to \$5 the cost of the pig plus the cost of purchased feed. Unless pork is scarce it hardly pays a part-time farmer to produce his own pork.

**Adding Goats and Rabbits** — During the winter, a goat will require a daily ration of about 2 or 3 pounds of hay and from 1 to 2 pounds of grain. During the summer a little less grain can be fed, perhaps 1 to 1½ pounds per day, and the doe can be tethered out on any grassy space that is available. Sweet corn stover, beet tops, bean and pea vines, and other by-products from the garden can be used as feed. A good doe will produce about 2 quarts of milk a day for 7 to 10 months each year.

It requires about the same amount of feed to produce a pound of rabbit as a pound of poultry meat. Rabbits need a good quality of hay, some green or succulent feed, and a grain ration. A buck and three or four does should produce enough young rabbits to supply as much rabbit meat as would be wanted by a family of five.

**Producing the Feed for Livestock** — It is doubtful whether the part-time farmer who produces only for home consumption can afford to produce his own feed, except possibly pasture, for livestock. It requires too much investment for power in machinery for the acreage involved. even with a small tractor for power it would be difficult to equip the small farm for less than \$500 to \$1,000. If enough acreage is available to grow feed crops, it is often possible to have a neighboring farmer grow the crops on shares. Many part-time farmers, however, state it is not profitable to keep much livestock if all the feed has to be purchased. (See Table 2 for livestock feed requirements.)

One part-time farmer was visited who was attempting to produce much of his feed for 5 cows and 150 hens. He was an electrician by trade. He originally had 5 acres which he used as a garden and for a flock of hens. Gardening on 2 acres proved to be too much for hand operation so he bought a horse. Next he found he needed more land to grow hay and pasture for the horse so he bought an additional 30 acres. To work the additional land he bought another horse and some horse-drawn equipment.

This made it possible for him to grow enough roughage to keep 3 cows. By this time he had to put an addition on his barn which he made large enough for 5 cows and 4 head of young stock. As he filled up this space with cattle he was forced to rent some additional ground. But now his farm business is too large for a part-time proposition and too small for a full-time farm. He said, "I just couldn't seem to find a place to stop growing. Now I find it is too much for me to handle along with my full-time job as an electrician. I am seriously considering selling out here and buying 3 to 5 acres on which I'll have a modest garden and a few hens."

***Producing Products For Sale*** — If the part-time farmer is going to do much commercial farming, he must have more than his leisure time to devote to the farm work. Such persons employed in part-time jobs as are rural mail carriers, insurance agents, school bus drivers, milk truck drivers, part-time carpenters can sometimes make a good supplementary business of part-time farming. This list should also include persons who receive pensions. The danger of such an arrangement is in the burden of work placed on the farmer and his family when they try to carry two, almost full-time jobs. Too many persons have sacrificed their health in attempting to manage such a business.

If one is to attempt to combine part-time farming with another steady part-time job, the enterprises to be selected will largely depend on the nature of the outside work. For instance, the mail man has time to do chores night and morning and may often have the afternoon free for field work. For him a herd of dairy cows or a sizable laying flock might be adapted. He could produce much of his own feed in addition to doing his chores.

For the carpenter whose work may be intermittent, in normal times, the production of garden crops and berries may fit better. On these enterprises, the farm work can usually be put off for a few days, when he has a carpenter job, without interfering with farm production. The small truck crop producer has considerable advantage if he is located on a good highway where the produce can be marketed at the door.

In any part-time farming venture it is important to keep expenses at a minimum. The smaller the acreage the greater will be the cost per acre of owning the necessary tools and equipment. This makes it difficult for the small farmer to compete, during normal times, with those who do a large business.