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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Calvin Rutherford Thomas entitled "The Impact of Amenity Landownership on Agriculture in Talbot County, Maryland." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Geography.

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THE IMPACT OF AMENITY LANDOWNERSHIP ON AGRICULTURE
IN TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Calvin Rutherford Thomas

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of amenity landownership with its characteristics of high land prices, absentee ownership, and land parcellation on farming and the use of cropland. Talbot County, Maryland, was chosen for study because it is a predominantly rural farm area with a long history of agriculture and popularity as a retreat area.

The results of the study indicate that the purchase of land for amenity uses pushes farmland prices beyond that justified for farm use, leads to increased absentee ownership of farmland, and contributes to the parcellation of cropland.

While a substantial part of the cropland parcelized into properties of less than twenty acres has been lost from production, evidence shows only very small losses on larger sized properties held by amenity owners. In fact, ownership of large acreages by amenity-seeking nonresidents has forestalled parcellation and the loss of cropland. Not only do the amenity owners subsidize farming by keeping high priced land in such a "low-order" use as agriculture, many are active in public planning efforts to preserve and sustain it. They see farming as enhancing the quality of the area and as an essential part of the atmosphere that attracted them to the area. As a consequence, agriculture remains vital and dynamic and the cropland acreage has remained nearly constant for three decades.

Unable to purchase the land they need because of high prices, farmers increasingly become renters of the land they use. High prices and intense competition for land make it difficult for many aspiring and existing farmers to get a self-sustaining acreage. In response, some quit while others turn to part-time farming.

Parcellation, high land prices, absentee ownership and the pressures to till more land have caused territorially fragmented farm operational units to become the dominant type. Although not causal of its existence, amenity ownership of farmland has accentuated the dominance of specialized grain farming in the county.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Spurred by growing affluence, mobility, and leisure time, the rate at which urbanites acquire second or leisure and retirement homes in rural areas of the United States has accelerated over the past three decades. Available evidence suggests that the demand for such homes will continue to grow and the involvement of urban residents in rural landscapes will become even more dramatic.¹

The incursion of city-dwellers into the countryside is prompting changes in the social, demographic, cultural, political, economic, and land use and landscape patterns of the host areas. Although the significance of this penetration has attracted the attention of geographers and others, the number of studies dealing with the subject is relatively small and specifically focused. The majority of the research has dealt with the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of occupants of second homes, the spatial distribution and character

¹Numerous studies recount the growing popularity of rural, small town areas for recreation and retirement. See, for example, Calvin L. Beale, Rural and Small Town Population Change, 1970-80, U.S.D.A. Economics and Statistic Service, ESS-5 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, February 1981); U.S. Council on Environmental Quality, Subdividing Rural America (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976), p. 139; Rutherford H. Platt, "Backwoods Urban Growth: The Recreation Land Development Boom," Proceedings of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 5 (1973), pp. 225-228; and Peter A. Morrison and Judith P. Wheeler, "Rural Renaissance in America? The Revival of Population Growth in Remote Areas," Population Bulletin, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Population Reference Bureau, Inc., 1976), pp. 1-27.

of the homes, the pattern of journeys from primary residences to second homes, and the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of second and retirement home developments on recipient areas. Work done by Ragatz, Wolfe, Tombaugh, Mercer, Dower, Clout, Downing, Marsden, Parson, Stroud, Aldskogius, Jacobs, Pyne, Bevins, and Coppock are representative of these studies.²

A review of the literature also reveals that virtually all of the investigations have been done on large-scale, planned commercial developments. Nondevelopment homes on "scattered lots," those that are not located in planned recreation or retirement developments and that occur anywhere the owner deems desirable and is able to purchase the property, have received little attention as agents of change,

²Richard L. Ragatz, "Future Demand for Recreational Properties," Urban Land, 33 (1974), pp. 10-16; Roy I. Wolfe, "Summer Cottagers in Ontario," Economic Geography, 27 (1951), pp. 10-32; Larry Tombaugh, "Factors Influencing Vacation-Home Location," Journal of Leisure Research, 2, No. 1 (1970), pp. 54-63; D. C. Mercer, "The Geography of Leisure: A Contemporary Growth Point," Geography, 55 (1970), pp. 261-273; Michael Dower, "Leisure: Its Impact on Man and the Land," Geography, 55 (1970), pp. 253-260; Hugh D. Clout, "Second Homes in the United States," Tijdschrift voor Enconomische en Sociale Geografie, 63 (1972), pp. 393-401; B. S. Marsden, "Holiday Homescapes of Queensland," Australian Geographical Studies, 7 (1969), pp. 57-73; P. Downing and Michael Dower, Second Homes in England and Wales (London: Countryside Commission, 1973); James Parsons, "Slicing Up the Open Land: Subdivisions Without Homes," Erdkunde, 26 (1972), pp. 1-8; Hubert B. Stroud, "Amenity Land Developments as an Element of Geographic Change: A Case Study, Cumberland County, Tennessee" (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Tennessee, 1974); H. Aldskogius, "Vacation Home Settlement in the Siljan Region," Geografiska Annaler, 49, No. 2 (1967): 69-95; C. A. J. Jacobs, Second Homes in Denbighshire, Tourism Recreation Research Report No. 3 (Authin, Denbighshire County Council, 1972); C. B. Pyne, Second Homes (Caernarvon: Caernarvonshire County Planning Department, 1973); Malcolm Bevins, Attitude on Environmental Quality in Six Vermont Lakeshore Communities, Bulletin 671 (Burlington: Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station, June 1972); J. T. Coppock, ed., Second Homes: Curse or Blessing (New York: Pergamon Press, 1977).

despite their large number and growing popularity.³ The paucity of studies is not an indication that the subject is unworthy of systematic study, but, rather, that the necessary data are very difficult to obtain.

Although there is concern over the impacts of leisure and retirement homes, a number of vital issues have been neglected. Foremost among the slighted are the homes on "scattered sites" and their impact on agriculture and the use of farmland.⁴

Motivated by the growing concern over the loss farmland to nonagricultural uses and the adequacy of the land base vis-a-vis future demands for agricultural goods, a few studies have given attention to the impacts of recreation and retirement homes on agriculture and land use in the host rural area.⁵ However, even these

³ Statements concerning the number and popularity of "scattered site" homes appear in a number of references. See, for example, Robert G. Healy and James L. Short, The Market for Rural Land: Trends, Issues, Policies (Washington, D.C.: Conservation Foundation, 1981), pp. 47-48.

⁴ In the past a few studies gave peripheral or perfunctory attention to the impacts of retirement and second homes on farmland. See, for example, John Fraser Hart, "The Three R's of Rural Northeastern United States," The Canadian Geographer, Vol. 7 (1963), pp. 13-22.

⁵ See, for example, National Agricultural Lands Study, Cochaired by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Council on Environmental Quality, Final Report, 1981 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, January 1981), pp. 44-46; Robert G. Healy and James L. Short, "Rural Land: Market Trends and Planning Implications," Journal of the American Planning Association, July 1979, pp. 305-316; and Healy and Short, The Market for Rural Land, pp. 44-48 and 125-306; George K. Lewis, "Population Change in Northern New England," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 62 (1972), pp. 307-322; Parsons, "Slicing Up the Open Land: Subdivisions Without Homes"; Edward Higbee, American Agriculture: Geography, Resources, Conservation (New York: John Wiley, 1950), pp. 304-308.

consider the topic superficially or only as a minor part of the overall study.

Among other issues, the studies done have raised a concern that the inflated land prices, absentee land ownership, and "land parcellation" or the division of property units into parcels of a few acres associated with the growth of "scattered site" leisure and retirement homes in rural areas pose a serious threat to farming and farmland. It is maintained that the cumulative affect of these factors, will cause, at least, a serious decline or, perhaps, even the demise of commercial agriculture in the host areas.

In their 1981 book Healy and Short state that "the division of high-quality farmland into two to ten acre building lots—precludes commercial agriculture of most currently practiced types" and that "farmettes" and "ranchettes" of ten to forty acres don't promise much commercial crop or livestock production.⁶ A 1980 study of farmland losses in the San Francisco Bay area identified "parcellation" as "the largest single consumer of farmland—taking more land, apparently, than does outright subdivision." It was also asserted that the changing ownership associated with the "parcellation" compounded the impacts on farming in the area:

Small farms can be highly efficient. But, most of these little properties don't wind up as producing farms at all; they finish as rural estates, hobby farms, or ranchettes. Aside from removing land from production directly, they

⁶Healy and Short, The Market for Rural Land, p. 210.

create real difficulties for serious agriculture around them.⁷

An Oregon study also expresses concern that scattered rural residences or small parcels will result in "functional infringements," hindering agriculture in nearby properties. The author notes that "A very few rural homesteads dotted through an agricultural area can have a surprisingly detrimental effect on a farming economy."⁸

Van Otten in his study of a portion of the Willamette Valley of Oregon reported that "the demand for small parcels of land has served to increase sharply the price of farmland" to the point where "commercial farmers cannot compete with those seeking to purchase parcels for noncommercial uses." He further states that "many of the units of small areal extent produce little if any farm produce for the market."⁹

The impacts of second home and recreational development induced patterns of land ownership on agriculture and land use in eighty selected counties of rural Appalachia are reported in a 1981 study. Compiled by the Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, the study contains

⁷ People for Open Space, Endangered Harvest: The Future of Bay Area Farmland (San Francisco: People for Open Space, 1980), p. 50.

⁸ H. Jeffrey Leonard, The Politics of Land-Use Planning in Oregon (Washington, D.C.: The Conservation Foundation), forthcoming manuscript, p. 17. Reported in Healy and Short, The Market for Rural Land, p. 212.

⁹ George A. Van Otten, "Changing Spatial Characteristics of Willamette Valley Farms," Professional Geographer, 32 (1), 1980, pp. 67-69.

findings in agreement with those noted above. The group found "that the decline of farmland in the region was greatest where farmers were competing with other owners who held the land for nonfarm uses."

Their data showed that "absentee ownership of land is associated with low use of land for farming." A trait that is attributed to the land being valued for reasons other than its farm-potential.¹⁰ Relative to the future of agriculture in such impacted areas, the Task Force concludes:

The pressures on the farm economy created by absentee and concentrated landownership—land scarcity and high land prices in particular—limit the economic viability of farming in recreational counties. This not only increases the likelihood that people currently farming will seek other employment; but also diminishes the likelihood of new people entering farming.¹¹

The above cited studies have also claimed that in conjunction with the need to expand the size of farm units to achieve economies of scale, absentee ownership, parcellation and high prices of farmland are significant factors in the existence and increased frequency of single farm operational units comprised of scattered, noncontiguous land parcels ("fragmented farm"), farmers renting all ("tenants") or a portion ("part owners") of the land they farm, and specialization in corn, soybeans, sorghum and small grains ("cash grain") production.

¹⁰ Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, Land Ownership Patterns and Their Impacts on Appalachian Communities: A Survey of 80 Counties (Washington, D.C.: Appalachian Regional Commission, 1981), pp. 6 and 131.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 137.

The evidence in Van Otten's Willamette Valley study led him to conclude that the demand for farmland by nonfarmers and their willingness to pay premium prices for small parcels of farmland served to inflate land values and made it difficult for farmers to acquire title to additional land. As a result, farmers, who felt they had to expand their land base to maintain an acceptable economy of scale, turned to leasing as an alternative to land purchase. The difficulty, yet necessity of gaining control over suitable land led farmers to the use of noncontiguous fields.¹²

In his 1971 article, "The Fragmented Neoplantation: A New Type of Farm Operation in the Southeast," Aiken observed that absentee ownership was one of the factors contributing to an increase in the rental of farmland and the existence of territorially fragmented agricultural operations in the Southeast.¹³

The association of absentee ownership of farmland, the rental of farmland, and "cash-grain" farming is made in several works. In 1968 Clawson noted that tenancy is most important in cash-grain farming and in areas where land values are highest.¹⁴ In The Look of the Land, Hart makes a similar observation, pointing out that tenancy rates tend to be highest in the traditional cash-grain areas of the

¹²Van Otten, p. 63.

¹³Charles S. Aiken, "The Fragmented Neoplantation: A New Type of Farm Operation in the Southeast," Southeastern Geographer, Vol. XI, No. 1 (April 1971), pp. 47-48.

¹⁴Marion Clawson, The Land System of the United States: An Introduction to the History and Practice of Land Use and Land Tenure (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), p. 99.

Midwest.¹⁵ More recently, Healy and Short state that, of the possible types, cash grain farming may be the most attractive when land is owned by absentee, nonfarm owners because of the comparative ease of setting lease terms.¹⁶

In summation, the majority of the research done to date maintains that cropland subdivided into multiple acre property units will probably be lost from production because land owners and especially farmers will consider the returns too small to offset the inconvenience and cost of cultivation. Absentee ownership of farmland and the high prices "outsiders" pay for the land, very often above that justified for farm use, make it very difficult for farmers and prospective farmers to get the land they need for profitable farming. It is also feared that nonresidents who buy farm acreage for recreation or retirement purposes and pay premium prices do not have a commitment to farming and will either put their land in "higher order" nonagricultural uses or in uses consistent with their recreational activities but not in keeping with prevailing agricultural patterns in the area. The attention of the nontraditional owners will focus on the land's amenity values and they will disregard its productivity.

Despite the work that has been done, there is a serious void in information on the subject. As indicated in all of the completed

¹⁵ John Fraser Hart, The Look of the Land (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 78.

¹⁶ Healy and Short, p. 219.

studies, there is a great need for empirical case studies to provide a basis for generalization and assessment of long term impacts. Specifically, there is a need for indepth studies of the synergistic effects of land parcellation, inflated land prices, and absentee landownership on the use of farmland and the nature of farming and farm operational units.

I. PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study will describe and analyze the combined effects of leisure and retirement home-induced parcellation of rural land units, high land prices, and absentee landownership on the use of agricultural land and farming traits and patterns in Talbot County, Maryland. The central theme of the study is to test whether the rise of "scattered-site" second and retirement homes in a rural farm area prompts an increase in land prices, absentee landownership, and land parcellation and that these in turn cause a major loss of cropland and a simple decline or cessation of commercial agriculture in the affected area.

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To determine whether or not parcellation is contributing to a significant loss of cropland by ascertaining how rural properties of less than twenty acres are used. Twenty acres was chosen as the threshold size because twenty acres is generally considered too small to be a self-sustaining agricultural unit. Furthermore, in Maryland, properties of over twenty acres generally qualify for preferential tax assessment if used for agricultural purposes.

2. To determine whether high farmland prices and absentee ownership of farmland threatens the future supply of cropland because the nonfarm owners put the land into nonagricultural uses.

3. To determine whether or not absentee ownership and high farmland prices threaten the future of full-time farming by making it difficult or impossible for farmers or aspiring farmers to get the land they need for profitable-sized units.

4. To determine whether or not absentee ownership and land parcellation contribute to a rise in "part-owner" farm tenure, "fragmented farm" operational units, and specialization in "cash-grain" farming.

II. METHODOLOGY

Information for the study was derived from a variety of sources, including numerous professional and government publications, the Censuses of Agriculture, county tax records, field observations, aerial photographs, tax maps, and personal interviews.

Because the tax rolls in the Talbot County Tax Assessor's office list the mailing address of the owner, the size and location of each property, the assessed value, and designate properties with agricultural "use value" assessments, they were vital sources of information on absentee landownership, land parcellation, the price of land, and land use. Agricultural "use value" assessment is assessing the land for tax purposes at its value for agricultural use rather than its market value. To qualify for such an assessment,

land must be part of an active farm operation. Consequently, land with such an assessment is farmland.¹⁷

The extent of absentee rural landownership, both the number and the acreage, was obtained from the county tax rolls by recording the number and area of property units located outside the five incorporated towns that were owned by persons with mailing addresses outside the county. Comparing property units over time as shown on tax plat maps, recording "partial" sales (when only a portion of a property unit is sold) as registered in the Property Transfer Logs, and compiling a list of rural landownership units of less than twenty acres provided most of the material on parcellation.

The Property Transfer Logs, which list the size, location, and purchase price along with the names and addresses of the old and new owners of all properties sold in the county each year, and the tax assessment rolls were important sources on land prices. In addition, personal interviews with county tax assessors, realtors, government agricultural officials, and farmers yielded data on rural land prices. These sources also provided a knowledge of who buys rural land in the county.

Data on land use, the size and character of operational farm units, farm tenure and product emphasis were gleaned from a number of sources. Field observations and personal interviews with realtors, county

¹⁷Maryland General Assembly, Annotated Code of Maryland (Charlottesville, Virginia: Michie Company Law Publishers, 1980), Vol. 7, Article 11, Section 19.

planners, the agriculture extension agent, the staff of the County Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (A.S.C.S.) of the United States Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.), and farmers were important data sources. A sample of 11 percent, forty, of the farm operators in the county were interviewed between June and August 1981. The sample was drawn from a list of farmers provided by the A.S.C.S. office and from the tax rolls. Individuals were chosen so that a representative sample of farms by area, size, tenure, and product emphasis was achieved. Interviewees were asked to describe the size and character of their operation and to explain the underlying factors or strategies that produced the character. In addition, they were requested to give their perceptions of the impacts of second and retirement home induced absentee landownership, inflated land prices, and parcellation on agriculture in general and their operation in particular. Their impressions of the future of farming in the county were also solicited.

The comparison of tax plat maps, scale of 1:600, and A.S.C.S. low altitude aerial photographs provided information on the types of land that have been subdivided into units of less than twenty acres and the manner in which these parcels are used. The photographs, scale 1:660, cover the entire county and are taken twice a year to check compliance with the various government programs administered through the A.S.C.S. office.

The County Comprehensive Plan, county policies on growth and development, zoning ordinances, and interviews were the principal

sources on the intended future of agriculture in the county. Since these policies, plans, and ordinances are a mixture of facts, opinions, values, and attitudes of planners, political leaders, and the most active and interested citizen groups, they provide a good indicator of community attitudes toward development and the future character of the area. In fact, they constitute an image or model of the desired future state. The statements in these documents dealing with agriculture directly and indirectly are thus a good indicator of its desired future and the attitude of the populace towards it.

Interviews with involved officials and reviews of newspaper accounts of planning and zoning hearings and other meetings dealing with economic development and land use were used to indicate the degree of influence or input of "outsiders" in the formulation and adoption of the plans, ordinances, and policies.

III. STUDY AREA

A single county was selected for study because the time consuming, tedious nature of collecting data on property ownership and detailed land use made coverage of a larger area impractical. The small size of the county, 167,040 acres, made the task manageable.

Talbot County was selected for study because it is representative of the large number of predominantly rural farm counties in the United States that possess water-frontage and other amenities and that are now readily accessible from major urban centers because of

highway construction in the past several decades. Long isolated and plagued with problems of stagnation or decline, many of these counties have been discovered by urbanities seeking a weekend or vacation retreat and/or retirement home away from the pressure of urban life.

More specifically, Talbot County was chosen because it is representative of the nonmetropolitan counties of Maryland's "Eastern Shore," that area of the state lying east of the Chesapeake Bay (Figure 1). As shown in Table I, the "Shore" is an economically lagging, rural farm area with low population density and a high percentage of the land area in farms. Like many other predominantly rural farm areas, Talbot County and the "Eastern Shore" as a whole experienced outmigration and a stagnant or declining population during the earlier part of this century. However, the region has experienced population growth during the past several decades. Although there is variation in the rates and timing of change on an individual county basis, the pattern of the past three decades has been one of growth. The preceding is well shown by the data in Table II. The turnabout in population correlates rather closely with the increased accessibility the area achieved with the completion in 1952 of the "Chesapeake Bay Bridge" linking the "Shore" to the urban region on the west side of the Bay (Figure 1). The increased ease of access contributed to population growth in a number of ways, including increasing the

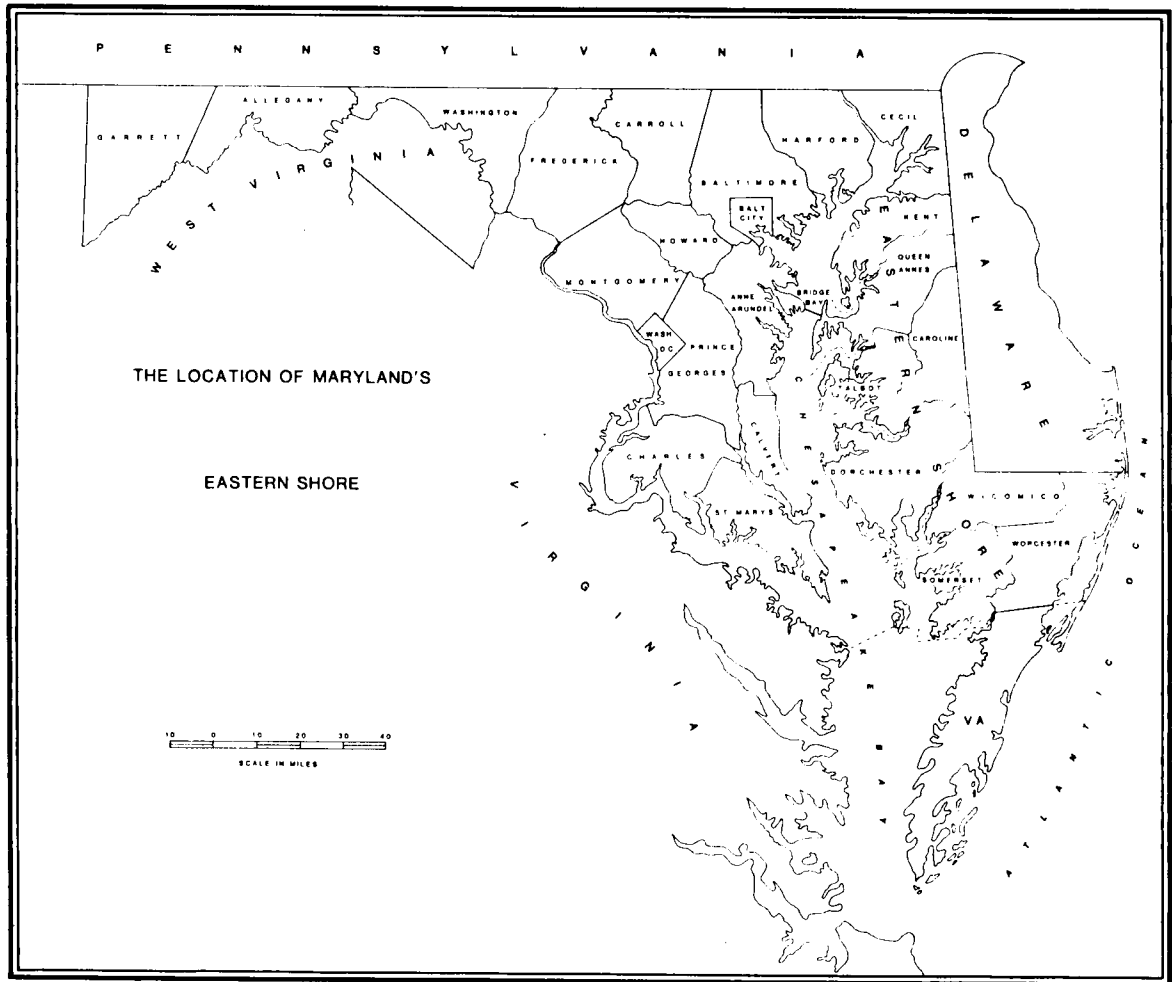


Figure 1. The location of Maryland's Eastern Shore.

TABLE I
SELECTED TRAITS OF NONMETROPOLITAN "EASTERN SHORE"
COUNTIES OF MARYLAND

County	Total 1980 Population	Persons/mile ² 1980	Percent of Land in farms, 1978	Percent Rural Population, 1980	Dollar per Capita Income 1977
Caroline	23,143	72	65	100.0	4165
Dorchester	30,623	52	36	61.8	4684
Kent	16,695	59	77	80.2	4810
Queen Anne's	25,508	68	72	100.0	5036
Somerset	19,188	57	31	84.8	3459
Talbot	25,604	98	70	70.6	5719
Wicomico	64,540	169	44	70.4	5167
Worcester	30,889	64	40	72.5	4572
Maryland	4,216,446	426	43	19.7	6561
United States	226,504,825	64	46	26.3	5751

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1978, Vol. 1, Part 20, Maryland (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1981); U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population, Vol. 1, Characteristics of the Population, Part 22, Maryland (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1982); U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1977 Per Capita Money Income Estimates for States, Counties, and Incorporated Places in the South Region of the United States, Series p. 25, No. 885 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1980).

TABLE II
PERCENT CHANGE IN POPULATION BY COUNTY AND DECADE,
"EASTERN SHORE" OF MARYLAND 1900-1980

County	Percent Change by Decade							
	1900 1910	1910 1920	1920 1930	1930 1940	1940 1950	1950 1960	1960 1970	1970 1980
Caroline	18.3	-2.9	-6.8	-0.1	3.9	6.7	1.6	17.0
Dorchester	2.5	-2.7	-3.9	4.4	-0.7	6.7	0.9	4.1
Kent	-9.7	-11.4	-5.2	-5.5	1.6	13.2	4.3	3.4
Queen Anne's	-8.3	-5.0	-8.9	-0.7	0.7	13.6	11.2	38.5
Somerset	2.1	-7.0	-5.0	10.3	-1.0	-5.4	-3.6	1.4
Talbot	-3.5	-6.7	1.5	1.1	3.4	11.1	9.8	8.1
Wicomico	17.3	5.0	10.9	10.6	14.8	23.7	10.6	19.0
Worcester	4.7	2.1	-3.1	-1.8	9.0	2.5	3.0	26.4
Regional Average	3.0	-3.1	-1.8	0.7	4.9	10.1	5.1	15.2

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

attractiveness of the area as a location for second and retirement homes.¹⁸

Talbot County and the "Shore" have a long history of second and retirement homes. As early as the late 1800's well-to-do families were frequenting the area for relaxation. By 1900 it was fashionable for rich northerners from Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and New York to purchase farms for country homes.¹⁹ As early as the 1920's Talbot County had become well known for its retreat and retirement homes. During the 1930's the number of second homes and absentee owned properties increased as mortgages were foreclosed and bankrupt farmers were forced to sell. In certain areas, much of the waterfront was yielded to the affluent from outside the area.²⁰ A local newspaper article in 1938 noted that "The Delmarva Peninsula is studded with handsome homes and broad acres of well-to-do families."²¹ In the

¹⁸Richard Ragatz and Carl Burlingame, The Vacation Home Market (Los Altos, California: Housing Data Bureau, Inc., 1973), p. 13. This study reported that one of the major reasons for the increasing popularity of second homes in the 1960's and the early 1970's was the improved access of remote amenity rich areas.

¹⁹Michael Kernan, "Charting the Rhythms of Maryland's Eastern Shore, Where Change Comes Slowly," Washington Post, August 27, 1978, Section G-1; Frank Henry, "Old + New = Charm in Talbot County," Baltimore Sun, April 23, 1961, Section A.

²⁰Boyd Gibbons, Wye Island (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press for the Resources for the Future, 1977), p. 89.

²¹The Queen Anne's Record Observer (Centreville, 1937), noted in Gibbons, p. 89.

1940's the influx of moneyed outsiders increased further and redoubled again when the "Bay Bridge" was opened in 1952.²²

Today, the "Shore," especially Talbot County, is a favorite weekend and vacation playground for many of upper income from the cities of southern and central "Megalopolis." The actual number of second home, retirement, or recreation properties in the area is unknown. However, a 1974 study estimated that there were slightly more than 15,700 second homes on the "Shore." Of this number, over 5,100 were considered to be "scattered site units" which were clustered on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.²³ This study deals only with second homes as defined by the Bureau of the Census, "residences other than the one where the household usually lives, which was owned or rented by the household for the entire year."²⁴ No attempt was made to estimate the total number of absentee owned recreational properties or retirement homes that had previously been a second home, except to note that the number of second homes converted to the primary residence of the owners had been significant in some areas.²⁵ The number of converted retirement homes alone may be quite large. Recent studies in

²²Kernan, Section G-1.

²³Morton Hoffman and Company, Inc., Second Homes in Maryland: Analyses and Projections of Location and Characteristics, 1970-80 (Baltimore, Maryland, Department of State Planning, 1974), pp. 67 and 77.

²⁴Bureau of the Census, Second Homes in the United States, Current Housing Reports, Series H-121, No. 16 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, June 1969), p. 1.

²⁵Morton Hoffman, p. 7.

Vermont and Virginia indicate the rate at which people converted their second home into their retirement home was between 20 and 34 percent.²⁶

A reported decline in the number of second homes in some areas of the "Shore" between 1960 and 1970 gives further support to conversion.²⁷

Consequently, the true number of recreational properties is significantly greater than shown above. The exact number of second homes in Talbot County is also unknown. However, there were 1,983 rural properties in the county owned by nonresidents in 1982.²⁸

The attractions of the "Eastern Shore" in general and Talbot County in particular as a place for a second or retirement home are several. In fact, the area possesses what a number of studies have shown to be the two most important qualities influencing the location of second homes, accessibility and natural amenities.²⁹

²⁶Office of Public Affairs, Dartmouth College, Vacation Home Survey for the Two Rivers Region, 1973-74. A report funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975); William E. Shands, The Subdivision of Virginia's Mountains, The Environmental Impact of Recreation Subdivisions in the Massanutten Mountain—Blue Ridge Area, Virginia: A Survey and Report (Washington, D.C.: Central Atlantic Environment Center, 1974), p. 32.

²⁷Morton Hoffman, p. 66.

²⁸Talbot County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1982.

²⁹John Borchert, Minnesota's Lakeshore: Resources, Development, Policy Needs (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota, Department of Geography, 1970), p. 35. In this study second home owners ranked accessibility as the first and the natural site amenities as the second most important factors in choosing their home locations; United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, Northern New England Vacation Home Study, 1966 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 7. Second home owners ranked the qualities of the site as the most important factor in their choice of second homes.

The situational location of the county is such that it has the seeming contradictory qualities of ease of access and at the same time a remoteness, or kind of isolation. In terms of linear distance, Talbot County is in proximity to the major urban centers of the "Mid-Atlantic" region. It is only about sixty miles to Baltimore, seventy-five to Washington, D.C., one hundred and ten to Philadelphia, and two hundred and fifteen to New York City (Figure 2). Not only are these cities close, they are connected to the county by good, major highways so that driving time ranges from about one-and-a-half to five hours. This ease of access gives great utility to a second home in the area and enables retirees from these urban areas to maintain easy contact with friends and familiar places.

The role of proximity is shown by the source areas of second home owners in the county. In conformity with the results of other studies, the majority of the second homes are owned by persons whose primary residence is less than 100 miles away.³⁰ A definite distance decay pattern is evident. The number of owners from a locality declines as distance from the county increases. Most of the second home owners live in the nearby metropolitan centers, especially Baltimore, Washington, Wilmington, and Philadelphia and are thus

³⁰ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Second Homes in the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969), Current Housing Reports, Series H-121, No. 16; Hugh D. Clout, "Second Homes in the United States," Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie, Vol. 63 (1972), p. 400. Both studies found that over 50 percent of the second homes in the United States were located within 100 miles of the owner's primary residence.

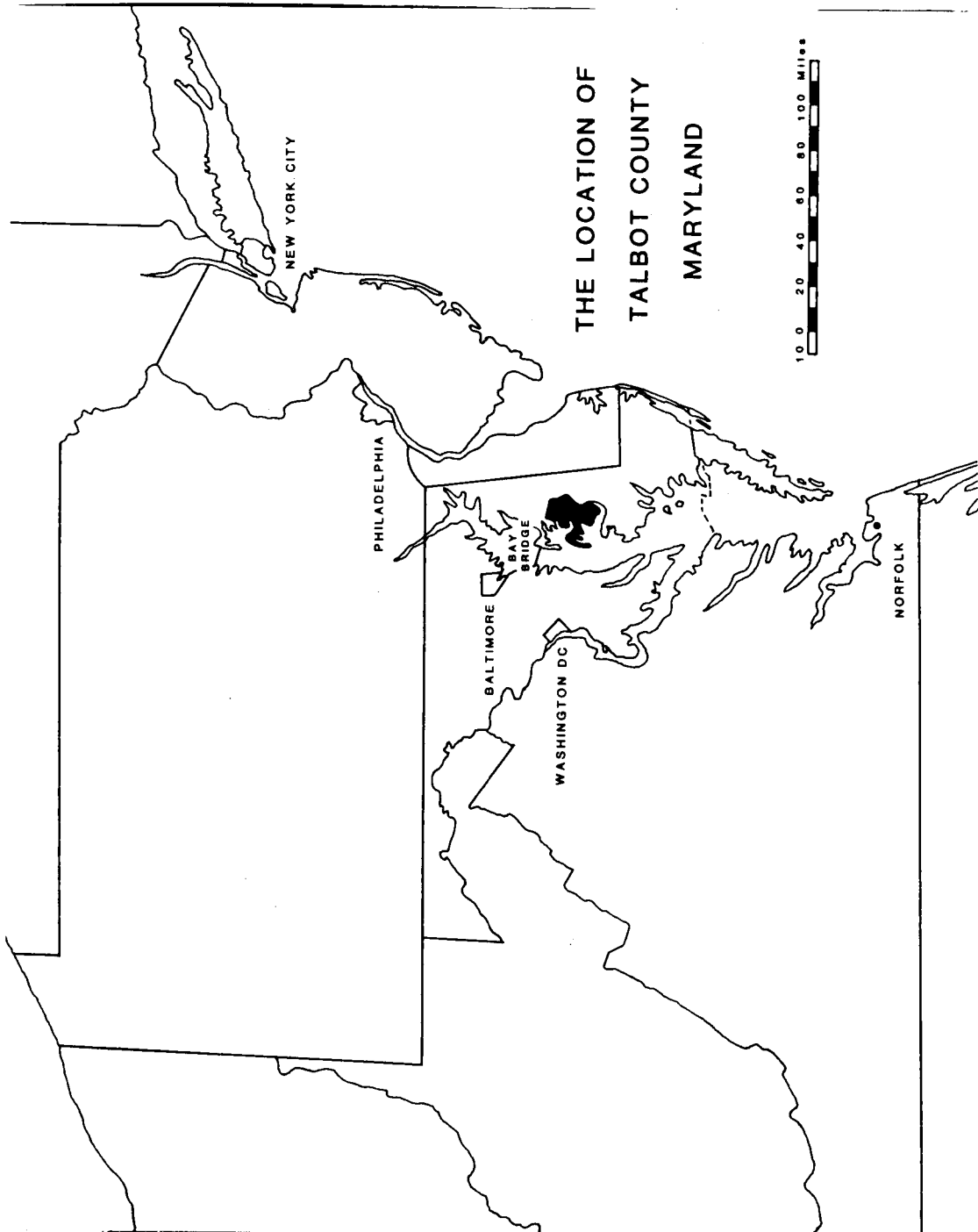


Figure 2. The Location of Talbot County Maryland.

within the locational parameters of weekend and even occasional daily driving time (Figure 3). Together with these "proximal" owners, persons living as distant as California, Quebec, Belgium, Mexico, and Switzerland own properties in Talbot County.³¹

In terms of natural site amenities, the area has abundant water frontage, identified as the biggest natural attraction to second home owners.³² In addition, seclusion and woodlands, also reported as important locational determinants abound.³³

Although encompassing only about two hundred and sixty-one square miles of land area, Talbot County has approximately six hundred miles of waterfront.³⁴ This long shoreline is caused by the shape of the county and the nature of its boundaries. Surrounded by the waters of the Chesapeake Bay and tributary streams and rivers on all sides except for a small area in the northeast, the county is virtually a peninsula. In fact, much of the county is a series of peninsulas

³¹Talbot County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1982.

³²A number of studies have shown that the single most desirable characteristic for recreational land is the presence of water. See, for example, E. J. L. David, "The Exploding Demand for Recreational Property," Land Economics, Vol. 45 (1965), pp. 206-217; Ragatz and Burlingame, p. 13; United States Department of the Interior, Northern New England Vacation Home Study, p. 6; Larry Tombaugh, "Factors Influencing Vacation Home Locations," Journal of Leisure Research, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter 1970), p. 56.

³³United States Department of the Interior, Northern New England Vacation Home Study, p. 6.

³⁴Urban Pathfinders, Inc., The Comprehensive Plan Talbot County, Maryland Comprehensive Planning Programs (Baltimore, Maryland, Department of State Planning, 1973), p. 1.

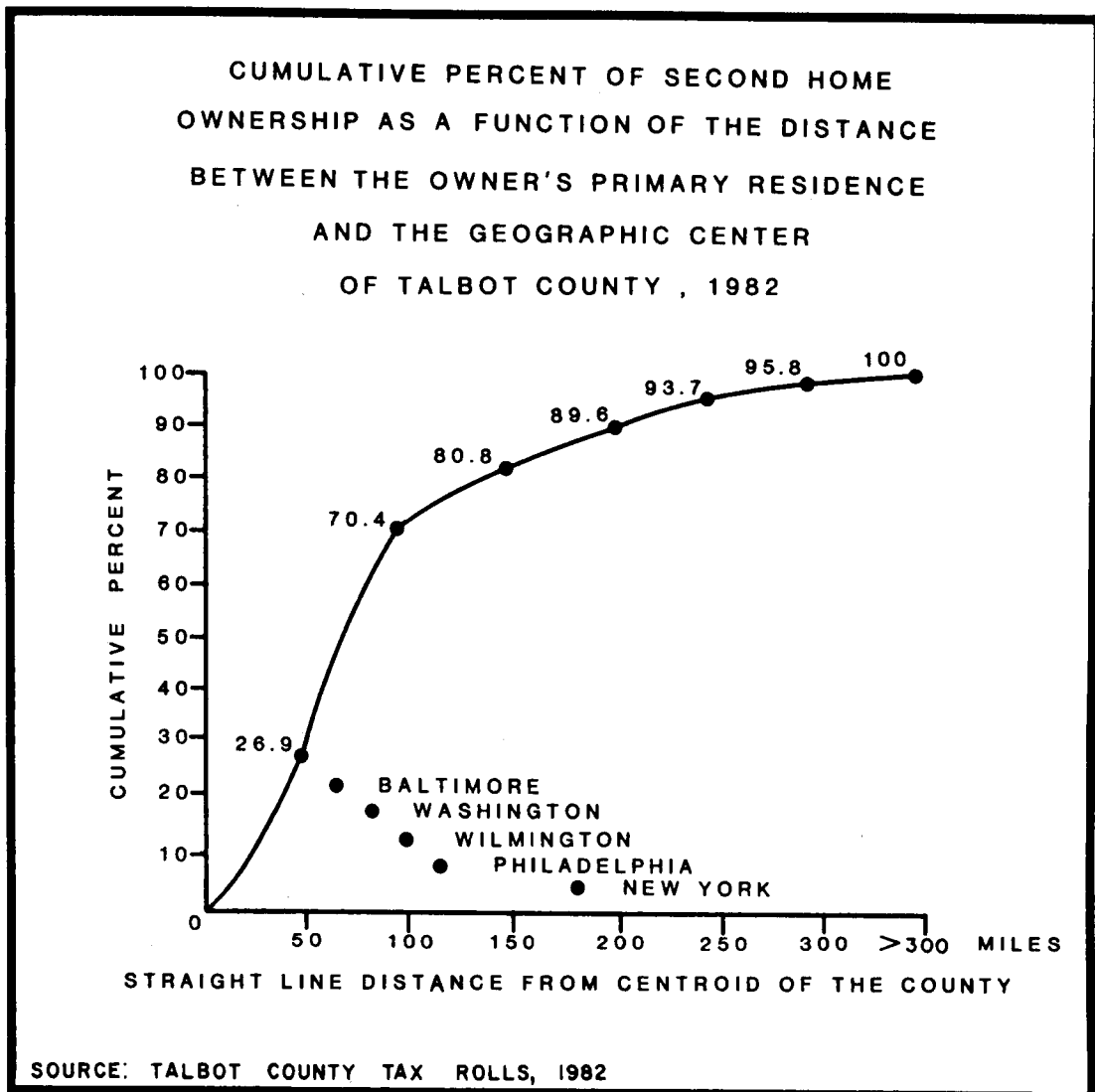


Figure 3. Cumulative Percent of Second Home Ownership as a Function of the Distance between the Owner's Primary Residence and the Geographic Center of Talbot County, 1982.

separated from one another by the numerous tidal inlets or estuarine arms of the Bay (Figure 4).

Not only is the waterfront lengthy, it is, for the most part, high quality shoreline with little marsh and relatively deep water near shore. With direct or easy access to the Chesapeake, the waters are both expansive and protected. These are excellent features for sailing and yachting. The worth of much of the frontage is also enhanced by the presence of porous sandy soils that enable the subdivision of the riparian land into numerous individual properties that can be served by separate septic systems.³⁵

The adjoining waters are not only attractive for aesthetic reasons and for boating, but also for fishing and the hunting of waterfowl. Located on the "Atlantic Flyway," the area has a plethora of ducks and Canada Geese in the fall and winter. The added abundance of deer and small game makes the county very attractive to sportsmen.

Despite the approachability and proximity of major urban centers, the area has a quality of seclusion. Part of this is due to location beyond the conventional daily commuting zone of any major city. However, the majority of the sense of remoteness and seclusion is attributable to the presence of the Chesapeake Bay and its disjunctive traits. Historically, the Bay has been a buffer that has sequestered the area.

³⁵William U. Reybold, Soil Survey, Talbot County, Maryland (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Soil Conservation Service, 1970), pp. 1-90.

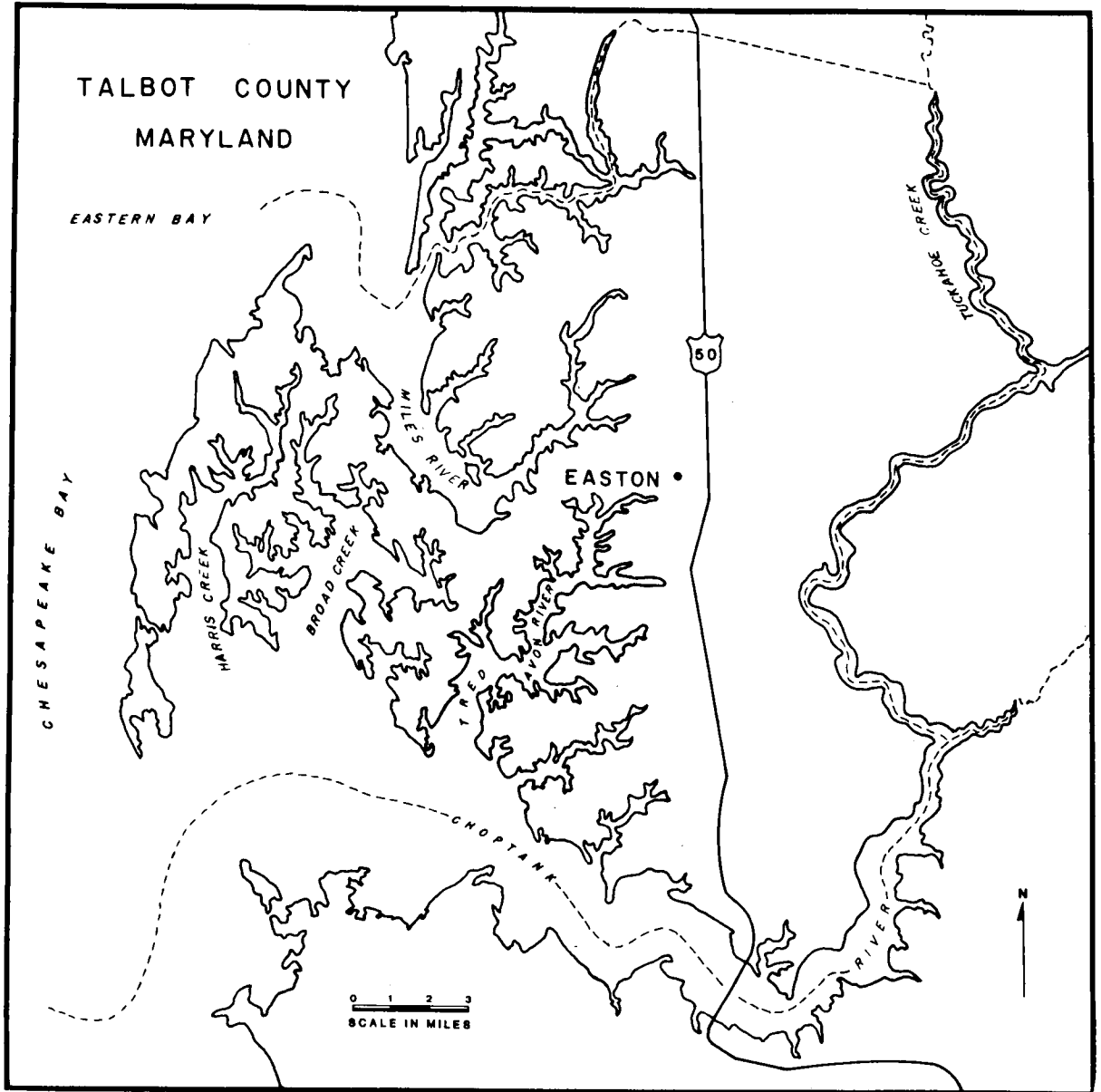


Figure 4. Talbot County Maryland.

The physical isolation afforded by the Bay in the past contributed to the continuance of a rural-agrarian life-style and mentality and the development of a sense of separate identity on the part of the inhabitants of the area. Although important in trade during the colonial period the region was largely bypassed by the westward focus of attention after 1800. Cut off by the Bay, the "Eastern Shore" became as a peripheral island and lost many of its commercial and industrial functions to the better situated area on the west side of the Bay.

Even though the Bay no longer physically isolates Talbot County and the "Shore," it is, as indicated in a recent study, a realistic barrier of economic and social significance that contributes to the continued social and cultural differences on the two sides of the Bay.³⁶ In 1979 John Lang noted that there is, "a sense of isolation—of being an age removed from Washington."³⁷ It is a relative backwater area no longer remote that provides a social asylum for urbanities with considerable economic resources. As one well known resident put it, the area has the exceptional property of "being so close, but yet so far" away from the metropolitan centers.³⁸

³⁶ E.B.S. Management, A Profile Study of the Eastern Shore of Maryland (Centreville: Wye Institute, 1964), p. 3.

³⁷ John S. Lang, "Eastern Shore Struggles Against a Modern Tide," U.S. News and World Report, Jan. 22, 1979, p. 57.

³⁸ Attributed to John Kimberly, former president of Kimberly Clark, in Norman Harrington, "The Shore's Well-Heeled Immigrants," Extra, The News American, October 29, 1972 (Baltimore), p. 4.

Besides the aforementioned attributes, Talbot possesses the rural-farm and small town character that many people find attractive.³⁹ According to the 1982 Tax Assessment Rolls, over 134,000 acres or over 80 percent of the county's 167,040 acres has "agriculture use-value" assessment or is part of active farming operations. The majority of the people in the county live in hamlets, villages and scattered rural residences. The 1980 Census of Population listed Easton, the county seat, with a population of 7,536 as the sole urban place. Thus, more than 70 percent of the population is rural. The rural small town character of the county is clearly shown by the data presented in Table III.

Finally, part of the present popularity of the county as a retreat and retirement area is due to the cumulative effects of having attracted people for these purposes over a considerable time period. The county has acquired a prestige reputation and a kind of sophistication associated with an educated and well-to-do population. Numerous ancillary facilities and services have come into existence to serve the specific needs and desires of these people. These cross the spectrum from a country club, private yacht and boating clubs, specialty shops and boutiques, fine restaurants, and stockbrokerage firms to good health facilities. In 1978-79 Talbot had 350 persons per

³⁹ Most residential preference polls taken since the late 1960's have shown that over one-half of the population would prefer to live in a rural, small-town area. See, for example, Glenn V. Fuguitt and James J. Zuiches, "Residential Preferences and Population Distribution," Demography, Vol. 12, No. 3 (August 1975), pp. 491-504.

TABLE III
TALBOT COUNTY POPULATION TRAITS, 1980

Place	Total Population	Percent of County Total	Percent Rural	Percent Urban
Incorporated Towns	10,380	40.5	27.4	72.6
Easton	7,536	29.4	0.0	100.0
St. Michaels	1,301	5.1	100.0	0.0
Oxford	754	2.9	100.0	0.0
Trappe	739	2.9	100.0	0.0
Queen Anne Town	50	0.2	100.0	0.0
Outside Incorporated Towns	15,224	59.5	100.0	0.0
County Total	26,604	100.0	70.6	29.4

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population, Vol. 1, Chapter B, General Population Characteristics, Part 22, Maryland (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1982).

physician, a figure bettered in Maryland only by rich Montgomery County, a suburb of Washington, D.C.⁴⁰

The county has also acquired an image for orderliness and predictability that the future character of the place will be similar to that of the present. An important attribute to people who are drawn by the present state and who invest substantial capital in properties whose value is strongly affected by the overall makeup of the area in which they are located.

The assurances that the county will not change appreciably in the near future are contained in the county plans and land use regulations, a number of which owe their inception and character to retirees and absentee landowners.⁴¹

Historically, Talbot has protected its character through planning and zoning. The county was the first in Maryland to have county wide zoning.⁴² Adopted first in 1953 and again most recently in 1974, the zoning ordinances were designed to preserve the low density settlement and rural character by requiring multiple-acre residential lots in many areas outside the towns and villages. For example, the

⁴⁰The Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland, Characteristics of Physicians in Maryland, 1978-79 (Baltimore: Maryland State Medical Association, 1979).

⁴¹B. C. Voshell, a vice president of Standard Oil of New Jersey, who retired to an estate in the county in the late 1940's is credited as being the originator of the Talbot Planning and Zoning Commission as well as serving as its director for its first seventeen years. Norman Harrington, "The Shore's Well-Heeled Immigrants," p. 4.

⁴²Ibid.

present ordinance requires minimum lot sizes of two, five or ten acres, depending on the area of the county. The intent is to concentrate future population growth in the towns and villages where smaller lots are permitted.⁴³ As the zoning code is strictly enforced or few variances are granted, it is likely that these efforts will have a fair measure of success.⁴⁴

In terms of overall growth and development, Talbot County has, at least since the late 1940's, pursued what is best described as a controlled or limited growth program that has viewed most industries and rapid population growth as undesirable.⁴⁵ The present attitudes and policies are embodied in the statements of county officials and the objectives of the current Comprehensive Plan. For instance, the President of the County Council in 1979 was quoted in a local newspaper as saying the county is not pursuing industries to locate in Talbot County.⁴⁶ Adopted in 1973, the County Comprehensive Plan presents the official goals and objectives for the county along with recommendations to guide the growth and development through the

⁴³ Talbot County Council, The Talbot County Zoning Ordinance, adopted Sept. 24, 1974, pp. 54-67.

⁴⁴ E.B.S. Management, A Profile Study of the Eastern Shore, p. 27; personal interview with Anthony Redman, Planner, Talbot County Planning Office, Easton, July 6, 1981.

⁴⁵ The Easton Star-Democrat, Nov. 21, 1947, noted the resistance to industrialization in Talbot County.

⁴⁶ Cambridge Daily Banner, "The Key to Industrial Growth in Talbot County Is Slow and Controlled," Feb. 27, 1979.

year 2000. The general thrust or theme of the objectives is that:

the county should endeavor to maintain a pace of growth and development which is controlled and moderate in order to preserve to the greatest extent possible the present character of the County.⁴⁷

Specific objectives include the maintenance of the rural character, low population density outside the towns, and the county as a retirement center. Other objectives are to protect farmland and sustain agriculture and to limit population growth to 10 percent per decade.⁴⁸

The selection of Talbot County as the study area was also prompted by its longstanding solid agricultural base. A part of the Atlantic Coastal Plain, the county is very flat with sandy to loamy soils. Although lacking in natural fertility, the soils store and readily release fertilizer to plants. The climate, with an average annual precipitation of forty-five inches and a frost-free period of 190 to 210 days is favorable to the production of a variety of mid-latitude crops. The level terrain, mild climate, and soils that respond well to fertilization make Talbot County an area well suited to agriculture.⁴⁹

As early as 1879, in addition to pasture, hay, and other crops, over 59,000 acres were planted in wheat and corn.⁵⁰ A 1926 publication

⁴⁷Urban Pathfinder's, Inc., The Comprehensive Plan, Talbot County, Maryland (Baltimore, Maryland, Department of State Planning, 1973), p. 62.

⁴⁸Ibid, pp. 15-67 passim.

⁴⁹William U. Reybold, Soil Survey, Talbot County, Maryland (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Soil Conservation Service, 1970), p. 3.

⁵⁰U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census Bulletin, No. 303 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, November 8, 1892).

observed that since the earliest European settlement in the seventeenth century the county has been preeminently agricultural.⁵¹ The continued vitality of agriculture is shown by the fact that over 70 percent of the land area of the county was in farms and total farm sales amounted to nearly \$27,500,000 in 1978.⁵² The nearly stable amount of cropland in the county since World War II is further testament to the continued good health of farming. As shown in Table IV, the Census of Agriculture indicates a slight increase in cropland acreage between the early 1950's and the late 1970's.

TABLE IV
ACRES OF CROPLAND IN TALBOT COUNTY, 1945-1978

Year	Cropland Acres	Year	Cropland Acres
1945	104,400	1964	94,303
1950	92,275	1969	91,724
1954	94,822	1974	92,741
1959	100,519	1978	95,179

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1945, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969, 1974, and 1978 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

⁵¹Maryland Geological Survey, Talbot County (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1926), p. 100.

⁵²U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1978.

As such, Talbot County was especially attractive as a study area because the experience there does not appear to conform to the reports in much of the literature which claim that leisure homes and absentee landownership cause a decline in agriculture and a loss of cropland.

Finally, of the counties of the "Eastern Shore," Talbot was selected for study because it has experienced the pressures of absentee owned, "scattered" site second and retirement homes for nearly a century and more significantly than the others. It is considered the center of this activity on the "Shore."⁵³ Second and retirement homes have been in the county long enough and in large enough numbers so that the economic, social, political, demographic, land tenure and land use impacts associated with them are clearly evident. Having evolved over time, the patterns here represent actual adjustments to second and retirement home generated forces. Even though not static, the patterns are more established than in the many areas that have experienced a growth in such second and retirement homes only during the past decade or two.

⁵³Kernan, Section G-I.

CHAPTER II

LEISURE HOMES AND ABSENTEE LANDOWNERSHIP IN TALBOT COUNTY

I. NUMBER OF LEISURE OR ABSENTEE OWNED PROPERTIES

The actual number of rural second and retirement homes in the county is very difficult to ascertain. However, by using the number of absentee owned properties, the vast majority of which are used for leisure, and an estimate of the number of "converted properties" as surrogates, a close approximation of the total can be achieved.¹ Absentee owned properties are those with an owner whose mailing address, as listed in the tax rolls, is located outside the county. Since most persons list their primary residence for mailing purposes, it is safe to assume that these people are not county residents. "Converted properties" are those whose owners formerly lived elsewhere while they owned the property, but have since made the absentee property their primary or full time residence as indicated by changing their mailing address to that of the county property. Interviewed realtors, planners, tax assessors, and landowners unanimously pointed to retirement as the principal reason for conversion.² Available

¹Personal interviews with James Latham, Realtor, Easton, August 24, 1981; Alice Nily, Realtor, Easton, August 24, 1981; William Wieland, Realtor, Easton, August 21, 1981; and Anthony Redman, Planner, Talbot County Planning Office, Easton, July 6, 1981. All said that the vast majority of absentee owned properties are used for leisure purposes.

²A total of twenty persons in real estate, the County Planning Office, the Tax Assessor's office, and landowners were asked why people made their former second home their primary residence.

demographic data supports retirement as at least an important reason for conversion by indicating an influx of the elderly. Even though experiencing net immigration since the 1950's, the median age and percentage of the county's rural population aged sixty-five years and over was the highest on the "Eastern Shore" (Table V). Retirement of the owner as a principal reason for second home conversion is noted in a number of studies.³

TABLE V

MEDIAN AGE AND THE PERCENTAGE OF THE RURAL POPULATION AGED SIXTY-FIVE YEARS AND OVER IN THE COUNTIES OF MARYLAND'S "EASTERN SHORE," 1980

County	Median Age Years	Percent 65 Years and Over
Caroline	32.0	13.7
Dorchester	34.3	14.0
Kent	33.9	14.7
Queen Annes	32.4	12.1
Somerset	32.2	15.0
Talbot	37.5	17.2
Wicomico	31.3	11.2
Worcester	32.9	13.4

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population, Vol. 1, Characteristics of the Population, Part 22, Maryland (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1982).

³See, for example, Michael A. J. Catford, "Cottage Conversion in Ontario: A Study of Its Extent and Its Potential Impacts" (Master's Thesis, University of Toronto, 1972), p. 34; Elaine Hitch, "Second Homes and Their Conversion to Principal Residences, A Case Study in the District Municipality of Muskoka" (Master's Thesis, York University, 1976), p. 40.

The 1983 tax rolls listed 1,983 absentee owned rural properties, those located outside the five incorporated towns. The number of converted properties is unknown. However, a review of the tax rolls between 1968 and 1979 found 460 converted rural properties. As shown in Table VI and Figure 5, the greatest number of both absentee and converted properties exist in those election districts with the greatest amount of water frontage.

TABLE VI

THE NUMBER OF RURAL PROPERTIES IN TALBOT COUNTY OWNED BY
NONRESIDENTS IN 1982 AND THE NUMBER OF RURAL SECOND
HOMES CONVERTED TO THE PRIMARY RESIDENCE OF THE
OWNER BETWEEN 1968 AND 1979 BY
ELECTION DISTRICT

Election District	Number of Rural Properties	
	Converted 1968-79	Nonresident Owned 1982
1. Rural Easton	99	294
2. Rural St. Michaels	134	691
3. Rural Trappe	95	453
4. Chapel	20	156
5. Bay Hundred	112	389
County Total	460	1,983

Source: Talbot County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1968 through 1979 and 1982.

Converted properties were identified by sequentially reviewing the tax rolls from 1968 through 1979 and recording the names of the owners and the location and description of those rural properties owned by

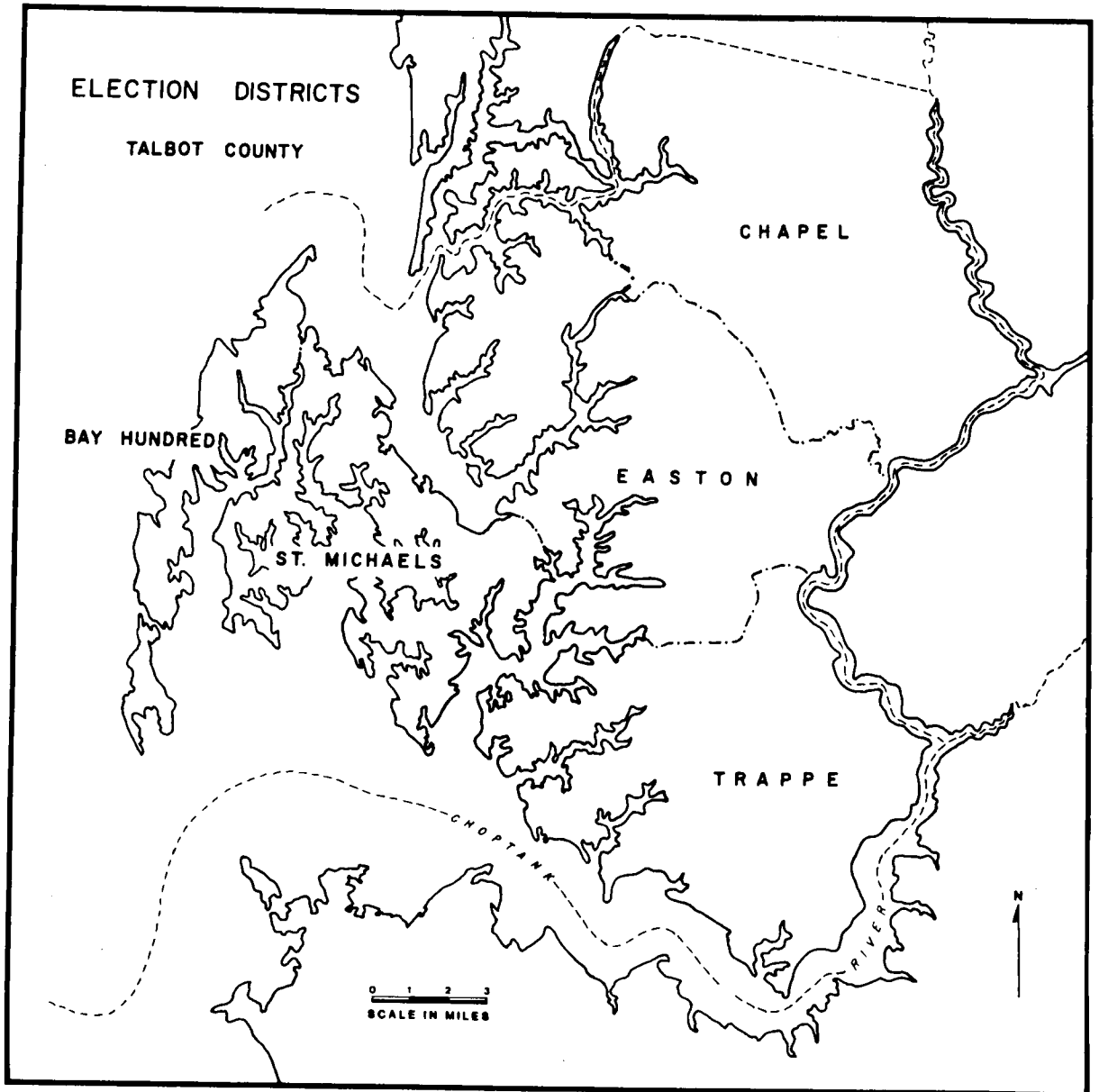


Figure 5. Election Districts, Talbot County.

persons who changed their mailing address from a place outside the county to that of the Talbot property. Only those properties whose same owner appeared on the 1979 tax rolls and who lived at the converted residence were retained on the final list. As properties were converted prior to 1968 and since 1979, the number of such properties is larger than the number counted. Consequently, the total of second and retirement rural homes in the county is certainly in excess of 2,500.

II. THE AMOUNT OF RURAL LAND OWNED BY NONRESIDENTS

Tax rolls show that the amount of rural land owned by persons living outside the county has more than doubled in the past two decades, increasing from just over 21,400 acres in 1960 to nearly 46,200 acres in 1982.⁴ As shown in Table VII, the area owned by nonresidents in 1982 represented nearly 30 percent of the 156,300 acres of privately held rural land and more than 23 percent of the rural property units in the county.⁵ Thus, compared to the results of the 1978 U.S. Department of Agriculture Survey of Private Landowners, both the areal and numerical incidence of absentee ownership in Talbot County is significantly above the national average. The U.S.D.A. survey

⁴The acreage of absentee-owned rural land was derived from the 1960 and 1982 County Tax Assessment Rolls by totalling the areal size of all properties located outside the incorporated towns and villages with owners whose mailing address was outside Talbot County.

⁵Obtained from the 1982 Tax Assessment Rolls by accumulating the number and acreage of all properties located outside the incorporated places. The 156,319 acres represent 93.5 percent of the total county area.

TABLE VII

NONRESIDENT OWNERSHIP OF RURAL LAND AND PROPERTY UNITS^a
BY ELECTION DISTRICT IN TALBOT COUNTY, 1982

Election District	Number of Rural Properties			Acres of Rural Land		
	Total	Absentee Owned	Percent Absentee	Total	Absentee Owned	Percent Absentee
1. Rural Easton	1,802	294	16.3	38,048	10,320	27.1
2. Rural St. Michaels	2,109	691	32.8	20,692	10,628	51.4
3. Rural Trappe	1,881	453	24.1	37,696	12,756	33.8
4. Chapel	1,380	156	11.7	49,594	7,616	15.4
5. Bay Hundred	1,317	389	42.7	10,189	4,876	47.9
County Total	8,489	1,983	23.4	156,319	46,196	29.6

^aRural land and rural property is that located outside the incorporated towns and villages.

Source: Talbot County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1982.

reported about 10 percent of the landowners as absentee owners, who owned just over 20 percent of the land.⁶

Although an accurate reflection of the amount of land owned by persons who live outside the county, the figures presented above do not correctly portray the amount of land owned by persons who are "not of the area." Specifically, they do not include the 7,172 acres held in the 460 properties that were converted to the primary residence of the one time absentee owners between 1968 and 1979.⁷ Conversion prior to 1968 and since 1979 adds to the total. Consequently, the actual extent of nonresident control of rural land is significantly larger than the 1982 figures indicate, at least 15 percent greater.

III. SIZE AND CHARACTER OF ABSENTEE OWNED PROPERTIES

The size of properties owned by "outsiders" in 1982 varied from less than an acre to over 1,000 acres. According to the tax rolls the majority, 79 percent, of the properties were less than ten acres. However, the amount of land held in such units accounted for only about 13 percent of the total absentee owned land. On the other hand, nearly 77 percent of the land was held in units of fifty or more acres by just over 10 percent of the absentee owners. The incidence of

⁶James A. Lewis, Landownership in the United States, U.S.D.A. Economics, Statistics, and Cooperative Service, Agriculture Information Bulletin, No. 35 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1980), p. 7.

⁷Talbot County Tax Rolls, 1968 to 1979. Figure derived by totalling the acreage in converted properties.

properties of less than ten acres and the acreage held in such properties is highest in those election districts with the greatest water frontage per land area, St. Michaels and Bay Hundred. All of the above is well shown in Table VIII and Figure 5, page 38.

Retreat and retirement rural residences range from simple cottages and renovated watermen's homes occupying less than an acre in and near the water oriented hamlets to former farmhouses, colonial mansions, and new modernistic dwellings sited on waterfront country estates encompassing several hundred acres. Despite the long term popularity of the county as a recreation and retirement home area, there have been very few developments specifically for this purpose with developer built housing and recreational facilities. According to available evidence only one such development existed in the county in 1982. It contained approximately 500 acres and included a golf course, convention center, townhouses, and individually built private residences. However, a number of large acreages with water frontage have been subdivided into lots of two or more acres and sold to persons for second or retirement home sites, leaving the new owners to arrange the construction of their residence. Figure 6 showing the plat of Arcadia Shores located on the Miles River is a representative example of this type of subdivision, designed to maximize the number of waterfront properties.

TABLE VIII

THE NUMBER, ACREAGE, AND PERCENT OF ABSENTEE OWNED RURAL PROPERTIES AND
ACREAGE IN OWNERSHIP UNITS OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES AND FIFTY AND
MORE ACRES BY ELECTION DISTRICT, TALBOT COUNTY, 1982

Election District	Number of Properties With:			Percent of Properties With:			Acreage in Properties of:			Percent of Acreage in Properties of:		
	Less Than Ten Acres	Fifty and More Acres		Less than Ten Acres	Fifty and More Acres		Less Than Ten Acres	Fifty and More Acres		Less Than Ten Acres	Fifty and More Acres	
1. Rural Easton	241	41		72.8	13.9		578	8,797		5.6		85.2
2. Rural St. Michaels	583	48		84.4	6.9		3,263	6,069		30.7		57.1
3. Rural Trappe	330	59		72.8	13.0		983	10,177		7.7		79.8
4. Chapel	114	26		73.0	16.7		350	6,984		4.6		91.7
5. Bay Hundred	336	31		86.4	8.0		937	3,443		19.2		70.6
County Total	1,577	204		79.5	10.3		6,111	35,470		13.2		76.8

Source: Talbot County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1982.

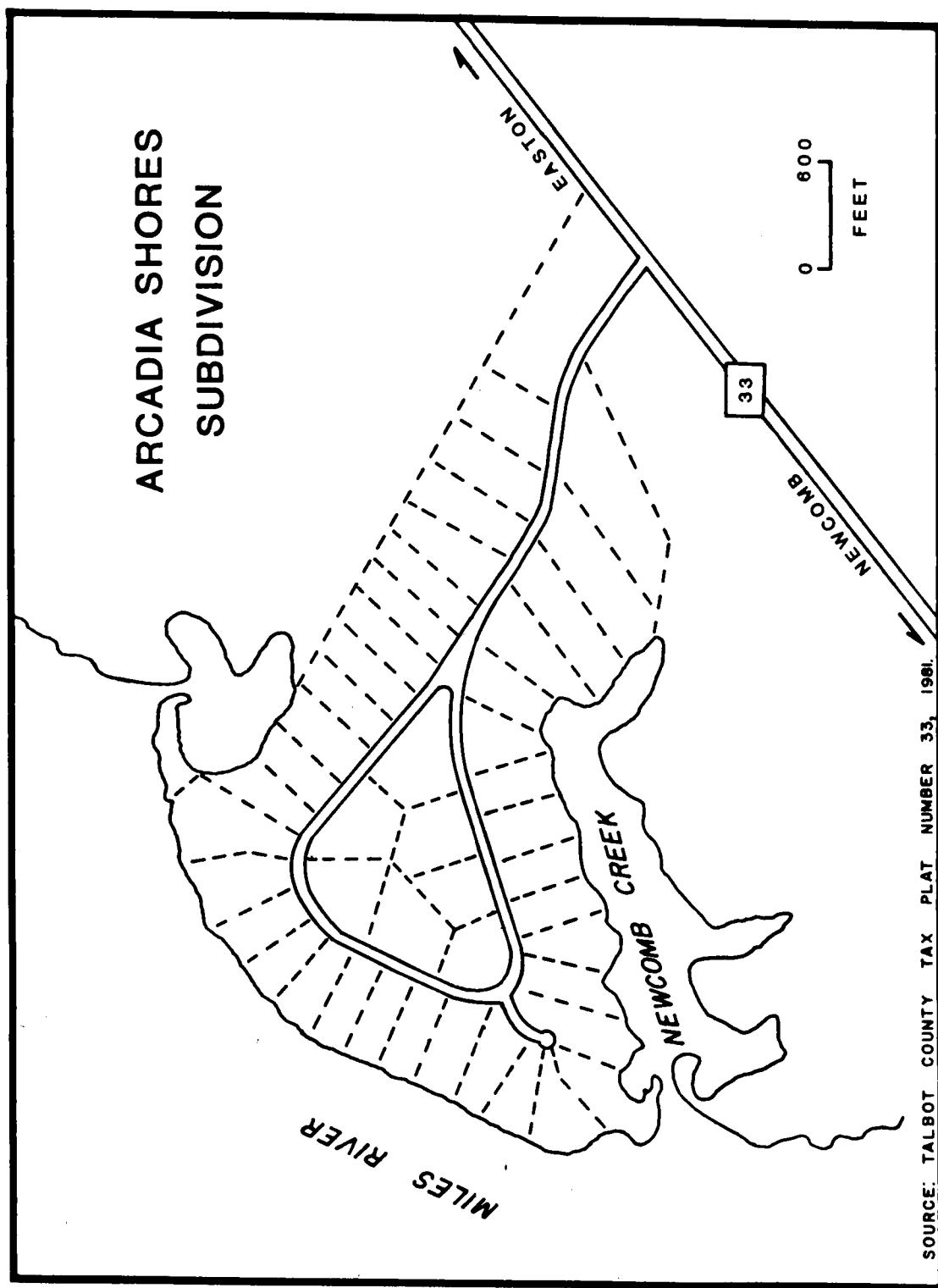


Figure 6. Arcadia Shores Subdivision.

IV. THE LOCATION OF ABSENTEE PROPERTIES

For the most part, second and retirement homes are situated on "scattered sites."⁸ That is, the location of homes does not conform to an overall plan or scheme. They may occur anywhere the owner desires and is able to acquire the property. Thus, the location of second and retirement homes is determined by the purchaser's perception of what constitutes a desirable site and the availability of land for purchase. The result is that the majority of these properties are irregularly spaced over the landscape and interspersed with the permanent homes of natives and other full-time residents. Although the distribution is uneven, it is certainly not random. As there are commonalities of desired site qualities among purchasers, and these traits are not ubiquitously spaced over the landscape, second and retirement homes occur with greater frequency in certain areas. In particular, concentrations are greatest in those areas deemed most attractive. As earlier noted, the single most preferred site trait is the presence of water frontage. In conformance, most of the non-village homes and virtually all of the "estates" front on the Bay or the creeks and rivers leading into it or are in proximity to them (Figure 7).⁹ Usually located some distance off the public roads,

⁸Morton Hoffman, Second Homes in Maryland, p. 67, reported 100 percent of all second homes in the county in the early 1970's were on "scattered sites."

⁹As used in this study, the term "estate" applies not only to large acreage properties, but to all country properties containing a residence sited on a lot of five acres or more.

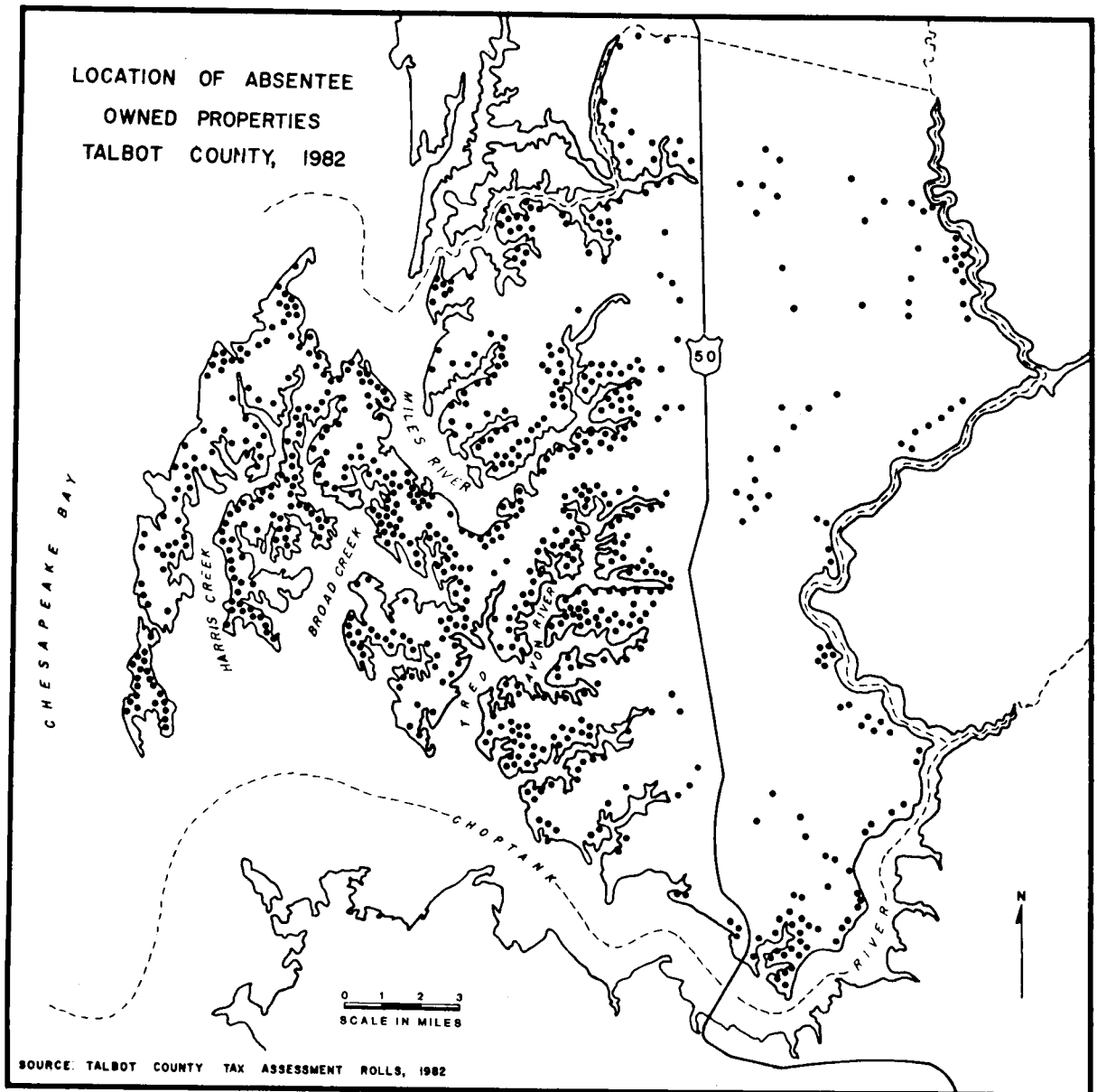


Figure 7. Location of Absentee Owned Properties, Talbot County, 1982.

"estate" residences are secluded from inland view by screens of trees and often stately tree-lined lanes. Since the County Roads Ordinance permits up to six residences on a private road, it is possible for individual properties of only a few acres to be secluded from public view and access.¹⁰

As shown in Figure 7, absentee properties exist in most parts of the county. However, they are most numerous in the waterfront and near waterfront areas west of Route 50 in the Easton, St. Michaels, Trappe, and Bay Hundred election districts. Smaller clusters exist along the shores of the Choptank River and its tributaries in the southeast, along the Choptank and Tuckahoe Creek on the eastern border, and near Easton in the central part of the county.

Figure 7 also shows that not all waterfront areas are as densely populated with nonresident properties. This variance in density is a function of several factors, including the size of property units and the variance in willingness of owners to sell small parcels. It is also a product of the fact that not all water frontage is equally good or suitable for residences and leisure activities. Some shoreline areas are poorly drained and/or have shallow water. Since these dispersed residences are served by individual septic systems, drainage or percolation is especially significant. A comparison of the location of absentee owned properties as shown in Figure 7 with the drainage

¹⁰County Council of Talbot County, 1978 Talbot County Roads Ordinance, Section 5, Part A, No. 7, item c.

characteristics of soils in waterfront areas as displayed in Figure 8 clearly reveals that those waterfront areas with well to moderately-well drained soils have the majority of these properties.

V. LAND COVER AND LAND USE ON ABSENTEE PROPERTIES

Field observations and low-altitude A.S.C.S. photographs show that absentee owned land includes woodland and cleared land. Using the large scale tax property plat maps, with selected absentee properties designated, as a guide, the areas of greatest concentration of these properties were repeatedly traversed by auto. Descriptive notes were made of the prevailing character of the properties, including land use and vegetative cover. In addition, the vegetative and land use patterns were discerned by correlating the absentee property designated tax maps with the aerial photographs covering the properties. The large scale of the photographs made it possible to easily identify wooded, cleared, and cultivated land.

The total amount of wooded and cleared land owned by nonresidents is unknown. Records on the subject are nonexistent and the time required to do a comprehensive inventory made coverage of the entire area impractical. However, an analysis of land cover was done on the nearly 7,500 acres of absentee owned land in properties of less than twenty acres. This was accomplished through the use of a simple, but effective procedure employing the tax plat maps and the A.S.C.S. aerial photographs. With the tax maps as a reference, the outline of absentee properties was plotted on the photographs. A transparent

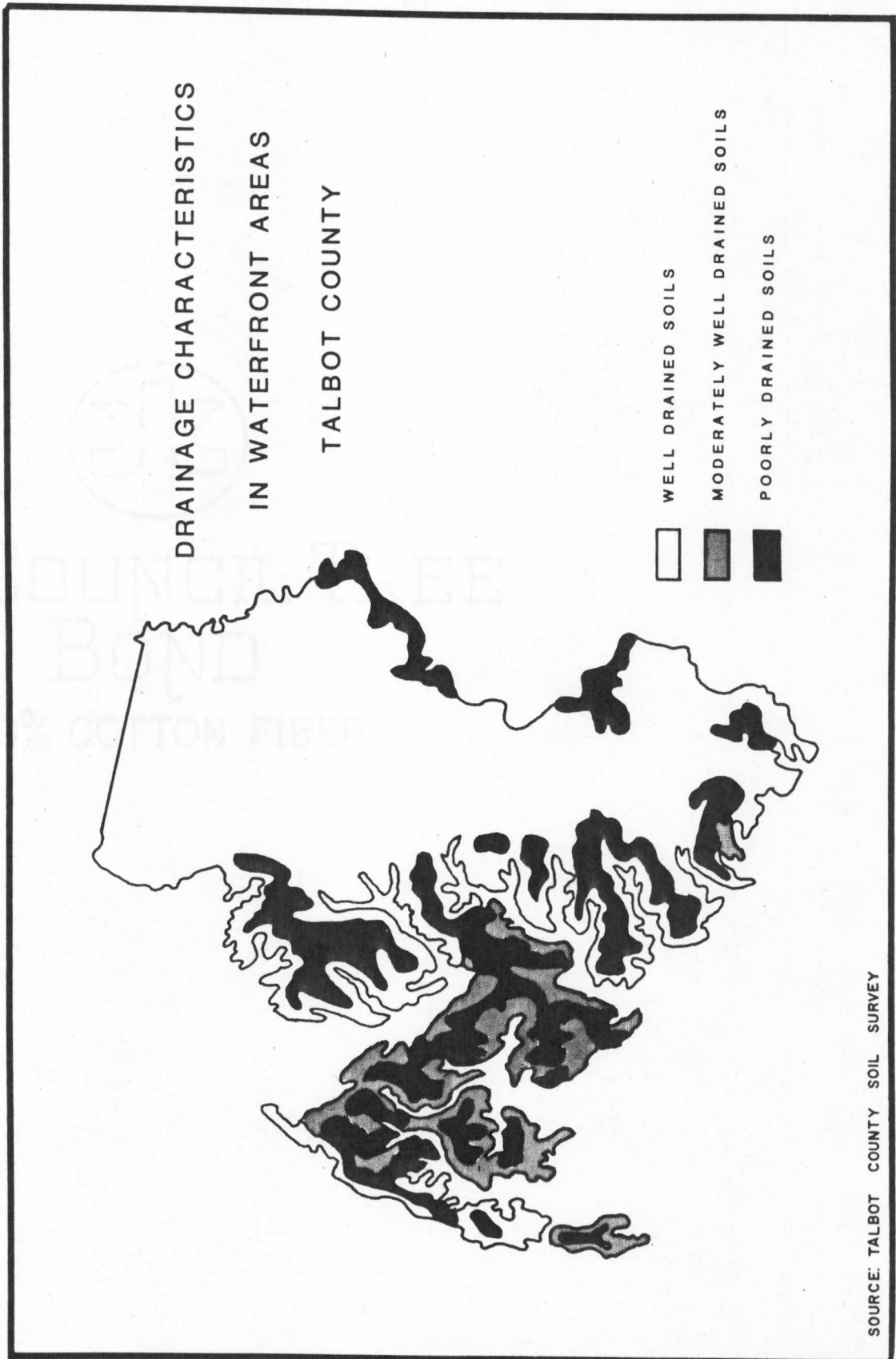


Figure 8. Drainage Characteristic in Waterfront Areas, Talbot County.

overlay of squares, drawn to the scale of the photographs so that each square enclosed one acre, was then placed over the property. Counting the number of whole or fractional squares over cleared or wooded land gave the acreage in each. This technique was used to derive all empirically measured data on land cover and land use. As shown in Table IX, the above revealed 4,100 acres of cleared and 3,300 acres of wooded land. Cleared land is all land that is not natural woodland, including cropland, residential areas and vacant land.

TABLE IX

LAND COVER ON ABSENTEE OWNED RURAL PROPERTIES OF LESS THAN TWENTY ACRES BY ELECTION DISTRICT IN TALBOT COUNTY, 1982

Election District	Acreage in Absentee Properties of Under Twenty Acres		
	Total	Cleared Land ^a	Woodland
1. Rural Easton	785	534	239
2. Rural St. Michaels	1,358	2,253	1,584
3. Rural Trappe	1,331	443	873
4. Chapel	417	273	139
5. Bay Hundred	1,079	605	467
County Total	7,470	4,108	3,302 ^b

^aThe category Cleared Land includes all land that is not natural woodland, including cropland, residential areas, and vacant land.

^bThe sum of the cleared and wooded area is not equal to the total acreage in properties under twenty acres because of measurement errors.

Source: Empirically derived from aerial photographs.

VI. ABSENTEE OWNERSHIP OF FARMLAND

There are also no records of the amount of farmland owned by persons residing outside the county. Nor is it possible to assess this from air photos since farmland includes both cleared and wooded land. Nevertheless, a close approximation was derived from the 1982 Tax Assessment Rolls by totalling the acreage of properties with agricultural use value assessment owned by persons whose mailing address is outside the county. Since land must be a part of a property that is actively devoted to farming in order to qualify for the use value assessment, all lands listed as such are a part of an active farming operation or are farmland, wooded or cleared.¹¹ As shown in Table X, nearly 37,000 acres of absentee owned farmland in properties of all sizes were identified using this procedure.

Despite yielding an accurate figure of the amount of land in active farm operations owned by nonresidents, the procedure gives an underrepresentation of the actual amount of farmland held by "outsiders." Because of the qualification requirements, properties of less than twenty acres owned by absentees rarely are given a use-value assessment, even if a majority of the land is farmed. Basically, twenty acres is the smallest property size that qualifies for use value assessment. However, units of less than twenty acres may qualify if they have been farmed continuously, the land was not subdivided after

¹¹Maryland General Assembly, Annotated Code of Maryland, Vol. 7, Article 11, Section 19.

TABLE X

ACRES OF ABSENTEE OWNED LAND IN TALBOT COUNTY WITH AGRICULTURAL
USE VALUE TAX ASSESSMENT BY ELECTION DISTRICT AND PROPERTY SIZE
1982

Election District	Acres of Absentee Owned Land with Use Value Assessment in Properties of:				All Sizes
	Less than 10 Acres	10-19.9 Acres	20-49.9 Acres	50 and Over Acres	
1. Rural Easton	16	15	438	8,298	8,766
2. Rural St. Michaels	0	17	421	5,839	6,277
3. Rural Trappe	66	107	937	10,121	11,231
4. Chapel	44	28	361	6,796	7,229
5. Bay Hundred	0	16	189	2,929	3,134
County Total	126	183	2,346	33,983	36,637

Source: Talbot County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1982.

1977, and the primary use of the land is agricultural. Lots purchased with less than twenty acres for residential purposes do not qualify.¹² Most small absentee properties are excluded because of recency of subdivision and/or inability to prove primacy of agricultural use. As shown in Table X, the tax rolls show only 309 acres of absentee owned land held in property units of less than twenty acres with use value assessment in 1982. This represented only 4 percent of the nearly 7,500 acres of absentee owned land in this size category.¹³ By comparison, over 1,400 acres of cultivated land in nonresident properties of less than twenty acres were measured on the 1982 A.S.C.S. aerial photographs (Table XI).

TABLE XI

ACRES OF CULTIVATED LAND IN TALBOT COUNTY HELD IN ABSENTEE
OWNED PROPERTIES OF LESS THAN TWENTY ACRES BY
ELECTION DISTRICT, 1982

Election District	Acres of Cultivated Land
1. Rural Easton	142
2. Rural St. Michaels	658
3. Rural Trappe	217
4. Chapel	159
5. Bay Hundred	231
Total	1,407

Source: Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service Aerial Photographs, 1982.

¹² Maryland General Assembly, Annotated Code of Maryland.

¹³ Derived from Talbot County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1982.

Additional support for a higher incidence of "outside" control of farmland came from the Executive Director of the county A.S.C.S. Office. He stated that according to his office records and his knowledge of who owns farmland in the county, between 50 and 65 percent of the cropland in the county is owned by nonresidents or former absentee owners who are now inhabitants of the county.¹⁴

In addition to showing that absentee ownership of farmland is high, available data also reveals that control of farmland is increasingly passing into the hands of nonresidents. For example, Property Transfer Logs disclose that the percentage of the total land sold in units of twenty or more acres that was bought by nonresidents increased from 29 percent in 1975 to 64 percent in 1980.¹⁵

¹⁴Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, Executive Director of Talbot County A.S.C.S. Office, Easton, Maryland, July 6, 1982.

¹⁵These figures were derived from the 1975 and 1980 Property Transfer Logs by accumulating the total acreage sold and the acreage sold to nonresidents in units of twenty or more acres.

CHAPTER III

THE RELATIONSHIP OF NONRESIDENT OWNERSHIP TO PARCELLATION AND THE PRICE OF RURAL LAND

I. NONRESIDENT OWNERSHIP AND PARCELLATION

Absentee purchase of rural land has contributed to parcellation, the subdivision of properties into smaller more numerous units. This is shown in several ways. First, by the fact that in 1982 there were 1,557 absentee owned properties of less than ten acres containing over 6,100 acres (Table XII). Second, a comparison of the percentage of absentee owned and total rural land held in various parcel sizes reveals that the proportion of absentee owned land in small parcels is higher than that for all rural land. Whereas over 13 percent of the nonresident owned land was held in properties of less than ten acres in 1982, only 9 percent of all rural land was owned in properties of this size (Table XIII). Although the difference is not great, it must be noted that the percentage of rural land in properties under ten acres in Talbot County is nearly three times the national average as identified in a national survey of landowners conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture. The survey showed less than 3.5 percent of the land in properties of less than ten acres

TABLE XII

NUMBER AND ACREAGE OF ABSENTEE OWNED RURAL
PROPERTIES OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES IN
TALBOT COUNTY BY ELECTION DISTRICT,
1982

Election District	Number of Properties	Acreage in Properties
1. Rural Easton	214	578
2. Rural St. Michaels	583	3,263
3. Rural Trappe	330	983
4. Chapel	114	350
5. Bay Hundred	336	937
County Total	1,577	6,111

Source: Talbot County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1982.

TABLE XIII

PERCENT OF ABSENTEE OWNED AND TOTAL RURAL LAND IN
TALBOT COUNTY IN PROPERTY SIZE CATEGORIES, 1982

Property Size	Percent Absentee Owned	Percent of Total Rural Land
Less than 10 acres	13.2	9.0
10 to 19.9 acres	2.9	3.3
20 to 49.9 acres	7.1	7.5
50 acres and over	76.8	80.2

Source: Talbot County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1982.

and nearly 91 percent in units of fifty or more acres.¹ The high percentage of all rural land in small units in Talbot is, at least, in part due to the subdivision of properties to sell to nonresidents over time. However, many of the once absentee owned properties are, as shown by the conversion study, owned by persons now residing in the county. Thus, conversion has reduced the disparity between the percentage of absentee owned and total rural land held in small units.

The parcellation of rural properties prompted by the purchase of land for recreation and retirement homes has been occurring for more than five decades. During the first thirty or so years of this century, many of the waterfront estates dating to the Colonial Era were purchased and the manor houses restored. First settled by Europeans in the 1630's and formed as a county in 1706, Talbot was one of Maryland's "Manor Counties." A thriving, commercial, industrial, and agricultural area during the Pre-Revolutionary Period, Talbot was the home of a great many aristocratic families who owned sizable "plantations." According to the 1783 Maryland assessments list, the mean size of land holdings in Talbot County was 615 acres. Only Anne Arundel County, where Annapolis is located, had more wealthy landowners.² Dozens of the eighteenth century mansions remain, a

¹James A. Lewis, Landownership in the United States, 1978, U.S.D.A. Economics, Statistics and Cooperative Service, Agriculture Information Bulletin, No. 35 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1980), p. 15.

²Clarence P. Gould, The Land System in Maryland, 1720-1765 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1913), pp. 79-80.

number have been restored and converted to leisure and retirement homes.³ The purchase of large estates peaked in the 1930's.⁴ As the number of leisure and retirement homes increased after the construction of the Bay Bridge in 1952, many of the large waterfront properties were subdivided into smaller "estates" and multiple-acre lots in a manner similar to that shown in Figure 9. This once 220 acre property was subdivided in the late 1970's into eleven waterfront parcels, the largest of which is fifty-three acres and the smallest is three acres.

Since the 1950's the subdivision into small farm sized units has subsided and the division of rural land into properties of less than ten acres has become far more common. This has been especially true in the waterfront areas of the Easton and St. Michaels election districts. All or portions of once large units have been sectioned into many parcels of a few acres. Figure 10 shows the subdivision of Presqu'isle on Wye, located along the Wye East River in the extreme northwestern sector of the Easton district, where most of the waterfront has been apportioned into lots of two and one-half to six and one-half acres. Figure 6, page 44, shows the Arcadia Shores subdivision, along the Miles River in the southwestern portion of the Easton district,

³Kernan, "Charting the Rhythms of Maryland's Eastern Shore," G-6; James Warner Bellah, "Maryland," Holiday Magazine, September 1954, p. 26. The Maryland Historical Trust lists 298 buildings in the county of historical significance.

⁴Frank Henry, "Old + New," 1961.

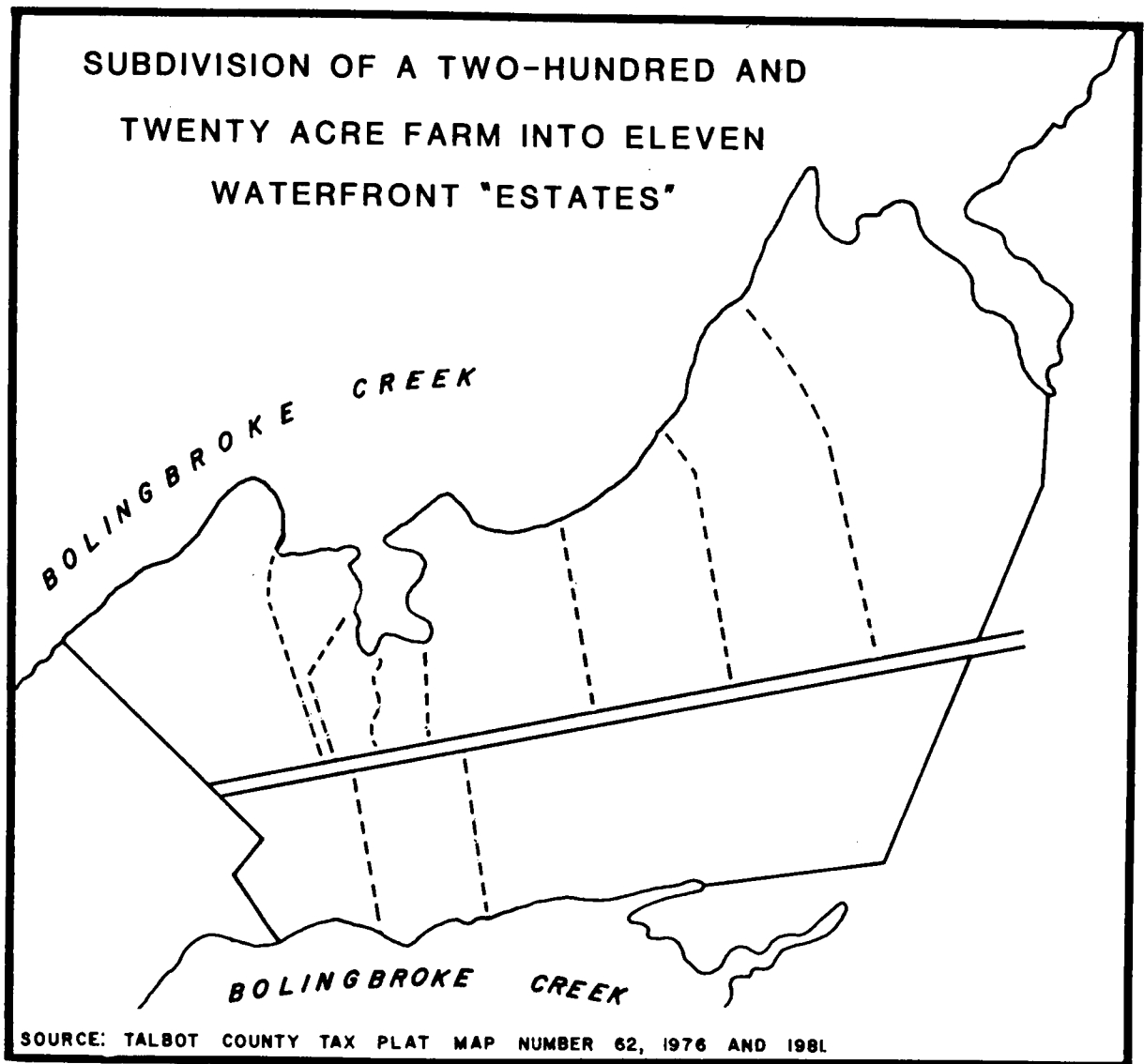


Figure 9. Subdivision of a Two-Hundred and Twenty Acre Farm into Eleven Waterfront "Estates."

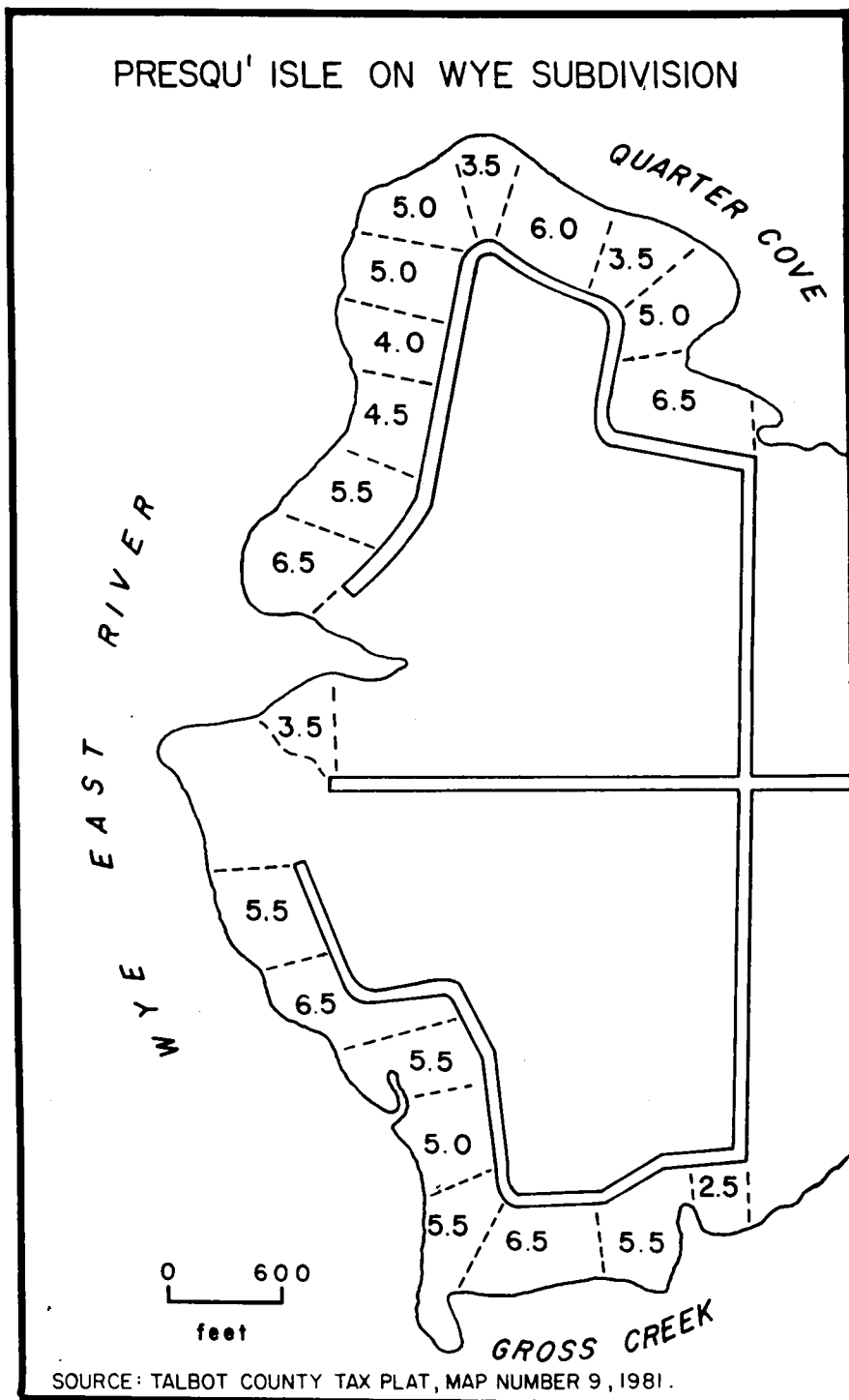


Figure 10. Presqu'isle on Wye Subdivision.

in which there are forty-six parcels of two or more acres. Between the early 1950's and the early 1980's more than twenty multi-lot subdivisions in waterfront areas were platted.

In order to maximize the number of riparian properties, a system of long narrow lots not unlike the "French Arpent or Long-Lot" has been used to identify properties in virtually all waterfront areas. As shown in Figure 11, the prevailing size may vary, but the elongated shape persists. Properties in platted subdivisions with numerous smaller properties display the same spatial pattern (Figure 6, page 44). Even inland lots have the attenuated shape so to enable the maximum number of lots with frontage on roads.

II. AMOUNT OF LAND PARCELIZED

From the standpoint of number of rural properties sold, those containing fewer than ten acres dominate the rural land market. The sale of parcels smaller than ten acres increased from 47 percent of all rural property in 1964 to over 85 percent in 1980. Not only did the percentage rise, the total number of sales of this size unit increased from seventy-nine in 1964 to 364 in 1980.⁵ In 1982 over 14,000 acres or 9 percent of the rural land in the county was in property units of less than ten acres. An additional 5,100 acres were in properties of

⁵ Ray A. Murray and Edwin I. Cissel, The Transfer of Farm and Open Country Real Estate in Talbot County, Maryland, 1964 (College Park: Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station). Miscellaneous Publication 648, November 1967, p. 11; Talbot County Property Transfer Log, 1980.

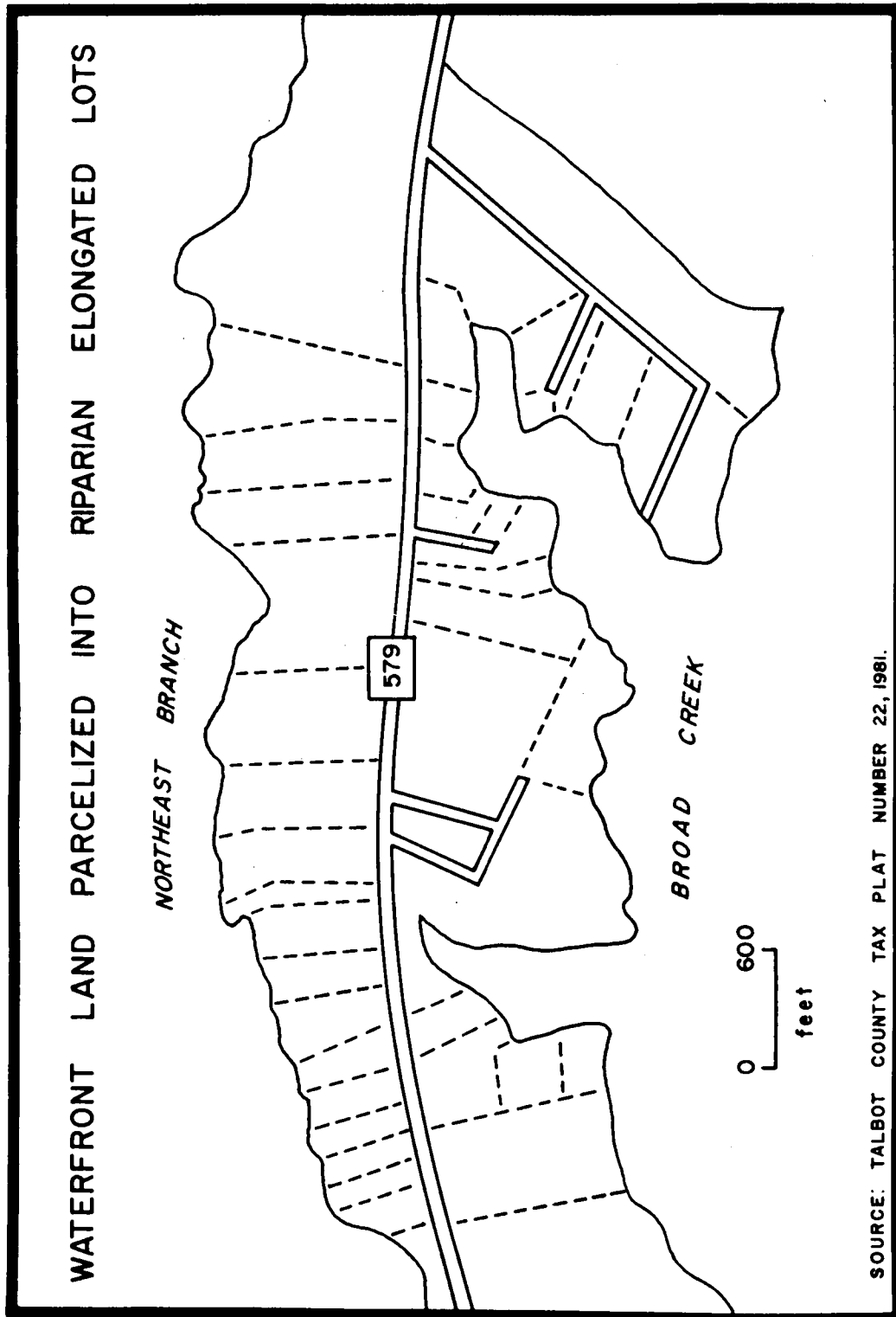


Figure 11. Waterfront Land Parcelized into Riparian Elongated Lots.

ten to 19.9 acres. Thus, nearly 19,200 acres or over 12 percent of the rural land was in units of less than twenty acres.⁶

III. LOCATION OF PARCELIZED LAND

As in the case of absentee ownership, parcellation is most extensive in the waterfront and near water areas in the western portion of the county. The water orientation is shown by the largest acreage in properties of less than twenty acres occurring in the Easton, St. Michaels and Trappe election districts (Table XIV). As shown in Figure 5, page 38, these are the districts with the greatest amount of shoreline. Furthermore, the highest percentage of rural land in properties of this size is in the St. Michaels and Bay Hundred districts (Table XIV). These are the districts with the longest shoreline relative to their overall land area. Other concentrations of small rural properties exist along the major highways, in the unincorporated hamlets, and on the outskirts of the incorporated towns, especially Easton.

IV. REASONS FOR PARCELLATION

The pressures for parcellation into property units that are larger than conventional suburban lots, but smaller than what is usually considered economical for farming come from a variety of sources. Buyers often desire multiple-acre lots for solitude and privacy. Realtors, planners, tax assessors and landowners interviewed during the summer of 1981 all said that the desire for privacy and

TABLE XIV

PERCENT OF TOTAL RURAL LAND AND THE ACRES OF RURAL LAND
IN PROPERTIES OF LESS THAN TWENTY ACRES IN
TALBOT COUNTY BY ELECTION DISTRICT, 1982

Election District	Rural Land in Properties of Less than 20 Acres	
	Percent	Acres
1. Rural Easton	11.1	4,241
2. Rural St. Michaels	26.3	5,442
3. Rural Trappe	13.3	5,000
4. Chapel	5.7	2,848
5. Bay Hundred	16.1	1,644
County Total	12.3	19,175

Source: Talbot County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1982.

seclusion was the dominant reason why people, especially "outsiders," purchased multiple acre lots. One interviewee even related that some leisure property owners buy adjoining properties when they are put up for sale to ensure that no one will build on them.⁷ So long as prices are not too high and property taxes are low, the purchaser is often inclined to take more land than is needed to accommodate the residence and contiguous activity area. As Talbot had a 1982 combined county and state property tax rate of only \$1.55 per \$100.00 of 50 percent of the assessed value (the lowest in the state), property taxes were little or no deterrent to the purchase of larger parcels than absolutely needed.⁸ Compared to the suburban land prices familiar to the purchaser, the land in Talbot County is cheap. However, the tendency to "over buy" has been tempered somewhat in recent years by inflated land prices. These rising prices contribute to continued parcellation and increase the likelihood of subdivision into even smaller units. The price of larger units exceeds what many buyers can or want to pay. Owners and sellers of rural land prefer parcellation because of the much higher per acre price that can be realized from the sale of a number of small parcels as compared to the sale of a few large units. The sale prices listed in the 1981 Property Transfer Logs showed that the per acre price of land bears

⁷ Personal interview with Guy Toms, County Tax Assessor, Easton, Maryland, July 6, 1982.

⁸ Guy Toms, June 22, 1982.

an inverse relation to the size of the property offered for sale. Two to five acre lots frequently sold for per acre prices that were four to ten times the prices received for large properties sold in the same general area.

The increase in small, multiple-acre lots is also attributable to the growing number of properties on a fixed land base and the passage of several ordinances by the county government. The number of property units in the county increased from 11,610 in 1975 to 13,560 in 1982.⁹ The County Zoning Ordinance adopted in 1974 is designed to keep rural population density low by requiring that all rural residential lots be two acres or larger. Since 1974 multiple-acre residential lots have been required in all rural areas outside the "village zones," existing towns and villages designated for cluster development. The 1974 Zoning Ordinance increased the minimum residential lot size from 20,000 square feet to two, five or ten acres, depending on the sector of the county.¹⁰ The County Roads Ordinance encourages parcellation by permitting up to six residences on a private road that excludes public use. Since the public is not permitted to use these roads, persons whose properties are located on them have, except for other riparian property owners, the seclusion afforded by a property equal

⁹ Personal interview with Doris Ainsworth, Assistant Director of the Talbot County Tax Assessor's Office, Easton, Maryland, July 7, 1982.

¹⁰ Talbot Council, Talbot County Zoning Ordinance, adopted September 24, 1974.

to the combined area of the properties served by the road. Thus, the desired degree of seclusion and privacy is possible even on a property of only a few acres. Figure 12, showing an area in the St. Michaels District along Harris Creek, portrays the seclusion afforded small lots by the roads ordinance. Since the road leading off Route 579 is private, the four three-acre waterfront lots have the isolation from public view and access equal to that of a forty-six acre property. Numerous similar layouts exist in the county. If fewer residences were permitted on a private road, larger properties would be required to achieve the same sequestration from public infringement.

V. LAND COVER ON PROPERTIES OF LESS THAN TWENTY ACRES

No specific records have been kept of the character of the land that has been parcelized. However, field observations and A.S.C.S. photographs show that both woodland and cleared land have been subdivided. Measurement of the acreage in each of the aerial photographs revealed that of the 19,175 total acres in properties of less than twenty acres, over 10,000 had been cleared and nearly 9,000 were wooded. During the 1950's and 1960's wooded land was more frequently subdivided but as available developable plots were depleted more and more cleared land was subdivided. Even though sizable acreages of undeveloped woodland remain, the potential for subdivision is limited because most of the woodland has poor drainage. Perhaps as much as 85 percent of the wooded land not parcelized will not pass health

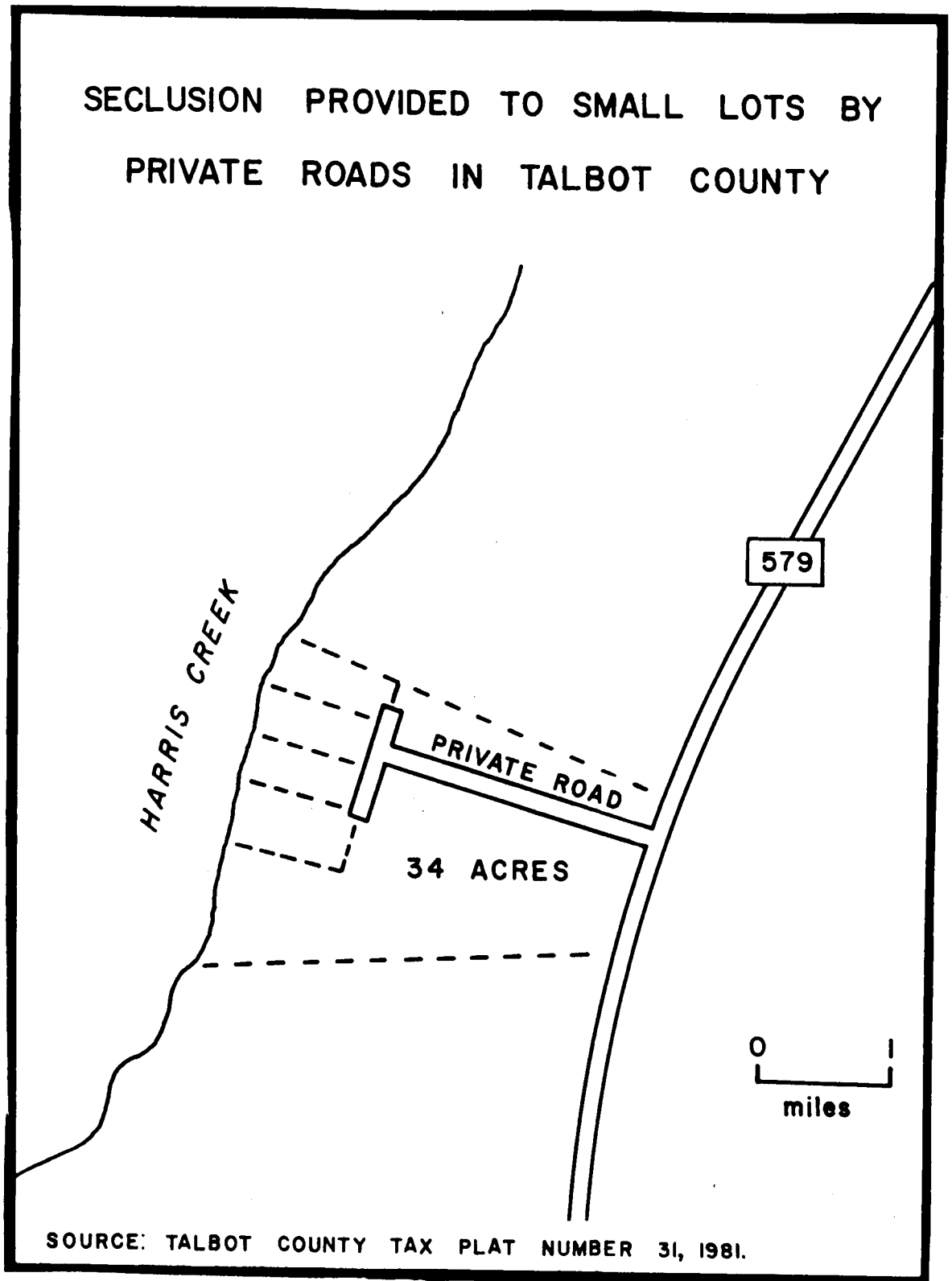


Figure 12. Seclusion Provided to Small Lots by Private Roads in Talbot County.

department percolation tests for individual septic systems.¹¹ As a result, the majority of the land subdivided in the 1970's and 1980's was cleared land. According to a Talbot County Planner, over 60 percent of the land subdivided between 1972 and 1976 was cropland.¹² In 1981 one realtor estimated that 80 to 90 percent of the land being subdivided was cleared farmland.¹³

VI. LAND PRICES

As in the country as a whole, farmland prices have soared in Talbot County in the past two decades. According to the Censuses of Agriculture, the mean per acre value of farmland rose from \$295 in 1964 to \$1,854 in 1978, an increase of 528 percent. The majority of this increase occurred between 1974 and 1978 when the average value rose \$876.¹⁴

Despite the remarkable increase shown above, the Census data does not reflect the true market values of farmland. A review of Property Transfer Logs, real estate ads, and interview data show that farmland has had a purchase or sale price well above the Census reported values. For example, the mean per acre price of farm and open country land sold

¹¹Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, June 22, 1982.

¹²Personal interview with David Boehm, Talbot County Planner-Engineer, Easton, Maryland, June 16, 1976.

¹³Personal interview with James Latham, Realtor, Easton, Maryland, August 24, 1981.

¹⁴U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1964, 1969, 1974, and 1978, Vol. 1, Maryland (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

in units of 10 or more acres in 1964 was \$540, nearly double the Census value. Even properties of fifty or more acres sold for nearly one-third more than the Census mean value for all property sizes.¹⁵ Available data showed that farmland in 1981-82 was selling for prices well above the 1978 Census figure. Units of fifty or more acres brought prices ranging from \$2,400 to over \$7,000 per acre. The average price for large units of land of which over 50 percent was tillable fell in the range of \$2,500 to \$3,200 per acre. Parcels of a few acres brought much higher prices, from a low of about \$7,000 to upwards of \$40,000 per acre.¹⁶

The difference in per acre price of land was a function of variance in parcel size, parcel location, and, to some extent, soil quality. On the average, the smaller the property unit, the closer the land unit to water, and the better the land quality, the higher the price.

By the late 1970's the value of Talbot County farmland had risen to the point where it was, on the average, the most valuable on the "Eastern Shore" and among the most valuable in Maryland. In 1978 the

¹⁵Murray and Cissel, pp. 11-13.

¹⁶These prices represent a composite of information derived from a variety of sources including real estate ads, Property Transfer Records which record sale prices, Tax Rolls which list the assessed value, and interviews. Persons interviewed included realtors, tax assessors, farmers, the Executive Director of the A.S.C.S. Office, and an official of the Federal Land Bank Association in Denton, Maryland, which loans money to farmers in Talbot County to purchase farmland.

only counties with higher values were those in the Washington, D.C., and Baltimore S.M.S.A.'s and Calvert County, a rapidly growing, suburban area with extensive frontage on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay (Table XV).

The rise in farmland prices, in addition to inflationary response, was basically caused by an expanding demand for land and a sluggish supply response. The increased demand is shown by the near tripling of property sales between 1964 and 1975.¹⁷ The sluggish response in supply is evidenced by only 2 percent of the land in units of twenty acres or more being sold in 1980.¹⁸ Although the increased demand can be attributed to a variety of factors the prime forces were the increased desire for more land among farmers and the increased bidding of absentees for land. While nonresidents purchased land for mixed reasons, such as an investment, a hedge against inflation, and the mystique and prestige of owning land, most absentee or former absentee owned properties are used for recreational and retirement purposes.¹⁹

The large profits realized from the sale of cash grains in the mid-1970's heightened the existing need and desire of farmers to expand the size of their operations. The value of agricultural products sold from Talbot County farms increased from just over eleven million

¹⁷ Talbot County Property Transfer Logs, 1974 and 1975.

¹⁸ Talbot County Property Transfer Logs, 1980.

¹⁹ Established by field observations and personal interviews with realtors, tax assessors and county planners.

TABLE XV
AVERAGE PER ACRE VALUE OF FARM REAL ESTATE
IN MARYLAND BY COUNTY, 1978

County	Dollar Value	County	Dollar Value
Alleghany	751	Howard ^M	2999
Anne Arundel ^M	2499	Kent ^E	1735
Baltimore ^M	2410	Montgomery ^M	3629
Calvert	1904	Prince George's ^M	2945
Caroline ^E	1479	Queen Annes ^E	1696
Carroll	1717	St. Mary's	1171
Cecil ^M	1603	Somerset ^E	1301
Charles	1479	Talbot ^E	1854
Dorchester ^E	1301	Washington	1341
Frederick	1584	Wicomico ^E	1508
Garrett	1003	Worcester ^E	1269
Harford	1756		

^EEastern Shore Counties.

^MStandard Metropolitan Statistical Area Counties.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1978, Vol. 1, State and County Data, Part 20, Maryland (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1981).

dollars in 1969 to nearly thirty-one million dollars in 1974.²⁰ With the larger income farmers were encouraged and able to purchase more and larger machines as well as buy more and pay more for land. The high incomes challenged farmers to find ways to reduce their taxable incomes. Tax regulations encouraged the purchase of depreciable capital items such as tractors, combines, and trucks.²¹ Once the farmers purchased the machines they were committed to expanding their operations. When farms became available for sale, farmers competitively bid against one another to acquire the land.

The expanded demand for rural land, including farmland, by "outsiders" is shown by the previously mentioned increase in absentee and former absentee ownership.

Since active farmers were also in the market for many of the properties large enough for economical farm use, the rising number purchased by absentees indicates a willingness of nonresidents to pay higher prices than most farmers. This tendency to outbid farmers and thus to increase the price of farmland was evident in the increasing percentage of properties of twenty or more acres offered for sale that was bought by nonresidents. For example, 29 percent of all such properties sold in 1975 were bought by "outsiders" and 64 percent in 1980.²² In addition, all persons interviewed in 1981 and 1982,

²⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1969 and 1974.

²¹ As reported in Wayne D. Rasmussen, "The Mechanization of Agriculture," Scientific American, Vol. 247, No. 3, Sept. 1982, p. 83, farmers generally adopt new technology only in times of favorable economic conditions.

²² Property Transfer Logs, 1975 and 1980.

including realtors, agricultural officials, and tax assessors, said that "outsiders" bid up land prices and were willing and able to pay more for land than most natives.

The contribution of recreation and retirement property purchases to higher farmland values is also shown by the disparity in farmland prices within the county that bears little relation to soil productivity. Despite being the best farmland, the land in the eastern one-half of the county has, for several decades, sold for significantly less per acre than most of the land in the western portion. For example, in 1964 the average per acre price of rural land sold in the eastern portion of the county was only about one-third the price paid in the areas west of Route 50.²³ Sale prices in 1981 confirm a continued differential. However, differences in mean per acre prices had declined to about one-half.²⁴ The higher prices in the west are directly attributable to the extensive water frontage and the accordant concentration of recreation and retirement properties in the area. The reduction in price differences was prompted by increased absentee and nonfarm purchases in the eastern sector of the county.

The higher value of farmland in Talbot County compared to adjoining counties with comparable soils but with relatively few recreation and retirement homes gives further credence to the contention that the bidding for land for recreation and retirement properties has driven up farmland prices.

²³Murray and Cissel, pp. 11-13.

²⁴Talbot County Property Transfer Logs, 1981.

CHAPTER IV

AGRICULTURE IN TALBOT COUNTY

I. HISTORICAL PATTERNS OF AGRICULTURE IN THE COUNTY

Talbot County has a well established agriculture economy that has passed through a number of phases since European settlement in the seventeenth century. During the Colonial Era farming was oriented to the production of a variety of food staples for home consumption and tobacco for sale to Europe. As tobacco declined in the mid-eighteenth century grains, especially wheat, became the principal item of farm sales. A general type of farming, combining livestock and crops, predominated through most of the nineteenth century. However, in the latter part of the century vegetables began to become a major cash crop.¹ Linked by steamer to Baltimore and by rail to Philadelphia and other northeastern cities, the area was well situated to capitalize on its early spring weather by providing fresh vegetables to these urban markets in the summer. Vegetable production, especially tomatoes and sweet corn, was also stimulated by the construction of a number of canneries in the area.²

¹Charles Clark, The Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia, Vol. I (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1950), pp. 82-98.

²The Tri-State Packer's Association List of Packers for 1915 (Easton, Maryland), listed 33 packing and canning factories in Talbot County.

Despite the growth of commercial vegetable production, a general or diversified type of farming persisted in the area during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Along with vegetables, beef, dairy products, and wheat were the principal sources of income for the farmers.³

II. POST WORLD WAR II SHIFT TO "CASH GRAIN"

During the 1930's and 1940's changes began occurring that gave rise to the present character of farming. Faced with stiff competition from Florida and the irrigated farms of the West and a declining local labor force, vegetable production began a decline in the 1930's that continued into the mid-1970's. This period also saw a reduction in the importance of cattle and their products, both beef and dairy, as well as a drop in wheat production.

Major features of the post-World War II period were a shift from livestock toward greater emphasis on field crops and a shift in cropping patterns away from wheat, hay and vegetables to corn and soybeans. An exception to this pattern was the increased importance of poultry and poultry products, especially broilers. The cited changes are well exemplified by the shifts in the percentage of farm income derived from specific products as shown in Table XVI and the the acreage occupied by

³Department of Agriculture Economics, University of Maryland Extension Service, Maryland Agricultural Trends by Counties: 1900-1960, Miscellaneous Extension Publications, NQ60, College Park, Maryland, September 1961.

TABLE XVI
CHANGES IN THE PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL FARM SALES
ACCOUNTED FOR BY SELECTED CROPS AND
PRODUCTS IN TALBOT COUNTY,
1945 TO 1978

Year	Percent of Total Farm Sales Accounted for by the Sale of:				
	Vegetables	Dairy Products	Poultry & Products	Other Livestock & Products	Grains
1945	16.2	22.5	24.5	10.1	24.0
1949	5.6	21.3	32.2	14.0	24.5
1954	3.3	15.9	29.1	15.9	32.5
1959	2.5	16.3	25.1	17.2	36.6
1964	2.2	10.9	27.2	18.2	39.6
1969	2.5	11.3	30.2	10.5	43.4
1974	1.5	6.1	28.9	4.8	58.2
1978	2.4	8.0	27.0	6.7	53.0

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1945, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969, 1974, and 1978 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

specific crops as shown in Table XVII. Also characteristic of this period was a replacement of diversified farming by specialized production. Rather than continuing the pattern of combining a number of product lines, including a variety of crops and certain livestock, farmers gave increased attention to only a few specific commodities. General farms, those on which a variety of products are produced and no one product or group of products accounts for 50 or more percent of the goods sold, gave way to specialized farms, those on which the sales of a particular product or group of products amount to 50 percent or more of the total value of goods sold.⁴ As shown in Table XVIII, nearly 98 percent of all farms were specialized operations and only 2 percent were general farms in 1978. In particular, "cash grain" emphasizing corn and soybeans came to be the dominant form of commercial agriculture. In 1978, as Table XVIII shows, nearly two-thirds of all farms were classified as "cash grain," farms on which grains accounted for 50 percent or more of the total value of farm sales. In that same year corn and soybeans occupied nearly 81 percent of the total cropland, 80 percent of the harvested cropland and accounted for over 80 percent of the total income derived from the sale of crops.⁵

⁴U.S. Bureau of Census, Census of Agriculture, 1969, Vol. 1, Area Reports, Part 23, Maryland (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), p. A-8.

⁵U.S. Bureau of Census, Census of Agriculture, 1974, Vol. 1, State and County Data, Part 20, Maryland (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1980).

TABLE XVII
CHANGES IN SELECTED AGRICULTURAL ACREAGES IN
TALBOT COUNTY, 1945 TO 1978

Year	Land in Farms Acres	Total Cropland Acres	Acres Planted in:					All Field Crops ^a
			Corn	Soybeans	Wheat	Hay	Vegetables	
1945	154,203	104,410	19,327	4,822	25,100	11,146	8,868	75,004
1950	139,698	92,275	21,124	4,600	25,200	11,392	5,715	72,478
1954	141,994	94,822	31,173	11,403	15,354	13,707	4,645	74,299
1959	138,059	100,519	36,281	14,827	14,352	8,190	3,585	77,236
1964	125,196	94,303	40,442	21,395	9,796	6,579	3,061	88,373
1969	125,154	91,724	39,581	18,141	8,483	2,980	2,546	75,951
1974	120,721	92,741	35,610	39,526	10,806	2,582	1,538	93,129
1978	117,400	95,179	37,268	40,497	5,460	3,232	2,743	95,384

^a Acreage in crops may exceed the total cropland because of double cropping.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1945, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969, 1974, and 1978 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

TABLE XVIII

PERCENT OF ALL FARMS IN TALBOT COUNTY BY TYPE AS
DEFINED BY THE MAJOR SOURCE OF INCOME FROM
FARM SALES, 1978^a

Farm Type	Percent of All Farms	Farm Type	Percent of All Farms
Cash Grain	66.9	Dairy	4.5
Vegetable and Melon	1.6	Poultry and Egg	10.5
Fruit and Tree Nut	0.8	Animal Specialty	2.0
Horticultural Specialty	2.0	Other Field Crop	0.8
General	2.0	Other Livestock	8.8

^aThe farm type represents a description of the major source of income from farm sales. To be classified as a particular type, a farm had to have sales of a particular product or group of products amounting in value to 50 percent or more of the total value of all farm products sold during the year. A general farm had income from three or more sources and did not meet the criteria for any other type.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1978, Vol. 1, Part 20, Maryland (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1980).

The rise of "cash grain" farming can be attributed to several factors, including: (1) the loss of farm labor caused by World War II and the outmigration of people seeking nonagriculture jobs; (2) the decline of vegetables due to competition and the loss of local labor; (3) the expansion of the local and regional market for cash grains provided by the growth of the broiler industry; and (4) high grain prices caused by increased exports in the early 1970's.⁶

III. SIZE AND NUMBER OF FARMS

The mean size and number of farms in the county have reflected the national trend toward fewer and larger units (Table XIX). These changes were made possible by the incorporation of much of the land from terminated operations into the remaining farms. A comparison of the rates of decline of land in farms, total cropland, and the number of farms makes this consolidation obvious. Between 1945 and 1978, the land in farms and total cropland decreased only 24 and 9 percent, respectively, while the number of farms dropped 64 percent.⁷

The move to increase the size of farm units was prompted by new technologies that were biased toward large-scale production. The

⁶ Outmigration was so great that the population of Talbot County declined nearly 8 percent between 1900 and 1940. Clark, Eastern Shore, Vol. II, p. 664. By 1950 nearly two million broilers and chickens worth nearly \$1.5 million were sold from Talbot farms. U.S. Bureau of Census, Census of Agriculture, 1950, Vol. I, Counties and State Economic Areas, Part 14, Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952).

⁷ U.S. Bureau of Census, Census of Agriculture, 1950 and 1978.

TABLE XIX
CHANGES IN MEAN FARM SIZE AND THE NUMBER OF FARM
OPERATIONAL UNITS IN TALBOT COUNTY AND
THE UNITED STATES, 1945 TO 1978

Year	Talbot County		United States	
	Number of Farm Units	Mean Size Acres	Number of Farm Units (Millions)	Mean Size Acres
1945	976	158	5.9	195
1950	807	173	5.4	216
1954	747	190	4.8	242
1959	570	242	3.7	303
1964	432	290	3.2	352
1969	419	299	2.7	389
1974	374	323	2.3	440
1978	354	332	2.5	415

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1945, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969, 1974, and 1978 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

switch to cash grains, conducive to mechanized production, intensified the trend. The new technology enabled farmers to care for much larger acreages than previously. This was accomplished by substituting capital goods, machines, and other inanimate inputs for labor. As farmers adopted the capital-intensive technology, their fixed production costs rose to the point that larger operations were required for a reasonable profit. With fixed production costs relatively constant, profits were largely contingent on the size of the area worked. The larger the area they tilled, the more the costs were spread and the greater the profits.

The pressures to enlarge have been heightened as the prices farmers receive for their produce have dropped relative to the cost of farm inputs. With a smaller profit margin, the path to acceptable profits lies in increased output volume.

As farms have increased in size and declined in number, the control of farmland has become increasingly concentrated in the hands of the few operators of large units. For example, in 1945 in Talbot County there were only five farms with 1,000 or more acres comprising less than 4 percent of the land in farms. By 1978 the number of such farms had increased to twenty-nine containing over 39 percent of the farmland.⁸ The 1982 A.S.C.S. records showed that the control of cropland was even more concentrated. In that year fifty-five farmers,

⁸ U.S. Bureau of Census, Census of Agriculture, 1945 and 1978.

less than 16 percent of the total, tilled 67,000 acres or over 70 percent of the cropland.⁹ The county A.S.C.S. office keeps annual detailed records on individual farm operator acreages. Farmers report their crop acreages in order to be eligible for federal programs. Reported acreages are monitored by taking aerial photographs each spring and fall.

IV. TENURE PATTERNS

Also concurrent with the increase in farm size has been a dramatic change in farm tenure patterns. Since a farm by United States Census of Agriculture definition is a single operational unit controlled or managed by one or more persons, land in farms can be rented and/or owned by the operator. The traditional land tenure categories of the Census of Agriculture are "full owners," "part owners," and "tenants." "Full owners" are farmers who work only land that they own. "Part owners" both rent and own land that they farm. "Tenants" operate only land that they rent from others. The trend in farm tenure in Talbot County during the past three decades has been away from full ownership and tenancy to part ownership. From 1950 to 1978 the percentage of farms in full ownership fell from 56 to less than 53, and that in tenancy from 31 to 15. At the same time the proportion in part ownership increased from 10 to 32 percent (Table XX). Although the above clearly shows the rise of part ownership, it tends to

⁹ Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, June 10, 1982.

TABLE XX

CHANGES IN THE PERCENT OF FARMS AND LAND IN FARMS HELD BY FULL OWNERS,
PART OWNERS, AND TENANTS IN TALBOT COUNTY AND THE UNITED STATES,
1950 TO 1978

Tenure	Year					
	1950 ^a	1954	1959	1964	1969	1974 1978
Percent of Farms:						
Full Owners						
Talbot	56.0	58.1	53.0	41.7	55.8	52.7 52.8
U.S.	57.4	57.2	57.1	57.6	62.5	61.5 58.6
Part Owner						
Talbot	10.2	15.4	20.9	30.8	22.0	28.3 32.2
U.S.	15.3	17.9	21.9	24.8	24.6	27.2 28.8
Tenant						
Talbot	31.1	24.8	25.6	26.6	22.1	19.0 15.0
U.S.	26.9	24.4	20.5	17.1	12.9	11.3 12.7
Percent of Land in Farms:						
Full Owners						
Talbot	40.3	41.3	36.3	25.6	32.2	29.6 27.2
U.S.	36.1	34.2	30.8	28.7	35.3	35.3 33.1
Part Owner						
Talbot	15.4	25.8	32.6	44.6	43.2	53.7 61.1
U.S.	36.4	40.7	44.8	48.0	51.8	52.6 54.9
Tenant						
Talbot	39.1	29.5	30.5	27.9	24.6	16.7 11.7
U.S.	18.3	16.6	14.9	13.1	13.0	12.0 12.1

^aTotals prior to 1969 do not add up to 100 percent because of a fourth tenure group, managers.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969, 1974, and 1978 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

exaggerate the continued importance of full ownership and to underrepresent that of part ownership. A more illustrative portrayal of the change is shown by the percent of farmland held in the tenure groups over time. For instance, between 1950 and 1978 the share of farmland held in part ownership increased from just over 15 to over 61 percent while that in full ownership declined by nearly one-third and that in tenancy by 70 percent (Table XX).

Although a little more dramatic, the changes in tenure in Talbot County closely paralleled those for the country as a whole since 1950. Nationally, the shift in tenure has also been away from full ownership and tenancy, especially as measured by the share of land in farms. However, the turn to part ownership has not been quite as great as in Talbot. Whereas the percent of farmland held by part owners in Talbot increased by nearly 46 points between 1950 and 1978, that for the country increased by less than 19. As a consequence, the proportion of farmland held in part owner units in Talbot increased from less than 45 percent of the national average figure in 1950 to over 110 percent of it in 1978. Despite these differences, the percentage of farms and farmland held in each of the three categories in Talbot County varies no more than 6 percentage points from the national average (Table XX).

The common trait of farmers renting some or even a majority of the land they work is directly related to the switch to cash grains and the accordant need to increase the size of the operational land

base.¹⁰ The role of increased size is shown by the larger comparative mean size of farms in the tenant and part owner classes in 1978. The average part-owner farm contained 629 acres, tenant 237, and full owner 171.¹¹ Even though the mean sizes are somewhat smaller, the size rank order by tenure status is the same as for the country as a whole. The 1978 national average acreage size of farms held by full owners was 235, tenants 396, and part owners 792.¹² According to a number of studies, this relationship of tenure status and size of unit is not just an average pattern, but persists in all agricultural regions of the country.¹³

¹⁰ A number of studies conclude that most farmers have increased their acreage by renting additional land. See, for example, Glenn A. Zepp and Robert H. McAlexander, Farm Adjustments in Southeastern Pennsylvania, 1960-1965, Progress Report 274 (University Park, Pennsylvania: Agricultural Experiment Station, 1967), pp. 1-3; V. Harrison, C. Tangbehn, and L. M. Eisgruber, "Capital Accumulation and Resource Adjustments," Economic and Marketing Information for Indiana Farmers, June 1969, pp. 1-4. Reference to the high incidence of land rental in cash grain areas is made in several studies including: John Fraser Hart, The Look of the Land (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 76; Bruce B. Johnson, Farmland Tenure Patterns in the United States, Agricultural Economic Report, No. 249 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1974), p. ii.

¹¹ U.S. Bureau of Census, Census of Agriculture, 1978.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ For example, see Bruce B. Johnson, Farmland Tenure Patterns in the United States, p. 4; Charles S. Aiken, "The Fragmented Neoplantation: A New Type of Farm Operation in the Southeast," Southeastern Geographer, Vol. XI, 1971, p. 47. Reports this relationship of tenure status and size in the Southeast.

Although the pressure to expand the acreage cultivated lies at the root of the growing separation of ownership and use of farmland, such pressure alone is not causal. The total cause has been the interaction of this element with several other factors, including: (1) the limited amount of farmland offered for sale, (2) the high price of farmland, (3) the rising purchase of farmland by nonresidents and nonfarmers, and (4) the capital intensive equipment inventories required in most modern agriculture.

Even though a farmer may have both the desire and financial resources to buy additional land, it is often not possible to do so because there is little suitable land available for purchase. Farmers generally are not interested in small acreages because they would add little to their farm size and because land sold in units of a few acres brings much higher unit prices. The sale of land units large enough to be attractive to farmers occurs only infrequently. For example, in 1980 only thirty-four properties of twenty or more acres were sold in Talbot County.¹⁴ The limited amount of land offered for sale relates to the unwillingness of landowners to sell for both economic and emotional reasons. In our society there is a mystique associated with the ownership of land. Land is not only seen as a good, stable investment that generates wealth, but also as a tangible asset that provides a sense of security, success, and prestige to its owner.

¹⁴Talbot County Property Transfer Logs, 1980.

In general, there is much more land available for rent than for purchase. The high percentage of farmland owned by nonfarm persons, both resident and absentee, provides a large pool. Nationally some 44 percent of farmland is owned by nonfarmers and, as previously noted, well over 50 percent of the cropland in Talbot County is owned by nonresidents or recent absentee owners.¹⁵ Even though they have little or no interest in working the land themselves, most of these landowners realize the income producing potential of the land and desire to have it farmed. Thus, while uninterested in selling their land to a farmer, the owners are anxious to rent to them. The 36,000 acres of land with agricultural use value assessment owned by absentees is testament to this statement.

The high incidence of renting is also related to the high price of farmland.¹⁶ High land prices increase the amount of capital required for purchase and thereby reduce the number of potential buyers among the farm population. Farmers who can afford to buy are relatively few; largely limited to those who already own a large enough land base so that they can borrow adequately and use the returns from the unencumbered property to help pay for the new land. The sale price

¹⁵ James A. Lewis, Landownership in the United States, 1978, p. 1.

¹⁶ Michael D. Sublett, Farmers on the Road, The University of Chicago Department of Geography Research Paper No. 168 (Chicago: Department of Geography, 1975), p. 43. Reported that in the Midwest a high incidence of rented land is a good indicator of high land costs. George A. Van Otten, "Changing Spatial Characteristics of Willamette Valley Farms," Professional Geographer, Vol. 32, 1980, p. 69. Relates that the high cost of land made renting preferred to purchase of land as a means to expand.

of farmland in Talbot County not only reflects the income producing potential and competition for ownership among farmers, but also the demand of "outsiders" for leisure and retirement estates. Not dependent on farming for either income or payment of the cost of land acquisition, these people are often willing and able to pay prices higher than can be justified by agricultural use. Thus, the sale price of farmland often rises to the point where farming will not pay the cost of owning the land. For example, while interviewed farmers and agricultural officials estimated that \$2,000 to \$2,500 was the maximum per acre price that could be justified for agricultural use, farmland in Talbot County was selling, as earlier noted, for an average of \$2,500 to \$3,200 per acre in 1982. Priced out of range of most farmers, farmland offered for sale is frequently bought by nonfarm persons and subsequently offered to farmers on a lease basis. In 1982 the Executive Director of the county A.S.C.S. office related that new absentee owners often ask him for the names of farmers who might be interested in leasing their land.¹⁷

The rise in renting is furthermore a consequence of the increase in the number of farmers who are willing to lease land. Once frowned upon, the lease is now widely accepted and, as mentioned above, the most frequently used avenue by farmers to expand the acreage under their control. In Talbot County it is estimated that 65 to 70 percent

¹⁷Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, June 10, 1982.

of the cropland is rented.¹⁸ By comparison, Johnson estimated that only 38 percent of the farmland in the United States was rented in 1969.¹⁹ Of the part-owner farmers interviewed, all were renting over 50 percent of the land they worked. The proportion of land under their control that belonged to them ranged from a low of 7 percent to a high of 46 percent.²⁰

The eagerness and willingness of farmers to rent is a product of the changes in agriculture in the past several decades, combined with the difficulties of buying land and the comparative advantages of renting.

As Aiken and others have observed, success in farming today is more dependent on managerial ability and the possession of machinery than the ownership of land.²¹ Since few farmers, especially the younger, have the ability to finance both machines and an adequate land base, they have little choice but to purchase the machines and rent, at least some of the land.

Additionally, renting is a good strategy for putting together a large operational unit at a minimal cost. Given the mean farm size of 332 acres and the capacity of most farm machines, many farmers can expand the acreage they till without any additional investment in

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Bruce B. Johnson, Farmland Tenure Patterns in the United States, p. 3.

²⁰ Derived from the responses by thirty-one farmers to the questions, how many acres do you till and how many acres do you own.

²¹ Charles S. Aiken, "The Fragmented Neoplantation," pp. 48-50.

equipment. By renting land, they can expand at a fraction of the cost of buying. In 1982 the cash-rent fee for an acre of cropland in Talbot County varied from a low of \$10 to a high of \$135. The mean fee was about \$70 per acre.²² The variance in rent was a function of the size of the rental unit, the quality of the soil, and the length of time the farmer had been renting the property. On the average, the larger the land unit, the better the land, and the more recent the period of rental the higher the price. Even though most leases negotiated in 1982 were establishing a fee of \$100 or more per acre, the capital required was well below that of the purchase price of \$2,500 plus per acre. In addition, landowners demanding one-half of the payment in the spring and one-half in the fall further reduced the amount of capital that needed to be laid out at any one time. Share rents, wherein the farmer and the landowner share the cost and profits on an agreed on percentage basis, reduce the capital requirements even more. Despite the increased popularity of cash-rent on the part of the landowners, most leases are on a share basis. The percentage arrangements most often cited by interviewed farmers were, farmers' percentage given first, 60-40 and 50-50.

Thus, by renting, the farmer retains a larger percentage of his capital for alternative uses, including the repair and purchase of machinery.

²²Derived from interviews with farmers and the records of the A.S.C.S. as related by the Executive Director in a personal interview, June 10, 1982.

Renting is an attractive alternative to buying also because it does not commit the farmer to large fixed expenditures over a long period of time as does a mortgage. Given the widely fluctuating nature of farm product prices and consequent farm profits, a farmer might find himself with a mortgage he can't pay. Lease contracts, generally with a term of only two or so years, provide the farmer with the option of cutting his costs when his income falls drastically. Running from January 1 to December 31, leases can be terminated by giving notice of intent by June 30 prior to the December 31 termination.²³

Despite the popularity and advantages of renting, farmers still buy farmland, even at prices above what they admit can be financed with profits from the land itself. Some of the realtors, agricultural officials, and bank officers interviewed in 1981 and 1982 estimated that 50 percent of the farmland sold in Talbot County in the recent past was bought by local farmers.²⁴ Many buy to ensure that they will have land to farm in the future, since leased parcels may be sold or rented to someone else at anytime. Some buy to provide land for their children who are eager to farm. Others buy to invest their savings and protect it from inflation. A few even engage in land purchase for purely speculative reasons. Traditionally, the successful farmer has used his savings to buy additional land. Land is the investment he

²³Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, June 22, 1982.

²⁴Personal interviews with Donald Osburn, Talbot County Agriculture Extension Agent, Easton, July 7, 1981; and Alice Nily, Realtor, Easton, August 21, 1981; and phone interview with an unnamed official, Federal Land Bank, Denton, Maryland, July 9, 1982.

knows best and therefore trusts most.²⁵ This purchase of land by farmers, along with the inheritance of land, accounts for the continuance of part ownership in lieu of full tenancy.

V. PART TIME FARMING

The pressures to enlarge farm size and the limited amount of land available has also contributed to an increase in part time farming, farmers working at off farm jobs. Unable to increase the size of the farm operation, many farmers have chosen off-farm employment to supplement the family income. As shown in Table XXI, the proportion of farmers holding jobs off the farm progressively increased from about one-third in 1950 to one-half of the operators in 1978. Not only were more working off the farm, they were also working more frequently at nonfarm jobs. As the data in Table XXI reveals, the fraction of farmers working 100 or more days off the farm in a census year increased from about one-fifth in the 1950's to nearly one-third in the late 1970's.

VI. FARM SPATIAL PATTERNS: THE FRAGMENTED FARM

The intense pressure and competition to acquire more land has also given birth to a different spatial organization of farm units.

²⁵Personal interview with Harry Ziergler, Easton, August 21, 1981. The affinity of farmers for investment in land is noted in a number of sources. See, for example, Robert Healy and James Short, The Market for Rural Land, p. 163; Marion Clawson, The Land System of the United States (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), p. 102.

TABLE XXI
 PERCENT OF FARM OPERATORS IN TALBOT COUNTY REPORTING
 DAYS OF WORK OFF THE FARM DURING A
 CENSUS YEAR, 1950 TO 1978

Year	Percent of Operators Reporting Off-Farm Work	
	Any Days	100 Days and Over
1950	33.6	20.0
1954	36.8	23.0
1959	31.9	21.2
1964	31.0	20.1
1969	46.1	29.6
1974	58.0	28.1
1978	50.0	32.8

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969, 1974, and 1978 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

Prior to World War II, the prevailing farm operation in Talbot County was comprised of a single contiguous land unit. But, as farmers moved to expand their land base, they were often unable to gain control over adjoining properties. Consequently, many purchased or leased land that was not adjacent to their base operation.²⁶ Farms made up of a number of separate noncontiguous tracts have become increasingly common. Compelled to enlarge, farmers, who are fully aware of the added costs and problems of working noncontiguous units, see the fragmented farm as a realistic or rational alternative to quitting farming.²⁷

Thirty-one or over 77 percent of the forty farmers interviewed stated that their operations consisted of units that were noncontiguous. This compares with an A.S.C.S. estimate of 80 percent of the farmers in the county tilling units that are not adjacent to their base operation. Nearly 95 percent of the noncontiguous parcels worked by the interviewed farmers were held on a lease or rent basis. A.S.C.S. records indicate about 85 percent of the noncontiguous parcels are rented.²⁸ The mean distance of the farthest parcels from headquarters

²⁶ Sidney Ishee, Trends and Adjustments on Talbot County Farms (College Park: Department of Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Maryland). Miscellaneous Publication No. 468, November 1962, p. IX, reported that fields operated by farmers were scattered and noncontiguous.

²⁷ Howard F. Gregor, Geography of Agriculture: Themes in Research (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 104, called the noncontiguous farm "rational fragmentation."

²⁸ Telephone interview with Harry Ziegler, May 10, 1983.

was seven miles. The size of the units physically separated from the base operation varied from one and a half to 300 acres.²⁹ A general statement concerning the relationship of parcel size and distance from the headquarters is difficult because a farmer may till a small unit that is near a distant large unit. However, parcels of only a few acres tend to be close to the base unit.

The Bridges farm is an example of the fragmented farm in Talbot County (Figure 13). This single operational unit contains nearly 1,500 acres divided between fourteen separate tracts spread over a fourteen square mile area. The tracts range in size from ten to 230 acres. The location of the tracts is such that they lay in all directions from the headquarters unit. The most distant of the tracts is approximately four miles from the headquarters. Encompassing only ten acres, the headquarters unit contains the home of the operator, storage buildings, and the machine sheds for the entire operation. Of the nearly 1,500 acres, only 125 are owned by the operator. The remaining acreage is rented from eight different landlords.

²⁹ Derived from interviews in which thirty-one farmers were asked to describe the size and spatial character of their operation.

THE BRIDGES FRAGMENTED FARM
TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND
1,466 ACRES

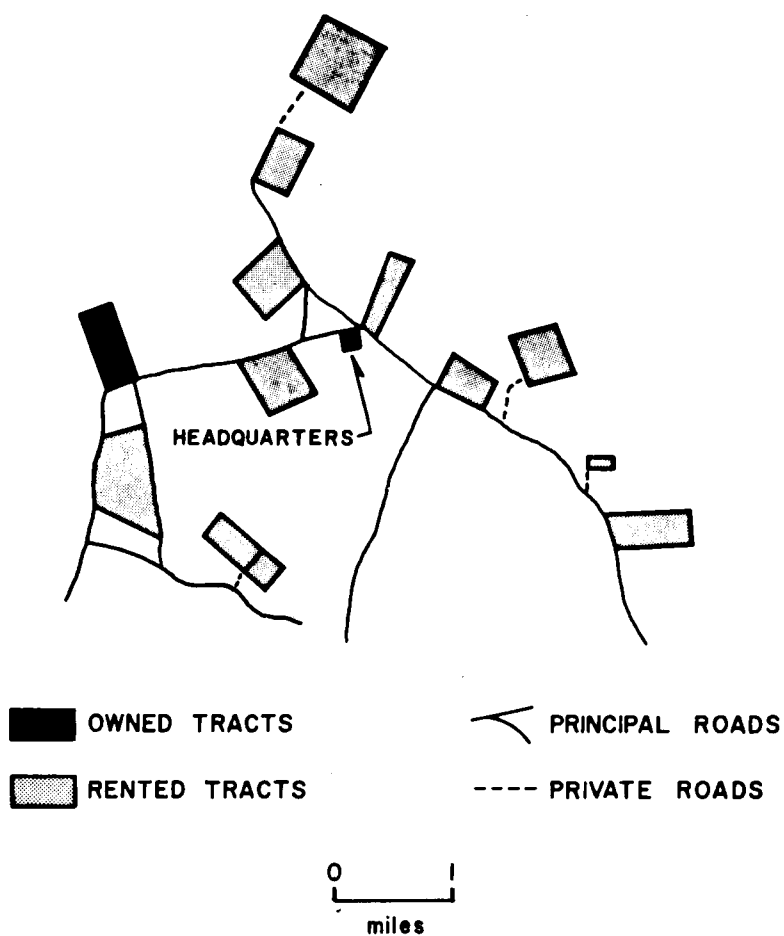


Figure 13. The Bridges Fragmented Farm, Talbot County Maryland, 1,466 Acres.

CHAPTER V

THE IMPACT OF ABSENTEE OWNERSHIP, LAND PARCELLATION, AND HIGH LAND PRICES ON CROPLAND AND FARMING

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes and analyzes the impact of the parcellation, absentee ownership and inflated land values on the farmland base, farm tenure patterns, the spatial character of farm operations, and farm product emphasis. Although the factors will be discussed somewhat separately, their effects are not independent, but synergistic.

II. ABSENTEE LANDOWNERSHIP AND THE LOSS OF CROPLAND

As pointed out in Chapter I, a number of individuals have theorized and reported that farmland owned for leisure and recreational purposes by persons who live elsewhere is frequently removed from agricultural use. These people maintain that the land is no longer used for farming because the owners are primarily interested in the land's amenity value and thus disregard its productive capacity. Their overriding concern is the quality of life in the countryside, not the realization of an immediate and recurring cash return from the land.

Contrary to arguments in the literature, absentee owned farmland in Talbot County is still mostly in agricultural use. As observed in

Chapter II, the Director of the county A.S.C.S. office estimates that 50 to 65 percent of the cultivated cropland in the county is owned by present or recent absentee owners. Field observations and aerial photographs also show that most of the cropland held in large absentee owned properties is cultivated. Additional support is given by the tax assessment rolls which reveal that nearly 80 percent of all absentee owned rural land is held in properties with agricultural use value tax assessments and thus are a part of active farm operations. This compares with 91 percent of rural land owned by county residents. Of the absentee owned land in properties of fifty or more acres, nearly 96 percent had agricultural assessment in 1982. The above information is presented in Table XXII which shows the percent of absentee and resident owned rural land in selected properties sizes with agricultural use value tax assessment.

Table XXIII, showing the total acreage and percent of total acreage of absentee owned land held in various property sizes without agricultural use value tax assessment, clearly shows that the majority, 73.5 percent, of the absentee owned land without agricultural assessment is in properties of less than twenty acres and especially less than ten acres. Thus, except for the smaller properties, the percentage of absentee owned land in properties with the agricultural assessment is only slightly less than that in properties owned by county residents. As disclosed in Table XXII, the percentage in properties of twenty acres or more is only about 4 percentage points less.

TABLE XXII

PERCENT OF ABSENTEE AND RESIDENT OWNED RURAL LAND WITH
AGRICULTURAL USE VALUE TAX ASSESSMENT IN TALBOT COUNTY
BY PROPERTY SIZE, 1982

Property Size Acres	Percent of Rural Land with Agricultural Use Value Tax Assessment		
	Absentee Owned	Resident Owned	Total Rural Land
Less than 10	2.1	6.4	4.5
10 to 19.9	13.5	27.7	23.9
20 to 49.9	72.0	76.5	75.3
50 and over	95.8	99.7	98.6
All sizes	79.3	91.2	85.6

Source: Talbot County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1982.

TABLE XXIII

THE TOTAL ACREAGE AND THE PERCENT OF ALL ABSENTEE OWNED RURAL
LAND WITHOUT AGRICULTURAL USE VALUE TAX ASSESSMENT
IN TALBOT COUNTY BY PROPERTY SIZE, 1982

Property Size Acres	Total Acreage without Use Value Assessment	Percent of All Absentee Owned Land without Use Value Assessment
Under 10	5,985	61.4
10 to 19.9	1,176	12.1
20 to 49.9	1,104	11.3
50 and over	1,487	15.2
All sizes	9,752	100.0

Source: Talbot County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1982.

Absentee owners keep land in agricultural use for several reasons. Contrary to the images portrayed in some studies, these are people who not only have and are astute with money, they will rarely pass up the opportunity to make more money, especially if there is little negative impact on them personally or their properties.¹ They are fully aware of both the income generating potentials of crop production and the cost reducing features of having an agricultural assessment for their land. The economic benefits of cultivation can be considerable. For example, if a landowner had fifty acres of cropland and he rented it to a farmer for the average 1982 "going price" of \$100 per acre, he would realize an income of \$5,000. With the land in cultivation it would get an agricultural assessment, setting the maximum assessed value for tax purposes at \$400 per acre. If we assume that the market value of the land is \$3,000 per acre, the assessed value is reduced by \$2,600. The savings in property taxes using the 1982 tax rate of \$1.55 per \$100 of 50 percent of the assessed value, would be \$20.15 per acre or a total of over \$1,000.

As revealed through interviews with farmers, realtors, and agricultural officials who have had significant contact with absentee owners, many of the absentee owners want the land farmed because farming

¹Personal interview with Alice Nily, Realtor, Easton, August 21, 1981. Among others, she related that absentee owners do things in order to make money, even if the amount involved is small. The principle of making some money is more important than the sum derived. Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, July 6, 1981. Reported that absentee owners were very money conscious, frequently wanting top dollar for land rent and participating in each and every government subsidy program possible.

fits their image of a desirable rural environment. They believe that agriculture enhances the county as a place to live and that farming, along with the water frontage, gives the county much of its scenic value. Keeping the land in farming helps to maintain the character of the county that attracted them to buy the land. This attitude is also revealed in the county Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance, both of which outsiders or former nonresident owners helped to formulate. Furthermore, all persons interviewed in 1981 and 1982 said that absentee owners wanted to keep the county in its present state.²

Despite the fact that almost 96 percent of the land in absentee owned leisure "estates" of fifty or more acres has agricultural assessment, nonresident title does often contribute to a measurable loss of cropland. Unlike the farmers, whose income is dependent on how much land he cultivates and consequently keeps the untilled area to a minimum, the absentee owner is more interested in privacy, seclusion, and the aesthetic appearance of the property. They allocate a varying number of acres to uses that give the property a gentry appearance. Very often they line their access roads with trees and shrubbery and plant a screen of trees around the expansive lawns and recreational areas adjacent to the residence and ancillary buildings.

²Similar perceptions were reported for a Virginia county in 1975. Gene Wunderlich, Land Along the Blue Ridge: Ownership and Use of Land in Rappahannock County, Virginia, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Economic Report No. 299 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975), p. 23.

The total area of cropland lost to these uses was not tabulated. However, it was measured on twenty properties selected from a list of the 204 absentee owned properties of fifty or more acres.³ The sample was derived by selecting every tenth property from the list that was arranged alphabetically by the owners' last names. The area in the homestead was measured on the A.S.C.S. photographs covering the properties. This procedure revealed a combined area of 122 acres. The area taken for residential and recreational uses on individual estates ranged from a low of two acres to a high of twenty acres. The mean acreage taken was just slightly over six. If we assume that the sample is representative of the 204 properties, the combined acreage would exceed 1,250. A check of the area allocated to the homestead on twenty farmer owned properties of fifty or more acres found an average of 1.6 acres. Thus, we can conclude that absentee ownership of farm-sized units caused a loss of at least 900 acres from the cropland base.

Despite the above mentioned loss, a prevailing opinion among realtors, planners, agriculture officials and farmers interviewed in 1981 and 1982 was that absentee ownership of large acreages helps to preserve farmland. This feeling was especially expressed about areas on or near the water. Because of the high price, it was felt that only the rich could afford to keep the land in a low intensity use

³ Talbot County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1982.

such as farming.⁴ It was also related that outsiders want to keep the area the way it is; they don't want subdivision and residential development. Being more financially secure, they are less likely to sell for these purposes than many "locals" who are tempted to take the large sums of money offered.

III. PARCELLATION AND THE LOSS OF CROPLAND

A number of writers have maintained, as observed in Chapter I, that cropland subdivided into properties of less than twenty acres is lost from the commercial agricultural land base. The contention is that parcellation is contrary to the prevailing farm trends of realizing the economies of scale associated with mechanization and the cultivation of large acreages. Units of only a few acres are too small to be profitably farmed by the owner as an individual operation and because of the inefficiencies and small returns, neither the landowners or the neighboring farmers will take the bother to work out lease arrangements. Thus, except for a small area given to a garden plot, the land goes unused for the production of crops.⁵

Clearly, some of the cropland subdivided into properties of less than twenty acres in Talbot County has been converted to nonagricultural uses. At least, the area occupied by residences and the associated

⁴This opinion was expressed by all realtors, planners, and agriculture officials and by over 70 percent of the forty farmers interviewed.

⁵Healy and Short, The Market for Rural Land, p. 210; People for Open Space, Endangered Harvest, p. 50; Van Otten, "Changing Spatial Characteristics of Willamette Valley Farms," pp. 67-69.

"living area" are lost. On units of less than three acres this constitutes all or virtually all of the lot, leaving none for agricultural use. Thus cropland parcelized into properties of only a few acres is almost always converted to other uses.

The actual amount of cropland lost to parcellation in Talbot County is very difficult to assess because it requires detailed knowledge of existing and prior uses of the parcels. The 1982 A.S.C.S. aerial photographs and field observations were used to establish prior as well as existing use and land cover on land held in parcels of less than twenty acres. Because of the persistence of cover patterns and the ease of identifying areas that have been planted in or cleared of trees, it was possible to ascertain continuity and changes rather accurately in the use and cover patterns for at least the last two decades. In addition, when the former status of an area was questionable, the Executive Director of the A.S.C.S. office was used as an expert witness to establish that state. A county native who has lived all but a few of his sixty-three years in the county, he is eminently qualified to provide such information. Once a full-time farmer, he has been the head of the local A.S.C.S. office for the past seventeen years and has personally been taking the semiannual aerial slides of the county for five years. Through his work of monitoring crop acreages, including the identification of properties and fields, he has been intimately familiar with the county land use and land cover patterns as shown on

A.S.C.S. photographs dating to 1954.⁶ As such, prior use was traced to the mid-fifties.

In the process of identifying former use, all land identified as cleared or unwooded in 1982, and that was formerly cleared but planted in trees or covered with scrub and brush, was counted as having been cropland in the past. The large scale, 1:660, of the photographs made it possible to identify planted woodlots by the regularized spacing and the purity of stands. All other lands were considered as having been "natural" woodlands. The assumption that cleared land and cropland were essentially synonymous was based on statements by realtors, farmers and agricultural officials that virtually all unforested areas were at one time used to produce crops.⁷

The location and areal extent of the properties of less than twenty acres were derived from the tax plat maps and then outlined on the aerial photographs. Measurements from the photographs showed that of the rural land held in units of less than twenty acres in 1982, over 10,300 acres had been cropland and nearly 8,800 acres were "natural" woodland (Table XXIV). The higher incidence of cropland parcelized, despite the preference of "outsiders" for wooded lots that naturally provide seclusion and privacy, is due to much of the

⁶Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, June 22, 1982.

⁷This was related in personal interviews by a number of people including Harry Ziegler, July 6, 1982; James Latham, August 24, 1981; John Camper, August 26, 1981; and Earl Harrison, Farmer, Bozman, August 24, 1981

TABLE XXIV
FORMER USE OF RURAL LAND HELD IN PROPERTIES OF LESS THAN
TWENTY ACRES IN TALBOT COUNTY IN 1982

Election District	Cropland Acres	Woodland Acres	Total Acres
1. Rural Easton	3,318	911	4,229
2. Rural St. Michaels	3,243	2,191	5,424
3. Rural Trappe	1,587	3,385	4,972
4. Chapel	1,221	1,611	2,832
5. Bay Hundred	934	691	1,625
County Total	10,303	8,779	19,082 ^a

^aThe total does not equal the tax roll listed acreage of 19,175 acres in properties of less than twenty acres because of errors in measurement.

Source: Measured from 1982 Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service aerial photographs, field observations, and consultation with the Executive Director of the County A.S.C.S. Office.

woodland being so poorly drained that it won't pass the health department percolation tests for septic systems.⁸

Since the aerial photographs taken in the spring clearly revealed land that was being tilled, it was possible to measure the area in these parcels that was still being used to produce crops and thus calculate how much of the former 10,303 acres of cropland has been lost from use. As shown in Table XXV, over 2,800 acres were identified as being tilled in 1982. Consequently, the loss of cropland due to parcellation is approximately 7,500 acres or nearly 73 percent of the parcelized cropland. These 7,500 acres were given over to a variety of uses in 1982, including planted woodlots, scrub and brush and residences and the associated ancillary uses.

Since nearly 73 percent of the cropland subdivided into parcels of less than twenty acres is no longer used to produce agricultural crops, the experience in Talbot County confirms or is in agreement with the findings of studies done elsewhere. Most cropland parcelized into multiple acre lots is lost from commercial agricultural production.

While parcellation should be viewed as a threat to cropland, it is, perhaps, also important to note that 2,800 acres in properties of less than twenty acres are still being cultivated. The use of this land shows that parcelized cropland is not automatically lost from agricultural use because of small areal size. Perhaps more important than areal

⁸Personal interviews with Harry Ziegler, June 22, 1982, and James Latham, August 24, 1981.

TABLE XXV

THE 1982 USE OF CROPLAND SUBDIVIDED INTO PROPERTIES OF
LESS THAN TWENTY ACRES IN TALBOT COUNTY

Election District	Planted in Crops Acres	Other Uses ^a Acres	Total Acres
1. Rural Easton	769	2,549	3,318
2. Rural St. Michaels	826	2,417	3,243
3. Rural Trappe	542	1,045	1,587
4. Chapel	439	782	1,221
5. Bay Hundred	243	691	934
County Total	2,819	7,484	10,303

^aThe category "other uses" includes all uses except crop production. It consists principally of planted woodlots, residential and associated uses, and scrub and brush.

Source: Measured from 1982 Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service aerial photographs.

size as determinants of use are the attitudes of the landowners toward having the land tilled and the existence and willingness of neighboring farmers to work the land. Even after the land has been subdivided the owner frequently finds that he has acquired more land than he can or wishes to take care of, yet does not want the land to be idle or become unkept weeds and brush for aesthetic and economic reasons. Given this situation, the owner has basically two options. He can either plant the land in trees or seek out a farmer to plant it in crops. The attractions of planting trees are several. The trees will need little maintenance, they are attractive, and they will provide additional seclusion and privacy. Although the acreage planted in trees was not measured, a quick perusal of the aerial photograph indicates that it is over 500 acres.

The decision to have the land put in crops seems to be prompted by the fact that crop production will reduce maintenance costs, not interfere with the primary purpose of owning the land, add a rustic or scenic quality, and produce some income.⁹ Consequently, some parcel owners who have an acre or more of land beyond what they use seek out a neighboring farmer to cultivate the unused portion on a lease basis.

Farmers till the small parcels because it is profitable. Since most farmers have the labor and machines to cultivate more acreage than is under their control either by ownership or leasing, they could

⁹ All persons interviewed said that the main reasons the owners of small parcels have their land tilled is to reduce maintenance costs and derive income from the property.

expand the areal size of their operation without any adjustments in equipment or personnel.¹⁰ Thus, other things being equal, the larger the acreage they work, the greater their gross profits.

As most farmers want or need to make more money, there is intense competition for land. The demand exceeds the supply available.¹¹ Because of the large demand and limited supply, farmers are inclined to take whatever land is available in their general area for an acceptable lease fee, including parcels of only a few acres. Farmers see the cultivation of the small parcels not as a preferred action, but as a rational economic decision and, in some cases, an alternative to quitting farming.¹² All of the farmers interviewed who tilled parcels of a few acres said they did it out of necessity. They needed to increase the acreage they tilled to increase their income and there was not enough land available in large acreages to satisfy the demand.

The willingness to till the small parcels is also because the inefficiencies of doing so are of a nonexpenditure type. The interviewed farmers cultivating small parcels were of the opinion that

¹⁰ Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, June 22, 1982. He related that a farmer with a son or two could work several thousand acres. All farmers interviewed said they could till more land with their equipment inventories.

¹¹ Sidney Ishee, Trends and Adjustments on Talbot County Farms, p. X. Observed that in 1962 Talbot County farmers felt that little additional land was available for renting.

¹² The leasing and cultivation of small parcels is not unique to Talbot County. Sublett reported it as "patch renting" in Putnam County, Missouri; Michael D. Sublett, Farmers on the Road, pp. 96-97.

the main diseconomy of using the small units was the greater amount of time required per unit area and not a capital outlay for fuel and other inputs.¹³ Since many farmers have an excess capacity of labor and machines, there is little reason not to cultivate the available parcels.

In some cases the time inefficiencies are reduced by creating circumstances wherein the tillage of a number of small parcels can approximate that of a large single unit. This can be done in areas of intensive parcellation by a number of the landowners letting their land to the same farmer. Even though the parcels usually cannot be combined into a single contiguous field because driveways and fence rows separate the properties, they can be tilled with minimal moving and interruption. The above is especially true in areas that have been platted into long narrow waterfront properties as shown in Figure 11, page 62. On these lots the owners normally use only the portion of the lot near the water, leaving the inland portion available for farm use. Thus, a number of adjacent lots can be combined into a fair sized area for cultivation.

The unattractiveness and the inefficiencies of farming small acreages is also reduced by the prevailing rental fees for small parcels being considerably less than that for large acreages. For example, in 1981 the most common cash rental fee for an acre of cropland in parcels of only a few acres was \$30 to \$50. This compared with a mean of \$80 to \$100 per acre for a unit of 50 or more acres

¹³ This same impression was given by Harry Ziegler in a personal interview on November 18, 1982.

of cropland.¹⁴ Although rare, a few of the farmers paid no rent for some small plots. Except for a few cases of share lease, most lease arrangements for small parcels were for cash. Farmers stated that the record keeping required for share rental of a number of little properties was too bothersome. Considering that some of the interviewed farmers had over ten different landlords, the above obviously has much merit.

Finally, a few farmers even related that tilling a number of parcels, including small ones, owned by different landlords gave a measure of security that one would not have if he rented the same acreage from a single landlord. The security being that he is less likely to be left without any land to farm because the land was sold or leased to another farmer.

Farmers have found that it is profitable to aggregate a larger operational unit by the inclusion of parcels of only a few acres. The combination of a number of small tracts with a few large blocks is the most common aggregation. For example, all farmers interviewed who cultivated land in parcels of a few acres, owned and rented properties with fifty or more tillable acres. One farmer, who estimated that he worked 1,100 acres, said he owned 408 acres, rented six large units and eighteen small parcels.¹⁵ Another, who tilled

¹⁴ A composite derived from the results of interviews with farmers who tilled both large and small parcels in the summer of 1981.

¹⁵ Personal interview with Phillip Foster, Farmer, Trappe, August 25, 1981.

1,600 acres, related that he farmed parcels ranging from 175 acres down to four acres. He owned several of the larger units, but also rented from fifty-five different landlords.¹⁶

The minimum sized unit farmers were willing to work was related to the distance of the parcel from another tilled plot. On the average, farmers said that small parcels had to be close by for them to bother with them. However, close by could be a matter of miles from the headquarter property so long as the parcel was within a half mile or so of a large unit the farmer was tending.

Except for a few in hay, the cultivated small parcels were planted in grains, wheat, barley, corn, or soybeans. The nature of grain production, requiring only occasional attention from the farmer and using highly mobile machines, makes farming the small and sometimes scattered fields much easier.

In light of the preceding, it appears that so long as owners of small land units are willing to lease their land for crop production, agriculture is a viable economic pursuit in the county, and farmers need or want more land to till, cropland in parcels of a few acres will be cultivated.¹⁷

In summation, while absentee ownership and parcellation caused by purchases for leisure and retirement properties have taken about 8,500 acres of cropland out of production since the mid-fifties, the losses

¹⁶Personal interview with John Camper, Farmer, Bellvue, August 26, 1981.

¹⁷John Fraser Hart, Look of the Land, p. 86. Observed that farmers will rent and till small acreages when agriculture is viable in an area.

have not been overly large compared to the total cropland acreage. As shown in Table XVII, page 79, the Census of Agriculture reports that the cropland acreage in the county has been nearly stable since 1945. Thus, the losses attributable to parcellation, absentee ownership, and all other causes have been largely offset by gains elsewhere in the county. In fact, the census data indicates that the area of cropland increased between 1950 and 1978 (Table XVII, page 79).

Additional evidence that amenity ownership and related parcellation has not caused inordinately large losses of cropland in Talbot County is presented by a comparison of the percentage changes in total cropland acreage in Talbot County between 1950 and 1978 with those in the three adjoining counties of Caroline, Queen Anne's and Dorchester. While Queen Anne's has a comparable number of scattered-site second homes, the combined total in Caroline and Dorchester counties is only about one-half of that in Talbot.¹⁸ As shown in Table XXVI, changes in Talbot County were consistent with those in the other three counties.

IV. ABSENTEE OWNERSHIP, PARCELLATION, HIGH LAND VALUES AND FARM TENURE

Absentee ownership, parcellation, and high land prices all encourage the leasing of land by farmers in an area where farming is viable.

¹⁸ Morton Hoffman, Second Homes in Maryland, pp. 67 and 77.

TABLE XXVI

THE PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN TOTAL CROPLAND ACREAGE BETWEEN
1950 AND 1978 IN TALBOT AND ADJOINING COUNTIES

County	Percent Change in Cropland Acreage, 1950 to 1978
Caroline	+0.9
Dorchester	+2.8
Queen Anne's	-2.3
Talbot	+2.4

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1950 and 1978 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

Unable to buy the land they need or want because better financed nonfarmers are willing to pay more for available land, many farmers who want to continue have little alternative but to rent land. The subdivision of farmland into small parcels also contributes to an increase in the incidence of land rental. Too small to be profitably farmed as a single unit, the cultivation of these parcels is dependent on their being a part of a larger farm operation. Since virtually all small parcels are owned by nonfarm people, those that are tilled are done so by a farmer under a lease agreement. Given the significant amount of absentee owned land, parcellation, and high land values along with over 70 percent of the county land area in farms, those types of farm tenure that include the rental of land should be quite high. This is confirmed by 1978 Census data that shows nearly 73 percent of all farmland was held by farmers who are full tenants or part owners. This percentage is high relative to the national average and most of the adjoining counties (Table XXVII).

Despite their obvious contribution, to attribute all or even a significant amount of the change in farm tenure, increased land rental, to the three factors discussed above rather than to the rise of cash grain production is probably inaccurate. This is shown by a comparison of the percentage of farmland held by tenants and part owners in Talbot and the counties that adjoin it. In each of these counties the cultivation of cash grains has come to be the overwhelmingly dominant use of farmland since 1950 (Table XXVIII). The fact that the percentage of farmland held in part owner and full tenant, as

TABLE XXVII

THE PERCENT OF FARMLAND HELD BY PART OWNERS AND FULL TENANTS
IN TALBOT AND ADJOINING COUNTIES AND THE UNITED STATES,
1950 TO 1978^a

Year	The Percent of Farmland Held by Part Owners and Tenants by County				
	Caroline	Dorchester	Queen Anne's	Talbot	U.S.
1950	43.7	43.4	56.4	54.6	54.7
1954	48.2	51.9	46.4	55.3	57.3
1959	52.0	57.3	49.6	63.3	59.7
1964	61.9	68.4	64.1	72.5	61.1
1969	58.8	64.5	56.8	67.8	64.8
1974	62.1	71.6	67.0	70.4	64.6
1978	68.5	76.0	70.3	72.8	67.0

^aPart owners both rent and own land that they farm. Full tenants rent all the land they farm.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969, 1974, and 1978 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

TABLE XXVIII
ACREAGE IN CASH GRAINS AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL CROPLAND IN
TALBOT AND ADJOINING COUNTIES, 1950 TO 1978^a

Year	Percent of Cropland in Cash Grains by County			
	Caroline	Dorchester	Queen Anne's	Talbot
1950	52.1	56.2	47.9	57.1
1954	61.5	55.1	48.3	64.1
1959	65.8	83.9	52.4	68.9
1964	79.6	88.7	61.6	81.4
1969	78.3	90.5	69.6	75.5
1974	99.0	106.0	90.2	94.7
1978	95.5	99.5	88.8	89.9

^aDoes not mean that this percentage of the total cropland was planted in cash grains during the year, but rather how the area planted in cash grains during the year compares to the total cropland. Because two grain crops were planted on the same land in one year, the percentage may exceed 100.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969, 1974, and 1978 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

shown in Table XXVII, is so similar in the four counties despite Dorchester and Caroline having only a fraction of the second homes found in Talbot and Queen Anne's, leads one to conclude that the rise of cash grain farming has been the main reason for the increase in farmland rental. On the other hand, the lower percentage of farmland in cash grains in Talbot and Queen Anne's, yet comparable percent of farmland in tenancy and part ownership indicates that while absentee title and parcellation may not be the main cause of increased rental of farmland, they have augmented, or accentuated it. Furthermore, farmland rental has been heightened by the combination of some 36,600 acres of absentee owned land with agricultural use value tax assessment and the fact that very few absentee owners farm their own land. The estimate that 50 to 65 percent of the cropland in the county is owned by nonresidents and recent absentee owners provides additional support.¹⁹

V. ABSENTEE OWNERSHIP AND PARCELLATION AND THE RISE OF CASH GRAIN FARMING

The use to which farmland is put is a function of a number of factors, foremost among which is the attitude of the owner. Within the framework of institutional provisions such as zoning, the use of land is decided by the landowner. His or her decision is dependent on the interplay of varied forces, including the reasons for owning

¹⁹Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, July 6, 1982.

the land. If the land is owned primarily to derive an income from its productivity, the choice of use will be determined largely by the potential to provide an acceptable income. However, if the land is owned principally for its aesthetic or psychological values, the choice of use is not dominated by the income potential, but by what the owner wants the property to look like and its complement to his purpose for owning the land.

As earlier observed, the vast majority of the farmland in Talbot County owned by nonresidents is held mainly for recreational and leisure uses. Consequently, even though the decision to have the land farmed may be partially motivated by a desire to cut the costs of owning the land, the permissible uses are limited to those that the owners see as aesthetically appealing and that either enhance or, at least, don't infringe on their enjoyment of the property.

In general, those uses that create offensive odors, or noise and a violation of privacy and seclusion by requiring that the farmer be on their land frequently are avoided. As such, most livestock enterprises are excluded. On the other hand, cash grain production not only meets the constraints set by the owners, but is also often seen as enhancing the appearance and character of the property. Grain production produces few, if any, odors or noise and requires the presence of the farmer on the land only occasionally and then only for a short time. This is especially appealing to the owners of small parcels where crop production would occur close to the residence. The colors and generally neat appearance of grain fields throughout

the year yield an attractive landscape. In addition, the presence of food, supplied by the growing grain or that missed in the harvest, attracts wildlife, especially deer and geese. The abundance of these animals is viewed positively by those interested in hunting and those who simply enjoy watching them. Their presence seems to add a quality of serenity and calmness that many of the owners are seeking. Over 50 percent of the farmers interviewed who rented land from absentee owners said they had landlords who asked them to plant wheat in the fall for feed for the geese. Most farmers renting absentee land also expressed concern over the mounting crop losses to wildlife, especially deer. Losses they attributed largely to the growing animal population caused by absentee owners prohibiting or restricting hunting on their properties. One farmer estimated his losses at about \$10,000 for one year.²⁰

In keeping with the above, virtually all of the absentee owned land that is cultivated is in cash grains. The few exceptions are mostly in hay crops.²¹ All farmers renting absentee owned land that were interviewed in 1981 reported that the owners wanted them on their land as little as possible, they didn't want animals pastured on their land, and they preferred or stipulated that grain crops be grown.

²⁰ Related to the author by personal interview with Harry Ziegler, July 6, 1982.

²¹ Confirmed by field observations, inspection of A.S.C.S. aerial photographs and slides, and interviews with farmers and the director of the A.S.C.S. office.

Some farmers reported that even the type of grain was designated. A few owners didn't want corn planted because it obstructed their view.

While there is little doubt that absentee owners prefer to have their land in cash grains and that this desire has contributed to the size of the acreage in grains, the attribution of the dominance of cash grain farming in the county to absentee ownership of farmland would be specious.

Since the majority of the absentee owners rely on local farmers to till their land, the willingness and the ability of the farmers to grow cash grains is essential.²² Because of the considerable cost and narrow range of crops that can be grown and harvested with the equipment necessary for the production of cash grains, about the only farmers who would be willing to plant grains on leased absentee owned land would be those who are already specialized in grains. Thus the local infrastructure of skills and facilities play a powerful role in the cultivation of grains on nonresident owned land.²³

As discussed in Chapter IV, several factors, in addition to absentee land ownership, contributed to the rise of cash grains after World War II. The most basic factor was that growing grains was profitable, a situation largely attributable to the expanding local or

²²Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, June 22, 1982.

²³This is basically true for agricultural use anywhere. John Fraser Hart, The Look of the Land, p. 113, observed that once established, the infrastructure plays a powerful role in influencing the decisions of farmers and perpetuating the existing patterns.

regional market for corn and soybeans created by the expansion of the broiler industry. As the number of broilers sold increased, so did the number of acres in grain in Talbot County and the other seven counties of Maryland's "Eastern Shore" (Table XXIX). This overall regional increase in grains clearly indicates that rise of cash grains in Talbot County was prompted by a regional shift and not by the increased absentee ownership of farmland.

TABLE XXIX

ACRES IN CASH GRAINS IN TALBOT COUNTY AND THE "EASTERN SHORE"
AND THE NUMBER OF BROILERS SOLD ON THE "EASTERN SHORE,"
1950 TO 1978

Year	Acres in Cash Grains		Number of Broilers Sold Eastern Shore
	Eastern Shore	Talbot County	
1950	371,900	53,100	36,911,600
1954	448,200	60,800	43,560,700
1959	483,100	69,300	79,630,100
1964	539,493	76,720	114,226,000
1969	556,551	69,267	150,546,158
1974	691,619	87,860	153,655,648
1978	678,832	85,532	187,468,890

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1950, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969, 1974, 1978 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

On the other hand, it is probable that if it were not for the possibility of having land put into cash grains, significant areas of absentee owned land would not be used for crop production. This is especially true for the small parcels. Few, if any, other agricultural uses would cause so little infringement on the owner's enjoyment of the property and so little bother to the farmer who works the land.

VI. ABSENTEE OWNERSHIP, PARCELLATION, AND FARM FRAGMENTATION

Because a significant portion of the farmland acreage is owned by nonresidents, a large percentage of the farm operations are assembled via land rental. This rental subjects the farmer to the whims of the landowners and creates an uncertainty of the acreage the farmer will have to work in the future. Since most lease agreements run only one or two years, the insecurity felt by farmers is great enough to affect their behavior. While any rental lacks the security of ownership, the precariousness of rental from an absentee owner is frequently seen as being greater than rental from a local resident. The perception is that many absentee owners are, on the average, more capricious than members of the community and are thus more likely to terminate leases more frequently and unexpectedly.²⁴

This perception, along with the inherent insecurities of renting, has induced some farmers to adhere to the old adage of "don't put all your eggs in one basket" by intentionally renting separate parcels owned by different persons. They see a large unit comprised of separate components rented from several landlords as an insurance against the loss of a major portion of the operational land base at any one particular time.

²⁴ While not all farmers interviewed felt this way, over 50 percent expressed doubt about the loyalty of most absentee owners to the farmers who rented from them. The majority believed that many absentee landlords would be quick to lease the land to another farmer, if he offered more money. The increasing frequency of absentee owners putting their land up for bids increases these suspicions. Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, June 22, 1982.

Despite the commonness and selected advantages of land rental, most farmers would prefer to buy land as a means of expanding their operation. However, in certain areas of the county, especially those on or near the water, it is nearly impossible for a farmer to buy land for farming because of the high prices outsiders are willing to pay. Consequently, a farmer who has land in these areas and has decided to buy more land to expand his operation is nearly compelled to buy in the inland areas of the county where the absentee demand is much less and the price lower.²⁵ If he succeeds in purchasing land there, he ends up owning and operating physically separate parcels.

The parcellation of farmland, prompted by the absentee demand for multiple acre recreational properties, also contributes to the existence of farm operations made up of noncontiguous parcels. The subdivision of farmland into numerous small properties requires that more properties be aggregated to form an acceptable sized operation, thus reducing the likelihood that all part of the operation will be contiguous. While interview data didn't reveal any significant difference in the percentage of fragmented farms from one area of the county to another, it did show that fragmented farm operations were comprised of more individual parts in areas of intense parcellation. For example, the median number of parcels in sample fragmented operations in the St. Michaels and Bay Hundred districts, where

²⁵ All but one of the farmers interviewed said that they would buy more land if they could afford it.

parcellation is greatest, was fifteen and that in the Chapel District, where parcellation is least, was only four.²⁶

Finally, in that absentee ownership and parcellation both contribute to a loss of farmland acreage, they intensify the competition for land among active farmers. The more difficult it is to get land, the greater the likelihood that a farmer will take land where he can get it and consequently have a spatially fragmented operational unit.

²⁶Derived from interviews with thirty-one farmers between June and August 1981.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

I. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

After nearly a century of amenity home ownership, Talbot County remains a predominantly rural farm area with more than 80 percent of the total land area in properties that are a part of active farm operations. Not only is the majority of the land still in farms, but the amount of cropland has remained nearly constant for the past three decades. Furthermore, agriculture continues as one of the principal economic activities in the county.

Despite its continued vitality, agriculture does show the effects of amenity landownership. The purchase of land by nonresidents for leisure and retirement homes has inflated the price of farmland to above that which can be justified for agricultural use. As a consequence, the ownership of farmland, including cropland, has increasingly passed into the hands of absentee, nonfarm persons. The high prices and purchases by outsiders make it difficult for farmers to buy the land they need or want. Given the premium prices, about the only farmers who can afford to buy farmland are those who already own some debt free and can borrow against their equity and use the profits from the unencumbered lands to pay for the acquisitions.

The need to expand farm size to achieve or maintain an acceptable income and high cost of land purchase have caused farmers increasingly

to become renters of land. Many farmers own some land but more and more of the land in farms is rented. From the standpoint of the acreage of farmland held, part ownership has become the predominant form of farm tenure. As a renter, the position of the farmer becomes more tenuous as more of the acreage cultivated is subject to the decisions of others.

The high prices and the intense competition for land make it exceedingly difficult for aspiring farmers to begin farming. In order to get started, young farmers must either inherit the land or begin by renting the land. Many are also part-time farmers, supplementing the farm income with off farm employment. The ranks of part-time farmers are also being swelled by established farmers who cannot get enough land to sustain an acceptable standard of living.¹

Because of the high land prices and the lack of interest in maintaining a large acreage, the purchase of land for amenity uses has contributed to the subdivision of farmland, including cropland, into properties of less than twenty acres.

The parcellation of cropland along with the desire and need to expand the areal size of farm operations, the uncertainty of the continued availability of rented land, and the inability of farmers to gain control over lands adjoining their own have caused farm operations comprised of spatially scattered and noncontiguous parcels to become the dominant type in the county. Some farmers who rent much of the land

¹Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, July 6, 1982.

they operate see rental from several different landlords as an insurance against losing a major portion of their cropland at any one particular time. The parcellation of farmland makes it necessary for a farmer to aggregate more properties to achieve an acceptable operation size. The greater the number of separate parcels tilled, the greater the probability that the operational unit will be comprised of physically disconnected parts.

Although the acreage is small compared to the total cropland base, nearly 73 percent of the cropland subdivided into parcels of twenty acres or less since the mid-1950's is no longer used to produce crops. As such, the claims of the literature that most cropland parcelized into multiple acre lots is lost from production hold true in Talbot County. Fortunately, only about 12 percent of the rural land has been subdivided into properties of less than twenty acres and the pressures for amenity properties are not ubiquitous. Only in the waterfront or near water areas are the pressures for parcellation significant.

Despite the fact that a majority of the parcelized cropland has been lost from production and that further parcellation should be viewed as a threat to cropland and farming, it is important to note that while these small parcels cannot be economically farmed as singular units, they can be put into crops if the owner desires and he can find a farmer willing to work the land. The 2,800 acres of cultivated cropland in properties of less than twenty acres, some in fields of less than two acres, shows that small size does not automatically

preclude crop production. Since most small parcels are worked by neighboring commercial farmers, it is obvious that cultivation is profitable. Thus, while parcellation does cause cropland to be lost, the losses are not, except for the very small properties, solely a function of the size. The attitudes of the landowners towards tillage and the existence and willingness of nearby farmers to work the land are also principal determinants. Those landowners who have their parcels cultivated do so to reduce maintenance costs and for the added income, no matter how small. Farmers cultivate the small parcels because of their need for more land and the inability to get it in larger units.

Cropland losses on properties of fifty or more acres owned by nonresidents for amenity purposes have been relatively small and are largely the result of the owner taking a multiple-acre plot for his residence and the associated recreational area. More than 95 percent of the absentee owned land units of fifty or more acres is in properties that have agriculture use value tax assessment, a status granted only to properties that are a part of active farm operations. Little cropland in large acreages has been left idle or put into noncrop uses. Virtually all is cultivated by a neighboring farmer under a lease agreement.

Under these circumstances, absentee ownership and high land prices do not necessarily deprive farmers access to farmland. In fact, the ownership of large acreages of high value farmland by well-to-do outsiders helps to forestall parcellation and the loss of farmland.

Unlike local farmers, these well financed people can afford to keep the land in low order uses such as agriculture and forego the large sums of money offered by developers who would subdivide the land. Consequently, amenity owners have subsidized the continued farming of areas where property values and parcellation pressures are the greatest by making the land available for crop production at prices below ownership costs.

Although absentee ownership and parcellation of rural land for leisure and retirement uses are not responsible for the specialization in cash grain production, they have accentuated or heightened its dominance. Of all the possible farm types, cash grain probably creates the fewest conflicts or infringements on the amenity landowners enjoyment of the property. In addition to having an aesthetic appeal, grain production generates little noise, no odors, and requires only infrequent visits by the farmer; hence there is a minimal violation of privacy and seclusion for the owner. The mobility of grain producing machinery and the occasional times it needs to be moved to the fields creates minimal problems for the farmer as well. Consequently, virtually all absentee owned and parcelized farmland in crops is in cash grains.

The landowner's readily available option of having his land rented and planted in cash grains has probably contributed to the relatively small loss of cropland on absentee owned land and the continued overall vitality of agriculture in the county.

Aside from some restrictions on poultry houses and the increased difficulty of assembling areally large operational units, second and

retirement homes scattered over the countryside do not appear to have seriously hampered agriculture in Talbot County. Rather than lobbying against farming, many absentee and retiree landowners see farming as enhancing the quality of the area and as an essential part of the atmosphere that attracted them. Even if they do not see agriculture as enhancing the area, they see its continued existence as necessary for the preservation of the rural, low density settlement, and open space character they perceive as indispensable to the enjoyment of their property. As such, these "outsiders" have not only been supportive, but have been influential in the planning, drafting, and adoption of the county zoning ordinance, the comprehensive plan, and the economic development policies which are designed to preserve the existing character of the county and thus sustain the preponderance of agricultural land use.²

In light of the preceding, the experience of Talbot County does not conform to the scenario painted in the literature by Healy and Short, or by Leonard, or by the Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force that nonresident purchases of land for leisure and recreational

²All persons interviewed in the county said that absentee and amenity landowners are very supportive of land use planning and zoning, sensitive to physical changes in the area, and firmly committed to preserving the existing atmosphere and character of the county. Among those interviewed were: John Boehm, Planner-Engineer, March 22, 1976; Anthony Redman, Planner, July 6, 1982; James Latham, Realtor, August 24, 1981; and William Wieland, Realtor, August 21, 1981. This position was also related in newspaper accounts. See, for example, Norman Harrington, "The Shore's Well-Heeled Immigrants," The News American, Baltimore, Maryland, October 29, 1972, p. 4. This article reported that influential newcomers are militant in efforts to preserve and enhance the character of the county.

purposes leads to a serious loss of cropland and a decline or cessation of commercial agriculture in the host area.³

While amenity ownership has not caused a major loss of cropland nor threatened the continuance of farming in Talbot County, it must be observed that this situation is attributable to the symbiosis of a number of factors that are peculiar to Talbot County and, perhaps, the other counties on the Delmarva Peninsula. As such, it should not be assumed that what has happened here will be duplicated in other parts of the country.

The continued vitality of agriculture and the small loss of cropland is because of the specialization in cash grains made possible by the regional broiler industry, the wealth of the amenity landowners and their perceptions that farmland and in particular grain fields constitute a desirable leisure landscape, and the ability of farmers to gain supplemental income from nonfarm sources.

The minimal infringements of grain production on the enjoyment of the property, the positive image of its visual qualities, and its attraction for wildlife incline amenity owners to have their land cultivated. Because of their wealth, landowners can afford to put the land in low return agriculture. While the agricultural use-value tax assessment granted to actively farmed lands is an added incentive

³Healy and Short, The Market for Rural Land, p. 210; H. Jeffrey Leonard, The Politics of Land Use Planning in Oregon, p. 17; Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, Land Ownership Patterns and Their Impacts on Appalachian Communities, pp. 6 and 31.

to having the land tilled, evidence suggests that its contribution to the continued farming of recreational land is minimal. Since properties of less than twenty acres owned for amenity purposes are not given the preferential tax, it has no affect at all on the cultivation of these properties.⁴

The availability of off farm employment combined with the minimal labor requirements of grain production enables farmers with marginal or submarginal-sized operations to survive as part-time farmers. Even though the controlled economic growth policies of the county have restricted the number of industrial jobs, the presence of free spending well-heeled amenity seekers provides employment opportunities in a variety of service occupations and construction. In addition, the water that attracts the "outsiders" provides an income source through "oystering" and "crabbing." The flexible hours and the opportunity to be a self-employed "waterman" are especially attractive to young farmers.

The location of the county on the Atlantic Flyway and the presence of rich sportsmen provide many farmers with an additional source of income, the leasing of the hunting rights to their property. The fees paid for the exclusive hunting rights to a farm may be equal to the net income the farmer realizes from crop production. One farmer

⁴Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, June 22, 1982. Among others, he related that the amenity owners would have the land farmed even without the cost reducing benefits of the use value assessment.

reportedly received \$30,000 for the hunting rights to his 1,200 acre farm in the winter of 1980-81.⁵

II. FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE IN THE COUNTY

The future of agriculture in Talbot County is difficult to foresee because of the variety of forces acting on it simultaneously. However, so long as agriculture in the region remains viable, farming in the county is unlikely to disappear or, perhaps, even decline significantly. On the other hand, the future agricultural patterns will manifest the changes necessary for survival as a commercial venture.

So long as the regional broiler industry remains strong, there will be a local market for corn and soybeans and thus cash grain farming should remain important. Nevertheless, given the cost-price structure of mechanized cash grain farming and the persistent pressures to cultivate more land in order to achieve or maintain an acceptable income, only the very large operations will be able to continue the grain monoculture. With growing absentee, nonfarm ownership and high land prices, these farmers must increasingly rent the majority of the land they use. Some will be farmers "without land," renting all the land they cultivate.

Even if the local market for grain does remain strong, it is unlikely that many of the farmers currently specializing in grains

⁵Personal interview with Donald Osburn, Talbot County Agricultural Extension Agent, Easton, July 7, 1981.

will be able to do so in the future. Because of the intense competition, not all will be able to get the additional land they need for profitable grain farming. Consequently, they will have to change their crop emphasis, go to part-time farming or quit farming.

Farmers, especially the older ones, who are unable or unwilling to make the necessary adjustments will probably take advantage of the high lease fees and land prices and either rent their land to other farmers or sell out and retire or take a nonfarm job. Others, not wanting to quit, but without an adequate land base to sustain an acceptable standard of living, will take employment off the farm to supplement their farm income. While these part-time farmers could produce any of a variety of crops, it is most likely that they will grow grains because of the minimal labor requirements. The increasing part-time farming, along with absentee amenity ownership of cropland, will help sustain grain production.

Farmers with inadequate land for specialization in grains but with a sizable land base who opt for continuance as full-time farmers may do so through an adjustment process involving diversification and intensification. Rather than relying on one or two items for the majority of their income, they may derive it from a variety of products. In this diversification process the emphasis is likely to remain on grains. A local market exists and they already have the machines required. Other crops that provide a larger net return per acre than grain, particularly vegetables, may well increase in acreage. However, because they can be mechanically harvested, tomatoes, sweet corn

and green peas are the ones most likely to be emphasized. With the aid of a little outside help, a farm family could easily grow thirty or more acres of these crops.⁶

Although unable to compete effectively with western producers, especially California, vegetable production in the area is becoming increasingly competitive because of the rising fuel and freight costs. In response, a cannery using tomatoes produced by local farmers under contract reopened in the county in July of 1982. This, combined with inability to make it in grains, has led a number of people to predict a rebirth of vegetables in the county.⁷ The increase of nearly 850 acres in tomatoes, sweet corn, and green peas, between 1974 and 1978 may be a precursor of things to come.⁸

Another high yielding crop that is getting attention from some farmers and which may become a significant cash crop is "Maryland" air cured tobacco. Not governed by the federal allotment programs if grown in Maryland, farmers could grow as much as they wanted.⁹ With favorable soils for its production in the county, the closeness of auction blocks in "Southern Maryland" on the western side of the Bay,

⁶Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, June 6, 1982; telephone interview with Wayne Shaff, Wicomico County Agricultural Extension Agent, July 6, 1982.

⁷Dick Moore, "Revival of Eastern Shore Canneries Eyed," Salisbury Times, June 23, 1982, p. 7.

⁸U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture, 1974 and 1978.

⁹Personal interview with Harry Ziegler, June 22, 1982.

and the limited additional skill and capital needed to produce it, it is seen as a possible option to grain specialization.

With more labor than they need for grains and not enough to totally specialize in labor intensive crops, even if they wanted to or had the market, these farmers are likely to continue planting the majority of their cropland in grains and a minority in vegetables. In particular, they will plant grain on their largest parcels, those most remote from their base operation, and those rented from absentee owners. Vegetables and other crops requiring more frequent attention will be planted on the small parcels located on or near the headquarters property and those owned by the operator.

The switch to more intensive crops should reduce the competition for land among farmers. Those farmers who are able to make an acceptable income from a smaller acreage than they controlled while specializing in grains may relinquish some of the land they lease to those continuing to produce only corn and soybeans. If this were to become significant, grain farmers would no longer need to work small parcels. As a consequence, little, if any, of the cropland held in properties of less than twenty acres would be tilled. If the switch to intensive crops were drastic, a possibility that could be prompted by the demise of the regional broiler industry and the accordant loss of the market for grain, amenity ownership could result in a major loss of cropland. Unable to get farmers to plant grains, many leisure owners would probably opt to take their land out of production and let it idle or plant it in trees rather than give it over to agricultural uses

that would impair the enjoyment of their property. The inability to have an acceptable agricultural use may result in fewer purchases of large acreages and the subdivision of current large amenity properties. The additional parcellation would, in turn, lead to further cropland losses.

While broiler production represents an intense land use, significant expansion is unlikely because many farmers view it as too regimented and marginal as a source of income.¹⁰ Furthermore, zoning basically prohibits broiler houses of commercial size on properties of less than fifty acres.¹¹ This provision manifests the opposition by amenity owners to the aesthetic blemishes and odors of broiler production.¹²

In summation, agriculture in Talbot County will probably closely follow the model Higbee described in the early 1960's for the future of farming in Megalopolis. The continued prosperity of farming will depend more on how the land is used rather than how much is available. The trend will be away from field crops grown to feed animals to those eaten and used by humans directly. Farmers will give more attention to the returns from the land rather than returns from labor. Rather than

¹⁰ Personal interviews with Donald Osborn, Talbot County Extension Agent, Easton, July 7, 1981; Edward Burns, Farmer, McDaniel, August 25, 1981; Phillip Foster, Farmer, Trappe, August 25, 1981; Earl Harrison, Farmer, Bozman, August 24, 1981.

¹¹ Talbot County Council, Talbot County Zoning Ordinance, September 24, 1974, Section 20.01, p. 55.

¹² This was related by many of the persons interviewed, including: Anthony Redman, Planner, July 6, 1981; Donald Osborn, July 7, 1981; Harry Ziegler, July 6, 1981; Earl Harrison, August 24, 1981, and Edward Burns, August 25, 1981.

specializing in just one or two commodities, farmers will produce a combination of crops that complement one another in terms of labor requirements. Finally, "estate farming" will help preserve farmland and farming by keeping valuable land out of the hands of developers.¹³

III. FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of this study suggest that not all absentee ownership of rural land for leisure and retirement homes should be viewed the same in terms of the effects on farming and farmland. The evidence presented here on the impacts is, in some cases, contradictory or significantly different in degree from that found in other places. A comparison of the Talbot County experience with that elsewhere as portrayed in other studies implies that the effects on agriculture and farmland are dependent on the vitality of farming, the farm emphasis or specialization, and the character of the amenity that attracts people.

Agriculture will obviously better resist the negative impacts where it is vibrant and profitable than where it is marginal and practiced largely because it provides a supplemental source of income or because of a lack of alternative economic pursuits. The farm emphasis or specialization is important because it affects the viability of agriculture through its impact on peoples' perception

¹³Edward Higbee, "Megalopolitan Agriculture," Chapter 6 in Jean Gottmann, Megalopolis: The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1961), pp. 258-340.

of its relationship to the enjoyment of their properties. Livestock and field crop production will be viewed differently. If it is seen as enhancing or nonthreatening, it will not be adjudged or legislated against and may even be viewed as something that needs to be protected and preserved. Furthermore, the health and character of agriculture affect the availability and willingness of farmers to rent and work absentee owned and parcelized cropland.

The pressures on agriculture are also related to the character of the amenity that attracts people. If the attraction is simply a rural setting in a remote area wherein all parts of the area are, if not equally good, acceptable, the stress will be present everywhere. If, on the other hand, the attraction is a specific feature such as water frontage that is not spatially ubiquitous, the pressures will be concentrated in those areas where it exists and the remainder of the area will be much less affected.

In order to make generalizations about the above, more detailed case studies are needed. Research needs to be done on areas with different amenity attractions and with differing agricultural specializations and vitality. Since the results of this study and other on the subject show that the vast majority of the cropland parcelized into multiple acre properties is lost from production, research is needed into the possible ways of regulating or curtailing parcellation of cropland. We need to establish whether zoning ordinances that require minimum sized lots of several acres retard or accelerate the losses. Such policies may maintain or preserve open space, but at the expense

of cropland. Rather than requiring a minimum size of a few acres, it might be better to establish a maximum size of an acre or two for small properties and a minimum size of fifty or more acres for larger sized properties in areas where the majority of the land is cropland. In establishing the minimum size for larger properties, it would be helpful to know if there is a threshold property size below which owners are not likely to have the land tilled and above which they do.

Finally, in that significant amenity ownership often contributes to the development of limited growth economic policies in the host area, more needs to be known about the impacts of these policies on farming. Do they help farmers stay in operation or do they contribute to an accelerated exodus from farming by limiting the off farm employment opportunities needed by many farmers to supplement an inadequate farm income. As such, these policies may also contribute to increased concentration of land control and production in the hands of fewer but larger operators.

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