

NATIONAL

Farmland Flight

Through the summer and into the fall, farm land in many parts of the country was drought-wracked and those whose lives depended on its bounty frantically fought the death-grip of aridity, dazedly resigned themselves to wait for government aid or painfully left their homes to seek greener fields elsewhere. The story goes on.

Every day, in trucks and trailers, families are migrating into states of the Pacific Northwest where agriculture has been relatively prosperous the past year. They are setting themselves up on abandoned farms and undeveloped land, or stopping on the outskirts of towns and cities in the states of Washington, Oregon and Idaho, trying to eke out an existence as common laborers. Some of them are squatting in shacks and makeshift dwellings made of tree branches, stray boards, strips of tin.

The details of this story came from regional directors of the Resettlement Administration who were gathered in Washington last week for a series of conferences on their national program. They said that some 15,000 farmers have moved out of the Dakotas, western Kansas and eastern Montana, leaving soil which because of aridity or exhaustion could not yield a paying crop.

In states of the Midwest, other farmers are grimly hanging on because they believe there is no other place to go and because within themselves they hold the hope of better things to come.

The minds of a good many farmers in the plains area are filled with the fear of another year of dryness and disaster. This feeling is aggravated by the fact that winter snows, upon which reliance had been placed for the building of a reserve of moisture in the subsoil of land already dried, have been well below the normal in the plains region, which lies outside the area of last week's floods.

Besides this, in the Dakotas and western Minnesota, many farmers are faced with the difficulty of adequately feeding their cattle through the winter months.

To RA men, the economic devastation has created a variety of problems. They see the nation faced with the questions of (1) providing adequate relief; (2) finding a way of absorbing the agricultural immigrants in areas where developed land is already taxed with a sufficient farm population; and (3) removing from acreage land which is too barren to be tilled by desperate farmers who believe anything is better than the arid soil they have vacated.