DISTANCE AS A FARM MANAGEMENT PROBLEM

by

MARNA J. LINTNER

B. S., Carroll College, 1972

A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Geography

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1974

Approved by:

Charles E. Bressing
Major Professor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

CHAPTER ONE

Until recently, scholarly works have all but neglected the subject of farm land concentration. The increasing size of farms has become an issue of study because scholars want to understand the enlargement process. This thesis will examine only one portion of the problem. Distance that farm operators are willing to travel for land given the nature of other determining factors in land acquisition is the central theme of this study.

Many other problems present themselves in this area of research, and among them are the problems of land management, land use, and land tenure. These problems have all been studied more widely than has the problem of land acquisition. Because the very nature of this problem is so basic to the livelihood of the farmer, it would seem it should have received more attention in the literature. Most studies dealing with the addition of land to holdings have been done by economists and sociologists. Geographers have mainly dealt with farm market areas of rural places (central place),[1] study of von Thünen's theory on a regional level,[2] and global classification systems of world agriculture.[3] And never, to the knowledge of this writer, has the enlarging farm unit size been studied by a geographer.[4]

Historical Development of Farm Sizes

Increasing farm size has been a recent trend throughout the United States. Though it has been noted since 1900, only since World War II has enlarging farm size come to national attention. (See Table 1.) The size of farms in the United States as a whole has risen from 146.2 acres in 1900 to

389.9 acres in 1969, with the greatest increase occurring between 1950 and 1969.

TABLE 1.--Average size of farm operating units in acres

	Year						
	1880	1890	1900	1930	1950	1959	1969
U.S.	134	137	146.2	156.9	215.5	302.8	389.9
North			133.3	166.2	194.4	245.4	306.1
South			138.2	106.4	148.2	217.2	286.6
West			386.1	433.3	699.6	987.1	1250.4

Source: Barlow and Libbly, "Policy Choices Affecting Access to Farmland," Who Will Control U.S. Agriculture, p. 26.

Contrary to trends in the rest of the United States, between 1900 and 1930 the South had a decrease in farm size, which can be attributed to the tenancy situation existing there. During this period, there was a breakup of landholdings into small sharecropping units, and by 1950, many of the sharecroppers had been displaced by machines and had moved into cities.[5] Thus the farms were again being operated in single units as in the antebellum South.

Landholdings in the West have grown at very rapid rates. Many giant corporations have bought land in the West in order to take advantage of special tax shelters which are intended for the benefit of farmers, but which they use to write off some excess corporate profits made in other areas. For example, Teneco in California has purchased 100,000 acres of irrigated land where fruits and vegetables are grown.[6] However, there are large non-corporate holdings in the West because in arid regions, landholdings must be extensive in order to allow for dry farming techniques and low carrying