

How did James Bennett's Farm Compare?

I wanted to learn how James Bennett's farm compared to other farms in Orange County and North Carolina. Using the 1850 agricultural census, I calculated the different data points as a rate per acre of total farmland for James Bennett's property, orange county, and the state of NC.

A note on Improved, Unimproved, and Total Farmland

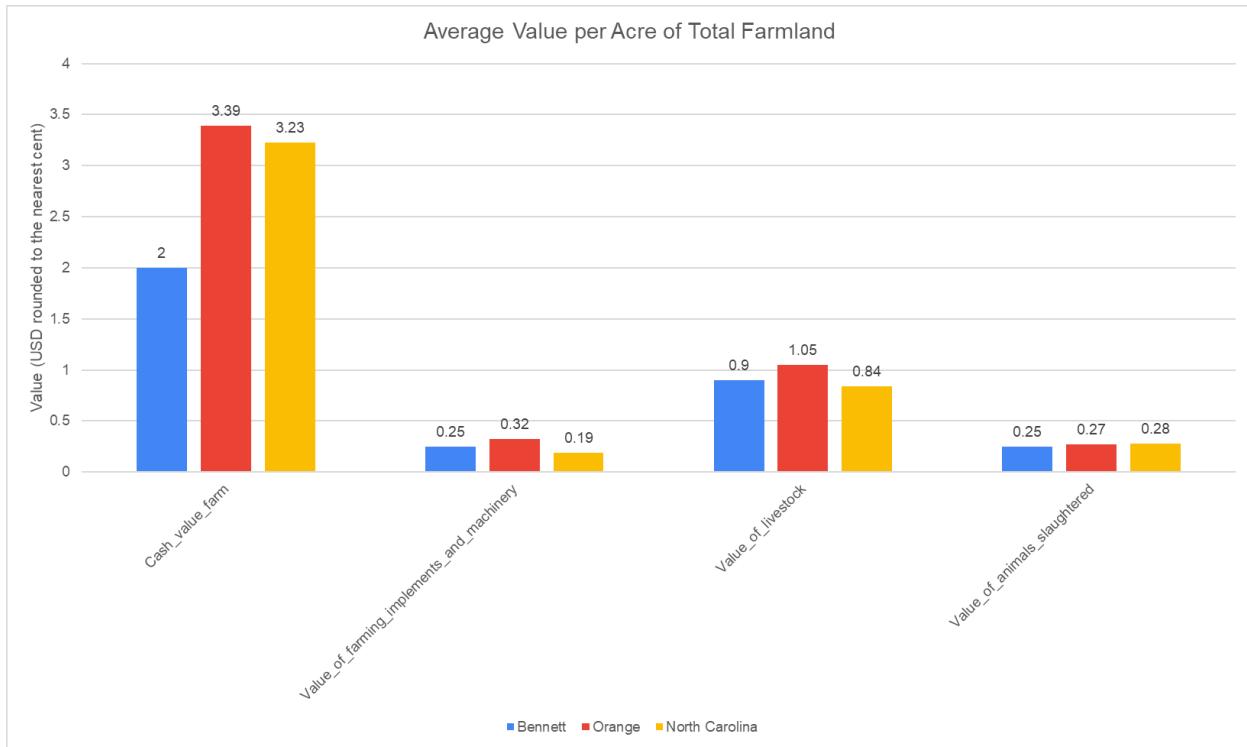
In 1850, the U.S. Census recorded farmland as either "improved" or "unimproved". Improved land is "cleared and used for grazing, grass, or tillage, or which is now fallow, connected with or belonging to the farm". Unimproved land "may be a woodlot or other land at some distance" (Agricultural Schedules, 1850-1900 pg. 3).

James Bennett had more improved land relative to unimproved land than the average of this ratio for either Orange County or the state of North Carolina.

- For every 1 acre of improved land, James Bennett had 1 acre of unimproved land.
- For every 1 acre of improved land in Orange County, there were about 1.3 acres of unimproved land.
- For every 1 acre of improved land in North Carolina, there were about 2.8 acres of unimproved land. This is likely because much of western North Carolina was not farmed by European/American colonists until a generation or two after central and eastern North Carolina.

In the American South, woods were part of an agricultural system of shifting cultivation and free-range pork production. Also, if land is allowed to go fallow in NC, then an early-stage forest will be present after only a few years. Thus, I am still unclear if woods used as part of the agricultural system were considered "unimproved" or "improved". Regardless, because even "unimproved" land likely was used by free-ranging livestock, I have used the total amount of farmland (improved+unimproved) to generate rates of per-acre farm production in this report.

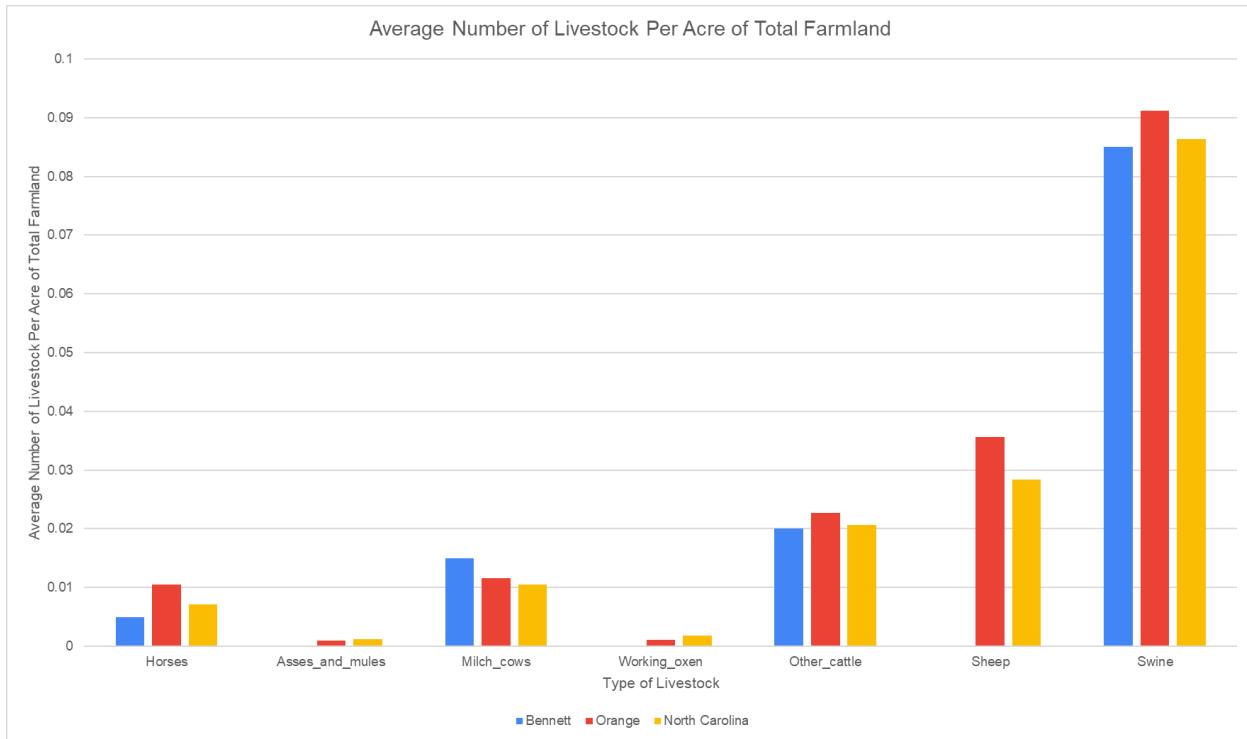
Figure One: Value



James Bennett's land was worth less per acre in 1850 than the per-acre cost of either Orange County or NC land. He had less valuable farming implements and livestock per acre than farmers in Orange County, but more than the average farmer in North Carolina.

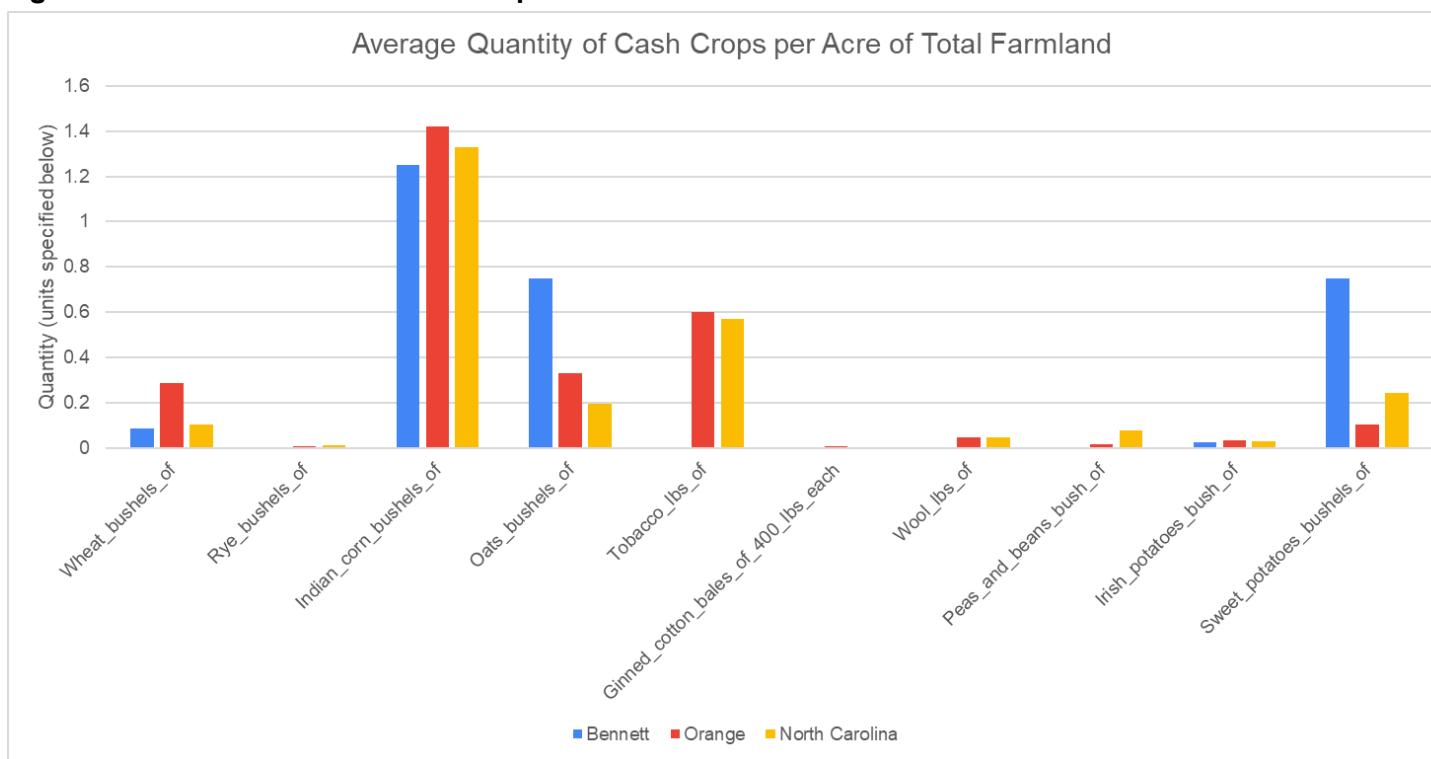
Interestingly, James Bennett had less value in animals slaughtered per acre in 1850. Could this be because he had fewer livestock? Used the land less intensively?

Figure Two: Livestock Quantities



It looks like overall, James Bennett had fewer livestock than other farmers from the same county and state. However, he had more milch cows.

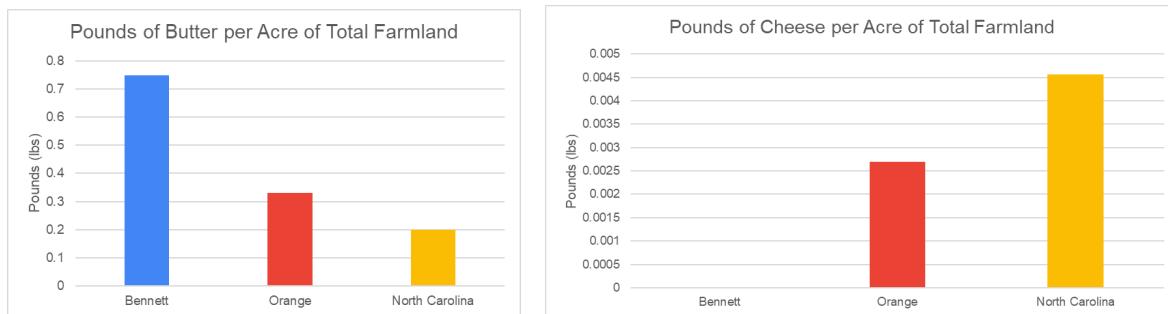
Figure Three: Quantities of Cash Crops



This chart demonstrates that like his fellow farmers in NC, James Bennett produced a lot of corn, although he produced slightly less per acre of total farmland than farmers in Orange County or North Carolina in general. However, whereas many Orange County and North Carolina farmers produced Tobacco, James Bennett did not. Instead, James Bennett produced almost twice as many oats and four times as many sweet potatoes as might be expected for a farm of his size in Orange County NC.

**note- I'm a bit iffy on this chart because the units are funky. Comparisons need to be made within crop categories, not across crop categories.*

Figure Four: Dairy Products



James Bennett produced a lot of butter per acre of farmland relative to other farmers in Orange County and North Carolina, but he didn't produce any cheese.

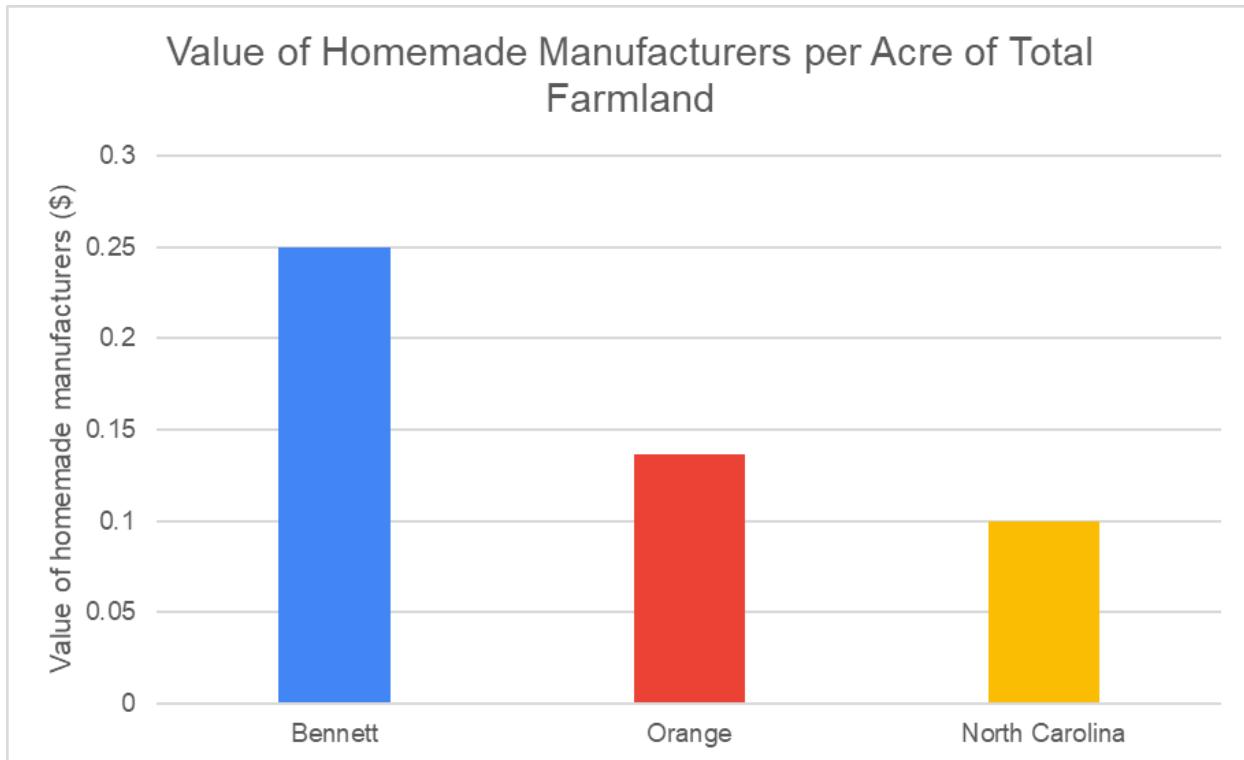
Production of Less Abundant Crops on James Bennett's farm in 1850

Barley, buckwheat, orchard produce, and wine were all rarely produced in North Carolina, let alone in Orange County and not at all on James Bennett's farm. James Bennett's market garden was valued at \$0, but this was not unusual for a farm of his size since market gardens were valued at less than half a penny per acre across NC, and no county-wide value was recorded for Orange County.

Hay, hemp, clover seeds, and other grass seeds were also not produced on James Bennett's farm, and rarely if at all in Orange County and North Carolina. Yet Flax and Flaxseed were both more commonly produced in Orange County and North Carolina, but not on James Bennett's Property

James Bennett produced 3 lbs of hops in 1850. While this may not sound like a lot, it meant that the amount produced per acre at James Bennett's farm was 34X higher than the NC average, and 61X more than the per acre average for Orange County.

Figure Five: Homemade Manufacturers



James Bennett produced homemade manufacturers that, when calculated as a per acre rate, are worth almost twice as much as similar per acre rates indicate the value of manufacturers were in Orange County. Bennett produced over twice as much as the per acre rates indicate for North Carolina.

A note on further research:

Were these rates and averages typical for a farm of his size? The next step would be to compare to farms of a similar size in Orange county.