

PERIPHERAL ITEMS IN THE ARGENTINE PATTERN OF
TERRENE OCCUPANCY

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INTRODUCTION

The rich and youthful farming region of Argentina formerly known as the Pampas is characterized by uniformity of natural environment and by multiformity and changeability of land occupancy. Thus, for example, in the small district of Pirovano¹ in the interior of the province of Buenos Aires (fig. 1), the featureless fertile plain is occupied by a complex assortment of great estancias fattening beef cattle in alfalfa pastures, large farms fattening swine in corn fields, small farms raising wheat and other cereals, and minor sorts of productive activity. Moreover, these various activities all represent a change from the previous use of the grassy plain for extensive grazing and all show tendencies toward further changes in the future.

This superposition of variety of activity upon uniformity of environment is not unnatural but is based on uniform richness in the fertile plain, allowing success in various productive enterprises, easy success of one sort at the start and alternative opportunities for success in later stages of development in which final stability has not yet been attained.

These characteristics of the central farming region represent only one aspect of the Argentine pattern of terrene occupancy. At the margins of the region and beyond, the complex variety of land utilization gives way to simpler regional differences, by reason either of less richness or of greater maturity of development. The field studies reported upon herein are examples of occupancy in certain peripheral districts.

The greater simplicity of peripheral areas is less evident toward the shore than toward the interior margin of the central farming region. In fact, the shoreward margin may be considered to contain the very heart of the region, for settlement began along the shore, particularly

¹This paper is the sequel of one entitled "Pirovano: Items in the Argentine Pattern of Terrene Occupancy," delivered at the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers, December, 1930, published in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, December, 1931. Both papers are based on field study in early autumn (March and April) 1930.

the northeastern shore including the river front; penetration of the interior took place from here, and the interests of the region have continued to focus here.

VICINITY OF ROSARIO

Near this northeastern margin is the first of the items of occupancy to be discussed (fig. 1). The smooth rich plain extends to the very shore of the Paraná which here bounds the region. The land is, if anything, richer than that of Pirovano in the interior—the soil is more fertile, the rainfall more plentiful, the growing season longer, the winter milder, and the location close to the great port of Rosario is superior. No wonder that this margin—settled earlier and more densely than the interior and now somewhat more advanced in its development—should be considered the very heart of the central farming region.

The subdivision of property has progressed far (fig. 2). The great estancias, originally established as units of extensive grazing on the grassy pampas have all but disappeared. Even large properties which have not been divided in ownership are no longer functional units but are generally subdivided into tenant farms. Thus the present pattern of land division reflects organization of the area for cultivation of the soil in farms of a size to be operated by single families.

The form of land holdings reflects an original haphazard division of a featureless plain and more or less systematic subdivision thereafter, so that although there was no unity of orientation at the start, the later straight line boundaries generally form rectangular subdivisions.

One of the small subdivisions is the Chacra Zavalla (fig. 3), rented by an Italian immigrant from a larger property. It consists of a single cornfield 148 acres in extent, interrupted only by a 2 acre strip of alfalfa, a vegetable garden, and a corral grouped around the farm house.

The dwelling is a two-room brick hut located apparently at random in the midst of the flat cornfield (fig. 13). No other buildings are required. The farm machinery, ample modern equipment for producing the one crop, lies unsheltered behind the house. The eight farm horses are kept all year in the corral, fed on alfalfa or allowed to browse after harvest in the cornfield. No less important than the machinery and the horses is the farmer's family of seven children. With the farm all under one crop it is the family that supplies the concentrated demand for labor at harvest time.

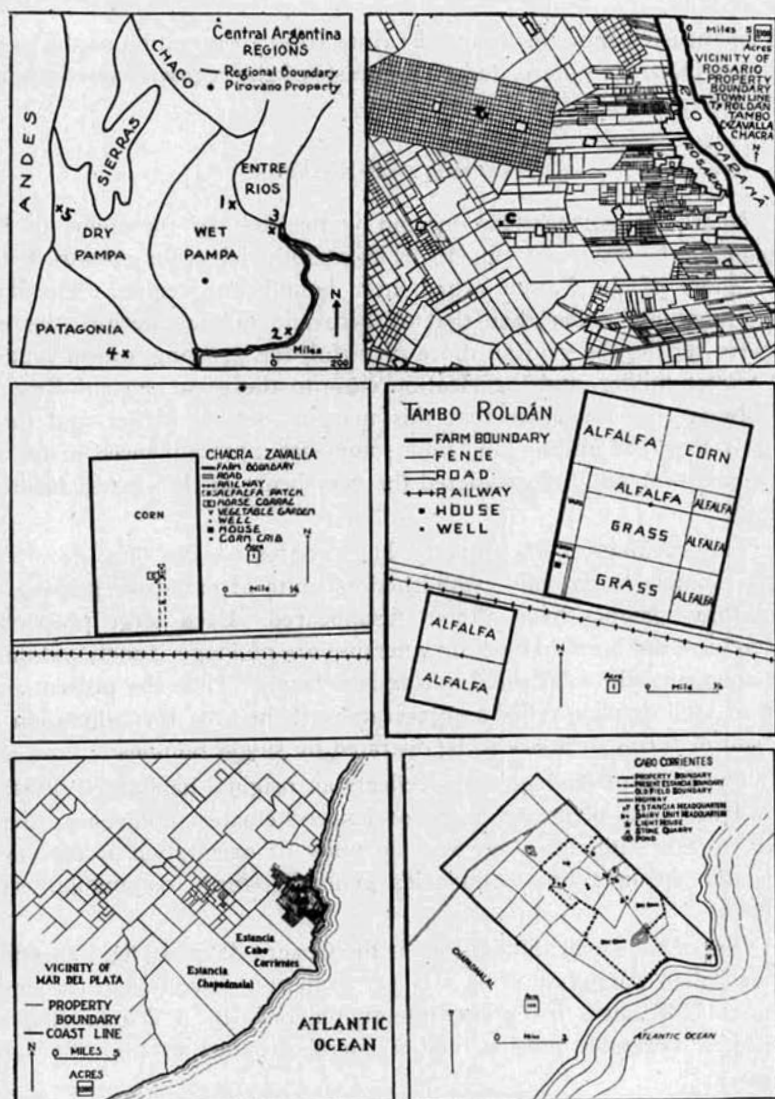


FIG. 1. Regional Map of central Argentina showing locations of the five peripheral studies: (1) Rosario, (2) Mar del Plata, (3) Paraná delta, (4) Choele Choele, and (5) Mendoza. The "Wet Pampa" is the Central Farming Region" referred to in the text. (Map based on Mapa de las Regiones Geográficas, Gastó ñ Federico Tobal, Buenos Aires, 1928.)

FIG. 2. District No. 1, vicinity of Rosario (fig. 1). This and the other four district maps (figs. 5, 8, 10 and 11) show areas of approximately the same size, in each case about 900 square miles.

FIG. 3. Map of corn farm in the vicinity of Rosario (figs. 2, 13).

FIG. 4. Map of dairy farm in the vicinity of Rosario (figs. 2, 14).

FIG. 5. District No. 2, vicinity of Mar del Plata (fig. 1).

FIG. 6. Map of Estancia Cabo Corrientes in the vicinity of Mar del Plata (figs. 5, 15).

The land is fertile silt loam with light subsoil and has produced corn continuously for years. When the annual rainfall reaches the usual amount of near 40 inches, the yield is commonly about 40 bushels per acre, but occasionally, as in 1930, a summer drought reduces the crop. The ears are gathered in bags and taken by wagon to a crib of cornstalks (fig. 13) near the house to await the arrival of a sheller in its round of the community. Then the shelled, bagged product, flint corn of export quality, is hauled to the nearby railway station for sale and shipment to the port.

This simple specialization in the best marketable crop which the soil will produce is a natural mode of procedure for a poor family occupying the land temporarily. But the system involves risk in the uncertainties of the one-crop yield, irregularities in labor needs, and inevitable depletion of the soil. As there are other possible crops and other farmers who are better off, this is not the only type of farming.

A less simple item in the pattern of terrene occupancy is represented by the Tambo Roldán (fig. 4). It is rented by a Basque immigrant who has some capital. The land is similar to that of the Chacra Zavalla, but contains a slightly depressed area that is poorly drained.

In the 351 acres comprising the farm, corn occupies one field of 47 acres, marketed like that of the Chacra but grown in rotation (fig. 14); alfalfa occupies 188 acres in 6 fertile fields, growing luxuriantly and available for pasture throughout the year, or for 5 cuttings of hay in summer, and maintaining itself for 5 years before replanting; natural grass pasture occupies most of the remaining 116 acres in the two poorly drained fields.

This combination is the basis for a dairy establishment of 80 cows. Calves are kept with their mothers and the products of the establishment are fattened calves and a moderate amount of milk which is taken to a nearby factory for the production of cheese and casein for export.

The only building needed on the dairy farm is a small house for the farmer and his family. It seems natural that this establishment with its easily productive and accessible land should be a prosperous contributor to a world market.

The Tambo Roldán and the Chacra Zavalla represent characteristic land utilization in the vicinity of Rosario. Obviously the one-crop farm is not a permanent establishment, but it is a short step from this to some sort of stable combination of grain, pasture and livestock such as that of the tambo. Already the chacra has a few pigs. Thus the pattern of occupancy seems to be approaching the uniformity and

