

What was a man's role on an 18th-century Virginia farm?

The main job of a planter living on a small colonial farm in Virginia was to raise a cash crop, which was usually tobacco before the Revolutionary War. Raising tobacco was hard work, starting with planting seeds in the winter and transplanting seedlings to the fields in the early spring. During the summer, the farmer had to worm, weed, and tend the tobacco plants. The tobacco was harvested, dried, and packed for shipping during the fall. Many farmers also grew corn to feed their families and livestock.

The farmer kept the farm accounts and oversaw the work of the slaves. Most farm families owned fewer than five slaves, including children. When the farmer took his tobacco crop to market to be inspected and sold, he received a tobacco note in exchange. He could then use the tobacco note to purchase goods that were not made at home. Most of the items that local merchants sold were imported from England before the Revolutionary War. The farmer made most of the purchases for the family.

The farmer had many other jobs as well. If he had the skills, the farmer may have built and repaired the house and other farm buildings. He might build fences to protect his crops, and simple furniture for the household. Many farmers hunted, both to provide food for their families and to protect their crops and livestock from wild animals. They also fished with fishing poles and nets in the nearby rivers and creeks of the tidewater region. Farmers taught their sons how to grow tobacco and other crops, keep accounts, and other skills necessary to run a farm.

Virginia planters who owned land had civic duties as well, such as paying taxes, voting, and participating in county courts as jurors. Men between the ages of 16 and 60 were also required to serve in the

county militia. They were required to muster (gather) several times each year, and had to provide their own guns and ammunition. Militia units were used to keep the peace, fight Indians, and put down slave rebellions, if necessary. Muster days also served as good opportunities for men to meet with their friends and neighbors.



Checking tobacco for worms



Hanging tobacco to dry



Woodworking



Repairing fishing nets



Leaving for militia duty



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