

Mules

The mule, long considered agriculture's beast of burden, has played a significant role in the shaping of America. Although there were few mules in Colonial America, our first president, George Washington, is given credit for being the first mule breeder in this country.

The turning point of mule popularity came when the King of Spain presented Washington with two Spanish jacks. When Washington mated the jacks with his fine coach mares, he proved that the resulting mules served as excellent coach animals and worked well on plantations.

The mule's capacity for hard work under plantation management made the animal a valued commodity throughout the Cotton Belt. Because the mule supply came primarily from Kentucky and Tennessee, initially their use in the South was somewhat limited.

According to historians, only a small degree of breeding was attempted in Georgia prior to 1850. In that year, the ratio of mules to horses in the state was said to be nearly one to three. In 1855, it is estimated that 4000 mules were sold to Georgia planters. By 1860 the tables had turned and there were nearly as many mules as horses in Georgia. In fact, the floppy eared creatures outnumbered horses in 31 counties. The state's mule population was concentrated in the cotton-growing counties with southwest Georgia boasting the largest population.

The mule was a prized possession of many farm families in early rural Georgia. Not only did mules help farmers make their living by tilling the fields, they provided transportation for families to church, to town and to neighboring farms. It is no wonder that farmers developed a strong attachment to these hardworking animals.

