WHEAT & BUCKWHEAT:

Wheat remained important as a staple to feed the family and as a cash crop. By the late 1800s, farmers could choose from many varieties of wheat to plant, but large growers in the West now dominated the market.

Somerset farmers recalled 1859 as “The Great Buckwheat Year.” A late frost on June 9 killed orchard fruit and all the crops already in the ground. Farmers planted all the buckwheat they could so they would have something to feed their families and livestock.

Buckwheat

Artwork by Mary Mullard Young, courtesy of Birkett Mills, Penn Yan, NY

HAY & OATS:

Hay and oats fed the farmer's own livestock but they were also valuable as cash crops. Livery stables, taverns, and tradesmen's families in town needed feed if they owned a milk cow and horses.

A haying scene

June, from Ballou's Pictorial, June 17, 1854.
Courtesy the Picture Collection, The Branch Libraries, New York Public Library

Oats

From The American Farm Book, or Compendium of American Agriculture by R.L. Allen, 1858.

THE FRUITS OF LABOR
CORN:

A dramatic rise in corn production after 1850 was probably due to selective breeding. Hardier strains of corn resisted the early frosts that were common at higher elevations. In 1850, fewer than ten percent of farmers in Somerset township raised corn and their yield amounted to 3,000 bushels. By 1870, 40% raised corn in the township and the yield was 92,000 bushels!
Potatoes! Potatoes!

A lot of good Potatoes are wanted for which highest cash prices will be paid.
Inquire at the office of the Herald & Whig.

Potatoes:

In 1865, H.D. Coleman of Somerset sold at least four types of seed potatoes:

“Goodrich Seedlings, Chila Garnet, Cuzco, and Pink Eye Rusty Coats, ‘warranted not to rot’.”

The price was $2.50 per bushel in the fall, “from 50 cts to $1 less than they can be bought for in the spring.”

From the Somerset Herald & Whig, September 27, 1865.

Peeling potatoes, 1800s

From Sauerkraut Yankees, Pennsylvania-German Foods and Foodways by William Woys Weaver, 1983.

Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Press
GRAFTED Apple Trees.

The subscriber, residing in Franklin township, Fayette county, 4 miles below Connellsville, on the Yonghiogeny river, informs the public, that he has on hand a large quantity of grafted Apple Trees, such as Rambos, Wen- dewers, Newtown Pippins, Red streaks & other sorts, large and fine for transplanting, all grafted from the best winter apples, except the Rambos, which is a fall apple. Purchasers may be sure of from 100 to 1000, if they apply in November or March next. November is the best time for transplanting, as the scions thrive better than when transplanted in spring. Several neighbors with a light two horse wagon, may carry from three to four hundred.

Philip Golley.
October 21, 1828.

Apple varieties

An advertisement from a Fayette County nursery demonstrates that many varieties of apples were already available by the early 1800s. From the Somerset Herald, November 5, 1828.

ORCHARD FRUITS:

Apples, peaches, and cherries fed the family and brought in cash.

Farmers made cider from some of their apples and vinegar from the cider.

They also made apple butter by boiling cider, sugar, and sliced apples down to a thick paste. Stored in kegs or crocks, this delicious, thick jam could be preserved through the winter.

Apple butter was valuable enough to be listed as an asset in estate inventories. It was so popular that some soldiers wrote home during the Civil War, asking their families to send them some.

Apple Gathering (detail)

1853, oil on canvas painting by Jerome Thompson

Courtesy of The Brooklyn Museum. Dick S. Ramsay Fund and funds from Laura L. Barnes Bequest. 67.61

THE FRUITS OF LABOR
GARDEN PRODUCE:

Families planted gardens for home use, though they undoubtedly sold some vegetables at local markets, too. They stored root crops in cellars. Many people preserved cabbage for winter use by making sauerkraut.

Making sauerkraut in the 1800s

The woman at center is using a cabbage cutter placed over a cooper-made tub. The girl on the left packs the cut cabbage down in a kraut tub.

From Sauerkraut Yankees, Pennsylvania-German Foods and Foodways by William Woys Weaver, 1983.

Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Press
TEMPERANCE SOCIETY.
A meeting of the "Stoystown Temperance Society" was to have been held in Stoystown School house on the 31st ult. But was unavoidably postponed until Thursday evening next the 26th September. All persons, of all characters, whether friendly or unfriendly to the cause of Temperance are invited to attend on the above evening, as an address, exhibiting the evils of Intemperance and showing the benefits to be derived from the formation of Temperance Societies; will be delivered by a member. Stoystown, Sept 26, 1833.

**Temperance Society Meeting**
From the Somerset Whig,
September 25, 1833.

Somerset County farmers still raised an astounding 48 bushels of rye per farm in 1840, while some adjacent counties raised only six. Somerset County farmers probably milled the rye into flour. They used the rye straw to stuff mattresses and horse collars, and to make strong storage baskets.

**A rye-straw basket**

*Snitz*, or dried apple slices, were sometimes stored in large rye-straw hampers

Photograph by H. Winslow Fegley, Berks County area, early 1900s. Courtesy of the Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center, Pennsburg, PA.

**Rye:**
Farmers across the nation grew less rye, for the Temperance movement reduced the demand for whiskey. In 1840, Somerset County had only half the whiskey stills that it did in 1810.
LIMESTONE:

Limestone outcrops occur on many Somerset County farms. Lime, used to reduce the acidity of soil in crop fields, is made by burning limestone. There were a few commercial lime kilns in the county in the 1800s, but some farmers made their own lime. They quarried the stone and burned it in a large outdoor pile in a field. They used wood or coal as the fuel and sold surplus lime for extra income.
COAL:

Until the 1870s, there were few commercial coal mines in the county. The lack of railroads made large-scale mining unprofitable. Farmers with outcroppings of coal in their fields or along stream banks dug their own coal to fuel cook stoves and the fireboxes in their sugar camps. They sometimes sold digging rights to their neighbors.