

What the Government is Doing for the Farmer

An Address by Secretary of Agriculture Houston, Delivered Before the National Dairy Show Association, Chicago, on Monday, October 26th.

I AM not here today to discuss the technical problems of dairying or the live stock situation specifically, and especially not to discuss either of these topics in their technical bearings. Others much more expert in such matters will deal with these problems. I am here to consider with you certain broad aspects of agriculture and of rural life in this nation; to indicate the interest of the Federal government in their betterment, and to tell you as fully as time will permit what the Government is doing to help the farmer and, therefore, to make the nation prosperous.

It is a truism that the advancement of farming and the betterment of rural life lie at the very root of our prosperity and strength as a nation. Today, all the people, urban and rural alike, are keenly interested in the supply of the necessities of life, and recognize the supreme importance of making agriculture efficient and profitable and rural life comfortable, healthful, pleasurable, and attractive. More attention and more intelligent thinking have been directed to the study of the fundamental problems in rural economics in the last few years than in any preceding decade, and it may be safely asserted that in the last two years more significant legislative measures have been enacted or pushed farther to the stage of completion than in any similar period in the history of the nation.

It is vastly significant that attention is no longer exclusively directed merely to the primary problems of production. The center of interest, as a matter of fact, has tended to shift, and the rural life problem has begun to be conceived, as it should be—as a very broad and complex one.

Larger Aspects of Rural Life.

Up to the last two or three years, unquestionably attention was directed too exclusively merely to the production side of rural life. The slogan was "make two blades of grass grow where only one grew before," and individualism characterized thinking and acting. Obviously, there is more to rural life than the mere increase of crops and animals, important as this is; more even than increase in production and the finding of markets; more than a matter of profits and even of justice in distribution; and to limit the attack on the rural life problem merely to these phases of it is inadequate and wasteful. It is necessary to look at this side of our national economy in its larger aspects as well, and while not neglecting the older forms of activity to do all in our power to organize rural life, to develop the moral, the intellectual, and the broader economic, governmental, and social interests. For, in the rural district, no less than in the urban district, it is life and that more abundantly which we are interested in, and to which all the material things must minister, and certainly the time has come to bring it about that all the fruits of modern civilization shall not accrue to the towns and cities.

The neglect of rural life by the nation has not been conscious or willful. We have been so bent on building up great industrial centers, in rivalling nations of the world not so fortunately circumstanced agriculturally, in manufacturing, fostering it by every natural and artificial device we could think of—so busy trying to make each city larger by a half million or more people for the next census, that we have overlooked the very founda-

tions of our industrial existence. It has been assumed that we have had a natural monopoly in agriculture, that it could take care of itself, and for the most part we have cheerfully left it to do so; and, too, recklessness and waste have been incident to our breathless conquest of a continent. And so, as the President recently said: "It has, singularly enough, come to pass that we have allowed the industry of our farms to lag behind the other activities of the country in its development. . . . Our thoughts may ordinarily be concentrated upon the cities and the hives of industry, upon the cries of the crowded market place and the clangor of the factory, but it is from the quiet interspaces of the open valleys and the free hillside that we draw the sources of life and of prosperity, from the farm and the ranch, from the forest and mine. Without these every street would be silent, every office deserted, every factory fallen into disrepair."

Peace and Prosperity.

We rejoice over the prosperity and the progress of American agriculture, which on the whole are marked. We witness a vast expenditure of money to foster agriculture through all sorts of scientific and practical measures on the part of the States and of the federal government. We are grateful for the fact that while the leading civilized nations of the world are in the throes of a deadly and destructive war, this nation is at peace and the American farmer is receiving increasing compensation for his effort and is permitted to enjoy his work and the fruits of it free from the burden of militarism, and without threat of wholesale destruction of life and of property. No thoughtful man can fail to be optimistic over the situation and the prospects, but optimism should not blind us to the seriousness of certain problems.

With all our efforts, while we witness an increasing diversification of agriculture and both a relative and absolute increase in many of our important lines of production, such as wheat, forage crops, fruits, dairy products, and poultry, we still note not only a relative but also an absolute decrease in a number of our important staple food products, such as corn and meats. In the former, in the last 15 years, there has been no substantial advance. In cattle, sheep, and hogs, there has been an absolute decline—in cattle from the census year 1899-1909 of from 50 million head to 41 million; in sheep of from 61 million to 52 million; of hogs from 63 million to 58 million, while population has increased 16 million.

Remember that this situation appears not in a crowded country but in one which is still in a measure being pioneered; in one in which, with 935 million acres of arable land, not over 400 million or 45 per cent is under cultivation; in one in which the population per square mile does not exceed 31 and ranges from .7 of one per cent in Nevada to 508 in Rhode Island. What is the trouble? Is it that the American farmer has not as much intelligence or as high a degree of efficiency as those of other nations? I would resent on behalf of the American farmer such an imputation and the facts contradict it. It is true, he does not produce as much per acre as the farmer in a number of civilized nations—but production per acre is not our standard.

It is production per person engaged in agriculture and by this test he is from two to six times as

efficient as most of his competitors. And I have not the slightest doubt that the ensuing years will make it clearer that the American farmers can hold their own in free competition with those of the rest of the world and not only retain in large measure a monopoly of his own rapidly growing home market but also supply a considerable part of the foodstuffs consumed by the world. Relatively speaking, extensive farming is still economically the sound program for the American farmer, but it is becoming decreasingly so; and the aim must be, while maintaining supremacy in production per man, to assert supremacy in production per acre. The continued solution of the problem here suggested is one which now seriously engages the attention of the federal government as well as the governments of the States.

Decrease in Staples.

Through every promising approach the government is studying and attacking the problem of increasing production. Through cultural methods and the control of plant diseases and plant insects the experts of Plant Industry are lending their assistance. They are suggesting improved varieties of staple crops, introducing new ones, encouraging standardization and pointing out methods of protection from plant diseases and plant insects; and the requisite quarantine measures are being enforced. They have introduced drought resisting plants, vastly stimulated the citrus fruit industry, established rice in California, cotton in Arizona, pointed the way to the continued successful growing of cotton in boll weevil districts, introduced the culture of figs in California, protected the farmer against seed adulteration, taken effective steps to safeguard the great potato industry of the nation, and have done many other things the mere mention of which time will not permit.

Just what factors have brought about the serious situation confronting the nation in its meat supply no one can with certainty define; and so to ascertain them I have appointed a commission consisting of the best authorities I could discover. It will make a survey of the whole field and report at the earliest possible moment. This study will embrace an investigation of production and consumption, of the methods of producing, finishing, and marketing, and when a conclusion is reached, such measures as may be helpful will be adopted and any further requisite measures for increasing production and bettering distribution will unquestionably be supported by the authorities.

Not Only Big Ranches.

Certain things, however, are now clear and definite measures for increasing the meat supply are being taken and can be taken with certainty.

It is clear that we have been considering the meat supply of the nation too exclusively in terms of the big ranch and of the large animals. Obviously it is important that we should continue to help the cattleman and to develop the ranch, and no pains will be spared to do this. The Government is now spending money to develop the live stock industry in connection with the reclamation projects, and the Department is asking for more. It is attacking the problem of overstocking and overgrazing on the range and in the national forests which furnish pasture for over one million six hundred thousand cattle

and horses and over seven million six hundred thousand sheep and goats. It is demonstrating that under systematic management the grazing value of land can be restored and increased and can produce heavier animals even with an increased number, and that under proper management the range can be improved faster in use than in idleness.

But unquestionably the largest hope for a considerable increase in our meat supply lies in three other directions: First, in systematic attention to the production of larger animals in the settled farming areas of the country, especially in the South. Second, in increasing attention to the smaller animals, such as swine and poultry, and Third, in the control and eradication of cattle ticks and hog cholera.

Animals and the Average Farmer.

There is no question that the average farmer in the settled areas of the nation generally can produce a greater number of the larger animals, principally as by-products, to the betterment of his farm economy, and without great increase in expense, and that the farmer in the South in this respect enjoys unusual opportunities. And it is further apparent that the farmers everywhere in the existing state of knowledge can largely increase the supply of swine and poultry products which constitute a large and increasing part of the consumption of the average family, the annual value of the latter alone aggregating half a billion dollars, or 50 per cent of the aggregate value of the cotton produced in the nation. The last census shows a lamentable neglect of live stock in the South.

While the average Iowa farm has six milk cows, in North Carolina and Alabama it has less than two, and in South Carolina one. While the average Iowa farm has 35 hogs, in North Carolina and Alabama, it has less than 5, South Carolina less than 4.

And while the average farm in Iowa has more than 108 poultry, in North Carolina and Alabama, it has less than 20, and in South Carolina less than 17. A well trained investigator has recently said that the average farm home in Georgia produces less than 2 eggs a week, less than 2-3 of an ounce of butter, and 2-3 of a pint of milk a day, and 1-3 of a hog, 1-12 of a beef, and 1-100 of a sheep per year per person, and that the cotton crop of the State does not even approximately pay its food and feed bill. No southern State is giving the requisite attention either to the production of foodstuffs for human beings or for live stock.

A conservative estimate indicates that Texas imports from other States annually more than \$50,000,000 worth of wheat, corn and oats; Georgia more than \$24,000,000; South Carolina more than \$20,000,000; and 12 southern States more than \$175,000,000 and \$48,000,000 worth of meats, dairy and poultry products. It may be admitted that most of these States should not undertake the production of these commodities for foreign or interstate shipment in competition with the great States of the Middle West, but every student must recognize the unwisdom of their failure to produce enough of these things for the consumption of their people and for the laying of the foundation of a prosperous live stock development.

Single Crop Evil.

Too exclusive devotion to a single crop anywhere is unwise in normal times, and is a peril in times of disturbance. It is bound to produce just such a catastrophe as has befallen the South in the present emergency. It prevents the full utilization of land and labor, fails to fill the gaps in the work schedules, and furnishes no reserve.

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