REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF AGRICULTURAL LEGISLATION

By Richard T. Ely

As secretary of the American Association for Agricultural Legislation I am glad to report that we have made appreciable progress in the realization of our aims and purposes as an Association for Agricultural Legislation. Our work so far has not been mainly to influence legislation, but rather to set up the machinery and perfect the organization through which influence may be brought to bear most effectively. The Association has, however, had the privilege of advising with respect to some legislation; it has furnished information to several men in different states about specific laws; and it has furnished bibliographies regarding legislation in specific fields. It has used its best offices in securing a modification of the census schedules to give a better and more detailed account of farms and farm population.

We have no means of measuring the influence the Association has had on legislation through the individual efforts of its members. Doubtless it has been considerable. The mere connection with an organization that is constantly analyzing and discussing rural social and economic problems tends to promote legislation along the lines investigated by stimulating people to think in terms of agricultural problems. We are of the opinion, too, that the great amount of literature we have sent out has played its part in helping to arouse the interest that is now centering around agricultural problems.

Our correspondence indicates that it is easy to arouse public interest and sympathy for the things we propose to do. In fact, our trouble is not in finding men to push the ideas worked out, but in getting them to see that it takes time and expense to get the necessary facts relative to most of the more pressing agricultural problems.

It will be granted, for example, that agricultural credit is deficient and operating under adverse limitations, but who has analyzed the conditions as to exactly the type of credit needed in any particular state, and the foundation afforded for that credit. When Congress undertook to enact a rural credit law it laid the foundation for it by extensive studies in Europe. But we have generally found that a law adapted to conditions in Europe does not necessarily work well in America. It was perfectly proper to study the organization and operation of such institutions in Europe, but it was much more important to make a still more thorough study of our own situation. Our legislative policy has been more or less analogous to the physician who prescribes without making a proper diagnosis of his patient. Just at present there is great enthusiasm for building rural community houses and memorials. It is indeed a fine idea, but who knows just what a rural community is? A casual dip into the literature on rural problems shows that there are almost as many ideas as to what a rural community
is as there are writers. These examples are not exceptions, the same
vagueness and lack of definite information surrounds most of the
rural problems. The problem of tenancy, a subject which has been
as much discussed as any other domestic problem, has been grossly
misdemeaned and misrepresented. Most of the literature has been
built upon personal opinion or superficial facts. As a result, a
great deal of prejudice has grown up regarding the whole subject.
When the A. A. A. L. bulletin on tenancy appeared and took the
scientific point of view, it met with an unusual reception.

All of this shows that there is here a wonderful opportunity for
investigation by a body of social and economic experts when backed
and encouraged by farmers and people interested in agriculture.
One of the most difficult tasks in the promotion of this work will
be to keep from going too fast. As a body of scientific men, men
interested in promoting the highest interest of our great basal in-
dustry, we must force ourselves to proceed with caution; for a
mistake made in the beginning is a serious mistake. Indeed, the
Association must lead in developing scientific methods as one of
its main functions. Accordingly, the foundations of our organiza-
tion must be laid on the bedrock of facts, and, in so far as possi-
ble, on the experiences of similar organizations.

Most of you realize, however, that precedent furnishes but little
help in the field we are proposing to develop. There are no organi-
izations in the field with similar purposes, and there has been none
exactly like it in the past. It is true that farmers’ organizations
now have, and have in the past had legislative programs. In some
instances they have accomplished great good. The Grangers, in
what is known as the Graner legislation, performed a distinct na-
tional service, even if they made many mistakes. These and other
instances, perhaps just as important, do not parallel the work we
propose to do, for theirs was and is primarily political and prop-
gagandist while ours is intended to be primarily scientific, arrived
at through painstaking research. Theirs was a more or less public
uprising demanding the destruction of certain notorious evils.
Our Association will attempt to furnish correct and abundant in-
formation for use in such circumstances, but it will go much further
than that. It proposes to form a constructive program. It is not
enough that agriculture and the rural population be relieved from
those maladjustments. Conditions must be so modified that they
will give agriculture its proper place, and give the agricultural
population equal social, political, and economic advantages with
those engaged in other lines of business. It is in the latter part of
the program that we must do our real constructive work.

The Grange, the Farmers’ Alliance, and other great farmers’
o rganizations, had no body of experts whose business it was to
make thorough social and economic analysis of the agricultural
situation and its relation to legal remedies. Their endeavors were
commendable, but lacked the sustained effort, and, too frequently,
the proper social and economic analysis, to give the best and most
lasting results.
Judging from the experiences of so many farm organizations, it is alleged that the farmers will not stand together; but we are persuaded the farmers have often been unable to unite on matters of legislation simply because the proposed laws were based on opinion and not on demonstrated data. We believe that when the facts are worked out through the exhaustive research of a body of people, in whom they have confidence, there will be no trouble in getting the program enacted into law.

No sporadic effort can accomplish the purposes sought here. Indeed, it would be difficult for a farmers' organization as they are now organized to accomplish the results contemplated. They are organized for a different purpose than research. They are business men with definite objects to gain. Furthermore, they do not have the facilities available for the work, or the men trained for the scientific research necessary.

The American Association for Agricultural Legislation is not seeking to supplant any existing farmers' organization. It is seeking to cooperate with them for the direct purpose of legislation along lines suggested by scientific investigation. Some organization is needed to combine the trained investigator and the active business farmer and his farmers' organization. The colleges and universities furnish our greatest body of trained investigators and those able to direct investigation. Most of the universities, and especially the agricultural colleges, are sympathetic with the farmer's point of view, but in the past it has been impossible for them to render the service they desire because of their official positions. It was to perform just such a mission, to fill just such a place, that this Association was organized. It makes it possible for the farmer and his college and university representatives to get together in the same organization around the same board to discuss the problems and to formulate methods of attack.

The Association must avoid taking the opinions of any faddist or combination of propagandist. It must say to all alike, "we must have the facts and will be governed only by the facts." It must take the lead in organizing to find out what the facts are. It must have no connections that would embarrass it in setting forth the facts as they are. The Association is looked upon as being such an organization, and as it grows in importance we must be careful to maintain that reputation, otherwise the influence of our work will be greatly lessened.

The Executive Council has encouraged the use of every legitimate means for the advancement of the aims and purposes of the Association. As a result we have taken two very important steps since our last meeting. In the first place, it was thought advisable to begin a definite publicity program, and to prosecute it as rapidly as finances would permit. Four monographs have been sent out during the course of the year, and there are at least three others practically ready. While the publication has been on a very modest scale, it has demonstrated its usefulness and its possibilities. The new members which were gained largely as a result of the
publication of a bulletin have almost paid for its publication. People seem hungry for the sort of material we propose to publish, and if the Association had the funds to finance a definite program, it would readily become self-supporting.

The second important step taken was the beginning of the organization of a nation-wide study program dealing with agricultural legislative problems. Notwithstanding all the imperfections of the program in the way of general organization, the combination of so many different points of view, and the fact that it came out long after most of the research in the various schools had been organized, it has met with a very encouraging reception. Perhaps one-third of the institutions approached on the matter have agreed to coöperate in making it a success. We confidently believe that with the proper facilities, enabling us to push the work as planned, the great majority of colleges and universities will be using this program in some form or another within the course of a year or two. It must be kept constantly in mind that this is a coöperative affair, and that the program must always be broad enough for the expression of individuality. If carried out on these broad lines, it offers each college a rare opportunity to get the constructive thought of the leading men of the country. It will be even more significant than that. If it be granted that the farmers and farmers' organizations take kindly to the purposes of this organization, it will give them an opportunity to help direct research along lines that seem to them most desirable. If the Association is successful in bringing about closer relations with the men of the social and agricultural sciences on the one hand and the farmers and those directly interested in the farm on the other, it will have accomplished a result well worth our most ardent efforts.

Indeed, it seems to me that a man of means, seeking to accomplish the greatest good with his fortune would do well to endow an organization that had for its purposes the aims suggested here.

The study programme and the publicity policy will work most beneficially together for the demand for publicity will expand enormously as a result of our study program. And the efficiency of our study program will depend to a large extent on the extent of our publicity activities. Publicity will play a large part by stimulating ambitious students to give thought to the problems and adherence to the programme; for they will have an opportunity to have a share in a movement that proposes to render a vital service. The coupling up of publicity with the study programme will be a tremendously effective means of developing more real, efficient leaders in agriculture.

It is a great stimulation to action for the people in one community or state to know what the people in another community or state are doing. To know that beneficial laws have been enacted in Wisconsin, North Carolina, or California is a great stimulus to similar progressive legislation in Iowa, New York, or Texas. But it is not enough to know that such and such a law is on the statute books of some particular state. It is much more important to
know the peculiar conditions under which it operates, and the particular objects it is proposed to accomplish, and how well it is accomplishing the objects aimed at.

Those of you who are familiar with the study programme realize that it covers a very large range of topics, and covers them in a rather comprehensive way, perhaps not always in the best way for the purposes we have in mind. It is necessary that we keep high academic standards, but at the same time we must frame these study programmes to accomplish practical ends and aims. It has been recommended that the members of each committee work out a definite policy, and that at least the chairmen of each committee get together as a Committee on Study Programs and weld each separate part into a working whole.

The amount of correspondence of the Association has increased very greatly. We have sent out approximately 2500 letters in answer to inquiries or in bringing the Association before the public. We have had the part time service of Mr. A. B. Cox in helping with the correspondence and managing the publicity part of the work. If the work continues to grow as it has during the past year, it will be impossible to handle it efficiently without a man to give his full time to it.

Our correspondence indicates that the time is ripe for the Association to inaugurate a very vigorous programme. The Association is performing a unique service and can expand it almost indefinitely when it is financially unfettered. The public mind is certainly ready for it. The Association has made considerable progress and has arrived at the point where it needs some man who can sell an idea. It will not be a great task; those interested in agriculture feel very keenly the need of the service we propose to perform. It resolves itself into the question of getting sufficient financial backing to set the machinery in motion on a full time basis. It is the same old story, "we will support you when we see you are going to be able to do the things you propose," but we cannot carry out the programme we propose until we get more funds.

There are something over 375 members at present, an increase of over 100 during the year. We have been careful to put our advertising where we thought it would accomplish the greatest good, but at the same time we have spared no pains, in so far as funds would permit, to send our advertising into many fields.

Many of our members have been so generous in their gifts as to enable us to do more than the small membership would indicate. It is hoped that still more will be willing to give generously to make more effective the work that has been outlined.

But when sufficient funds are available and we begin to develop our study programme and expand our publicity activities, we must avoid degenerating into a discussion society, or the mere publisher of a magazine. Study programmes and publicity are not ends in themselves, but legitimate means to be used in promoting our purpose of securing sound agricultural legislation. We must
not be contented with making analyses of problems; we must translate those analyses into simplified workable legislative programmes. In some instances it will be best to express our views in the form of model bills, in others in the form of resolutions and memorials to legislative bodies and the public. This does not mean that we are to become a political organization—that would be as far from our purpose as a mere discussion society. It is easy to advocate and promote sound legislation without entering partisan politics.

Our purpose then is to use the study program, publicity and other available means to combine the theoretical and the practical in the field of agricultural research and legislation, and thus make practical the theoretical. A body of people grouped together working scientifically for practical ends and without selfish motives can accomplish results that would seem almost marvellous. The American Association for Labor Legislation is a very pertinent illustration of a similar organization in a different field, which is doing for labor what our organization hopes to do for agriculture. Labor has learned that it pays big dividends to cooperate with college men. The Association for Labor Legislation has accomplished more in the standardization of labor laws and in the scientific development of labor legislation than other agencies combined. The Association has accomplished these great results through the scientific investigation of facts, careful study of all existing laws covering specific matter and consultation with those practically affected by the proposed laws. This has been followed by recommendations so carefully worked out that they have commanded the respect and received the attention of legislative bodies. The enthusiasm engendered by their Association has not only led students but leading university professors into the shops and factories for first hand study.

Be believe that the American Association for Agricultural Legislation can be made to perform a like service for the advancement of agriculture. If the farmers, college men and others interested in agriculture will support the Association as its aims and purposes deserve that they should, the next ten years will show wonderful advances in agriculture so far as sound legislation can advance it. We will have scientific men going from the colleges into the fields to study the agricultural problems, as they now leave the college to go into the shop to study the problems of labor.

Our purpose is to deal with agriculture in its broader constructive aspects. We propose to help discover that social and economic organization of agriculture that will result in the greatest good to those engaged in the industry consistent with national interests. Such a purpose demands that we work out a policy to prevent the mere fact of being born in the country depriving the child of the benefits of a high school education, even the advantages of competent sanitary and medical attention; it means that constructive land policies must be worked out to prevent the growth of a peasant class in America; it means that an efficient system of market-
ing must be developed to prevent any exploitation of the farmer, and to insure that all products pass from the producer to the consumer with the least cost and friction; it means the organization and improvement of our system of highways to prevent gluts and waste on the farm as well as in our central distributing centers; it means that a system of credit must be worked out that will make the farmers' security as available for his purposes as the credit of any other class is available for its purposes; it means that all legislation must be so constructed as to give agriculture equal legal protection and encouragement. When the American Association shall have accomplished these things, it will have begun to accomplish its aims and purposes.

THE BUSINESS SESSION

The business session of the meeting was held at 10:30 December 31st, with Prof. Ely presiding. The treasurer read his report which was approved. The Committees on Rural Life and Roads submitted written reports which appear elsewhere in this publication.

The Committee on Nominations nominated Frank L. McVey for president, James E. Boyle and E. G. Nourse for vice-presidents, Richard T. Ely for Secretary, B. H. Hibbard for treasurer, and the following men for membership in the Council, O. C. Ault, John D. Black, W. S. Handschin and S. A. Lindsey. The report of the committee was adopted by a unanimous vote.

Prof. Ely read a communication from Frank Emerich in which he submitted a plan through which he proposed to raise money for the Association. The Association by unanimous vote instructed the secretary and treasurer to take up negotiations with full power to act. It was also generally understood that if Mr. Emerich should be employed for such a purpose literature gotten out by him must have the approval of Profs. Ely and Hibbard.

Prof. Taylor moved that steps be taken immediately to get the subscriptions of all members in order to put the Association on a better financial foundation. In pursuance of his plan he started three subscription lists, one $50, one $25 and one $10. Every person present subscribed to one or the other. The following subscribed $50: R. T. Ely, B. H. Hibbard, H. C. Taylor, George Thomas, R. O. Rankin, L. D. L. Weld., C. J. Brand.

The twenty-five dollar list was represented by: H. M. Eliot, L. C. Gray, J. I. Falconer, O. C. Ault, M. L. Wilson, J. D. Black, O. E. Baker, F. W. Peck.

The ten dollar list was represented by: Holbrook Working, A. B. Cox, H. E. Erdman, Theo. Macklin.

A. B. Cox, the Assistant Secretary, made a report in which he outlined the work being attempted through the study program, and the unusual extent to which it is finding a welcome among the various colleges and research organizations. He emphasized the necessity of having a well worked out policy and asked that two plans that are represented in the different committee reports be