

## RURAL SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF THE UNITED STATES

A Catalogue of Problems Suggested by Rural Leaders in the Various Sections of the United States.

### INTRODUCTION

The rural problem of the United States is both economic and broadly social in character, with aspects so closely connected in real life that any sound treatment of the one phase will require a corresponding study of the other.

That the general sections of the nation vary as to type of agriculture and as to stage of social and economic development, and hence present problems widely different in character is evident and significant. If it is true that in some sections farms are too small, and farmers too plentiful, it may be true in other sections that farms are too large, and farm families too few. While, moreover, it is generally felt that the country as a whole needs a larger number of people engaged in agriculture, it will not of course be lost sight of that a disproportionately large number of farmers would render farming unremunerative. All good farms seem to have their farmers, in spite of the widespread alarm at farm people's leaving the land; and in the human attempt to provide the poor people of cities a place in agriculture, it will be noted that the general complaint among farmers is that farming frequently does not pay, and that altogether too many farmers are poor. It is not simply farmers that are needed, but good farmers—farmers with ample capital to make farming pay.

The agricultural economist has already come to problems needing the point of view of the rural sociologist. The economic philosophy of getting the most out of the land and winning the largest labor income needs to be supplemented and modified by the doctrine of doing the best by each farm family in any system of working of the land. As the philosophy of largest industrial output has been modified by the labor philosophy of a minimum wage and an eight-hour day in order to protect the human worker and his family, so the rising generation in country life requires the protection of public opinion in a theory of agricultural production and living which will not exploit the farmer, soul and body.

Farm labor furnishes an acute problem in some sections of the United States; but no treatment of this problem on purely economic grounds is sufficient. Proper housing is a distinct and important element in the question for married laborers and doubtless some form of continuation school is imperative for the unmarried work-

ers. Unquestionably the farm labor problem as a whole is put in the shade somewhat on the social side by the fact that as yet the families of farm owners and operators in the United States are themselves in need of better housing facilities and better vocational training.

America is on the point of socializing its thought in regard to rural life and land policies. The farmer is taking a step or two in this direction. Statesmen are thinking of farming in relation to national policy and human welfare. The strategic thing just now and in the years immediately ahead of us is a wise leadership in rural economic and social thought. Disaster may easily come through a narrow, sectional, partisan, or exploitative leadership. Casual thinking must be replaced by painstaking investigation.

The economic issues of the time may be classified as follows: first, those which require little if any group attention, such as the question of farm efficiency, or the choice of crops. Second, matters requiring the attention of substantially all farmers, or possibly of all citizens. The solution of these questions is to be looked for in legislation such as the passage of a tariff on sugar, or corn. Third, the question arising in connection with problems which pertain to specific business undertakings. These as a rule center about marketing, credit, tenancy, or farm labor.

We have made a start toward solving these problems, but it is only a start. Even the best method of solution is by no means determined upon in every case, if indeed it is in any case. The first thing needed is a clear comprehension of the situation. When that is gained a long step will have been taken toward a remedy. They will have to be taken up one at a time, some by states, some by the national government, more by the interested parties independently of politics or government.

The country life movement, as a whole, it should further be recalled, has reached the point where it seems desirable, for research purposes, to select from the mass of rural issues in any particular section of the United States, a few problems that are fundamental to the main line of rural progress. These few issues, once selected, might well be standardized in detail by some central cooperative research bureau. Following this, certain uniform methods of study might be formulated. A wide employment of such standard problems and methods would eventually lead to a public policy of large rural improvement.

As a stimulating influence upon such selection, the following catalogue of rural issues in the United States seems calculated to be highly suggestive. There will, it is hoped, come to the minds of investigators, as they read these lists, other issues not stated therein, and it is probable that question marks will be placed by them after

some of the statements included. A decision will also doubtless be reached in regard to the relative importance and immediate urgency of the various issues.

Matters which require legislative enactment should engage the attention of thinkers in every state. The very definite requirements of legislative statement should be boldly faced, and the making of proposed statutes should be undertaken. When rural social thinking shall have as its goal practical legislation rather than vague discussion, achievement is certain to follow. In like manner, matters in the field of voluntary association should be subjected to definite plans of organization and practical working programs.

#### THE METHOD OF GATHERING AND ORGANIZING THE STATEMENTS OF THE PROBLEMS

The following statements of the rural social and economic problems in the United States are based on significant quotations from about one hundred and fifty letters from teachers, farmers, county agents, preachers, editors, and others interested in and acquainted with agricultural problems. The informants were carefully selected from Dr. Bailey's "Rus", the "Who's Who" in Agriculture. Generally, the persons selected were born and reared in the country, educated and spent most of their lives in the state or section they were asked to speak for.

The object was to get statements from those who have made a study of the problems, those who have active contact with country life, those who are actively interested in the rural social and economic problems at present.

Some mistakes were probably made in the selection of so many names, but on the whole the replies were remarkable. It is probable, furthermore, that some letters have been misinterpreted by taking important statements out of their proper setting, but no other way seemed so feasible for putting such a mass of material into such narrow compass, and still leave a large part of the personality of the different writers. It will be noticed that the letter called for a statement of state problems rather than sectional problems. That was done to avoid a confusion of the issue and a too general statement of the problems. They are grouped in geographical divisions for the sake of brevity and convenience, and because of a general similarity of state problems within a given section.

The authors take this opportunity to thank the informants for their very generous replies, and to beg indulgence for the liberal use of their expressions.