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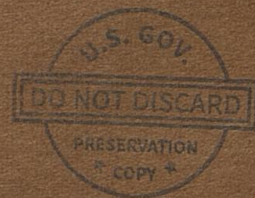
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RURAL RELIEF AND RECOVERY

RURAL MISERY IS NOT
MERELY A DEPRESSION SIT-
UATION BUT THE RESULT OF
LONG-EXISTENT DESTRUCTIVE
FORCES IN RURAL LIFE . . .



WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
SOCIAL PROBLEMS • NUMBER 3

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Number 1. Depression Pioneers

Number 2. Rural Youth

Number 3. Rural Relief and Recovery

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

F. C. Harrington, Administrator

RURAL RELIEF AND RECOVERY



by
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This pamphlet, the third of a series, is designed to present reliable nontechnical information on social problems of general interest. A more comprehensive discussion of the problems covered in the pamphlet will be found in *Seven Lean Years*, by T. J. Woofter, Jr. and Ellen Winston, a publication of the University of North Carolina Press.

RURAL RELIEF AND RECOVERY

MANY PEOPLE find it hard to understand why there should be so much need for relief in rural sections, especially among the farmers who supply the Nation with food. It is much easier to understand the need for relief among the city unemployed, who, without their regular pay checks, are soon without food or the means of paying for shelter.

The farmer has long been a symbol of economic self-sufficiency. Yet, throughout the depression rural families in large numbers were recipients of relief. Rural relief needs were less than city needs at first. But rural relief needs mounted proportionately year after year. Local relief funds became exhausted, and the States and the Federal Government had to take over the burden.

In 1935, when a peak was reached, about 2½ million rural families, comprising more than 10 million persons, were dependent on some form of relief. The urban relief families were still more numerous—4 million.

Since 1935 rural relief needs have declined but not as rapidly or as consistently as had been hoped. New masses of rural population were brought on the relief rolls by the drought of 1936 and the far-reaching effects of the business recession of 1937. Altogether, at one time or another from 1931 through 1937, 3½ million rural families have received desperately needed assistance. That means more than one out of every four rural families.

What has happened to our agricultural population?

Many things have happened, some of which started long before 1929—droughts, crop failures, price collapses, foreclosures, tenancy troubles, soil exhaustion, among others. Our farmers have had their own particular defeats and disasters in addition to bearing their share of the universal privations of the industrial depression.

Their special resource—the land itself as a means of family subsistence—has been lost by a large part of the rural population. Great numbers of landless farm hands are as economically helpless as city factory hands; farm hands, like factory hands, are increasingly displaced by laborsaving machinery.

Today the self-sufficiency of our farmers amounts to this: They are not actually on relief to the same extent as our city workers. And the costs of rural relief are proportionately as well as quantitatively less than those of urban relief. Yet, over the 7-year period from 1931 through 1937 the cost of rural relief totaled 3½ billion dollars. This total takes no account of special loans and benefits for agriculture which operated both to help keep farm families off relief and to reduce the need of those who were forced to apply for public assistance.

Three and a half billion dollars is a large sum. But the alarming thing is the fact that numbers of new rural families come on the relief rolls every year as others go off. Before these new families are forced to apply for aid they have gone through a long period of struggle that has ended in defeat—the total exhaustion of their resources. There are evidently causes that are creating rural poverty and misery almost as fast as it is capable of being relieved.

Much data—human facts as well as statistical figures—have been gathered by the Works Progress

Administration and other Federal agencies that have administered rural relief during the last 6 years, and a good deal of study has been given to this material. We know not only what kinds of farm and village people come on relief, but why they are obliged to apply for assistance. We know that rural misery is not merely a depression situation, but the result of long-existent destructive forces in rural life that had already become acute before the national depression set in. These rural ills were, indeed, contributory factors in bringing about the Nation-wide depression.

Some of the work that is being done in connection with rural relief is of a reconstructive kind, but most of it is necessarily restricted to meeting the emergency of human needs as they become acute. These rural ills, if only palliated but left uncured, may be contributory to future depressions on a national scale, which in turn will suddenly produce widespread rural misery.

Yet these rural ills can be cured. Emergency expenditures for rural relief should be accompanied by a fundamental and statesmanlike attack on the causes of rural poverty.

Not all rural poverty is agricultural in origin. The rural population, by census definition, includes persons in towns or villages with less than 2,500 inhabitants. These small towns and villages, together with scattered nonfarming families in the open country, account for more than half of all rural relief cases. Some of these small towns and villages have grown up about a mine or other industry, and their unemployment has industrial causes. But many are the local centers of farming regions, and their unemployment is the result of agricultural distress.

THE FARMER'S LONG DEPRESSION

The old-time independence of the American farmer was not destroyed at a single blow. Back of the great depression there is a long record of agricultural unrest, reflected in farmers' political organizations and agitation for legislative relief during the period of industrial prosperity before 1929. The proportion of our population engaged in agriculture has been decreasing over the years, but the proportion of our national income going to agriculture has decreased much more rapidly. In 1909 as much as 35 percent of our "gainfully employed population" was dependent on agriculture; and that 35 percent received 19 percent of the national income. In 1930, 21 percent was dependent on agriculture and received only 9 percent of the national income.

In those two decades there was an increasing shift to cash-crop farming. This meant that the farmer raised less food for his family and less feed for his livestock and that his whole standard of living was increasingly dependent on the current market prices for his cash crops. At the same time tractors and gasoline were beginning to take the place of horses and oats. This mechanization of farming has steadily continued, and there are now more than a million and a quarter tractors in use on American farms.

There has been a corresponding increase in efficiency. From 1870 to 1930 the output of the average worker in agriculture increased two and a half times. This increased efficiency has made it necessary for more young people to leave the farms and go to town to make a living. But all farming was not mechanized, and it was hard for the family farm to compete

with large-scale mechanized farms. In order to pay for new equipment and other needed improvements, more and more farmers mortgaged their homesteads. From 1910 to 1928 the farm-mortgage debt increased threefold, reaching a total of 9½ billion dollars. Thus—loaded with debts, obliged to make increasing outlays to keep up with the standard of agricultural efficiency, and without crops to fall back on for family consumption—the American farmer was exposed to the full impact of unfavorable changes in market prices. The new farming system had in fact put him, along with the urban industrialist, at the mercy of economic forces, including credit and finance, over which he had practically no control. And the farm laborer and farm tenant alike were correspondingly put into the situation of the industrial worker, who is likely to be laid off in hard times.

Fewer than one-third of all farm families operated large-scale units. Of the remaining two-thirds many were tenants or laborers on large-scale holdings; some were part-time farmers who gained most of their livelihood from employment off the farm; and still others were so-called “subsistence farmers,” consuming at home more than half of their products.

These small farming units supported more than half of all farm families, but they provided only a small part of the agricultural products that flowed into market channels. In 1929 almost half of the farms had less than \$1,000 worth of products per farm, and altogether they contributed less than 11 percent of the value of all marketed farm products.

In some areas—such as the Appalachian Highlands and the Plains States—increasing population pressed hard on the limited land resources and caused the subdivision of farms into units too small for the

adequate support of a family. Also, here and everywhere, the great demand for profits from cash crops fostered a kind of farming that was ruinous to the soil. Continuous clean cultivation and harvesting exposed the surface of the land to the ravages of rains, and much of our basic resource—the soil—was washed off into the streams and carried to the sea, seriously depleting wide areas and utterly destroying the fertility of other areas.

American agriculture was expanded abnormally to meet the abnormally great demands of warring Europe for grain. After the war not only did this abnormal demand come to an end, but improved agricultural efficiency everywhere cut down severely the former normal export market for American farm products. There was a world-wide surplus of grains and a collapse of world prices. With American agriculture geared to peak production, the export market practically ceased to exist. Shrinkage in domestic purchasing power provided the final push that carried American agriculture over the precipice.

POPULATION PRESSURE

These world events hastened and intensified the agricultural depression in America. But there are other forces that have operated recently to the disadvantage of rural life. Chief among these has been the pressure of population on the resources of certain areas.

Up to the early twenties, when immigration was cut off, Europe was a principal source of man power for our growing industries and expanding agriculture. Recently it is the farms that have been the source of new labor. The city birth rate is hardly high enough

to maintain city population, but the farms have supplied population sufficient to meet the labor needs of both country and city.

The farm rate of population increase has been much more rapid in the poorer than in the more prosperous areas. It is the Cotton South, the Appalachian-Ozark Mountains, the Lake States Cut-Over Region, and the Plains States that have contributed most heavily to the supply of new man power, much more so than the more prosperous New England, Middle Atlantic, and Midwest areas.

The resultant population movement from the farms, and especially from the poorer farms, to the areas of industrial opportunity was abruptly blocked by the depression of the early thirties. From 1920 to 1930 the net farm-to-city movement was about 600,000 persons a year. From 1930 to 1935 it was only about 120,000 a year. There were not enough jobs in the cities for the workers already there. Ambitious young people who went to the city to look for work came back defeated, and others never left the farm. There were many, too, who had gone to the city before but now came home because they had lost their jobs.

The farms are not able to provide jobs for these additional workers. Many older farm workers are out of jobs because of the mechanization of agriculture. The industries of rural villages are equally unable to provide jobs for the young people whose path to the cities has been blocked by the depression. Some of these unemployed workers from the farms and villages become migratory laborers, as do the farm workers driven out by droughts. Others stay on the farms and in the villages and are only partially employed.

UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Population increase in rural low-income areas has meant a general lack of opportunity. Those future American citizens who are reared on farms and in villages have less chance to get an education, and far less public provision for their health and welfare, than those who are brought up in cities.

The agricultural States have more children to bring up and less money to spend in bringing up children than the industrial States. On the farms of South Carolina, in 1930, each 100 persons in the productive age class (15 to 65) had to support 78 children under 15 years of age. In urban California there were only 30 children under 15 years of age to each 100 persons in the productive age class; and in urban Michigan there were only 41 children per 100 older people. The agricultural States are those with the lowest incomes per person. They have to provide public education and health facilities as best they can for a disproportionately large number of children out of a disproportionately small income. Try as they may, these States are not able to give their young people equal opportunities with those of other States.

This should be a matter of concern to the industrial States, which will sooner or later be in need of the young workers from the agricultural States. Of the workers they get, a great many will be poorly educated. It will be difficult for industry to use such workers in any but the simplest tasks.

THE PLIGHT OF RURAL YOUTH

The plight of rural youth is one of serious import for the future and full of grave perplexities for the

present. It is a tragic fact that more young people than ever before in the Nation's history should be coming to maturity in these years of great unemployment. Many of them have never held a paying job that was not financed by Federal funds. Nothing short of a very great expansion in private employment can offer any hope of regular industrial or agricultural work for great numbers of them.

A survey of rural families on relief showed that of the boys and girls with any kind of job experience 80 percent had done only unskilled work. Most of the girls had been domestic servants. This is a measure not only of their actual job opportunities but also of their previous educational opportunities, including opportunities for vocational training.

The one favorable effect of the depression upon youth has been to prolong school attendance. In spite of restricted budgets, rural schools have shown record enrollments. But, unfortunately, it is in the rural areas where there is the greatest surplus of youth that there exists the greatest lack of high schools.

Rural youth get less schooling than urban youth, farm youth less than village youth, and rural youth on relief the least schooling of all. As late as 1930 the United States Census showed that 1 out of every 20 farm youth was unable even to read and write. Boys on the farm generally get less education than girls. Facilities are now improving, but youth on farms when in search of education have serious difficulties in meeting the problems of distance and transportation.

Many of these young people will finally seek their livelihood in towns and cities. But special vocational training, when any at all is available, is limited to agriculture and home economics.

In the joblessness of rural youth there are dangers of two kinds. Prolonged lack of jobs and wages in the period of young manhood and young womanhood means an unnatural delay in adjustment both to their life's work and to marriage. For youth there is no adequate substitute for a job. Employment is indispensable for self-respect and for orderly habits as well as for self-support, and without it youth's morale and character are likely to deteriorate.

Besides this danger to rural youth in its joblessness, there is another danger to our national economy. In areas, such as the South, where population pressure is severe, industrial wages tend to remain low because farm boys need jobs so badly.

In time, we are assured by statisticians, the slackening rate of the general population increase will tend to reduce the pressure in overpopulated rural areas. Reviving industry, we hope, will provide more jobs for rural youth. But for the next two decades there will be a large farm population that will even in normal times be living in a state of dangerous insecurity and will in times of depression inevitably become a charge on public funds. Against this prospect there stands only the possibility of a widespread adoption by this insecure group of methods of farming which will both increase the production of marketable crops and raise the standard of food growing for home use.

DISADVANTAGED FARM CLASSES

As farm ownership becomes increasingly difficult, the mass of landless agricultural workers grows larger. The plantations of the South have their multitude of laborers; the large-scale farms of the

Southwest, the beet farms of the mountain area, and also, to some extent, the wheat fields depend heavily on migratory labor in planting and harvesting; while wide areas of both the Cotton South and the Midwest operate through a tenant class.

There were 2,700,000 agricultural wage workers in 1930. Farm hands used to be young men of the same social class as the farm owners, and their farm jobs represented a step up the ladder toward farm ownership. Now it has become increasingly difficult for them to climb up the ladder; many of them must remain farm laborers all their lives. In 1934 the whole yearly earnings of the average laborer on a cotton plantation were \$180 and house-occupancy. The earnings of migratory-casual laborers on farms, after deducting expenses of traveling from job to job, amounted to \$124 for the whole year. Most of these workers are the heads of families.

Farm tenancy has been increasing rapidly in the last 20 years. More than 3 million farmers—over two-fifths of the total—did not in 1930 own the land they farmed. Some of these were relatives of the owner and could look forward to farm ownership. Others owned their animals and tools and were able to pay cash rent for the land they farmed. But nearly a million and three quarters of them—more than half of all farm tenants—were share croppers, economically helpless and dependent.

Share tenants in the South were formerly chiefly Negroes. But in recent years share tenancy has increased faster among whites than among Negroes, and white share tenants are now in the majority.

The share tenancy system concentrates on cash crops, and the tenant's share is far from adequate for his family's living. There is little subsistence garden-

ing to fall back on for home consumption, and the family diet is usually deficient. The tenants are constantly a year behind in their finances, and they have to pay excessively high rates of interest for their credit advances. They constitute a group as economically insecure as the agricultural laborers, and both classes come very extensively on relief.

Finally, there is a fair-sized group of part-time farmers. Many of them have never made their entire living from farming. It is for them a side line, and they get most of their money income from industry. One-sixth of all farm families—those in which the farmer has 50 days or more of work each year away from the farm—can be classified as part-time farming families, dependent for cash on employment in mines, in lumbering, and in near-by industrial towns. Few of them realized how insecure their position was until these industries shut down. Yet, they would have been in a far worse position without their farm houses and the part of their living that they could get from their farm gardens. It has often been impossible for them to extend their farming operations so as to produce for the market. Part-time farming offers hope of a degree of security under favorable conditions, but a certain minimum of outside employment for wages is necessary to its success.

FARMERS ON RELIEF

Owners, tenants, part-time farmers, laborers, villagers—all these different classes in the rural population suffered from the depression, but in varying degrees.

The farm owners were the best situated for prolonged endurance of depression conditions. At the

time when the largest number of rural people were obliged to ask for Federal assistance, only 1 farm owner out of every 17 was on the relief rolls. The numbers of farm owners on rural relief were lowest of all in the prosperous Corn Belt and in the Hay and Dairy Area. Owners were on relief in the greatest proportion—1 out of every 5—in the Lake States Cut-Over Area.

Comparison of farmers in the same neighborhood helps to explain why many were on relief. They had small farms, sometimes less than one-third of the average acreage in their neighborhood; and they also lacked adequate livestock and farm equipment. In some instances they were part-time farmers who had lost their supplementary industrial employment. In other instances they were too heavily loaded with debt.

The landless farmers were much less able to meet the depression. One out of every seven tenants was on relief in February 1935; and it is estimated that, at one time or another during recent years, more than one-fourth of all the country's farm tenants have had to be given public assistance. In the drought-stricken Dakotas, over half of the tenant farmers were on relief at one time. They had poor land, small holdings, little livestock, and worn-out farm machinery; crop failures and low market prices had run them into debt and they had lost to their creditors what livestock and equipment they possessed.

One of the great differences between self-supporting tenants and those on relief was in the extent of their education. Those with as much as a grade-school education weathered the depression much better than their semi-illiterate neighbors.

But in every instance it was the tenants with the larger and better equipped farms who first managed to get themselves off relief and back to self-support.

Of the share tenants more than 1 out of 12 were on relief in the peak month; and the proportion would have been higher had it not been for the aid this group was getting through rural rehabilitation loans. In the South, where share tenancy is most extensive, about twice as many share croppers as other tenants were on relief. Many share croppers already had such low standards of living that their condition was little changed by the depression. And of all farming groups the share croppers had the greatest insecurity in retaining their connection with farming. Almost half of the share croppers on relief were entirely without work of any kind. The amount of relief granted to croppers was very small, usually about \$9 a month for a family. This reflects the low level of living standards in the rural South, and in the Cotton Kingdom in particular.

What proportion of all farm-labor families was on relief cannot be determined accurately, but it was high. About 150,000 such families were dependent on Federal support in June 1935, and more than 275,000 had been on relief in the previous midwinter. Most farm laborers had no experience in any other kind of work. They had little or no savings. Within 3 months, on the average, after the loss of a job, they had to go on relief. Tenants, in comparison, could maintain themselves for 7 months and farm owners for 13 months after losing their farms.

VILLAGE PROBLEMS

In the winter of 1934-35 there were on relief 1 million heads of rural families who had held nonagri-

cultural jobs or had had no previous wage-work experience. In June 1935 one in every eight village families was dependent on Federal relief funds. Conditions varied greatly from one region to another. In the Hay and Dairy Area only 1 out of 13 village families was on relief; in the Lake States Cut-Over Area the rate was 1 in every 4; and in the drought-stricken Dakotas the rate was 1 village family on relief out of every 5.

Family distress in different kinds of villages has different origins. Some villages are little commercial service centers for agricultural hinterlands, and their fortunes rise and fall with those of the farm people. When farmers cannot buy, these agricultural villages stagnate and many workers lose their jobs.

But the workers in other rural villages and small towns are dependent not on farmer buying-power but on employment in the local branch of some industry, such as mining, textiles, or lumbering. Their economic future and that of the villages depend on whether the local industries can revive. Some of these towns and villages may be expected to thrive, together with their basic industries; others are doomed to become stranded.

The prospects of lumbering villages appear to be among the most hopeless. When the timber is cut, their means of livelihood is gone, and the workers must either follow the sawmill or go back to unproductive farming on cut-over land.

The prospects of many small mining towns are not much better. The industry now tends to concentrate on the better mines in the more accessible areas. The number of bituminous coal mines in operation decreased from 8,300 to 5,600 between 1919 and 1929. But the miner cannot follow the job,

for increased mechanical efficiency of operations requires fewer miners; there was a decrease of 100,000 bituminous coal miners during the 1919-1929 period. The severest reductions in employment were in the small mines scattered around the borders of the main coal regions. All through the coal regions of the Appalachians can be seen grimy, decaying villages where the miners will probably never again have a chance to get work in mining.

Similar conditions are to be found in some of the iron mining villages. And the shift of the textile industry to the South has left stranded village populations in New England.

Two-fifths of all village people on relief have been unskilled industrial workers. One-fourth reported agricultural experience. Another fifth comprised skilled and semiskilled workers. There were few white-collar workers on village relief. In a large number of cases—17 percent—a woman was the head of the household on relief. Aged persons were also numerous. And many village families were on relief because they contained no person capable at the time of holding a job.

PROBLEM AREAS

Different areas have shown rural distress to an unequal extent. The Corn Belt and the Hay and Dairy Area had the smallest proportions of rural people on relief.

When the rural counties with the highest relief loads were plotted on a map, they fell into certain type-of-farming areas. The highest relief figures were found in the Lake States Cut-Over Area, the Appalachian-Ozark Area, and the Eastern and

Western Cotton Areas. The Great Plains Area was added by the droughts of 1934 and 1936. These problem areas are chiefly areas of chronic distress, of stabilized poverty.

In the cut-over counties around the Great Lakes many farmers could formerly depend on lumbering or mining for part-time employment and have never been able to make a living without a supplementary cash wage. Other farmers, coming in, found too late that the cut-over lands are unsuited to profitable farming.

The Ozarks and the Appalachians were recognized as problem areas long before the depression. Here, after forests were cut over and unprofitable mines were abandoned, the hillsides were cleared for farming, and the result has been ruinous erosion of the soil. The land is inadequate to support the rapidly increasing farm population. "It is difficult," says a recent report on the Appalachians, "to see how under any program of rehabilitation or reemployment all the man power of this area can be absorbed in any industrial or agricultural employment possible at the moment."

In the South the one-crop system, without rotation, and the lack of livestock have meant that the fertility of the soil could be renewed only by use of expensive commercial fertilizer in ever-increasing quantities. Twelve Southeastern States are responsible for three-fifths of all our fertilizer costs, which in 1929 amounted to over 271 million dollars. This region—that of the Old South—is our largest chronic problem area of rural poverty.

These are the large sore spots. Other smaller problem areas are to be found where distress is as intense but not as widespread.

DROUGHT DISTRESS

General agricultural recovery was sharply interrupted by a series of droughts in the Great Plains States. Recent drought conditions made their appearance as early as 1930 and reached their cumulative climax in the summers of 1934 and 1936, when large parts of 10 States were drought-stricken.

Drought has been a constant danger and a recurrent affliction ever since the days of earliest settlement on the Plains. Wherever pioneer farmers pushed beyond the irregular line of 20-inch annual rainfall, they were invading the danger zone. And, as we now realize, the plowing up of grazing land to increase wheat production in times of high prices greatly increased the danger.

The population of the area has adjusted itself to drought conditions by moving out in recurrent dry periods; other farmers have moved in as soon as good rains have offered better prospects. Many of those who left the area have moved West, where they swell the army of "fruit tramps" and "pea pickers" who man California's great farms in the harvest season. Since 1934 this population movement outward from the area has been partially checked by the provision of Federal aid.

The drought damage of 1934 and 1936 was added to depression distress, and for the last 4 years a very large proportion of the people in the area has had to depend on public assistance. There are two main areas of drought damage. The northern area centers in the Dakotas, eastern Montana, northeastern Wyoming, and west central Minnesota. This covers the Spring Wheat Area and contains some ranching and mixed agricultural sections. The southern

area, centering in the adjacent corners of Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Texas, and New Mexico, comprises the so-called "Dust Bowl." The northern and southern areas have wide differences in soil, climate, topography, and type of farming, but they are alike in deficiency of rainfall. These two parched regions include nearly one-tenth of the Nation's land area.

When the droughts came, crops failed and the wind blew the topsoil off the farms. Debts came due, local banks closed, the personal credit of able farmers vanished, and the tax resources of local governments were soon exhausted in attempting to meet relief needs.

This started earlier than most people realize. Two weeks after the Federal Emergency Relief Administration was set up in 1933, the first petition from drought sufferers was received. Early in June 1933 the Red Cross gave notice that the situation had passed beyond its powers, and the FERA took over the burden of drought relief.

When severe drought struck again in 1934, the Government was forced to take unusual measures, through the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, by rental and benefit payments, and by the purchase of livestock that would otherwise have perished. At the peak of distress more than one out of every five households were receiving assistance. As recently as the winter of 1937-38 the Farm Security Administration was obliged to refuse rural rehabilitation loans to many farmers simply because there were no prospects of a crop. In July-December 1936, in 16 counties, more than half of the inhabitants were recipients of Federal aid; and in 1 county more than 85 percent were in this situation of dependence.

Such facts bring up the question: What is the future of the Great Plains—depopulation or reconstruction? The farmers of this region have been aided by Government subsidies for the past 7 years, and assistance in some form must continue. No general evacuation of the area can easily be imagined. And the fact is that this area, even with little rainfall, is capable of supporting a considerable population, but only if its agriculture is readjusted to fit the natural conditions.

This means a restoration of much of the land to pasture. Field crops can be grown along stream beds. It is the high plains that should be left out of cultivation, so that they may be covered permanently by native vegetation. How much land will this leave for cultivation? That is not certain, but a recent study of 20 counties in the heart of the Dust Bowl led to the recommendation that 52 percent of all land, including both cultivated and idle land, be given back to Nature. That still leaves a good deal of land for crops. Such a program will not support the peak population of 1930, but it will provide many of the people of the region with means of self-support.

RURAL RELIEF AND REHABILITATION

Rural relief is still being conducted as an emergency activity, on a hand-to-mouth basis. Sooner or later public opinion and Congress will have to decide upon some kind of long-range reconstructive program for rural regions.

The first depression necessity was the provision of food, clothing, and shelter for those desperately in need, and this was properly done through direct relief. A variety of programs have since been

developed to meet different kinds of need. The Works Progress Administration now provides work for the employable unemployed. Various groups of unemployable people are being assisted by the Social Security programs of aid to the aged, to the blind, and to dependent children. Various needs of young people are being ministered to by the Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Youth Administration. The special needs of farmers have led to the setting up of the Subsistence Homesteads program, the Rural Rehabilitation program, and the Resettlement and Farm Security programs. The history of these organizations need not be told here. Our concern is with their attempts to make rural people again self-supporting after they have fallen into extreme need.

It has never been possible to relocate or rehabilitate more than a small proportion of needy farmers. In November 1937, after several hundred thousand farmers had been removed from the relief rolls by rehabilitation loans, the proportions of farm families receiving different kinds of public assistance (excluding Farm Security loans) were as follows: WPA, 40 percent; Farm Security grants, 6 percent; aid to the aged, to the blind, and to dependent children, 39 percent; and State and local direct relief, 15 percent.

Direct relief grants were made by the FERA, up to 1935, to individual households primarily on the basis of the deficiency in the family budget; and such relief grants varied from one section to another in accordance with local standards and cost of living, amount of supplementary income, and policies of administrators. The return of direct relief to the States has resulted in a marked decline in the adequacy of relief grants in some of the poorer States.

In October 1938, 13 rural States were making relief grants that averaged less than \$10 a month per family. In some States funds were so limited that large numbers of those in distress were granted no relief whatever except surplus commodities.

Direct relief is of course only a temporary palliative for the distress of an agricultural population. Work relief has preserved the morale of the rural unemployed and contributed many social services, such as libraries, school lunches, and public health measures, as well as such projects as roads, dams, and public buildings. But work relief, however valuable in its results, does not permanently remove the original causes of farm poverty. The goal of any constructive program for the relief of farmers must be to reinstate them in productive agriculture.

Rehabilitation loans are designed to maintain the farmer on a farm, where he may preserve his agricultural skills and resources. But under conditions of drought (and also under flood conditions) it may be hopeless to expect farmers to grow crops and repay loans. At the same time it may be desirable to keep them on the land by the expedient of temporary direct relief. A program of aid to needy farmers must be elastic enough to fit the individual and local as well as the national situation.

The use of rehabilitation loans instead of direct relief requires the extending of a new type of credit. These loans are made on the basis of the need of the family and its prospects for rehabilitation on the land. There has been a high percentage of repayments. This is due to the principles that have governed the program: first, the risks have been spread over thousands of borrowers; second, these borrowers have been carefully selected; and third,

their subsequent farming operations and household budgets have been efficiently supervised.

The service thus developed has been of a type not available from any commercial agency. The whole experience gained in this program tends strongly to contradict the opinion sometimes expressed to the effect that people on rural relief are so handicapped as to constitute a substandard group. A recent survey of 230,000 rehabilitation borrowers showed that, from the time of the granting of loans through the 1937 crop year, they had increased their average individual net worth by \$253, a grand total of over \$58,000,000.

THE PREVENTION OF RURAL POVERTY

We have seen that 3½ billion dollars were spent by private and public agencies on rural relief from 1931 through 1937. And we may well pause to ask the question, What if this sum had been available in earlier years for prevention? Is it not possible that much of later relief needs would never have developed?

Certainly it would have been possible to prevent much of the distress which these expenditures have helped to alleviate. And—quite aside from the human suffering that might have been prevented—it would have paid the Nation to spend these billions in prevention.

It is high time for us to adopt a long-range point of view on rural needs. Our need is for further knowledge of what to do and for agreement on what to work for. Only when the best knowledge of the experts in these matters is backed by the force of public opinion can we work with full effectiveness toward the prevention of rural poverty.

There is desperate need to take measures for the preservation of our soil. The need is immediate. Unprotected topsoil can be carried away by a few rains; and the loss cannot be made good except by years of painstaking effort. And surely, if patriotism ultimately means defense of the homeland, then efforts at soil conservation must be classed as a fundamental type of patriotism.

Underlying all our hopes for rural America is the effort to achieve a more balanced agriculture—one geared not only to adequate production for all available markets but also to the conservation of the soil and to increased security for the farm population. The groundwork for much of this program has been laid. But in a country as vast and varied as ours, agricultural reconstruction can only be effected on a regional basis. To combine into one national plan steps that will meet the economic needs of different regions is no simple task. Midwest dairy farmers, for example, tend to view with alarm the increase in livestock needed in the rural Southeast to balance its cotton economy. Again, while the AAA program was of great benefit in most agricultural regions, the subsistence farmers of New England—who did not receive large AAA payments—complained that the cost of their meat, flour, and clothing was increased by the whole program.

Difficult human factors are involved in the problem of regional-national balance in our agriculture, involved perhaps most of all in crop control. In many farming areas the growing of wheat, cotton, tobacco, and orchard crops is carried on primarily by large-scale operations rather than on family-sized farms. Any cutting down of production for the market affects these two types of farms very differ-

ently. The large-scale farms—like factories—lay off their help. But on family farms a decrease in cash crops can be to some extent balanced by increases in the family living from the farm (instead of from the store). This may mean a considerable saving. One of the most significant findings in a recent study of tenancy showed that, while the landlord's income increased in proportion to the amount of cotton grown, the tenant's real income increased in proportion to the amount of foodstuffs grown for home use.

In view of our potential demands, American agriculture must be geared to some expansion, which would thus accommodate part of the increase in rural population. Yet, our existing crop surpluses and our dwindling markets point to the present need of adjusting farm production to effective commercial demand, which can be accomplished only through crop control over a period of years. Overproduction results in low prices, and these low prices have been the direct cause of the forced sale of many farms and the displacement of many farm laborers.

The possibilities of an increased use of land in balanced general farming need to be considered together with the necessities for commercial crop control and subsidies. There is especial need for a consistent land-use policy for both the drought area and the Cotton Belt.

It has been suggested that crop restrictions should be applied more stringently to large than to small farms. This would give new entrants into agriculture a better chance to balance their general farming with a cash crop. This policy would in the long run increase the number of small owners; and it would decrease the need for that group of migratory agricultural laborers, hired men, and tenants

which comes so quickly and so extensively on relief. The development of such a trend in American agriculture would correspondingly diminish the need for rural relief in the future.

It should be possible to secure for agriculture the benefits of mechanization and large-scale operation, while at the same time effecting an equitable distribution of farm income. One proposal toward that end depends upon cooperatively owned and managed farms. Successful methods of cooperative farming (as distinguished from cooperative marketing by farmers) have still to be worked out by experimentation under American conditions. The current plantation system combines large-scale management with the individual operations of the share croppers. Its method differs, of course, from the cooperative method in that under the plantation system the share cropper owns none of the property, has no voice in its management, and receives a much smaller share of the total income.

The benefits of crop control and farm subsidies will reach different parts of the agricultural population in differing degrees, as long as we have great numbers of farmers who own none of the land they till. Any program designed to reduce the need for rural relief must be specifically designed to reduce tenancy.

A certain amount of tenancy, especially for young farmers, may be expected to continue. But the present situation is one in which tenancy is increasing and ownership diminishing. A permanent tenant class is being developed, one in which the daughters marry tenants and the sons become life-long tenants. The development of such a permanently dependent class is socially deplorable.

The President's Committee on Tenancy has recommended two courses: first, improvement of the condition of those who are tenants; and second, assistance to tenants who are ambitious to become land owners. In carrying out the first item of such a program, England is a hundred years ahead of this country; for England has protected the landlord-tenant relationship by laws governing leases and has established a system of special land courts for dealing with cases arising under these laws.

We need in America to formulate sharing arrangements that will result in (1) diversified crop production, (2) protection of both landlord and tenant in their interests in improvement of lands and buildings, and (3) increased security of tenure for satisfactory tenants. As for assistance to enable tenants to become farm owners, that has been begun by the Farm Security Administration.

The permanent rehabilitation of village populations in certain areas is dependent on the revival of rural industries. There is no prospect of the revival of lumbering and mining operations in many localities. The small towns and villages formerly supported by these industries are likely to remain stranded towns until they become "ghost towns," without an inhabitant. Many indications point to an increase in the number of these stranded towns as the natural resources at such places are exhausted.

As for the promotion of rural industries in connection with farming villages, little appears to have been accomplished by the efforts made thus far. Such a development can only proceed as part of the further decentralization of industry; at present the tendency toward decentralization does not extend beyond the outer rims of large industrial centers.

An effective rural housing program would improve the living conditions of many thousands of rural families. But with construction scattered over wide areas, the practical difficulties are far greater than in urban housing.

The problems of rural childhood and youth need special attention. Our national welfare demands that these future citizens be given a good education and one consistent with national rather than local resources. It has already been pointed out that there is a great disproportion among the States in their financial ability to support public education and that some of the poorest States have the most children to educate. The equalization of educational opportunities can only be accomplished through the use of Federal funds for this purpose.

Better education in rural regions will help not only to improve nutrition and living standards (in so far as malnutrition and unsanitary conditions are the result of a lack of knowledge) but will also create a general demand for higher standards. In addition, more prolonged schooling for youth will relieve to some extent the immediate pressure of competition for unskilled jobs.

Vocational guidance services are now almost wholly lacking in rural communities. There is a gap between school and work which points to the need for adult education centering in vocational instruction but broad enough to constitute a preparation for the unpredictable economic opportunities of our changing world. Since much of rural youth is in the long run destined to become a part of our industrial urban population, vocational training should not be based exclusively upon the narrow range of existing rural economic opportunities.

There is a great lack of library services in rural areas. More than 70 percent of our rural population has no library services except such as are meagerly provided through school libraries where these exist. Libraries are necessary to meet both educational and recreational needs.

Public-health services are sadly deficient in rural communities. In over three-fourths of our States less than 50 percent of the rural population has the benefit of a full-time public-health unit's services; and for the average State the part of the rural population getting such services is less than a third. In the whole country there are fewer than 50 rural counties that have public-health services comparable to those that exist in many up-to-date municipalities. Yet rural communities can provide themselves at relatively low cost with much more adequate health services than they now have. Public hospitals can extend medical services to needy families. Traveling clinics for school children have long since proved their worth.

The extension of such necessary services now awaits an equalization of funds over the richer and poorer areas of the Nation. The need is sufficiently evident for the use of the broader tax base of the whole Nation. The States, in addition to their responsibilities in providing for public education and public health, now bear the responsibility of caring for all unemployables on relief and of matching Federal appropriations for the care of the aged, the blind, and dependent children.

The spread of social services throughout rural regions will give considerable new employment to rural people and equalize rural income. At present urban people take the work done by health, library, recreational, welfare, and character-building agencies,

public and private, as a matter of course. Their increase in rural areas will serve to bring closer the ideal of equal opportunity for all.

THE PROBLEM AHEAD

The rural situation is complicated, and the outlook may appear to be gloomy. It is true that there is no justification for a facile optimism about the future of our rural population.

Yet, if a reasonable amount of foresight is now exercised, the decline of American agriculture can be stopped before it forces American farmers down to the level of a permanently helpless peasantry. To solve their problems will require a long-time program. Some very fundamental planning is called for—broader than any single program of land use, tenancy reform, tax adjustment, or rural relief, and necessarily combining all of these measures.

If returning urban prosperity should in the meantime cause us to forget rural problems, they will again pile up a staggering relief bill in the next depression. And these problems will still remain to be solved, as they remain at present after all that the Government has spent in providing temporary help.

The costs of widespread rural poverty are so enormous that such poverty should not be permitted to continue. The necessary large expenditure that must be made on a constructive program is the price we must pay for our failure to begin that work in the past, when prevention would have cost much less.

The rural problem is a national problem. The only permanent prosperity that this Nation can achieve will be one based on the solid foundation of a healthily prospering rural population.

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