

Policy, Politics, and Production

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PRESIDENT EISENHOWER has shown admirable courage in forthrightly tackling the farm problem. That problem is one of his Administration's greatest—and obviously farm policy needs some modernization and improvement. Current parity considerations are related to 1910–1914 conditions. The real conditions of agricultural production and the relation to our whole society and economy today are different from those of 40 years ago. Is it logical to base a farm program on outdated relationships?

A higher percentage of the country's income today is being spent on food than has been spent in the past. Fewer people are needed on the farm per thousand of population and technological advancement is making possible more efficient farming. The feature article in this issue (page 60) presents a significant example of progress in farming efficiency.

Improvement of income per unit cost in farming, as in any other business, is a basic goal. The drive for such improvement never should be forsaken. Any farm policy should take this into consideration.

The heart of the problem, of course, lies in the achievement of a balance between production and consumption. The U.S.A. is one of the very few well-fed countries in which the balance lies heavily on the side of production. Throughout the world there are a great many countries in which the likelihood of producing enough food to provide a sufficient balanced diet for the population is remote. While we do not foresee difficulties of this kind in our nation in the near future, we cannot presume that they may never arise. Only a few years ago there was some concern over the prediction that our population would reach 190 to 200 million by 1975. We now have reason to believe that we readily can provide a good diet for such a population. But already population estimates for 1975 have increased upward to as much as 206 million. Very few countries of the world have a population increase equal to ours.

We must be prepared for situations not foreseen. The ideal lies in an agricultural industry and economy which feeds its population well, while at the same time having reserve capacity with which to meet extenuating or unpredicted circumstances.

In the interest of sound practice, our farmers should be encouraged to produce to meet our domestic needs and any other available real markets, on the minimum amount of land needed and at the lowest cost per unit. It would yield them a maximum total profit, while

maintaining strong reserve capacity. And the improvement of practices developed for high-efficiency farming could be applied to the reserve land capacity when needed—as in an emergency—to give us a tremendous production.

An appraisal of the response to certain aspects of the Marshall Plan aid indicates convincingly that other countries are not pleased by the feeling that they are dependent on our charity. Sincere and selfless charity is admirable. But there is reasonable doubt that the giving away of masses of foodstuffs abroad, purchased from American farm surplus by American taxpayers, will please the recipient countries any more than it should please the taxpayer—if it is a device for unloading surpluses.

A farm program is needed that will encourage better farming practices and share knowledge of improved techniques with other countries that may be interested. It will place the farmers of our nation in a more self-respectable position and will do the same for other nations. It will take marginal land out of impractical cultivation and it will develop a reserve for meeting emergencies. And it can keep up the farm income—a matter of profit, not of gross take.

One of the fundamental considerations listed by the President in discussing the Administration's approach to the farm problem was that research and education are indispensable. These are the tools by which we can develop our efficiency to the point where farm production can meet our needs while giving a good return to the agricultural producers without bringing forth surpluses which must be excessively underwritten by government support. There is a great deal of evidence that we can produce in such a fashion while maintaining reserve capacity which could meet even a great increase in demand. Research and technological progress must be pursued with the greatest of vigor, but at the same time we must seek and develop constantly better means for putting research to work.

Realistically, the political aspects of the farm problem are very great. But the continuation of the strength of the American economy as a whole demands a sound basis for the future of agricultural progress. Constant technological improvement is one of the most important stones in the foundation of a good program.