

Politics and the Future

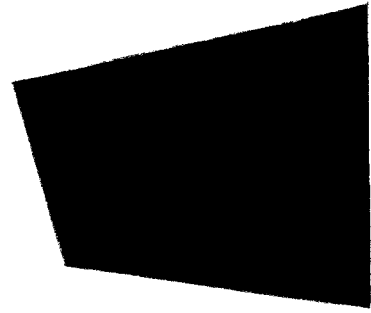
AS WE GO TO PRESS, a fierce battle is running in Congress between the supporters of Secretary Benson's views on an agricultural program that is best for the country and supporters of the views of the House Agriculture Committee. Secretary Benson, backed by President Eisenhower, favors departure from the rigid price support program, while the House committee is fighting for its continuation at 90% of parity. The Secretary has declared that he will not support any program which he does not believe is in the best interest of the welfare of the country as a whole. Members of the group known as the "farm bloc" Congressmen are pledged to fight for what they believe to be the interests of people in the constituencies from which they were elected.

The vote of one small inefficient farmer is equal to that of one modern efficient, progressive farmer. This is an important factor in the decision by the Congressmen as to how they shall vote on a farm program. Two weeks ago, we reported the opinion of Stanley Andrews (AG AND FOOD, June 23, page 668) that while 25% of the farmers are highly progressive, perhaps as many as 50% are falling behind, technically. Some of these are dragging their feet. The significance of such a trend is worthy of contemplation.

Farming as a "way of life" is losing its place in our society, just as has the individual weaver, the individual cabinet maker, and others who a century ago were important individuals in every community and whose success and progress were not necessarily related to efficiency. There is a degree of sadness attached to such an idea and it means the disappearance of a certain amount of color and human warmth from our culture. But the whole structure of our national economy has changed a great deal and that fact must be faced whether or not it is personally pleasing. Agriculture has become an industry and a business and in the type of industry which has evolved in this country, if the inefficient cannot do a good job those who are more efficient and effective will replace them.

The encouragement of good agriculture practices to enable the farmer to help himself should be much more the primary responsibility of government in this area than should the continuous propping up of those who are in difficulty. The Department of Agriculture is doing a remarkable job of finding ways by which the farmer may become more efficient and thus help himself. The USDA was established with the aim of keeping the farmer informed and we see no more permanent and effective aid that could be given agriculture by government than helping the USDA with that objective.

The percentage of farmers is decreasing. In the feature article of this issue (page 724) we learn that while a farm worker in 1904 was able to produce enough food and fiber for seven persons, today he can produce for 18. The number of people depending



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on agriculture for food also is increasing at an impressive rate. Over-all percentage of farmers in the U. S. is going down.

In a previous issue we reported comments which urged better public relations for the farmer, who was said to have become a whipping boy. Continued or increased high support of farm prices in a society certain to contain a decreasing percentage of people having direct contact with the farm is not likely to improve the farmer's public relations. The percentage of the direct farm vote is growing smaller. Will this put the farmer and agriculture in a disadvantageous position? Let us hope that the determined effort by Secretary Benson, backed by the President, may become a trend in government in the interests of the future of agriculture and the people who work in it, directly and indirectly. In their own interests, those people should move to encourage a healthy, not an ailing, agriculture and a government which does the same thing.

Interdependence Among Sciences

TWO WEEKS AGO, we attended a soil microbiology conference at Purdue. The expressed purpose of the conference was to examine the needs and accomplishments in the field and to stimulate interest, thinking, and research in soil microbiology. It appeared that a great deal was accomplished. In summarizing, one of the session chairmen noted that much of the work of the conference was analysis rather than synthesis and the need now is for more of a synthesis approach.

Directly in line with that idea was the striking impression we got of the many branches of science involved in the field of soil microbiology. Chemistry, biology, geology, bacteriology, and many others came into the discussions. Plant pathology in soil management for example came in for relatively little discussion but its importance is quite evident.

This is only one example of the many fields of the great area of agricultural and food science in such a position. As we proceed further in our knowledge of the highly specialized branches of science, the greater is our realization of the dependence of each upon other specialized sciences. The whole is a fabric rather than a series of individual threads and most effective use of that fabric depends upon a greater exchange of knowledge among the sciences.