

The Frontiers Are Not All Developed

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OUR FARMERS generally have gone far in embracing the findings of science. Fertilizer use skyrockets. Powerful and vastly more effective insect and disease control chemicals come proven from the experiment station to us almost every year. The plant breeder plods on and his magic brings forth better things. The vast facilities of industry constantly bring new wonders. Then on the agricultural front, in the field, the county agent carries out the final and clinching step—the field demonstration. There, the attentive passing eye can see the new lesson being written in the soil.

Yes, we have gone far in applying science to the land. But there is one great frontier of production left that is hardly touched. I speak of supplementary irrigation in the rainfall belt.

We are prone to speak of our abundant water resources. In South Carolina you could swim anywhere in the state if the rain that fell in a year stayed where it hit the ground. But the trouble is it doesn't come regularly. Nor does it stay there. We average about 6 droughts with a duration of two weeks or longer a year.

Now these recurring droughts in the rainfall belt don't always ruin crops. But they do take a mighty toll. Earliest recollection carries me back to the small farm where the principle items that went into farming were our strong arms and the old compost heap down there in the edge of the lot. Crops were pitched in the best of wisdom. And in June they often carried the golden promise of a bumper harvest. But all too often one of those withering droughts came in July or August and parched that promising prospect into a sorry spectacle. The harvest was meager. And the folks were disappointed. They tightened their belts, wore patched clothes, and had a hard winter. But when spring rolled around again, the sheriff hadn't come to sell them out. And they still had the two principle elements that went into the making of a crop. Their right arms were as

strong as ever, and the old compost heap had accumulated even bigger.

Not so now. Farming is big business. At every turn it calls for money. And when you get your crops laid by, you have your fortune staked out there in those fields. And there must be a goodly harvest, or your friend the sheriff will likely have to be out to see you.

Therefore, with costs high, and with no signs of their coming down, the farmer has to do everything in his power to ensure his harvests. He knows about good seed, proper fertilization, good stands, insect and disease control, and the like. And he can make a good crop, *if he gets the water!* Ah, there's the rub.

Out West they spend millions and go to almost any extreme to get that precious stuff—water. How much simpler is our task! The Almighty sends the water to us in the form of the gentle showers and the dashing storms. But much of it runs away to the sea and is salted when drought strikes and we need it. The ingenuity of modern man can contrive to retain some of that water for use when drought strikes. It entails reforesting the steep areas, sodding, terracing, contour farming, ponds, reservoirs, and the like. Much of that is already under way.

We have overproduction with most things already. My answer to that is, *poor farming is surely no remedy for what ails us.* Each acre planted must make its utmost. Supplementary irrigation in the rainfall belt is now largely the undeveloped key to that. It is coming. In our state we now have some of it in every county. I have yet to find a farmer who doesn't like it. We have most of the other answers. Given water, the average farmer can virtually sit on his porch at planting time and dream of splendid harvests in the fall. And experience shows that those won't be idle dreams either.

Business too has a mighty stake in this.

(Mr. Eleazer writes for about 100 newspapers in the Southeast and conducts weekly radio and television shows in that area.)