

Firm Farm Prices Put Research to Work

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THOSE WHO WORK FOR FARMERS through efforts directed toward the development, manufacture, or sale of a product, whether directly or indirectly related to agriculture and whether tangible or intangible, have an interest in preserving price parity for farmers.



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If farmers get a cut in pay, their purchasing power is thrown out of balance with the price of things they buy. Chances are that it would come sooner than you think. A good example of this is how quickly the falling purchasing power of dairy farmers was reflected in fewer purchases of farm machinery and supplies, including fertilizer.

A cut in farmers' purchasing power, coming at a time when the potentialities of research applied on farms is just becoming publicly acclaimed and accepted, would be dealing a disastrous blow both to farmers and to all those who are engaged in the development of new and better materials and methods for agriculture. As we move forward with the knowledge we now have and that to be gained through further research, the production records of past years will be significantly outstripped. The question is: Are we going to use our knowledge to bring higher living standards, or are we going to listen to some of our short-sighted agricultural leaders who want to put research findings on the "shelf" and turn back the clock to recession and depression?

We are going through a temporary period when the major problems facing agriculture seem to be those of so-called surplus production. A good share of the credit for this ability of the American farmer to produce abundantly goes to those who have developed new and better methods and materials. To this, the food scarcity advocates would doubtless agree, but at the same time they fail to recognize the effect of their suggested policies upon slowing down the application in the form of research results. The sliding scale advocates give lip service to the great need for research in agriculture, yet recommend policies that would result in placing research results back on the "shelf" where they were during the twenties and thirties.

Cut farmers' prices and, figuratively, some of them will rig an eight-horse hitch for a three-bottom tractor plow, not because this is the best way nor because they do not know the best way. Farmers accept new machines, materials, and methods—the products of research and industry—when they have the money to invest and not until then.

Look at what happened beginning in the early thirties and continuing through the early forties. Farm machinery dealers, teachers of vocational agriculture, county agents, and countless others were engaged in an educational campaign to teach farmers the use of more efficient farm machines and the advantages of increased use of fertilizer, insecticides, and improved seeds. Many of these agricultural workers had become discouraged because farmers would not respond and take full advantage of the fruits of research then on the "shelf."

Research Knowledge Applied

What happened during the years of firmly supported agricultural prices? Farmers succeeded in taking down from the "shelf" new products of research—not only that, they made practical application which has increased production. Some say farmers finally caught on to what agriculture educators had been preaching and teaching ever since the depression. No doubt but that this had favorable effect on increased efficiency in agriculture. One cannot help noticing, however, that farmers did not buy the products of research and industry until they were assured of a firm, adequate price support level. One can easily accept the fact that they knew better farming methods all the time but just could not afford to place them in effect because of the unfavorable agricultural price structure prevailing during the depression and near-depression years.

With the term "burdensome surpluses" having been adopted as the battle cry of those who oppose an adequate price support level for farmers, there is more misinformation on the subject than could be corrected in the space available at this time. You will find revealing, however, calculations as to just how long the basic commodities pledged for Commodity Credit Corporation loans and those owned by that agency will last. Calculations are based on total domestic and export disappear-

ance in 1952. The basic commodities, as you know, are the only commodities on which price support at 90% of parity is mandatory under existing law.

Here are the facts—we have, as of May 31, 1954, enough corn to last 3 months, 1.5 days; cotton, 7 months, 3 days; peanuts, 3 months, 2 days; tobacco, 3 months, 18 days; wheat, 10 months, 14 days; rice, 5.5 days.

I do not agree that our present stock of food is excessive. I do recognize that we need to adopt policies that will result in the utilization of our future abundant production. In the years ahead, our own expanding population will likely cause our abundant food production to be viewed in an entirely different light. Until that time, however, we should adopt programs that will provide storage and utilization of our food on an increasing basis. Programs recommended by National Farmers Union are as follows:

Safety reserves equal to at least one full year's domestic and export needs of farm commodities and supplies needed by farmers for the production of food and fiber.

REA-type loans for constructing storage facilities.

Practical means of narrowing the gulf between consumers' dollar demand and their real need for food. Examples are: school lunch program, food allotment or food stamp program, expanded food distribution to welfare institutions, penny milk for school children, and sanitary milk vending machines for public schools.

International food and raw materials reserve.

Additional international commodity agreements similar to the International Wheat Agreement.

Expanded use of United States abundant production for promotion of peace in the underdeveloped countries.

To allow the continued existence of starvation, hunger, and malnutrition at home and abroad when we have know-how combined with abundant food production here is morally wrong. We should expand our programs of technical assistance and use our abundant farm production to relieve misery and suffering and to contribute to expanded economic development, larger and more efficient production, and higher living standards. To do so would implement greatly the humanitarian sentiments of western civilization and the ethical principles of our religious heritage.

The struggle against imperialistic world communism will be more certainly won in the cotton patches, wheat fields, and rice paddies and the poverty-stricken teeming cities of the world than on the battlefields.