



PERSPECTIVE...

Changing Dimensions of the Farm Market

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SOME PEOPLE FEAR what the machine is doing to mankind. Are we becoming slaves to our push buttons? I believe that the new industrial revolution is doing just the opposite. Most new machines do not mechanize men. Machines give men more opportunity to be human. Here is the principle of today's production manager: if a task is unduly heavy or repetitious, then a machine ought to do it. Look, for instance at what has happened to the sweaty, backbreaking job of lifting and carrying bags of feed, seed, and fertilizer around a warehouse. In an up-to-date concern, men with fork-lift trucks do more work during working hours. They don't get as tired. They can have more leisure, and they can enjoy it more. The fork-lift truck is not a man's master—it is his obedient and husky servant. . . .

Improvements in farm production cut the costs of producing the crop, give farm people more leisure time, and free youngsters for more schooling (and schooling is important, because farming, like industry, demands scientific training as it never has before). They also draw more and more factories into the nation's farming areas, so that people can work where they want to live. The result is that fewer and fewer farmers produce more and more food.

Most people know that the farmer is catching up on his share of the 20th century standard of living. With good communication, electric power, modern technology, and a fair return for his labors, the farmer, as a consumer, is enjoying everything his city brother has. Good roads and speedy transportation have brought the farmer closer to the rest of the country.

He buys chemicals, feed, seed, fertilizer, and other production goods—not just because they please him, but to use in his business. They are part of his investment on which he expects a good return. Now what kind of business is farming today?

It's productive—in the past 15 years, total output of American farms has increased more than one third. Output per man-hour of labor on farms nearly doubled—an average increase of more than 6% per year.

During the same period, the number of farms decreased 15% and the number of people on farms went down 27%. In 1940, about one out of every four of our people lived on farms, compared with about one out of every eight today. Meanwhile, during the past 15 years, about 17 million acres of our flattest and most fertile farm lands have been converted to non-agricultural use. . . .

And only 40% of the farmers produce about 90% of the nation's agricultural output. This same 40% of the nation's farmers plant: 75% of the nation's corn acreage, 90% of the wheat acreage, 67% of the cotton, 74% of the hay acreage, and raise 90% of the livestock.

This makes selling to the farmer easier. Only 40% of the nation's farmers must be reached in order to attain most of the potential market. Furthermore, these are the farmers who are making a business of efficient production. They'll pay more for things which make them more productive. (*Excerpts from a speech before the Southern Seedmen's Association. Mr. Gordon was formerly assistant director of sales of Grasselli Chemicals Department, Du Pont Co., in charge of agricultural chemicals.*)