



## Small Farm Problems

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THE EXHAUSTIVE WRESTLING with farm subsidy problems has not yet delivered a solution acclaimed by all to be the final answer. Agriculture apparently is in for trouble for some time to come. One of the vexing aspects of the problem is the small farm, which more accurately should be described as the small, relatively inefficient, low-income farm. We have suggested before that such farms are on the way out. And we have been criticized as favoring bigness for its own sake.

Perhaps we were slightly off base. We should have suggested that most such farms are moving toward extinction as commercial farms. This is a distinction deserving more consideration in connection with the farm problem.

Agriculture, as an industry basic and necessary to our welfare, needs help. Help must come from the country as a whole. It should be related to the true aspects of the situation, and the country as a whole, and should be directed toward basic improvement, not merely superficial relief.

An obvious route to improvement of farm income is improvement of efficiency of production. Strong technical advances are contributing greatly to the available possibilities for such improvement. Despite the occasional public reaction against improving production in the face of surpluses, commercial farming means competition to produce the best for the least. This demands encouragement and constant pushing of research and technical improvement.

The small and relatively inefficient farm is finding it almost impossible to stay in the race. Among other barriers is the need for large capital investment to make use of new technology.

As late as 1950 there were at least a million full-time farmers who sold less than \$2500 worth of farm products in that year. This offers a problem that isn't likely to be solved by our existing subsidies or those now being planned. Nor are most such farmers likely to save themselves by bringing technical advances to their farms. Furthermore their contribution to the surpluses is minor.

Many such farmers are leaving the farm and finding other means of livelihood. But there are some who appear determined to make a go of it or prefer farming as a way of life. It is an important principle that a man should have the privilege of trying to make a living by any honorable means of his choice. But the Government does not have the responsibility to see that he is flourishing and prosperous regardless of the effectiveness of his pursuit.

For purposes of our farm programs, then, it seems reasonable to give some serious thought to the difference between commercial farming and subcommercial farming.

Effort should be put to solving the problems of each, but it is fair to neither to lump them together. The former must compete in what is becoming a technical industry and must use all means of scientific and technical improvement to do a better job of providing better food at lower production cost per unit.

The subcommercial farm does not have the resources to hold its own in this lively competition, but it is part of the farm problem and needs attention.

## Stronger Agricultural Chemicals Industry

DURING THE EARLY 1950's, the agricultural chemicals industry did not distinguish itself for soundness of business approach. Virtually the whole industry was entangled in an unhappy situation. There had been a great deal of hasty seizing of what looked like opportunities, and there was a considerable amount of getting burned. In minor panic, some foolish business practices began to grow.

But leaders in the industry showed strength. They sounded some strong warnings. There were some agonizing reappraisals. The results have been encouraging. Now we see the growth of sound policies supported by such valuable instruments as market and technical research. The whole approach appears more thoughtful and careful.

A very important step in the progress has been the action relative to pesticide residues and their control. The Miller Pesticides Amendment now seems to be getting into gear, and, even though some problems may be as yet unsolved, a much more hopeful light is being cast upon that difficult situation. The work of Lea Hitchner and his colleagues in the National Agricultural Chemicals Association in aiding industry-government cooperation in developing control legislation is being recognized as it begins to pay dividends.

The future of agricultural chemicals had been easy to make attractive on paper. The industry now has been through a trial by fire that showed the harsh practicalities involved in moving toward an attractive future. The tone at present is the soundest observed in several years.