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(For Branch Offices see page 72)

The Real Surplus

IN A MATTER of days now, Congress will reconvene. As usual, considerable controversy over farm programs old and new appears certain. And again this year, as in most years during the past decade, surpluses and how to prevent or dispose of them will be among the chief topics of debate.

More than in any recent year, perhaps, there appears to be some hope of progress toward eventual solution of the perennial farm problem. For more and more voices are being raised against continual treatment of symptoms in lieu of attack on the root of the problem. In very recent weeks, particularly, there has been mounting evidence that agriculture's basic problem may finally be treated with the healthy candor it needs.

In an interview in the November-December issue of *Farm Profit*, agricultural economist Arthur Mauch of Michigan State University went straight to the point. "The truth, if we have the courage to face up to it," Mauch declared, "is that the real surplus is of farmers themselves."

An almost identical comment was made late in November at a National Press Club luncheon in Washington, by Earl L. Butz, formerly Assistant Secretary of Agriculture and now dean of agriculture at Purdue University. Describing the heart of the farm problem as, again, a surplus of farmers, Butz declared that the best way to help the marginal farmer—the operator of an under-sized or under-developed farm—is to help him either to become a better and more efficient farmer, or to find employment in other fields in which his income opportunities are larger.

"It is not at all coldblooded to suggest to a farmer that he seek other employment if he can't make a living in farming," said Butz. In fact, it is coldblooded to attempt through legislative programs to keep him tied to a farm that is inadequate to provide a decent living for him and his family.

Still another plea for realism appears in the just-issued report of the Committee for Economic Development. The CED, a committee of 150 business executives and scholars whose research on economics and national policies is supported through business contributions, is frequently influential in shaping government policies. Its latest proposal calls for a new farm program based on getting people and land—entire farms—out of agriculture.

The CED would not only retire as many as possible of the lowest income farms, but would also place in temporary retirement significant numbers of whole farms with medium income. Once surpluses had been used up, and rising population had restored the need for rising farm output, the better farms would be returned to active duty.

The committee acknowledges that there is no difference between its objectives and those of existing Soil Bank programs. The purpose in each case is to eliminate production of surpluses, bringing supply and demand into balance so that farm prices can again be determined in the market place.

The CED does, however, urge a major change in procedures, with a definite move away from the income-price support view of farm assistance. The committee would like to see both a more selective and a more extensive retirement of farm land from agriculture. Its proposed shift to free markets would be accomplished by progressive reduction in price supports—accompanied by firm efforts to move low-income farmers into other occupations.

Recent surveys have shown that the family farm is not disappearing from the American scene. The family farm is, however, growing larger and more efficient; through increasing adoption of better equipment and methods, the use of more and better fertilizers and agricultural chemicals, and application of sound business procedures, it is attuning itself to this nation's modern pace. Elimination of marginal farms and reemployment of surplus farmers in other pursuits will in no wise alter the family character of American farming. Obviously it will reduce the actual number of farms, but this would only mean acceleration of a trend that has been operating for several decades.

The marginal or subsistence-level farm is out of step with modern agriculture. Its disappearance will do no violence to the attractiveness of the American scene. Indeed, the scene should be improved by removal of its least attractive elements.