The Contribution of Sociology to Agriculture

by Carl C. Taylor

IT HAS OFTEN been said that the physical or “natural” sciences have been developed to a high state but that they are just as capable of wrecking as of creating civilization. What is needed, according to this view, is a social science that will show us how to use our knowledge for the good of man. But the social sciences are very young, and to a considerable extent they have been confined to the classroom and the professor’s study. Can they be applied as an everyday practical matter to the problems that beset all of us in the everyday world? Here is an attempt to explore the possibilities of using sociology in the study of agricultural problems. The author gives us a sweeping survey of the fields covered by sociology and holds that it can throw a great deal of light on the problem of building a better rural life.

SOCIOLOGY has been developing for only a little over a generation, but during that short period it has been organized into fairly concrete fields of study and investigation focused upon social problems of which the general public has become conscious. The following specific fields of teaching and research, each of which will be described

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later in this article, probably represent sociology as well as any: Social organization and social structure; population study, or social demography; social ecology, or human geography; cultural or social anthropology; social psychology; social pathology.

In some of these fields considerable work has been done in relation to agriculture and rural life; in others, very little. In order to appraise the complete contribution which sociology should be making to agriculture, it is necessary to take into consideration fields of knowledge and techniques of study that have become current in general sociology, although not always in rural sociology.

Rural sociology has as its primary aim improving the well-being of the farm population. It originated as a recognized discipline in teaching and research less than 25 years ago as a part of the general impulse to improve agriculture technologically, economically, and socially. Since then it has developed quite an elaborate body of research findings, but it has not yet brought to bear the full impact of available knowledge either from general sociology or from studies made in fields other than agriculture. Until it surveys the possibilities of doing this, it will not be in a position to make its full contribution to agriculture. In practically all instances its services will be focused directly upon problems to be solved. Owing to the fact that social causes are complex and sometimes deeply laid in the past history of social situations, recognition of the existence of problems is the necessary first step in their solution. It is the function of sociology, therefore, to reveal problems as well as to assist in solving them.

The roots of some of our most distressing agricultural problems are in part social, in part psychological, and in part cultural. We have widespread soil erosion partly because some of the customs, habits, and attitudes of farm people, instead of contributing to the conservation of soil, have speeded its destruction. We have hundreds of thousands of farm families living on lands which will not support adequate standards of living partly because great population movements of the past swept these people into places where successful settlement cannot be sustained. We have recently had more than a million farm families on relief and have only slightly less than 3,000,000 farm-tenant families, many of them sharecroppers. This is because of a slow but apparently steady shift toward the bottom of the agricultural ladder on the part of hundreds of thousands of farm families who because of general economic and social conditions are unable to maintain an acceptable economic and social status. This fact and the causes of it were not recognized while the problems were developing.

We are today in the midst of even more rapid social change than in the past, and new problems are developing while we are in the process of correcting old maladjustments and seeking new adjustments. Both maladjustments and adjustments depend to a considerable extent on the habits and attitudes of rural people, and an understanding of this fact demands a knowledge not only of social problems as such but also of what rural people themselves think about their

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problems and the extent to which they can be mobilized to assist in the solution of them.

**FIELDS COVERED BY SOCIOLOGY**

In order to orient the present discussion as definitely as possible to agriculture and to the established body of sociological knowledge and techniques, some elaboration of the fields listed above may clarify the contribution of rural sociology to the promotion of rural welfare.

**Social Organization and Social Structure**

In many ways the study of social organization is the heart of sociology, for social organization constitutes the more or less formalized machinery by which people live their daily lives. Social organization in rural life is in many ways similar and in a number of ways dissimilar to that in urban life. Each rural grouping has a pattern affected or conditioned not only by geography and the means of transportation and communication but by inherited social patterns, sometimes ethnic or racial, sometimes religious, sometimes economic, but never by any one of these factors exclusively. Neighborhoods, communities, and villages; institutional and service groups, including families, schools, churches, and libraries, and health, recreational, and welfare agencies; class and commodity groupings; and even political groups, all constitute forms of human association and social organization. Participation in the activities of these groups is the chief concern of rural people, and the groupings therefore affect their behavior and attitudes in everything they do. People measure their social standing in terms of the extent to which they are able or are permitted to help operate these pieces of social machinery; and since everyone desires an acceptable social status, some of the deepest issues of rural welfare are involved in the problems of participation in social organizations.

At a time when the impact of the world at large on rural life is steadily increasing, it is important to know to what extent stable local organizations of various kinds contribute to the economic, social, and psychological stability, well-being, and contentment of farm people. In terms of time and energy, their major concern is with comparatively local community organizations. It is a question whether adequate consideration is given to this fact in agricultural programs, even though security in rural life is one of the objectives of these programs.

In no section of the world has rural life changed more rapidly or drastically than in the United States during the relatively short period of our national history. This is another way of saying that the structure of American rural society has always been and still is in process of change. Change is essential to progress and adaptation, but it also disturbs and sometimes destroys things which tend to be the bulwarks of a culture. Considerable study of the effect of social change upon social institutions and organizations has been carried on by sociologists and anthropologists at various times and places, but the knowledge and understanding gained from such studies have not been fully utilized in developing an understanding of what may be happening in the rural life of the United States.
The pattern of settlement in many places in the United States was at one time that of village communities, but most of these gave way to scattered farmsteads as population moved westward with the settlement of the continent. Thousands of towns and hundreds of cities sprang up. Communities disintegrated and died, and new ones were formed. Institutions changed, and new service agencies appeared. The class structure of rural society changed greatly. All these processes of change will probably continue, but the rate of change will be less rapid as a settled economy and culture are established. Both the rate and type of change will be affected by changes in the numbers, composition, and distribution of the population, and the readier infiltration of urban culture and world culture into rural regions. Agricultural programs and plans must be based upon guesses or calculations as to where these changes will lead.

Will we revert, as Professor Gras, agricultural historian at Harvard University, predicted, to a village economy? Are rural neighborhoods doomed? Must rural communities be larger and financially stronger in order to support an adequate set of social institutions and service agencies? Must local government boundaries be redrawn? Are special-interest groups superseding all neighborhood and community groupings? Are distinct and permanent classes—laborers, tenants, owner-operators—developing in our rural society? Are rural resettlement and urban-rural resettlement communities developing, and should they develop? If so, where and how and in what patterns? These and other questions are important in a changing society such as ours. Furthermore, the answers to these questions would be immediately useful in the projection and operation of action programs. For example, it would be valuable to know what form of social organization would be effective for a county which is adding to its previous activities an ever-increasing list of new programs, such as those of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the Soil Conservation Service, the Farm Security Administration, the Farm Credit Administration, the Social Security Board, and relief and welfare agencies.

Population, or Social Demography

Population studies have been made for thousands of years. At first these involved only the simple task of counting or taking censuses of relatively primitive people. Demography (from demos, people, and geography) is a field in which the sociologist claims no monopoly, for population analyses, with which it is concerned, are for certain purposes important to the economist, the political scientist, and even the geneticist. Demography is, however, fundamental to the study of vital and social statistics and thus is one of the basic fields of sociology. It consists of far more than census taking. It not only deals with the numbers, distribution, and composition of populations, but it is also a study of the characteristics of various segments of the population and their relationships to internal and external factors of change. It even ventures predictions concerning population trends and their cause-and-effect relationships to the physical, economic, and social environment.

Studies and analyses which will contribute to an understanding of the composition, characteristics, and trends of the farm population...
are of unique importance, because farm populations practically everywhere throughout the world bear peculiar relationships to national populations and to national economic and social structures. The urbanization of society has been in process for generations and has stimulated an almost constant net flow of population from farms to towns and cities, out of agriculture into industrial, commercial, and professional occupations. The rural birth rate nearly everywhere is higher than the urban birth rate, and in many instances is highest in those rural areas with the poorest natural resources and the lowest standards of living. (See the article, The Rural People, p. 827.) Because persons born and reared in rural areas, including areas with relatively poor natural resources and poor economic and social opportunities, will continue to furnish workers and citizens to other segments of the national population and to the economic and social life of the Nation as a whole, all parts of our national society must be concerned with the character, composition, and opportunities of the farm population.

The population of the United States in gross numbers increased from fewer than 4 million in 1790, the time of the first census, to about 131 million on January 1, 1939. In 1790 the area of settlement was a strip averaging about 250 miles wide along the Atlantic Ocean; by 1910 it quite thoroughly covered the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific. At that time the farm population was 32,076,960, the greatest ever recorded by the decennial census. It had increased each decade from the time of earliest settlement, despite the fact that during each decade it contributed thousands, and in the later decades hundreds of thousands, of people to the urban population by way of rural-urban migration. Farm population did not increase, however, during the two decades following 1910. In 1930 it was only 30,169,000, or approximately 1,908,000 less than in 1910, notwithstanding a national population increase of approximately 30,803,000 for the 20-year period. Since 1930 the farm population has again increased by an average of about 200,000 a year.

What has occasioned these trends and shifts? What will happen during succeeding decades? What significance will growth and shifts in population have for programs of road construction, rural electrification, school expansion or contraction, land use adjustment, and rural relief and rehabilitation? Answers to these questions are being sought constantly by the agencies mentioned on page 1045 and by many others, governmental and private, the projection and planning of whose programs depend upon the best estimates obtainable concerning population growth and movements. The decennial general census and the 5-year census of the rural and farm population furnish considerable useful information. Annual farm-population estimates add to this information. In the operation of action programs, a great deal of knowledge is accumulated about the nature of general and specific population situations, and sociology can use this knowledge in the interpretation of quantitative data. Sociology has major tasks ahead of it, however, if it is to develop information adequate for the guidance of agricultural programs and policies that are already in action and must continue for the sake not only of rural but of national welfare.
Social Ecology, or Human Geography

The social geography or ecology of rural life is the study of the way people distribute themselves over the land in developing and utilizing natural resources and in response to cultural and social forces. It goes further than physical or economic geography and is as important as either.

The pattern of land utilization—that is, the organization of the geographic base in terms of economic enterprises—strongly affects the total social structure of a region. The amount of land required or utilized per farm unit determines the density and spacing of the farm population and consequently affects all social institutions and all social contacts. The kind of community life, the adequacy of social institutions, and to a considerable extent the levels of living of the people of an area depend at least partly on the natural resources of the area. The man-land ratio, or the ratio of human resources to natural resources, therefore constitutes the most important equation in so-called land use planning. Such ratios are never fixed. They have constantly changed during our national development, and they are still changing. The chief factors causing change are depletion or development of resources; changes in science, technology, and markets; high or low birth rates; migrations; and sometimes changes in local, State, and Federal governmental programs. A number of these factors are social, and all of them separately and together influence certain types of social structure and social change.

Likewise the ownership and control of land and the tenure upon it condition social welfare. Unless tenure is relatively permanent and secure, the making of profits from an efficient use of the land will not in itself guarantee that the operator is enjoying social, psychological, and cultural security or welfare.

Cultural or Social Anthropology

Not least among the natural resources of a society or a nation is its social heritage. In a rapidly changing society this heritage may not only be lost sight of, but to some extent it may be actually lost. It is not possible, of course, for any society to break the ties between its past and present or its present and future completely, but it is relatively easy to fail to recognize the strength of these ties and to fail to understand their ever-present influence. Such failure is not only easy but quite common, especially among those who deal day by day with more exact and measurable phenomena. It is natural that new traits of culture, especially when they are physical or economic and therefore easily observed, should obscure the presence of old traits that lie deeply hidden in people's attitudes and their value judgments. It is not easy for some people to believe that these attitudes and judgments are the most persistent things in human experience, for the very reason that they are not exhibited and paraded on the surface of human behavior. Nevertheless they may constitute the inertias of any society and may, therefore, be brakes upon the wheels of change as well as conservators of the "sacred" tenets of the group. The more rationalized—that is, the more scientific, efficient, and planned—agriculture becomes, the more and not the less important
it is to understand these forces of inertia because they are the forces that tend to thwart the complete rationalization or expertization of economic, political, and social programs.

The folk culture in a simple society is its most treasured possession. This is probably true of even the most complex societies, though people are not aware of it. When change is very rapid and diverse, however, the treasured possessions of culture are jostled out of their place in the life of the group because of the competition of new elements that temporarily obscure them. In our modern rural society, we undoubtedly desire many of the new things, but we would like to obtain them without sacrificing all of the treasures that have come to us by way of social heritage from the past. We want not only the economic but the social and psychological security people had when self-sufficient agriculture prevailed. We want the richness of rural life that many less commercial agricultures have because of their folk art, music, drama, recreation, and other community activities; we want those qualities of personality and those social values which we think grow only out of family, neighborhood, and community life; but we do not want the continuation of a large amount of irksome labor, the dire physical and social isolation, and the relatively low standards of living that can be eliminated by modern science, business, and technology.

We are not in a position to attain this happy combination of the things that come to us from the past and those that come by way of new inventions and scientific discovery unless we understand the folk processes as well as the scientific processes. We must be able to answer such a question as how far and how fast improvements can be made in the material standard of living by artificial stimulation or by demonstration. Sufficient understanding to answer such a question is not impossible. Cultural anthropologists have for decades been studying not only the components of cultures, but the entire cultures of relatively simple societies. Their techniques are applicable to the analysis of more complex societies.

Each agricultural region of the Nation was settled at a different time by different people and at a different stage of our technological, economic, political, and social development, and each in response to a different environmental situation. Each region, therefore, probably constitutes a more or less unique cultural area, the characteristics of which must be understood in the promotion of programs of adjustment in agriculture and rural life. These adjustments must be made through a process of adaptation to the culture of each separate region. Recently sociologists in increasing numbers have been giving attention to the problem of analyzing the cultural areas of the Nation, with the conviction that such analyses will contribute to an understanding of the adaptations that must be effected if adjustments in agriculture and rural life are to be successfully accomplished.

Social Psychology

While the cultural anthropologist studies human behavior more or less as a complex whole in terms of folkways, customs, traditions, and group values, the social psychologist goes one step further and attempts to understand these cultural processes as they manifest themselves in individual human behavior.
The field of social psychology deals with the way customs, traditions, institutions, unique life experiences, and the like are reflected in the attitudes and opinions of members of a group. Furthermore, it deals with group opinion or public opinion and attempts to analyze and understand the operation of public opinion as it functions in collective behavior.

The attitudes and opinions of farm people are the greatest conditioning factors in all agricultural programs. They are as important to the agricultural scientist and educator as they are to the politician, propagandist, and salesman. In a democratically operated society they are part and parcel of every agricultural adjustment, and any attempts at adjustment will be successful only to the extent that the opinions and the attitudes of those involved in the adjustments are understood and appreciated. Verbal opinions are easy to ascertain, but back of these opinions lie attitudes that are often hidden deep in the occupational and folk life of people, often not even recognized by the people themselves but nevertheless influential in their behavior. Social psychology has made considerable progress in the development of research techniques by which individuals and groups can uncover and understand these attitudes. As yet there has been very little application of these techniques in an attempt to discover basic rural or farm attitudes. The techniques are applicable, however, and their utilization in behalf of understanding situations with which action programs constantly grapple would undoubtedly yield fruitful results.

The approach of social psychology would enable us to get at least partial solutions to such problems as the attitudes of farmers toward the various agricultural programs and the economic and social adjustments which these programs seek to effect; how public opinion can be made to function and how other democratic processes can be made to work in programs that are promoted, at least partly, and in some cases quite dominantly, from above; what is happening to individual initiative and enterprise under such programs and under widespread public relief programs; and what is happening to the old rural neighborhood and folk attitudes and habits under the impact of mechanization and commercialization.

Because of the relative slowness with which new elements of culture have in the past penetrated rural areas, old forms of behavior and old ideas, especially when they have become institutionalized, have prevailed in rural areas for a considerable time after they have materially changed in urban centers. A thorough understanding of both the values and the inertias of rural institutions is essential to an understanding of the processes by which change can be accomplished by means of programs initiated either within or without rural communities.

As rural people are swept more and more into the price and market economy and through various means of transportation and communication become a part of the larger society, the scope and level of leadership must necessarily change. The areas of group action in which farmers participate have widened in terms both of geography and of the number of people involved. Leaders who were competent on a local, neighborhood, or community basis may not be capable of
leading large farmer pressure groups or of representing even their local group in large cooperative economic undertakings. The scope of effective leadership must and does change to meet these situations, and techniques and levels of leadership not necessary in the old situations become necessary. In such cases the type of leader needed may not be merely the personable fellow who is a good neighbor, but that person who by training and experience is capable of dealing with economic and social issues of Nation-wide and even world-wide scope. If agricultural and rural-life planning are to be democratic, there is great need to understand all of the factors contributing to effective leadership. We must know, for instance, at what point, or at least under what circumstances, old leaders give way to new leaders in the process of social change. Social psychology should contribute this kind of understanding.

With the rapid expansion of agricultural research, education, and necessary regulatory activities, a tremendous growth of institutional machinery has taken place in rural life. Agricultural colleges and secondary schools, extension services and experiment stations, departments of agriculture and conservation have all developed fairly recently and with tremendous rapidity. In order to be efficient, they have rapidly become institutions, with a great corps of leaders, more or less standardized procedures and programs, and to a considerable extent policies that are already traditional. Over against this more or less rigid set-up, there is continual change in the techniques of production, transportation, communication, and the areas of human association. Social psychology has a contribution to make by way of assisting those in charge of these institutions and agencies to understand the eternal and inevitable conflict between the process of institutionalization and the process of change.

Farmers today are more a part of the general public than were any past generation of farmers. They frequently act as a class-conscious group or segment of the public. Farmers' organizations, farmer pressure groups, farm legislation, and farmer opinion are recognized parts of our national life and thinking. The historical, social, psychological, and institutional characteristics of farmer opinion should be studied on an area-wide, Nation-wide, and occupation-wide basis as people attempt to understand and wrestle with the adjustments they conceive to be necessary for agriculture and rural life. The field of social psychology has during the last decade developed elaborate techniques and accumulated wide experience in measuring public opinion, in studying agencies that form public opinion, and in understanding the pros and cons of pressure-group behavior. With the development of all of these phenomena in rural life and with the tremendous influence of public opinion in a democracy, a new field is open and is being rapidly entered by social psychology in an attempt to contribute to an understanding of farmers and farm groups in their relationships to the so-called general public.

**Social Pathology**

Social pathology is the study of social maladjustments; and while it is unpopular to emphasize the faults of any social order of which we are a part, it is only wisdom to understand what the sore spots in rural
life are and where they are. In the rural districts of the United States, as in rural districts all over the world, crime has always been relatively slight and pauperism almost absent, but poverty has been much more widespread than is commonly known. As long as we were in a frontier and pioneering era, low material standards of living and even poverty were tolerated in the expectation that the maladjustments would be comparatively temporary and that economic success would in due time eliminate them. Today there are many social maladjustments in rural life of a sterner nature and of sufficiently long standing to merit, in fact to demand, the closest analysis.

If rural families living on a low material standard or even in poverty do not themselves resent this status, it ill behooves the sociologist or anyone else to be unduly worried about them unless the existence of such conditions jeopardizes the institutional and community life of other families or handicaps the future generation being born and reared in these homes. When a set of conditions making for rural poverty is of long standing, influences a large segment of the rural population, and comes to be recognized as socially unhealthy, however, it becomes desirable, even imperative, that measures for improvement be applied in the interest of general rural welfare. That such conditions do exist in American agriculture cannot be gainsaid. Something approaching rural slums has apparently been developing through a number of generations, but this has not been obvious to the general public, or even to the rural public, because poverty-stricken farm families, unlike poverty-stricken urban families, have not lived in congested or crowded areas, and also because our pioneer psychology of hopefulness has blinded us to accumulating maladjustments. Housing, for instance, has probably always been the weakest spot in the rural material standard of living, but inadequate rural houses existing by the thousands have not been so concentrated geographically as to be obvious to the passer-by. Rural unemployment has most often existed in terms of underemployment or ineffective employment and has not been recognized because of the relatively self-sufficient mode of life on the farm. Consequently, little if any attention has been given to the problem of farm unemployment, and there has been insufficient study of the realistic functioning of the agricultural ladder, with all its implications for the entire farm population and the whole enterprise of agriculture. It is too often assumed that there is a steady stream of people moving up the agricultural ladder from laborer to tenant to owner, while there is considerable evidence that actually there is an ever-increasing number of persons who are being stalled on the lower rungs of the ladder and even a goodly number who are descending rather than climbing.

CONTRIBUTIONS SOCIOLOGY CAN MAKE TO RURAL LIFE

As long as the social problems of our rural people were pretty much solved by the comparative ease with which the current normal standard of living could be attained and as long as practically all social problems were limited to the local community, no great knowledge of the body of phenomena which constitutes the field of sociology seemed
necessary in the successful conduct of agriculture and rural life. Each local community to a considerable extent lived an integrated life; the family and the neighborhood were the chief patterns of human association; and each local community was relatively self-sufficient. Today the majority of American farmers have become a part of the "great society." New areas of association, much wider in scope and involving a much more diverse and complex set of economic, political, social, and cultural relationships, have entered rural life. Thus the contribution which sociology has to make to an understanding of these relationships and areas of association is constantly expanding.

The desirability of studying simpler agricultural societies and even archaic forms in modern society has been recognized for decades, but thus far little has been done in the application of the same techniques of study to the analysis of contemporary rural society. These techniques can just as well be utilized in studying the hundreds of thousands of farm families and hundreds of rural communities which still follow to a considerable extent the economic and social habits of simpler agricultural societies. Five hundred thousand farm families live on self-sufficing farms, many of them in so-called problem areas, and these areas or communities offer sociologists opportunities for analysis involving only a little more difficulty than studies of primitive societies.

From the day when the majority of American farmers lived largely by means of self-sufficing farming and had a self-sufficing community life, to the present, when the majority of them are operating commercialized and mechanized farms and are living as members of the great society, many adjustments in the whole mode of rural life have been required. In some instances, the adaptations made necessary by economic change have been successful and easy; in other cases, they have been difficult and have disturbed older modes of living to such an extent as to create social maladjustments. These maladjustments range all the way from a relatively slight realignment of old neighborhood and community groups to an almost complete loss of the folk culture of rural life. Today changes are taking place more rapidly than in any previous generation, and it has become necessary to understand as fully as possible the impact of change on the basic institutional structure of rural life, the personalities of rural people, and the cultural values or the philosophies which many people believe to be the unique worth of rural life.

Above everything else, sociology has a contribution to make to an understanding on the part of rural people that they are living in a society composed to a considerable extent of comparatively new relationships which involve them in problems that were not a part of the rural life of past generations. The task of operating a modern commercial farm is an economic enterprise often involving a capital set-up of $20,000 or more, credit arrangements that follow channels all the way from the local community to the large banking centers of the world, a market economy tied in with a world economy, large contributions to government by way of taxes, and calculations and decisions of almost big-business proportions. The operation of such an enterprise is so different from that of a simple, self-sufficing farm
that the customs and traditions handed down from the fathers do not offer adequate guidance for the daily and seasonal tasks.

The farmer's participation in the areas of governmental and political action has steadily increased because of his widened economic concern and because channels of communication—the telephone, the rural free delivery, the automobile, the daily paper, and the radio—have enlarged his world of behavior and understanding. He now knows that regional, national, and international factors and situations influence his life and that through public opinion and pressure groups he has some ability to influence State, national, and international policies. His areas of governmental and political concern and association have therefore steadily expanded from a local school district, township, and county, to State, national, and international proportions. These new areas of association are as real in influencing his life as are his neighborhood relationships or his individual farm enterprise, and the development of any body of knowledge which will help him to function more successfully in these new areas and processes of association is greatly to be desired. Sociology, together with the other social sciences, can contribute to this understanding.

Social and cultural stimuli originating in sources far removed from the local neighborhood are as definite a part of the farmer's new world as are the distant world markets that are today a part of his economic situation. In simpler agricultural societies the very essence of self-sufficiency inhered in the fact that economic, social, and aesthetic values were not separate things. Local community life was a unit, and because the reign of custom was automatic, competition between rival values seldom created problems. In modern American farm life, each farm family must constantly contend with and, as best it can, resolve the conflict between alternative uses of time, attention, and money. Desires for current levels of living, stimulated by standards set outside the local community and even outside of rural life itself, compete constantly with the desire for farm ownership; family and neighborhood activities compete just as dynamically for the time, attention, and energy of farm people as for the expenditure of funds; and the whole body of folk culture, including everything from farm practices to religious and aesthetic values, is thrown in competition with alternative ways of doing and thinking. Many farm persons are conscious of these conflicts, and there is continuous discussion and argument among students of farm life as to whether the steady loss of rural folk culture is in fact a loss or a gain in general rural welfare. No matter which of these contending schools of thought may in the long run prove to be correct, it is highly desirable that farm people and farm leaders understand the changes that are in process and the factors at work. Sociology, cultural anthropology, and social psychology have no patented answers to the numerous questions these complex factors in contemporary civilization raise, but they can offer great assistance in understanding the situations and processes involved.

August Comte, the so-called father of sociology, offered encouragement rather than discouragement because of the complexity of the phenomena with which the sociologist deals. He said, "The practical applications of the sciences increase with their complexity," and gave as the reason for this conclusion the argument that "phenomena grow
more susceptible to artificial modification with the increasing complexity of the phenomena." 3 Lester F. Ward emphasized this same truth when he said: "Although its phenomena are the most complex of all and the most difficult fully to understand, when understood, if they ever are, the results their study promises in the direction of their modification in the interest of man are beyond calculation." 3 What these two eminent early sociologists were saying was that the living phenomena which the sociologist studies are more susceptible to change and guided direction than any other body of phenomena. If this is true, then the science of sociology has outstanding contributions to make to the field of planning, and there is considerable likelihood that it can assist in guiding behavior toward the end of human welfare.

Now, as never before, sociology is being given an opportunity to offer counsel and render service in great public, especially governmental, programs. For many years the sociologist has conducted research and written books on normal social behavior and conditions, and for a number of decades he has rendered practical service in the field of social maladjustment, especially in connection with crime and poverty; but only during the last few years has he been called on to give actual counsel and service in guiding large public activity programs. Today he is asked not only to analyze and interpret social trends, study public institutions and movements, and furnish social statistics in many fields, but also to answer a large number of specific questions about normal effective social organization and behavior. Like every other scientist, he must admit that he cannot always answer certain questions specifically. He can, however, if given time to study trends and situations, give approximate answers to many of the questions arising out of the problems of which farm people and their leaders have recently become conscious. If his answers sometimes seem vague and general, it will be well to remember what Von Wiese says: 4

Behind the alleged obscurity of sociology there often lurks the mental obscurity of pseudo-sociological writers; they mouth the word without comprehending its actual meaning. In some cases, they derive their intellectual credentials from other sciences, but like to demonstrate their intellectual superiority by dabbling in sociology and then casting aspersions on it.

In other words, contrary to the general opinion, the sociologist is quite unwilling to venture easy answers to difficult questions but is perfectly willing to accept the responsibility of studying the factors, trends, and situations out of which necessary answers may be obtained.

Different social sciences have established themselves in fields of research dealing with the same phenomena, but with different methods of analysis and different objectives. The economist, for example, studies such forms of human association as corporations, trade unions, and cooperative societies, but is interested in them primarily from the standpoint of their efficiency as means of production and the exchange of wealth. The sociologist studies them with regard to the differences in their structure and function, the processes that account for their

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origin, maintenance, and change, and their effect on the whole life of
the people who constitute their membership. Because the habits,
customs, traditions, and attitudes of the members are important to
effective economic organization, sociology makes a practical contribu-
tion to the analysis of situations that are often thought of as purely
economic.

In other words, rural sociology is but one of the sciences useful in
attempting to build an adequate and satisfying rural civilization. It
uses the scientific method for studying the ways in which rural people
associate, with the conviction that through the application of the
methods of science that have improved their material conditions, men
may be able to improve their relations to each other; for it is in these
relations, whether they are competitive or cooperative, expressive of
conflict or fellowship, that they find their deepest satisfactions.

Because rural sociology is one of the recently developed fields in
sociology, which itself is the youngest of the social sciences, its greatest
contributions to agriculture are yet to be made. In the immediate
future, the major contributions will probably come from the study of
the amount, the direction, and the significance of shifts in farm popu-
lation in the various geographic areas of the Nation and between
rural and urban centers; the reorientation of the farm population to
the potential productive land resources of the Nation; the various
community and institutional organizations that are the chief day-by-
day concerns of farm people; the facts about, and the significance of,
the growing number of so-called disadvantaged persons and families
in the farm population; the gradual stratification, in terms of economic
and social classes, of the people who live on the land; the farmer as a
personality and rural life as a body of folk culture; the behavior and
thought processes by which farm people get into step with the larger
world of which they have become a part; and the participation of
farm people in more effective democratic planning for rural welfare.