



Farm Labor in an Era of Change

by WILLIAM T. HAM¹

IT USED TO BE that the farm laborer could expect to rent a little farm, save up his money, and eventually have a place of his own. It used to be that the "hired hand" was almost part of the farm owner's family, eating his meals with them, entering into their plans. Today there is a growing army of farm laborers drifting over the country, not rooted to the soil, homeless, unemployed a large part of the time, able to provide only the most miserable living conditions for their children, and hopeless of ever doing any better. Is this a situation the United States can tolerate? Shall we shut our eyes to it and let it drift to some dangerous crisis? Or can we, by frankly recognizing new conditions and attacking them intelligently, do something to give these Americans a toehold in the changed world of today and a stake in the well-being of their country? These are the questions considered in this article.

LIKE ALL other rural groups, the farm laborers have been much affected, for the most part adversely, by the agricultural changes of recent years. However, being widely scattered and having no organization to speak for them, they have received little attention. The problems of farm operators and tenants have been discussed in detail and programs worked out to bring about improvement, but it has apparently been assumed that the difficulties of the hired laborers would disappear as the position of farm operators was bettered. Until recently it has been taken for granted that the man who remained a farm laborer lacked the initiative or capacity to rise to something

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better and that the real labor problem was simply that of finding a sufficient number of competent hands to do the work of the farm.

THE PLIGHT OF FARM LABOR

Too Many Farm Laborers

Today, however, the farm laborer's problem is forcing itself to the front in other terms. In the first place—despite the complaints of farmers as to the scarcity of seasonal help—there is a superabundance of labor power on American farms. Much of this is among the members of the farm family, who in many cases have productive farm work only during a few months of the year. If these individuals were in the city and worked as intermittently at factory jobs, we should call them partially employed and not wonder at their resulting low standard of living. On the farms, however, the existence of unused labor power is commonly accepted as part of the order of nature. This was not so in earlier days.

The presence of these unemployed or partially employed members of the rural community who must be supported out of available resources although they lack opportunity to make a full contribution to the farm enterprise, is one explanation of the depressed standards of farm living in many areas. On the one hand, a high farm birth rate has been maintained. On the other, opportunities for farm-born persons have decreased. In agriculture this has been due to the disappearance of free land, the deterioration of much land already in use, the dislocation of farm markets, domestic and foreign, and the consequent necessity for crop adjustments. To some extent, also, it has been due to overemphasis upon cash income and cash crops and to neglect of diversification, with ill effects upon noncash elements in farm-family living and upon the opportunities for farm labor, whether in

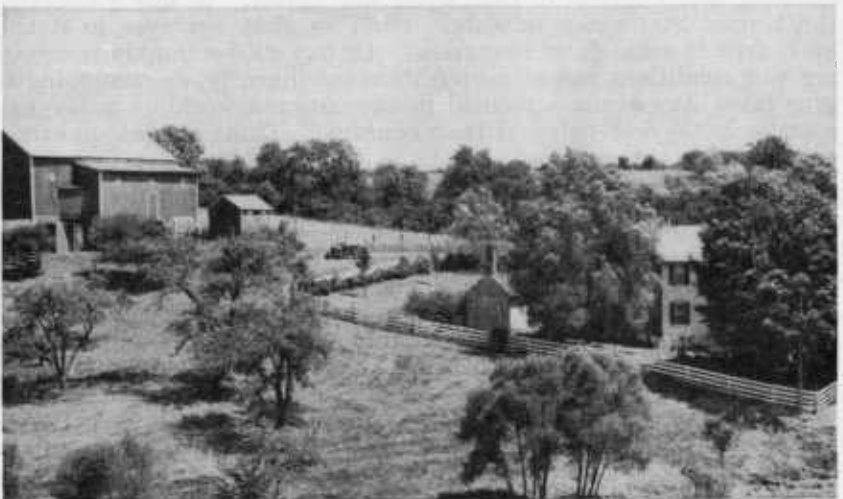


Figure 1.—A diversified farm such as this requires the type of labor represented by the hired man.

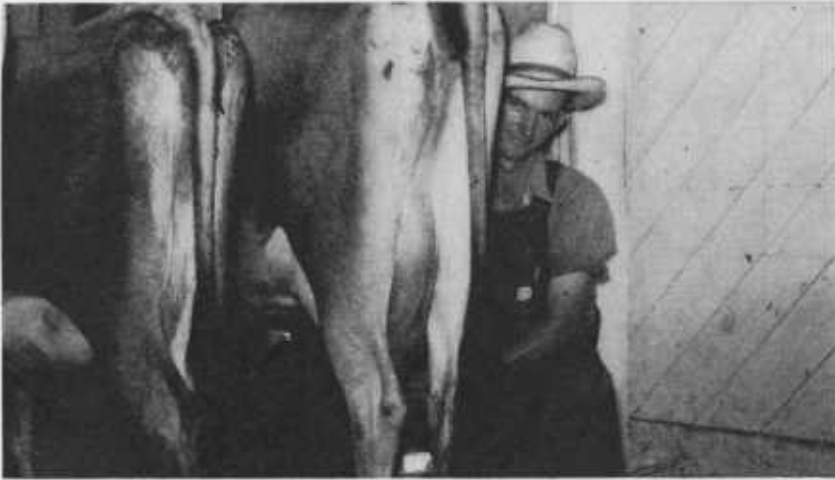


Figure 2.—The hired man lives in the community and is often almost like one of the farmer's family.

the family or hired, to contribute to these elements (figs. 1 and 2). In industry the loss of normal outlets for rural people has been due to failure of production to expand into new fields and the development of labor-saving methods in fields already open.

From 1930 to 1932 there was an unusual movement of persons from the cities to the farms. Subsequently this movement was greatly reduced, but even so, the annual net migration from farms from 1930 through 1934 averaged only 120,000 as compared with an annual average of 600,000 during the decade 1921-30 (4).² Thus there was a damming up of the rural population. Moreover, a large proportion of those held on the farms were young persons whose presence tended to increase the competition for jobs and to depress farm wages. In addition, the increased use of farm machinery in some areas, together with the crop-reduction programs, has tended to reduce the number of tenants and croppers and to increase the number of wage hands. The protracted drought, too, drove thousands into the labor market.

Hired Labor for Life

One result of this damming-up of farm labor, both in the operator's family group and in the ranks of the workers available for hire, is that the farm laborer has less chance for advancement than used to be the case. (See *New Conditions Demand New Opportunities*, p. 810.) Before the depression it was the common view that the farm laborer was merely a person on the way to becoming a tenant or one temporarily engaged in agricultural employment before passing on to work in industry. In 1929 an authority asserted (2) that it is doubtful whether, in this country, farm wages ever have been high enough to warrant any man's deliberately adopting farm labor as a life occupation—that, as a matter of fact, wages have been only part of the

² *Italic numbers in parentheses refer to Literature Cited, p. 921.*

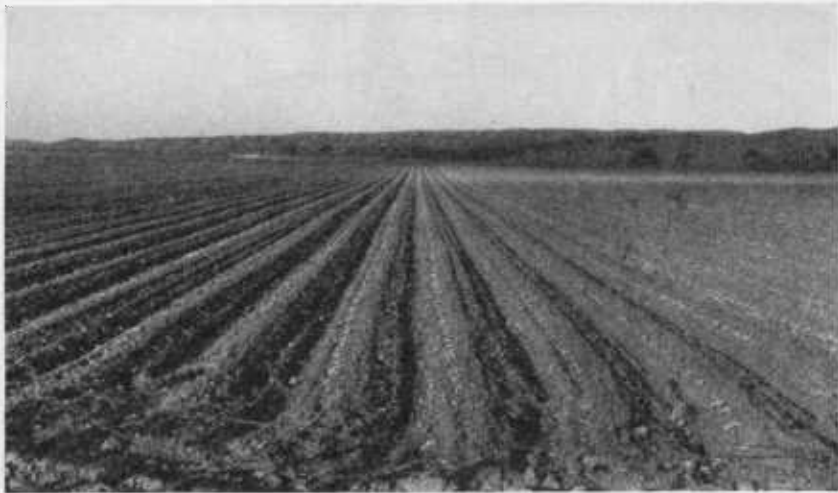


Figure 3.—Forms in the specialty-crop areas require a different type of labor from that on diversified farms.

remuneration, the rest consisting of training in the procedure of running a farm. In recent years, however, with farm tenants experiencing such difficulties in maintaining their status, it is obvious that the laborer's prospects have been poor. Hired farm work has become a permanent, rather than a transitional, occupation for an increasing number of farm people. Among them are fewer, proportionately, of the less competent, the tramps, hoboes, and drifters who figured so largely in early accounts of farm labor—and more, in proportion, of those who may be regarded as normal farm people, denied the opportunity for self-betterment which earlier they would have had, and which, if times improve, they may have again.

Associated with this relatively new permanency of status is the development in many areas of relationships and conditions which, in the past, have been associated with industrial rather than farm labor. In a recent volume of the Congressional Record is a passage describing the relationship of the farm hand to his employer (6):

The habits and customs of agriculture of necessity have been different than those of industry. The farmers and workers are thrown in close daily contact with one another. They, in many cases, eat at a common table. Their children attend the same school. Their families bow together in religious worship. They discuss together the common problems of our economic and political life. The farmer, his family, and the laborers' [sic] work together as one unit. In the times of stress, in the handling of livestock or perishable agricultural commodities, of impending epidemics, and at many other times the farmer and laborer must stand shoulder to shoulder against the common enemy. This develops a unity of interest which is not found in industry. This unity is more effective to remove labor disturbances than any law can be.

Now while this state of affairs may once have been common, it cannot be asserted that today such community of interest prevails. Of course, in discussing farm labor problems, a distinction should be made between the regular farm hands, hired for all or most of the year,

and the seasonal laborers, especially those in the highly specialized fruit- and vegetable-producing areas. On April 1, 1930, there were 2,732,972 persons whose usual occupation was working on farms for wages. In the agricultural census of 1935, of the 967,594 farms that reported hired help, 722,645 had only 1 employee, 137,670 had 2, while only 11,410 reported 10 or more wage hands. It is clear, therefore, that the more or less regular farm hands are widely scattered. They are characteristic of the regions given over to production of corn and livestock, wheat and the small grains, of the dairying districts and the western range. There is little reference to them in the writings on farm labor. For the hired man, undoubtedly, rural life has rewards aside from cash income received. Nevertheless, his position is not what it used to be. During recent years, wage rates have not kept up with the rise in farm income. Relations with the farm family are seldom as intimate as formerly. Mechanization has eliminated certain types of work and considerably changed the rest. Moreover the farm hand is frequently the principal sufferer from the failure to make the most of those rural resources which, if not at present productive of cash income, could contribute to better housing and other necessities.

With the seasonal laborers, particularly those in the specialty-crop areas, the situation is still more difficult because of the irregular and limited periods of employment and the lack of permanent or resident status in the community (figs. 3 and 4). At the height of the season there are well over 1 million persons employed on farms hiring 3 or more, and nearly half a million on farms hiring 10 or more workers.

In some areas there has been a considerable development of large-scale farms, of which a census investigation listed 7,875 in 1929 (3). This is only about 0.1 percent of all farms and represents less than 5 percent of American agriculture. However, this 0.1 percent paid 11 percent of the farm wage bill; on these farms the average wage bill



Figure 4.—In specialty farming, labor is irregular and not resident in the community.



Figure 5.—On large-scale farms the conditions of employment are more like those in a factory.

was \$13,385, as compared with \$135 for the 6 million other farms. Of these large-scale enterprises, more than 40 percent were fruit, truck, and specialty-crop farms, about 25 percent were stock ranches, and 10 percent were dairy farms. Of the total number, 2,892 were in California, and 731 were in Texas, as compared with 65 in Iowa and 21 in Minnesota. Of the large-scale enterprises in truck crops, California had 59.7 percent; of large-scale fruit farms, 60.1 percent; of large-scale cotton enterprises, 30 percent; of large-scale dairies, 40.5 percent; and of large-scale poultry farms, 52.9 percent. In this State in 1930 agricultural wage earners made up 56.4 percent of the total gainfully employed agricultural population 10 years of age and over, as compared with 26 percent for the United States. These figures indicate a development in agricultural organization quite different from that of the family-size farm.

On these large-scale farms the conditions of employment are more like those in a factory than like those on the traditional American farm (fig. 5). Hence the tendency on the part of labor sympathizers to refer to "factory farming." Aside from the number of workers employed, the work is of a highly routine character, being carried on by gangs under the direction of foremen or field bosses. The hiring of workers, their supervision, the payment of wages, and even housing and provisioning are often turned over to a labor contractor or to a representative of the packing or canning company or the cooperative marketing agency. Wage rates are very uncertain and may be cut without notice. Anything more unlike the variety and personal responsibility of the work of the hired man can scarcely be imagined.

The Forgotten Man

However, it is not only the increasing importance of seasonal labor or the change in the status of the regular farm hand that is compli-

cating the agricultural labor problem. There is also the intrusion into agricultural circles of standards derived from industrial labor. Since 1933, despite vast unemployment, the laborers in industry have made gains. In 1935, after a period of experiment with the now famous section 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, the Wagner Labor Relations Act was passed. This act reasserted the principle of collective bargaining in industry, assured to labor the right to be represented by agents of its own choosing, and forbade employers to interfere with the freedom to organize. In 1935 came the Social Security Act, which outlined a far-reaching scheme of unemployment insurance and assistance for the aged, the blind, and other groups. In 1938 the Fair Labor Standards Act became operative, establishing a minimum for wages and a maximum for hours. The result of these legislative enactments has been to give impetus to the organization of industrial laborers and to create a new atmosphere in employment relations. Many powerful employers who in the past refused to countenance labor organizations have now accepted collective bargaining and appear to be satisfied that it offers a means of orderly procedure in their necessary dealings with their employees.

During all this period of debate and development the agricultural laborer has remained in the background. The legislation designed for the benefit of agriculture recognized expressly only sharecroppers and the workers in the sugar fields. From the benefits of the National Labor Relations Act, the Social Security Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, the farm worker was definitely excluded. Accordingly, in 1939, unprotected in his right to bargain collectively, with no floor for his wages or ceiling for his hours, and denied the benefits of unemployment insurance and old-age assistance, the farm hand is worse off, by comparison with the industrial workers, than he was in 1933. Consciousness of this situation has undoubtedly done much in recent years to complicate already unsatisfactory employment relations on the farm.

With the specific conditions of which farm laborers complain—low incomes, low wage rates, irregular employment, unsatisfactory conditions of work, bad housing and living conditions, denial of civil liberties, and unsatisfactory status in the community—it is impossible to deal properly here. As regards income, it is obvious that if in 1929 1,700,000 farms on which lived probably 7,700,000 persons yielded gross farm incomes of less than \$600 a year,³ the income prospects of farm laborers during the troubled years since that date cannot have been favorable. In 1929 farmers paid about 1,284 million dollars in cash wages, board, and lodging. By 1933 this farm labor bill had dropped to 517 million. Total farm income had also dropped from about 12 billion dollars in 1929 to 5¼ billion in 1932, but by 1937 again amounted to about 10 billion (*5, 1938 report, pp. 91-92*). In that year total payments to labor, however, were still below 800 million dollars.⁴ In all probability the full-time earnings of agricultural workers, including perquisites, average under \$400 a year for the country as a whole.

³ TAYLOR, CARL C., WHEELER, HELEN W., and KIRKPATRICK, E. L. DISADVANTAGED CLASSES IN AMERICAN AGRICULTURE. U. S. Farm Security Admin. Soc. Res. Rpt. 8, 124 pp. 1938. [Processed.]

⁴ UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE. INCOME PARITY FOR AGRICULTURE PART II, EXPENSES OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION. SECTION 1, THE COST OF HIRED FARM LABOR, 1909-38. PRELIMINARY. 45 pp., illus. 1939. [Processed.]

Data available since 1910 show that farm wage rates have maintained a fairly consistent relationship to farm income, gross and net, and also to prices received by farmers for their products. However, since 1933, when farm incomes turned upward after the catastrophic fall in 1932, farm wage rates, which had not fallen as far, failed to recover at as rapid a rate and have remained somewhat lower than the earlier relationship between wage rates and farm incomes would lead one to expect. Doubtless the inability of laborers to shift to industry is a factor. On July 1, 1939, the average rate of pay per month without board was \$36.26, as compared with \$37.28 the year before. Per day, without board, the rate for 1939 was \$1.59; for 1938, \$1.63.⁵ In some areas—for example, on the Pacific coast—rates are considerably higher, but employment is highly seasonal and requires constant movement and expense in search of jobs.

According to the census of 1930 the wage worker has, on an average, 150 days of farm employment per year. To this instability of employment the trend toward larger farms in some areas and the gradually increasing mechanization of agricultural operations are contributing by reducing the need for regular hands. Where such equipment as the corn picker and the combine harvester is in use the seasonal-labor requirements are reduced also.

At this point, however, it should be noted that in agriculture, as in industry, the advent of the machine is not an unmixed evil. As a matter of fact, as a means of increasing income per worker, it is desirable that more, rather than fewer, machines should be introduced. Hand labor is inefficient as compared with human effort applied through machines; therefore, it is poorly paid. The presence of a plentiful supply of cheap labor in the Corn and Cotton Belts is thus an obstacle to that mechanization by which the incomes of those who are retained in agriculture would be raised. What to do with those who are not retained is another question.

As a consequence of the low incomes of farm laborers, their standards of living are incredibly low, their housing is inadequate, their means of preserving health are meager, and their community relationships are reduced almost to the vanishing point. In these respects the regular laborers and the sharecroppers are not much worse off than a large proportion of the farm operators, tenants, and owners.⁶ But the seasonal laborers, who make up probably one-half of the 2 to 3 million hired workers in the country, are undoubtedly at the bottom of the heap—especially the quarter of a million or more who are migratory. Concerning the difficulties of the beet workers in the Lake, Mountain, and Pacific Coast States, the field hands of the great California valleys, the vegetable workers of New Jersey, the citrus workers of California and Florida, and the cotton, fruit, and truck-crop workers of Texas there has grown up an extensive literature of complaint.

During recent years there has been a sharp increase in the number of labor disputes in agriculture, particularly in the specialized crop areas. In 1927 there were 2 strikes, involving 322 agricultural

⁵ UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE. FARM WAGE RATE INDEX DOWN 3 POINTS FROM YEAR AGO. 18 pp., illus. July 14, 1939. [Mimeographed.]

⁶ See page 9 of reference cited in footnote 3.

workers; in 1928, 4, involving 410 workers. In 1933, however, the number of strikes rose to 47, with 58,701 workers participating. Since that time through 1938, there have been 159 strikes of agricultural workers reported, of which 24 involved 1,000 or more workers each. Although 24 States were affected, 80 of the strikes since 1933 have occurred in California. Many of these disputes have been characterized by extreme bitterness on both sides; they offer eloquent testimony to the urgent character of the agricultural labor problem in the special-crop areas.

LINES OF ACTION

The first line of attack upon the farm laborers' problems is part of the general offensive against low farm incomes and bad living conditions. As stated in the Report of the Secretary of Agriculture for 1937 (5)—

Progress toward economic security and improved living standards among farm laborers depends in large measure, like the prosperity of agriculture in general, on the extent to which the country advances toward a fairer distribution of the national income as between agriculture and urban industry.

The farmer's ability to hire on terms satisfactory to laborers is limited by his ability to pay. Unless the conditions of agricultural prosperity can be restored, measures directed toward improving the lot of any particular group—owners, tenants, croppers, or laborers—will avail only to a limited extent.

Closely connected with this broad frontal attack upon the general problems of agriculture is another line of action which is equally basic, directed toward making labor power on farms a scarcer and therefore more effectively utilized and more highly valued article. Unless agricultural income—both cash and noncash—can be increased beyond all expectations, it is necessary, along with what can be done in that direction, to reduce the number of those among whom income is shared. To do this involves success in the efforts directed toward the increase of employment in factory, mill, and mine. As long as there are millions of unemployed in the urban areas, as long as farm youth lack the opportunity to take up industrial occupations but remain, perforce, on the farms, so long will it be difficult to improve materially the position of the farm laborers.

To say this, however, is not to advocate large-scale removal of rural population to the cities or to belittle the possibility of the further development of farm and other rural resources in such a way as to utilize existing rural labor more fully. What is needed is a resumption of the hitherto normal movement of a certain proportion of farm youth in response to opportunity in industry. There are those who would keep all farm people on the farms, who regard the hope of self-betterment in nonfarm occupations as illusory. They believe that agriculture and its allied rural industries can be so transformed as to afford a satisfactory living to all who are farm-born. Others believe that industry can be decentralized and brought to the rural centers to be combined with farming in a fruitful way of life. Such hopes should be cherished and every effort bent to secure their realization. But we are bound to recognize that if, from 1920 to 1930, two-fifths

of all farm boys between 20 and 30 years old migrated to the cities, the cessation of this movement and the damming up on the farms from 1930 to 1935 of 2 million extra workers greatly complicated the farm problem (2). Fuller employment in industry would not only increase the demand for farm products and expand farm employment; it would also offer renewed opportunity to such farm people as prefer to seek jobs in the cities.

Better Labor Distribution

Emphasis upon such considerations, which apply both to the farmer and to the man he hires, should not blind us to the importance of certain special circumstances which affect the workers. Chief among these is the system of labor distribution, which is at present, as it long has been, nothing short of chaotic. In the special-crop areas, particularly, growers evidently assume that the seasonal workers needed at peak periods must and will be available without any responsibility on their part as to whether there is work enough to go round or what happens to the laborers after the need for them on the farms is ended. Indiscriminate advertising for labor often leads to oversupply, with low wage rates, low earnings, widespread distress, and hastily contrived methods of partial relief as the result.

If it is necessary for agriculture in these areas to be subsidized by the community, through provision of livelihood for the unemployed, the fact should be recognized by farmers as well as by the State and something better than the present haphazard methods of assistance worked out. But before taking this path it is desirable that every effort be made, locally and nationally, to adjust the supply of labor efficiently to the demand for it, through the development of an effective farm-placement and information service. Already notable steps in this direction have been taken in some States—for example, in Texas. But the progress is uneven. What is needed—since labor migrations are interstate in character—is more cooperation between Federal and State agencies, education of the growers to the advantages of effective placement, and regulation of frequently irresponsible private employment concerns. Such measures will not increase the volume of employment—indeed they will leave some laborers with less work than at present; but they will reduce the heavy cost of fruitless travel and lessen the distress which accompanies gluts in the labor market. Heavy movements of farm laborers from one area to another can be controlled, and means can be provided for assisting potential migrants to remain at home.

More Regular Employment

Closely connected with these measures looking toward the more effective placement of farm laborers is the modification of crop organization and farm practices so as to promote continuity of employment and increase annual earnings. In some areas there appears to be a possibility of the introduction of crop sequences that will reduce the need for seasonal labor. There are also certain types of processing which are now performed off the farm but which could well be combined with farm operations to increase the volume of available

employment. In some areas there has been unjustified and uneconomic resort to the use of labor-saving machinery.

Precisely what adjustments of this sort can be made is not yet clear. It is frequently argued that the inevitable effect would be to increase the costs of production of the farmer and thus the prices of the commodities he produces, with consequent lessening of consumer demand and reduction of the amount of employment for farm labor. Indeed, it is asserted that the whole trend of development on the farms is in the opposite direction, that is, toward greater specialization in production and the use of equipment, which, although increasing the need for hired labor for short periods, lessens the dependence upon regular labor. This argument may be a sound one, especially for the individual farmer and in the short run. However, for the community there are additional costs involving serious social wastage. It may be best for society to assume these costs directly, leaving the farmer free to use labor as he sees fit; on the other hand, it may be preferable to induce the farmer to take a longer view. In any case it cannot be denied that it is desirable that farm operators who employ considerable seasonal labor should be encouraged to consider their responsibilities to the public in connection with the social problems arising from their present employment policies.

As a contribution, if a minor one, to the solution of these seasonal labor difficulties the provision of permanent and mobile camp facilities deserves to be encouraged. Of themselves these can contribute little to the permanent rehabilitation of the seasonal workers; they do, however, greatly improve the health aspects of seasonal farm employment. At present the Farm Security Administration has 25 permanent and 6 movable camps either in operation or in course of being established, in 7 States. More than half of them are in California. About 35,000 families use these camps in the course of a year. Such aid would be desirable for 10 times as many.

Widespread in rural areas is the need for the extension of the services of the public health authorities and for the establishing of rural medical centers. The experience of the Farm Security Administration in working out its system of cooperative medical care for low-income farm people has shown that it is possible to secure the active cooperation of State and local medical societies in providing more adequate health protection at lower cost. Through more than 100 medical-service plans, organized on a county or district basis, a number of experiments in types of organization and methods of approach are being worked out that should furnish a pattern for this type of service in the future, applicable to farm laborers' as well as farm operators' families.

More nearly adequate funds for housing and camp inspection in rural areas are in most States a real need. Coupled with this is the desirability of further effort directed toward low-cost housing construction such as will make it possible for families working on farms, permanently or temporarily, to escape what have been accurately described as rural slums. There should also be further experimentation with methods of providing home and garden quarters for agricultural workers and education in more efficient buying and consumption.

Equality Under Law

At the present time, as has already been noted, the agricultural laborers are almost entirely outside the system of protective labor legislation which has been established since 1933. The tendency of legislatures, both national and State, to exclude farm laborers is due (1) to a belief that the actuarial and administrative difficulties would give rise to administrative costs so high as to be prohibitive; (2) to a fear that the small farmer would be placed at a disadvantage; (3) to a tradition that the farm hand does not require protection; (4) to a fear that inclusion of farm laborers would mean defeat of any labor legislation proposed; and (5) to lack of any well-organized labor support.

The argument most frequently advanced by farm interests against extending protection to agricultural laborers, and to those in processing plants as well, is the largely fallacious one that such action would necessarily decrease the returns to farmers. As a matter of fact, it is becoming obvious to all disinterested persons that we cannot go on indefinitely denying to workers on farms and in allied occupations the benefits of legislation designed to improve the lot of labor generally. To do so is to create a class of pariahs, of really forgotten men, and to contribute to a definite inferiority of status which, in time, as industrial and agricultural conditions improve, the farmer himself will have cause to regret. Such action, moreover, is a type of negative class legislation which is repugnant to the spirit of American institutions.

Agricultural workers, like domestic and casual workers, were excluded from the social security legislation of August 1935 primarily because of the administrative difficulties anticipated on account of the high proportion of employers to employees, the payment of wages partly in kind, and the wide dispersion of the workers and their employers.

In its report to the President of December 30, 1938, the Social Security Board recommended the extension of old-age insurance—now estimated to include at any one time only 50 percent of the Nation's gainfully occupied population—to agricultural workers employed in large-scale farming operations; it suggested continuance of the exclusion of workers employed by small farmers to do the ordinary work of the farm. This recommendation was based on the grounds (1) that it is sound social policy to extend old-age insurance to as many of the Nation's workers as possible; (2) that, while the complete inclusion of agricultural employees leads to administrative difficulties, the inclusion of workers on large-scale farms would reduce rather than increase the administrative difficulties that now exist; and (3) that the financial soundness of the system is endangered by present arrangements, under which considerable numbers of farm workers come in by the "back door," so to speak, through acquiring rights to minimum benefits by working, from time to time, off the farm, in covered employments. It appears that at present it is almost impossible to delimit the field of agricultural labor with anything like the certainty required for administration. Particularly in enterprises concerned with processing and marketing as well as with agricultural production, the employer is plagued with perplexities involved in the

keeping of necessary records of covered and excluded employees.

With respect to unemployment insurance, it was the view of the Board that, although in some foreign countries the systems have been extended to cover agricultural employees, in this country the agricultural wage-earning group is so much less clearly defined that extension of unemployment insurance to all agricultural employees at the present time is inadvisable. However, as in the case of old-age insurance, the Board recommended that the exception should apply only to the services of a farm hand employed by a small farmer to do the ordinary work connected with his farm. In addressing the Congress on the subject of social security on January 16, 1939, the President expressed his belief that under both the Federal old-age insurance system and the Federal-State unemployment compensation system "equity and sound social policy require that the benefits be extended to all of our people as rapidly as administrative experience and public understanding permit."

Inclusion of farm workers under the wages and hours regulations of the Fair Labor Standards Act should be governed by the facts as to employment status. Where workers are employed on the farm in considerable numbers, the individual workman is at the same disadvantage in dealing with his employer as the worker in industry and is entitled to the same protection. It is assumed, of course, that due consideration must be given to the peculiarities of agricultural production, especially as regards hours of employment. On those farms that have a man or two, regularly or at certain seasons, no questions as to wages or conditions of employment are likely to arise that cannot be settled equitably by the persons concerned. Similar considerations apply to the related question of including farm workers under the National Labor Relations Act, which was enacted by Congress for the purpose of protecting workers in their exercise of the right of collective bargaining. Farm workers, like all others in the United States, undoubtedly have that right and should be denied no guaranty that is extended by law to workers generally.

As regards farm wages, one may risk a reference to some foreign experience.

It is noteworthy that in each of the three countries—Great Britain, New Zealand, and Australia—where national minimum-wage legislation has long obtained, inclusion of agricultural workers has closely followed enactment of minimum-wage laws covering industrial workers. In England and Wales, despite a difficult beginning, an intervening depression, and an impoverished condition of agriculture, the legislation has been kept continuously in operation for 15 years and in 1937 was extended to Scotland. Its continuance appears to have been due to a belief in an interaction between agricultural and industrial wages of such character that if agricultural wage rates are not coordinated with those in industry the best elements of the agricultural labor supply are lost to the farmer. This relationship may be more marked in Great Britain, with its proportionally greater farm employment, than in the United States, but considerations of this kind are undoubtedly of some weight in explaining what is sometimes referred to as the "inland march" of the unions on the Pacific coast. Here, as in the southern textile areas, it is contended that the low

standards of rural workers exert a depressing influence upon industrial wage rates, and thus justify a concerted effort to improve the conditions of rural employment.

Need for State Action

In the United States, of course, the situation, as compared with that in Great Britain, is complicated by the size of the country and the Federal character of our governmental arrangements. Hence the importance of State action in all matters that affect agricultural labor.

At present, under State laws relating to workmen's compensation, unemployment insurance, the hours of work of women and their wages, the employment of children, wage collection, and the like, agricultural workers are quite generally excepted; and, where they are included, enforcement leaves much to be desired. How this situation is to be remedied—whether by Federal assistance, pressure of organized labor, or the process of education—remains to be determined.

In all of the agricultural States the employment service should be expanded and improved and more effective methods of cooperation with the Federal service devised. In those areas where seasonal laborers are a necessity, public welfare imposes the duty of seeing to it that the workers have decent camping or housing facilities, public or private, and that proper standards of sanitation are maintained. The social importance of more adequate provision of educational opportunities for the children of agricultural workers need not be emphasized. The increase of labor organization and agricultural strikes in recent years suggests the desirability of working out methods of wage determination by joint conference of employers and employees, and also methods of stabilizing wage rates so as to prevent those violent fluctuations associated with ill-regulated movements of labor which so seriously reduce the earnings of seasonal workers. It is also desirable that facilities for mediation and conciliation in farm-labor disputes should be worked out. In certain counties of California an auspicious beginning in this direction has been made, and there has been considerable discussion of the possibility of a State board of conciliation for agriculture. When strikes of agricultural workers do occur, it is essential, as was noted by the President's Committee on Farm Tenancy, "that the civil liberties of the workers, and the right of peaceful assembly and of organization, be preserved" (?).

The possibilities of improvement of the status of farm labor through independent action on the part of organized producers and laborers remain to be explored. In some areas there is evidence that associations of producers are beginning to concern themselves with other aspects of the labor problem than that merely of providing an adequate supply of cheap labor. It is important that such associations should assume more responsibility for the social effects of the methods of labor utilization and management. Otherwise agriculture and its allied industries can hardly escape, not merely the inefficiency and loss involved in interruptions of orderly production, but also the growth of militant organizations of labor and the necessity for intervention on the part of government.

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