THE HUMAN SIDE OF FARM ECONOMY.¹

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Our discussion this afternoon has two foci, farm economy and the human factor in that economy. To set forth the human side of the vast agricultural enterprise so that the three great parties to the enterprise, the economist, the public, and the farmer may perceive how much the rural problems of each move about the focus of the purely human, is my principal aim. To suggest how meager is scientific information about the human factor, especially on the non-economic, purely human side is a secondary aim. And further to suggest that the economist, the public and the farmer will welcome humanistic specialists and organized research through these specialists into the purely human aspects of the farming enterprise, is a third aim ranking with the first.

I.

Let us look first at the rôle of the purely human in the problems of the farm economist. Let us approach this rôle, moreover, through words of the economists themselves. Professor Boss says:

Farm Management is the application of business principles and the scientific principles of agriculture (as discovered by the chemist, the physicist, the agronomist, the animal husbandman and other specialists) to the business of farming.

I am assuming that in the mind of Professor Boss the "other specialists" mentioned include specialists on certain non-economic aspects of the human animal who appears as the chief factor in farm management; for Professor Boss, implying the dependence of farming upon subtle non-economic human forces, goes on to say:

For the past several years it has been difficult to employ satisfactory farm help at seasons when it is most needed.

Few farmers market their products in the best possible fashion. The reason for this state of affairs lies largely in the lack of community interest in the problem.

¹ (Address delivered before a joint meeting of the National Country Life Association and the American Farm Economic Association, Tuesday, November 11, 1919, at Chicago, Illinois.)

Upon the farmer quite as much as upon any other one factor depends the efficiency of the farm organization and the profits from farming.

Dr. Carver has a great deal to say about waste labor, acknowledging the helplessness of the economist to increase production, unaided by humanistic agencies. He says:

Of waste labor there are four principal kinds—the unemployed, the improperly employed, the imperfectly employed, and the voluntarily idle. In the elimination of these four forms of waste lie greater opportunities for the constructive economist than in any other direction.

The greatest source of waste labor power is vice and immorality.

To be a thoroughly equipped scientific farmer probably requires a higher education, than any of the learned professions, with the possible exception of medicine.

A progressive attitude of mind, a willingness to change, to learn a new method when it is once demonstrated to be better than the old one, is one of the first requisites to an efficient and economical employment of the labor power of a community.

However wise and efficient the government may be in its agricultural policy, if the farm managers are unprogressive, if they are under the power and domination of a superstitious form of religion or of unscrupulous demagogues, the work of the legislator will be in vain.

Dr. Nourse, implying that the human factor is susceptible of being energized or devitalized by obscure forces not under economic control, says:

In agricultural economics it is the farmer who is in all cases, the ultimate subject of our concern.

Labor in the economic sense means mental as well as physical effort, and the intellectual and spiritual qualities of individuals vary even more widely than their stature or their strength.

In 1901 and 1902 and 1903 the hook-worm formed the nucleus of jest in talk and printed items; it was then the "lazy worm." But as time and experience confirmed and added to the earlier warnings, the real meaning of the insidious enemy to the district fastened itself in the public mind; and more than one paper earnestly urged the economic as well as purely pathological importance of the disease.

Dr. H. C. Taylor, who is an optimist on ways and means of raising the farmer's output by increasing the farmer's personal quality and social status, says:

Human brawn and human brain are so important in giving direction to the other factors that man may easily be counted the most important of the three factors of production. Whatever affects man as an agent in agricultural production seriously affects the results of this basic industry.

The man with ill-health who is often unable to work, has little hope of success on the farm.

When two farmers employ equal amounts of labor and capital-goods upon equal areas of equally productive land, the one who possesses a relatively high degree of efficiency can produce a larger return than his competitor who is less efficient.

In the mind of the high-class young farmer, the life of himself and his family, in accordance with a high standard of comfort and right relations in the community, will give purpose and force to the primary economic motive and hold it in its right position as a means to an end, but not as an end in itself.

Dr. Warren, opening our eyes to the complicated human qualifications for success in farming, says:

More farmers fail because of poor farm management than because of poor production.

For success in farming, health, strength, and ability for the wife are almost as important as for the farmer.

Occasionally a man makes a fair success when he has no particular qualifications except muscle, but success under this condition is much more difficult than formerly. Good common sense which is another definition for business ability is the most important trait, but the highest profits are made by those who combine this ability with experience, scientific knowledge of plant and animal production, manual and mechanical skill, and hard work.

These quotations are sufficient, doubtless, to show how concerned the farm economist is with the human factor in farm economy as appearing in farm labor problems and farm management problems. What stands out with startling clearness at this point in the development of agricultural scientific agencies is the general absence of specialists working on the particular human aspects of the human factor which are important to farm economy. The farm economist, so far as I know, has never set up a claim to be a specialist on rural health, rural eugenics, rural psychology, rural education, or rural political science. The conclusion is forced upon us that rural economists will welcome to the study of farm economy a staff of specialists on the non-economic, purely human phase of farm life. Think for a moment of the development of scientific data on the physical, chemical and biological side of the land factor in farm economy. Think of the scientific advance in our knowledge of the capital factor in plant breeding, plant disease; and in cattle breeding, cattle feeding and cattle disease. Think of the scientific staff at work in each line. Think of the amount of money annually expended in research in all these lines. Then note the creed of the foregoing economists that production and the farmers's profits hang upon the dynamic quality of the human agent; then recall that we have as yet in our agricultural research agencies only an instance here and there, surely no widespread recognition of research, on the purely human side of farm

economy; and the human situation in farm economy is fairly spread before you on the table in its broad outline for sober consideration.

It would be a shock to many to learn how meager is our trustworthy information about the life, labor, and happiness of our farm population. Rural sociology, a very recent social science, attempting to coördinate some of the basic human sciences and apply them to farm life, has made a few bare beginnings upon the problem. Perhaps the most serious general fact corrupting the value of the statistics of "rural population" is this, that we have never had as yet a classified census of farm population. Rural sociologists are especially handicapped by this glaring defect in population statistics. Not until the farm population is sifted and sorted out of the so-called rural population, and then classified with respect to dynamic characteristics, attainments, and shortcomings can we expect national statistical information about the rural human animal for utilization in farm economy.

Psychologists have not yet deigned to study the psychology of farming, as they have the psychology of some other occupational processes, like salesmanship, advertising, and industrial management. Nor have the political scientists, with small exception, attempted to tackle the problem of why farmers possess no modern local political instruments of the character of the village or city municipality.

The arena of country life, labor and struggle, where the farmer and his family achieve their primary habits of thought and action is the farmstead,—a miniature social and economic principality. A full knowledge of the human being who is sovereign over this little rural domain is one of the keys to understanding farm economy as well as rural society.

The so-called efficiency movement of our time, which in the department of business goes under the name of scientific management, is probably responsible for the application of principles of psychology to many practical situations arising in the course of industry and commerce. It was a far-reaching discovery when the administrative staff of commercial organization seeing that goods of quality did not automatically impress the consumer and produce sales, arrived at the conclusion that buying and selling was a social operation depending upon principles underlying the processes of the human mind. The psychology of salesmanship and advertising thereupon became a fixed part of business organization.

Is it not quite possible that the promoters of scientific agriculture, in their eager and confident application of the fundamental physical

sciences to the processes of agricultural production and distribution, have arrived at the point where the human factor must be taken more completely into consideration on the psychologic side? Agricultural extension method, recently introduced widely in the United States, is a partial answer to this question; "demonstration" which is visible explanation on the spot, is everywhere the vogue. But has not the deservedly popular extension method in agriculture arrived at the same point in its development where business organization stood when it was "demonstrating" its goods without a basic knowledge of the psychology of the buying operation?

Unless agricultural promotion, research, extension, education—in both its productive and marketing aspects—is to reach a point of diminishing returns at the stone wall of the rural social mind, it apparently must add to its method, a broad recognition of the psychological and social aspects of rural life.

The environmental influences surrounding human life, labor, and intercourse on the farmstead furnish a set of pressures and strains upon farm life, the physiological, mental and social effects of which we may observe and judge. Here then is the beginning of a psychology of farm life which may, as time goes on, be elaborated by the psychologist and sociologist who happen to possess rural sympathy and farming imagination.

If the light of scientific research can be widely turned upon the farm family and the farm population, it is not unreasonable to suppose that methods of vitalizing and of energizing the present motives of the farmer as a producer and profit-maker will be found. What is still more probable, moreover, sources of brand new social dynamics through new farmer groupings, will be made available to the farm population as a whole which will add materially to our national farm economy.

It may be fairly assumed that the farm economist would be highly interested in and would welcome, therefore, a series of studies carried on by specialists after something like the following program:

A. THE FARM POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES.

1. A numerical census by counties.
2. A tabulation by counties of all the usual population items in the population schedule such as age, sex, color, education, literacy, marital condition and the like.

B. THE HEALTH OF THE FARM POPULATION.

1. State health maps.
2. Regional maps showing areas of outstanding ailments.
3. Health studies in areas of low production.
4. Health studies in areas of tenancy.
5. Studies of the health of farm children and women.
6. Health studies of farm population engaged in the various types of agriculture.

C. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE FARM POPULATION.

1. Psychological studies of farm populations engaged in various types of agriculture.
2. Psychological studies of farmer organizations.
3. Psychological studies of farmers under various forms of land tenure.
4. Psychological studies of hired laborers.
5. Psychological studies of various race elements in the farm population.
6. Psychological studies of rural and urban inter-relations.
7. Psychology of extension work among farmers.
8. Psychology of backward and progressive communities.

D. THE EDUCATION OF THE FARM POPULATION.

1. Studies concerning the influence of elementary education of the farm population on farm economy.
2. Studies concerning the influence of secondary education of the farm population on farm economy.
3. Studies on the influence of technical agricultural education on farm economy.

E. MUNICIPAL PRIVILEGES FOR THE FARM POPULATION.

1. Studies of farm population groups, agricultural and social.
2. Studies of the existing charters of local government among farm populations.
3. Studies on the relation of urban municipalities to farm population groups.
4. Studies on the adaptation of municipal instruments to the conditions of open country residence.

The thoroughgoing recognition by farm economists of the value to farm economy of some such program as the above would have a profound influence upon research agencies in each state of the Union. Voiced recognition would supplement the silent welcome which I have assumed.

II.

The public is a decided party to all fundamental policies touching agriculture and the agricultural population. The public pays its share of the bills of agricultural experimentation, extension, and technical education. This fact alone entitles the public to consideration. The public especially desires assurance, I take it, that the human factor in the farm enterprise, namely, the farmer and his family, and the group of farm families associating together in community life, is reacting to the state and national expenditure in such a way that the benefits derived therefrom are relatively permanent, finding lodgment in the bed rock of rural community life and not in constant danger of being washed off the land into some urban stream. Nothing short of a systematic study of the farmer as a human being, a study holding out inducements of valuable discovery as does experimentation with swine, cattle, and sheep—can give to the public the solid assurance it needs for continuing the vast agricultural financial program.

The public is interested furthermore in the farm population—not only as efficient producers of food, but as contributors of human balance to American citizenship. In all political discussions the agrarian class is referred to, with more or less sincerity to be sure, as the backbone of the nation's integrity, justice, and democracy. From this point of view the problem of how to maintain a high standard of rural citizenship is a vital problem, but a very special one, depending on conditions which are as yet unknown only because unstudied. The structure of rural society has only recently challenged students of social life, and the sources of information are largely original observations yet to be made.

The public will probably feel more comfortable about its budget for the improvement of farming in this country and easier in mind about the Americanism of its rural population if a study of rural human conditions is made the aim of a responsible research agency in every state. The following subjects will serve as a guide to what the public would presumably like to know.

I. THE FARM FAMILY AS A BASIC INSTITUTION.

1. Influences at work upon the stability of the farm family.
2. Influences which produce permanency in residence or the shifting of families from rural community to rural community.
3. The relation of the farm family to urban life and energy.

II. THE RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT OF FARM LIFE.

1. The influence of new methods of farming upon religious thought.
2. The relation of church groups to agricultural groups.
3. The influence of a larger contact with life upon the farmer's religious ideals.

III.

The farmer himself, in many ways the most deeply concerned, is the party to the agricultural program in America most intensely interested. He wants his share of the annual national dividend and is coming to want this more and more insistently; but it should not be forgotten that he wants this dividend for the purpose of maintaining an American standard of living. And right here is the rub; for how to maintain an American standard of living on the farm, as country life is now organized, is an enigma. The average farmer from sheer perplexity of soul solves the enigma by sidestepping the main issue. He either is resigned to a lower standard of living for his family, or as soon as his profits warrant, and sometimes sooner than they warrant, he leaves the agricultural enterprise, quits the farm and farming, turning it over to inferior farmers in many cases it must be conceded; and seeks the American standard of living for himself and family in an urban center where the social tools, instruments, and machines of social power have been more fully developed. This result is plainly disastrous to the main agricultural enterprise of the Nation and is a blow to the country life philosophy of many hard-headed people who hold that prosperity alone solves the country life problem. It all too frequently takes away from the land the persons possessing seasoned farm experience, pulls up usually from rural community life the most prosperous and spirited family groups and turns the human stream into an already congested town and city current, where farm-bred persons seek more or less successfully to find their place in new life and work relations. The problem of maintaining a high standard of living for American farmers and keeping intact on the land the seasoned farm population itself is a rural human problem of the greatest moment to the farmer, the public, and the

rural economist. But this is not exclusively an economic problem. Rather it is a very complicated social, human, psychological, and political problem, having to do with a class of people whose cultural, esthetic, and intellectual aspirations have hitherto been very largely postponed by one force or another, by one set of circumstances or another.

The farmer himself will welcome, it may safely be assumed, scientific studies of the following nature:

I. THE AMERICAN STANDARD OF LIVING FOR THE FARM POPULATION.

1. The social instruments of power.
2. The political instruments of power.
3. The relation of rural prosperity to standards of living.

II. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STATUS OF THE FARM POPULATION.

1. Causes of social equality and social inferiority in the country.
2. Causes of political equality and political inferiority in the country.

CONCLUSION.

From the point of view, therefore, of the farm economist, the public, and the farmer, it would seem to be a stratgetic advance for the rural research agencies in state and national life to include in the field of their legitimate activities the purely human side of farm economy, along with the purely economic. This question will face especially the agricultural experiment stations in the different states. And the form in which it will come up to them will be this: Is the purely human side of farm economy susceptible of investigation by methods of a scientific character? Already some experiment stations have answered this question affirmatively, have incorporated rural social investigation into their program of research and have paved the way for other experiments stations by demonstration of scientific method in this field. It is to be hoped that the director of every agricultural experiment station will speedily take this same stand, and give opportunity for the beginnings of a research staff in every state devoted to the purely human problems of the farm population. To know the farm people of the State in their relations to farming, to community life, to political life, seems an aim worthy of every state. The U. S. Department of Agriculture is already on record as intending to study the human side of farm economy, and welcomes coöperation in the states with responsible agencies of research.