

**FARM INCOME AND  
FARM LIFE**

# FARM INCOME AND FARM LIFE

*A Symposium on the Relation of the Social  
and Economic Factors in Rural Progress*

PREPARED BY A JOINT COMMITTEE

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## INTRODUCTION

At their annual meetings in 1924 the American Country Life Association and the American Farm Economics Association voted to authorize their presidents to appoint a joint committee for the preparation of a report on the relation of the social and economic factors in the improvement of rural life. As finally constituted this committee consists of Andrew Boss, University of Minnesota, O. G. Lloyd, Purdue University, and F. D. Farrell, Kansas State Agricultural College for the Farm Economics Association, and M. L. Wilson, Montana Agricultural College, J. H. Kolb, University of Wisconsin, and Dwight Sanderson, Cornell University, who was chosen chairman, for the Country Life Association.

The creation of this joint committee was due to the suggestion of President Kenyon L. Butterfield, who for many years has raised the query as to whether rural progress is not as much due to the desire for better things in life as it is the result of the improvement of the farmer's economic status. His thesis is that "greater profits in agriculture depend upon standards or prospective standards of living and comfort." \* To what extent is a higher standard of life the result of a better income? May the desire for the former stimulate greater exertion and efficiency and result in a better income as a means to the end sought? The need for a consideration of this problem arises from the frequent assertion of many farmers and the attitude of some agricultural economists that if the farmer's income could be increased he would automatically adopt a higher standard of life; while, on the other hand, not infrequently rural sociologists, educators, clergymen and others interested in the improvement of the quality of

\* K. L. Butterfield, *The Farmer and the New Day*, New York, 1919, p. 65.

human life on farms, advocate and undertake programs of improvement beyond the possibility of permanent financial support by the locality unless its economic resources are materially increased.

Obviously there is much to be said on both sides of this question, and the committee was created for the purpose of analyzing the problem and assembling facts and opinions concerning it, not with the idea that it could settle the questions involved, but that it might be able to define the issues and clarify our thinking on this problem which is so fundamental for a sound program of rural improvement.

Approaching its task with these ends in view, the committee first defined its problem as "The Relation of the Social and Economic Factors in Rural Progress." Whether or not this statement of the problem is definitive depends, of course, upon one's conception of the terms involved. Thus if one accepts Dr. Black's definition of economics (see p. 38), the whole question would seem to be one of the relation of different *economic* values in rural progress. The committee has made no attempt to define sharply the terms "economic" and "social", but has used them in the ordinary sense of the man of the street, on account of the lack of any better words to express its meaning. From this standpoint the term "economic" refers to those activities of life which have to do with the production, exchange and consumption of material wealth. The term "social" is even more difficult of definition. In contrast to the word "economic" as here used, the word "non-economic" would be more inclusive. The social factors in rural progress, as we conceive them, are those activities which affect human personality and character, usually by means of some form of association involving such factors as health, education, recreation, religion, artistic appreciation, sociability, etc. They are those goods which are commonly spoken of as included in "social welfare". Thus the two words "economic" and "social" as here used are not strictly antithetic or mutually

exclusive, but they do represent different categories of values and express better than any other the popular usage. In short the committee sought to make a brief, popular statement of the general problem committed to it which would roughly define the area to be studied. The more exact definitions of the terms "economic" and "rural progress" are considered by the collaborators in Chapters I and III.

The committee has been handicapped in its work by lack of any funds for its expenses. Consequently but one meeting has been held at which only half were in attendance. Being obliged to carry on the work by correspondence, and in view of the limited amount of time which it was possible for its members to give to the work, the committee decided that it would be best to make a somewhat detailed analysis of the general problem into sub-topics and to then invite the collaboration of numerous writers who had given special study to, or who were particularly qualified to discuss, individual topics. This was done and the outline for the coöperative study finally furnished to the collaborators is given in the Appendix, p. 319. Thus the final report now presented consists mostly of a symposium from the committee's collaborators. Owing to our inability to secure writers on some topics, and to the failure of others to notify us they could not furnish articles until too late to secure other writers, as well as to differences of interpretation of the topics by some of the authors, and, indeed, to the clarifying of the committee's own analysis as a result of the study of the articles submitted, it has been necessary to disregard the sequence of the original plan, though most of the topics have been kept as originally stated.

The work of the committee has, therefore, been chiefly of an editorial nature. It has sought to furnish a thread of continuity to the various chapters of the discussion by brief introductions and summaries, indicating their relationships to other parts of the report, and to unify the whole by a chapter of conclusions. These have been prepared by various members of

the committee, and in each case bear the initials of the editor. Although much of this editorial work has fallen to the chairman of the committee, yet the whole manuscript has been read by each member of the committee and the introductions and conclusions have been revised to meet the suggestions of its members, so that the report as now presented is truly the joint work of the committee as a whole.

It seems almost unnecessary to add that the committee is in no way responsible for the views of its collaborators. In some cases it has indicated a difference of opinion in its editorial comment, but in most cases it has made no effort to comment on views with which it may differ.

Obviously whatever merit the report may have is due to the generous assistance given by the collaborators, who have given their time and thought without compensation because of their interest in the topics on which they were invited to write. To all of them the committee extends its most sincere appreciation for their coöperation, without which its task would have been impossible.

The committee is also indebted to the appreciative interest of the directors of the Institute of Social and Religious Research, whose grant has made the publication of this report possible.

In presenting this report the committee is aware that some of the most fundamental questions raised have not been satisfactorily answered because of the lack of scientifically determined facts. On the other hand it is believed that the report gives a new insight into the essential elements of rural progress. It is hoped that the report may form the basis of discussion by both of the associations to which it is submitted and by other groups interested in rural life, and that out of such discussion may come a better understanding of the interplay of the social and economic factors in rural welfare and a closer coöperation between those professionally engaged in these two aspects of rural progress.—D. S.

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## APPENDIX

### OUTLINE FOR A COÖPERATIVE STUDY OF

### THE RELATION OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS IN RURAL PROGRESS

*Under the auspices of a Joint Committee of the American  
Country Life Association and the American  
Farm Economics Association*

NOTE:—The comments in parentheses ( ) after each topic are merely suggestive of what is involved in the topic, but the comments are not intended to be exhaustive or exclusive. Collaborators should discuss the topics from whatever point of view seems to them most significant.

#### *I. The Economic Aspect.*

- A. To what extent is economic efficiency essential for satisfactory rural life?
  1. What is the standard or goal of economic efficiency in agriculture?

(A new statement of the meaning of economic efficiency in agriculture is necessary. Usually this question is considered solely from the standpoint of national economic welfare, in terms of the maximum production of food at lowest cost. Does it not also involve the ability to secure social goods by the individual farm family, and the adjustment of the relation of the agricultural class to other classes so that farmers may have social goods and opportunities equal to those of other classes?)
  2. What is a satisfactory standard of living for the farmer; i.e. what is the norm? To what extent economic or social? (Should we recognize a definite limitation of the standard of living of the farmer, inherent in agriculture as an occupation, or should there be an equal opportunity for the standard of living of better farmers to advance as high as among

- the more favored classes, such as manufacturers, bankers, etc? Can the norm of the standard of living be static, or must it be relative? Are there certain features of the farmer's standard of living which produce values peculiar to the farm, which cannot be enjoyed elsewhere, and which may compensate to a degree for the lack of certain material goods?)
3. How does the economic status of agriculture or the economic relation of agriculture to other industries and commerce affect possible standards of living of farmers?
  4. Social losses or gains (or lower and higher standards of living) due to neglect or improvement of economic efficiency in agriculture, or due to economic resources and the efficiency of their use in agriculture.
    - a. What is the social significance of the coöperative movement? (What are the social by-products of the coöperative movement? Is conviction of the ethical justice of coöperation essential for its permanent success, or may it succeed solely on an economic basis?)
    - b. What is the effect of minimum and maximum economic status in agriculture on the standard of life, as compared with median economic status?  
(Is there a tendency for farmers below a certain minimum or above a certain maximum of economic status to have less interest in social welfare, or is social welfare promoted by those in medium circumstances who are striving for improvement? For instance, the latter class support the church and education more than either the lowest or highest economic classes. Consider the effect of prosperity on religion.)
    - c. What is the social effect of large estates?  
(Granting the economic efficiency of large estates or chains of farms under a single management, does such a system promote a desirable social situation or the highest rural welfare?)
    - d. What is the social effect of tenancy?  
(Granting the economic efficiency of tenancy under a sound leasing system, are there social losses from tenancy which make it desirable to limit its growth for non-economic reasons?)
    - e. How do the economic limitations of poorer agricultural sections affect social conditions? How far shall State assistance to rural communities go?  
(Should the State attempt to furnish equal opportunities

- for education, health, communication, etc., to people in poorer agricultural districts, and if so should it not limit the occupation of lands which are far below the margin of profitable production?)
- f. How do types of agricultural production and income affect the form of expenditure and culture? (Do dairying, truck growing, tobacco raising, etc., definitely limit the type of culture of their people, and do fruit growing, grain farming, etc., give opportunity for higher culture through more leisure, chance for travel, etc?)
  - g. To what extent will better economic conditions of farmers make possible a wider diffusion and higher development of human welfare on the farm?
    1. To what degree is better economic status necessary for creation and maintenance of satisfactory rural institutions and standards of living?
      2. a. Under what conditions does greater economic efficiency result in higher culture or standard of life?
        - b. What prevents increased economic efficiency from producing better culture or standard of life?  
(Does greater economic efficiency uniformly produce a better life? If not, why not? What conditions are essential for economic progress to result in a higher culture? Are these purely economic, or purely spiritual conditions, or a proper relation of the two sets of factors?)
- B. To what extent is human welfare essential to economic efficiency in agriculture?
1. Economic losses or gains in agriculture through neglect or improvement of human efficiency.  
(Under this heading it is aimed to secure concise statements of existing data concerning the economic value of conditions of human welfare, and how economic progress is limited by them.)
    - a. Economic aspect of health. (Summarize the economic losses and limitations due to hookworm, malaria, lack of obstetrical care, etc., in country.)
    - b. Economic aspect of education. (Show the superior economic ability resulting from education. Farm management surveys have accumulated a considerable body of statistics on this.)
    - c. Economic aspect of *sociability*. (Show the relation of social isolation on farms to holding desirable farm labor. Show lack of social life as a factor in determining in-

dividualistic attitudes which make coöperation in marketing more difficult. Consider other phases of the economic value of sociability.)

- d. Economic value of the *beautiful* or *esthetic*. (Show the economic value of beautification of the farmstead, of music—as in the work songs of negroes, of village band concerts for drawing trade, etc.)
  - e. Economic influence of *religion* and the *church*. (Show the relation of religious conviction regarding farm life as a dynamic in economic efficiency, as among the Mormons, Dunkards, etc. The effect of appreciation of higher goods upon thrift, etc.)
2. To what extent does the development of non-economic "goods" promote better economic conditions?  
(Show how education, religion, art, etc., enlarge the world of the individual and community and create new wants, which act as a dynamic toward economic production. One the chief difficulties in securing the progress of backward people is to break down their complacency and to arouse new desires, which frequently are non-economic in their objective. The recent cultural advancement of Denmark seems to illustrate this.  
Likewise experience has shown that sound ethics usually proves to be sound economics, as in the cases of slavery, shorter work day, prohibition, etc., although only in the later stages of these movements is the economic validity recognized.)

## II. *The Social (Non-Economic) Aspect.*

- A. What are the fundamental satisfactions or values of farm life?  
(Historically agriculture was developed as a means of human sustenance superior to hunting and gathering. It is now more largely a means of making a cash income. Does the production of food for sale serve as an end in itself, as did the original object of farming for family sustenance, or is commercial production largely a means to an end? If commercial farming is a "means" then what are the distinctive "ends" or "objectives" of farm life? Are there values in commercial agriculture which can make it as satisfying as other occupations? Are there social values in farm life not found in town or city occupations? If so, what are they? To what extent are the fundamental satisfactions in rural

life secured through health, education, sociability and play, esthetic appreciation, religion, home and community life, and similar social values? May these social values be realized in farm life in a way which give satisfactions peculiar to it and differing from the social values attainable in urban life? If so, what weight should they be given in determining public policy for rural progress?)

- B. What is the measure of rural progress?  
(May it be measured by the degree to which social values and standards—as outlined above—are advancing, and if so what is the relation of the better development of economic resources and the efficiency of the agricultural business?)

- C. To what extent may conditions and forces which promote the non-economic social welfare of rural people, advance rural progress independently of the economic factor?

(Contrast the culture of communities of similar economic status with and without general education, vital religion, music sociability, community life, etc.

Is an economic minimum essential for education, religion, sociability, etc., or only for their institutions? Are not these goods chiefly dependent upon the attitudes and ideals of rural groups, and to what extent are they obtainable independently of economic prosperity?

Another approach to this topic is given in the query raised by Dr. C. J. Galpin, to wit, whether if the farmer secured a better income, would it be possible for him to purchase the "good" we call religion. Would he be able to buy the immaterial "goods" he desires even if he had the money?)

### III. *The General Welfare of the Agricultural Class* as affected by the above considerations.

- A. Is the greatest economic efficiency in agriculture compatible with social welfare? of the individual? of society?

(It has been stated that the farmer who devotes a considerable amount of time to community welfare cannot compete with the farmer who devotes his entire energy to his farming, provided they are of equal ability; and that in the long run the farmer who minds his own business will possess the land. To what extent is this tendency true and how does it affect the individual and how does it affect society?)

- B. Will a low standard of living result in more production and force out those with higher standards of life?

(It is often held that foreign immigrants and those who be-

cause of relative poverty are willing to accept a lower standard of living, or who have larger families and use as much family labor as possible—neglecting their education, etc.—are willing to pay more for land and can make a living on poorer land than those with a higher standard of living who are not satisfied with the living the farm affords them, and that the former will drive out the latter much as cheap money drives out good money.)

- C. Under the present economic system will agriculture attract those with higher living ideals if maximum production is the aim?

Are maximum production, maximum division of labor, etc., compatible with a democratic agriculture?

(If the most efficient production and distribution of material goods, so as to secure the greatest economic return, is the aim of agriculture, will farming be a satisfying mode of life to those with higher ideals of living? Does not the capitalist system tend to emphasize investment in plant (productive goods) with men incidental, to encourage the largest practicable division of labor, efficient technicians and cheap labor? Is this compatible with the idea of human welfare of the family and of the community as the chief end of effort, and with farming as a satisfying mode of life? Must farming adopt the essential economics of the factory system and make returns on capital the primary aim, or can farming recognize human values as equally important?)

- IV. *Conclusion.* To be prepared by the editors as a summary, integration and interpretation of the above.