

April, 1943

Dhananjayrao Gadgil Library Arch Bulletin 313



GIPE-PUNE-046868

# Problems of Beginning Farmers in Iowa

By J. A. STARRAK

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION  
IOWA STATE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND  
MECHANIC ARTS

RURAL EDUCATION SUBSECTION  
RURAL SOCIAL SCIENCE SECTION

AMES, IOWA

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## SUMMARY

The investigation upon which this report is based, was made by interviewing 504 farmers who had begun farming as independent operators since 1930. The primary objectives were as follows:

1. To discover the problems which present major difficulties to young farmers in Iowa in their endeavor to become established in farming as independent operators.

2. To discover the ways and means commonly employed by beginning farmers in solving the problems encountered.

3. To ascertain the degree of success which is achieved by the typical young farmer in Iowa in solving the problems and overcoming the difficulties attendant upon establishment in farming.

4. To ascertain the nature and extent of the formal educational experiences of the typical beginning farmer in Iowa, and to reveal the deficiencies therein in the light of the problems he is called upon to solve in the process of becoming established in farming.

## MAJOR PROBLEMS AND THEIR SOLUTIONS

The major problems reported fell into seven categories or problem areas, arranged in the order of their difficulty: (1) financial, (2) production of crops and animals, (3) housing, (4) securing foundation stock, (5) obtaining good land, (6) management and (7) securing equipment. The most frequently reported problems and ways of solving them may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. In the area of finance, the problems most frequently reported as presenting the greatest difficulty were lack of collateral security, repaying loans when due, locating good sources of loans, unwillingness to borrow, small income, and high interest rates, in the order named. Borrowing was resorted to by the great majority, while small minorities had sufficient earnings and savings, or current income to meet financial obligations.

2. Among the major production problems were those arising from the diseases of hogs and cattle, low soil fertility, drouth and rain, and insect infestations. The practice of approved sanitation methods, the vaccination of hogs, seeding land to legumes and the rotation of crops were the chief remedies employed.

3. In the provision of housing, the major problems were occasioned by insufficient numbers, poor condition and poor arrangement of farm buildings. Little progress was reported in the correction of these deficiencies.

4. The major difficulties reported in obtaining foundation stock

seemed to be caused by the great scarcity of good breeding stock, especially in the breed desired, and the consequently high prices. Gradually increasing their herds by raising their own stock with the use of purebred sires was the solution employed most frequently. The ability to judge farm animals by "shopping about" and at public sales was also widely used.

5. For those not fortunate enough to have obtained land through inheritance, the scarcity and high price of good land constituted formidable problems. The majority who had solved this problem had done it through the aid of relatives.

6. Problems listed under management had to do with buying and selling, planning crop rotations, relationships with hired men and landlords, budgeting time and land utilization, in the order named. The advice of fathers and their own experience were reported as chief aids in solving management problems.

7. The obtaining of equipment evidently does not present serious difficulties to many young farmers. The high cost of new equipment was the chief difficulty reported. Over 50 percent solved equipment problems by using equipment belonging to relatives.

#### THE DEGREE OF SUCCESS ACHIEVED

Eighty-seven percent reported having made satisfactory progress in becoming established in farming; 96 percent of tenants expected to become owners; 30 percent reported farming more profitable and 21 percent less profitable than expected.

Sixteen percent had achieved ownership of their farms; 74 percent were tenants, while the remaining 10 percent were about equally divided between paid operators, partners and family members. Twenty-six percent had made changes, usually upward, in farming status. The mean size of farm, value of land and animal and crop yields approximated the state averages.

#### EXTENT AND NATURE OF FORMAL EDUCATION

The formal education of the young farmers, especially in agricultural subjects, would seem to be inadequate. While the mean length of schooling was 11 years, 21 percent had never gone beyond the eighth grade, and only 10 percent had attended college or trade school. Twenty-five percent had studied general agriculture, while 31 percent had a mean of 2.7 years of vocational agriculture in high school. Twenty-four percent had been members of 4-H clubs for a mean period of 4.2 years. Six percent had attended one or more agricultural demonstrations; 4 percent, agricultural short-courses; 6 percent, part-time classes; 24 percent, adult evening classes, and 3 percent had been members of rural young people's groups.

## CONCLUSIONS

The financial problems involved in becoming established in farming constitute the most difficult ones encountered by the typical beginning farmer in Iowa. Private corporations furnish the chief source of borrowing, with private individuals a close second. For those who do not have near relatives who own land, the obtaining of good farm land is the most difficult problem.

In the area of production, the control of animal diseases presents the most difficult problems, followed closely by the obtaining of good foundation stock.

The housing situation on Iowa farms evidently presents serious difficulties to beginning farmers, while the problems involved in securing farm equipment are least difficult.

Management problems, especially those involved in buying and selling, in land utilization and in relations with hired labor, seem to present real difficulties.

The typical beginning farmer in Iowa starts his career as an independent operator as a tenant on a farm of average size and value. He probably does not make enough improvement on the land and farmstead to compensate for the loss of fertility and general depreciation. While a large percentage make some application of improved farm practices, the evidence indicates that in both the generality and thoroughness of application there is much to be desired.

The formal education or schooling of the typical beginning farmer seems to be seriously deficient in amount and content.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Instruction in agriculture on a vocational basis should be made available to all prospective farmers while in high school. Part-time classes for farm boys and young men not in school and evening classes in agriculture for adults should also be integral parts of the educational program in each rural community. The problems involved in becoming established in farming should receive major emphasis in both high school and part-time classes.

More emphasis than is now given should be devoted to the systematic study of the crucial financial problems involved in establishment in farming. In instruction on the production of animals the recognition and control of the more common animal diseases of the section should be stressed. Special emphasis should also be given to the development of a long-time home project program in livestock.

Instruction in farm management should deal with the utilization of land, buying and selling, relationship with land and with hired men, budgeting time and planning farm operations. The evaluation of the economic productiveness of farm land, and of the housing situation on any given farm should also be stressed.