

AGRICULTURAL PROSPERITY DEPENDS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL LEADERSHIP

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As Farming is becoming more complex in all aspects and as it assumes many of the characteristics of other businesses and as the farmer becomes a greater consumer of the products of other segments of industry, he can no longer retain the independent, isolated position which has characterized him in the past. The farmer is in strict competition with other segments of the economy for labor, materials, and capital. He must also compete in the market place and legislative halls. As an individual working alone, he cannot meet this competition, hence group action is essential if agricultural prosperity is to be regained.

In this complicated world of surpluses, international policies, competition with synthetics, high cost of production, farmers, like all other segments, must be organized for group action. Organization itself implies leadership.

This history of man is the story of a hungry animal in search of food. Throughout the centuries, the map of the world has changed as groups of men searching for better land and protection for that land and their families have moved about and finally located on the most fertile spots of the earth's surface. Most wars have originated because of the desire of a nation to expand its food and fiber producing ability through the acquisition of new lands. In the United States, the number of people necessary to supply the nation has steadily reduced and in a century has gone from 65 per cent to 10 per cent of the population. This trend will continue until a very small minority will be charged with the responsibility of supplying an adequate diet to an ever-increasing number of people. To insure the nation's supply of food and to enable the producers of that food to enjoy economic benefits comparable to the rest of the nation, two great needs can be pointed out. The proper management of the land so as to insure continuous

production is one of these needs; the other is the development of leaders to guide the destiny and the progress of the food-producing group.

With all other groups organized to further their interest at the market place and in legislative halls, it is imperative that agriculture meet this challenge also. In every neighborhood, community, county and state, there is a vast pool of undeveloped leadership. Until this leadership arises at every level, agriculture can continue to look forward to a low-income, depressed condition. Education, travel, and other factors are very gradually bringing to the rural areas an enlightened outlook, but progress is not fast enough. The tragedy of the situation is that the very group that has made the abundant life possible in America enjoys that abundance to a less extent than any other large segment of the population. The increased efficiency of agricultural production has released millions of able-bodied workers to develop the non-agricultural resources of this country to the extent that we lead the world in the production of almost everything. Other nations with similar natural resources have been unable to develop them because the vast majority of the population is still necessary to produce food and fiber for the people of those nations.

The farmer has passed the benefits of advancing technology on to his customers. This is good for the customers, but until the farmer learns to retain at least a portion of the benefits of his advancing technology, he will continue to receive less than a fair portion of the nation's wealth. No longer can the individual farm family make very much progress by itself -- it must learn to work with other families for the benefit of the group. Group action always requires leadership and it is to leadership that we must look for agricultural prosperity. More and more the concept of Extension work is changing from that of an agency geared only to production to one which can help in the development of leadership. Our progress distinctly depends upon how well we learn to work together and our ability to work together will depend upon the leadership which can be developed.