DON'T DOWNGRADE Agriculture

(Portion of talk by Dr. Earl Butz, Dean of Agriculture, Purdue University, taken from ARIZONA CATTLELOG)

Entirely too many people in this country think of agriculture as a declining industry. It is not surprising that this is true. In nearly any daily newspaper you may read an account of someone bewailing the decrease in numbers of farms and of farmers. You get the impression that this is a recent development, when as a matter of fact it's been going on for decades and decades.

Nothing is more erroneous than to think of agriculture as a declining industry. American agriculture is an expanding industry in every important respect except one—the number of people required to run our farms. Only in this single respect can it be said that agriculture is a "declining" industry.

Our agricultural plant uses each year purchased production inputs, more specialized marketing facilities, and more research than the year before. It is obvious, therefore, that those writers and analysts who refer to agriculture as a "declining" industry look only at a single phase of this growing and important American industry.

Although a smaller share of our total population is engaged directly in farming, the agricultural industry is big, broad, and basic. Out of 68 million people employed in America, about 26 million work somewhere in agriculture. Seven million of these work on farms, 8 million produce goods and services purchased by farmers, and 11 million process and distribute farm products. Hence, almost 2/5 of all our employees are engaged in agriculturally related work. These are jobs important to everyone—basic to our economy. They are jobs with futures—jobs with personal and financial rewards.

The declining trend in farm population is itself a sign of a strong agriculture. This is the age of science and technology in American agriculture. Brainpower has replaced horsepower as the essential ingredient on our farms. Total U.S. agricultural output has increased two-thirds in the last two decades, while farm workers have gone down some three million. This means that production per worker on our farms has doubled in the last 20 years. This is a remarkable increase in production efficiency. It can be matched by no other sector of the American economy.

One farm worker in America now feeds and clothes himself and 27 others. Just a generation ago, in 1930, he fed and clothed himself and only nine others. A century earlier, he could feed and clothe himself and only three others.

The farm plant in America purchases each year approximately $17 billion worth of goods and services used in farm production. To this it adds a value of about $17 billion on farms, which means that the total farm produce leaves the farm gates at about $34 billion. Processing and distribution add another $45 billion to this, which makes a total value of output in agriculture of approximately $80 billion.

These figures point out the growing importance of agriculture as a market. Industry depends upon agriculture as a customer to a greater extent than most people realize. In contrast to a generation ago, when farmers were producing most of their own fuel, power, and fertilizer, industry is now furnishing farmers each year:

- $6.5 billion tons of finished steel—more than is used for a year's output for passenger cars.
- 50 million tons of chemical materials—about 5 times the amount they used in 1935.
- 18 billion gallons of crude petroleum—more than is used by any other industry.
- 285 million pounds of raw rubber—enough to make tires for 6 million automobiles.
- 22 billion kilowatt hours of electricity—more than enough to serve the cities of Chicago, Detroit, Baltimore, and Houston for a year.

I could go on citing other evidence of the tremendous importance of agriculture in our national life. An efficient and progressive agriculture is the very foundation stone of a prosperous and strong America. The first claim of any society upon its total production resources is to get enough food to keep the population alive. This is true in primitive societies, in semi-developed societies, and in highly developed societies.

We do this so efficiently in this country that it takes only a tenth of our workers to get the job done. This means that about nine-tenths of our population is available to produce the wide variety of goods and services that make up the American standard of living. On top of this, in the last generation we fought one major war, did another minor war in Korea, and have tooled up for a third war which we hope won't occur. While we've been doing all of this, our real standard of living per person has increased some 50 per cent.

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