

Transition from an Idealized to an Industrialized Agriculture

by John R. Wildermuth*

"Agriculture has long been considered different from other occupations. Farming has been thought to be a way of life as well as a business, the cornerstone of free enterprise, the bed for social values, a producer of worthy people, as well as crops and livestock. This body of belief is as old as the nation. It has variously been called agricultural fundamentalism, agrarianism, and the agricultural creed. I shall not try to trace the origin of these ideas other than to say that they came from the French physiocrats more than 200 years ago and that the person most responsible for their propagation in the United States was Thomas Jefferson. With this body of belief we lifted the status of the American farmer and created an agriculture which is the envy and admiration of the world."¹

As a consequence of agrarian thought, almost everything agricultural was considered unique, different, set apart. Large-scale corporate enterprise was generally approved, but not in farm production. Rental arrangements were good for other enter-

prisers, but farms should be owner-operated. It was considered appropriate to restrict entry into medicine, plumbing, taxi-driving and barbering, but everyone who wanted to farm should be allowed to do so.

The uniqueness of agriculture was also evidenced in the legislative process. Agriculture was the one industry to have a department of government and a Cabinet post. Agriculture received special benefits, such as the Experiment Stations and the Extension Service. Agricultural labor was excluded from general labor legislation. So dominant was the agricultural creed that for 150 years prior to the 1930's every major piece of farm legislation was in conformity with it.

Even in the educational community, agriculture was unique. All the disciplines pertain to agriculture, as they do to other vocations. But when the educators undertook to apply the disciplines to agriculture, they set up special departments: agricultural engineering, agricultural economics, agricultural education. I am not saying that this was an error. It may have been correct. My point is simply that agricultural production, agricultural education, and agricultural policy have all been imbued, to a greater or lesser extent, with the agrarian philosophy.

But now this whole structure is

crumbling, pulled down by the agricultural revolution. The Jeffersonian concept of the family farm scarcely applies to a modern Arizona farm, with an investment of a half million dollars. Today's farmer does not place so high a psychic value on an agricultural occupation that he is willing to work for half as much as a man in town. The image of the farmer as the cornerstone of self-reliance has been impaired by government programs that now provide one-fourth of his net income. The political power of farmers has been eroding, through the decline in the number of farms and through reapportionment.

Major farm legislation, formerly enacted each election year on the theory that it was a political plus, is now considered at four-year intervals, between elections, on the theory that it is a political liability. Agricultural policy, which formerly was produced by the "agricultural establishment," is now the product of many groups, private and public, in and out of agriculture. These trends have been resisted at every step by the farm bloc, the farm organizations and the Department of Agriculture. But they have occurred, nonetheless.

All of this is introductory. My purpose is to pose the alternatives laid before farmers, prospective farmers,
(Turn to page 16)

* Assistant Professor in Agricultural Economics.

¹Source: Paarlberg, Don, "Is Agriculture Losing Its Uniqueness," Unpublished Address presented to the American Meat Institute Executive Management Meeting, March 6, 1967.

From Idealized to Industrialized Agriculture

(From page 3)

and all others with a current or potential vested interest in agriculture. There are two alternatives, two ideological views with which one can operate.

One alternative is to affirm adherence to the agricultural creed, to support the agricultural establishment, to accept some agricultural orientation and to fight tooth and nail just to become a martyr.

Some would say that these issues are purely economic and that agriculture's problems would disappear if farmers could somehow force consumers to pay higher prices for farm products. The truth of the matter is that agricultural incomes have been lower for a given set of human and capital resources than if these resources were used in nonfarm enterprises *simply because too many people want to stay in agriculture*. This overabundance of desire to stay and work in agriculture does provide an abundance of inexpensive food and fiber for consumers, but at the same time, it depresses agricultural prices and thus, agricultural incomes. You can't have your cake and eat it, too. If you must hold to the old order, you better be prepared to accept the fact that you will be "paying for the privilege" of being a consumer of the rural ethic.

The other alternative is to accept the passing of agricultural fundamentalism, with all its consequences.

It may indeed be that you have no real alternative; to try to hold to the old order is really little more than a rear-guard action. It is a cliché of our times, but nevertheless true, that competition and technology force us to accept change. Agricultural interests supported the Farmers Home Administration in an unsuccessful effort to maintain large numbers of people on the land. They resisted reapportionment, and lost. They are in the process of losing the battle to exclude agricultural labor from general labor legislation. In all of these battles, the agricultural creed was the rallying call. Any effort on the part of agriculture to rally support based on the agricultural creed will undoubtedly fail, as previous efforts

have failed.

Big business, high finance, consumer sovereignty, environmental quality, social and racial equality — these are the forces that are driving our nation today. We are becoming a homogenized society and all agri-

culturalists will be doing themselves and modern rural and modern urban 21st century America more service if they will dwell less on the beauties of their agricultural past and more on how to function in a complex industrialized society.

Root - Rot Proof Garden

(From page 7)

kinds of plants that are either immune or resistant to root rot. This list is quite adequate to permit choice of material for an attractive landscape as it contains 20 trees, 34 shrubs, 15 perennials, 15 annuals, and 7 summer vegetables. As the average home planting has from 1 to 3 kinds of trees, and 3 to 8 kinds of shrubs there is room for personal choice.

If holes are prepared for planting trees and shrubs adequately by treating soil with manure, soil sulphur and ammonium phosphate (Folder 158) the plantings will be protected against root rot, the soil enrichment also will

double or triple the rate of growth. While this preparation is not needed to protect the immune plants, the increase in growth applies to these also.

Note that root rot kills plants in the hot months, mostly July to October; vegetables and flowers grown from October to May escape injury from root rot. Acid loving plants, such as camellias, gardenias, azaleas, and rhododendrons, also escape when grown in soil with half peat moss or other humus.

It is probable that by using immune and resistant plants (even with treatment of holes) that the planting would be free from root rot, and more certain if holes were treated. Trees or shrubs chosen from the list of moderately susceptible plants in Folder 158 might also remain free from root rot if planted in treated holes.

PROGRESSIVE
AGRICULTURE
IN ARIZONA

Official Publication of the
College of Agriculture and
School of Home Economics
The University of Arizona

Harold E. Myers Dean

to: