AGRICULTURE is among the newest sciences of the day. It is true that farming is the oldest occupation known, but scientific methods of getting the most out of the soil are very recent. It has not been many years since work on the farm was done either by hand or by hitching a yoke of oxen to some kind of a crude instrument. In those times each farm was self-sufficing; that is, every family raised only what was to be needed by them for the year. Their diet did not consist of as wide a variety of foods as we have today, nor their clothing did not consist of silks, satins, nor even smooth spun cotton. The grain and few vegetables that they raised were supplemented with pork, beef, and what wild game they could kill. Their clothing was the roughest kind of home spun cotton.

Such was the picture of agriculture before science and invention began to develop our real agricultural resources. This development once started, grew at a very rapid rate. Machines took the place of man-power, the steamship and railroad took the place of the covered wagon, and the self-sufficing farm gave way to the modern industrial farm.

The twentieth century presents an entirely different picture of agriculture. Even though we still find an occasional "hayseed" farmer, which the cartoonists have so often placed before the public, the number of intelligent and educated men that go to the farm increases each year. The farmer is now interested in how to get the greatest returns from the soil with the least amount with the things that are needed and not produced on the farm. He now gives his attention to a few, or perhaps a single, crops. If by this method he cannot produce enough for a livelihood, he will quit and work for wages, or try something else.

Marketing in the 20th Century

With this twentieth century method of agriculture has come one of the largest problems that has ever been faced by the farmer, namely, that of marketing farm products. It is one thing to grow a crop efficiently and another thing to market it to the best advantage. In our system of marketing, the middleman is often the center of fire, or supposed to be the cause of low prices to the farmer, and high prices to the consumer. The statement is often heard that if we do away with the middleman our marketing system would be much improved. This statement, on the surface, looks as if it were perfectly logical and true, but upon closer examination we find that this is a grave mistake. An analysis of the gigantic problem of marketing will explain why the middleman is indispensable.

Having produced the product on the farm, marketing consists of getting the product to the consumer in the desired quality, the desired quantity, and at the proper time. In order to perform these services the following operations are necessary: assembling, grading, packing, processing, transporting, storing, financing, and distributing. In our modern system these services must be performed in order to put the product in a condition so that the consumer will buy it.

Assembling consists of gathering products together in quantities large enough so that they may be shipped in car lots, and thus offset the higher expense of shipping in smaller quantities.

Grading is done to pull out the undesirable products and to place the remaining articles in groups, making each group a mass of products of standard size and quality. This operation does two things; first, it places a premium on those goods of the highest quality which in turn stimulates the production of a high quality product; second, it saves freight by eliminating the shipment of these culls, which, if placed upon the market, will not sell at any price.

Packaging consists of putting these products in cartons or boxes so as to ease and facilitate the handling of them. This saves labor in handling, one man can carry a hundred pounds of beans in a sack and several sacks on a hand-truck, but he could only carry a few pounds with his bare hands.

Processing brings in the operation of changing the form of the product; such as making flour and cooked cereals from wheat, or sugar from sugar cane. This middleman service is very essential as there are not many people who would buy a ton of sugar cane for a few pounds of sugar, or a sack of wheat for a week's supply of flour.

Transporting is necessary because many of the desired products are produced many miles from where they are consumed. Often the factory is many miles from the producer, and a long distance from the consumer.

Many of our agricultural products are of such a nature that they must not be stored so as to have a supply the year around. For instance, all wheat is harvested within a month or two,

(Continued on Page 15)
THE MIDDLEMAN IN MARKETING
(Continued from Page 8)
and yet we have a plentiful supply of wheat and flour all the year. This natural tendency for farm products to be harvested within a short period of time makes storing an indispensable operation.

Distributing consists of getting the goods on the grocers' shelves, ready for the consumer to buy. This usually takes place through the wholesaler, who is located in every town of any size. Each wholesaler supplies a sufficient number of retailers so that he can buy the products in car lots.

Many of these operations require the expenditure of a large amount of capital, so that it requires men who have savings in the form of cash to perform many of these services.

From the above discussion it can readily be seen that the middlemen are all those who have performed services from the time the product leaves the farm until it is placed on the grocers' shelf ready for the consumer to buy. There are a few articles, such as fresh vegetables and fruits, that may be purchased direct from the farmer, but the average person of today does not go to the farmer and buy a sack of wheat when he wants a loaf of bread for supper.

The absurdity of doing away with the middleman may be easily seen if one stops to compare the list of groceries one buys on a Saturday night with the number of farmers he would have to visit and the immense territory he would have to travel over in order to collect the same list of goods, and then they only be in a crude form. It is true that the present system is not free from faults, and that many times the middleman makes large profits and takes unfair advantage of the farmer and consumer, but even with these disadvantages one cannot very well do without the middleman.

A great deal of graft in the system is eliminated through the competitive system. These services must be performed, the farmer does not have the time or money, and the consumer cannot do these things and still take care of other business, so it still remains that certain consumers called middlemen must perform these services.

Co-operative marketing already has done a large share to reduce the number of middlemen. With the co-operative system, the farmers have their own organization to perform these services. But with the exception of a few co-operatives, competition still exists with private parties that seek to perform these same operations. Co-operation is the means of solving many of the evils of marketing, but it should never be thought of as a cure for all difficulties. There must be other things developed in the near future that will greatly aid in giving us a more efficient marketing system.

The middleman cannot be discarded, but he can be restricted.

"Bridget, do you know anything about my wife's whereabouts?"
"Yes, sir, I put them in the wash."

J. H.: "That was a nice little party you held last night."
L. T.: "Wasn't she, though?"

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