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## THE FARM LABOR SITUATION

### FARM LABOR

We are presenting this week a table showing how wages for farm labor compare in the different states, and also how the supply of farm labor compares with the demand in each state. These estimates are made by the United States Department of Agriculture.

It appears that farm labor is much more plentiful than it has been in several years; in only four states is there a scarcity and in these cases it is slight. On the other hand the surplus is as much as ten percent in eighteen states, and in one state—Oklahoma—it is twenty-six percent. This surplus of farm labor undoubtedly reflects the curtailment of employment in industry. Young men from the country who have been working in the cities naturally return to the country when times are dull in town. There is probably no large number of city residents seeking work on the farms.

The excess of available farm laborers is probably due in part to a reduced demand. Increased mechanization has released many workers. This is illustrated in the widespread use of the "combine" in the wheat belt. Scarcity of money among farmers is another cause of economy in the employment of labor. The low price of agricultural products which has prevailed for several years has undoubtedly influenced many farmers to curtail expenses and operate as far as possible on a self-sufficing basis.

### Wage Factors

A study of the table indicates practically no correlation between supply of labor and wages. For instance, in South Carolina and Georgia there is a scarcity of farm laborers yet these states are paying lower wages than any other states. On the other hand, the New England states and the Mountain states pay high wages despite a surplus of workers. This indicates that wages are determined more by custom and by the wages offered in competitive industries than by supply and demand. It is not uncommon in the industrial states like New York and Pennsylvania to find wholesale unemployment and a high scale of farm wages at the same time. Industrial workers when laid off return to the country to live, but they prefer idleness or casual labor to regular work at moderate wages. They would rather work three days a week at three dollars a day than six days at two dollars a day. Perhaps they should not be blamed for it, yet it must be remembered that the farmer cannot offer as high wages as the railroad or the factory, for his margin of profit is so small that every dollar counts mightily.

Low wages in the South are unquestionably due to the presence of the negroes and to the relatively small competition for labor offered by industry—practically none so far as negroes are concerned. Construction work has of course offered employment to the negroes and the result has been a slightly higher farm wage scale.

The surplus of farm labor which exists at present is probably a temporary condition. Competent farm labor will remain scarce and high. Wages are not too high from the point of view of the laborer. Farm labor has always been underpaid and perhaps always will be. It is not that the farmer is greedy and unreasonable; the farmer is proverbially generous with that of which he has an abundance; he is niggardly with money because he has so little of it.

### Why Wages Are Low

As agriculture becomes more commercialized and more mechanized there will be introduced more money economy. The change that has already taken place is striking. Yet there are many phases of farm work that do not lend themselves to mechanical performance. The mechanical milker, for instance, is far from a complete success. It is of no practical benefit on the average farm where there are only four or five cows. On every farm there are such things as hoeing and chopping, feeding livestock, repairing fences, mending harness, cleaning stables, doctoring sick animals, and countless other chores that must be done by

hand. It is amusing to read some of the articles which appear in the newspapers and magazines to the effect that the farmer would share in the Nation's prosperity if he would only follow the example of big business and make machinery do the work. It is true that many farmers are using inefficient and antiquated methods, but the farm (if it is also a home) must remain a small proprietorship with a variety of tasks, much hand labor, a large degree of self-direction, many immaterial compensations but no large amount of money. A farm is a home as well as a unit of production; it offers a way of living as well as an occupation. Neither the tenant nor the farm laborer can ever enjoy the larger satisfaction of country life and the perpetuation of these classes should not be encouraged.

### ALL-THE-YEAR FARMS

The tragedy of agriculture in the South has been that it has been pitched upon a plane of mere periodic activity, confined chiefly to that specific time of the year for cotton cultivation.

No section of the country can properly prosper with that sort of agriculture. It has often been demonstrated how impossible such a program is in order to make for agricultural achievement and success.

Take the case of Eastern Montana that was a few years ago engaged only in wheat-raising along with the production of a little flax.

During the crop season, there was a veritable insanity, a running to and fro in a mad scramble to get the thing done that had to be done in the shortest possible time. The rest of the year the farmers had nothing to do except to take care of a herd of horses that were eating their heads off in the idleness that followed the mad-house tactics necessary during the short while wheat-growing and harvesting called for. Most of the farmers eventually found themselves broke by this system.

Though wheat is still their principal crop, Montana farmers are now raising sugar beets, beans, certified alfalfa seed, certified potatoes, canning peas, farm flocks, dairy cows, corn, poultry, honey, apples, cherries, and strawberries. Canneries, sugar factories, creameries, and seed warehouses have sprung up. The people have become industrially minded; they realize that where capital is not working steadily it loses ground. A farm investment of \$15,000, idle two-thirds of the year, is entitled to no more return than a \$5,000 investment working all the time. Putting this axiom into action, they are making Montana farms all-the-year workshops.

Rotation and diversification of crops that give the farmer a steady all-the-year job instead of a hysterical over-rush during short seasons and soul-killing idleness during the rest of the year, is the salvation of farming anywhere. —Charlotte News.

### ELECTRIC FARMING

About 45 percent of the farms of Sweden are using electricity for lighting and light power. In the United States not more than 3 percent of the farms are receiving electric current from power lines, according to G. E. Tripp, chairman of the Westinghouse. California, of course, claims the lead, with 554,000,000 horse-power-hours of electric power used in agriculture during the year 1923, but 80 percent of that is employed in pumping water for irrigation. The number of electric-power consumers on farms in California is reported as 25,915. Ohio has 17,000 farms supplied with rural electric service, and Iowa and Pennsylvania have about 12,000 each.

To read over the list of the applications of the current one would think that the electrical farmer hadn't any chores to do and that his electrified stock were living in the lap of luxury. I am skeptical, as one of my age naturally would be, about the moral effect of all these new-fangled ways. Incandescent lights in the pig-pen! Electric fans in the cattle shed! Ultraviolet rays for hogs and hay! Is it good for young hens to be kept up all hours of the night under the white lights, gadding about and stuffing their

### EDUCATION FOR LIFE

The farm youth will be best qualified for citizenship through an educational process that gives him mastery of the tools of learning; a knowledge of his true relation to the various groups which make up the world social order and a knowledge of the independence of social and occupational groups; a knowledge of the real possibilities and requirements in the major groups of occupations through which men serve and gain a livelihood, and an opportunity to test his ability and congeniality for characteristic tasks in these occupations; freedom to choose his field of service and opportunity for efficient training through a school curriculum that specifically relates to its chosen field of service; knowledge that functions in physical efficiency and habits that conserve health; moral courage that comes of understanding, physical vigor, and a feeling of self-reliance that comes through such guidance that successful mastery of problems becomes habitual. —John J. Tigert.

crops with rich food? Can a thermostat altogether replace the maternal instinct?

And what will be the effect on the farmer and his family? Will he continue his commendable habit of early rising if he can milk a dozen cows at a time by simply turning on the juice? Will not the farmer's wife lose the well-rounded arms that she developed by long hours at the churn and the rosy complexion that she acquired over the cook-stove? Will the tungsten filament give that well-grounded education that we, or anyhow our forefathers, got by means of the torch or tallow dip? In short, will those whose hardest labor has been to press a button or jerk a switch acquire those sterling qualities which have made us what we are? —Daily Science News Bulletin, reproduced in Literary Digest.

### BANKERS AID FARMING

There are several reasons for the growth of the banker-farmer movement in Pennsylvania. William S. McKay, Chairman of the Agricultural Committee, Pennsylvania Bankers Association, has reported to the Agricultural Commission of the American Bankers Association. The cooperation and leadership of the county agents in the several counties of the state; the appointment and functioning of county chairmen of agriculture known as Key Bankers, one of whom there is in each county of the state; and the organization of county bankers associations, whereby agriculture is given consideration by all the banks, are responsible for this interest. The following table shows the activities for the year:

Project	Number of Counties
Sent young farmers to state college for special course.....	5
Encouraged farm shows.....	16
Held agricultural tours.....	6
Sponsored various club activities	38
Gave illustrated lectures on poultry, cow testing, and improved farm methods.....	1
Distributed pure-bred livestock, chicks, and disease-free potatoes.....	13
"There is probably no class of business men that has a greater opportunity for helpfulness than the bankers in this movement," declares Mr. McKay. "It builds up a substantial community which makes for better banking institutions; it adds to the material prosperity of our state, but above all, it is the expression of a service which will react favorably upon the character of those interested." —Roanoke-Chowan Times.	

### RELATIVES AS TENANTS

In parts of the United States where farm tenancy is extensive, a considerable proportion of the tenants are related to their landlords. A study made

by the United States Department of Agriculture in the Central states showed, in more than half the counties surveyed, that more than 30 percent of the tenants were related to the landowners. In the Southern states, where much land is farmed by negroes, the percentage of tenants related to landowners is only about half the percentage existing in the North.

Tenants related to their landlords are usually interested in the farm they operate, and in the community in which they live, to a degree exceeding that ordinarily manifested by the unrelated tenant. Tenants related to landlords in the North and Western states, in 84 percent of such cases, are either sons or sons-in-law. Obviously so close a relationship exercises considerable influence on tenancy practice.

Among states having much farm tenancy, Wisconsin has the highest percentage of tenants related to their landlords. The percentage for that state is 40 percent, compared with 20 percent in Dakota, the lowest state in this respect. Variations in the relative number of tenants related to landlords in different parts of the country are due in part to prevailing customs in transferring farms from one generation to another, in part to the number of children remaining on farmers' farms, in part to racial considerations, in part to the amount of land held for speculation. —U. S. Dept. of Agriculture Press Item.

### BACK TO CRACKER BOX

When a small group sits around the grocery stove on a cold winter afternoon, their conversation may begin as idle gossip, but as likely as not some matter of common concern comes up which is discussed with both heat and knowledge. The heat may spring from the friction of opposed interests, and the knowledge may be that of a variety of experiences rather than of expert research. Nevertheless, what emerges is in the nature of a cooperative product of social value, an agreement leading, as likely as not, to common action in that disputed matter of the village pump.

Now, sophisticated city people, who have no cracker boxes to sit upon and no leisure for the slow process of gossip as a means of detecting vital issues, are apt to condemn this very fount

and essence of American democracy. They are all for calling in the expert, before they are sure what it is they need expert knowledge upon. They become so economical in the employment of their own mental powers that they have no patience with the fellow who is trying to lead them into a consideration of a subject that does not at once and compellingly concern them. Thus—we have many evidences—the art of conversation is dying out, together with other cultural heritages of the American people.

But there are revivals. We learn that in at least one typical metropolitan community a number of men deliberately went back to the slow but valuable methods of the country grocery store for a taste of that simple, neighborly democracy which in the past has formed the matrix for even the highest individual achievements in political, social and religious thinking. Call it mere gossip if you like; there is in it kinship with the mood of cooperative inquiry. —The Inquiry.

### AGRICULTURE LEADS

The place of agriculture in the economic life of nations is readily shown in the accompanying table which was taken from the New York Times, March 25, 1928.

Rank	Industry	Employees
1	Agriculture.....	10,241,000
2	Construction.....	3,051,000
3	Railroads.....	2,184,000
4	Textiles.....	1,110,000
5	Machinery.....	868,000
6	Coal.....	748,000
7	Lumber.....	474,000
8	Clothing.....	466,000
9	Iron and Steel.....	438,000
10	Automobiles.....	430,000
11	Tel and Tel.....	381,000
12	Publishing.....	296,000
13	Electricity.....	230,000
14	Shoes.....	207,000
15	Baking.....	160,000
16	Oil.....	158,000
17	Rubber.....	141,000
18	Tobacco.....	132,000
19	Paper.....	124,000
20	Meat.....	120,000

### ALAMANCE COUNTY SURVEY

An economic and social survey of Alamance county has been completed by John W. Harden of Graham, working in cooperation with the Department of Rural Social Economics at the University. It is a book of one hundred pages, nicely illustrated, and contains a wealth of information and suggestion relative to Alamance county. The cost of publication was borne jointly by Alamance county through the general fund and the school fund, the Burlington Board of Education, the Burlington Chamber of Commerce, and the University Extension Division.

A limited supply of the bulletins is available for free distribution by each of the following agencies—the Burlington Chamber of Commerce, the University Extension Division and the Department of Rural Social Economics at the University.

### FARM LABOR IN THE UNITED STATES

#### Supply and Average Wage, April 1, 1928

In the following table the states are ranked according to the average wage paid to farm labor in April, 1928. The parallel column gives the supply of farm labor in each state expressed as a percent of demand. The table is based on information contained in the April number of Crops and Markets published by the United States Department of Agriculture.

For the United States as a whole the current wage for farm labor is \$2.34 per day without board. Stated broadly, wages are higher than the United States average in all the northern and western states and lower in all the southern states. The highest wage scale prevails in the North Atlantic states and the lowest in the South Central states. Rhode Island and Georgia represent the two extremes, with farm labor wage scales of \$3.70 and \$1.80 respectively. In all sections farm wages are slightly lower than at the same time in 1926 or 1927.

Farm labor is much more plentiful in most states than it has been in several years. In the country as a whole the present supply of farm labor represents 107.5 percent of demand. In 1927 the ratio was 102.5; in 1926 it was 98.1; in 1925 it was 99.5; and in 1924 it was 92.8. It appears therefore that a farm labor scarcity has gradually given way to a surplus.

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Rank	State	Supply expressed as percent of demand	Wages per day without board	Rank	State	Supply expressed as percent of demand	Wages per day without board
1	Rhode Island.....	104.....	3.70	24	Minnesota.....	109.....	2.95
2	Montana.....	102.....	3.65	24	Colorado.....	110.....	2.95
3	Massachusetts.....	119.....	3.60	27	Kansas.....	111.....	2.80
3	Connecticut.....	110.....	3.60	28	Illinois.....	115.....	2.70
3	New York.....	108.....	3.60	29	Indiana.....	109.....	2.60
6	California.....	114.....	3.50	29	Maryland.....	113.....	2.60
7	Wyoming.....	100.....	3.45	31	Delaware.....	101.....	2.50
8	New Hampshire.....	106.....	3.40	31	Arizona.....	110.....	2.50
8	New Jersey.....	101.....	3.40	33	West Virginia.....	115.....	2.30
10	Washington.....	109.....	3.30	34	Missouri.....	109.....	2.15
11	Vermont.....	97.....	3.20	34	New Mexico.....	114.....	2.15
11	Michigan.....	113.....	3.20	36	Virginia.....	104.....	2.10
11	North Dakota.....	103.....	3.20	37	Oklahoma.....	126.....	1.95
11	South Dakota.....	105.....	3.20	38	North Carolina.....	102.....	1.85
11	Idaho.....	108.....	3.20	39	Texas.....	117.....	1.80
16	Pennsylvania.....	113.....	3.15	40	Kentucky.....	103.....	1.65
16	Oregon.....	116.....	3.15	41	Florida.....	113.....	1.65
18	Ohio.....	110.....	3.10	41	Mississippi.....	95.....	1.55
18	Nebraska.....	109.....	3.10	41	Arkansas.....	105.....	1.55
18	Maine.....	109.....	3.10	42	Tennessee.....	102.....	1.50
18	Nevada.....	104.....	3.10	44	Alabama.....	101.....	1.50
22	Iowa.....	109.....	3.05	44	Louisiana.....	102.....	1.50
23	Utah.....	113.....	3.00	47	South Carolina.....	98.....	1.35
24	Wisconsin.....	104.....	2.95	48	Georgia.....	99.....	1.30