Help The Small Farm Blossom

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By William C. Norris, Chairman of the Board of Control Data Corporation

Preserving the small family ...m is viewed by the experts ... our country, and conse... ently by almost everyone ...e, as a desirable social ...l but one that makes no ...nomic sense. The prevail... wisdom is that the only ...ional choice for the small ...nily farmer is to get big or ... out.

But as is so often true, the ...perts are wrong. There is ...owing evidence that better ...utions to many of the basic ...oblems plaguing the nation's ...d chain can be realized by ...ans of the small family ...m than can be achieved ...large operations.

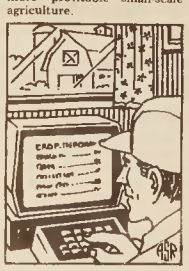
Too often, the efficiencies ...large-scale agriculture, rely... on intensive use of fossil ...ls, chemicals and capital, ...e been accomplished with... adequate regard for jobs, ...mage to the environment ...d human health and other ...tors. The efficiencies then ...e been achieved at added ...t to society.

There are, however, increas... numbers of persons, albeit ... small in number, who cor... ly assess that the environ... nt for small-scale agricul... e is improving. The pessi... tic view is more widespread ...wever, and that makes it ...ficult for persons to get ...istance in starting up or ...erating a small farm. Mon... lenders automatically shy ...ay from loans to soundly ...ed small farmers because ...y believe that a small ...mer can't succeed. Most of ... agriculture research in our ...versitites is aimed at large... le farming and local agri... tural extension agents have ...dequate current, relevant ...ormation on small-scale agriculture.

What would help most would be for all those concerned with agriculture to spend a few hours at the library. In the process they would quickly learn that small-scale agriculture will have its place in the sun.

One of the most supportive facts to learn is that in a number of other countries that include Taiwan, Japan and Denmark, small-scale agriculture is quite as efficient as U.S. agriculture and more conserving of natural resources.

Further evidence would be found in experiments and in existing and emerging technologies that point to more profitable small-scale agriculture.



One of the most promising experiments under way is the model farm at Tuskegee Institute, where net income of $15,000 to $20,000 per year is expected from farms of 25-35 acres using crop diversification, high-value crops, limited animal production, and intensive techniques.

Tests of a small-scale sprinkler irrigation head currently nearing completion indicate a 15% savings in energy and as much as 20% savings of water.

Soil run-off can be substantially decreased (estimated reductions of 50% by the year 2000) and total yield increased with intercropping and minimum tillage practices, which are most feasible in small-scale operations. Selected intercropping of from two to eight plant varieties has increased some small farm incomes in the eastern U.S by 50%.

Farm-size nitrogen fertilizer plants, using air, water, and electric power from windmills are under development at Kettering Research Laboratories. These units are designed to provide complete nitrogen self-sufficiency for individual farms.

A number of solar technologies, either in-hand or emerging, make small-scale grain drying and storage more efficient than present fossil fuel-intensive methods. Other solar applications provide lower cost sources of power for irrigation and adequate heating for animal buildings, even in northern climates.

Small farm models have been developed to demonstrate substantial production gains from the integration of limited acreage high-value crops and small-scale animal agriculture, notably sheep and hogs. Corresponding models are in the process of being developed for dairy goats and beef cattle.

Technologies are advancing that are greatly increasing the efficiency of indoor food growing through the use of hydroponics, aeroponics and other technologies. Many of the present installations are large scale, but with further research, lower-cost systems will be feasible.

In marketing, there is a growing consumer/producer reliance on farmers' markets, health food stores and restaurants, local bakeries and small-scale efficient food processing technology. For instance, one manufacturer is marketing a low cost, energy-efficient commercial food canning system which fits into 750 square feet of space.

A new low cost technology for vegetable and fruit preservation which combines vacuum cooling with a controlled atmosphere technique, enables preservations of 30 to 150 days for ship transportation or on-site preservation before selling and processing.

Many more small-scale technologies, currently available or under development, could be mentioned. However, these examples demonstrate the point that sufficient know-how is available to significantly enhance the productivity of small family farms and small-scale food processors. In this age of computers, gathering and dissemination of this know-how is a manageable job. With further focused R&D, increased viability over a wider range of conditions can be even more firmly established.

Given a better informed agricultural constituency there would be a surge of activity in support of small-scale farming. Legislators would match their perennial promises to foster a healthy environment for family farms with legislation that removes the disadvantages of the small farmer vis his large neighbor that are inherent in present government policies. Universities would redirect research to improve small-scale agriculture. Farm equipment manufacturers would produce the small-scale implements that are needed, and money lenders would become open-minded to the opportunities at hand.

Not only would existing small family farmers begin to make a more attractive livelihood, but millions of additional young people would have the opportunity to choose a career in small-scale agriculture.

Those who will take time to investigate will clearly see that the issue isn't *if* but *when* small-scale agriculture will blossom in the U.S. The sooner the better — considering that small-scale agriculture can better cope with the rising cost and growing scarcity of fossil fuels, the growing scarcity of water, the urgent need to stop the alarming depletion rate of soil fertility by erosion, and stream pollution and other environmental degradation also caused by erosion, fertilizers and pesticides.

The experts of 20 years ago predicted that six large-scale computers would provide all of the engineering and scientific computation that would ever be needed in the world. Today thousands of computers that are more powerful than those early machines are being sold each year. The ag experts of today will be proven just as wrong about the potential for small farms.

SAFETY SENSE

Is your home the picture of safety? It may not be if you have old films in your attic. The 35mm film used in movie theaters till the early 1950s deteriorates with age and in time can become a fine brown powder that can burst into flame at temperatures as low as 106° F—a temperature found in many attics.

* * *

If you have such nitrate films, free material on preserving them—and possibly preserving your home from fire—is available by writing to Joseph G. Empsucha, Assistant Motion Picture Archivist, The American Film Institute, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. 20566.

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ROBESON COUNTY COMPENSATORY INDIAN EDUCATION PROJECT
POST OFFICE BOX 1358
Lumberton, North Carolina 28358

WHAT ARE THE FACTS ABOUT THE INDIAN EDUCATION PROGRAM?

- How much money does the Robeson County Title IV Program receive?
- How is the money received for Indian children spent and which children participate in the program?
- How is the budget decided upon and who decides how much money is to be spent for what purpose?
- Which schools participate in the Title IV program and what kinds of programs and services are available to Indian children?

FOR THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS AND FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS, COME TO AN OPEN PUBLIC HEARING AT THE ROBESON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION.

Date: January 5, 1980

Place: Board Room

Time: 7:00 p.m.

ALL INTERESTED PERSONS ARE INVITED TO ATTEND.