

HOW TO EXTEND RURAL TELEPHONE SERVICE.

Begin at Home With Your Local Exchange, Join this to Other Rural Exchanges and Insist Upon a Mutual Service Agreement When You Connect With the Lines of the Big Company.

By J. Z. Green, Marshville, N. C.

THERE are several plans under which rural telephone service has been established and extended, under the co-operative idea and mutual exchange of service, but in the county which has, perhaps, the most extensive and satisfactory rural telephone service in the South, the system has had its remarkable growth and development under the following practical plan:



MR. GREEN.

A farmer in a community buys a switchboard which he installs in a room of his residence and he erects a line connecting his switchboard either with another rural exchange which has connection with a market town or runs the line directly to the railroad town. He offers service to all his neighbors who will buy their own telephones and erect their lines to his switchboard, usually at 50 cents per month, where two or more telephones are on the same line. This plan is self-protective and insures its patrons against imposition with excessive charges. The only asset the exchange man owns is the switchboard and a line giving connection with a market town or village. His patrons own the remainder of the system, and if the owner of the exchange should decide to increase prices for service, his patrons have a lever to use against it, which they can do by a simple request of the switchboard man to disconnect their lines at the board. This arrangement prevents the owner of the rural exchange from exercising arbitrary "trust" methods, if he should become greedy for larger rents.

Mutual Connection of Exchanges.

No satisfactory rural telephone system can possibly be developed in any county where one exchange is permitted to charge another exchange for connection. In the early history of the rural telephone system in the county referred to the larger telephone exchange at the county seat town persisted in charging the smaller rural exchanges \$2 a month for connection. This was a small price compared with the cut-throat prices which the telephone "trust" charges rural exchanges around such cities as Greensboro and Charlotte, but it was too much. So the rural telephone folks got busy and began to quickly organize another exchange for their convenience at the county seat town, and knowing that their town customers couldn't get along without the farmers and would quit them and go to the new exchange, the old exchange folks decided to yield to the demands of the country exchanges and permit them to connect without charge, on the mutual exchange of service basis.

And why not? Why should investments in one exchange demand tribute from equally as good money invested in another exchange in the same county? In other words, is it morally or legally right for a greedy telephone "trust" to declare big dividends from rents and tolls collected from farmers' investments—from assets owned by farmers in which the "trust" hasn't a penny invested? In Union County, farmers' rural exchanges positively refused to pay town exchanges \$24 a year for connection because it wasn't right to pay it, but in counties where a telephone "trust" has things its own way, the very few farmers' exchanges that have managed to come into existence

Toll Lines Should Not Be Tolerated.

Toll lines for local use in a county should not be tolerated. They are a nuisance. In an eastern county the other day a farmer called his home from town and it cost him ten cents for a two-minute talk. And he was already paying \$2 a month rent for his 'phone at home—an amount that was equivalent to a 10 per cent dividend on a \$240 investment, but the actual investment represented was not over \$40.

Prohibitive telephone rents and tolls have done more to hinder the extension of rural telephone service in some counties of North Carolina than all other causes combined. In fact, there are some counties that will never have a creditable development of the rural telephone service until the schemes of some grafting telephone companies are beautifully defeated. Among all the 34 independent telephone exchanges and the 2,000 rural telephones in Union County there isn't a local toll line in the county, the price of rural 'phone rents is only 50 cents per month, and one exchange makes no charge against another for connections, yet many of these rural exchanges are paying investments for their owners, and stock in some of them would bring a good premium above original cost.

How to Overcome Difficulties.

There isn't any better place to take up the proposition to establish a neighborhood telephone exchange than in your local Union. In fact, a local Union can be made the best asset and the most constructive force in any community, and if you haven't got the local Union, get in communication with the State Organizer and have one organized. In your local Union get a member to agree to buy the switchboard and let the other members agree to immediately purchase their 'phones and build their lines to the switchboard. Along the main roads it is best to start by putting up poles heavy enough to bear up several wires. Now, as for connection with your town or city exchange: Don't be in too big a hurry for that kind of connection. When the town exchange agrees to let you in without rents, on the mutual exchange basis, it will be time to go in. You have just as much right to charge a town exchange for connection with your rural exchange as they have to charge you for connection with the town exchange. And when enough independent rural exchanges have been established in any county to represent a hundred or more good farmers you may depend upon it that the business men in town, whose very life and existence depends upon your patronage, will help you get in behind the town exchange strong enough to secure satisfactory terms of connection. A neighborhood telephone exchange is worth many times its cost as a social and neighborhood convenience. You can afford to wait for town connection and just keep on building your county exchanges until you have enough families interested and enough rural telephone assets to make your demands interesting.

In fact, the fight for a square deal and just rates will be practically won after you shall have installed several good, live, independent rural exchanges in the county, for you will then be masters of the situation.

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