

The Right Knock Together

Beyond The Door Of Opportunity...

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Opportunity does not always knock at our door. Sometimes opportunity is, itself, a door on which we must knock; and this is the figure of speech which best fits North Carolina's agricultural opportunities at this time.

Beyond the door the opportunities are almost unlimited, and the door will open readily to the right kind of knock. But in many areas of the state a radically changed attitude on the part of both farm and non-farm people is needed for a firm and effective knock on the door.

To begin with, our farmers must realize the opportunities that exist for expanding production in lines not now overburdened with surplus, and not likely to become so. We have the soil, the climate and the readily-available know-how to produce practically all of the commodities for which there is a growing market, but which we are not even producing for our own consumption.

The really depressing picture for farmers is in the large grain-producing areas of the mid-west. Despite an increasing population, consumption of cereal crops has been decreasing, but the farmers in that area have little opportunity for shifting to profitable new lines of production. Per capita consumption of most other items, and particularly meat, has been on the increase.

We already have in this state a far greater buying power for fresh produce than we are growing, to say nothing of the markets and processing plants which could be established if we had the production for them. Less than a third of the beef and pork consumed in the state is processed here, but even then North Carolina meat plants must buy outside the state millions of dollars worth of beef and pork, on the hoof and in other forms, to keep their plants operating.

Yet annually more than a million acres of cropland stand idle each year in North Carolina—acres which could be producing commodities we now import from other states. Many more acres are producing only a small percent of their capacity. We are located in the heart of the most populous area of their nation, yet we are not only failing to take advantage of our opportunities to produce and process for this large market, but much of what we do produce is shipped out of the state for processing and then back in a gain for retail sale. With such op-

portunities for producing and marketing within North Carolina and the surrounding region, many commodities sold on the national eastern markets are shipped in from far away California.

California, indeed, offers an illustration of how the necessity for overcoming major obstacles has turned liabilities into assets. A long distance from the populous eastern seaboard which constitutes the nation's largest market, the farmers of that state were practically forced into a pattern of group, or cooperative, marketing. As a result, California leads the nation in total cash receipts from farm marketings. It can compete with other states much nearer to markets because the group approach provides uniformly dependable quality and quantity of production and also helps to cut both production and marketing costs. Mushrooming urbanization, decreasing farm land and increasing consumption will demand an increasing percentage of Pacific Coast products for use in that area. This means that now is the time for North Carolina to move into supply a greater part of the food marketed on the eastern seaboard.

Here in North Carolina we allowed an asset to become, not in itself a liability, but a deterrent to re-orienting our thinking in terms of what we have and what we need to do to realize our agricultural potential, which is also our greatest potential for economic expansion. Our ability to grow fine tobacco, and our long-established market outlets for it, have so dominated our interest that we have failed to launch out and make use of our total resources. Of course, we should be grateful for North Carolina's outstanding position in producing and marketing tobacco, and we should continue our efforts toward improvement in growing and selling this crop. But instead of regarding tobacco as the "end-all and be-all" of North Carolina agriculture, we should look upon our accomplishments with this crop as an illustration of what we can do in other lines of production if we give them the same kind of intensive concern and efforts. If ever we could afford to allow any of our valuable resources to lie idle, we can certainly not afford to do so now when farming operations require such a large investment and there is so great a need for expanding our over-all economy.

The day has come, indeed has long since been here, when we need

to put every acre, every tree, every blade of grass, every man-hour of available farm labor, into profitable production. There is scarcely a farm in Eastern North Carolina that does not have unused resources which could be employed to advantage. Whether it is primarily a tobacco farm, a cotton farm, or "majoring" in some other crop, there are opportunities for putting idle land and labor to work.

For instance, swine can be a profitable sideline as well as a major item of commercial production. Markets and processing plants already in the area are unable to find their buying needs here. A farmer with two brood sows can produce pigs for the market as profitably as one with a large herd. Beef cattle, too, can be a profitable sideline and with comparatively little investment in either labor or equipment. In this mild climate cattle require no housing, and the amount of labor required is very small compared to states where animals must range over vast acres of poor grazing land.

These are but examples. They do not being to list all the agricultural opportunities there are in the state as a whole or even in eastern North Carolina. It is no exaggeration to say that for most North Carolina communities full utilization of the agricultural resources would be the equivalent of adding one or more large new manufacturing industries to the local economy. Not only that, many areas could also have a new

industry if they had a sufficient supply of farm commodities; so actually the first and most important factor is production.

To achieve this would, as I have said, require a generally new attitude on the part of farmers; but it would also require a new attitude on the part of non-farm business men in the area—a new appraisal of the economic potential of agricultural resources. For marketing is a vital factor in realizing on this potential, and while this cannot be dealt with as separate and apart from farm production, neither can farmers, either individually or in groups, deal with it alone.

There has been a complete revolution in the agricultural marketing pattern. There must be dependable quantities of high quality production to attract a market. On the other hand, one farmer or a group of farmers cannot just launch out into commercial production of a commodity and then wait for a market to come. Today's agricultural markets are more than mere assembly points for the farm produce of an area. Even produce destined for the fresh market requires machinery and equipment to grade and package it before it moves out from the distribution point, and there must be sufficient quantity to warrant such investment. Full exploiting the opportunity means also that we must greatly expand our food processing industries and produce for their

needs. Thus opening the door to a community's of an area's full opportunity means farmers and non-farm business men getting together and taking a fresh look at the total resources and what can be done with them. With such an approach ways can be found to overcome the obstacles. And once the obstacles are overcome the total economy will get an amazing shot in the arm. Handling and processing expanded farm production will add many non-farm job opportunities. Supply-

ing the materials and equipment for also add non-farm jobs and business. Let's get together and knock at the door.

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