

**THE FARMERS UNION
AND CO-OPERATION**

By National Secretary A. C. DAVIS,

Continued From December 21, Issue.

It is very evident that co-operative endeavor to secure this result must take the form of societies of production, and while some latitude may be allowed to cover some feature not embodied in this idea, the principles of this form must predominate. Attempts thus far made by the organization to market farm products have fallen far short of co-operative ideals. A great majority of the ware houses and elevators built, owned and operated by the membership are in no sense co-operative. The success of some of these institutions have, in a financial way, been indeed phenomenal, but the results have been those of a private stock company rather than that of a co-operative stitution.

The kind of crop, whether or not it is competitive, also the percentage of such crop actually grown and controlled by the membership are factors which must be considered before attempting to formulate a plan for selling to the best advantage. Most of the products of the American farm are competitive; that is, they are grown in other parts of the world, or are grown in other sections of our own country where the organization has not yet reached. So long as the membership does not control a sufficient percentage of a crop to empower them to dictate prices, the object of the society handling such should be to sell direct to the consumer, and while no more than the prevailing market price may be obtained, the producer will gain by saving the "middleman's" profit. The interchange between the organization in different localities of such products as are grown in one section and consumed in another may be made profitable to producers by eliminating the "middleman's" profit at both ends of the line. The spirit that possess some to demand more for a commodity from a brother member of the Union than can be obtained upon the open market, should not be encouraged.

Such local organizations as are developing trade with the consuming public in other localities, and are reciprocating by using products of other sections direct from the grower, should be given hearty support. Nothing will so impress upon farmers of all sections the necessity for organization as these examples of successful co-operation, and the result of this will eventually be the spread of the

Farmers Union into every section of the United States.

The scheme for handling these crops that are but slightly competitive, or those crops over which the organization may, by reason of their numbers, hope to exert a controlling influence, may be more far reaching in its intent. The nearest approach we have in this country to a non-competitive crop is cotton, so we may be pardoned for discussing its handling somewhat in detail, because it will be used merely as an example of what may be accomplished when the producers of any given crop are thoroughly organized and equipped to handle it.

There is so little world competition in the production of this crop that there is absolutely no excuse for it not bringing each year its full economic value to the producer. Some of the principles about which we preach so much, and upon which our organization is supposed to be based, are equity, justice and the golden rule. In keeping with these principles, the first step before beginning to move the crop of any year, is to determine upon the equitable price. There are a number of elements that enter into the calculation. It must be considered in its relation to the entire social fabric of the world. The demand for it as a necessity, together with the standards of living and general level of the consuming public must have consideration, and a fair understanding of these, coupled with a knowledge of conditions which surround the producer, tending either to diminish or increase the cost of production will give a basis upon which to fix a fair valuation. The price of no crop can be fixed upon what it was worth last year, nor what we hope it will be worth next year, but must be determined by its economic value this year. That the nation's greatest asset has been unmercifully slaughtered during this Fall and winter cannot be denied. So flagrant has the injustice been that every business interest in the South has raised its voice in an attempt to stem the downward trend of prices. Considered from the standpoints suggested above, no possible excuse can be given for the prices that are being offered the farmer. It is humiliating to admit, but nevertheless true, that there is an element in control more powerful than the Commissioners of Agriculture—more powerful than the Governors; more powerful even than the vast

army that brought the crop into existence, and that is a handful of men operating a fictitious exchange that bears no sort of relation to producer nor consumer.

More meetings have been held—more speeches made over the present crisis, for crisis it certainly is, than in any one year yet,—the effect of these upon the market has not been noticeable. Neither will it be. Great good has been done, of course, because men have been made to think seriously about handling their own business affairs. But the solution of the question of obtaining fair prices has not been remotely approached. There is but one force in the field capable of reaching a solution, and that is the Farmers Union.

Had we not lost sight of the co-operative feature in warehouse management, and slept through the years of comparatively fair prices, this blow to our pride and pocket-books might have been avoided.

Co-operative handling of the crop will solve the problem. One of the most difficult things to accomplish, it seems, this year, was to get sufficient capital behind the holding movement. This trouble is due to but one thing, and that is the chaotic condition of our warehouse system. Lack of system would perhaps be more proper. No trouble need be anticipated in securing loans when the local warehouses are properly bonded and are made to bear some relation to each other.

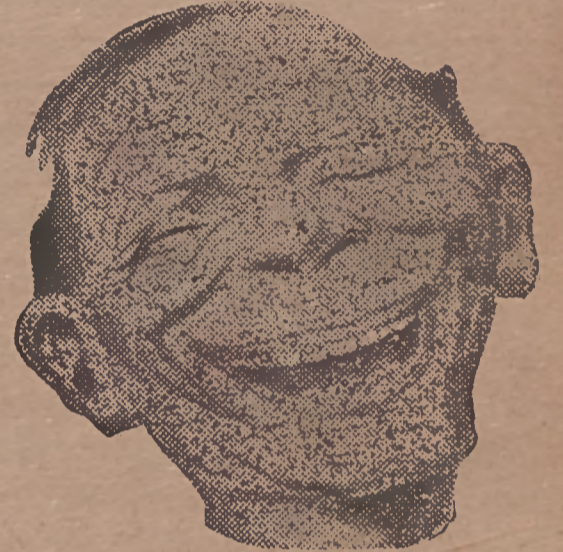
The urgent need of vast sums of money to loan to the membership who expect to hold a portion of the crop would seem to show that a co-operative society for handling the crop should be a combination of the first and third forms suggested in the beginning of this article—e.g.—a society of production and credit. It does not follow that such an organization must have sufficient funds of its own to loan its members, but it does mean that such an organization must have sufficient facilities for storing and handling the product as will insure abundant credit in the money markets. Our attempts to eliminate competition among individuals by building local warehouses, was laudable, but if each bale of cotton was sold through the local warehouses, so long as they remain as at present, having no relation one to another, competition is as evident as in the days when the individual sold at auction on the streets. Some of the State Unions, recognizing this, have federated their warehouses under one management, which is evidently a step in the right direction. There are but two more steps to take and the goal will have been reached: put these federated warehouses upon a co-operative basis and form an organization capable of handling the entire output.

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