

# Co-operative Buying Societies of Germany

H. C. Price in Rural New Yorker.

Next in importance to the co-operative agricultural credit associations of Germany are the co-operative societies for the purpose of farm supplies. These have been developed principally within the last twenty years and are now found very generally distributed over the entire country. According to the latest available statistics there are over 4,000 such societies, with an average membership of over 100 per society, which means that over 400,000 German farmers are members and purchase their supplies through them. The average amount of goods purchased through each society amounted to \$12,500 per year, or a total of \$50,000,000, which is estimated as being one-sixth of such goods purchased by the farmers of Germany. While all kinds of supplies used by farmers are purchased through such societies, the greater part of their business is the buying of commercial fertilizer, feed stuffs, seed and grain, coal and farm machinery. The result of the organization of purchase societies has been the collective or wholesale purchase of these products with a guarantee as to their quality. It has resulted in furnishing the farmer goods not only at a cheaper price but of a better quality and has insured his getting what he paid for.

Before the organization of the purchase societies the farmers, and especially the small farmers which make up by far the vast majority of German farmers, were helpless to make terms with business firms with whom they had to deal. This was especially true of the fertilizer companies and the commercial feed dealers. These two classes of products, both of which are largely used by German farmers, are handled by wealthy and closely organized companies. The farmer who bought only a few tons could require no guarantee of quality or see that it was fulfilled when furnished without an undue amount of expense and trouble. The prices were being constantly advanced and in self-defense the farmers organized into local purchase societies and the local societies into central district societies. At the present time there are twenty-six such central purchase societies and these stand in close relation to each other through their officers. As a result of this co-operation, organizations have been formed with which any of the companies are glad to make terms and do business. The quality of the goods purchased, especially of the fertilizers, feed stuffs and seeds, is closely watched and tests are made regularly to see that the guarantees are fulfilled. In visiting agricultural experiment stations in the different parts of Germany last winter, I found that in some of them as many as 10,000 chemical analyses are made each year of fertilizers and feeds. Upon inquiring from whom these samples came, I was told from co-operative purchase societies and from manufacturers. These societies are doing what the individual farmer could not do except at considerable expense and trouble in getting analyses made of the goods purchased.

Within ten years the volume of business done by these purchase societies has increased six times and in 1910 (the last year for which figures are available) over 1,000,000 tons of fertilizer, 400,000 tons of feeding stuffs, 10,000 tons of seeds and 1,000,000 tons of coal were purchased through them by farmers. The result of the organization of these pur-

chase societies has been not only to reduce the price and improve the quality of the goods handled through them, but all other goods of the same kind sold to farmers privately must compete both in price and quality, so that the societies have had a beneficial effect in giving all farmers a better grade of goods at a cheaper price.

These organizations are benefiting not only the farmers themselves, but they accomplish an economic saving in the distribution of goods that benefits the merchant as well as the farmer. They substitute a wholesale market for a retail, goods are sold and shipped in car-load lots instead of in one and two ton lots, and the sale of goods is made to one person or at most, a small committee instead of to fifty or a hundred different farmers. All of these savings enable the merchant to sell his goods on a narrower margin and the farmer gets the benefit of it.

Co-operation has proven to be the key to success for the German farmer and it certainly offers great possibilities to the farmers of America. The greatest problem before the American farmer at the present time is not the production of larger crops, the improvement of his live stock, or even the maintenance of the fertility of his soil, important as all of these are, but rather the reduction of cost of distribution, both of what he sells. If this can be done the farmer will get a larger proportion of what the consumer pays for farm products as well as the consumer getting them at a lower price. If the cost of distribution can be reduced on the goods he buys, he will pay more nearly what the manufacturer gets for his products and it will be mutually beneficial.

The most feasible solution of the problem is by co-operation. It has proven entirely satisfactory in the countries that have used it the longest, and its use is rapidly expanding in them. A simple and effective way to begin is by establishing co-operative purchase societies through which farmers can buy a few of the more commonly used goods. The success of these societies will soon lead to the adoption of other forms of agricultural co-operation and its general adoption means a revolution of American agriculture.

A Yonkers, N. Y., physician had a negro cook who was a chronic complainer. One day she came in groaning with a pain in her side, and the doctor offered to prescribe for her.

He went into the dining room, poured out a spoonful of game sauce, stirred in some English mustard and sprinkled on some cayenne pepper, and handed the dose to the sufferer, telling her to take it down at one swallow.

It was two weeks or more before she turned up with a new pain. This time it was in her other side. Her employer offered to fix her another dose of his medicine.

"No, suh!" said Mary firmly, "I'm much obliged to you, doctor; but I've done got my mind made up never again to drink nothin' what water won't quench."

"Nothing is more significant of men's character than what they find laughable."

We should not complain when we think the other fellow has a better job than we; rather let us rejoice.



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