

--- TO THE FARMERS OF CLEVELAND COUNTY ---

GENTLEMEN:---

This letter is addressed to you by men who have your interest and the interest of Cleveland County at heart, just as you have our interest and the general interest at heart. We are one family here, working for the common good, with the knowledge that a program that helps all helps each individual.

We are addressing you on a subject now very much discussed, and which is being more and more discussed. And that is the problem growing out of the cultivation of cotton. Let us be perfectly frank and sincere. We do not wish to be accused of butting in; we do not wish to be misunderstood as aspiring to possess superior knowledge, or anything of that sort.

We simply wish to discuss the subject briefly, and fairly and frankly, as man to man, in the interest of the common endeavor to keep this county in the lead in agricultural wealth.

FARMING IS BASIC INDUSTRY.

For you know, as we all know, that the basis of all prosperity, here and everywhere, is the farm. When you prosper we all prosper; when you fail, we all feel the pinch.

Now, the sum and substance of the discussion which is going on, centers around the common belief that cotton is being too much stressed in this county. To put it another way, it is said that perhaps cotton is not too much stressed, but that other crops are not stressed enough.

As to whether or not too much attention is being paid to cotton cultivation, that is a broad subject. Perhaps in a way it may be said that you can not grow too much cotton, considering it is a cash crop. But, considering what we may term the reverse side of the issue, that you are not paying enough attention to other crops, conclusions are pretty plain.

You know, and we all know, to what extent the importation of hay and forage crops has grown here in late years. And you know, and we all know, to what extent canned goods for our tables are being bought from other parts.

Which means that we are not producing enough for our needs in the feeding of animals or the feeding of ourselves. Which again means this, that the hard earned money you wrest from the soil in the growing of cotton has to be turned over to the hay merchant and the foreign grocer.

And there is no good reason for this, other than that contemplated by the good old word—habit. By which we mean that from year to year, lured on by the hope of larger income from the cotton acreage, you have neglected other crops.

It would seem to us that this neglect, this omission, we will put it, has developed to the point where the very economic health of the community is threatened.

CANNOT LIVE BY COTTON ALONE.

Friends, we can not live by cotton alone, any more than we can live by bread alone. There must be diversification. Nature abhors a straight line. The symbol of God is the sphere.

The writer of this letter, sitting in the of-



rice of one of the very leading men not only of this section but of the state, heard him say—and as he said it he crashed his fist down heavily upon his desk so forceful was his thought:

“It is nothing short of an economic crime that our people should be living out of tin cans, shipped from the outside, and the animals from hay hauled a thousand miles, when we can produce here the very best forage crops and the good vegetables as can be produced anywhere in the world.”

BUTTER PRODUCTION FALLS.

We are reliably informed that in one year the production of butter from the two creameries in Cleveland County fell off 104,000 POUNDS.

Of course it will be argued, that some of this milk was diverted, and is now being served to local customers who use the milk direct. But whereas that may be a fact, a balancing fact is that there is still the unsupplied demand at the creameries.

From which the conclusion may be drawn that the number of cattle is dwindling, or that the feed is not sufficient for the maximum of milk production, as was formerly the case.

GROW FORAGE CROPS.

It would seem to us, viewing the problem from the outside as it were, and looking upon it with that advantage of perspective to which the one closer to it is denied, that you farmers of the county face two fundamental necessities for continued advancement. One is, to cultivate enough forage crops to make your farm self sustaining, insofar as the feeding of your animals is concerned, and the other is, to cultivate enough fruits and vegetables to feed the local community.

You may say that it is not up to you to supply the local people with vegetables. And in

a sense that is true. From one point of view you are entirely independent. But from another point of view you are not. You can not economically ignore a market at your door for products which you can grow. It would seem to us to be economically a false principle, to grasp after a foreign good in the shape of cotton profits, and neglect the good which lies at your doorstep.

It is the story over again of “acres of diamonds.”

VEGETABLE MARKET.

It is a fact that years back you tried to sell vegetables in Shelby and the other centres of Cleveland County and you could find no market. That was for the reason that almost every man kept a cow and cultivated a garden. From your discouragements of those years you got into the habit of depreciating the value of vegetables as a crop.

But during the last few years conditions have changed. A vast urban population has developed, made up of non-food producers. These incomers have created an enormously enlarged market.

We heard a man say no longer ago than today that a farmer could with profit plant a hundred acres in roasting ear corn alone, and find a ready market for the output right here at home.

You farmers are loth to believe that, because your past experience has been otherwise. But times have changed. And you too must change. And this is the essence and the pith of the whole argument. Conditions change, and we must adjust ourselves to those changes. We can not go on living today as we did yesterday. Today's problems are not those of yesterday, any more than those of next year will be like those we now face.

IF COTTON SHOULD FAIL?

We don't wish to assume a pessimistic attitude; we don't seek the role of the joy killer; but the plain unvarnished truth is that the principle at the root of the farming industry in this county must be revised to fit the changed condition, or we will face a serious situation.

One bad year of cotton, folks, and—

We will be in want.

You are now paying out your good hard earned dollars to the feed man and the foreign canned vegetable specialist. Which is bad enough. But if cotton should fail you—one short season—you would be in the breakers. You are taking a chance.

As we see the issue, economic safety lies in diversification; by which we mean the growing of poultry. (It is said thirty hens will buy the coffee, sugar and flour for the average family.) The production of dairy products. The production of sufficient forage to make a farm self sustaining, and the production of vegetables not only for family consumption, but for sale.

And with all that, there need be no serious curtailment in the cotton crop.

Yours in good faith, and looking toward a continually prospering county,

O. MAX GARDNER,
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