

Summary

Report of the Country Life Commission

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Purpose

Not to help farmers raise better crops, but to call his attention to the opportunities for better business and better living on the farm. If the country life is to become what it should be, and what I believe it ultimately will be – one of the most dignified, desirable, and sought-after ways of earning a living – the farmer must take advantage not only of the agricultural knowledge which is at his disposal, but of the methods which have raised and continue to raise the standards of living and of intelligence in other callings.

Prominent Deficiencies

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- Lack of knowledge on the part of farmers of the exact agricultural conditions and possibilities of their regions.
- Lack of good training for country life in schools.
- The disadvantage or handicap of the farmer in contrast to the established business systems and interests, depriving him of the benefits that would result from unmonopolized rivers and the conservation of forests, and depriving the community in many cases of the good that would come from the use of great tracts of agricultural land that are now held for speculative purposes.
- Lack of good highways.
- The widespread continuing depletion of soils, with the injurious effect on rural life.
- A need of new and active leadership.

Remedies

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- Encourage continuous surveying of all agricultural regions.
- Encouragement of a system of extension work of rural communities through all the land-grant colleges with the people at their homes and on their farms.
- A thoroughgoing investigation by experts of the middleman system of handling farm products, coupled with a general inquiry into the farmer's disadvantages in respect to taxation, transportation rates, cooperative organizations and credit, and general business systems.
- Establishment of a highway engineering service, or equivalent organization, to be at the call of the states in working out effective and economical highway systems.

- An inquiry into the control and use of the steams of the United States with the object of protecting the people in their ownership and of saving to agricultural uses such benefits as should be reserved for these purposes.
- Establishment of a system of parcels post and postal savings banks.

Remedies for the Disregard of the Inherent Rights of the Farmer

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- There is need of a new general attitude toward legislation, in the way of safeguarding the farmer's natural rights and interests.
 - We recommend that the welfare of the farmer and the countryman be also kept in mind in the construction of laws.
 - We specially recommend that his interests be considered and safeguarded in any new legislation on the tariff, on regulation of railroads, control or regulating of corporations and speculation, river, swamp, and forest legislation, and public health regulation.
- Recognize the necessary rights of the individual farmer to the use of the native resources and agencies that go with the utilization of agricultural lands and to protect him from hindrance and encroachment in the normal development of his business.
 - If the farmer suffers because his business is small, isolated, and unsyndicated, then it is the part of government to see that he has a natural opportunity among his fellows and a square deal.
- An attitude of government, both state and national, as will safeguard the separate and individual rights of the farmer, is in the interest of the public good.
- We commend the general policy of the present administration to safeguard the streams, forests, coal lands, and phosphate lands, and in endeavoring to develop a home-owning settlement in the irrigated regions.
- One of the most available and effective single means of giving the farmer the benefit of his natural opportunities is the enlargement of government service to the country people through the post office.
 - We hold that a parcel post and a postal savings bank system are necessities; and as rapidly as possible the rural free delivery of mails should be extended.
- A thoroughgoing study or investigation of the relation of business practices and of taxation to the welfare of the farmer, with a view to ascertaining what discriminations and deficiencies should be conducted.
 - This investigation should include the entire middleman system, farmers' cooperative organizations, transportation rates and practices, taxation of agricultural property, methods of securing funds on reasonable conditions for

agricultural uses, and the entire range of economic questions involved in the relation of the farmer to the accustomed methods of doing business.

Conservation and Land Use

Speculative Holding of Lands

- Landowners who possess large areas of land in available locations tend to hold it for speculative purposes. This prevents the land from settlement and the development of an agricultural community.

Monopolistic Control of Streams

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- Waterways: Protection from Monopolies
 - The legitimate farming interests of the whole country would be vastly benefited by a systematic conservation and utilization, under the protection of the State and Federal Governments, of our waterways, both great and small.
 - Important advantages of these waterways are likely to be appropriated in perpetuity and without adequate return to the agricultural inhabitants of the use of them.
 - The protection from monopoly is one of the first responsibilities of the government.
- Waterways: Uses
 - Drainage Lines
 - Sources of Irrigation Supply
 - Carriers and equalizers of transportation rates
 - Readily Available Power Resource
 - Raising of Food Fish
 - River navigation affords the best and cheapest transportation of farm products of a nonperishable nature. The rivers afford the best means of competition with railroads, because river carriage is cheap, and because the rivers once opened by the Government for navigation are open to all, and monopoly of their use should be an impossibility.
- Unfortunately, the tendency of the present laws is to encourage the acquisition of these resources on easy terms, or their own terms, by the first applicants, and the power of the streams is rapidly being acquired under conditions that lead to the concentration of ownership in the hands of monopolies.
- The commission suggests that a special inquiry be made of the control and stream resources of the United States, with the object of protecting the people in

their ownership and of reserving to agricultural uses such benefits as should be reserved for these purposes.

Wastage and Control of Forests

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- The forests have been exploited for private gain until not only has the timber been seriously reduced, but until streams have been ruined for navigation, power, irrigation, and common water supplies and whole regions have been exposed to floods and disastrous soil erosion.
- The conservation of forests and brush on watershed areas is important to the farmer along the full length of streams, regardless of the distance between the farm and these areas.
 - The loss of soil in denuded areas increases the menace of flood, not alone because of the more rapid run-off, but by the filling of channels and the greater erosion of stream banks when soil matter is carried in suspension.
- The wood-lot property of the country needs to be saved and increased.
 - Wood-lot yield is one of the most important crops of the farm, and is of great value to the public in controlling streams, saving the run-off, checking winds, and in adding to the attractiveness of the region.
 - In many regions, where poor and hilly lands prevail, the town or county could well afford to purchase forest land, expecting thereby to add to the value of the property and eventually to make the forests a source of revenue.

Soil Depletion and Its Effects

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- There are two classes of farmer – those who make farming a real and active constructive business, as much as the successful manufacturer or merchant makes his effort a business; and those who merely passively live on the land, often because they cannot do anything else, and by dint of hard work and the strictest economy manage to subsist.
- The social condition of any agricultural community is closely related to the available fertility of the soil. “Poor land, poor people,” and “rough land, rough people” have long since passed into proverbs.
- When the land begins to yield with difficulty, the farmer may move to new land, develop a system of self-sustaining agriculture (becoming thereby a real farmer), or be driven into poverty and degradation.
- The evolution of a really scientific and self-perpetuating agriculture is beginning to appear here and there, mostly in the long-settled regions.
- The drift to poverty and degradation is pronounced in many parts of the country. In every region a certain class of the population is forced to the poor

lands, becoming a handicap to the community and constituting a very difficult social problem.

- The great agricultural need of the open country is a system of diversified and rotation farming, carefully adapted in every case to the particular region.
- It is a general feature of our agriculture, due to a lack of appreciation of our responsibility to society to protect and save the land.
- Although we have reason to be proud of our agricultural achievements, we must not close our eyes to the fact that our resources are still being lost through poor farming.

Reclamation of the Land

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- It is important to the development of the best type of country life that the reclamation of the lands in rural regions proceed under conditions insuring their subdivision into small farm units and their settlement by men who would both own them and till them.
- The Federal Government should act to the fullest extent of its constitutional powers in securing the reclamation of these lands under proper safeguards against speculative holding and landlordism.

Restraint of Trade

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- The commission has heard much complaint, in all parts of the country and by all classes of farmers, of injustice, inequalities, and discrimination on the part of transportation companies and middlemen.
 - If the statements can be trusted, the business of farming as a whole is greatly repressed by lack of mutual understanding and good faith in the transportation and marketing of agricultural produce.
- We feel that there should be a free understanding between transportation companies and farmers in respect to their mutual business.
 - We find that farmers who have well-informed opinions on tariff, education, and other public questions are yet wholly uninformed in respect to the transportation man's point of view on freight rates and express rates that may be in dispute.
 - A disposition on the part of all parties to discuss the misunderstandings fairly would probably accomplish much.
- The whole matter of the railway freight rates should be made more understandable.

- There should be a simplifying or codifying of rates that will enable the farmer or a group of farmers or of other citizens who use the railways to ascertain readily from the published tariffs the actual rate on any given commodity between two points.
- The rates are a large factor in the development of population; in many instances the railway rates determine both the character of the population and the development of industry.
- The railway companies, by their rates, may decide where the centers of distribution shall be, what areas shall develop manufacturers, and other special industries. To the extent that they do this they exercise a purely public function, and for this reason alone, if for no other, the Government should exercise a wise supervision over the making and publication of rates.

Health in the Open Country

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- Theoretically the farm should be the most healthful place in which to live, and there are numberless farm-houses, especially of the farm owner class, that possess most excellent modern sanitary conveniences.
- It is a fact that there are also numberless other farm houses, especially of the tenant class, and even numerous rural school houses, that do not have the rudiments of sanitary arrangement.
- There are many questions of nationwide importance, such as soil, milk, and water pollution; too much visiting in case of contagious diseases; patent medicines, advertising quacks, and intemperance; feeding of offal to animals at local slaughterhouses and general insanitary conditions of those houses not under federal or other rigid sanitary control; in some regions unwholesome and poorly prepared and monotonous diet; lack of recreation; too long hours of work.
- In general, the rural population is less safeguarded by boards of health than is the urban population. The physicians are farther apart and are called in later in case of sickness, and in some districts of medical attendance are relatively more expensive.
- The necessity for disease prevention is therefore self-evident, and it becomes even more emphatic when we recall that infection may be spread from farms to cities in the streams and also in the milk, meat, and other farm products.
 - Quite aside from the humanitarian point of view, the aggregate annual loss to the nation from insanitary conditions on the farms must, when expressed in money values, reach an enormous sum, and a betterment of these conditions is a nation-wide obligation.
 - How and what to eat, the nature of disease, the importance of fresh air, the necessity of physical training even on the farm, the ineffectiveness or even the

danger of strums, the physical evils of intemperance, all should be known in some useful degree to every boy and girl on leaving school.

- We think that the Federal Government should be given the right to send its health officers into various States on request of these States at any time, for the purpose of investigating and controlling public health; it does not now have this right except at quarantine stations, although it may attend to diseases of domestic animals. It should also engage in publicity work on this subject.

Agricultural Economics

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- The organized and corporate interests represented in mining, manufacturing, merchandising, transportation, and the like, seem often to hold the idea that their business may be developed and exploited without regard to the farmers, who should, however, have an equal opportunity for enjoyment of the land, forests, and streams and of the right to buy and sell in the open markets without prejudice.
- The way in which discriminating conditions may arise is well illustrated in the inequalities of taxation of farm property. It is natural that visible and stationary property should be taxed freely under our present system; it is equally natural that invisible and changeable property should tend to evade taxation. The inevitable result is that the farmer's property bears an unjust part in taxation schemes.
- We recommend that the welfare of the farmer and countryman be also kept in mind in the construction of laws.

Highways

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- Highways that are usable at all times of the year are now imperative not only for the marketing of produce, but for the elevation of the social and intellectual status of the open country and the improvement of health by insuring better medical and surgical attendance.
- We suggest that the United States Government establish a highway engineering service, or equivalent organization, to be at the call of the States in working out effective and economical highway systems.

Agricultural Labor

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Statement of the General Farm Problem

- The laborer, if he has the ambition to be an efficient agent in the development of the country, will be anxious to advance from the lower to the higher forms of effort, and from being a laborer himself he becomes a director of labor.

- The farm labor problem, however, is complicated by several special conditions, such as the fact that the need for labor is not continuous, the lack of conveniences of living for the laborer, long hours, the want of companionship, and in some places the apparently low wages. Because of these conditions the necessary drift of workmen is from the open country to the town.
- On the part of the employer the problem is complicated by the difficulty of securing labor, even at the relatively high prices now prevailing, that is competent to handle modern farm machinery and to care for livestock, and to handle the special work of the improved dairy.
- It is further complicated in all parts of the country by the competition of railroads, mines, and factories, which, by reason of shorter hours, apparently higher pay, and the opportunities for social diversion and often dissipation attract the native farm hand to the towns and cities.
- The difficulty of securing good labor is so great in many parts of the country that farmers are driven to dispose of their farms, leaving their land to be worked on shares by more or less irresponsible tenants, or selling them outright, often to foreigners.
- All absentee and proxy farming create serious social problems in the regions thus affected. There is not sufficient good labor available in the country to enable us to farm our lands under present systems of agriculture and to develop our institutions effectively.
- The most marked reaction to the labor difficulty is the change in modes of farm management, whereby farming is slowly adapting itself to the situation.
- The excessive hours of labor on farms must be shortened.
- The growing tendency to rely on foreigners for the farm labor supply, although the sentiment is very strong in some regions against immigration.
- The most difficult rural labor problem is that of securing household help on the average farm. The larger the farm the more serious the problem becomes.
- The necessity of giving a suitable education to her children deprives the farm women largely of home help; while the lure of the city, with its social diversions, more regular hours of labor, and its supposed higher respectability, deprives her of help bred and born in the country.
- Under these circumstances she is compelled to provide the food that requires the least labor. This simple fact explains much of the lack of variety, in the midst of the greatest possible abundance, so often complained of on the farmer's table.
- Labor-saving appliances in the future will greatly lighten the burdens of those who are willing to use them.

- With the teaching of home subjects in the school household labor will again become respectable as well as easier and more interesting.
- There is widespread conviction that the farmer must give greater attention to providing good quarters to laborers and to protect them from discouragement and from the saloon.
- The shortage of labor seems to be the least marked where the laborer is best cared for.
- While all farmers feel the shortage of help, the commission has found that the best farmers usually complain least about the labor difficulty.

Developing the Local Attachments of the Farm Laborer

- Such reorganization of agriculture must take place as will tend more and more to employ the man the year round to tie him to the land.
- The employer bears a distinct responsibility to the laborer, and also to society, to house him well and to help him to contribute his part to the community welfare.
- Eventually some kind of school or training facilities must be provided for the farm laborer to cause him to develop skill and to interest him intellectually in his work.
- Some kind of simple saving institution should also be developed in order to encourage thrift on the part of the laborer. It would be well also to study systems of life insurance in reference to farm workmen. The establishment of postal savings banks should contribute toward greater stability of farm labor.
- The development of various kinds of cooperative buying and selling associations might be expected to train workmen in habits of thrift, if the men were encouraged to join them.

The Question of Intemperance

- The Commission has made no inquiry into intemperance as such, but it is impressed, from the testimony that has accumulated, that drunkenness is often a very serious menace to country life, and that the saloon is an institution that must be banished from at least all country districts and rural towns if our agricultural interests are to develop to the extent to which they are capable.
- Intemperance is largely the result of the barrenness of farm life, particularly of the lot of the hired man.
- There is most urgent need for a quickened public sentiment on this whole question of intoxication in rural communities and order to relieve country life of one of its most threatening handicaps.

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- At the same time it is incumbent on every person to exert his best effort to provide the open country with such intellectual and social interests as will lessen the appeal and attractiveness of the saloon.

Migration: Choice of Residence

- The difficulty of securing good labor is so great in many parts of the country that farmers are driven to dispose of their farms, leaving their land to be worked on shares by more or less irresponsible tenants, or selling them outright, often to foreigners.

Recommendations

1. **Taking Stock of Country Life.** – There should be organized, as explained in the main report, under government leadership, a comprehensive plan for an exhaustive study or survey of all the conditions that surround the business of farming and the people who live in the country, in order to take stock of our resources and to supply the farmer with local knowledge. Federal and state governments, agricultural colleges and other educational agencies, organizations of various types, and individual students of the problem should be brought into cooperation for this great work of investigating with minute care all agricultural and country life conditions.
2. **Nationalized Extension Work.** – Each state college of agriculture should be empowered to organize as soon as practicable a complete department of college extension, so managed as to reach every person on the land in its State, with both information and inspiration. The work should include such forms of extension teaching as lectures, bulletins, reading courses, correspondence courses, demonstration, and other means of reaching the people at home and on their farms. It should be designed to forward not only the business of agriculture, but sanitation, education, home making, and all interests of country life.
3. **A Campaign for Rural Progress.** – We urge the holding of local, state, and even national conferences on rural progress, designed to unite the interests of education, organization, and religion into one forward movement for the rebuilding of country life. Rural teachers, librarians, clergymen, editors, physicians, and others may well unite with farmers in studying and discussing the rural question in all its aspects. We must in some way unite all institutions, all organizations, all individuals having any interest in country life into one great campaign for rural progress.

Reference

United States; Bailey, Liberty Hyde (ed.). 1909. *Report of the Country Life Commission: Special Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Country Life Commission, 60th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1909, S. Doc 705* (Washington: Govt. Print. Off.)