

# Excerpts from the Report of the County Life Commission, 1909

**Pg. 20**

## **I. GENERAL STATEMENT**

Broadly speaking, agriculture in the United States is prosperous and the conditions in many of the great farming regions are improving. The success of the owners and cultivators of good land, in the prosperous regions, has been due partly to improved methods, largely to good prices for products, and also to the general advance in the price of farm lands in these regions. Notwithstanding the general advance in rentals and the higher prices of labor, tenants also have enjoyed a good degree of prosperity, due to fair crops, and an advance in the price of farm products approximately corresponding to the advance in the price of land. Farm labor has been fully employed and at increased wages, and many farm hands have become tenants and many tenants have become landowners.

There is marked improvement, in many of the agricultural regions, in the character of the farm home and its surroundings. There is increasing appreciation on the part of great numbers of country people of the advantage of sanitary water supplies and plumbing, of better construction in barns and all farm buildings, of good reading matter, of tasteful gardens and lawns, and the necessity of good education.

Many institutions are also serving the agricultural needs of the open country with great effectiveness, as the United States Department of Agriculture, the land-grant college and experiment stations, and the many kinds of extension work that directly or indirectly emanate from them. The help that these institutions render to the country-life interests is everywhere recognized. State departments of agricultural, national, state, and local organizations, many schools of secondary grade, churches, libraries, and many other agencies are also contributing actively to the betterment of agricultural conditions.

There has never been a time when the American farmer was as well off as he is to-day, when we consider not only his earning power, but the comforts and advantages he may secure. Yet the real efficiency in farm life, and in country life as a whole, is not to be measured by historical standards, but in terms of its possibilities. Considered from this point of view, there are very marked deficiencies. There has been a complete and fundamental change in our whole economic system within the past century. This has resulted in profound social changes and the redirection of our point of view on life. In some occupations the readjustment to the new conditions has been rapid and complete; in others it has come with difficulty. In all the great series of farm occupations the readjustment has been the most tardy, because the whole

structure of a traditional and fundamental system has been involved. It is not strange, therefore, that development is still arrested in certain respects; that marked inequalities have arisen; or that positive injustice may prevail even to a very marked and wide-spread extent. All these difficulties are the results of the unequal development of our contemporary civilization. All this may come about without any intention on the part of anyone that it should be so. The problems are nevertheless just as real, and they must be studied and remedies must be found.

These deficiencies are recognized by the people. We have found, not only the testimony of the farmers themselves but of all persons in touch with farm life, more less serious agricultural unrest in every part of the United States, even in the most prosperous regions. There is a widespread tendency for farmers to move to town. It is not advisable, of course, that all country persons remain in the coun-try; but this general desire to move is evidence that the open country is not satisfying as a permanent abode. This tendency is not peculiar to any region. In difficult farming regions, and where the competi-tion with other farming sections is most severe, the young people may go to town to better their condition. In the best regions the older people retire to town, because it is socially more attractive and they see a prospect of living in comparative ease and comfort on the rental of their lands. Nearly everywhere there is a townward movement for the purpose of securing school advantages for the children. All this tends to sterilize the open country and to lower its· social status. Often-the farm is let to tenants. The farmer is likely to lose active interest in life when he retires to town, and he becomes a stationary citizen, adding a social problem to the town. He is likely to find his expenses increasing and is obliged to raise rents to his tenant, thereby making it more difficult for the man who works on the land. On his death his property enriches the town rather than the country. The withdrawal of the children from the farms detracts from the interest and efficiency of the country school and adds to the interest of the town school...

## **Pg. 26**

### **The Circular Of Questions**

As a means of securing the opinions of the people themselves on some of the main aspects of country life, a set of questions was distributed, as follows:

- I. Are the farm homes in your neighborhood as good as they should be under the existing conditions?
- II. Are the schools in your neighborhood training boys and girls satisfactorily for life on the farm?
- III. Do the farmers in your neighborhood get the returns they reasonably should from sale of their products?
- IV. Do the farmers in your neighborhood receive from the railroads, highroads, trolley lines, etc., the service they reasonably should have?
- V. Do the farmers in your neighborhood receive from the United States postal service, rural telephones, etc., the service they reasonably should expect?

- VI. Are the farmers and their wives in your neighborhood satisfactorily organized to promote their mutual buying and selling interest?
- VII. Are the renters of farms in your neighborhood making a satisfactory living?
- VIII. Is the supply of farm labor in your neighborhood satisfactory?
- IX. Are the conditions surrounding hired labor on the farms in your neighborhood satisfactory to the hired man?
- X. Have the farmers in your neighborhood satisfactory facilities for doing their business in banking, credit, insurance, etc.?
- XI. Are the sanitary conditions of farms in your neighborhood satisfactory?
- XII. Do the farmers and their wives and families in your neighborhood get together for mutual improvement, entertainment, and social intercourse as much as they should?

What, in your judgement, is the most important single thing to be done for the general betterment of country life?