

*J.E. Prince*

"OF THINGS TO COME"

*A Citizens' Forum on Canada in the  
Post-war World*

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# The People on the Land

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Prepared by JEAN HUNTER MORRISON and GEORGE GRANT  
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## *The People on the Land*

During the last sixteen weeks, much of our discussion about the problems before us in the post-war period has focussed on urban life. When we talked about full employment, we considered mainly our industrial set-up. When we examined the state of affairs in our own community, it was usually a city or a small town. Tonight our attention turns to the people on the land.

Many of us who live in Canadian cities or small towns were brought up on a farm. But whether or not we have a personal link with the farming industry, what happens to it is of vital importance to the well-being of Canada as a whole, for almost a third of the Canadian people live on farms. Farming is the second most important occupation in our country. In 1935 the value of farm products comprised 26% of the total value of production, with manufacturing alone ranking higher.

This enterprise supplies almost all the food Canadians eat (with the exception of a few products not grown here, such as coffee, and some items which add to the variety or quantity of the home supply, such as fruits). It supplies raw material for about 36% of Canada's manufacturing enterprises. In 1928 goods of farm origin actually accounted for more than half (on a value basis) of all Canadian exports. In 1930 it was estimated that "practically half the domestic market for the products of urban manufacture is provided by Canadian agriculture." (Economic Organization of Canadian Agriculture, by J. F. Booth). This means that Canadian industry loses an important market when Canadian farmers can't afford to buy its products. If Canadian agriculture is not prosperous, the entire population of our country suffers.

### **CRISIS ON THE FARM**

Canadian farmers, like the rest of us, are worried about the future because of the past. Canadian farming has been in a state of crisis since the 20's. Farmers were the first to experience the disastrous effects of falling prices; their returns decreased sharply in the post-war depression between 1921 and 1923. Farm prices failed to rally to the same extent as profits or even wages. They declined abysmally during the great depression.

Farm young people left the land in great numbers, driven off by lack of capital to start farming on their own account, or unwillingness to undertake the hardship of farm life with no hope of adequate returns. They were attracted by the supposed opportunities for education, jobs, and an easier life in the city. Rural

community life began to go to pieces. Many farmers could carry on only by increasing mortgaged indebtedness, or by giving up ownership and becoming tenant or farm-labour. Modern transportation and communication broke up the isolation of the rural community and loosened the bonds of neighborhood life.

Now let's try to uncover what brought about this crisis.

**Loss of Markets** For one thing, farmers were feeling the effects of the world decline in trade, which began to make wheat and other farm products a drug on the world market. Also during the depression the purchasing power of the working population here at home, suffering from unemployment and low wages, was sharply lowered. Markets abroad and markets at home were both cut drastically, with the result that the farmer could not sell his products.

**Size of Farms** Internally, there were other crucial problems. The size of thousands of Canadian farms was pretty well determined in the early days by how much land could be cleared of forests in one generation. Later, in prairie settlement, it was fixed at 160 acres per grant. With the advent of modern machinery and transportation, many of these farms turned out to be too small for profitable production. For example, although the majority of wheat farmers own a quarter-section (160 acres), statistics of costs and revenue show that the return on capital investment for a half-section varies from 3.2% in the richest land, to 0.9% for the vast central plains area; and on a section farm, from 6% to 4.1%. In other words, wheat-farming is only profitable on at least a half-section and then only on the best land.

The farmer, therefore, has been facing not only a crisis in world trade and prices, but a crisis in the efficient utilization of land in Canada. He very often finds his acreage too small.

On top of all this, he still works his farm as an individual owner, while he has to buy all his machinery from one of two or three huge companies dominating the whole field of production. He sells his milk to one of a very few large dairy firms, his wheat to one of half-a-dozen milling companies. For a long time he has been trying to bargain as an individual with gigantic corporations or semi-monopolies. True, he has in many instances, notably grain-growing, discovered the power in cooperative marketing, and cooperative buying. But after the farmers' revolt at the close of the last war, which swept out some provincial governments, the

farmers' voice has for many years sounded rather feebly at Ottawa in comparison with the powerful voices of big and well-organized industry.

### NO LONGER THE FORGOTTEN MAN

Many farmers probably feel that until the war they were Canada's forgotten men. Now they have suddenly moved onto the centre of the stage, as city people worry about food supplies, and as the government proudly supplies the United Nations with vast quantities of Canadian foodstuffs. Why has farming suddenly moved into the spotlight?

**Increased Production** The largest factor is probably guaranteed markets—markets as large or larger than farmers can possibly produce for, combined with better returns than they have seen for years. This higher farm income can be accounted for by increased purchasing power on the part of the population as a whole, huge government orders for Britain supported by various subsidies, and an army to feed with the government doing the buying.

Farm production has increased tremendously during the war in spite of great shortages in manpower and machinery. It has taken place at the expense of serious wear and tear both on farm equipment and on the farm operators, many of whom are now working beyond the normal retirement age.

**Organization** There is another reason why farmers are ceasing to be forgotten men. They have organized! They are beginning to find a collective voice and make it heard at Ottawa. The Canadian Chamber of Agriculture, started in 1933, became in 1939 the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the first national federation of the major farm organizations in specialized fields. In conferences, press statements, delegations to Ottawa, this voices the farmers' views on matters affecting his welfare. Education efforts on an entirely new scale have gone along with this—radio forums and study groups. In some provinces, field secretaries have encouraged county and district organizations, short training courses for young people, and local participation in the policies of the Federation.

**Government Recognition** The government is beginning to appreciate the constructive role organized farmers are anxious to play. In the spring of 1943 the Minister of Agriculture called into being an advisory committee to the Food Board, on which the Federation of Agriculture was strongly represented. The Federation met with government field men and provincial departments of agriculture in the same spring, to break down the contracts for Britain into provincial quotas and to discuss the problem in meeting these quotas.

In most provinces, local community organization translated these food goals into practical objectives for their own areas. In various parts of the country they were called Victory Committees, County War-Committees, and so on—but whatever the name, they were the mechanisms through which farmers accepted responsibility for our national objectives. Many of these committees made surveys of the productive capacity in their area, and then tackled the obstacles preventing them from using this to the full. Informal cooperation spurted ahead all over the country—neighbours sharing machines, helping each other with harvests, buying and selling cooperatively. Surely here is a pattern for the future!

Farmers have made a notable contribution to our war-effort at considerable personal sacrifice. But they feel a great insecurity about what will happen at the close of the war. Many of them for this reason have held back on too heavy outlays in capital equipment, even though this would increase war-production enormously. A good number are still burdened down with past debts, which only now are they beginning to clear off.

### FUTURE PROSPECTS

Now what will happen after the war? Without trying to speak as a prophet, several things are apparent.

First, even if contracts with Britain cease suddenly, there will still be a huge demand for food on a world scale.

As we have seen in previous discussions, UNRRA provides the mechanism for feeding war-torn countries after the war, and Canada is making a worthy contribution here. The United Nations Food Conference, meeting in the spring of 1943 at Hot Springs, Virginia, recognized that agricultural production was still not large enough to feed the people of the world properly.

**More Food Needed** To meet the food needs in the first six or seven years after the war, agricultural production will have to be expanded considerably, and to secure adequate supplies of protective foods, shifts in production will be necessary. This expansion and shifting must begin now, both because of the time needed to plan and achieve it and because of ever-threatening wartime food surpluses.

The Food Conference recommended that a world organization on food and agriculture should be set up, and a provisional committee is already working on plans for doing so.

Now, the main question is how to achieve this needed production. The United Nations in conference recognized certain essentials: farmers must have higher purchasing power; farming must be carried on more scientifically; there must be free and flourishing exchange between countries so that foods should be grown not

with a view to national self-sufficiency but wherever they could be produced most efficiently (e.g. European nations, as Sir John Boyd Orr suggests, might very well leave wheat-growing to Canada, South America, etc., and concentrate on vegetables and protective foods.) This would involve:

"international arrangements for the control of basic staple foodstuffs entering international trade. There was agreement that the objects of any such arrangements must be to eliminate excessive short-term movements in the prices of food and agricultural commodities, to mitigate general inflationary or deflationary movements and to facilitate adjustment in production which may be necessary to prevent economic dislocation."

Now what does this kind of world perspective mean for Canada?

**Feeding Canada** Canadian farmers have first of all the responsibility for seeing that the Canadian people are well fed. This means not only that enough of the right kind of food must be produced, but also that the urban population must be able to afford the right foods. Hence, farmers have a stake and a very great one, in education on nutrition, adequate wages paid to labour, social security measures, full employment.

**World Arrangements** Canadian farmers have the added responsibility of contributing to the food stocks of the world so that they will be sufficient to feed the millions who are undernourished or starving in other countries. This means that they have a stake in the international agreements regulating production and trade—in fact, in Canada's total foreign policy, both economic and political.

**A Better Life** Canadian farm-life will have to be attractive to the younger generation. In other words, farm-people will have to share fully in the increased well-being we hope to achieve after the war.

This is not just a matter of adequate income. It means rural electrification, libraries, good schools, community cultural and recreational centres, health units. In other words, the farm people, like the city people, must somehow be ensured the necessities of life, and the amenities that modern scientific development have made possible.

**More Farmers?** Will there be room for more people on the land? Can we welcome immigrants from the war-torn countries? Or can we even make way for the thousands of soldiers who wish to settle on the land? No settlement or immigration scheme will be anything but a failure if agriculture as a whole does not achieve new levels of prosperity and efficiency. If agriculture continues on the old basis, there is unlikely to be anything but disaster out of encouraging immigration and settlement. A reorganized world and Canadian agriculture, and a full-employment economy will be the only guarantee of room for more farmers in Canada.

### WORKING TOGETHER

We have opened up many questions tonight. Some of them seem complex and difficult. Yet it is obvious that many of the farmers' problems cannot wait till after the war to be solved.

Rural electrification, community centres, better rural schools—all of these items must be put on the post-war agenda. Yet this agenda is being planned right now, in parliament, and in all kinds of public discussion. If such projects are undertaken they will provide not only a better life for farm people, but employment opportunities for rural and urban people alike.

The shape of the new world order and the future basis of international trade are being prepared now in the throes of war. Farmers, like every other section of the community, have a vital stake in all these international arrangements, and must play their part in determining them. Through their county committees they have met Canada's wartime food objectives in an intelligent and highly efficient way. Here is a framework through which all farmers may participate in feeding the world in an organized way.

Farmers themselves face the responsibility in their own organizations of planning the future, and indicating what changes need to take place. It's up to the rest of us—business men, professional people, industrial workers, and all of us—to understand their problems, and to work with them for a strong and prosperous Canada.

### MORE INFORMATION

*The Farmer Citizen at War*, by HOWARD R. TOLLEY, Chief of the Bureau of Economics, United States Department of Agriculture, Macmillans. Toronto, 1943. \$3.75. An excellent discussion of the farmer's stake in the war and the peace, with special reference to the United States.

*Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations*, (the Rowell-Sirois Report). Vol. I. King's Printer, Ottawa. The best source material about the past history of Canadian agriculture, with a wealth of statistical detail.

*Principals of Post-War Reconstruction for Agriculture*, available from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture in your province. 10c. A pamphlet stating the stand taken on this subject by the C.F.A.

*American Farmers and the United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture*: No. 5 in *Farmers and the War Series* of pamphlets, available from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. Includes report of declaration and recommendations of the Hot Springs Conference.

*National Farm Radio Form Pamphlets*, 1943-44 Series: Planning for Health (No. 2), Planning Farm Credit (No. 3), Planning for Rural Living (No. 4), Planning Reaches the Family Farm (No. 5). Available from National Farm Forum Office, 71 King St. W., Toronto, 10c each.

For statements of the various political parties in regard to Canadian agricultural problems, see accounts of the proceedings of the House of Commons in your local newspapers, or in Hansard, which may be ordered from the King's Printer, Ottawa.

**FILMS****WORLD OF PLENTY**

An United Kingdom film part of which is devoted to the post-war plans for agriculture in the world. A Canadian revision of this film is also being made and will be available after March 1, 1944.  
(Running time—45 minutes)

**POWER AND THE LAND**

An United States Government film about rural electrification.  
(Running time—40 minutes)

**THE HERITAGE WE GUARD**

An United States Government film about the history of agricultural and forestry resources on this continent and how to conserve them.  
(Running time—24 minutes)

**HERITAGE**

What happened in the drought years in western Canada and conservation measures employed since. (Running time—17 minutes)

**REPORT QUESTIONS**

1. Do you think Canadian farmers have had a "square deal" in our economic life?
2. Do you think there is any basic conflict of interest between farmers and organized labour in this country? In what ways can farmers and working people co-operate more closely in solving post-war problems?
3. What kind of post-war public works projects would benefit both farm and urban people?

**SEND YOUR ANSWERS TO YOUR PROVINCIAL OFFICE**

**THINGS TO DO**

Find out what are the particular problems of farmers at the present time in your immediate vicinity, with regard to:

- (a) markets, help on the farm, prices for their products, etc.
- (b) living conditions: electrification, education, recreational opportunity, labour-saving devices, telephones and radios, etc.

Hold a special discussion, if possible with representatives of farm organizations, about how townspeople might help solve these problems.

**FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Do you think Canada has room for more farmers after the war?
2. It is stated above that the farmer has often tried to bargain as an individual with huge corporations. What is the way out of this situation?
3. What kind of tariff policy would satisfy the needs of manufacturers and farmers alike?
4. What do you think are the best ways of developing larger home markets for agricultural products? (e.g. higher purchasing power, more farmers producing more food, better education of the general public about proper nutrition, etc.)?

**Next Week: WHO SHAPES THE FUTURE**