Family Farms in 1975 To Be Larger, Specialized

Family farms will be bigger and more highly specialized in 1975—and they will continue to dominate our Nation's agriculture.

This conclusion comes from a recent analysis by ARS agricultural economist H L Stewart, of prospective changes in farming during the next 15 years. The analysis was based in part on data obtained in a larger USDA study to assess the job of agriculture and agricultural research in meeting future needs.

Findings indicate that farmers will continue to step up adoption of labor-saving and out-put - increasing techniques They will purchase additional equipment needed for more complete mechanization of crop production and livestock feeding operations. They will also hire more services, such as spraying, dusting and fertilizing, and obtain more professional management assistance, including help in buying and selling livestock.

Greater use of these production materials and services will help farm operators to increase the size of their enterprises — without losing their control of management

Changes in size of farm enterprises between now and 1975, the agricultural economist believes, will vary considerably, depending on type of operation and geographic location.

Dairy farms will continue to increase in size and decrease in number Many small herds will gradually be absorbed by dairymen able to invest the extra capital necessary to meet stricter sanitation requirements and to obtain advantages of larger scale operation Even so, Stewart believes, dairying in 1975 will still be largely a family-operated business.

Exceptions will be those having unusual location and specialization advantages as the drylot dairies in southern California. A few dairy farms may be integrated with a feed business, whose primary interest is maintaining feed sales volume.

Average number of cows on family-operated dairy farms may increase 25 to 30 per cent by 1975. This is about the same percentage increase that occurred during the past 15 years. Farms with stanchion barns will probably average 30 to 35 cows, and farms equipped with loose housing may average as high as 40 to 50 cows.

Dairymen in the Northeast will probably intensify forage production at the expense of grain production and buy more concentrates In the Midwest, they will likely increase production of forages and grains

Other livestock farmers also will take advantage of labor-saving techniques and specialization to reduce unit production costs. Stewart says, however, that reductions in unit costs usually tend to level out within the size range of family farms USDA studies, for example, have shown that unit costs on a large-scale livestock farm are only 5 percent lower than such costs on a comparable 1 man farm In an Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station survey in northern Illinois, optimum use of land, labor, and capital was found on farms of 260 to 339 acres

Hog Production May Expand

In the Corn Belt, limited forage supplies will encourage some livestock farmers to expand hog production rather than beef production Labor requirements, as well as capital and managerial limitations, will prevent expansion to the 1,000 or more hogs that one man can raise But 500 to 600 hogs per farm (compared to an average of 170 today) may be commonplace by 1975. Hog producers will increase feed grain supplies by shortening crop rotations and using more fertilizer. But they will need to buy additional concentrates.

Corn Belt farmers not in position to expand hog production may put greater emphasis on beef cattle in an effort to increase efficiency and meet market demands for uniform quality of products. Other farmers in the area may discontinue all livestock enterprises Many of these operators will take off-farm jobs and shift to cash-crop production as a part time operation

Cattle ranches, Stewart believes, will change less in the next 15 years than Corn Belt livestock farms, because ranchers are already highly specialized and have few production alternatives But these primary producers of feeder cattle will need to increase volume of business and develop uniform product quality to meet specifications of order buyers and contract feeders

Large-scale livestock feeding will become increasingly important in the West and Southwest, where expanding markets coincide with abundant supplies of livestock feed grains, and supplemental forage But the size of these enterprises will be checked somewhat by managerial limitations and associated risks and uncertainties Farm-sized feeding operations will continue to predominate in the Midwest because of the availability of farm-grown feeds and otherwise unmarketable operator and family labor

Vertical integration will almost surely dominate the broiler and egg industries Production in 1975 will be largely under contract—with producers providing labor, housing, and equipment, and

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