

## Part Time Farming A Boon or Burden?

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Will farmers continue to supplement farm income by other productive work in the next few years?

Many Americans have been part-time farmers since industrialization began in this country. In spite of the increasing specialization in the agricultural enterprises, there still will be a substantial number of part-time farmers.

This type of agriculture, long a part of the farm economic scene, has been met with varying degrees of enthusiasm over the years. Some had it as a substantial and secure way of life to others it is only a curious sociological phenomenon. As an institution, it is berated by some full-time farmers. To industry it has been used as a "safety-valve" during periods of chronic unemployment. Today many people wonder whether part-time farming can still exist in these days of greater specialization in agriculture.

FOR A GOOD many people part-time farming is a way of life—more than an economic necessity. Young families with growing children often find some open land around a home more appealing than the city or its densely settled suburbs. Also in the urban fringe, homes with some acreage frequently can be purchased for less initial investment than comparable housing in towns, thus providing some economic incentive to would-be part-time farmers.

This land often is farmed by the owner, not necessarily to its fullest capacity, but to bring some income even at low labor and capital return.

Why do people part-time farm when their labor on the farm earns about one-fourth to one-third as much per hour as other work? Studies indicate that for some families the combination of farming with outside work provides a greater total income for the family than either the farm alone or other work alone. There also is a sizeable group which feels it provides a measure of security against unemployment or for retirement.

Society has more people who desire farm living than the nation needs or can use as full-time farmers. In other words, the nation now requires barely five million farmers but has many more than this number who would prefer to farm. Some of this excess may find satisfactory adjustment on small, part-time farms.

INCREASINGLY heavy capital investments are necessary for farmers to keep production costs in line with present-day

market prices. Many operators especially the middle-aged and those on inadequate farms, find part-time working for wages a satisfactory adjustment. These swell the ranks of part-time farmers.

To a small extent, part-time farming is a means of eventually leaving the farm

Occupational histories indicate that some of this movement is true for middle-aged and upper-middle-aged farmers. Young farm people, however, are more likely to go directly from the farm to other work. A sizeable number of younger middle-aged people from towns go into part-time farming. In such cases the farm provides considerable food and also a wholesome environment for growing children.

It is common to accuse part-time farmers of contributing to the farm surplus problem, and of being in this way responsible for low price levels

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Some part-time operators (Continued on Page 21)

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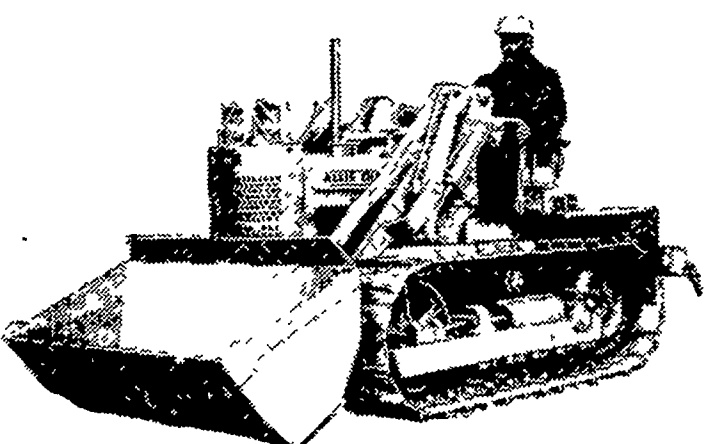
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