

The Family Farm - A Going Business

Corporate mass production techniques which revolutionized American life by turning out low-cost manufactured goods on huge assembly lines appears to be ill-suited to the growing end of agriculture. Such is the burden of an analytical article on corporate farming in Fortune magazine by Dan Cordtz.

The article, entitled "Corporate Farming: A Tough Row to Hoe," traces the anything but illustrious record of some of the largest farming operations undertaken by conglomerates and other companies seeking to adapt industrial mass production to the growing of food crops. The record, as he traces it, completely negates the popular belief that corporation farming poses a threat to the family farm.

More often than not, when corporations attempt to apply the "... economies of scale..." to farm operations the result has been spectacular failure. The problem has been that overhead costs very often have grown faster than sales. Observes Cordtz, "In fact, farming has turned out to be so profitless and trouble-filled that many of the corporations that invaded agriculture in the late 1960's are now in full retreat."

The greatest mistake the corporations have made in entering farming is traceable to the assumption that crops could be produced like automobiles. However, as Mr. Cordtz writes, "An old adage holds that the essential factor in profitable farming is the shadow of the owner on his land..." The modern assembly line is based on the control of variables, on the establishment of repetitive procedures that eliminate the need for workers to make choices.

'Farming', as Professor Sidney S. Hoos of the University of California (Berkeley) points out, 'is saturated with uncertainties: weather, soil, seed, yields.' Such uncertainties call for countless important decisions that must be made out in the field, not behind a distant desk."

Another factor in successful farming, observes Cordtz, is that many decisions must be intuitive and based upon a willingness to take a calculated risk. Decisions must also be backed by a far-

mer's familiarity with his land—there is no such thing as an operating manual for a farm or any substitute for close, personal involvement.

This "... helps to explain," says Cordtz, "why independent farmers, agricultural economists, and even many corporate farm managers agree that the most efficient producing unit is a farm that can be run by its owner." As Cordtz explains it, "... as the operation grows beyond the ability of its owner to stay on top of his field operations, where critical decisions must be made daily, costs begin to mount. Overhead... can soar as extra layers of management are needed."

These factors working against large-scale industrialization of agriculture are reflected significantly in farm statistics. A number of farms with annual sales above \$10,000 (in current dollars) has tripled since 1939. Such farms typically net about 35 percent on sales and can be operated by the members of a family and perhaps a hired man or two. Farms of this size account for 30 percent of all cash receipts by growers.

"Only 1.2 percent of commercial farms," says Cordtz, "in the U.S. are incorporated, and nine tenths of them are merely family-owned farm businesses that have grown to a size that makes a corporate structure desirable for tax or inheritance purposes. Just 1,800 farms—less than 0.1 percent of the total—are operated by corporations with more than ten shareholders. They cultivate about 15 million acres (1.6 percent of all land in commercial farms) and account for less than 3 percent of total farm sales."

The fear that corporations are going to take over food and fiber production and drive the backbone of private land ownership—the family farm—out of business appears to have been greatly exaggerated. The greatest threat to such ownership, corporate or otherwise, still remains taxes, inflation and government encroachment on the affairs of private citizens.

Grassroots Opinions

WANTAGH, N.Y., SEAFORD CITIZEN: "We often wonder if parents take the time to warn their children of the dangers of shoplifting and vandalism. Quite often young people decide they are out to defy the 'establishment' by setting out to steal or destroy. Not only are they in danger of ending in jail, but also, of finding themselves with a police record because they did something on a dare or a thrill. Parents should check on articles brought into the home, to be sure they have not been taken out of a store without permission. The saying, 'Where are your children tonight?', holds true more than ever. Trust; but know what is going on!"

ALTOONA, PA., MIRROR: "Nations that won't spend enough on their military defenses end up spending more to support the military offensive forces of the conquering aggressors who hold them captive"

SPIRIT LAKE, IOWA, BEACON: "There would probably be a greater number of scientific breakthroughs each year if so many scientists were not engaged in trying to develop the ultimate washing powder."

GREENSBURG, KANS., KIOWA COUNTY SIGNAL. "A government report shows the cost of living for the average urban family of four is now \$10,971. There were no figures for rural areas, but we can assure them that the cost of living out this way is a lot less than \$10,000 as there aren't that many even making that kind of salary. I can

imagine there are thousands of families in the urban areas that don't see \$10,000 a year either. It makes us wonder how the government takes a survey and what they consider 'average family'."

MORRIS, MINN., TRIBUNE: "In this computerized age, it is well to remember the superiority of man's brain. According to Professor John Meier of Colorado College, there is little doubt that the human brain is by far 'the most perfect computer.' He says: 'It has several billion circuits; it can operate four hours on the energy of a single peanut; it is completely mobile; it occupies less than a cubic foot of space; and—probably best of all—it is produced by unskilled labor.'"

BENSON, ARIZ., NEWS-SUN: "One thing we DO advocate heartily is that every adult citizen of the United States become informed of the issues at stake in the forthcoming election before pulling the lever in the voting booth. Never before have Americans faced so many clouded issues which will affect our lives the next four years and, perhaps, the next century. It's your future... and mine. Let's not blow it!"

ALTOONA, PA., MIRROR: "We put price-raising taxes on everything and keep increasing these price-raising taxes and then wonder why prices are rising. We put controls on most everything except these price-raising taxes."

NOW IS THE TIME . . .

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To Be Careful with Wheat Seeding

Barley seeding time is at hand but could be too early for most varieties of winter wheat. In recent years some of the varieties that were reported to be resistant to the Hessian Fly came down with the infestation. Therefore, wheat growers who are seeding any variety except Arthur 71 should not sow wheat until after a killing frost or after October 10 here in Lancaster County. The Hessian Fly is an insect that works in the stem of the plant next spring, weakens it, and the head will break over and not develop properly. Even the newer variety of wheat named Arthur 71 may not be as stiff-strawed as some of the other varieties such as Redcoat or Blueboy, it has demonstrated good resistance to Hessian Fly.

To Manage Dairy Herd Carefully

Dairymen who are grazing the last cutting of alfalfa or red clover with their milking cows should be careful so that the milk will not have a "grassy" flavor; this has often happened in the fall of the year when the herd consumes fresh alfalfa or clover. The herd should be grazed when the forage is dry and after they have had a feeding of other dry matter such as hay or silage. Also, in order to prevent off-flavored milk, the cows should be removed from the legume three to four hours before the next milking period. Careful herd management is needed to prevent a loss of a tank or two of milk.

To Be Careful with Corn Pickers

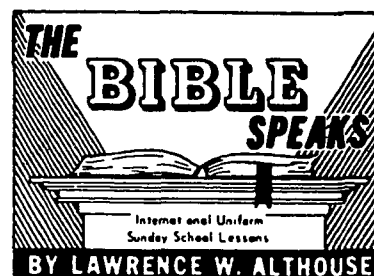
This is an annual word of caution to corn growers but it seems each year a number of men do not take it seriously and get caught in the corn picker. All shields and protective devices should be kept in place and the machinery should be totally stopped before any cleaning or adjustments are made. It is tragic to read and learn about the loss of fingers, hands, arms, and even a life because of a corn picker accident. Take time to be safe and keep all of your extremities. Hired employees should be given firm instructions on safety in the operation of corn pickers. The harvest season is ahead of us and now is the time to prevent accidents.

To Handle New Cattle with Care

Cattle feeders bold enough to make the investment at this time is replacement cattle are reminded of the need of special care for the first several weeks. There are many "do's and don'ts" in order to reduce the amount of trouble. Several of these are to handle the cattle quietly and with a minimum of stress; also, keep them segregated from other cattle, and give them mostly fresh air, fresh water, and roughage for the first several days. The "Eye of the Master" is also very important to detect sick animals and treat them promptly. The investment is big; the care should be very intensive.

Plane Wood

Balsa wood is the lightest-weight commercially important wood, and is almost white in color. Because of its light weight it is used in life preservers, floats and model airplanes.



ITCHING EARS

Lesson for October 1, 1972

Background Scripture: Ephesians 4:11-16, 25-32, Philippians 4:2-8, 2 Timothy 4:1-5, James 3:1-12.
Devotional Reading: Romans 15:14-25

The politician says: "I promise you..."

The merchant says: "We guarantee..."

The tax-payer says: "I certify..."

The propagandist says: "We can prove..."

The promoter says: "We will demonstrate..."

—And no one takes any of them seriously!

A number of years ago my son and I were watching television and during a high-pressure commercial, he turned to me and, as if he had just discovered the secret of the universe, said "They don't really mean it, do they Daddy?"

Whatever is true . . .

No, they don't "really mean it." And one of the reasons frequently given for this game of benign deception is that "it is precisely what the people want." The newspapers concentrate on the sensational, they say, because "that's what sells newspapers" (—we just reflect the public taste; (—"We just reflect the public taste; we do not create it"—).

The televisions major in trash, they say, because that's what people want to see and hear (—"We're in business, not education"—).

There must be some truth in these allegations. The Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy says: "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths" (4: 3, 4).

It is so today Where there is something new and different and bizarre that someone wants to hear, there will be found someone who is willing to give it to them Promises, lies, innuendos, slander, blasphemy—whatever it is someone will be found to provide it because there is someone who wants to hear it

Think about these things

Yet, having said that, it is not enough to simply identify the trends that respond to people's "itching ears." We must give people what their ears desire, but also what their hearts and minds need! As Paul puts it, "... whatever is true, whatever is honorable . . . think about these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Preaching may not be "your bag," but you still have a responsibility for "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious . . ."

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Rev. Althouse