

# Who Will

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farms may become a more dominant factor in good production, just as they have come to dominate good processing and marketing. And in any case, farms will continue to get bigger.

"Continuation of the trend toward larger and fewer farms can be expected as successful farmers expand their operations. Increased control of agriculture by the food marketing and farm-supply industries and, perhaps to a lesser extent, by other nonfarm investors can also be expected," Guither

concluded.

Leonard Kyle, a Michigan State University economist, agreed with Guither that farm operations will be bigger. Kyle, in fact, appeared to be an outspoken supporter of a corporate farming system for the U.S. "Many farmers still don't take the possibility of a corporate agriculture seriously because they don't believe it can happen," Kyle said. "Twenty years ago, almost no one believed it could happen. But today, the corporations themselves, and growing numbers of integrated or displaced farmers know that corporations can succeed in various parts of both field crop and livestock production."

Some corporations now farm huge acreages of specialty crops, manage great ranch spreads, and feed hundreds of thousands of cattle, Kyle said. Almost all broilers and many turkeys and eggs are produced by farmer-growers who are under contract to vertically integrated firms.

Efficient use of capital, technical information and management by corporations all tend to favor a system where farming could eventually be controlled by

fewer than 500 corporations in the U.S. "Those farmers miss the point who laugh at certain operating errors made by corporate farmers," Kyle said. "For example, while the errors made by Penn Central appear to have been tremendous, that huge railroad system still exists. As another example, IT&T grew so fast and so large, not because of any exceptional operating efficiency, but rather, because it had a deliberate and successful strategy of growth via acquisition and merger."

The capacity of the giant corporation to grow and grow, despite the lack of any real competitive edge over individual farmers in a traditional accounting sense, is the crucial difference between the corporate and the individual competitor, Kyle told the group.

Wallace Barr, of Ohio State University, discussed two different types of agricultural system - dispersed open market and the government controlled. The basic features of a dispersed system, Barr said, would be modest size, freedom of the operator to make decisions and the existence of an open market. "Central to the system is the freedom of the operating farmer to make management decisions," Barr said.

This system would conform to what people traditionally think of when they think about farming, and it is a system which would serve a nation of farmer-citizens very well. However, in our society, where the number of farmers keeps dwindling steadily, some steps would have to be taken to assure the success of a dispersed system. Two of the strongest steps proposed by Barr would be to prohibit agribusiness corporations from engaging in agricultural production, and putting strict limits on amount and terms of land ownership by nonfarmers.

Barr would not exclude incorporated family farms from the system, but would eliminate the conglomerate

## Lancaster Farming, Saturday, Mar. 30, 1974-15

or contractually integrated operation that has farming as one of its activities.

"In a dispersed system, larger numbers of individual farmers must be able to make management decisions and not have them taken over by land owners, creditors, input suppliers, or purchasers of raw commodities," Barr said.

While a government controlled agriculture would seem distasteful to most farmers, Barr commented, there is already a degree of government control. The recent experiment with price controls on beef was one example he noted.

Donald D. Knutson, head of the USDA's Farmer's Cooperative Service, discussed the possibility of developing a cooperative system of agriculture in the country. He said it would involve fewer and larger units than in the present system of voluntary farmer cooperatives. To maintain control, all farmers would belong to tightly organized cooperatives that would handle most procurement of supplies and all marketing of agricultural products. Land ownership would generally remain with the individual cooperative members.

Under the system, marketing decisions by the cooperative would place direct restrictions on producers' production and marketing decisions. But farmers would control the cooperatives and they would approve restrictive decisions on themselves. The farmer would be preserved as a capitalist, but he would have to see that the cooperative operated in his best interest.

Knutson said individual farmers and ranchers in this system would face more restrictions than in the open market, but less restrictions than in the corporate system.

Harold Guither then addressed the group on the subject of a combination system. Here, Guither said, independent farm producers would have freedom to make management decisions, but cooperatives and corporations would be assured of continued operation. Government would support an active role for each.

A special government body would monitor the changing structure and recommend actions to maintain the combination system of agriculture, so no single system would be allowed to dominate.

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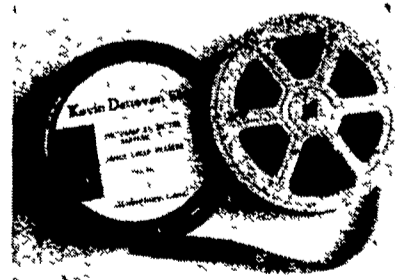
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