

The Census Bespeaks a Sound America

A CHANGE in the domiciliary status of William Y. Saunders of, we'll say, Cross Corners, Nebraska, is causing the "whither-are-we-trending" economists to suffer from brain fag. It seems that Mr. Saunders and Mrs. Saunders and the little Saunderses were not found on the old Saunders homestead when the census taker called in January of this year. Inasmuch as they were there in 1910 and in 1900 and maybe on numerous preceding decennial years, their absence this year caused quite a shock.

Failure to find the Saunders family in its old rural haunt inspires many to wonder if agricultural life isn't shrinking to the point whereby our food supply may be threatened in the not far distant future. For so many Saunders families and other families failed to answer from "real country" farms the roll call of the census that, it seems, undisputed farm population will show a decrease in the 1920 census returns.

The explanation probably is that William Y. Saunders has merely moved to town, where his children can attend better schools and his wife reach a more prosperous church than were available to them in the country. Very likely he is just as much a farmer as ever and is contributing just as much, probably more, to agricultural production than he ever did. The fact that he has moved to town, from which by reason perhaps of an automobile and good roads he can yet direct his farm, may reflect more favorably than unfavorably on the condition and state of agricultural life in these United States in the year of 1920.

That American farming life is tending somewhat toward converging in towns and villages, that agricultural production is keeping apace with demand despite an apparent decrease in "real country" population and tremendous increase in "urban" population—that, succinctly, American life is still sound and distributed on a healthy basis, no matter what changes have come about, are among the things which United States Census tabulations to date clearly reveal.

Yet the changes which tabulations to date show or suggest are intensely interesting and in many ways they are of exceeding importance. The growth of population shown for the last ten years is rather under expectations. Instead of there being at least one hundred and ten millions of us, as nearly everybody expected, we number only a little more than a hundred and five and one-half millions. The rate of increase in total population was less than for several previous census periods. For the first time in our history, American population failed to double during the last thirty years because of decline in rate of growth during the last ten years. This is attributed by the census people to the effect of the war in cutting off immigration and, in slight measure, to the epidemics of influenza which ran up the death rate for a year or two.

The growth of population is less significant than the changes in its distribution which the 1920 census is showing. The most puzzling change is in that division defined by the Census Bureau as "urban" and "rural." By "urban population" the bureau means all those people who live in towns and cities of 2,500 or more inhabitants. That type of our population has grown either tremendously or outrageously, depending upon whether you are a pessimist or optimist. It now clearly constitutes more than one-half of all our population. More than twelve million Americans now live in "urban" territory than so lived in 1910. The rate of growth was 28.6 per cent for the last ten years. By "rural population" the Census Bureau means all those people who live in towns and villages of less than 2,500 inhabitants and the open spaces of unrestricted and unincorporated "real country." They constitute only 48.1 per cent of the total population, and show a growth of only 3.1 per cent during the last ten years. But if we eliminate all incorporated communities and consider "real country" only, we find that the undisputed farm population has actually decreased. Preliminary figures issued by the Census Bureau show that 227,355 fewer persons actually live in pure rural territory than so lived in 1910; and that that type of population constitutes only 38.8 per cent of all.

From those figures the pessimistically inclined may draw very gloomy deductions as to the future. Superficially, they would indicate that mouths to be fed are increasing, though not so fast as of yore, quite rapidly, while hands for producing food to fill those mouths are decreasing. If the analysis were correct there could be but one meaning, scarcer and costlier food and other farm products. But such an analysis isn't necessarily correct, nor even nearly correct.

In the first place, as in the case of the Saunders family we have noted, more farmers have probably left the farms than have quit farming. And each person engaged in farming is producing more than ever before, with prospect of continued and accelerated increase. This latter circumstance no doubt accounts for much of the shifting of farm population to the cities, that is to say, the farms do not need so many hands as in the day when farm machinery

What the First 100 Agricultural Counties Show

	Census 1920	Census 1910
Number of Farms	151,442	150,156
Acres in Farms	15,986,102	16,147,812
Improved Acreage	8,039,084	7,899,318
Number of Horses	309,620	326,258
Number of Mules	164,484	120,791
Number of Cattle	1,236,449	1,084,716
Number of Hogs	1,379,786	1,195,326
	(1919)	(1909)
Corn Acreage	49,458,275	46,152,604
	(1919)	(1909)
Wheat Acreage	9,673,204	8,323,590
	(1919)	(1909)
Oats Acreage	8,340,368	10,192,138
	(1919)	(1909)
Hay Acreage	1,690,078	1,468,772

States represented, but not in equal proportion—Arkansas, Alabama, California, Georgia, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, North Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin.

the figures were gathered last January. They show that there has been only a slight gain in farms. This was a great surprise to the best experts, even those in the United States Department of Agriculture. They were confident the 1920 census would show at least 7,000,000 operating American farms, while it actually shows only 6,459,998, against 6,361,502 in 1910 and 5,737,372 in 1900. Heretofore American farms have increased in number at the rate of about one per cent a year, while for all of the last ten years the increase was only 1.5 per cent.

One-half the states actually show decreases in the number of farms. It is significant, too, that no one of those that showed decreases in 1910 now shows increases. New Mexico, which showed an increase of over 100 per cent during the first decade of the century, discloses a decrease for the last ten years. The Far West generally shows increases in the number of farms, New England shows decreases, most of the South shows increases, and in the Middle West it is a set-off between slight increase and small decrease.

Does the failure of farms to increase in number indicate larger farms? The complete figures on that item are not yet available but those which have been announced indicate that, as usual, the American farm shrank in size during the last ten years. However, the first hundred counties whose figures were tabulated report that the shrinkage was in unimproved rather than improved land. In those countries, representing nearly one-half the states, there was a small increase in the land actually under cultivation. And the shrinkage in the number as well as the size of the farms is not

reflected by decrease in agricultural output. While the figures on that item are not complete, partial tabulations indicate that farm production has kept up fully with growth in the country's population. This is proven definitely for the counties and states that have been fully tabulated.

The reason production seems to have kept up in the face of a declining farm population and area is evidently because of farm machinery. All the reports show phenomenal growth in the value of farm assets grouped in "farm implements and machinery." Virtually every county tabulated shows that those values have outgrown all other farm values. It is not all due to the fact that farm implements and machinery cost more than they did ten years ago, but undoubtedly much of it is due to the fact that farms are now stocked with much more and better implements and machinery. Invariably the value of that item of farm assets is shown to have grown more than 100 per cent during the last ten years. It has outgrown even the increase in the value of land, which, however, has gained at a greater rate than was shown for the decade 1900-1910. The first 142 counties whose figures were tabulated showed increases in the value of farm lands and buildings averaging 70 per cent. They included all the counties of two New England states, where increases were small, and an undue proportion of other eastern states where farm land has not gone up so much as in other sections of the country. About one-half the counties so far reported on show increase in the value of farm lands averaging 100 per cent or more. About one-fifth shows increases of 200 per

cent or more. That on the whole is a healthy sign, for if farming as an industry were in the "bad way" that other figures can be made to indicate there wouldn't be that eagerness for land that is expressed in heightening values. Yet in many localities growing values, expressed in land, have had a depressive effect on agriculture. The small farmer has been driven from many communities by inability to buy land. It is interesting to note that a compilation of figures so far disclosed on land values shows the greatest increases were in those counties, taken together, where tenantry is reported on the increase. Yet it is reassuring to note also that only about one-third of the counties report increase in tenantry.

Hence, the census figures announced to date do not give body to the probably choicest morsel constantly chewed upon by the "whither-are-we-drifting" type of agricultural economists. The returns from nearly two hundred counties may be unrepresentative, but they indicate that tenantry, instead of causing farm life in America to be dominated by absentee ownership as it is abroad, is probably declining. And in most of the country the percentage of tenants when compared with owners directing their own farms is not so large as many think.

The advances made in the use of farm machinery is reflected in substantial decline in the horse population on farms as it has declined even more decidedly in cities. In the first one hundred counties 309,620 horses were reported this year, as against 326,258 in 1910. But that ancient competitor of the horse, the mule, is not suffering in like manner. The districts that have been reported on show big increase in the mule population, which proves that despite the growing use of automobiles and tractors, the farmer is far from dis-

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lent less aid than it does now in producing crops.

No doubt, however, there were other and less healthy causes for some shifting of population cityward, for example, high wages. But since the census was taken, many of those causes are not operating so forcefully as they did. It is now the opinion of some agricultural department experts that the trend of population is now actually from city to country.

The trend of farmers toward the more comfortable life afforded by the urban community is shown by the substantial growth in the population of those villages and towns that are so small as to be classed with rural territory. They show an increase of nearly two millions, or 21.5 per cent, constituting a total population that now comprises nearly 10 per cent of all the people in the country.

While there was great shifting of population as between sections, particularly in the direction of industrial areas affected by the war, there were no changes in that direction which seem to forebode any serious national problems, unless it be the extraordinary growth of the very large cities. There are no such radical state gains as were shown in 1910 when three states recorded population increases of more than 100 per cent. In fact, the largest percentage gain made by a state during the last census period is 63.1 for Arizona. New York state shows a gain of only 13.9 per cent, and that of New Jersey, a characteristically "industrial" state, gained only 24.4 per cent. Pennsylvania, another "industrial state" gained only 13.8 per cent, and California gained 44.1 per cent. Only three states show decreases, Mississippi, Nevada and Utah, and in each case the decrease is small.

It is not very difficult to explain the census figures on total population. It is quite difficult to explain those on the number of farms found in operation when