

# Menace to Tenant Farmer

Agriculture in the United States paralyzed, and the nation dependent upon foreign countries for its food supply—that is the condition threatening us today, the students of economics declare. Impossible? Not at all. Several European countries already have had that same situation to face, and some are wrestling with it today. In spite of the vast farming area of this country and the comparatively sparse population per square mile, there is certain promise of national starvation, so far as home production is concerned, unless a radical change is effected in American farming methods.

The evil that menaces agriculture and its kindred industries—that threatens the nation's source of bread and butter and beefsteak—is the tenant farmer. He it is that is squeezing the fertility from the soil, robbing the land of its power to produce, and leaving vast areas of once rich country exhausted, barren and dead. He has marched half way across America in the wake of the homeseeker and the home maker. Where he has tarried he has left blight and desolation. And he is marching on.

**Every Ten Farms Four Tenants.**  
Four out of every ten farms in this country today are occupied by tenant farmers; a small number compared to the tenant populations of some foreign countries in the past, but the number is increasing rapidly, and it already is sufficient to make you feel its weight in the cost and quality of your bread and meat.

For several years past the yield per acre of the agricultural products of this country has remained practically stationary, whereas, with recent revolutionary improvements in farming methods and farm machinery, it should have increased at least 15 per cent. The tenant farmer is to blame. For the past few years there has been a question whether the agricultural products of this country would show any surplus for export, while Denmark which was once tenant ridden, produces an annual surplus of \$9 an acre. The tenant farmer is to blame.

To grasp the full import of the havoc being wrought by the tenant farmer it is necessary to understand something of his methods and their effect upon the land, and how these methods in time affect the nation's food supply. Ruthless robbery of the soil's fertility, indifference to the future, a penny wise and pound foolish policy—those characterize the tenant farmer's practices. He is migratory—an agricultural vagabond. He stops to-day only long enough to wrest a crop from the abused earth, hastily harvest it and then move on to repeat the process in a newer and more promising spot. What conditions he leaves behind he neither knows nor cares. He farms in a chosen locality today, tomorrow he is gone; and that locality can be taken care of by someone else. His one object is to wring from the tortured land the limit of its strength and then to abandon it without restoring a jot of the plant food he has taken away.

The enduring productivity of the soil depends upon methods of restoration and conservation. These are effected by fertilization or the rotation of crops, or both. Land, sown to the same crops year after year without being restored by natural or artificial methods in harmony with natural laws, will not go on producing forever. On the contrary, the life of farm land repeatedly sown to the same crops and without fertilization, is only about ten years.

**Dead Land in the Tenant's Wake.**  
Do you realize what that means? Ten years of exhaustive cropping by successive tenant farmers may leave a section of what was virgin land a dead and barren waste, incapable of supporting a human life until it has been put through a long and intelligent course of "doctoring." Ten years and the tenant farmer has made a portion of the nation's agricultural area incapable of producing food sufficient for himself, not to mention the city resident, who is dependent upon a surplus production.

In the northern and eastern states today are thousands of abandoned farms that have been threshed to exhaustion, either by tenant farmers or by equally unintelligent and careless owners. The surpassing depth and fertility of the soil of the middle west have delayed a like condition in the comparatively new country. Many farms in this region, robbed and mistreated though they have been have borne the drain for a generation and still yield a scant living. Many others that had reached so low a state of vitality that they would not support both a tenant and a landlord, have reverted to the personal care of their owners and have been rehabilitated by a period of lying fallow and undergoing intelligent restorative processes.

Three times in the past the farms of Maryland were "skinned" and exhausted by continual cropping with to-

bacco, hemp and other products of the region. Three times they were squeezed to the point of worthlessness and were abandoned. After years of fallowness, during which they reverted to the wilderness, they slowly were restored by nature to a state of fertility, when they again were cleared and placed in cultivation.

"Moving day" in the city is May 1st. Moving day in the country is March 1st. On the latter day the tenant farmer of the year takes possession of the farm he is to "skin" for the season. He previously has agreed to pay the landlord, not cash, but a portion of the crop. If he assumes charge of the bare land only, supplying his own seed and farming implements, such as they are, he usually agrees to pay a rental of one-third of the crop. If he takes possession of a "home place" and is provided with a residence, barns, out-houses and, perhaps, some implements, seed and stock, he must pay one-half or more of his crop.

If he succeeds a previous tenant he finds the land just as it was left after the previous crop had been harvested—the ground unbroken, not an ounce of fertilizer applied to the soil; the house and out-houses in need of repairs, the fences falling to pieces and the gates off their hinges.

But if he is to make anything out of his crop this year he hasn't time to bother his head about fertilization when he has no fertilizer, or about repairs to houses, fences or gates. He concludes that he can get along for the summer with things as they are, and will leave the matter of improvements and restoration of the soil for some one who may come after.

### Haste and Waste.

The tenant farmer produces only the crops that are easiest of cultivation and surest of ready sale, such as corn and wheat. He tries no experiments in agriculture. He grows no alfalfa, because it takes time to establish alfalfa. He sows no forage crops because he has no stock to feed. He plants corn or wheat, something that can be harvested in a hurry and marketed in a hurry. The landlord, of course, is to be blamed for permitting his land to be misused and poorly farmed, his buildings and fences neglected and left to go to rack. But farm landlords, whether they are retired and moved to town or are city capitalists who have acquired the land through speculation, frequently are as indifferent and ignorant as the tenant. And good farm tenants are not to be found every day.

The shiftlessness, the indifference and the hopelessness of the tenant farmer is shown not alone in the manner in which he abuses the soil and neglects the improvements on the farms he works on shares. He is no less neglectful of the farm implements, whether they chance to be his own or the landlord's. On the tenant farmer's place plows, cultivators, rakes and such other machinery as he may have used will be seen lying in the fields, under hedges or in the fence corners, exposed to the weather at all seasons. If he is too busy to clip the landlord's hedge, or to mend a hinge on the gate, he is too busy to drag a cultivator or a mowing machine under shelter. One of the obvious and familiar marks on the tenant farm is the farm implements, susceptible to ruin by rain or snow, left exposed to the weather in the fields where they last were used.

### An Agricultural Tramp.

The tenant farmer, because he is continually on the move, has no community interests—he has nothing in common with his neighbors, either in a social or business way. He has no part in the application of new methods in scientific farming—producing better live stock by pure breeding or improving the quality and quantity of grain crops by careful seed selection and scientific cultivation. He is not cooperative. He is a "bushel farmer." Much that has been accomplished in improving live stock has been made possible by owner farmers sharing the cost of high class stock animals that no one member of the community could afford to buy.

Co-operative methods in Denmark in the purchase and use of improved breeding animals have increased the production of dairy products 10 per cent and decreased the cost of production 15 per cent in ten years. That means nothing to the tenant farmer—he has no dairy interests and he is not co-operative.

Socially the tenant farmer has no place in the community where he is stopping temporarily; he is a stranger and his position does not command the respect of his farmer owner neighbors. He has no interest in the community life or community interests. He takes no part in community road building enterprises and probably none in the church or the school. His interest in his surroundings does not extend beyond the day on which his lease is to expire—February 28th next.

And just to the degree that he is an

undesirable neighbor does he prove an influence to send more landowners to the city and leave more farms in the tenant land class.

**The Tenant Blight in the South.**  
The farm is unique in that it is both a factory and a home; and it has a double value, a factory or producing value, and a home value. When, as a temporary abiding place of the tenant farmer, it ceases to be a home, it has lost part of its value and has effected the value of farms in the same community. In Mississippi, Georgia and in Louisiana, where from 58 to 62 per cent of the farmers are tenants, land may be bought for \$25 an acre that is fully as desirable as land in Kansas that brings \$60 an acre. The predominance of the tenant farmer has impaired the home value of the southern land.

The corn belt of the middle west, as well as the south, is sorely afflicted with the tenant farmer. In Illinois, Iowa and Missouri the number of tenant farmers is as high as 45 per cent; in Kansas and Nebraska it is 10 per cent. In the northern and eastern states 10 to 15 per cent are tenants. The number of tenants varies for various reasons. On the impoverished or worn out farms of the east and north there are fewer tenant farmers, because the land will not produce a living for the tenant or an income for the landlord. In the south the comparatively small number of owner farmers is partly due to the fact that many of the tenant farmers are negroes, and white landlords do not care to live neighbor to them. In Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma the low percentage of tenants is due to the large area of comparatively new land and recent development—the original owners have not yet accumulated a fortune and entered upon a general movement toward the town, the mecca of the farmer who has "made his pile."

But successive years of large crops, high prices and rapidly advancing land values are making fortunes rapidly for middle western farm owners, and there is likely to be a marked increase in the number of tenant farmers in the corn belt in the next few years. And that rapid advance in land values throughout the middle west during the past few years is one of the contributing causes to the middle west landlord's indifference to the manner in which his farm is cultivated and cared for. He considers the increasing land prices as so much earned and does not worry if his farm improvements run down or his share of the crops is not so large as it might be. He probably does not consider that the advance in land prices must stop some time, and that when he decides to sell he may find his farm has become so impoverished that it is worth far less than that of neighboring properties that have remained under the care and cultivation of their owners.

### Soil Robbing and High Prices.

The effect of the tenant farmer's methods upon the cost of living today has been traced by students of the subject and without any extraordinary mental gymnastics. No special acuteness is necessary to understand that soil robbing and shiftless farming means smaller crops; that smaller crops means a shrinking supply and a shrinking supply means higher prices.

A large majority of the farms that are passing into the hands of tenants today have been stock farms or dairy farms, or both. The intelligent farmer-owner found out years ago that the greatest profits from the farm were to be had by stock raising or dairying and feeding the crops grown. Probably he grew rich enough to move to town because he used that knowledge. But the tenant farmer is not going to raise stock and that farm forthwith ceases to contribute a share of the nation's supply of beef, pork and mutton, or butter, milk and cream. The enormous decrease in the last few years of packing products in this country probably is due largely to the increasing number of farms that have ceased to raise stock under tenant cultivation.

It of course would be absurd to assume that all tenant farmers are of the soil robbing, land skinning class. Many, perhaps 20 per cent, are young men, men of ambition, intelligence and energy who are making a start in life for themselves and are compelled to become independent farmers as tenants. Such tenants rent the land with the view of eventually owning it, and have a vital interest in restoring and conserving the productivity of the soil. They, too, are intent upon building up a beef or dairy herd with a pen of pigs, and they work to that end. The intelligent young tenant farmer of today is wide awake to the importance of seed selection and the use of improved farm implements. A farm under his tenancy is likely to increase in productivity. Such tenant farmers, instead of being a part of the national menace are helping to check its advance. They are the future farm owners that will be called upon to assist in the elimination of the undesirable class of farm tenants.

**Teach Reading and Farming.**  
And how shall the tenant menace be eradicated? The answer is given

by Henry J. Waters, president of the Kansas State Agricultural college:

"Education must be the means of uprooting the tenant evil on the farm," President Waters says, "not in colleges and universities alone, but in the country schools. The children of the tenant farmer, as well as the children of the farmer owner, must be taught the rudiments of intelligent, modern farming while they are being taught the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic. We cannot eliminate the undesirable tenant farmer of today—we must try to head off new generations of undesirable tenant farmers. Let children begin to acquire ideas of modern farm methods when they begin their school life.

"Some children never reach the high school stage, many never pass it. Especially is this true of the children of tenant farmers, many of whom, in the nature of things as they now exist, are likely to become tenant farmers in their turn. Teach those children, as soon as they are able to understand anything, that there is something more to agriculture than scratching the soil and waiting for the Lord to send a crop; arouse their interest in the possibilities of the farm and they will seek more knowledge.

### As Other Nations Have Solved It.

"Eradicating the tenant evil is not a work of a day. It is a task of years. But it can be done, and practical training in the schools of the country is the means with which to accomplish it. Denmark a few years ago was tenant ridden to such a degree that the government was compelled to adopt means to save the country's agricultural interests. Sixty-five per cent of the population of Denmark was on farms and a great majority were tenants. Public funds were used to aid thousands of those tenants in becoming farm owners. The elements of intelligent farming and domestic science were taught in the schools.

"Now Denmark has twenty-nine agricultural colleges and six thousand agricultural students. Only one farm out of ten is occupied by a tenant. The country has a population of 155 to the square mile, as compared with our population of thirty-seven to the square mile, yet the Danes produce an annual surplus of agricultural products of \$9 for every acre of land under cultivation."

Ireland for many years was oppressed with the farm tenant curse, because of the immense holdings of a few landlords. The British government has gone to the tenants' aid there, too. During the last few years in Ireland three hundred thousand farms or more than one-third of the agricultural land of the country, has passed into the possession of the tenant class.

Great Britain, Germany and other European countries are wrestling today with the tenant farmer problem and its attendant evils. How the system retarded agricultural progress in Great Britain is indicated by the fact that one hundred years were required to increase the average production of wheat from fourteen bushels to thirty-one bushels per acre.—Kansas City Star.

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