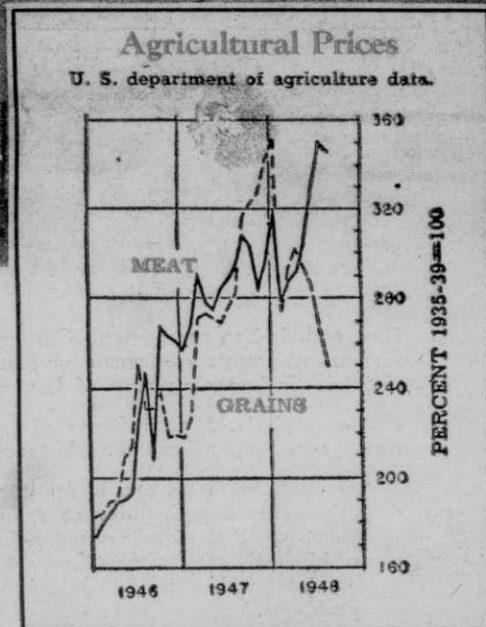


Farmer-Stockman

What's Ahead

A Little
PLANNING NOW
Can Remove Much
of the Uncertainty
From This Question

By RALPH MERCER



WHAT will the future bring? This is a question which many producers who can remember the past are thinking and even asking.

With thinking people this question is only natural, both in view of our extended years of high and well distributed production and the very high production record over most of the United States in the last few years. This production record has been made possible in part by better varieties, better farming practices being followed, and most certainly by favorable moisture and growing conditions.

It is the hope of every one that these conditions which we have enjoyed for the past decade will continue. It is the hope that high production and good prices will be with us always. That seems to be a little too much to expect when we look at the records over the past 25 years.

Now Is Time to Plan

Now, while the goose is still laying golden eggs, is the time to do a little planning and to execute the plans. Then, even though we remain on a high level of production and prices for a number of years, we'll be in a position, when and if the bottom does sag a little, not to be hurt too badly.

Maybe this is just as good a place as any to do a little thinking out loud. We realize, of course, that if all or any of us could look into the future we'd do a lot of things differently, but as long as we can't, maybe we'd better review a few possibilities.

When I was county extension agent in Rosebud county—and, by the way, that was when times were really tough—we used to talk in terms of "not putting all our eggs

into one basket." I realize that that advice may seem a little old fashioned at the present time, but it's still sound and might be worth considering before it's necessary to do just that kind of planning.

The reason I think of it now is that I met an old patron of those days at one of the fairs this fall and we had a real visit. During the gabfest, Bill said, "Ralph, of all the things you tried to teach me, diversification has stuck with me and really brought me out on top."

Possible Procedures

Well, what are a few of the things that seem worthy of consideration? Here are a few of them that may encourage you to think of a lot more:

1. Tillage methods designed to reduce wind and water erosion.
2. A higher percentage of small grain crops grown on summer fallowed land.
3. More universal use of varieties recommended for Montana.

4. Marginal land returned to grass.

5. More use of flood water.

6. Development of a program for irrigated land which will include a system of improved water use, drainage and use of fertilizers.

Let's take a look at a few of the statements listed above. During the big push to gain maximum production, many of our better tillage practices were discarded. Much strip-cropping was abandoned in favor of block farming. A continued disregard for this practice will no doubt result in a big blow most any year. The adoption of the stubble-mulch practice, which will mix stubble with the soil, will not only permit more readily the penetration of water but will help materially in holding our soil in place.

Retaining sod waterways in sod breaking, and the establishment of grass waterways on land subject to erosion are developments that should take place before damage has been done. All these practices will contribute to a more permanent system of production which could be accomplished while things are still on a high level, but tough to accomplish in an emergency or when the going gets rough.

More Summer Fallow

Summer fallow is the foundation of small grain production in the major wheat growing sections. There should be more of it. The acreage in wheat, oats and barley is still much larger than the acreage in summer fallow. The corn-small grain rotation in eastern Montana is good business and

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