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The Farm Way of Life

WHEN WE HEAR a phrase like "the farm way of life" we are likely to see in our mind's eye some pleasant aspect of the farm we grew up on or visited when we were young.

It would benefit no one to paint the farm way of life all in rose colour, but the liabilities of farming are so prominently before us in the press and on the air that it will be a useful exercise to take a look at the asset side of the ledger.

People on the farm do not base their attitudes toward life on values that are purely materialistic. When you talk with them you find that men emphasize independence, job satisfaction and stability, while women stress the "togetherness" of the family, the variety of the work, and the healthiness. Both men and women enjoy aesthetic values continually, such as urban people taste only partially and at long intervals.

Such people have a strong streak of poetry in them, experiencing every year the brief loveliness of seed-time and sprouting crops; they are philosophers, too, because they experience also the sense of transcendence brought by harvest time.

Of all situations in which to live, none can be more delightful than a farm community. It is not made up of fine houses tightly packed, but of cottages and houses made and used for comfort, with room to look around. We know everyone and are interested in everyone, and we are authorized to believe that everyone is interested in us. There is a satisfying consolation in the quiet efficiency of good neighbours in crisis or disaster: they think of the needful thing to do and do it without pretense or show.

The farm environment

The farmer is regulated by nature, not by clocks and watches. He is close to the universe. The shifting constellations, the tilting earth, the changing winds: these are the signs that tell the farmer it is the day for planting, or the day of reaping, or the day of curing

and storing. His timepiece is of colossal proportions, a computer infinitely greater than any man-made contrivance.

The farmer has servants, too. They are the lightning and the rain of the clouds, the burrowing of the worm, the plough of the frost, the sun which has for ages soaked the land with light and heat, and the earth itself, which yields new service to every application of intellect.

Farming, more than any other business, relies on the personal qualities of those who make up its ranks and direct its destinies. By contrast, the individuality of the industrial man is largely lost in the uniformity of the group; his personality is molded to the shape required by the organization.

This is not to say that farming should be stagnant. It is not enough to meet a new situation today by nostalgically recalling the past. Many people in Canada, of old-country origin, know what it is to live in a picturesque farm cottage with a stone floor and a thatched roof, and a huge hearth of field stone with a turf or briquette fire keeping the kettle singing. But that is no reason for rejecting a carpet for the floor, central heating and an electric stove. We need to make the best of the conditions in which we live.

This changing world

Modern society is in flux. The atomic adventures and the events in international politics which confront us every day in newspapers and on television are difficult for ordinary people to understand. They challenge us to develop methods of living together in the new circumstances so as to preserve all that is best in personal, family and social life.

Today's farmer must be able to use and maintain power machinery, to hire and supervise skilled labour, and to manage large amounts of capital investment. He needs managerial ability to control expenses effi-

ciently, market his product, and keep a proper balance between all phases of his business.

The complexities which passing years have brought to the farm are set out in detail in the studies of the Saskatchewan Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life. Starting in 1955, the Commission has published fourteen research reports of extraordinary interest.

As to the continuing importance of agriculture, little need be said. With every increase in population — and, according to the Population Reference Bureau Inc., Washington, the world's population is increasing at the rate of 45 million a year — farming increases in importance, because all these new mouths have to be fed. Ralph Waldo Emerson described the farmer's place: "In the great household of nature the farmer stands at the door of the bread-room, and weighs to each his loaf."

Attempting to forecast the future is dangerous, because one never knows what inventions or improvements may change the situation. Can anyone write the job description of a Canadian farmer for 1967, when Canada will be a century old, or much less for 2067? What will he have to know? What new skills, what new sensitivities, will he have to possess to deal with the new elements in agriculture and in his world environment?

According to a study prepared for the Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects, food needs may roughly double by 1980, farmers' earnings may rise rapidly, perhaps all of the familiar fruit farms in Ontario's Niagara area may disappear under housing and industrial development, and prairie producers may look more to beef and hog sales than to wheat for the mainstay of their incomes.

The future of the farm family cannot be projected along a statistical graph alone. That future involves quality as well as quantity, happiness as well as economics. As Dr. H. H. Hannam, President and Managing Director of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, expressed it in an article published in *Facing This Hour*: "Do we want a self-reliant citizenship on our farms, with a status equal to that of those in other industries and professions, and with an outlook and skill and poise arising from the experience and confidence that they are shaping their own destiny?"

Rural and urban life

Some people feel an urge to get away from the farm, from its discipline, its restrictions, and the power of the elders. They think that people in urban centres have something that would please them.

The danger is that people seeking to move off the farm into industrial centres may toss aside a valuable haystack in search of a paltry needle. Many of the disadvantages charged against farm life can be overcome by an alert mind, a fertile imagination and handy fingers. Many disadvantages charged against the farm will be found to crop up in the city also.

We have to look in both directions, and bring the two ways of life into focus and adjustment, keeping things in proper perspective. It will not do to take the best of city living and demand it as the minimum of farm living.

Any farmer who mourns over the lot of farmers should consider that city life is not a bed of roses for everyone. Sickness, injury and incapacity strike in both city and country. City life means specialization of labour, with its disrupting influence on family relationships. It removes children from the class of contributors to the family budget and sharers of the family work burden. The capacity for self-entertainment is wilted in the city by the prevalence of commercialized entertainment.

So, though a farmer may be pinched on one side, he has advantages on the other. If we list the benefits of farm living, just the ones that are mentioned by Louis Bromfield in *Pleasant Valley*, we will find it difficult to balance them in weight or attractiveness with a list of city benefits.

Let us not discount too heavily the little pleasures of living on the farm: like the drink of living water from the spring, the rows of jars of home-canned fruit and pickles, the crock of buttermilk in the spring house, the heaps of potatoes, squash and apples, the stove to sit around, the clear, unsmoked sky, the chickens scurrying up the path to beg scraps, the air waves washing over a field of grain.

There is an uplifting sense of freedom and power in driving a tractor on the long slopes of a gently-rolling farm, and a feeling of accomplishment when we steer a straight furrow with a horse-drawn plough on a tough side-hill.

Community life

Trying to blend the best of the established way of life with what is made available by progress in science is a task for individuals who regard their happiness highly enough to work heartily with others. One should not have to be coaxed into activity beyond his own door step. Participation in community life is as necessary to one's own mental health as it is to the existence of our western society.

Perhaps something more formal is needed these days, but there is much to be said for the "conversation

clubs" of another day when neighbours just "dropped in" to chat. The old-time "bee" did more than raise a barn. Its horizontal integration of neighbour with neighbour held more values than does vertical integration which stems from government and authority. It made a vital contribution in mutual help, comradeship in a cause, friendliness and understanding.

The face-to-face contacts of farm community life provide us with intimate values, but we need to put some energy into preservation or reconstruction of the social community. It will profit a farm family little to come into possession of broad acres, to grow bumper crops, to build big barns, if its social life degenerates into a bad copy of urban life instead of maintaining its own character and dignity.

Perhaps new sorts of community organizations are needed to meet old needs presenting themselves in new forms. United effort under inspired and imaginative leaders can work through local services such as schools, churches, 4-H clubs, and farm organizations. A community centre that has imaginative and energetic leadership will provide social life, recreation, culture and a library.

Besides the outlet given through organized community activity, people on the farm need personal outlets. Recreation is more than resting in the shade or toasting one's toes at the winter stove. There are hobbies and cultural pursuits that provide satisfying self-expression.

One farm couple will come home after a heavy day in the hay field, or from milking, and spend a couple of hours playing, one the piano and the other the violin, in complete relaxation from work. A young farmer, turning up a strange-looking stone on the blade of his plough, became interested in geology and has now an attractive and well-organized collection of fossil shells, petrified wood, and polished rocks. Creative recreation of some sort to suit the individual's interest and capability is possible to everyone.

The farm home

Home is the centre of family life, but in a special way the farm home is the centre of everything. Its working centres should be easy to work in, its sleeping rooms should be quiet, and its recreation rooms should be comfortable and commodious.

The farm home should show its attractiveness outwardly, so that not only the passing stranger but the farmer catching a glimpse of it from his distant field will feel it beckoning.

A neat farmstead is an indication of a good manager. Keeping buildings in good repair and painted, providing protection for machinery, cleaning up trash

and weeds: these are part and parcel of good farm management — and they result in eye-appeal, too.

Working outward from the house we would have foundation planting of shrubs, perennials or vines to take the bareness off the walls and soften square corners. Then there would be an open lawn as a sort of carpet for an outdoor living room. Flowers and shrubs would bound the lawn, sweeping up to trees so arranged as to frame the house and break the wind. Most of this requires only a few hours' work with a spade and hoe after the first breaking, seeding and planting.

More ambitious, but within the reach of nearly every farm family, is a pond to be used for storing water, for watering cattle, for fishing, for swimming in summer and skating in winter, and for just sitting beside.

The simplest pond may make use of an eroded depression through which a creek flows, or into which rain drains. It can be laid out with a line level and built with a plough and a drag or a farm snow plough. Its banks are seeded or sodded to grass, bushes extend from the banks to a belt of trees or perhaps a woodlot. Instructions for every part of the project may be obtained from provincial government departments or the Department of Agriculture at Ottawa.

As for fixing up the house inside, there are two principal reasons for the lag in making changes and installing family conveniences. The first is generally recognized: the farmer's obsession with the idea that farm equipment comes foremost and that he must keep on improving it by the purchase of new machinery with every dollar that can be squeezed out of subsistence. The second reason is familiarity with things as they are. A want has to be felt with some strength before a person will bother to improve his standard of living.

Dealing with the first, consultants to the Manitoba Royal Commission said that a higher priority should be assigned to expenditures on the farm home than is now generally done, and that the proper relationship between farm home and farm operation expenditures should be worked out co-operatively by the whole family.

Take, for example, the farm kitchen, the most-used room in the house. In it the housewife spends most of every day, and it should be arranged around her schedule of work. There is no truth, declares Mrs. Raymond Sayre, president of the Associated Country Women of the World, in the old contention about crowded and cluttered farm kitchens that "You can't have it any other way on a farm." A helpful book entitled *Your Modern Farm Kitchen*, with photographs

and plans, is published by the Rural Housing Advisory Committee for British Columbia, Victoria. The same committee publishes *Utility Room for the Farm Home*.

As to the second reason for neglect of the farm home — being accustomed to it as it is — this is under fire from younger members of farm families. Their barrage is particularly effective because the lure of the city is so strong that they will not put up with discomforts they do not have to bear. Even after making allowances for the necessities of the farm acres, they feel strongly that consideration should be given seriously to making life in the home as comfortable as it can be.

All goals of rural improvement are rooted in non-material or intangible values. No matter what the farmer's programme may be, he must take account of its effect on the personal security and moral, spiritual and aesthetic satisfactions of his family.

Problems and planning

Those who wish to criticize and who are minded to condemn the farm way of life should take a good look at first hand and offer their services for constructive action. The worst responses to an unpleasant situation are helplessness and intolerance.

Some men and women are better organizers than others, and some are bolder adventurers, but to a greater or lesser degree we all have both qualities. Anyone, young or old, who is excited by the prospect of making the farm lastingly attractive to young people, and who cares enough to try, has an outstanding opportunity. He will not wait for an ideal environment — which no one ever had — or whine about the lack of facilities or interest — which is a weakling's method. He will be resourceful, as farmers have ever had to be. He will make a plan for improvement of his home, his farm or his community, and persuade others to come in with him on the team.

Part of the plan should be a budget of time and a budget of money. A financial budget is not a strait-jacket but a plan with a purpose. You decide what new furnishings or machinery you would like to have this year and within the next five years. Then, when the cash becomes available from the sale of this or that crop or stock, set aside what will be used for maintenance of life and farm plant and for reserve. Select an amount of the balance, and decide what desired improvement should have priority.

Control of expenditures so as to get the best possible return in living comfort and serenity is more than good accounting, but records are needed to make it effective. The Royal Bank of Canada publishes, and distributes free to interested persons, two books that make the work simple: *Farmers' Account Book* and *The*

Family Budget Book. These may be obtained at any branch of the Bank, or from Head Office.

The farm family

The fundamentals of a happy life should be rooted primarily in the requirements for healthy family living, and it is likely true to say that the farm way of life provides the greatest opportunities of any in the world for this sort of living.

The work of the farmer and the play of his children are carried out in direct connection with the home and the family and nature. The union of farm husband and wife, of parents and children, has been noted for its closeness and its permanence. Whereas wives of city workers often have only a dim notion of what their husbands do at the office or the factory, and know still less about their daily problems and set-backs, the farm husband and wife work shoulder to shoulder, each understanding the perplexities of the other.

Perhaps the most important function of the farm wife and mother is that summed up in this way in the report of the Manitoba Royal Commission: "It is she who often serves as a catalytic agent in developing the co-operation of all family members to do a particular job or to work towards a goal which is to benefit the whole family."

As for children, the rewards of farm living are great. They have all those contacts with air and earth and water which make for wisdom and understanding and judgment. These are indestructible virtues which enrich all their subsequent lives. "They will, I think," says Bromfield, "understand what is decent and tolerant in life, and comprehend both the evils of selfish exploitation and the evils of a regimented world in which human dignity and the soaring quality of the human spirit are cramped and stifled."

To assure children of the full benefit of these qualities, every effort must be put forth to make farm homes and communities attractive to them. Young people's movements, like the 4-H Clubs, have this in mind. Club work helps rural boys and girls to develop pride in ownership, to accept and discharge responsibility, to adopt a scientific attitude toward farming, and to create better homes for better living.

The country which maintains the soundest ideals and ambitions in the way of family building will be the country peopled with the strongest and most capable citizens. These things cannot be learned from books, but through living. Much of what is learned on the farm — a vast fund of wisdom and skill — is transmitted from father to son, from mother to daughter, on the thin air of oral tradition or of living example. That is the essence and the substance of the farm way of life.