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RURAL YOUTH PLANS ITS FUTURE

QUIET but dramatic changes have been taking place in rural Canada during the past quarter century. Rural life is very different today from what it was a generation ago, and tomorrow it will be still further changed.

The two aspects of life that make up our civilization — rural and urban — seem to differ at so many points that we are likely to overlook the fact that they are complementary. They must go together, or there can be no civilization at all, as we understand it. It is well, therefore, that each should know the other.

Fundamentally, the difference between urban and rural life is this: our surroundings in the cities are mainly artificial, while in the country they are natural objects. City people live in an environment where things are made; country people live in an environment where things are grown.

In the cities, men and women enjoy and are tormented by the products and systems of men, while in the country they have the benefits and must reckon with the caprices of nature, the seasons, the weather, the soil.

At the time of the 1951 census there were 5,381,000 of Canada's 14,009,429 people living in rural areas, that is, on farms and in places of less than 1,000 population. Our rural population was 38.4 per cent of our total population.

Six years ago the Canadian Research Committee on Practical Education prepared a report showing that one-half of our children of school age live in rural communities, and about one-third of the gainfully employed males in Canada are engaged in agriculture.

Rural life is, then, of substantial interest to Canadians in every province.

Some persons think of Canada as being a land of huge farms, but ever since agriculture started here in the early part of the 17th century this has been a family farm country. Less than one per cent of Canadian farms are operated under employed management, and the census of 1951 shows that 48 per cent of farm

holdings in Canada fall between 51 and 200 acres in size. Only ten per cent are 640 acres and more. (The *Ninth Census of Canada* report, available from the Queen's Printer, Ottawa, devotes Volume VI to agriculture, part one dealing with the Atlantic Provinces and Quebec, while part two covers the rest of Canada. The price is \$3 each part).

These are conditions favouring youth. Our rural society is progressive, with the progressiveness that is born of ownership. Our rural people are less bound by habit, less wedded to the old, less opposed to expanding horizons, than is the rural class of any trans-Atlantic country except Denmark. They have outgrown their homespun and oxcart stage. While they are diligent about today's tasks their eye is on the future.

Rural and Urban Living

The revolution in transportation wrought in this century has brought about extraordinary changes. There is now no such thing as the isolation of rural people from city influences, or of city people from rural influences. The rural community is developing social institutions and organizations unthought of a couple of generations ago.

There can be no stopping the drift between country and city that is motivated by economic and occupational interests, and there should be none. The gangway must be kept open and free, so that young people may have an opportunity to develop their talents within the environment of their choosing. But liberation of rural people from the restrictions and repressions formerly thought of as part of rural life is enabling them to expand mentally, enriching and broadening their lives.

Problems remain, of course. They fall into three broad categories: cultural, material, and structural. Culture includes tradition, habit, beliefs and hopes. The material element is made up of the standard of living, the physical environment, and the stored up utility which we call wealth. The structural element includes the forms of living together in organization and co-operation.

These are not regional or class problems only, but individual. Every person's experiences and yearnings are different from those of other people. Like city people, those who live in rural districts are just now awakening to the fact that happiness in life is not achieved on a hit-or-miss system, nor is it wrapped up solely in material things such as income and possessions. It is much more something of the spirit of achievement.

The Spirit of Inquiry

Agriculture remains the chief occupation in which the group art is transmitted in an altogether natural, spontaneous, matter-of-course and informal manner. Every son of the farm serves an apprenticeship in agriculture. Without realizing that he is acquiring what is perhaps the most difficult, because it is the most embracing, art in the world, the rural youth receives a technical education as a matter of course.

The handed down technique, however, is not enough in these days. Young people are asking about the theory behind it. Intellectual curiosity and the spirit of inquiry are abroad. The scientific principles of land use, and of crop and animal production, the business principles which will assure the success of the farm enterprise, and the social principles which bring these together in the making of a happy contented life: all these are exercising the minds of rural young people. Superstition and custom are giving way to experimentation and research.

Evidence of the shift in rural thinking is to be seen in the list of publications of the federal and provincial governments, in the activities of departments of agriculture, in the new liveliness of rural fairs and agricultural exhibitions, in the extension courses carried by universities to rural areas, in the radio service provided by the C.B.C. and privately owned stations, in the high tone and scholarly presentation of vital topics in farm journals, and, most potent of all for future well-being, the interest and activity of young people in local groups and national organizations.

It is not enough nowadays for young people to be told about stem rust of grain: they must see the rust on the straw and make use of the microscope in studying its nature. Laboratory work in soils goes hand-in-hand with observations and activities on the farm. New educational resources are giving rural life a richer environment offering opportunities comparable to those associated with urban living. Rural youth is taking advantage of these resources, and contriving its own new resources, so as to make the most of its abilities.

Readers who are specially interested in rural education will find much of interest in the June 1951 issue of *Canadian Education*, published by the Canadian Education Association, Toronto. Many rural communities — possibly most of them — desire either an increase in the amount of education made available, or a change in the direction education takes.

The Research Committee survey recorded 89 per cent holding the opinion that special training is needed in rural schools to supplement that given on

farms. Farmers responding to the inquiry are well aware of technical development in agriculture, and they believe that teaching vocational agriculture and farm mechanics will induce young people to make farming their career.

The Rural Family

Farming takes in every detail of life: it is indoors as well as out; it is part of family life as well as of the farmer's working hours. To the rural family, "home" means not only the farmstead proper but broad acres of fields and woodland. Theirs is a little domain encompassing the domestic sphere. The farmer, his wife and their children are all the time helping to produce live things in garden, orchard, barn and hen-house, and the products are all the time coming back into the kitchens to be prepared for meals or market.

It is natural, then, that the democratic characteristic of counselling together should unite farm families in a way seldom known to city people. There are well defined and distinct spheres of labour for men and women and children, but their effort is united in a unique way.

The young people in the rural family have the same basic desires as urban young people: for new experiences, for sociability, for activity, and for conflict and mastery. Satisfaction of these desires centres around work, which is expected to provide independence, satisfaction, security and room for achievement.

Despite all the great changes brought about by the improvement of tools and mechanisms and the application of new forms of energy, farming remains a laborious occupation. Long hours are usually necessary. Varying conditions and seasonal requirements make it impracticable to fix the length of a work day. The demands of live-stock and the pressures of the season and the weather forestall any general standardization. A questionnaire to farmers revealed that farm operators and hired labourers are expected to work between 10 and 15 hours daily in all seasons except in winter, when the number of daily working hours might be reduced to nine.

It is necessary, then, to make the most of what leisure time is available. Farm men desire relaxation, such as in reading and radio listening; farm women want more social life, entertainment, and self-improvement; farm young people express a desire for movies, dramatics, dancing, and self-improvement. All wish to spread out into community living, and to participate in active projects. Few expressed a desire to just sit talking or listening or being catered to by commercialized entertainment.

Rural Amenities

There is need for continual improvement in farm home living conditions. The primitive standards of pioneer days no longer satisfy. The habit of doing without things is one that does not appeal to young people, who aspire to something more than a life of

hard work. They want attractive home decoration, efficient plumbing, proper diet, and many comforts. They want the homestead to look beautiful.

Up to now, equipment for farm production has usually been purchased before home conveniences. Farmers' purchases have recognized the truth of the old saying "a barn can build a house sooner than a house can build a barn". Anyone reversing this order was thought to be putting the cart before the horse.

At the time of the census, only 56 per cent of Canada's farm homes had electric light, compared with 76 per cent of rural non-farm homes and over 99 per cent of urban homes. Only 33 per cent of the farms had water piped into the house, compared with 46 per cent of the rural non-farm homes and 94 per cent of urban homes. There were 528,430 farm homes without bath tub or shower (84 per cent) compared with 446,720 rural non-farm homes (72 per cent) and 361,170 urban homes (17 per cent).

It will not be argued that possession of an indoor tap and a bath tub means greater cleanliness, but indoor plumbing is, in its way, a symbol of comfort. And the plain fact is that more comfort is vitally necessary if the farm is to be made attractive to young people. The country home of the old type will not hold its own against the lure of the city.

A Minnesota engineer has calculated that the average housewife who carries water from an out-door well or pump spends 20 eight-hour days a year in doing it; if she carries the waste water out again, it will add 10 more days of work. Being condemned to 30 days hard labour every year carrying water does not fit in well with the possibilities farm women see life holding out to them. As a consequence, rural districts report increased interest during the past few years in purchase of fittings and equipment to build comfort into farm homes. Credit facilities to improve rural living conditions are available under the Farm Improvement Loan Act.

The 4-H Clubs

Rural young people are taking their own way of preparing a better future. They attend lectures and demonstrations provided by travelling representatives of departments of agriculture and the universities . . . and they have organized their own source of education and recreation, the 4-H Clubs, under direction of the provincial departments of agriculture.

The story of 4-H is a big one. It is an answer to the need of rural boys and girls for encouragement and help in attaining better life satisfaction, and developing richer personalities. These 4-H Clubs put into the hands of youth tools whereby to make time and effort more productive of happiness. They try to help rural people to solve their problems, to strengthen family solidarity, and to build interest in the responsibilities of citizenship.

The 4-Hs stand for Head, Heart, Hands and Health. The objectives are to train the head to think, to plan and to reason; the heart to be kind, true and sympa-

thetic; the hands to be useful, helpful and skilful; and to promote health in order to resist disease, to enjoy life and to make for efficiency.

Any rural boy or girl up to the age of twenty-one who is able to carry out a demonstration of some better farm or home activity may become a member of a 4-H Club. Regular meetings are held, conducted according to parliamentary procedure, so that the young people learn through doing how to discharge the functions of a public or group business meeting.

In 1933 the Canadian Council on 4-H Clubs was incorporated, its membership consisting of departments of agriculture, prominent business concerns and agricultural organizations. The maintenance of a national office, through which the entire 4-H programme in Canada is united, is made possible through the contributions of the member agencies, of which this bank is one.

Booklets describing 4-H Club work in detail may be obtained from Mr. James D. Moore, Secretary Manager, the Canadian Council on 4-H Clubs, Confederation Building, Ottawa.

Activity in Canada

There is no yardstick by which to measure the contribution made by 4-H to Canadian rural life, but many evidences of achievement might be cited. High school teachers say that boys and girls become better students after they have taken up 4-H work; directors of agricultural societies report that 4-H has revived the local fair and in many places has returned it to the farmer; there are thousands of instances where 4-H has helped to discover talent and keep on the farm boys and girls whose interest naturally lies there.

There are more than 65,000 rural young people and 8,000 voluntary local leaders busy in Canada's 4,869 4-H Clubs. High spot in the organization's year is National 4-H Club Week, timed to coincide with the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. Trips to this annual event are awarded to provincial winners in various club projects. One day is given over to judging contests, when champion teams from every province compete for national honours in clothing, foods, garden, dairy, beef, swine, poultry, grain and potato competitions.

Young people select the activity in which they wish to busy themselves and to perfect their knowledge. Last year's club activities showed 18,426 members interested in home economics, 23,630 in live-stock and poultry, 10,383 in field crops, 9,857 in horticulture, and 2,919 in various other projects.

Club work contributes to the economic welfare of a region through enlisting boys in crop and livestock improvement projects, and girls in home economics clubs. Through education in conservation it contributes to the national well-being. "What these benefits have meant in terms of the enrichment of rural living in Canada, no one can evaluate in concrete figures," said Mr. Moore in his report on *4-H Club Work in Canada*.

Many Benefits

There are other benefits besides those of technical skill and knowledge. Through 4-H Club work the young people assure for themselves a well-balanced training in citizenship. They learn to express themselves ably and effectively by taking part in group discussions, debates and demonstrations. By serving as officers and on committees they learn to accept and discharge responsibilities, and to work harmoniously with others. They learn to organize their time and materials. The keeping of records on costs of production develops their business sense. Judging programmes sharpen their powers of observation, prudence, discrimination, and self-reliance. They learn to value and use the contributions science is making in the field of agriculture and home-making. Through their association with members who have other interests, they learn something of the wide ramifications of rural life, and, while being especially happy in their personal achievements, they are proud, too, of the knowledge they gain of the other facets of life.

The 4-H programme places personal responsibility upon every boy and girl taking part in it. It is compulsory for each member to raise, manage or complete at least one project every year. This project is centred at the member's home, thus keeping the youth's life home-centred, acquainting his parents with the work he is doing, permitting him to benefit by their advice, and involving first-hand participation in good farm practice on his own ground. He takes responsibility, makes decisions and develops basic skills. The official 4-H motto in Canada is: "Learn to do by doing".

The Research Committee survey showed that farmers are strongly in accord with the principles of the 4-H programme. When asked to express an opinion about the practical value of supplementing class-room instruction by supervised projects on the student's home farm, 76 per cent replied "very valuable", 22 per cent said "of moderate value", and only 2 per cent said "of little value".

While putting into practice what they have learned at school and in their group discussions with agricultural representatives and university lecturers, the young people find scope for their inventiveness. They may conduct experiments with a view to increasing the yield of certain crops, improving pasture, eradicating perennial weeds, increasing milk or egg production, adding to home comforts, beautifying home surroundings, remodelling a farm building, or equipping a home workshop.

Assistance by Parents

Some parents assist in full measure by allowing a son who is taking training in agriculture to operate a portion of the home farm for himself on his own ideals. A teen-age boy might work the land on a fifty-fifty basis — parent supplying the equipment, son the labour — according to the boy's ideas, without interference.

A boy in that position will have his imagination stirred, and out of his pride in responsibility and possession he will develop a desire to learn the scientific reasons behind the things he does, thus truly adding to his knowledge and developing wisdom.

4-H does not end with adolescence. Young people may stay in 4-H Clubs until they are 21, and there is now developing a movement to provide for a continuation into later life of the association they have formed. The Junior Farmer Association in Ontario, for example, with 9,000 members this year, averages 18 to 28 years; the Quebec forestry group has organized a senior section, and other provinces are moving in the same direction. These advanced groups are of great benefit to the 4-H Clubs. They proffer their counsel and guidance and leadership. As Cicero said truly: the unskilfulness and inexperience of youth does stand in some need of the prudence of age to be its guide and director.

Community Interest

In addition to the practical service given by 4-H to young people, to the community and to the nation, there is a further value of great importance incorporated in the principles and ideals.

The "we" feeling, so greatly needed in today's world, and necessary to complete one's personality, is largely the consequence of membership in various groups and institutions. It is a state of participating in, union with, a sharing of, and adjustment to the common life of one's environment.

Along with this broadened personality feeling, 4-H Club work widens a youth's horizons and builds his self-confidence. He learns to work with others, but not to lean on them. He develops self-control both in relation to his work and to other people with whom he is in competition. He educates himself to give proper consideration and weight to the three factors most intensely involved in secular life; persons, actions and objectives.

It may be said, then, that the great membership in 4-H Clubs and their wide recognition by young and old indicate the way in which Canadian rural youth is planning its future. The 4-H Clubs train young men and women for leadership; they improve farms and rural communities through the introduction of better agricultural and home-making practices; they help to build a finer rural home life; they improve scholarship; they encourage co-operative community effort for the common good; they rouse ambition and provide boys and girls with the knowledge and means to help them succeed; and they contribute, in large measure, to the development of a satisfying culture.

It is as young people catch a vision of better home and community life, and by their own effort command the agencies that will enable them to realize it, that rural life will maintain its ancient status as the birth-place of civilization's advances. The inspiration may come from above and round about, but the achievement must come from within the young people themselves.