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The Folk School idea in action : training for rural organization, rural citizenship, distribution, farming. 1935

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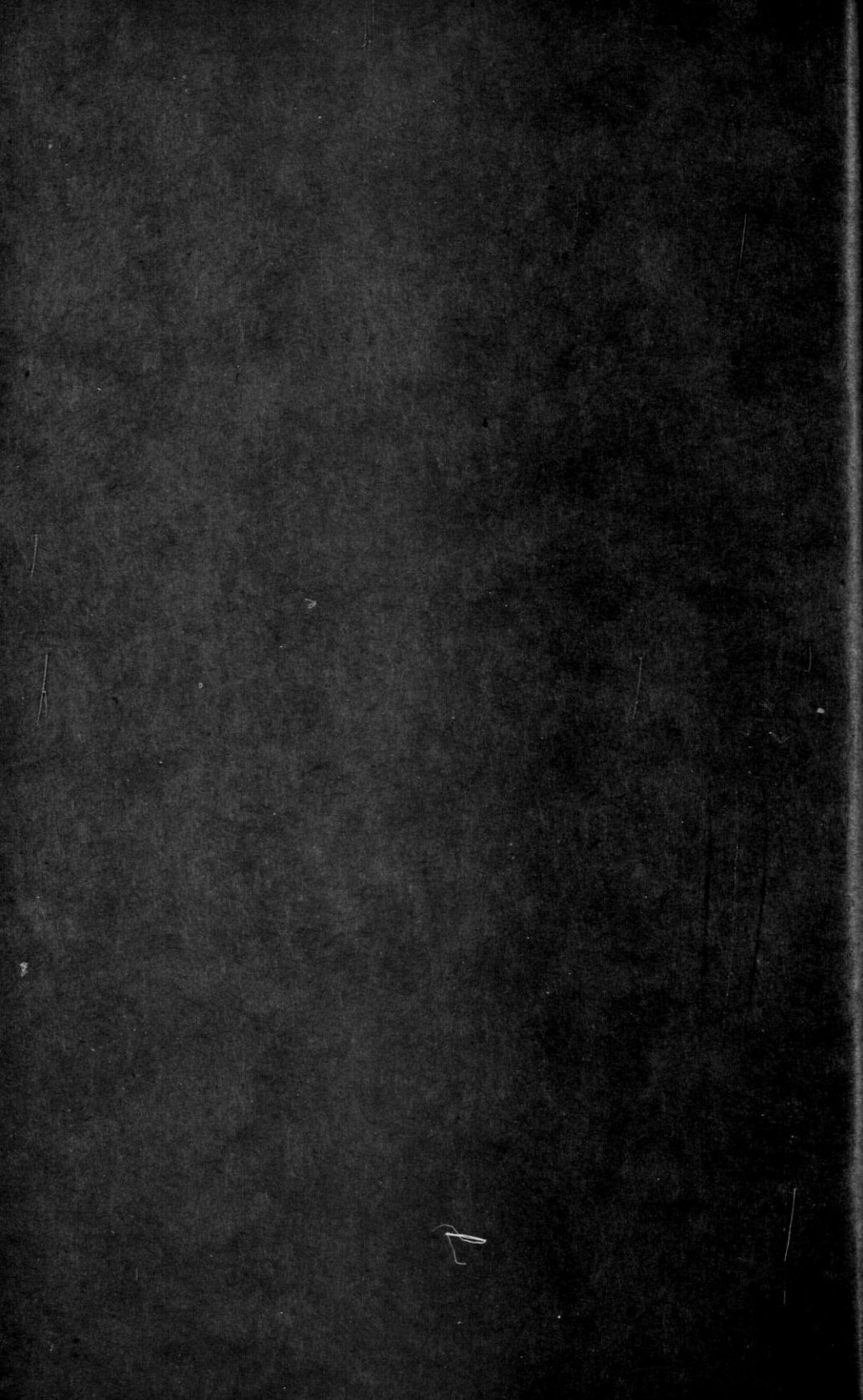
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*An Educational
Opportunity
for young men on the farm*

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June, 1935

THIS statement by Dean Christensen is not a mere expression of a pious hope. It is the interpretation of a new kind of educational opportunity available for the youth of rural Wisconsin, a kind of training available at no other point in our educational system.

In it the University of Wisconsin adapts to the needs of the young adults from Wisconsin farms the idea of the Folk Schools which gave to Denmark a disciplined and informed rural leadership that literally remade Denmark's national future.

It rests upon the sound idea that the men who are to run our farms require an education that trains them as directly for their task as law schools train lawyers or medical schools give us physicians.

It is one of the notable new steps in American education.

Glenn Frank
President of the University
of Wisconsin

THE FOLK SCHOOL IDEA IN ACTION

training for

RURAL ORGANIZATION
 RURAL CITIZENSHIP
 DISTRIBUTION
 FARMING

*By Chris L. Christensen
 Dean of the College of Agriculture
 University of Wisconsin*



THE satisfactory solution of many of our agricultural problems will be greatly aided by the education of our farm youth. This education should be in the economic and social fields which train for better rural organization and able rural leadership as well as in the arts and sciences of agriculture.

Farm income and farm life are being increasingly influenced by what takes place beyond and outside the four line fences which surround the individual farm. Farmers who have done a good job producing within the borders of their fences often find that they face low prices for what they sell and high prices for what they buy. Often they see tariffs and foreign trade policies of the government, partial shut downs of industrial activities, and urban unemployment and greatly reduced urban payroll, wipe out to a large extent the gains which they could rightfully expect

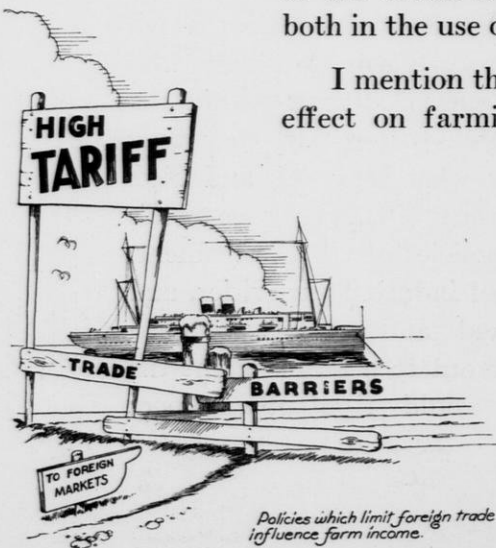
through efficient and scientific practices and skillful management of farm production.

Commercial Farming Affected by World Conditions

Tariff policies and trade barriers, in one form or another, have restricted foreign trade and market opportunities for farmers producing corn-hogs (lard and pork), wheat, cotton, tobacco, rice, etc. Although dairy production is essentially on a domestic basis even dairy farmers have often taken drastically low prices due to reduced activity in industry and commerce and consequent unemployment of urban workers with the accompanying greatly lowered payrolls.

This restricted buying power has meant that city consumers pay farmers less for their products. And yet, the farmer has continued to work and produce. In contrast, a large part of the urban and industrial population idles, both in the use of plant and labor.

I mention these specific situations and their effect on farming to illustrate the need for



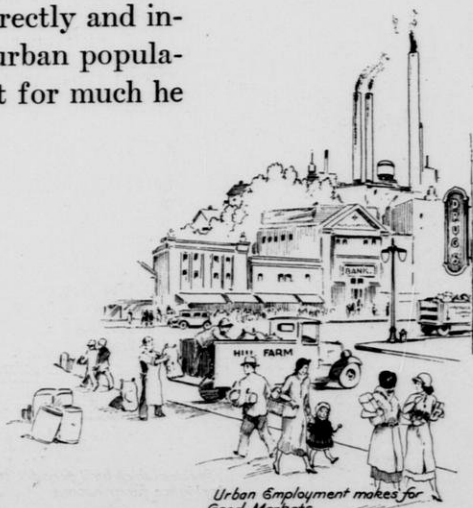
*Policies which limit foreign trade
influence farm income.*

rural citizenship to take a real interest in the problems and policies of foreign relations, industry, urban labor, transportation, banking and credit, etc. Present day farming is linked closely with the industrial activity and employment of the urban population. For among other things farm production has become rather highly specialized and the average farmer is producing food stuffs and raw material for the urban population.

Ready Interchange of Goods Desirable

The urban worker needs and wants farm products and the farmer wants to supply him. The farmer would also like to have some of the factory-made goods and services produced by the urban groups. Naturally the size of the farm market for goods and services produced by the urban population is largely determined by the prices the farmer receives for his products and what he pays for industrial products.

No one can deny that the farmer has much at stake in policies that affect, directly and indirectly, the productivity of the urban population which constitutes the market for much he

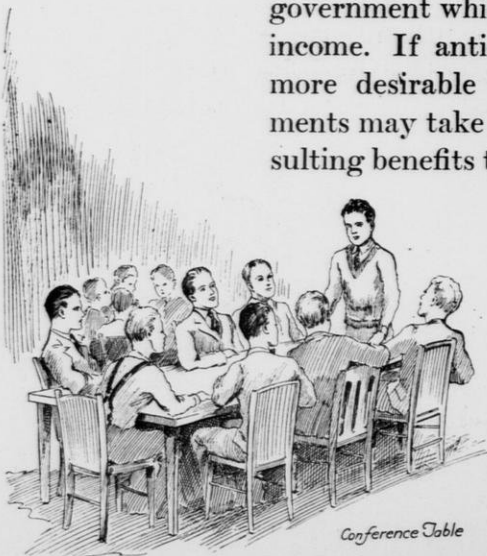


Urban Employment makes for Good Markets.

is producing, be that at home or abroad. This leads me to suggest that farmers need to understand the large economic and social issues of the day and their influence on farm income as well as upon the general welfare of farm life.

If agriculture is to take its place around the council table where are determined policies concerning the farmer's economic, political and social welfare, farmers will need to be represented by trained leadership of a home grown type working through effective organization.

The experiences of the past decade have served to indicate that the economic and social changes which have been taking place and those which likely will take place in the future will undoubtedly affect farming, farm distribution, and farm life in a very extensive way. It would seem that agriculture is confronted with some far reaching adjustments, particularly in its relationship to distribution, markets (both domestic and foreign) and policies of government which affect farm prices and farm income. If anticipated and prepared for, the more desirable economic and social adjustments may take place reasonably soon with resulting benefits to farmers and to other groups.



Conference Table

Equal Educational Opportunity Needed

These are problems, however, that are already upon us. We cannot wait for their solution until the youngsters who are now in the cradle become young men and women. The challenge before us is to *equip educationally* the young men and women in the rural communities to better cope with the new economic and social problems affecting agriculture. These young men and women will need to rely on the educational process to open the way for an intelligent understanding and subsequent participation in the economic, social and political policies and movements of the day.

Rural youth will need more education. Some will need to train for professional service in connection with agriculture. There will continue to be a need for teachers in high schools, colleges and universities. Some farm boys will train for service to farming in the agricultural sciences, carrying on the work of the Henrys, the Kings, the Babcocks and others. Others with training will be needed in the industries as chemists, pathologists, bacteriologists and other workers.



A Famous Scientist

And for the thousands who will man the farms and rural communities there will be needed a form of education that will help young men on our farms to think through the new economic and social changes with which they will be confronted. We need a form of education that will help farmers to think about and better understand the facts about consumption, distribution and markets, both domestic and foreign.

We will need farmers who are trained to handle themselves as effectively in the affairs of distribution as they are equipped to handle the affairs of production. We probably would all agree that the farmer knows as much about production within the four lines of his farm as the manufacturer knows about manufacturing, but the latter is better equipped to trade upon



the markets and to participate in the policies of government that affect his business.

Must Educate to Handle Distribution as Well as Production

The farmer must know and understand the workings of economic and social policies of state. He must know something about economics. It will be well for him to know something about history, because herein he may learn about the experience of his forefathers in dealing with some of the economic, social and governmental problems with which we are now confronted.

He must know the issues in our national and international affairs and their relationship to the welfare of agriculture. He must not only understand these issues but he must be trained and equipped to state them.



in an Evening Forum

It was this vastly important educational problem confronting young men on Wisconsin farms that we had in mind, in the spring of 1932, when we reorganized the *Farm Short Course* at the Wisconsin college of agriculture. To parallel the work in the four year agricultural course we frankly set out to provide a similar educational opportunity for young men on the farm—in their twenties and older. We knew there were very many who were desirous of having such educational opportunities.

I believe the *Farm Short Course* now truly provides an enlarged educational opportunity for rural young men who intend to farm and want to deal intelligently with affairs of agriculture and rural citizenship. Alert, ambitious rural youth want to improve themselves. They desire intelligence, self-expression, understanding and appreciation of affairs of community, state and world. They want to be equipped to meet social as well as material needs in life.

An Educational Enterprise for Adults

It has been said, "Life becomes rational, meaningful, as we learn to be intelligent about

Rural leaders must be educationally equipped to meet others on equal terms.

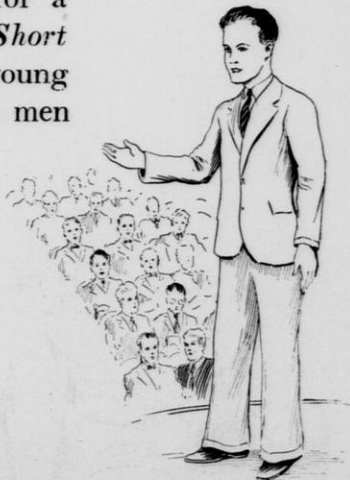


the things we do and the things that happen to us." Rural people have a right to an educational opportunity that will bring forth human expressions and enjoyment that make for enriched living.

This new educational venture is for adults. It is a form of adult education. It is not a secondary school nor an agricultural high school course. Both grade and high school facilities are now available nearer the home for farm youth.

It is for young men on farms who have reached maturity. The majority of the young men in this new course are from 19 to 26 years. Many are older.

There are no entrance requirements or examinations. It is a two year educational set-up running for a four months period between the middle of November and the middle of March. Attracted by the practical and helpful course of study, students return voluntarily for a third winter of training. The *Farm Short Course* is designed to meet the needs of young men of the entire state. Eager young men



from 69 of the 71 counties of Wisconsin were enrolled in the course in the winter of 1934-35.

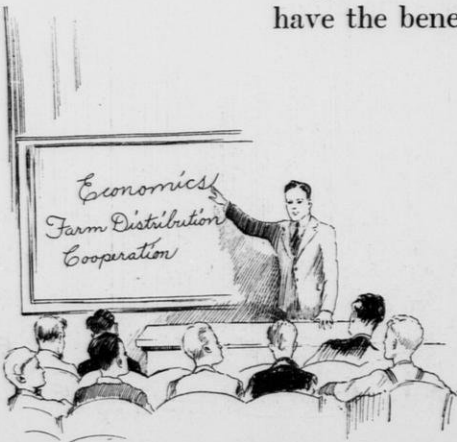
A Well-Rounded Curriculum

The curriculum, or course of study, is built around the social and cultural needs, as well as the vocational interests, of young farm men.

The courses in the humanities and social sciences give young men an acquaintance with economics, history, sociology, and political science. With the help of other colleges of the university there are available courses in dramatics, public speaking, music appreciation, etc.

The vocational training courses include nutritional chemistry, bacteriology, farm mechanics and engineering, grain, forage crops and pastures, livestock, soils, farm management, forestry, farm insects and pests. Courses are provided in farm marketing and distribution, cooperative organization and management and farm and business law.

Farmers will need to rely, increasingly, on cooperative organization. Farm youth must have the benefit of education in the principles

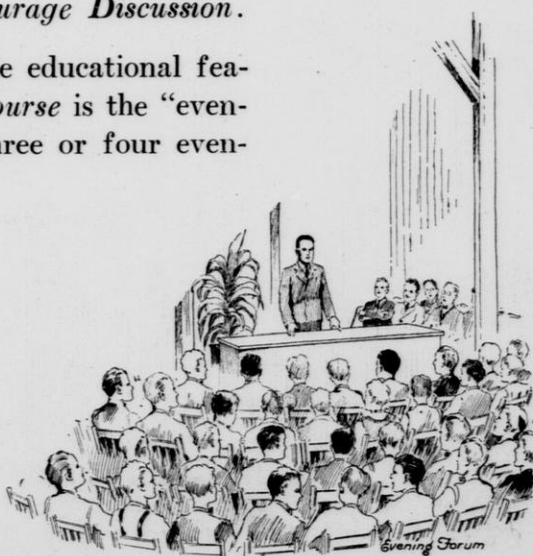


and practices of cooperation. This is essential groundwork for the development of rural leadership capable of manning the affairs of distribution. Business technique must be worked out and skill in cooperative organization perfected if farmers are to organize and handle successfully their business in a corporately thinking world.

In the efficient and successful operation of farm cooperatives the right type of management personnel plays a major role. Farmer members and directors of cooperatives are constantly confronted with the problem of finding the right man to help them manage their group business. The cooperative management field is one which should be a challenge to the young man of the farm today for there is a scarcity of young men with business ability and training essential to successful cooperative management.

“Evening Forums” Encourage Discussion.

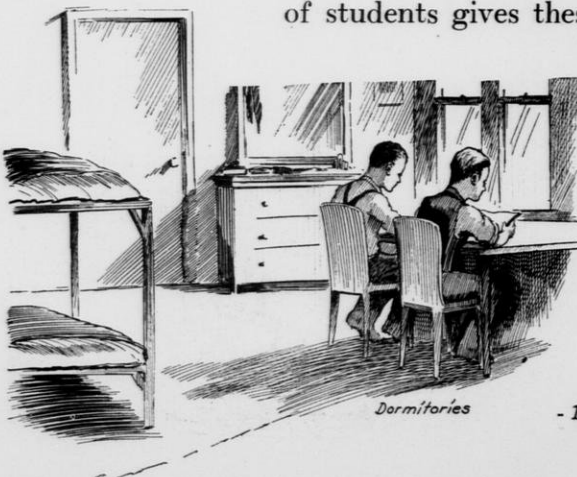
One of the new valuable educational features in the *Farm Short Course* is the “evening forum.” Regularly, three or four even-



ings a week, these young men meet together in their assembly room. Leading personalities on and off the university campus, who are personally acquainted and experienced with affairs, problems and situations in industry, distribution, agriculture, education, government, world relations, banking, transportation, medical service, meet with these young men to discuss problems in their particular fields. Being very informal these forums provide opportunity for discussion. Young men exchange experiences and views. Students learn to express their ideas about situations in which they have a personal interest or experience. Their knowledge and experience becomes meaningful. Students together think and discuss the realities of life. Such discussion stimulates and develops an open-mindedness. The learning process becomes vital and purposeful in the lives of these young men as citizens as well as farmers.

Students Learn to Think and Work Together

Living and working together in dormitories provides a wholesome educational environment; helpful to the social development of these young farm men. This community life of students gives these young men an oppor-



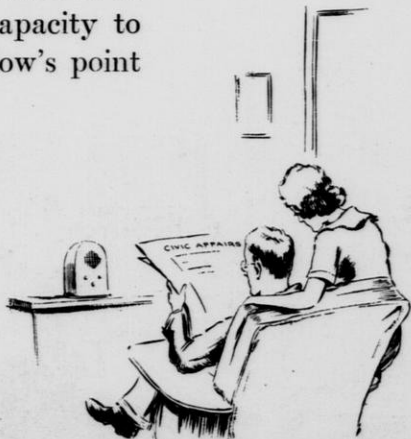
Dormitories

tunity to form acquaintances, not possible in the classroom alone, and permits a freedom in discussion of common problems. They learn to think, work and play together. This affords a personal educational development which should prove helpful to them in working together on farm problems.

There are also human values in the fellowship and social environment which these young men experience in living together in their simple dormitories. The educational process becomes continuous in their rooms and around the dining tables. Adult education should be continuous—it should stimulate a mental alertness and eagerness so necessary if individuals are to enjoy freedom in expression and rationalism in adjustments to ever-changing social situations.

The educational value of student dormitory life was ably set forth by President Charles Richard Van Hise in his inaugural address June 7, 1904.

“The professor in the classroom and the laboratory can do much for a student . . . But, when the student goes out into the world, there is no other part of his education which is of such fundamental importance as capacity to deal with men, to see the other fellow’s point



of view, to have sympathetic appreciation with all that may be good in that point of view, and yet to retain firmly his own ideas and to adjust the two in fair proportion. Nothing that the professor or laboratory can do for the student can take the place of daily close companionship with hundreds of his fellows. In the intimate communal life of the dormitories he must adjust himself to others. He must be genial, fair, likable, or else his lot is rightly a hard one. This fundamental training in adaptability to and appreciation of his fellows can only come from attrition between a large number of human units."

Train for Rural Citizenship

This kind of a well-rounded adult educational process, I believe, will help give farm people the preparation which farming and rural citizenship needs. Out of an informed and trained rural population will come a home grown farm leadership capable of making adjustments to meet the social and economic changes that science, specialization and industrialism will continue to impose on agriculture. An enlightened and informed rural people will do more to facilitate the great economic and social adjustments of rural as well as urban America than any other single movement.

Sketches by B. C. Jorns

