

**AGRICULTURAL
CO-OPERATION IN
ENGLAND AND WALES**

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Agricultural co-operation in England and Wales by W. H. Warman

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By
W. H. WARMAN

WITH A PREFACE BY
LESLIE SCOTT, K.C., M.P.,
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PREFACE.

Major Warman's short account of Agricultural Co-operation in England and Wales comes at an opportune moment. The abandonment by the Government of the policy of protecting the farmers of the country from disaster by guaranteeing grain prices, has left farmers to their own resources. Once again British agriculture has, unaided, to face the fierce attacks of international competition as best they may. For the campaign our farmers have two weapons—scientific farming and sound business. The air is filled with talk of the former, but the public hears, and agriculturists think too little of the latter. And yet on the business side of agriculture there is no shadow of doubt that if our farmers will *really* carry out the principles of agriculture co-operation outlined in Major Warman's interesting book, they will greatly increase their power to battle successfully with the difficulties which are likely to be their lot for many years to come.

The total turnover of British Agriculture, in its annual purchases and sales, makes it far and away the most important industry of the country. And yet, broadly speaking, it is our only industry not conducted on the ordinary lines of modern business. Economy of purchasing, efficiency in selling, are alike impossible in the world of business as we know it to-day except upon lines of far-reaching combination; but that principle has not been applied to farming, except to a very

limited extent. Some attempts have been made to supersede the individual farmer and to institute factory farms of twenty or thirty thousand acres with the express object of applying the principle of combination; but this method cannot be applied to the industry without sacrificing what to the nation is an invaluable asset. We want the small independent farmer; we have nearly half a million independent farmers. Half of them farm holdings of less than 50 acres; nine out of ten have holdings of less than 150 acres. They are an independent race, sturdy and not easily swayed by the gusts of popular opinion; in fine they constitute a steadying factor in the combination of forces which actuate our body politic. An extension of factory farming by big limited liability companies would supersede the independent farmer, and we do not want him superseded. But the only way we can keep him and at the same time give him the advantages of commercial combination, is by the system of organisation in co-operative societies, in which the farmer's buying is bulked, and his selling is bulked; in which those societies in turn combine together, in regard at any rate to a large part of their trade, for the purpose of buying and selling through a central buying and selling federation. By this method wide business combination can be applied to the total requirements and the total output of a great number of separate and independent farmers.

Another aspect of the British farmer's problem of to-day is that unless he reduces his costs of production to the minimum, by getting as near as he can to the sources of supply for the

requirements of his farm, and as near as he can to the ultimate consumer for the sale of what he produces, it will be quite impossible for him to make a profit out of his business, and at the same time pay good wages and employ the maximum amount of labour. It is idle to talk of the "policy of the plough," and the need of encouraging arable farming, as against the natural inclination of the farmer in difficult times to minimise his risks by putting his land down to grass, unless by arable farming the farmer can make a decent livelihood. Farmers do not farm for patriotism or for fun. They farm to make a living for themselves and their families. And to-day, when the State has so completely dissociated itself from any responsibility for the prosperity of the industry it is no use to preach to farmers how they should farm unless you can tell them at the same time how they can farm at a profit.

This country has lagged behind other countries in regard to co-operation. The message of this book is one of encouragement to British farmers. If they will provide proper working capital for their local societies and for their wholesale society; and if they will really give them both their trade; there is not the slightest doubt that the profits of farming in this country will be substantially increased; that arable farming will be made possible; and that through the extension of arable farming the land will be able to support a much larger population than is possible in any other way whatever.

In conclusion I should like to add a word of explanation. There is a wide difference, both of

practice and theory, between agricultural and industrial co-operation. Agricultural co-operation is designed with the express object of preserving individual initiative—it all ultimately depends on the enterprise of the independent farmer. As I see it, the great merit of the system, from a national point of view, lies in the very fact that it does preserve the independent farmer and individual initiative. In regard to industrial co-operation, it is customary for private traders to allege that its object is to supersede individual initiative and to put in its place some Communistic system of industry and trade. It is true that the traders can quote some of the leaders of the Industrial Movement in support of this view, though I doubt whether it represents the essence of the movement or the opinion of the masses of the industrial classes who belong to distributive co-operative societies. I see nothing in the principle of industrial co-operation which necessarily identifies it with any form of Communism; and there is no doubt that in certain ways much good has been done by the industrial movement. This is no place to join in the controversy between the industrial co-operators and the traders, and I express no opinion whatever upon it. But I think it important that the public should realise that agricultural co-operation stands completely outside that discussion, and that support of it does not involve taking sides in the industrial controversy.

LESLIE SCOTT.

Chairman

Agricultural Organisation Society.

Agricultural Co-operation in England and Wales

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THIS book is intended to be a small but clear picture of the position of agricultural co-operation in England and Wales at the present time. It is remarkable that, while there are many books on the co-operative movement in agriculture in other countries, there is no authoritative work on its English development, and few are aware that the system is now in operation throughout England and Wales on a scale at least comparable with anything that exists in our Dominions or in foreign lands. Everybody who takes an interest in agriculture is aware, for instance, that Denmark saved herself after the loss of Schleswig Holstein by the fact that her farmers and smallholders adopted co-operative methods and succeeded in under-selling our own producers in the English market by the co-operative marketing of butter, eggs and bacon. It is common knowledge again that in most continental countries agricultural co-operation has been for many years a flourishing