



# COMEBACK FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE

## ... about the author

These reassuring words for Rural America come from an old friend, G. B. Gunlogson of Racine, Wisconsin. An agricultural engineer and expert in many fields, GB "retired" recently but did not mean it for a minute. He is now busily engaged in the greatest project of all — telling our rural people what a wonderful life is right in front of them — if they just do things begging to be done.



A recent study of conditions in rural areas among small town and farm people has brought to light many interesting findings which signify the beginning of important changes in the future of Rural America. Despite the recapitulation of trends and various opinions expressed in print and on the air about the widespread migration of people toward cities, the countryside is not about to wither away and become a "no-man's land". All the enduring elements are still there and the roots are firmly in the ground to assure a healthy future and, in due time, a resurgence of growth. Here are some facts which may be of interest:

The countryside comprises nearly ninety per cent of the land area of the country, not counting public lands. It contains a large and very important segment of America's total population and economy. The census places the rural population, people living on farms and in towns of 2500 or less, at 55,000,000. Actually we may add to this five or six million more who live in slightly larger towns but are essentially rural.

This adds up to 60,000,000 or close to a third of the total population, about 25 per cent of which live on farms.

While the basic economy is farming, these people are engaged in highly diversified enterprises. This is the third of the population which not only produces but also forms the first link in connecting the rest of the population with the necessities of life. This is the third which annually produces more primary wealth than all the rest of the population.

This is the propertied part of the population. In addition to the 1.12 billion acres of farm land in their hands the per capita ownership of homes and other property (except in a few areas) is considerably higher than for the rest of the country.

These people are different and their environment is different. They are more independent and less regimented or group controlled. The percentage of entrepreneurs, self-employed and owners of businesses is far higher. These conditions and experiences have made for greater resourcefulness, enterprise and better work habits than is generally found among city people. They are closer to the realities of life and their values are different.

For many years rural people would look to the city for advancements and advantages. They were enchanted by big industries, big businesses, big payrolls, glamor and adventure. The lure of big pay and easier work attracted millions. During war and in prosperous times intensive recruiting campaigns for factory workers reached almost every rural community. Most of the recruits remained although some returned when work gave out, rather than join the ranks of the city unemployed.

Young people from the country who had education frequently attained much success in the city. To "make good in the city" became a great challenge in many communities. While this has been a two way blessing, it has tended to make country people look too much in one direction and overlook opportunities at home.

Except for the local weeklies (and farm papers going to farmers) nearly every type of media reaching the country is city oriented and slanted. There is little in any of the general run of periodicals that

is geared to country people, or identified with their way of life, opportunities and aspirations. Essentially these publications are designed to serve the urban level and interests.

**THE TIDE MAY BE TURNING.** There are signs that the tide may be reaching its crest. The process of change is many sided and it is being shaped by people—people with desires, needs, values and who reason and plan for their future. For one thing cities are becoming less attractive. Many are suffocating from over-population. Many are facing serious financial problems, unemployment, influx of aliens and indigents, inefficiency, slums, growing crime and disintegration of human values. These conditions are tending to worsen and their solutions grow increasingly difficult. The big city complex may be likened to an old structure that has been repeatedly added to, shored up and patched up. It has become inefficient, outdated and unsound. Many city people are living on a thin margin and many are disillusioned. Country people are becoming increasingly aware of some of these conditions.

Some years ago industry began to decentralize because bigness in one place created certain problems which could best be solved by establishing other units. Behind such moves many factors are involved such as sources of materials, accessibility to markets, transportation, over-crowding and other environmental conditions. Now many industries are studying how this process may be carried on still farther. Actually new approaches may be evolved enabling certain industries to disperse their production into still smaller units.

In recent years another movement got under way. People began to suburbanize and business centers began to spread into the country. This may be the beginning of a broader movement which may reach out still farther. This country has never stood still. Free people will always continue to seek better living conditions and new opportunities.

**THE COMMUNITY PACKAGE CONCEPT.** There are two new developments which are likely to halt a long trend and almost certainly will help to shape a new future for Rural America. A number of small towns are making a reappraisal of themselves and what the community has in resources and people and potential opportunities. This has stimulated local planning and efforts which in many instances has brought significant improvement in local attitudes and economic conditions.

There are many factors which are changing this attitude and are bringing the farmer and townsman together in a common purpose. Better roads, of course, have brought the farm and town closer together. The consolidated school has been an important influence in many counties, enabling children to occupy the same class rooms and enjoy the same cultural, social and recreational activities. Farmers and businessmen are joining together in community, business, recreational, social and church affairs.

The results may be widely noted in the growing number of new hospitals, clinics, homes for the aged, parks and public works. At the same time planning on the economic front has not been overlooked. Many communities have active committees (or Chambers of Commerce) made up of local businessmen, farmers and professional people carefully sur-

veying every likely area for economic development. This has included processing of farm products and other locally oriented enterprises or service. Some manufacturing plants turning out various products or parts have been successfully established in many small towns.

These committees have discovered that the countryside has many hidden assets and attractions which can be developed to make the community better and provide opportunities for people. They are also discovering that to succeed a community must have self-starting and generating forces within itself.

Never before has there been more widespread interest and endeavor in behalf of rural development. One noteworthy example is the rural development program launched a few years ago by the Department of Agriculture. Some of the Agricultural Colleges and the Extension Services have undertaken various studies. These agencies have not only been helpful but they have shown readiness to cooperate in these local undertakings. The agricultural college operates largely on state basis and is freer from Washington politics than some of the agricultural agencies.

**THE COUNTRY NEWSPAPER.** There is much evidence to show that a good local newspaper is one of the key factors in the life and progress of any country community. Without it the community is somewhat like an individual deficient in speech, hearing and eye sight. The newspaper is the instrument which can help most to keep together and keep moving ahead the many-sided interests in a country community. It alone can present the living pulse and progress of a community to the local people and the outside world. It records family gatherings, births, school doings, Sunday sermons, local sports, field and crop conditions, and the affairs of local business and industry.

Nowhere else are the character and the prospects of a community reflected more clearly than in the columns of the local newspaper. Indeed, if one were selecting a new location for a business one of the first things to look into would be the quality of the local paper.

**TIME IS ON THE SIDE OF COUNTRY PEOPLE.** To know much about the country one has to experience it and sense its qualities, magnitude and infinite variety. Within its boundaries of oceans, the Rio Grande and Canada it has nearly 3 million square miles of land outside cities and their suburbs and many regions and climates. It has 3 million miles of highways, 15,000 towns and about one million different businesses and services. Never have the opportunities in this vast and varied country been greater.

The growing population pressure in populous centers will place ever higher premium on the very things which now are in super abundance in the countryside: land and congenial living space, products of the good earth, beauty of the landscape, woods, clean water and wild life. It is inevitable that people of the cities must turn increasingly to the country for these essential needs of life. No wonder that people in many rural areas are beginning to reappraise these assets and their strategic position. No wonder that many city people are beginning to look and to long for the country.