

The Farm Subsidy Sieve

To the Editor of Land & Liberty.

Sir,—I should like to comment on the article "We Give Generously" in your October issue, for there is one fundamental point missing which, if not taken into account, will mean that taxation of agricultural land, though conferring great benefit on the community, will do little to foster agriculture. In a later article, "For Field and Village", it is said (p. 158) "It would make more money available for machinery and other equipment with which to increase productivity". But is more machinery, etc., required? Assuredly not.

Let me give an example — and it is typical. It is of a "spacing" drill for beet and several other crops, sowing only 4 lb. beet against the normal 12 lb., just coming onto the market when war broke out. Under DORA, Government refused to grant material for its manufacture and handed it over to the Sugar Beet Research and Education Committee. Many meetings were held with selected members of that body (who selected them is not known), but it became obvious that those chosen were interested parties, all hostile to the drill — and for this reason.

This country, when war broke out, was dependent for beet seed of foreign and mainly German origin. Here was a grand opportunity for starting a British seed industry, and the many growers who entered the lists not unnaturally looked askance at a drill which, if widely adopted, meant only one third of the seed normally required. It was these potential growers who dominated the meetings and the drill was killed.

But what has happened since? A flood of "spacing" drills came onto the market, the cost of the development of which by many firms must have been enormous. But the meaning of the word "spacing" was changed; they all drilled around 12 lb. seed, but *in addition*, another implement had to be added, the gapper. This added to the capital cost of farming, but what did it matter? The cost came out of subsidies. The farming community has largely become a sieve through which subsidies flow to the benefit of the agricultural engineering and chemical industries.

That example is long dead and buried but the farming community is still sucked dry by those industries. The National Institute of Agricultural Engineers — one of those semi-official institutions and conferring no individual responsibility on its members — is in close league with the Institution of British Agricultural Engineers now attempting to assume the position of a professional Society of which the examination is a qualification for practice. Its Council is a mixture of representatives of firms and of persons closely associated with the Ministry.

The chemical industry, too, runs large research farms with a like host of agents pushing their wares on the farming community, fertilizers, dusts and sprays, the latter now under such heavy criticism (vide *The Times*, Oct. 14 1960). Against these, the farming community have no protection and the Ministerial officials can not resist the strong political pressures brought to bear.

The crying need of the industry is the establishment of a research organisation *within* the industry, the members of which are set the task of securing full production with minimum of capital (mechanism) and recurrent expenditure (fertilizers and other chemicals). If they do not produce results and justify their existence in reasonable time, they would get the sack. A centralised research organisation under the National Farmers' Union would be useless; its members could only be advisory and would come under the pressure groups.

Further, the small farmer is now an anachronism, for he cannot make that full use of the facilities now available which would both give him a profit and full production. Yet the Government, under the Small Farmers' Act, is pouring out money to keep alive an anachronism.

That means a radical reorganisation of the industry — and it is quite possible. Its form I cannot discuss here but it was outlined in 1935 and received the strong support of the late Lord Altrincham (then Sir Edward Grigg); but for the war and his death, I think much progress would have been made.

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PLANNERS AND LAND VALUES

To the Editor of Land & Liberty.

Sir,—As a municipal planner I found most interesting Mr. Bryan Anstey's suggestion that planners should make "value contour" maps. These would be very useful and could become one of the most important planning tools. They would enable us to form a more accurate assessment of the effects of what we had done as well as to project results in a more realistic way. I hope more planners will consider their potentialities.

Any citizen who thought the matter out would probably agree in principle with Mr. Anstey that land belongs of right to the community. He would probably also agree that in addition each individual in the community should have certain rights to the land.

Here in Western Canada we have huge areas zoned for urban development for 30 years or more beyond current needs. Yet land prices are much higher than ever they have been. Therefore I doubt whether restricting the amount of building land has as great an effect on price