

A Word with You

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The farm problem is the fly in the ointment of today's flimsy "prosperity." Economists who glow about our continued progress and prosperity knit their brows when it comes to the farm problem. At least one outstanding economist, Dr. William A. Irwin of the American Bankers Association, is unreservedly optimistic and isn't even worried about the farm future because "the law requires the government to support farm prices." But most are a little more cautious.

The plight and plaint of the farmer since the turn of the century has been that he's being slowly pushed to the wall. He's had to struggle to get a living income, in the face of increase in productive power. His prices have been falling while prices everywhere are rising—which is another way of saying he has to work harder for the same result. Mechanized farming, which should be a blessing to him, is not. The small farmer is being squeezed out—to poorer lands, to farm tenancy, or to an abandonment of farming. Migrant labor is only one symptom.

What Price Supports?

The problem has been stated as one of giving the farmer his "fair share of the nation's wealth."

The answer of the government has been price support—which benefits the big rent-collecting farm owner more than it benefits the working farmer. It has also created the ridiculous and vicious situation of destroying tons of food while many are going hungry. And the farmers would really rather not have this situation.

The experts have been telling us Georgists that land isn't so important anymore, because agriculture is such a small part of the economy. Well, here we are. We don't even have to knock down this straw man because we can prove our case with it.

Agriculture *is* a basic thing. It, and the other extractive industries, are still the ground floor of our economy—not just any old fraction of the total. And it's rather astigmatic to be admiring some pretty decorations in the house while the foundation is crumbling.

"Props" are the government's solution. How about seeking out a solution that will make farming as strong and healthy economically as it's supposed to be physically? Henry George's analysis and remedy apply precisely to today's farm problem.