# Better prices - sure cure for farming ills; says speaker at agricultural conference

(Following is a speech given by Rev. E. J. Roche of St. Dunstan's University as a recent agricultural educational conference held at the P.E.I. Vocational Institute.)

By Rev. E.J. ROCHE
St. Dunstan's University

I think this is the first time in my life that I wished I had not been brought up on a farm. The problems of farmers appear much more complex and difficult to those who are or have been directly involved in them than to those who see them only from a distance, or learn about them from books, movies and newspapers. In the years before I became acutely aware of the usefulness or even the necessity of money I thought farming was a wonderful life. As I grew older and my import needs grew more acute I became disillusioned, perhaps even cynical to the point that my present thesis is that there isn't a thing wrong with farmers or farming in Prince Edward Island that a little better price for produce wouldn't cure. With potatoes at 30 cents a hundred weight and beef at 16 cents, neither formal nor vocational education is worth a tinker's dam. Farmers cannot produce profitably at those prices no matter how much schooling or education they have or get.

Newspaper editorials paternally suggest that farmers resemble grouchy adolescents who can't seem to get it through their heads that they are really wonderfully well off; dealers and packers pat them on the head and hope they know what they are doing, hope that they are aware of the consequences of their immature behaviour. The implication is that they are not, but that it's no use to tell them. They will just have to learn the hard way.

REV. E. J. ROCHE

### 3 KINDS OF PEOPLE

Besides our fishermen, we have in fact three kinds of people in Prince Edward Island — farmers, non - farmers, and those farmers who are in the process of becoming non - farmers. Those in the transition group are characterized by their apathy. They just didn't quit farming. They are fading out of it. They haven't yet become non - farmers. They are fading into it. They are reluctant to be placed in either group just yet. They have no status, no certainty in their future. Just being transplanted but not yet having taken root. They keep a close eye on themselves to see if they are going to make it. If they could only get a job driving a snowplow, or driving a roadmachine, or driving the mail, or driving a school - bus, or working in one of those new processing plants, or on the park, or maybe they'll go away to Toronto next fall.

Then we have the non - farmers producing nothing on their own but fractionalizing the services which the farmers and fishermen need and don't need to the point that in 1956, we had 43,112 farmers supporting 30,470 in urban centers. 14,707 of these in Charlottetown alone. And what is Charlottetown — a distribution center, a town of merchants, civil servants and professionals living off of one another and the farmer but all ultimately living off the farmer. And as it becomes increasingly evident that he just cannot carry so many, they turn to the tourists for new backs on which to spread the load.

### "GETTING BY"

And then we have the farmers — the people who are always "getting by" but who never seem to be able to discover a future. They read their papers and their magazines; they listen to their radios and watch their televisions; they take advice and philosophy from everybody, from anyone who, when he has no one else to advise, can always advise the farmer; but they can never see a future, never see a chance to get the bull by the tail even if it is their own bull. There is always a dozen on the tail ahead of them, and everyone swinging the bull in his own direction.

The farmers with whom we are concerned here produce as many potatoes per acre as anyone else in the world, they keep an excellent type of milk cow, they raise good beef. Their technique of production is good. But they still can't see any future in their enterprise. Why? Because so far they haven't been able to get the upper hand on their own destiny. They know that the barbers can get together and change the price of haircuts, that dentists can get together and change the price of fillings, that the packers already agree on the price of meat, that the catalogues set the price of clothing, and that the dealers set the price of potatoes.

**The farmer buys at prices set by somebody else and he sells at prices set by somebody else. And if he says that the price of potatoes will be better next fall, everybody laughs because they know that he hasn't any idea what the price of potatoes will be. In fact he probably doesn't know how much it costs him to grow them.**

And so we ask, "What are we going to do for the farmers?" Who is "we"? Shouldn't the question be, "What are the farmers going to do?" I can see what a lot of them are going to do — they're going to quit. The last schools, the last churches, have already been built in many of our Island communities. It is only a matter of time. This is a fact that we might just as well accept right now. It's a matter of the survival of the fittest and a lot of our farmers are not in that category now, some through their own fault, many more because of events and trends over which they had no control.

Some submarginal land will be vacated; some marginal land will be vacated; some good land will be vacated. Homes won't be sold, just boarded up. And many a farmer is going to feel worse than he should because he'll be nailing the boards on a relatively good barn, a better barn than his father ever had, and a house with running water and electricity, the price of which he would now be happy to have in cash.

### ANOTHER POINT

But we better take a look at the situation from another point of view. It hasn't always been this bad and we hope it won't continue to be. What about the boys and girls who are now within a few years of going into the business and living off farming? Let's conjure up in our minds an individual in elementary school, Grade VI perhaps, who is destined for this way of life. What is his present preparation? What does he know about farming, its possibilities, its problems, its techniques?

This young man has ahead of him a life to live, and a living to make. Of the two I consider, of course, that the former the life to be lived is more fundamental, more important, but impossible apart from the second, the living to be made.

His education must serve both objectives. It must teach him how to live the good life with a genuine appreciation of all the things that are worthwhile, a satisfying life which comes from having been able to do the things that are worthwhile and a really successful life which comes only where he has been awarded the crown of everlasting happiness. It must teach him how to make a good living, in his case how to be a successful farmer. Like every other type of education, this one involves a multitude of approaches, and many points of view. And here I am not speaking only of the technical aspects of the education for farm living. The manner of living the good life itself is vastly different for the farmer than it is for the teacher or the professional man or the businessman. His appreciations are of different temper, his satisfactions are of a different nature from those of others.

### MORE FUNDAMENTAL

It is a more fundamental life, a less complicated life than that of others and it has rewards proper to itself. But these rewards are not available to the boy whose education puts value and emphasis on other rewards, the rewards of other kinds of life. A farmer who is left to himself to discover the secrets of nature, the philosophy of farm living, or worse still schooled in a philosophy of living and success that is foreign to his environment, cannot but be unhappy with the unhappiness of the schizophrenic, the emptiness of the man of frustration whose educational background is for the professional and the urban, whose living is natural and rural.

And so to the school, to the rural school and to the regional high school. What is the difference between the education available to our farm boys and girls and the education available to our urban boys and girls? I submit that our present school program completely neglects to take this difference into consideration. I contend, at the same time, that a thorough analyses of the present curriculum for rural children is in order and that the times demand a new approach to the education of our rural children. Both curriculum and teachers can and should be appraised in the light of the current needs of our rural youth. To do this I would suggest that one of the senior officials in the provincial department of education should be a man who is highly qualified in farm production, farm management, and farm marketing; that he be responsible for liaison with the provincial and federal departments of agriculture, and especially with the Dominion Experimental Farm. The fruits of much excellent agricultural research are not filtering down to the levels where they can do the most good. Our boys and girls are going through schools that are almost completely out of contact with the realities of their lives. We have men who can prepare just as interesting and fascinating texts on agriculture as the present wonderful series on science. Why not work up a six-year program, embracing grades III to VII for each of our three counties, and in this series teach our boys and girls a philosophy of rural life, the essentials of good production, of good management, of good marketing. Show them how good our Island soil really is, how it can be well used. Show them how our only hope of success lies in co-operative marketing.

### PROFITABLE WAYS

Nine-year old boys and girls are interested in farm animals, their habits, their feeding, their breeds. Now the only source of information they have is their own farm on which they often see only poor or mediocre grade cattle, carelessly fed, and poorly housed. They need to be taught that there are other breeds of animals, other methods of feeding and housing, and perhaps more profitable ways of handling livestock.

Ten-year olds can be taught that there are different kinds of fertilizers and that different needs. Teach them how expensive it is to grow some crops on some of the neighborhood soils and how this land might better serve another purpose. Teach them what goes to make up a soil what kinds of plant nourishment it contains and that the soil can be tested to find out what it is like.

In another year concentrate on crops, fertilizers and cultivation; then machinery and harvesting; bookkeeping for farmers; and marketing.

In the high school do it all over again but now it has become a four-year course in agricultural science and special provision is made for the girls. Is two hours a week too much to give to a study of the rural life which is the only life these boys and girls know?

In a few years our large meetings will be a meeting of minds that have a combination of theory and practice, minds that have a new slant on farming and farm problems, minds that when put together will come up with a future for farmers and a future for Prince Edward Island.

### CONCERNED TEACHERS

But to do this we must have teachers who are concerned about the problems of farmers and rural life, teachers who judge it worthwhile to attend the Easter Monday meeting of the potato growers to learn firsthand about the marketing problems and the proposed solutions. Let the department of education employ one good man to prepare the texts, to compile the information already available, to submit an analyses of farm problems and farming and texts for each of our three counties. Let this study be introduced early in the rural school, Grade III at least, and teach it in every grade to the end of high school. It won't be long until it is getting into the homes and on the farms where the children live.

And now to the regional high schools. I submit that these schools could have been set up more economically, that they could embrace larger areas, that the per-pupil cost might have been less BUT I submit that larger and fewer regional high schools would not serve our rural people. In fact I maintain that we need a few less. Montague Regional High School is too large and takes in too much territory. Another is needed in the Belfast area. The Tyne Valley-Ellerslie area needs a Regional High School. Regional high schools that are outside the shopping radius of our farm people are beyond their area of involvement, not to say beyond the reasonable reach of our boys and girls. We have too many boys and girls spending too much of their lives on busses now. The advantages of the school are being offset by the hardships involved in getting to it. Efficiency is a fine thing but not if it is at the expense of service. Criticisms can be and have been levelled at both governments for letting our regional high school system grow up. These criticisms are not justified. The money spent has been well spent. My only criticism is that in a couple of cases bureaucratic civil servants succeeded in getting too much efficiency at the expense of availability. But a college preparatory program is not the exclusive responsibility of these schools, nor preparation for office jobs. It is from these that our farmers must come, it is to these centers that our farmers must be brought, if the Prince Edward Island farmers battle is even won it will be within the walls of these very schools. They constitute our only hope and at present they do nothing.

Have our boys and girls been servants of the entrenched monopolies, the victims of vertical integration, the serfs of absentee landlords? To work the frustration out of the farmer, put a new slant on the school curriculum, create a new use for the regional schools. Get farming and education together, and start at the top and at the bottom and in the middle at the same time.

Our beef industry isn't profitable, but not only because of vicious marketing conditions, but also because not enough of it is top quality. Less than 10 per cent of our beef is top grade owing to a poor beef breed of animal and also because of poor finish. Do our boys and girls know how hardit is to turn a profit on beef if it is kept over two winters? It isn't so long since the importance of speed in finishing hogs began to get down to the grass roots level. Shown how long we have to prepare to feed 35 million Canadians? Do they know that there is a point at maximum yield per acre? How many additional acres will be needed in the next 16 years? Where will these come from? Someone has suggested the reclamation of swampland. Why not use the good land already cleared first and the farmers who are existing on it? But then what's the use, if farmers are to continue to be the

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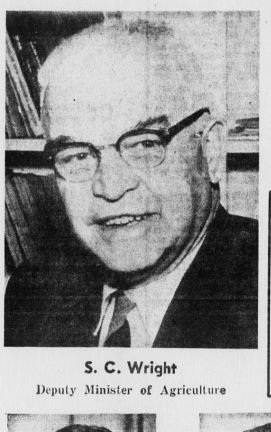

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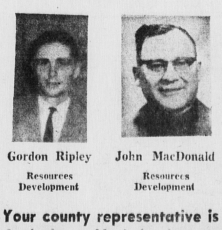

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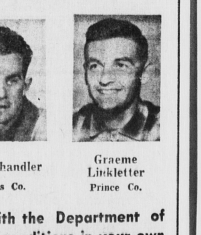

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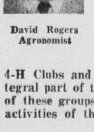

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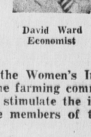

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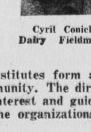

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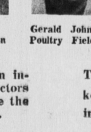

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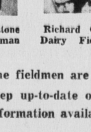

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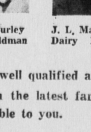

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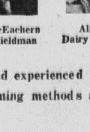

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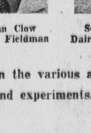

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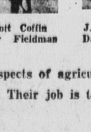

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4-H Clubs and the Women's Institutes form an integral part of the farming community. The directors of these groups stimulate the interest and guide the activities of the members of the organizations.

The fieldmen are well qualified and experienced in the various aspects of agriculture. They keep up-to-date on the latest farming methods and experiments. Their job is to make this information available to you.

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# Dept. of Agriculture

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