

# The Agricultural Highway

**A**MERICAN AGRICULTURE is again travelling the unmarked highway of the pioneer. This new pioneering is not concerned with settling new lands; it is concerned with solving new problems. North Dakota's agricultural history is short, a little more than half a century. The agriculture of Virginia is six times as old. But the old agriculture of an Atlantic seaboard state travelled its highway at a slow pace until after the war between the states. North Dakota's agriculture has been geared to a rapid tempo ever since the first sod was "busted." By and large, the State never experienced a period of subsistence farming—extensive commercial agriculture has dominated agricultural practice from the beginning. North Dakota has imposed upon her lands a used pattern that, for much of the State, failed to take account of the inevitability and frequency of drouth. Adjustments are taking place—the 1940 census reveals some stern, hard facts about the Great Plains as a whole.

North Dakota was admitted to the Union in 1889; one year later a Wisconsin professor invented the Babcock butterfat test. North Dakota clung to grain; Wisconsin turned to dairy cattle. These two states have travelled different roads. Just as Wisconsin was turning to dairy cattle in the early 90's, North Dakota was placing her faith in dry-farming—both states have had to, or will have to seek detours and by-ways on their respective agricultural highways.

This great prairie State is really adapted to large-scale extensive farming with large units. As North Dakota marches toward the half-way mark of the 20th century, the State must choose which highway she is to follow. Is this State to be one of many relatively small farms with many farmers on the land, or is it to be one of a few large farms with few farmers on the land? The issue cannot be dodged. It must be faced. Is North Dakota's population going to continue to be dominantly rural? If so, what plane of living shall prevail, and what influences are at work determining that plane of life? Those who place their faith in single panaceas are likely to be disappointed. There are a lot of bad spots in the highway ahead—it is going to take the combined efforts of the best biological engineers, the best agricultural engineers, and of the best social engineers to improve the travelling. Education at all levels is a form of social engineering—social engineers have throughout the ages had many brakes put upon their efforts—every time this has happened society has suffered.

North Dakota has pioneered much important agricultural legislation—laws help, but they are not enough—education and management must march alongside in a great cooperative effort for the common good.

H. L. WALSTER, Director.