

## THE LAND IS OUR HERITAGE

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We, as a people, are secure only so long as our land is productive. The land is all that we have and to it we owe our existence. It is our natural mode of livelihood and we, each of us, regardless of our vocation, at some period in our lives have a desire to return to the soil.

As the potential production from the land decreases, the standard of living of the aggregate of our population must decrease. During our mad haste to develop a great industrial nation we have forgotten our source of living. We have failed to recognize that a sound, permanent, industrial development depends upon a permanently productive soil. A railroad may build through a fertile virgin land and prosper for a few years by the exploitation of the natural resources; factories may be built on the same unsound basis. But when such natural resources are gone, the railroad and factories are in bankruptcy and the life savings of many are lost.

A people may have all the gold of the world, yet be poorer than the head-hunters of the jungle, if there is nothing to buy. Deprive the people of all their gold and surround them with the abundance of the soil and they are rich. Constantly add to one's possession land of low fertility and one will soon discover he is a very poor man, while even a small acreage of productive soil will give life and living to a happy and contented family.

The growth of the population of the United States has perhaps been unequalled by any nation. "The census of 1790 enumerated only 3,929,000 people and the census of 1930 enumerated 122,775,000. The increase between 1920 and 1930 was 17,000,000; this increase alone is almost as great as the total population of Canada and Australia. Since 1930 the population has increased to about 127,000,000."

The small population of 1790 had the same 1,902,139,000 acres of land to support it as has the present population. This land is classified as follows: Grade 1, 101,038,000 (Excellent); Grade 2, 210,935,000 (Good); Grade 3, 345,872,000 (Fair); Grade 4, 362,559,000 (Poor); Grade 5, 881,735,000 (Incapable of tillage). These proportions, are rapidly being changed by erosion and depletion.

It is estimated that we have 413,000,000 acres of crop land and that crops were harvested from 359,000,000 of these acres in 1930; 464,000,000 acres are in farm pastures and approximately 884,000,000 acres are in either public or private grazing land not in farms. Thirty-six per cent of the beef cattle, 57 per cent of the sheep, and 75 per cent of the wool are produced on this vast grazing area. In addition, an estimated 1,000,000 big game animals are on this land. Much of this land is being destroyed by over-grazing, which leads to erosion.

Our land policy, or lack of land policy, has brought about the greatest waste in wealth and human effort that any nation has ever known in so short a period. Our attitude has been one of land exploitation, supplemented by an equally vicious evil—that of land speculation. Our only thought seems to have been to get people on to the land, with no attention being given to the adaptability of the land. This careless method has broken the spirit and wasted the life's labor of thousands of farm families, and at the same time the heritage of those yet to come has been destroyed.

Soil erosion has been the greatest single hazard; 35,000,000 acres of land have been completely destroyed for crop production; this is sufficient land for 218,000 families with 160 acres each; 125,000,000 acres have been seriously damaged, most of the productive top soil being gone; 100,000,000 acres more have started to erode seriously. This does not take

into account the serious erosion on the vast public domain of the grazing west. Nor does it account for the billions that have been invested in navigation, water-power sites, reservoirs for municipal water supplies and for irrigation, much of which has been lost, due to silting from eroded lands.

The organic matter and plant food lost annually through erosion and leaching is enormous. Organic matter lost by erosion and leaching is estimated at 170,000,000 short tons annually while that lost by grazing and removed by crops is only 152,000,000 short tons. Plant food elements lost by erosion and leaching is 116,900,000 short tons, while that lost by grazing and crop removal is only 19,600,000 short tons. Organic matter added annually to the soil is 100,000,000 short tons, leaving a net loss per year of 222,000,000 short tons. Plant food added annually is 44,830,000 short tons, leaving an annual net loss of 91,670,000 short tons. Much of this annual waste may be prevented by the inauguration of a proper national land policy.

It is estimated that by 1960, when it is supposed we shall have reached a stable population, it shall be necessary for us to have 386,000,000 acres of land in harvested crops as compared to 359,000,000 acres that were harvested in 1930, or a difference of 27,000,000 acres. At the rate our land is being destroyed by erosion, we shall have at that time several million acres of land less than will be necessary to support our population on its present standards of living.

In addition to the erosion on the crop land there is serious erosion on the vast grazing area. Because of misuse approximately 415,000,000 acres, or three-fourths of the western range outside the boundaries of the national forest and other public administered reservations, are now subject to erosion and depletion of cover.

Our forests are a valuable resource and play an important part in our economic life, yet they have been abused and exploited to the point of annihilation. The sawmill operators were reckless in their destruction, as though we would have no further need for timber. Then the fallen timber was burned, thus destroying the young timber. American forests, before the depression, produced an annual revenue of \$2,000,000,000 per year, and employed 1,300,000 workers at a wage of \$1,500,000,000. Forests are not only a great source of wealth and employer of labor, but they hold soil and water, prevent floods, maintain cooler temperatures in summer, make streams more favorable for fish and furnish a habitat for game. Under proper management, they furnish grazing and a place for recreation. We are not producing our domestic needs for timber. We produce only one-half our pulp wood and our annual growth of timber is only 9,000,000,000 ft. while we consume approximately 16,500,000,000 ft.

The most serious problem this nation has to face is its land problem. Our forefathers had as their first motive for freedom the ownership of land by each individual, but they had no idea that such unguided freedom would destroy itself. They never dreamed that within a few generations 50, 60, and 70 per cent of the farm population would be enslaved by a tenant system and that much of the farm land would be owned by insurance and mortgage companies that have no desire to own such land. They never believed that soon a large part of the farmers would be burdened with mortgages incurred to make up the difference between profitable and non-profitable farming. They did not foresee that the devastating effects of erosion brought on by careless farming, breaking out of sod and destroying of forests would soon make a barren waste of much land, fill up streams and destroy lakes.

Private ownership of farm land, with no restriction as to its use and treatment, is just as undesirable as would be the ownership of city property with no restrictions. Every city has zoning laws and ordinances that prohibit the use of land for undesirable purposes. I may own a vacant lot in a city, but I have no right to allow it to become foul with weeds. I may not desire pavement on the streets, but if it is best in the minds of the majority, I must pay my share. It is just as logical that farm and range land be controlled in the same way except that "The Great Out-of-doors" is a national problem.

We have millions of acres of land in cultivation that should have been left in timber or grass. The National Resources Board, to which I am indebted for much of the data contained in this paper, estimates that there are 75,000,000 acres in farms, 20,163,000 being in crops, which should be put to some other use. It is estimated that with the retirement program and the need for additional land for the increased population, we shall need 47,000,000 additional acres of crop land by 1960. Sufficient productive land may be had by development of irrigation and by drainage, but it must be a controlled development and not one of commercial exploitation.

We should realize that complete freedom of the use of land is no freedom at all. A sound land policy must include a method of getting the land permanently into the possession of the actual producer. There should be some form of inducement to cause the land to be used properly and protected, and there must be Government enforcement of such proper land use. It should become unprofitable for one to own more land than he can use or to own land for speculative purposes. We are not traveling a road without a sign board. History teaches the fall of civilizations through land mismanagement, neglect and soil robbery. We also have the history of nations that have endured through the ages because of proper land use and management.

A farmer living on the headwaters of a stream may have a legal right to use or misuse his farm in such a way that it destroys good land with silt and water, thus endangering property and life lower down the stream, but he has no moral right. He may have a legal right to plow and destroy the natural hardy vegetation on semi-desert land which will produce not more than two crops out of five, but he has no moral right to strangle a nation with dust during the remaining three years. He may have a legal right to clear timber from land naturally so poor, hilly and sandy that it cannot produce profitable crops, but he has no moral right to destroy the timber and by cultivation reduce such land to a barren waste. He may have a legal right to drain a swamp where the land is of questionable value for agriculture, but he has no moral right to destroy the nesting place of the migratory water fowls which are the property and pleasure of all of us.

There is still an abundance of fertile soil in this nation, enough to furnish homes for all the people who live upon farms. Much of it requires water to make it productive, but we now have completed great dams, are building others and can build more that will furnish ample water for irrigation. Other land can be drained. The land when watered, or drained, will produce in abundance. This, to be sure, would necessitate the shifting of population. But, is it good for underprivileged people to eke out a mere existence on isolated, eroded or dry land, offering nothing but back breaking toil and discouragement for the entire family with poor schools and little social advantages when, with proper land classification and management, they could have more of the good things of life?

Even if we discount the underprivilege, useless toil and blighted ambitions of the farm people who live upon poor land, we cannot overlook

the national aspect of the destruction wrought by misuse of land. The development of a proper land-use system is one of our greatest problems. It is a national problem, one that requires the best brains of our land to solve. The Federal Government should retire the poor, eroded lands and restore them to their proper use. It should also make provisions for bringing into production a sufficient amount of fertile land, to furnish a profitable farming unit for those displaced by the purchase of the poor land. This is a job which is too big and too far-reaching for a state. It is a task in which state lines must be forgotten. *It is humanly possible, economically sound and socially justified.* Nature has endowed us with an abundance of fertile soil and other resources, and the ingenuity of man may increase production enormously.

As our forefathers laid waste the less desirable land of the east they moved west and took more land with little thought or knowledge of its proper use. They have depleted and permitted much of this to wash away and blow away in the same careless manner. So widespread and far-reaching is the destruction that a Dean of one of our great scientific schools was once moved to remark, "If mankind cannot devise and enforce ways of dealing with the earth, which will preserve this source of life, we must look forward to the time—remote it may be, yet clearly discernible—when our kind, having wasted its great inheritance, will fade from the earth because of the ruin it has accomplished." This, to be sure, is the vision of one looking into the dim future. But have not we something to be concerned about at present and in the very near future when we in the span of one generation, have seen in some of our newer states millions of acres destroyed and the owners thereof made poor with the land?

The land is all we have; will our children be proud of what we leave them? Yes, if we begin now to maintain what we have and to help nature restore that which we have wasted. No, if we continue this careless destruction which is little short of criminal, thus placing upon the shoulders of posterity the burden of expending uncounted millions in attempting to restore this source of wealth.

One may have a deed to a piece of land, but that should not give him the privilege of using that land to the detriment of others now living or yet to live. We, as a nation, need to become land conscious and to know that without productive soil we have nothing. The land is our heritage; let us not destroy the birthright of the next generation.

