

In spite of the clear evidence of the aging of farm labour force since 1951, it is not too easy to draw confident conclusions as to the implications. Of the total decline of some 215,000 in the male labour force from 1951 to 1958, 173,000 of the decline came out of the 14 to 44 age group and 42,000 out of the older age groups. Yet unpaid family labour, which we would expect would be predominantly in the younger section, declined by perhaps 90,000 male workers. The shift in the age distribution of the actual farm operators would, therefore, probably not be nearly so severe as the overall labour force figures indicate. The normal aging of the labour force to be expected in a relatively new region such as western Canada, moreover, was probably by 1951 not complete. In fact probably not more than a 4 per cent increase in the percentage of farm operators in the 45-and-over classification occurred between 1951 and 1958. This is hardly a sufficient violent shift on which to confidently base conclusions.

Nevertheless there is little doubt that the present low level of farm returns, plus the large amount of capital required for an economic farm plant, plus the fact that for the moment the trend is toward fewer farmers, makes farming something less than the most attractive possible career to a young man from the farm who has succeeded in obtaining a fair education, and who is intelligent and ambitious. Nor is agriculture the easiest industry in which to get established. Agriculture, as much as any industry, needs to attract its share of such people. Many thoughtful farmers are afraid it is not, today, doing so. The best answer is to see that insofar as possible agricultural prospects and opportunities are improved by sound, forward-looking farm policies in the fields of farm products marketing, credit, vocational training, land tenure and rural development.

The declining labour force has of course been paralleled by changes in numbers and size of farms. In 1941 there were 733,000 farms in Canada. In 1956 the number decreased to 575,000. Allowing for changes in census definitions the decline in the total number of farms was a little more than 100,000 between 1941 and 1956. During the same period the average size of Canadian farms increased by nearly 28 per cent, from 237 to 303 acres. The major part of this change in farm size took place in western Canada, but in all provinces the average size of farms increased. Consolidation of farm holdings resulted in a considerable decline in the number of farms with acreages of one hundred or less. More than 90 per cent of the farms in Canada are farms operated by single families.

The reduction in the farm labour force is set out in **Table 2** and the question obviously arises as to how much longer this trend is likely to continue, and what further rate of reduction will be experienced.

The hazards of predicting future changes in the farm labour force are well illustrated by the attempt in this direction made by the Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects. The Commission report on agriculture, published in January of 1957, predicted a decline of the agricultural labour force to 733,000 in 1965 and 715,000 in 1980. By 1958 the agricultural labour force had already dropped below the Commission's estimate for 1980. The labour force in 1960 in fact amounted to only 675,000.

The Commission's conclusion was that the trend toward fewer numbers in the farm labour force will have nearly come to a stop by 1965, as a result of labour demands for meeting increased livestock production needs. However, it seems today to be the consensus of opinion that, looking at the agriculture industry from the point of view of the apparent number of uneconomic farm units, substantial further declines in labour force will occur. Of course it must be borne in mind that a trend to increased use of employed labour might offset reduction in a number of farm operations to a degree. The great majority of farmers employ little or no hired help, and with improvement in their ability to pay, many farmers would very thankfully make