

## Intensive Farming in Canada

### A High Return Per Acre and a Low Return Per Man is an Achievement of Which no Country Need be Proud

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Much criticism has been directed against Canadian farmers in the past, especially those of the prairie provinces, for their alleged wasteful methods in cultivating the soil. Undoubtedly many economies may be effected in farming, as elsewhere, but it is not at all certain that farming is less efficiently conducted than manufacturing and other industrial activities in the Dominion. A great deal is said about "intensive" farming, but critics are not agreed, and are often not at all clear in their own minds, concerning just what is meant by that phrase. It goes without saying that it is impossible to carry on agriculture in Canada in the same way as it is conducted in Japan, China and India—the very lack of population makes it impossible. In Japan the rice plants are transplanted by hand; and in China field crops are cultivated in much the same way, while the people of India lavish an immense amount of labour upon transplanting by hand rice and wheat plants. This means a greater crop per acre, but a much smaller return per capita of population. Hard necessity forces the people of the Orient to toil in these laborious ways, to eke out even a meagre existence. It is a sheer impossibility, for lack of labour if for no other reason, to duplicate such conditions in this country, even if the people had the will to do so. What then, do these critics mean by intensive farming?

The ready answer of the majority is, that they desire a larger output per acre, and a more careful cultivation of the soil. In so far as these ends may be gained by the use of machinery and the adaptation of scientific methods to the work, much good would be accomplished. Now, in the prairie provinces in particular, the farmers make large use of machinery and labour-saving devices of all kinds; and it is doubtful whether, under present conditions, a larger machine equipment per farm can be advantageously used. The adoption of scientific farming, so highly desirable, is a slow process and can only come about through education, which takes time. It is, of course, true that the yield per acre, as compared with the returns in Germany and in England, is low; but to parallel European conditions a much greater application of labour would need to be made to the soil. If, in farming a quarter or a half section, the farmer employed half a dozen hired men instead of the one, or at most two, labourers as at present, the yield per acre would undoubtedly be increased—but increased at the expense of human life, happiness and welfare. It cannot be too strongly urged that the Dominion, to afford the greatest expression to the life of the individual, must keep the standard of living high. A high return per acre and a low return per man is an achievement for which no country need be unduly proud.

#### ANTAGONISM OF INTERESTS.

In this connection it must not be forgotten that there is an antagonism of interests between the land owner and the labourer, in every farming community. For the most part the land owner desires to see land prices high and wages low; while, on the other hand, the labourer wishes low land prices and high wages. There is no doubt that cheap land and relatively high wages have attracted population to Canadian shores. As soon as land becomes scarce and dear, in proportion to population, and wages low, the stream of population from Europe will be directed elsewhere. It is not necessary to go far afield to establish this truth. Iowa is the richest agricultural state in the American Union; and there land prices are very high. Thirty years ago it was possible for the labourer to hire out for a number of years and then to acquire stock machinery and land with the products of his labour. This can no longer be done. Lands are high in price and must be very carefully—even intensively—farmed to yield a product sufficient to pay interest on the capital invested, upkeep, replacement and repairs. Owing to the difficulty in securing lands, many young men have sunk into the proletariat class, or have been compelled to strike out elsewhere for cheap lands and homes of their own. The truth is that the richest agricultural state in the Union is losing population; and its stalwart, virile men are trekking to the prairies of Canada. It may be said that this is inevitable; but that is far from proving that it is desirable. High priced land and low wages are the conditions necessary to permit intensive farming to be carried on in America; and intensive farming in turn brings with it either depopulation or low wages and a mean standard of living. What, then, do Canadian manufacturers desire when they demand that our farm-

ers, and especially those of the prairie provinces, shall go in for intensive farming? It is safe to say that they do not understand all that is involved. The solution of the problem had far better be left in the hands of those who best realize its difficulties—the farmers themselves.

#### A SECOND INDIA.

Intensive farming may come in time among the farmers of the West under the menace of an increased population demanding food. In that case wheat and other grains must give way to "factory" farming—that is, to the kind of farming that obtains at present, for the most part, in Ontario and the other Eastern provinces and in the middle Western states. In these sections the products of the farm are finished on the farm, and find their way to market ready, or almost ready, for the consumer. It is hardly possible, however, to carry on wheat farming in this way, unless Canada sometime in the remote future becomes a sort of second India or China. It is possible to make wheat farming pay in the West because of the yield per man and not because of the yield per acre. The broad, level prairies lend themselves admirably to the use of machinery and large scale production—that is, to a large output per man.

It must not be forgotten, however, that size alone is not the determining factor in deciding whether agriculture is intensive or extensive in nature. It is the size of the business unit as a whole that determines whether farming is being carried on, on a grand scale. The market gardens in the vicinity of Paris demand the employment of a large amount of labour, and a heavy investment of capital. Although the size of the farm is small the industry in many cases is large. Acreage alone, therefore, does not decide the question. Moreover on the small farms of France, Germany and Sweden, although the return per acre is much greater than in the United States or Canada, farming is far more wasteful and destructive of human happiness and of human life. The small farm, intensively cultivated, does not give scope for the employment of up-to-date machinery, and animal power. The peasant farms his acres almost with devotion, and secures high returns, but at a tremendous cost to himself and those dependent upon him. These tiny farms, in many cases, will not even permit of the use of one horse, not to mention a team of horses or of oxen; and a milch cow is all that can be afforded to supply animal power. The grain is threshed by hand in the long winter months—again at great labour cost and labour waste. It often does not even pay these peasant proprietors to co-operate with one another in purchasing the machinery thought necessary for successful farming in this country; for although such machinery could be used to great advantage, especially a threshing outfit, it would leave the men unemployed in the winter, and their labour could not be made use of at all. Be it remembered, moreover, that these peasants are not dull nor stupid; they are merely forced by circumstances to farm as they do. The small farm, intensively cultivated, has proved their ruin. We do not by any means assert that the small farmers of Germany, France and Belgium are poor and inefficient. The contrary is, indeed, the case; but the very small farm—the farm that is most intensively cultivated—has no justification, either in terms of efficiency or output, for continued existence.

#### MOST DESIRABLE UNIT.

The farmers of the prairie provinces have come to the deliberate conclusion that a half section is the most desirable unit, as far as land is concerned, for agricultural success. It enables them to effect various economies—economies of skill in management, economies in equipment, and economies in buying and selling power. Farming on this scale permits the owner to keep his mind clear for thinking out the main problems of his business, while the carrying out of details may be left to his hired help. It is in the economy of equipment, however, that the greatest gains are secured. On a farm of this size labor-saving machinery can be used to full capacity during the periods of cultivating, seeding and harvesting. It is manifestly unprofitable to carry a full stock of essential farm machinery and implements on a farm that does not give the largest scope for their use. This is, indeed, a serious problem for the agriculturists of the West; for in any event much of this farm machinery must lie idle during a large

part of the year. It is perfectly plain that millions of dollars are tied up in agricultural machinery and farm implements, and that this vast sum of wealth lies unproductive for many months in the year. This is something for our captains of industry and railroad managers to think over, when they proffer the excuse that sufficient equipment, cars and so forth, cannot be supplied to move the whole Western crop during the autumn and winter months, because millions of dollars would be tied up and yield no return during the rest of the year. This is precisely what the farmer must do with his money; and if he should refuse to tie up his capital in this manner the rest of the country would starve.

#### A LARGE SCALE.

The farmer who cultivates his land on a sufficiently large scale may effect considerable economies in buying and in selling also. In this event the farmer can afford to take more time in studying the market, as he will often be in a position to buy in carload lots. Similarly in selling, he may ship in large quantities, even by the train load, and thus effect many economies that will increase his profits. If he is growing specialties, and not the staple crops, he may advertise widely to his advantage in finding a market for his products. The grower of staples, of course, gains nothing through advertising in this way, since fixed markets are already established and daily price quotations are available in the newspapers.

It is not contended in the least that the Western farmer should attempt to cultivate too large a farm, because that leads to inefficiency and waste. There are manifest disadvantages in attempting to farm on a "bonanza" scale—disadvantages that accrue from seasonal changes, the size of the farm itself, and the temperament of farm workers. It is obvious that the owner of a very large farm loses time in going from place to place, in transporting machinery and tools from one section to another, and in supervising and directing labour. The seasonal difficulties are patent—storms, floods and insect pests, as well as plant blights, make it impossible to carry on agriculture on the grand scale. Where work may be carried on in a methodical way, as on the semi-arid lands of the American West, where rains and storms do not interrupt agricultural operations, the very large farm is a feasible project. Let it not be supposed, however, that this involves, in the true sense, large-scale farming. Indeed, one man with his wife and children, and with sufficient machine equipment, may cultivate with advantage a whole section of this semi-arid land; but the returns per individual will not be any greater—if as great—as on a quarter section in the Canadian West. It must be constantly kept in mind that large-scale farming depends upon the size of the whole business unit. In the Canadian West climatic changes make it impossible to successfully farm on the grand scale. To do so, it is requisite that the labour force be organized and drilled, in order that no time may be lost. Now, the average farm labourer, by temperament, is an individualist and does not readily lend himself to the methods of the drill master. Farm workers in that respect are just the opposite of factory operatives, who achieve most under scientific management. Scientific management, as it is usually understood, would kill farming, since it depends for success upon methodical work, control from above, and the reducing of "motions" in each operation to a minimum. The farm labourer, on the contrary, achieves the best results when he is thrown largely upon his own resources and is given the opportunity to exercise his own initiative and judgment.

The very large farm is adapted only to a slave economy. Slave labour has always been employed in large-scale farm production, because it is necessarily of a low grade and cannot be self-directed. On the cotton plantations of the Southern States, slaves worked at their best under the driving force and supervision of an overseer. It was essential that, if the overseer was to use his labour to the best advantage and effect the most economies, he had to have many slaves. The same results would follow if Canada and the United States had a large supply of low grade labor, incapable of directing itself, available for farm work. If those who demand a larger output per acre through intensive farming have their way, we shall have, in time, a proletariat class, unintelligent and incapable of employing or directing itself. Intensive farming will, therefore, yield results little expected. The farmers of the prairie provinces can be trusted to use their own judgment as to the size of the farm that they can best cultivate. High wages and a high standard of living, and opportunities for success to the industrious, energetic labourer, are what this country demands if it is indeed to remain a democracy and justify its name—the New World.