

Co-operative Supply

A department of co-operation which has for many years been successfully and profitably employed by the farmers of European countries, and one which lends itself readily to employment in Canada, is that of co-operative supply:—the co-operative purchase—and in some cases also the co-operative production—of what may be called the raw materials of the farmer, his seed, feeding stuffs, machinery, twine, fence wire, lumber, fertilizers and other materials necessary to his business. This branch of co-operation is closely allied to the co-operative store, the only difference being that the co-operative store is organized from the standpoint and for the benefit of the consumer, while the co-operative supply association exists to provide materials needed in the business of production. The supply association often combines both functions, however. In "Co-operation at Home and Abroad," C. R. Fay, an English authority, gives an interesting account of the history and achievements of co-operative supply associations in Europe.

The Example of Denmark

Denmark leads in this as in several other branches of co-operation. If a Dane wants to buy or sell a commodity, he seems instinctively to form a society for the purpose and the experience there shows that the more co-operation a country has the better co-operation succeeds. In Denmark there is one big supply organization, The United Co-operative Supply association, comprising 800 societies, of which one is to be found in nearly every Danish village. These are country stores, which sell provisions and general household requirements as well as raw materials. They own a big wholesale house in Copenhagen, very like the Manchester Wholesale. There is also the Farmers' Co-operative Purchase Federation, comprising 4,000 farmers, who on ready money terms buy feeding stuffs, seeds and manures, and sell butter, eggs and garden produce through a single depot in Copenhagen. There are also six feeding stuff associations with a membership of 600 co-operative dairies; also four manure associations, whose members are either agricultural societies, co-operative dairies or individual farmers; nine federations of seed purchase societies; also one creamery requirement association, comprising 362 co-operative dairies, with a depot at Copenhagen.

A German Society

The supply society which Mr. Fay inspected at the village of Guntersblum, Germany, will afford a picture of the simplest form of co-operative society engaged in the supply of raw materials. As an establishment it is simply a shed. Its sole official, the secretary, works also at the local credit bank and does his business either there or at home. Each quarter he obtains from the farmers an estimate of their requirements and transmits the orders to the office of the provincial wholesale. The deliveries are hauled by the farmers themselves from the station to their respective farms. The society pays cash and takes the risk of non-payment by the members. As a measure of prudence the secretary orders a little more than the amounts demanded, which he keeps in the shed. Then in case any farmer should have underestimated his wants, he need not have recourse for this slight but instantly required addition to outside traffickers, who are usually Jews; for these men often refuse to supply incidental wants unless the buyer will promise to continue his custom. The fixing of price and the distribution of the surplus profit are conducted on the same principle as in the retail store in the town—sale at the market price and division of the surplus according to the amount of trade done through the organization.

Co-operative Factories

The strongest supply organizations, those of Denmark and Switzerland, supply household requirements as well as the materials of agriculture. Not only

has the Danish organization a huge wholesale warehouse at Copenhagen, but it has also like the British wholesales, its own productive departments: a cocoa and chocolate factory at Kolding, a tobacco factory also at Kolding—erected on account of a boycott by the tobacco merchants—and rope and soap factories at Aarhus. The organizations of the other countries confine themselves strictly to agricultural requirements, seeds, manures, foodstuffs, and sometimes machinery. Many of the organizations thus limit themselves not because they feel too weak to assume the work, but because they consider it outside their province. The biggest supply society in Ireland, at Enniscorthy, Wexford, deals in machinery and general provisions as well as seeds and manures but its extension into these lines met with opposition from the Irish Agricultural Organization Association which organized Irish co-operation, because the association thought it imprudent to arouse the hostility of retail traders. The Enniscorthy society was compelled by a boycott of Irish machinery merchants to obtain its machinery from the east of England, yet the value of this branch of the society's work was proved when its premises were burned down some time ago and the local prices of agricultural machinery went up 50 per cent.

Benefits to Farmers

"Yet whatever their limitations in some countries," says Mr. Fay, "the agricultural supply societies have done much for the farmer. The early difficulties were everywhere the same. The peasant proprietor was constitutionally averse to change. First he thought the new-fangled manures useless because he had often been defrauded by the merchants; then when the society supplied them he thought them useless because he did not know how to use them properly. The co-operative society not only brought him cheaper supplies, it also taught him how to use them. Opponents of co-operation have contended that this testing work could have been equally well done by the local professors of agriculture, but his own society commands from the farmer what the local professor does not, namely confidence. In Germany, for example, the testing stations were practically neglected until they were managed in connection with a co-operative organization.

"In many a co-operative society the difficulty is to find someone to take up a new idea. When one farmer, perhaps the big man of the village or a man of peculiar enterprise, leads the way, the rest follow.

Frauds Stamped Out

"Though some commercial houses have always been strictly honorable, it is impossible to deny that the small farmers have been hopelessly plundered by travelling agents. Here is a sample of a fraud which the supply societies in Rhine-Hessen have stamped out. The average quality of feeding stuff should be about 16 to 18 per cent. of protein. The Jew traffickers used to put the number 20 in big figures on the feeding cakes and the real percentage—a very low figure—in small numbers in the corner. The '20' was their own business mark. By this means the farmer was induced to believe that he was buying excellent feeding stuff. In such things as seeds and manures the farmer is especially open to deception because their value cannot be tested at once.

"In particular cases the societies, in order to replace worthless stuff by stuff of good quality, have had to raise the price, to the loudly expressed disgust of the farmer, but generally the societies have effected huge reductions. Thus in France the diminution of price amounted to 46 or 50 per cent. of their former cost in the typical cases quoted. Again in Belgium a report states 'We still bear in mind this striking fact that when at the outset we were on the point of establishing agricultural associations in certain villages, the merchants in a single day lowered by 7 francs per 100 kilos the price of linseed, which was previously priced at 15-16 francs.'

In Canada, Too

The fact that the same economies can be secured by the co-operation of Canadian farmers in the purchase of their

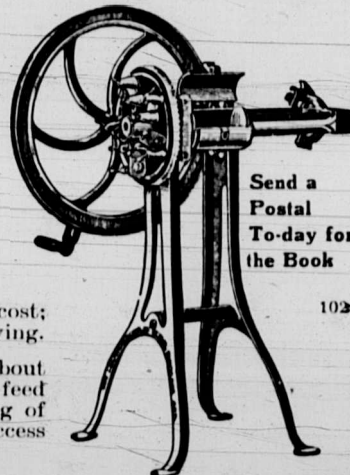
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supplies, is proved by the experience of a number of groups of members of the Grain Growers' associations and of the U.F.A., which were reported in the Guide of April 19, 1911. With the exception of the Farmers' Co-operative Co., Ltd., of Davidson, Sask., all the groups reporting on that occasion have been working without formal organization, simply clubbing together to purchase a car load of twine or flour, each paying the wholesale price with a proportion of the freight and each

transaction being complete in itself. When a co-operative bill is passed by Parliament, however, as it is hoped will be done in the near future, it will be possible to organize permanent co-operative societies for the supply not only of the farmers' raw material but also of household requirements of every kind, and the benefits of co-operation will then doubtless be enjoyed by a much larger number of farmers and workers throughout Canada.

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