

Targets for Tomorrow

AN AUSTRALIAN ONCE SAID to me that Swedish people had the "spirit of co-operation" inborn. I am not quite sure. It may be a question of education too. Be that as it may, Swedish farmers are good co-operators. Sometimes it even looks as though they are too eager, and might possibly go too far. There are farmers in this country not willing to enter a consumers' co-operative shop or a private grocery shop. "We want farmers' own shops," they say!

In some instances they have already started co-operatives of that kind. Personally I do not think that necessary, or even that it is desirable. Some of the farmers most strongly pronounced in this direction would put it like this:

"I want to buy a plough from a selling and buying co-operative, manufactured in the Farmers' Co-operative Machine Works; the iron from the Farmers' Co-operative Iron Works and the ore and coal from the Farmers' Co-operative Mines, and I want to sell my products through farmers' co-operatives, which ought to retail them through farmers' co-operative shops in every line."

Should the commodities be sold only to farmers and people engaged in farmers' co-operatives? Of course, this is clearly an exaggerated question, as no one ever said anything like that; but a tendency in this direction can be traced among certain groups of farmers.

I think it is most important that this attitude should not exist. The problem has been touched on already in connection with the agreements between farmers' and consumers' co-operatives and private trade. It would be no use if everyone in this country who is running a business of some kind murmured to himself, "Perhaps I may not be in a position to carry on much longer. Farmers' co-operatives are expanding, and no doubt they will come along some day and take my business too."

This reasoning is only for practical purposes. We farmers cannot afford to have enemies everywhere. Negotiations and co-operation (also with groups other than farmers) will bring more success than will bickering.

Let us stick to the essentials. It was quite necessary to reorganize the marketing of our farm products to get control of the bulk, in order to influence prices and margin. It was important too to obtain control of the necessities.

Moving Ahead

Let us consolidate our own enterprises in every respect and keep ahead of technical development, and get as many farmer members as possible. This is very

much a question of education, particularly of the coming generations, who did not take part in the pioneer work and do not know very much of the state of affairs before co-operation started.

There are still some lines within farmers' co-operation that ought to be put on a new basis, for example the marketing of fruit and vegetables. There also may be a need for insurance co-operatives.

Finally, monopolies may appear, trying to get more than their fair share. If so, co-operatives must be started in order to cut down the margin to a reasonable level.

The production of milk powder exemplifies the struggle against monopoly. We used to process the milk exclusively into butter and cheese. During recent years, however, the demand for milk powder has been increasing steadily. It is used by bakeries, chocolate factories, etc., and it would not be surprising if in the future it were to become nearly as important as butter or cheese. Factories for processing milk to powder have already been started, both by private enterprises and farmers' co-operatives.

There are signs of a fight between the different interests in this line. It seems natural that farmers should control the major part of the manufacturing. Milk is the essential product of Swedish farming, and milk powder is only an intermediate stage, not the ultimate.

However, we must draw a dividing line between our activities and those of other groups. Co-operation really means working together, not only with our

fellow farmers, but also with people representing lines other than agriculture, all of them being our customers.

What has co-operation done for Swedish farming, and where would we be today had there been no co-operation?

The first question can be answered in a number of ways, although I doubt if even a statistician could give the full answer in terms of dollars and cents. The answer to the second question, of course, lies in the results co-operation has achieved.

Through co-operation the farmers have managed to reduce the middleman's margin to a reasonable level. Most of the farm products are marketed through our co-operatives, which means that the profits belong to the farmer shareholders. The existence of the co-operatives also has prevented the private enterprises from taking more than their proper share of the business.

Since we control most of the production, we have been able to assemble the processing and distribution functions into a smoothly operating routine. This has saved the farmers a lot of money.

Co-operation has permitted us to centralize the processing and distribution units and to equip them with the latest labor-saving equipment. Our refrigerator plants and storehouses are capable of holding surpluses when the market is overstocked and releasing them when goods are scarce. All of these points have resulted in savings and additional profits for the farmers.

A critic might say: "Why do you Swedish farmers worry so much about all your co-operatives? Look at other countries — their governments are fixing prices, and so is the Swedish government. Everything can be done on a governmental basis."

I think his reasoning would be sadly wrong. The prices fixed by the government will always be concerned with retail or wholesale sales. The co-operatives are concerned with the price that the producers get.

Co-operative Influence

There is another point worth considering in this respect. The existing government may be pro-agriculture, in favor of fair prices for farm products. Then one day along comes a new government with quite another attitude towards the farming industry. This has happened many times both in this country and elsewhere. In such circumstances there is no one but ourselves to care for our interests, and even we cannot do it without grouping our forces. Through the co-operatives we control the bulk of agricultural production, and through the Federation and the Farmers' Union we are able to negotiate and exercise influence. These bodies represent a considerable power in the farmers' hands, and also a power within the community.

However, we do not abuse this power, but use it only as a defense and in order to achieve a living standard equal to that of other groups.

Co-operation alone cannot make farming prosper-

ous, but there is no doubt at all that co-operation is one of the most important means by which we can reach the target — fair returns and a fair standard of living for the farming population.