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## The Issues in Farm Goals and Values

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OUR WORLD is changing. America is changing. Changes are most obvious in our material world — in science, technology, engineering and in all the gadgets that make up the paraphernalia of modern living. But our social world also is changing. Ways of organizing family, religious, political and economic activities are no longer the same as before. The relationships between men and women, husbands and wives, and parents and children increasingly reflect equalitarian rights and responsibilities for all parties. Religious beliefs and practices are becoming closely related to ideas arising from the natural and behavioral sciences. Minority groups are demanding and achieving political and social rights long denied them. And the economic basis of our society, including agriculture, is undergoing revolutionary changes.

### GOALS AND SOCIAL CHANGES

Changes, however, do not always occur smoothly. Some changes are accepted more readily than others, and some are encouraged while others are resisted. Generally, we accept and encourage changes in our material world — in the techniques for doing work more efficiently or for altering our surroundings — much more quickly than we accept changes in the ways of conducting our affairs in family, economic, religious or political activities. Modifications in our social relationships frequently bring anxiety and hostility, as the illusion of secure, stable ways

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of conducting these affairs crumbles before our eyes. Frequently we are suspicious or apprehensive about changes in social relationships.

Unlike most changes in our physical surroundings — even the man-made parts — changes in social relationships, including our work roles, require adjustments in our ideas about the “right” or “natural” way of doing things. Think of the last time you felt a flash of anger or a sense of righteous indignation because of a negative or critical remark directed against a group to which you belong. Why these reactions?

Simple. Almost all activities vitally related to our existence in this incredibly complex society result from our participation in groups. Order in these activities is maintained by striving for socially approved ends (goals) by means of socially approved means. For instance, we want many things: a good level of living for our families and ourselves, success, comfort, to name just a few things. And we attempt to attain these ends by means of work, perhaps supplemented by careful investment of part of the results of our labor.

The agreement upon goals sought and the means used to attain them shows remarkable persistence and wide acceptance in our society. The persistence and generality of goals are due in large part to their intimate association with values we have learned to accept. Values give rise to the ranking of the importance of goals. They define the approved and disapproved means of attaining goals. Values are ideas, and can be inferred from the choices we make among alternative courses of action. When people choose to remain in farming, despite lower incomes in many cases and less ready access to medical, religious, social and recreational facilities, it must be because they value certain satisfactions derived from farming over those that could be derived from a higher paying nonfarm job.

However, values seldom exist in isolation from one another: customarily sets of values hang together and form a set of interrelated values. For instance, nationalism versus internationalism, agricultural fundamentalism versus a broader social view and racism versus social, economic and political equalitarianism include numerous interrelated values with their associated goals and means for attaining these goals. However, we are seldom consciously aware of holding abstractly related sets of values about groups or activities. Instead, our personal feelings and degree of emotional involvement with these values and groups become focused upon certain symbols. As concrete objects that represent a cluster of values, symbols often become infused with great emotional attachment.

Our flag represents our country, its history, traditions, accomplishments and aspirations. The cross invokes still other feelings and responses. And in the particular segment of the economic system in which we are especially interested, references to the farm family may communicate little information, but will pack a large emotional wallop with a certain audience.

Thus, symbols, goals and values influence our objectivity; beliefs or opinions about matters become "facts" because we desperately want to believe things are as we want them to be, and not necessarily as they actually exist.

It is obvious, therefore, that inevitable difficulties, misunderstandings or failures in communication face us as we attempt to discuss goal and value issues in American agriculture and in rural community organization. Because we live in a vigorous multi-grouped society, value and goal issues always will abound. And because we have faith in reason and democratic processes, we expect to discover ways of resolving social and economic conflicts.

In this book we hope to make a modest contribution to the goal of identifying and possibly clarifying some of the value and goal issues associated with the dynamic agricultural sector of the economy and with changing rural community organization. We cannot hope to consider all such issues; our approach must be selective.

As the members of the program committee of this conference wrestled with the problems of organizing this conference, we agreed upon two conditions: (1) Our concern should be with issues which are directly and immediately related to agriculture and rural communities. (2) Furthermore, we should focus on broad issues of an ethical nature that underlie many of the current manifestations of policy differences regarding the economic and broader social bases of agriculture.

However, numerous issues could be discussed within this frame of reference. We offer one system for organizing sets of value and goal issues in American agriculture. Others will want to add or delete from our list of six sets of issues. Some may not accept our list at all. Any of these reactions would be understandable because conflicts exist over both the ranking of goals and values and over the means that should be used to attain goals and values in American agriculture and rural communities. But we must begin somewhere. In this introductory statement we begin with six clusters of goals and values. These are issues associated with freedom, justice, efficiency, security, the general welfare and with order and stability. For now, we attempt to specify some of the elements in each of the six clusters of goals and values and to suggest some of the conflicts among them.

The chapters which follow present alternative perspectives regarding the value and goal issues. They offer alternative solutions to current problems associated with American agriculture and American rural community organization.

Although we speak of value and goal issues in agriculture, these issues in American agriculture and rural community organization are reflections of similar issues of the total American society. However, several factors still differentiate rural farm society from the rest of society. These include the intimate association of farming as a way of life and farming as a business or production enterprise, the low population densities in most farming and rural nonfarm communities, and the high degree of specialization and the dependence of most farm-dominated communities on the economic health of a single industry. And some of the value and goal conflicts discussed in the following pages stem directly from the spatial, social and economic conditions that characterize rural areas.

## THE ISSUES

For our purposes, we suggest the following six sets of value and goal issues:

### I Issues associated with freedom

1. Issues associated with freedom related to agriculture production and distribution:
  - a. What should be the limits of freedom for farm operators or managers regarding production and distribution of agricultural products?
  - b. What systems of control, pricing mechanisms, farm organizations, trade associations or government action, if any, should be developed to maintain agricultural production at appropriate levels, to provide for adequate distribution of these products and yet to protect farm producers, distributors and the consumers in the many exchanges that are involved?
  - c. What should be the role of the federal government in developing or administering various farm production control systems in regard to various farm commodities?
2. Issues associated with freedom related to rural community organization:
  - a. What levels of government should assume responsibility for guaranteeing equal educational opportunities for all American youth, rural and urban alike?

- b. What degree of freedom should be preserved for local governments as contrasted with state governments and for the latter as contrasted to the federal government in relation to taxation and other forms of governmental power?
- II Issues associated with justice related to agricultural production and distribution:
  - a. What are the "rights" of farm operators to gain from their contribution to national economic growth in the same manner enjoyed by other industries?
  - b. In what ways should farm production be protected from economic losses associated with benefits that the farm producers have passed on to consumers because of innovations in uses of capital and development of greater efficiency in production?
  - c. What obligations do farm employers and government have in guaranteeing the rights to employment, decent wages and living conditions for the farm employees?
- III Issues associated with efficiency in agricultural production and distribution:
  - a. How much emphasis should be given to economic efficiency in agricultural production at the expense of the community population base, family ownership and operation of farms or ranches and other values associated with rural life?
  - b. What impetus or retardation should be given to trends toward larger and fewer farms and ranches and toward economic structures other than family-sized units?
- IV Issues associated with security
  - 1. Issues associated with security related to agricultural production and distribution:
    - a. What are the responsibilities of the local, state and federal governments in assuring financial security for the farm labor force over their productive years as well as during their retirement?
    - b. What are the obligations of society in protecting workers whose welfare is endangered by planned or unplanned developments in society?
    - c. What costs should be borne by individual workers and what costs should be borne by local, state or federal governments for assisting the transfer of redundant agriculture workers into productive nonfarm occupations?
  - 2. Issues associated with security related to farming as a way of life:

- a. What are the responsibilities of the state and federal governments in providing credits or other forms of financial or nonfinancial assistance to help persons maintain or improve their levels of living?

V Issues associated with the general welfare:

1. Issues associated with the general welfare related to agricultural production and distribution:
  - a. What should be the role of governmental bodies in attempting to maintain prosperity and preventing recessions in the agricultural or nonagricultural economy?
  - b. What protection should the federal government provide for American farm products threatened by competition from foreign-produced agricultural products?
2. Issues associated with rural community welfare:
  - a. What is the role of society (government) in providing abundant, relatively low-cost and widely-distributed farm products?
  - b. What obligations fall upon society for distributing agricultural surpluses to needy persons in the United States as well as to deprived persons in other countries?
  - c. What financial responsibilities does society have for assuring the quality of educational, health, protection or welfare programs for persons living in any part of the country?
  - d. What responsibilities, if any, should various governmental bodies assume for assisting population transfers among sections of the country and in helping adapt community services to these changes in population, both in the sending as well as in the receiving communities?
  - e. What should be the geographical basis for the organization of rural community services? Are localistic ties or loyal ties sufficient bases for organizing educational, religious, political, welfare, protective and economic functions?
  - f. At what administrative level should resources be allocated and controlled to insure adequate functioning of the community services specified in point "e"?

VI Issues associated with order and stability related to community organization:

- a. What should be the reciprocal obligations and limitations among groups of producers in relation to order and stability in producing, pricing and distributing agricultural products?

- b. What governmental bodies should be responsible for fair reapportionment and for adjusting governmental policies to the changing population makeup of the states and the nation?

Conflicts among these clusters of goals and values may be considered in terms of the order of their importance. Only a few suggested questions can be raised in this presentation. For instance:

1. To what extent should freedom in economic decision-making be emphasized if enhancing this condition imposes limitations on conditions associated with justice, security, welfare or order and stability?
2. How much sacrifice in efficiency should be made to enhance justice or security?
3. If justice is desired, what limitations must be imposed on freedom and efficiency?
4. If order and stability are desired, what limitations must be placed on freedom or efficiency?
5. What should be the relative order of importance for these clusters of goals and values?

The foregoing and related goal and value issues demand thorough consideration. We now turn to this task.