

RECENT TRENDS OF RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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THE increases in the farm population during 1945 and 1946 are the first such increases since 1932. They follow a series of years during which the net losses in the farm population had been extraordinarily large. By 1945, the farm population had declined to 25.2 million persons, from 30.3 million in 1940 and the depression high of 32.0 million in 1933. But although there was an increase of 1,260,000 between April, 1944, and April, 1946, the farm population in April, 1946, was 11 per cent less than in 1940, and smaller than it had been at any time during the fifty years prior to 1944.

Losses in the farm population in the past have been due to migration from farms. During the twenty-five years between January 1, 1920, and January 1, 1945, there was an average net migration from farms of 600,000 civilians per year. Even during the 1930's, the average annual net migration from farms was approximately 375,000. However, because the excess of births over deaths was relatively large, the net losses were much less than the losses through migration, with the result that the farm population in 1940 was only approximately 4 per cent less than in 1920.

The increase in farm population during 1945 is primarily an adjustment from the large out-migration of the war years. The increase resulted from the return of some 452,000 men, net, from the armed forces and an excess of births over deaths amounting to 348,000. More than a million civilians moved to farms from nonfarm areas, but that number was balanced by an equivalent number of moves from farms to nonfarm areas. A balancing of these two population movements in any one year is in itself unusual. No doubt it is a result of the rapid industrial reconversion and demobilization of the military forces in the latter part of 1945. The same factors are operating dur-

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ing 1946; and the increase in farm population during the first half of this year is greater than the normal seasonal increase.

Though the extent and duration of this readjustment are not readily discernible, it appears likely that the size of the farm population of this country by 1950 will be considerably below the level of 1940 or the preceding years. Characterizing the recent increases in farm population as an adjustment to the unusually large migrations from farms during the war years rests on the assumption that the long-time trend of migration from farms and reductions in the farm population has not yet run its course. This in turn rests on the further assumption that there will continue to be ample employment opportunities for those individuals who leave the farms in the future. Unless such opportunities continue to exist, there may be a repetition of the development of the 1930's when there was a large-scale reduction in migration away from farms, some migration to farms, particularly in the poor land areas, and extensive under-employment and unemployment on farms.

If employment opportunities in agriculture continue to shrink, but farm residents continue to maintain a relatively high level of fertility, opportunities in nonagricultural employment are a necessary outlet for the farm population. Conversely, if nonagricultural employment opportunities continue to expand, migration from farms will continue to be necessary to provide urban workers.

In the past, the farm population has had a higher level of fertility than the nonfarm population; the Census of 1940 showed that the fertility ratio in the farm population was 63 per cent greater than that of the nonfarm population. Since that time the fertility of nonfarm women has increased much more rapidly than that of the farm women. Nonetheless, estimates of fertility ratios in October, 1945, indicated that the ratio for the farm population was still nearly 50 per cent greater than that for the nonfarm population.² For both groups the

² These comparisons are based on ratios of children under 5 per 1,000 women 14-44, because no other age break-down for women in October, 1945 was available.

fertility ratios in October, 1945, were slightly greater than those in 1930. The fertility ratio of the farm population had declined by 10.5 per cent between 1930 and 1940, while that of the non-farm population declined by 16.8 per cent during the same period. The increases between 1940 and 1945 were not identical; that for the farm population was 14.1 per cent, while that for the nonfarm population was twice as great, 28.7 per cent. The fertility of the farm population has changed less rapidly, either increasing or decreasing, than that of the nonfarm population. The reported changes are consistent with the view that before 1940 the fertility of the farm population was less subject to control than that of the nonfarm population, and that the present temporary situation will be followed by more rapid declines in nonfarm than in farm fertility. It appears unlikely that the differential between these two will soon disappear, or that in the near future the farm population will not continue to have more children than are needed for replacement of that population.

Though fertility in the farm population is considerably higher than in the nonfarm population, the numerical and proportionate contribution of the farm population to the total population is declining. The farm population now includes only about one-fifth of the total. Even though that fifth contributes more than its proportion of births, there is little basis for concluding that the maintenance of a high level of fertility in the farm population could or would be sufficient to maintain the national population if the nonfarm population should fail to maintain itself. If the farm population should become still smaller than it is at the present time, its contribution will probably also become smaller than it is at present.

Because entry into the labor market and changes of residence normally occur in young adulthood, it is useful to examine the effects of the higher levels of fertility on these age groups. In the farm population there is normally a larger number of young people reaching maturity than there are older persons dying or retiring and thus creating vacancies in the labor force. As of

1940, the situation was such that, assuming no migration during the succeeding decade, the number of young male adults available to replace older men who would die or reach retirement age during that time was 67 per cent greater than was needed for replacement. In other words, two out of every five young men who would reach their 25th birthday during the decade would not be needed to keep the number of 25-69-year-old men at the 1940 level. If some decrease in the number of older men occurs due to migration, the excess of younger men is correspondingly increased.

That condition did not exist uniformly throughout the country. The replacement ratios varied widely from State to State, from a low of 100 in New Hampshire to a high of 217 in Utah and North Carolina. It existed to a greater or lesser degree in all parts of the country and was least marked in the more productive agricultural areas, most pronounced in the less productive areas.

In 1940, the replacement rate for adult males in the farm population was 9 per cent greater than in the rural nonfarm population and 64 per cent greater than in the urban population.

Actually, the wartime migrations were so numerous that by 1945 the replacement rate for males of working age in the rural farm population had dropped to 100; *i.e.*, without further migration to and from farms, the number of men reaching age 25 between 1945 and 1955 would be approximately equal to the number of older men who would die or reach retirement age. This unusual condition results from the very large migration of young men to the Armed Forces and to nonfarm jobs, for in effect there has been an advance drawing on the number of young men who might have been available for migration during the ten years following 1945. This temporary condition is being altered rapidly. As men return from the Armed Forces and as the smaller cohort of young adult men is replaced by the teenage group, which was too young to be involved in the wartime migrations, there will again be more young farm men reaching

adulthood than are needed to replace older men who die or retire.

The extensive wartime migrations followed a decade during which migration from farms had gone on at a reduced rate, with the result that by 1940 there was on farms a large reservoir of manpower above the numbers needed to maintain or to increase agricultural production. One indication of this is the fact that although the total farm population in 1940 was about the same as it had been in 1930, a significant change in age composition had occurred during that decade. The number of persons under 14 years of age decreased by approximately a million persons, while the number who were 14 years old or over increased by the same amount. The increase in the number of persons of working age was not based on an expanding need for agricultural workers, but primarily on the lack of alternative opportunities. The increase during the 1930's in fact had occurred in spite of the growing use of labor-saving technology and the tendency toward concentration of agricultural production in the best adapted areas which, along with other factors, had resulted in a reduction of manpower requirements.

The wartime demand for industrial workers and for members of the Armed Forces re-established and expanded the opportunities for migration from farms. Aside from some experimental attempts at shifting workers from less productive to more productive agricultural areas, some intensive job-training programs in remote rural areas, and some intensive efforts to publicize job opportunities in the more isolated rural areas, the movement to industrial and other jobs was largely without reference to manpower needs in agriculture. The more accessible areas, and those with better communication and educational facilities, were drawn on early for heavy contributions, but by the end of 1943 there was not a rural area in the country that had not felt the effects of large-scale population shifts. The policy of Selective Service was to defer men who were essential to agricultural production. Although this policy proved difficult to apply in a uniform manner under the system of local

determination which was used, the number of 14-24-year-old males in the rural farm population decreased by about one-fifth less than that in the rural nonfarm population.

Altogether there were about 11 million migrations from farms to cities, towns, and villages between 1940 and 1945, with 2 million of these by persons who went directly into the Armed Forces. There were 4 million moves to farms, and the natural increase of the farm population amounted to 2 million. The net result of the changes of the war period was a decline in the farm population from 30.3 million at the beginning of 1940 to 25.2 million at the beginning of 1945.

The greatest reduction in the farm population occurred in the West South Central States, which had also contributed heavily to the farm-nonfarm migration of the 1930's. In these States the farm population decreased by one-fourth between 1940 and 1945. Losses in that area had been occurring continually since 1933. In 1945, the farm population was only 70 per cent as large as in the peak year 1933. Losses were large throughout the South; for the entire region the decline in farm population between 1940 and 1945 amounted to 20 per cent.

A migration as large as that between 1940 and 1945 does not affect all segments of the population equally any more than it affects all areas equally. The wartime migration of men exceeded that of women, though the reverse was generally true before the war. The fact that nearly all of the persons entering the Armed Forces were men was obviously a factor in bringing about this unusual sex ratio among the migrants, but even if all of the persons who went from farms directly to the Armed Forces are left out of account, the remaining migrants still include more men than women.

The persons who were between 20 and 24 years old in April, 1944, had contributed proportionately more migrants than any other age group. This contribution can be readily expressed as a percentage of the persons in that age group who would have been present on farms had there been no migration; *i.e.*, the survivors of persons who were 16-20 years old in April, 1940.

Fifty-four per cent of them were lost to the farm population through migration—66 per cent among men and 40 per cent among women. Among the next younger group, those 14–19 years old, in 1944, approximately 25 per cent had been lost to the farm population by migration, with the ratio slightly higher for males and slightly lower for females. And among persons 25–44 years old, 29 per cent of the men and 12 per cent of the women were lost through migration, including entrants into the Armed Forces. The shift was so marked that, whereas, in 1940, 64 per cent of all males 14 years old and over were under 45, in 1944, this percentage had decreased to 56 per cent. As part of the current readjustment, some of the younger men who left during the war years have returned since April, 1944, and others will no doubt return during the next years, so that the next Census may be expected to show an age distribution somewhat nearer normal than that of 1944.

The large volume of migration from farms during 1940–1945 was accompanied, as in normal periods, by migration in the opposite direction. The Bureau of Agricultural Economics estimates that during those five years there were approximately 11 million migrations from farms and 4 million to farms; together amounting to a gross total more than twice as great as the net loss of 7 million. A similar result was secured by the Bureau of the Census from a recent survey of the civilian population which reported movement to and from farms between December, 1941, and March, 1945. Nearly 5.5 million persons reported a nonfarm residence in March, 1945, but a farm residence at the time of Pearl Harbor. Conversely, 2.5 million reported residence on a farm in 1945, but not on a farm at the time of Pearl Harbor. The gross total of 8.0 million is nearly two and one-half times as great as the net loss by that measure. These two methods deal with entirely different concepts of migration and the absolute figures which result are not comparable. Nonetheless the two reports agree in showing that even in a period in which there was a large net movement away from farms, there was also a considerable movement to and from farms.

How much of the movement to farms that has already occurred will be permanent cannot be foreseen at present, for considerable shifts in population as part of the adjustment process are still to be expected. Widespread housing shortages in cities may have led considerable numbers of persons to seek available residences on farms until housing becomes more readily available in their urban places of employment.

Some indications of future developments can be secured from the postwar intentions of soldiers who had come from farms. A survey by the Army indicated that out-migration from the highly developed agricultural areas of the West North Central States and from the Southern States probably would be heavy. Another survey of white enlisted men in the Army found that nearly two-thirds of the men with farm experience who left farms to enter the Armed Forces planned to return to full-time farming, but that only 9 per cent of the young farm men who had entered some other occupation prior to their induction into the Armed Forces definitely planned to return to farming after the war. Late in the summer of 1946 approximately 1 million veterans of World War II were working on farms. This is more than two-thirds as many as the number of farm workers who had entered the Armed Forces before the war ended. Current estimates of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics indicate that veterans are going to farms in the Far Western States in greater numbers than would be the case if the movement were in proportion to the areas from which they came before joining the Armed Forces and that they were going to farms in the North and South Central areas in less than proportionate numbers. But civilians are not returning to farms in such volume. Recent estimates indicate that by mid-1946 the migrants to farms were predominantly persons who had not lived on farms immediately before the outbreak of the war.

In any attempt to visualize the future course of the farm population it is necessary to distinguish between residence on farms and residence in rural areas. The trend toward suburban and country living by urban workers is expected to continue

and may be accelerated as transportation again becomes readily available. To an increasing degree there are included among the people living on farms individuals who have little or no relation to the operation of the farm or the performance of the work on the farm. Personal preference, convenience, cost, hedging against a depression, and many other factors may make a farm appear to be a desirable place of residence for persons whose major occupation is not in agriculture. There have been strong and insistent voices calling for decentralization of industry and of residential areas, and extolling the advantages of producing at least a portion of the family's food requirements through part-time farming. Although there has been an increase in the number of families who secure their livelihood through a combination of agricultural and nonagricultural activities, further increases in the numbers of these families are likely to be slow. Surveys of home food production have indicated a lessening of that activity after the war, and past experience would indicate that many persons are unwilling or unable to meet the requirements of continuous part-time farming when food supplies are generally adequate and employment and wage levels are high.

Although not all agricultural workers live on farms, and many farm residents do not work in agriculture, even in 1944, nine out of ten agricultural workers lived in a household which included a farm operator or a household whose head was engaged in a farm occupation. In the main, therefore, the assumption of a relationship between agricultural production and the size of the farm population appears to be valid. In those terms the present outlook is for a smaller farm population in the future than during the prewar years. A recent analysis of future production and labor requirements, made in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, attempted to make full allowance for increased food demands likely to result from full employment; it took into account a cautious evaluation of the prospects for export markets, and the development of farm technology, including the cotton picker; and gave recognition to the inhibitions to movement of unneeded and underemployed farm work-

ers. Even with such qualifications, the conclusion was that by 1950 the number of workers needed in agriculture would be below the low levels reached during the war years.

The major developments leading to this conclusion are those which have occurred in the recent application of farm technology. The record of the war years is generally known; agricultural production during 1945 was approximately 32 per cent greater than in 1935-1939, though the annual average number of farm workers was 10 per cent less. But this is not only a wartime development. Agricultural production during 1945 was 59 per cent greater and the average number of farm workers was 20 per cent less than during the years 1910-1914. Even in 1940-1945 the United States was not fully utilizing all of the potentially available technology in its agriculture, and it is therefore inconceivable that the high levels of productivity of agricultural workers which were achieved during the war years will not be exceeded in the near future. Shortages of machinery and fertilizers in many areas slowed down production in recent years; significant wartime developments in the types and methods of application of pesticides will soon be widely used; inability to secure all of the desired labor during the war induced developments in the use of power, methods of cultivation, and rationalization in the use of labor and in the marketing of farm products which will no doubt continue. Moreover, in many fields there was an acceleration of scientific and technological development.

There are also some major developments which tend to operate in the opposite direction. No doubt the relaxation in the long hours worked by farm workers, which is already noticeable, will continue, and there will be less reliance upon women and children for agricultural work than there was during the war years. Because of the war some retirements were postponed, and current levels of prices of farm products and of farm real estate will stimulate the replacement of over-age farm workers by younger persons. On the whole, however, the anticipated replacements are not likely to be on a "one for one" basis. The

workers who are being displaced are generally the older or physically weaker persons—the persons entering the working force are largely men in the most active ages.

The large-scale shifts in diet during the last generation have involved increased consumption of agricultural products which require more intensive applications of human labor. Mechanization and other labor-saving developments have been less rapid in fruit and vegetable production, and in the production of dairy and poultry products than in the production of grain. Increased demand for such products would require proportionately greater increases in the labor used than a corresponding increase in the demand for cereals, but labor-saving technology in these fields will no doubt be rapidly developed.

In view of the future developments that appear to be clearly foreseeable, it seems unlikely that the farm population of the future will be as large a number or a percentage of the total population as it was in 1940, if ample nonfarm employment opportunities exist. A severe depression probably would again increase the farm population, especially in the areas least adapted to commercial agriculture. But an increase under such conditions would be a symptom of social and economic maladjustments and would require treatment as such.

With respect to agriculture the manpower problem is more largely one of distribution and utilization than of the total number of workers. In a social and economic order that provides adequate employment opportunities for all of its workers, the issues in rural-urban migration become those of securing optimum occupational adjustments for the individual workers. This assumes fluidity of the labor force. For the areas of net out-migration, a major concern would be with measures to reduce or prevent the detrimental effects of a continued out-migration of the most capable individuals; for the areas of in-migration, a major concern would be with reduction or prevention of the adjustment problems which arise when many persons from one cultural setting must adjust to another.