

## Comment

ROBERT K. BUCK

I ENJOYED READING Dr. Kirkendall's paper, "The Mind of Henry Wallace." My comments are those of a farmer who grew up on a southern Iowa farm during the twenties and thirties.

The *Wallaces' Farmer* came in the mail every week—in fact, my father had a lifetime subscription to the magazine. Henry Wallace's grandfather, "Uncle Henry," was editor of *Wallaces' Farmer* from 1895 to 1916. Printed on the front cover under the name of the paper was the guiding principle:

Good Farming, Clear Thinking, Right Living  
A Weekly Journal for Thinking Farmers

Every week Uncle Henry wrote an extensive analysis of the "Sabbath School Lesson" for the following Sunday. That was "must" reading in our home.

As a youngster, I remember my uncles reporting on trips to Des Moines which included visits with "Uncle Henry" and Henry C. Wallace. My grandfather, my father, and my uncles considered these earlier Wallaces as "giants." Uncle Henry's framed picture hung on the wall of my father's bedroom for as long as I can remember.

In the book *Sixty Million Jobs*, written in 1945, Henry A. Wallace stated:

My father became Secretary of Agriculture in 1921. And when Franklin Roosevelt gave me the same job in 1933, I know how proud I was to see my father's portrait hanging on the wall of my

office. I suppose I must have felt, then, a longing to see the portrait of "Uncle Henry" beside that of my father. I do know, though, that often times in the almost eight years that I sat in that office, my thoughts could not help but go back to "Tama Jim Wilson" and "Uncle Henry" and my father. They taught me this one basic and kindly fact—"the farmer, if he is worth the seed he sows, is a humanitarian."

In presenting one of the major papers at the World Food Forum, celebrating the United States Department of Agriculture centennial, Henry A. Wallace said:

Of my own personal experience I know how much I owed in the first place to Iowa State College. But I also know that as a farm editor by pouring out tons of printers ink on the subject in the early twenties, I greatly hastened the adoption of hybrid corn.

Wallace traveled widely in the United States and abroad during the 1920s and early 1930s. He wrote extensively for the readers of *Wallaces' Farmer* about what he observed in such countries as Russia, Hungary, and England. He wrote every week about the technical, political, and economic problems of farmers. Surely, few people have been as well prepared for public service as was Henry Wallace when he became secretary of agriculture.

Dr. Kirkendall made several references to Henry Wallace's concern with the consequences of the mechanization of farming and his belief that the growth of large-scale farming was virtually inevitable. He quotes Wallace who, in 1927, wrote: "Soon we shall have four or five people living in the city to every one living on the land." What a conservative estimate: By the 1980s there are thirty people living in the cities of the United States to every one on the farm!

We now have a two tier system of farms: many small farms, usually part time, using essentially the same technology as large farmers, but producing a small part of the total output and a relatively small number of large-scale, specialized farms producing a large part of the total food and fiber for market.

Fifty years after Mr. Wallace moved from secretary of agriculture to the vice-presidency, another secretary of agriculture, Robert Bergland, published a collection of essays on farm structure written by scientists in the USDA and the land-grant col-

leges. Mr. Bergland wrote, in the introduction to this book:

We have lost over half our farms since 1940—control of agricultural production and resources has been concentrated, bit by bit, in fewer and fewer hands. Of more than 2 million farmers counted by the census, 200,000 now produce two-thirds of the nation's food and fiber. . . . We have few programs today that deal specifically with farm structure and no comprehensive policy on the subject at all. . . .

Most of the income benefits from traditional commodity programs, for example, go to the largest producers. Our tax laws have favored larger operations and encouraged outside investment in agriculture. And our credit system may well have fostered a kind of economic cannibalism within agriculture by giving aggressive operators the means to buy out their neighbors.

At the present time there is little interest among United States farmers and farm leaders in doing much about this long-time trend toward "concentration" in agriculture.

James Hearst, Iowa's best known poet, wrote in *The Iowan*, Spring 1979, "We cannot escape from consequences. The question to ask is, are we willing to pay the price for what we want; or to put it another way, is what we want worth what it will cost?"

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