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Farm Relief

We have heard much in regard to the so-called problem of farm relief. We know as a matter of actual fact that there is such a problem in a great many different parts of the United States, that agricultural communities are finding it more and more difficult to make both ends meet. There is no nation-wide solution of the problem, because no one remedy would work equally well in a particular part of the nation. For instance, we in the State of New York would find little relief for our farms in the raising or lowering of the tariff on wheat, or in the creation of an equalization fee.

Our own farm difficulties can and must be helped in a number of ways, but many of these methods will take a number of years before they become effective. Such, for instance, is the condition of many of our citizens who continue to use land for farm crops instead of using that same land for grazing or for raising trees. In other words, we must begin to work out a plan for using every acre for the purpose to which that particular acre is best suited.

In the same way we can accomplish much in improving the marketing conditions throughout the State.

However, while all of this takes time there are certain practical methods of relief which require only action by the Legislature. I am glad to say that the Agricultural Advisory Commission appointed by me even before I came into office as Governor has brought in recommendations which are not only essentially just but which will have the practical effect of relieving many of our agricultural communities from an unequal burden of taxation. This commission of the Governor has made it clear that the agricultural industry does not and should not ask for relief at the expense of other industries. The commission has in its earlier meetings given special attention to the unequal features of the present Highway Law. They find, for instance, that the requirement of the present law of a 35 per cent contribution by the counties toward the building of new State roads, means in the case of richer counties almost negligible taxes on the individual tax owner, whereas in the poorer counties which still have a large road mileage to be built the burden is, in many cases, ten times as great, producing a burden which it is almost impossible for the local communities to bear. Therefore, the recommendation of the commission calls for an equalization of this burden so that, while the richer counties will not have to pay any more than they are doing under the present law, the poorer counties will receive a relief by a greater proportionate contribution by the State itself.

The next step recommended by the commission is that on bridges yet to be constructed on state roads the cost shall be on the same basis of an equalization of the burden. Next, the commission recommends that the present contribution by towns and incorporated villages toward the maintenance of state highways shall be eliminated altogether and that the State shall bear all the maintenance costs. Finally, this farm relief commission recognizes

that it is time to pay more attention to the carefully planned, secondary, or lateral roads, feeding into the main through-state highways, and it is proposed that county highway departments receive about three million dollars worth of aid from the State to build these roads each year, subject, of course, to the approval and supervision of the State Department of Public Works.

At the present time the Governor's commission is trying to work out the application of the same principle of equalizing the tax burden in its relationship to the rural schools of the State. In county after county of rich school districts, those, for instance, which are able to tax a valuable railroad property, can obtain a very large sum in the way of State aid for their schools, whereas another district only a few miles away having only a low assessed valuation can get very little aid from the State. It is hoped that a plan similar to the principal proposed for the highways can be worked out to cover education as well.

All of this means, of course, additional expenditures by the State of New York and that is why it becomes equally necessary to raise additional sums by some new or additional form of taxation. We can not spend money without raising it first. That is why the gasoline tax seems to be inevitable.

However, I want to make one thing perfectly clear and that is whatever is decided on as the best method of handling this tax problem, it should be arrived at without regard to partisan politics. There is no reason why partisan politics should enter into the question at all, even a division of opinion as between the cities of the State on the one hand and the rural districts on the other. We are all in the same boat and if we put too large a burden on the rural sections, the cities must and will inevitably feel the reaction just as too heavy a burden on the cities will in the long run retard the progress and prosperity of the farms.