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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**

**The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945**

**Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension**

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**File No. 364**

**1930 February 14**

**Ithaca, NY - New York State College of  
Agriculture, Cornell University - Betterment of  
Agricultural Conditions**

At State College of Agriculture, Cornell University  
February 14, 1930  
Betterment of Agricultural Conditions

I think we are all agreed that the year 1929 will go down in history as affording the greatest amount of substantial progress for the agricultural interests of the State in modern times. Because of a more general and whole-hearted cooperation on the part of all of the interests affected and because of definite governmental aid of all kinds through the State Administration and the Legislature, marked advance has been made along economic and social lines for the bettering of agricultural conditions.

This broad attitude of intelligent interest in agriculture continues and further important steps are being taken this year to round out what we may well call a full program.

The time has come, however, to pause for a moment and ask ourselves the definite question of what the objective of all of this interest and cooperation is. Are we passing these new laws and spending all of this new money merely to correct existing conditions? In other words, is this a mere correctional policy or does it go much farther? If it does go farther, what is it aiming at?

To answer this question it is necessary to give a very brief survey of the fundamental reasons for the relative decline of agricultural prosperity in our State during the past decade.

The first reason is the economic one. We have come to realize that many thousands of acres in this State have been cultivated at a loss, acres which are not under modern conditions suitable for agriculture. Secondly, we have used many thousands of acres of soil for growing crops unsuited to the particular soil. Third, we have allowed thoroughly antiquated marketing processes to continue without intelligent change to meet the economic growth of the cities. For instance, we have built up a marvelous system of State Highways, without providing either the feeders to those roads at one end or the market facilities at the other end. Finally, we have only just begun to reorganize the tax burden so as to eliminate its inequalities.

The other reason for the past and present troubles is the social one. Modern civilization has brought wholly new methods of living. We must admit very definitely that one of the principal causes for the trek of thousands of people, especially the young people, from the farm to the city has been because the farms have been cut off from the amusements and interests which the urban communities provide. Modern in-

ventions, such as the radio, telephone, and the automobile, are helping to correct a lop-sided situation, but we must take a more intelligent interest in the whole problem of making farm life more socially interesting as well as more financially profitable. That this can be done is evidenced by the actual cases of a growing group of individual families who are worthy to be listed as master farmers. In the same category of social needs comes the development of educational facilities in the rural communities. Much has been done yet we still have a long way to go to make all rural education come up to the standards which have been already set.

Another definite problem, of the future relates to the health of the rural communities. We are all distressed by the growing difficulty of obtaining adequate medical service and care. In many communities the actual costs of medical care is almost prohibitive and in many the medical facilities are themselves almost lacking.

In the same way we are facing the problem of the country church. The old days of the local Dominie who could live with his family on a salary of \$500 a year and where the general maintenance cost perhaps another \$500 a year, have gone by. We are confronted definitely in most communities with a multiplicity of church buildings, a multiplicity of different sects and the unfortunate injection of the high cost of living into our religion.

These are the outstanding economic and social causes of agricultural decline. And there is what might be called the supplementary reason that during these past years the urban and suburban communities have offered a better chance for industrial employment than ever before, and also a better chance to obtain social advantages.

It is all very well for gloomy people to talk about the almost complete disappearance of farm life in America! They cite the advance of chemical sciences with the suggestion that within another generation, one acre of land will grow enough chemical ingredients to make possible the manufacture in pill form of concentrated breakfasts for ten thousand human beings. They insist that the human race will be perfectly happy in another generation in taking in the early morning a pill out of one bottle labelled poached eggs; another pill out of another bottle labelled oatmeal and cream; and a third pill out of another bottle labelled one glass of milk. We can all agree that this delightful theory is wholly false, and one example that proves its falsity is the fact that where twenty years ago the production of vegetable crops in this State for canning purposes was one of our most important cash crops, today the use

of canned goods by the people in the cities has greatly fallen off because they have learned to use fresh vegetables, even through the winter months, vegetables which are grown in the southern parts of the United States, and even in the tropics.

Furthermore, there is necessarily a limit to the continuance of the migration from the country to the city, and I look in fact for a swing of the pendulum in the other direction. Things all point that way. Industrially the United States has made not only the greatest strides in history in this generation, but perhaps has come to the period when industrial expansion will slow up. In other words, many economists are seriously questioning whether we have not for the time being reached the saturation point of industrial production calling for a period of digestion for a number of years to come. No matter how anxious we may be to prevent any panic of thought over the unemployment situation at this time, we must nevertheless recognize the fact that there are more people in the cities of the United States who are walking the streets looking for jobs than at any time within many years.

The effect of this condition, for it is a condition and not a theory, is that there will be less opportunity for young people to go from the farm to the city in the next few years and find work awaiting them. By the same token many people from the cities will give more serious attention than in the past to the possibility of moving to the country.

How happy is the family today located on a farm in New York State and able to say every day as they get up in the morning and as they go to bed at night, "We at least have no fear of starvation. We at least have no fear of losing our job. We may not be getting very rich, but at least we are able to go on with our lives without suffering and without drastic change."

This great objective, that I have been speaking about, aims at the great fundamental of making country life in every way as desirable as city life, an objective which will from the economic side make possible the earning of an adequate compensation and on the social side the enjoyment of all of the necessary advantages which exist today in the cities.

All sorts of factors are involved: better roads, better markets, better schools, better health facilities, better churches, lower rates for electricity, lower rates for telephones. Let us keep the objective definitely before us as we work year after year on the individual problems leading to that objective.

Perhaps great betterment can be obtained through the development of the idea of regional planning. A planning for example for every city in the State, the same principle which has already been applied to the milk supply for New York city. As an example of how the administration in Albany is seeking to develop better facilities throughout the whole State, I have just sent a letter to the Mayors and Health Officers of all the principal upstate cities asking them to come to Albany on March 11th, for a conference looking towards the establishment of regional milk sheds for the further elimination of bootleg milk and cream coming into our State from far distant points.

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p. 700  
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*Betterment of Agricultural Conditions*

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