
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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GUERNSEY T. CROSS - Secretary to the Governor.

STATE OF NEW YORK
EXECUTIVE CHAMBER
ALBANY

January 21, 1931

ADDRESS OF GOVERNOR ROOSEVELT AT THE ANNUAL DINNER OF THE
NEW YORK STATE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY, HELD AT THE AURANIA
CLUB, ~~WEDNESDAY~~ WEDNESDAY EVENING, JANUARY 21, 1931.

(Albany) -----

Tonight I am not going to talk to you about what the State has done for the farmers during the past two years. I am only going to say that the splendid program of actual accomplishments has been put through only as a forerunner of a much bigger and more vital policy of the State. Indeed, all of the study and work of the Agricultural Advisory Commission has emphasized the need of tying the various steps already taken into a bigger and more comprehensive whole.

The time has come when, in my judgment, the State can lay the corner-stone of a land policy - something that has been done by no other state in the union; something which is needed by modern civilization and by the social and economic advances made by the present generation.

The big question is, what are we going to do with the land area of the State? No one has ever asked this question before; no one has ever answered the question.

First of all, what is the land area? About 30,000,000 acres. Of this, about 3,000,000 acres are used for cities, villages, residential and industrial purposes. That leaves 27,000,000. About 5,000,000 acres are today in mountains, forests, swamps and other lands that have never been cultivated. That leaves about 22,000,000 acres which was once in farms. Of this, about 4,000,000 acres have been abandoned or are no longer used for farm purposes. This leaves about 18,000,000 acres in farms.

The obvious first question in regard to this farm land is how is it being used for farming, and the first step has been taken to answer that question. Last year the Legislature passed, on the recommendation of the Agricultural Advisory Commission and myself, an appropriation for a survey of our agricultural resources, the

amount of the appropriation being \$20,000, though I asked for \$96,000.

However, with this \$20,000, the College of Agriculture at Cornell University, has started several important projects in a study and evaluation of the land resources of the State. As a part of this study, a survey has been made of one whole county, Tompkins County. Very simple and clear maps have been prepared covering every 10 acre square in Tompkins County and showing the following:

- (a) The type of soil.
- (b) The climate, that is, the length of growing season between killing frosts and the amount of annual rainfall.
- (c) The present use of the land, that is, whether it is forest land and swamp land or improved land, whether in pasture, in hay, or in annual crops and if so, in what crops.
- (d) Who lives on the land, or owns it and how the owner uses the land, that is, to make his livelihood out of it, or to occupy it only as a home while working away from the farm in the city or elsewhere.
- (e) An analysis of the people who live on the land; whether they are old people who have always been there, or new people who have recently come; whether they are Americans or foreigners; whether the young people are staying on the land or leaving it; whether the cultivation of the farm is supporting the farmer in accordance with an American standard of living.
- (f) A measure of the contribution that each farm makes to the food supply of the nation.

The outstanding net result of this survey proves that a very high percentage of the land now in cultivation has no right to remain as farm land. Several generations of farm experience indicate that farmers cannot make a satisfactory living from this land. This percentage runs as high as 22 per cent. of the farm land in some of the townships in Tompkins County.

Using all of these data, bringing to bear upon the problem what we know about trends in population, in demand for farm products, in the use of larger, modern machinery, there begins to evolve a real plan for the proper development of the land, in other words, a land policy for the State of New York.

This study of Tompkins County includes a classification of the land in the county into several groups with first-class land that should always remain in farms at one end of the scale, and land that simply should be reforested at the other end of the scale.

A road system to serve the best interests of these areas is projected on a scientific basis. The plan indicates the roads which should be main thoroughfares and improved accordingly; those which may be a part of the secondary hard road system, narrower and cheaper but out of the mud; roads that should be kept open only as fire breaks and trails to enable people to reach the reforested areas.

The plan also includes a location for electric power lines such as will serve all people of an area and not leave some worth-while farms in pockets which can never be economically reached by electricity. You will see that this plan contemplates two things - the development of the best soil areas to the highest possible degree with the objective of ultimately providing farm to market roads and electrical power to practically all the farms that should be maintained as economical farm units and as rural homes. The plan also contemplates removing from agriculture and putting to their proper use those soil areas which through this scientific survey and through the experiences of generations of farmers have been shown to be unsuited for farming.

Hand in hand with this survey there should go a reforestation program on a scale that has never before been attempted by any state or nation. These abandoned farm areas are today a blight upon our agriculture and a great state liability. Year by year they become poorer and poorer through erosion, the depletions of nature and uneconomic use. If put to their proper use, the growing of trees and the furnishing of recreational opportunities, they will again become a great state resource of wonderful value to our future New York. I assume that the Hewitt amendment providing for the greater state program in reforestation will again be passed by the Legislature this winter. I hope that the people of the State next fall will ratify this proposed constitutional amendment which will make it possible for a great reforestation program to develop.

A scientific land policy will save the State money in that it will remove the necessity for the upkeep of thousands of miles of road. It will prevent the wrong location of electric power lines. It will help to develop a great agricultural industry in the regions best adapted for farming. The work that has been begun in Tompkins

County should be extended to all the other counties in the State.

We have proven to our satisfaction that there are large areas in the State of New York where people are attempting to maintain farms without any economic or social justification for maintaining them. I use the word social as well as economic for the very good reason that the continuance of the maintenance of these farms proves a drag on the social development of our rural life, for the very good reason that the families that maintain and operate these farms cannot make a success of them and must necessarily fail to obtain the social advantages and live up to the social standards which we ought to give to all our population.

This, I call, the beginning of a real land policy for the State of New York. As leaders of agriculture and of farm thought in the State, I report it to you and commend it to you for your study.

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At Annual Dinner of the New York State Agricultural Society,
Aurania Club, Albany, January 21, 1931

Why the State Should Adopt a Scientific Land Policy

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