

February 16, 1937

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FOR Speech File

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STEPHEN EARLY

Assistant Secretary to the President

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

I transmit herewith for the information of the Congress the report of the Special Committee on Farm Tenancy.

The facts presented in this report reveal a grave problem of great magnitude and complexity. The American dream of the family-size farm, owned by the family which operates it, has become more and more remote. The agricultural ladder, on which an energetic young man might ascend from hired man to tenant to independent owner, is no longer serving its purpose.

Half a century ago one of every four farmers was a tenant. Today, two of every five are tenants, and on some of our best farm lands seven of every ten farmers are tenants. All told, they operate land and buildings valued at eleven billion dollars.

For the past ten years, the number of new tenants every year has been about forty thousand. Many tenants change farms every two or three years, and apparently one out of three changes farms every year. The agricultural ladder, for these American citizens, has become a treadmill.

At the same time, owners of family-size farms have been slipping down. Thousands of farmers commonly considered owners are as insecure as tenants. The farm owner-operator's equity in his property is, on the average, 42 percent, and in some of our best farming sections is as little as one-fifth.

When fully half the total farm population of the United States no longer can feel secure, when millions of our people have lost their roots in the soil, action to provide security is imperative, and will be generally approved.

A problem of such magnitude is not solved overnight, nor by any one limited approach, nor by the Federal Government alone. While aggravated by the depression, the tenancy problem is the accumulated result of generations of unthinking exploitation of our agricultural resources, both land and people. We can no longer postpone action. We must begin at once with such resources of man-power, money, and experience as are available, and with such methods as will call forth the cooperative effort of local, state, and federal agencies of government, and of landlords quite as much as tenants. In dealing with the problem of relief among rural people during the depression, we have already accumulated information and experience which will be of great value in the long-time program. It will be wise to start the permanent program on a scale commensurate with our resources and experience, with the purpose of later expanding the program to a scale commensurate with the magnitude of the problem as rapidly as our experience and resources will permit.

The Special Committee on Farm Tenancy emphasizes the necessity for action of at least four types: First, action to open the doors of ownership to tenants who now have the requisite ability and experience, but who can become owners only with the assistance of

liberal credit, on long terms, and technical advice; second, modest loans, with the necessary guidance and education to prevent small owners from slipping into tenancy, and to help the masses of tenants, croppers and farm laborers at the very bottom of the agricultural ladder increase their standards of living, achieve greater security, and begin the upward climb toward land ownership; third, the retirement by public agencies of land proved to be unsuited for farming, and assistance to the families living thereon in finding homes on good land; fourth, cooperation with state and local agencies of government to improve the general leasing system. These activities which bear such close relation to each other should furnish a sound basis for the beginning of a program for improving the present intolerable condition of the lowest income farm families.

The Committee has very properly emphasized the importance of health and education in any long-time program for correcting the evils from which this large section of our population suffers. Attention is also called to the part which land speculation has played in bringing insecurity into the lives of rural families, and to the necessity for eliminating sharp fluctuations in land value due to speculative activity in farm lands.

The attack on the problem of farm tenancy and farm security is a logical continuation of the agricultural program this administration has been developing since March 4, 1933. Necessarily, whatever program the Congress devises will have to be closely integrated with existing activities for maintaining farm income and for conserving and improving our agricultural resources.

Obviously action by the states alone and independently cannot cure the widespread ill. A nationwide program under federal leadership and with the assistance of states, counties, communities and individuals is the only solution. Most Americans believe that our form of government does not prohibit action on behalf of those who need help.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

THE WHITE HOUSE,

February 16, 1937.

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Suggested Draft for the President's Message to Congress
on Farm Tenancy Report

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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