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Articles in the field of agricultural economics, suitable for publication in the journal, will be welcomed.

Articles should have a maximum length of 10 folio pages (including tables, graphs, etc.) typed in double spacing. Contributions, in the language preferred by the writer, should be submitted in triplicate to the Editor, c/o Department of Agricultural Economics and Marketing, Pretoria, and should reach him at least one month prior to date of publication.

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Contents

	<u>Page</u>
I. TRENDS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR	1
INTRODUCTION	1
ECONOMIC REVIEW	1
Gross value of agricultural production	1
Agriculture's contribution to the gross domestic product	2
Net farm income	2
Expenditure on intermediate goods and services	2
Investment	2
Producer prices	3
Prices of farming requisites	3
Consumer prices for food	3
Consumer expenditure on food	3
BRANCHES OF INDUSTRY	4
<u>Field crops</u>	4
Maize	4
Grain sorghum	5
Bokwiet	5
Wheat	6
Grondbone	6
Sunflower seed	7
Tobacco	8
Chicory	8
Dry beans	9
Lucerne hay	9
Sugar-cane	9
<u>Horticulture</u>	10
Citrus	10
Deciduous fruit	10
Dried fruit	12
Viticulture	12
Bananas	13
Vegetables	14
Potatoes	14
Rooibos tea	15
<u>Livestock</u>	16
Grazing conditions	16
Stuck numbers	16
Meat	17
Wool	18
Mohair	19
Karakul pelts	20
Industrial milk	20
Varsmelk	21
Eggs	21
II. ARTICLES	
1. A review of South Africa's farming industry	23
- F. J. van Biljon, Imperial Cold Storage and Supply co. Ltd., Pretoria	
2. The measurement of managerial inputs in agriculture	26
II. A South African concept of agricultural progressiveness	
- P. J. Burger and J. A. Groenewald, University of Pretoria	
III. STATISTICS	29

The Measurement of Managerial Inputs in Agriculture

II: A SOUTH AFRICAN CONCEPT OF AGRICULTURAL PROGRESSIVENESS

by

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INTRODUCTION

Why are some farmers called progressive and others not? What is it that one takes into consideration when deciding in which category of progressiveness a farmer or a farming community resorts? Of what importance is this concept to agriculturists?

In little more than a decade or two, agriculturists have come to appreciate more and more the extremely involved nature and wide scope of the problem arising from the impact of technological change, and the demands of modern society, on both the farming community and agricultural communicators. Central to this realisation has been the acknowledgement of the farmer figure as the hub around which the entire agricultural production process revolves.

In this article, a review of modern impressions on the subject will be presented to give meaning to the concept of progressiveness and to form a foundation for expansion of the theme in later contributions to this series.

THE NATURE OF PROGRESSIVENESS

Nowadays, the adjective "progressive" is freely used in agricultural circles to imply, in a broad sense, that conditions are better in one area than in another, or that farmer A has "something" which farmer B lacks. In spite of its general use, it is rather perplexing to find, upon enquiry, a great divergence of opinion as to the factors and characteristics which qualify for inclusion under that broad term.

However, when all things are taken into account, the term "progressive farmer" (or "progressive community") can be rendered down to one basic meaning, viz level of productivity.¹⁾ Now, level of productivity is a function of many factors which may be grouped, for present purpose, under the headings of "technical" and "human" elements.

Without going into detail, it has become abundantly clear that technical factors in themselves cannot adequately account for differences in agricultural productivity between farmers. It is obvious

that a whole series of other elements peculiar to human nature, play a great role in this respect. These "human" factors include education, level of aspiration, motivation etc., which, when related to level of productivity in farming, may in the final run be reduced to the "quality of farm management" exhibited by the agricultural entrepreneur.

Progressiveness in a farmer may therefore be seen as a quality closely connected with efficiency in farm management. Evidently, very little is known about this aspect. As Benvenuti puts it: ²⁾

"It has always been assumed as more or less obvious that the personal qualities of the farm operator are a major factor in level of productivity. But, actually, it is surprising how few are the authors who have wondered what might be the implication behind the qualification 'quality of the farm management'".

While it is common knowledge that farmers differ in managerial ability, the explanations for this phenomenon are not so clear. "Are these differences essentially based on differences in 'inborn' qualities, or are they acquired as a result of differences in contacts and experiences in social life? In other words, are these qualities essentially of cultural origin?"

These questions formed the "point of departure" for Benvenuti's ³⁾ study of farming in cultural change in the Netherlands. After an intensive review of pertinent literature, he hypothesised (p. 67) that "progressiveness in farming is strongly concomitant with a particular mentality and world view and that this world is the modern Western one". Elaborating on this conclusion, Benvenuti (p. 70) states that if progressiveness is a state of mind (and not merely an acceptance of urban material civilisation), farmers are ordered primarily on a "dynamism (Western)-fixity (non-Western)" continuum and not along a "rural-urban" continuum. However, he goes on to suggest that these frames of mind (i.e. dynamism-fixity) "are strongly related to the degree to which the individual has been exposed to the modern Western pattern of culture and, therefore, also to the degree by which the individual is

1) Benvenuti, B. (1962) Farming in cultural change. Van Gorcum & Comp., N.V., Assen, pp. 1-5.

2) *Ibid.*, p. 3.

3) *Ibid.*

functionally taken up into the organisation of the social structure of a society of a modern Western type".

The authors are in absolute accord with Benvenuti's point of view (and eventual finding) that progressiveness is denoted by a farmer's quality of management which is a function of a certain psychological make-up and which, in turn, is fostered by a modern socio-cultural environment. However, there is a slight difference in approach in that here we are not concerned with the effect of the clash between modern and traditional cultures as was the case in Benvenuti's investigation. In present day South Africa peasant farming communities, as found in Europe, are, for all practical purposes, unknown. While a process of continuing urbanisation and acculturation is taking place (as it will all over the world until the end of time), the White farming community in South Africa is essentially "modern" with a typically "Western" culture.

Consequently, a basic assumption in our dissection of the concept "progressiveness" is that White South African farmers are all of one essentially similar "cultural type" (culture is here seen in terms of the polar opposites modern-traditional or rural-urban). Therefore, if Benvenuti's hypothesis is followed, differences in "culture" cannot be assumed to be significantly responsible for disparities in farm managerial ability or progressiveness. Rather, the differences in progressiveness between farmers in South Africa must, to a large extent, be ascribed to differences in "mentality".

The obvious question now is: What is meant by the term "mentality" in the context of the progressive farmer? Clearly, in the light of Benvenuti's view that progressiveness means "level of productivity" which, in turn, is a product of managerial ability and technical innovation, "mentality" must, inter alia, refer to a particular outlook and mental ability on the part of the farmer which in practice, must be evident in a positive attitude towards, and the economically, psychologically and socially rational use of, innovations.

Research findings in the field of agricultural extension support this contention to a large extent and have stressed many other personal characteristics of the polar types "progressive" and "regressive" which could be included in a personality sketch of either one.

However, before attempting such a description, a further element should be added to those hypothesised by Benvenuti (i.e. a particular mentality and world view) in order to adapt his concept of progressiveness to South African agricultural conditions. This element is responsibility, especially as it is overtly exhibited by the farmer in his day to day utilisation of natural production resources.

The inclusion of this element is motivated entirely by the scope and extremely serious nature of the erosion threat in local agriculture. No purpose will be served here by elaborating upon this well-known and generally appreciated fact.

It must, however, be stressed that nowhere in the world, and particularly not in South Africa, can progressiveness in farming be viewed as relating to the short-term production function of the farmer alone. Proficiency in farm management and a rapid rate of adaptation to technological change are highly commendable and undoubtedly powerful indicators of the progressive personality, but it is firmly contended that the exhibition of responsibility by the farmer, in the way he applies technological change to his natural agricultural resources, is equally, if not predominantly important.

When progressiveness is seen in this light, it is obvious that the existing appreciation of the concept as well as current measuring devices are out of step in that they accentuate production and managerial ability to the exclusion of long-term responsibility towards that which enables agricultural production, namely natural resources. The authors contend that no farmer who disregards conservation can be deemed truly progressive.

The foregoing discussion has pointed to the fact that the progressive farmer is positively inclined towards change stimuli. Harking back to Benvenuti's concept that "progressiveness" is, by deduction, descriptive of a certain "quality of management", it may be concluded that the progressive farmer exhibits a brand of managerial ability which firstly, recognises the importance of science and technological change for the continued development of the enterprise and secondly, incorporates the inherent skill and rationality to apply with discretion and integrate successfully those practices which will increase the level of agricultural productivity on a permanent, scientific basis.

By stressing managerial ability and a positive attitude on the part of the farmer to scientific change, and by implying the urgent desirability of a long-term outlook on agricultural production, this definition includes all the personal elements discussed as being essential components of the progressive farmer in South Africa. In a social climate conducive to change and within which he occupies an internationally unparalleled status position, there are truly very few barriers, barring short-term economic ones, on the progressive farmer's way to success and prosperity.

A PERSONALITY SKETCH OF THE PROGRESSIVE FARMER

The progressive farmer personality is characterised by high intelligence and flexible powers of reasoning. Inner systems of thought communication, conceptual thought construction and thought abstraction are well developed. To this personality, decision-making appears and is accomplished as a relatively uncomplicated, natural process and is seldom irrational in terms of set goals. Clearly defined, positive and attainable goals are a feature of the progressive per-

sonality and these objectives are seldom entirely self-centred but tend to include broader social ideals. The direction afforded by goals, coupled with a personal acceptance of the "self" as it is and of life as it comes, leads to confidence and self-possession and an emotionally stable and maturely balanced, empathetic outlook. This personality is largely independent. It is not readily bound by the dictates of groups and their norms. Personal values do not dogmatise observation or perception and action and attitudes are readily adaptable in respect of areas where interest is high. Excessive ego-involvement in attitudes is rare.

It has many varied frames of reference so that skill at perceiving and interpreting correctly is of a high order. The possession of many frames of reference eliminates resistance to change and gives rise to a frank curiosity in respect of that which is new, while perspicacity facilitates rapid evaluation of merit. To a great extent, the progressive farmer personality is characterised by a highly developed sense of responsibility towards non-renewable resources. It is strongly motivated by high aspirations. It is not easily balked or frustrated, and it impresses with its show of persistent, determined vigour.