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PROCEEDINGS

of

WESTERN FARM ECONOMICS ASSOCIATION

Seventh Annual Meeting

June 21, 22, 1934

And Papers Presented At The

CONFERENCE ON LAND-USE PLANNING  
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

June 18, 1934

University of California  
Berkeley, California

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## SOCIOLOGICAL PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN

### LAND-USE PLANNING<sup>(1)</sup>

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City and rural zoning as heretofore practiced has been confined almost exclusively to prohibiting expansion of certain land uses in designated areas or more positively it has restricted the development of this land to a list of specific purposes. In recent months much public interest has been aroused in the possibility of making zoning laws retroactive. This would mean extensive modification or discontinuance of the present use of the land.

The economic legal and social problems involved in the latter type of zoning are quite different from those of the former. The uprooting of established populations is involved. This paper will attempt to cover some of the more important aspects of the problems which will arise from these population shifts.

Even though much information on land use planning is now on hand ready for use, there are still large segments lacking. At best only a scant foundation has been laid for retroactive zoning. Economic land classification as a method is well advanced and it is an implement which can now be put to use. It is relatively easy to point out the submarginal areas for agricultural and other industrial uses. That to do next, however, after several hundred farmers and their families are found to be located on these poor lands is by no means apparent nor easy to answer. If they are not to remain on this land, where are they to go and what are they to do to make a living? Some answers to these questions may be found in closer settlement on the better land and in subsistence homesteads, but other alternatives will no doubt be needed. Apparently land use planning must go hand in hand with industrial planning because new jobs must be found for workers released by agriculture through natural increase, from consolidation of small farms, and from the elimination of submarginal farming areas.

Even if attractive economic alternatives are found for these people, a second social problem still presents itself. It is the problem of inducing men and women to leave local associations, friends, and habits of life which are dear to them. A disproportionate number of these people are old and the pull of better economic opportunities has become feeble and rather ineffective. Others prefer solitude and freedom from direction by others to a higher standard of living. A small number of these people are social misfits and cannot endure close association with other people. Fortunately most of these people are dominated by the common American standard of values and a more attractive income and an easier existence will cause them to migrate. The residue will probably call for special treatment. That this special treatment should be, remains yet to be discovered. An illustration of special treatment is found in West Virginia, where one

large lumber company made a practice of purchasing the farms of elderly people and leasing these farms back to them for \$1.00 a year as long as these people lived. Then they died, the improvements were burned to prevent squatters from occupying the site. The shift from farm to forest use may take twenty years for completion by this route, but the social peace and security is maintained. During the transitory period these people are often employed as fire guards, and for other forest protection purposes.

In the pre-planning era, it was popular to believe and to assert that economic forces would cause people to leave submarginal areas for better opportunities. This view still has some champions and it must be admitted that economic forces really do function in time. But, as Doctor Hibbard of Wisconsin used to say: "things will adjust in the long run, but the trouble is that we all live in the short run." Similarly, C.F. Dayton said in a recent article in the *Journal of Farm Economics*: "The justification of this type of research..... must be found in the validity of the premise, namely that if the farmers who occupy submarginal farms can only be supplied with the figures to show that their farms really are submarginal, they will make responses appropriate to this revelation. The circumstances of our economic life lend scant support to the validity of this premise." The statement by an old pioneer that he became so poor that he could not leave the country was not merely an excuse. It has been, and is, stark reality.

The lag in the response to economic pressure in agriculture constitutes a serious national problem at this time, and as a matter of fact, this problem has existed throughout our history. Witness the painful decay of agriculture on the poor land of New England. In many countries during the past two hundred years this lag in adjustment of the land problem has caused social and political revolutions to epoch making proportions. Maybe we have in America learned to take these shifts constructively and peaceably.

No one need travel far to see plenty of evidence of lagging adjustments to better economic opportunities. The mountain settlements of the Appalachian highlands have been examples in purest form for a hundred years. Every state has some poverty sections where people continue to live under income standards far below the surrounding territory. A colossal example is the area where much of the cotton crop is grown. This land use may be classed as submarginal with respect to economic opportunities of the people. The present depression has widened and deepened these poverty areas by a forced march back to the land. Technological unemployment, in one sense at least, is not new. It is only more acute in the present generation because of the lack of expanding markets and good land to which people may move and thereby gradually work themselves out of submarginal standards of living. Commercial, industrial and agricultural production which actually pays good wages has never been sufficient to employ all employable persons. In spite of attractive economic theories upholding unplanned competition this same unplanned economy is apparently drifting us to the control and enjoyment of the best land and capital resources by a few, while the many and meek will by progressive acceleration inherit the cast off capital goods and the submar-

inal lands of the earth. The sociological problems of this drift are a major concern to those who value liberty, peace, and prosperity. Already there have been rumblings in Congress and in the press concerning backward states having a voice in controlling the "really important" states (industrial states). A nation might exist half free and half slave for a while, but it is hardly probable that a nation with our present attainments in education and intelligence to exist for very long in a small part affluent and in large part relatively poverty stricken. In spite of our limited knowledge, and in spite of the apparent difficulties, land use planning as a method for moving upward the standard of living of all the people may well be tried. Perhaps the traditional machinery governing distribution of wealth needs technical perfection and rational direction to fit in with this movement.

Concretely what has been proposed as a planned rural land use program? Dr. L.C. Gray has submitted the following:

1. Gradual permanent retirement of lean acres.
2. Elimination of rural slum areas.
3. Elimination of nuisance areas.
4. Grouping of rural populations.

These steps all call for some other location for the people on the land. President Roosevelt has suggested that as new supermarginal land is brought into use that a corresponding area of submarginal land be eliminated from agricultural use. This plan has the advantage of providing a place to which the displaced farmers may go. Since most of the good land yet available must be either irrigated or drained, and since this kind of land calls for highly skilled and disciplined farmers, some friction will be encountered in transferring the farm populations. Some means must be found to move the better farmers over to the newly developed land and the relatively incompetent farmers from the submarginal areas to other farms above the margin. Nearly every new irrigation project has had its crop of inexperienced farmers who have been forced out. It seems that the best prospects for new reclamation projects would be the sons of experienced farmers on land with closely related types of agriculture. It would hardly be practical to move general farmers from poor land in the Mississippi Valley to irrigated lands in the Columbia Basin. The land in the Columbia Basin would have an overhead cash charge of from \$5 to \$20 per acre per year, and a value when developed of from \$100 to \$500 per acre. High quality vegetables, fruits, and other intensive cash crops are the only ones able to bear such a burden, and special skill and discipline are required in their production.

Perhaps the most immediate obstacle to shifting rural population will be local pride, local business houses, and business institutions. They will not be eliminated or reduced without objections. To move people out of a county, not to mention moving people from one state to another, would at present be courting political opposition. It seems that some provision will need to be made to compensate local business and professional people for their loss or to move them and their business along with the rural population. A very dominating public purpose, lending overwhelming public sentiment for such shifts, will need to exist to overcome local opposition. However, as stated by Jacob Crane, of the

