

Hundreds of thousands of people have streamed to our cities from our rural areas, and from all areas of our country who should have stayed in the rural areas. The Swedes from rural Minnesota coming into the Twin Cities, the Negroes and whites from the South coming into Philadelphia or Los Angeles or the people coming in from the hills of Arkansas, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, and southern Illinois converging on St. Louis and Chicago. Unfortunately the rural poor reproduce as fast as they migrate to the cities. This poverty cannot be left to solve itself. It would be more humane, and much cheaper, to help people to remain in rural America rather than continue to pour into our metropolitan areas.

To prevent the decline of rural population the first step is to increase income for the family farmer. This is essential for the vitality of all rural America. The small towns thrive when the small farmers thrive. One hundred percent of parity is needed for the family farmer so that his farm and his sweat produce the wages of a factory worker plus a return on the investment in land and equipment. We feel this is as essential for the family farmer as the minimum wage is for the farmworkers. Secondly, rural America must be the kind of place which attracts and holds people. Today nearly half of the blighted housing is in rural America in the small towns, villages, and the farms. Most of our rural communities lack the basic social and public services available in the average urban community. Nearly half the poverty is in rural areas.

They have less health care. One densely populated rural county we are working on an antipoverty campaign has no doctor. We had to import one from 40 miles away for physical examinations. There are 40 more such rural counties without doctors.

The average family farmer is still having a rough time financially. One factor contributing to this situation is the high property taxes now being paid to support essential community schools and services inadequate as they are in the most rural areas. Because the small towns are not getting their share of Federal aid for community services the burdens must be borne by the property taxpayers in the county—namely the farmer. In 1964, farm real estate taxes went up in every State except Montana—for a grand total of \$1.5 billion. Average tax, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, was \$1.51 per acre. But the average New Jersey farmer paid \$12.10; the farmer in New Mexico 18 cents.

Nearly one-third of our population over 65 is in rural areas. Many will not benefit much from medicare because of a lack of community facilities.

In many rural areas the very old and the very young constitute the majority of the population. In another county in Arkansas, in which our antipoverty program is located, over 40 percent of the people are over 65. We need to retain the whole families and young adults in our rural areas. We can only do this by having as high quality of living in rural America as in urban America. This means community services, recreation and educational programs, jobs and income earning possibilities and all the rest. A civilization which can make life tolerable while orbiting the earth can make life tolerable in the rural areas.

A NEW RURAL RENAISSANCE PROGRAM

If there is as much substandard and blighted housing in rural areas as there is in urban areas as the census reports, then programs of equal magnitude are needed. If we are to prevent the continual flow of impoverished people from rural areas to urban slums, major new programs are needed. We need the kind of credit in rural America which the Federal Housing Authority and the housing and urban development programs have provided in urban America.

We repeat an adequate family farm income with a family farm cutoff and a minimum wage for farm labor will be the biggest help rural America can have.

Secondly, we need an adequate supply of capital at reasonable interest rates. We salute your chairman of the Banking and Currency Committee, Congressman Wright Patman for his valiant efforts to keep the cost of money at reasonable rates. We also salute the committee for last year fixing the interest rates on several of the housing programs at 3 percent. Congress should and the administration should also, set fiscal policy not the bankers on the Federal Reserve Board. There are easier ways to combat inflation than asking people to pay the bankers more for their loans. Our Farmers Union Convention stands squarely opposed to the current high interest rate policies of the Federal Reserve Board.