Young people today are finding it increasingly difficult to get started in farming. Farming investment, according to the USDA Economic Research Service, has increased from an average of $6,158 per farm in 1940 to a current figure of $59,519. What's more, capital needs have doubled in the past 20 years and are expected to double again in the next 5 years.

In closing, we sincerely hope that this committee and the Congress will follow through on the problems brought to the surface in this series of hearings and do everything possible to curb this threat to our independent farm families from the corporate giants and recommend enactment of progressive legislation aimed at keeping our farm families on the land.

Thank you.

Senator NELSON. I thank you very much, Mr. Radcliffe, for your very fine statement.

(The complete prepared statement and supplemental information submitted by Mr. Radcliffe follows:)

STATEMENT OF BEN H. RADCLIFFE, PRESIDENT, SOUTH DAKOTA FARMERS UNION

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, we are honored that you have taken the time from your busy schedules to conduct this hearing and to look into what we feel is one of the most serious problems facing American agriculture and family farmers today.

The independent farmer and many rural communities throughout this great nation could face oblivion unless the movement of huge non-farm corporations into agriculture is halted.

Certainly one of the most important issues of 20th Century America revolves around the question: "Who Shall Control Agriculture?". This struggle attracts few headlines. Changes in the control of agriculture have come about so gradual in the last quarter century that policy makers are inclined to attribute it to evolution rather than to use the more appropriate term, revolution.

National agriculture policies, for nearly two centuries, have encouraged development of the family farm. And the nation has benefited from this policy, as industrious family farmers built the greatest agricultural production plant the world has ever known.

But all is not well in rural America these days. A vicious cost-prize squeeze has driven thousands of family farmers off the land, many of whom emigrated to the already overcrowded cities.

Farm prices declined from 74 percent of parity in mid-March to 73 percent of parity for mid-April, according to the USDA report for the month ending April 15. During the same period, farm prices and government farm payments combined, went from 80 percent of parity in mid-March to 79 percent in mid-April. The 73% level for parity compares with 71% in 1934 in the depths of the depression and the purchasing power of farm products, when adjusted to today's values, is very little more than it was back in the 30's.

Nearly every third farm in a broad area of the agricultural midsection of America today stands empty with the silent migration to the cities accelerating. Meanwhile, thousands of small towns throughout the country feel the impact from the loss of their farmer customers which were the lifeblood of the community's economy.

This year the number of farms will be the lowest since 1872 and considerably less than half of the peak of 6,812,000 farms in 1935 and 25% below the number just 10 short years ago. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there were 3,057,000 farms on January 1 of this year and the decline is continuing at a rate of about 80,000 annually.

Farm people in 1947 made up nearly 17 percent of the national population. Twenty years later they accounted for only 6.4 percent, and today the percentage is still declining.