FARM TENANCY IN THE UNITED STATES

AN ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE 1920 CENSUS RELATIVE TO FARMS CLASSIFIED BY TENURE SUPPLEMENTED BY PERTINENT DATA FROM OTHER SOURCES

BY

E. A. GOLDENWEISER
AND
LEON E. TRUESDELL

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FOREWORD.

The past two decades have witnessed an increased interest in every aspect of agricultural life and agricultural industry in the United States. It is generally recognized that the prosperity of this great fundamental industry is not only essential to the success and prosperity of all other industries, but that it is to a large degree the economic basis of social progress and political stability. Like other industries, agriculture presents two classes of problems. These may be designated as the material and the human. As in other industries also, the former has until quite recently received far more attention than the latter. Scientific research and inventive genius have done much to solve the problems of agricultural technique and to increase the effectiveness of farm equipment and methods of operation. Far less, however, has been accomplished in the matter of improving living and working conditions or, in other words, solving the human problems.

Of these human problems, tenancy was among the first to be recognized and studied. Over forty years ago this question had come to be regarded as of sufficient importance to warrant a special census inquiry, and since that time agricultural economists and statisticians have been giving more and more attention to the matter. The agricultural schedules for each of the last five decennial censuses have contained inquiries concerning tenancy, so that now statistical data are available showing the growth of this form of farm tenure during four decades. Unfortunately the earlier censuses of this period did not include inquiries comparable in all respects with those of the more recent enumerations. As a consequence historical comparisons are not possible in regard to certain aspects of the question.

The authors of this monograph have found it necessary to draw upon other sources than the census schedules for information in interpreting the statistical data, but even with this supplemental material it has not been possible to present a complete picture of the present status of farm tenancy in the United States. It has been found even more difficult to trace tendencies or to predict the course of future developments. In spite of these difficulties, worth-while results have been obtained, and the conclusions arrived at are of an encouraging nature.
It is apparent that, outside of the South, where the cropping system of tenancy largely prevails, especially among colored farm operators, there is no indication of the existence of any large body of farmers whose permanent status is that of tenants. On the contrary, the evidence seems to prove conclusively that tenancy is generally a convenient way of approach to full ownership. It is, in fact, a part of the agricultural ladder. Moreover, there has been no alarming increase in tenancy during the past two decades, and such increase as the figures show is mainly accounted for by the great appreciation in land values, which tends to lengthen somewhat the time necessary for the young farm tenant to accumulate savings for the purchase of a farm.

This study, like all general statistical investigations, must of necessity leave many minor questions unanswered. It suggests many topics for more intensive studies. Some of these could be dealt with by a sampling process which would not require any large expenditure of effort or money, but which the Bureau of the Census is not authorized to undertake. Others—notably those having to do with the relation between tenancy and farm products, yield of crops per acre, etc.—call for the tabulation of more of the farm census data by tenure. This additional detail ought not to add greatly to the total expense of the tabulation or to the time required, and it is to be hoped that it may be included as a part of the program for the next census of agriculture.

Carroll W. Doten.