

Co-operative Farming.

By

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In the brief time allowed to me I should like to impress on this Conference the advisability of starting Co-operative Farming Societies as a means of quickening the pace of agricultural production. We have in India so far been familiar only with one form of cooperation, that of credit and even in this the progress that has been made is but little compared with the ground that remains to be traversed. A new form of cooperation involving a most exacting discipline may not appeal to our ryot population or to the authorities who are concerned in their welfare, but the task has to be attempted without any further delay.

The average size of a holding in India is only 4 acres. In Mysore it is $6\frac{1}{2}$ acres. Even so 500,000 or nearly half the number of holdings are between one and five acres. It is largely this class of holders who find the income from their holdings hardly enough for their livelihood. They get practically no more than a bare return for the labour spent on their farms. There is no question of surplus except perhaps in very fat years and without a surplus no capital can be invested on farm improvements. They are heavily indebted and they can rarely get credit for investment in costly manures. The Agricultural Inspector or demonstrator sells manure usually to those who are richer, who can purchase manure for cash or on credit. But these are a very small fraction and any improvement effected by them will leave unaffected the poor class of ryots to whom investment of capital on their farms is an economic problem, which persuasion in demonstration will not solve. In Mysore the field trials with improved manures for paddy show that production could be quadrupled in five years. Production has been increased from an average of 300 seers per acre for 27 acres to 1267 seers. But this required the application of manure at the rate of Rs. 22 to 25 per acre. Now 1.5 acres farmer cannot possibly find this money and unless he has it on credit there is very little chance of his using the manure. I think that unless this class is in a position to take the advice of the Agricultural Department the progress of Agriculture must continue to be very slow.

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To enable them to do so, I would suggest the formation of Farming Cooperative Societies under which the farmers in a locality form into an association and agree to follow the same improved methods of agriculture. Each society will elect a panchayet who will decide what the normal yield of each farm under the society is. In regard to kind of manure, type of seed and agricultural methods to follow the society will be guided by the Agricultural Department. The members of each society may each take after harvest the normal yield as fixed by the panchayet. The rest should be made over to the society to be stored and sold at the time when prices are high, the amount realised being credited to each member but remaining with the society. All money required for improvements, as improved implements, improved seed, machinery for threshing etc., should be purchased out of this fund. Loans may also be given to members up to 75 per cent of the maximum at their credit in the society.

All improvements recommended by the panchayet shall be binding on each member individually and collectively and failure on the part of any member should involve penalties to be specified by the society in regard to each item of work not done. Generally however the society should rest content with carrying out under their own supervision the operation which a farmer has neglected and charging double the expenditure incurred. Each society should have a paid literate secretary.

This in very rough outline is the scheme of Farming Societies I have in mind. Details will have to be worked out with reference to local conditions, type of crop etc., but I have given enough to show the lines on which the Farming Societies should develop: On the joint security of members of the society, I believe manure companies will readily give credit for the first year of the work of the society. In subsequent years the society will draw on its own funds for the purchases it has to make.

Societies should be formed in the first instance only in regard to wet lands and the crop to be grown cooperatively must be paddy and sugarcane. The first few societies should be started under departmental guidance and have as secretaries men trained in agriculture. As soon as the societies are well established and have begun to work satisfactorily the departmental men should be replaced by intelligent and literate local men. The men so withdrawn should be sent elsewhere to start more societies.

Societies formed on these principles will be the means of spreading improved methods of agriculture faster and more widely than any other agency and what is more important will provide with much needed capital the large class of farmers forming as much as 50 per cent of total ryot population, who in the absence of it cannot effect agricultural improvements and will continue as they are now, impoverished, loaded with debts and liable to be thrown on famine relief works the first year the rains fail.