

Part-time Farming in Nova Scotia

By ANDREW STEWART

"PART-TIME farming" includes all situations in which, in addition to participation in industrial or non-farm activity, some part of the available labour of the family is expended on the production of agricultural commodities. This is a broad, common-sense definition of part-time farming. It is not sufficiently precise for purposes of enumeration, and could undoubtedly be made to include many situations which would not be classified as "part-time farms" in a census classification. On the other hand it does focus attention on the essential feature of "part-time farming," namely, the combination of productive activities one of which involves the production of agricultural commodities.

Industrial developments in the early 80's broke down the earlier rural pattern in which non-farming activities were closely dovetailed with agriculture. The local craftsman was unable to compete with industrial techniques in urban industry. He tended to move into the city or migrate elsewhere, and those who remained to farm the land turned their attention to production for the market. The number of farms in the province declined substantially, and it is clear that a large part of this decrease in number of farms was due to a decline in part-time farming. However despite this trend the part-time farm has shown some capacity to survive. A large proportion of the farm holdings in the province to-day would have to be classified as part-time farms under any reasonable definition of the term; and there has been some evidence of an increase in certain areas. In connection with the Census of 1931, an analysis was made of all farm holdings, the families on which derived more than

half of their income from non-agricultural sources. On the basis of this definition, which is narrower than the one suggested above, 12,225 farms out of a total of 39,444, or 31%, were classified as part-time farms.¹

Part-time farming is a complex phenomenon embracing many significantly different conditions. It includes the case of the industrial wage-earner who, without family assistance, employs his spare-time in the production of garden produce, and the family farm where some members of the family work on the farm while others are employed elsewhere. The part-time farmer may be an industrial wage-earner or an independent worker. He may use his holding to produce only for consumption by his family, while in other cases a substantial part of the produce may normally be sold in the market. Agricultural activities are combined with many different occupations some of which provide steady and continuous employment, others seasonal employment, and still others intermittent or irregular employment. The Census study referred to above, indicated a wide variety of combinations of activities among part-time farmers in Nova Scotia. The most common non-agricultural occupations were fishing, unskilled labour, personal service, building and construction, transportation and communication, and commercial occupations. The occupations in which the largest proportions of workers engage in part-time farming appeared to be those already mentioned and, in addition, wood products, logging, and mining and quarrying (excluding coal mining). Some combinations, for example, coal mining, water transport, and farm labour, are found in marked concentrations in those areas where coal is present, at ports, and in districts with highly commercialized agriculture. From

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1. Unpublished material prepared by D. Lemieux, Dominion Bureau of Statistics.

many aspects the combinations of farming with fishing, coal mining, and lumbering are the most significant types of part-time farming in Nova Scotia.

The Inducements to "Part-Time Farming"

The industrial worker who is also a producer of farm or garden produce adds farm work to the effort he expends in his industrial employment: work done by a farmer in outside occupations is additional to his effort in running his farm. What then are the inducements which lead some people to extend their efforts in these directions, and to place themselves in situations where they can effect a combination of activities? Looking at the matter from the point of view of the person who is primarily a non-agricultural worker, there is, first of all, the added income derived from produce consumed by the family and from sales. Secondly, families living outside the boundaries of cities frequently find that they can live more cheaply. Perhaps the most important factor contributing to this is lower house rent or taxes, although other "savings" can be made through reduced expenditure on clothing, amusements, etc. However it is clear that some of these "savings" are due not so much to lower prices as to poorer services or less opportunity for spending. For example, house rent may be lower mainly because the houses are less well provided with conveniences than in cities, and expenditure on entertainment may be lower mainly because entertainment facilities are not so convenient. Moreover, the cost of transportation may be significantly higher.

Thirdly, the industrial worker may attach importance to his homestead as an insurance against unemployment and loss of earnings. He recognizes that should he find himself out of work, he will have something to fall back on, and from which he can make a contribution to the maintenance of his family. On the other hand his holding may tie him to a particular locality when he might be able to find work elsewhere; and it is possible that the fact that he has the holding as a means of support may weigh

against him in his search for work. Finally, the worker may feel that there are intangible advantages to himself and to his family in rural life and rural activities; but individuals are likely to differ appreciably in the importance they attach to these considerations.

To each person the problem is one of weighing the advantages in increased income, reduced expenses, greater security, and intangibles, against the disadvantages of increased effort, lesser conveniences, employment opportunities, etc. The decision will differ in individual cases.

The Farm or Rural Aspects of "Part-Time Farming"

The possibilities of successful participation in part-time farming depend on a number of factors associated with the farming or rural side of the combination of activities. Location is important because of its relation to the character of the land; accessibility to and from the place of employment off the farm; accessibility of markets for "surplus" products; and accessibility to social attractions.

The presence or absence, in part-time farming communities, of those services, facilities and conveniences which are generally available in urban centres may be an important factor affecting the success of part-time farming. In the case of industrial workers located close to cities there is a constant comparison between rural and urban life, and to secure decentralization of population it may be necessary to create, in suburban areas, conditions which, in respect to these conveniences, closely parallel the conditions of life in the urban centre. In the case of workers in more distinctly rural areas the contrast between the rural town and the surrounding country is less marked.

The attitudes and aptitudes of people themselves affect their adaptability to part-time farming. Experience suggests that there is no infallible test by which those who will prove successful might be selected. More satisfactory results are likely to follow where the decision to

engage in part-time farming is arrived at voluntarily and not under pressure, for example, actual coercion, over-zealous promotion, or the pressure of circumstances.

Although the organization of the holding may make the difference between success or failure, it is a mistake to suppose that there is a standard type of holding, uniform with regard to size, layout or enterprises, which is best in all situations. In fact each unit might with advantage, be adjusted to the labour available, physical conditions, location, preferences of the individual, and needs of the family. The holding should, of course, be large enough to provide profitable employment for the amount of labour-time and effort which the worker and his family might wish to give to it. Given the amount of labour the area of land might depend on the quality of the soil and the products which are to be produced. In view of the long hours which the part-time farmer has to work, at least at certain times, improvements, convenient buildings and layout, productive stock and labour saving equipment are likely to be particularly important. The part-time farmer is not a specialist in farm production, and it is difficult for him to keep as well informed on production techniques as the full-time farmer may. Moreover his production problems may be quite different from those of the commercial farmer. It is therefore not surprising if many part-time holdings are inefficiently operated, and there would appear to be a special case for advisory services on behalf of part-time farmers. In practice their agricultural problems may tend to be overlooked because agricultural advisory services are designed to meet the needs of commercial farmers, and those engaged in these services are fully occupied in what is recognized as their primary responsibility.

Production on part-time holdings is usually thought of as being primarily for family consumption. However it does not seem desirable to prevent produce sales, and many part-time farmers will

wish to market some produce. Some part-time farmers may wish to specialize, for example, in the production of eggs or fruit, for market. The nature of the local markets and marketing facilities may therefore be important. However, in view of the small amounts sold by individuals and the possibility of disruption of the market through disorganized selling, there is a strong case for organization of marketing to prevent disturbing irregularities in the flow of produce to market.

The Nature of the Non-Agricultural Employment

The problems of part-time farming vary with the nature of the non-farm activity. The peculiar characteristic of agricultural production is that in order to get the best results the processes of production must be carried out at definite times; and if any results are to be obtained at all, there is only a limited range of time during which each production activity must be completed. It is further characteristic of agricultural production that the timing of the production activities is seasonal, with a substantial concentration of labour requirements during the summer months. It follows from this that the possibilities of effectively combining other activities with agriculture depends in part on the timing of employment in other occupations.

This aspect of the problem may be illustrated with reference to the combination of lumbering, fishing and steel-working with agriculture. Employment in lumbering is concentrated in the winter months. Lumbering consequently dovetails well with agriculture. It is possible for the farmer to operate a moderate size of farm which will contribute to family living and bring in cash income, and to utilize the labour not fully occupied in farm activities during the winter months in lumbering operations. There are other considerations which make this a favourable combination of activities. Both farming and lumbering are rural occupations, and, at least in part, the skills

required are common or on a common level. In a province like Nova Scotia farming is, in many areas, closely associated with timber resources, and the problem of location does not arise. However, where the timing of activities is different the problem of location is less acute than in other cases. It appears therefore that this is a type of part-time farming which should be encouraged, and should be capable of expansion in the Province of Nova Scotia.

In contrast with lumbering, fishing tends to compete for labour at times when it is required for agricultural production. This is a serious limiting factor to the extension of part-time fishing and farming. It tends to restrict the extent of the farming operations which can be undertaken. Experience in Nova Scotia indicates that effective combination of fishing and farming is not impossible. In the North Shore fishing districts and in Lunenburg, despite unfavourable periods, there is evidence of a substantial degree of stability, and of conditions of life among farmer-fishermen which do not present any marked contrast to those in districts dominated by other occupations. This cannot be said of the shore fishing communities on the Atlantic Coast. Here the fishermen have never carried on farming operations on a scale comparable to that in the North Shore districts. The reason for this is to be found in the unfavourable physical conditions for farming on the Atlantic Coast. These conditions combined with the competition of the two activities for labour, appear to impose formidable limitations on the extension of part-time farming activities in the Atlantic Coast districts.

Seasonal variations in employment are relatively small in the steel industry, and steel workers may be considered as being steadily employed throughout the year, including the summer months when the bulk of the agricultural work must be done. Here again therefore the extent of the farming operations is limited by the nature of the non-agricultural employment. Moreover, steel is an urban industry and the worker must live within

reasonable distance of the place of employment. These considerations suggest that part-time holdings for steel-workers will tend to be small, and concentrated in areas readily accessible to the plant. In such cases the part-time holding may be substantially limited to a rural or suburban home and garden.

All occupations are subject, in greater or larger measure to irregularities of a recurrent nature, and periods of full employment are followed by periods under- or un-employment. Part-time farming can help the worker through periods of under- or un-employment. But the organization and operation of a holding is difficult under these conditions. If periods of full-time employment are anticipated, the worker cannot operate a large holding at these times. On the other hand a small holding with limited production potentialities cannot go far in providing for family requirements during a period of unemployment. Some flexibility of production from the holding is possible but expansion during a period of unemployment may require resources at a time when the worker does not have them. It seems therefore that under these conditions the holding will tend to be small and can, at best, provide only partially for the unemployed worker's needs. However this contribution, although limited is by no means insignificant. In Nova Scotia the coal and steel industries have been subject to this type of irregularity. If they continue to be affected in this way an expansion of part-time holdings among workers in these industries would be a stabilizing factor. The appropriate type of holding would appear to be a small homestead with enough land for production of garden produce.

"Part-time Farming" Under Changing Conditions

Under changing conditions employment in some industries may be expected to decline, and some workers may be permanently unemployed. It is obvious that, by its nature, the part-time holding is incapable of providing any adequate

solution to the problem of the permanently unemployed worker. Where therefore a local industry is so affected that it cannot be expected to sustain the previous level of employment, the industrial problem cannot be evaded by recourse to part-time farming, and other means of meeting it must be found.

Again under changing conditions new industries and new opportunities for industrial employment may appear. These possibilities may be related to part-time farming in two ways. Growing knowledge and changing techniques may make it possible to establish new industries in rural areas. These will offer new sources of employment to farm families, and an extension of part-time farming will occur. Indeed, because of the small size of many farms in Nova Scotia, the limited employment they can provide, and the limited income which can be derived from them, the establishment of such rural industries would be a beneficial and stabilizing influence in rural communities. It is therefore desirable that such opportunities as present themselves should not be missed. The possibilities should be fully explored, and such encouragement and assistance provided as may be consistent with the establishment of local industries on a per-

manent and self-supporting basis. While the decision in each case would require a close consideration of the particular circumstances, it seems reasonable to suppose that the diversified resources of the Province of Nova Scotia can provide favourable opportunities for development along these lines.

In the second place, where new industries develop in or adjacent to towns, and attract new workers to the area, the associated housing development calls for consideration of the provision of part-time farming facilities. While the preceding discussion implies that the possibilities will vary with the particular circumstances, there is a strong case under any circumstances for providing the workers with at least enough land to provide them with the opportunity to establish a garden.

Within limits part-time farming can be expected to make a significant contribution to promoting more stable and generally satisfactory conditions in the Province of Nova Scotia. The interests of the provincial government, local governments, employers, workers' organizations, and individuals are involved, and development can be most effectively promoted through the sympathetic and active cooperation of all concerned.

Public Transportation in Canada After the War

By JOHN L. McDougall

THERE are four chief transportation media, air, road, rail and water, all of which have their part to play. It is probable that, after the war, air travel will take a large part of the high-class passenger travel and first class mail for distances beyond 6-800 miles. Both road and water carriage are of present importance and will probably grow in relative importance as time goes on.

But rail transport is now and will long remain the basic carrier in a country of continental extent such as Canada.

It is highly probable that far too much attention has been given to the "railway problem" in Canada and far too little to the disorganization of the economy which has had sharply unfavourable effects upon railway operations and earnings. Since 1920 there has been a most extraordinary disparity between the returns to those engaged in rural pursuits and to those in urban industry without

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