Headlines shout the scarcity of foods, of present and impending greater shortages: "Food problems held critical"; "Dairy products rationing is asked"; "Butter is frozen", and many others. More impressive even than such headlines are the dwindling stocks on grocers' shelves, the limited supplies in meat markets, the rationing of sugar, coffee, butter, the restrictions on purchases of many other items; the rising prices for all sorts of food products. Below the headlines, for those who delve in small type for circumstantial information there are abundant facts which furnish convincing support for the truth of the headlines. The Department of Agriculture in a recent summarizing statement, reported that while for many farm products 1942 promises to be close to a record production year, the increased supply would fall considerably short of meeting total needs; for the combined demands of military needs, Lend-Lease shipments, and civilian requirements. Moreover, the indications are that 1943 may be considerably less productive than 1942.

"Roosevelt sees almost no limit in need for food" was the headline caption for a news account of a letter sent by the President to the National Grange Convention held in the State of Washington on Nov.14. "This year American farmers made a magnificent response to the demands upon them. Those demands are increasing; so are the obstacles in meeting them---- The farm families of the nation have a great stake in that better world; they also have a great responsibility in the fight to achieve it."

The farmer's responsibilities. It is a familiar and oft-cited fact that farm life develops and depends upon a high degree of personal responsibility. Certainly few or no industrial or city workers have to face the variety of challenging difficulties which are the continuous lot of the independent farmer-producer; long hours of labor, a constant battle against the forces of nature; against insects and the less publicized but far more damaging fungous diseases; the necessity for anticipating things to come; of maintaining farm machinery and farm buildings. With all possible prevision, the farmer may still be faced by some unpredictable and unpreventable hail or wind disaster which may turn the most carefully planned production into a total loss, or so reduce the year's return as to make his labor yield him only a few cents an hour by careful, cost-accounting calculation. Moreover, the combination of factors which result in generally good production may in themselves lead to heavy losses when the final returns are in. "Apple growers received only 40 cents per bushel in 1939. In only two of the past twenty years have prices for apples on cost-account farms fallen below 40 cents. Costs were high, resulting in the largest loss since these accounts have tabulated, or an average loss of 19 cents per bushel." (N.Y. State Coll. of Agriculture, 1941). In another Cornell bulletin, is reported a declining acreage in lettuce production in New York State, due to poor returns, from 7200 acres in 1926 to 3350 acres in 1936.
1942 promises to be a better than average year from the standpoint of farm production and income, but one or two good years will hardly compensate for many lean years, and for many farmers the lean years have stretched beyond the Biblical "seven lean years." We learn from a headline that "Thanksgiving dinner will cost 25% more than in 1941", and more exactly from federal market indices that food prices for October, 1942 were 21% higher than for October, 1941. But such increases are not matched by corresponding gains in farm incomes. He does not have that much more to spend. Everything he has bought for personal use and in raising his crops has obviously felt the impact of the inflationary developments of the past year or two. He has paid more for farm tools, for fertilizer, for seed, for stock feed, for labor, and for his own food, and for the other requirements of his family. It may come as a surprise to some to think of the farmer as in the market for good for his own table but in that class of farmers designated by the Department of Agriculture as "commercial farmers", those whose year's production enters to a considerable extent into the general flow of commerce, the amount of food raised for themselves is definitely small. The more successful a farmer is as a commercial producer, the less time he has for his kitchen garden and other subsistence production. The old adage that "the shoemaker's children often go barefoot" has some counterpart in country life. If he does use his products he "pays" for them at current market prices.

Farmers do have a great responsibility in the fight to achieve a better world but they also have a definite responsibility to be hardheaded realistic before they step-up production to any considerable degree. These are days when any proposal for constructive legislative action is likely to raise storms of violent protest from some vested interest, labor, management, bureaucracy, or public-witness the opposition to the imposition of gas rationing for the entire country. Congressional and even executive action seem to have to lag behind a desirable schedule in order to avoid offending some special privileged class. Who has a right to call the farmer 'selfish' because he meets the determined self interest of producer in other fields with a resolute, firm insistence on the realities which underly any successful program for increased agricultural production?

Crucial factors in increased farm production. Before the farmer embarks on any large-scale increased production, before he plows additional acres, buys expensive but necessary fertilizer, machines, and seed, and before he invests more labor as well as money and materials for the 1943 campaign, he will want to know the answers chiefly to two questions: (1) Will there be available the labor essential to the harvest of what is raised? (2) In these days of "price ceilings" and "cost-plus" enterprises in some areas of defense production, can the producer on the farm front count on price return which will guard him against financial disaster. The answer to that question has been furnished by another front page headline (Nov. 29, N.Y. Times) "Farm food goals fixed by Wickard...Price support is pledged...Included in the program are specific price-support announcements for many major commodities."
With that assurance, the assurance of an adequate labor supply is really the crux of the whole question of raising the amount of food and other agricultural products which are essential to our war effort. There is no shortage of land and other facilities to more than double within one year the production of such short-term farm productions as pork and poultry, beans, corn, and many other annually planted vegetable crops. But to increase such meat stocks, action should be taken immediately to start the incubation of million of additional eggs, and to breed hundreds of thousands of additional sows. For the increased harvest of 1943 plant products, the budget and plans for seed, fertilizer, tools, and operations should be decided upon with two or three months. For the longer-term planning, required to augment production of dairy products, of beef, and of most fruits, the first question the farmer would need to have answered would relate to the year-round labor as well as the harvest labor which increased production would require.

Two critical and opposing home front factors find frequent often contiguous newspaper space the crisis shortage in agricultural labor, and the rates of pay and weekly hours of labor in defense industries. Balanced against the farmer’s weekly average of hours worked, for which sixty is a conservative minimum, we read that more than forty hours in a factory in these times of emergency would reduce production. More than that, we are told that in some industrial fields where high production is important, the number of available workers who must be kept employed makes necessary a reduced weekly total of no more than thirty-three. Consider the case of the milk raiser and the milk delivery man who leaves the daily bottles at your doorstep. Cornell statisticians figure (1939) the farmer’s labor in milk raising as bringing him about 25 cents per hour for this phase of his farm work. The delivery of milk is paid for at approximately 1.00 per hour. A federal agency recently proposed that milk deliveries be reduced to alternate days, to save gasoline, rubber, and manpower. Such delivery would be perfectly feasible with modern refrigeration, but the proposal has so far not been put into effect. The drivers’ union oppose it because some of the delivery force would lose their jobs. The selling companies dislike it because they fear its effect on their sales; customers would find that it was not too inconvenient to go to stores for their milk with an added incentive of paying a cent less per quart. (So far, the consumers, with sons in the fighting force, have not been consulted.)

Overtopping all other contingent factors which make for hesitation on the part of the farmer toward an all-out increased production drive of food and other agricultural products is the present inescapable fact of farm labor shortage, and the related disparity of farm labor pay when compared with that of defense industries. Grapes brought good prices the past fall but thousands of pounds dried on the vines in the Hudson River counties because there was no one to pick them. String beans have brought prices in the New York wholesale market for standard grades (varieties “Bountiful” and “Valentine”) which have averaged nearly .2.00 per bushel from July 1st through September of this year (Agricultural Marketing Administration reports). Such a price meant an excellent profit for the farmer, even with all the increased costs involved, but one grower in the Red Hook section was left in September when the price
approached $2.50, with two hundred bushels unharvested; no labor was obtainable although he offered 50 cents a bushel for picking. From the worker's point of view, earlier in the summer, picking beans was not a very remunerative occupation. On one exceptionally poor patch, five college students, working from a labor camp, gathered one bushel in one hour, for a total of 35 cents between them. In good patches, workers from this same group earned from $2.50 to $3.15, paid at the rate of 30 to 35 cents per bushel. Average daily earnings for these amateur bean pickers were less than $2.00. Farmers' sons from the same region were getting as much as $40.00 per week, a dollar an hour, in defense plants in Poughkeepsie.

The Hudson River counties north of Albany comprise some of the finest dairy country in the State, but what chance has a milk raiser of enlisting year-round help or even summer harvest hands in competition with the concentration of armament factories which have expanded their production until a stringent housing shortage has been created? Even knitting mills in the same general region working on government orders but with ceiling prices on their products, cannot keep their labor in competition with the cost-plus industries of Schenectady.

Sources of farm labor. The press of today gives a picture of many minds working on the farm labor problems, but still far from meeting in agreement, either as to a satisfactory formula for its solution, or as to the construction of a practical working plan by which the farmer can be given assurance of the help he must have if he is to increase production. That the difficulty cannot be met by increasing food prices to a point which would enable the grower to compete with defense industries on a wage basis seems obvious unless inflation is accepted as better than our present status. While there is talk of freezing the farm worker in agricultural servitude at present rates of pay, such a program can scarcely bear analysis. Competent farm labor is skilled labor, Markham's "Man with the Hoe" notwithstanding, demanding responsibility, versatility, and intelligence far beyond the qualifications set by Shipbuilder Kaiser when he offered 55 cents per hour to anyone who "knew one end of a monkey wrench from the other". Farm animals which have been injured by neglect cannot be readily 'repaired'.

Several sources of adequate farm labor have been suggested in the press and in Department of Agriculture publications (Farmers in a changing world, Agricultural Yearbook, 1940.) All these have in common the fact that they would relate to groups of potential workers who are new in some excess during part or all the year in the occupations or regions where they reside. All of them have been or are in process of being tried in this present year. On the Pacific coast, during the past summer, the forced migration of 100,000 residents of Japanese origin, left a most acute labor shortage for the harvest. A hurriedly improvised cooperative community effort which involved city and village dwellers of all ages and professions was set into motion, with generally successful results. In some of the southwestern states, the importation of some thousands of Mexican workers seemed the most feasible plan. For years, emergency harvest needs in various parts of the country have been met by travelling caravans, the "Okies" and "Arkies" of the western states;
the negroes who followed the summer northward from Florida. At the present time, with restrictions on gas and rubber, with reduction in numbers due to recruiting for military service, and also for defense industries, the available workers in all these groups has been cut down and their movements greatly restricted. While these groups will continue to furnish a labor source, especially for harvest time, their numbers will be more and more reduced. A Florida paper told recently of the induction of 200 Negroes into the army from one community. More and more public agencies will need to organize their enlistment and transportation.

In an earlier paragraph, reference was made to a classification of some farmers as "Commercial farmers" as opposed to others who live and work on farms but get little more than mere subsistence from them. As of 1939, H. Alexander (Agricultural Yearbook, 1940) estimated that families in this group comprised as many as three million people of whom one million were receiving some form of government relief. In some cases, such families have been helped through government loans and advice toward financial stability and productivity. In other cases, they are living on what are characterized as 'sub-marginal' farms, areas on which the possibility of any real self-sustaining commercial production is more than doubtful. Indeed, a definite program has been under way for some years for the gradual purchase of such sub-marginal areas, their withdrawal from farm use, and their gradual development as part of the forests preserve of their respective states. Coincident with the withdrawal of such farms, their former residents are encouraged and helped to move and become established in favorable regions. From the large reserve still remaining of such subsistence farmers, it is proposed by gradual education to enlist many thousands of experienced farm workers who will be valuable additions in other regions where labor is now scarce.

City students as farm workers. From the ranks of the youth of the cities, the young men of good physical development from 15-17 years of age, and the young women of a wider range, there can be recruited tens of thousands of potentially valuable farm workers. Actually such use is already being made of them, on temporary and partially organized basis, but it is suggested here that such use be extended according to carefully planned programs. For the present, the primary purpose of such recruiting would be its immediate contribution toward agricultural production. Coincidentally, there would accrue educational values of inestimable worth, and on a long-term basis, the educational returns might well outweigh the immediate value in food production.

A workable program for their use is far from being in the class of wild and impracticable theories. The experience of numerous communities during the past summer in the emergency use of high school and college students has laid a wide experimental basis. During the First World War hundreds of boys of high school age were enlisted in the "Boys' Working Reserve" to serve individually, and from camp groups as farm workers. Already the federal Office of Education has set up a program for a similar "Victory" Corps and the organization of such groups is under way in high schools throughout the country. Two other federal projects, the C.C.C., and the work centers of the N.Y.A. should be able to contribute a wealth of practical experience
and of equipment and perhaps residence centers for agricultural work camps. In both types of these former federal work camps, training and educational programs were important phases of the work. Two privately supported farm work programs, the Volunteer Land Corps, and the International Student Service, have done important and successful pioneer work; the first in placing students individually on farms in Vermont and New Hampshire; the second in several work camps in farm localities.

During the summer of 1942, Brooklyn College came rather unexpectedly to have a stake in a farm-work-camp project in Dutchess County, N.Y. After a preliminary program which resulted in the enrollment of 189 prospective farmers and farmerettes, June 1st arrived with almost none of the group actually placed on farms. Negotiations by Mrs. B.K. O’Neil of the College Placement Office, resulted in the establishment of three labor camp groups in and near Red Hook, N.Y., with an initial registration of eighty-six. Later additions brought the total to over one hundred of which sixty-seven came from Brooklyn College, the remainder from City, Hunter, and Queens Colleges. The supervisors who contributed their time included four with Brooklyn College connections, one from an N.Y.A. work camp center, and two with St. Johns College (Brooklyn) background.

The three camp groups, ranging in size from seven students with a working teacher, to the largest of sixty-four, contributed through three months a large total of hours of labor. Approximately 40,000 quarts of strawberries were picked during the first two weeks, and additional thousands of containers of varying sizes of cherries, beans, tomatoes, apples were added to the harvest. In addition to these straight harvesting tasks, these student workers carried on a considerable variety of other farm operations of manual type; haying, hoeing, apple thinning, etc. Their work was sufficiently well regarded so that farmers made trips up to 26 miles to pick up their daily quota of workers. A general report of the project as an experimental venture has been made to the Brooklyn College Faculty with an analysis of the chief difficulties and with proposals designed to make any further ventures of this sort more successful.

On the basis of the past summer’s experience, of experience with a high school boy’s work camp during 1918, and of other general experience, the following outline program is offered for the utilization of college and high school youth as emergency farm workers.

Program for using city youth as farm workers.

1) Enroll for immediate service carefully selected high school boys, 15 to 17 years of age, who will agree to accept year-round assignment to live and work on individual farms. Place them with care-fully selected farmers who will accept them into their families with the proviso that they be used for part-time work during the school year, and allowed to attend the local central high school to carry on their educational program. By some daily work, and by weekend and recess work, they should at least be able to earn their keep during the year. By June 1st, they should be qualified by training to render fairly competent farmhand service during the harvest months. Following English experience, girls of a wider age-range should be included in such assignments. Protective supervision through county agents and local committees should be organized carefully.
2) For the summer harvest season of 1943, enroll large numbers of qualified 15-17 year old boys and a wider range of young women for placement on individual farms during the summer harvest season. Release from high school and college will presumably be feasible for a full four month season during 1943, and later war years.

3) For the same four month period, in fruit and vegetable areas where individual farm residence is infeasible, organize camps of varying sizes, according to housing possibilities. The recruiting, orientation, and preliminary training should be carefully planned by the home educational institutions, high school and college. From these institutions also should come selected leaders and teachers. Small camp groups, of about ten, have definite advantages; such groups can be more readily accepted into the life of the community. Housing furnishing, and management are on a simpler scale. Larger groups offer certain advantages, despite the fact that they require more "machinery". They would stand as residence dormitories, like those of a school or college away from home, and would contribute experience of the kind associated with such institutions.

The first of the above three proposals is offered with some uncertainty as to its full practicability when all factors are considered. The other two have already proved themselves beyond a shadow of a doubt. Certain general conditions should be set to cover all three types of enrollment and service. Adequate health and accident insurance should be provided for every assigned worker. Federal, state, and local agencies should take definite responsibilities in placement and in protective supervision. For camp projects, such agencies should take the lead in securing and subsidizing adequate housing, furnishings, sanitation, and other living conditions, including recreational space and facilities. For such camp groups there should be some guarantee of continuous work at reasonable rates of pay for workers of average or better capabilities. This is a most important point.

To make such camps of the greatest possible educational value, it has been suggested that with the harvest work, there might be instituted a correlated summer school program of one or more organized courses. Fruit picking is not such heavy work as to incapacitate those engaged in it from doing anything after the day's work is done. In the course of four months, an evening or two per week, plus rainy days, or even an alternating work-study program on the Antioch plan would provide time for definite credit courses. If such courses were specially correlated with the work and living experience, eg., rural sociology, farm economics, agricultural botany, etc., their value to the students would be obvious. Or, with a view to the acceleration of college programs, camps groups could be assembled comprising class sections of freshmen, newly registered as of June 1st. For them, standard required courses could be offered by teachers who combined qualities fitting them as camp leaders as well as subject teachers. Is there any doubt that in the course of four months, such freshmen could also deserve credits for physical education through their farm work? Or that girls, and perhaps boys, might be granted home economic credits as a result of practical experience in housekeeping, marketing, cooking, etc?