Book Reviews

The most attractive feature of the book is its numerous maps and engravings from the colonial period. It contains a long and useful bibliography, which probably gives undue emphasis to older titles. There are remarkably few typographical errors, although Herbert E. Bolton's classic on Florida and Texas appears as *The Spanish Wonderlands*—possibly a Freudian slip.

Indiana University
David M. Pletcher


This book needed to be written, and Harold Breimyer was well-qualified to write it. The author drew on his varied experiences in the United States Department of Agriculture and in the Council of Economic Advisers to prepare this volume. While much of the analysis is at a sophisticated level, the illustrations and applications are down to earth. The narrative moves smoothly and the style is easy.

The traditional American agriculture of a generation ago writhes under death pangs as it sheds its simpler, agrarian past and emerges into the more complex forms of the technological and commercial world of today. Neither the demise of the old nor the birth of the new is easy.

The first section of the book deals with the concept of individual freedom in an agricultural setting. The agrarian philosophy that undergirds traditional agriculture places a high value on such institutions as family farm, owner-operation, low tenancy, and that poorly defined thing we call freedom. A substantial body of thought has maintained in former years that these institutions, expressing themselves through their traditional social and political values, have been the wellspring of social and political stability in our entire society.

In today's transition to commercial agriculture and concentrated agri-business, many of the traditional attributes of agriculture are under pressure, and the values growing out of them are shaky. Much of the struggle in agricultural policy is concerned with an attempt to preserve the traditional social and political values of an essentially agrarian society, while we project our farmers into the commercial pattern of our urban and heavily industrial world in which the modern farmer must operate. To accomplish this trick requires more finesse than anyone has demonstrated to date, or than the author suggests.

Not only is the traditional on-the-farm independence of the farm operator threatened; but also various groups are experimenting with new systems or organization, such as contractual integration—both vertical and horizontal, new and larger cooperatives, bargaining associations, withholding actions, and the like.

Today's economic pressures for change in agriculture are compelling.

To resist them in the name of individual freedom, for example, is often to forego the chance for increased earnings and higher living levels associated with modern large-scale and often integrated business organization. We may one day decide that many of our most cherished
personal values, customs, and institutions, which were essentially forged in an agrarian setting, may not be very useful in our modern urban-industrial society.

In another section, the author shows the growing interdependence between farmers and the economic institutions of present-day agriculture. It is made clear that the concept of total independence of farmers is a delusion; that the modern farm is really involved in an intricate network of complex relationships. The farmer is dependent upon—and often at the mercy of—a multiplicity of services outside his line fences. Some of these are performed by farmers' cooperatives, some by private or corporate entrepreneurs, and some through the activities of government.

There is growing pressure on the small “independent” unit, in which the farmer combines in one person the functions of owner, operator, and manager, and uses the market exchange to conduct his relations with his suppliers and his markets. Various forms of integration and contractual agreements are invading agriculture, with their inevitable erosion of some of the traditional freedom and independence that have characterized traditional farming.

The author does not hold these changes to be harmful or undesirable. His analysis of them against the historical perspective of agrarian tradition is stimulating.

The job is not necessarily to preserve traditional agriculture or its historical traditions and institutions. The challenge is rather to devise a policy for agriculture which will move it into its industrial age and at the same time strengthen the dignity and worth of the individual in it. The author feels this goal is possible of attainment.

Purdue University

Earl L. Butz