

**A BRIEF COURSE IN  
RURAL ECONOMICS AND  
RURAL SOCIOLOGY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649297825

A Brief Course in Rural Economics and Rural Sociology by John Phelan

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Cover @ 2017

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UNIVERSITY OF  
CALIFORNIA

A BRIEF COURSE IN

# RURAL ECONOMICS AND RURAL SOCIOLOGY

By

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EAU CLAIRE BOOK & STATIONERY CO.

EAU CLAIRE, WISCONSIN

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## INTRODUCTION



The cordial reception given the first edition of this little book has made a second edition necessary. Some changes, which in the light of class room use seemed advisable have been made. Many topics have been treated more fully, a few that were not in the first edition have been included, and a few others have been omitted entirely. A course of study adapted to eighth grade pupils in rural schools has been added. In making use of this course of study in a rural school it is suggested that the topics be taken up in connection with the work in history, civics, geography, etc.

This book is intended as an introduction to the study of rural economics and rural sociology. It has been prepared to meet the needs of rural teachers and pupils in rural schools. In no sense is it a scientific treatise. It will have served its purpose if it leads its readers to a further study of the great movements making for the betterment of country life.

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Part I.

## RURAL ECONOMICS

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### SOME ECONOMIC TERMS

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**Economics Defined.** The first question that naturally arises in our minds when we take up a new subject is what is the subject about. If we examine text books on general economics, we find that the topics treated are those about which we read every day in the newspapers and magazines; as, for example, labor and wages, child labor, labor unions and their purposes, strikes and boycotts, capital and interest, banks and banking, exchange, land and rent, tenancy, conservation of natural resources in mines, forests, streams, fertility of the soil, etc. We note, too, that all of the topics have something to do with wealth. This fact leads us naturally to the definition of economics as "the social science which treats of man's wants and the goods (commodities and services) upon which the satisfaction of his wants depends." A simpler definition is, "Economics is a study of man's efforts to get a living".

**Rural Economics.** Rural Economics treats of those activities of man which have to do with the making and spending of a living in the country. In a constructive sense it is concerned with the business life of rural communities, in order that farm crops may be improved in quality and quantity, that farm products may reach the consumer with the least possible cost of transportation and delivery, that the business of farming may be made more exact through the aid of science, that accounting may take the place of rule of the thumb methods of cost computation, that those who will make the best use of the land be encouraged to remain upon the farms, and above all that the future may be provided for by making the





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The primary purpose of all education is training for citizenship in the large sense of the word. A good citizen is able to make an honest living by his own labor; hence the schools should prepare him to be an efficient worker and give him some knowledge of the industrial conditions which he will have to meet. A good citizen is able to do his part of the work which society requires. He must be able to fill local offices in church, state and school; and hence he must know something about the needs of his community, economic, social, political. Good schools and churches, improved roads, and efficient government are not the result of accident but are the direct product of education to higher and better ideals of life and living. A good citizen must be able to derive pleasure from books, magazines, pictures, lectures, and other intellectual interests. Illiteracy in our land is a disgrace for the younger generation. Right thinking and living are as much part of good citizenship as the ability to make money, and right living and thinking depend largely upon one's intellectual outlook. A good citizen must be a potent force in support of the right, able to distinguish quickly and accurately between the right and the wrong of every public question. If the purpose of the school is to train for citizenship, it follows that teachers, in whose hands rests a large part of the education which our boys and girls receive, must themselves know something of the practical affair of everyday life.

## The Development of Agriculture in the United States

**Early Agricultural Conditions.** Our agricultural development has been influenced by many forces chief among which may be mentioned (1) our vast western territory of rich farming land; (2) the invention of farm machinery and tools; (3) the development of railroads, canals, and roads; (4) slave labor in the south; (5) the development of factories and the growth of large cities; (6) agricultural education.

During the colonial period and after the Revolution until about the year 1830 but little progress was made in agricul-

ture. The Indians, who were not bad farmers for their day, taught the colonists many lessons. From them the early settlers learned how to grow the two chief crops of colonial days, corn and tobacco. The Indians practiced seed selection; they fertilized their fields with fish; they recognized the value of birds to agriculture; they made use of irrigation in the West; they cured tobacco, preserved meats, fruits, vegetables. Though their methods of farming were crude and their tools few, it is said that they raised not less than one million bushels of corn per year.

Many of the farm crops and animals had to be introduced into this country from Europe. Wheat was first grown by Gosnold; potatoes were brought to Europe from Chile and thence to the North American colonies. Horses, hogs, and cattle were brought here by Columbus.

Custom, tradition, and ignorance controlled agriculture in the early days. Rotation of crops was unknown, and manures but little used. The people were facing problems with which they were unfamiliar. They were ignorant of the soil, the climate, and of the crops suited to the new land.

**Period of Westward Expansion.** After the Revolution the settlers pushed rapidly into the Western country, attracted by the rich farming land. The fact that there was rich land to be had in the West has tended to make the American a poor farmer, for there was little need of preserving the fertility of the soil. Again, the shifting of the people westward tended to hinder the development of settled community life and community institutions, such as the school and the church. Last but not least, the frontier encouraged a spirit of independence, a feeling of every one for himself and no interference. Long after the frontier passed away the spirit of independence in thought and action remained, making cooperation among farmers difficult and hindering the development of local institutions which depend for their support upon united action.

**Period of Inventions.** The period beginning about the year 1830 marks a decided change in our agricultural develop-