

An Authoritative Voice: the Reorientation of the Canadian Farmers' Movement, 1935 to 1945

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Article abstract

L'agriculture canadienne a subi de multiples transformations depuis le siècle dernier ; divers organismes ont tour à tour jalonné l'éveil de la conscience rurale qu'on observe dans la deuxième moitié du dix-neuvième siècle de même qu'ils ont caractérisé le militantisme qui se manifeste au début du vingtième. Les années trente verront ce mouvement adopter une orientation beaucoup plus axée sur les problèmes du marché et, en 1935, on fonde la *Canadian Chamber of Agriculture*. C'est sur les activités qui ont marqué la première décennie de cette association que se penche l'auteur de cet article.

Un des premiers objectifs de cet organisme fut d'établir de solides structures régionales-provinciales. La Chambre préconisait la mise sur pied d'un marché ordonné, l'instauration de services sociaux adéquats en milieu rural, l'amélioration du système de crédit en vigueur et l'élaboration d'une politique nationale convenable en matière d'agriculture. Au cours de la deuxième grande guerre, l'association eut gain de cause sur plusieurs points. Cependant, en cours de route, le mouvement se transforma peu à peu en groupe de pression et perdit graduellement son aspect propagandiste. On semblait désormais accepter que, bien qu'il soit maintenant plus clairement défini, le rôle de l'agriculture était appelé à diminuer dans la vie canadienne.

*An Authoritative Voice: the Reorientation of the Canadian Farmers' Movement, 1935 to 1945**

IAN MACPHERSON

Canadian agriculture has been noted most obviously by historians for three main watersheds since Confederation. During the later nineteenth century, the early organizations of Canadian farmers, highlighted by the Patrons of Husbandry in the 1870s and the Patrons of Industry in the 1890s, played important if attenuated roles.¹ At the start of the twentieth century, the second outburst, associated with Grain Growers' Associations and the early organizations of the United Farmers movements, affected the political process and helped define regional consciousnesses. Then, most dramatically, at the end of World War One, the Progressive movement altered Canadian political culture, upset the balance of power in Ottawa, and changed the governments of several provinces. Largely because of their political consequences, such outbursts have been studied closely, though their underlying economic, technological, and social ramifications have not yet received the attention they deserve. Rather remarkably, though, a fourth major turning point, which began in the 1930s, has not yet been regarded seriously by historians.²

The main reason why this last watershed in Canadian agricultural history has been generally ignored is that it did not produce any obvious challenge to the existing political system. Rather significantly, too, it produced no semi-secret societies; it was not characterized by an overpowering defence of the farm based on the rural myth; and it was not entwined with numerous causes such as prohibition, feminism, and the Social Gospel. Instead, it was limited in purpose, frankly economic in outlook, and pragmatic in its methods. The day of charismatic farm leaders was going, the rural philosophers were in eclipse, and the agrarian dream of a reformed world was fading. Such reduced perspectives, however, did not mean that the latest reorientation was

*The author is indebted to M. Farren for his assistance in undertaking research for this paper and to Professor J. Thompson for his comments. He is also indebted to the Canada Council and the University of Victoria for providing the assistance that made it possible.

- 1 For an introductory bibliography to Canadian agricultural history, see F.J.K. Grezic, "Introduction", L.A. Wood, *A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada* (Toronto, 1975).
- 2 None of the texts commonly used in teaching Canadian history at the university level refer, even in passing, to the changes in agriculture or in agricultural organizations which occurred during the 1930s and 1940s. This paper outlines the main changes in the farm movement in that period; it does not, in the space available, examine the underlying social and economic factors involved.

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unimportant. Indeed, in terms of how it indicated a changed role for Canadian agriculture, it may have been the most important of the four outbursts from the countryside.

The emphasis on economics, of course, was not in itself new. All the previous rural protests had been intricately tied to significant economic changes and all had had important economic programmes. In fact, finding ways to meet rising economic costs, to take advantage of transportation changes, and to develop advantageous marketing programmes had been basic to all of the agrarian outbursts. What was new was that significant sections of Canadian agriculture came to the realization that widespread government intervention was necessary to ensure a "just price" for farm products. Previously, the vast majority of Canadian farmers had resisted government intervention in the market place. Even the government sale of grain in World War One had been regarded suspiciously, both when it was introduced and retrospectively.³ In fact, most farmers of all commodities had preferred the open market system and, for those who wanted some collective method, the traditional technique up to 1929 had been through co-operative organization. Patterned after foreign models, especially in Denmark and the United States, marketing co-operatives had become common among grain growers, dairymen, sheep men, poultry producers, fruit growers, and even vegetable growers. Indeed, especially after the advent of pooled marketing in the 1920s,⁴ co-operatives had become an integral part of rural economic and social life.

Nevertheless, there were limitations to co-ops as economic institutions. Increasingly, they had become complex organizations requiring an expertise not always readily available among managers and boards of directors. More seriously, co-operatives could never apparently provide a total solution to rural marketing problems. The ultimate solution was complete control of the marketing system by farmers on a commodity basis. Only by that type of domination could farmers ensure what they considered to be a "just price"; only by that method could they regulate prices across crop years. The basic problem with co-operatives was that, while most could gain majority support from farmers, nearly all failed in gaining more than two-thirds support from producers. Those remaining outside often benefitted from the impact of co-operatives but, by "dumping" their produce, could also depress prices.⁵ Stated simply, co-operatives, drawing produce from various size farm operations and from different production areas, could sometimes, on the average, be marginally less efficient. The underlying cause for that weakness was that co-operatives were deeply rooted in the rural thought of the early twentieth century and were committed to helping small operators on family farms, even when those farms were barely economic.

3 See C.F. Wilson, *A Century of Canadian Grain* (Saskatoon, 1978); and H.A. Innis, *The Diary of Alexander James McPhail* (Toronto, 1940).

4 For a discussion of the impact of pooling, see I. MacPherson, *Each for All: A History of the Co-operative Movement in English Canada, 1900-1945* (Toronto, 1979).

5 See Public Archives of Canada (hereinafter PAC), Canadian Federation of Agriculture Papers (hereinafter CFA), vol. 1, file "Canadian Chamber of Agriculture - G.G. Coote, 1938-39", G.G. Coote, "Submission (in part) of Canadian Chamber of Agriculture to Rowell Commission"; vol. 10, file "Alberta Farmers' Union", H.E. Nichols to C.G. Groff, 7 September 1944.

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Co-operative marketing was also demonstrably weak in influencing the international flow of commodities. Ironically, even the wheat pools had limited impact internationally. Originally, they had been organized to influence the international trade and thus they had established offices overseas to facilitate grain sales and had attempted, with some success, to develop special arrangements with the large co-operatively-owned milling companies in Europe. During the late twenties they had even spearheaded a drive to unite with grain producers in the United States, Argentina, and Australia in a commodity agreement to regulate the international grain market.⁶ The attempt, however, was premature as farmers overseas and governments at home and abroad would not join in the mammoth undertaking. This failure to organize the grain trade internationally was followed by the collapse of the pools in the early thirties. While the mitigating circumstances of that collapse ensured that farmer loyalty would remain strong, it nevertheless further seemed to demonstrate that co-operative techniques were incapable of coping with the broad ups and downs of international marketing systems.

Amid these failures, the inevitable, increasingly-preferred⁷ solution to the limited potential of co-operatives was marketing boards.⁸ The prototypes for this kind of marketing were seen in the sale of grains by the Canadian government during World War One and in the marketing boards that had appeared during the twenties in Australasia and South Africa. Indeed, by 1932 marketing boards had been adopted in thirty-eight countries around the world. From the point-of-view of many Canadian farmers, government-controlled marketing boards made up largely of farmers were the first giant step toward "orderly marketing", a concept which included the maintenance of fair prices, the regulation of supply, the cultivation of demand, and the improvement of quality. Though hardly seeing them as panaceas, many farmers nevertheless believed boards were essential to the development of sound methods of production in the countryside.

This emphasis on marketing was merely the most controversial aspect of the new orientation of Canadian agriculture in the 1930s. Just as fundamentally, organized Canadian agriculture was moving toward a redefinition of its role in society. Inexorably, it was searching for a new, more clearly-defined relationship with government and a more authoritative voice in society generally. It was concerned about diversifying production, especially on the Prairies; about keeping abreast with the remarkably rapid changes in animal husbandry, plant science, and farm technolo-

6 See *Proceedings of the First International Pool Conference which Includes the Third International Wheat Pool Conference* (Regina, 1928).

7 Not all farmers, even among those who supported co-operatives, wanted marketing boards. Significant members wanted a completely "free" market while another sizeable group wanted to place all their hopes on co-operatives. The latter group was more important than is generally realized. It played an important role in defeating the agitation for the "100% Pool" in Saskatchewan during the 1930s and it resisted the attempts of the mid and later thirties to develop marketing boards. For a brief discussion of the co-operative movement and marketing boards, see I. MacPherson, *Each for All*.

8 Marketing boards were not considered as replacements for co-operative marketing by most farm leaders. Most boards would need representatives from farm groups and co-operative enthusiasts assumed their organizations would gain the right to name board members.

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gy; about improving social services in rural areas; and about enhancing the opportunities for young people on farms. It increasingly called out for planning based on consensus in the countryside, and it was determined to enhance the quality of rural life. Alarmed by the growing gaps between town and country in public utilities, educational resources, amusements, and social services. Canadian farm groups were becoming more aggressive, more practical, and in some ways more successful.

I

On an institutional level, the reorientation of Canadian agriculture was symbolized by the emergence of the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture in 1935. Its development began two years earlier when Prairie and British Columbia farm leaders met at the World's Grain Show in Regina. There was some enthusiasm shown for forming a national organization at that meeting, but the idea might have died had it not been for the continuing agitation of J.T. Hull and J.H. Wesson, respectively secretary of the Manitoba Wheat Pool and president of the Saskatchewan Pool.⁹ Then, in 1934, C.A. Hayden, editor of *Country Life in B.C.*, gave the movement considerable impetus in a series of interviews on the subject with thirty-seven farm leaders, including some from outside British Columbia.¹⁰ Subsequently, at the Royal Winter Fair, held in Toronto in November, 1935, seventy-five national farm leaders decided to form the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture. The name was proposed by British Columbian representatives who had formed a provincial chamber earlier that year. The national organization was nonpartisan and intended to unite all branches of Canadian agriculture for collective action,¹¹ to provide whatever services farmers wanted, and to help formulate national agricultural policies.¹² To encourage communications among farm groups, the Chamber sparked the formation of provincial or regional associations made up of farming and co-operative organizations. By 1937 a strong network was in place across the country.¹³

The context within which the Chamber evolved was complex. The most obvious backdrop was the Depression. Across the country, farmers of all commodities were reeling, angry yet uncertain, before the deepening Depression. While the most obvious victims were Prairie farmers who suffered from the cruel coincident of drought, there

9 CFA, vol. 13, file 17, "British Columbia Federation of Agriculture, 1941-44", W.E. Haskins to J.T. Hull, 18 June 1942.

10 *Ibid.*, Series of letters between Haskins and Hull; and *The United Farmer*, 3 January 1936, p. 2.

11 The Chamber as originally established was liberal in admitting any group of farmers except those connected directly with processors, for example, the National Dairy Council. Aside from provincially or regionally based organizations, there were two national commodity groups affiliated in the early years, the Canadian Horticultural Council and the National Dairy Federation. See H.H. Hannam's letters to G.G. Coote, Glenbow-Alberta Foundation, G.G. Coote Papers, box 12, file 186.

12 CFA, vol. 5.

13 The regional/provincial organizations which made up the CFA by 1939 included provincial chambers or associations of co-operative institutions in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island. The Maritimes Chamber of Agriculture represented farm groups in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

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were others who suffered deeply as well.¹⁴ In the fruit industry weather conditions, constricting markets, and high fixed costs impoverished many previously-affluent farmers. In the dairy industry, conditions worsened as farmers on reduced incomes tried to adjust to the new marketing patterns created by the emergence of the centralized plants and large milksheds typical of modern dairies. No segment of Canadian agriculture, in fact, escaped the economic adversities of the Dirty Thirties.

The Chamber, then, was partly a consequence of the Depression. It was also the outgrowth nationally of a wide range of organizational activity which had swept nearly all segments of Canadian agriculture since 1900. Some of the organizations, like Canadian Livestock Co-operatives (Maritimes), Co-opérative Fédérée, United Farmers' Co-operative, the wheat pools, the United Farmers of Alberta, and British Columbia Fruit Growers' Association, were old bottles being filled with new wine. Others, like the United Farmers of Manitoba, the British Columbia Chamber of Agriculture, and numerous commodity groups, were either new or they were transformations of older associations of producers. While all of these institutions demanded basic changes, some were more precise than others in what they wanted. The most obvious centres of agitation for changing the national agricultural picture were the Prairie grain growers, the British Columbia fruit producers, and the United Farmers movement in Ontario. From them would come most of the leaders of the new national movement.

A focus for the new organizational activity was the attempt to create a national marketing programme during the last months of the R.B. Bennett regime. Numerous groups had lobbied for this programme;¹⁵ and it had been regarded as a major breakthrough, the culmination of years of effort.¹⁶ Significantly, Bennett's Natural Products Marketing Act of 1934 coincided approximately with two other important developments, the investigations of the Royal Commission on Price Spreads and the creation of the central Bank of Canada. The revelations of the Commission stressed the power of middle men and suggested the spectre of a few food processing firms and wholesale houses dominating the agricultural sector.¹⁷ The agitation for a central bank, long a major issue in parts of rural Canada,¹⁸ further revealed extensive

14 In late 1934 when the Chamber was being organized, the index of farm prices stood at 60.9 (the base year was 1926). This marked a rise from early 1933 when it had stood at 43.0. The weakest segment—but also the largest segment of Canadian agriculture—was field products which consistently was five to eight points below the national farm average. *The Economic Annalist*, (December 1934), p. 2.

15 By conservative estimate, there are over twenty thousand pages of correspondence and memoranda connected with this lobbying in the Bennett Papers (PAC). The first major industry-wide meeting on marketing was in Toronto in November, 1933. The meeting sent a resolution in favour of federal legislation for marketing and this resolution in effect became the basis for the Bennett government's bill. See PAC, Records of the Department of Agriculture, RG 17 (hereinafter Agriculture Records), vol. 3338, H.B. Cowan to W.M. Clark, 9 April 1934.

16 See *The Western Producer*, several issues, 1934.

17 See *The Western Producer*, *The Scoop Shovel*, *The Farmers Advocate*, and *The Country Guide*, 1935.

18 The two major rural spokesmen for banking reform were W.C. Good and G.G. Coote. See the former's *Farmer Citizen* (Toronto, 1958), pp. 131-8; and the Coote Papers, files 57-93.

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concentrations of wealth and historic ties between business and government. These three inter-related developments convinced many farm leaders that it was essential for agriculture to assume a new, more aggressive role in Ottawa. For too long too many farm groups had puritanically remained aloof from the corridors of power in both Ottawa and provincial capitals.

The indecision over marketing created by the Liberal victory in 1935 further intensified the drive toward lobbying activities. The Liberals under W.L. Mackenzie King did not have a clearly developed agricultural policy. Instead, there were different factions within the party and within cabinet struggling over the issues of international marketing agreements, minimum prices for various commodities (but especially grain), the continuation of the wheat board, and national marketing legislation. Generally, the organized farmers had difficulty making their case on these issues to the King government. The most sympathetic Liberal was the formally retired, but still active W.R. Motherwell.¹⁹ Throughout the late thirties he was an important spokesman and advisor for the Canadian Chamber. The new Minister of Agriculture and former Saskatchewan Premier, J.G. Gardiner, was respected but among farmers, as among members of his own party, was hated as much as he was admired. Just as importantly, Gardiner had to be convinced that greater government regulation of the agricultural sector was necessary;²⁰ he would not be until the war years. T.A. Crerar, once the champion of agriculture and leader of the Progressives, was in almost total eclipse. The farmers' movement had passed him by in both its political and economic programmes during the early 1920s. By the late thirties, there was little good will left except for that lingering between him and the United Grain Growers. Crerar became particularly suspect in 1936 and 1937 when the Liberal government apparently moved to abandon the Canadian Wheat Board. Similarly, C.A. Dunning, Premier of Saskatchewan in the 1920s and now Minister of Finance, had lost touch with the new generation of national leaders and did not look sympathetically upon the call for greater government control over marketing.

The problems of the Depression, the cumulative effects of three decades of rural organization, the opportunities and revelations of the Bennett regime, the challenges of international marketing systems, and the uncertainties caused by the King government's ambivalent policies, then, form the initial context within which the reorientation of Canadian agriculture took place. In total, those factors stimulated the various groupings of Canadian farmers to surmount their traditional differences based on regional competition, personalities, varying commodity needs, and ethnicity to become a reasonably coherent force. The movement toward a consensus did not happen immediately, however, and in fact evolved in the period between the mid-thirties and the early 1940s.

II

After its formation in 1935, the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture went through a

19 See Coote Papers, files 179-92.

20 D. Forster, "Grain Policy of the Canadian Government", research paper kindly loaned to the author by Professor H.B. Neatby, Carleton University.

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period of difficulty until it found its authoritative voice. Though J.H. Wesson, a powerful leader in the pooling movement, was president in the early years, the most important official was the permanent secretary. Initially, the secretary was H.B. Cowan, the editor of *Farm and Dairy*, a Peterborough journal long esteemed in eastern Canada. A man with remarkably diverse interests,²¹ Cowan had been active in the farm movement since the early years of the century. He was a good writer with a wide acquaintanceship, particularly in the diverse Ontario agriculture but, isolated in Peterborough, he had limited contacts in Ottawa and weak connections with western, Quebec, and Maritimes agricultural circles. He was also handicapped while he was secretary from 1935 to 1938, because most of the provincial/regional organizations were just being organized or were trying to consolidate their strength. Faced by these problems, Cowan was unable to provide aggressive leadership. His most important contributions were in preparing information on farm machinery for presentation to governments, in putting forward the arguments for creation of a co-operative bank,²² and in establishing links with other national farm movements. He played a role in developing the agenda for the Empire Producers' Conference in Sydney in 1938 and was secretary to the Canadian delegation to that conference.

Although imperial trade ultimately was only a partial solution to the problems confronting Canadian farmers, the Chamber did explore this possibility in the 1930s and 1940s. Negotiations had started at the Imperial Trade Conference in 1932, when Canadian farmers had made some limited gains.²³ At the Sydney Conference, the Canadians played important roles in pressing for producer domination of marketing boards throughout the Empire, for greater trade within the Empire through commodity councils, and for regulation of trade in the interests of orderly marketing.²⁴ This grand dream of developing harmonious trade in agricultural goods within the Empire was not realized at or after the Conference, but the involvement of the Canadian leaders reaffirmed their belief in a drastic change in government policy on agriculture.

During 1938 the Chamber's financial situation deteriorated. Nearly all the funding for the organization came from the Prairie wheat pools and would continue to do so until the early 1940s.²⁵ For a period, the western groups, angered by the lethargic organizational activities in the Maritimes and the reluctance of some Quebec

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- 21 Cowan was an ardent advocate of prohibition, proportional representation, women's rights, and the social gospel. When interviewed by the author in 1967, Mr. Cowan had to curtail the sessions because of meetings with members of Parliament over the need for the Single Tax. To the end of his life, he "kept the faith".
 - 22 Cowan was an advocate of creating a special bank to meet the needs of the rural co-operatives and to assist generally in resolving the problems of rural credit. He gathered information from American sources where special banking provisions had helped the development of co-operatives. See CFA, vol. 1, file "Canadian Council of Agriculture, 1937-8", H.B. Cowan to G.G. Coote, 15 October 1937; and vol. 3, file "Cowan, H.B.—Circulars & Correspondence, 1937-39", Cowan to Coote, 27 July 1937.
 - 23 See V.C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto, 1957).
 - 24 See CFA, vol. 4, file "Empire Producers' Conference", reports to directors of Canadian delegation.
 - 25 In most of the years in the late thirties, the three pools contributed about 66 per cent of the Chamber's income and the United Farmers' Co-operative about 25 per cent.

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organizations, nearly seceded. Amid the resulting financial uncertainties, Cowan resigned and was replaced in late 1938 by George Coote. A member of Parliament for the United Farmers of Alberta between 1921 and 1935, Coote was well known in rural circles and had good contacts in Ottawa. A veteran of more than twenty years of farmer politics, he was a wisened observer who summarized well the course of agrarianism in a speech he gave in 1940:

Agriculture, particularly in Western Canada, has heretofore followed the illusion that by pressing for the idealistic it could best accomplish its ends. Election after election, thousands of farmers rallied to the cry of free trade—equal rights to all, and special privileges to none. The net result of all this effort seems to have been virtually nil.

I believe the great majority of farmers have absolutely given up all hope of any such policy being adopted—at least in their lifetime.

The farmer feels that there is only one thing left for him to do. That is to secure whatever legislation may be necessary to protect him (insofar as possible and particularly in the domestic market) against the low prices which have destroyed his income so many times in the past.²⁶

Coote was fortunate in becoming secretary of the Chamber when there were renewed efforts to unite Canadian agricultural circles. In December, 1938, John Bracken, the premier of Manitoba, sponsored a gathering of western agricultural leaders, civil servants, and academics in Winnipeg. The conference marked the re-emergence of pool leaders as dominant voices in the grain industry after the adversities of the early thirties. It was, however, more than a meeting to ventilate the traditional grievances of western grain growers. All the major commodity groups were represented and, most importantly, in addition to pressing for a continuation of the Wheat Board, the conference advocated a comprehensive agricultural marketing programme. It also examined the long range trends for agriculture, not too optimistically as it turned out, thereby re-enforcing the pessimistic search for mechanisms of survival in rural areas. To explore the problems made clear at Winnipeg—the challenge of overproduction, the impact of technology, and the international marketing situation—the conference appointed a Continuing Committee on Markets and Agricultural Readjustment.²⁷

As a result of the success of the Bracken conference, eastern farmers held their own meeting in Montreal in March, 1939. Sponsored by the five eastern provincial governments and Chambers of Agriculture, it was organized by H.H. Hannam. This gathering was a remarkable event. Traditionally, the farmers of eastern Canada had been a highly individualistic lot. Divided by geography, ethnicity, commodity group, and personalities, they had never, even in the Progressive outburst, presented clear, united policies on agriculture. At Montreal, while subdivided into four commodity groups, the eastern farmers came out solidly on behalf of centralized marketing systems. As in the case of the Bracken conference, a continuing committee was appointed to investigate the problems of agriculture and to seek new marketing

26 CFA, vol. 3, file "Coote, G.G., Secretary's Files (C.C.A.) 1938-41", G.G. Coote, "National Forum—Should Farmers Lobby?"

27 For summaries of the Bracken Conference, see Wilson, *A Century of Canadian Grain*, pp. 576-81.

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legislation. Later that year, the committee, using a draft bill drawn up by W.E. Haskins of British Columbia, unsuccessfully asked the federal government to legislate for federal marketing of agricultural goods across provincial and national boundaries.²⁸ Nevertheless, the fact that such unity could be achieved was significant because it indicated how aroused the farm population had become even in traditionally quiescent eastern Canada.

Coote and the Chamber transmitted the dissatisfaction of the eastern farm groups to an increasingly concerned federal government. They also facilitated an exchange of information among commodity groups organizing marketing boards on a provincial basis. This development began after the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council had declared Bennett's Natural Products Marketing Act unconstitutional in 1936. British Columbia led the way in preparing provincial legislation and, when its act was declared *intra-vires* in 1938, the Chamber pressured and aided provincial chambers to secure similar legislation in all provinces. By 1940, all except Quebec had general marketing acts allowing for provincially-organized marketing boards and commodity agreements. Ontario and British Columbia were particularly active in establishing marketing boards largely because of the militancy of their provincial Chambers of Agriculture and the particular difficulties of their tree fruit, vegetable, dairying, and livestock farmers.²⁹

An effective speaker and an experienced politician, Coote was especially successful in articulating the rationale for a revived farmers movement. In his view organized agriculture was a necessary grouping in any modern state. Businessmen and labourers had organized powerful institutions in their own interest and he believed farmers had to do the same. The main aim of such organization was to permit farmers, in conjunction with government, to plan more effectively the production and sale of farm produce. In his view, the Canadian economy still rested largely on a rural base. The Depression could largely be explained by the reduced purchasing power of farmers, which he saw having disastrous effects as it forced the curtailment or closure of numerous industries dependent upon rural purchasing power.³⁰ On a national level, he argued in a Keynesian fashion for a loosening of credit, especially in rural areas, as the best way to stimulate the economy. In his view, steps in this direction had allowed the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, and Australia to cope more successfully than Canada with the Depression.³¹

28 CFA, vol. 28, J.H. Wesson, Presidential Address, Canadian Chamber of Agriculture, 24 January 1940.

29 See G.F. Perkin, *Marketing Milestones in Ontario, 1935-1960* (Toronto, 1962) pp. 4-6.

30 For a speech which reflects the main points Coote made consistently in the late thirties, see Coote Papers, box 11, file 99, "Agriculture, 1932-38", "Planning for Agriculture, Address Delivered by George G. Coote to Kiwanis Club, Calgary, November 15th, 1938". See also box 11, file 96, "Co-operatives, 1931-40", the speech without a title beginning "The word laissez-faire" For a more scholarly presentation of the same arguments, see PAC, W.C. Good Papers, vol. 16, file "Agriculture, 1925-1960", H.S. Arkell, "A National Policy for Agriculture".

31 G. Coote, "Planning for Agriculture", pp. 1, 7, 13.

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Coote's most important point, however, was the need for planning. He argued that controlling supply was as essential and as "moral" as controlling the flow of oil in the Turner Valley or "the out-put of Motor Cars from the assembly line of an automobile factory."³² He called for "parity prices" by which he meant that efficient farmers must be able to expect to meet their costs of production and to make a reasonable profit. Particularly attuned to the Prairie situation, he was angered by the impact of the Depression upon farm incomes. In 1926 cash income per Prairie farm had been \$2,143; in 1932 it was \$562; by 1937 it had recovered to only \$901. On a national level the picture was not much better. Between 1926 and 1932, the volume of production of food and field crops had declined only 6 per cent but the gross cash income of Canadian farmers had been cut by 62 1/2 per cent.³³ In short, as Coote and other spokesmen commonly pointed out, Canadian farmers in the Depression, although accounting for nearly one-third of the population, earned about 9 per cent of the total national income.³⁴ The only cure for such injustice was more careful planning of the rural economy.

One of the most disturbing consequences of the lack of planning for agriculture was the development of rural "slums". Flashes of the old Progressivism illuminated Coote's speeches as he described rural poverty and greater urban affluence. In a speech to the Calgary Kiwanis Club in 1938, for example, he pointed out that only one in seventy-three Prairie farm homes had a bathroom equipped with running water, only one of eighty-two kitchens had running water, and only one of every thirty-two farm homes had electric lights. All of these conveniences were commonplace in the cities.³⁵ City dwellers benefitted in other ways as well; they enjoyed paved streets, street cars, buses, fire protection, water systems, electric lights, parks, and amusements at their door, luxuries rare or non-existent in the countryside.³⁶

Coote's support lay in the West. Long a resident of Alberta, his roots lay in the distinctive rural radicalism of that province. He had limited impact in Eastern rural circles. Thus, a particularly important role was played by H.H. "Herb" Hannam who had been vice-president of the Chamber from its inception. Hannam was especially important since he was a transitional figure in the Canadian agrarian movement. A former school teacher who had briefly taught in the West, Hannam was born in Grey county and had become involved in co-operatives in the 1920s. During the early thirties, he rose rapidly within both the United Farmers of Ontario and the United Farmers' Co-operative. A dynamic personality, a convivial companion, and a dedicated worker, Hannam was by 1935 one of the best known farm leaders in Ontario. A protégé of J.J. Morrison and a disciple of W.C. Good, he had impeccable ties with the old leadership. A leader in young farmer circles, he was one of the handful of "young turks" who emerged in the United Farmers' Young People and the New

32 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

34 CFA, vol. 3, W.H. McEwen, "Food, Fighting and Farmers".

35 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

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Canada Movement in the 1920s and the 1930s.³⁷ Given this ability to communicate with both the young and the old, he became invaluable in uniting farmers behind the national Chamber.

Shortly after Coote became secretary, Hannam became president of the Chamber. In most respects the two men's outlook coincided and together they reflected the drift of thought in Canadian agricultural circles at the end of the thirties. Hannam was a particularly close student of the Danish agricultural co-operative movement;³⁸ he believed that Canadian farmers should organize into co-operatives with strong local units. He thought co-operatives should be the backbone of the organized farmers' movement, the economic strengths which would allow the provincial/regional chambers as well as the national organization to represent the rural viewpoint to government.³⁹ Similarly, he asserted that co-operatives should be the dominant voice in any marketing schemes that were developed. Above all, he called for unity in and among farm groups. On a provincial level during the late thirties, he played a major role in uniting the widely-scattered and divided Ontario farm organizations into the Ontario Chamber, a remarkable achievement given the traditional rural disunity of that province.⁴⁰ In the 1940s he played a similar role at the national level. For him the emerging farmers' movement had to unite all kinds of producers, both sexes and all age groups, in organizations capable of protecting and enhancing rural life.⁴¹

Hannam's greatest contribution, therefore, lay in the organizational zeal and skills he brought to the national Chamber. He had rejuvenated the United Farmers' Co-operative in the 1930s largely by a grass roots' campaign developed through study clubs, the publication of *The Rural Co-operator*, and the use of radio. Hannam made several speeches over radio station CFRB in Toronto in 1938 and 1939 and became impressed by the possibilities of the medium for educating farmers and mobilizing rural opinion. When he became increasingly active in the federal Chamber in the latter year, he helped to develop strong ties between it and Farm Radio Forum, the CBC's attempt to assist farm families in resolving some of their problems.⁴² Throughout the history of that programme, the tie would remain strong.⁴³ By 1945 there were nearly

37 See I. MacPherson, *Each for All*, chapters VII and VIII.

38 Interview, L. Harman, Toronto, July, 1978.

39 For a statement of Hannam's views on co-operatives, see H.H. Hannam, *Co-operation the Plan for Tomorrow Which Works To-day* (Toronto, 1937). This popular pamphlet, which went through ten printings in twelve years, deals with urban as well as rural co-ops. It was written when Hannam was most enamoured with co-operative thought.

40 For a description of the organization of the Ontario Chamber, perhaps the most complex provincial/regional chamber, see CFA, vol. 3, V.S. Melburn, "The Ontario Federation of Agriculture".

41 See H.H. Hannam, "President's Address before the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Ontario Chamber of Agriculture", 1 April 1940. United Co-operatives of Ontario Archives (Mississauga, Ont.).

42 The forums were particularly effective in English-speaking eastern Canada and played a major role in organizing farm groups to support the Maritimes and the Ontario Chambers of Agriculture.

43 Farm Radio Forum was sponsored in part by the Chamber and its programming generally reflected the interests and perspectives of the Chamber. For example, see the *Farm Forum Guide* for 1943-45 for several issues on marketing, the need to mobilize rural opinion, the cost-price squeeze in rural areas, and the role of co-operatives.

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two thousand Forums across the country, all of them potential centres of support for a national farm movement.

III

The consolidation of the Chamber — and of most Canadian agricultural organizations — picked up momentum in the adversities of the late thirties; even more, it was greatly aided by the outbreak of war. Hostilities in Europe and the consequent abrupt alteration of shipping patterns ultimately meant that Canadian farmers were in an advantageous position in the forties. There were uncertainties, however, over what commodities should have priority and over how the problems agriculture might encounter could be minimized. Thus, especially in the early war years, there was a drive to rationalize agriculture policy and to plan the rural commitments to the war effort more rationally. The increasing drift toward planning of the preceding few years would become the decided policy of governments and most farm groups by the middle of the war.

An important force in the creation of new policies for the countryside was the perspective provided by the federal and provincial departments of agriculture. From the earliest years of the century some members of those departments had gone beyond their traditional roles and become active in marketing activities.⁴⁴ Many co-operatives, especially in the fruit, livestock, and dairy industries, had been assisted greatly by civil servants. During the thirties, reorganizations of the federal and provincial departments had clarified roles for older branches of the departments and had created new marketing units.⁴⁵ Members of departments had also been largely responsible for the development of the Canadian Society of Technical Agriculturalists, an association which significantly affected agricultural policies and encouraged the professionalization of farmers. Hence, by the end of the thirties, the departments had the expertise and the organizational frameworks to undertake more aggressive roles.

When war broke out, the federal and provincial governments moved quickly to develop a war-time agricultural policy. In September, 1939, an Agricultural Supplies Board made up of federal officials was created to assume over-all direction of Canadian agriculture.⁴⁶ General policy and quotas, when necessary, would be set in Ottawa, leaving to provincial departments the task of direct supervision and advisory services. Because of uncertainties in demand and transportation, the governments were reluctant to stimulate production in the early years.⁴⁷ Two commodities, grain and apples, posed particular problems on account of gluts at home, a dwindling demand in Great Britain, the closing of European markets, and uncertain future requirements. Consequently, price support systems for grains were introduced and special programmes urging consumers to buy apple juice and apple sauce were undertaken.⁴⁸ The

44 See I. MacPherson, *Each for All*, chapter III.

45 See Agriculture Records, vol. 3376, G.S.H. Barton, "Agriculture in War Time".

46 This paper does not attempt to describe the totality of government policy on agriculture in World War Two. An admirable start on that immense topic is provided by G.E. Britnell and V.C. Fowke, *Canadian Agriculture in War and Peace, 1935-1950* (Stanford, 1962).

47 See Agriculture Records, vol. 3376, G.S.H. Barton, "Agriculture in War Time".

48 See *Ibid.*, vol. 3379, R.L. Wheeler, "Apple Marketing".

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crucial task, though, was to harmonize Canadian production with the needs of Britain and the realities of war. Starting in late 1939, federal Department of Agriculture officials negotiated with British counterparts on a commodity basis. Yearly contracts for bacon, dairy products, fish, and vegetables were the result. These contracts, in turn, indicated the priorities for Canadian agriculture.

The war caught the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture still in the process of assembling its strength. Thus, it was not able to participate as effectively in the government's activities as its leaders wished. Realizing that Coote's limited organizational skills and his residence in Nanton, Alberta were liabilities,⁴⁹ the Chamber in 1939 started to organize for major changes. A fund of ten thousand dollars was raised from member associations, the name was changed officially in 1940 to the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, and arrangements were made to open an office in Ottawa. Herb Hannam became the full-time, paid president and W.E. Haskins, long an important leader in the British Columbia fruit industry, was appointed secretary. These organizational changes were a direct reaction to the needs of the war-time economy.

As the Liberal government moved to control agricultural production, Canadian farmers became uncertain over what they should produce. In 1939 and 1940 the Agricultural Supplies Committee advised farmers to grow what they had found advantageous in the past. This advice frequently left farmers with the same situation of over-supply and inadequate incomes of the pre-war years. Even more seriously, the prices established by the government for commodities with known demand remained low. Great Britain, the chief purchaser, could afford only low prices and the federal government insisted that those prices would be the ones farmers would receive. From the viewpoint of farm groups, this meant that farmers were being asked to bear an unfair percentage of the costs of waging war.

Farm reaction to the federal policy began to crystallize in late 1939. The Chamber drew up a war-time policy calling for an increase in farm income, assistance for producers with surpluses, farmer involvement in marketing schemes, and assistance with credit problems.⁵⁰ During 1940 intense debate ensued between western grain growers and "Jimmy" Gardiner over the minimum price for wheat; when the price was set at seventy cents a bushel, Number One, basis Fort William, many farmers and the wheat pools were dissatisfied.⁵¹ In the same year the price for dairy products was pegged at levels based on the experience of the previous few years, a decision that angered an increasingly militant dairy industry.⁵² The organized farmers did not object to using contracts with Britain to help define production limits nor did they want to charge the British higher prices. What they wanted were government subsidies to ensure a reasonable income. Their anger peaked early in 1941 when the government set price levels for many non-agricultural commodities and wage levels for workers at

49 See CFA, vol. 15, file "G.G. Coote 1941-45", G. Bredt to H.H. Hannam, 26 October 1940.

50 *Ibid.*, vol. 32, "Proposed Draft of War-Time Policy for Canadian Agriculture".

51 *Ibid.*, vol. 28, J.H. Wesson, Presidential Address to the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture, 24 January 1940.

52 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, "Canadian Federation of Agriculture meeting in Toronto on January 21st, 22nd, 23rd and 24th, 1941".

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1926-29 levels. In contrast, most farm prices were left at a comparatively low bench-marks of the late thirties.

The anger erupted when Gardiner called a two day conference on the agricultural situation generally, and the pegging of butter prices specifically, at London on the 10th and 11th of January 1941. There, he met two thousand angry farmers. The Ontario Minister of Agriculture, P.M. Dewan, joined in the chorus of dissatisfaction which, in effect, said that farmer costs were high and rising while income was low and stationary. They particularly attacked pegging butter price at 34 1/2 cents a pound, about eight cents less than the 1926-29 average.⁵³ Twenty-four producers' organizations, led by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, complained bitterly to the rather surprised Gardiner about the situation.⁵⁴ Never before had so many different kinds of Ontario farmers shown such unanimity; never before had the Ontario Federation been able to enlist such support.⁵⁵

In his new position as president of the Canadian Federation, Hannam saw the London meeting as an important watershed. There, he believed, many Ontario farmers had realized the necessity of creating their own lobbying organization. This recognition, long evident in British Columbia and Prairie organizations, was also gaining acceptance in the Maritimes. In the same month, the New Brunswick Farmers' Association passed a resolution stating that its members would support only those candidates at subsequent elections who endorsed its programme of orderly marketing and parity prices. Roy Grant of the Canadian Livestock Co-operative (Moncton), A.B. MacDonald, long a leader of Nova Scotia farmers, J.C. King of the New Brunswick Department of Agriculture, and W. Walsh of the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture were the most ardent supporters of intensive organization for Maritime farmers. Only Quebec farmers remained reluctant, though even their major organizations, Co-opérative Fédérée and L'Union Catholique des Cultivateurs, joined the Canadian Federation in late 1939. Thus Hannam spoke from strength as well as with conviction when he said in early 1941,

...the maintaining of an organization to play its part in shaping legislation is a form of self-help which primary producers, in their own interests and that of the general welfare, can no longer afford to neglect. Coming face to face with the crisis today, we see more clearly the need for comprehensive organization. *But there will be other emergencies in the future and our only sensible course of action is to provide the effort and finances which will mobilize the best brains of our industry and marshal and co-ordinate the resources of all branches of agriculture behind our one organization for Canada—the Federation—in such a way that it shall be equipped at all times to speak with the dignity and weight befitting a great and basic industry.*⁵⁶

53 *Ibid.*, vol. 28, file "Reports, General Data, etc., 1940-41", Report of the Board of Directors, Canadian Federation of Agriculture, 20 January 1941, pp. 6-8.

54 *Ibid.*, vol. 5, file "Hannam, H.H., 1938-41", has a text of the O.F.A. resolution.

55 Interview, Leonard Harman, July, 1978. See also CFA, vol. 23, file 70, H.H. Hannam Presidential Address to the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Toronto, 22 January 1941.

56 *Ibid.*

After the London meeting, the Federation gained strength rapidly as the voice of Canadian agriculture. Its support, massed through member organizations, grew to 350,000 by the end of the year and it could claim that it represented significant percentages of all major commodity groups. During 1941 and 1942, the executive met several times with members of the federal cabinet while Hannam and Haskins conferred continuously with officials in the departments of agriculture. Partly through their efforts, but mostly through increased production and inflation, farm income rose until it became about 17 per cent of the national total. As this rise was accompanied by an 18 per cent decline in the rural population, the gains achieved were significant, although not on a par with those achieved by industry and labour.⁵⁷ The Federation also benefited from the pressures applied by the war to reorganize Canadian agriculture. Wheat surpluses continued to be high, indicating the need to diversify Prairie agriculture. Somewhat reluctantly, the Federation participated in the introduction of quota systems aimed at shrinking production of the West's classic staple. It reinforced the Department's call for increased production of coarse grains, livestock, and poultry and approved plans for the development of flax and sugar beet production.⁵⁸ Most importantly, it was a chief negotiator with government in deciding price levels and subsidy arrangements which in 1942 alone added \$200 million to farm income.⁵⁹ By playing a role in making and publicizing these decisions, the Federation raised its profile and coincidentally made the task of government officials considerably easier.

Coordination between governments, the Federation, and farmers generally achieved some degree of permanence in December, 1942. In that month the Agricultural Supplies Board convened a conference to set goals for 1943. The Federation played a prominent part in the conference, welcoming the attempt at communication and involvement. It collected data on the deteriorating labour and farm-machinery situation. It put forward the views of its member organizations on prices and costs. It pointed out the need for post-war planning so that agriculture would not confront, at the end of hostilities, an increasing number of farmers pursuing drastically curtailed markets. The Federation's approach was conciliatory and constructive, however, and was far removed from the confrontational atmosphere which had characterized Gardiner's London meeting.⁶⁰ Indeed, the 1942 conference was so successful that it became, in effect, the forerunner of the "Outlook Conferences" held annually since the war years.

A few months later, the Federation elaborated its programme for rigorous control over food production based on reasonable returns to the farmers. It called for the creation of a food ministry and a food board. The government, already moving in a

57 See W. E. Haskins, "Agriculture: No. 1 Industry", *The Monetary Times*, 15 August 1942.

58 See CFA, vol. 11, file "Annual Meeting 1943", H. H. Hannam "Presidential Address, Canadian Federation of Agriculture, 28 January 1943".

59 *Ibid.*, p. 2. See also W. C. Good Papers, vol. 16, file "Agriculture, 1923-47", W. M. Drummond, "Agriculture Subsidy and Price Policies".

60 For summaries of the conference in December, 1942, see the description by the Agricultural Supplies Board, (CFA, vol. 9) as well as Britnell and Fowke, *Canadian Agriculture in War and Peace*, pp. 132-4.

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similar direction, agreed to the creation of a board and it reorganized the price control structure to allow for greater farmer involvement. Control over farm food supply was transferred to the Department of Agriculture from the Wartime Prices and Trade Board and the Minister of Agriculture assumed complete responsibility for subsidy programmes. Most importantly, the government established a National Advisory Committee to the Food Board, to which the Federation and its provincial/regional affiliates appointed six of the twelve members.⁶¹ In addition, advisory committees, some old, some new, were strengthened to allow for producer participation in policy decisions on specific commodities. By war's end the Federation was represented on fifteen of these committees. After some ten years of effort, the farmers' movement had succeeded in opening permanent channels of communication with government.

In addition to this emphasis on planning agricultural policy with government, the national movement stressed a series of other priorities in the mid- and later war years. One of the most evident of these was a concern over rural health centres. Many farm organizations, but especially some in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Ontario, had long evinced a determination to improve rural medical facilities.⁶² Farmers had pioneered in co-operative health systems and rural municipality health schemes since the 1920s. Concern rose in the thirties when doctors left rural areas and when sophisticated urban health systems seemed to be more inaccessible than ever. Reacting to the investigations of the federal government into a national health programme, the Federation submitted a comprehensive national scheme to an Advisory Committee on Health Insurance in the Department of Pensions and National Health. Drawing on the experience of several farm leaders, notably George Hoadley of Alberta, the Federation's plan was well received and well publicized.

The organized farmers also were progressive in starting as early as 1941 to prepare for peace. The Federation was concerned that the gains made in the war years would be lost and thus it drafted position papers on reconstruction as early as 1942. In 1943 it presented a brief on reconstruction to the agricultural subcommittee of the Reconstruction Committee for Canada. In brief, the organized farmers of Canada were determined to gain the income levels which were adequate to maintain rural stability. They were equally determined that any post-war migration to the countryside would be planned and orderly; they were particularly concerned that the chaos of the 1919-23 period not be repeated.

Despite the problems of over-supply experienced for much of the twenties and all the thirties, the Federation's leaders believed that it would be possible to maintain the increased production of the war years and even expand it. The key was careful regulation and government encouragement of sales. Estimates made by the Department of Pensions and National Health during the war indicated that a 25 per cent

61 Good Papers, vol. 16, file "Canadian Agriculture 1923-1947", H.H. Hannam, presidential address, Canadian Federation of Agriculture, 27 January 1944.

62 See CFA, vol. 20, file "Health Insurance", "State Medicine for Saskatchewan"; "Principles for a Plan of National Health Insurance"; reports to the CFA directors on national health insurance; and correspondence between Hannam and George Hoadley. See also the author's interview with L. Harmon, July 1978.

increase in selected agricultural products was necessary before all Canadians would have an adequate diet.⁶³ Even more dramatically, there were remarkable opportunities throughout the world. In 1943 Hannam attended the Hot Springs conference of the United Nations which, in effect, established the Food and Agricultural Organization. That experience, along with a growing friendship with Lester Pearson, whom he came to know well at the conference, gave him an international perspective. He took seriously the "freedom from want" pledge of the Atlantic Charter and believed Canadian farmers could play an important role in meeting the predictably growing food problem throughout the world. Along with the leadership of the Federation he recognized that soils and agricultural production were vital assets that would become increasingly important. The profit motive aside, the role of Canadian agriculture in helping resolve international problems became, for Hannam, Wesson, and others, a popular, idealistic theme by war's end.⁶⁴

IV

By 1945, then, organized Canadian agriculture through its Federation had found a different place in Canadian life. It had accepted the existing political system and was working effectively within it. It had moved away from its traditional *laissez-faire* position and toward schemes for planned development and orderly marketing. It had shown a concern for social problems in the countryside and, through Farm Radio Forum, had found an important way to awaken farm communities to these problems. In embracing the dream of a world of plenty following the war, it had even found a new cause.

The new national agricultural policy urged by the organized Canadian farmers was perhaps best summed up in 1942 by Herb Hannam. In an article in *The Monetary Times*, he called for a policy which would:

- (1) Recognize the fundamental nature of food and soil and farm people.
- (2) Establish a fair balance of income between agriculture, labor and industry.
- (3) Give primary producers adequate representation on all boards set up to sell or handle the sale of their products.
- (4) (Encourage) the adoption by all governments within the Dominion of measures designed to establish a proper relationship between the prices of agricultural commodities and the goods and services farmers must purchase.
- (5) Recognize the principle of a two-price policy which means that prices of farm commodities in the home market must bear a proper relationship to cost of production and cost of living in Canada, even though it may be necessary for our exportable products to go to the world market at a lower price.
- (6) Develop a national marketing program designed to feed our markets both at home and abroad in an orderly manner. In the post war period this envisages the systematic handling of export products under international agreement.

63 CFA, vol. 11, file "Annual Meeting, 1943", H.H. Hannam, Presidential Address, Canadian Federation of Agriculture, 28 January 1943.

64 *Ibid.*, vols. 30-31, file 102, H.H. Hannam, "Statement for the Press Re United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture". Included in this file are several other statements.

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- (7) Develop a national production program shaped according to the needs of the marketing program designed to conserve the soil and to give our farmers guidance which would enable them to plan their farm program at least two years in advance. This is but the simple minimum requirement of any business.
- (8) Recognize the importance of and establish a long range soil conservation program designed to maintain the fertility of our soils as a vital national asset.⁶⁵

New policies, however, meant new problems, some of them only dimly perceivable in 1945. Was planning on the scale the organized farmer wanted in the 1940s possible? Could the sense of solidarity generated in farm circles in the late thirties and early forties be maintained? What level of farm operation—what size of family farm—should be judged as economic and worth preserving? How would systems like Farm Radio Forum adapt to the changes after the war? Would close co-operation with government lead to domination by civil servants and politicians? *Would an emphasis on national agrarian unity ensure the victory of moderation when radical innovation might be necessary?* How would regionalism assert itself in the post-war world? Were the currents and drifts evident in farm circles between 1935 and 1945 transitory or permanent? What were the underlying social and economic factors that had caused the farmer outburst of the preceding ten years? These questions were obvious by 1945. What was not in doubt was that the role of the Canadian farm movement had changed significantly in just one decade.

65 *Ibid.*, vol. 29, Offprint, H.H. Hannam, "Viewing the Farmer's Side", *The Monetary Times*, 17 January 1942.

Résumé

L'agriculture canadienne a subi de multiples transformations depuis le siècle dernier; divers organismes ont tour à tour jalonné l'éveil de la conscience rurale qu'on observe dans la deuxième moitié du dix-neuvième siècle de même qu'ils ont caractérisé le militantisme qui se manifeste au début du vingtième. Les années trente verront ce mouvement adopter une orientation beaucoup plus axée sur les problèmes du marché et, en 1935, on fonde la *Canadian Chamber of Agriculture*. C'est sur les activités qui ont marqué la première décennie de cette association que se penche l'auteur de cet article.

Un des premiers objectifs de cet organisme fut d'établir de solides structures régionales-provinciales. La Chambre préconisait la mise sur pied d'un marché ordonné, l'instauration de services sociaux adéquats en milieu rural, l'amélioration du système de crédit en vigueur et l'élaboration d'une politique nationale convenable en matière d'agriculture. Au cours de la deuxième grande guerre, l'association eu gain de cause sur plusieurs points. Cependant, en cours de route, le mouvement se transforma peu à peu en groupe de pression et perdit graduellement son aspect propagandiste. On semblait désormais accepter que, bien qu'il soit maintenant plus clairement défini, le rôle de l'agriculture était appelé à diminuer dans la vie canadienne.