

Hotel Nogaró
Buenos Aires, D. F.
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In the United States wheat is a cash crop. Corn, being a feed grain, is marketed as livestock. In the Argentine all the major cereal crops--corn, wheat and flax--are cash crops, the first two, in normal years, being almost equal in peso value. The provinces of Buenos Aires, Santa Fe and Córdoba compose the corn belt of Argentina. Although the corn belt area is approximately equal to the area of the states of Iowa, Illinois and Missouri, the part of it which gives the highest yields and which is most devoted to corn cultivation is scarcely larger than the state of Iowa. This area comprises the northwest part of Buenos Aires province, the southern part of Santa Fe province and the central and eastern part of the province of Córdoba. In order to inspect the best corn and the area of most of Argentina's corn production, Mr. Paul Nyhus, the agricultural attache of the U. S. Embassy, Mr. Donald Stoops and I entrained from Buenos Aires and traveled 223 kilometers west and slightly north to Pergamino. At Pergamino Nyhus hired an automobile. The 1942 corn crop is uniformly good and promises to average more than 40 bushels to the acre in the area we saw. There are several outstanding differences between Argentine corn, a flint variety, and the dent corn of the United States. The ears of the Argentine corn are smaller. In appearance the kernels are of a different, a stronger yellow. There is not the dent on the kernel which gives the name to the North American type. Instead, the kernel is round and slightly fuller at the end. Given the same conditions, Argentine corn is not likely to absorb moisture as readily as the dent corn. Corn here is planted in rows, but in such density that it does not have an ordered appearance. Although the ears are not so large, the dense growth tends to make up the deficiency by providing more ears to the acre. Production here is fully equal to that of North American hybrid corn planted on good, glacial drift, loam soil. Some fields will easily produce 80 bushels to the acre. The 1942 crop is now made.

Argentine corn does not have the annual "race with the frost" which is a crop hurdle in the United States corn belt. If there were a frost danger here, the entire corn crop would be past harm's doing in another week. And the mercury rises into the 80's and 90's every day. Snow in this latitude, even in winter, is a phenomenon. It is a good thing for the Argentine tenant farmer that there is no frost danger, because he would have no earthly use for soft corn; whereas in the United States soft corn has some feeding value. Corn harvesting will not start until April and will continue to be picked throughout May, June and July. There are no mechanical pickers, simply farmer operators and hired men who pick by hand, putting the ears into a bag which they drag along. There are no champion corn pickers in the Argentine, probably because there is no hurry about picking the corn. Perhaps the reason the United States has corn husking contests is because winter comes so quickly. Argentine corn is cultivated by colonos, or tenant farmers. The land, owned by estancia operators, is rented to them on a share basis. Of the produce of the land, the owner gets about 35 percent and the colonist the rest. Tenant farmers usually have about 200 acres, on which they plant about 80 percent of the total acreage to corn. Ten percent may be devoted to flax or wheat cultivation. The other 10 percent is pasture for the horses and animals of the tenant. It must be borne in mind that even in the best corn areas of the Argentine half, or more than half, of the land is in pasture. The corn and cereal area of the Argentine has been under cultivation for 40 to 50 years. The same land has been used over and over again, but the depletion of the soil is scarcely noticeable. It would be a matter for a good soil expert to tell how much longer the land can take such punishment. It is not uncommon for corn to have been planted on the same land for 25 consecutive years. Living conditions of the colonos are most primitive, the only buildings being of adobe construction and having no modern im-

provements. With regard to farm buildings (and for that matter all types of buildings in the Argentine), there is a complete absence of wood, except for a few beams and doors. The inquiries I have made indicate that there is no lumber industry in the Argentine worthy of the name.

Flint corn continues to be planted in the Argentine because the export purchasers prefer it. Argentine corn, in normal years, moves almost entirely to the continental market. Since the war, by reason of the naval blockade, the market has been shut off. There is no other marketable crop to which the cereal land could be diverted. The wheat and flax markets have been equally affected by the war. It would not be the part of wisdom to change the variety of corn to dent so that it might be used as feed, because the Argentine pampa is a livestockman's paradise, the best grazing land in the world. A pressing economic problem to the grain farmers whose entire income depends on a market for cereals, there has seemed to be no answer but for the government to establish an artificial market. This will be the third crop year that the colonos will have depended entirely on their government. The real grain market crash came in the summer of 1940, following the fall of France. Since 1940 the government has been paying the farmer approximately 22 to 23 cents a bushel. The first year the government paid the farmer 85 percent of the set price in cash. Then realizing there was no prospect of disposing of the corn, the government sold the corn back to the farmer for the difference which it owed. The last vestiges of the 1940 corn crop is still to be seen on the chacras, rotting away in the open or being picked to pieces by chickens. The government is not anxious to take possession of the corn, for possession means only a succession of fixed charges in the way of storage and freight obligations.

The result is that the corn is being stored on farms in makeshift granaries called trojes. This system is a far cry from the Ever Normal Granary system of the United States under which corn and wheat are stored in the steel bins of the government or sealed in farm granaries where they are reasonably well protected from the elements, insects and rodents. The trojes cannot be compared with the bins or the permanent, board-slatted cribs which are common in the corn belt of the United States. The trojes are simply made of sunflower stalks and wire. They are circular and of varying sizes. Some of them are more than 20 feet in diameter and from 12 to 18 feet high. The 1941 corn crop is almost entirely stored in trojes. Last year's corn has even now deteriorated to such an extent that given the possibility of an immediate demand for it and the ocean bottoms to transport it, it would be unlikely that any considerable percentage of it would be marketable. It is alive with weevils and other insects. On some ears there is not a kernel which has not been explored by some "bug." Again this year the farmer will gather his corn in the usual arduous manner, store it in the trojes and sell it to the government. There will be a lot of corn, probably 300,000,000 bushels, but unless the war ends in the next twelve months the weevils will have another feast.

There is another feature to the corn surplus. It is also the story of the wheat and flax surplus. It is the dilemma of the grain trade. The government, by reason of impossible world trade conditions, has had to make an artificial market for the Big Three in the cereal market. In December the grain futures market at Buenos Aires was discontinued. Obviously, exporters, with the foreign market completely gone, do not need a futures market for hedging purposes. There are no price prospects for grain farmers and no business for grain traders until war's end. Meantime it would seem that the cereal farmers are farming merely to keep in practice.

A studied, scholarly statement on the United States' position with respect to the hoof and mouth disease, called here the fiebre aftosa, has been received by the U. S. Embassy here and will shortly be released to those Argentines who would like a

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clarifying statement. The hoof and mouth disease is a controversial subject which has many technical aspects and about which there are many points that even the best informed men on the subject do not agree. The Argentine argument is that the disease as it exists here is mild and relatively harmless; that the Argentine government has an inspection service which would prevent the exporting of diseased meat carcasses; that England, a country with an excellent cattle industry, allows the wholesale importation of Argentine chilled meat. The agricultural expert who wrote the United States statement submits a history of the problem as it has affected the United States. He points out the fact that the foot and mouth disease has appeared twice in the United States during the past 30 years, following the passage of the Underwood Tariff Act in Wilson's administration and again in the early 1920's. In both cases there was reason to believe that the disease had been transmitted by virus in scraps of Argentine meat which were fed to hogs. The statement asserts that England has been most concerned with the disease, especially since it has appeared there in the last 20 years at least every other year and often in consecutive years. The record of the United States where the sanitary sanctions are in effect, the report states, is obviously better. Canada, too, has in effect the same kind of sanitary sanctions as the United States. In England's case it is suggested that it is necessary for the island to import large quantities of meat for its civil population irrespective of the consequences to its cattle industry. The report states that Argentine veterinary experts, far from regarding the disease as mild and relatively harmless, have warned against the complacency with which the disease is viewed. With respect to Argentine inspection, the report counters with the contention that it is impossible by such a method to eliminate virus-infected carcasses. It is asserted that even the best, most careful inspection of meats removes only those meats where the effects of the disease are apparent. An animal might have a high fever at the time of slaughter and the disease would leave no indication; yet the virus would be present in all its virulence. One thing about which all the experts agree is that the fiebre aftosa does not make meat unfit for human consumption.

The Argentine feeling is that the sanitary sanctions are used as a pretext to prevent the importation of superior Argentine beef into the United States. That is not the purpose of the sanctions, and they are not interpreted in that way by the Department of Agriculture. The concern of those who are enforcing the sanctions is to see that the disease does not spread to the United States. If it can be established--for example in Patagonia--that the hoof and mouth disease does not exist there, meat from that area would be permitted to enter the United States. The fiebre aftosa is so widely prevalent in the pampa area that it would be exceedingly difficult to control and eliminate. Wholesale slaughter is the only manner to war against the disease. It is a scientific problem which can only be approached in a scientific way. However, political and economic concerns have become so mingled in the usual treatments of the subject that it is very hard to separate them. If this problem could somehow be solved, Argentine-United States relations would improve noticeably. Anyone who has seen the beautiful grazing land of the Argentine with its thousands upon thousands of well-fed, blooded cattle can understand the pride which the Argentine citizen has in this, his greatest industry.

This evening I leave on the Southern Railway for Urdampilleta, the railroad station closest to the Campion estancia. Urdampilleta is 7 hours, 21 minutes out of Buenos Aires, or about 300 kilometers. I shall arrive at 3:56 a. m. Maybe, before tomorrow night, I shall be rigged up in bombachas, wearing a sash, astride a criollo pony--very much a falsified Gaucho.

Sincerely,

Francis Herron