

**American Farmers
and
The Rise of Agribusiness**

Reprint Edition 1975 by Arno Press Inc.

AMERICAN FARMERS AND THE RISE OF AGRIBUSINESS:
Seeds of Struggle
ISBN for complete set: 0-405-06760-7
See last pages of this volume for titles.

Manufactured in the United States of America



Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Lord, Russell, 1895-1964.
Men of earth.

(American farmers and the rise of agribusiness)
Reprint of the 1931 ed. published by Longmans, Green,
London.

1. Farmers--United States. 2. Agriculture--United
States. I. Title. II. Series.
S521.5.A2L67 1975 338.1'0922 74-30642
ISBN 0-405-06812-3

LORD
MEN OF EARTH

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FIRST EDITION

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

my Yellow Dent, a 110-day corn, with this hundred-day flint. But that cross, according to arithmetic, would give about a 102-day semi-dent; something that nobody would want.

"Then the thought struck me: Why not stir in this Amber Flint (the variety I'd got by crossing pop and sweet corn) ? Put that into the equation and it looks like this:

Wimple's Yellow	110 days, 16 rows to ear, dent
King Philip	100 days, 8 rows to ear, flint
Ear'y Amber	60 days, 8 row, flint amber

"Average the traits; it figures 90 days, 12 rows to the ear semi-dent. And that's how it worked it out in the field.

"I took some ears of it out to California and showed them to Luther Burbank the year before he died. He said: "You've done something wonderful. Why, it took me thirty years to put twelve rows on Golden Bantam !"

"I will do some more work to bring this hybrid to true type on show points. But the type is fixed now for all practical purposes. This isn't a commercial grab with me. I won't care if it doesn't make me a nickel. I want this thing to be my monument."

III. MAROONED

ROSEN RYE is Michigan's great crop find. The first seed was sent over from Russia in 1909 by Joseph A. Rosen, a Russian who had been taking work under Frank A. Spragg, professor of plant breeding at Michigan State.

Joseph Rosen is in his fifties now, and a leader of efforts toward Jewish agricultural colonizations since undertaken by the Soviet government. As a youth in Moscow University, Russia, he was anti-monarchistic, and was sentenced to five years in Siberia as a political prisoner of the Czar. He escaped in six months, went to Germany, and from there came to America. He worked for two years as a farmhand in Michigan before entering the college there.

The seed that he sent Professor Spragg was 2000 kernels of an unknown rye raised around Riga, Russia. The kernels were long, plump and bluish-green in color. There were just enough to plant a plat the size of a horse blanket.

Spragg multiplied it for two years. It proved to fill long heads right out to the end, and to have a wonderful short, stiff straw. He put out some seed to farmers in 1911.

In the next eight years the seed spread to nearly a million acres in Michigan. It commonly doubled the yield and quality of native ryes. In some counties it replaced wheat as a regular winter crop. But then this new variety began to mix badly, and it couldn't stand mixing. The moment that foreign pollen intruded, the variety began to lose all its characteristics; it "went to pieces" fast.

In 1917, when the state crop improvement association took hold of the situation, its inspectors found only five per cent of the Rosen up for seed fit to certify. And much of the ninety-five per cent that didn't pass was being shipped all over the country to disappoint people.

Dean Joseph Cox of the College of Agriculture was head of the farm crops department at the time. He set out to find some place where it would be possible to grow absolutely pure Rosen, the farms there to act as parent farm year after year, to the seed farms on the mainland.

Ten miles out in Lake Michigan, off Sleeping Bear Point, he found an island of woodsmen—a self-contained and self-sustaining agricultural society, or very nearly so. The parleys that preceded action were long and involved, but one family, the Hutzlers, at last announced faith in science and took the lead. The next year—after they had harvested twenty bushels to the acre as compared with nine and eleven bushels of the native ryes—they invited the other six farmers into a compact to drown anybody who raised any rye but Rosen on the Island's seven farms.

Five years later it was plain that the Hutzlers and the other islanders were not only capable of maintaining, but of breed-

ing and improving Rosen. So the crop association passed a ruling that all Rosen sown for certified seed on the mainland thereafter must be no more than two generations removed from head-selected Island Rosen rye.

"Not the least interesting result of the whole venture," said the Professor who told me all this, "is the readiness with which these islanders — none of them, I suppose, men of much education, have learned the technique of seed farming. So, at least, I hear. But I have never been, myself, to the Island. I should like to go there and see what those islanders have done with their seed breeding. And you, I take it, would like to see what seed breeding has done to the islanders. Suppose we go."

FROM Lansing, the seat of the Michigan State University, we drove something over 250 miles northwest, straight up across the cut-over country, first on concrete, then on gravel, then on sand-tracks winding arbitrarily three ways at once around tree stumps and conquering armies of sand pine. "This is the heart of the Paul Bunyan country," said the Professor, and recounted legends. Our scientific photographer, jolting around in the back seat among his apparatus, grunted somberly. Not for him was the charm of the Bunyan saga or the high arched wind-swept beauty of that day. The roads grew worse and worse and the way was long, yet it was for some reason one of those days that you remember long afterwards with a sense of peace.

We came that evening to Sleeping Bear Point, the third tip of Michigan's lower peninsula, and camped there for the night. A boat leaves that harbor for South Manitou Island three times a week, weather permitting. Natives of the Point told us that it sure was an End of Nowhere, this island we were headed for.

Three miles one way, they said, four the other. About eighty people on it. Seven cars. No good roads. No one of those cars on the Island had ever been more than four miles from its home garage. You couldn't get a car over to the mainland and be at all sure of getting it back. Lake Michigan steps too

high in a hurry to allow its further islanders any such running around as that.

Some of those cars on South Manitou, said the Point people, had probably never run more than twenty miles an hour since the day they were bought. But a boy we talked with contradicted this. He said there was a lake at the center of the island, a big lake, a mile long. And when that lake froze over in winter, the Island boys sneaked the family cars down there and opened them up.

Next morning the thirty-foot mail launch Lenor put into Sleeping Bear Cove, and we crossed to South Manitou. Landing, we went to a life-saving station, manned by a dozen coast guardsmen with the record of four big wrecks marked up on their boathouse walls. One of the coast guardsmen consented to drive us back to the Hutzler place, at the center of the Island. The road was two deep tracks through sand, with strips of logs — corduroy — here and there. Forest pressed closely upon both sides — pine, well-grown maple, beech, birch, ash, above thick underbrush. "It's lonesome as all hell, back here from the water," the coast guardsman said.

We came to a fence cutting straight through the timber, and a wire gate. Passing this, we came abruptly into the Hutzler clearing. The whole of it spread before us like a carpet, visible at a glance. Orderly fields of grain and row-crops and tall sweet clover, a neat white nautical-looking cottage, a small fenced orchard and garden with a border bed of roses and petunias — all clear-cut, with a cleanness and brightness about it that you find only near great bodies of water on a clear fall day.

We paid our taxi and unloaded. George Hutzler came out of the cottage, and approached. He was a spare, sinewy German of about fifty, with a drooping mustache, and a pensive way of looking at where you were standing just as if you weren't there. The Professor introduced himself, then extended the introductions. Our host stood with his hands in his hip pock-

ets. He said nothing and did not offer to shake hands. The Photographer sat down on his camera case, and petulently threw pebbles at a hen.

"Louie!" shouted George Hutzler. A shy, studious-looking boy in his middle twenties came out of the barn. He had his father's thoughtful gray eyes. And now there were two of them standing there looking at us, and the Professor had once more to do the honors. Again, silence. We all just stood.

"I saw your rye at Chicago last winter," I said, finally, half-shouting, as one does to the deaf.

"Yes; we sent some," George Hutzler said.

The Professor did better. "I saw it too. That is why we have come here all the way from Lansing." He paused. We waited. Out of the side of my eye I could see even the Photographer trying to look as much like a pilgrim as possible.

George Hutzler asked. "Have you fed?"

Yes, we had brought a lunch, and eaten it early, on the boat.

That wasn't right. You could feel it. "We would like to have fed you," said the elder Hutzler. Then: "If it's rye you want to see, we got it. Out back."

He turned and started walking with long strides. We trailed him, half sheepishly, as tourists do a guide. Louis Hutzler fell back politely and helped the photographer carry things. They walked rigidly together, saying little, just as, up front, the Professor was walking with the elder Hutzler. All of us were acting for all the world like adolescents on the first day of dancing school.

We saw the rye, and took photographs. The Professor examined the work carefully and found it good. He expressed himself as amazed and gratified at the success of the Hutzlers with some experimental hand-crosses, and at the precision of their records as to every plant in their big head-row Rosen rye breeding plat. "We try to farm right," said George Hutzler. From then on, things began to go better. He went on:

"Some others here on the Island have done all right too. My

brother-in-law, Irvin Beck, beat us for International sweepstakes one year. And Mrs. Johnson, down by the shore, grows the best red kidney seed beans in the state. There is some talk now about our all taking a new sweet clover the college has, and keeping it pure. We have to do things all together here — plant the same things and ship together at the same time. We all let our cattle run in the woods and then have a round-up, with rifles. It costs too much money to charter a boat by yourself.”

We went to the top of a hill of sweet clover and he showed us edges of some of the other farms, wrapped, like his, in woodland. Then, on his own land he showed us where his father had cleared the first twenty acres out of the woods, and where he, George, had gone in with an ax and carved out the other fifty acres later on.

Back at the cottage — as clean as the cabin of a yacht, with three guns over the kitchen door and the frame of a sewing machine, no longer used, displaying “box social” boxes in the parlor — we saw Louis’ typewriter, the only one on the Island. He uses it to acknowledge seed orders, and so on. “We got a regular business going here now,” said his father. “How you like these cakes? Lucky you didn’t come last week or you’d got some of Louie’s. One of us tends the horses; the other fellow takes the house that week. Two hours a day is plenty for housekeeping — meals, dishes, scrubbing and all . . . Louie, get the gentleman some more cakes and fill them glasses up again.”

Louie poured. Pear cider. “Pretty near two years now in the cellar,” said his father, “and not sour yet.”

“Really, . . .” said the Professor.

“You won’t get the real taste of it ’til about three glasses. Fill ’em up, Louie, all around !”

It was a smooth cider, in no way violent. It made you feel comfortable and easy to get along with. Even our Photographer began to show some expression around the eyes. “That’s the stuff, Louie,” he said loudly. “Fill ’em up !”

"I propose," said the Professor, "a toast to the success of our friends here, at the coming International."

We drank it. George Hutzler said:

"I'm just a backwoodsman. All this dressing up and showing off, I don't want it. You fellows come back sometime when there's hunting, and stay a week, maybe? It's hot in here. Let's go outside. Louie, bring out another pitcher of that cider, and some more cakes, and show the gentlemen our cup."

Their cup stood all of two feet high from base to brim. The inscription declared the holder to be winner of sweepstakes in the years named for all classes of seed rye exhibited at the International Hay and Grain Show, Chicago. "Our name is on the back," says George Hutzler, "three times."

"See?" said Louie, showing us. "'George & Louis Hutzler, South Manitou Island, Mich.' Three years out of the past five. If we win it again this fall, it's ours to keep."

"If you don't mind," said the Professor, "a half-glass for me, this time."

"We don't pour half-glasses on this island," said the elder Hutzler. "Fill 'em up, Louie. Fill 'em up!"

We drank slowly, sitting on the grass in the sun with a light breeze blowing in from the Lake. I thought of some more questions that I ought to ask if I was going to write anything, but the Photographer and elder Hutzler were engaged, rather idly, in discussing Prohibition, and the Professor was having a good time looking at the sky and humming, and Louie was trying to make an ant climb a blade of grass. So I let it go.

After a while, Louie said, "You oughtn't leave without going up Sand Mountain." "That's right," agreed his father, "I took a judge from Chicago up there once. He just stood and looked for twenty minutes. He couldn't say a word."

We got to our feet and started hiking up a sloping trail toward a tall bare sand-dune, perhaps a mile away. The beaches along the trail were a bright green and silver. The sun struck down through them with splotches of gold. "I like this trail,"

said George Hützlér. "I come up here right often in the summer-time."

He told us how the Island came to be settled by its present inhabitants. "When coal-burners come in, it left some people stranded here. My father was one of them. He came to this country from the Old Country on a sailing boat. It took him six weeks. He shipped as a sailor on the lakes. In the winters he lived at Buffalo. He got married to my mother there.

"All the big lake boats burned wood then. They would put in here at this island for wood or when there was a big blow. It was livelier here then. I have seen thirty, maybe forty, wood-burners and schooners, all lit up at night, down by the point. And we had big lumber camps here then, sawing wood for the boats to burn.

"My father thought maybe lumbering like this would pay him more than being a sailor. He quit the lakes and made a big enough space here to build a cabin on. There where the barn is now. I was born there in 1873.

"But then all the boats began to burn coal. They didn't come any more to our island. We had to clear more land and farm it so as to eat. We cleared those twenty acres, the two of us, before he died. I must have been about Louie's age then.

"I married the daughter of my nearest neighbor. I built our cottage from my own timber. Louie was born in 1902. His mother died when he was twelve years old. Him and I have been baching it here together for about fifteen years.

"We were just going along any way at general farming when Professor Cox come in with this rye. It's been a good thing for us. We got an order for seed the other day from South Africa. We get 'em from California all the time.

"Louie and I are going to Chicago and see our rye win this December. This year we are going even if we have to go over two weeks ahead of time to the train. The first year we showed, I went by myself. The Lake got kicking. I had to wait nine days over on the mainland before I could get back."

We were making our way up the dune sidewise, through thickets stunned and windbeaten. Suddenly we came out upon the open summit. "Now, look!" he said. The whole shining island with its white encircling beaches, and the endless living blue of Lake Michigan, was at our feet.

"Perfectly magnificent!" exclaimed the Professor.

Said George Hutzler: "I guess there's plenty other good places to live. Anybody who wants 'em can have 'em. You couldn't pay me to live anywhere else. I am used to the Lake. I'd miss it."

After a while we started straight down the side of the dune, half-running with long sliding strides through the sand. "Watch!" yelled Louie, and turned a flip-flop, landing sliding. "Hit on your feet, runnin'," his father shouted, and demonstrated. We all stopped.

"Here!" said the Photographer, pushing his Graflex at me. "I'll turn one and you take me right in the middle of it."

"All right," I said, "and then you take me . . ." Often I wonder under what heading and subheading in the Professor's neat and scholarly archives those photographs are filed.

The Hutzlers got out their car — four years old, without a scratch — and ran us down to the boat. I rode up front with Louie. He told me that all the men his age had left the Island. "They go into the Coast Guard or something. I used to think that was what I'd do. But, being alone like he is, my father sort of needs me here. I did go once. One winter I went to Chicago and tried to learn something in an automobile school. But my stomach went back on me. I couldn't eat. I felt bad all the time. I felt more lonesome there in the city than I do here.

"This seed business has made a big difference. It used to be when it came fall and the work was over, you didn't have anything to do but hunt. But now we'll be busy right up to Christmas, nearly, picking out the peck of seed we show at at Chicago.

"It's a lot of work. We run ten bushels of our best over our

screen and then take needles and go over it grain by grain. Father picks for size, and I watch the color. It's hard on the eyes. Two or three hours of it at a time is all you want. But when the cup comes in, you're glad you did it. You feel like you amount to something.

"I don't know. We got a better business here now than I guess we could get anywhere else. But we're too far off from schools and like that. If I was ever to get married and, you know, have children I'd like for them to be able to get to a high school. And I don't believe very many other people'll come here; I mean to stay.

"I tell him" — Louis lowered his voice a little and gestured with his head backwards toward his father — "maybe we ought to go over and farm on the mainland. But you heard him. He says he couldn't live anywhere else. And as long as he stays here, I'll stay; that part's sure."