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# SAFE FARMING FOR 1926

By Bradford Knapp
*President Oklahoma A. and M. College*

*Are You Going to Plant More Acres of Cotton In 1926? Read this Bulletin Before You Decide*

Stillwater, Oklahoma

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# *Safe Farming for 1926*

By BRADFORD KNAPP
*President Oklahoma A. and M. College*

There are times when foresight and caution are very important in any man's business. Farming is, after all, one of the most difficult callings a man can be engaged in. The difficulty is that most of his plans have to be made on an annual basis and not on a monthly or shorter basis. He plans his crop system for the year and plants his crop, tends it, harvests it and often loses because of conditions entirely outside his own control. We are about to make up our minds what to do in 1926 regarding the acreage of the various crops to plant on our farm, and that question is indeed a very important one for us to decide. If we are wise, we must consider a number of things which I desire to point out in this circular. What has been the course of events in the past few years regarding our principal money crops? What are the chances for the future? What are the general conditions regarding supply or carry-over, buying power of the people or demand, etc.?

## FARMING A BUSINESS

Farming is a business and, as a business, it must follow the same sound laws of economics which are followed by other lines of business. The profit which comes from farming depends upon many factors just as it does in every other business. One of these is good management and economy in production; another is production of a good quality of a product fit for the market; another is a good method of marketing the product or what we might call economic marketing; and another is the price we are able to get for it, which depends upon many factors such as demand and supply, etc. Another matter is whether we can afford to increase or diminish the supply of a crop under existing conditions. Just like any other manufacturer, we must consider, as farmers, whether the world will consume more or less of any given crop.

So, here we are in the early part of 1926 planning what we shall do for a farm plan for 1926 on the faith that we can make a living and get enough out of it to pay taxes, interest, debts, etc., and educate the children and live in comfort for the next year.

Before we decide what is best, would it not be a good scheme to examine the records and see what farmers generally have done in Oklahoma and in the cotton area of the south for the last few years? I have been examining the best available statistics regarding crops in Oklahoma and in the South during the past few years and here is what we find:

1. In the past FOUR years, farmers have increased the cotton acreage in the Southern States 39% and they have increased the acreage 11.1% in the last year, that is, the acreage of 1925 over that of 1924.

2. In Oklahoma, farmers have increased the cotton acreage 77.8% in the past FOUR years and 36.7% in the last year. We have almost doubled the cotton acreage in Oklahoma in these four years.

3. The record shows that the average price on the farm per pound of lint on December 1st, 1925, was lower than the average farm price the year before by 23.4% or 17 cents in 1925 as against 22.2 cents on December 1st, 1924.

4. The average value of an acre of cotton in Oklahoma in 1924 was reported as $43.42 while the average value of an acre of cotton in Oklahoma in 1925 was reported as $25.42 or a trifle over *forty per cent* reduction.

5. In 1925, here is what farmers did in Oklahoma regarding acreage:

Cotton *increased* from 3,861,000 acres to 5,183,000 acres.
Wheat *decreased* from 3,556,000 acres to 3,449,000 acres.
Corn *decreased* from 2,862,000 acres to 2,558,000 acres.
Barley *decreased* from 209,000 acres to 126,000 acres.
Oats *decreased* from 1,200,000 acres to 1,140,000 acres.
Rye *decreased* from 37,000 acres to 33,000 acres.
Broomcorn *decreased* from 246,000 acres to 94,000 acres.
Hay crops *decreased* from 1,061,000 acres to 911,000 acres.
Grain Sorghums *increased* from 975,000 acres to 1,053,000 acres.
Irish Potatoes *increased* from 32,000 acres to 39,000 acres.
Sweet Potatoes *increased* from 18,000 acres to 20,000 acres.

In other words, in Oklahoma we *increased* cotton acreage *very greatly,* we increased grain sorghum acreage slightly and

also both kinds of potatoes slightly, and we *decreased* the acreage of every other standard crop.

In many parts of the state, I hear that farmers are going right ahead with the same kind of plan for 1926 without regard to conditions, without regard to markets, without regard to a possible surplus.

## THE SURPLUS TROUBLE

In the meantime, those who are reading the papers know what is going on elsewhere. The farmers of the corn belt are up in arms over their distress due to over-production of corn and hence a great surplus. Our statesmen in Washington are busy trying to find some way in which we may take care of possible surplus products and market them to advantage without upsetting the home market. The greatest problem facing us is that of spreading the results of a good year and a large acreage over several years of marketing and thus gradually absorbing it into the lean years without too severe a strain on the price at any one time. Manufacturers can readily cut down on production but the farmer has great difficulty in understanding conditions, seeing far enough in the future, and adjusting production to the market.

During the years of short cotton crops, the carry-over of cotton from one year to the next has gradually run down but we have had two relatively large crops in the past two years and the chances are strongly toward an increase in the carry-over. That is the surplus problem for the South. We have had it in other years and know all about it from experience. What we must consider now is, do we want a surplus again? No wise man ever made much more of a product than he believed he could sell for a fair price. We are all inclined to take some chances and speculate a little. The main question is how far are we going to go in that direction.

## FARM PROSPERITY MEASURES ALL PROSPERITY

Bankers and business men in this state realize fully that their prosperity depends upon the prosperity of the farmers. They want farmers to make a good living and have money to spend in making their lives comfortable and satisfactory. Indeed, everyone these days knows that farm prosperity governs all our pros-

perity. Hence our plans for this year are important to every farmer and to everyone in the state as well. Should the general plan of farming in this state in 1926 bring financial disaster through our failure to provide safeguards or to take care of home necessities, the disaster would be very great.

Now, the main question is what are we going to do? As I see it, we have two courses to pursue this year:

1. Go right ahead and increase the acreage of cotton on every farm as we have been doing for four years past. In doing this, we must realize that it means less and less of acres in feed crops, less hay, less grain sorghums, less oats, less corn and less of everything except cotton. It means even less livestock because it means less feed.

2. Provide first for reasonable and much needed supplies of food and feed with special emphasis on grain and forage for livestock; provide means for improving the fertility of our lands and then plant no increase, but rather a decrease in acreage in cotton. The kind of a season and the yield per acre will govern the size of the crop.

## "DON'T BITE OFF MORE THAN WE CAN CHEW"

There is another matter which every cotton farmer should consider and that is the acreage which can be taken care of and picked and hauled to the gin. Any man who has been about over the state the past fall and winter knows that we had so large an acreage in cotton that it could not be handled. We left beautiful fields of cotton standing in the field until the cotton plants dried up, the lint was blown out on the ground, what was left on the plants was turned to a gray dirt color and then we snapped it or collected the bolls without picking and dumped it at the gins in great piles and had it ginned and took a very low price for the product. The quality of this cotton was no credit to us as good business men and, I am inclined to believe, it hurt the price of all Oklahoma cotton. Two hundred pounds of lint per acre at 18 cents is one thing and one hundred or a hundred and fifty pounds of lint from "bollies" at 11 cents is another thing.

## THE BOLL WEEVIL

Due to the severe winters we have had in the past, the boll weevil has not been a problem in this state during the past year. That it can easily be a serious problem, you need only to ask

farmers in the southeastern part of the state who saw their crops ruined several years by this pest.

No one can yet say what this season will mean as far as boll weevils are concerned. The winter has not been severe thus far. It may bring severe weather in March and thus decrease the number of possible weevils to start the new season. The kind of spring we have will also have its effect. Rainy weather in June and July may make a difference. No one can foretell what the conditions will be in Oklahoma. I am only asking you if it is not the safest plan to farm always as though you wanted to be reasonably safe from every calamity.

## A TICKET FOR HOME

In that connection, I want to recite a little circumstance that used to interest me very greatly when I was a boy. We lived down in the good old State of Louisiana years and years ago. The young fellows used occasionally to go to New Orleans and bet their money on the races. I noticed a very interesting thing which they often did. The moment one of them arrived in the city, he went immediately to the ticket office and bought himself a ticket back home; then he went to the race track, and if he lost all his money, he still had "the ticket for home" and returned home with a degree of self respect. I wonder if it wouldn't be a pretty good thing for us in the southwest and in the entire cotton territory to buy a "ticket for home" in 1926.

No business man goes into a great undertaking unless he insures his business. He does not take on the risk there is in putting in a stock of goods or in constructing a building; he takes out insurance against unnecessary risk which he ought not to carry upon his own shoulders. I am simply suggesting that we take out an insurance policy upon our farming business for 1926.

## SAFE FARMING

A great many men have joined us in calling the system I am advocating "Safe Farming." I must confess that I like this term much better than I do "Diversified Farming." Farming is a business and as such follows plans for definite reasons. I have written and spoken on this subject for years and have always defined "Safe Farming" as a system of farming which does three things:

1. It plans the farm work so as to maintain and build up the fertility of the soil as the first necessity for successful farming. It means legumes, manure, terracing, etc.

2. Under this system the farmer plans, as nearly as he can, to produce the food for his family and feed for his livestock on his own farm.

3. Under this plan, the farmer plans to produce and sell more than one farm product for his cash income and not to depend entirely upon only one crop or livestock product.

Many farmers in the south follow such a plan and my observation is that such farmers are generally and almost universally in better financial condition than their neighbors who gamble year in and year out on cotton alone. You will find their farms in better shape, their fields better handled, and especially, their finances not open to such great losses in bad years.

## TWO SIDES TO FARMING

There are two sides to successful farming, efficient and economical production and efficient and economical marketing.

If the price of a farm product remained the same, the man who produced his crop at the lowest cost per bushel or pound would make the most profit. The yield per acre has a considerable bearing on cost of production and we, in Oklahoma, must not forget that fact. Look at the figures given in the table at the back of this bulletin and see these facts. In 1923, we had a very low yield per acre of cotton in Oklahoma. The yield per acre averaged only 98 pounds of lint, but the price was high (29.6 cents average on December 1st, 1923) and the estimated value of an acre of cotton that year was $29.01. If the price had been 17 cents, the value per acre would have been only $16.66. In 1924 we had a much larger yield per acre or 187 pounds of lint on an average. The price on the farm on December 1st, 1924, was estimated to be 22.2 cents and the value of an acre of cotton $43.42. In 1925, the yield was lower, 143 pounds of lint per acre; the price was lower, 17 cents, and therefore the estimated value per acre was lower, $25.42. I have detailed these figures to show that the yield per acre has a great deal to do with value of product per acre and therefore with profit.

## YIELD PER ACRE AND COST OF PRODUCTION

This subject is so important that I wish to present these further thoughts for the farmers of this state. The yield per acre in Oklahoma has varied with the seasons from 225 pounds of lint per acre in 1920 down to 98 pounds of lint per acre in 1923. Of course, a great part of this variation must be charged to the season. In the last two years, the variation between 187 pounds of lint per acre in 1924 and 143 pounds of lint per acre in 1925 was pretty largely a seasonal variation due to rainfall and weather conditions as they affected the crop.

Nevertheless, farmers in Oklahoma must recognize that when the season is good and when the season is poor, the best profit is made from the acre that is fertile and able to utilize whatever moisture falls upon it, and that this yeild per acre has a direct relation to the cost of production and therefore to the profit there is in cotton growing in Oklahoma.

The chief factors influencing yield per acre may be stated as follows:

1. Fertility of the land.
2. Seasonal conditions or weather.
3. Drainage, prevention of erosion or prevention of run-off.
4. Insect pests, such as boll weevil, leaf worm, etc.
5. Plant diseases, such as wilt, root knot, etc.
6. Good seed, of the proper variety.
7. Methods of handling the crop such as preparation of seed bed, time of planting, cultivation, etc.

It is not possible here to discuss these in detail, but only to say that except for item number 2, seasonal conditions, and items number 4 and 5, insect pests and plant diseases, the other items are largely within the control of the farmer. He can build up the fertility of the land, he can drain his field or terrace it to prevent erosion and to stop run-off of water, he can get good seed, and he can pursue good cultural methods. He can also minimize the injury from insect pests and plant diseases. The only thing he cannot control to some extent is the one factor of seasonal conditions.

Within certain limits, the greater the yield per acre, the lower the cost of production per pound, other things being equal.

We make our money in cotton farming, not by the total bales of cotton or by the total acreage in cotton we produce, but by the difference between the market price of cotton and what it costs us to proudce it. Of course, economy of labor and good management are just as important in cotton farming as they are in running a store or a factory.

To produce an acre of cotton, we will have the labor of men and teams in preparation of the soil; we must figure the proportional cost of implements necessary to do the work, cost of the seed, the cost of cultivation, cost of ginning, taxes and insurance, depreciation on the buildings and fences, proportional cost of the upkeep of the farm in general, interest on investment, and possibly something for operating cost as well. When we cultivate too many acres of cotton and get a low yield per acre through lack of sufficient attention and thorough handling, we immediately reduce our profit. If we can raise five bales on ten or twelve acres of land, or even on fifteen, we are making a greater profit than we will to cultivate twenty-five acres in order to get the same amount of cotton.

In a neighboring state where we had figures for quite a number of years, in 1921 an estimate was made of the cost of production per pound of lint based upon a varying yield. On heavy land, we found that the cost would run as high as 29 cents per pound of lint where the yield was only 100 pounds of lint. If the yield was increased to 200 pounds of lint per acre, the cost of production was decreased to 17 cents, while if you increased the yield to 300 pounds, the cost was slightly below 13 cents. On lighter land, we found that these costs varied, and that 100 pounds of lint could be produced at a cost of about 21 cents, 200 pounds at a cost of about 12 cents, and 300 pounds at a cost of approximately 10 cents per pound. In that year, the yield of 100 pounds of lint per acre or even 150 pounds per acre in Arkansas left no profit to the farmer, or in other words, he was compelled to reduce his standard of living in order to get by under these conditions.

At the Experiment Station in Oklahoma, we are attempting to get figures that will permit us to give some results along these same lines, but this work has not been carried on for a sufficient length of time to make us feel sure of the results.

The most important point in our whole program for 1926 should be to take care of the fertility of the land and concentrate our minds upon good farming rather than trying to raise so many acres of cotton that we produce our whole crop at a net loss.

## COOPERATIVE MARKETING

Cooperative marketing is a system designed to assist farmers in their marketing problems. It is now accepted as the best system by all farm organizations and by most of our bankers, business men and statesmen. Under this system, the great job is to take the member's cotton and do everything which is necessary in order to properly sell and distribute it to the consuming mill and do this as economically as possible, to cut out the waste and inefficiency in marketing, and then pay to the member the largest possible share of what is received. Members and other farmers must remember that cooperative marketing cannot do impossible things. It cannot, for example, force the world to buy a large crop for the same price as a smaller one. It can help to market the crop wisely and in an orderly manner and thus decrease the disaster and help prevent greater fluctuation of price. The job of taking care of a clear surplus of a crop is one which is causing the wisest statesmen in America to think and think hard. If we willingly create such a surplus of cotton, we must face the consequences.

## FEED CROPS NECESSARY

A good many of us have been talking about livestock and dairying, poultry production and various other lines of work---all of them most excellent and entirely necessary for permanent agriculture, but we cannot build a livestock industry without the feed necessary to feed that livestock and feed it well. Even the best of livestock, purebred high-producing stock, does not do well on a scarcity of feed, and the supply of feed and forage and good pasture is the one great necessity of the livestock industry. Let me go further and say: FEED IN THE BIN IS WORTH MORE THAN MONEY IN THE BANK IF FEED HAS TO BE SHIPPED IN. I mean that the farmer who has feed on his own farm in ample supplies in the fall of 1926 will be better off than the man who merely has money in the bank in the fall of 1926 and has to ship feed in. The livestock industry never pros-

pers by hauling feed and hay from the retail stores in town out to the farm in order to support that industry. It will prosper only in case we produce an adequate supply of feed in Oklahoma. So I am urging that we think first of the safety and security of our program and therefore take steps to supply ourselves this year with these necessary things, the feed and forage necessary for every head of livestock we have on our place and every head of stock we expect to have on the place during the next year. That is a program absolutely necessary for our success.

For the farm owner, I would suggest that he sit down and figure out what amount of grain and forage will be required for his livestock. He will know what acreage will be required to produce this grain and forage. Then he can use the balance of his acreage for cotton and for the production of other crops for sale or for the production of livestock and livestock products for sale for cash.

As far as the tenant is concerned the problem is much more difficult. Unless landlords and those controlling the credits are willing to work with tenants on this problem, it is difficult to see how they may adjust themselves to any program except that which has been followed and is being followed to the point of depleted soil fertility and uneconomic production. Even with all the handicaps, if wise and careful planning is done in any community, there may be a chance for tenants to do better and not to put all their eggs in the same basket. However, this is a question of long and difficult planning and careful work which cannot be covered here.

## A SAFE FARMING PROGRAM

Let me run over the items that compose what I have called "the ticket for home" or "an insurance policy":

1. A good home garden for every farm family, including potatoes, either Irish or sweet or both, for home use, and where possible a patch of cane for syrup. I am not sure but that in many places in Oklahoma and other cotton states it might be well to have a few potatoes for sale.

2. I think we ought to plant enough grain crops to feed our livestock.

3. Hay and forage and pasture for the livestock should be provided.

4. We should grow our own food, our own meat, milk and eggs for the family by keeping good cows, sows and hens and improving the quality through good breeding, care and management. The family that has the milk, meat and eggs, plus the garden, with the good work of the housewife and the daughter, who may be in the home demonstration club, in canning the surplus of the garden for the winter's use, is infinitely better off than the family which buys all of its necessary food at the grocery store in cans and paper sacks. Let me just say, in this connection, that I think cotton is one of the greatest crops God Almighty ever gave his people. It is a wonderful crop to grow, but it is the poorest crop to eat I ever saw and the poorest people in the world are the people that have to swap low priced cotton for high priced food.

5. In addition to the cotton crop the wisest plan for the efficient farm family is to have some other cash product to sell. In such a case even if the cotton crop fails, or if we produce so much that the world will not buy it at a satisfactory price, we still have something else to fall back on. Isn't that after all the wisest thing in planning our work for this year?

Cotton with the dairy industry and some poultry makes a good combination. Cotton with some hogs, some fruit or something else that we make a definite plan to produce for marketing either locally or on the markets of the world is a worthwhile program. Let me just say this: I have been in every cotton state and in most of the cotton-producing counties of the United States, and I have never seen in my life anyone who was what I called "a safe farmer" unless the local people assured me that he was a good business man, respected in the community and far safer than the ordinary farmer. I remember I had a good friend in North Carolina, Old Major Graham, who, for many years was Commissioner of Agriculture in the old "Tar Heel" State. I asked Major Graham, a man 80 years of age, some years ago, whether I was right or wrong in my contention that the man who had a safe system in which he produced his own food and feed and had something else to sell besides one cash crop was not a better risk and a better farmer than the man who risked everything on one crop. I remember the old Major looking off across the fields of North Carolina and saying, "Mr. Knapp, I am an old man and have lived many years; yet I have never seen a man sold out by the sheriff who had hay in the hay mow, corn in the crib and meat in the smoke house." In other words, the man who provided for his family against the evil days of failure of

his crop is infinitely better off and safer than the man who does not.

Not very long ago I set down what I call "The Gospel of Safe Farming.' In Biblical language, it would run something like this:

1. Remember the fertility of thy soil that thy days may be long on the land which the Lord, thy God, giveth thee.

2. Take heed of thy garden and thy cow, thy sow and thy hen that thy wife and thy children may eat though all else shall fail thee.

3. Put not thy trust in one crop only upon thy farm, but provide against the evil days by producing thine own food and feed.

4. Despise not the day of small things. Thy bread grain, thine own vegetables, meat, milk and eggs are thy sure rock of safety in time of trouble. Neglect them not upon thy farm.

5. The wise man leaveth nothing to chance, but produceth for his family their food in season and for his livestock their feed and forage. The foolish man risketh all upon one crop and great is his sorrow and the lamentations of his family when disaster cometh to that crop.

Think it over. It is worth your very earnest consideration. I am thinking of the future. I am thinking of the families upon the farm. I am thinking of the necessity of their prosperity and happiness. I am thinking of the children and of their going along the roadway to the school house. I am thinking of the happiness that is to come at Thanksgiving and at Christmas time if we have prosperity. I am also thinking of the sorrow and distress to come if the season in 1926 should throw us back in debt and brings us into that slough of despondency through which we went in 1914 and again in 1920. The prosperity of the farmers of Oklahoma and of the southland depends very greatly upon our having a balanced system of farming, upon our producing the necessities of life at home and being independent of other sections. With plenty of food and feed we can sell to the world this great crop and the other products of our farms so much needed to supply the clothing and food of the world.

## THE COTTON CROP

Acreage, production, estimated farm value, yield per acre and value per acre in the United States and in Oklahoma by years from 1914 to 1925, inclusive. Data taken from U. S Census and U. S. Department of Agriculture publications.

### Cotton in the United States

| Year | Acreage | Production in 500-lb. Bales | Estimated Farm Value | Average Farm Price Dec. 1 | Yield Lbs. Lint Per Acre | Value Per Acre |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1914 | 36,832,000 | 16,135,000 | 549,036,000 | 6.8 | 209.2 | ---------- |
| 1915 | 31,412,000 | 11,192,000 | 631,460,000 | 11.3 | 170.3 | $19.46 |
| 1916 | 34,985,000 | 11,450,000 | 1,122,295,000 | 19.6 | 156.6 | 30.64 |
| 1917 | 33,841,000 | 11,302,000 | 1,566,195,000 | 27.7 | 159.7 | 45.12 |
| 1918 | 36,008,000 | 12,041,000 | 1,663,633,000 | 27.6 | 159.6 | 45.03 |
| 1919 | 33,556,000 | 11,421,000 | 2,034,658,000 | 35.6 | 158.2 | 59.00 |
| 1920 | 35,878,000 | 13,440,000 | 933,658,000 | 13.9 | 170.8 | 25.14 |
| 1921 | 30,509,000 | 7,954,000 | 643,933,000 | 16.2 | 124.5 | 21.05 |
| 1922 | 33,036,000 | 9,762,000 | 1,161,846,000 | 23.8 | 141.3 | 35.03 |
| 1923 | 37,123,000 | 10,140,000 | 1,571,815,000 | 31. | 130.6 | 42.17 |
| 1924 | 41,360,000 | 13,628,000 | 1,540,884,000 | 22.6 | 157.4 | 37.26 |
| 1925 | 45,945,000 | 15,603,000 | 1,419,888,000 | 18.2 | 162.3 | 30.90 |

### Cotton in Oklahoma

| Year | Acreage | Production in 500-lb. Bales | Average Farm Price Dec. 1 | Yield Lbs. Lint Per Acre | Value Per Acre |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1914 | 2,847,000 | 1,262,000 | 6.5 | 212 | ---------- |
| 1915 | 1,895,000 | 640,000 | 11.3 | 162 | $17.52 |
| 1916 | 2,562,000 | 823,000 | 19. | 154 | 29.26 |
| 1917 | 2,183,000 | 9,59,000 | 26.5 | 165 | 39.75 |
| 1918 | 2,998,000 | 5,77,000 | 25.5 | 92 | 21.68 |
| 1919 | 2,424,000 | 1,016,000 | 35.2 | 190 | 66.88 |
| 1920 | 2,765,000 | 1,300,000 | 10.5 | 225 | 23.62 |
| 1921 | 2,206,000 | 481,000 | 15.4 | 104 | 16.02 |
| 1922 | 2,915,000 | 627,000 | 23. | 103 | 23.69 |
| 1923 | 3,197,000 | 656,000 | 29.6 | 98 | 29.01 |
| 1924 | 3,861,000 | 1,510,000 | 22.2 | 187 | 43.42 |
| 1925 | 5,183,000 | 1,550,000 | 17. | 143 | 25.42 |