

Q and A for Vice President Humphrey and Senator McGovern for TV interview
February 15, 1968.

Question -- Mr. Vice President, this exodus of people from farms and small towns to the cities, how massive is it, and is the decline in farm jobs the major factor in this migration?

Answer -- During the 1950's some 600,000 people a year moved from the farms and non-metropolitan towns and cities into our urban areas. During the first half of this decade this migration rate dropped dramatically with non-metropolitan areas losing an average of less than 120,000 people a year. Improvements in agricultural efficiency, which have contributed greatly to economic growth and national prosperity, also released phenomenal numbers of farm laborers from agricultural production. Over five and a half million farmers and farm workers (5.7 million) left the land between 1940 and 1966. Many of course, found their way to our larger cities.

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Question -- This liquidation of farms which transfers millions of people from the countryside to overcrowded, congested cities, do we have to accept this as inevitable?

Answer -- This diminishing of farm jobs is a continuing process...a fact of life in every industrialized nation in the world.

New technological breakthroughs appear just around the corner in a number of agricultural fields, including tobacco. A whole new generation of machines is already beginning to appear in the fruit and vegetable field.

It is estimated the need for farm labor will drop another 45 percent over the next 15 years. Furthermore, so many farm workers already have so little to do, earn so little income, that one out of three are virtually unemployed.

The real heartbreak is that many farm workers who are forced to move to the big cities have no other skills, no preparation for city life. In effect, their failures and frustrations are transferred from a rural setting to a more concentrated, more visible urban setting. There, congestion and despair feed on these frustrations. The result is discord, riots -- and human isolation in the midst of almost incredible human congestion.

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Question -- But is this inevitable? Can or is something being done about it -- something to stop this forced exodus to the cities? Or do we want to interrupt this trend?

Answer -- To answer you in order: No, this exodus is not inevitable, and something is being done to reverse the tide, to explore the issues. Two months ago I joined the Secretaries of six Federal departments in a symposium to explore this growing problem of people/space imbalance...the interrelated twin elements of urban impaction and rural decline.

Our objective was to start a national dialogue that would help decide this urgent question of living space for man. Is it good for the people and the nation for 70 percent of us to live in cities that cover less than 2 percent of our land? If not, who not?

Should we formulate a national policy to divert new economic growth, and therefore people, into non-impacted towns and cities, or should we let matters drift?

This meeting was a first infant step toward charting a national course for our people and their land -- a course that could make it possible for 300 million Americans to live tomorrow in less congestion than 200 million live today.

But we are not waiting for an end to this dialogue before we act. We are at work trying to strengthen and revitalize the economy the countryside...with its towns and small cities.. To help their

people build new homes, create new jobs, obtain new public services, and expand their cultural opportunities. Senator McGovern has introduced before Congress a vital piece of legislation in this revitalization effort. A proposal to help smaller communities obtain new jobs and industry.

Question -- Mr. Vice President, do you believe our countryside and small towns can be saved -- and how?

Answer -- Rural areas possess the potential for significant development in the years ahead. The extent to which we realize the benefits of this potential in future times depends, however, upon the decisions we make today. If we do nothing, the congestion and pollution that is now beginning to blight our environment will likely continue unabated. If we begin to plan and act now-- through use of areawide planning that ties rural to urban, through adoption of a national manpower policy, through the use of incentive programs to attract industry away from congested population centers, through experimentation with the new town concept--if we begin applying these and other concepts today, we can make significant progress toward improving the environment of our large cities at the same time that we foster growth in many outlying rural areas.

In some situations, the new town concept holds particular promise. If an area has a sufficiently large labor supply and is properly located in reference to its markets, it may be feasible to create a new population center. The center may be an expansion of an existing village, a development to encompass a number of villages in close proximity to each other, or a complete "new town." Whatever its form, with careful planning and design, these new population centers should be able to avoid the worst and embody the best attributes of our countryside and urban environments.



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