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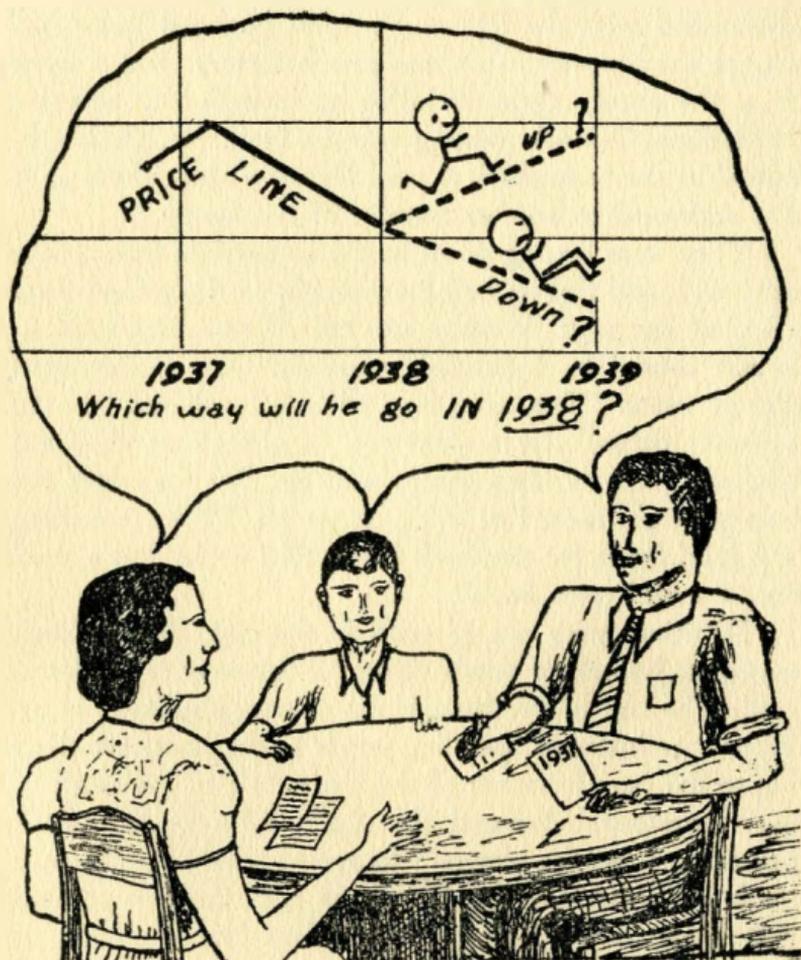
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# The Bach Family Looks at 1938

The Story How One South Dakota Family  
Used the Farm Outlook



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SOUTH DAKOTA AGRICULTURAL  
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STATE COLLEGE — BROOKINGS, S. D.

FARMER JAMES BACH opened the lid of his mail box and took quick inventory of the daily deposit the carrier left on his morning rounds. A beautiful illustrated seed catalogue, with its gaudy cover page constituting the first sign of spring, the daily newspaper, the farm magazine, a card from cousin Egbert in Detroit, who, dissatisfied with the life of his rural boyhood home had sought employment in an automobile factory, and a letter from the county agent enclosing an invitation to attend a 1938 Farm Outlook meeting was the mail. Mr. Bach submitted to the temptation to read Egbert's card, although it was addressed to another member of the family.

They were cutting down in the automobile factory, the card said, and Egbert had been caught in the second trimming of the staff. Warehouses full of new cars with no buyers caused by industrial recessions, were the reasons, Egbert wrote. "The brass hats tell me I will not lose my seniority rights," the message ran, "and they say they will take me back on when things pick up. But that does not help me right now. I'm trying to get on WPA. Are there any good farms for rent back home? If I could find a good one, I would come back."

So things were not so good in the city, Farmer Bach mused, as he walked slowly down the driveway to the farmyard. The sun broke through the clouds, imparting in an instant the luster of sparkling jewels to the hoarfrost clinging to the bare branches of the shelterbelt to the north of the farmstead. Arrested by the sudden beauty, Bach paused to enjoy the picture. His eye traveled over the view his home presented. The hay stacks with the tops covered with snow, looking all the world like brown chunks of chocolate cake, topped with a generous helping of whipped cream, the hills of snowbanks which brought winter coast-

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ing for the children to the flat prairie country, the composite scene was glistening with the sun upon the crystals left by Jack Frost's work.

James Bach's eye stopped on the feed lot back of the barn where the feeding steers were fighting over the last of the morning feed. Instantly, his mind readjusted itself from the appreciation of winter's beauties, which he admitted somewhat shamefacedly, would shortly, if allowed to continue, cause him to burst forth like Whittier's poetical description of a snow and frost covered farm.

Two steers were battling over the rights to one corner of the feed bunk. "Fightin' again, huh," he mused. "Sure hard to keep 'em full." With eye and mind sharpened to such calculations by long experience with the severity and duration of Dakota winters, he noted the inroads on the corn cribs, hay stacks and fodder pile compared to the progress of winter and the amount of meat covering the ribs of the steers. Cattle and hogs had been going down in price. He paused again and paged to the market section of the paper he carried. "Cattle off 25 cents again today," the headlines read. He thought of Egbert's card and idle city workers, seeking relief. Such men do not buy meat. Should he sell those steers now or wait for a higher market? But would further gains be offset by lower prices later on?

Still mulling over the doubtful prospects of 1938, James stamped the snow from his overshoes, and went into the kitchen. Mrs. Bach and their son, Tony, a strapping, studious youth of 20, were waiting to examine the mail. Mr. Bach was proud of Tony and looked to him to carry on the farm when his father's working days were over. Tony was interested in farming. Well, he should be, it was born in his blood.

Tony was an admirer of Joe Johnson, the county agent and he reached first for the circular Outlook letter. "The 1938 Outlook meeting," he said, "Gee, I'd like to go to that. It would help us to plan our crops for next year and what to expect for prices. Those steers, Dad, maybe that would answer the question whether we should keep or sell them. What did the market do yesterday?"

"It's down again—25 cents. And Egbert says times are bad in the East. I hate to sell them. Maybe they will come up. I don't know what to do. If you want to go to that meeting, I'll go with you. We might learn something but I don't think anybody can forecast the future."

"Fine, we'll plan on it, then" replied Tony. "We used to have some of that in school, but I haven't been keeping up on it very well."

"Does it say anything about women being invited," asked Mrs. Bach.

"No, I don't think so. Probably won't be any women there."

"Oh yes, it does," exclaimed Tony. He read from the letter—"The farm homemaker has an equal interest in Outlook with the farmer." "You'd better go with us, Mother. Between the three of us, I'll bet we can soak up the more important points of this outlook business."

"Well, we'll plan on it—the day after tomorrow," Mrs. Bach said and departed for the kitchen to see about dinner.

The Bach family became "outlook conscious" the next two days and read and reread the Outlook circular sent by the county agent. They discussed the Outlook for their own farming operations in terms of the general outlook for the country. Prospects were better, they learned, for live-stock producers rather than the grower of cash grain crops; farm prices in general were expected to be lower in 1938 than they had been in 1937.

They came to think of their farm as a manufacturing plant. The farmer was the owner, manager, operator, foreman and principal laborer. The capital represented by the Bach farm and its substantial farm buildings, and they were no more pretentious than many of their neighbors, was equal to the capital invested in a small factory. The Bach's realized that the management of a plant of that size was worthy of considerable time to plan, direct and organize its future operations. They realized that they had not given as much thought to planning as they should. They discussed pro and con, the reasons for the variations from year to year in farm prices. With this background of

discussion, the Bach family found themselves with 40 of their neighbors sitting in the townhall two days later waiting for County Agent Joe Johnson to arrive to conduct the outlook meeting.

While the crowd was assembling, conversation drifted to the topic of the day—the Outlook for 1938 and what it would hold for the farmer. They were interested in that Outlook. Their plans, hopes, and incomes were all dependent upon what the turn of the wheel of fortune would bring in 1938. It was their purpose now to know how that wheel would be apt to turn next year and from what they might reap the greatest benefit. They wanted to know why the wheel turns as it does, what controls are possible and how they should be applied.

“Don’t believe there is much we can do about it,” remarked Bill Coates, an old neighbor of the Bach’s directing a well-aimed tobacco projectile at a hole in the door of the hard coal stove which had lost its bit of mica, “but it’s interesting to hear what these fellers have to say. Couldn’t haul hay this afternoon anyway.”

“How’s your hay holding out?” asked Jim Darling. “Mine’s nearly gone.”

Oh, I’ve got a right smart left,” Bill said, “Enough to pull me through. Have to skimp, though.”

“Don’t you think it would be a good idea to sell some of the stock rather than try to bring them through on short feed?” someone asked.

In preparation for replying Coates was adding fresh ammunition to his magazine which was emptied by that last shot at the stove, when County Agent Joe Johnson entered the room carrying a large roll of charts and an armful of printed Outlook circulars. He was greeted by a buzz of friendly “Hello, Joe’s.” Johnson had built a host of friendships among the farmers of the county during the five years he had served them.

Just before the meeting started, the Bach family moved down in the front seats and sat together where they might easily compare notes. Johnson opened his remarks with a few statements on general conditions. Factory production

had been slowing down, he said, unemployment increasing and consumer demand declining. Mr. Bach thought of Cousin Egbert out of a job in Detroit.

"These unfavorable trends seem likely to continue into 1938," the county agent continued, "and have an adverse effect on prices for farm products. Both prices and buying power are expected to be lower in 1938 than they were in 1937. This is not a pleasant story but nevertheless it is a fact which must be faced in planning for the future.

"With a smaller than average number of livestock, the price of meat animals is likely to be maintained at fairly high levels and with prospects for cheaper feeds, the livestock feeder should be in a favorable position during the coming year. The same is true of dairying. One year ago, a pound of butter would buy only 19 pounds of feed grain. Today, a pound will purchase 52 pounds of grain, which is a decided advantage to the dairyman."

Mrs. Bach's eyes sparkled when she heard that egg prices throughout 1938 will probably be somewhat higher than in 1937 but her hopes fell when it was brought out that, owing to increased hatchings, prices for poultry will probably be lower late in the year.

"I'll beat that game," she thought. "I'll get all the eggs I can from my pullets, market my poultry early and not depend too much upon money from selling poultry late in the fall."

Tony was interested to hear that although lower prices for wool were indicated, prices for market lambs were likely to rise above those of other meat animals. Sheep projects had been Tony's principal interest while in 4-H work.

Then the discussion turned to wheat. Mr. Bach leaned forward and fixed his eyes upon the chart and heard with concern that there was likely to be a carryover of 100 million bushels more than last year—the result of the largest wheat acreage ever sown in the United States which in 1937 reached 81 million acres. But it was encouraging to learn, that with return of favorable weather, the gross return to Dakota wheat growers would be greater than

1937 when the total production was only about half of the last 10-year average. The price of hard red spring wheat grown in the Dakotas was not likely to be depressed so much as that for other classes of wheat.

The room was very quiet when Johnson said that flax was in great demand. The area is comparatively small where it can be successfully raised. Prices were likely to be high. Localities suited to flax could increase their acreages 30 percent over the seeding of the last three years, without danger of producing more than enough for domestic consumption. "There," said Jim Bach, "is a fact worth remembering. I'm going to look into this flax proposition a little further."

The Bach's lingered until the last question was answered, feeling that even if they did have many chores to do, the management of their farm and home deserved the time necessary to gather facts on Outlook for the coming year. As they drove home that evening, they continued to discuss the facts brought out in the afternoon session.

"I think maybe we'd better change some of our wheat acres to flax," Mr. Bach ventured. "Flax brings a good price and there doesn't seem to be much danger of producing too much right away."

"Maybe we ought to buy a few good dairy cows," Tony put in. "Johnson showed us that butter is likely to bring a good price."

"I don't know about buying any just now," his father replied, "but we should certainly try to get all the milk we can from those we already have. We can feed them well and make good money. That might be the best course to follow, and not buy any more cows. Cattle are likely to go lower in price, you know, within a couple of years."

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. Bach, "I heard so many facts and figures and guesses and prospects this afternoon, I don't know whether I am going or coming. I can never remember them all."

"Shucks, Ma, there wasn't so much to it," Tony said. "I've got it all down here in summarized form. Listen to this: Eggs and dairy products seem pretty good. Livestock

appears better than crops. Sheep are the best of the livestock. Potatoes are dirt cheap now but will be a good price next year. They are low in price now because of the enormous crop this year and such a thing will probably not happen again for years.

"More wheat was sown last year than ever before—81 million acres and they sowed only 77 million acres during war time. Flax is high and will likely remain high because the United States does not raise enough to meet her own needs—"

"I thought it was interesting what Johnson said about cattle," Mr. Bach broke in. "He said that the number of cattle usually increases for about eight years and then decreases for the next eight years. That cycle has been going on for years and years. And right now we are approaching a low point in cattle numbers and may reach it this year. After that the number is likely to increase. And when it does, the price will go lower, just as sure as we're alive. The same is true of hogs. We're pretty sure to have more for market in 1938 than we did last year and the number is likely to increase for two or three years after that."

"But Pa, all this talk about low prices—does it mean that we must go without things this year?"

"Not necessarily. If we plan carefully, we may still get all the things we need. First, we must give special attention and care to the things likely to yield the largest income and then buy carefully so we may get full value for our money."

"Well, I don't know about that," Mrs. Bach replied. "Only time will tell how things will turn out this year. But it is quite a thing to learn that what others are doing way off in Chicago, New York and even in other countries, has a direct bearing upon the income of our farm."

"Here we are nearly home," said Mr. Bach slowing down the family car to make the turn at the gate. "I'd call this Outlook meeting a success. I sure learned a lot."

"So did I," Tony echoed, but Mrs. Bach, always practical, remarked, "I must fix some potatoes for supper—they're cheap now and will probably be higher next year."