

The Relation of County Roads to Indiana's Farming Economy

GEORGE R. HARVEY, Secretary Treasurer
Indiana Farm Bureau
Indianapolis

We certainly, as farm people, have a high stake in the county road system. The way we now farm and move products to and from the farm, to be without an adequate road system would be disastrous. I checked the latest complete figures on mileage and kinds of roads and found that of the 77,000 plus miles, which we have in the county road system, a little over 70 per cent of these roads are gravel, stone, or something even less resistant to bad weather. Therefore, it is costly, and I know county commissioners have problems in keeping these roads in all-weather usage.

When we think of specific needs for country roads, one of the things that is uppermost in our minds is schools. Because the school bus, getting heavier and bigger all the time, has to travel down these roads by almost every home every school day regardless of weather during the year. We have had quite a school consolidation program, as you know, here in the state of Indiana over the last several years, especially accelerated in the last two legislative sessions. The heavier, larger school bus, able to cover more distance, is one of the keys to this school consolidation program. Back when I went to school, as a lot of you who attended at about the same time will remember, the school hack was used, the horse-drawn school hack as we called it. I remember we lived $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles out in the country and it took us about an hour to get to school. The team seldom trotted and I wasn't at the end of the line. I believe five or six miles was the total distance of that particular school route. Nowadays we would expect a school bus to travel 25 miles and possibly more in that length of time.

I will not quote too many statistics because it would take too long, but comparing between 1940 and 1960, which we can all remember, we find that the farms in the nation have decreased from more than 6 million units in 1940 to about $4\frac{1}{2}$ million units, or about 25 per cent. Yet the automobiles used by the people who still occupy those farms have increased slightly to more than 4,000,000 in both instances. The trucks have increased by three to one, and the tractors a little better

than three to one. And here is another factor that enters when we think of the kind of roads we need and are going to need out in the counties. Approximately one-third of our farmers are holding jobs off the farm for 100 days or more a year. That means they need an adequate road to get back and forth. Also, approximately 24 per cent of the farm wives hold an off-the-farm job.

Then we have to continually keep thinking of safety features and how they can be applied to our county roads. Statistics show that 50 per cent of the fatal accidents to rural people happen with an automobile involved. About 40 per cent of those accidents are due to running off the road and the main reason is that the road is too narrow.

I think the point that 89 per cent of all farm products move by truck to market should be made. Bigger and heavier equipment is going to be the order of the day in the future. The population shift has already been mentioned two or three times. Urban population is moving into the country and there are places out in the country that 20 years ago if anybody had told you there would be a cluster of 40 or 50 houses built there you would have considered them crazy. But as you drive around over the country you see these clusters of homes in some very peculiar places and these people have to get to and from their jobs.

Now just a word about management. I am not going to make any real suggestions on management. I am just going to tell you a few of the things we hear, and I put "that we hear" in quotation marks. But we hear that there is some favoritism shown out in the counties by the county road management. I try to defend that. I know that sometimes this probably does happen. But if we knew the gory details, as I like to call them, why roads go by this house and why roads do not go by that house—I know you would get an entirely different picture. But another thing we hear is that folks are concerned and wondering if they get all of the ingredients, materials, gadgets, and whatever it is that is supposed to go into a road, really into the road during the last six months of an administration that is going to change. (I do not have the slightest idea what in the world they are thinking and talking about. I just say we *hear* this.)

Our rural folks know that ditches are very, very important to a road. They know that if the road is properly ditched, we are going to have a solid road longer.

I might mention something about the cut-offs. I call them cut-offs where interstate highways have gone through. And we know everybody's road doesn't go over or under, and none go across these new

super highways. But, when a road isn't going to a town anymore, there is a tendency to forget maintenance. We just want to point out that we hope that those roads will still be on the maintenance list.

Finally, let us consider one of the main things—highway money. It was stated by Mr. Hillenbrand that highway money is for highways, and you know that in the Farm Bureau we believe that highway money is for highways with no diversion. I was at the session of the legislature in 1941 when we had the last diversion and we were fighting it all the way. There is some diversion now, about half the expenses of the state police and some for safety programs. This much has been agreed to. But any more diversion from the highway gasoline tax moneys will be strongly opposed by the Farm Bureau. We know that when the next legislature meets, there will be a strong temptation to siphon highway funds into the general fund.

The distribution formula for dividing the gasoline tax of 53 per cent state, 32 per cent county, 15 per cent cities and towns is fair. Each of the three would like a larger portion, but for one to get more, some one of the others would have to take less and I just do not believe this is going to happen.

Therefore, you can count on the Farm Bureau in the next session of the General Assembly to be in there battling against any more diversion of highway funds or a reduction in the county's 32 per cent of the gasoline tax.