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# COUNTRY LIVING-

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### *Thinking about moving to the country?*

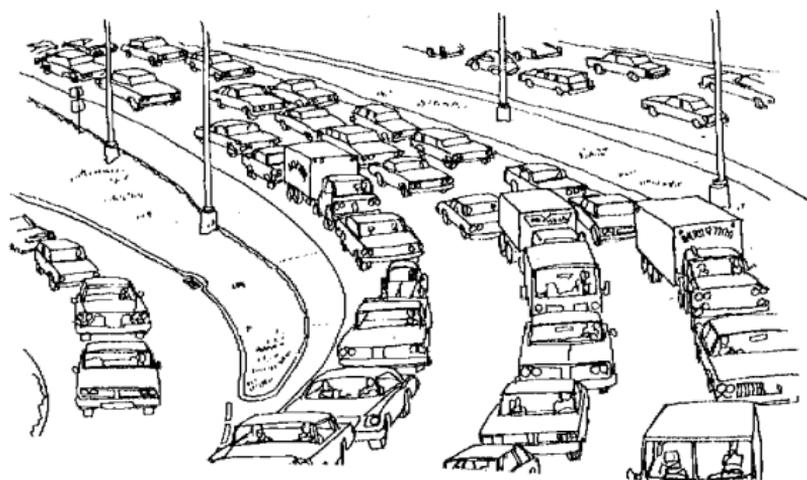
**T**his publication is directed at the family currently living in a metropolitan area and is thinking about moving to the country. Not the suburbs—the country. “. . . Where a person can keep a few chickens, grow some fruits and vegetables, and get the benefits of farm living.”

While preparing this publication, many knowledgeable people were consulted. Each was asked about the possibility of establishing a small farm home in their locality. Consensus was that while this would have been easy 25 years ago; today—depending on the areas—chances of fulfilling that dream range from “impossible to very difficult.”

There was complete agreement on the high cost involved. As one experienced Extension agent put it, a person must be willing “to pay the price in both dollars and aching muscles. A badly underfinanced venture into the country can become an unmitigated disaster.”

There was also complete agreement on the need for a publication that would not necessarily frighten people away from trying, but would alert them to many of the problems and help them avoid what could be a very costly mistake.

*Prepared by Manning Becker and Gene Nelson, farm management specialists, Oregon State University Extension Service. This publication is based on a Western Farm Management Extension Committee bulletin prepared by Edward Yeary, California Extension farm management specialist.*



On weekends, freeways bear obvious witness to the desire of a great many city people to get out into the country, and a considerable number of country dwellers to indulge in the city's offerings. And why not? A change can often be beneficial.

But making a permanent change from city to country living for a whole family can be quite another story. There are many cases of families that have made such a move and been quite happy about it. There are also those however, who wish they hadn't or who have given up and gone back to the city.

You don't want to belong to the latter group, so here are some things to consider.

### *Your life style*

What does it take to make you happy? Some people find hard, manual work a distinct pleasure—they're never happier than when gardening or building an addition to the house. Some distinctly dislike this type of activity.

Many people want to "get close to the soil." They get tremendous satisfaction from the accomplishment of a successful vegetable garden. Some would rather play cards.

Most people like pets—dogs and cats—and some go farther and enjoy being around large animals—horses, cattle, sheep. For others, stuffed animals are sufficient.

There's no denying that some people should never move out of the city—they need what a city offers—convenience, entertainment, shops, a feeling of security. And then there's the question of whether everyone in your family feels the same way.

So the first thing to do before making a decision is to draw up a sort of balance sheet similar to the one on this page. Balance what your present life offers with what you and your family feel a move to the country would offer.

With few exceptions, the country offers better, cleaner air than the city. But in some locations air pollution is becoming a major problem for farmers and their crops. This factor should not be overlooked when selecting a country home. Dust storms can be a problem in some areas.

As a rule, the country offers more opportunities for outdoor living than the city. Your house is seldom close enough to the next one to make screens necessary for privacy. There's usually room enough to plant a good-size lawn that's handy for recreation.

**Balance Sheet**  
*Desire\**

*Present city  
life provide?*

*Proposed country  
life offer?*

Clean air  
Outdoor living  
Neighbors  
Food  
Schools  
Entertainment  
Free time

Security  
Medical help  
Income  
Others:  
hobbies,  
utilities,  
transportation

\*You'll think of more than those listed.

Most places in the country are closer to hunting and fishing grounds than are cities. Nearby small towns often provide an enthusiasm for team sports that more than compensates for lack of professional talent.

Food? What you raise may be better and less expensive than that available in the city. But again, it may not. That will be discussed later.

School is an important part of the life of children. Rural schools often provide much of the athletic programs and social life for the community. Will local schools provide your children the type of programs you desire?

The amount and quality of entertainment will vary in different localities but the country usually will not offer as large a selection as a city. In many communities, entertainment centers around homes, churches, fraternal or other organized groups. Major television network programs are receivable in most areas—direct or by cable—but variety may not be as great as in metropolitan areas.

Free time available in the country will depend on factors discussed later, but the amount of free time will generally be in direct proportion to chores left undone or accomplished by hired help.

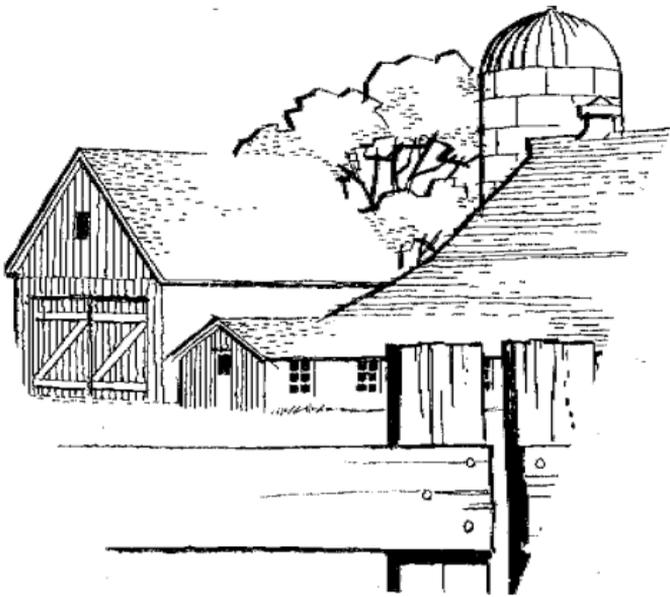
Consider the importance you attach to security—to being able to lift a telephone receiver and summon police, fire equipment, or an ambulance in a matter of minutes. This may take longer in the country.

If the quality of medical help available looms large in your scheme of things, your choice of possible localities could be reduced.

And as it must to all discussions, finances becomes a topic of utmost importance—probably the overriding factor that would or should determine whether to make the move. Putting it bluntly, moving to the country is almost surely going to cost a lot of money. Can you afford it?

If all or a major part of your income will continue to be from one or more jobs in the city, deduct the commuting cost from your income—but not from your income tax. If the move makes another automobile necessary, don't overlook the additional cost of the vehicle and insurance.

You might be able to save on taxes, but you might not. It is also problematical whether you will save on food bills. And if you expect to augment your income by the sale of foodstuffs you hope to raise on your farm, your chances are exceedingly slim.



### *Your decision*

If the sample balance sheet doesn't fit your life style or your desires, make up your own.

There are undeniable advantages and pleasures in country living. There are also drawbacks. You and your family are the **only** ones who can determine what you are willing to put up with to gain what you feel you want out of life.

### *If the country wins*

If you weigh both sides and decide that a place in the country is for you, your next question will probably be how to go about it—how to get started. So it's back to the pencil and paper to do some figuring and planning.

A publication the size of this one couldn't hope to provide answers to all of the questions that will occur to you during and after your move. There's no place to start and no place to stop. So probably the first thing you will want to write down is the address of the Oregon State Extension office in the region you hope to locate. They are called county Extension agents, and are usually located in the county seat.

At the county Extension office you will find information on how much land is needed to support different animals; what kind and how much feed will be needed; what crops are adapted to the area and the necessary cultural practices for each; and even simple plans for building useful farm structures.

**Problem No. 1**—and quite possibly the most difficult to overcome—may be locating suitable real estate, either with or without a house on it.

Land surrounding many cities is being sold for residential development (houses, apartments, condominiums, retirement villages) and the ever-present shopping centers. Farther out from the city, much of the land is being zoned for agricultural use with minimum plots of from 20 to 50 acres. In many counties regulations prevent a farmer from selling off small plots without going through complex legal procedures and getting a “development” permit. This tends to put emphasis on selling houses, not land on which to set up a small farm home.

In other instances, land surrounding cities is occupied by clusters of small houses on small lots. Some are former real estate developments that have gone from bad to worse and now constitute what some people call “rural slums”—35- or 50-foot lots liberally sprinkled with rusting automobile bodies or dilapidated, former chicken coops housing broken dreams. One would have to buy half-a-dozen of these places with contiguous lots (practically impossible), tear down existing buildings, and start all over again. Even so, you might be unhappy about your neighborhood.

Fortunately this is not true for all cities but it is true in enough of them to limit the possibilities of finding a suitable location easily.

Farther out from the city limits, in agricultural areas, holdings get larger and larger and chances of finding a small place approach zero.

You may want to engage the services of a realtor, but don't expect miracles. Most realtors specialize in farm properties (large acreage), city property, or business property. Rarely would a realtor have listed for sale the kind of property you are looking for.

But let's suppose that in spite of these conditions you want to give it a try. Consider a few requirements:

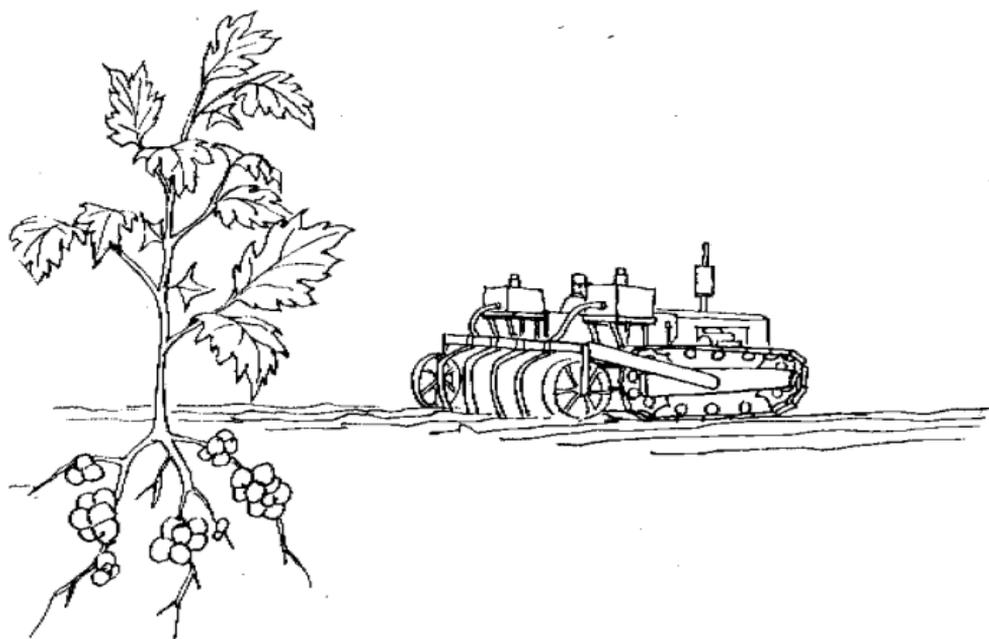
### *How big a place?*

This too will depend on your life style or what you expect of your place in the country. You'll probably need 1,500 to 2,000 square feet of space for a house—that's an area about 40' x 50'. Allow additional space for garage or carport and driveway. You'll undoubtedly want a patio and perhaps a lawn and flower garden.

Now total up the space for living.

**A vegetable garden?** Probably. A plot 50' x 50' should be about all one family could tend in spare time without mechanical help. With a power-assisted walking tiller you could tend a larger plot; with a garden tractor, perhaps twice that much. At this point you would do well to set at least tentative goals for the amount of produce you want to grow, and this will depend in large measure on expected time available for gardening. Even though you may never sell any of your produce, you'll undoubtedly want to can or freeze some for yourself.

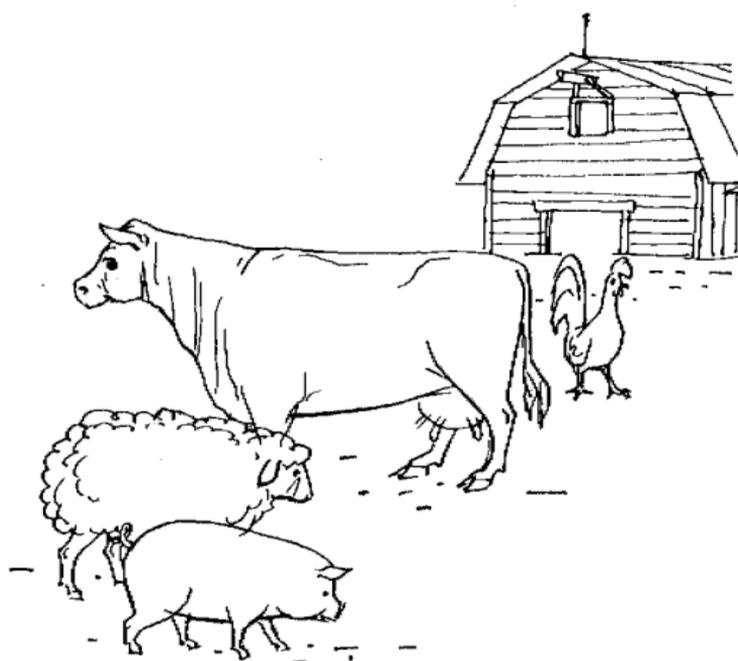
**Fruit trees?** A few—but be selective and avoid being greedy. Fruit trees take a lot of room, a lot of special care, and a lot of water. They will present many problems if they are not adapted to local climatic conditions. New dwarf varieties of some fruits should be investigated; they take less room and are easier to maintain. But any kind will have to be sprayed, pruned, irrigated, and watched carefully for disease and insects.



Some fruit trees require cross-pollination to produce fruit, so you can't plant just one tree; you have to have at least two different varieties. Some fruit trees are subject to infestation by one or two different insect pests while the trees next to it are subject to completely different problems, thus complicating biological or chemical control measures.

It's great to have your own fruit to put up but it might be cheaper to buy it at the local market.

But if you must, in figuring space needed, full-size fruit trees take about 250 square feet each; dwarf varieties about a quarter of that.



**Animals?** You're on your own here. What kind of animals do you want? Chickens and squabs don't require much space; horses do. A rule of thumb has it that a full-grown horse or cow requires an acre of good pasture for support or 10 acres of poorer pasture. An acre of good pasture will support three sheep.

Are you planning for a 4-H Club animal project for one or more youngsters? The Extension Service has excellent literature on that subject and will help you determine how elaborate a setup you may want.

You might do well to leave the decision on what animals you want, if any, until you have decided on a location. Weather conditions, proximity to a town, and pollution control regulations might influence your decision.

**Add it up.** Throw in some space for berry vines if you like, and possibly a utility or storage shed for equipment. Total up the space you feel you will need; allow yourself an error factor of 10 per cent and you're ready to start looking.

### *There's a lot to consider*

In addition to the obvious things to guard against, like overeager real estate dealers (sometimes called land promoters) and surveyors of too-easy credit, here are a few other items to consider:

**Zoning and taxation.** Some counties, and other governmental units, in search of more tax revenue are casting covetous eyes on any developments that could be appraised at residential rates. In some cases, logic plays a minor rôle in the decision, and residents of what was long considered agricultural land find themselves assessed at residential rates. Check this before buying any piece of property.

Zoning regulations might also rule out your keeping some animals except cats and dogs.

**Soil and water.** Soils range from excellent to impossible. Look at surrounding places, if nobody in the area is raising anything it's possible nobody can. Including you.

Irrigation of crops will be necessary if summer rainfall is not adequate. If local water is of poor quality (high salt content), wickedly expensive, or almost impossible to obtain in quantity, you're fighting a losing battle. Look elsewhere.

**Comfort and service.** If you're buying an existing place, consider how it compares with your previous home. What about all those conveniences you're used to—electrical appliances, handy outlets?

Does someone take away your garbage on a regular schedule or must you make arrangements to dispose of it?

Is your place hooked into a local sewage disposal system or must you rely on your own septic tank? If you have to put in your own can you get the required permit? Is the area available for a drainfield adequate?

Remember moving to the country is no guarantee that theft and other crimes associated with



cities will be left behind completely. Tools and equipment have been stolen from unattended fields—presumably to be sold as scrap metal for the few pennies they will bring.

And check to make sure you're not locating in a place that substitutes truck or railroad noise for the noise of city traffic. Most freight on trucks or railroads moves at night, which can make the noise involved irksome.

**Vacations.** It's relatively simple to close up a city home and go off for a vacation, but in the country you have to consider who is going to mind the shop—feed the animals, do the chores connected with even small-unit farming. Summertime is when you are busiest.

If you plan to hire some work done you would do well to inquire into the availability of experienced help. Many farm operations that look relatively simple to the uninitiated require some degree of skill if they are to be done correctly. Fruit-tree pruning and picking are two that come to mind immediately.

**Improvements needed?** Will grading or terracing be necessary? Will brush or tree clearing be needed either for protection against fire or for establishment of pasture or planting of crops?

Is the fencing adequate for your needs? Fencing—especially for corrals—is expensive even if you do your own work.

## *You've got the place . . . now what?*

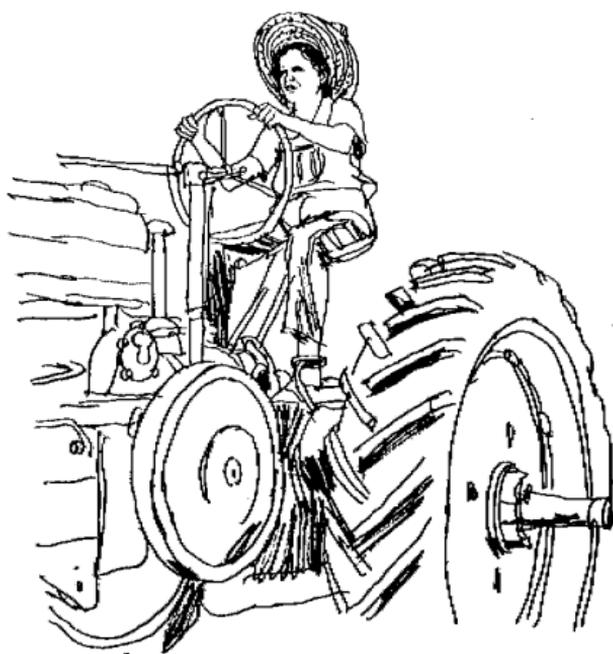
If your new property isn't already laid out or fenced off, or even if it is, you would do well to draw up some rough plans of what you want to end up with. The illustrated plan suggests units you may want to establish.

Remember to leave access roads or paths to different parts of your planted areas so maintenance work can be accomplished.

If irrigation is going to be one of the more important operations, you may want to increase the number of outlets to save hose dragging. And even though they are expensive, permanent sprinklers may be warranted for some locations.

You may want a lath house or cold frame for starting plants in flats.

You'll almost certainly want a tool shed or a place to store equipment when it isn't being used.



You'll be astonished at the amount of material such as stakes, wire, etc. that accumulate in a few years.

But the big thing to remember is to allocate some space to be used for making the planted space more efficient.

**What to plant?** It's amazing how much you can learn and how many ideas you can get from the more elaborate seed catalogs. Don't expect all of your fruits and vegetables to look exactly like the beautiful pictures in the catalog, but you can give it a good try if you follow directions and get a decent break on the weather.

Directions printed on seed packets are helpful but incomplete. They don't say what to do when you see little green bugs, or when the leaves start turning brown. So start collecting information on growing the crops you selected; some of it is free and some must be purchased.

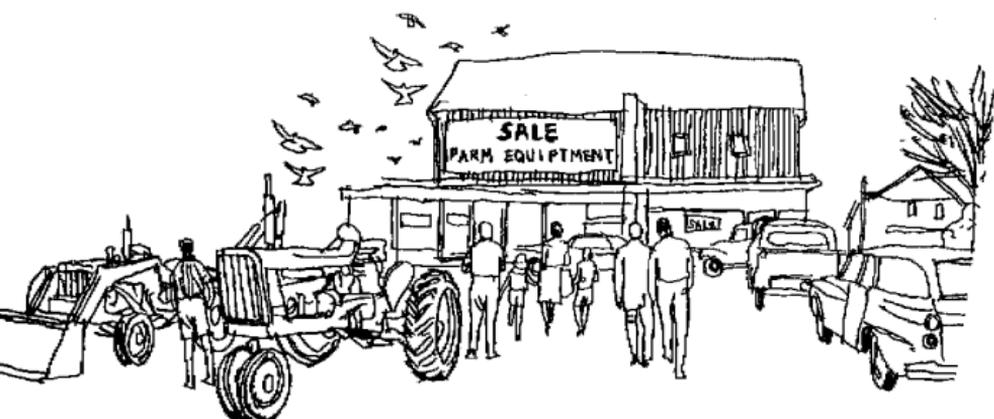
Your local Extension Service or nursery can help with recommendations on various crops that do well in your area and can advise on needed soil amendments, pest and disease control measures, etc.

The Extension office can provide their own and USDA literature on many subjects, and as a rule your neighbors can give you the benefit of their experience with local conditions.

**Equipment.** It is doubtful if any amount of engineering progress will ever completely eliminate the need for the person with the shovel, but happily their role is now a minor one on the farm. The point is that even a small operator will need some hand-operated tools; hoes, shovels, rakes, etc. You might also find it beneficial to get power assistance for some operations.

In the interests of good economics it should be stated here that the expense of power equipment might be very difficult to justify on any "farm" smaller than 2 acres. But experience has shown that people tend to invent their own justification for the purpose of expensive equipment, and they can get eager support from the salesperson of such delightful merchandise.

Power-assisted, walking tillers that save an immense amount of digging sell for about \$250. Optional attachments for doing a number of other jobs are available at extra cost.



Purchase price of a ride-on tractor starts at about five times the price of the walking tiller, and optional attachments can run from \$60 to well over \$300 each. You might consider renting equipment rather than buying it.

Obviously, some sort of protection from the elements must be provided for expensive merchandise. There are several do-it-yourself all-metal storage sheds available with parts ready to bolt together.

A sprayer to protect against pests and diseases can be had for from \$10 to over \$600, depending on the amount of muscle the operator is prepared to expend.

There's no place to start and no place to end a list of things the gadget-minded person will think they can't live without, so perhaps it is best to just issue a warning against becoming "equipment poor."

And unless you are hopelessly inept at fixing things, one of the handiest, quickest to pay for itself units on a farm will be a small shop in which minor repairs can be made to tools and machinery.

**Can you make money?—Probably not.**

True, there have been cases where people have farmed small plots, like 12 acres, and done very well financially. But practically all of these people had things going for them that most city dwellers will not have. Most had good farming backgrounds and experience. Almost without exception they were willing to put in 12 to 15 hours of back-breaking work every day for weeks at a time. And lastly, they usually concentrated on highly specialized, high-income crops that grow well only on top-quality soil in extremely localized areas having ideal climates for the particular crop.

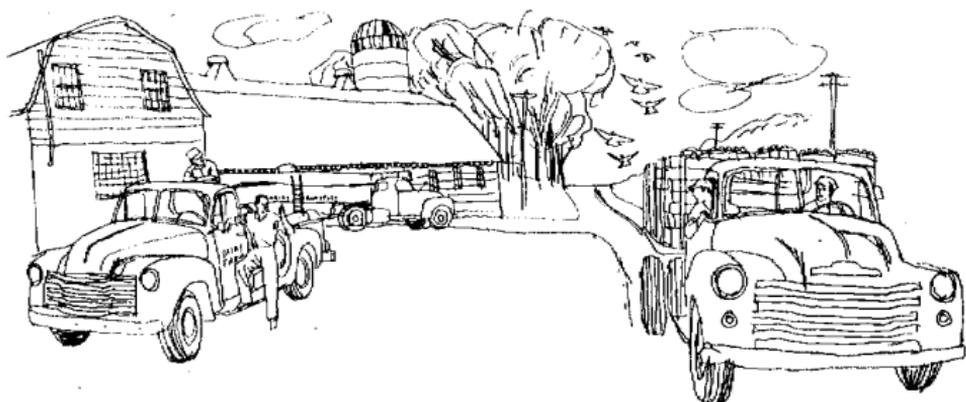
And in this connection, there are cases on record of people who have been encouraged by a few enthusiasts to raise some specialty crop because "there was a good market" for the produce. But too often and too late the grower found that the few enthusiasts did not multiply into an adequate market, especially for a product that commanded a premium price.

There is also a distinct possibility that part of the food you raise yourself will cost more than it

would have if purchased at a store. An example would be eggs—you couldn't hope to compete either in price or quality with the commercial egg-producer who has 100,000 birds; automatic equipment; everything it takes to cut costs and raise quality.

The same would apply to chickens or turkeys raised for meat.

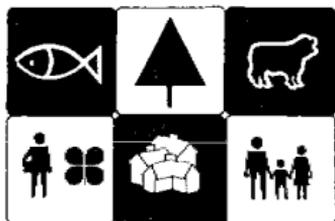
As one experienced Extension agent put it, "The increased cost of food may change the opportunity to sell products at the farm. There has been quite an increase in the roadside marketing business in the country. But the successful ones are those with reliable supply and a variety of products attractively displayed, and with adequate storage and refrigeration facilities. The casual, small operator who has a few miscellaneous products to sell finds it is not worth the time, bother, or energy to sell these excess products at the farm."



Fruits and vegetables may be grown in any manner you wish, can be harvested at their peak of perfection, and either eaten fresh or put up. But pricewise the commercial producer will probably beat you every time. However, you will undoubtedly want to grow, can, freeze, or dry your own produce for the satisfaction it provides.

### *It's your decision*

It is hoped that this discussion has presented enough basic information to keep a family from making a hasty move to the country and then looking back on their former life in the city as "the good old days." If the move is carefully thought out and planned there is no reason for this to happen.



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