ACTION COMMUNITIES CAN TAKE WHICH WILL ASSIST IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTHERN IOWA

Ray E. Wakeley, Joe Bohlen, Frances Carlin, Francis Kutish, Andrew McComb, Verner Nielsen, Irwin Oest, J. T. Scott, Morton Smutz and Raymond Beneke

People in southern Iowa must continue to reorganize for better living. Community adjustment is directly and vitally related to agricultural adjustment. Present and proposed future changes in agriculture and industry will change communities in southern Iowa. Important changes will be indicated in community organization and services. Some of these changes will make communities better places in which to live and work. Other changes will make communities more effective in meeting changed conditions in a highly organized society. Among other things, improved communities can assist directly in agricultural adjustment. Modern communities are an essential counterpart for modern agriculture. Specific suggestions of what communities in southern Iowa can do and are doing will be emphasized.

Suggestions for improvement have been most adequate for farms. Data have been presented to indicate that southern Iowa farmers can do better, in fact much better than they presently are doing. Southern Iowa is a rural area and will probably so remain. While the outlook for industrial development in southern Iowa is not bright, it is not impossible, and some increases in income will come to workers who commute to industrial jobs outside the area.

Suggestions have been made for the improvement of the towns which might be subsumed under the general heading of consolidation of areas and enterprises. Populationwise, farm population will continue to decrease. County seat towns will grow slowly. Small towns may be expected to stand still or decline in total population. Southern Iowa population in total is likely to remain about the same as at present.

The task of this committee is to indicate how present and proposed future changes affect communities in southern Iowa, and how those communities can be made

Ray E. Wakeley is professor, Department of Economics and Sociology. Joe Bohlen and Francis Kutish are professors; Raymond Beneke is associate professor; J. T. Scott is assistant professor, Department of Economics and Sociology. Frances Carlin is professor of Foods and Nutrition. Andrew McComb is professor of Forestry. Verner Nielsen is professor and head, Department of Dairy and Food Industries. Irwin Oest is professor, Engineering Extension Service. Morton Smutz is professor and head, Department of Chemical Engineering.
more effective instruments of the people for making such changes as will be needed to provide a more abundant life for the people of southern Iowa. In summary, how can the people in southern Iowa develop their communities into better places to work and live? In considering this general problem we must consider communities as they were and as they are, as well as what they may become and what are the relationships between community development and agricultural improvement in southern Iowa.

**Early community characteristics.** Southern Iowa was settled on the basis of the needs for community living in a horse and buggy era. The "team haul" was the work task which set the limits of distance between towns. The township, patterned after New England experience, was considered a proper area for local government, and it was the largest political area within which people might get together easily. School districts were limited in size to match the trudge of little feet. Towns were incorporated early and small and independent, and they have remained independent. Town school districts were known as independent districts. These were the people whose immediate ancestors coined the state motto, "Our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain."

Farms and towns prospered, compared to the specialty farmers on the open prairie. They were diversified; they could live in the timber and they had water, but their crop land eroded. Their roads were surveyed over the hills, ignoring the wisdom of the early settlers who had followed the streams. The best timber was marketed during World War I and in the 1920's. Mostly weed or crippled trees were left. Pastures grew up to weeds and brush. Woodland was closely pastured. Crops burned up in the fields during most of the 1930's. Coal mining and railroading declined or disappeared. These conditions have tended to enforce and reinforce the conservatism of the people. Southern Iowa has been low on orientation toward change.

So southern Iowa, which was organized and reached its zenith before northwest Iowa was fully settled, became, after World War I, a land of too many horses, too many and too small farms, too many and too poor roads, too many and too small towns, too many schools, too many churches, too many units of government, too few jobs, but a still proud and independent people. Other writers have said that local values and norms of conduct have been preserved from the days of their horse-and-buggy ancestors to the present. During this early period "the book" was not the book-of-the-month, but the Bible. Hard work and saving were virtues.

Southern Iowans have believed strongly in education for their children. They want their children to "have it better" than they had. The average years of schooling has been higher for farm operators in southern Iowa than for operators in northern Iowa.
Presently, southern Iowa is an area of tremendous economic contrasts. The farm operator level of living index in 1945 varied among southern Iowa townships from a low of 60 to a high of 178. The rural-nonfarm level of living, including rural towns in southern Iowa, was lower than the United States average, but the farm operator level of living was higher.

People in southern Iowa place relatively high value on friendly personal relations, on local neighborhood and primary community institutions, on small towns and small town loyalties. Southern Iowa has more town adjustments to make and less resources with which to make them than has any other part of Iowa. The necessity for reorganization comes from a plethora of small farms, small organizations and small communities with which they are unable to meet the challenge and the competition of today's world. Present recommendations call not only for local community reorganization but also for county reorganization and for reorientation and reorganization of southern Iowa as a district with special relation to the state.

Setting the stage for action. Obviously, the speeding up of agricultural adjustment in southern Iowa did not cause the problems of southern Iowa communities, but it has increased the immediacy and the seriousness of these problems and thereby has increased the necessity for their solution. At the same time improvements in agriculture production, marketing and industry can make community improvements possible.

The solutions for these problems should not lag a generation behind the problems. The situation demands big plans; plans for the present and plans for the future. In the long run it is important to see some ultimate destination in terms of long-run goals. In the short run, it is essential to see and meet some present pressing needs. Out of the solution of present problems in an organized way will come confidence and ability to see and solve larger long-run problems. Presently the important thing is to see clearly present pressing needs and to demonstrate improvement in the right direction; that is, in ways which will also contribute to the attainment of long-run goals.

Southern Iowa on the move. Southern Iowa is better off than many people suppose. In farm operator level of living, it is above the national average and improving. People in southern Iowa are still proud and independent and in a mood to help themselves. People in southern Iowa are pressing for answers for solutions to their problems. This is true of communities and particularly of leaders in all the county seat towns of the 10 counties under present consideration. They are concerned with questions of county and community development; with organization and leadership; with programs for obtaining more industry, better schools and churches; with cooperation of farmers in community affairs. One of their chief concerns, variously expressed, is how to obtain effective community action. But community action begins at home. The problems of southern Iowa must, in the last analysis, be solved in southern Iowa.
by the people in southern Iowa. This does not ignore state and national changes. It does mean that southern Iowa should take advantage of national trends. It does mean that southern Iowa should be organized as a unit to influence state and national regulations so that they will be as favorable to the development of southern Iowa as elsewhere.

People of Iowa want good community life, and they want to know how to get it. For good community life, adjustment is not enough. Effective organization and leadership is needed. In their own communities, people can work together to remedy present difficulties. They should recognize that effective community action does not depend so much on population as it does on the organized determination of the people in the community and the use they make of what they have to work with. Volume of business is important in school, church, and business. But it is also important to have relatively complete and effective communication, and people must have a feeling of belonging to the community and concern for community development whether their residence is in the larger center, in the small town, or in the country part of the community.

**Community Adjustments and Population Change**

Southern Iowa and all of Iowa are on an export basis for agricultural products and for population. Southern Iowa has produced more people than stayed in southern Iowa ever since it was first fully settled. Out-migration has been going on for so long a time that many have become accustomed to people leaving and think little about it. But the more rapid loss of farms and farm families since World War II has again raised migration problems. At the same time, birth rates have increased. Southern Iowa now feels the combined effect of high birth rates, reduced number of farms, and improved communication on communities which have never been fully modernized. Migration is a characteristic of both town and country. This does not mean that population will always decline in total numbers. More probably it will remain about the same or, decrease or increase slowly. This does not mean that towns will die, although the smaller ones may cease to grow or decline.

Continual net out-migration from southern Iowa has tended to leave fewer young people and more older people. However, the people of southern Iowa were proud possessors of a strong protestant ethic which makes them independent in spirit and makes them strong believers in progress of their own making.

Part-time or full-time employment in southern Iowa will continue to increase as a source of added income and sometimes as a substitute for migration. Skills developed among part-time or full-time commuters are a valuable source of skilled workers sometimes needed to encourage local industrial development.
Redistribution of population. Not all the people who leave farms or leave small towns leave the county. Some of the farm folks move to town; some of the town folks move to the county seat or to a larger community center. Migration rates are highest for the farm population and lowest for the larger community centers. This results in a feeling of loss and defeat for the farm population and a false or illusory sense of well-being and progress in the community center. Thus the leaders in the community center who should be most concerned may ignore the problems of adjustment until they in turn meet or fail to meet competition from larger or more active centers.

This redistribution of population, this increasing concentration at the community center results in one more important ecological characteristic; the concentration of older citizens in the small town. This is much more than a residual matter. Older people congregate and concentrate in small towns because they are near home, because they can live there more cheaply and so conserve their limited resources. Care of older retired persons is a problem and a major business opportunity in southern Iowa. When their work is no longer needed, they should be urged and assisted to qualify for social security payments and, if necessary, for old age assistance and for county medical care. These are family and community responsibilities. Other states are finding a nice business in the care of older persons. Southern Iowa need not pass up such opportunities. Furthermore, the more able of our older people have abilities which can be used in community development. They are the ones most likely to leave if reasonable facilities for good living are not available locally.

In summary, it must be emphasized that the basic community problem in southern Iowa is not migration, but a redistribution of the population which remains and an integrated organization of a federated type which will facilitate united community action for better business, educational, religious, health and recreational services; usually on a county basis.

County Development and Agricultural Adjustment

Agricultural adjustment is only one of the major forms of adjustment taking place in southern Iowa. Total adjustment is needed, and community adjustment is a major part of total adjustment. Adjustment means the organization, coordination and integration of the community so that people will not only enjoy living in it; they will enjoy being a part of it. They will develop community machinery for more adequately meeting their needs. In southern Iowa, most of the counties are one-town counties. In one-town counties, the organized life of the county depends on the county-seat town and revolves around it. The county seat is the county community center, and the community life of the people of the county is related to and revolves around it. Local government
centers there. Specialized businesses are located there. County school administration centers there as also does public library service. Most county organizations have their headquarters in the county seat town.

The county seat is also the major point of contact or the local headquarters for outside organizations and service agencies which serve the county. The fullness and the richness of the life of the people of the county depends largely upon the county seat town. The county seat town cannot escape responsibilities for county leadership and the development of the county as a unit. But the county seat town cannot do these things alone. It is but the major center of the county community. This brings us to consider the part which the small towns and the farmers must play in this process of complete county-community organization.

Around the borders of most counties is a ring of smaller towns. Southern Iowa has a comparatively large number of these small independent, incorporated towns and villages. These towns have served Iowa well, and they still have minor business and service functions to perform for those persons who are far from the county seat. Southern Iowa will not be served by a campaign to preserve their independence or to destroy them. Small towns are a part of the county community. Total county organization can be accomplished on a voluntary basis if county seat towns will accept responsibility for the entire county and smaller towns will give up enough of their independence to become an organized part of the county community. The county seat town must contribute to the improvement of services for better living in the now underserved small towns.

Farmers in the county community. Agricultural adjustment has been interpreted to mean that farmers will in the future be fewer and more prosperous. Farmers will not become adjusted until they too become identified with the county community and have an active responsibility and share in community development. Modern farmers are quite capable of taking their place and playing an active role in society of which they are a part. They can identify themselves with the county through participation in county units of farm organizations, through participation in the affairs of the small town which is now part of the county community, or they can participate directly in county seat organizations and activities which are county wide in organization and program. Perhaps community active farmer leaders can be described by contrast with some quite different farmers who are in the county but are not recognized as contributing anything to its development. These independent farmers are not the best community builders.

More prosperous farmers of the future will spend relatively less for food, clothing and shelter; relatively more for better living, home remodeling, new furniture and conveniences, good clothes; more for recreation, music, drama; more for health, education, religion, communication. The county community
has major responsibility for providing these improved services for farmers and for others in the county.

Improving community services in town and country. The county community, to be successful, must plan to make all essential services available to the entire county; must organize them on a county basis. These include business and industry, education, religion, local government, health, recreation, welfare, cultural arts, and communication. Coordinated planning and organized follow-up by county leaders are necessary to provide all of these services to the entire county. Most of the counties do not even try to do so. Sometimes badly needed services just are not generally available. It is not an easy matter for a service agency to blanket a county with any service or program, but in a totally organized county community, it can be done.

School leaders have been setting a fast pace. Word was recently received that Davis county had become one district for the operation of its school system. This is another first for southern Iowa. Public library service is already established in the county seat towns. This service should be extended to the entire county on a public service basis, with reference help so that people can find the information they need. More consumer education is urgently needed. People in southern Iowa may or may not be able to live as well as people in other areas. But with more consumer education, they might now be living better than they do. Consumer values, as well as economics, must be included in county wide programs.

With few exceptions among rural church organizations southern Iowa is still operating too much on a horse-and-buggy basis. Some churches are making determined efforts to establish larger units. But the needed county system of church organization appears far in the future, although churches are trying to profit by what school people have learned about reorganization on the basis of school attendance areas.

Local government by townships became out of date with the coming of good roads. Thus the county became the important unit for local government. But the county was the creature of the legislature. Already many governmental units organized as special districts ignore county lines, and it appears unfortunate that more of them cannot do so. It appears unlikely that the county as the independent separate unit of local government will continue to exist in rural areas. When local government units change, other services also tend to organize on the larger locality basis.

Medical and dental services are organized increasingly on a county basis with the principal service group being a group of practitioners organized in a clinic which can give both general and some special services.
The cultural advantages available generally to rural people are inadequate when compared to the best in southern Iowa. County recreational facilities are often lacking. Schools and private agencies are unable to fill the gap. Music and drama are subordinated to organized athletics. Art centers for the display of paintings, sculpture, and for the encouragement of photographic arts are generally absent in county community centers. But they need not remain absent in any live community.

Industry in the county community. More and better job opportunities are desired by all county seat towns, and, by some, more job opportunities are considered essential. Present job opportunities are mostly in business and in farming, and total employment in these is not expanding to employ more people.

Development of local commercial enterprises should not be overlooked. Much can be accomplished by expanding the community trade areas to a county basis. Banking service can be expanded to care for the needs of a more highly commercialized agriculture. Banks alone can almost control development of county business enterprises. Banks can largely control the development of both industrial and family housing. The courthouse square is becoming outmoded as the county seat shopping center. Sufficient parking space is not available; room for business expansion is not available; new modern shopping centers are needed. Markets in our county community are too often haphazard in character and inefficient in operation. Trade centers often are not good farm market centers. Marketing is a vital part of the service of any county community.

Needed industrial development does not just happen. It has to be cultivated. Industry needs the support of a live community. The community must be large enough so that the industry will not overpower it; large enough so that it will have something to offer. Community size is an important factor, and community centers with less than 5,000 population appear to be industrially disadvantaged, but not hopelessly so. It is more important to industry to have an active growing community than it is to have one of overpowering size. Industry wants and needs to have a favorable community of opinion in which to develop. New industry must know that the community would like to have the industry as a part of the community; that the local people have prepared for its coming, and that the community is in all respects one which employers and employees will be proud to call home. Our county communities cannot have industrial development on their own terms. Getting industry is a highly competitive undertaking. It is the responsibility of the county not just to get industry but to develop a more favorable environment in which all citizens can conduct their business.

Not all the problems of industry and community are general. Some of them
are very specific. Community centers must have adequate supplies of good water, adequate sewage disposal and good streets. These are no longer relatively free goods. They are very expensive, but our community centers must have them.

Community centers must have good road and railroad or water connections with the outside. In this particular, Osceola is perhaps the most favorably located town in our 10-county area. But county roads are important too and all parts of a county should be able to communicate by telephone with the county center without paying toll. A limited number of diagonal roads would be very helpful.

Housing is a problem where enough good homes are not available. Workers who get good wages like to live in good homes. Much of the housing in southern Iowa has been built a long time, is not modern and is impractical to modernize. This is of special concern to farmers. Continued farm consolidations make farm houses available. Many of these might be torn down or used for storage. Available homes which are reasonably modern might be rented or purchased by an industrial commuter, a retired family, or perhaps a trucker. Farm adjustment will encourage home improvement and modernization; maybe even landscaping. A light in a window may signify home, but it takes a lot more than a light in a window to make a modern home. Modern homes, modern farms and modern communities go together, but to be truly modern, there should be a touch of modern industry. Reasons are not hard to find. Labor is available; our communities import commercial and manufactured products, and the multiplier effect of industrial employment gives an important advantage. This is not an argument for self sufficient communities. It is an opportunity for communities which are sufficiently awake to see what is happening and active enough to take advantage of their opportunities. Some of the best opportunities are born of ideas in the minds of local people who need expert advice to develop them and community support to organize the business.

**Current Community Developments**

Southern Iowa has made a good beginning. What is needed are increased motivation to proceed; expert facts and advice so people of southern Iowa will understand their situation and make the fewest possible mistakes; encouragement and help to do the most complete job possible.

Much can be done by continuing progress now under way. For example, La­moni, a church town with a college, is organized to promote a complete program of community development. Mt. Ayr is organizing on a county basis. Osceola has a fine new courthouse and is making good progress in school re-organization and industrial development. Chariton and Centerville are one
jump ahead of the rest in size although not so large as Creston or Ottumwa. Chariton shows some progress, and Centerville is moving ahead. Creston has an organized community council with an ambitious program for 1959. Bloomfield has a fine medical clinic and now is developing a county school system. Corydon is on the move, but slowly. Albia is increasing its experience with industrial development. Leon is awakening, but is handicapped by competition from other communities. Ottumwa is the big town among the 10 counties; the one which should serve as the larger area or district center for adjoining counties.

Recently I (Ray Wakeley) spent a short time in Leon and in Osceola. The members of the agricultural extension staffs were working on community and county wide problems. They wanted facts, and they wanted help with county research. They have a concern with county community development which will make its mark on these counties. County leaders are among the ones who need help now.

Problems of unification. In southern Iowa as elsewhere, there are small farm and big farm differences. There are differences between town and country, between little town and big town; between religious groups; between workers and owners; between young and old; between newcomers and old established residents. Skilled community leadership is essential to keep these grouped categories working together for combined community interests. This leadership must be drawn from all groups and all categories. Some will be leaders of organizations, and others will work effectively behind the scenes. Most of them will not be professional persons who go and come; who do not belong. It is a truism that people work best together who "belong" together and are permanently identified with the progress of the area.

The county wide community properly has been recommended for southern Iowa, but life extends beyond the county. The time has now come to recommend a southern Iowa development council or association of county communities which can make a unified approach and develop a plan for meeting the pressing problems of the entire area. Small beginnings can lead to big results. The important thing is to start. But when starting, plan to cooperate. When in doubt, plan for bigger things. Southern Iowa development is Iowa development. Iowa development is state development. The state of Iowa should accept full responsibility for setting the stage and providing special assistance and financial arrangements so that both state and local development can approach the maximum.