SUGAR BEETS IN THE WAR AND POST-WAR PERIODS
FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE BEET SUGAR INDUSTRY

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IN projecting the role of the sugar beet in the post-war period, the need for forward planning is at once apparent. This industry, a veritable infant among agricultural crops grown in the United States, has demonstrated a remarkable ability to live through periods of economic stress and oftentimes unfriendly political attitudes. With it all, it has become through the years a part of the community pattern of life where the crop has been grown during the last 25 to 50 years. This is not surprising when the value of the crop to the community is understood, and when the background of the industry is examined.

PRESENT STATUS OF THE INDUSTRY

The entire normal domestic beet acreage of approximately 1,000,000 acres grown in 1942 was only 0.3% of the total cultivated farm acreage in the United States. Yet, this small acreage produced almost 30% (12,327,342 100-pound bags of sugar) of our 1942-43 national consumption of sugar and was widely used in 43 of the 48 states, as well as in Alaska and the District of Columbia. This is indeed a rapid stride for an industry which began experimentally here about 100 years ago, and became first commercially established some 60 years back on a small scale and blossomed into much larger scale production only 40 years ago. Approximately 80 beet sugar factories process sugar beets into sugar during normal times, serving a beet-growing industry located in 19 states and a beet-growing clientele comprising some 100,000 farmers.

From standpoint of food production the sugar beet crop is one of the most efficient producers of food that is known among cultivated crops. On the same soil, sugar beets produce two major crops—sugar and forage. A 14-ton-per-acre crop of sugar beets produces about 3,700 to 4,000 pounds of sugar, or a food value of approximately 7,000,000 calories. This total is augmented by such by-products as beet tops, pulp, and molasses. The by-products from a 14-ton-per-acre yield of beets has a feed replacement value equal to a 60-bushel corn crop (6). When fed in a balanced ration these by-products from 1 acre of beets will produce approximately 300 pounds of beef (10). In addition to the use of beet by-products for livestock feeding, beet molasses now is being extensively used in the manufacture of citric acid, yeast, and glutamic acid. Lime, a by-product from the refining process, is also used in several areas for improving soil texture and correcting soil acidity. In the post-war period, use of these by-products in plastics and other products is envisioned.

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3Figures in parenthesis refer to “Literature Cited”, p. 582.