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BENNINGTON COLLEGE BULLETIN

THE FARM

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REVISED CALENDAR 1943-1944

1943

April 7th—Opening of Second Semester

July 31st—Commencement

August 26th—Opening of 1943-44 Session

December 11th—Beginning of Winter Period

1944

April 5th—Opening of Second Semester

THE FARM

Introduction

THE farm project which is described in this bulletin is one aspect of the war program of Bennington College. The great importance for the war effort of utilizing all available resources of land and manpower in food production is so obvious as to require no elaboration here. Bennington College is fortunate in being in a position to make this direct contribution to war production in addition to the more enduring contribution to the national life which is the permanent responsibility of a liberal arts college.

A well-conceived educational program which is rooted in the values of the civilization for which we are fighting needs no radical revision in order to adapt itself to the requirements of the nation at war. The Bennington College curriculum has a two-fold purpose. First, it is designed to educate its students in the responsibilities of American citizenship, through an understanding of and commitment to the cultural values of our tradition. The role of the United States in the war and post-war world will call forth all our resources of wisdom, perspective, good-will and responsibility, and these are the qualities which a liberal education seeks to develop. The second purpose of the Bennington College curriculum is to train each individual as a competent worker in some specialized field. This aspect of the program is extremely flexible, and has already adapted itself to immediate needs for trained personnel for war work. Individual arrangements have been made for acceleration, and the College has followed the lead of the government in directing students into the training most urgently demanded: physics, mathematics, and chemistry; pre-medical and pre-nursing work; languages, statistics, economics and government.

Apart from such shifts of emphasis and acceleration in individual programs, the most conspicuous adaptation of the College to the war effort has been the revision of the calendar. The resident terms have

been concentrated in the spring, summer and autumn months, leaving a gap of only three weeks between semesters in August, and extending the Winter Field Period to nearly four months. The calendar revision, which involves no change in the fundamental educational program of the College, does achieve three things:

First, the saving of fuel. The College has been almost entirely oil heated, and is now in the process of making an orderly conversion to coal. The alteration in the calendar will effect a substantial saving in all types of fuel.

Second, the maximum use of volunteer labor in food production, by having the College in almost continuous operation throughout the growing and harvesting season.

Third, the more effective use of the Winter Field Period. This lengthened period provides the opportunity for students to engage in some other form of direct war production, or to acquire specialized technical training leading to acceleration of College work. The College will assume greater responsibility for the planning and supervision of field work, and all individual arrangements will be made under the centralized direction of a special staff.

In short, the revised calendar makes it possible for Bennington College students to engage in year-round war work while continuing their education. The war work itself will be a part of their education, giving them an understanding of the processes of agricultural and industrial production which has been lacking in the over-specialized experience of modern living. The usual academic holidays will be eliminated, at least for the duration of the war, and little time or physical energy will be available for such peace-time pursuits as tennis, golf or plain loafing. Few people will feel this as a loss, when it is balanced against the inestimable privilege of a liberal education, and the satisfaction of contributing to the defense of the civilization which embodies liberal education as one of its principal values.

LEWIS WEBSTER JONES

Bennington, Vt.
March, 1943

For the year 1943 the Bennington College community will become largely self-supporting as far as food is concerned. On the hundred acres of farm land comprising part of the College property, students, faculty and staff will produce most of the meat, poultry, garden vegetables, potatoes and apples necessary to supply a community of four hundred people throughout the College year.

1942

A year of farming experience has equipped Bennington College for a greatly expanded productive program in 1943. On its own land and with its own equipment and labor, the College last year produced over 50% of the vegetables consumed by the community during the summer and fall sessions. Shortly after Pearl Harbor the students had begun to ask how they could contribute to the war effort. Mr. Woodworth of the science faculty suggested that since civilian food shortages would develop as allotments to Lend-Lease and to our armed forces increased and as farm equipment and manpower became scarcer, everyone with farm land, workers, and equipment should utilize them to the fullest. During the Winter Period plans were developed for an experimental program.

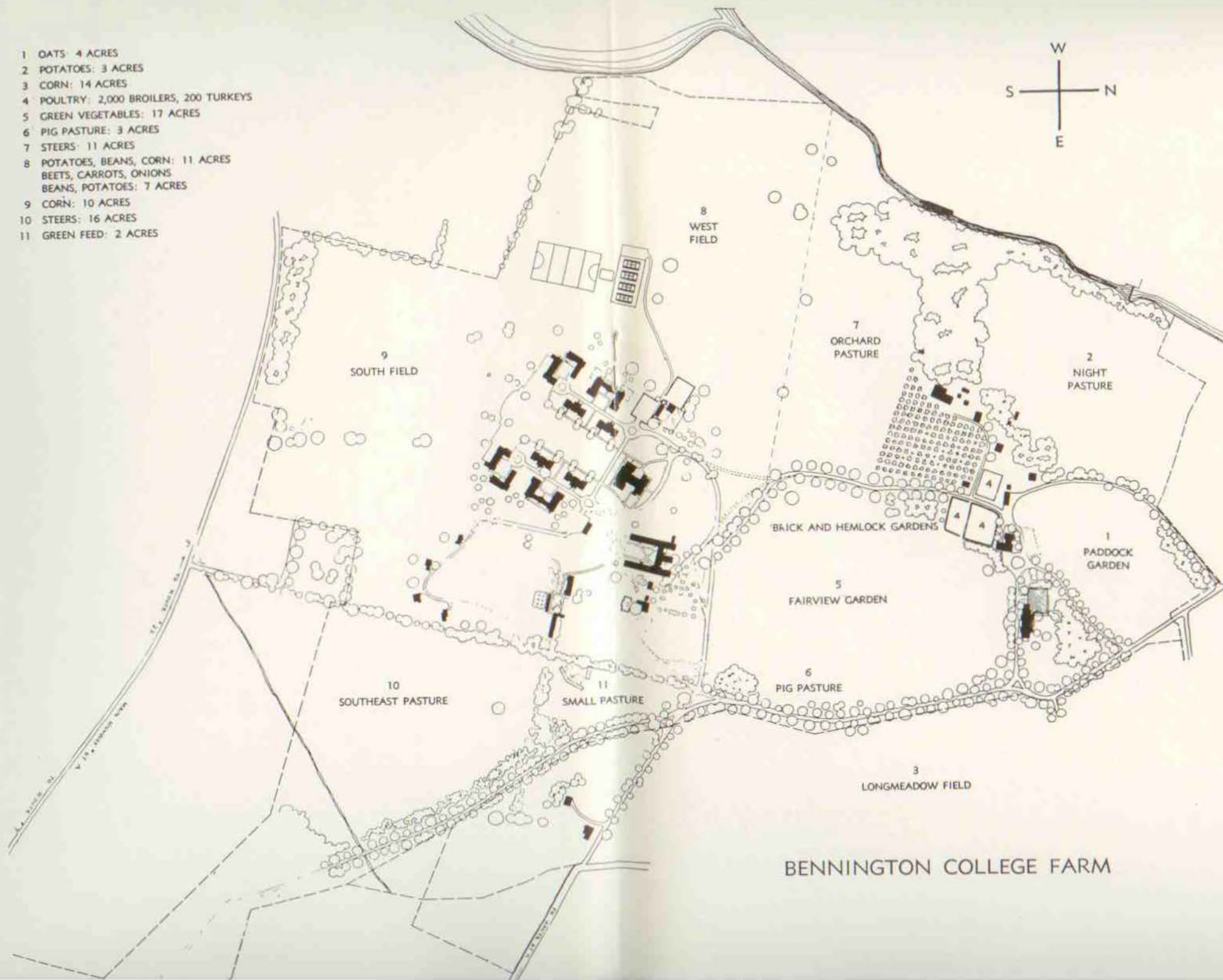
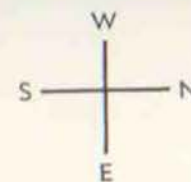
The first step agreed upon was the installation of a quick-freeze unit, with 2,000 cubic feet of storage space, as a means of preserving whatever might be grown; under any circumstances it should prove a sound investment, making possible the purchase of food in quantity at the height of the season for later consumption. The acquisition of the Jennings estate had brought the College 40 acres of land suitable for crops and forage, and farm equipment adequate, after a few replacements and many repairs, to handle the heavy work of farming this land. Two men from the maintenance department could be used part-time for heavy work and the running of the machines, and the faculty, staff, and student body of about 400 could be counted on to supply volunteer labor for the other innumerable, time-consuming tasks. So plans were drawn up for putting 17 acres into vegetables and for digging a storage cellar for root vegetables.



* By the time the students had returned to College, the soils of different fields had been analyzed, fertilizer and seed had been purchased, and Mr. Woodworth was ready to set his science students at the task of starting 14,000 greenhouse seedlings—tomato, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, sweet pepper, celery. Plowing was delayed because continued rains turned the frozen ground to mud, but finally the tractor prepared the fields for seeding and transplanting. The hardier crops were planted, and as danger of frosts passed, volunteers were enlisted to transplant the greenhouse shoots into the long garden rows. In late May President Jones announced a "Farm Day," on which the whole community turned out to help clean up long neglected farm buildings and clear for later use fields not yet freed from their accumulations of brush and rubble. By early June 7 acres of potatoes, 6 of beans, 1 acre each of sweet corn, peas, green beans, and winter squash, and 3 acres of miscellaneous vegetables were showing green under the heavy spring rains.

But the farm needed help from more than the weather, and continuous obstacles had to be surmounted. While some students responded enthusiastically and faithfully to the calls for labor, the need for such volunteer work was by no means generally apparent in the spring of 1942, and papers due seemed far more urgent than digging or planting. The long inventory of farm equipment was more impressive on paper than were the machines when actually examined in the barns. Essential equipment was missing and much of it was in such disrepair that it had to be painstakingly patched up time and again. With no cultivator for the old Farmall tractor, a makeshift had to be rigged out of three horse cultivators fastened to a heavy beam, and four men were required for what would ordinarily have been done by one. To thresh the shell beans, an old Westinghouse small grain thresher, unused for 25 years, had to be patched up, liberally greased, and nursed along, groaning and protesting. The potato digger, bought before the first World War, could be worked only with periodic halts to release the jams and to weld or wire together recalcitrant parts. The Farmall has now been turned in for a new tractor, and with a new potato digger and a new plow, and a cultivator which is being desperately negotiated for, this year's machine work should require much less worry and less wasted manpower.

- 1 OATS: 4 ACRES
- 2 POTATOES: 3 ACRES
- 3 CORN: 14 ACRES
- 4 POULTRY: 2,000 BROILERS, 200 TURKEYS
- 5 GREEN VEGETABLES: 17 ACRES
- 6 PIG PASTURE: 3 ACRES
- 7 STEERS: 11 ACRES
- 8 POTATOES, BEANS, CORN: 11 ACRES
BEETS, CARROTS, ONIONS
BEANS, POTATOES: 7 ACRES
- 9 CORN: 10 ACRES
- 10 STEERS: 16 ACRES
- 11 GREEN FEED: 2 ACRES



BENNINGTON COLLEGE FARM

The weather last summer was too good. Peas planted to mature after the beginning of summer school were so hurried by the rain that they ripened between sessions, when only a few people were on hand to pick an acre of peas and freeze them in the ice cream freezer for later consumption. Wet weather stimulates weeds more than vegetables, and the crops of bindweed, ragweed and purslane got ahead of the few workers lost in the acre of peas. In the meantime the installation of the quick-freeze plant, planned for April, was delayed by the usual difficulty of filling war-time orders so that it was not ready for use until mid-August. By then all the peas and spinach, much of the broccoli, and the first and best of the chard and green beans had gone by.

The vegetable storage cellar proved as obstinate in its delays as the peas in their haste. In April, College students had volunteered for work with picks and shovels to dig a nine-foot hole, 42 by 22 feet. But New England stones held firmly in place by hard clay were too discouraging for even the stoutest wielder of a pick. By early July the surface had been scraped off just enough for the passer-by to recognize that something was being started. Maintenance men had to be brought in with tractor and scoop, and the "farmerettes," who had elected to stay on for full-time summer work on the farm, were shifted to excavation and construction work. They loosened each scoopful with pick and shovel, helped haul out boulders weighing as much as two tons, and neglected the weeds running riot elsewhere. For two weeks, six to eight students sweltered in alternate dust and mud, loosening chunks of heavy clay, prying out closely packed rocks, dodging the tractor and scoop. Then came a cooler, muscle-bruising week of collecting wood from a College lot on the East Mountain, where a lumbering crew had just been cutting hemlock. There the students lopped off the tops and helped carry two hundred, eighteen-foot logs out to the College truck. Then the professionals took over and directed the building of the structure of the root cellar, just in time for the first crop of early potatoes.

Despite hardships and handicaps, the first year of the College farm was fully as successful as had been expected. Enough vegetables were preserved in the quick-freeze and the storage cellar to provide 50% of the kitchen needs for vegetables for the school year. If summer school students were exposed to broccoli and green beans three times a day, a variety of frozen green vegetables and corn, such as would have been difficult to obtain in any other way, was available

during the fall term. The ready response to appeals during the autumn for students to pick fast ripening tomatoes, toss potatoes into burlap bags, and shell beans showed that they would work readily and find enjoyment in it. Students were organized to hand-pick 400 bushels of apples in a week, setting ladders and climbing into the branches of 150 trees. Those planning the farm program have learned what difficulties are to be faced and where different stresses must be laid, and have gained the experience necessary to organize a more ambitious program for the coming year.

The financial aspect of the farm program was, from the first, entirely subordinate to its purpose as an aid to the war effort. When the program was inaugurated, President Jones anticipated that the cost to the College would exceed the saving, but promised that should there be any surplus it would be turned over to the Reduced Tuition Fund. Cost accounting on such a program is not only difficult, but indeed almost arbitrary. If, however, the amortization of the quick-freeze plant, the use of regular College services, and the large percentage of volunteer labor are not reckoned in totalling costs, it may fairly be said that the College farm came very close to paying its own way.

1943

Once again, while the students are away for the Winter Period, plans are being drawn up for this year's farm. As the national food situation has altered, so the Bennington farm takes on a new aspect. Throughout the country farm labor and machinery are scarcer than last year, and weather conditions may well be less favorable than during the past two excellent growing seasons. Yet voices from Washington urge the farmers to outdo themselves in attempts to produce a record crop again this year. At Bennington, new conditions are both favorable and unfavorable. Under the revised College schedule the students will be on hand for work throughout most of the summer, thus assuring an adequate supply of labor. The greater part of the consumption will come while the food is at its peak, and less of a burden will be put on the quick-freeze and the storage cellars. But seed, fertilizer, feed, and other essentials are more difficult to procure, particularly for farms such as this one, that put in entirely new orders or request larger supplies than last year.



If all goes well, Bennington College will provide all of its own food, with the exception of eggs, dairy products, flour, and certain fruits, during 1943. The 17 acres of vegetables and potatoes of last year will be increased to 25; 37 acres will be newly plowed and planted to corn, oats, and soy beans for animal fodder. Because of the skilled labor needed for an all-year reproducing herd, the College has decided to attempt to do no more than buy the young animals, to raise and fatten. Already 450 chicks are pecking at mash in a brooder Mr. Woodworth has built in the shop at the Barn; and in March they will be moved into new quarters in the greenhouse and elsewhere in the Barn, when another 400 are gently lowered into the brooder. When College orders are finally filled, 2,000 chickens and 200 turkeys will be quartered near the Carriage Barn and the apple orchard. In March, 30 eight-week old pigs and 8 feeder calves will arrive. The hogs will be kept not far from the vegetable garden, into which they can be turned to finish off the plants after the various crops are harvested. After the first months the steers will need little care and can be turned loose to forage on 40 acres of College pasture land.

The 8 acres planted in green vegetables and corn will provide the kitchen, from late spring on, with all the fresh vegetables it needs, and the surplus will be packed into the 2,000 foot storage room of the quick-freeze to be eaten throughout the rest of the College year. In the fall, the root cellar and other storage cellars of slightly higher temperature will be filled with nearly 2,400 bushels of root vegetables, 400 bushels of apples, about 1,000 head of cabbage, and 2 tons of squash. The cockerels now in the brooder will be ready for use as broilers by early May. As they are needed throughout the year the livestock will be killed and eaten, and the rest will finally be slaughtered and stored in the quick-freeze plant as space is made available in the late fall by the use of green summer vegetables.

Such an ambitious program can be successful only with enthusiastic cooperation from the student body and faculty. Mr. Woodworth can supply the technical information, plan and supervise the actual program. The maintenance staff will do much of the work with the animals, all of the plowing and harrowing, and as much of the planting and cultivating as can be done with the tractor. But where farm machinery needs to be supplemented by hand work, regular volunteer labor will be essential. At a Community Meeting

last December the enlarged farm program was described and discussed. The students realized the value of such a plan and willingly accepted their share of the responsibility, agreeing to work the five hours per week estimated as the maximum that will be needed from each member during the growing season. Tetanus toxoid shots were given to all the students before they left for Christmas, to make doubly sure that scratches received in the field can cause no harm. And before the students return a plan is being made for the organization of regular work groups for which the girls will sign up as part of their College program.

Before College opens in April the farm will be well under way. Most of the animals will have arrived, and 20,000 seedlings will have been set out in the greenhouse during March. One of the first student tasks will be to set out some 2,000 young lettuce plants in the cold-frames. As soon as the ground is dry enough, the long rows of small seed vegetables—carrots, beets, spinach, chard, onions, squash, pumpkins, radishes—will have to be planted by hand and wheel seeder. After the danger of frost is past, the seedlings from the greenhouse and the cold-frame will be set out, a task demanding care and many hands, as each of the 22,000 plants must be handled separately. Before long it will be time to thin, and then to pull by hand the weeds missed by machine cultivation. Prompt and wise thinning, as well as constant fighting with the weeds, can make all the difference between a mediocre and a bumper crop.

Before many vegetables are strong enough to resist the weeds, it will be time to start harvesting the earliest crops. The kitchen must be kept provided with peas and other spring vegetables as they reach their height, and it takes time to pick for 400 people. The final yield can be increased enormously over last year by catching the crops while in their prime and hurrying them into the quick-freeze. While some students bring the vegetables from the garden, others will sit in back of the Commons, shelling peas, tipping and cutting beans, stripping and cutting the kernels off the corn, and blanching everything which goes into the quick-freeze plant. As the beans and corn come, and then 700 bushels of tomatoes, the tempo of harvesting will increase, until finally in the autumn the late crops of root vegetables, the cabbage, the potatoes, the apples will have to be brought in.

All this will give exercise, recreation, and indeed education in conformity to Bennington's established policy. From the start the College has felt that recreational sports should fit naturally into the

lives and environment of the students, and should prepare them for activities they will continue after College. To take time from the healthy pursuits of hiking, bicycling, swimming, for the equally beneficial exercise of farm work, is to adapt activities even more closely to the immediate surroundings and the needs of the time. Backs and arms and legs may get tired, hands and feet may be cold in spring and fall, and for several months the sun may give more heat and burn than one wants; but none of the work will be really hard, and instead of the lonely drudgery so common to farm life, here students will be working in friendly groups for a common, community purpose.

From the long-range view, the introduction into the Bennington community of practical experience in food production and preparation is but a further step along the lines of effective education. An urban population, cut off from the soil and generally unacquainted with vegetables or meats except on store counters, misses one important phase of life. Bennington College does not plan to turn out skilled farmers or expert horticulturalists, but it can offer members of the community an opportunity to become familiar with problems of food production, to experience some of the aches, the worries, and the joys of farming, and to make a direct contribution to the war and post-war economy.

Photographs by Ann Cobb Thorne and James F. Meyers.