

UNA PAGINA CLASSICA

A CLASSICAL TEXT

Introduction

Benjamin Franklin (January 17, 1706 [O.S. January 6, 1705] – April 17, 1790) lived most of his life in the city, yet he had an extensive interest in agriculture and farming. He introduced native American plants to Europe and some European plants to America, advocated a silk industry for the British colonies, printed a number of books on agriculture and botany, suggested implementing crop insurance, and helped educate people in the use of gypsum as a fertilizer.

In 1743, Franklin published his «Proposal for promoting useful knowledge among the British plantations in America,» which suggested the formation of the American Philosophical Society. One of the society's proposed purposes was to share information on developments in agriculture.

The Future of Family Farming in 1769

Benjamin Franklin

the seed thrown into the ground in the kind of continual miracle, wrought by the hand of God in his favor, as a reward for his innocent life and his virtuous industry.»

April 4. 1769

Positions to be examined.

- 1 All Food or Subsistence for Mankind arise from the Earth or Waters.
- 2 Necessaries of Life that are not Foods, and all other Conveniencies, have their Values estimated by the Proportion of Food consumed while we are employed in procuring them.

which are therefore only Subsistence thus metamorphosed.

- 6 *Manufactures* are only *another Shape* into which so much Provisions and Subsistence are turned as were *equal in Value* to the Manufactures produced. This appears from hence, that the Manufacturer does not in fact, obtain from the Employer, for his Labour, *more* than a mere Subsistence, including Raiment Fuel and Shelter; all which derive their Value from the Provisions consumed in procuring them.
- 7 The Produce of the Earth, thus converted into Manufactures, may be more easily carried to distant Markets than before such Conversion.

“Positions to be Examined, 4 April 1769,”

Founders Online, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-16-02-0048>.

[Original source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 16, *January 1 through December 31, 1769*, ed. William B. Willcox. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972, pp. 107–109.]

Following Franklin's «retirement» from business in 1748, he purchased a 300-acre farm in New Jersey where he planned to live and work the land. However, public affairs got in the way of farming, and after a few months, Franklin returned to Philadelphia.

While in London in the late 1750s and early 1760s, Franklin attended meetings and became a member of societies and committees that had an interest in agriculture. The groups discussed encouraging the cultivation and production of safflower for dye, of silk and hemp for textiles, and of olive oil for cooking, and proposed offering farmers a financial premium for growing such crops.

Franklin had a respect for farming and the people who worked the land. He called agriculture «the only honest way, wherein man receives a real increase of

- 3 A small People with a large Territory may subsist on the Productions of Nature, with no other Labour than that of gathering the Vegetables and catching the Animals.

- 4 A large People with a small Territory finds these insufficient, and, to subsist, must labour the Earth to make it produce greater Quantities of vegetable Food, suitable for the Nourishment of Men, and of the Animals they intend to eat.

- 5 From the Labour arises a *great Increase* of vegetable and animal Food, and of Materials for Clothing, as Flax, Wool, Silk, &c. The Superfluity of these is Wealth. With this Wealth we pay for the Labour employed in building our Houses, Cities, &c.

- 8 *Fair Commerce* is where equal Values are exchanged for equal the Expence of Transport included. Thus if it costs A. in England as much Labour and Charge to raise a Bushel of Wheat as it costs B. in France to produce four Gallons of Wine then are four Gallons of Wine the fair Exchange for a Bushel of Wheat. A and B meeting at half Distance with their Commodities to make the Exchange. The Advantage of this fair Commerce is, that each Party increases the Number of his Enjoyments, having, instead of Wheat alone or Wine alone, the Use of both Wheat and Wine.

- 9 Where the Labour and Expence of producing both Commodities are known to both Parties Bargains will

generally be fair and equal. Where they are known to one Party only, Bargains will often be unequal, Knowledge taking its Advantage of Ignorance.

- 10 Thus he that carries 1000 Bushels of Wheat abroad to sell, may not probably obtain so great a Profit thereon as if he had first turned the Wheat into Manufactures by subsisting therewith the Workmen while producing those Manufactures: since there are many expediting and facilitating Methods of working, not generally known; and Strangers to the Manufactures, though they know pretty well the Expences of raising Wheat, are unacquainted with those short Methods of working, and thence being apt to suppose more Labour employed in the Manufactures than there really is, are more easily

imposed on in their Value, and induced to allow more for them than they are honestly worth.

- 11 Thus the Advantage of having Manufactures in a Country, does not consist as is commonly supposed, in their highly advancing the Value of rough Materials, of which they are formed; since, though sixpenny worth of Flax may be worth twenty shillings when worked into Lace, yet the very Cause of it's being worth twenty shillings is, that besides the Flax, it has cost nineteen shillings and sixpence in Subsistence to the Manufacturer. But the Advantage of Manufactures is, that under their shape Provisions may be more easily carried to a foreign Market; and by their means our Traders may more easily cheat Strangers. Few, where it is not made are Judges of the Value

of Lace. The importer may demand Forty, and perhaps get Thirty shillings for that which cost him but twenty.

- 12 Finally, there seem to be but three Ways for a Nation to acquire Wealth. The first is by *War* as the Romans did in plundering their conquered Neighbours. This is *Robbery*. The second by *Commerce* which is generally *Cheating*. The third by *Agriculture* the only *honest Way*; wherein Man receives a real Increase of the Seed thrown into the Ground, in a kind of continual Miracle wrought by the Hand of God in his Favour, as a Reward for his innocent Life, and virtuous Industry.

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