



# GRASS-ROOTS AMBASSADORS

*By Ruth S. Livingston*

IN 1947 a new bit of slang entered the American vocabulary, already rich in slang phrases. This time, however, it had an international meaning. "Iffy" applies both to the United States and to countries abroad, and is an important contribution to the forwarding of international understanding so necessary in this present day.

"Iffy" symbolizes the International Farm Youth Exchange Program. This was originated in this country late in 1947, and owes much to six young British farmers, members of British Young Farmers' Clubs, who spent three months over here living on farms of 4-H Club and Future Farmers of America (F.F.A.) members. In 1948, seventeen of our young ruralities went to seven European countries and six exchangees came to the United States. Four years later 280 delegates went from this country and 212 exchangees came

here to live the family life of farmers in thirty-five states.

It was toward the close of World War II that 4-H Clubs and other similar youth organizations throughout the country found that a frequent topic of conversation whenever they gathered was, "How can we make sure it doesn't happen again?"

Various methods were discussed; food and clothing were sent abroad. But the young men and women of America decided that something more was needed — something more constructive toward a better understanding between rural people around the world. Since the family is the basis of all society, they decided they could best make a contribution to world peace by helping to further an understanding between rural people at the family level. They also firmly believed that in the grass-roots of a country are the real roots.

With young people everywhere, to talk is to act. They decided that if young men and women from farms in the United States could live and work on farms in other countries and if their counterparts in those countries could come here, then each could learn of the way of life of the other, and better understanding would result. So they came to the Cooperative Extension Service of the Department of Agriculture with their idea for furthering an understanding between rural groups. There they were encouraged and received the support necessary to transform the "idea" in to the present program.

**N**O GOVERNMENT MONEY is used for this project. The cost for each two-way exchange, including the administrative overhead, is about \$1,200.00. This is taken care of by voluntary contributions to the National 4-H Club Foundation and to State Iffy funds through the State Extension Services.

The program itself is simple and practical. It includes preparation and training at home through use of language and reference materials, intensive orientation before departure (usually in Washington, D. C.), transoceanic passage by ship or plane, usually with a group, with some orientation en route as well, a reception and program in the designated foreign country, planned and supervised by the U. S. Agricultural Attaché in cooperation with the host country, and *living and working* with

two to ten farm families for four to six months. The young people attend church, youth meetings, exhibitions and rural affairs with the host families. Upon their return to this country their task is by no means completed. It is their mission to spread throughout their various home states their knowledge gained from experiences, speaking not only to their contemporaries in 4-H Clubs and to the Future Farmers of America, but to adult groups as well. One Iffy returnee gave over 150 lectures in 1952, and it would be difficult to estimate how many heard him and changed their opinions of the country the Iffy had lived and worked in.

An Iffy must be twenty to thirty years of age, a high-school graduate with a mature personality. He must have been reared on a farm and know its life and work. He must have experience with rural youth organizations and must be eager to understand other people, and able to speak the language if going to a non-English speaking country, or willing to learn the language of his host country.

The foreign exchange is selected on much the same basis, plus a knowledge of English and a very real desire to absorb and employ the ways of farming as it is done in this country. He, also, must share his experiences with the stay-at-homes upon his return to his native land.

The delegates find an amazing amount of interest in American ways. Surprise is often expressed

that these young people really intend to live and work with the rural families in whichever country they find themselves and they really do so. It has long been a prevalent opinion in foreign lands that all our young people tear around in Cadillacs and rush from movies to dinners and dances; that all farm work is mechanized and no American knows how to use either a hoe or a scythe; that merely pushing buttons accomplishes all our housework.

Jewell Ellis, a Kentucky girl, gave her farm hostess a surprise in Israel. "I think that one of the best experiences that I had this past week," she writes, "was when I worked in the kitchen. To begin with, it is a job neither the men or women like, and by working there I think I rather persuaded the people that we *do* work in America. The first job was washing dishes. They just couldn't believe that we knew how to do such work. After the first day I was told, 'You left everything so clean . . . you work very fast . . . you are very pleasant.'"

**A**NOTHER prevalent notion that exists in practically all the foreign countries to which our delegates go is that everyone in the United States is rich, no matter whether he lives in cities or in rural areas. This concept is one which our Fulbright exchange students have remarked on many times. William Runsick, an Arkansas youth, came upon it in England.

"I made one friend the hard way," he says. "We were at a young Farmers' Club meeting and I was talking to a farmer. He first asked me if I didn't have all the money in the world. I just said, 'No, of course not.' He replied that he thought America had money to throw away. I changed the subject and started talking about the 4-H work and happened to remark that 4-H'ers were helping to improve farming conditions. He said, 'Oh, do you mean there is something in America that needs improving?' This went on for some time; then finally he said, 'I want to shake your hand. You are the first American who ever admitted that the U.S. wasn't perfect.'"

To be an Iffy is to become an authority on things in the United States, says Georgena Risinger of Pennsylvania. "I have been asked all types of questions from comic to serious. They didn't mean to be funny, but they just happened to seem funny to me, especially the ones: 'Do cowboys live in your state? Are there Indians living in Indiana?'"

A knowledge of mechanics, of what makes the wheels go round on tractors, was a useful asset for Bob Hume of Mansfield, Massachusetts. He found himself on a Tunisian farm where the agricultural implements were immobilized because of necessary repairs. No one knew how to do them. Bob had been a leader at home in tractor maintenance for his local 4-H Club. As 90 per cent of the

Tunisian tractors were of American manufacture, he found himself on familiar ground. And here shirt-sleeve diplomacy came in. A firm friendship was established between the Tunisian farmers and the young American who was willing to get down in the dirt and grease and get the machines working.

Herbert Brown of Kentucky has a good word to say for Turkey. He spent many months there with different agricultural families. "The Turks are really making progress in agriculture," he writes. "You see some of the most primitive farming in existence and also some of the most modern methods. They are people who are trying to lift themselves by their own bootstraps. . . . There is no racial problem here because if one is born and raised here, he is a Turk. All of the men consider themselves brothers regardless of their skin is black, yellow or white."

**T**O WORK side by side and to share the same deprivations and discomforts with peoples of different countries typifies democracy at its best. Exchangees are as welcome in the United States as are our delegates in foreign lands. Forty-four countries have so far sent young people to America to live and work with our own young people on farms in all parts of the country. Without exception, they have all been eager to learn English, to join wholeheartedly in the community activities of American youth.

One boy, a German, returned to his home so imbued with the spirit of his experiences in America that the first task he set himself was to convince another youth in his district, a youth brought up in the Nazi creed, who bitterly opposed even any mention of America, that he was missing the best thing to be had in life if he did not take advantage of the Iffy program. So well did he succeed in this that his Nazi friend applied for, and received, permission to come over and see for himself what it was all about. Today there is no more ardent supporter of the International Farm Youth Exchange program than this boy, who is winning friends for it all over Germany. "Germany is my Fatherland," he maintains, "and America, my Motherland."

Democracy in the United States began on the farms. It had its roots in the grass. The same courage and foresight that gave this country democracy in its early days is today showing to other countries in a practical way the road to democracy. Everyday working together is a binding force. The young people who desired to establish a better understanding among nations by reaching out to the rural and more isolated communities, where there is less contact with all sorts and types of strangers, evolved an idea that is having far-reaching effects upon far-and-wide friendships. They are truly grass-roots ambassadors.

BY HARRY THOMPSON

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# Thinking of SUICIDE



TICK-TOCK, tick-tick. The big clock ticks away the dark depths of time. It is six o'clock in the morning. Mary tosses on the bed in her hotel room. Emotionally thwarted, life seems futile and she is afraid of living. Mary eyes the bottle of sleeping pills and glass of water on the night table, reaches for them, swallows a handful. Tick-tick, tick-tick.

It is now 6:30 and little Johnny crawls out of bed. He's a bit terrified and he's grief-stricken as the result of last night's whipping for bad behavior. Johnny doesn't remove his pajamas but picks up his cowboy lariat, slips down to the basement, fashions a noose, ties an end to a steam pipe and hangs himself.

Tick-tick, tick-tick. The hands of the clock point to seven. Tommy showers, shaves, dresses, makes a hurried cup of coffee and starts for the bus. But he turns back at the doorway and thumbs through the stack of bills he can't pay. There is a moment of indecision as he peeks

into the bedroom. Back in the living room he takes the insurance policies out of a drawer, re-reads the various clauses, satisfies himself these cannot be defaulted, picks up his war-souvenir pistol, and calmly blows out his brains.

Around the clock, twenty-four hours a day, this sort of thing goes on. *Suicides are as inexorable as time itself, and in the United States there is one every thirty minutes.*

Thinking of suicide? *Just a minute, please!* Put that pistol down! Throw away the poison! Flush down those sleeping pills! You have not reached the end of the rope and ends *can* be made to meet. For there is an organization — listed in the telephone directories of many cities — which offers to the despondent a new grip on life and sells, for free, the courage to live. It is the National Save-A-Life League (usually listed as *Save-A-Life*), and it is a religious, non-sectarian, non-profit agency, having as its purpose the prevention of suicides, and dealing with suicide