

Mechanical Cotton Picker.—There has been much discussion in recent years relative to unemployment and insecurity due to inventions of labor-saving machinery. In this connection a report by the Works Progress Administration on the mechanical cotton picker is of interest. It states that many uncertainties stand in the way of an attempt to evaluate the effects of a successful mechanical cotton picker on the labor economy of the Cotton Belt. Estimates based on a single-row machine of a type similar to those now being used experimentally show that total costs and losses for mechanical picking would come to \$23.66 per bale, or \$14.84 per acre, the equivalent of \$1.65 per 100 pounds of seed cotton. This may be contrasted with the rate of about \$1.00 per 100 pounds paid for hand picking in the Mississippi Delta in 1936. An improved two-row, twice-over machine having a longer life and requiring only one operator might lower the cost of mechanical picking to around 65 cents per 100 pounds. Several years will be required to develop such a machine. In the meantime the picker is not likely to take the Cotton Belt by storm. Successful one- and two-row machines, if developed, might, in the course of perhaps 10 years, be applied to an upper limit of about half the present cotton acreage and displace a maximum of 2 million hand pickers for the picking season of about 40 workdays. The displacement of half a million pickers within a period of 5 to 10 years appears more probable, however. Although such a displacement might not add appreciably to the total volume of unemployment for the nation as a whole, it would tend to aggravate the insecurity of the tenants and sharecroppers in the localities where the picker was used.

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