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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Office of Economic Adviser

Eq. XXIV Corps

APO 235, c/o PM San Francisco.

Seoul, Korea, 23 February 1948.

SUBJECT: Land Reform in Korea

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THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

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SIR:

I have the honor to present additional information concerning land tenure in South Korea and the effect of land reform proposals now under consideration may have on the pattern of land ownership in the American occupied zone in Korea. The information included in this despatch supplements other information on the same subject included in Seoul Polad despatch No. 77 of 12 September 1947, entitled "Land Reform in Korea".

I - Present Status of Farm Land Ownership in South Korea:

The Department of Agriculture of the South Korea Interim Government recently completed a survey of the status of farm land ownership and the size of farms in South Korea as of 31 December 1946. This survey revealed that there was a significant decline in farm tenancy between the end of the war and 31 December 1946. However, as of the latter date, of the 2,137,288 farm households in South Korea, 43% rented all the land they tilled, 38% owned part and rented part of their land, and only 16% owned all the land they cultivated. Table I includes the number of farm households, by categories of ownership, as of December 1943 (the last available report on this subject before the Japanese surrender), as well as of 31 December 1945 and 31 December 1946. The decline in the percentages of households which rent all the land they cultivated from 51% of the total in 1943 to 43% in December 1946, is explained largely on the basis of the following factors:

The reduction in legal rentals for farm land to a maximum of

one-third of the principal crops, put into effect in October 1945, sharply reduced the income received from the land by the landlords, and therefore usually made them more willing to sell their land to tenants.

Since the end of the war the subject of land reform has been widely discussed and it is generally considered to be only a matter of time before some type of land reform is put into effect in South Korea. These factors coupled with the

the confiscation without payment of the land of landlords in North Korea in March 1946, has tended to keep the price of farm land low in relation to other prices, and has thus enabled many tenant farmers, whose economic status was raised by the reduction in maximum rental payments, to purchase the farms they till. Although no statistics for 1947 are yet available, the same trend toward the sale of farms by landlords to tenants noted in 1946 was undoubtedly continued during 1947.

Table 2 gives the number of farm households in South Korea as of 31 December 1946 including type of tenure, by provinces. Table 3, giving the number of farm households by size of farm, as of 31 December 1946, reveals a significant trend toward subdivision of the larger farms into smaller units and an increase in the number of the very small farms. Thus the number of farms of over 24.5 acres decreased 40.1% during the calendar year 1946, the number whose size ranged from 12.5 to 25 acres decreased 33.2%, the number whose size was from about 7.4 to 12.5 acres decreased 15.9%, and the number whose size was from 4.9 to 7.4 acres decreased 16.9%. During the same year, 1946, the number of farms of less than 1.22 acres increased 7%, while the number whose size ranged from 1.22 to 2.451 acres increased 9.6%. These developments are attributed largely to the increased pressure for land resulting from the arrival of over two million Korean repatriates from Japan and China and refugees from northern Korea during the latter part of 1945 and 1946. This trend toward reduced size of farms, which at present averages only about 2.7 acres per farm in South Korea, tends to reduce the proportion of agricultural production available for sale to the government for rationing to non-self-suppliers, and thus to accentuate the food problem.

Table 4 indicates that of the 2,136,925 farm households in South Korea, as of 31 December 1946, only 243 were non-Korean. Over 89% of the total farm households reported farming as their sole occupation. Most of the 231,631 households which farmed only part time also engaged in fishing to supplement their agricultural income.

2 - Possible Effect of Land Reform Proposals now Under Consideration Upon Pattern of Farm Land Ownership in South Korea:

If the South Korea Interim Legislature should approve the

Land Reform Bill presented for its consideration and approval by its Agriculture, Industry, and Labor Committee, it is estimated that about 90% of the farmers in South Korea would hold title to the land they farm within one year after passage of the bill. This bill would enable tenant farmers to purchase the farms they now cultivate from absentee landlords for annual payments of 20% of production for a period of 15 years. However, because the strong rightist bloc in the Legislature desires to withhold consideration of this bill until a Korean Government is established, it now appears unlikely that the present Legislature will approve a land reform bill which includes disposition of both former Japanese-owned and Korean-owned agricultural lands.

If the present Legislature fails to approve a land reform bill involving disposition of both former Japanese and Korean-owned agricultural lands, it is planned that vested former Japanese-owned agricultural lands will be sold to tenant farmers during the spring of 1948, either with Legislative approval or by executive decree.

Regular reports on the progress of the land reform proposals will continue to be sent to the Department by radio.

Tables 5 and 6 are presented to show the present agricultural land holdings of the New Korea Company, the agency designated by the Military Governor to administer former Japanese-owned agricultural lands. As shown in Table 5, the total agricultural land administered by the New Korea Company as of December 1947, totalled 696,545 acres (284,188 chongbo). This represents over 90% of the known former Japanese-owned agricultural land in South Korea; various other government agencies still administer minor holdings of vested farm lands. Table 6 shows that the total number of farm households now renting farm land from the New Korea Company as of June 1947 totalled 554,067, of whom 33,393 were part time farmers. At that time the average New Korea Company land rented per farm household was only 1.1 acres (4.5 tanbo or .45 chongbo). This former Japanese-owned land includes much of the best rice land in South Korea. Although these plots are below the average size farm, many New Korea tenants either rent additional farm land from Korean landlords, or own small plots in addition to the farms they rent. The total number of persons living on New Korea Company administered lands, as of June 1947, was 3,127,347, about 15% of the total population of South Korea. It is generally believed that if the tenants on New Korea administered land are given the opportunity to purchase their farms on favorable terms, increased pressure will be exerted by tenants of Korean-owned farms to secure the same opportunity of purchasing their farms

Respectfully yours,

ARTHUR C. BUNCE
Minister

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Table 2

NUMBER OF FARM HOUSEHOLDS IN SOUTH KOREA, BY TENANCY,
 as of 31 December 1946

Province	Owner- Farmer	50-100% Owner- Farmer	Less than 50% Owner- Farmer	Tenant	Others	TOTALS
Seoul	90	157	220	2,361	56	2,884
Kyonggi	23,836	38,478	44,252	160,725	12,495	279,786
N. Chungchong	17,374	24,901	31,164	63,096	1,126	137,721
S. Chungchong	19,996	33,383	43,129	126,431	4,871	227,815
N. Cholla	14,092	29,089	43,228	156,236	25,638	268,283
S. Cholla	52,661	69,099	71,821	163,992	17,171	377,804
N. Kyongsang	66,838	79,322	80,810	123,734	4,231	354,935
S. Kyongsang	52,661	80,177	78,502	81,366	---	322,706
Kangwon	28,823	26,720	23,976	43,059	356	122,934
Cheju	30,900	5,574	3,114	2,686	146	42,420
TOTAL 1946	337,271	386,905	423,276	923,686	66,150	2,137,288
TOTAL 1945	284,509	337,506	378,574	1,009,604	55,284	2,065,477
% Increase or Decrease 1946 over 1945						
	18.6%	14.6%	11.8%	- 8.5%	19.7%	3.5%

Note: One household equals five persons.

Source: Statistics Section, Bureau of Agricultural Economics,
 Department of Agriculture.

Table 3

NUMBER OF FARM HOUSEHOLDS IN SOUTH KOREA, BY SIZE OF FARM,
as of 31 December 1946

Province	Less than 5 Tan *	5 Tan to 1 Chungbo*	1 to 2 Chungbo	2 to 3 Chungbo	3 to 5 Chungbo	5 to 10 Chungbo	Over 10 Chungbo	Sub-total	Non- Farming †	TOTALS
Seoul	735	1,440	427	167	79	2	—	2,850	34	2,884
Kyonggi	59,717	84,647	83,093	38,178	10,817	710	11	274,073	5,713	279,786
N. Chungchong	57,044	46,231	25,701	6,344	1,261	93	6	136,680	1,041	137,721
S. Chungchong	80,978	79,446	46,243	12,870	2,793	591	23	222,944	4,871	227,815
N. Cholla	94,414	84,947	48,702	11,892	2,417	318	24	242,714	25,569	268,283
S. Cholla	163,560	115,887	60,714	17,322	4,717	1,143	26	363,369	14,435	377,804
N. Kyongsang	106,558	124,454	92,689	21,728	4,950	310	15	350,704	4,231	354,935
S. Kyongsang	110,234	141,662	58,930	10,820	854	206	—	322,706	—	322,706
Kangwon	35,253	41,208	32,170	11,232	2,531	146	38	122,578	356	122,934
Cheju	15,377	15,588	8,665	1,930	627	87	2	42,276	144	42,420
TOTAL 1946	723,870	735,510	458,234	128,483	31,046	3,606	145	2,080,894	56,394	2,137,288
TOTAL 1945	676,805	671,186	459,443	154,571	41,431	5,399	242	2,009,077	56,400	2,065,477
% Increase or Decrease 1946 over 1945	7.0%	9.6%	*-.3%	-16.9%	-25.1%	-33.2%	-40.1%	3.6%	100.0%	3.5%

* One Tan equals .2451 acres; one Chungbo equals 2.451 acres.

† Non-Farming households are those which are considered farmers but are not presently raising crops on their land.

Note: One farm household equals five persons.

Source: Statistics Section, Bureau Agricultural Economics, Department of Agriculture.

Table 4

NUMBER OF FARM HOUSEHOLDS IN SOUTH KOREA, BY NATIONALITY,
as of 31 December 1946

Province	Koreans	Chinese	Others	Solely Farming Households	Part-time Farming Households	TOTALS
Seoul	2,846	38	--	2,221	663	2,884
Kyonggi	279,570	215	1	256,425	23,361	279,786
N. Chungchong	137,707	14	--	125,856	11,865	137,721
S. Chungchong	227,792	24	--	209,064	18,751	227,815
N. Cholla	268,245	38	--	230,192	38,091	268,283
S. Cholla	377,788	16	--	328,853	48,951	377,804
N. Kyongsang	354,919	15	1	329,289	25,546	354,935
S. Kyongsang	322,706	--	--	279,704	43,002	322,706
Kangwon	122,933	1	--	105,013	17,916	122,934
Choeju	42,420	--	--	38,824	3,536	42,420
TOTAL 1946	2,136,925	361	2	1,905,657	231,531	2,137,283
TOTAL 1945	2,065,105	362	10	-----	-----	2,065,477

Note: One Farm Household equals five persons.

Source: Statistics Section, Bureau Agricultural Economics,
Department of Agriculture.

Table 5

DISTRIBUTION OF LAND AREAS ADMINISTERED BY NEW KOREA COMPANY
as of end of December 1947
(areas in Chungbo *)

Provinces	Agricultural Land Areas					Forest Area	TOTAL All Land Areas
	Paddy Area	Dry Area	Dot Areas	Other Areas	Agrie. Area		
Kyonggi	23,634	9,658	650	1,597	35,539	19,267	54,806
Kangwon	819	1,055	88	16	1,978	15,598	17,576
N. Chungchong	4,927	4,083	427	415	9,852	2,832	12,684
S. Chungchong	24,385	7,543	774	2,219	34,921	---	34,921
N. Kyongsang	13,483	8,917	370	463	23,233	---	23,233
S. Kyongsang	26,084	7,741	452	2,801	37,078	---	37,078
N. Cholla	56,752	7,720	404	370	65,246	---	65,246
S. Cholla	55,068	18,303	102	1,905	75,379	---	75,379
Cheju	17	920	2	23	962	---	962
TOTAL	205,169	65,940	3,269	9,810	284,188	37,697	321,885

* One Chungbo equals 2.451 acres.

Source: Land records of New Korea Company.

Table 6
TENANT FARMERS TILLING FARM LANDS OF NEW KOREA COMPANY
(as of June 1947)

Provinces	Number of Tenants		Average Area per Tenant (Tan*)	Number of Persons on Farms		Average Number of Persons per Family
	Full-time Farmers	Part-time Farmers		Male	Female	
Kyonggi	36,878	8,131	5.9	143,168	138,720	6.2
Kangwon	4,286	861	3.6	16,132	15,251	6.0
N. Chungchong	23,788	1,252	3.6	75,638	69,188	5.9
S. Chungchong	68,152	4,119	4.4	194,492	183,045	5.2
N. Kyongsang	47,990	1,969	4.1	168,146	153,922	6.5
S. Kyongsang	74,129	6,142	3.8	255,812	238,121	6.1
N. Cholla	98,885	5,185	5.9	315,531	303,997	6.0
S. Cholla	166,351	5,772	4.1	434,807	419,936	5.0
Choeju	166	11	3.4	499	592	6.1
TOTAL	520,674	33,393	4.5	1,604,275	1,523,072	5.6

* One Tan equals .2451 acres, or one-tenth of a Chungbo. This area of New Korea Company land rented by each household, and does not include the lands tilled by the farm households which are either owned by them or rented from Korean landlords.

Source: Tenant Survey of New Korea Company, 1947.