

State Resembles an Exploited Colony

IN SOME respects the State of Oklahoma resembles a foreign colony being exploited by an empire as a source of raw wealth.

We ship 90 percent of our agricultural commodities out of state to be converted into consumer products worth from five to 20 times what our producers get for them.

We pipe our petroleum and natural gas to factories and homes in other states to be used in processing our commodities and to make comfortable living for the workers whose jobs they provide.

Finally, for lack of employment opportunities here, many of our young people are compelled to seek work out of state. They may be hired to manufacture or sell products made from our wheat, our cattle, our peanuts, our cotton, our oil, our gas.

Our politicians aren't much help. If industrial boosters persuade a company to move a factory here, the big spenders at the capitol may find new and unexpected ways to levy taxes on it.

When Oklahoma was a new state

settled mostly by people whose prime ambition was to acquire a piece of land and make a living as farmers, out-of-state markets seemed logical outlets.

Cities like Liberal, Wichita and Coffeyville, Kan., thrived close to our border. So did Joplin, Mo., Fort Smith, Ark., and a whole row of cities just across Red River in Texas.

Cattle always have been a major source of farm income and the Oklahoma City stockyards have been a state asset since the first packing plants were established in 1910. When changing conditions caused packers to move out or suspend operations the stockyards survived by emphasizing its stocker and feeder market.

It is said to be the world's largest of its kind but most of the animals go to out-of-state feedlots for finishing. Packing plants are there, too, near their sources of supply.

Often it is assumed that because Oklahoma does not grow large quantities of corn or soybeans that no feed supply is available. We might be overlooking a big opportu-

nity.

Oklahoma usually is ranked second among all states in size of wheat crops produced, with 151 million bushels last year. But we have only four flour mills operating and they processed a little under 21 million bushels of wheat last year.

About three-fourths of our wheat is exported, at world market prices, by the ton. That's the way we sell virtually all of our agricultural commodities — at the lowest price per unit.

Oklahoma has nearly 5 percent of the nation's cattle, with 5.5 million head on Jan. 1 this year. But last year our 24 packing plants slaughtered only 460,600 head. The others went to feedlots and meat packing plants elsewhere, for others to profit.

Wheat makes good livestock feed. If we used more of it to finish our beef cattle, we could have more feedlots, which might attract more packers, making better markets and more jobs. If others can make a profit on our commodities, why can't we?